

SCHIZO

by  
Matthew Sidney Long & Christopher Virnig

Inspired by True Events

2018

matthewsidneylong@gmail.com  
cjvirnig@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COASTLINE - DAY

Ocean and Forest. WE MOVE FORWARD past a fishing boat casting crab pots out into the swirling blue water.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

WE LOOK DOWN on a YELLOW SATURN STATION WAGON moving along a thin strip of road - WE FOLLOW car.

EXT. FOREST & ROAD - DAY

REDWOOD TREES and asphalt - the car speeds away - WE FOLLOW it into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Like a banana slug on Mars, the car is enveloped by the massive, ancient sequoias until all we can see is RED...

EXT. REDWOOD GROVE - DAY

Stepping out of the station wagon, MATTHEW COLEMAN (45) pulls a hat over his ponytailed hair and reaches for a BLACK WEEDEATER lying in the back seat.

Whistling an old show tune, he dances his way through the thick trees and FIRES UP the weedeater.

**SUPERIMPOSE: AUGUST 11, 2011**

Staring down at the crab grass and stinging nettles growing freely around a massive redwood --

COLEMAN

I am truly sorry, my friends. But  
I'm afraid this is your day of  
reckoning.

He stops dead in his tracks upon seeing a sizable section of FRESHLY TILLED SOIL.

He runs the weedeater above the soil in a circle and then bends down to investigate.

Scattering the loose dirt with his free hand, he plucks a few SMALL WHITE SEEDS from the earth and inspects them.

(CONTINUED)

COLEMAN

What. The. Hell.

As he moves to pull the cord on the weedeater, he hears a METALLIC CLICK.

Looking up, AARON BASSLER (35) stares at him wide-eyed from the edge of the foliage, his rifle aimed straight ahead.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Hey now, easy...

Aaron cocks his shaved head and pulls the trigger --

And MISSES.

Coleman drops the weedeater and dashes for the car.

Aaron steps fully into the clearing and holds the trigger down - POP, POP, POP.

Coleman STAGGERS and SHRIEKS. Looking down, his right arm is a BLOODY MESS.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)

Stop! Please!

Opening the driver's side door, he heaves himself onto the seat just as Aaron lets loose another spray of gunfire.

Coleman lurches forward as blood pours from a gaping hole in his chest.

After a BEAT he goes limp and slides onto the ground, one foot still elevated onto the seat.

Aaron stares down at him, smoke seeping from the barrel of his rifle - the weedeater still thrashing in the dirt.

In one swift movement, Aaron drops his pants and defecates all over Coleman's body - marking his territory like a wolf.

WE ZOOM IN on Aaron's fractured eyes...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

... PIERCING BLUE EYES stare at us, practically THROUGH us.

Scratches decorate his shaved head and a splotch of red underneath the bandage over his left eye widens until --

(CONTINUED)

A TRICKLE OF BLOOD escapes from underneath the dressing and slides down his face like a demonic tear.

Aaron Bassler, still boyish and wild, doesn't so much as blink as he sits in an ORANGE JUMPSUIT.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Can we re-dress that cut and get  
him a fresh bandage, please? It's  
disgusting to look at.

(O.S.) A door opens but Aaron's stare does not waver.

After a BEAT --

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Aaron, can you please remind me  
again what specifically it was that  
you were doing out there?

Another collection of blood begins pooling under his eye.

AARON  
(nonplussed)  
I was running.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

With his movement segmented by the passing redwoods, Aaron appears to be TRAPPED IN A FLIP BOOK as he runs amid the massive trunks.

Clad in black from head to toe, he clutches a sleek ASSAULT RIFLE in his right hand.

BACK ON:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

The dam has broken and a grotesque RIVER OF BLOOD flows into Aaron's eye, around his nose, and finally off his chin in a steady drip.

And still he gazes *at us*.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Mr. Bassler, do you understand why  
you're here?

(CONTINUED)

AARON  
(muttering)  
I understand you're wasting my  
time.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
We are here because of the crimes  
you've committed. We need to talk  
about that.

Aaron SPRINGS TO HIS FEET AND LURCHES FORWARD, rivulets of  
blood spraying off his face in every direction.

AARON  
Red. Communist. Fucks!

Another BEAT.

AARON (CONT'D)  
They're coming. We get distracted  
and they prepare.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
And I promise we'll get back to  
that.

Aaron kicks his chair against the wall and slumps to the  
floor.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)(CONT'D)  
Aaron, look at me... Would you  
agree that there's something broken  
in our system if a severely  
troubled person can slip through  
the cracks of our society and not  
be rehabilitated humanely?

Aaron answers by raising his middle finger --

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
THEN tell us what the fuck you were  
running from in the forest.

With both hands he begins SMEARING BLOOD all over his face a  
la Lord of the Flies.

AARON  
Who said I was running *from*  
anything?

EXT. WOODS - DAY

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

Entering the small clearing, Aaron stands next to the bunker and pops a Hershey's Kiss into his mouth.

From here, he looks down the hill to where --

HUNDREDS OF RED POPPIES sprout out of the ground in carefully planted rows.

AARON  
(looking up)  
Out of the ground and into the sky.

Removing a bottle of LIGHTER FLUID from his backpack - he begins saturating the rows of red poppies.

He runs a hand along his finely shaved head.

AARON  
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 a strange "8" NUMERAL on top of a CROSS-HAIRS sign.

Aaron strikes a match and glances skyward.

AARON (CONT'D)  
Come to 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 - IAN CHANEY (30's) and JERE MELO (70's) - ENTER THE CLEARING at the base of the hill.

Seeing the small fire --

(CONTINUED)

MELO

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

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

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 shit. 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)

Shit... 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.

AARON

FBI! FBI!

Almost reflexively, he PULLS THE TRIGGER.

Just as the POP-POP-POP sound reverberates throughout the clearing, Jere Melo GRUNTS from the impact and SPINS AROUND LIKE A TOP, falling face first to the ground.

Aaron squeezes the trigger just as Chaney dives behind the wooden boards at the lip of the bunker.

He peppers the boards - sending sparks and woodchips flying into the air.

The *THRUUUUM* of bullets pass by Aaron's head before he even sees the muzzle flashes from the other man's gun.

Aaron's magazine CLICKS EMPTY.

As he reaches to his belt for a new clip --

Chaney MAKES A BREAK FOR THE TREES.

Aaron drives the new clip home and takes off after him.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Redwoods blur past as Chaney sucks for air.

He fumbles with his phone and holds it to his ear.

CHP DISPATCH (O.S.)

911 Emergency reporting.

IAN CHANEY

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...

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Aaron runs at full speed amongst the trees.

Up ahead - he sees Chaney screaming into his phone and desperately darting to and fro between the hulking redwood trunks.

Repositioning his rifle, Aaron stops behind a redwood and carefully scans the vegetation in front of him.

He sees nothing until --

A HEAVY CAR DOOR SLAMS SHUT and an ENGINE REVS.

Aaron's eyes narrow for a BEAT before a MOMENT OF REALIZATION hits him and he sprints out from behind the tree.

EXT. SKUNK TRAIN RAILROAD TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Bursting through the treeline and onto the tracks, Aaron can only watch helplessly as the SKUNK TRAIN SPEEDER CAR accelerates toward a TUNNEL a few hundred yards ahead.

Ian Chaney looks back through the rear window and the two of them make one last bit of eye contact before the car DISAPPEARS INTO BLACKNESS.

EXT. AARON'S CAMPSITE - LATER

Aaron sits amid the charred poppies, sobbing.

They are mostly black now, with deep streaks of red matching the pools of blood surrounding Melo's lifeless body.

Turning from Melo, he clutches an old PHOTOGRAPH in his hand.

It's a picture of his mother and father, smiling in the sun.

Overwhelmed, he looks back at the dead man.

A BEAT.

The wind rustles through the treetops and he looks up until --

WE SEE WHAT AARON SEES:

The treetops OPEN UP above us like a BLOOMING FLOWER - and the sky BECOMES RED.

(CONTINUED)

As before, the redwood branches begin to CURVE AND TWIST, forming the mysterious 8-symbol amid the emerald leaves.

SWIRLING FASTER, the symbol's circles and triangles mix together and collapse back on themselves - forming a shimmering whirlpool in the branches.

Reaching for it, Aaron gets to his feet.

As if in a trance, he slings on his backpack, steps over Melo's body, and follows the spiraling symbol deeper into the forest...

EXT. HIGHWAY ONE - NIGHT

Aaron walks backwards down the two lane road, his hoodie pulled low.

A car approaches down the deserted highway and Aaron sticks out his thumb.

The towering forest to his left and the great ocean to his right make him look tiny.

The car slows and Aaron walks up to the driver's window.

The YOUNG WOMAN inside rolls it down a crack.

A BEAT.

AARON

Can I use your phone?

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron stands with his back to the car, the redwoods stretching out before him into a black infinity. He holds the woman's phone to his ear - the RINGING becoming louder.

Finally, his Mother picks up.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Aaron? Is this you??

AARON

(into phone)

I'm not coming back.

MOTHER (O.S.)

What? What are you talking about.  
Aaron. No. Please listen to me --

(CONTINUED)

AARON  
I'm calling to say goodbye.

A long BEAT.

The waves pound on the beach behind him.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
I don't like it when you talk like  
this.

AARON (CONT'D)  
(choking back tears)  
I love you Mom.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Aaron!

AARON  
I have to go.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Wait. Don't hang up! --

AARON  
Goodbye.

EXT. BACKYARD GARDEN - DAY

A POMO INDIAN WOMAN digs her hands into the wet soil of a WILD GARDEN. She is SHELL SEVERI (30's), a pit bull with sad eyes. Her striking jet-black hair is braided down to her waist.

A modest A-frame house made of redwood and glass sits behind her in the gloom.

She pulls out weeds around three green Marijuana plants, placing the feisty peppergrass in a colorful, intricately woven basket as her --

PHONE BUZZES in the grass next to her.

With her hands caked in mud --

SHELL  
Shit...

Wiping her hands in the damp grass as best she can, she grabs the phone.

CLOSE ON PHONE SCREEN (text from Dale): *Shooting in woods, possible fatality. Active Scene. Sherwood Road mile marker 6*

Jumping to her feet, she's already unzipping her overalls.

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron's face is cleaned and bandaged... but his eyes are still WILD.

AARON

Do you know how easy it was for me  
to get a gun?

There is a fumbling of papers in the background.

AARON (CONT'D)

For anyone to get a gun...

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

Which firearm are you referring to,  
Mr. Bassler? Are you planning to  
harm anyone?

Aaron cocks his thumb and points his finger AT US - setting his sights.

AARON

And I swear I don't have a gun.

He stands up, shifting the imaginary rifle to his shoulder to get better aim.

AARON (CONT'D)

My Norinco SKS Sporter seven point  
62 by 39 millimeter semi-automatic  
assault rifle is my favorite gun.  
My beautiful monster.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

Where is your gun now, Aaron?

Aaron is off somewhere else.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

Aaron, please concentrate. Can you  
tell me where your... *Norinco SKS*  
is located? Where we can find it?

Aaron pulls the imaginary TRIGGER on his assault rifle --

AARON

I'll show you mine if you show me  
yours.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

CLOSE ON: TWENTY GLEAMING METAL ASSAULT RIFLES glisten in the cold rain.

**SUPER: AUGUST 27, 2011, MANHUNT - DAY 1**

PULLING BACK: MEN AND WOMEN WITH GUNS are scattered about the crime scene like a pack of wolves as --

TWO POLICE HELICOPTERS roar over the swaying redwoods.

Slipping silently through dripping green ferns at the edge of the clearing, Shel pulls a YELLOW RAINSLICKER over her thick dark hair... a spear-shaped TURQUOISE STONE dangles from her neck.

She glances up at the copters disappearing into the fog and pulls out a notebook.

She surveys her surroundings, careful not to be NOTICED BY:

EXT. AARON'S CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

The body of Jere Melo lies face down in a patch of blood-soaked grass.

TOM ALLMAN (50's) stares down at the body, jaw firmly clenched under an iron-gray mustache.

A fair and reasonable man, he wears a SHERIFF'S UNIFORM with the seal of MENDOCINO COUNTY embroidered on the sleeve.

All around him, the hilly crime scene is ALIVE WITH LOCAL POLICE, every woman and man armed and on edge.

DETECTIVE GREG VAN PATTEN (30's), all coiled energy and sharp angles, joins Allman and looks down at the deceased.

DET. VAN PATTEN

Jesus, Tom. Poor Madeleine. Have you told her?

SHERIFF ALLMAN

She's at home praying for a miracle  
I'm not gonna be able to deliver.

EXT. AARON'S CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

Allman inspects the grow of charred and blackened poppies.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
This is definitely not Cannabis.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
We think they're poppies.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Poppies?  
(a beat)  
Like Wizard of Oz?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
(nodding)  
There's more...

Allman looks down into the dirt bunker.

He kneels down and examines the bullet-riddled wooden beams fortifying the mouth of the hole.

Rising to his feet, the sheriff aims an imaginary rifle down the hill.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Jere never had a chance in hell.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Let's just be thankful that kid made it out in one piece.

Frustrated, Allman kicks at the ground.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Two murders in two weeks. Dammit.

He glances around the crime scene, weary.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
(to Van Patten)  
So what do we got?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
One set of boot prints, so we're thinking a single perp. Other than a blanket and shell casings, this is all we've recovered so far.

A FOIL BLUNT lies in the trampled grass, surrounded by HERSHEY KISSES WRAPPERS.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Smoking opium maybe?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Crime lab is already en route.  
We'll find out soon enough.

Allman glances at his watch.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
I can't stick around and wait for  
them. You good here?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
I'll take care of everything. Give  
Madeleine and the family my  
condolences, will you?

EXT. AARON'S CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

Making his way to the treeline, Allman stops at a  
congregation of deputies.

DEPUTY #1  
Sheriff, we got ourselves a tourist  
here.

He pushes Shel out in front of Allman.

DEPUTY #2  
Says she's a writer for the  
Advocate News.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
I don't give a good damn if she  
writes for the New York Times. How  
did you get out here?

SHEL  
Hunting for mushrooms.

She holds up three chanterelles and smiles.

SHEL  
Would you like one?

DEPUTY #1  
And this crime scene just happened  
to be on your route, huh? Pretty  
serendipitous, if you ask me.

Shel opens her notebook and begins to scribble.

SHEL  
*Serendipitous*. Good word.

CUT TO:

Several feet away, DALE (30's), a lanky POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER of Pomo descent, hears the commotion and lowers his camera.

He can only shake his head at the sight of Shel standing next to the sheriff and the deputies.

DALE  
(muttering)  
Stupid, Shel. Very stupid.

BACK ON:

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Miss, please put your notebook back in your backpack and we'll escort you off the premises.

Shel hesitates --

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
I'm only gonna ask you once.

He nods to another deputy.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
We're done here.

The deputy motions for Shel to follow him.

DEPUTY #1  
There's something else, sheriff.

Allman follows the deputy's gaze high up the trunk of a giant sequoia to where a figure "8" on top of a cross-hairs sign is carved into the bark.

DEPUTY #1 (CONT'D)  
There's more over here.

Several other trees contain the carved numeral. Following the deputy under the yellow police tape, Shel snaps a quick picture with her phone.

DEPUTY #1 (CONT'D)  
What do you make of it, sheriff?

Allman can only stare.

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

CLOSE ON: Aaron sketching a figure "8" on top of a spidery cross-hairs sign.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
So you grew up here, Mr. Bassler?

AARON  
Born and raised. Timberwolf strong.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
And your father is a fisherman, is that right?

AARON  
(nodding)  
He works on the ocean. I work in the woods.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Work? Is it your intention to harm anyone while you... work?

Aaron looks up for a BEAT, puzzled.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
You work in a beautiful place. The grace and size of these trees --

AARON  
They're the blue whales of the plant world.

He goes back to drawing.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Yes, the redwoods... it's enough to take your breath away.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
What kind of work do you do in the woods?

Aaron presses his face close to his notebook, his sketching becoming violent... Pencil SNAPS - Paper TEARS --

CLOSE ON NOTEBOOK: huge, JAGGED trees fill the page - their massive trunks surrounding the 8-symbol like Greek columns around an ancient oracle...

INTO:

EXT. MODEST HOME - DAY

... An AMERICAN FLAG flapping over the front stoop of a neatly maintained home.

Pulling into the driveway, Sheriff Allman steps out of his police cruiser and rubs his eyes --

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Goddammit.

INT. MELO FAMILY HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Grieving relatives look on as MADELEINE MELO (70's), devastated, holds her hand in Allman's.

MADELEINE  
Have you gotten him out of there?  
Can I... can I see him?

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
We'll have him out very soon, I promise you. It's very rugged terrain up there and it's taken us a lot of time to secure the area.

MADELEINE  
Tom, please tell me he didn't...

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
No, he did not suffer. You have my word. I inspected the wounds myself. He died instantly. At the very least, you can put your mind at ease about that.

MADELEINE  
(tears flowing)  
Where will you even begin to look for this man?

EXT. MELO FAMILY HOME - MOMENTS LATER

GREG MELO (40's) walks Sheriff Allman back to his cruiser.

GREG  
I appreciate you coming by personally, sheriff. It means a lot to us.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

I can't tell you how sorry I am for your loss, Greg. Doesn't even seem real.

Allman offers his hand and Greg holds it for a BEAT.

GREG

You make that monster pay for what he did, Tom. You hear?

EXT./ABOVE SHERWOOD ROAD - DAY

The TWIRLING LIGHTS atop the cruiser snake through the ubiquitous green florescence like exotic algae floating in the surf.

(O.S.) a CELLPHONE RINGS.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)

(on phone)

This is Tom Allman.

DET. VAN PATTEN (O.S.)

Sheriff, it's Van Patten. How did it go with Madeleine?

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)

Shitty.

BEAT.

DET. VAN PATTEN (O.S.)

Listen, I just got back to the station. I'm here with Mr. Chaney as we speak. We got his full statement.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)

Poor kid. Did he give us anything?

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - CONTINUOUS

Van Patten sips a Red Bull, holding the phone to his ear.

Through a glass partition, he watches Ian Chaney's hand tremble as he holds a styrofoam cup to his lips.

DET. VAN PATTEN

Listen, sheriff, Chaney was able to ID the gunman.

(CONTINUED)

**INTERCUT: POLICE STATION and CRUISER**

Allman's grip on the steering wheel tightens.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Anybody we know?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Name is Aaron James Bassler, age  
35. Local, has a jacket, mostly  
petty stuff. Nothing like this.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
How certain is Mr. Chaney that this  
is our perp?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
One hundred percent. He's known the  
guy since grade school. I'll brief  
you when you get in.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Good. In the meantime, let's get to  
work on this guy. We need parents,  
siblings, friends, girlfriends, the  
whole nine yards...

**END INTERCUT**

The glimmering vehicle coils its way along the foggy road until the redwoods slowly cede ground to the homesteads and buildings of FORT BRAGG.

EXT. AARON BASSLER'S HOUSE - LATER

Allman steps underneath the yellow police tape and examines a CRUDE RETAINING WALL lining the outside of the house.

Van Patten approaches and nods to the wall.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
He must have wanted to keep the  
bogeyman out.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Or keep him in.

INT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

C.S.I. officers busily scour the living room where MAPS and PAPERS have been tossed asunder.

Dale, sporting his ubiquitous camera, documents the barren living room where a BOOKSHELF and soiled SLEEPING BAG are the only utilitarian objects.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
 (pointing to a Mead notebook)  
 So far this is the only semi-cogent  
 piece of evidence we've recovered.

CLOSE ON NOTEBOOK: Indecipherable scribbles accompany STRANGE SYMBOLS and crudely drawn MISSILES, GUNS, TANKS and RED STARS.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
 Semi-cogent?

DET. VAN PATTEN  
 I figure there has to be a story in  
 there somewhere. It may not make  
 sense to us, through all this fog,  
 but it does to him.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
 More eights. Just like at the crime  
 scenes.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
 Something to do with numerology  
 maybe?

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
 We need to check it out.

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

AARON  
 I used to hide in the woods as a  
 boy. Sometimes for a whole day.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 How old were you?

AARON  
 Eight.

BEAT.

(CONTINUED)

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
(clearing throat)  
Your parents divorced when you were  
eight, correct?

AARON  
(barely whispering)  
That legendary divorce is such a  
bore.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Are you angry at your parents,  
Aaron? Do you want to harm them?

He mumbles something.

AARON  
Harm them? I tried to warn them.  
Tried to warn everybody. I even  
warned those Chinese fucks that I  
know what they're doing.

More shuffling papers.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Is that why you drove down to the  
Chinese consulate in San Francisco,  
Aaron?

AARON  
(to himself)  
Nobody believes a fucking thing I  
have to say. It's not my fault that  
you're going to die. That everyone  
is going to die.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
I do believe you. But let's back  
up. Will you tell me what it was  
you threw over the wall at the  
Chinese consulate? You scared a lot  
of people when you did that. They  
had to call the bomb squad out and  
everything.

AARON  
She told me the truth. They needed  
to know that I knew.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
She? Who is 'she', Aaron?

FLASH TO:

EXT. AARON'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

A large, crackling BONFIRE spits a shower of orange sparks up into the night sky as it devours the smoldering remnants of a kitchen table.

With sweat gleaming off his bare chest, Aaron tosses his LONG BLOND HAIR out of his face and carries two chairs out of the house.

Without hesitation he tosses them into the conflagration and watches as the orange flames lick ever higher.

He gazes into the depths of the burning mass until --

A pair of OBLONG EYES appear to blink back at him.

Mortified, he breaks for the house just as the entire yard becomes bathed in a BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT.

As if falling under hypnosis, Aaron looks back at the pit as a thin ALIEN-LIKE FEMALE uncoils up and out of the flames.

He watches as the tall creature raises a clawed hand toward the starry night sky.

As if she is projecting an image --

A squadron of FIGHTER JETS roar past overhead, their sonic booms bouncing off the house like an echo chamber.

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 into the blackness over the woods.

AARON  
(to the alien)  
What's happening?!

With her hand still projecting, he once again looks above the treetops to where faint movement is discernible.

The sound of wind rippling through fabric hits his ears just as he sees --

PARATROOPERS attached to RED PARACHUTES beginning to descend all around him.

His paralysis finally broken, Aaron sprints past the fire and into the surrounding redwoods.

INT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Sucking for air, Aaron hears CHINESE VOICES all around him as the 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.

Running to the point of hyperventilation, Aaron is knocked to the ground by the concussive blast of another missile.

The sound of 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 and presses himself up against the steep bank.

Shivering from wet and fright, he listens to the faint voices that seem to hover all around him in every direction.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Aaron's eyes pull open to a leaden gray sky overhead.

With his body slimy with wet mud, he extricates himself from the stream's bank and scans the woods.

The silence is deafening.

EXT. AARON'S BACKYARD - DAY

Glowing red embers are all that remain of the bonfire.

Taking refuge behind the wide trunk of a redwood, Aaron scans his property for any sign of movement.

Nothing.

Stepping into the yard, he looks into the fire pit where two table legs still protrude from the ashes.

INT. AARON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shrunken and refracted, the Chinese Meteorologist glimmers off Aaron's pupils.

With the TV as his only light source, Aaron moves to the center of the room and begins digging under PILES OF DETRITUS scattered everywhere.

AARON

Come on, come on...

Retrieving a Mead notebook, Aaron resumes his position in front of the TV. He turns the volume up on the Meteorologist who speaks in Mandarin and begins filling the pages with Chinese symbols and haphazard sketches...

INT. AARON'S HOME - DAWN

Nose still to the TV screen, Aaron fixates on the weather maps and Chinese characters flowing past.

AARON (CONT'D)

You little fuckers are good, I'll give you that. You think nobody knows what you're about to do.

After a BEAT he begins tearing out several of the pages in his notebook and places them inside a small box. He grabs a roll of duct tape...

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - NIGHT

Aaron sprints up Geary Blvd in his logging boots - COIT TOWER looming behind him.

He stops at the tall, concrete wall surrounding the Chinese Consulate and pulls three small boxes wrapped in duct tape from his backpack.

Without hesitating, he tosses them one by one over the wall...

INTO:

EXT. AARON BASSLER'S HOME - DAY

... Aaron climbs down into a MOAT-LIKE TRENCH encircling his house - pulls a shovel from the dirt - and begins smoothing out the freshly poured concrete of a crude RETAINING WALL.

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

EXT. SHEL'S BACKYARD GARDEN - DAY

CLOSE ON PHONE SCREEN revealing the 8-symbol carved into red bark.

A dirty fingernail traces the "8" and then slips the phone into a down pocket.

Pulling back, Shel grabs her notebook and begins sketching the strange symbol with a red pen when --

The garden is suddenly CAST IN SHADOW.

She looks up just as a COLD WIND begins swirling down through the trees; the sound of WHISPERS faintly audible.

Shel springs to her feet and hurries inside.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Shel crosses through the dark living room.

A FRAMED PHOTO OF AN OLDER WOMAN occupies a bookshelf - the woman's long, black hair and Native American features strongly resemble Shel.

SHEL  
(to photo)  
Shut up, momma. I don't want to  
hear it right now.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - LATER

Shel continues sketching the 8-symbol - the notes for her article squeezing in around it like hieroglyphics.

A laptop, half-lit roach, and quarter glass of Cabernet wait patiently by her side.

Her big tabby cat, DOC, is curled up on her lap as --

HER PHONE BUZZES.

(CONTINUED)

She clicks the screen to see a text (from Dale): *Forensics report linked Bassler to Coleman murder = serial killer.*

Grabbing her keys, she reaches for the roach and inhales deeply as Doc's PURRING fills the room...

EXT. MATTHEW COLEMAN CRIME SCENE - ROCKPORT, CA - DAY

Faded yellow police tape is spread around a clearing.

Shel steps over the tape and looks across the glade to where several gigantic trees form a red barrier to the dense forest beyond.

Pulling down her hoodie, she makes her way over to the towering trees.

Scraping dirt and loose bark off their roots and trunks, she finally finds what she's been looking for: an 8-symbol carved into an immense red trunk --

JUST LIKE the one at the Melo site.

Holding out her phone, Shel snaps several photos of the strange symbol and begins composing a text.

CLOSE ON PHONE: *Dale, give these photos to Sheriff Allman. I think they might have missed them.*

She runs her fingers over the symbol's crude lines...

CUT TO:

Thousands of FRESHLY PRINTED NEWSPAPERS flying through a conveyor.

EXT. THE ADVOCATE NEWS BUILDING - NIGHT

A final BUNDLE of newspapers is stacked into the back of a DELIVERY TRUCK.

CLOSE ON FRONT PAGE: **DOUBLE MURDER SUSPECT STILL ON THE LOOSE** by Shel Severi.

Pictured, TWO HEAVILY ARMED SWAT MEMBERS, complete with camouflage, goggles, and M-16 rifles, at the front of the --

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SKUNK TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Fifty SWAT members, armed to the teeth, sit in grim silence as the thick green foliage flashes past the locomotive's windows.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 3**

Detective Van Patten rams a clip home on his rifle.

DETECTIVE VAN PATTEN  
Welcome to Vietnam, ladies and gentlemen. If I were you, I'd pack as lightly as possible.

INT. TIP-TOP LOUNGE - FORT BRAGG - DAY

From a secluded booth, Shel writes a new article in longhand in a dogeared Mead notebook.

Her phone buzzes and she looks, bleary-eyed.

Putting the phone to her ear --

SHERIFF ALLMAN (O.S.)  
(recorded message)  
Residents of Mendocino County, this is your sheriff, Tom Allman. By now most of you are aware that a murder suspect is believed to be at large in our area. Although he is considered armed and very dangerous, I implore all of you to remain calm and vigilant --

She pockets the phone and scans the room:

Two dropouts play Nine Ball while the rest of the LOCALS are at the bar, mesmerized by the TV coverage of the manhunt. A skinny cowboy lounges at the 70s JUKEBOX.

Out of nowhere --

Dale slides into the booth.

DALE  
Hey. Sorry I'm late. It's totally batshit crazy at the substation.

SHEL  
It's OK. I barely even know where I am right now. I've been writing for like 36 hours straight.

(CONTINUED)

Dale signals the bartender for two more cups of coffee.

DALE

Jim Bassler was interrogated today.

She perks up slightly.

SHEL

Is he still there?

DALE

Naw, they cut him loose. I think they're done with him for now.

INT. JIM BASSLER'S HOME - DAY

JIM BASSLER (60's) sits across from Shel. Her cellphone sits on the coffee table, recording.

Stern and still wiry, the bags under Jim's pale blue eyes make him look sad and tired as they stare down at --

ANOTHER grimy MEAD NOTEBOOK laid open to the same indecipherable scribbles.

He moves to the window --

JIM BASSLER

(barely audible)

He was my little boy once.

Shel remains silent --

JIM BASSLER (CONT'D)

And then he turned 19... and he wasn't anymore.

She can see his uneasy reflection in the glass --

The window providing no solace, he turns back to Shel and hands her Aaron's notebook --

JIM BASSLER

You can keep this as long as you need it. I'm tired of looking at it.

SHEL

Thanks. I promise I'll return it... If you don't mind my asking, what have his doctors said?

(CONTINUED)

JIM BASSLER

He is a schizophrenic. They've never given me his exact diagnosis, but all signs point to that.

Shel's face drains of color.

Their eyes lock in a moment of understanding...

INT. MENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT - LOBBY - DAY

A young Native American RECEPTIONIST (20s) smiles up at Dale.

Approaching them --

SHEL

Excuse me, is Mr. Hamburg in?

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, he left for the day.

SHEL

Thanks, I'll call and make an appointment.

Dale gives Shel an almost imperceptible nod to a KEY RING sitting inside an open desk drawer.

RECEPTIONIST

(to Shel)

Have a great day!

SHEL

You, too. Thanks.

Rounding the corner, Shel stops.

Turning back, she sees the Receptionist beaming at Dale, enchanted by his good looks.

SHEL (CONT'D)

(returning)

Actually, could you please tell me where I can find the lavatory?

RECEPTIONIST

It's down at the end of the hall.

Still mesmerized by Dale, she never notices as --

Shel SNATCHES the key ring.

(CONTINUED)

SHEL  
Perfect, thank you!

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Glancing both ways down the empty corridor --

Shel stops in front of a door that has MEDICAL RECORDS stenciled on the frosted glass.

She holds up the key ring.

SHEL  
OK. Which one?

Trying several keys to no avail --

TWO DOCTORS in white coats round the far corner.

As they consult with each other over a patient chart --

SHEL (CONT'D)  
Oh shit, come on...

The last key on the ring SLIDES INTO THE LOCK and she opens the door.

INT. MEDICAL RECORDS - MOMENTS LATER

Huddled in the dark next to an OPEN FILE, Shel scans the various paperwork until --

She places a hand over her mouth.

SHEL  
Oh my god.

CLOSE ON FILE: **Date of Evaluation: August 11th, 2011**

**Diagnosis: Paranoid Schizophrenia w/ drug-related hallucinosis.**

BACK ON: Shel nods, grimacing, as if she expected it.

With her phone, she snaps a photo of the file and switches to voice recorder.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
Just as Mr. Bassler has long suspected, his son was indeed diagnosed with paranoid  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHEL (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
schizophrenia with drug-related  
hallucinosiis.

Looking ill, Shel closes her eyes...

FLASH ON:

INT. SHEL'S HOME - DAY

... Pushing open her mother's bedroom door, Shel glares at the older woman's wild, unkempt hair as she SCRIBBLES on the wall.

Crudely drawn NATIVE AMERICAN symbols stare back at her.

SHEL  
Momma, it's time for your pills.

SHEL'S MOTHER  
Get out of here, whore.

SHEL  
Please, momma...

The older woman's head snaps around to look at Shel - a TURQUOISE STONE dangles from her neck.

SHEL'S MOTHER  
I knew you were his spawn. From the  
moment you came out of my body.

Shel takes a step forward, but her mother intercedes with raised fists.

SHEL'S MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Madumda's spawn! Your coloring is  
different. And your smell. You  
smell like him.  
(nodding)  
That's how I know.

SHEL  
(shaken)  
No. I've already been to Kuksu. You  
took me to see him, remember?  
Madumda is no longer with me. He's  
with you now.

SHEL'S MOTHER  
Oh, he'll always be with you, sweet  
one. Do you really believe Kuksu  
could keep him away forever?

(CONTINUED)

SHEL

Will you just stop? You haven't  
taken your pills all day!

SHEL'S MOTHER

(laughing)

His blood runs through me, too.

She violently grabs Shel's wrist.

SHEL'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

One day, he'll come after your  
heathen cunt just like he came  
after mine...

BACK ON:

INT. MEDICAL RECORDS - PRESENT DAY

... Shel closes the file, her mother's turquoise stone  
pressed cold to her chest.

SHEL

(into recorder)

The authorities knew what he was  
but couldn't do anything to stop  
him. Or help him. And since I'm  
breaking the law by being in here  
right now... neither can I.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Shel twists open a can of cat food and scoops it into a dish  
as Doc rubs against her leg.

A VOICE-RECORDING from her phone plays from the counter --

SHEL'S VOICE (V.O.)

Because of the HIPAA privacy laws  
in our country, a person like Aaron  
Bassler can go untreated and no  
one, not even his family, can make  
him get treatment...

A beat.

She grabs her land line and puts it on speaker as she dials.

SHEL

To hell with this.

A gruff, no-nonsense FEMALE VOICE picks up.

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Shel? What have you found? Please tell me it's something we can use. It's a madhouse in the newsroom. USA Today and the Washington Post have requested office space. The AP is already here.

SHEL

Ericka, listen... I've changed my mind. I'd like a new assignment.

ERICKA (V.O.)

And I'd like Kim Kardashian's booty. Get real, Shel. Your copy is due in ten hours.

Even from here, Shel can make out her mother's photo from the darkened living room.

As she stares at the photo --

FLASH TO:

BLOOD SPATTER covering a dirty up wall.

BACK ON:

Shel closing her eyes...

Silence for a BEAT.

ERICKA (V.O.)

Shel, listen to me. Those East Coast stringers are en route as we speak. They're going to be leaning on us pretty heavily for at least a day or two until they get their feet wet. You are the only one I've got who's capable of working something this big. Please, I am begging you, do not let me down when I need you most. I know this is personal for you, but follow your heart.

Frustrated --

SHEL

You want my brain, not my heart...

INT. SHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

With Doc purring at her side, Shel JOLTS awake.

She hits play on her phone's voice-recorder.

SHEL'S VOICE (V.O.)

Even if they suspect that he is  
mentally ill, there is literally  
nothing they can do to help him.  
The only way would be for Aaron to  
voluntarily submit to treatment...  
which he would obviously never do.

Lost in thought, Shel brushes the big cat's nose --

SHEL

A classic Catch-22, Doc.

*Kuksu...*

She starts --

BEAT.

Shel jumps to her feet and grabs the dog-eared notebook.

She scribbles "CATCH-22" across the top of a fresh page.

SHEL'S VOICE (V.O.)

(continuing on phone)

It is a flaw in the system. A  
glitch...

She rips the previous pages out of her notebook and stuffs  
them in the trash --

CLOSE ON NOTEBOOK: Shel's pen begins writing *"This story is  
not only about murder. It is also about glitches and  
sickness. Unnecessary, untreated sickness..."*

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Shel drives down Franklin Street with her windows open...

Out-of-work loggers, fisherman and hunters hang outside the  
Tip-Top, their evening beers now starting at noon.

Musicians and hippie artists mill about the nearby coffee  
shop nodding to Shel as she drives by.

(CONTINUED)

THROUGH THE CRYSTAL COYOTE PENDANT swinging from her visor, Shel sees a distorted, jagged jumble of warring factions - the dark beanies and red 49ers caps mixing together like guns and blood.

She slams on her brakes and grabs her backpack --

INT. ADVOCATE NEWS - MOMENTS LATER

Shel barges into the corner office.

ERICKA (O.S.)  
Give it to me.

The wild gray hair and intense eyes of ERICKA ANDERSON (50's) leans forward and holds out her hand. She's a hippie, but fuck with her at your own peril.

ERICKA (CONT'D)  
You're two hours late. This is going online, you know.

Shel hands her the jump drive and rips open her backpack.

SHEL  
There's nothing on that.

ERICKA  
Dammit Shel. Every single time. How hard --

Shel shoves her notebook into Ericka's hands.

SHEL  
It's called "CATCH-22" and it's from a totally different angle.

Instinctively, Shel fingers the stone around her neck. Ericka sits down - so does Shel - they've been here before.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
I wanna go this way, Ericka. The story is the system. Not the slasher flick.

Ericka speed reads, leaning back in her chair.

ERICKA  
I'm still reading...

SHEL

Bassler is also a victim. Doesn't excuse his actions, but it's the context, Ericka. That's where the story is.

Ericka waves in a young man.

ERICKA

Sid, get Brad. And get Linda on the phone to hold the late copy.

She holds out her coffee mug.

ERICKA (CONT'D)

(to Sid)

Honey, not sugar.

Shel exhales, vindicated, her whole body relaxing.

ERICKA (CONT'D)

Get out of here, Severi. Since you can't type worth a shit, we've got it from here.

SHEL

Thanks, you won't --

ERICKA

(reading)

Shut up and get some sleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OLD HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Aaron, scruffy with long hair, walks down a hallway.

He stops at the last door on the right and twists the knob.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aaron's GRANDMA lays in the big flowery bed, fast asleep.

He kneels next to the bed for a BEAT before kissing her silently on the forehead.

Aaron pulls a plastic bag and a Mead notebook out of his backpack.

(CONTINUED)

He sprinkles white opium specs on the green bud packed into his tinfoil pipe and inhales; he sets the pipe down and concentrates on the pages of his notebook.

THEN: *Strangely*, the CHOP OF AN AXE cutting into a tree echoes throughout the tiny bedroom. A ROARING CHAINSAW joins in. Then, the SOUNDS of large JETS FLYING through the sky - MACHINE GUN FIRE - SCREAMS --

AARON  
(murmuring)  
I lost something along the way...

As if in a trance, he begins to *scribble* --

SOUNDS of people arguing in CHINESE fill the room. The LONELY HORN of a buoy at sea. The distinctive THUD of newspapers landing on doorsteps DISSOLVES INTO:

A TWELVE YEAR OLD AARON pumping on his dirt bike, a red backpack stuffed full of newspapers bouncing on his narrow shoulders... THUD, an Advocate News knocks against a red front door... Aaron whistles happily and pulls another paper from his bag --

AARON (V.O.)(CONT'D)  
I remember when...

DISSOLVING INTO CHEERS from a baseball field AS --

YOUNG AARON circles under a fly ball, his cap falling off like Willie Mays, the baseball meeting his mitt with a SMACK... He leaps into the air triumphant, as a youthful Jim Bassler and his wife, LAURA BRICKEY, CLAPPING from the metal bleachers BECOMES --

THE LOUD BOOM of a tree crashing to earth, INTERRUPTING the memory... The sound of FIGHTER JETS and EXPLOSIONS overwhelm the bedroom once again --

Slumping against his grandma's bed, Aaron's chin descends to his chest..

AARON (CONT'D)  
I remember when... I remember...

**END FLASHBACK.**

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron slumps over in his chair, murmuring --

AARON  
*I remember when...*

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 You remember what exactly, Mr.  
 Bassler? Do you consider yourself  
 dangerous to others right now?

The notepad slides off Aaron's lap and he SNAPS TO.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 Think, Aaron. Take your time. What  
 do you see inside your head?

Still - he doesn't answer.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 Mr. Bassler?

AARON  
 I see death.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 You were talking about your  
 grandmother.

AARON  
 I didn't have to hide from her.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
 She understood you?

Aaron looks directly AT US --

AARON  
 She knew what was coming.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Detective Van Patten and two other SWAT each hold a FLIR  
 THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA and point it out the window at the  
 forest below.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 7**

VAN PATTEN'S POV (THROUGH FLIR): The woods appear IRON GRAY  
 AND TRANSLUCENT.

(CONTINUED)

PILOT (O.S.)

Hey detective, just keep your eyes peeled for anything glowing red or yellow. That'll be the color of any heat signature. If he makes a cookfire or happens to lie down out from underneath a tree, you'll see him clear as a bell. Maybe deer or bear, too.

Van Patten scans the forest, but is only greeted by a gray abyss.

INT. HELICOPTER - NIGHT

CLOSE ON (through FLIR): Gray, translucent trees flow by from the forest below until a large, incandescent RED AND ORANGE mass comes into view.

PILOT (O.S.)

I have a confirmed visual, over.  
East of Northspur Road by river.

**INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:**

EXT. WOODS - NEAR HELICOPTER - NIGHT

A VAN pulls to a stop at the side of a country road.  
The sliding door opens and FOUR SWAT members pile out.  
They activate their NIGHT VISION GOGGLES.

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - CONTINUOUS

Allman holds a walkie-talkie close to his ear.

EXT. WOODS - NEAR HELICOPTER - MOMENTS LATER

Like ghosts, the SWAT team slinks through the dark forest.  
NIGHT VISION POV: Trees, weeds, and the flowing Noyo River.  
The SWAT members look at each other, confused.

SWAT MEMBER #1

(whispering)

This is Omega One. We do not have a visual. Please advise, over.

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON (through FLIR): The four SWAT members glow reddish orange as they move near the brightly lit mass.

PILOT (O.S.)  
Roger that, Omega One. I have  
visual on your position. The target  
is straight ahead of you, ten  
yards, over.

BACK ON:

EXT. WOODS - NEAR HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

The SWAT members shrug and shake their heads at one another.  
They move forward, rifles primed.

PILOT (O.S.)  
(through walkie)  
You are on the target, over.

They all swivel their heads in both directions, paranoid.

SWAT MEMBER #2  
(whispering)  
Yo, what is that damn smell? Is he  
dead somewhere?

As she takes a step forward, there is a loud CRUNCHING under her boot.

Everyone turns toward the sound, rifles aimed.

SWAT MEMBER #3 (CONT'D)  
What the...?

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - CONTINUOUS

Allman, jaw clenched, leans forward.

SWAT MEMBER #2 (O.S.)  
(through walkie)  
This is Omega Two, it's a negative.  
Stand down, over.

Exhalations and curses abound.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

What do you see, over?

SWAT MEMBER #2 (O.S.)

It's a pile of clam shells and sea urchins, I think. Steam is rising off of it. Must be today's catch.

**END INTERCUT**

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Aaron's mother and father (both 30's) are shouting out into the dark forest.

JIM BASSLER

Aaron. C'mon now. It's getting late.

LAURA

Honey? You've been hiding all day. Time to quit now, let's come home.

An EIGHT YEAR OLD Aaron stands perfectly still among the thicket of trees surrounding the modest home - invisible amid the ferns and branches.

His face is serene as he holds an orange KITTEN close to his chest. The tiny cat's purring and soft fur fill his nostrils. His mind is calm - he is happy...

But then:

AARON (O.S.)

(from interrogation)

I've always wanted to disappear...

JIM BASSLER

Son? Aaron?! Please answer.

LAURA

Aaron. Please! Come home now...

Aaron doesn't move. Neither does the kitten. The two dark figures walk right past him until their voices grow distant.

AARON (O.S.)

But hiding isn't enough anymore.

Just as he finally relaxes, there is a THRASHING in the leaves next to him and he turns to see --

(CONTINUED)

A LARGE BLACK SALAMANDER staring him in the eye...

AARON (O.S.)(CONT'D)  
It's time...

**END FLASHBACK.**

BECOMING:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron stares up at the ceiling --

AARON  
...to disappear completely.

INT. PATROL CAR - SHERWOOD ROAD - SUNSET - PRESENT DAY

Detective Van Patten gulps a Red Bull as the old crimson house approaches on his right.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 9**

DET. VAN PATTEN  
(into walkie)  
This is 33. I'm approaching the mother's house, over.

DISPATCH (O.S.)  
Roger that, 33.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Looks quiet this evening. No news vans at the moment.

As Van Patten passes the house, a FLICKER OF MOVEMENT catches his eye.

HITTING THE BRAKES, he strains his eyes and sees a BLACK PANT LEG disappear from view behind the house.

DET. VAN PATTEN (CONT'D)  
What the hell...?

He stares at the empty side of the house for a BEAT.

Reaching for the walkie --

DET. VAN PATTEN (CONT'D)  
This is 33. It's probably nothing, but I thought I saw someone  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DET. VAN PATTEN (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
sneaking around the backyard of the  
mother's house, over.

DISPATCH (O.S.)  
Roger that, 33. Do you still have a  
visual, over?

Straining his eyes, Van Patten sees nothing.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Negative. But I think you'd better  
get Dutch over here, over.

INT. PATROL CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Van Patten keeps his eyes squinted at the side of the house.

With nothing stirring, he sees two YOUNG GIRLS watching him  
from atop their bicycles.

Returning their wave, he looks back to the house where --

A DARK SHAPE catches his eye.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
Shit!

**INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:**

Halfway to the treeline, Aaron hears a CAR DOOR slam behind  
him and turns to see --

A PATROL CAR idling in the street at the front of the house.

Jumping behind the corner of the house, he reaches for his  
assault rifle as --

Van Patten barks into his walkie.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
This is 33! Possible visual on  
suspect at 134 Sherwood Road! Will  
pursue on foot, request backup!  
Repeat, backup requested!

He kicks the door open and draws his service revolver as --

Aaron slips into the treeline.

INT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

With the house disappearing from view Aaron hears --

DET. VAN PATTEN (O.S.)  
Aaron Bassler!

With his revolver drawn, Van Patten races through the trees, weapon outstretched.

DET. VAN PATTEN (CONT'D)  
Come out with your hands up! This  
is your last warning!

In a blur --

DUTCH, a hulking GERMAN SHEPHERD, tears past him.

The K-9 sniffs the air and then plunges headlong into the thicket barking at the top of his lungs as --

Aaron, out of breath, doubles over against a tree trunk overlooking the Noyo river more than a hundred feet below.

He hears the BELLOWING OF A BIG DOG, but before he can take two steps --

Dutch thrashes through the underbrush.

They LOCK EYES for a beat before Dutch leaps into the air toward him. Aaron swivels out of the way and pulls himself up onto the nearby train tracks where --

AN OLD WOODEN TRESTLE stretches out before him.

The shepard is right behind, TEETH GNASHING, as Van Patten breaks through the timberline.

A split second to decide --

Aaron races ahead and without hesitating JUMPS OFF THE BRIDGE. The icy Noyo ROCKETS UPWARD to meet him, until --

WE SEE WHAT AARON SEES:

The sky is red, the river redder... falling stars and satellites speed by us in their descent as more Chinese fighter jets soar over the treetops - their SONIC BOOMS SHAKING the entire forest once again...

SPIRALING DOWNWARD we smash the water's surface like breaking a mirror, and we are jerked back out of his head.

(CONTINUED)

Aaron holds his breath UNDERWATER, kicking himself toward the far riverbank.

LOOKING UP from the shadows, he sees Van Patten silhouetted next to Dutch, the encroaching fog obscuring the view below them as --

The Skunk Train emerges from the trees and THUNDERS across the trestle behind them.

**END INTERCUT**

EXT. NOYO RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Dutch splashes up and down the riverbank, his nose in the air. He has a red FANNY PACK clenched in his jaws.

Aaron is nowhere to be seen.

Detective Van Patten and TWO SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES emerge from beneath the trestle, guns drawn.

DEPUTY A  
(holstering)  
Shit!

DET. VAN PATTEN  
What are you doing?! He could be  
anywhere!

The other deputy also holsters his firearm.

DEPUTY B  
If he were anywhere near here,  
Dutch would have him by the balls.

DEPUTY A  
Dammit, I thought we had him. I  
can't believe the fuckface jumped.

She pats the dog on the back.

DEPUTY A (CONT'D)  
How'd he get away, Dutchie? Nobody  
gets past you.

Detective Van Patten looks around, head on a swivel.

DEPUTY B  
Trust us, detective, he's  
gone. Dutch lost the scent in the  
water.

(CONTINUED)

(to the female deputy)  
What's in the fanny pack?

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Finishing a sketch, Aaron sets the pencil down and holds the sheet of paper over his face.

His blue eyes appear through two holes and the penciled outline of a Jason Voorhees HOCKEY MASK fills out the rest of the sheet.

AARON  
(voice muffled)  
This is who you think I am, right?

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Alright, it's time to cut the shit, Mr. Bassler. We've given you a very wide berth during our discussion here because we want you to feel comfortable. But it's time we talk about what you've done. Can we do that, please?

Still holding up the flimsy Jason mask with his left hand, Aaron uses his right to draw a large 8-symbol across it.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Yes, we're very familiar with that symbol, Aaron. *What does it mean?*

INT. SHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Stretched out on the living room floor with Aaron's notebook splayed open in front of her, Shel skillfully rolls a joint and lights the spark.

As soon as she exhales the plume, Doc leaps down off the back of the couch and scampers into the kitchen.

Shel takes another hit off the blunt and reaches for a Barack Obama "Hope" ash tray, as --

HER PHONE BUZZES with a text from Dale.

CLOSE ON PHONE SCREEN: *You wanted tabs on Bassler. He was nearly caught today behind mother's home. Dog got his fannypack. Snuck some pix for u.*

(CONTINUED)

PHOTOS begin arriving in her inbox: A RED FANNY PACK, a deck of playing cards containing only EIGHTS OF SPADES, RED STARS made of cardboard, and a couple loose WHITE SEEDS.

Shel gets up and walks over to the photo of her mother.

SHEL

Crazy eights. What is your code,  
Aaron?

The older woman stares out at her from the dark redwood... Shel holds her mother's gaze for as long as she can, but then turns away.

EXT. MAIN ST. - FORT BRAGG - DAY

CLOSE ON: A large brown LOGGING BOOT steps heavily on the pavement. Followed by another...

PULLING BACK: We move up the boots, over dark blue jeans, across a sturdy belt, and up over black suspenders and a thick flannel shirt to reveal --

PAUL BUNYAN.

LABOR DAY in Fort Bragg.

Somber residents line the damp streets for the annual PAUL BUNYAN DAYS PARADE.

One float bears a large memorial of Jere Melo.

Sheriff Allman, sitting atop a VINTAGE MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE, rides behind.

Moving through the crowd, Shel pulls her hoodie over her raven hair and makes a bee-line toward the end of the parade route.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Allman exits the Mustang at a red, white and blue staging area across the lot.

He wipes at his lapel with a handkerchief.

SHEL (O.S.)

Excuse me, Sheriff Allman?

Without even turning toward her, Allman begins walking to his cruiser.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

I have no official comment, Ms. Severi. Yes, we almost had him yesterday, but you already know that. When we have more information to divulge, Detective Van Patten will deliver it.

Keeping up with the sheriff stride for stride --

SHEL

What is your department doing about the figure eight symbols from the trees or the playing cards from the fanny pack? Do you have any leads on what those may mean?

SHERIFF ALLMAN

How the hell do you know about the playing cards and the fanny pack?

SHEL

(prepared)

The same way I knew that if I went back to the Matthew Coleman murder site, I'd find those carvings in the trees that your guys overlooked. I hope those pics were helpful, by the way.

Allman stops in his tracks and turns back to face her.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Ms. Severi, this is not my first rodeo. Do you really believe we missed those carvings?

Off her look --

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)

If you'd have bothered to read the police report, you'd know that those carvings were documented and cataloged. Every shred of evidence is being taken into consideration.

Gritting his teeth he resumes his trek.

SHEL

(keeping up)

Did you read my latest column? Aaron is a very sick man. He's a product of a ridiculously archaic

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHEL (cont'd)  
 mental health system. He's like...  
 Frankenstein's monster.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
 Ms. Severi, Jere Melo was a beloved  
 leader in this community for 40  
 years. If you want to piss  
 everybody off with your bleeding  
 heart liberal bullshit, that's your  
 prerogative. But Aaron Bassler is a  
 cold blooded killer and it's my job  
 to find him.

Allman hops in his cruiser and rolls down the window.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
 Now if you'll excuse me, I need to  
 get back to work before anyone else  
 gets killed.

SHEL  
 (closing her eyes)  
 Sheriff, please...

FLASH TO:

BLOODY HANDPRINTS festooning a bedroom wall...

BACK ON:

SHEL (CONT'D)  
 If we can somehow unlock the  
 mystery to his symbols, we can find  
 him... and maybe even save him.

Frustrated at being affected by her words, he jams the key  
 in the ignition.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
 (softening)  
 I appreciate where you're coming  
 from, Shel. But you and I simply  
 aren't living in the same reality.  
 I'm sorry.

INT. CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER

Pulling out of the parking lot, he can still see her  
 standing there through the rearview.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
(yelling)  
I'm the one that's gonna lose my  
damn mind!

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - DAY

CLOSE ON: A MAP with RED THUMB TACKS arranged in a circle.

Allman stands near the cork board in front of a large group of commanders.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Given the events of the past 48  
hours with Dutch, we know Bassler  
is still somewhere in the Noyo  
Basin.

(pointing)  
That means he is within this  
perimeter. Tomorrow morning,  
Mendocino SWAT will penetrate from  
the west, Marin County SWAT from  
the east. Fish and Game will push  
in from the north with the U.S.  
Marshals taking the south.

Van Patten sits on the edge of his desk chewing gum.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
One more thing. Uncle Sam sent us  
some presents... Detective.

Springing off the desk, Van Patten holds up a small HIGH  
DEFINITION CAMERA.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
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.

A chorus of nods --

DET. VAN PATTEN (CONT'D)  
He wants to plant poppies, we're  
gonna plant thirty of these babies  
all over his playground. They're  
gonna be our eyes.

INT. ALLMAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Collapsing into his chair, Allman rubs his eyes.

Van Patten paces across from him.

DET. VAN PATTEN

The way this guy moves so silently through the woods, it's damn near impossible that he hasn't been right up next to us several times already.

Spread across Allman's desk are photos of the 8-symbol carved into redwood trees, along with the fanny pack and deck of playing cards.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

(nodding)

He's got the upper hand.

Van Patten shuffles the deck of playing cards and Allman watches as all the eights of spades flutter by.

He picks up one of the cards and holds it to the light.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)

He knows something we don't...

EXT. MENDOCINO COUNTY - DAY

Beyond the fog-covered umbrella of endless redwoods, an angry red sun begins to materialize on the horizon.

AARON (V.O.)

(from interrogation)

In these woods... is salvation.

**INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:**

FROM ABOVE: A FLEET OF VANS heads out of Fort Bragg and into the heart of darkness lying beyond.

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

(softly)

Some people think life began in the oceans. But it began right here. In our woods.

Dale reads aloud from a book on symbology as Shel sketches in her notebook. Her 8-symbol is now fully colored and very detailed - its cross-hairs reticle a bright red warning underneath the eight's swirling rings.

(CONTINUED)

Like Allman's desk, her living room floor is covered by PHOTOS of the 8-symbol.

AARON (CONT'D) (V.O.)  
Soon there will be nothing but fire  
and death for all of you. Your  
corpses and the corpses of your  
children will all be stinking and  
smoldering and turning to ash.

The sliding door of one of the van's stands open and a TECHNICIAN fastens a camouflaged HD CAMERA to a tree limb.

The camera CLICKS when she flashes her hand in front of it.

AARON (CONT'D) (V.O.)  
But not for me. While everyone else  
was distracted, I was alert when  
she spoke to me.

**END INTERCUT**

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Who is 'she'? Did you speak with  
somebody while you were out there?

He drops the crude Jason mask.

AARON  
That's classified.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Your mother? You spoke to her?

He smirks and then lets out a high-pitched giggle.

As the thought recycles through his head, he erupts into HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER.

AARON  
(eyes watering)  
Is she my mother?!

EXT. BOAT - DOLPHIN ISLE MARINA - FORT BRAGG - DAY

Sitting in the stern of his vessel, Jim Bassler rigs a fishing line with expert precision.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 16**

(CONTINUED)

Amid screaming gulls and a distant fog horn, FOOTFALLS come trip-trapping down the dock.

SHEL (O.S.)  
Mr. Bassler?

Looking up, he offers Shel a sad smile.

JIM BASSLER  
Hello again.

Standing next to her is Dale, his camera hanging from a strap around his neck.

SHEL  
This is my friend Dale. May we come aboard?

EXT. BOAT - MOMENTS LATER

Dale looks at Jim Bassler's assortment of fishing poles with fascination.

DALE  
We're not holding you up from going out, are we?

JIM BASSLER  
No, no. I wouldn't dream of fishing while... all this is going on. I just like to be near the water. Settles my nerves as I prepare for the worst.

SHEL  
We'd like to help if we could.

She produces a folder full of 8-symbol photos.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
Do have any idea what this symbol might mean to your son?

JIM BASSLER  
(shaking his head)  
Can't tell you how many hours I've sat staring at his scribblings. The eights, the red stars, all of it. It's gibberish to me.

(CONTINUED)

SHEL

It's the same with us. But I just haven't been able to let this go. Based on what I went through with my mother, I believe the police are approaching this whole thing from the wrong perspective. They believe he's some killer out in the woods who's just stalking his next victim. But we both know that's not true.

She opens her notebook and shows him her sketch of the strange 8-symbol.

SHEL (CONT'D)

He's out there trying to *do* something. Living in some... alternate reality.

He reaches for her hand and takes it in his own.

JIM BASSLER

I cannot thank you enough for your Catch-22 article. You've managed to bring more attention to the issue than I will in my lifetime.

SHEL

I would like to do more.

She clasps her own hand over his.

SHEL (CONT'D)

We'd like to save your son. And I'd like to write about it.

JIM BASSLER

How can I help?

DALE

Would you mind if we took a look around Aaron's home? Maybe took some photos?

Jim Bassler looks out to the ocean...

Nodding to himself, he retrieves a KEY RING --

JIM BASSLER

(emotional)

I can't even tell you what it's like to have an ally in all this.

(CONTINUED)

He walks past them toward the dock.

JIM BASSLER  
Follow me.

EXT. AARON BASSLER'S HOME - DAY

Dale SNAPS PHOTOGRAPHS of the retaining wall surrounding Aaron's humble abode like the moat around a deranged castle.

DALE  
Somehow I don't think this wall is  
up to code.

Jim Bassler steps over old police tape and sticks the key into the lock.

JIM BASSLER  
(to Shel)  
This is as far as I go... You have  
an hour of daylight left.

INT. AARON'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

In the fast fading light, there is not much to see but a few scattered papers and the muddy bootprints left behind by the authorities.

DALE  
(snapping photos)  
Even by our people's standards,  
this is spartan living.

Shel is on her hands and knees retrieving the various pieces of paper spread pell-mell across the filthy floor.

DALE (CONT'D)  
Anything good?

SHEL  
Not really. Just the same crap.

As she reaches for another sheet of paper, she notices a GAP between the bottom of the bookshelf and the floor.

*Kuksu...*

SHEL (CONT'D)  
What the hell?

Reaching her fingers into the gap, she pulls and a HINGE CREAKS and the shelf SWINGS OPEN LIKE A DOOR, revealing --

(CONTINUED)

NARROW STEPS leading down into blackness.

They exchange glances, SHOCKED.

DALE  
Holy Anne Frank...

SHEL  
Dale, when you were here with the  
police, did they know about this?

He shakes his head and refocuses his camera --

INT. HOUSE - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

They have 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.

DALE  
What. The...

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

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

The flash from Dale's camera lights up the entire room.

Shel, totally mesmerized, reaches to touch the flowers.

SHEL  
Red poppies...

With her mind working overtime, she grabs her phone and  
sorts through the pictures of the fanny pack Dale had  
previously sent her.

CLOSE ON PHONE SCREEN: a photo of the three white seeds.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
(sotto)  
Poppy seeds...

(CONTINUED)

DALE  
Say again? *Polpol?*

SHEL  
Yes. I think those were poppy seeds  
in the fanny pack that the dog  
captured. And there were charred  
poppies where Jere Melo was killed.  
(pointing at the mural)  
And there are poppies right here.

DALE  
Okay? Keep going...

SHEL  
(overwhelmed)  
I have to figure it out, but don't  
you see how wrong it is for the  
sheriff and SWAT to discount all of  
this?

Examining the mattress, Dale sees a POLAROID PHOTOGRAPH  
peeking out.

DALE  
Hold on a sec.

CLOSE ON PHOTO: YOUNG AARON stands smiling with his PARENTS.

Dale flips it over and it reads: **Ten Mile Beach '84.**

Shel sees the photo and looks at Dale.

SHEL  
June of 1984.  
(thinking)  
How old was Aaron in 1984?

DALE  
He was born in '76, so he'd have  
been...

SHEL/DALE  
Eight...

FLASH ON:

EXT. OCEAN - SUNSET

... Young Aaron *walks out of the Polaroid*, towards us -  
towards the waves...

He looks back at his parents, still smiling - fully at ease.

It's like he's looking AT US.

Laughing, he runs along the white surf - Ten Mile Beach  
stretching out before him like a ribbon into the pink sky...

INTO:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

... Aaron sips coffee from a styrofoam cup.

AARON

When they take something from you  
like that, you feel it down deep in  
your soul...

He looks up --

STRAIGHT AT US.

AARON (CONT'D)

You ever feel that... That hurt?  
That aloneness?

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

Of course I do. We all do... but,  
why did you go into the woods *then*?

AARON

A man's house is his prison.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

I believe the phrase is "castle"...

Awkward pause.

AARON

A man's house is his prison. A  
prison can be a good thing, you  
know. It can shut out things and  
keep you safe. It can be your own  
space, your own sanctuary. A place  
to keep secrets.

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
(whispering)  
What is your secret, Aaron?

AARON  
I went into the woods because they  
took my home. They took my secret.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Who did?

AARON  
My father. He betrayed me.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
That's not what the report says.

AARON  
They took my face from my head and  
left me on the sand like a beached  
whale.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Aaron, please concentrate. What is  
this secret? Is this what caused  
you to do the things you've done?  
Is that why you're in here?

AARON  
So I swam into the forest because  
that's the only place I knew... the  
only place I trust.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
So, you believe your survival  
skills will allow you to survive  
this Chinese apocalypse?

AARON  
(shaking his head)  
No. I'm getting out of here before  
that...

FLASH TO:

EXT. AARON'S HOUSE - 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.

(CONTINUED)

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 --

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 speechless.

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.

AARON (CONT'D)

Won't be long now.

JIM BASSLER

(struggling)

Aaron...

A BEAT.

JIM BASSLER (CONT'D)

Your Aunt Jean owns this place. You know that, right? Jesus, she's gonna have a stroke when she sees what you've done.

AARON

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

(CONTINUED)

JIM BASSLER

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

AARON

Are you deaf? I said --

JIM BASSLER

Cut the shit, Aaron! I'll be back in a week and I expect to see this all gone. I can't believe this shit.

As his father storms off, Aaron's jaw clenches and the veins in his forehead stand out.

Grabbing the nearby trowel, he begins furiously adding more concrete on the retaining wall.

AARON

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

As he bores down on his task, he doesn't initially see the GREEN GLOW spreading through the air around him.

It's not until he hears the WHOOSH of fire that he jerks his head out of the hole and sees the female alien once again RISING OUT OF THE FLAMES.

Aaron leaps out of the hole and carefully approaches her.

AARON (CONT'D)

(panicked)

I've been waiting for you, Rea. Are they coming? Is it today?

He looks up at the evening gloam around him, but everything remains serene.

AARON (CONT'D)

I'm trying to prepare, but I don't think it's enough. Can you help me? Can you tell me what I need to do to survive the attack?

The creature holds out one of her clawed hands as if trying to pass him something.

Skittish, Aaron's chest heaves in and out as he finds the courage to inch closer to the strange being.

(CONTINUED)

As he reaches out his own arm, she drops a clear baggie of WHITE SEEDS into his hand and motions toward the forest.

AARON (CONT'D)

You need me to go out there in the woods? And plant these... And then you'll help me?

He looks from the bag of seeds back to his wall.

AARON (CONT'D)

Are you sure this is what you want me to do?

Again she points deep into the forest.

A beat.

THEN: In one swift movement, Aaron leaps over the wall and throws open his front door.

INT. AARON'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

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

AARON

(sotto)

I can't stay here any longer.

He makes a beeline for the BATHROOM, where --

He splashes water on his face and pulls an electric clipper from a drawer.

In a hurry, he furiously begins buzzing away his locks of long blond hair.

EXT. AARON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dressed in black with a COMPLETELY SHAVED HEAD, Aaron has the packet of seeds in one hand and his assault rifle in the other.

He shoves the seeds in his backpack, along with a jug of water.

Throwing everything in his truck, he gives the sky another fearful glance.

(CONTINUED)

AARON  
I'm ready, motherfuckers.

INT. TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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, 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.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: The metal fence surrounding DANA GRAY ELEMENTARY rushes forward through the glass.

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...

INT. ADVOCATE NEWS - CONTINUOUS

With NPR on the radio, Ericka taps a pen on her knee as Shel reads over her edited article.

Numerous lines of text are BLACKED OUT on the printout.

ERICKA  
You're gonna lose the battle to win  
the war, Shel.

Shel keeps reading.

(CONTINUED)

ERICKA (CONT'D)

Remember when you called me a week ago saying you couldn't do this?

SHEL

(looking up)

You're the one who told me to follow my heart. You can't take all this out, Ericka. These are the most important parts of the entire piece.

ERICKA

(authoritative)

You're not gonna fight me on this one, kid, because you're not gonna win. You're gonna finish reading this killer piece you just wrote and then you're gonna shake my hand and we're gonna win together.

SHEL

This is bullshit, Ericka, and you know it.

ERICKA

And we're both gonna smile and feel exhilarated because we know we've printed something worthy and important. Even without the derogatory - *unproven* - accusations regarding law enforcement and SWAT. It will still be good work...  
Right, Shel?

Shel tosses the printout on Ericka's desk.

Ericka is silent - her pen keeping time like a metronome until --

SHEL

To hell with this.

Shel turns for the door and Ericka motions to Sid, nodding "it's a go".

ERICKA

It might not taste very good right now, Shel, but --

SHEL

(out the door)

I'll be at the Brewery drinking my lunch if anyone needs me.

INT. FORT BRAGG BREWERY - NIGHT

Shel stares through three empty pint glasses at an OLD BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO of a LOGGER standing in front of a gigantic felled redwood tree.

She polishes off her fourth Red Seal Ale and sets it next to the other three - the sequoia's massive crimson circumference dwarfing the lumberjack through the glass...

SUDDENLY - the logger *turns* to face Shel, a sharp red beak SPLITTING out of his face toward her.

*Kuksu...*

FLASH TO:

INT. SHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

(O.S.) An ALARM BUZZING.

With a groan, Shel reaches out a hand and turns it off.

Sitting up at the edge of the bed, she rubs her eyes and glances at the clock: **4:01 AM.**

Yawning and barely able to keep her eyes open, she grabs the pill organizer and plucks a colorful assortment of capsules into her hand.

Opening her mother's bedroom door --

All four walls are covered with nonsensical scribblings written in BLACK INK.

SHEL'S MOTHER  
Get out, heathen cunt!

Too stunned to speak, Shel glances at the fresh graffiti for a BEAT before closing her eyes.

Desperately trying to stay calm --

SHEL  
Mother, I can't even...

Setting the pills down on a coffee table, she makes a beeline for the door.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
Take your pills, crazy bitch.

(CONTINUED)

Back in her bedroom, Shel throws the pillow over her head and SCREAMS in frustration.

BACK ON:

INT. FORT BRAGG BREWERY - PRESENT

Sipping from a cold one, Shel gazes at a Jere Melo memorial hanging from the brewery's brick wall.

A Korean War vet, former mayor, and current city councilman, it's no wonder why everyone wants the head of his killer on a spike...

Shel reaches to the turquoise pendant hanging around her neck and holds it up for inspection.

FLASH TO:

Sunlight spilling through the windows.

Shel pushes open her mother's bedroom door and sees --

FRESH TENDRILS OF BLOOD dripping down the ink-stained walls.

SHEL

Momma?!

Rushing to her mother's lifeless body, Shel sees gaping wounds on both of her wrists.

SHEL (CONT'D)

Momma, no! What did you do?!

Dropping to her knees, Shel rips her own shirt off and tears the fabric into strips.

Tying tourniquets over both of her mother's wrists, she begins performing CPR.

SHEL (CONT'D)

Momma! Don't you do this! Don't you fucking die!

Behind her, the array of pills stand undisturbed where she'd left them on the coffee table the night before...

BACK ON:

Shel lurches forward, knocking a beer glass to the floor.

Trying to catch her breath, she traces the redacted paragraph in her notebook with her forefinger...

(CONTINUED)

SHEL (V.O.)  
(reading)  
*Predictably, neither law enforcement nor SWAT seem to have a clue when it comes to breaking this case open and looking at it through a non-military type lens...*

Shel closes her eyes.

*Fuck this shit...*

INT. ADVOCATE NEWS - LATER THAT NIGHT

With unsteady footing, Shel slinks through the MOSTLY DESERTED NEWSROOM, careful not to be noticed.

SHEL (V.O.)  
*... Numerous elements of the investigation, including mysterious red opium poppies, numeric hieroglyphics and alien symbology, have repeatedly been ignored or deemed inconsequential by the authorities, at the peril of both Aaron Bassler himself and, by extension, our very community...*

She stops in front of --

ERICKA'S OFFICE.

INT. ERICKA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Closing the door and leaving the lights off, Shel turns on Ericka's computer.

*Fuck the system...*

CLOSE ON ERICKA'S DESKTOP: The rest of the redacted paragraph is now being typed out word by word in real-time.

SHEL (V.O.)  
(typing)  
*... This inhumane, cavalier attitude is not uncommon. My own mother's life was consumed and ultimately destroyed by the awful effects of paranoid schizophrenia because she was allowed to fall through the system's many cracks*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHEL (V.O.) (cont'd)  
*and there was nothing I could do to  
 save her. My hands were tied by the  
 law.*

EXT. DOWNTOWN FORT BRAGG - LATER

Shel wanders down a deserted Main Street in a TORRENTIAL  
 DOWNPOUR, her hoodie pulled low.

SHEL (V.O.)  
*But the investigative failures we  
 are seeing from local law  
 enforcement are merely symptoms of  
 a larger disease. An  
 institutionalized contagion  
 comprised of outdated privacy laws  
 and misinformation about mental  
 illness that ultimately killed my  
 mother by allowing her to go  
 untreated. And it also killed  
 Matthew Coleman. And Jere  
 Melo. And it will assuredly end up  
 killing Aaron Bassler, too. It is a  
 mistake of the highest order for  
 those in charge of the manhunt to  
 brush these essential psychological  
 and medical facts under the  
 proverbial rug. A mistake that may  
 very well end in yet more bloodshed  
 and death. We need to try another  
 way. We must try another way.*

At a lonely intersection, Shel stares up into the rain at a  
 BLINKING RED STOPLIGHT.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
 (slurring)  
 Do we help the sickest of the sick?

INT. SHEL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

SLAP!

Shel jolts awake, sending Doc off the bed with a MEOW.

She turns to the window TO SEE --

THE ADVOCATE NEWS FRONT PAGE pressed against the cold glass.

(CONTINUED)

ERICKA (O.S.)  
Why did you do it Shel??

Leaning forward, she can just make out her byline and the line "*mistake that may very well end in more bloodshed*".

The paper drops and Ericka's flushed face fills the window.

ERICKA (CONT'D)  
(screaming through glass)  
Why'd you fuck me like this?!

Shel's phone DINGS and she sees 17 missed calls from Dale.

Hung over, Shel runs her hands through her hair as the realization of what she's done sets in.

Ericka BANGS on the window, livid.

ERICKA (CONT'D)  
I want you gone, Severi!

The window CRACKS LIKE ICE --

ERICKA (CONT'D)  
You and I are done!

EXT. OCEAN - SUNSET

Still hungover, Shel jogs alongside the crashing waves, deep in thought --

A young boy and girl run back and forth up ahead of her, the tide nipping at their heels.

Shel glances at the boy AND FOR A SPLIT SECOND all she sees is Aaron: a giggling, innocent, little child with unbound energy, playing in the surf...

Speeding up, she flies by them, quickly becoming a distant dot running toward a vanishing point of green trees and pink, orange clouds...

INT/EXT. SKUNK TRAIN - DAY

The Skunk Train comes to a halt in the RED JUNGLE, the sky above it blotted out - the air around it thick and heavy.

From an open air car, Jim Bassler raises a BULLHORN to his lips, his voice fighting through the static.

(CONTINUED)

JIM BASSLER  
Aaron? Son...? Can you hear me?

The ancient trees are SILENT.

Jim Bassler looks to Allman, who nods back at him from inside the adjacent car.

JIM BASSLER (CONT'D)  
(shouting)  
Son! I need you to listen to me,  
now... No one here wants to hurt  
you. We only want to know that you  
are okay... Please answer Aaron!

He lowers the bullhorn, squinting back tears.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
You're doing fine. Do you have  
another one in you?

Jim Bassler dutifully raises the bullhorn to his mouth.

JIM BASSLER  
Aaron...  
(voice cracking)  
I love you. Please. Come home.

INT. SKUNK TRAIN - LATER

Allman sketches the ubiquitous 8-symbol in his newly purchased notebook.

Behind him, Jim Bassler stares out the window, his eyes trained on the green void flying by the glass.

Allman moves his finger from one circle to another as the train disappears into a tunnel.

INT./EXT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

From above we see Allman's police cruiser driving along a forested road beside the Skunk Train tracks.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 19**

DET. VAN PATTEN (V.O.)  
(over CB radio)  
Team One is heading up Northspur  
Road. We've got seven cabins  
outfitted. Will be in position  
shortly, over.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Copy that, detective. I'm heading East on Irmulco with Team Two. Let's get in and out asap with a minimal footprint. The last thing we want to do is spook him, over.

DET. VAN PATTEN (V.O.)

Roger that, sheriff. Ten days and no sightings, my guess is he's long gone from these parts. Probably up in Portland by now.

EXT. RURAL CABIN - NEAR NORTHSPUR, CA - DAY

Allman steps out of his cruiser and moves to a tree standing athwart a SMALL CABIN.

He retrieves the concealed HD camera and begins scrolling through the captured images.

CLOSE ON CAMERA: Images of the cabin's empty front stoop stream quickly by until --

A picture of what appears to be a MALE FIGURE flicks past.

Allman stops and scrolls back to the previous image.

CLOSE ON IMAGE: Aaron, wearing torn clothing, holds the ubiquitous assault rifle in his right hand while reaching for the cabin's window with his left.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Jackpot.

The hair stands up on the back of Allman's neck as he looks up to see the HINGES HAVE BEEN REMOVED from the cabin's front door.

INT./EXT. NORTHSPUR CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Allman, gun pointed, peers into the cabin's shadows.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Aaron! If you're in here, come out with your hands up!

Moving into the entryway, he sees MUDDY BOOTPRINTS on the hardwood floors and then --

SHUFFLING FEET in the next room.

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
This is the sheriff, drop your  
weapon and come out here! Now!

Inching his way across the main room, the creak of a LOOSE FLOORBOARD shatters the silence.

Cringing, Allman bounds ahead to the nearest wall.

INT. NORTHSPUR CABIN - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cupboards and cabinets open, foodstuffs are scattered around the countertops.

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. NORTHSPUR CABIN - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A rustling sound comes from the room at the end of the hall.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Announce yourself! NOW!

The door to the room is closed.

Through gritted teeth, Allman takes a huge breath and KICKS THE DOOR IN --

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

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

Allman EXHALES and leans against the wall as...

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

... Aaron LEAPS THROUGH A BED OF FERNS and rolls down a steep embankment until --

WE SEE WHAT AARON SEES:

The forest and sky are dark crimson once again as a cluster of RED STARS begins hovering overhead... the stars arrange themselves into the familiar 8-symbol as the dark shapes of uniformed soldiers land all around us...

(CONTINUED)

CRACK - Aaron slams into a tree, and we are back outside of his head.

On his feet like a cat, Aaron runs deeper into the forest as Allman's SHOUTS recede behind him into the fog.

EXT. NORTHSPUR CABIN - LATER

Another helicopter swoops by overhead and ruffles a large map that Allman is staring down at.

The woods and premises are teeming with police and SWAT.

Detective Van Patten, fresh out of the woods, pulls his sweaty gear off.

DET. VAN PATTEN

(to Allman)

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.

Nodding, Allman points to 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 us again.

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

INT. NORTHSPUR CABIN - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dale maneuvers his way around the white-clad CRIME TECHNICIANS and snaps photos as they scour the premises.

As he leans up against the kitchen table to make way for a tech, something CRUNCHES under his shoe.

Bending down, Dale sees a half dozen WHITE SEEDS scattered under the table.

DALE

(snapping photos)

You'll want to document these.

A FEMALE TECHNICIAN (20s) squints down at the floor.

(CONTINUED)

DALE (CONT'D)  
Sorry, I think I squished one.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - DAY

Dozens of pairs of HEAVY BOOTS trample and squash the green stems sprouting out of the earth.

Aaron watches helplessly, the hand gripping his rifle shaking with equal parts rage and terror.

AARON  
(muttering)  
No, no, no.

As sweat pours down his face, the only thing his eyes focus on are the boots destroying his grow one step at a time.

Suddenly his eyes go wide.

AARON (CONT'D)  
I'm a dead man.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - DAY

Candles and incense burn as Shel pores through a book of Pomo gods and goddesses - searching unsuccessfully for any sign of Rea.

SHEL  
Whoever or whatever she is, this  
bitch ain't Indian.

She slams the book closed just as a text arrives from Dale.

CLOSE ON PHONE SCREEN: *Found poppy seeds inside the cabin, so he must still be using 'em for something. Do NOT give ANYONE this pic or I'll lose my job. No joke.*

The PHOTO OF AARON from the HD camera lands in her inbox.

She switches to the photo of the Rea mural from Aaron's basement with the blooming red poppies spread out around the alien's feet.

Deep in thought, she walks over to her mother's photo and stares into her DARK BROWN EYES just as --

HER MOTHER'S LIPS seem to move, mouthing the word: *Kuksu...*

EXT. BACKYARD GARDEN - LATER

On her hands and knees in front of a tilled patch of soil, Shel sticks her hand into a BAG OF POPPY SEEDS.

SHEL

Let's figure this out together,  
Aaron.

She drops a scattering of white seeds into the earth and covers them with dirt.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - LATER

The north star Polaris blinkers overhead as the sounds of night have replaced the hubbub of chattering walkie-talkies and men's voices.

Emerging from his concealment, Aaron lifts a boot into the air and drops it down on the yellow police tape lining the perimeter of the clearing.

Dropping to his knees, he inspects the destruction and defilement of the poppies - thousands of muddy bootprints pockmark the enclosure.

He rips out one of the trampled stems and examines the plant which was only hours away from blooming.

He turns his head skyward.

AARON

I'm still here! Don't leave me!

Tears stream down his face as he lies down flat on his back, staring up at the emerging stars in the celestial sphere.

AARON (CONT'D)

Don't leave me. Please.

EXT. AARON'S NORTHSPUR CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A WRINKLED WHITE HAND closes over a dirty, calloused hand.

Aaron's grandmother, dressed in white, gently shakes him until his eyes pull open.

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER

Wake up, sweetheart.

Sitting up, Aaron stares into her kind old eyes.

(CONTINUED)

Is he really seeing this?

AARON

How?

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER

I can't stand seeing you struggle like this. You've worked so hard.

The tears begin sliding down his face again.

AARON

I'm in trouble, grandma. I think... I think I'm going to die.

She reaches down and wraps him in a tender embrace.

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER

Shhh. You don't need to struggle anymore. It's been so long since you've been happy.

He closes his eyes as she rests her chin on his shaved head.

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

You don't have to struggle, sweetie. I can take you to a place where you'll be happy. Where you'll finally have peace.

A BEAT.

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Would you like that?

Aaron can only mumble as he closes his eyes.

AARON'S GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

Join me here. All you have to do is stop fighting. Just let yourself go, Aaron. Just let yourself go.

EXT. REMOTE CABIN - WOODS

SWAT has another cabin surrounded.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 21**

Silent and deadly, their rifles are trained on the opened front door.

When Detective Van Patten steps out of the cabin, all the guns lower in unison.

(CONTINUED)

DETECTIVE VAN PATTEN  
All clear!

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - CONTINUOUS

Listening in, Allman deflates in disappointment.

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
Timeline?

DETECTIVE VAN PATTEN (O.S.)  
(over radio)  
Mud on the floor is dried and  
cracked. Been at least 12 hours  
since he was here.

Frustrated, all Allman can do is stare down at the almost  
finished 8-symbol sketch in his notebook...

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron yawns and rubs his eyes.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
Do you sleep much, Aaron?

All he can offer is a shit-eating grin.

AARON  
They'll come at night. When all of  
the little babes are sleeping  
peacefully in their beds and their  
parents are busy screwing in the  
next room...that is when they'll  
come.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)  
But don't you ever just get tired  
sometimes? Don't you ever have a  
desire to sleep late one day and  
put your feet up? Take a day off,  
in other words?

He considers her words for a BEAT.

AARON  
Are you asking me if I've ever felt  
like giving up?

FLASH ON:

INT. LOG CABIN - DAY

A thumb traces over the dozen poppy seeds that remain in the plastic baggy.

Aaron's right finger fiddles with the trigger on his assault rifle as he lies sprawled out on the old dusty floor.

An empty bag of potato chips and two soda cans litter the area around him.

The thrumming of a helicopter causes him to raise his head and peak out the window - but after a BEAT the silence has returned and he slides listlessly back to the floor.

Slumped against the well worn 70s-era sofa, Aaron picks up the rifle and places the long barrel against his right eye.

AARON

I will not be taken alive, you  
Commie fucks.

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

He lowers the weapon and SOBS.

AARON (CONT'D)

I will not be taken alive!

Once again he picks up the weapon and places the barrel in his mouth.

Breathing heavily, his right thumb moves over the trigger.

AARON (CONT'D)

(eyes tightly shut)

I will not be taken alive!

Along with a LOUD BANG -

BRAIN MATTER and RED, GOOPY VISCERA festoons the sofa's old cushions.

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

A BEAT --

FOOTSTEPS trip-trap on the roof above.

SNAPPING OUT OF HIS REVERIE --

(CONTINUED)

Aaron, alive and whole, grabs the rifle and moves to the front door.

Eyes glued to the ceiling, the soft steps move directly over his head.

Aaron aims the rifle at the roof - but thinks better of it.

AARON (CONT'D)

Not today.

Throwing the door open on its loose hinges --

He sprints into the yard, his rifle trained over the door.

With her glowing EMERALD EYES glaring down at him, the gray MALTA CAT doesn't so much as flinch at Aaron's sudden and threatening movements.

Slowly lowering his weapon, Aaron is mesmerized by the cat's bright green eyes.

AARON

Is it you?

Purring, her oblong eyes narrow at the sound of his voice.

AARON (CONT'D)

I've been waiting...

Emotional with relief --

AARON (CONT'D)

I thought you'd left me behind.

He reaches into his pocket and holds out the diminished bag of poppy seeds.

AARON (CONT'D)

Is there still time?!

The cat MEOWS loudly and LEAPS off the roof onto the ground.

In the treetops, Aaron can see the twisting 8-symbol assembling in the branches. The big cat scampers across the unkempt yard toward it and disappears into the treeline.

Clutching the seeds tight in his fist, Aaron is right behind her.

EXT. SKUNK TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 23**

Dozens of SWAT members and SEARCH DOGS file off the Skunk Train, ready for another day in the woods.

EXT. OLD CABIN - WOODS - DAY

A team of camouflaged SWAT materialize out of seemingly thin air as they slowly step out of the treeline.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 27**

One SWAT member, moving toward the door of a cabin, notices the hinges have been removed and motions toward his team.

INT. FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION - NIGHT

Detective Van Patten cracks open a door to the sight of --  
SEVERAL DOZEN REPORTERS crammed into the press room.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 31**

DET. VAN PATTEN

They're as ready as they're ever  
gonna be, sheriff.

Pausing in front of the doorway, Allman closes his eyes and takes a deep breath before stepping through to the sight of FLASHBULBS POPPING.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Every inch of floor is covered in papers, books and empty wine bottles.

Looking mangy and exhausted, a cigarette hangs out of the corner of Shel's mouth as she looks from one of Aaron's scribblings to her laptop.

On the MUTED TELEVISION, Sheriff Allman stands at a podium with the photo of Aaron breaking into the cabin raised into the air. The "largest manhunt in California history" scrolls below.

There is a KNOCK AT THE DOOR and Dale enters.

(CONTINUED)

DALE

Shel...

He glances around the living room, alarmed.

DALE (CONT'D)

Is this why you haven't been  
answering your phone? *Sin wa  
tsiyal?*

When she looks up, there are dark circles under her eyes.

SHEL

I'm sorry, Dale. I've just been...

She looks around at the disaster zone.

SHEL (CONT'D)

I haven't seen my phone since  
sometime yesterday morning.

Dale sets his bag down and takes a seat next to her.

DALE

You made any progress around here?

She flips through her notebook and hands it to him.

SHEL

I still have no idea who Rea is or  
what their relationship is, but I  
think he first 'met' her when he  
was eight. She's some kind of huge  
salamander or something.

Shel shoves a notebook in Dale's face and points to the  
8-symbol.

SHEL (CONT'D)

I think this may actually be a  
landing site... You see?

He stares at the jargon on the page and shakes his head.

DALE

OK? Like a crop circle? Did she  
abduct him and perform experiments  
on him or something?

SHEL

(frustrated)

I don't know. The key to whatever  
he's doing out there is in here

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SHEL (cont'd)  
 somewhere... I just haven't been  
 able to find it yet.

Her eyes light up and she grabs his arm.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
 Oh! Come look at this!

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

SPROUTING GREEN POPPIES poke out from the earth.

SHEL  
 (proud)  
 Aren't they beautiful? They should  
 only be a few days from blooming.

Overwhelmed, Dale can't help but shake his head.

Off his look --

SHEL (CONT'D)  
 What?

DALE  
 Shel.  
 (searching for words)  
 You've become... obsessed. And I  
 don't think it's good for you.  
 Physically or mentally. You don't  
 look healthy. When is the last time  
 you've eaten? Or slept?

When he moves to touch her face, she SWATS HIS HAND AWAY.

SHEL  
 Not good for me physically or  
 mentally? I don't look healthy?  
 (rage building)  
 You think I'm going crazy, don't  
 you?

DALE  
 What? No...

SHEL  
 Say it!!

Shel stands defiant --

SHEL (CONT'D)

Tell me you think I'm going schizo  
like my mother!

DALE

No! That is NOT what I think!

Relenting, the fight goes out of him.

DALE (CONT'D)

I just don't understand why you're  
doing all this.

SHEL

He's not a monster, Dale! He's sick  
and needs help.

She reaches for the turquoise stone around her neck and  
thrusts it in his face.

SHEL (CONT'D)

Just like when I was a little girl  
and my mother took me to see Kuksu.

DALE

I know the story, Shel.

He reaches for her hand --

SHEL

I've never forgiven myself for not  
doing more when the evil spirits  
took over my mother. I should have  
forced those pills down her throat,  
Dale. Instead...

She pulls away -

SHEL (CONT'D)

I won't let that happen again.  
Aaron may not have Kuksu to help  
him. But he has me.

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron continues to draw symbols on the ink-stained paper.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)

(frustrated)

Aaron, please! Trust me when I tell  
you that you are not gaining  
anything by withholding information

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.) (cont'd)  
from us. Quite the opposite. Tell  
us what this all *means*.

AARON  
(deadpan)  
I could tell you. But then I'd have  
to kill you.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - WOODS

Three ALAMEDA SWAT members drape tree branches over their  
truck to offer concealment.

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 34**

All three of them wear "Alameda" caps.

SERGEANT WILHELM (30's), game face on 24/7, moves out onto  
the narrow dirt road to inspect their work.

SGT. WILHELM  
I think that'll have to do. Let's  
get into position.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

The three men take cover in the trees next to the road.

SGT. WILHELM  
Can't see a damn thing through  
these trees, but at least we've got  
defilade and enfilade positioning  
along the road.

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #1  
The Mendocino boys said hunters  
haven't been allowed out here all  
season. If I spot a buck, I'm  
taking it.

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #2  
(nervous)  
Shit, the only jungle your dumbass  
knows is made out of concrete. It's  
called Oakland.

All business, Wilhelm looks back down the road toward their  
camouflaged vehicle where --

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT reflects off the bumper.

He frowns.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - DAY

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

Aaron stares at the atmospheric phenomenon for an extended BEAT until he can stand it no longer.

AARON

I see your sign, Rea. I am ready.

Rubbing his eyes, he looks down at his new growth of red poppies - in FULL BLOOM all around him.

He removes his hoodie and picks up the bottle of lighter fluid sitting next to his backpack.

AARON (CONT'D)

Into the sky...

Aaron begins dousing the red petals with the fluid.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - WOODS - DAY

Wilhelm grits his teeth and once again looks at the reflection coming off the bumper.

He sighs and trains his attention back on the road and the surrounding greenery.

And then back to the bumper.

SGT. WILHELM

Shit.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron drops a match on the poppies and watches as small tendrils of black smoke begin rising into the air.

He lights another match.

And then a third.

Looking up, he once again takes in the beauty of the resplendent sun dog hovering over the area like a spaceship.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - CONTINUOUS

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #2

Shit, sarge. You said it'd be cold  
way out here in the stix. I got  
sweat drippin' down the crack of my  
ass from all these layers.

Wilhelm scans the road.

And then the bumper.

SGT. WILHELM

Dammit. Shut your holes and cover  
me. I gotta fix the camo.

He flings down his rifle and makes a beeline for the truck.

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Orange flames begin charring the outermost poppies.

In a trance, Aaron stands inside the slowly shrinking ring  
of fire; his arms once again outstretched.

AARON

Out of the ground... and into the  
sky! Come to me, Rea!

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Wilhelm places a large fern over the exposed section of  
bumper and nods with satisfaction.

Stepping back onto the road, he looks up and sees --

BLACK SMOKE billowing into the air from the nearby woods.

SGT. WILHELM

What the hell...?

He instinctively steps into the forest in the direction of  
the smoke.

And then it hits him: HE DOESN'T HAVE HIS M-16.

Reaching for his sidearm, Wilhelm sees MOVEMENT THROUGH THE  
TREES and hears a MAN YELLING...

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Sweat drips down Aaron's bare torso as the circle of fire has closed him in tightly.

Every vein in his head and neck stick out like cords.

AARON  
(skyward)  
TAKE ME REA!!!

EXT. AARON'S DEEP FOREST CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

Wide-eyed and trembling, Wilhelm watches Aaron's contorting movements through the sheet of flame.

Holding out the pistol in front of him --

A TWIG SNAPS under his foot.

Hesitating for the briefest of beats, Wilhelm finally takes one step into the clearing, pistol still raised.

SGT. WILHELM  
Sheriff's office, get on the  
ground!

Squinting, he can just make out Aaron's movement until --

POP-POP-POP!

Wilhelm dives to the ground as TREE BARK SPLINTERS all around him!

He fires EIGHT ROUNDS at Aaron, who dives into the treeline.

Silence...

Gasping for air, Wilhelm changes out his clip and hears rustling in the trees behind him.

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #1 (O.S.)  
Sarge!

SGT. WILHELM  
Call for backup and get my rifle!

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

They stand with their backs to each other in a 360 degree covering position.

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #2  
Was he hit?

SGT. WILHELM  
I don't know. I emptied a clip.  
What was the ETA on the  
backup? The sun is going down.

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #2  
Twenty minutes.

Out of nowhere --

TWIGS AND BARK EXPLODE around them before they even hear the gunshots.

DIVING to the ground --

ALAMEDA DEPUTY #1  
Where, where, where?!!!

SGT. WILHELM  
Right flank! Two o'clock!

Aaron lowers his weapon and disappears just as they all OPEN FIRE on his position.

When Wilhelm raises his hand for a cease fire, SMOKE and FALLING LEAVES are the only things they see.

INT. SHEL'S HOME - NIGHT

Crestfallen, Shel watches TV NEWS COVERAGE of the Alameda SWAT shootout.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR  
This is the first confirmed sighting of Bassler since a hidden camera caught sight of him breaking into a Northspur home two weeks ago. Authorities are confident the noose is closing in on the double murder suspect...

Shel turns off the TV and faces the menacing silence.

Dejected, she begins tossing all of her meticulously arranged papers and books into one messy pile.

(CONTINUED)

She picks up her Mead notebook and flips to the page with her 8-symbol sketch. It's almost finished.

SHEL  
I'm sorry, Aaron... *Mul'e badul.*

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A helicopter flies overhead and a BRIGHT SEARCHLIGHT illuminates the treetops.

When it moves off, a DARK FIGURE emerges from the treeline and onto the bank of the NOYO RIVER.

Clutching his rifle, Aaron's face is CAMOUFLAGED IN MUD; only the whites of his eyes are visible in the moonlight.

With the coast clear, he begins running next to the river.

AARON  
Wait for me, Rea!

INT. SHEL'S HOME - MORNING

Doc rubs Shel's face as he steps over --

A LARGE BOOK turned to a black and white photo of a tall Pomo Indian wearing an ornate headdress.

He begins mewling - lifting up his back paw to reveal a long, sharp beak sticking out from the man's face... the simple caption below it reads: *Kuksu, Medicine Man*

Shel's eyes slowly pull open to morning sunlight filtering in through the windows.

As she rises, Doc scampers after her, still meowing.

She fills his bowl and reaches for her cellphone.

Scrolling through photos of the Alameda SWAT shootout from Dale, she stops when seeing pics of the small field of CHARRED RED POPPIES.

Frustrated, she looks away.

Moving toward the door to the garden, she closes her eyes and relishes the warm sun on her face.

When her eyes open, she GASPS.

Out in the garden --

The POPPIES HAVE BLOOMED.

EXT. BACKYARD GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The blood red flowers bend toward Shel's hand under the cool ocean breeze.

SHEL  
(whispering)  
*Polpol..*

Mind racing, she once again pulls up the photo of the Rea mural from Aaron's basement on her phone.

Instead of focusing on the red poppies around the alien's feet, she now focuses on Rea's OUTSTRETCHED HAND.

SHEL  
You can only summon Rea when the  
poppies bloom!

CLOSE ON: Rea's inviting, outstretched hand.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
And you think she's your ticket  
outta here before the Chinese kill  
us all.

She holds the eerie photo next to the tallest poppy.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
But you keep getting interrupted,  
don't you? First Matthew Coleman,  
then Jere Melo... and now Alameda  
SWAT. But *where are you going??*

Bordering on hyperventilation, Shel touches the crimson petals with her trembling fingers.

*Kuksu...*

INT. SHEL'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Rushing in from the garden, Shel begins furiously digging into the pile of books and papers when her hand lands on --

THE PHOTO of Aaron breaking into the cabin.

SHEL (CONT'D)  
(eyes wide)  
Oh shit!

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

**SUPER: MANHUNT - DAY 36**

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

INT. CRUISER - DAY

With a white-knuckle grip on the steering wheel, Allman glances over at Van Patten in the passenger seat.

His phone rings.

He regards the buzzing phone for a BEAT before answering.

**INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:**

SITTING IN HER CAR, Shel looks through her windshield at the Northspur cabin.

SHEL

Sheriff Allman? It's Shel Severi. Listen, I think I've figured out what Aaron is doing. It has to do with the blooming poppies...

Utterly incredulous --

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Shel, I don't have time for this right now. We're right in the middle of...

SHEL

Sheriff, please, just listen. Aaron is heading back to the area around the Northspur cabin where you captured the photo of him. I've cracked his code. I just got here.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

You what?!

SHEL

After your encounter with him two weeks ago, do you remember any mention of red poppies being found in this area?

(CONTINUED)

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Shel, listen to me. We already know where Bassler is. We have his bunker surrounded twenty miles away from Northspur and we think he may be wounded from the firefight yesterday. He is nowhere near that area. Do you copy?

Sitting in her car, Shel is gobsmacked.

SHEL

But... that can't be.

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Go home, Shel. This nightmare will finally be over soon.

**END INTERCUT**

EXT. REMOTE CLEARING - DAY

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

The stillness in the air is so complete that the buzzing horseflies are deafening.

Donning full riot gear, Allman wipes at the perspiration sliding down his face.

Moving in behind him --

DET. VAN PATTEN

Checkdown is complete, sheriff. All units are a go.

Allman holds up a megaphone --

SHERIFF ALLMAN

Aaron Bassler! You are surrounded on all sides by law enforcement. There is no possibility of escape. When I begin counting, you will have ten seconds to surrender yourself peaceably or we will take you by force.

As he begins counting, a team of SWAT moves in.

Reaching ten, they are only greeted by more horseflies.

As he nods his head --

(CONTINUED)

Allman watches as SWAT THROWS OFF TARPAULIN COVERING.

Amid trained rifles and hoarse shouts --

SWAT MEMBER #4  
Clear!! We got him!

Holstering their weapons, Allman and Van Patten make their way toward the bunker as SWAT emerges with the SUSPECT.

Allman is struck dumb at the sight of --

A DIRT-CAKED HISPANIC MAN (20's) wearing a filthy flannel shirt and blue jeans.

Terrified, the man pleads with his captors in Spanish.

DET. VAN PATTEN  
I don't believe it. A fucking grower?

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

EXT. REMOTE CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

As they watch the authorities processing the scene --

DET. VAN PATTEN  
I don't understand it, Tom. He really is like Harry Fucking Houdini. We know he's here, right? There are only so many places the son of a bitch can hide!

SHERIFF ALLMAN  
You know, Shel said she knows...

He stops - other words frozen in his throat.

SHERIFF ALLMAN (CONT'D)  
(deadpan)  
Shel...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The immense redwood canopy is shrouded in a veil of DENSE, SOUPY FOG which Shel observes pouring into the woods like smoke from a forest fire.

(CONTINUED)

Glancing behind her, the hulking trunks waft in and out of the gray vapor like ancient monoliths recently sprouted from their subterranean lair.

After a BEAT --

A DARK SHAPE flickers across the trail.

SHEL  
(squinting)  
Hello?

Becoming completely subsumed, Shel tries in vain to see what might be lurking in the primordial morass.

There! Was that more movement?

She does not wait to find out.

Taking off at a sprint, she fights to stay on what she believes to be the pathway.

Registering movement on her LEFT FLANK one moment --

The dark shape-shifting motion then appears on her RIGHT.

Fighting panic and fatigue, she comes to a halt at the edge of a SMALL CLEARING, sucking for air.

Taking one step forward, she STOPS with one foot still suspended in mid-air.

Beneath her foot --

AN OVERRIPE BLOOMED RED POPPY - from Aaron's Northspur campsite.

Old yellow police tape catches her eye, along with more trampled - but not burned - poppies.

FRESH FOOTPRINTS dot the dew-soaked grass.

With the hairs on the back of her neck standing up, she slowly raises her hands into the air.

After a BEAT --

SHEL  
Aaron? Are you here?

As if trapped in a silent vacuum of space-time, her beating heart is the only sound reaching her ears.

SHEL (CONT'D)

It's the poppies, right? This is a landing site. I know you're waiting for Rea, Aaron.

Slowly turning in a 365 degree circle, she scans the swirling, shifting fog for any sign of movement.

SHEL (CONT'D)

I know all about Rea and what you need to do.

She points to the dark red poppies under her feet.

SHEL (CONT'D)

You need the poppies to bloom in order to signal her. Isn't that right? But you keep getting interrupted.

Turning another 45 degrees, she stifles a scream.

The BARREL OF A RIFLE materializes out of the haze as if this were a gas-strewn World War I battlefield.

AARON

You're all red motherfuckers.

Blinking once to make sure the visage before her is real --

SHEL

Please don't fear me. I will not get in your way.

Aaron's eyes hover between the sky above them and Shel's still raised hands.

SHEL (CONT'D)

It takes two weeks for poppies to bloom, doesn't it? But two weeks is a long time to wait.

His gaze is equal parts murderous and wondrous.

FLASH TO:

Concealed between the massive red trunks, Aaron watches in GROWING RAGE as Matthew Coleman drags the WEEDEATER next to the 8-symbol he carved into the tree.

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

First there was the man in the truck up in Rockport.

(CONTINUED)

FLASH TO:

As flames begin dancing around blooming red poppies --

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

Racing up the slope, he reaches into the BUNKER for his assault rifle just as Jere Melo and Ian Chaney emerge from the trees.

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

Two weeks later, just as your new poppies were blooming, the two men found your bunker.

FLASH TO:

Inside the cabin, Aaron guzzles a bottle of Scrimshaw when he hears a SOUND.

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

Then you came right here to Northspur. But just as these poppies were about to bloom...

Gun raised and sweat beading on his forehead, Allman KICKS IN the bedroom door --

The OPEN WINDOW greets him.

BACK ON:

SHEL (CONT'D)

And then there was yesterday and all the shooting... so you came back here.

Now Aaron looks at Shel with amazement and dread.

AARON

Who are you?

SHEL

I'm a friend, Aaron. I'm here to help you.

Agitation growing --

AARON

She sees you. You need to leave. Get away from here.

(CONTINUED)

SHEL

Why won't Rea take me, Aaron? I'm just like you. I don't want to die, either.

AARON

No. She picked me a long time ago.

SHEL

When you were eight years old, right? When your parents divorced?

AARON

I was alone when she found me. In the woods.

Shel fights to keep air in her lungs.

SHEL

Do you still think you're alone?

AARON

No. I have her.

SHEL

What about your mom and dad?

He shifts uncomfortably.

SHEL (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea how badly they miss you and want to see you?

AARON

(glum)

It's too late for them. The time has passed for all of you.

SHEL

(gentle)

Aaron, look around. Where is Rea? Hanè?

He allows himself a quick glimpse up into the misty trees.

AARON

She won't let you see her.

SHEL

Where are the Chinese? Why haven't they invaded already? I've read your notebooks. Weren't they supposed to have attacked a long time ago?

(CONTINUED)

AARON

They're...

He glances to the treeline again, but all is quiet.

AARON (CONT'D)

I heard them...

SHEL

I know what you're going through. The sounds. The voices. The fear. My mother thought I was Satan's child. She told me every day how he'd come for me one day.

AARON

Satan doesn't exist.

SHEL

(smiling)

Where have you been my whole life? You could have talked some sense into her for me.

A BEAT.

SHEL (CONT'D)

The Chinese aren't coming, Aaron.

As he takes it all in, Aaron's rifle slowly begins to dip.

SHEL (CONT'D)

If you agree to drop your weapon, I will personally guarantee your safety. I'll call your dad just as soon as we get back to my car. You can see him tonight. You have my word, Aaron. Let's go home.

As if in a trance, mesmerized by the thought of safety and security, Aaron's rifle begins to drop further downward - but his finger is still on the trigger.

Just as he recoils to prevent it from dropping out of his grasp --

Aaron's HEAD JERKS BACK amid a RED MIST and he crumples to the ground.

As if in slow motion, Shel looks over and sees the smoke seeping out of --

Three black SWAT RIFLES.

(CONTINUED)

Allman, gun holstered, rushes past the SNIPERS into the murky clearing as Shel's HYSTERICAL SCREAMS become oddly MUTED.

Kneeling down beside her, Allman barely notices the Sacramento SWAT team SHAKING HANDS and HIGH-FIVING their victory.

As Aaron's piercing blue eyes stare up at the heavens, waiting for a salvation which will never come --

Allman realizes Shel is saying something.

With blood dripping from her hands, she removes the turquoise pendant from around her neck and places it over Aaron's body.

SHEL

Kuksu will protect you now.

ZOOMING in on Aaron's eyes as they go dark...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron stares straight at us.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, we PAN to see the other side of the table.

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

FEMALE AUTHORITY

(gently)

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.

AARON

(singing)

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE AUTHORITY (cont'd)  
head right now. 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 that can help you, Aaron.

Aaron smiles and points a finger at her.

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.

AARON  
Are we done?

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

MALE AUTHORITY  
Game over.

FEMALE AUTHORITY  
(through gritted teeth)  
We can't keep doing this... He's  
not fit to be placed back in  
society.

MALE AUTHORITY  
(grabbing his briefcase)  
You know our hands are tied.

Disappointed, she glares at her partner and closes her file.

FEMALE AUTHORITY  
(standing)  
Your mother is waiting for you  
outside. Please take care of  
yourself, Aaron. And do not forget  
to take your medication. It's  
vitaly 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.

After 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 and today is August 11, 2011. Subject of psychiatric evaluation is Aaron James Bassler, case number 43056. Subject was arrested on August 7th 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 his mother, Laura (60s), waits.

Weathered by years of wind and ocean, she hugs him tightly  
--

AARON  
You got all my stuff?

She nods and wipes away tears.

LAURA  
In the car.

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 --

AARON  
(impatient)  
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.

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?

AARON

How many times do I have to say it? There is nothing wrong with me. They let me go, didn't they?

LAURA

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

(CONTINUED)

AARON

Mom, stop.

LAURA

(emotional)

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.

Pulling away, he steps out of the car and immediately reaches behind the seat for his rifle

A BEAT.

He slams the car door shut.

AARON

When I find what I'm looking for,  
I'll call.

Broken and defeated, Laura watches her son disappear into the dark forest.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Traveling below the gyrating redwood umbrella, Aaron trudges through the woods with his dark hoodie pulled low.

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 he interacts with.

Approaching a clearing, Aaron slinks through the massive trees, silent as a deer.

Setting down his rifle, Aaron digs in his backpack until he produces a baggie of WHITE SEEDS.

With a bowie knife, he begins tilling a section of dirt to plant the seeds.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Based on today's psychiatric evaluation, as well as the subject's criminal history, my

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.) (cont'd)  
preliminary diagnosis is paranoid  
schizophrenia with drug-related  
hallucinosiis.

Seeds planted, Aaron studies the grove of trees nearby.

He selects a sturdy trunk and with the large knife begins  
CARVING into its bark.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)  
Having overtly refused voluntary  
outpatient psychiatric treatment,  
the subject was released per state  
and federal regulations as he  
awaits further jurisprudence on a  
DUI charge.

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

Finally satisfied, he sets down the knife and we see --

A JAGGED "8" on top of a spidery CROSS-HAIRS sign carved  
into the crimson bark. He touches it.

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

The LOW RUMBLE OF A VEHICLE interrupts his reverie.

He leaps backward and disappears into the red grove.

AARON'S POV: From between two massive redwood trunks,  
FOOTSTEPS approach and the BUZZ of a WEEDEATER turns on.

Like before, the buzzing gets closer --

COLEMAN (O.S.)  
I am truly sorry, my friends. But  
I'm afraid this is your day of  
reckoning.

As if in slow motion, WE SEE Coleman's weedeater circle  
across the FRESHLY TILLED SOIL until --

WE PULL UP through the treetops --

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

A BEAT.

(CONTINUED)

THEN A GUNSHOT BLAST --

And all the reds and blues become BLACK.

FADE OUT:

**POSTSCRIPT:**

*At the time of the unprecedented 36 day manhunt for Aaron Bassler in the fall of 2011, Mendocino County was not participating in Laura's Law - an optional state law allowing for court-ordered outpatient treatment for the severely mentally ill deemed unfit to make informed decisions on their own behalf.*

*On January 1, 2016, Mendocino County began a one year pilot program of the law. Currently, 13 of California's 58 counties are participating in some version of Laura's Law.*