

THE BOOK OF ELI

by

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WGAW 1163132

Version 1.4.4  
February 22, 2007

A civilization is destroyed only when its gods are destroyed.

- Emil Cioran

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Bare as all hell. The trees stripped of their bark and white like ghosts. Some torn violently from their roots and felled.

STARK GRAY SUNLIGHT shafts between the trees, clouded by a creeping fog that obscures the true color of everything. A LIGHT SNOW flutters. The world monochrome, lifeless and cold.

A CAT prowls across the dead earth. Barely recognizable as the domestic breed it might once have been. Its fur mangy and rank, body rib-thin from starvation. Entirely feral.

It moves slowly, cautiously. Sniffing the air, scanning the forest, alert. Trusting nothing of its surroundings. It paces across a leaf-strewn clearing, closing stealthily on:

A DEAD MAN, splayed face-down in the earth. His feet bare. Face frozen in a grim death mask. A GAPING GUNSHOT WOUND in his head, the dried blood caked around it matting his hair.

As the cat moves closer, approaching warily:

P.O.V. FROM ACROSS THE CLEARING

About thirty yards away. Someone is watching. Waiting. SLOW, DEEP BREATHS, heard through a GASMASK RESPIRATOR.

CLOSE ON A PAIR OF INDUSTRIAL GOGGLES

The MIRRORED LENSES reflecting the forest clearing, locked onto the cat. The slow, metered breathing continues.

THE CAT slows, but continues pacing toward the corpse. More cautious than ever. It inches forward, sniffing at the body.

ON THE WATCHER. Crouched behind the mangled stump of a felled tree. Concealed beneath a camouflaging mesh of leaves, twigs and bracken. A "ghillie suit" of the kind used by snipers.

THE CAT sniffs at the dead man's hand, frozen by death in a grotesquely contorted claw. The animal still unsure. Looks around again, checking its surroundings for predators.

THE WATCHER moves almost imperceptibly. The leaves covering him rustle ever so slightly as we hear - just barely - the familiar creaking sound of a BOW STRING BEING DRAWN TAUT.

THE CAT hears it. Looks up, alert. Staring right at the watcher, but he is too well camouflaged to be seen. An interminable, tense BEAT - is the prey going to flee?

Finally, the cat turns its attention back to the carcass, nibbling gingerly at the flesh of the man's fingers.

THE WATCHER looses the arrow. It sails across the clearing and SKEWERS THE CAT clean through. It drops to the ground.

THE WATCHER STANDS, shaking off the ghillie suit, revealing him to us for the first time.

He wears a weather-beaten knee-length duster. Hooded sweater with more layers beneath that. Torn pants and scuffed work boots. Everything filthy and battered from years of wear.

Along with the goggles, his face remains obscured by a DISPOSABLE PAPER DUST MASK and a CRUDELY-FASHIONED FUR HAT with dangling ear flaps that may once itself have been a cat.

Around his neck he wears a silver SAINT CHRISTOPHER PENDANT hanging from a frayed twine cord.

His name is ELI.

He shoulders the bow and walks across the clearing. Crouches beside the dead cat and pulls out the arrow. Wipes the blood from the shaft, then reaches down to collect the body.

Suddenly the cat SCREECHES AND FLAILS WILDLY! Eli recoils, falling backward, stunned, as the cat - MORTALLY WOUNDED BUT FIGHTING TO THE DEATH - bites and claws desperately at him.

Eli struggles violently with the cat, wrestling it to the ground and grabbing up a HUNK OF FALLEN BRANCH. He holds the writhing animal down and CLUBS IT until it lays still.

He sits back, breathing harder than the dustmask will allow. He yanks it down, revealing the dirty, unshaven face beneath. Impossible to tell his age, but certainly not a young man.

For a moment he just sits there. Then bundles up the dead cat and returns to the mangled tree stump. Folds away his ghillie suit into a nearby RUCKSACK which he hauls up onto his back.

A canteen dangles from the backpack, a SHOTGUN strapped to its side. Eli reaches down for his final possession - an old SAMURAI SWORD in a scabbard which he slings across his back.

He gazes up at the sky. A snowflake drifts down and lands on his cheek. He reaches up and brushes it away, leaving a BLACK SMEAR on his face. Not snow after all, but some kind of ASH.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Eli emerges from the treeline onto the cracked and ruptured asphalt. Lined by more of those ghostly, stripped-bare trees.

He sniffs the air, breathing it in. Checks the road in both directions. Deserted. A few yards away is the rusted, burned-out chassis of a CAR. He heads toward it.

The car rests half on the road, half in the adjacent ditch. Stripped of its tires and engine. In the driver's seat is a MUMMIFIED BODY. A BULLET HOLE piercing its forehead.

Eli regards the body dispassionately. Tries the door handle but it's jammed. He yanks on it harder and eventually wrenches it open. He leans in and checks the man's feet.

They're bare. No shoes or socks. Eli curses under his breath.

He leaves the car behind and heads on down the road. As he walks away, we see that the sole of one of his boots has worn loose, held in place now only by a rubber band.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli continues down the road. He ambles along slowly, a man in no hurry. A man who has been walking a long time.

The road has since emerged from the forest. Passing now through a wasteland of dead scrub brush and urban junk.

The sun beats down from directly overhead. The sky has no color to it, paper-white. The unfiltered sun's stark light leaves everything seeming bleached-out, over-exposed.

CRANE UP as Eli walks on. On the horizon is the silhouette of a CITY. Or what was once a city. Columns of BLACK SMOKE rise from within, casting a deathly pall over the skyline. BURNED AND BROKEN SKYSCRAPERS jut out like tombstones.

Eli reaches a fork in the road and stops. The road he's on appears to wind off in the direction of the ruined city on the horizon. The other fork continues on into the wasteland.

After a brief pause, Eli changes direction and heads off down the other fork, away from the city.

EXT. ABANDONED TOWN - DAY

Little more than a main street lined with storefronts. Eli walks steadily along, side-stepping rubble and debris. Ignoring the petrified corpses lying in the street.

He passes by abandoned stores, every one picked clean. Empty shelves, smashed windows. Looted and burned. He doesn't even look inside, knowing already that he will find nothing.

Until he comes to a store that does cause him to stop. An old-fashioned sign squeaks on rusted hinges in the breeze.

ED'S SHOES - GENTLEMEN'S AND LADIES' FOOTWEAR

He steps into the doorway and pushes open the door. It swings open on its one remaining hinge before splintering away from the frame and crashing to the floor in a cloud of dust.

INT. SHOE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Eli steps inside. Like all the others, the store has been cleaned out. Shoe racks and empty boxes strewn over the floor. The whole place reeking of dead, musty air.

Eli looks around, just to be sure. Drags his sheathed sword idly along the empty racks as he checks them. Nothing.

As he turns back for the door, his foot nudges against a shoe box. It's not empty. He crouches down, flips the lid off hopefully... and pulls out a LADY'S HIGH-HEELED SHOE.

He strokes the shoe leather with his hand. Shakes his head grimly, then tosses the shoe back into the box and leaves.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

On the outskirts of town. In disrepair - peeling paint, broken windows, damp-stained walls - but habitable.

Eli stands in the front yard, surrounded by brownish, overgrown weeds. Thinking it over. Turns to face the setting sun. It will be dark soon. He turns back toward the house.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

The front door is sent CRASHING OPEN with a hard kick, revealing Eli silhouetted in the fading sunlight. The shotgun unhitched from his pack and held ready. He moves inside.

Another dead place. Flies buzzing in the still, dank air. Everything covered in a thick layer of dust but otherwise largely preserved. An eerie snapshot of a world long gone.

KITCHEN

Every cupboard empty. Eli checks each one, poking around in the dark corners with his sword, but finds nothing but dust.

He opens the freezer, checks inside. Empty save for a small ICEBOX. The lid stuck fast with mildew and gunk. Eli digs at it with his grimy fingernails and manages to pry it open.

Inside are the wizened, petrified remains of a HUMAN HAND. Floating in slimy, discolored water. The smell vile and thick enough to make Eli retch. He quickly jams the lid back on.

#### BEDROOM

A wooden bedframe stripped clean. The dresser drawers have been emptied and lie strewn across the floor. Eli moves toward a large walk-in closet and opens the door.

No clothes inside - just the near-fossilized corpse of a MAN HANGING BY A NOOSE. Twisting gently back and forth.

Unfazed, Eli crouches down and checks the man's feet. An old pair of Converse All-Stars hang limp from the man's skeletal ankles. Eli calmly sets about unlacing them.

He checks the size; they're a fit. He upturns each shoe and shakes the old flakes of mummified flesh from them. Discards his ruined boots and puts on the sneakers, laces them up.

He walks around, pacing up and down, getting a feel for the new shoes. They feel good. For the first time, he smiles.

#### LATER

Eli sits in the corner, roasting the carcass of the dead cat over a small CAMPFIRE. He cleans the animal's pelts as he watches it cook. Pokes at the meat with a pen-knife, checking it for done-ness. It appears ready to eat.

He clasps his hands together in prayer.

ELI

Dear Lord, thank you for your generosity in providing us today with this bountiful feast.

He speaks with a RASPY, OLD-WORLD MIDWEST DRAWL, like John Wayne or some other long-forgotten western icon.

ELI

Thank you for the many gifts that you have given me. Thank you for your protection and your guidance. Thank you for bringing me this far. I know my long journey's end is near. I ask now only for the strength and the courage to complete the task that you in your infinite wisdom saw fit to bestow upon me over all men. I won't let you down. Amen.

He signs a cross over himself, then uses the knife to saw off a chunk of meat. Takes a bite, savoring the taste with great relish. To him, it's grade-A filet mignon.

ELI

Hey. What about you? You hungry?

It appears as though he is talking to himself... until a RAT emerges from his coat pocket, whiskers twitching keenly. Eli offers it some meat. The rat gnaws enthusiastically at it.

SUNDOWN

The last of the waning sunlight shafts through the bedroom's broken window. Eli rummages through his backpack, pulls out a SMALL PACKAGE wrapped in cloth and tied fast with string.

He sits back in his corner and carefully unwraps it. It's a BIBLE. Faded and cracked leather cover, the pages dog-eared, their gilded edging long since worn away by use.

Eli gazes lovingly at it. Lets his fingers play across the embossed gold cross on its cover. A cherished thing.

He begins to read, half-hidden in the shadows of the fading sunlight. Silently mouthing the words as he reads them.

MANY PAGES LATER

Eli closes the bible and parcels it back up as before. Replaces it in his pack, then reaches in for something else.

A CAR BATTERY. Old and streaked with acid stains. Attached to a tangled bunch of ELECTRICAL WIRING and JUMPER CABLES. Eli reaches into his pocket and produces:

AN IPOD. Badly beat-up, the case pretty much held together with duct tape. But functional. Eli attaches the battery cable to the iPod and places the headphones in his ears.

The music plays. Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor*. Eli rests back against the wall and pushes the volume way up.

THE MUSIC SWELLS. Eli's fingers dance and swoop in the air, as though conducting an orchestra, as he is transported by the music to another world, a world far from this one.

MORNING

Sunlight shafts through the window. Eli sits slumped in the exact same position, headphones still in his ears. Asleep.

The rat scurries up Eli's chest and licks his face. Slowly, he wakes, realizing he fell asleep with his music still on. Checks the battery. It's dead, drained overnight. He frowns.

He gets to his feet, moves to the window and checks outside. All seems quiet. He loads up his backpack and weapons.

ELI

Come on.

The rat scurries up his leg, onto his duster and disappears into the breast pocket. Eli turns and moves out.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - MORNING

The gate squeaks shut behind Eli as he exits the front yard.

He breathes in the air, turns to feel the warm morning sun on his face. Then turns away from it and walks on down the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The landscape barren and featureless, road lined with dead trees. Eli walks along the warped and broken asphalt.

Up ahead is a HUNCHED FIGURE by the side of the road. Eli arrives to see that it's a YOUNG WOMAN. Bone-thin, dressed in filthy rags. Skin plagued by an unpleasant rash.

The SHOPPING CART she was pushing has overturned into a roadside ditch, spilling its contents. Blankets, tins of food, old clothes. She's on her knees trying to gather it up.

She looks up as she sees Eli approaching. Instantly cowers from him, raising her hands to protect herself. Terrified.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh. Please don't hurt me. Here, take anything you want. You want some food? Take it.

She offers him a can of pet food with a trembling hand. Eli stands there looking at her. His expression impossible to read behind the mirrored goggles.

ELI

I'm not going to hurt you.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's what the last guys said.

Eli bends down and picks up a couple of the cart's spilled contents. Steps forward and offers them to her.

ELI

Here.

She blinks. Unsure. Cautiously she reaches out and takes it.

YOUNG WOMAN

Could you help me? The wheel came off. I can't fix it. Maybe if I could get it out of the ditch. But I can't.

Eli looks at the cart. It has come to rest in the ditch just inches from a THICK BRACKEN HEDGEROW that lines the road.

He looks again at the girl. Her faded blouse is unbuttoned, revealing a little cleavage. Her skirt torn along the leg, showing more than a little thigh. Almost deliberate.

He sniffs the air. Watches the hedgerow warily. Just like the cat he hunted, his senses heightened and on alert.

BEHIND THE HEDGE

THREE ROADSIDE BANDITS are crouched, waiting to pounce. Each armed with a crude blunt weapon. They exchange anxious looks.

ELI sniffs the air again - then backs away from the girl.

ELI

One good thing about no soap any more. You can smell the road agents a mile off.

The girl's face falls as Eli backs up. The three bandits EMERGE FROM THE HEDGEROW, brandishing their weapons. A couple of them wear old sunglasses and goggles similar to Eli's.

The BANDIT LEADER grabs the girl by a fistful of hair as he passes, yanking her painfully to her feet.

BANDIT LEADER

Dumb bitch. What did we tell you?

He pushes her away, she crumples to the road in a heap.

Eli backs away, but TWO MORE ARMED BANDITS drop from hiding in the trees behind, cutting off his escape, surrounding him.

BANDIT LEADER

What you got there in the pack?

ELI

Nothing.

BANDIT LEADER

Yeah, that's what they all say. How about you take it off real slow and tip it out so's we can take a look?

BANDIT #2 notices the shotgun strapped to the pack.

BANDIT #2

He's got a gun.

BANDIT LEADER

Shit, it ain't loaded. They never are. Ain't that right, old man?

(beat)

Open the fucking pack or die.

ELI

I can't do that.

The bandit leader steps forward aggressively. Now within striking distance of Eli. He grins, teeth filthy and rotten.

BANDIT LEADER

Want us to do it for you? We can get it off real easy after we've hacked your fucking arms off.

ELI

No. I mean I can't die. I'm on a mission from God, and under his divine protection. You stand in my way, you stand in his. And he will strike you down, through me, his faithful instrument.

BEAT. The bandit leader looks at Eli incredulously... and then LAUGHS. The other bandits laugh along nervously.

BANDIT LEADER

God, huh? Haven't heard that one in a long time. What are you, some kinda preacher?

ELI

Something like that.

BANDIT LEADER

Well, I got news for you, preacher man. God left these parts a long time ago. He ain't here to protect your ass. Now take off the pack and set it on the ground.

Eli doesn't move, doesn't say a word. The bandit leader takes another step forward and shoves him in the shoulder.

BANDIT LEADER

Are you fucking listening to me?

ELI

I hear you. You lay that hand on me again and you will not get it back.

The other bandits exchange nervous looks. This is not how it's supposed to go.

BANDIT LEADER

All right, I had just about enough of this shit...

He lunges forward, grabs the shoulder strap of Eli's pack.

If you blinked, you missed it. But somehow Eli has now drawn his sword. A RIVULET OF BLOOD snakes down along the blade and drips onto the asphalt.

Bandit leader's hand is still gripped firmly around Eli's shoulder strap. But it's no longer connected to his arm. The SEVERED HAND hangs there from the strap, dripping blood.

Bandit leader staggers backward and raises the bloody stump where his hand once was. Looks at it in shock and horror.

BANDIT LEADER

What... you just... he just cut my fucking hand off! My fucking hand!

Eli pries the hand loose from the strap and tosses it onto the road as bandit leader's legs give out and he slumps to the asphalt. His eyes dart around, as though confused.

BANDIT LEADER

What you standin' around for? Kiss him!

BANDIT #3

What's he talkin' about, kiss him?

ELI

He's in shock. He means "kill him".

A tense BEAT. And then the four remaining bandits ATTACK ELI ALL AT ONCE, weapons flailing.

Eli flourishes the sword. A BLUR, TOO FAST TO FOLLOW. But it's clear he is possessed of an inhuman level of skill.

It is over in moments. The four bandits LAY SLAIN IN THE ROAD, blood pooling out onto the asphalt.

The bandit leader crawls toward his severed hand, a few yards away. Eli steps in and kicks it out of his reach.

ELI

I told you you wouldn't be getting that back.

Bandit leader looks up to see the figure of Eli bearing down on him, silhouetted ominously against the sun. He looks for a moment like an avenging angel, something not of this world.

BANDIT LEADER

Who are you?

ELI

My name is Eli.

And with that, Eli runs him through with his sword.

He turns to see the young woman slumped in the road, sobbing. She cowers again as he approaches, certain that she is next.

He WALKS PAST HER. Sheathes his sword, then pulls out the shopping cart from the ditch and rights it. The woman watches incredulously as he gathers up her supplies into the cart.

ELI

Take it and go on your way. And don't fall in with men like these again. No good can come.

She looks at him, puzzled.

YOUNG WOMAN

Why are you doing this?

Eli says nothing. Walks back to the slain bandits, crouches beside them and begins searching their bodies.

He takes a scarf from around the neck of one. Finds a Zippo lighter on another, checks that it works and pockets it.

LATER

The five bodies are lined neatly in the ditch, half-covered with dirt. The best burial they are going to get.

Eli stands before them, head bowed in prayer. He speaks quietly and quickly, a speech he has given many times.



The overpass's collapsed section is now just a MOUNTAINOUS PILE OF RUBBLE that leads down to the road below.

Eli steps onto the rubble. About to make his way down when he FREEZES. He hears something. The faintest of sounds. He takes cover, peering down at the road beneath the overpass to see:

TWO PEOPLE walking together on the road. We see everything from ELI'S P.O.V. - too far to make out much detail, but apparently it is a MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE.

The man pushes along an OLD WHEELBARROW covered by a tarp as the woman, seemingly his wife, walks alongside. The barrow's rusted wheel gives out a plaintive, rhythmic SQUEAK.

Eli ducks down again as he hears something else. This time much louder. The menacing growl of MOTORCYCLE ENGINES.

FOUR BIKES IN TOTAL. Riding out of the horizon, closing in on the couple. They see the bikes coming and panic. Try desperately to steer the barrow off the road.

The bikes screech to a halt and the FOUR RIDERS dismount. Brandishing a variety of weapons. The couple make a run for it but they're quickly chased down and tackled to the ground.

The woman SCREAMS and struggles helplessly as the bikers swarm over the man like a pack of predatory animals.

The woman is pulled to the ground and the clothes stripped from her. Eli turns away. He knows what comes next.

Eli listens as the woman screams and screams. He reaches for his shotgun... hesitates... then withdraws his hand.

ELI

It ain't your concern. Stay on the path. It ain't your concern. Stay on the path.

Eli repeats it like a mantra. He clearly wants to intervene, but will not permit himself to. Instead, he simply sits and waits grimly as the woman continues to scream for help. And then finally, suddenly, is silenced.

Down below, the bodies of the man and woman lay dead and bloodied in the dirt. The bikers tear the tarp from the wheelbarrow, spilling its contents onto the asphalt.

They ferret through the items, scavenging a few items - we don't see what - and stuffing them into an old cloth satchel. They leave the rest strewn in the road and ride off in the direction they came, dust pluming in their wake.



The blacksmith doesn't look up from his work but motions toward a stable-like structure at the far end of the street.

ELI

Thank you.

Eli heads down the street. Stopping when he comes across a STATUE erected in the center of the road. A TALL MAN crudely fashioned in clay. One hand placed paternally on the head of a SMALL CHILD, the other outstretched toward the sun.

As he observes the statue, Eli notices that passing residents take a moment to PAUSE AND GENUFLECT before it. Worshipping.

Curious, Eli reaches up and runs his hand over the statue's face. Then hears SHUFFLING FEET behind him and turns as a PARADE OF EMACIATED MEN AND WOMEN trudges past. Roped together at the waist, each man leading the one behind.

Heads shaved, thin from malnutrition. And each one BLIND. They gaze at the ground with pale, dead eyes. They carry picks, shovels and other tools - a sightless CHAIN GANG.

Eli watches as the pathetic parade shuffles past, herded like cattle by a brutish CHAIN GANG BOSS who swats at them with a stick to keep them moving and indicate direction.

CHAIN GANG BOSS

Come on, move it!

The gang boss glares at Eli as he passes by. Eli doesn't return the look, just continues crossing the street as the blind are herded away. Headed toward a wooden building with a pictogram of a LIGHTNING BOLT suspended above the door.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Eli enters and looks around. Long counter-tops with shelves behind, displaying an eclectic variety of goods. Scavenged engine parts. Old electrical wiring. Small appliances.

An old ELECTRIC GENERATOR rumbles noisily, powering strings of multi-colored CHRISTMAS LIGHTS that hang all around.

Behind the main counter a convoluted Rube Goldberg-esque STILL is running. An ENGINEER in a leather apron pours the remnants of a can of motor oil into the still's funnel.

Attached to the still is an old MOTORCYCLE MIRROR. In its reflection the engineer sees Eli checking out the store.

Without turning around, he reaches surreptitiously behind the counter for something.

Eli turns toward the counter - to find the engineer training a PUMP-ACTION SHOTGUN right at him.

ENGINEER  
I don't know you.

Eli slowly raises his hands.

ELI  
I'm not from around here.

ENGINEER  
No shit. Who are you?

ELI  
I'm just a customer.

ENGINEER  
A customer with a shotgun?

He nods toward the shotgun visible on Eli's backpack.

ENGINEER  
You come in here to rip me off?

The engineer's hands tremble, his finger tight on the trigger. This man needs to be talked down carefully.

ELI  
No. I'll set it down. Okay?

ENGINEER  
Slowly!

Eli nods. Unhitches the pack and sets it down, steps away.

ENGINEER  
You carry a gun in the outland, you don't bring one into town less you live there. Don't you know that?

ELI  
I'm sorry, I forgot. I've been on the road a long time.

This seems to make the engineer more suspicious of Eli.

ENGINEER  
Show me your hand.

ELI  
I'm not a-

The engineer jerks the shotgun at Eli nervously.

ENGINEER

I said show me your fucking hand!

Eli raises his hand and holds it outstretched, palm faced downward. The engineer watches it closely for any sign of ticks or tremors, but Eli's hand stays steady as a rock.

ELI

I'm not one of them.

The sight of the steady hand seems to reassure the engineer a little. Finally, he lowers the shotgun.

ENGINEER

What do you want?

ELI

I'm just passing through. I need some help. I can pay.

ENGINEER

What kinda help? And what kinda pay?

ELI

I'm going to get something out of my pack. Okay?

The engineer raises the shotgun nervously again.

ELI

I know, I know. Slowly.

The engineer watches him like a hawk as Eli opens up his pack and pulls out the car battery. When he sees it, he gasps.

ENGINEER

Holy shit.

Eli places it on the counter. The engineer looks it over with awe, like it's a priceless historical artifact.

ENGINEER

Where'd you find this?

ELI

Years ago, in the outland back east ways.

ENGINEER

Does it work?

ELI

Yeah, it just needs a charge. Can you do it? I got the cables.

ENGINEER

Depends if you also got the coin.

Eli pulls the Zippo lighter from his pocket. The engineer picks it up, sparks the flint, watches the flame flicker.

ENGINEER

It'll take a couple hours. There's a bar across the street you can wait, they just opened up.

ELI

I'll wait here.

ENGINEER

You don't trust me?

ELI

(smiles)

I don't know you.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

FOUR MOTORCYCLES roar into town and pull up outside a LARGE BARN. As the riders dismount, one detaches a CLOTH SATCHEL from his bike's cargo rack.

The four riders head inside. They each have long, straggly hair and brutish expressions. We recognize them now as the BIKER BANDITS who killed the couple on the road.

EXT. BARN - OFFICE - DAY

A large part of the barn's upper floor has been converted into an OFFICE. Or what barely passes for one. A TATTERED RUG lines the floor. FADED, DISTRESSED PAINTINGS of questionable taste on the walls. A BARE LIGHT BULB buzzes overhead.

The centerpiece is a simple WOODEN DESK, the kind that might have once been used by a schoolteacher. Downright opulent by the standards of this indigent world.

A TALL FIGURE is seated in a battered LEATHER ARMCHAIR. Feet up on the desk, face hidden behind an OPEN PAPERBACK BOOK.

The book's cover is faded, wrinkled and water-stained, as though recovered from an ancient flood. But the bold title is still just visible: 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR causes him to lower the book. Unlike everyone else we've seen, he appears healthy and well-groomed. A rich mane of hair, full set of teeth.

He's OLDER than most we've seen, too. Close to Eli's age. His skin weathered. More than a little Tommy Lee Jones in him.

He wears a tattered SUIT AND TIE. None of it matches, everything scavenged from different outfits and eras. But he looks almost civilized. Respectable. His name is CARNEGIE.

CARNEGIE

Come.

His accent is like caramel. A rich, deep-south drawl.

The door opens and REDRIDGE enters. Tall, powerfully built.

REDRIDGE

One of the road crews just rolled into town.

Carnegie looks nonchalantly at his cracked old wristwatch.

CARNEGIE

Of course they did, the bar's open. Outlanders, always looking for answers at the bottom of a bottle.

REDRIDGE

Not these guys.

Carnegie glances back up at Redridge, intrigued.

REDRIDGE

These guys say they got something.

Carnegie whips his feet off the table and stands.

CARNEGIE

Get them up here.

INT. BARN/SALOON - DAY

A simple bar, tables and chairs. A FIREPLACE sputters dimly. WOODEN STEPS lead to an UPSTAIRS LANDING. Vaguely reminiscent of an old west saloon but far more primitive.

A MANGY TABBY CAT walks across the straw-laden floor. A dozen or so CUSTOMERS in the place, a mixed, rough-looking bunch.

Redridge emerges from an upstairs room and nods to a group of his MEN who are holding the bikers at the foot of the stairs.

INT. BARN/SALOON - CARNEGIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Carnegie checks his reflection in a CRACKED HAND MIRROR, licks his palm and slicks his hair back. He adjusts his tie as the door opens and Redridge's men usher the bikers inside.

Carnegie wheels around and flashes a smile at them. Suddenly he is every bit the showman, charismatic and slick.

CARNEGIE

Gentlemen! It's truly a delight to see you again! I understand your latest excursion in the outland has been a profitable one?

Along with his cultivated image, his accent, cadence and delivery remind us of an old-time Southern TV evangelist.

The bikers exchange looks. They understood maybe half the words in that sentence. The lead biker - named HOG - speaks.

HOG

We did good.

CARNEGIE

Well, let's see, shall we?

Hog tips the satchel's contents out onto Carnegie's desk.

BOOKS. About a dozen different volumes of all shapes and sizes. Carnegie rifles excitedly through the collection.

We see various titles as he sorts through them. Treasure Island. The Da Vinci Code. A volume of encyclopedia. The Diary of Anne Frank. Tuesdays with Morrie.

CARNEGIE

No. No. No. No. No.

As Carnegie rejects each one with growing disappointment and frustration, it's clear he's looking for a specific book.

CARNEGIE

It's not here.

HOG

These ain't worth nothin'?

CARNEGIE

When you bring me the book I asked you for, it'll be worth something.

The bikers exchange more looks. An unspoken conversation.

HOG

We been doin' this a long time now.  
Had to make a whole lotta corpses  
to bring you all these books. You  
want us to keep at it, reckon it's  
worth more than a few free glasses  
of that swill you call liquor.

Carnegie's guards bristle, ready for a confrontation.  
Carnegie just smiles, always ready to smooth things over.

CARNEGIE

Gentlemen, gentlemen. I urge you  
once again to take the long view  
here. When we find this book - and  
believe me, we will find it - we  
are going to build a new world. A  
world far greater, far more  
righteous than this one. And you  
and I are going to be perched right  
on top of it, looking down upon it,  
masters of all creation!

His carefully stage-managed rhetoric is delivered with the  
utmost conviction, every word dripping with passion and  
persuasion. He's a master salesman, a true huckster.

CARNEGIE

And you know, I think you're  
absolutely right. That is worth  
more than a few glasses of liquor.  
A whole lot more.

He steps forward and looks Hog right in the eye. His gaze  
like a laser beam, utterly disarming.

CARNEGIE

The book I want is out there  
somewhere, just waiting to be  
found. Once there were millions of  
copies - you only need to find one!  
Find it and bring it here. And I  
promise you, you will be rewarded  
beyond anything you can imagine.

It's impossible not to be swayed by this guy. He's just so  
full of fiery passion and infectious belief, you almost want  
to reach into your pocket and hand over your wallet.

Hog snatches up his empty satchel.

HOG

This better not be bullshit.

He turns and marches to the door, the other bikers following. The guards escort them out, only Redridge remains.

Carnegie slumps back into his chair, frustrated, pissed off.

REDRIDGE  
Might help if they knew just what  
they were looking for.

CARNEGIE  
Not one of them can read. How would  
they even know when they found it?

REDRIDGE  
So how's about you just tell me?

Carnegie and Redridge lock eyes. BEAT.

REDRIDGE  
Two years now you been sending  
these crews into the outland.  
Burning up gas we can barely spare.  
For a goddamn book? What the hell  
kinda book can be worth all this?

Carnegie ignores him. Stands, walks toward the door. Redridge sighs, gestures toward the books piled on Carnegie's desk.

REDRIDGE  
What about these?

CARNEGIE  
Put them with the others.

INT. SALOON - DAY

Redridge stands by the stone fireplace, tossing the books one by one into the fire. The flames flicker and leap around the books as their pages blacken and are consumed by the fire.

INT. ENGINEER WORKSHOP - DAY

Eli watches as the engineer hooks up the battery to the generator. He licks his lips, dry as sand. Unscrews his canteen to take a drink, but it's down to its last few drips.

ELI  
What's this place across the  
street? They got any water?

ENGINEER  
Only water in a hundred miles. They  
got their own still over there.

Eli thinks a while longer. Then stands and stuffs his shotgun inside his pack, shoulders his gear and makes for the door.

ELI

I'll be back.

Eli stops in the doorway and turns back to the engineer.

ELI

If that battery ain't here when I get back, I will use this gun on your kneecaps and I will put this building to the torch and I will watch it burn to the ground with you alive inside it. So help me God.

And with that he turns and leaves. The engineer gulps. Not a hint in Eli's voice that he didn't mean every word.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Simply furnished. A WOMAN stands by an old Victorian wash-stand, washing her hands and face in the porcelain bowl.

Her name is CLAUDIA. Early 30s, pretty. She gazes into the wash-stand's mirror as she dries her hands, but it's so cracked and warped it's near impossible to see a reflection.

The door opens and Carnegie enters. He still looks steamed. Claudia doesn't turn to look at him, keeps facing the mirror.

CLAUDIA

Is that you, honey?

Carnegie says nothing. Just paces angrily up and down. Finally Claudia turns to face him.

CLAUDIA

Something wrong?

CARNEGIE

More books came in from the road today.

CLAUDIA

Oh? It's been a while.

CARNEGIE

And it'll be a while longer. Just another pile of useless junk.

She adopts a sympathetic expression, tries to be supportive.

CLAUDIA

You'll find what you're looking for. It's out there somewhere. You just have to have faith.

This seems to anger Carnegie. He wheels on her.

CARNEGIE

Faith? Is that what you think we're missing around here?

She detects the aggressive tone in his voice and goes quiet, head bowed. Carnegie moves toward her angrily.

CARNEGIE

My old man used to have faith. He had it in spades. My mother, too. You know where it got them? You know where it got me?

He's in her face now. Claudia avoids eye contact, submissive.

CARNEGIE

Faith is for the weak. It's for them out there, the sheep. This world is what you can see and touch and taste. It's what we make it. You think I built this town on faith? Is that what you think?

He's shouting now, and she's trembling, afraid to speak.

CLAUDIA

I'm sorry.

Carnegie realizes he's frightened her. He softens.

CARNEGIE

No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Hey. You okay?

He lifts her chin up, wipes away a tear.

CARNEGIE

You just get me all riled up with that kind of talk. It's not what I need from you right now.

(smiles)

You know what I need right now?

He puts his hands on her lustfully. It's clear she's not in the mood, but she halfheartedly responds anyway. More out of a sense of wifely duty than reciprocated passion.

As they kiss, Carnegie pushes her excitedly against the wall and feverishly begins unbuckling his pants.

INT. SALOON - DAY

The original customers have now been joined by the four bikers, who sit at their own table drinking a clear and pungent moonshine-type liquor from a shared jar.

Eli enters. All eyes are on him immediately, regarding him with guarded interest as he pulls up a stool at the bar.

The BARTENDER approaches, looks him up and down. Suspicious.

BARTENDER  
Outlander? Let me see-

Eli raises his hand as before. Holds it outstretched, steady.

BARTENDER  
What'll it be?

Eli places the canteen on the bar.

ELI  
Water.

BARTENDER  
That's the good stuff. It don't  
come cheap.

Eli takes off his scarf and puts it on the bar. The bartender takes it and looks it over.

BARTENDER  
That'll get you half-way.

The bartender spies Eli's silver Saint Christopher pendant.

BARTENDER  
What about that?

Eli stuffs the pendant inside his shirt. No way that's for sale. Instead, he reaches into his coat and pulls out the pelts he skinned from the dead cat, lays them out on the bar.

ELI  
That's the best I got.

The bartender takes a pelt and examines it. The mangy cat leaps up onto the bar and approaches. Sniffs at the pelts with suspicion and HISSES at Eli.



BARTENDER

Hey, how about another drink, Hog?

HOG

That cat's been comin' in here for nigh on two years. It got more right to be here than you. Who the fuck do you think you are?

ELI

I don't want any trouble.

Hog grabs him by the arm.

HOG

Well, that's too bad, 'cause-

*Blink.* Suddenly Hog's head is pinned to the bar by nothing more than Eli's thumb. Pressed deep into a nerve cluster in his neck. Eli leans in close as Hog whimpers, paralyzed.

ELI

I know you. Murderer of innocent travelers on the road. You're going to spend eternity drowning in a lake of fire for the things that you've done. Did you know that?

The other bikers stand and approach, the OTHER CUSTOMERS following suit. Eli senses the trouble gathering behind him.

ELI

You go on back to your table and I'll be on my way. All right?

It's all Hog can do to just barely nod his head. Eli releases his thumb. Hog staggers backward, gasping for breath.

Eli stands and makes toward the door, but the bikers and other patrons have moved to block his exit.

BURLY PATRON

You push Hog, you push all of us.

Eli sighs, looks down at the floor. He's been pushed one time too many today. For the first time, we see anger in his face.

ELI

Cursed be the ground because of you. By toil shall you eat of it. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. From the ground were you taken. For dust you are.

The patrons look at Eli strangely. Who is this guy?

Eli reaches back and draws the samurai sword. Carves a line in the dirt at his feet with the tip of the blade.

ELI

And to dust you shall return.

INT. SALOON - CARNEGIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Carnegie has Claudia pinned against the wall, his pants bunched around his ankles, ass bared as he pounds away at her. Not making love. This is mechanical, loveless sex.

Claudia stares vacantly over his shoulder into space as Carnegie thrusts into her again and again. Deeply uninterested, just waiting for it to be over.

Suddenly, we hear a CRASH O.S. Carnegie stops and listens.

CARNEGIE

Did you hear that? What was that?

Claudia sees an opening to get out of this.

CLAUDIA

Maybe you should go check.

BEAT. Carnegie keeps listening. Then comes another CRASH.

CARNEGIE

What in the hell is going on?

He pulls up his pants, grabbing a RIFLE propped by the door as he rushes out. Claudia just stands there for a moment, then reaches down and pulls up her panties.

She moves from the wall and makes her way across the room, feeling her way with her hands, gazing off into nothingness. Only now do we finally realize that she is BLIND.

EXT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Carnegie emerges from the bedroom onto the landing. Looks down over the railing - and is stunned by what he sees.

CHAOS in the bar below. Eli cutting a one-man swath of mayhem through the dozen brawlers. Most already lie dead. TWO MORE MEN ATTACK Eli and are effortlessly felled by his sword.

Carnegie rushes hurriedly along the landing, banging loudly on the doors of the upstairs rooms.

## CARNEGIE

Get your asses out here!

ON ELI. Surrounded by the dead, only one man left standing. Hog. He backs away as Eli circles him like a predator. Sword held ready, the blade glistening with dark red blood.

SOLARA re-emerges from the back room with Eli's refilled canteen. She stops and emits a horrified GASP when she sees the bloody carnage laid out in the bar before her.

She watches, mortified, as Eli moves toward the helpless, terrified Hog, going in for the kill. Raising his sword...

Suddenly, Solara steps forward and CRIES OUT:

SOLARA

Stop!

Eli FREEZES. Sword hanging in the air, poised to strike. He turns his head to where Solara stands behind the bar.

SOLARA

Please don't.

BEAT as Eli considers. He looks back at Hog, still completely at his mercy... and then LOWERS THE SWORD.

ELI

Go.

HOG

(confused)

...What?

ELI

It ain't for me to judge you. Your time for that's gonna come. Believe me. Now go on. Get out of here.

Hog stumbles backward through the door, into the sunlight. Eli moves toward Solara, who stands petrified behind the bar. Reaches out and gently pries the canteen from her loose grip.

ELI

Thank you.

In the saloon doorway, Hog turns back inside, grabbing up a BROKEN BOTTLE from the bloody floor as he goes.

Hog rushes Eli from behind. Solara sees him coming and goes to SCREAM - but before any sound can come, Eli flips his sword backward and Hog runs right onto it, SKEWERING HIMSELF.



Eli can't help but react at the mention of that word.

CARNEGIE

It means we have laws here. Laws set down long before any of us ever walked this earth. And one of them is, you don't eat the flesh of your brother. Else you're no better than an animal. And not welcome here.

Eli doesn't respond. Just stands there in Carnegie's gaze.

CARNEGIE

So what's your business here, friend? Walkers don't usually come into town less they want something.

ELI

I had a battery needed charging and a canteen needed filling. I didn't come here looking for trouble.

Barely noticeable, Carnegie gestures to one of the gunmen, who nods in acknowledgement and leaves.

CARNEGIE

Well, you sure as hell found it. Do you know who I am?

ELI

No.

CARNEGIE

My name's Carnegie. I own this bar. I own the whole town. You've never heard of me?

ELI

That's you out there on the street.

CARNEGIE

Remarkable likeness, isn't it? You'd never guess half the men who built it were blind. A small tribute from a grateful people. I was deeply touched.

ELI

You had slaves build you a monument to yourself?

The mention of that word rankles Carnegie. He walks around the desk toward Eli, waves an admonishing finger at him.

CARNEGIE

Don't call them slaves. That's an old word. I'm not a slaver. I'm trying to help these people.

Carnegie can't help himself - once again he is in his natural element, spinning the argument his way, pitching. Selling.

CARNEGIE

In the outland the sightless are preyed upon like sick animals. Here at least they're protected. They do the essential work others don't want. And in return they eat, they drink, they survive. Last year, a couple of them even got married - performed the ceremony myself.

(beat)

You see, I'm not exploiting these people - I'm saving them! Any one of them is free to leave whenever they wish. But here they stay. And they thank me every single day for their salvation!

An impressive, impassioned performance. He sounds just like an old-school TV evangelist. But Eli is unmoved.

ELI

It's none of my business what you do here. Like you said, it's your town. I just want to be on my way.

CARNEGIE

What's your name, walker?

Eli doesn't respond. Just stands there.

CARNEGIE

All right, I guess we just call you Walker. Don't see too many folks your age these days. You lived in the world before? You can read?

ELI

I read every day.

CARNEGIE

That's good. Good man. We educated folk, we need to stick together, if we're ever going to rebuild this world. People like you and me, we're the future.



















CARNEGIE

So let's not see anybody get hurt.  
Okay?

He speaks more softly now. As he strokes his hand tenderly through Claudia's hair, a tear runs down her cheek.

INT. SALOON - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark outside, but the room is brightly lit by the glow of the oil lamp. Eli sits up on his bed, quietly reading his bible.

Another KNOCK at the door. Eli jumps up and hurriedly hides the book inside his shirt.

ELI

Come in.

The door opens to reveal Solara. Looking very different than she did before. Cleaned up and wearing a flowery summer dress, blonde hair let down over her shoulders. Stunning.

Unlike everyone else we have met, she seems - physically, at least - totally unscarred by the horrors of the times. Far too beautiful a thing to belong in a world like this.

SOLARA

Hi. Can I come in?

ELI

Someone was already here with food and water. I got everything I need.

SOLARA

You sure about that?

She glides into the room, closing the door. She's good. Very seductive. Eli is totally disarmed in her presence.

SOLARA

It's too bright in here. Mind if I turn it down a little?

She doesn't wait for an answer. Moves to the table and turns down the oil lamp. A darker, more seductive lighting scheme.

SOLARA

That's better. I'm Solara. You're Walker, right?

ELI

No. My name's Eli.

SOLARA

That short for something? Elias?

ELI

Elijah.

SOLARA

Elijah. I never heard that one before. It's kinda cute.

She sits on the bed, kicks her legs playfully. Her light cotton dress revealing in all the right places. The silhouette of her body bathed in the seductive glow of the oil lamp. No red-blooded man on earth could resist her.

ELI

Look, I don't mean to be rude. But I'm really not interested.

SOLARA

You sure about that? It gets mighty lonely out there on the road.

She leans over on the bed, resting on her elbow. Her hair cascades down. God damn, she looks good.

SOLARA

If you're worried about money, this is all paid for. The whole night.

ELI

It's not that. You're a very nice girl. But I'm not that kind of man.

She slides off the bed, approaches him. Begins to work the buttons of his shirt.

SOLARA

They're all that kind of man.

He moves her hand away. Gently pushes her back a step.

ELI

I'm not.

She is stunned. No man has ever turned her down before. And then she seems a little insulted.

SOLARA

They told me you were crazy. Maybe they were right.

Eli opens the door for her.

ELI  
I'm sorry. Good night.

Suddenly all her other emotions give way to fear. She moves to the door and slams it shut again. Looks Eli in the eye.

SOLARA  
Please don't make me leave. I have to stay the night. If I don't...

ELI  
If you don't, what?

SOLARA  
He'll hurt my mom.

ELI  
Who will? Carnegie?

She nods, fighting back a tear. This angers Eli.

ELI  
Maybe he and I oughta have words.

He goes for the door handle, but she stops him.

SOLARA  
No! Please, don't!

ELI  
He's hurting you. He's hurting your mother. He's-

SOLARA  
He's my dad.

BEAT. Eli moves his hand away from the door.

SOLARA  
Look, if you want to help me, just let me stay here tonight. We don't have to do anything. I'll sleep on the floor. Tomorrow you can tell my dad that we had a good time. I'll be no trouble, I swear.

She looks up at Eli imploringly. Transformed. No longer the teenage sex kitten. Now she's just a frightened little girl.

ELI  
You want to have a conversation?

She smiles, wiping the tear from her cheek.

LATER

Eli and Solara sit together on the bed. A silent BEAT. At first, it appears as though they have nothing to say.

ELI

You know, you don't have to be afraid of me. What happened down there in the bar...

SOLARA

I'm not afraid of you. I know you didn't start that trouble. When I first saw you, I knew you weren't the type to go looking for it.

ELI

How'd you know that?

SOLARA

My mom says I'm a good judge of character. She says I can read people. That I know a good man when I see one.

She smiles. Eli is surprised to find himself smiling back.

SOLARA

So... you're pretty old, right?

Eli smiles, amused by the bluntness of the question.

SOLARA

I'm sorry. I just mean, I haven't seen too many people your age. How old are you exactly?

ELI

You know, I don't rightly remember.

SOLARA

But you're old enough. I mean, you remember what it was like? In the world before?

Eli nods.

SOLARA

What was it like?

Eli thinks about this. Dredging through old, old memories.

ELI  
Better than this.  
(beat)  
People lived longer back then.  
Longer than me. Some were more than  
a hundred years old.

Solara smiles like she's having her leg pulled.

SOLARA  
Come on.

ELI  
I swear, it's true. Nowadays it's  
not the same. If you're sick or  
you're weak or you're old you won't  
last long out on the road.

SOLARA  
So how come you have?

BEAT. Eli thinks. Should he or shouldn't he?

ELI  
Can I read you something?

SOLARA  
Wait. You can read?

Eli pulls the bible from his shirt. Solara's eyes widen.

SOLARA  
And you have a book?

ELI  
Not just any book.

He opens it up, scans the page with his finger until he finds  
the passage he's looking for.

ELI  
The Lord is my shepherd. I shall  
not want. He makes me lie down in  
green pastures. He leads me beside  
still waters. He restores my soul.  
He leads me in the paths of  
righteousness.

ON SOLARA as she listens to Eli read. Transfixed.

ELI

Though I walk through the valley of  
the shadow of death, I will fear no  
evil. For you are with me. Your rod  
and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in  
the presence of my enemies. You  
anoint my head with oil. My cup  
runs over. Surely goodness and  
mercy shall follow me, all the days  
of my life. And I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever.

SOLARA

That's beautiful. Did you write  
that?

ELI

(smiles)

No.

SOLARA

What book is it from? Is it poetry?

ELI

I guess you could think of it that  
way. It's from the Holy Bible.

SOLARA

I never heard of it. What's it  
about?

BEAT as Eli thinks. How on earth to answer that?

ELI

It's about love, and forgiveness,  
and life and death, and mercy, and  
revenge, and the beginning and the  
end of the world. I guess it's  
about a little bit of everything.

SOLARA

Can I see?

She reaches out for the book but he snatches it away.

SOLARA

What? I'm not going to do anything.

ELI

I'm sorry. I'm charged to protect  
this book. I can't trust it with  
anyone. Not even for a while.

SOLARA

What's so special about that book?

BEAT. Eli runs his fingers across the embossed gold cross on the beat-up leather cover.

ELI

It's the last one. There are no other books like this. All the others are gone, destroyed by the war or in the burnings that came after. This is the only one that survived until now. The last one anywhere.

SOLARA

How can you know that?

ELI

I just know.

(beat)

For a long while after it happened, I just wandered on the road like most everybody else. There were still a lot of people around back then, in the beginning. I didn't really know what I should do or where I was going. I was just moving from place to place, trying to stay alive. And then one day I heard this voice. I don't know how to explain it, it's like it was coming from inside me. But I could hear it, clear as day. Clear as I can hear you talking to me now.

SOLARA

What did it say?

ELI

It led me to this place, I don't really know where. And I found this book buried deep under some rubble. No way no-one was ever going to find it if they didn't know exactly where to look.

SOLARA

But you knew because the voice told you?

ELI

That's right. And that voice told me to carry the book west. It told me that a path would be laid out before me, that I'd be led to a place where this book would be safe. It told me I'd be protected against anyone or anything that tried to stand in my way. If only I would have faith.

(beat)

That was twenty-five years ago. And I've been walking ever since.

SOLARA

(skeptical)

Because a voice you heard in your head told you to.

ELI

I'm not crazy. I didn't imagine it. I know what I heard.

SOLARA

So who was it? The voice?

BEAT as Eli considers his answer.

ELI

A very important, very powerful man.

SOLARA

More powerful than my dad?

ELI

(smiles)

I should say so, yes.

BEAT. The two of them sit in silence for a moment.

SOLARA

Would you teach me to read?

ELI

What?

SOLARA

I never learned. No-one around here knows how. Only my dad, and he won't teach me. I think he likes being the only one who can read. I think it makes him feel powerful.

ELI

I think you're probably right.

SOLARA

So would you teach me?

ELI

I'm sorry. I'm leaving tomorrow.  
And I won't be back this way, ever.

She looks down, sad. She likes this guy. She doesn't want him to leave. Eli can sense her sadness.

ELI

Are you hungry?

SOLARA

I guess a little.

ELI

There's some food on the table over there. Let's eat.

She walks over to where the dinner tray is covered by a small cloth. She whips it away - to reveal ELI'S RAT nibbling on a piece of cheese. Solara SHRIEKS and backs away.

The rat scurries down the table leg and leaps up onto Eli's shoulder, just as afraid of her as she is of it.

ELI

It's okay, it's okay. He's with me.  
(to the rat)  
Don't be afraid, pal. This is Solara. She's our friend.

Solara approaches warily. Reaches out and strokes him. The rat scurries up her arm. She almost shrieks again.

ELI

It's okay. It means he likes you.

SOLARA

It does?

ELI

Trust me, if he didn't like you, you'd know about it.

Solara pets the rat on her shoulder. Then:

SOLARA

Did you really mean that?

ELI  
Mean what?

SOLARA  
That I'm your friend.

BEAT. Eli finds himself surprised that he admitted such a thing. When is the last time he had someone he could call a friend? He can't even remember.

ELI  
Sure.

She smiles. Giggles as the rat's whiskers tickle her ear.

Eli breaks the cheese in two and gives half to Solara. She's about to eat but stops as Eli clasp his hands in prayer.

ELI  
Our father, we thank you for this meal which you have been so gracious to place before us.

Unsured of what to do, Solara mimics Eli, putting her hands together and bowing her head.

ELI  
We thank you for a warm bed and a roof over our heads on a cold night such as this.  
(beat)  
And we thank you for the gift of friendship in these hard times.

Solara looks at him, touched by that.

ELI  
Amen.  
(beat)  
You say that last part too.

SOLARA  
Amen. And now we eat?

ELI  
And now we eat.

They sit and eat together, sharing the simple meal.

PULL OUT from the window as they eat, away from the saloon. Away from the town and its flickering points of torchlight. Moving farther and farther away until the entire town is consumed by the darkness of the world.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAWN

The pale sun rises over the town. To establish:

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - MORNING

Carnegie and Claudia sit at the table, eating breakfast in silence. A third place is set, but no-one is seated there.

Solara enters and sits down without a word.

CARNEGIE

Good morning, Solara.

Solara doesn't say anything.

CARNEGIE

I said good morning, Solara.

SOLARA

Morning, dad.

CARNEGIE

How was your night? Did you sleep well?

Claudia appears perturbed by Carnegie's subtle probing. Solara flashes him a frosty look.

SOLARA

I did like you asked. Isn't that what you really want to know? Just come out and say it.

Carnegie glares at her sternly.

CARNEGIE

You don't speak to your father like that. When I ask you a civil question, I expect a civil answer.

Solara lowers her head, scorned. Carnegie continues eating.

CARNEGIE

Did he say anything?

SOLARA

No. We didn't talk much.

CARNEGIE

Well, do you think you managed to change his mind about staying?







They turn to face the engineer's storefront - just as ELI EMERGES ONTO THE STREET, shotgun still in his hand.

EVERYBODY FREEZES. Like a wild west stand-off. Redridge's fingers play over the butt of the pistol on his hip.

BEAT as time hangs perfectly still for a second... and then ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.

Redridge draws and FIRES, splintering a wooden post inches from Eli. Eli rushes along the boardwalk, RETURNING FIRE. The shot wings Redridge in the shoulder. He goes down, wounded.

Carnegie dives for cover as FOUR MORE GUNMEN rush from the saloon. Carnegie waves frantically in Eli's direction.

#### CARNEGIE

Go! Go!

They spot Eli sprinting away and rush off in pursuit.

Carnegie gets to his feet and storms back inside the saloon.

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - DAY

Solara and Claudia watch through the window. Turn suddenly when they hear the door slam open behind them.

Carnegie stands in the doorway, glaring at them.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

LOCAL RESIDENTS scream and rush to and fro in panic as Eli darts along the boardwalk.

CARNEGIE'S GUNMEN pursue, firing their rifles wildly on the run. The bullets splinter wood, pierce barrels and crates, narrowly missing Eli as he dashes, keeping his head down.

Eli aims the shotgun and FIRES without even looking. The shot HITS A GUNMAN SQUARE IN THE CHEST, dropping him to the dirt.

Eli hits the deck, diving for cover behind a JUNKPILE as more gunfire ricochets all around him. He takes a moment to collect himself, reloads the shotgun.

The three remaining gunmen close in on the junkpile warily.

Eli signs a cross over himself with the shotgun, looks to the sky and offers up a silent prayer. Then emerges from around the junkpile back into the street. All three gunmen OPEN FIRE, their bullets whipping past on either side of him.

In one swift motion Eli raises the shotgun and FIRES. Three shots in quick succession. And then there is silence. Smoke wisps from the shotgun's sawn-off barrel.

The three gunmen LIE DEAD IN THE STREET. One hit square in the chest. The other two each have maybe one half of their heads remaining.

Eli looks around. He's right at the end of the main road, the perimeter where the town meets the open desert. He's free.

And then, A GIRL'S SCREAM. Distant but unmistakable.

Eli whips around. In the upstairs window of the saloon, Carnegie shoves Solara roughly against the wall. Barking angrily at her, shaking her.

Eli looks at the road. Then up at the saloon. Then back to the road again.

ELI  
(quietly; to himself)  
It ain't your concern. Stay on the  
path.

But he sounds less resolute now than before. Until today this was always a simple decision for him to make. But now...

ELI  
Dammit...

He marches back toward the saloon, stepping over the fallen bodies of the gunmen, re-loading his shotgun as he goes.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Redridge finally manages to clamber back up to his feet, wincing as he clutches his painful shoulder wound.

He looks up just in time to see Eli coming right at him. Without breaking stride, he COLD-COCKS Redridge in the jaw with the shotgun, sending him back to the deck, out cold.

INT. SALOON - UPSTAIRS DINING ROOM - DAY

Eli kicks the door wide open, finds Carnegie holding Solara against the wall. She sobs, terrified. Eli levels the shotgun at Carnegie's head.

ELI  
Let her go.

CARNEGIE

That cannon of yours casts a pretty wide net. I don't reckon you can hit me without hitting her.

ELI

I reckon you're right.

He holsters the shotgun. Then in the same fluid motion draws a PISTOL from his belt that we never even knew he had.

ELI

This, though? With this I'll shave the hairs clean off your balls at a hundred paces. You believe me?

Carnegie releases his grip on Solara, steps away, hands up.

CARNEGIE

I believe you. I have to say I'm surprised to hear that language coming from you, though. I mean, you being a holy man and all.

BEAT. Eli glances at Solara.

CARNEGIE

She told me all about it. Told me all about the bible, too.

(beat)

Can I see it?

ELI

No.

Carnegie takes a small step forward. Suddenly, his whole demeanor changes, and he now looks at Eli imploringly.

CARNEGIE

You know, I've been searching for a book like that one for years. All I've ever wanted was to bring the word of God to these poor unfortunates here. To shine its light upon them and give them something in this wretched world that they could believe in. Something to live for! It's why I built this town, did you know that? All we've been missing is the word to show us the way. And now, praise the Lord, you've brought it to us.

Carnegie takes a step closer. He appears entirely sincere - but then he is very good at doing so.

CARNEGIE

It's not right to keep that book hidden away, all to yourself. The word is meant to be shared with others. It's meant to be spread! Isn't that what you want? I could help you do that. You and me, we could do it together.

BEAT. Eli seems to be considering what he's heard carefully.

ELI

The Lord himself told me that if I carried this book west, one day I would find the place where it was needed. Where it would be safe. Where it belonged.

Carnegie smiles broadly... and then with a sudden blur of movement Eli PISTOL-WHIPS him to the floor.

ELI

But this ain't it.

He turns to Solara and offers her his hand.

ELI

Come on.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Eli emerges from the saloon, leading Solara onto the street. RESIDENTS part before them, staring at Eli with astonishment.

Eli passes the statue of Carnegie - and STOPS. Something about that thing is bothering him.

SOLARA

What? What is it?

ELI

You shall not make for yourself any graven image...

He turns, drawing his samurai sword and in the same fluid motion SLICING across the base of the statue.

BEAT. And then the STATUE TOPPLES from the neat cut just below the knees, CRASHING DOWN to the ground and SHATTERING. The assembled residents GASP at this defiant display.

Eli sheathes his sword and takes Solara by the hand again.

ELI  
Now we can go.

CRANE UP over the main street as they both head out of town.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The town just visible on the distant horizon behind Eli and Solara. Eli walks as he always has, his pace steady and slow. Still, Solara lags along behind. She's already tired.

SOLARA  
Where are we going?

ELI  
I told you where I'm going. You're free to go wherever you want.

She stops in the road.

SOLARA  
Wait... I'm not coming with you?

ELI  
You're only going to slow me down.

Eli doesn't stop walking. Solara is forced to catch up.

SOLARA  
So what the hell was all that about back there?

ELI  
The man was hurting you. I don't like that, so I put a stop to it. Now you're free. He can't hurt you any more.  
(off her stare)  
No need to thank me.

SOLARA  
Thank you? For what? What am I supposed to do now?

ELI  
Whatever you want. That's what being free is.

SOLARA  
Whatever I want. Except go with you.

ELI

I have to get where I'm going. I can't be worrying about someone else along the way.

Solara is incredibly hurt by this. Blinks back a tear.

SOLARA

I thought you were my friend.

BEAT. Eli wrestles with this for a moment.

ELI

I'm sorry.

He walks on, leaving her behind in the road. She stands there, furious, screaming at his back as he walks away.

SOLARA

Fine! I'll just go back home! I had a life there! A family! I didn't ask you to save me! I didn't ask you for anything!

He doesn't turn or acknowledge her at all. Just keeps walking off into the horizon. Getting smaller all the time.

Solara stands there in the road, weeping. All alone.

SOLARA

(softly)  
Fine.

She turns and walks back in the direction she came.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - BARNYARD - DAY

A small, penned-in area to the rear of Carnegie's saloon containing an eclectic bunch of farmyard animals. Goats, sheep, geese, pigs. Mostly mangy, sad-looking specimens.

Carnegie stands in the yard, tossing handfuls of animal feed from a nearby sack onto the ground. He watches with satisfaction as the animals gather at his feet to feed.

Claudia emerges from the saloon with an ice-pack.

CARNEGIE

Thank you, darling.

Carnegie applies it to his jaw, red and swollen from Eli's pistol-whip. Redridge appears nearby, his arm in a sling.

REDRIDGE

He killed four of my men and walked out of town without a scratch. They shot off a hundred rounds at him and he didn't get hit once. I never even heard of anything like that.

Carnegie doesn't appear to be listening. He is lost in a world of his own as he tends to the farm animals.

CARNEGIE

You know, I always thought of myself as a shepherd. Bringing together the wayward and the lost. Tending to my flock. But all the things I want to do, I can't do them on my own. The one thing I've needed is the one thing that's always been missing. Then one day it walks right into town - so close I can almost touch it - and then walks right on out again.

Carnegie finally looks up from his animals, at Redridge.

CARNEGIE

I want you to put a crew together and go out after him.

REDRIDGE

He's not going to work for you. I think he's made that plain.

CARNEGIE

I'm not interested in him any more. I only want the book he's carrying.

REDRIDGE

If I'm gonna risk my ass hunting down this maniac in the outland, I need to know it's gonna be worth it. I need to know what's so special about this goddamn book.

BEAT as Carnegie considers this.

CARNEGIE

You have no idea. You're too young, you don't remember the world before. But I do. I remember.

He turns back to his animals, summoning up old memories.

## CARNEGIE

When I was a kid my parents used to read that book every goddamn day. My mother, she'd read it along with this smooth-talking preacher on the TV screen. They used to be able to beam these guys right into your house, into every house in the world, through the air. Like magic.

(beat)

She worked two jobs and she sent every spare penny she had to that fucking guy on the TV. My old man, he'd read that book, then he'd get liquored up and kick my ass, tell me all about the power and the glory and how I was going to burn forever in hell for the sins I was born with. He made sure he beat it into me good.

He snaps out of his reverie and looks at Redridge.

## CARNEGIE

Don't you see? It's not just any book. It has the power to motivate people. It can give them hope, it can terrify them. It can shape them. Control them.

(beat)

Do you remember how I built this town? It wasn't done with force, it wasn't done by blood. It was done with the power of words. I created this place out of nothing, because people believed in a promise that I sold to them. Those guys on the TV, they were richer than you could ever dream, and it was all built the same way. With words. With promises. And with that book.

(beat)

That book is a weapon. Aimed right at the hearts and minds of the weak and the desperate. Just imagine what I could do with it. I could build a new world. In my image. People will come from far and wide to hear what's inside of it. They'll follow me anywhere just to get a taste of it. And they'll do whatever I tell them.

As usual, Carnegie's slick rhetoric has worked - Redridge has totally bought into it. Claudia, however, looks appalled.

REDRIDGE

What if the book doesn't say what you want it to say? Do you even remember what's in there?

CARNEGIE

Oh, it'll say what I want, I can promise you that. Because I'm going to rewrite it. I'll keep the parts that work for me and make the rest whatever I want it to be.

(beat)

A new bible, for a new world.

He reaches out and takes Claudia by the hand.

CARNEGIE

What do you think, darling? A whole new world, to do with as we will. Won't that be grand?

She smiles halfheartedly, but it's clear she is mortified.

Carnegie turns back to Redridge.

CARNEGIE

Find that book.

REDRIDGE

He has half a day on us already.

CARNEGIE

So use the motor pool. .

REDRIDGE

There ain't much gas in reserve.

CARNEGIE

Whatever there is, use it.

Redridge nods and goes to leave.

CLAUDIA

What about Solara?

BEAT. In all this excitement about the book, she had been completely forgotten about.

CLAUDIA

She's still out there. With him.

CARNEGIE

Right. Right. Of course. Bring her back, too, if you can. But-

REDRIDGE

The book. I know.

Redridge turns and leaves. Claudia scowls at Carnegie, but he doesn't even notice, just goes back to feeding his animals.

EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - DAY

Solara wanders the road. She's tired. The sun beats down mercilessly. Nothing but desolation and wasteland all around.

She comes to a FORK IN THE ROAD. Stops at the junction, unsure. Was this here before? She doesn't remember.

There are no signs. Both paths look the same. Which one is which? She turns and looks back, looks around. She's lost.

SOLARA

Shit. Shit.

She alternates her finger between the two paths. Eeny-meeny-miney-moe. Picks a path and follows it, headed down the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli walks on. Slow and steady. His gaze, as ever, fixed firmly on the horizon. Takes a swig from his canteen.

Suddenly, he STOPS and stands stock still in the center of the road. Impossible to know what he's thinking.

He stands there for a long time.

EXT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - DAY

Solara comes upon an abandoned CHEVRON STATION. She doesn't remember passing this. Looks back up and down the road.

SOLARA

Where the hell am I?

There's a RUSTED CAR parked at one of the pumps. Like every other car we've seen, stripped of its tires and engine.

She walks around to the driver's side. A PETRIFIED FEMALE BODY lies on the ground, half-in, half-out of the car.

Solara claps her hand to her mouth and recoils, horrified.

In the dead woman's hand is a dusty bottle of MINERAL WATER. Solara hesitates. Not wanting to get closer. But so thirsty.

She braces herself, grimacing, and tries to take the bottle, but the dead woman's hand is closed tight around it. She pulls harder and wrenches it free. In the process she falls on her butt and flips the corpse over onto its back.

In the other woman's arm, she has a SKELETAL BABY cradled to her bosom. It seems to be staring right at Solara.

Solara SCREAMS and frantically shuffles backward away from it. Gets to her feet and runs across the forecourt.

She stops by the station shop and rests against the wall, hyperventilating, heart pounding. Trying to get it together.

She inspects the water in the bottle. It looks clean. Unscrews the cap with shaking hands and takes a sip.

She SPITS IT BACK OUT, coughing. It's rank. Undrinkable.

INT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - FOOD COURT - DAY

Solara enters. Gloomy inside. Comprehensively looted. Empty shelves coated in thick sheets of dust.

She moves further in, searching for something, anything. But the place has been gutted. There's nothing. She checks the wall of dead refrigerators. Shattered glass, all empty.

She's never known desolation and emptiness like this. It's beginning to scare her. She wheels around in a panic.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Hello?

Distant, calling from outside. Solara hears it and freezes.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Hello? Can anyone help me?

EXT. WASTELAND GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

She runs out across the forecourt, onto the road.

A FEMALE FIGURE is hunched by the side of the road about fifty yards up ahead. Hard to see what she's doing from here.

SLUMPED FEMALE

Hello? Is anybody there?

Solara starts walking toward her.

The woman has her back to Solara. She's on her knees, muttering to herself. Gathering objects up from the road.

As Solara moves closer, we see that the woman is struggling with an UPTURNED SHOPPING CART. Stuck in a roadside ditch, its contents spilled out next to a few BRACKEN BUSHES.

We see her face now. It's the SAME YOUNG WOMAN from before. The same shopping cart. The same trap.

SOLARA

Are you all right?

The woman looks around, sees Solara standing nearby. She's shocked to see that it's a girl.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh. Yes, I'm fine. Thank you. You go along, I'll be okay.

SOLARA

You look like you need some help.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, really! I'm fine. Really... I need a man to help. Not you. You just keep along. Please.

The woman seems anxious to get rid of her. Tries to indicate the threat silently with her eyes, but Solara doesn't get it.

SOLARA

It'll just take a minute.

She steps into the ditch and starts to haul the cart out.

YOUNG WOMAN

Really, it's fine! Please!

Too late. THREE ROAD BRIGANDS POUNCE FROM THE BUSHES. Every bit as brutish and horrifying as the group that Eli killed on the road in our opening. They grab Solara and drag her from the road into the desert, screaming and kicking all the way.

YOUNG WOMAN

Let her go! She ain't got nothing!

The BRIGAND LEADER looks Solara up and down lustfully.

BRIGAND LEADER

I ain't too sure about that.

Solara is reviled by the man. He's filthy, his stench overpowering. One eye missing, just a dark, empty socket. He licks his lips, revealing a mouth almost devoid of teeth.

YOUNG WOMAN

This wasn't the deal!

The brigand leader lashes out and grabs her by the throat.

BRIGAND LEADER

Shut your mouth, bitch. You oughta be grateful you're getting a break.

He releases her. She slumps to the dirt, whimpering.

BRIGAND LEADER

Never did care much for that dried-up old snatch anyhow.

He looks back to the struggling Solara.

BRIGAND LEADER

This one, though... this one looks fresh. You a virgin?

She says nothing, just sobs helplessly.

BRIGAND LEADER

Well, let's find out.

He unbuckles his pants, lets them drop to his ankles.

We hear a sound. It's hard to place. Something like a THHUP.

The brigand leader is frozen in shock. His face goes pale, the blood draining from it. The two bandits holding Solara look at their leader in dismay. Staring down at his crotch.

A quiet whimper escapes from his lips as he looks down.

There is an ARROW IMBEDDED IN HIS CROTCH. What was once down there is now just a bloody mess of mangled meat. More blood streams down his thighs. A real horror show.

He staggers backward, shrieking. Hands shaking. Staring down at the awful wound from which the long arrow shaft extends.

The two other brigands release Solara and whip around, scanning the horizon. They see nothing. One of them has a RIFLE. He unslings it and aims it frantically around.

Then they both see it. Coming right at them. The most terrifying thing either has ever seen.

ELI, WALKING TOWARD THEM FROM THE ROAD, OUT OF THE SUN. His silhouette distorted in the rippling heat. An avenging angel.

He pulls another arrow and draws it back as the rifle bandit trains his weapon on him, finger tightening on the trigger.

Eli SHOOTs. The arrow sails through the air and RIGHT INTO THE RIFLE BARREL. The feathers at the end of the shaft plugging the muzzle tight.

Rifle bandit pulls the trigger. The gun EXPLODES, BLOWING HIS HANDS CLEAN OFF. He falls to the ground, screaming.

Eli only had two arrows. He shoulders the bow and draws his sword. All the remaining brigand has is a small knife. The two now square off at arm's length. A hopeless mismatch.

BEAT. The knife brigand hesitates, trembling. And then RUSHES ELI WITH THE KNIFE. Eli deftly sidesteps, flourishes the sword. So quick it almost seems like he didn't move at all.

The knife bandit staggers forward a couple more steps. His hand goes limp and drops the knife.

And then his HEAD FALLS BACKWARD like a Pez dispenser. Almost completely decapitated, but not quite. Blood fountains from the neck stump as his body falls to the dirt.

Eli moves to the other two bandits who lay horribly wounded on the ground, but still breathing. He stands over their fallen bodies. They stare back up at him, helpless.

He crouches down between them in the dust.

ELI

I offer you both one final chance  
in this life to seek forgiveness  
for your sins so that your souls  
may find salvation. Will you say  
with me the act of contrition?

The brigand leader defiantly spits blood at him.

BRIGAND LEADER

Fuck you.

Eli sighs. Stands and looks down on him without pity.

ELI

Some might think it'd be most  
fitting to leave you here like  
this. Let you die slow in the sun.  
But I know better.

(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)  
 I know where you're going. And the  
 sooner you get there, the sooner  
 you'll get what's coming to you.

He plunges his sword into the bandit leader, finishing him  
 off. Pulls the arrow from his crotch and wipes it clean.

He turns to the other man, raising his sword.

RIFLE BANDIT  
 Wait!

Eli pauses, sword hovering over him, poised to strike.

RIFLE BANDIT  
 I want to say it. I want to be  
 forgiven.

Eli crouches once more by his side.

ELI  
 Repeat after me. Oh God, I am  
 heartily sorry for having offended  
 thee, and I detest all my sins.

The bandit follows along with Eli, mouthing the words  
 quietly. The life ebbing from him with each moment.

ELI  
 I firmly resolve, with the help of  
 thy grace, to confess my sins, and  
 do penance, and to amend my life.  
 Amen.

RIFLE BANDIT  
 Amen...

His eyes roll back as his final breath leaves him. Dead. Eli  
 signs a cross over his body, then stands and walks away.

Solara sits on the ground nearby, a wreck. Eli approaches and  
 gathers her up in his arms. She clings on to him tightly.

SOLARA  
 You came back for me.

ELI  
 What are friends for?

She laughs, a tear rolling down her cheek. Grips him tighter.

He helps her up and escorts her back to the road.

ELI

This is the deal. You keep up. You pull your weight. You fall behind, I can't help you. Okay?

SOLARA

Okay.

She looks back at the young woman still slumped in the dirt.

SOLARA

What about her?

ELI

There's nothing can be done for her.

They walk on down the road.

EXT. DESERT TOWN - GARAGE - DAY

METAL GARAGE DOORS roll back to reveal darkness within.

A PAIR OF HEADLIGHTS fires up. Full beam right at us.

A VEHICLE roars out of the darkness onto the street. Heavily modified with plate armor and turret-mounted weapons. But its original form still recognizable underneath.

It's a HONDA ODYSSEY minivan. Once the #1 choice of soccer moms, transformed now into an armored personnel carrier.

Another minivan roars from the garage behind it. A DODGE GRAND CARAVAN, similarly customized and armed to the teeth.

THREE MORE CARS follow. As eclectic an assortment as you could imagine. A MINI COOPER. FORD EXPLORER. A PRIUS. Each adorned with plate armor and weapons.

In the lead Minivan is REDRIDGE, heavily armed. He nods to the DRIVER, who guns the engine.

The fleet of armored vehicles moves out, kicking up a great funnel of dust in their wake as they roar out of town.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Late afternoon. The sun hangs low on the horizon. We're far from the road. Nothing but scrub brush and a few PRAIRIE DOG BURROWS dotted around.

A PRAIRIE DOG pops its head up, scans the horizon. Sniffing the air, whiskers twitching... and is SKEWERED BY AN ARROW.

Thirty yards away, one of the pieces of scrub brush appears to COME ALIVE. And then we realize it is Eli's GHILLIE SUIT, camouflaging both he and Solara beneath it.

Eli casts off the camouflage net and walks toward the dead prairie dog. Solara just stands there, appalled.

SOLARA

You killed it! That cute little thing!

Eli picks up the dead animal by the scruff.

ELI

It's good eating, is what it is.

He yanks out the bloody arrow. Solara looks away.

When she turns back, Eli is standing right there, holding the dead animal in front of her face. She YELPS in surprise and staggers backward, falling on her butt.

SOLARA

That's not funny.

ELI

If you're going to be on the road, you can't be picky about what you eat. You eat what's there to eat.

SOLARA

I'm not eating that.

ELI

(shrugs)  
More for me.

EXT. WASTELAND CAVE - DUSK

Eli and Solara sit in the mouth of a desert cave, around a flickering campfire. The prairie dog roasts on a spit.

Eli digs his knife into the carcass, the blade comes out clean. It's done. He clasps his hands together and gazes down penitently at the ground.

ELI

Father, we thank you for your generosity in providing us with this meal. Bless this food to our use and us to thy service, and keep us ever mindful of the needs of others. Amen.

Eli carves off a piece of meat. Juicy and succulent. He bites into it, teasing Solara by making a show of how good it tastes. He feeds a piece to the rat perched on his shoulder.

Solara tries to appear uninterested, but she's starved.

SOLARA

What does that taste like?

He takes another bite, thinks on this as he chews.

ELI

Tastes like chicken.

She tries to fight the temptation to try it... but she can't. She reaches out and tears off a piece. Sniffs at it, takes a small bite... then quickly wolfs down the rest. Eli smiles.

As she eats, she gestures toward Eli's Saint Christopher.

SOLARA

What is that?

Eli reaches up and touches his hand to it.

ELI

It's a Saint Christopher medal.

SOLARA

Who's Saint Christopher? Is he a character from your book?

Eli smiles and shakes his head.

ELI

Christopher was a man who lived a long time ago. He wanted to be a good man, he wanted to help people. So he would stand by a river that had no bridge and carry people across. He was a big strong man and there was no one he couldn't carry.

Solara listens, rapt. Eli is a good storyteller.

ELI

Then one day a young child came to the river and asked to be carried across. Christopher tried to carry him but he was too heavy. He was just a small boy but he was heavier than any man he had ever carried.

(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)

The boy explained that he was the son of God, and that he was so heavy because he bore all the sins of the world. After that, Christopher was able to carry him across and when they got to the other side the boy baptized him in the river. And that's how he became a saint. Later on, he was known as the patron saint of travelers.

SOLARA

What is a saint, anyway?

ELI

It's someone who spent their life doing good things for others. Enough that God himself took a special interest in them.

Solara looks at Eli tenderly, with admiration.

SOLARA

Someone like you.

Eli looks away, down at the ground. He appears sad.

ELI

No. Not like me. Saints ain't killers. And I done too much of that. Spilled too much blood.

BEAT. No words, just the flickering firelight.

SOLARA

Will you read me some more from the book?

ELI

It's late. You should get some sleep. Maybe tomorrow.

LATER - NIGHT

The fire down to its last embers. Eli sleeps next to his pack, half-hidden in the looming shadows of the cave. His hat and goggles hung up for the night on the hilt of his sword.

Solara sleeps nearby... then opens her eyes. Not asleep after all. She looks over at Eli - his face hidden in shadow and so impossible to tell if he's asleep or awake.

SOLARA

Eli?

No response. Quietly, she moves forward, kneeling by his side. She opens his coat and checks the pockets. Empty.

She goes deeper, peeling back the layers of clothing, stealthily frisking him. She finds something on his lapel, hidden under several layers, that causes her to stop.

It's a RECTANGULAR PLASTIC BADGE. The red, white and blue colors faded and worn. It reads:

WELCOME TO WAL-MART  
MY NAME IS "ELI"  
HOW MAY I HELP YOU?

She stares at it for a moment, not knowing what to make of it. Then moves on, continuing to pat him down.

Whatever she's looking for is not here. She turns her attention to the backpack. Slowly, carefully, opens it up.

There it is. THE BIBLE, wrapped carefully in its neat little package of cloth and twine. She reaches in for it.

Suddenly, ELI'S HAND SHOOTS OUT AND GRABS HER BY THE WRIST. She cries out, startled. Eli sits up, his face just a dark shape in the shadows. For the first time he appears a little scary to Solara.

ELI  
What are you doing?

SOLARA  
You scared me! I thought you were asleep.

ELI  
On the road you sleep with one eye open. I asked you what you were doing.

SOLARA  
I just wanted to see the book.

ELI  
You want to see the book, you ask me. Nobody touches it but me. Ever. Until it gets where it's going. Do you understand?

He's very forceful. She nods, a little afraid of him.

ELI  
Tell me you understand!

He grips her wrist tighter.

SOLARA

Okay! I understand! Ow!

Eli releases her wrist. Takes the pack from her and closes it up. Pulls it closer to him and lies back down.

ELI

It's no use to you anyway. You don't know how to read it.

SOLARA

Well... now we have the time, maybe you can teach me.

ELI

Maybe. Get some sleep.

She lies back down beside him, but doesn't close her eyes. She just lies there, watching him.

EXT. WASTELAND - DAWN

The sun rises out of the east. And out of the sun comes the FLEET OF ARMORED VEHICLES. Racing side-by-side down the road.

The lead vehicle comes to a halt. A door opens and Redridge gets out. MORE ARMED MEN emerge from the other vehicles and follow him as he marches into the wasteland by the roadside.

The DEAD BRIGANDS are splayed out in the dirt where Eli slew them. A FLOCK OF BUZZARDS is picking their bones clean.

REDRIDGE

He's been here.

Redridge looks at the footprints in the dirt headed from the bodies and back onto the road. Two sets of tracks.

REDRIDGE

The girl's with him.

He moves back to the cars.

REDRIDGE

Move out!

The other men hold for a moment, still looking at the half-eaten bodies in the dirt. Redridge turns back.

REDRIDGE

I said move out!

## CARNEGIE GUNMAN

I heard this guy's protected somehow, some... power from up above. That there ain't nothing on this earth can touch him.

## REDRIDGE

He's just a man. You put a bullet in him, he'll go down like any other. I don't want to hear no more of this superstitious horseshit!

Hesitantly, they make their way back to the vehicles. The cars gun their engines and move on down the road, past the abandoned Chevron station. Dust pluming in their wake.

## EXT. ROAD - DAY

Eli and Solara walk together, passing by a few burned-out buildings. It appears we might be headed toward a town.

Solara looks up at the sweltering sun. Then around at her surroundings. Nothing but devastation and decay.

## SOLARA

You say you've been walking for twenty-five years. Have you ever considered that you might be lost?

## ELI

No.

## SOLARA

But how can you know? How can you know this is the right way?

## ELI

I told you. My path has been laid out before me.

## SOLARA

Yeah, but laid out by who?

## ELI

By Almighty God.

## SOLARA

Well if this God guy's so mighty, how come it's taking you so long to get where you're going? Doesn't he know the way?

Eli wheels around and jabs a scolding finger at her.

ELI

You want to stay on this road with me, don't ever let me hear you take his name in vain like that again.

Solara is surprised by the severity of his reaction.

SOLARA

Sorry.

Eli resumes walking.

ELI

God has a reason for everything being the way it is. It's not always apparent to us. But it is his plan nonetheless.

SOLARA

So, is he talking to you right now? Telling you where to go?

ELI

It's not like that. It's kinda hard to explain. I'm guided by faith.

SOLARA

I don't know what that word means.

BEAT as Eli thinks on how to explain it.

ELI

It means you know something even though you don't know it.

Solara thinks about this, shakes her head.

SOLARA

That doesn't make any sense at all.

ELI

It doesn't have to.

They walk on.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

On the outskirts of a small town that lies in ruins. Almost every building burned or reduced to rubble.

Except for one SMALL HOUSE. The building is damaged and worn but in mostly decent condition. It stands out among its surroundings for being the only structure still intact.

The windows are BARRED. The outer structure fortified with SHEET METAL and other custom patch-ups. The whole plot surrounded by a CHAIN-LINK FENCE TOPPED WITH RAZOR WIRE.

Eli and Solara crouch behind a pile of rubble nearby.

SOLARA

I don't get it. It looks almost... normal. Like nothing ever happened. How can it still be out here?

ELI

I don't know.

SOLARA

Maybe we should look inside. There might be food.

BEAT as Eli considers. Then stands and unhooks his shotgun.

ELI

Stay behind me.

They approach the house cautiously. Arrive at the perimeter fence. There's a gate held in place by a PADLOCK.

Eli pulls a pair of BOLT-CUTTERS from his belt and snips the padlock free. Swings open the gate with a metallic SQUEAK.

They move inside, up the garden path. Though the soil in the yard is dead, it's been carefully raked and tended. WEEDS arranged in thoughtful patterns, like real flowers.

SOLARA

This is weird.

ELI

Yeah.

Eli steps forward, his foot planting on a CRACKED PAVING STONE that shifts almost imperceptibly under his feet. Accompanied by a barely audible SOUND. He looks down.

ELI

Shit.

SOLARA

What?

A ROPE NOOSE suddenly whips around their feet, tightening at their ankles and YANKING THEM UPSIDE-DOWN INTO THE AIR. Eli drops his shotgun to the ground.

They hang there for a moment, twisting in the breeze.

The front door to the house SWINGS OPEN to reveal...

AN ELDERLY COUPLE. The woman's gray hair tied into a neat bun. The man bald, squinting through wire-frame glasses. They look like the couple from Grant Wood's "American Gothic."

Instead of a pitchfork the man holds a 12-GAUGE RIOT SHOTGUN which he keeps trained from the hip on Eli and Solara.

They step outside, regarding their new visitors carefully. The man seems more suspicious than his wife. He drags Eli's shotgun toward him with his foot, hands it to his wife.

ELDERLY MAN

Who are you?

ELI

My name is Eli. This is Solara. We're travelers, that's all. We don't mean you any harm.

ELDERLY MAN

You cut my padlock. I saw you. Trying to break into our house.

ELI

I'm sorry. We didn't think anybody lived here. We thought it was abandoned, like all the rest.

This seems to annoy the man.

ELDERLY MAN

Take a look around you. Look at this yard. Does it look abandoned to you?

Clearly he's proud of the work he's done with the pitiful means at his disposal.

ELI

No, sir. I... like what you've done with the place.

ELDERLY MAN

What's your business here?

ELI

No business. We're sorry to have troubled you. If you'll let us down we'll happily be on our way.

The wife steps forward, she's much warmer, less guarded.

ELDERLY WOMAN

George, look at them! They're not robbers or road agents! One of them's just a girl!

ELDERLY MAN

Seen that before. Oldest trick in the book.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, stop! It's no trick. Let them down!

The woman glares at him. The husband reluctantly accedes and moves to the concealed trap apparatus. Releases the rope, dropping Eli and Solara to the ground in a heap.

The old woman helps them to their feet. They shake off the noose from their ankles.

ELDERLY WOMAN

I'm so sorry about my husband. We so rarely get visitors these days, he's suspicious of everybody.

(beat)

I'm Martha and this is my husband George. Would you care for some tea?

Eli and Solara exchange a look. What the hell is this?

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's like something out of the world before. The interior is almost perfectly preserved. Chintzy couches. A mahogany table. A TV set in the corner. Lace curtains. Unreal.

Eli and Solara sit on the couch, feeling self-conscious and looking entirely out of place in this cozy environment.

George sits across from them on the couch, scowling at them inhospitably. The shotgun resting across his lap.

Martha emerges from the kitchen, carrying a tray laden with a tea pot and old china cups. Cracked and faded, but intact. She places the tray on the coffee table and sits.

MARTHA

I'm afraid we don't have any cake or biscuits for the tea. They ran out some time ago.

She lifts the tea port and pours into the cups. But it's not tea, only water. Somewhat murky water. Eli and Solara stare at the cups, unsure. Martha gestures toward them.

MARTHA

Please.

They raise their cups and take a sip. Martha watches eagerly. It's clearly a thrill for her to be doing something as civilized and elegant as serving "tea" to guests.

MARTHA

How do you like it?

ELI

It's.. uh...

SOLARA

It's very good.

Martha smiles, delighted. She lifts her own cup to her lips. HER HANDS TREMBLE, the cup rattling against the saucer.

ELI

Have you always lived here?

MARTHA

For almost forty years now. This home is our pride and joy, isn't it, George?

George just grunts. Not interested in conversation.

MARTHA

We refused to leave, even during the troubles. We said, didn't we George, we said if we're going to die anywhere, we're going to die right here, in our own home.

ELI

I don't understand how you've survived out here this long.

MARTHA

Well, George is something of a handyman, aren't you, dear? He did a lot of work on the place, making it safe. We may be old, but we're resilient. We've had more than a few who've tried to take this place from us. Haven't we, George?

GEORGE

Yes. Yes we have.

He stands and moves toward the back door. Opens it up and beckons Eli and Solara to come look.

EXT. HOUSE - BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara stand in the doorway, looking out on the yard. Solara is horrified by what she sees.

The entire back yard is a GRAVEYARD. Maybe twenty human graves dug shallow into the earth. Some were dug long ago, others look like they're very recent.

SOLARA

Are these... graves?

MARTHA

Of course. It would be uncivilized not to bury them. We're not barbarians.

GEORGE

Plus, it's good for the soil.

MARTHA

Come on back inside. I think I might be able to rustle up some sandwiches.

George and Martha go back inside, leaving Eli and Solara gazing at the little graveyard.

ELI

We have to get out of here.

SOLARA

They look so sweet... I would never have believed they were killers.

ELI

They're worse than that.

SOLARA

What?

ELI

They didn't just kill these people.  
(beat)  
They ate them.

Solara is stunned.

SOLARA

They what?

ELI

There's a disease in the outland.  
Spread by eating human meat. It  
affects the brain. Dementia, loss  
of motor function. Did you notice  
the old woman's hands shaking?  
She's got it. They've both got it.

SOLARA

Oh my God...

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara re-enter. Solara looks at George nervously.  
He's still carrying that shotgun.

Martha's voice drifts in from the nearby KITCHEN.

MARTHA (O.S.)

I found some meat for those  
sandwiches! Are you hungry?

SOLARA

No! Thank you!

ELI

We really must be going.

GEORGE

So soon?

An unnerving glint in his eye. Eli moves toward the door.

ELI

Yes, I'm afraid so.

As he gets to the door, George moves to intercept. Hard to  
tell if he's blocking his path or moving to open the door for  
him. A tense BEAT.

Martha emerges from the kitchen.

MARTHA

Are you sure you won't stay?

ELI

Yes. Thank you again for the tea.

Eli stares George down. Reluctantly, George steps aside. Eli  
opens the door and escorts Solara outside.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eli and Solara emerge into the sunlight. Walk down the garden path. And FREEZE IN THEIR TRACKS.

THE ARMED VEHICLES ARE COMING. Driving toward them out of the horizon in a hazy cloud of dust.

SOLARA

Oh no... it's my dad. It's his men.

ELI

Are you sure?

SOLARA

I recognize the cars.

ELI

Back inside.

Eli bundles Solara back into the house. George stands in the doorway, squinting at the approaching convoy.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

George follows them back in, furious.

GEORGE

What did you bring upon us?

MARTHA

George? What's wrong?

GEORGE

A whole convoy of armed degenerates, that's what's wrong! Coming here for them! And they led them right to us!

Martha rushes to the window, pulls aside the lace curtain. Outside she sees the armored vehicles SCREECHING TO A HALT.

The men spill out from the vehicles and take cover behind them, locking and loading weapons.

MARTHA

Oh no they don't...

She rushes across the room, teeth gritted with determination.

GEORGE

Martha, what are you doing?











































