

INBORN

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Inspired by True Events

June 2019
Draft 3.3

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EXT. EARTH'S ORBIT - NEAR SPACE

NORTH AMERICA stretches out before us in all its sterling glory.

As we slowly descend on the United States --

DOZENS OF VOICES BLEND TOGETHER in a dizzying pastiche of what sound like 911 EMERGENCY CALLS.

This cacophony gives way to JAGGED BREATHING and DIGITS being entered into a phone.

After two rings, a WOMAN'S VOICE --

CHP DISPATCH (V.O.)
911 emergency reporting.

PANICKED MAN (V.O.)
Hi. Listen to me right now. My name is Ian Chaney. I'm here with Jere Melo out in the woods. We're being fired upon by some growers! I think Jere might have been hit.

CHP DISPATCH (V.O.)
Where are you located, sir?

A SATELLITE bearing CHINESE CHARACTERS silently slides into view.

IAN CHANEY (V.O.)
I have no idea. We are right on the tracks, ummm...

CHP DISPATCH (V.O.)
What town are you in?

IAN CHANEY (V.O.)
Fort Bragg, California.

Spinning in zero gravity, the red machine hones in on the American West Coast as we --

BEGIN PLUMMETING TOWARD EARTH at several thousand miles per second.

BURNING THROUGH THE FIVE LAYERS OF ATMOSPHERE in an astonishing assortment of reds, yellows, and blues, CALIFORNIA quickly rises to meet us.

Our trajectory takes us north of SAN FRANCISCO to where green plumage of REDWOOD TREES appear like algae.

(CONTINUED)

CHP DISPATCH (V.O.)
Let me put you through to the
sheriff's office, just a moment.

"AUGUST 27, 2011" *superimposes* through the FOG.

CHP DISPATCH (V.O.)(CONT'D)
You are being transferred.

MORE GUNSHOTS fill the air.

MSCO DISPATCH (V.O.)
911, what is your emergency?

BREAKING THROUGH the forest's treetops --

A SKINNY MAN RUNS up ahead.

He is being pursued by ANOTHER MAN.

MSCO DISPATCH (V.O.)
Where are you at?

We FINALLY reach him.

Sweaty and out of breath, IAN CHANEY (30s), clutches a 9 MM SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOL and looks back over his shoulder.

IAN CHANEY
I'm out in the fucking woods!

The Pursuer gains ground.

His movement segmented by the passing redwoods - the Pursuer appears to be TRAPPED IN A FLIP BOOK as he runs amid the massive trunks.

Flip - he's a man with a shaved head. **Flip** - he's a boy with long blond hair. **Flip** - the man. **Flip** - the boy.

Clad in a black jumpsuit from head to toe - **flipping back and forth** - he clutches a sleek ASSAULT RIFLE in his right hand.

Bursting through the treeline and onto the TRAIN TRACKS, Chaney leaps onto a passing SPEEDER CAR, which accelerates toward a TUNNEL.

As he looks back --

The Pursuer with the shaved head RAISES HIS GUN, and we ZOOM INSIDE its long metal barrel.

SUPERIMPOSE TEXT:

(CONTINUED)

In the fall of 2011, the largest manhunt in California history occurred in the redwood forests north of the Bay Area.

At the time, Mendocino County was not participating in Laura's Law - an optional state law allowing for court-ordered outpatient treatment for the severely mentally ill.

The following is inspired by true events.

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - MENDOCINO COUNTY, CA - DAY

Primordial REDWOOD TRUNKS waft in and out of a dense, soupy FOG.

Northern California has never looked so much like a gas-strewn European battlefield.

Silently materializing out of the vapor --

The BARREL of a NORINCO SKS SPORTER 7.62x39 MILLIMETER ASSAULT RIFLE.

It belongs to AARON BASSLER (35).

Shaved head scratched and marred with dried blood - he is the same man from before, dressed in the black jumpsuit.

Dropping to a knee --

A BRIGHT YELLOW Pacific Banana SLUG inches across his boot.

He lowers the weapon, and gently picks up the slug.

Sprouting out of the ground beneath him --

A wilted RED POPPY.

Setting the slug down on a fern, he runs one of the dying petals between his thumb and forefinger.

Almost tenderly.

As the fog roils away - we can see DOZENS of the red plants poking out of the earth.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron's black combat boots step over rows of trampled poppies.

Directly ahead of him is an OPEN SPACE devoid of trees, exposing a tiny hole in the forest ceiling.

The dark outline of something LARGE fades in and out of the swirling mist.

Aaron slow steps it - rifle outstretched.

Finally penetrating the gray curtain, all he can do is gawk.

The ebony-colored SPACECRAFT looks completely undisturbed - like it's been sitting here in this clearing for 200 million years with the rest of the forest.

All around it --

Poppies are BLOOMING.

One by one - the bright red petals pop open like molten magma.

The pitch-dark, velvety smooth surface of the craft REFLECTS everything around it - including CARVINGS etched into the surrounding redwood trees featuring a strange FIGURE 8 over CROSS-HAIRS symbol.

Aaron isn't so mesmerized that he fails to see the OPEN PORTAL leading inside the craft.

A BEAT.

As he steps toward the threshold --

A THUNDEROUS FLASH OF LIGHT sends him tumbling backwards.

He lands hard on his back.

The echoing of SEVEN GUN SHOTS reverberate around the clearing.

Pawing at his bulletproof vest - Aaron's fingers are STICKY WITH BLOOD.

His eyes pinball as he tries to gain his bearings.

Muffled voices draw near.

(CONTINUED)

AARON
Rea??? I'm here!

The faces of THREE CHINESE SOLDIERS loom over him.
Aaron can see the disgust in the faces leering down at him.
The FEMALE ONE reaches out her hand --

AARON (CONT'D)
Take me with you!!!

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 36

WE ZOOM IN on Aaron's fractured eyes until --
HE BLINKS, making everything **GO BLACK**.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

PIERCING BLUE EYES PULL OPEN and stare AT US, practically
THROUGH US, as --

SUPER: 12,810 DAYS EARLIER

A BRAND NEW baby boy, AARON JAMES BASSLER, is BORN.

His eyes widen into a full-throated wail, crying himself
into life.

Slimy with amniotic fluid, his pupils nictitate behind
shimmering membranes as the DOCTOR hands him over to his
sweating mother, LAURA (20s).

CRYING together, mother and son sound like one.

The WIND picks up outside, as if watching.

Their joy and exhaustion fill the old redwood-paneled
hospital, spilling over to his father, JIM (30s), who --

BENDS DOWN to kiss them both on the forehead.

The sunlight attaches to the trio through the high window -
like a painting.

SUPER: YEAR 0

Three points of reflected light in a shadowy world, they
form a perfect triangle of mother, father and son.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Aaron sucks for air as he thrashes through the dark, impenetrable redwoods, his shaved head slick with sweat.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 35

OLD AARON

Rea! I'm coming back to our other place! Don't leave me here!

Practically keeling over --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Take me with you! I don't want to die!

Directly ahead - the trees begin to thin.

An awareness washes over him and he slows his pace.

He veers toward the clearing.

At the treeline, he stops.

Directly ahead of him --

A RUSTIC CABIN is bathed in sunlight.

From a garden of wildflowers in the yard comes a FLITTER OF MOVEMENT.

There - practically camouflaged in the pastiche of yellows, reds, and purples --

A BOY (8) with long, blond hair stares silently at Aaron.

His body is luminous and undefined - the multi-colored flowers seeming to glow THROUGH him.

Then --

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Aaron?

IN UNISON - Aaron and the Boy turn to see a GRAY-HAIRED WOMAN in a blue plaid shirt standing on the front stoop of the cabin.

She turns TOWARD US --

(CONTINUED)

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Aren't we supposed to help the
sickest of the sick?

INT. BASSLER HOME - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

CLOSE ON: A BLACK SALAMANDER PLUSH TOY.

A pair of TINY PINK HANDS squeezes it.

SUPER: YEAR 1

Aaron rubs the soft fabric against his face, then fixates on
the lamp across the room.

A BEAT.

It feels like he's looking AT US.

What does he want?

The yellow bulb BECOMES...

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

A SUN DOG wrapping itself around Earth's star like a halo -
as it sits high in the clear azure sky.

Aaron gawks at it for a BEAT.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 34

Then --

He STRIPS NAKED.

At his feet --

Bright red poppies are in FULL BLOOM.

From his backpack he retrieves a BLACK JUMPSUIT that's been
STITCHED TOGETHER with random pieces of dark fabric.

It's a crude piece of work that would look good on
Frankenstein's monster.

After putting it on --

He begins dousing the poppies with a bottle of lighter
fluid.

(CONTINUED)

OLD AARON
Today is the day.

A MATCH is struck.

As it drops onto the ground --

ORANGE FLAMES lick across the red poppies.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Rea!

Arms aloft --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Take me!

Black smoke billows into the air.

As he searches the sky above him --

A MALE VOICE calls out.

There, through the rippling flames --

A HUMANOID SHAPE twists and contorts in phantasmagorical grotesqueness, until --

The clear visage of a CHINESE SOLDIER solidifies.

And he's screaming at Aaron in MANDARIN, gun outstretched!

Aaron drops to the ground next to his rifle.

Firing off a burst - the Chinese soldier ducks for cover.

As Aaron beats it to the trees --

Two bullets WHIZ past his ear.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Sobbing uncontrollably - Aaron runs as fast as his legs will carry him.

Totally overwhelmed - he stops.

Blubbering, he looks up at the green foliage overhead.

OLD AARON
Oh god. Rea...?

A BEAT.

(CONTINUED)

Something else comes over him.

Something angry.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

In the CROSSHAIRS of a RIFLE SCOPE --

THREE Chinese soldiers stand with their backs to each other in a 360 degree firing position.

Aaron's hands are TREMBLING - causing the crosshairs to fritter this way and that.

OLD AARON
Commie fucks will not stop me...

He pulls the trigger!

Dirt and pine needles kick up, as --

The Soldiers dive onto the ground.

By the time he squeezes off another round --

The foliage all around him EXPLODES in a hail of bullets.

Ceasing fire - Aaron is gone.

SMOKE and FALLING GREEN LEAVES are the only things left in his wake...

BECOMING:

EXT. BASSLER HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Aaron's tiny fingers touching the tail of a large brown SALAMANDER.

SUPER: YEAR 2

PLUNGING BELOW the earth's surface we see a complex tributary of roots spreading out into the dirt.

CENTIPEDES and BANANA SLUGS move through the soil as another salamander slithers below a green fern.

Its YELLOW EYES pulsate behind thin membranes until --

It's Aaron's eyes we are looking at.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

10.

For a second, the amphibian and baby hold each other's gaze, but then --

HIS MOTHER PICKS HIM UP, and the moment is broken.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

Like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, Aaron sits in the middle of a small field of almost blooming POPPIES.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 33

He's CLEANING HIS GUN.

The CHINESE CHARACTERS on its barrel bounce and jumble together as he obsessively runs a rag across its metal again and again, faster and faster...

INTO:

EXT. NOYO HARBOR - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

A DARK BROWN MOTHER SEAL giving birth to a brand new baby pup.

Next to a dock.

A boy's head peers over the nearby fishing boat.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Aaron looks down into the murky water.

SUPER: YEAR 3

The BABY SEAL snorts to life --

LAURA (O.S.)
Jim! look at this.

Jim stops cleaning his crab pots and they stand together behind their son.

He clasps her hand.

JIM
I wonder if Aaron will remember
this?

She watches the baby seal break through the birthing membrane.

(CONTINUED)

Squeezing Aaron's hand --

LAURA
It's her little mini-me.

INT./EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY

A POLICE HELICOPTER roars by overhead - practically kissing the green treetops.

INSIDE --

TOM ALLMAN (50s) wears a SHERIFF'S UNIFORM with the seal of MENDOCINO COUNTY embroidered on the sleeve.

He holds a FLIR THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA up over his iron gray mustache.

(THROUGH FLIR): The woods appear GRAY AND TRANSLUCENT.

Until --

A FIERY RED FIGURE appears between the trees.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 32

It's running.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)
There! 3 o'clock!

The chopper DIPS DOWN toward the treetops.

CLOSE ON (through FLIR): The red figure DISAPPEARS.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D) (O.S.)
Lower! We gotta get lower!

As they swoop down toward the river --

The shape is GONE.

PILOT (O.S.)
We lost him.

INT. HELICOPTER - LATER

The never-ending forest blurs past beneath them.

(CONTINUED)

PILOT (O.S.)
Sheriff, we might have something.

CLOSE ON (through FLIR): Like before, a red shape pulsates through the ashen landscape.

It stops running.

And leaps down into a dark hole.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)
Jesus, is that another bunker?

PILOT (O.S.)
Affirmative.

SOARING DOWNWARD --

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A MASSIVE CONVOY of squad cars and armored vehicles obfuscate the pastoral countryside in a series of shrieking siren blasts.

EXT. REMOTE CLEARING - NEAR SHAKE CITY, CA - MOMENTS LATER

FIFTY RIFLES are aimed at a COVERED BUNKER dug into the side of a hill.

The air is deathly still.

The buzzing of horseflies is deafening.

FOUR SWAT officers throw off the tarpaulin covering the bunker.

Amid trained rifles and hoarse shouts --

SWAT MEMBER
Clear!! We got him!

A DIRT-CAKED HISPANIC MAN (20s) wearing a filthy flannel shirt and blue jeans is led out in handcuffs.

Wide-eyed, the man pleads with them in Spanish.

SWAT MEMBER #2
A fucking grower?

Sheriff Allman takes in the curses drifting across the clearing from every direction.

(CONTINUED)

Pulling a PHOTO from his vest --

He holds it up to the man.

ZOOMING IN on it--

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)
¿Sabes qué significa eso?

The eerie 8/CROSS-HAIRS symbol - CARVED INTO a redwood trunk
- FILLS THE SCREEN...

BECOMING:

EXT. REDWOOD DECK - DAY

A SLIDING GLASS DOOR opening - as Aaron steps onto the deck.

SUPER: YEAR 4

His EXTENDED FAMILY is spread all over the backyard,
GROWN-UPS drinking - TEENAGERS talking - COUSINS running
around playing kick the can.

He holds a rolled-up piece of paper in one hand - a red and
green crayon in the other.

YOUNG AARON
Daddy, look!

Unspooling the crinkled paper --

His father helps him.

From the radio, Christopher Cross's *Sailing* wafts through
the cool afternoon air.

Laura comes out in her jeans and apron.

She runs her fingers through her husband's wiry hair and
takes a sip of his beer.

LAURA
What ya got there, Double-A?

His tiny fist pulls the drawing flat revealing a FOREST of
stick figure trees. Crimson trunks, emerald tops - it's like
Christmas wrapping paper --

YOUNG AARON
They ah the boo whales of the plant
wold.

(CONTINUED)

Some of the grownups are looking over now.

JIM

Wow, this is so good son... they're what?

The little blond boy steps to the middle of the deck to tell his story.

Laura sits down on Jim's lap as everyone leans in to listen.

YOUNG AARON

I like wedwood twees... I like boo whales too.

LAURA

You like to draw too, don't you honey?

His tow head bobs up and down in the fading sunlight as the whole family gathers round.

YOUNG AARON

That's why I say...

He points to his drawing --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Wedwood twees ah the boo whales of the plant wold.

He hands the sketch to his mother while everyone else chuckles and compliments Aaron on his redwood forest.

Climbing on his father's muscular shoulders, he looks IN OUR DIRECTION until --

A LOUD, DARK wind rustles through the trees, and Aaron turns to the forest quizzically...

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

A solitary RAIN DROP lands on a green leaf.

Then another.

Under his leafy canopy - Aaron's eyes pull open.

Contemplating the rain --

He pulls his hood down and scrambles out.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 31

(CONTINUED)

Dropping to the ground --

He watches as the misty precipitation waters the BUDDING
POPPIES.

They could bloom any day now.

OLD AARON

Thank you, Rea! Thank you!

Laughing, Aaron lets the rain wash away the dirt and grime
caked to his face.

INT. CAR - DAY

Aaron suction his lips to the window.

His cheeks puff up like a blowfish as he fogs up the glass.

SUPER: YEAR 5

From the driver's seat --

LAURA

Blow what down, honey?

He points a chubby finger at the redwoods blurring past.

LAURA (CONT'D)

The trees? Why would you want to
blow the trees down?

YOUNG AARON

Superman can blow them down. Like
this.

Mimicking the Man of Steel - Aaron issues an exaggerated
breath, fogging up the glass until --

His face disappears into glass...

BECOMING:

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

A SEWING NEEDLE being pulled through a piece of faded black
fabric, completing a stitch.

SUPER: DAY 30

Expert fingers complete stitch after stitch like a machine.

No mistakes.

INT. BASSLER HOME - DAY

On a GRAINY TV: **Joe Montana completes a pass to Freddie Solomon.**

Jim and a group of BUDDIES yell and clap their hands.

Shit is getting intense.

SUPER: YEAR 6

They're huddled around a big box TV - watching the 49ers play the Cowboys at Candlestick Park.

JIM

Walsh has never had a QB with Montana's accuracy.

BUDDY #1

You can have Montana. Give me that Elway kid at Stanford. Any day.

Montana throws an incomplete pass from the 13 yard line.

Bellowing and cursing rings out.

BUDDY #2

Goddamn it! It's now or never.

A FLICKER OF MOVEMENT catches Jim's eye.

Through the window --

Aaron squeals with laughter and jumps in the puddles around the WINTER LAKE that has formed from all the rain.

Jim's gaze lingers there.

JIM

Laura's gonna shoot me if that kid catches pneumonia.

A hand locks onto Jim's arm.

BUDDY #1

This is it! A trip to the Super Bowl on the line!

They all stare breathless as **Montana rolls to the right - looking for an open receiver.**

(CONTINUED)

BUDDY #3
Shit, shit, shit!

Just before he's about to be forced out of bounds --

Montana turns and looks into the end zone one final time.

JIM
Throw it away, Joe!

Seeing something - Montana takes one step backward to elude the oncoming defender.

Then --

He heaves the ball back across the middle where it's SNATCHED OUT OF THE AIR by Dwight Clark in the back of the end zone for a TOUCHDOWN!!

All hell breaks loose as Jim and his friends celebrate "The Catch."

But then --

A SHRILL SCREAM cuts through everything.

Jim's smile ebbs as he tracks its source.

The winter lake.

EXT. WINTER LAKE - MOMENTS LATER

Three little boys are using all of their might to lift Aaron out of the shallow water.

For Jim --

Time SKIDS TO A HALT.

His eyes are glued to the reflection on the water's surface: BLUE SKY turning purple.

Purple.

The same color as his son's face.

At the thought of Aaron - he snaps out of it.

JIM
I got him!

Lying him down supine, he begins performing CPR.

JIM (CONT'D)
Come on, son!

Switching to chest compressions --

Aaron JERKS to life - SPITTING UP a lungful of water.

When he finishes coughing and retching --

Jim holds his frail body close.

Tucking his head into his father's chest, Aaron looks down into the water whence he just came.

There --

An ASHEN FACE - eyes wide and mouth agape in terror - twists under the shimmering, rippling water.

When Aaron blinks, the face is GONE.

Nothing left but shallow water until --

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

Aaron's boot breaks the water's surface as he bends down to a crude channel containing a tiny trickle of water from a creek.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 29

He lifts the piece of redwood bark serving as a dam and the water eases into the flower bed.

OLD AARON
Out of the ground and into the
sky...

The water soaks into the freshly turned soil.

Healthy, green poppy stems poke up through the dirt.

Aaron places the bark back in its place, smiling.

EXT. BASSLER HOME - ABOVE

The trees surrounding the house spill back into a GREAT FOREST which stops at --

A FLICKER OF BLUE, where the Pacific takes over.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: A frosted chocolate BIRTHDAY CAKE.

With eight lit candles - arrainged in the shape of the
NUMBER 8 - poking out.

SUPER: YEAR 7

Aaron stares at it, totally obsessed.

Somewhere close by --

A man and woman are SHOUTING.

But the sounds are muffled and muted.

Aaron is blocking them out.

He risks a peek at the clock: **11:59 PM.**

Something slams into the table. HARD.

As plates and silverware jangle and clatter from the impact
--

The cake goes AIRBORNE.

Aaron watches it - in SLOW MOTION - as it clears the side of
the table and hangs in SUSPENDED ANIMATION...

BECOMING:

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - DAY

A BLACK AND WHITE SURVEILLANCE PHOTO of Aaron breaking into
his grandmother's old rustic cabin.

Projected onto a screen.

His head shaved and rifle outstretched like a third
appendage, the grainy image makes Aaron look like a monster.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 28

In front of a bank of microphones --

Sheriff Allman stares down the array of cameras pointed at
him.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

As you can see, any thought that Aaron Bassler has fled the vicinity is ill-founded. For that reason, we ask for your continued patience in staying out of the woods.

In the packed little room - everyone from a New York Times stringer to grizzly local lumberjacks stare up at the sheriff.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)

He grew up in these woods. He *knows* them. It's why we've decided to offer a reward for any information that will lead to Mr. Bassler's apprehension.

He holds up a WANTED POSTER of Aaron's glaring mug shot offering a \$30,000 reward.

Before he can get another word out --

A FEMALE REPORTER (30s) steps near the podium.

FEMALE REPORTER

Shel Severi, Advocate News.
Sheriff, can you explain how it is that one man has managed to elude capture and outfox the entire law enforcement contingent for this long?

The \$64,000 question.

Allman considers this for a BEAT.

Then --

SHERIFF ALLMAN

We've got 400 square miles of jungle. We're not trying to find a rabbit, we're trying to find the rabbit and he has an assault rifle.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

FLYING THROUGH THE AIR, the BIRTHDAY CAKE hits the linoleum floor with a PLOP.

SUPER: YEAR 8

(CONTINUED)

Still inert - Aaron can only stare at the frosting spattered across the floor.

The muted yells and curses continue somewhere in the periphery until --

A shadow cuts across the window.

Through the glass --

A HOODED FIGURE looms.

Aaron leaps on the counter to get closer.

The figure TURNS TO HIM, pulling off his hoodie to reveal the shaved head of an athletic man.

LEANING IN --

Aaron studies the man's face. But then he's gone.

AND ALL AARON SEES is his own reflection - with the clock on the wall behind him blinking **12:00 AM**.

INTO:

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A legal document announcing the DIVORCE of Jim Bassler and Laura Johanson...

INTO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Peeking out through the ancient red trees, we see Aaron - long hair spilling out of his hoodie - walking underneath an old TRAIN TRESTLE.

The bridge's wooden framework begins to RUMBLE.

A loud whistle blows - but the young boy keeps walking alongside the NOYO RIVER until --

The world famous SKUNK TRAIN emerges from the dark green curtain.

Faces of gawking TOURISTS flash past.

Gazing up, Aaron looks different somehow. Hardened.

Checking his compass, he once again becomes a small spec trudging underneath a vast red canopy.

INT./EXT. CABIN - LATER

The redwood door to the familiar rustic cabin swings open and AARON'S GRANDMA (60s) pulls him in tight against her blue plaid shirt.

GRANDMA

My boy.

She sets her sewing needles down next to her RED PIN CUSHION and kisses him on the forehead.

All high cheekbones and wild gray hair, she takes Aaron's backpack and leads him up the small staircase to the tiny loft.

YOUNG AARON

I get to sleep up here?

The A-frame forms a cozy pyramid at its apex, with a small skylight poking out from its slanted ceiling.

She tosses his pack on the bed and starts back down the stairs.

GRANDMA

It's all yours, Double-A.

He jumps on the bed and unzips his backpack --

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Go ahead and put your stuff away and come down to the kitchen. I need your help making --

YOUNG AARON

Hot dogs?!

GRANDMA (O.S.)

Hot dogs? Hot dogs??

Aaron sits on the edge of the bed smiling --

YOUNG AARON

Yes!! Hot dogs!

He pulls out a POLAROID PHOTOGRAPH of his mother and father and him holding hands on TEN MILE BEACH.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Coming.

Setting the photo face up on the small dresser, Aaron can't help but notice his parents, smiling and happy - fully at ease - looking back at him... AT US.

A BEAT.

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Grandma? Can we live together in the woods forever now?

EXT. FOREST STREAM - DAY

In a dreary gray dawn --

Aaron stands ankle-deep in a flowing stream.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 27

With a felled tree limb he carves a small canal into the shallow bank.

Behind him - a TWIG SNAPS.

Pivoting 180 degrees - Aaron snatches the rifle out of mid-air as the centrifugal force slings it around his body.

Scanning the dripping woods --

OLD AARON

(in Mandarin)

Shei zai na?

A BEAT.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Rea?

Again, nothing.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT STOOP - FORT BRAGG, CA - NIGHT

The BABYSITTER (17) rings the doorbell.

She's the epitome of mid-80s *Haute Couture*: huge bangs, tapered jeans, and a baggy off-shoulder Joy Division t-shirt.

The door opens to --

(CONTINUED)

COWBOY (30s/40s) taking a drag off his Marlboro.

He looks her up and down.

COWBOY
'Evenin. Come on in.

INT. COWBOY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron is glued to the TV.

He looks catatonic.

SUPER: YEAR 9

BABYSITTER
Hey Aaron.

YOUNG AARON
Hi.

BABYSITTER
As promised, look what I brought.

She hands him a VHS cassette of *Red Dawn*.

His eyes are intrigued - but he shows no outward emotion.

BABYSITTER (CONT'D)
Pretty rad, huh? I know you've
been dying to see this.

YOUNG AARON
Thanks...

From the doorway --

COWBOY
Laura, let's boogie! I'm parched.

He leers again at the Babysitter.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
You can put your things in the
kitchen, darlin'.

As she exits --

He kneels next to Aaron.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
You mind yourself tonight,
hmm? None of your funny
business. We clear?

His eyes never leave the TV screen.

Laura enters from the bedroom.

She sees the remnants of this interaction.

Says nothing.

LAURA
Okay, I'm ready.

She kisses Aaron's head.

LAURA (CONT'D)
'Night, sweetie.

INT. COWBOY'S HOUSE - LATER

With all the lights off - the TV's glow illuminates Aaron's face.

He's engrossed in the movie, no longer a little boy.

What does he need?

Yawning, the Babysitter stands and moves toward the kitchen.

YOUNG AARON
Should I pause it?

BABYSITTER
Don't worry. I've seen it three
times.

INT. COWBOY'S HOUSE - LATER

The Babysitter walks down the dark hallway.

The bathroom is empty.

BABYSITTER
Aaron?

At his bedroom, she flips on the light.

Empty.

(CONTINUED)

BABYSITTER (CONT'D)

Are you in here?

Concerned - she walks back to the front door.

It's AJAR.

BABYSITTER (CONT'D)

Oh, fuck!

EXT. COWBOY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Cowboy's boots clip-clop on the pavement.

He's burning another heater.

COWBOY

God-fuckin'-dammit.

LAURA

Just take it easy on
him. Please? He's been through a
lot.

The Babysitter is a wreck.

BABYSITTER

I'm so sorry. I fucked up, didn't
I?

COWBOY

It ain't your fault, darlin'. He
pulls this shit all the damn time.

He splashes his flashlight through the treetops.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

I'm sure he's up in a tree
somewhere. Like a damn monkey...

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Sitting high up on a tree limb --

Aaron stares at the blood red orb hanging in the sky.

A LUNAR ECLIPSE is in full swing, like a perfectly placed
lamp.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 26

Under the strange crimson light --

Aaron turns back to his needlework. He holds the black cloth in front of his shaved head, contemplating each stitch with deliberate precision.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

CLOSE ON: A small suitcase plastered with X-Men, Spider-Man, and Superman STICKERS.

Jim picks it up and sets it in the back of his truck.

SUPER: YEAR 10

JIM
C'mon, Aaron. Time to go.

He stares at the front door for a BEAT.

The pervading silence is a heavy one.

INT/EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jim peers into an empty kitchen.

JIM
Aaron, it's time. Your mother is waiting for you.

As he turns toward the hallway --

Something catches in his peripheral vision.

Through the window - Aaron is climbing a redwood.

Jim watches his son with a kind of somber amazement.

Every muscle in Aaron's small body is engaged as he wills himself up the tree trunk...

BECOMING:

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

Aaron hugging his assault rifle next to the dying fire, fast asleep.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 25

A YOUNG TWO-POINTER BUCK springs through the grove - sparkling wet with dew.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

28.

He stops to stare at Aaron until --

WE ZOOM IN ON THE GUN:

IT STARTS TO SPIN as the forest fades away to BLACKNESS...

INTO:

TWO HANDS grab the gun and pull it out of the darkness --

EXT. GUN FACTORY - CHINA

THE GUN is only a PIECE OF METAL now. It is set on a conveyor belt and a beam of light is flashed across its stripped down surface.

SPARKS FLASH as the infant weapon is pulled under a LINE OF MACHINES --

INTO:

A MONTAGE OF IMAGES --

AS THE NEWLY FORMED ASSAULT RIFLE gets passed from one man to another; finally being packed in a carton and put on a CARGO PLANE.

- A) Flying from China to SAN FRANCISCO
- B) Being purchased at a GUN SHOW
- C) SHOOTING targets at a GUN RANGE
- D) Being DISASSEMBLED, being REASSEMBLED, being CLEANED
- E) On a strip of foggy beach in the early morning, being SHOT out into the blue-gray ocean
- F) Under a bridge, older hands pass the GUN to younger hands
- G) Being DISASSEMBLED, being REASSEMBLED, being CLEANED
- H) FLYING THROUGH THE REDWOODS, Aaron's HANDS gripping its handle tightly

THE GUN begins to SPIN AGAIN...

INTO:

Aaron rolling over in his sleep, his gun gleaming next to him in the firelight. A SPARK pops --

BECOMING:

EXT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - GARDEN - NIGHT

An asteroid slingshotting through a vast STARRY SKY --

YOUNG AARON (O.S.)
Is that a spaceship?

SUPER: YEAR 11

GRANDMA (O.S.)
I guess you could call it one of
our spaceships. It's called a
satellite.

Aaron stares skyward - transfixed. His Grandma lays next to
him, each in their own sleeping bag.

YOUNG AARON
What's that?

GRANDMA
It's... anything that orbits
something else.

YOUNG AARON
Like the moon?

Taking a sip of hot cocoa --

GRANDMA
Yes. That's right. Only it's
manmade...

YOUNG AARON
So, it's part of something else?

Another satellite shoots across the sky --

GRANDMA (O.S.)
Yes... Everything is.

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - DAY

Over the din of RINGING TELEPHONES and a CACOPHONY OF VOICES
--

HURRIED BODIES jig and pirouette around a maze of extra
desks crammed into the small room.

Call it controlled chaos.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 24

(CONTINUED)

Phone cradled under an ear and his fingers clicking away at the computer --

The RECEPTIONIST at the front desk doesn't even notice the MAN AND TWO WOMEN standing in front of him.

They're all donning blue "U.S. MARSHALS" jackets.

EXT. FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

A PREGNANT WOMAN (30s) shoos her two small children out of the house.

Burdened with backpacks and lunchboxes, she raises her voice at the ferocious youngsters who are running around the minivan, playing tag.

From the curb --

Aaron sits atop his bike, a black backpack stuffed full of newspapers slung over his narrow shoulders.

SUPER: YEAR 12

He can't take his eyes off her swelling belly.

Almost instinctively, he places a hand over his own belly...

PREGNANT WOMAN
(to Aaron)
Hi there. Are you all right?

A BEAT.

Realizing she's speaking to him - Aaron's face flushes.

THUD.

An ADVOCATE NEWS knocks against the front door.

On the front cover: the iconic TIANANMEN SQUARE PHOTO of a man standing in front of a COLUMN OF CHINESE TANKS.

Confused, the Pregnant Woman watches as Aaron hauls ass up the street.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

Neat rows of FRESHLY TILLED earth until --

ONE BY ONE we see Aaron dropping WHITE SEEDS into the dirt.

Covering up the seeds - Aaron studies the grove of trees surrounding his new campsite.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 23

He sizes up the sturdiest trunk of the lot.

With the bowie knife, he begins CARVING into its bark.

His blue eyes never blink. Not even once.

The familiar JAGGED "8" on top of a spidery CROSS-HAIRS sign is carved into the crimson bark.

He touches it.

OLD AARON

Rea, I've done what you've asked.

He waits.

TURNING HIS HEAD TO THE SIDE --

The "8" becomes an INFINITY SIGN.

A BEAT.

He traces the interconnecting circles with his fingers.

OLD AARON (V.O.)

The Chinese know I'm here. They'll find me if you don't come.

EXT. DANA GRAY MIDDLE SCHOOL - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

The BELL RINGS as --

HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS cram through the doors into the afternoon sunshine.

Aaron takes a seat against the side of the building.

SUPER: YEAR 13

All around him --

His PEERS congregate in groups.

(CONTINUED)

A joyful buzz reverberates across the yard at having been let out of prison.

Aaron holds open an X-MEN comic.

But he's not really looking at it.

He's looking over the page at a tall NATIVE AMERICAN girl.

Her long, jet black hair is gleaming in the afternoon sunlight.

His eyes never leave her.

But her dark eyes never look his way.

Not once.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. DANA GRAY MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Over the page of Aaron's comic --

The school yard is completely EMPTY.

A few candy wrappers flutter in the dead grass.

The sunlight is also long gone.

Just shadow and gloom now.

Aaron puts the X-MEN comic in his bag.

INT. COWBOY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Aaron steps into the house --

There are no lights on.

YOUNG AARON

Mom?

In the kitchen --

A NOTE: **Working late. Love you!**

He opens the fridge.

Nothing remotely edible.

(CONTINUED)

But at least the ubiquitous Red Seal Ale is stacked neatly on the bottom two rows.

Not a single bottle missing.

From the cupboard --

He produces a package of Top Ramen.

CLOSE ON: The square bloc of NOODLES simmering in boiling water...

BECOMING:

EXT. REDWOOD TREE - DAY

A steady drizzle falling through the branches.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 22

Shooting up the massive tree like a spider, Aaron breaks through the treetops to take in the view.

An endless sea of green wherever he looks.

His eyes keep searching. For an opening. For a clue --

CLOSING HIS EYES.

A BEAT.

OLD AARON
(sotto)
Keep going east...

Reaching for his needlework --

HIS EYES SNAP OPEN and he is immediately CONSUMED in his task.

The black garment is getting bigger.

He CURSES at missing a stitch.

INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT

Sinead O'Connor's cover of *Nothing Compares 2 U* blares through the car's speakers.

Laura is totally enraptured.

(CONTINUED)

The beauty and power of the song has transported her to another dimension in a way that only music can.

SUPER: YEAR 14

Pulling into the garage --

She sits motionless until the song comes to an end.

The jarring SILENCE brings her back to reality.

Along with the two bags of groceries sitting in the passenger seat.

INT. COWBOY'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The first thing she hears: Cowboy YELLING.

One of the grocery bags SPILLS to the floor as she hurries down the hall.

At Aaron's doorway --

Cowboy sees her.

He holds out a partially smoked JOINT.

COWBOY

Lookit' what baby boy here was up
to just now.

The smoke in the room makes *The Empire Strikes Back* poster on the wall look hazy.

A David Bowie song is playing from Aaron's portable CD player.

We passed upon the stair...

She turns from the joint to her son.

LAURA

Aaron...?

But he isn't looking at either of them.

We spoke of was and when...

He's staring down into his Mead notebook.

Scribbling redwood trees in the shape of an "8".

Cowboy moves past her out the door.

(CONTINUED)

COWBOY

You deal with this shit.

Remaining in the doorway, she looks in at her son.

There's an intensity in her gaze.

I thought you died alone, a long long time ago...

It's as if this is the first time she's ever truly laid eyes on this strange teenage boy.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The north star Polaris blinkers overhead.

Aaron lifts a boot into the air - and drops it down on YELLOW POLICE TAPE.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 21

His campsite is DESTROYED.

Nearly half of the poppies have been trampled.

What happened here???

He rips out a single flattened stem and holds it to his ashen face.

HEAVY and moist -

It was only days away from blooming.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Passing beneath the familiar train trestle --

Aaron's long, blond hair mixes with the reds and greens until all we can see is a wall of trees...

SUPER: YEAR 15

BECOMING the treeline surrounding the familiar rustic cabin
--

EXT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - DAY

Aaron looks through the glass window and KNOCKS AGAIN.

No response.

He can see dust motes dancing in the sunbeam from the skylight.

YOUNG AARON

Grandma?

He hops down the steps and reaches under a piece of driftwood shaped like a gray whale.

Grabbing the key - he slips it into the lock and steps inside.

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

YOUNG AARON

Grandma... it's Aaron.

No sign of her.

He walks down the narrow hallway and stops at the last door.

Twisting the knob --

Aaron's Grandma lies in the big flowery bed, fast asleep.

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Grandma?

Her face is GRAY.

No pulse.

Cold.

He JUMPS BACK.

Eyes dead, she gazes at him until --

SOMETHING PASSES by the door.

Aaron runs to the the hallway, flicks on a light.

There's no one there - except for the wind.

(CONTINUED)

In the entryway, MUDDY BOOTPRINTS are caked on the hardwood floor.

Then --

SHUFFLING FEET in the next room.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)
This is the sheriff, drop your
weapon and exit the cabin! Now!

Inching his way across the main room, he steps on a LOOSE FLOORBOARD.

Cringing, he bounds ahead to the nearest wall.

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: Two empty SCRIMSHAW beer bottles, STILL SWEATING WITH CONDENSATION, sit on the kitchen table.

A NOISE coming from down the adjoining hallway draws Allman's attention.

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Making his way down the hallway --

SHERIFF ALLMAN
Announce yourself! NOW!

The door at the end of the hall is CLOSED.

Through gritted teeth --

He takes a huge breath and KICKS THE DOOR IN!

Gun extended, ready to fire, he sees --

A family of FIELD MICE squeak and scurry through the open closet door.

Drapes flutter through an OPEN WINDOW leading directly to the forest.

He EXHALES and leans against the wall.

EXT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - LATER

A helicopter swoops by overhead - ruffling a large map that Sheriff Allman is staring down at.

The woods and premises are TEEMING WITH POLICE AND SWAT.

A SQUAD LEADER, fresh out of the woods, pulls his sweaty gear off.

SQUAD LEADER

Found another of his poppy growths
about a half mile due east of here,
but he won't be stupid enough to go
back there.

Cursing, the sheriff points down at the map.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

We secure Irmulco from the east and
let the river be our boundary to
the north. We cannot let him slip
our cordon again.

They all look up as the Skunk Train pulls in and two dozen more SWAT, some with DOGS, get off.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Aaron circles under a fly ball, his cap falling off like Willie Mays, the baseball meeting his mitt with a SMACK --

SUPER: YEAR 16

Loose and healthy - he leaps into the air triumphant, a black silhouette against a setting sun.

From opposite ends of the metal bleachers, Laura catches Jim's eye, and their shared look is one of pride and relief.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

Rifle outstretched at hip level --

Aaron's shaved head pokes through the dense treeline as he enters the clearing slowly.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 19

The first thing he checks is the ground.

No boot prints.

(CONTINUED)

Next he inspects the TRIPWIRES jury-rigged out of fishing line.

All intact.

He finally sets the rifle down.

Tossing down his gear, he stops.

There - in the dirt.

Tiny green stalks sprout out of the ground.

Half laughing/half crying, Aaron collapses to the earth.

YOUNG AARON (V.O.)
 "Nothing, nothing mattered, and I
 knew why..."

BECOMING:

INT. ENGLISH CLASS - FORT BRAGG HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Aaron is reading *The Stranger* out loud to his classmates --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)
 ... And so did he. Throughout the
 whole absurd life I'd lived --

SUPER: YEAR 17

Aaron turns the page --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)
 ... a dark wind had been rising
 toward me from somewhere deep in my
 future...

BECOMING:

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

CLOSE ON: A WANTED POSTER stuck to a telephone pole.

YOUNG AARON (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 ... across years that were still to
 come, and as it passed...

NOTE: This is the same wanted poster of Aaron seen at the Sheriff's press conference.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG AARON (V.O.)(CONT'D)
... this wind leveled whatever was
offered to me at the time...

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 18

YOUNG AARON (V.O.)(CONT'D)
... in years no more real than the
ones I was living."

Pulling back --

Aaron STARES at his own inky visage tacked to the pole.

Does he even recognize himself?

Pulling his purple hoodie over his shaved head, he turns.

And stops.

Standing in the middle of the road, enveloped by a swirling
fog --

A TEENAGE BOY (18). With long blond hair.

OLD AARON
You again?

They stare at each other for a BEAT.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Get out of the road.

The Boy doesn't flinch.

As the fog temporarily lifts - Aaron's eyes lock onto the
Boy's shirt: Kurt Cobain.

He'd recognize that shirt anywhere.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Who are you?

When he blinks - the Boy is gone.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron can barely discern movement up ahead.

OLD AARON
Would you stop?!

Footsteps ascend wooden steps.

(CONTINUED)

Then --

GRANDMA'S CABIN looms before him, dark and desolate.

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

There is no color.

The familiar furniture is nothing but vague, shadowy objects.

Ahead --

A DARK SHAPE.

Aaron moves forward.

Finally, passing upon the stair --

Aaron stands face to face with his YOUNGER DOPPELGANGER.

There is just enough opaque light to illuminate the Boy's youth. His innocence.

Overwhelmed --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

You... you're still free.

Smiling, Aaron wipes away a tear.

A tear of what? Joy?

As he reaches for his younger self --

FEAR spreads across the Boy's face.

Aaron pulls his hand back.

He knows this Boy's destiny.

He's lived it.

This youthful innocence, this freedom...

Is doomed.

Unable to bear it --

Aaron turns away.

He reaches into the nook behind the stairs and produces the black Chinese ASSAULT RIFLE.

(CONTINUED)

He holds it out like an offering.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Take it.

The younger Aaron takes the weapon into his grasp.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Try not to slip through the
cracks...

His job finished - Aaron beats a retreat to the doorway.

From somewhere in the dark shadows --

YOUNG AARON

What is happening to me?

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Aaron wakes up with a start.

He hears the sound again.

SUPER: YEAR 18

Sitting up --

THERE'S SOMETHING on the stairs.

His shaggy hair and Kurt Cobain shirt are wet with sweat.

YOUNG AARON

Hello?

He can see a dark shape below him.

Flipping on a light --

The form becomes a purple hoodie.

Pulling it back --

IT'S THE OLDER AARON, shaved head gleaming.

CARRYING THE GUN.

THE MOONLIGHT from the skylight spills a pool of yellow
between them... as the 18 year old stares down at his 35
year old self.

The barrel of the assault rifle pushes into the light.

(CONTINUED)

Aaron takes a step down the staircase.

YOUNG AARON
Who are you?

The other Aaron walks into the moonlight and FLIPS THE GUN'S HANDLE toward his younger self --

OLD AARON
Take this.

A BEAT.

The gun GLEAMS between the moonbeams.

Pushing it toward Aaron's hands --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Take this and you are taking all of me with you...

He GRABS Aaron's forearm --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Do you understand? I am inside of you now.

Aaron JERKS HARD to pull away but his older self only tightens his grip.

Looking up into the older man's face, he sees the dark, haunted visage of his future --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
And you are inside of me.

From a distance the beam of light from the skylight looks like it could be issuing from a spaceship.

Handing the gun to Aaron --

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
You'll know when to use it.

Aaron isn't fighting anymore.

Their eyes LOCKING --

YOUNG AARON
What is happening to me?

He takes the cold metal in his hands as the older Aaron pulls his hoodie back on.

(CONTINUED)

A BEAT.

OLD AARON
Guess I'll see you around...

Turning, he walks down the stairs.

Aaron follows but then stops.

He raises the gun to his eyeline and points it to where his older self just was.

But there's only darkness. And the kitchen curtains fluttering in the breeze.

BECOMING:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The RUSHING WATER of a WATERFALL as --

Aaron makes his way down a hillside.

At the bottom, he peels off his clothes.

Still in his boots - he wades deep into the cold green water.

CARRYING HIS GUN.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 17

He douses himself under the water cascade and furiously shakes his shaved head from side to side like a wet dog until --

HE LIFTS THE RIFLE above his head.

Howling like a wolf --

OLD AARON
Buuuuuuuuuuuuurrrrrrrrrrr!

DROPS OF WATER jump off the metal gun like liquid popcorn just as --

The SUN BREAKS THROUGH the gray sky - CREATING a tiny rainbow in the mist.

THROUGH THE MULTI-COLORED sheet of water, Aaron points his gun AT US between the reds and greens.

(CONTINUED)

Because of the reflections, it looks like there are TWO AARONS shimmering in the spray.

Splitting through the flowing curtain, Aaron wades over to the other side of the pool and looks back at the cascading river.

Dwarfed by the water's sound and fury --

He immediately starts drying off the gun with his hoodie.

In no time at all - the gun GLISTENS LIKE NEW.

Satisfied - he TURNS HIS BACK to us - and pisses into the water like a little boy.

EXT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - DAY

From a distance, Jim finishes peeing in the bushes and then plants a FOR SALE sign in the front yard. He taps it twice with his hammer and then glances to the treeline.

The redwoods are silent - and so is Aaron.

SUPER: YEAR 19

A BEAT.

Jim jumps in his truck and is swallowed up by the forest as he drives off.

EXT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Issuing from the treeline like a ghost, Aaron walks to where his father stood not two minutes earlier.

Without a second thought --

He UPROOTS the sign and tosses it under the porch.

He pulls out a sleeping bag, the assault rifle, and a bag of groceries and slinks inside, LOCKING the door behind him.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Stashing THE GUN under the staircase, Aaron looks up through the skylight, as if for a sign...

INTO:

INT. CABIN BATHROOM - NIGHT

Splashing cold water on his face from the abalone sink.

His long hair dripping like yellow seaweed --

Aaron STARES AT HIMSELF in the mirror.

Raising his childhood dinosaur toothbrush to his teeth --

HE STOPS BRUSHING when he sees the spiderweb cracks overtaking the corner of the looking glass.

Is that his Grandma?

For a BRIEF moment he CATCHES HER WATERY IMAGE between the cracks' reflection, holding her tomato pin cushion, SEWING --

But then she's gone - that feeling lost - the cracks just lines on glass...

Aaron goes back to his brushing - but then JUMPS BACK:

His reflection has a *SHAVED HEAD!*

SPINNING AROUND, he runs both hands through his bushy hair. There's nobody there. He taps the mirror, but his reflection is back to normal.

YOUNG AARON

Grandma?

He picks at the cracks --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Are you really here?

Nothing.

LEANING CLOSER --

He pulls back his hair, pulls it tight - trying to replicate what he'd look like with no hair --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Aren't we supposed to help the sickest of the sick?

He turns from the mirror until --

ONLY HIS BACK fills the reflection.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

Rows of green stems sprout from the earth.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 16

Entering the clearing --

Aaron unzips his backpack and dumps out eight ROCKS.

INT. PURITY MARKET - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

Aaron drops eight packets of TOP RAMEN into his cart next to a bag of Thanksgiving Coffee.

SUPER: YEAR 20

He reaches for a pack of HERSHEY'S KISSES, tosses it in his cart, grabs another.

Ironic plays over the grocery store's tinny speakers.

LAURA (O.S.)

Aaron?

A BEAT.

LAURA (O.S.)

Honey, look at me.

It's a free ride when you've already paid --

She reaches for his hand.

YOUNG AARON

Don't do that, Mom.

He turns toward her, his boyish face staring directly ahead, almost like he's talking TO US --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Don't creep up on me like that.

Taken aback --

LAURA

Aaron, that's not what I was doing.

YOUNG AARON

How do I know what you were doing?

He moves past her down the aisle.

(CONTINUED)

To his back --

LAURA
Please come home.

Aaron stops.

YOUNG AARON
Mom, you know our deal.

LAURA
I do.

YOUNG AARON
Say it.

A BEAT.

LAURA
Your room is all ready...

YOUNG AARON
I wanna hear you say it!

LAURA
Why can't you just come home and
stay with me? There's no
'lectricity out there, you're all
alone, it's not safe -

Aaron barrels by her.

LAURA (CONT'D)
You were my little boy once.

He tosses a pack of hot dogs into his cart, but doesn't look
back.

LAURA (CONT'D)
And then you turned 19... and you
weren't anymore. Where did he go?

YOUNG AARON
Say it!

LAURA
(desperate)
If I don't hear from you within a
week after going into the woods...

FINALLY, Aaron turns to face her.

(CONTINUED)

LAURA (CONT'D)
I call the sheriff's office and
report you missing.

Aaron nods, satisfied.

Squeezing his mother's hand --

YOUNG AARON
You know I always come back.

He kisses her on the cheek and disappears down another
aisle.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

From his knees, Aaron is meticulously arranging the pile of
rocks.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 15

There is clearly some method to his madness.

As we move up and over him --

A ROCK FORMATION of the 8/cross-hairs symbol covers the
entire length of the clearing.

The top circle of the "8" is halfway finished.

Picking up another rock...

EXT. ALLEYWAY - FORT BRAGG, CA - NIGHT

A rock strikes a window - SHATTERING the glass.

(O.S.) Uproarious hooting and hollering.

Aaron high-fives two LOWLIFES (20s).

LOWLIFE #1
Drink up, Bassler.

SUPER: YEAR 21

In grungy rags, sporting a patchy beard and long hair --

Aaron takes a pull from the flask.

Belches.

(CONTINUED)

LOWLIFE #2

We should try mailbox baseball.

Aaron shakes his head and takes another pull.

Even he knows these guys are losers.

Out of the corner of his eye --

RED FLASHING LIGHTS.

LOWLIFE #1

Oh fuck!

The two Lowlifes hightail it in the other direction.

Totally plastered --

Aaron doesn't even bother to move.

INT. DRUNK TANK - NIGHT

As the POLICE OFFICER closes the cell door --

YOUNG AARON

Can you help me?

POLICE OFFICER

What, you hungover already?

YOUNG AARON

No, not that.

He shakes his head violently.

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

Something's wrong. With my
head. With my... mind.

The Officer narrows his eyes, *studying Aaron's face...*

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) At his desk - the Police Officer flips through his Rolodex and dials a number.

B) From the cell - Aaron looks up as the Police Officer arrives with a DOCTOR in a white coat.

C) Walking down a corridor - the three of them come to a door that says: "Mendocino County Mental Health Services."

(CONTINUED)

D) Donning comfortable clothing - Aaron sits in a bright, sunny room. A friendly PSYCHIATRIST sits across from him, making notes in her chart.

E) Aaron takes a paper cup and puts the pills in his mouth. He swallows them down with water.

F) In the cafeteria - Aaron, clear-eyed, sits with a group of other patients. He smiles and laughs at something funny. He looks happy.

H) Dressed in street clothes - Aaron steps through a door to where his father is waiting. After a BEAT, Jim wraps him in a hug. They head out the door, together...

END MONTAGE

BACK ON:

DRUNK TANK --

The Officer is STILL STUDYING Aaron's face which is staring back at us - unblinking.

What do you need, Aaron?

A BEAT.

YOUNG AARON

What is is happening to me?

CLICK.

POLICE OFFICER

Just sleep it off, pal. You'll be out at eight.

Pulling out the key --

Aaron hangs his head low until all we can see is his long, wild hair covering his face like a curtain.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

A needle pulls thread through black fabric.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 14

Behind him, out in the small clearing, it starts to rain --

Black dirt, freshly tilled, drinks up the water.

INTO:

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim's hand curling around a bottle of Red Seal Ale as it rests on his belly.

Snoring from the comfort of his La-Z-Boy --

A loud THUD jolts him awake.

SUPER: YEAR 22

Discombobulated - he looks around the room.

The clock reads **3:08 AM**

Rubbing his eyes --

A DOOR SLAMS outside somewhere.

Looking out the window --

Aaron is descending the driveway - yelling and swearing to himself.

JIM
Jesus Christ.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Aaron's cursing ECHOES off every dark edifice.

Jim struggles to keep up.

Just as he's about to call out --

Aaron stops.

And drives his boot through a park bench - SPLINTERING it.

Then he full-on RAGES.

He brings his boot down again and again and again until the bench is PULVERIZED.

Turning to run --

Aaron collides headlong into a LIGHT POLE.

His bell rung - Aaron gazes up at the stars for a BEAT.

The rage expunged from his body like a demon after an exorcism.

(CONTINUED)

Climbing to his feet - he inspects the carnage of the bench.

Scooping up the remnants - he tries re-compiling the detritus.

But the pieces don't fit anymore.

Aaron puts a hand over his eyes and SOBS.

From the shadows --

Jim is FROZEN IN PLACE - his brain short-circuiting...
helpless.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

CLOSE ON: A SILVER ELECTRIC RAZOR sitting next to the
GLEAMING assault rifle.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 13

Grabbing the razor with a bruised arm --

Aaron BUZZES it across his scalp.

WAFTS OF DIRTY BLOND HAIR fall to the forest floor, dusting
the assault rifle with yellow specs and follicles...

BECOMING:

EXT. MAIN STREET - FORT BRAGG, CA - NIGHT

DRIPS OF MIST as Main Street is DESERTED and engulfed in a
thick fog.

At a lonely intersection --

Aaron stands under the clear crimson beams of a BLINKING
STOPLIGHT.

SUPER: YEAR 23

Slurring --

YOUNG AARON

Hello?

He staggers to the sidewalk.

Nothing but dark, ominous window fronts leer at him.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)
I need help!

He cranes his neck all around - looking for someone.

Anyone.

But Fort Bragg looks post-apocalyptic at this hour.

No help here.

No help anywhere.

EXT. SKUNK TRAIN - DAY

TWO HEAVILY ARMED SWAT MEMBERS, complete with camouflage, goggles, and M-16 rifles - stand at the front of the train as it heads deeper into the gloomy woods.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 12

LEAVING THE CONFINES OF THE TRAIN we PULL UP through the treetops --

The great forest spreading out below us - the ocean shimmering like a mirror.

A BEAT.

THEN WE SLINGSHOT from one end of Mendocino County to the other; across vast divides of greens and reds and blues, until --

CRASHING THROUGH THE TREETOPS - we are down on the forest floor again; right next to Aaron, who is...

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Methodically DROPPING poppy seeds ONE BY ONE into the freshly tilled garden of his new camp.

EXT. NOYO HARBOR - PACIFIC DAWN FISHING BOAT - NIGHT

The FOURTH OF JULY FIREWORKS light up the night sky.

Aaron's EXTENDED FAMILY laugh and drink from the bow of a large crabbing boat.

SUPER: YEAR 24

Strobe-like flashes illuminate their faces.

(CONTINUED)

Aaron stands off to the side, alone - staring out at the water.

He can hear the family reunion all around him, but he can't quite understand it.

JIM (O.S.)
... let's all raise a glass to the
new millennium.

The fireworks crack and explode around the harbor illuminating the dozens of other boats on the water like a photograph.

SMACK!

A RAW EGG splatters against Pacific Dawn's hull.

Splat! SPLAT!

Jim downs his beer and reaches for a bucket of eggs.

JIM
Okay, fellas! Here we go!

The closest boat to them HURLS another round of eggs onto the Pacific Dawn's bow, as people scatter and laugh.

It's a Fort Bragg tradition - the Fourth of July egg fight - and everyone joins in.

Except Aaron.

After chugging a beer --

He rips off his hoodie.

His muscled torso is bare underneath.

YOUNG AARON
Fuck you America!

The beer shines red, white and blue on his chest --

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)
Come and get me you mutherfuckers!
Come and get me!!

KNOCKING OVER a young family --

He leaps over his mother and swings from the boat's deck like a spider monkey, landing high atop the ship's cabin.

The eggs keep flying in, but everyone has turned to Aaron now.

Splat!

White shells crack against Aaron's shoulder and head.

Unbelievably, he catches a flying egg in his hand.

JIM

Son, get down. Now!

FLINGING it back at the oncoming boat --

Aaron follows the egg's trajectory by JUMPING off the cabin.

Crack!

His ankles BOUNCE off the boat's stern as he tumbles forward into the dark water.

LAURA

Aaron... Baby!

She leans over the boat's rail but Aaron breaks the surface too far away.

Pop-pop-POP!!

Fireworks and eggs BURST everywhere --

YOUNG AARON

I'm right here America! I'm right
fucking here you fucks!!

The Pacific Dawn's railing fills with faces - anxious to see what Aaron will do next.

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)

I am the lizard king and I can do
anything!

JIM

Aaron. Aaron!

But he's too far gone now --

The passengers on the other boats are staring too.

Laura catches Jim's eye, and their shared look IS CHILLING as it morphs from worried to scared to utter heartbreak.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

Aaron - naked to the waist - emerges from the treeline.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 11

His left arm is in a sling improvised out of a shirt.

He winces in pain as he removes it.

Crusty dried blood and purple contusions decorate his forearm.

TEETHMARKS pockmark the flesh.

He bends down next to the stream.

Splashing water across his mangled arm -

A FLICKER OF MOVEMENT.

The Young Boy is staring right at him.

OLD AARON

I can see you.

A BEAT.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

What do you want?

Squinting his eyes - Aaron can just make out the boy's Kurt Cobain t-shirt.

As he sets the bucket down, the Boy turns and disappears into the woods...

BECOMING:

INT./EXT. JIM BASSLER'S CAR - DAY

REDWOOD TREES FLASHING BY Jim's house, as he pulls into his driveway.

His jaw drops open.

SUPER: YEAR 25

Parked next to the garage: a brand new 2002 CHEVY SILVERADO twinkles in the sun.

He watches as Aaron meticulously applies a coat of wax to the vehicle's red exterior.

(CONTINUED)

Exiting his car --

Jim has never seen his son so prideful of anything in his life.

JIM
When did you get back?

YOUNG AARON
This morning.

JIM
This your truck?

YOUNG AARON
Like her?

JIM
So that's it, huh? Cashed your savings and went straight over to the dealership?

YOUNG AARON
That a problem?

Jim removes his glasses and rubs his eyes.

JIM
You wanna be livin' in my garage 'til you're 30 years old? That your plan?

Aaron stops wiping.

JIM (CONT'D)
Goddammit, son. That money was an opportunity for you. To get something going.

A vein throbs in Aaron's forehead.

His face is the same color as the acrylic.

JIM (CONT'D)
Hell, you could've used that money on a down payment for your own place...

Aaron springs to his feet and throws open the door to the truck.

Jim leaps out of the way as his son steps on the gas and barrels down the driveway.

(CONTINUED)

PEELING OUT - the truck disappears into a cloud of white smoke...

BECOMING:

EXT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

THICK WET FOG, swirling within the dawn's gray light.

Soaked and miserable - Aaron glimpses his mother's house through the trees.

Dark and silent.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 10

Drawing a deep breath --

He makes a break for it.

Sprinting across the open backyard - he looks like he's storming Omaha Beach.

Finally reaching the house --

Total quiet.

He reaches up behind a planter and retrieves a key.

INT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cowboy snores rhythmically next to Laura.

Standing in the doorway --

Aaron looms. Silent as carbon monoxide.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A. Aaron tosses his dank clothes into the dryer.

B. Clad in boxers - he raids the kitchen for Twinkies, potato chips, and beer.

C. He plops down on the couch - chowing down on the junk food.

D. He flips on the TV.

It is set to a CHINESE MILITARY CHANNEL.

Rows of soldiers perform flawless maneuvers.

(CONTINUED)

OLD AARON
Fuck you.

INT. AARON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Still wearing only boxer shorts --

Aaron stands in the doorway of his bedroom.

Or what used to be his bedroom in a past life.

Was the bed always this small?

Opening the closet door - he's greeted by old relics: a stack of X-Men comics, a worn baseball mitt, and stick-figure drawings of redwood trees.

From a box he uncovers piles of old photos.

He blinks at the youthful glow of his parents - no older then, than he is now.

And his Grandma smiles at him in her plaid shirt, drinking coffee on the porch of her cabin.

But his eyes gravitate toward his younger visage: In Grandma's garden, on the Skunk Train, at the Grand Canyon, on Ten Mile Beach.

Faster, he FLIPS through the images like a FLIPBOOK.

OLD AARON (O.S.)
Where you did you go?

INT. SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Clad in dry, clean clothing --

Aaron sifts through Laura's gardening paraphernalia.

Tucked away between a stack of clay pots: a bag of WHITE POPPY SEEDS.

EXT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Crossing the yard - Aaron's breathing is the only sound in his ears.

Halfway to the treeline --

MOVEMENT in the neighbor's yard.

(CONTINUED)

Before Aaron can fully turn his head --

A MALE VOICE calls out in MANDARIN.

Shit!

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Aaron runs at full tilt.

Life on the line type of sprint.

Behind him --

The Soldier is still shouting foreign words.

Followed by the BELLOWING OF A BIG DOG.

EXT. NOYO RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Aaron skids to a halt at a STEEP BLUFF.

A hundred feet straight below him: the Noyo River.

To his left - an old wooden RAILROAD TRESTLE spans the river.

More FRANTIC BARKING, then --

A hulking GERMAN SHEPHERD crashes through the underbrush.

They LOCK EYES for a BEAT.

OLD AARON

Whoa...

But the dog charges!

Aaron leaps up onto the trestle's wooden beams.

The shepherd is right behind - TEETH GNASHING into his arm.

A split second to decide.

Aaron races ahead.

With no hesitation --

HE JUMPS OFF THE BRIDGE.

EXT. NOYO RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Aaron PLUNGES deep underwater.

Breaking the surface, gasping --

He sees a CHINESE SOLDIER silhouetted next to the dog.

They watch helplessly from the bluff as he floats away downstream.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

(O.S.) FRANTIC YELLING.

Jim bolts upright in his bed.

His room is bathed in an orange incandescence.

SUPER: YEAR 26

Leaping to the window --

The GARAGE IS ON FIRE.

EXT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

It's a full conflagration.

His long hair plastered to his forehead with sweat - Aaron holds a garden hose up to the mammoth flames.

The effort is so futile it's comical.

JIM
(apoplectic)
What in Christ's name have you
done?

He yanks the hose out of his son's hand.

JIM (CONT'D)
This is your home, Aaron! How
could you do this?

The defiance in Aaron's face melts away faster than the burning structure behind him.

It's replaced by another look.

The look of uncertainty.

(CONTINUED)

Of fear.

Speechless, the two men stand amid flying embers and black smoke - nothing left to do but take in the strange beauty of an uncontrolled fire.

But their silence speaks to something else.

A line has been crossed and they both know it.

Finally -

YOUNG AARON

Dad?

A BEAT.

As Jim meets his son's gaze --

A sense of understanding seems to pass between them.

An understanding of mutual hopelessness.

The one not knowing how to ask for help.

The other not knowing how to give it.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Glimmering in the firelight --

Aaron finishes CARVING another 8-symbol into a massive red trunk and sets his large knife down next to THE GUN.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 9

Like a COILED SNAKE, the assault rifle glistens amid the campfire sparks... WATCHING --

As Aaron empties out his backpack.

He unzips every pocket - but he's not finding what he's looking for. Frantically, he grabs his old Mead notebook and starts inspecting each page...

INTO:

EXT. TEN MILE BEACH - DAY

Aaron laying back on the dark sand staring up at the sky.

Holding up the same Mead notebook, his shaggy blond hair spills out of his hoodie.

SUPER: YEAR 27

He continues SKETCHING --

AN ALIEN FIGURE. Flying through a crude galaxy of stars.

With the waves pounding on the beach, Aaron peers up over the edge of the notebook to where --

A FAMILY is laughing and splashing at the water's edge.

One little tyke is up on his Father's shoulders.

As for the Mother --

The breath CATCHES in Aaron's throat.

Her long, jet black hair sears into his retinas.

He's seen that hair a million times in his dreams.

It's really her.

Holding her young daughter's hand - a small wave gently pulls them into the water.

As the little girl SCREAMS in terror --

Mom and Dad ERUPT IN LAUGHTER.

Mesmerized by this scene of serenity - Aaron laughs, too.

But as she looks in his direction --

He turns away from her - *from us*, and --

BURIES HIS HEAD behind the notebook full of 8's and trees...

BECOMING:

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

CLOSE ON (through FLIR): Gray, translucent trees SPEEDING BY from the forest below.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 8

It's like an endless, impenetrable ocean.

No sign of Aaron anywhere, just REDWOOD TREES until the horizon.

EXT. OLD HOUSE - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

Aaron's beat-up red Chevy pulls up in front of a shabby GRAY HOUSE.

The yard is choked with weeds and dandelions.

SUPER: YEAR 28

Jim appears from around the side of the house.

JIM

Not the Hearst Castle. But it
beats the garage, eh?

Aaron's eyes are already reconnoitering the perimeter of the property.

A risk assessment.

JIM (CONT'D)

You can relax. Nobody but old
folks for five blocks.

Jim holds out the keys.

JIM (CONT'D)

There's an old rotary mower in the
shed. Clean up the yard. It's
yours now.

YOUNG AARON

I will.

A BEAT.

JIM

You good? Need food or anything?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG AARON
I'm fine. Thanks.

Taking the hint - Jim pats his son on the shoulder.

At his car --

JIM
This is the best I can do for
you. Take some pride in the place.

Aaron watches his father disappear down the street.

All alone --

He KISSES the blue key with chapped lips and inserts it into
the redwood door.

FOR A BRIEF MOMENT his face is SERENE.

He finally has his own place, but then --

THE WIND RUSHES IN from the dark forest and he shuts the
door behind him, trying to keep it outside.

EXT. FOREST STREAM - NIGHT

A babbling stream is the picture of nocturnal tranquility.

Until --

A DARK SHAPE manifests out of thin air.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 7

Rifle outstretched - Aaron may as well be walking point on a
night mission in Vietnam.

He stops.

Ahead - through the trees - an illumination.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NEAR NORTHSPUR, CA - MOMENTS LATER

A brilliant harvest moon bathes the small clearing in pale
light.

Staying within the treeline, Aaron probes the open space,
leery of a trap. He clocks the tiny opening in the forest
roof.

Satisfied - he finally steps into the opaque light.

(CONTINUED)

OLD AARON

Thank you, Rea. This will be our
new eastern camp.

Ready to get to work - he sets his backpack down and peels
off his outer layers of clothing.

Underneath it all, he wears a faded Kurt Cobain t-shirt.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Out of the ground...

With his knife, Aaron digs into the soil.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

And into the sky.

INT. COURTROOM - FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

JUDGE LANSING (50s) enters through her chamber door and
takes a seat behind the bench.

Aaron, long hair tied back in a pony tail, wears a blue
COUNTY JAIL jumpsuit.

Next to him: his PUBLIC DEFENDER (30s).

SUPER: YEAR 29

JUDGE LANSING

Please be seated.

In the gallery behind Aaron: Jim, Laura, and Cowboy.

Taking off her spectacles, the judge stares straight into
Aaron eyes until he averts his gaze.

JUDGE LANSING (CONT'D)

I've seen this movie too many
times. And when I look at you,
it's clear as day that you are
right on the line. There's a
healthy, law abiding citizen inside
of you, because you were just that
- for 18 years.

Aaron shuffles his feet, agitated.

JUDGE LANSING (CONT'D)

But now there's this other version
that's emerged... This
delinquent... Today it's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE LANSING (CONT'D) (cont'd)
vandalism. But what will it be
tomorrow?

The Public Defender whispers something in his ear.

JUDGE LANSING (CONT'D)
I sincerely hope you take this
opportunity to receive the help you
need...

She SLAMS the gavel.

INT. GRANDMA'S CABIN - DAY

CLOSE ON: AARON'S HAND opens a cabinet door - revealing the
iconic tomato PIN CUSHION.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 6

Pulling it out, he also grabs three spools of THREAD.

SLAMMING the door shut --

INTO:

INT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Aaron standing over his mother's bed, dripping wet.

He watches her sleep.

Then --

YOUNG AARON
(leaning down)
Mommy?

Laura's eyes snap open.

Her eyes pinball around the room.

But Aaron isn't there.

SUPER: YEAR 30

She deflates.

But just a little. This isn't the first time.

She watches the rain falling outside her window.

INT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Donning a bathrobe and slippers --

Laura stops outside a closed bedroom door.

Peering into the room --

The bed is empty. No Aaron.

There's been no Aaron here for a very long time, but she still checks every day.

Her eyes linger for a BEAT on the faded *Empire Strikes Back* poster still clinging to the wall.

Then --

A KNOCK at the front door.

INT./EXT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jim stands on the front stoop, soaked from the rain.

Laura's color drains at the look on his face.

JIM

You turn the TV on yet?

INT. AARON'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

On the TV: **Fort Bragg Pastor Slain While Hiking in Cleone.**

Staring at the screen, Laura and Jim each have a white-knuckle grip on their coffee mugs.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

(on TV)

The suspect should be considered armed and very dangerous. We ask that anyone with any information about this crime come forward at once.

Laura turns it off.

Their reflections stare back at them from the black screen.

Laura gives her ex-husband a pleading look.

All Jim can do is shake his head.

(CONTINUED)

JIM
He spends a lot of time in those
woods up by Cleone.

LAURA
Have you seen him lately?

JIM
Not for about two months.

LAURA
Maybe we could ask his
neighbors? Maybe one of them has
seen him. Can give him some sort
of... alibi.

Alibi.

The word itself takes their breath away.

LAURA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
He was our little boy once.

A BEAT.

JIM
He's sick, Lor. There's something
been growing inside of him. He's...

Throwing up his hands -

JIM (CONT'D)
I don't see what choice we have.

LAURA
You could do that? To our son?

JIM
What happens when they find out it
was him?

INT. JIM'S CAR - DAY

A swarm of people flock in and out of Fort Bragg Substation.
Laura stares at the front door through sunglasses.

JIM
Are you ready to do this?

She watches a NEWS VAN skid to a stop.

(CONTINUED)

Then another.

LAURA
Turn the radio up.

JIM
What? Why?

Off her look --

He turns up the volume.

RADIO VOICE
An arrest has been made in the
killing of the youth pastor whose
body was discovered outside of
Cleone last night.

Their eyes meet.

Oh shit...

RADIO VOICE (CONT'D)
A name hasn't been released yet,
but the gender has been confirmed
as female. Details are still coming
in, but the sheriff's office is
suggesting it was a tragic case of
mistaken identity --

Laura reaches out and grabs Jim's arm.

Removing her sunglasses --

She sobs tears of relief.

LAURA
Oh, thank the Good Lord Jesus...

Dumbfounded at what he just heard --

Jim looks from Laura back to the substation building.

JIM
He's still not well.

A long BEAT.

LAURA
I know.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Aaron studies the red ceiling above him... No open sky in sight.

HE FLIPS THROUGH THE PAGES of his worn notebook --

The ALIEN FIGURES, RED STARS, SPACESHIPS and MILITARY TANKS are crammed so close together there's barely any white space left.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 5

Pausing - he notices his exaggerated SHADOW stretched out on the ground before him... like it's coming from inside of him.

Amused, he reaches for his rifle and hops to his feet.

CLOSE ON SHADOW:

Gesticulating and contorting wildly --

One of his shadow-arms is normal.

But on the other side --

The GUN looks like an APPENDAGE of Aaron's body.

In place of his elbow, forearm, and hand is a barrel, magazine, and pistol grip.

Like Robocop - he holds out the arm/gun, pretending to fire off round after round.

He laughs out loud.

EXT. AARON'S HOME - DAY

Giggling, Aaron climbs down into a MOAT-LIKE TRENCH encircling his house.

SUPER: YEAR 31

His muscles stick out like cords, as he pulls a shovel from the dirt and begins smoothing out the freshly poured concrete of a crude RETAINING WALL.

His assault rifle rests on the lip of the hole, within arm's length.

EXT. FORT BRAGG, CA - DAY

Main Street is quiet.

A few cars. A few pedestrians.

A LOW RUMBLE registers.

At the far end of the street --

A military-grade HUMVEE turns onto Franklin Street.

Then another.

And a third.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 4

Sunlight glints off the massive CONVOY of heavy machinery as SWAT thunders through the little town.

It's like a military parade.

From the Tip Top Lounge --

RED-NOSED LOCALS are crowded into every window, gaping at the cavalry.

EXT. AARON'S HOME - DAY

A large coiling VAPOR TRAIL perforates the brilliant azure sky.

Squinting up at the tiny airliner knifing its way through the troposphere, Aaron squeezes it between his thumb and forefinger.

SUPER: YEAR 32

He glances over at the bonfire burning in the pit.

The massive pile of firewood stacked next to it gives off the impression that JFK's eternal flame would sooner be extinguished.

Jumping up on his concrete wall, he begins to board his front window.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Aaron?

Aaron freezes like a deer --

(CONTINUED)

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Aaron? Are you home? I come in
peace, son.

With a white-knuckle grip on the hammer, Aaron hears the
footsteps approaching until --

His father gawks slack-jawed at the haphazard construction
project in progress.

He is gobsmacked.

YOUNG AARON
I've only got room for one. If I
were you, I'd stock up the boat and
be ready to go up the coast.

He once again glances at the wispy vapor trail.

YOUNG AARON (CONT'D)
Won't be long now.

JIM
(struggling)
Aaron...

A BEAT.

JIM (CONT'D)
Your aunt owns this place. You know
that, right?

YOUNG AARON
Once they come, nothing will
matter. Not private property, not
money. Nothing.

JIM
You need to take out that wall and
refill this goddamn hole. Right
now.

YOUNG AARON
Are you deaf? I said --

SMACK!

Jim RIPS the hammer out of Aaron's hand and CHUCKS it into
the forest.

JIM
Cut the shit, Aaron! I want you the
fuck out of here --

(CONTINUED)

Aaron's jaw clenches and the veins in his forehead stand out
--

JIM (CONT'D)

Now!

Aaron grabs a nearby trowel and begins furiously adding more concrete onto the retaining wall.

YOUNG AARON

You wanna die like everyone
else? Fine with me, motherfucker.
I warned you. Many times.

His father lunges at him but Aaron leaps back over the wall and disappears inside the house.

INT. AARON'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

The living room is devoid of furniture except for the television and several large jugs of drinking water and non-perishables.

LEAPING OUT THE BACK WINDOW Aaron becomes a tiny spec swallowed up by the red forest.

With the yellow curtains fluttering in his wake --

Jim steps inside.

MAPS and PAPERS have been tossed asunder. A soiled SLEEPING BAG sits in the corner.

Turning from the window --

He notices a GAP between the bottom shelf and the floor of a CRUDE BOOKSHELF.

Reaching his fingers into the gap - a HINGE CREAKS and the shelf SWINGS OPEN LIKE A DOOR.

NARROW STEPS lead down into blackness.

INT. AARON'S HOME - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

He has to duck the ceiling is so low.

The bunker-like room contains nothing but a mattress and --

A LARGE MURAL of a majestic FEMALE ALIEN.

The name "REA" is printed on the creature's oblong forehead.

(CONTINUED)

She has one arm outstretched in a beckoning gesture. On the inside of her palm is the 8-symbol.

Her salamander-like feet are also perched at the center of another "8", which is surrounded by a field of BLOOMING RED POPPIES.

All around Rea the forest is ON FIRE. Impressively drawn CHINESE FIGHTER JETS drop bombs like eggs.

Like Adam in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco, Jim reaches out to touch Rea's hand with his index finger...

EXT. FOREST - AARON'S BUNKER - DAY

Only two forensic techs remain at the crime scene.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 3

Few words pass between them during their grim work.

TIME LAPSE TO:

EXT. AARON'S BUNKER - NIGHT

All of the authorities are gone.

Nature has reclaimed its space.

At the bunker --

Aaron's face is stoic. Resolute.

And then he loses it.

 OLD AARON
 Jesus, fuck.

Like Clark Kent, he RIPS OPEN the black jumpsuit covering his body.

He doesn't stop tearing until he's buck naked - the jumpsuit lying in TATTERS at his feet.

EXT. AARON'S BUNKER - LATER

Aaron's right finger fiddles with the trigger.

Still naked, he pops a Hershey's Kiss into his mouth and savors it.

(CONTINUED)

It's the last one in the bag.

Aaron picks up the rifle and jams the long barrel against his right eye.

OLD AARON
I will not be taken alive, you
Commie fucks.

Tears well in his eyes as he inserts the barrel into his mouth.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
I will not...

Chest heaving - his right thumb moves over the trigger once again.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
(eyes tightly shut)
Be taken alive!!

He PULLS THE TRIGGER.

Along with a THUNDEROUS BANG --

BRAIN MATTER and RED, GOOPY VISCERA festoons the ground.

White smoke hangs in the air over what's left of Aaron's mangled body.

Then --

A PIERCING, BRIGHT LIGHT emerges from INSIDE THE BUNKER.

The entire clearing becomes awash in light.

Aaron snaps out of his morbid reverie as --

A pair of OBLONG EYES emerge from the bunker.

He stammers backward. Wants to run.

As if hypnotized --

He watches the thin ALIEN-LIKE FEMALE uncoil herself up and out of the hole.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
Rea???

The tall creature raises a clawed hand.

(CONTINUED)

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
The Chinese. They're here. I saw
them last night!

As if she's projecting an image --

The dead, trampled poppies are RESURRECTED.

The burned and wilted petals BLOOM into a vivid mass of
incandescent red.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
If I plant more poppies, you'll
still take me with you?

The strange creature beckons to the east.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)
East? Yes, I'll go east... They
take two weeks to bloom.

Her gangly arm extends straight up toward a tiny opening in
the forest ceiling.

She slowly lowers her arm.

Her lithe body begins to sink back from whence it came.

Those oblong eyes stare straight at Aaron until they, too,
disappear in the bunker.

A BEAT.

As the brightness fades and darkness re-stakes its claim
over the land --

The projection of the blooming red poppies also evaporates -
until only the trampled, dead plants remain.

But Aaron is already gone.

INT. CHINESE CONSULATE - SAN FRANCISCO, CA - NIGHT

THROUGH WINDOW: A small, DUCT-TAPED PACKAGE arcs over a
HIGH CONCRETE WALL and sails through the night air...

SMASHING through the glass --

SUPER: YEAR 33

Another package follows.

EXT. CHINESE CONSULATE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron, dressed in black, retrieves another bundled parcel from his backpack.

Looking both ways - he lobs it over the wall.

A BEAT.

Methodically, he zips up his backpack and begins walking down Geary Blvd. COIT TOWER looms in the distance.

Turning on a side street, he starts to run until --

TIRES SCREECH and FLASHING CHERRIES bathe him in red light.

POLICE OFFICER
On the ground! Now!

INT. CHINESE CONSULATE - LATER

A BOMB SQUAD TECHNICIAN cuts through the last strip of tape on the package.

A BEAT.

Following protocol, *carefully reaching in* --

SHE PULLS OUT piece of black material... which unfolds into a sleek full-body JUMPSUIT.

TURNING to the video screen full of CHINESE OFFICIALS, she adjusts her microphone.

BOMB SQUAD TECHNICIAN
I think it's a... spacesuit?

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Aaron WRETCHES.

He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 2

He reclines in a crude lean-to constructed out of sticks and ferns.

A SONIC BOOM shatters the silence.

Then another.

(CONTINUED)

Overhead --

A squadron of FIGHTER JETS roars past.

Dropping to his knees in terror --

Aaron fixates on the last plane in the procession.

He can just make out the CHINESE FLAG on the side of the aircraft before it disappears.

OLD AARON (CONT'D)

Jesus. It's happening...

The sound of WIND RIPPLING THROUGH FABRIC hits his ears.

Straining his eyes at the black sky, he sees --

PARATROOPERS attached to RED PARACHUTES descending all around him.

INT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron hears CHINESE VOICES everywhere.

Paratroopers land and begin unbuckling their gear.

A low rumble registers until the ground begins shaking.

Above the treetops --

The fighter jets once again thunder past in one continuous and deafening roar.

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION rips through the night air, lighting up the entire sky.

Aaron is knocked to the ground by the concussive blast of another missile.

MACHINE GUN FIRE reverberates off the ghostly redwood trees whose color is exacerbated by the fiery orange glow illuminating the entire sky.

Reaching a flowing stream, Aaron leaps down into the water.

He presses himself up against the steep bank.

Shivering from wet and fright --

Voices - speaking in Mandarin - hover all around him in every direction.

INTO:

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

An "8" of Spades playing card dangling from the rearview.

Gripping the steering wheel with both hands, Aaron slams on the gas - the speedometer nearing 100 MPH.

SUPER: YEAR 34

Rolling his window down, he glances up at the night sky, searching for any sign of danger.

Rounding a corner and coming into town, he does not take his foot off the gas.

Looking out again, there comes a FLASH OF RED from above.

Squinting between his long dirty hair, he tries to make out the source.

Is it the Chinese?

Looking back at the road --

Aaron SCREAMS and drives his boot hard down on the brakes until --

The metal fence surrounding DANA GRAY ELEMENTARY rushes forward through the WINDSHIELD.

With thundering velocity, the big truck SLAMS into the fence - ripping through the metal wire - and CRASHING into a tennis court net 30 feet beyond.

A long silent BEAT.

Soaked in blood, Aaron's eyes begin to flutter and he moans at the sound of: Thousands of CHINESE PEOPLE SPEAKING, muffled screams, and the sound of FIGHTER JETS flying overhead...

BECOMING:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron staring straight AT US.

SLOWLY, we PAN to see the other side of the table.

(CONTINUED)

A FEMALE AUTHORITY (40s), dark and whip-smart, writes notes in her file as a MALE AUTHORITY (30s) enters the room.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

Aaron, can I ask you a very serious question? And it's not about any of the things we've been talking about today. Not exactly, anyway.

YOUNG AARON

Everybody's got somethin' to hide... 'cept for me and my monkey.

The Male Authority guffaws and looks at the two-way glass.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

It's clear that you have lots of complex thoughts going on in your head right now. Inside your body. Needless to say, we are very concerned for your safety and well-being. If you would be willing to participate in an out-patient treatment program, we have really smart and caring people here who can help you.

Aaron smiles and points a finger at her.

YOUNG AARON

You think I'm the crazy one.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

Nobody said anything about crazy. It would be out-patient. Three days a week. Please, Aaron.

YOUNG AARON

Are we done?

Shaking his head, the Male Authority leans in and whispers to his counterpart.

MALE AUTHORITY

Game over.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

We can't keep doing this... He's not fit to be placed back in society.

(CONTINUED)

MALE AUTHORITY

You know our hands are tied.

She glares at her partner and closes her file.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

Your mother is waiting for you outside. Please take care of yourself, Aaron. And don't forget to take your medication. It's vitally important.

They both watch in silence as Aaron exits the room.

After a BEAT, the Male Authority pats her on the shoulder.

MALE AUTHORITY (CONT'D)

Good luck, doc.

When he leaves the room, she opens her file and begins addressing the CLOSED-CIRCUIT CAMERA in the corner.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

This is Elena Marquez, MD, PhD. Subject of psychiatric evaluation is Aaron James Bassler, case number 43056. Subject was arrested for DUI and destruction of private property when he drove his truck onto the tennis court of Dana Gray Elementary School.

INT. JAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Dressed in REGULAR STREET CLOTHES, Aaron is buzzed through a heavy door to a lobby where Laura waits.

YOUNG AARON

You got all my stuff?

She nods and wipes away tears.

LAURA

In the car.

YOUNG AARON

Let's go.

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron opens the passenger door of the YELLOW VOLKSWAGON BEETLE and sees the butt of his NORINCO SKS ASSAULT RIFLE behind the seat.

LAURA

Sweetie, it doesn't have to be this way. You're more than welcome to stay with me at the house. Your father also said --

YOUNG AARON

I gotta clear my head, mom. Just take me out there.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

LOOKING DOWN on the V.W. Beetle moving along a thin strip of road --

FOLLOWING as it drives parallel to the mighty Pacific Ocean.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

The subject demonstrated continual perceptual disturbances for the entire duration of the evaluation.

INT. VW BEETLE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron pulls a purple hoodie over his head and leans against the window as redwoods fly past.

His cheeks puff up like a blowfish as he fogs up the glass.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Disturbances included delusions of persecution, as well as visual hallucinations on at least two occasions. Subject's primary focus was on a special mission to escape an impending apocalypse. On numerous occasions the subject expressed visible fear and antagonism toward the Chinese.

INT. VW BEETLE - LATER

The car is parked on the side of a small road next to a very remote LOGGING TRAIL.

Aaron and his mother sit in absolute silence until --

LAURA

Can you at least tell me if they
diagnosed you with anything?
Shouldn't they be treating you?

YOUNG AARON

How many times do I have to say it?
They can't hold me without my
consent. But there's nothing wrong
with me.

Aaron twists the ends of his long blond hair --

LAURA

I want to turn this car around.
Drive us back into town...

YOUNG AARON

Mommy, stop.

LAURA

Do you think I want my son living
in the woods? Like a damn animal?!

He opens the door to get out but she envelopes him in a desperate hug.

LAURA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I want my little boy back.

Pulling away, he steps out of the car and immediately reaches behind the seat for his rifle, knocking a PILL BOTTLE to the floor.

A BEAT as Aaron contemplates the medicine until --

He slams the car door shut, leaving the pills behind.

YOUNG AARON

If you don't hear from me within a
week...

Laura bows her head. She can barely get it out --

(CONTINUED)

LAURA

I call the sheriff's office and
report you missing.

Broken and defeated, she watches her son disappear into the
forest as --

THE WIND PICKS UP behind him, the forest gets darker, and
everything TURNS BLACK...

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Traveling DOWNHILL below the gyrating redwood umbrella --

Aaron glides through the woods, his shaved head bobbing up
and down like a yellow buoy.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Coupled with his reduced mental
state, the subject's avowed
militancy toward the Chinese
creates a situation of legitimate
concern as it pertains to not only
his own safety, but also for the
safety of those with whom he
interacts.

Approaching a clearing --

SUPER: MANHUNT DAY 1

Aaron slinks through the massive trees in his tattered Kurt
Cobain shirt, silent as a wolf.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Trudging UPHILL through thick underbrush --

Aaron's shaggy blond hair looks red against his Kurt Cobain
shirt.

He can see a clearing opening up ahead.

SUPER: YEAR 35

Stepping through the treeline --

An OPEN-TOPPED BUNKER is carved out of a sloping hillside.

(CONTINUED)

He stands next to the crude shelter and pops a Hershey's Kiss into his mouth.

He looks down the hill to where --

HUNDREDS OF BLOOMING RED POPPIES sprout out of the ground in carefully planted rows. Underneath a small patch of open sky.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Based on our psychiatric evaluation, as well as the subject's criminal history, my preliminary diagnosis is paranoid schizophrenia with drug-related hallucinosis.

Setting down his rifle, Aaron studies the grove of trees nearby.

It's eerily quiet.

Looking deeper --

He sees a DARK FIGURE standing between the trees.

Head shaved, the man STRIDES FORWARD --

THEIR EYES meet.

For a moment, there are TWO AARONS.

Reaching beneath his bullet-proof vest, Aaron pulls out the SILVER CLIPPERS and hands them to his younger, long-haired self.

A BEAT.

The REDWOODS SWAY AND WHISPER above them until --

THE BUZZING of the electric razor breaks the moment, and NOW there is only ONE Aaron before us... staring back AT US, his hair falling all around like yellow leaves.

SHAVING OFF the last strand of hair --

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Having overtly refused voluntary outpatient psychiatric treatment multiple times over a 15-month period, the subject was released again per state and federal regulations as he awaits further jurisprudence.

(CONTINUED)

With sweat dripping down his face, his blue eyes never blink.

AARON

Rea, I've done what you've asked.
Please do not forsake me.

Stripping naked, he pulls the BLACK JUMPSUIT from his backpack and slips into it, zipping it up.

He grabs a bottle of LIGHTER FLUID and begins saturating the rows of red poppies.

He runs a hand along his newly shaved head.

AARON (CONT'D)

You will all burn.

Removing a BOOK OF MATCHES from his pocket --

AARON (CONT'D)

But I will endure.

In the overarching treetops, the leaves and branches begin BENDING AND CONTORTING into the curious "8" NUMERAL on top of a CROSS-HAIRS sign.

Aaron strikes a match and glances skyward.

AARON (CONT'D)

Take me!

Just as the match drops and ORANGE FLAMES DANCE ACROSS THE POPPIES --

Aaron's head snaps toward the bottom of the hill, alarmed.

Bounding up the hill, he reaches into the bunker for the assault rifle and disappears into the treeline as --

Two armed men - JERE MELO (70s) and Ian Chaney - ENTER THE CLEARING at the base of the hill.

Seeing the small fire --

MELO

Shit! Help me stomp it out before
the whole goddamn forest goes up!

Jumping on the flames, they reduce the conflagration to small plumes of white smoke.

(CONTINUED)

IAN CHANEY
(doubled over)
You ever see anything like this?

Shaking his silver head, Melo follows Chaney up the small hill.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Deathly silent, Aaron has the assault rifle aimed directly at Chaney, who is glancing down into the bunker.

IAN CHANEY
Come take a look.

EXT. AARON'S CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

At the bunker, Melo sets his axe down and looks back at the smoldering poppies.

Grabbing his phone --

MELO
I don't believe this. Lemme log the coordinates of this place. You're right, Hawthorne is gonna shit a golden brick.

A RUSTLING OF LEAVES causes Chaney to turn his head.

A BLACK SILHOUETTE lurks above them.

IAN CHANEY
(whispering)
Wait... I think he's right behind us.

The older man squints up into the thick underbrush.

MELO
Hey! What the fuck are you doing over there?

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Aaron takes a giant inhalation of air and steps into the clearing.

(CONTINUED)

AARON
FBI! FBI!

Almost reflexively, he PULLS THE TRIGGER.

POP - POP - POP!

Jere Melo GRUNTS from the impact and SPINS AROUND LIKE A TOP, falling face first to the ground.

DEAD.

The wind rises and we RUSH IN on Aaron's face:

HE IS A BOY. HE IS A MAN. HE IS A SCHIZOPHRENIC... HE IS A **MURDERER.**

Aaron's EYES NICTITATE as the --

Familiar JAGGED BREATHING and DIGITS BEING ENTERED INTO A PHONE (**from opening**) fill the air.

CHP DISPATCH (O.S.)
911 Emergency reporting.

IAN CHANEY (O.S.)
Hi. Listen to me right now. My name
is Ian Chaney. I'm here with Jere
Melo out in the woods!

RAISING HIS GUN so the barrel is directed right at us --

Aaron PULLS THE TRIGGER.

The GUNFIRE from Aaron's rifle BECOMES...

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

SEVEN LOUD BLASTS - as bullets PUNCTURE FLESH.

Falling backward --

Aaron stares up at the chrome BLACK SPACECRAFT - his body
LEAKING BLOOD.

NOTE: This is the same scene from beginning.

Through the open portal --

REA beckons to him - her oblong eyes blinking.

At the sight of her, a wave of tranquility spreads across
Aaron's broken body.

(CONTINUED)

This is a tranquility he has never known.

MUTED COMMANDS are being barked out from somewhere.

But Aaron doesn't hear them.

Doesn't hear anything.

After one more BEAT he raises his arm toward the spaceship, prepared for deliverance.

With blood soaking through his spacesuit --

The THREE FACES appear above him, only they are not Chinese.

They all wear "SACRAMENTO COUNTY SWAT" tactical gear.

Aaron sees their mouths moving, but no sound reaches his ears.

His gaze drifts past them.

To Rea's ship.

She's there, inside the portal.

He locks onto her oblong eyes.

Knows he'll never make it aboard.

AARON

No...

Then --

Something MOVES inside of him.

His chest begins DISTENDING OUTWARD, until --

His entire diaphragm begins RUPTURING.

Delirious and in shock from blood loss, Aaron watches in awed amazement as a HEAD and SHOULDERS begin rising out of the viscera of his broken body.

Then arms, chest, legs, and feet follow.

Standing upright, with long blond hair, Aaron (age 8) takes two steps toward Rea.

Stops.

Looking back --

(CONTINUED)

Sees what's left of himself lying over blood-soaked poppies...

On the ground - Aaron watches the Boy climb into the ship next to Rea.

ONE LAST TIME their eyes meet, until --

The portal CLOSES and the ship's boosters roar to life.

The clearing becomes immersed in a BLINDING LIGHT.

Bleeding out, Aaron follows the black ship as it ascends into the air.

When it rises above the massive trees surrounding the clearing --

The poppies on the ground reveal themselves to have been a landing site, planted in a GIANT, RED FIGURE 8.

A CIPHER only seen from the air.

Spitting up blood, Aaron lies his head back.

As his chest heaves one final breath --

His piercing blue eyes stare up at the heavens.

Is this what salvation feels like?

FADE OUT

POSTSCRIPT:

On January 1, 2016, Mendocino County began a pilot program for Laura's Law. Currently, 15 of California's 58 counties are participating in some version of the law.