

A BLACK SCREEN

COLE (V.O.)

There are no words to describe the sound, no comparison that can make you understand.

The sounds of a huge rock and roll crowd, 100,000 or more, starts to rise over Cole's voice. The cheering grows until it's almost deafening.

Now a helicopter rotor can be heard over the crowd.

FADE IN:

EXT. HELICOPTER - DAY

A helicopter is flying over a sea of rock and roll humanity in a muddy field, stretching out to the horizon. In the distance is a huge stage and sound towers.

It's a festival of mammoth proportions.

SUPER: Pure Rock Festival, Northern California, 1984.

The helicopter touches down in a field behind the stage. A rock band emerges, dressed in early 80s Melrose Avenue rock finery, all black leather and torn t-shirts.

They are The Crawling Kingsnakes:

PAUL BALDWIN, bass, the quiet one, always fading into the background,

BRIAN JAMES, guitar, dark, mysterious, perfectly primed long, curly hair and immaculate stage clothes,

TOMMY THUNDER, drumming on every available surface, tattooed, hyperactive and possibly dangerous, and

THORN, front man, pure gutter poet and rock and roll god.

His clothes, body, and face show the wear-and-tear of too many years on the road. But, in spite of it all, he exudes a powerful charisma.

The band are all in their early twenties, except Thorn, who's five years older.

They're followed out of the helicopter by COLE PARSON (whose voice we heard before). He's the same age as Thorn, a fully-decorated rock and roll veteran with the battle scars to prove it.

A big earring dangles from his ear- he looks like a pirate, caught out of time.

Cole shepherds the band through the mass of people backstage, to the steps at the side of the stage.

He watches as they climb the stairs.

COLE (V.O.)

Not sex, not money, not any drug in this world. The president of the United fucking States will never know a feeling like this.

The band stands on stage with their instruments, ready.

Thorn picks up the microphone and holds it high over his head for a moment.

COLE (V.O.)

In that moment, on that stage- a man becomes a god.

And then the world explodes.

The sheer power of the band, and the roar of the crowd create a sound unlike any other in the world.

The music is pure, loud, glorious heavy metal, and it sweeps over the crowd like a tornado- they rush forward, pressing against the barriers in front of the stage.

Security guards pull the fans who are being crushed out of the fray as the band plays on, Thorn prowling the stage with animal intensity.

LATER:

The song segues into a drum solo by Tommy.

The other three walk to the side of the stage and swig liquor provided by Cole.

Onstage, Tommy is performing a wild strip tease/drum solo- peeling off his clothes as he pounds out a thunderous beat.

He stands up, plays with his hands, knocks some of the drums over, and threatens to strip off his last remaining item of clothing, his bikini briefs.

The others walk back on and resume playing, and Brian turns his amps up to maximum and blasts into huge powerchords, trying to outdo Tommy.

SIDE OF THE STAGE

A man in a suit has been standing unnoticed, watching from the sidelines. He opens his briefcase, pulls out an early-model mobile phone, dials, and holds it up towards the stage, so whoever's on the other end can hear the concert.

ON STAGE

As the show reaches its climax, Thorn jumps from the front of the stage into the waiting arms of the kids.

The crowd goes insane.

They catch him and he stands up straight on their hands and shoulders, and continues singing.

SIDE OF THE STAGE

Cole is in a whispered conversation with the man holding the cell phone.

Thorn finishes the song with a climactic yell and the band, completely drenched in sweat, leave the stage as the crowd roars for more.

Cole greets them with a big grin and hustles them backstage, through the throng of fans and groupies, towards the helicopter they arrived in.

EXT. AIRPORT TARMAC - NIGHT

The helicopter touches down at a small airfield, where a sleek white private jet waits, gleaming under the lights.

A logo on the side reads "Hourglass Records."

The band gape, awestruck, as Cole ushers them onto the plane.

EXT. HOURGLASS RECORDS BUILDING - DAY

The group climbs out of a limo in front of the impressive cylindrical architecture of the Hourglass Records building, towering over Hollywood.

They're still in their sweaty stage clothes from the festival.

TOMMY
(giddy as a schoolboy)
Fucking Hourglass Records!

INT. ELEVATOR

The group is riding up. The ELEVATOR can talk.

ELEVATOR
Fourteenth floor.

Tommy and Brian elbow each other and giggle behind the back of schoolteacher Cole.

FOURTEENTH FLOOR

They get off the elevator and are greeted by a stunningly beautiful SECRETARY.

SECRETARY
Good morning gentlemen, he'll be
with you momentarily. Have a seat,
and help yourselves to a drink.

They sink into an incredibly expensive leather couch.

Tommy opens a cabinet full of very good booze. He pulls it out with a grin and they all dig in.

They only have a moment to enjoy their drinks before the secretary interrupts:

SECRETARY
This way please.

They follow her into a glass elevator in the center of the floor.

TRENT LONG'S OFFICE

The elevator rises to the next floor, and even Cole is amazed by what they see:

The entire floor is an office. The walls are all glass, showing off an unbelievable 360-degree view of the city, all the way to the ocean in the west.

Behind a massive desk sits TRENT LONG.

He's in his early 40s, imposing, powerfully built, wearing an impeccable suit, with piercing eyes that stare straight through everyone and everything.

He's the president of Hourglass Records.

His office is decorated in the most garish early 80s luxury imaginable, and covered with music business mementoes- gold and platinum records, pictures of famous groups with Trent, etc.

The same man who made the phone call from the side of the stage at the festival loiters in the background.

TRENT
Tommy, Brian, Paul.
(beat)
Thorn.

Tommy notices a piece of equipment on Trent's desk- an electronic readout with a green line that constantly jumps and hiccups.

TOMMY
What's that?

TRENT
Seismograph. There are 42 major fault systems running beneath California. When the big one hits, the whole state is going to just slide into the ocean.

TOMMY
When?

TRENT
Nobody knows. But all the laws, all the rules and standards of society, it's not going to mean a goddamn thing when the big one comes.

Trent smiles at Cole.

TRENT
But you already know that, don't you, Cole?

COLE
How do you mean?

TRENT
The Pure Rock Festival. How did you get on the bill?

Cole shakes his head, shrugs, doesn't want to answer.

TRENT

You bullied your way on. You weren't even booked- you showed up, and you threatened, and you pushed, and you got your boys on the stage. You even hired a helicopter for your dramatic entrance. None of those kids were there to see you- but your boys got them on their feet, got their asses moving. That's how things get happen in this industry- not by some contract, or in a boardroom.

Cole and the group smile in relief.

TRENT

Things are changing- that festival put heavy metal on the map. People are ready for this kind of music now. The day is not far off when a metal act will sell platinum, maybe double platinum- there are no limits.

He puts some fat paperwork in front of them.

TRENT

Gentlemen, I want to make you the biggest rock and roll group in the world.

INT. GUITAR STORE - DAY

A huge music superstore frequented by struggling musicians, drooling over instruments they can't afford.

Paul Baldwin walks in and points at thirty or more of the most expensive bass and six-string guitars, as the struggling musicians watch, sick with envy.

INT. ANTIQUITIES SHOP

Brian James in a dark little store full of strange artifacts- robes, old mysterious books, and other artifacts of sinister and unknowable purpose.

He buys just about everything from the very pleased shopkeeper.

EXT. ROLLS ROYCE DEALERSHIP - DAY

Tommy Thunder walks onto the lot, wearing his typical leather and ripped T-shirt, and carrying a ratty, falling-apart briefcase.

A snooty SALESMAN looks him up and down.

SALESMAN

The used cars are around back, sir.

Tommy gets up about an inch from the frightened man's nose.

TOMMY

Fuck. Used. Cars.

He snaps the briefcase open in the man's face. It's completely full of cash.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A typical Los Angeles High School. The school day is ending, and the principal is standing outside, watching the students go home.

A chauffeured white Rolls Royce pulls up in front of the school. All the students gape as Tommy Thunder, resplendent in a new suit, sticks his upper body out of the sunroof, clutching a bottle of whiskey.

TOMMY

Hey, Principal Evans! Remember me, Tommy Hudson? Remember how you said I'd never amount to anything, how I'd always be a loser, working for minimum wage?? WELL FUCK YOU MOTHERFUCKER!

The principal gapes as Tommy flips him off, then drops his pants and gives him a full moon.

The school kids break into a standing ovation for Tommy, who laughs maniacally as the Rolls squeals off.

EXT. THORN'S NEW MANSION - DAY

Thorn drives a shining new hot rod up to his new house- the prototypical castle on a hill, 360 degree views, a huge pool in the back yard, the whole thing.

INT. THORN'S NEW MANSION - NIGHT

Thorn is wandering from room to room in the huge house, just looking, not believing that it's all really his.

He hasn't moved anything in- there's no sign of furniture or any personal effects whatsoever.

He stands at a huge window and stares down at the lights of Hollywood, lost in thought.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

SUPER: Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1981.

A frozen city in the dead of winter, empty streets smothered in a thick blanket of snow.

A pathetic old beater of a station wagon sputters down the street, sliding on the ice.

The back of the car is stuffed with amps, microphones and other musical equipment.

At the wheel is a younger Cole, sound asleep in the passenger seat is a younger Thorn.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS ROCK CLUB - NIGHT

Cole parks the car in front of a rock club. Thorn slowly regains consciousness, and they get out of the car and unload the gear.

Despite the blistering cold, Thorn's wearing only leather pants and a leather vest.

INT. ROCK CLUB

A mediocre band is playing to a disinterested crowd.

Cole and Thorn enter.

Cole tracks down the CLUB OWNER and they argue, Cole pointing at Thorn and gesturing angrily.

COLE

We drove a hundred miles down here
in a fucking blizzard!

CLUB OWNER

Not my problem.

Cole stares him down murderously. The owner looks Thorn up and down, considering.

Finally, he gives in.

CLUB OWNER
Twenty minutes.

The band finishes, and the singer steps off stage.

Thorn climbs onstage and confers with the band. He goes to the microphone, and nods to the drummer, who counts off the song.

It's an old rock and roll number, and Thorn rips into it with a vengeance, stunning everyone in the room.

Thorn gives it his all, leaning back and screaming, his voice filling the room and almost overwhelming the band.

From the bar, someone is watching Thorn closely-- CLAUDIA.

She's not a day over 19, dark-haired, pale skin, hauntingly beautiful and innocent.

LATER:

Thorn finishes a song. The audience has doubled in size since he started singing.

He starts to walk off stage, but the club owner frantically motions for him to get back. He does, the band plows into another song, and Thorn sings.

Meanwhile, Cole and the club owner are talking again. He slides Cole a small wad of bills, and Cole grins.

INT. ROCK CLUB - THE NEXT NIGHT

The place is packed, and there's an audible buzz in the air.

Thorn takes the stage with the pick-up band and does the same thing he did the night before. The crowd loves it, from the first note.

LATER:

Thorn, drenched in sweat, is propping up the bar, surrounded by people who want to buy him drinks, and young kids who look like they haven't had a solid meal in weeks.

Thorn takes time to chat with every kid who approaches him.

Then he spots Claudia, sitting alone at the end of the bar. She's dressed too well to be in a rock club, and looks uncomfortable, like she knows she doesn't belong here.

She's staring at Thorn, fascinated. Thorn approaches her.

THORN

Can I buy you a drink?

CLAUDIA

I don't think so. I should go.

THORN

Go where?

CLAUDIA

Home. I shouldn't even be here.

THORN

I'm singing again tomorrow. Come back tomorrow.

CLAUDIA

I don't think I should.

(beat)

It was nice to meet you.

Claudia exits the club, stopping once to look over her shoulder at Thorn.

INT. ROCK CLUB - THE NEXT NIGHT

Thorn is singing again, to another packed house.

He spots Claudia in the midst of the crowd, right in front of the stage. He starts singing to her, staring into her eyes.

She can't look away from him.

LATER:

Thorn finishes the show and disappears backstage.

A few moments later, Cole approaches Claudia, and passes her a note.

EXT. STREETS OF MINNEAPOLIS - NIGHT

Thorn and Claudia, walking the snow-covered streets of a run-down neighborhood.

Thorn leans over and whispers in Claudia's ear- she's fascinated by everything he says.

They stop outside a--

CHEAP HOTEL

Where pimps, prostitutes, and lowlifes are loitering on the sidewalk.

Thorn grabs Claudia and kisses her.

Without a word, she follows him inside.

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Thorn and Claudia burst into the room, passionately tearing off each other's clothes.

They fall together on the shabby single bed.

MORNING

The sun is just starting to rise. Thorn is still asleep as Claudia slips out of bed and is about to leave--

But she turns back, writes a phone number on a scrap of paper, and leaves it on the nightstand.

EXT. SUBURBS OF MINNEAPOLIS - MORNING

It's still very early as a taxi drops Claudia off in front of an imposing stone mansion, in a neighborhood that's as "old money" as can be.

She unlocks the door and tiptoes inside.

MONTAGE:

Several months pass as Thorn slowly works his way up through the Minneapolis rock scene- playing better and better clubs, to bigger and bigger audiences.

His most loyal fans are the young street kids who follow him everywhere, seemingly multiplying in numbers every time Thorn sings.

Claudia is always there, too, watching, right in front of the stage.

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

In an alley behind one of the rock clubs, young kids are waiting in the blistering cold.

Thorn and Claudia exit the back door of the club, and the kids swarm around Thorn.

He signs autographs and chats with every single kid, as Claudia watches.

After most of the kids have gone, Thorn ends up talking with a KID who looks around 14. He needs a bath and a hot meal.

THORN
Where are you from, man?

KID
Hibbing. Up north.

THORN
I'm sorry.

Thorn and the kid both laugh.

THORN
Did you run away?

The kid nods.

KID
Fuck that place, man. I'm not gonna end up in some mine, coughing up my lungs every night for shitty pay. You don't know what it's like up there.

Thorn starts to say something, then looks at the kid, sees the awe in his eyes, and changes his mind.

THORN
Yeah, I guess I don't.

KID
It's fucking awful. But man, when I hear you sing, I know there's gotta be something else out there. Look at you- those fuckers could never hold you down- not in a million years.

Thorn and the kid hug, and then the kid goes on his way, ecstatic.

All the kids are gone now, and Claudia and Thorn walk away, along the frozen, deserted late-night streets.

LATE NIGHT BAR

Very sleazy, almost a speakeasy.

Thorn and Claudia are doing shots.

THORN

Why did you come in the club, that first night?

CLAUDIA

Maybe my dad works in a bank, not an iron mine. But it's not really any different.

She throws down a shot.

CLAUDIA

Those kids are right. School, and work, and church, and everything- it's all a bunch of fucking lies.

Claudia laughs cynically.

CLAUDIA

I don't believe in any of it.

THORN

Believe in me.

HOTEL ROOM

Claudia and Thorn, drunk, stagger into his hotel room.

Thorn lays her down on the bed and sits next to her.

THORN

I'm going to be a rock star. I'm going to have a big mansion, up on a hill. And I'm going to play concerts, not in these shitty little clubs- in big stadiums, for a hundred thousand kids- can you see it?

Claudia looks up at him, enthralled.

CLAUDIA

I can see it.

THORN

And you're going to be there, in the front row.

(MORE)

THORN (cont'd)
And in that huge stadium, with all
those people, you'll know I'm
singing just for you. Do you
believe me?

CLAUDIA
Yeah.

Thorn lays down with her and they kiss passionately,
stripping off each other's clothes.

INT. LARGER ROCK CLUB - NIGHT

Thorn is singing in the best club in the city now, and the
place is packed.

As Thorn rips it up on stage, Cole watches from the back of
the room.

A man with the clothes and suntan of someone from L.A., not
Minnesota, sidles up to Cole and passes him a business card.

It reads, "FRANKIE PAYNE, Music Representation."

BACKSTAGE

A lot of people are hanging out, drinking and partying-
Frankie Payne is plying the band and everyone else (but
mostly Thorn) with booze and pot.

Thorn listens closely as Frankie whispers something in his
ear.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Thorn, after some effort, manages to start the old station
wagon he and Cole arrived in.

SUBURBS OF MINNEAPOLIS

Thorn's beat-up car rolls incongruously through Claudia's
neighborhood.

He parks across the street from her house.

Claudia peeks out of her bedroom window and spots Thorn.

Moments later, she sneaks out of the house and into Thorn's
car.

INT. THORN'S CAR

They lean across the seats and kiss. Thorn starts the car and
they drive away.

EXT. MINNESOTA COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Thorn parks his car on the side of the road.

He and Claudia get out and walk down a hill, through trees, until they reach the shores of a-

FROZEN LAKE

It's a beautiful scene- the lake, frozen solid and covered in pure, untouched snow, stretches off into the distance.

Thorn and Claudia walk out onto the ice. They kiss for a while, then Thorn breaks away.

THORN

A guy came to the club tonight.
He's from L.A. He says this kind of
music is really taking off out
there. He said he can make me a
star.

CLAUDIA

(shocked, confused)
California?

THORN

This is what I've been waiting for,
This is my chance. This could be my
only chance.

CLAUDIA

But you're doing great here!

THORN

I can't keep doing this. I can't
keep playing to the same two
hundred kids, over and over again.
I have to get out while I still
can.

CLAUDIA

Then I'll come with you. I won't
take anything- we'll start over- a
new life.

Thorn shakes his head.

THORN

You don't know what it'll be like
out there. We wouldn't have any
place to live.

(MORE)

THORN (cont'd)
We'd be on the streets. Your
parents would send the cops after
us.

CLAUDIA
I don't care!

THORN
In a few years I'll be a star. I'll
have the mansion, and everything we
talked about. Then I'll send for
you.

CLAUDIA
Why can't we just be together?

THORN
This is what I need to do. You
wouldn't love me, if I was just a
club singer, if I never went for
the top. You think you would, but
you wouldn't. We'd just be like one
of those pathetic married couples,
getting old, bitching at each other
in some shitty little apartment,
hating each other, hating what we'd
let ourselves become.
(beat)
This is the only way.

CLAUDIA
But what if you never make it?

THORN
I can see it. I'm up there, on that
big stage, in front of a million
kids, in front of the whole world-
they're all watching me. And
they're going to remember me.
Forever.
(beat)
I'm going to make it. For you,
Claudia.

CLAUDIA
I don't know if I can do this.
Please, Scott?

Thorn stares into the distance with a faraway look.

THORN
Don't call me that. I'm not Scott
anymore.

EXT. CHEAP HOTEL - MORNING

The station wagon waits at the curb, loaded to the bursting point with musical equipment.

Cole stands, shivering, waiting until Thorn finally emerges from the hotel, carrying his one beat-up old bag.

EXT. CLAUDIA'S STREET

Thorn drives the station wagon very slowly, and stops in front of Claudia's house.

But there's no movement inside- no one's home.

Thorn stares for a long moment, then drives on.

STREETS OF MINNEAPOLIS

Thorn drives the station wagon onto a freeway, picking up speed until he's flying, leaving the city behind as fast as he can, headed west.

OPEN HIGHWAY

Thorn and Cole in the station wagon, speeding away from Minnesota and across the country, towards L.A.

When night falls, they stop by the side of the road, and sleep in the car.

In the morning, they get out and stretch on the empty highway, with nothing but corn fields surrounding them for hundreds of miles.

LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The station wagon, on its last legs, crawls into L.A.

SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

The Strip is crawling with young, hungry rockers- everybody is forming a band.

Frankie Payne drives Thorn and Cole slowly down the Strip in a big long convertible, letting them take it all in.

INT. FRANKIE PAYNE'S APARTMENT

Frankie leads Cole and Thorn into his prototypical 80s L.A. bachelor pad.

FRANKIE

You boys make yourselves at home.

Frankie indicates his wet bar, featuring a huge array of liquor and a dish of cocaine.

FRANKIE

I have to go take care of some business. Later on I'll take you over to meet the band.

Frankie exits.

Cole pours himself a big glass of whiskey and sinks into a leather couch, admiring the view of L.A. through the big bay windows.

Thorn goes to the-

BATHROOM

Thorn stands in front of the mirror, staring at his reflection.

He lays out scissors, hairspray, and makeup, in front of him.

EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES

Frankie is driving Cole and Thorn in his car. Thorn is hidden in the shadows of the back seat.

Frankie stops the car outside an apartment building just off the Strip. The place looks like it should be condemned.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING

Frankie leads Thorn and Cole up the steps, towards an apartment at the top.

It's like walking through a war zone- the steps are knee-deep in garbage, empty bottles and who knows what else.

Music is blasting out of the apartment. Frankie knocks on the door, and it almost falls off the hinges.

APARTMENT

An absolutely filthy, disgusting disaster of a tiny apartment. Trash, old food and beer and booze bottles are everywhere.

The carpet is severely charred.

Younger versions of Tommy, Brian and Paul are sitting around, staring at a barely-functional black and white TV. Whatever's on is practically invisible underneath a sea of static.

Music is blasting at severe hearing damage levels. The shades are drawn and it's almost totally dark, even though it's daylight outside.

FRANKIE

(screaming as loud as he
can)

BRIAN, PAUL, TOMMY! THIS IS YOUR
NEW SINGER!

Thorn walks into the little bit of light that's creeping into the apartment, and the band see him for the first time.

Thorn has completely transformed himself:

He's cut up the shirt he was wearing on the trip out, until it's barely there at all. He's used several cans of hairspray on his hair.

And he's painted his face with black make-up under his eyes. In the dim light, he looks imposing, mysterious, otherworldly.

The band just stare at him for a while.

PAUL

What's your name, man?

THORN

Call me Thorn.

INT. SLEAZY CLUB

Thorn and the band takes the stage in a dirty little club. Thorn is dressed and made up as he was when he met the band.

The music sounds ragged, but very powerful.

Thorn is a completely different performer from the one in the Minnesota clubs. He's singing with more power, more intensity, more everything, rampaging across the stage like a feral animal.

He almost seems possessed.

Brian, Tommy and Paul exchange impressed looks as Thorn wails away in front of them.

There's only about fifteen kids in the audience, but they're enthralled by Thorn and the band.

ANOTHER CLUB

The band finish another gig, this time to a substantially larger audience.

LATER:

Still sweaty from playing, the musicians loiter at the bar.

Brian corners the CLUB OWNER.

BRIAN

Do you think we could get our money now?

CLUB OWNER

I can't pay you now. Next week.

BRIAN

But we agreed-

CLUB OWNER

I don't see any contract. You punks are lucky I let you make that noise in here at all. I pay Payne, he pays you. That's how it works.

BRIAN

Fucking Payne never pays us shit, except maybe a bottle of Jack Daniel's and half a sandwich if we're lucky!

CLUB OWNER

Then talk to him. I'm fucking busy.

The club owner pushes past Brian and starts to walk away. Cole has been watching. He steps in the owner's path.

COLE

These boys did a lot of hard work tonight. They need to get paid. Now.

CLUB OWNER

Who the fuck are you?

Cole grabs the man by the throat, lifts him off his feet and slams him against the wall.

COLE
I'm the guy who's telling you to
pay the fucking band.

CLUB OWNER
(choking out the words)
Alright. Alright. Come back to the
office.

OWNER'S OFFICE

Cole and the band watch as the owner unlocks a cash box.

CLUB OWNER
(reading off paper)
Looks like the paid attendance was
a hundred and eighty two, times a
dollar fifty a head, is-

Cole pulls a "clicker" out of his pocket and looks at the
number it displays.

COLE
Funny. I got three hundred twenty
six.

Cole stares the owner down, with murder in his eyes.

CLUB OWNER
Let's just call it two fifty.

Cole nods, and the owner counts out the money.

HALLWAY

The band count and then pocket their money.

The band huddle up, whisper amongst themselves, then break.

BRIAN
(to Cole)
So- you wanna manage us?

Cole looks them up and down.

COLE
What, you bunch of dirty, sleazy,
vulgar, no-good punk trash
motherfuckers?
(beat, then grins)
Ah, what the hell? I got nothing
better to do.

EXT. WHISKEY A GO GO - NIGHT

SUPER: Six months later.

A line of KIDS is stretching down the block from the famous rock club. Most of them are wearing the Crawling Kingsnakes' name and snake logo, crudely reproduced on their T-shirts or denim jackets.

A buzz is in the air, kids spreading rumors like:

KID #1

I heard Brian James sold his soul
to the devil to teach how to play
fucking guitar!

KID #2

They burned down the English Disco
last week- I know a guy who was
there!

KID #3

My sister said Tommy hangs around
her school at three o'clock,
waiting for the girls to come out-
and she's in sixth grade!

KID #4

Do you guys know where Thorn is
from? I heard he's half-Mexican.

KID #2

Nah. My friend knows a guy who used
to roadie for Jezebel. He said
Thorn used to drive trucks for
them.

They continue chattering as the line starts to move forward.

INT. WHISKEY A GO GO

The place is totally packed with Kingsnakes fans.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And now, ladies and gentlemen, the
Whiskey A Go Go is proud to
present, the underground
sensations, the hottest thing on
the Sunset Strip, The Crawling
Kingsnakes!

The kids go wild as the band hits the stage, and Thorn shrieks out the first note.

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

The Kingsnakes exit the Whiskey and start walking west. They're joined by more and more fans and girls, until they're surrounded by a mob.

INT. RAINBOW BAR AND GRILL

The band and their followers storm into the Strip's most famous rock and roll hangout.

In the private booths, those at the top of the food chain hold court, while groupie girls circle the floor, vying for the attention of the rockers.

In the biggest booth, the British group Jezebel are holding court. They're in their early forties, growing fat and complacent with too much booze, drugs, money and success.

One of the members of Jezebel is flagrantly groping a young girl against her will. She slaps him, and the band pours drinks on her and physically throws her out of the booth.

DARK CORNER

Away from the action, Trent Long holds court in the shadows.

With him are two state senators, BARNETT and RIGDON (early 40s). They fit in like penguins in the desert, but they're whooping it up, hammering down drinks, having a great time.

Also with Trent is IAN BROWN, a suntanned, greasy man in a white suit, wearing sunglasses indoors, sitting quietly in the shadows.

Several barely-dressed groupie girls totter by on eight-inch heels. Trent waves over the most beautiful groupie, MONICA STARR, a classic blonde bombshell.

MONICA

Hey Trent.

She leans over the table- her breasts just about jumping out of her halter top. The senators' eyes go wide.

TRENT

Good evening, Monica. I'd like you to meet two of the finest senators of this great state of California.

The congressmen eagerly shake hands with Monica and the other girls.

TRENT

And I believe you already know Ian.

The girls smile at Ian, and pile into the overcrowded booth.

WITH THE KINGSNAKES

Cole and the band are led by a waitress to a smaller booth, hidden in the shadows of the huge one Jezebel are occupying.

COLE

BRING US FUCKING LIQUOR!

Waitresses arrive and cover the table with dozens of drinks, and everyone digs in.

LATER:

Most of the glasses are empty and the Kingsnakes are all very drunk.

The singer of Jezebel, PAUL DICKERSON, walks by the Snakes table and takes a contemptuous look at them.

He's wearing tight yellow leather pants with a prominent bulge.

DICKERSON

You lot are keeping Jack Daniels in business then, eh?

TOMMY

Just trying to enjoy our youth. Before we're old. And washed-up. And have to put a cucumber down our yellow leather pants because our dried-up old dick doesn't go up anymore.

DICKERSON

Who the fuck do you little pissants think you are? I've been in this business twenty years. Tomorrow you'll be back in the gutter they dragged you out of. So you'd better show a little respect for your betters, because when you come begging-

Tommy throws his drink all over Dickerson's pants.

DICKERSON
 You miserable little shit! Those
 are eight hundred dollar trousers-

Brian throws his drink at Dickerson, too.

BRIAN
 (fake British accent)
 Fuck off, you bloody wanker cunt!

Everyone at the Kingsnakes' table start lobbing liquid, then actual glasses, at the Jezebel booth.

The Jezebel group gets up to fight. Tommy charges them, screaming psychopathically.

He grabs Jezebel's bass player and bites him on the arm.

JEZEBEL BASS PLAYER
 What the fuck??!

The whole Jezebel group is terrified of Tommy, and they make for the exit.

COLE
 What's wrong with us? Don't we have
 any respect for our betters?

TOMMY
 We're just trash- tomorrow we'll be
 back in the gutter where we belong!

Everyone laughs, and the Snakes party moves in to Jezebel's big private booth, where they're joined by most of the girls who were previously hanging all over Jezebel.

The room, mostly full of young "trash" rockers like the Kingsnakes, gives them a round of applause as they take over the booth.

Cole motions for some of the struggling rockers to join the Kingsnakes' party, and they do.

Cole passes out the drinks Jezebel left behind to all comers.

TRENT'S TABLE

Trent and the senators are watching the whole scene with interest.

TRENT
 You see gentlemen, our business
 isn't so different from yours.
 (MORE)

TRENT (cont'd)
When you have the power, you can do
anything you want.

Ian Brown offers up lines of cocaine, which most of the table indulges in greedily.

TRENT
(to senators)
Go on.

BARNETT
(looking around room,
incredulous)
Right here?

TRENT
This is our world- we make our own
laws.

The congressmen indulge in the coke.

TRENT
Good. Now, you're here tonight
because I believe we can help each
other.

RIGDON
How?

TRENT
I find business talk so dry, don't
you? What if I show you instead?

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

The congressmen, Trent, and Ian Brown board the Hourglass Records private jet.

EXT. SKIES OVER CARIBBEAN/INT. JET - DAY

The congressmen stare out the window as the plane circles in for a landing on a pristine Caribbean island.

From the air, it appears to be uninhabited.

But as the plane comes closer, an airstrip becomes visible, cut out of the lush jungle.

EXT. ISLAND AIRSTRIP - DAY

The passengers disembark the plane. Nordic mercenaries with submachine guns and very dark sunglasses escort them to waiting jeeps.

EXT. PRIVATE ISLAND COMPOUND - DAY

The jeeps drive up to a massive compound, hidden in the jungle.

Steel gates slide open and they drive in.

THE COMPOUND

There's a massive mansion and several smaller buildings, with more under construction.

There's all kinds of plants and trees, and exotic wildlife roaming the grounds.

The congressmen gawk as the jeeps drive past a massive swimming pool, complete with artificial waterfall. Beautiful, topless women are lounging poolside.

INT. PRIVATE CABANA - NIGHT

The senators are being entertained by half-naked local girls and mountains of cocaine, booze, and food.

Trent enters.

TRENT

I see you gentlemen are making full use of our facilities.

BARNETT

(stuffing his face)
Oh hell yes!

TRENT

Good. And I want to let you know that our facilities will always be available to you and your associates. But I need your help.

RIGDON

Anything we can do. Anything.

TRENT

I believe you gentlemen know Arthur Dixon, the president of my company.

BARNETT

Yes, I've met him. A good man.

TRENT

Yes. He's been a mentor to me. But I'm afraid his time may have passed. He doesn't understand the realities of our business today.

BARNETT

So what?

TRENT

I happen to know that you gentlemen sit on several committees that hold great influence over the way business is conducted in the great state of California.

Trent signals to one of his henchmen, who's been hovering in the background. The man brings a large stack of documents.

TRENT

These are records of certain... Irregularities in Hourglass Records accounting over the last fifteen years. But perhaps the state would be willing to let us go with a slap on the wrist, if the company agreed to make a fresh start... with a new man at the top.

The senators smile their agreement.

Trent signals to one of the island girls, who pours three glasses of champagne for the congressmen and Trent.

TRENT

Gentlemen- Let's drink to the future.

All three men toast and drink.

TRENT

I'm flying out tonight- I have to meet one of our acts on the road, check up on things. When you're ready to leave, there's a plane standing by that will have you back in L.A. in six hours. Until then, this is your home. Anything you want, you only have to ask.

EXT. CRAWLING KINGSNAKES' APARTMENT - MORNING

A huge black tour bus with blacked-out windows pulls up in front of the apartment, almost running over a rocker who's passed out in the street.

Cole, standing next to the bus driver, leans on the horn.

A few moments later, Tommy, Brian, and Paul, obviously not recovered from the night before, stagger out of the apartment, Brian and Paul carrying a few scraggly old bags.

Tommy doesn't have any bags, or even a shirt. Just the leather pants he's wearing, with a pair of drumsticks sticking out of the back pocket.

COLE

Come on boys!! This is the BIG ONE!
You're going to lay waste to this
country and come back fucking rock
stars! COME ON!

Cole shoos them onto the bus, then looks around, impatiently.

COLE

Where the fuck is Thorn? You can't
have a fucking rock and roll tour
without the fucking SINGER!

The roadies shake their heads, disavowing any knowledge of Thorn's whereabouts.

Finally, Thorn appears.

The road crew and random rockers who are standing around give Thorn a standing ovation, and look at him like a genuine hero.

INT. BUS/EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES

It's a low-level tour bus- without any bunks or luxuries, just rows of seats with metal armrests.

The band are already getting settled into their tour routine-

Each member has staked out a row of seats and is carefully arranging his personal effects for the long months ahead- they position water bottles, cigarettes, sunglasses and other essentials so they'll always be within reach.

Tommy's fooling with a remote control, which controls an overhead mounted TV and VCR.

ON TV

"Captain Blood," the Errol Flynn pirate movie, is playing.

Flynn climbs up to the crow's nest of his ship and reads his edict.

BUS

The bus rolls off through Hollywood, and enters the freeway as the movie plays.

FLYNN/CAPTAIN BLOOD (V.O.)

(on TV)

We, men who sail under no flag,
herby design to sail under no flag
together. Let it be the flag of
blood: Desperate men in search of
desperate fortune, all as one.

INT. CLAUDIA'S BEDROOM (MINNESOTA)

Claudia looks unwell- paler than before, with huge dark circles under her eyes.

She dials the phone.

CLAUDIA

(into phone)

Hey. How's L.A.?

INTERCUTTING:

Claudia's female FRIEND is living in a seedy Melrose Avenue apartment, surrounded by the whips and chains of a professional dominatrix.

FRIEND

(into phone)

It's wonderful.

(beat)

I met a guy, a client, he says he
knows them.

WITH CLAUDIA

Claudia writes down a number, hangs up with her friend, and dials the number she wrote.

KINGSNAKES' APARTMENT

The place is for all intents and purposes abandoned.

Rats run among the fetid piles of garbage. The phone rings twenty times, unanswered.

WITH CLAUDIA

She hangs up, and starts dressing for a night out, all in black with black makeup.

INT. MINNEAPOLIS ROCK CLUB - NIGHT

The same club where Claudia once watched Thorn play.

The scene has changed- things are darker, a snarling band dressed all in black is playing painfully loud, frightening music.

The audience is dressed all in black, too.

Claudia enters with a crowd of friends who are in just as bad shape as she is.

One of them snorts from a tiny vial of cocaine, then passes it to Claudia, who snorts it, too.

Claudia is immediately revitalized, she starts bopping up and down, wildly dancing to the music, trying desperately to pretend she's having a good time.

BACKSTAGE

Claudia and her friends wander through the backstage of the club and approach the dressing room of the band, which is guarded by a BOUNCER.

Claudia, unsteady on her feet, almost slumps onto the bouncer.

CLAUDIA
Can we get in, Carl?

The bouncer smiles sympathetically and opens the door.

BOUNCER (CARL)
Sure, Claudia.

DRESSING ROOM

A party's going on, and Claudia and her friends are enthusiastically received by the band that was onstage earlier.

Claudia smiles a big smile at the lead singer, SMITH. He beckons her over and gives her a drink.

She swallows it in one gulp and sits on Smith's lap.

EXT. CLAUDIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

The sun is rising as Claudia staggers in the front door of her parents' house.

INT. CLAUDIA'S HOUSE

Claudia enters, not even trying to be quiet. Her FATHER comes down the steps and confronts her.

CLAUDIA'S FATHER
Where have you been?

Claudia ignores him. Her father takes a close look at her—her clothes are dishevelled, and her black make-up is smeared.

CLAUDIA'S FATHER
You're on drugs, aren't you? I
can't have this in my house,
Claudia.

CLAUDIA
I'm not on fucking drugs!

Her father puts his arm on her shoulder.

CLAUDIA'S FATHER
I want you to talk to Dr. Hanson.
He's one of the finest therapists
in—

CLAUDIA
No! You're not putting me in any
goddamn hospital!

CLAUDIA'S FATHER
Claudia, I'm only trying—

CLAUDIA
Fuck you!

Claudia turns and storms out of the house.

She walks out the door and down the street, yelling at the still-sleeping houses.

CLAUDIA
(almost in tears)
Fuck all of you! Fuck this whole
place!

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS ROCK CLUB - MORNING

A tour bus is parked outside the same rock club as earlier.

Claudia, looking even more dishevelled than before, approaches and knocks on the door.

A just-woken-up and unamused roadie eventually answers.

CLAUDIA
Is Smith here?

The roadie considers, looks Claudia over, and points to the back of the bus.

INT. TOUR BUS

The windows are completely blacked-out, and the only light comes from the little neon lights that illuminate the floor like an airport runway.

The walls are lined with bunks, the sleeping musicians hidden behind closed curtains.

At the back of the bus, the singer Smith emerges from the largest bunk, like a vampire from his coffin.

SMITH
Claudia.

CLAUDIA
(crying)
I didn't have anywhere else to go.

Smith puts his arm around her and helps her into his bunk with him.

EXT. MIDWESTERN HIGHWAY/INT. TOUR BUS - DAY

The tour bus of Witching Hour (Smith's group) is rolling along a desolate, snow-covered highway.

Inside, Claudia is asleep in Smith's arms.

EXT. SPORTS ARENA - EVENING

The tour bus pulls into the vast parking lot of a twenty thousand seat basketball arena.

The lot is filling up with rowdy, tailgating heavy metal fans, arriving in big American muscle cars.

The arena marquee reads "The Tiger Sharks," and underneath, in much smaller letters, "With Special Guests, Witching Hour."

INT. UNDERNEATH THE ARENA

Claudia is part of a large group of hangers-on that follows Smith's band off of the bus and through the bowels of the arena to their dressing room.

The hallways are a solid mass of roadies, groupies and fans, and Claudia gets pulled away from Smith.

LATER:

Claudia finds her way to the band's dressing room and pushes her way in.

DRESSING ROOM

She sees a scene of complete decadence. Smith has two groupie girls on his lap, and is smoking something from a small pipe.

Claudia pushes her way across the room to Smith. His eyes are glassy and he can't focus on her.

CLAUDIA
Smith- what?

Smith laughs.

SMITH
What's wrong, baby? Come here and
join the party.

Claudia storms out of the dressing room.

BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - LATER

Smith and his band exit the dressing room, trailed by their groupies.

They're yelling and screaming, psyching themselves up for the show.

Behind them, in the other direction, Claudia is sitting unnoticed, slumped against the wall, crying and completely alone.

LATER:

The sounds of Witching Hour playing in the arena above echoes through the corridor.

The Tiger Sharks walk down the hall. They're a quintessential early 80s L.A. hard rock band, all tight leather and long hair.

Everything about them, including their groupies, is a step above Witching Hour.

They're trailed by a coterie of hulking security and slick men in suits.

The man in the most expensive suit, obviously running the show, is-

TRENT LONG

The whole entourage walks past Claudia without even glancing at her. Except Trent.

Claudia looks up and makes eye contact with him. She's been crying, and her makeup is running. Her face is the perfect picture of wounded beauty.

He can read in her eyes- she simply has no place left to go.

As everyone continues down the hall, Trent stops and kneels by Claudia.

TRENT
What's your name?

CLAUDIA
(sniffling)
Claudia.

TRENT
What's the matter, Claudia?

CLAUDIA
I came here with Witching Hour.
With the singer, Smith. When I saw
him with those stupid groupies- he
was so high he couldn't even
remember my name.

TRENT
It's going to be OK, Claudia.

CLAUDIA
How? I came on their bus- I don't
have any place to stay, any way to
get home- I don't even have any
home to get to.

Trent puts his arm around Claudia, and helps her to her feet.

TRENT

You know what the Witching Hour are? They're small-time midwestern club trash. They're only here because their manager did me a favor once, and I wanted to throw him a crumb. They'll never work for me again. They're finished.

Claudia's stopped crying, and now she's staring at Trent with wide-eyed wonder.

Trent smiles at her, and leads her down the hall into the--

TIGER SHARKS' DRESSING ROOM

It's worlds more luxurious than Witching Hour's- a vast room with a huge buffet table of expensive food and drink.

Trent leads Claudia into an adjoining--

PRIVATE DRESSING ROOM

He sits down with her on a couch.

TRENT

I want you to stay here as long as you need to. Get yourself together. And then, I'd like you to join me for the show.

CLAUDIA

Why are you doing all this for me?

TRENT

I've risen to my position in this industry because I make it a policy to always treat people the way they deserve to be treated. And a woman like you deserves to be treated with respect, Claudia. You deserve security.

Trent exits.

LATER:

The noise of the Tiger Sharks on stage is audible through the walls of the dressing room.

Claudia is making herself up at the mirror, primping like a girl getting ready for the junior prom.

When she's finished, she looks perfect.

ARENA

The Tiger Sharks are playing, and the crowd is going wild.

There's nothing outstanding about the music, but it's very loud and completely professional, the stage show is glitzy and polished, and the audience is getting exactly what they paid for.

The singer is RIKKI, long blonde hair, tight clothes, pretty almost to the point of femininity. The girls go crazy whenever he moves.

SIDE OF THE STAGE

Trent is standing with his cronies, watching the band in action.

Claudia joins him. Trent smiles when he sees her, put his arm around her and brings her in front of him, so she has an unobstructed view of the stage.

TRENT

This part always kills 'em. Watch.

Rikki climbs atop his guitarist's shoulders.

The guitarist plays a squealing solo while Rikki strips off his shirt and gestures to the crowd.

The guitarist carries him around the stage, so he can play to each section of the audience.

Trent smiles at Claudia, and she smiles back.

TRENT

I discovered these boys on the Sunset Strip. Have you ever seen the Sunset Strip, Claudia?

Claudia shakes her head, "no."

TRENT

That's where it all happens. The whole world looks to us now, for fashion, for music, for everything. I'm going to be president of my company soon.

(MORE)

TRENT (cont'd)

I have a great big house in the Hollywood Hills, you can look down on the lights at night, they go on forever, like an ocean. It's the most beautiful thing in the world.

ARENA UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE

The Tiger Sharks and their entourage pile into a fleet of long black limos and are driven, with a police escort, out of the arena, through a throng of screaming fans waiting outside.

The last car in the fleet is a towncar. Trent and Claudia get in.

EXT. AIRFIELD - NIGHT

The limo convoy drives right onto the tarmac of a small, middle-of-nowhere airfield.

Two planes are waiting- one a chartered passenger jet, the other a small, sleek, far more impressive 8-seater Gulfstream (the same one that flew Trent and the congressmen to the islands).

The band board the larger jet, pausing to pose for photos on the stairs.

Trent and Claudia board the smaller jet.

EXT. LAX AIRPORT - DAY

Trent's private plane is met on the tarmac by a long, white limo.

Trent leads Claudia down the steps of the plane. She's overwhelmed by everything, and shields her eyes from the brilliant L.A. sun.

Trent gives her his sunglasses, and they get into the limo.

INT. LIMO/EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES

Trent and Claudia drink champagne in the limo, and Claudia stares out the window as the limo drives them through L.A. and finally to Trent's house in the Hollywood Hills.

EXT. TRENT'S HOUSE

Trent shows Claudia out of the limo and into his house.

INT. TRENT'S HOUSE

Trent shows Claudia to a guest room.

Claudia is suddenly aware of the fact that she has no bags or possessions of any kind.

Trent smiles and hands her a credit card.

TRENT

My driver will take you shopping
this afternoon. Whatever you want,
it's on the label.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

Claudia wanders through the expensive shops.

Trent's driver helps her load her purchases into his car.

INT. TRENT'S HOUSE - CLAUDIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Claudia is in the guest room that Trent has provided her, surrounded by shopping bags full of new clothes.

She pulls out and examines her purchases, one more luxurious than the next.

Suddenly, she buries her head in the clothes and weeps.

TRENT'S BEDROOM

Trent is in bed, asleep.

Claudia, wearing a new nightgown, tiptoes into the room and crawls into Trent's bed.

EXT. HIGHWAY/INT. KINGSNAKES' TOUR BUS - MORNING

Everyone inside the bus is passed out, except Thorn.

He stares out the window as the bus rolls out of St. Louis, Missouri, following the Mississippi river north.

INT. HOURGLASS RECORDS BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

A press conference is being held; a SUIT is addressing reporters.

SUIT

It is with great regret that we today announce the departure of Arthur Dixon, a member of the Hourglass Records family for over fifty years.

Dixon, in his sixties, stands and watches blankly, seemingly overwhelmed and not understanding what's happening.

No one stands too close to him.

HOURLASS RECORDS BUILDING - TOP FLOOR - PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

This is the same office where The Kingsnakes will later sign their contract with Trent.

Moving men are carting out the last of Dixon's effects- antique furniture, autographed pictures of him with bands, and other mementoes of a lifetime in the music business.

Trent is watching with great satisfaction as they bring in his garish furniture.

He steps out onto the circular balcony that surrounds the office. He stretches his arms out over the city below him.

TRENT

(quietly)

You are mine.

EXT. MALIBU CLIFFS - DAY

On a cliff overlooking the Pacific, Trent and Claudia's wedding is taking place.

The sparkling crowd is full of beautiful people from the music and movie industries.

Claudia walks down the aisle in a beautiful white dress. She smiles wide- she looks perfectly happy.

EXT. TRENT'S PRIVATE ISLAND - AIRSTRIP - DAY

Trent, still in his tux, carries Claudia, still in her wedding dress, off of the Hourglass Records private jet.

THE COMPOUND

The servants and mercenaries line up in two long columns, each fifty or more strong.

Trent and Claudia walk between the two long lines, up to the mansion. The mercenaries fire their guns in the air in salute.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS

The Kingsnakes' tour bus rolls into town.

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS STREETS - NIGHT

Thorn, alone, wanders the streets around the rock club where he and Claudia first met.

INT. TOUR BUS - NIGHT

Thorn is staring blankly out the window, bottle in hand, as the bus rolls out of Minneapolis.

Cole is the only other one awake.

THORN

Now what?

Cole pulls out a map of America, with the stops of the tour marked in red, snaking across the country.

COLE

Sioux City. Omaha. Topeka.

Thorn passes the bottle to Cole, who takes a long swig.

Cole stares out the window at Minneapolis, receding behind them.

COLE

Been a long time since we've been back.

THORN

There isn't anything here to come back to.

(re: bus)

This is the life we've chosen.

Cole drinks, and passes the bottle back to Thorn.

COLE

Orphans of fucking America.

The highway screams by outside the window.

INSERT:

Cole's map. The trail of tour stops ends in Northern California, at a dot labelled "Pure Rock Festival."

BACK TO:

EXT. THORN'S MANSION - NIGHT

SUPER: 1988

Thorn is standing on the back steps of his mansion- it's been four years since we last saw him here, but it looks like he's aged ten.

He's looking out over a massive, bacchanalian party.

In his back yard, huge football stadium-style lights illuminate the scene:

The cream of LA's rock scene is here: musicians, producers, executives, models/groupies- a completely eclectic mix of people, wearing everything from leather and chains to formal wear.

People are jumping in and out of the pool, and there's a stage where various musicians are jamming.

Everyone is drinking every kind of good liquor and champagne imaginable, getting drunk and falling on the perfectly-groomed lawn to stare up at the stars.

COLE (V.O.)

We were the hottest thing around that year, and everyone knew it. Our first album had gone gold, and we were just back from our first European tour.

MONTAGE: ARENAS AND HOTELS OF EUROPE

Scenes of the Kingsnakes rampaging across the continent:

Cole terrorizing European promoters, making sure the band is safe, paid, boozed, drugged and laid.

The European fans going crazy for the Kingsnakes: rowdy French, Italians, English, etc.

Brian is developing his "black magician" image, appearing onstage in hand-tailored silk suits, embroidered with ornate runes and symbols. The kids love it.

ENGLAND

Tommy is just getting crazier, using a cricket bat to play/lay waste to his drum kit.

ITALIAN HOTEL ROOM

The lights are out and Brian is conducting some sort of ritual, chanting cross-legged in front of a circle of candles, with magical symbols drawn on the floor in the center.

Tommy can be heard in the adjoining room of the suite, pounding on the door:

TOMMY (O.S.)
BRIAN! BRIAN!! I KNOW YOU'RE IN
THERE MOTHERFUCKER!!!

But Brian ignores it, intent on his ritual.

Suddenly, the wall of the room explodes: Tommy has used explosives to blast a hole from his adjacent room.

He stands there in the gaping, smoking hole, backlit, looking like the devil.

GERMAN OUTDOOR FESTIVAL

The band, playing with frightening German death metal acts, in front of fans who resemble medieval barbarians.

Chunks of meat and an actual sheep's head fly on stage as the Snakes play.

PARIS - HOTEL GEORGES V

The restaurant of one of the world's great hotels. The black-tied diners are aghast as the Kingsnakes and their crew sit down to eat.

Tommy throws some food in the face of the snooty waiter, and soon a full-scale food fight is in progress.

LAX AIRPORT - DAY

The band staggers off the plane, tour fatigue taking a heavy toll. Everyone goes their separate ways with barely a "goodbye."

Tommy is picked up by a Rolls Royce, driven by a uniformed chauffeur.

The Rolls' radio is tuned to a rock station, broadcasting a flamboyant old-school DJ named JESSE LANE. He sounds genuinely excited about the music he's playing.

LANE (V.O.)

(on radio)

Good afternoon, this is Jesse Lane on KXLA radio, coming to you live with real rock and roll straight from the golden streets of the wild west! I'd like to send a big "welcome back" to some of LA's baddest boys- they just got back from destroying Europe on a headlining tour, here they are, The Crawling Kingsnakes!

A Kingsnakes song blasts out of the radio.

TOMMY'S NEW HOUSE - MALIBU

Tommy is dropped off at his new home on a Malibu cliff, overlooking the ocean.

There's a half-built mansion, and a hole where Tommy's pool is being dug.

The only person around is a Mexican construction worker.

Tommy excitedly latches onto him, and takes him on a tour of the grounds.

They stand looking out from what will be the second-story master bedroom balcony.

From this vantage point, it's clear that the pool is being built in the shape of a vagina.

Tommy is giggling, as proud of himself as a schoolboy.

TOMMY

Look! Isn't that fucking awesome?

No response.

TOMMY

It's a pussy!!

The construction worker just stares at Tommy like he's from another planet.

THORN'S PARTY

COLE (V.O.)

So naturally, everyone was at Thorn's parties that summer. There was Baker Thomas, the legendary producer of the seventies.

JACUZZI

Thorn's outdoor jacuzzi is occupied by BAKER THOMAS, 50s, down-on-his-luck but still elegant, alongside a dozen naked or nearly-so women and rock musicians.

COLE (V.O.)

There was Monica Starr and her groupie clique, the Sunset Starrs. They didn't mind being called groupies- they loved it.

Monica is holding court surrounded by her beautiful handmaidens and a sea of admiring men.

COLE (V.O.)

And then there was her rival, Angela Arnez and the Hot Rod Queens.

ANGELA, dressed in black leather, dangerously sexy, sneers across the lawn at her rival Monica. Angela's surrounded by her clique of equally dangerous bad girls.

COLE (V.O.)

And then there were the porno girls from Pleasure Pictures-

Several beyond-gorgeous porn starlets frolic with Tommy in the pool as Brian James films with a brand-new VHS camcorder.

COLE (V.O.)

And from the real movies, Allen Voivod and Elliott McMillan. And of course Ian Brown.

Ian gives Allen and Elliott huge complimentary mounds of coke, which they indulge in with true movie star panache.

COLE (V.O.)

And Michael French, the aerospace tycoon who sold cruise missiles to anyone, anywhere who was willing to pay cash, and Wen Ho the alleged head of a Chinese Triad, who they said controlled seventy percent of all the cargo traffic into the port of Long Beach.

French is whispering something to Ho, who reclines in a big divan like a king, surrounded by gorgeous Chinese women.

COLE (V.O.)

There was also Greg Ravendahl, the champion surfer, and the rapper Grandmaster X, out on the coast from the Bronx to make his first album.

Ravendahl and Grandmaster X are standing together, sharing a joint and staring in amazement at Wen Ho and his harem.

COLE (V.O.)

And Paul Dickenson, the folk singer, who sat in the corner playing his acoustic guitar and singing old songs, whether anyone was listening or not, and Chris Washington, the pro football quarterback-

Chris Washington, blonde and All-American, stares with amazement at the rocker girls and everything else that's going on.

COLE (V.O.)

-and the one they just called "Monster," always in a blue suit with blue shoes, who they whispered was a gang captain from South Central L.A., and had killed 15 men already that year.

"Monster" looks serenely dangerous while listening to Dickenson's folk songs.

COLE (V.O.)

All these people were in L.A. then. And they all came to Thorn's parties.

THORN'S LAWN

The Magic Rat, (the hulking biker of questionable sanity who leads the Snakes' road crew) and the crew are playing a game of football on the lawn.

They snort coke in the huddle, and then play with a total disregard for property or human life- they crash over and through tables, people, and end up flinging themselves and anyone else they can get their hands on into the swimming pool.

Huge fireworks are launched by the road crew and explode overhead. A small fire starts on the lawn, but no one pays much attention.

TOMMY

-is admiring Angela Arnez, the bad girl groupie queen, from across the lawn. He makes eye contact with her and she smiles slightly.

Then he charges across the lawn and tackles her in the grass. Angela's furious for a moment- then they lock eyes and they're all over each other.

TRENT

-enters the party like an emperor. Everyone gets very quiet as he walks past to join Thorn and Cole.

TRENT

I know your boys are exhausted from Europe. But we have to strike now. Anyone can get lucky once. The second album is the one that makes a true superstar.

Baker Thomas staggers by, drunk and hanging all over a girl less than half his age.

TRENT

Baker.

Baker turns, confused, and tries to focus his eyes on Trent.

Trent beckons him over like he was a friend's shy child.

TRENT

Come here, Baker. I want to talk to you about something. A job.

Baker perks up at the mention of a job, and approaches.

TRENT
Baker Thomas, Cole and Thorn, from
the Crawling Kingsnakes.

Cole and Thorn shake Baker's hand with great reverence.

COLE
(sincerely)
It's a fucking privilege, Mr.
Thomas.

Baker smiles with gratitude.

TRENT
The Snakes are about to head into
the studio to start their second
album. I want you to produce.

Baker, shocked, stumbles and spills most of his drink.

BAKER
I... I'd love to.

Trent smiles, and signals to a waiter, who immediately brings Baker a new drink. Baker is a new man now, all confidence, chatting to Cole and Thorn.

BAKER
How long you boys been out here in
Gomorrah then?

COLE
Six years. From Minnesota.

TRENT
My wife's from Minnesota. Claudia
couldn't be here tonight- big
parties like this just make her
nervous- too many people staring at
her.

At the mention of the name "Claudia," Thorn gets an
incredibly intense, faraway look in his eyes.

Cole, and Baker continue talking, but Thorn doesn't hear a
word.

WITH WEN HO

Trent wanders over to the Chinese gangster and his harem.

TRENT
Anything new?

Ho grins and indicates a very young, very beautiful Chinese girl.

Trent kisses her, takes her by the hand, and leads her away.

EXT. TOMMY'S MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

Tommy screams up to his now-finished house in a brand new sports car.

Angela Arnez is with him. He gives her the grand tour of the facilities.

In his big garage, besides his fleet of exotic cars, Tommy has set up the world's largest drum kit.

It's comically big- four bass drums, an ocean of cymbals, more drums that anyone could possibly need.

Tommy jumps on it and plays a quick solo for Angela, who applauds.

TOMMY

I gotta get to the studio.

ANGELA

What am I supposed to do all day?

TOMMY

Whatever. Just make yourself at home, relax. Lay out by the pussy.

Tommy kisses her goodbye and runs out.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

A mob of Kingsnakes fans is waiting on the sidewalk, almost all dressed in black with long hair, many wearing T-shirts with pictures of Thorn on them.

One by one, the group members trickle into the studio:

Paul Baldwin is almost not recognized by the fans. When he is, he signs autographs and chats politely.

Brian arrives wearing a dark hooded robe, and is whisked into the studio by security men. Fans gasp and whisper as he passes, no one dares try to speak to him.

Tommy arrives in his trademark leather pants and no shirt. The fans, especially the girls, go crazy for him.

Tommy high-fives the guys, and kisses the girls. Then he pulls a big wad of cash out of his pants and throws it into the crowd.

But the fans save their biggest reaction for Thorn- they cheer him wildly.

INT. HOLLYWOOD RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

The Snakes are tuning up their instruments, getting ready to record. Each of them now has a personal roadie/tech to assist with their equipment.

Booze is everywhere, and the room is thick with cigarette and marijuana smoke.

Baker Thomas is in the control room, twisting knobs and checking levels. He speaks into the microphone that broadcasts onto the studio floor:

BAKER
(into mic/over speakers)
Can we get a level check on the guitar?

Loitering behind Baker is MATT MCKINNEY, a young hot-shot producer in an expensive suit and far too much gold jewelry.

He takes the mic from Baker.

MCKINNEY
(into mic)
Never mind that. Let's just get started.

Baker and McKinney exchange a look. McKinney stares Baker down.

MCKINNEY
Trent wants to get this done as fast as possible. No fucking around.
(into mic)
Any time you're ready, Brian.

LATER:

Thorn is just watching as Brian, Paul and Tommy play- each musician is working separately on his individual part, to be put together later into a track.

Thorn slips away from the grasping hands of the groupies surrounding him and into a--

PRIVATE ROOM

-off of the main studio floor.

There are piles of music magazines on the table, and Thorn picks them up and pages through them obsessively, staring at the pictures.

LATER:

A huge pile of discarded magazines is on the floor.

Cole enters and sees Thorn just sitting there, staring with unbelievable intensity at a magazine in his hand.

COLE

Thorn?

Thorn doesn't seem to hear him.

COLE

Thorn- what the fuck are you looking at?

Thorn motions Cole over, and shows him the magazine photo he's staring at.

It's a shot of Trent, posing proudly with one of his spandexed and hairy metal bands.

In the background, barely visible, a woman sits, alone. Thorn points to her.

COLE

Yeah? So what?

THORN

It's Claudia.

It is Claudia. She's older, more distant, almost disappearing into the background of the picture.

THORN

It's her.

COLE

This is fucking trouble, Thorn. Let it go.

THORN

No.

Thorn stares him down. Cole sees how serious Thorn is, and just shakes his head.

COLE
(resigned)
Fuck.

EXT. MELROSE AVENUE - DAY

Cole, in a hat and sunglasses, is parked in his suped-up hot rod, watching the shoppers.

Claudia emerges from a store with two handfuls of bags. She looks older and more troubled, like in the magazine picture.

Cole exits the car and walks alongside her.

She stares at him for a long beat, before she finally recognizes him.

CLAUDIA
Cole.

Cole grabs her by the arm and escorts her towards his car.

CLAUDIA
Where are we going?

COLE
Just get in the car.

She does, and Cole squeals away down Melrose.

INT. THORN'S MANSION - DAY

Thorn, wearing his most amazing rock and roll suit, paces back and forth, constantly peeking out the windows.

EXT. THORN'S HOUSE

Cole roars up.

When Claudia steps out of the car, she just stands and stares at the sheer scale of Thorn's house and the grounds.

INT. THORN'S HOUSE

Claudia enters, and Thorn descends the big staircase to meet her in the foyer, while Cole lingers in the background.

Thorn and Claudia just look at each other, too emotional to speak. Finally Claudia manages-

CLAUDIA

What a beautiful house. Do you live here all by your self?

THORN

Yeah.

(beat)

I'll show you around.

Claudia follows Thorn.

They pass through dozens of rooms, decorated in a variety of styles with seemingly no unifying theme.

Some walls or ceilings have replicas of famous paintings (one domed room has a replica of the roof of the Sistine chapel), while others just have tacky paintings of naked women.

SISTINE CHAPEL ROOM

Claudia spins around, staring at the ceiling.

CLAUDIA

Why did you do this?

THORN

(shrugging)

I don't know. I had to do something.

BEDROOM

A huge stereo system dominates Thorn's room- the speakers are the kind a rock band would use on stage.

Everything is covered with rare vinyl records, classic blues, country and rock rarities spanning the whole history of popular music.

Thorn opens the closet and shows Claudia his ultimate rock and roll wardrobe, designer leather and silk (with ornate patterns sewed on), hats, jackets, and all manner of rock star accessories.

Claudia sits down on the bed and picks up an ancient blues record.

CLAUDIA

I've never seen anything like this before. All these records.

Thorn takes the record and plays it.

A crackly voice comes out of the speakers- the music is clearly of another time- so pure and raw that it might as well be from another planet.

They sit and listen quietly. A tear falls on the album jacket.

THORN
What's wrong?

CLAUDIA
The music. It's so beautiful.

Thorn starts to kiss her tears away. Claudia's distant at first, but then responds passionately, and they fall together on the bed.

EXT. THORN'S BACKYARD - DAY

Thorn and Claudia are walking across his vast property.

A change has come over Claudia- she seems like the innocent young girl from Minnesota again, amazed by the beautiful gardens and everything else she sees.

Claudia looks at Thorn, in his flamboyant rock star clothes.

CLAUDIA
I saw your picture. Your album is in our house, and I saw you on the cover, but I never recognized you. You changed your name.

THORN
I'm having a party this weekend. I want you to come.

Claudia nods "OK."

EXT. THORN'S MANSION - NIGHT

Another party, with the same star-studded cast as before, and then some.

If anything, things are even wilder this time.

In Thorn's huge swimming pool, a pirate battle is raging- factions of the road crew and others have set sail on inflatable rafts and pool toys.

The Magic Rat is captaining a ship manned by the most psychopathic members of the crew. They're flying the Skull and Crossbones.

The battle rages with small garden implements, until The Rat and his crew use a pyrotechnic device (intended for a rock stage show) to launch a big flare at the other raft and light it on fire.

Everyone jumps off into the pool as their raft burns and melts.

THORN'S BACK STEPS

Thorn is surrounded by a crowd that includes Rikki, the singer from the Tiger Sharks, who's staggering around with a bottle in his hand.

RIKKI

(good-natured, drunk)

I've got nine fucking gold records
in my house! How many have you got
Thorn?

Thorn's ignoring him, staring off across the lawn, where Claudia is standing with Trent.

RIKKI

Let's face it, The Kingsnakes are a
good, second-level band. Maybe you
don't sell as much as us, but
you've got integrity, and at the
end of the day, that's what really-

THORN

Stay here.

Thorn and Cole enter the house.

LATER:

They return, Thorn carrying three framed gold records, Cole with something hidden in a sack.

THORN

Cole, do the honors.

Everyone takes a step back as Cole produces a shotgun from the sack. He uses the butt to smash open the gold record casings.

THORN

My weapon, please, sir.

COLE

Certainly.

He passes Thorn the gun. Thorn checks and fiddles with it.

COLE
Are you ready, squire?

THORN
Ready, my good man. PULL!

Cole throws the gold record high in the air, spinning vertically like a frisbee flipped on its side.

Thorn shoots it with the shotgun, shattering it into thousands of pieces. A rowdy cheer goes up from the partygoers.

LAWN - WITH TRENT AND CLAUDIA

Trent shakes his head in disgust. Claudia smiles at Thorn, then stops when Trent sees her.

Trent and Claudia are joined by Rigdon and Barnett. The two politicians are looking extremely prosperous, and are now protected by Secret Service agents.

TRENT
Congressmen, welcome.
Congratulations on the election.

Rigdon laughs and pulls out a newspaper clipping, which shows a photo of four smiling men, including Rigdon and Barnett, posing in front of the U.S. Capitol.

The headline reads: "California's Young Guns Storm the House."

RIGDON
(sarcastic)
It's a new day in America, and we're bringing government back to the people.

TRENT
How are you finding Washington?

BARNETT
Shit, Washington's cold and boring.
It sure ain't nothing like this.

In the background, Thorn shoots another gold record out of the sky.

Trent passes the congressmen some colorful brochures, full of pictures of Caribbean islands.

The brochures are labelled "The Epoch Corporation."

The congressman page through them.

BARNETT

And what line of business exactly
is the Epoch Corporation in?

Trent smiles, then laughs. After a beat, the congressmen
laugh too.

TRENT

The Kingsnakes are going to be
finishing their new album in the
islands- perhaps you'd like to
observe the recording process
firsthand.

BARNETT

Why do you send 'em all the way
down there? Aren't there any good
studios here in L.A.?

TRENT

Why pay for someone else's studio
when we own our own? And of course
there are certain tax advantages.

Trent sees Monica Starr walk by.

TRENT

But enough about business. They'll
be plenty of time to relax, too.

Trent beckons Monica over, and whispers something in her ear.

Congressman Barnett takes her by the hand and leads her off
into Thorn's isolated, maze-like--

GARDENS

In a spot far away from the party, Barnett grabs Monica and
starts kissing her, roughly. He grabs her skirt and pulls it
up to her waist.

MONICA

What the fuck are you doing?

BARNETT

What? You're a groupie, aren't you?

MONICA

I'm not a whore! I fuck who I want,
when I want!

BARNETT

That's not what Trent told me. He
told me you were mine. A gift. To
do with as I pleased. Or else he
would deal with you.

Monica is furious, but relents and lets Barnett grope her.

EXT. AIRPORT TARMAC - MORNING

A Hourglass private jet is waiting on the runway. A limo
drives up- inside are Monica and several of her groupie
clique, escorted by an armed Nordic mercenary.

Out the window, the girls can see the congressmen and their
entourage, fat, greedy middle-aged men in suits.

They elbow and whisper to each other with glee when they see
the girls- they're practically drooling.

The girls look terrified, but don't say a word.

EXT. RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

Thorn, alone, enters the studio he and the group have been
using.

LATER:

Thorn exits the studio. He's completely exhausted,
emotionally and physically.

He's carrying a tape.

EXT. 7-11 - VERY LATE NIGHT

Thorn pulls his hot rod into the parking lot. Claudia's in
the passenger seat.

The transients outside stare at them as they enter the store.

INT. 7-11

Thorn and Claudia are picking up tons of liquor, junk food,
anything they can get their hands on.

The total is over a hundred dollars, and Thorn pays with a
huge wad of cash.

Claudia never takes her eyes off Thorn the whole time they're in the store.

EXT. CHEAP MOTEL

Thorn pulls into the parking court of a cheap motel off the Strip.

He approaches the clerk's bulletproof glass box.

THORN
Captain and Mrs. Blood.

Thorn passes the clerk a hundred dollar bill, and the clerk gives him a room key.

INT. ROOM

Thorn and Claudia break into the liquor and goodies from the 7-11.

LATER:

The bed is a mess, covered with empty bottles and food wrappers. Thorn and Claudia are both good and drunk- Claudia can barely keep her eyes open.

THORN
I brought something for you. It's just a demo, but I wanted you to hear it.

Thorn puts the tape from the studio in a small portable player and presses "play."

It's Thorn, singing an emotional love song, over a rough "demo" rhythm track.

As the tape ends, Claudia is all over Thorn.

LATER:

They're in bed together- clothes are scattered all over the place.

CLAUDIA
I don't understand why you have to go.

THORN
He wants us to finish the album at this new studio down there.
(MORE)

THORN (cont'd)

We have to do what he says for now.
But that's all going to change.

CLAUDIA

How?

THORN

Our contract is only for two albums. That's how he does business- hype up a new group, then get a second album in stores as soon as possible. The second album is always trash- but by the time the fans know that, he already has their money. Trent doesn't believe a heavy metal group can be anything besides disposable. He uses them up, and he throws them away.

CLAUDIA

So, when you finish your second album...

THORN

I'll be free. We'll be free. And our album isn't trash. When it hits, we're going to be the biggest metal group in the world. We can go anywhere, do anything, and there won't be a goddamn thing he can do about it.

CLAUDIA

Really? It's really going to happen?

THORN

Really. I love you, Claude. I love you like I love the sound of the crowd, the force of it- like a fucking tornado. There's a moment, when I'm on stage, when it's right, when nothing else matters, there's no past, no future, no world outside- just me, and the band, and the kids.

(beat)

I love you like I love music.

LATER:

They're still sitting together, talking and planning excitedly, when the sunrise starts to lighten the window.

Thorn stands to go, and kisses Claudia goodbye.

She stands in the doorway and watches as Thorn drives away, the morning sun gleaming brilliantly off the sheet metal of his hot rod.

EXT. LAX TARMAC - DAY

The band and Cole are delivered by limo to a waiting Hourglass Records private jet.

Thorn joins them, driving his hot rod right onto the tarmac.

INT. TRENT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Claudia enters the bedroom, Trent is waiting.

TRENT
Where were you?

CLAUDIA
With Joanie, and Melissa. We
checked into the Hyatt.

Trent smiles benignly.

Claudia strips off her clothes and enters the bathroom to shower.

After she's in the shower, Trent notices the tape from Thorn hanging out of the pocket of Claudia's discarded clothes.

He pops it in a player and hears Thorn singing.

Trent, puzzled, listens for a minute, then pops the tape out and tosses it on a pile of other tapes.

INT. PLANE/EXT. SKY OVER THE ISLANDS - DAY

The plane is descending towards Trent's hideaway island.

Inside the plane, it's a party: everyone is drinking, drugging, and throwing things around.

Tommy has stripped completely naked and is banging on the door of the cockpit, trying to force his way in.

The plane banks sharply, coming in for its final descent, and Tommy tumbles backwards down the aisle.

EXT. COMPOUND - DAY

An SUV drives the group into the compound.

Since the congressmen's first visit, it's been improved upon- several new buildings have been added, including a concrete bunker that houses the recording studio.

Once the gate has closed behind them, a uniformed servant opens the SUV's doors, and the band stagger out.

They are greeted by STEPHAN, a towering, well-tanned blonde, blue-eyed man with an unplacable European accent and the tattoos of a soldier-for-hire on his biceps.

A large pistol is holstered on his belt.

STEPHAN

Greetings, gentlemen. Trent asked me to make you welcome. Your producer has already arrived. The studio is there.

He points to the bunker.

STEPHAN

Whatever you want, we can have it sent in- girls, booze, anything. There's no need for you to ever leave the grounds. Gentlemen, welcome to paradise.

INT. BUNKER STUDIO

A heavy bulkhead door closes behind the band as they enter and descend the stairs into the studio, ten feet underground- the only light here is artificial.

It's a totally state of the art studio, technologically miles beyond the one they were using in L.A.

Matt McKinney is waiting for them.

MCKINNEY

Welcome, boys.

THORN

Where's Baker?

MCKINNEY

Baker will be along. We've got a lot of work to do. Let's get started.

The band start work- reworking the songs they started in L.A., doing the same vocal, guitar part or drum track over and over again.

The clock on the wall creeps forward from midnight to six a.m.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - MORNING

The band stagger out of the studio and collapse into chairs by the huge pool, where they're immediately brought huge tropical drinks.

Ian Brown plies everyone with huge bricks of cocaine. Tommy and Brian happily indulge.

The compound is filled with all manner of dubious men and beautiful and dangerous women, a spectacular melange of party people who've descended on this island from every corner of the world.

A beautiful, dark-skinned ISLAND WOMAN approaches Brian and sits beside him.

ISLAND WOMAN

I have a powerful feeling from you.

BRIAN

(barely conscious)

What?

ISLAND WOMAN

You have a power. Something that touches others, in ways they cannot even explain. You are maybe an artist?

BRIAN

Guitar.

ISLAND WOMAN

But even this power you have is not enough for you? You are always wanting more.

BRIAN

I want to be a legend.

ISLAND WOMAN

The road you have chosen is dangerous. Many will not survive the journey. Perhaps this will offer you some protection.

She gives Brian some kind of voodoo charm on a necklace. He puts it on.

MONTAGE:

Several days, or maybe weeks pass in a drug- and sun-drenched haze.

The band stagger into the studio at night, then stagger out at first light to party until it's time to go to the studio again.

EXT. COMPOUND - NIGHT

At a late-night pool party, Tommy staggers up to Stephan and puts his arm around him.

STEPHAN

I think you're having a good time,
yes?

TOMMY

Yes.

Tommy and Stephan each notice that the other man's arms are covered in tattoos.

TOMMY

(re: one of Stephan's
tattoos)
Where'd you get that one?

STEPHAN

Biafra. It was done for me by the
Congolese tribesmen. It is a symbol
of bravery.

Tommy is staring in stoned amazement.

STEPHAN

I fought with them in the Congo
war. I am a soldier for hire.
(re: one of Tommy's)
And what about this?

TOMMY

It was bought for me by the
groupies of the Sunset Strip. It's
an ancient symbol of sexual power.

Both men laugh.

Thorn wanders by and into an isolated cabana.

INT. CABANA

It's almost totally dark inside. Thorn, exhausted, flops down on a divan.

Gradually, he becomes aware of someone else nearby, lurking in the shadows.

BAKER

Thorn.

THORN

Baker?

Thorn now sees Baker, who's smoking something from a small pipe. He looks like he's on death's door.

BAKER

Welcome to the party.

THORN

Why haven't you been at the studio?

BAKER

What's the point? Trent never wanted me for anything besides a figurehead anyway. Maybe sell a few extra records- "the great and generous record company president rescues the washed-up producer from obscurity." Maybe these kids' older brothers might tell them who I was once.

THORN

It doesn't have to be like that.

BAKER

Yes it does.

THORN

You produced Diana Do-Right!
"Juvenile Dementia-" that fucking album was everything to me.

BAKER

That was a long time ago. You can't live in the past.

They fall silent.

Baker offers Thorn the pipe, Thorn declines. Baker lights it up, and exhales a big cloud of cocaine smoke.

POOLSIDE

Tommy and Stephan are still hanging out.

Tommy is fidgeting uncontrollably. Stephan looks at him sympathetically.

STEPHAN
I'm thinking perhaps you need
something to level you out?

Stephan motions for Tommy to follow him to a poolside--

CABANA

-where Ian Brown is holding court, surrounded by congressmen Rigdon and Barnett, and their entourage.

Monica and her groupie girls are here, draped over the men in suits. Monica sits on Barnett's lap, staring blankly into space, dark circles under her eyes, a shadow of her former self.

She's drugged out of her mind.

Stephan whispers something in Ian's ear. Ian produces a tiny vial of brown powder and spoons some out for Tommy.

Tommy snorts it. A few seconds later, he stops fidgeting and a blissful look takes over his face.

TOMMY
Oh my God. What was that?

Stephan and Ian look at him, laughing.

TOMMY
What's so funny?

STEPHAN
You have just snorted heroin in
front of two United States
congressmen!

McKinney enters.

MCKINNEY
Tommy, you're needed in the studio.

TOMMY
Give me a minute.

After a few beats of trying to compose himself, Tommy tries to stand up, only to stagger sideways and collapse into the arms of Rigdon.

The congressman and the rock star just look at each other and giggle, and Tommy finally manages to stand up and follow McKinney out.

INT. STUDIO

The band ooze their way in- McKinney is waiting for them.

MCKINNEY

We just got word from L.A. Trent is flying in tomorrow. He wants to see results.

The band reluctantly pick up their instruments and get back to work.

EXT. COMPOUND - NIGHT

Trent and Claudia are driven into the compound by Stephan, in a tinted-glass, bulletproof SUV.

COMPOUND - POOLSIDE

A party has been prepared to welcome Trent. Trent hobnobs while Claudia sits alone.

Trent walks and talks alone with Ian.

TRENT

Everything running according to schedule?

IAN

We got the load in from Colombia yesterday. Two planes headed out to Mexico tonight. It'll be in Yuma by Tuesday, L.A. by Thursday. It looks like it's going to be a very profitable year for the Epoch Corporation.

They both smile.

IAN

Care to sample the product?

Ian produces some cocaine, and they both indulge.

Trent is now noticeably more animated and boisterous. He signals for Cole to join him.

TRENT

Cole! How are our boys?

COLE

Working their fucking asses off.

TRENT

Good. That's what I like to hear. And I want to assure you that all your work has not gone unnoticed.

COLE

Are you going us give us gold watches- "for years of valuable service to the company?"

Trent feigns a good-natured laugh.

TRENT

I'm producing a show. An all-day thing. At the Coliseum.

Cole is genuinely impressed.

COLE

The L.A. Coliseum?

TRENT

A hundred thousand kids. And your boys as the headliners. It sold out in twelve minutes.

Trent takes another big snort of cocaine, and laughs maniacally.

TRENT

Twelve fucking minutes. No advertising, no promotion. We can do anything now.

(beat)

Where's the band?

COLE

In the studio.

Trent calls across the lawn to Claudia.

TRENT

Come on baby, we're going to go see the band in the studio!

INT. BUNKER STUDIO - CONTROL ROOM

Trent, Cole and Claudia enter.

McKinney's here, looking down on the studio floor, where the band are blearily operating on little to no sleep.

Brian finishes the guitar part he was playing and slumps into near-unconsciousness on a nearby couch.

MCKINNEY

Ten tracks in the can. We just need to re-do the vocal on this last one.

TRENT

Excellent.

Trent gets on the mic that broadcasts from the control room down to the studio floor.

TRENT

(into mic)

Boys, I believe your manager has some news he'd like to share with you.

He yields the mic to Cole.

COLE

(into mic)

We're headlining a sold-out show at the L.A. fucking Coliseum!

The band are immediately wide awake- grinning, high-fiving each other. Even Paul Baldwin smiles.

Tommy plays a celebratory drum roll, knocking over part of his kit in excitement.

MCKINNEY

(into mic)

You guys can go celebrate. We only need Thorn for this.

The rest of the band and Cole exit.

EXT. COMPOUND - DAWN

Tommy, Brian, and Paul join in a fantastic, surreal celebration with the locals and assorted hangers-on.

The Island Woman paints Brian's face in a skeletal mask. Then Brian joins her and the other islanders in a ritual dance around a roaring bonfire.

Tommy and Paul are giddy, sharing a bottle of whiskey and a joint, constantly looking at each other and giggling, watching an amazing red sun rise over the Atlantic.

INT. BUNKER STUDIO

Thorn steps to the mic. McKinney presses a button to start an instrumental track.

Thorn starts singing- it's the love song for Claudia that he played her at the hotel, now with a full backing track by the Kingsnakes.

Through the glass, Thorn's eyes meet Claudia's.

Trent sees. He hears the lyrics and realizes Thorn is singing them directly to Claudia.

Trent looks back and forth between the two of them, stunned.

TRENT

(to McKinney)

Alright. That's enough. We'll fly 'em out tonight. Mix it down back in L.A.

MCKINNEY

But it's not-

TRENT

Stop it!

McKinney presses the button and stops recording, even though the song is only halfway over, and Thorn is still singing.

STUDIO FLOOR

Thorn looks at the control room, confused.

CONTROL ROOM

Trent grabs Claudia and practically drags her out of the room.

EXT. COMPOUND

Trent pushes Claudia into the waiting SUV.

CLAUDIA
But I need my bags!

Stephan arrives, throws Claudia's bags in the back of the truck, then climbs in with Trent.

The SUV speeds off and out of the compound.

EXT. HOURGLASS RECORDS PRIVATE JET

Trent's jet takes off from the island airstrip and quickly gains altitude.

INT. HOURGLASS RECORDS PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

The plane is cruising at a high altitude through the night. Claudia is asleep in the last row of seats.

Trent sits with Stephan and some of his flunkies, doing lines of coke and drinking shots of liquor.

Trent mutters ruefully, to the other men or maybe just to himself.

TRENT
Rock and roll. Fucking rock and roll music. Do you know what it is- what it really is? It's a fucking joke. A perversion of nigger music created by hillbilly trash.

Trent does a shot and slams the glass down.

TRENT
I pick the groups, the sound, tell them how to dress on the album cover so the little girls will get all wet over them. I get them on the fucking radio, push them up the charts, book the fucking concerts- I make them. These kids would worship anyone I put up there with the right look, the right sound- I can make a fucking rock star overnight! They call themselves artists?! I'm the fucking artist!

INT. HOURGLASS RECORDS BUILDING - TRENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Trent has dark circles under his eyes- he hasn't slept in days. He's shuffling around papers and talking on three phone lines at once.

TRENT
(into phone)
I don't give a fuck when we signed
the contract. I'm tearing it up.
The Tiger Sharks are the headliner.
Period.

(beat)
Don't talk to me about "washed up!"
You're fucking washed up!

(beat, then laughs)
Lawyers? Now you're talking to me
about lawyers? I will bury you in
fucking paperwork so deep you'll
never get out. This is not
negotiable. Have a nice day.

He slams the phone down and talks into another one.

TRENT
(into other phone)
What? What!? Hold please!

He slams the phone down on the desk and does a huge line of
coke, then sits back in his chair as the person on the other
end of the line can distantly be heard yelling at Trent.

INT. KINGSNAKES' PLANE - NIGHT

The Kingsnakes are on another private plane back to L.A.,
everybody fitfully trying to sleep.

EXT. L.A. COLISEUM

Very early morning outside the massive football stadium.

Fans are already lined up- many have slept there, setting up
tent cities along the sidewalk. The ones that are awake are
already passing around bottles and joints.

A few cops watch disinterestedly.

LATER:

The sun is higher in the sky now, and the fans have grown to
a mob, all pushing and shoving, jockeying for the best
position to enter the stadium first.

Fights are routinely breaking out.

The cops have been reinforced by several squads, in full riot
gear, who are using their shields to form a wall to keep the
fans in place.

INT. LIMO

Thorn and Cole are in the back of a limo, rolling through L.A., each lost in his own thoughts. Finally, Thorn speaks up:

THORN

What if this is it?

COLE

What the fuck are you talking about?

THORN

If this is the end, for the group. If this is all we ever get, and then it's all over.

COLE

Do you know where I'd be if it wasn't for this band?

Thorn shakes his head "no."

COLE

In jail, or dead. I hated that fucking town, there was no way I was gonna end up in the mines like my dad.

(beat)

But I couldn't play anything- I couldn't do anything, besides steal and fight. And then I heard you sing. And I thought, he is the one. This is the guy who can blow the doors off this stupid town, who can make it out on that highway and crank it up and just fucking run. This guy can go all the way.

(beat)

And I'd be damned if I was going to let any of those motherfuckers stop you.

Cole takes a big swig of whiskey.

COLE

If we can have the Coliseum- that's fucking it, man. We made it. If we're dead tomorrow, they can never take that away from us now.

(MORE)

COLE (cont'd)

And I wouldn't trade a second of it for anything. Not for a lifetime in their fucking world.

Cole pours two fresh glasses of whiskey from the limo bar and they drink in silence.

Then Cole taps Thorn and points out the window- they're approaching the Coliseum.

They see the army of cops standing at attention, the sunlight gleaming off their helmets and shields like a Roman legion.

When the kids see the limo, they rush towards it, but the police push them back with shields and nightsticks.

The violent scene disappears from Cole and Thorn's eyes as the limo enters a dark tunnel that leads under the stadium.

EXT. COLISEUM - AERIAL VIEW

The stadium is completely full.

The stage is at one end of the field, and the floor of the stadium is completely covered with people, standing room-only, packed together like sardines.

Above the stadium, several news and police helicopters circle.

INT. UNDERNEATH COLISEUM - LOCKER ROOM

The Kingsnakes' dressing room is a football locker room.

The thumping bass of a band playing above can be heard through the ceiling, shaking the light fixtures.

The band and Cole are sitting around, enjoying pre-show refreshments.

A LACKEY of Trent's enters.

LACKEY

Cole. Thorn. Trent wants to see you.

He motions for them to follow and they do. The rest of the band watches, surprised.

HALLWAYS UNDER STADIUM/COMMAND CENTER

They follow the lackey through the hallways full of wanna-be and never-will-be heavy metal bands, tuning instruments, putting on make-up, and hairspraying themselves.

TRENT'S COMMAND CENTER

Has been set up in a wide open space in the bowels of the stadium. Several of Trent's employees are floating around, answering phones and speaking into walkie-talkies.

A squad of Nordic mercenaries are performing security duty, armed with state-of-the-art semi-automatic weapons.

The lackey guides Thorn and Cole to a private room that's serving as Trent's office.

Stephan and one of his sidekicks are keeping armed watch over the office and Claudia, who sits alone on a couch, staring into space.

Trent ignores the visitors and does a huge line of coke. Finally, he speaks to Cole-

TRENT

About the running order. We need you to do about twenty minutes.

Cole's draw drops- he's stunned. Then he explodes.

COLE

Twenty minutes!? Are you out of your fucking mind?! We're the fucking headline act!!

Trent's mouth spreads into a thin, evil smile.

TRENT

This is a festival event. We're promoting our roster- there is no headline act. Everyone gets the same time.

COLE

(quietly)

You motherfucker. Who is it? Who's the headliner- the fucking Tiger Sharks?

Trent chuckles.

TRENT

It's the business, Cole. The business we've both chosen. This is rock and roll.

Thorn, who has been listening quietly, suddenly turns on Trent.

THORN

You don't know anything about rock
and roll!

Trent laughs at him.

TRENT

No? I know more than you ever will,
Thorn. You think you're some kind
of messiah- sent to save these
little middle-class brats from
their imagined oppressors- it's all
bullshit! This is vaudeville, Thorn-
you're a clown- you get up there
and do your little act, and I, out
of the goodness of my heart, throw
you a few pennies for your effort.

Trent looks at Claudia.

TRENT

(to Thorn)

You've never been able to save
anyone, have you?

Thorn glares at Trent with pure hatred.

Claudia is looking extremely anxious, looking back and forth
between the two men.

THORN

We don't need you. Claudia's
leaving you. When the album comes
out, we're both finished with you
forever.

Trent's confidence is unshaken.

TRENT

Is this true, Claudia?

CLAUDIA

(very shaky)

Yes.

THORN

She's always loved me. Always.
There are things between us that
you could never understand.

TRENT

Is that so? She's my wife.

CLAUDIA

I've never been your wife- I'm your property! I was a trophy to you- the lost little girl you could scoop out of the gutter and show off to your stupid fucking friends!

THORN

That's all over now, Claudia.

TRENT

Is it? You're going to take her away from me? With what? Without me, you have no band, no money. Your royalty checks all come to me. The house, the cars, they're mine. They were always mine. I own you, Thorn.

Thorn starts to say something, but Trent cuts him off, grinning evilly.

TRENT

But you think you can get out of your contract when your album comes out? Those tapes will never see the light of day- It's just a write-off for us now.

(beat)

It's all over for you, Thorn. And tomorrow, we'll scoop another bunch of hairsprayed little pricks off the Strip, throw on some studio tricks, and put their album in the stores where yours would've been. And all those fucking kids you love so much- they'll never even notice the difference. In a month, they'll have forgotten you ever existed.

(beat)

Now, I believe you have a show to do.

Trent signals to the mercenary, who escorts Cole and Thorn out, practically at gunpoint.

CLAUDIA

Thorn!

Claudia tries to stand up and run after him, but Stephan physically restrains her.

EXT. FLOOR OF THE COLISEUM

The Snakes walk out from underneath the stands to the area underneath the massive stage, escorted by a squad of gun-wielding mercenaries, who push everyone, including the police, out of the way.

They can hear the crowd, but can't see it- the roar is unbelievable. Gradually it becomes clear, the crowd is chanting-

CROWD
SNAKES! SNAKES! SNAKES!

Brian, wearing his most extravagant black magician suit, fingers the charm the Island Woman gave him.

Cole stands and watches as the band climbs the stairs to the stage, smiling slightly in spite of everything.

STAGE

The sun is setting behind the top of the Coliseum as the band walks on.

The crowd greets them with a roar like nothing any of them has ever heard before, far louder than the Pure Rock festival.

Thorn is the last one on.

At center stage, he strikes the eternal rock star pose, microphone in one hand, other fist in the air.

And then the music starts.

The band is at the top of the game- they will never sound any better, or any louder, than this.

Thorn prowls the front of the stage, looking down at the fans- there's a huge crush at the front of the stage- kids are pushing forward and the ones at the very front are being smashed against the crowd control barriers.

LATER:

The Kingsnakes are just finishing one of their best songs. As soon as they hit the last note, an ANNOUNCER comes over the PA.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Ladies and gentlemen, the Crawling
Kingsnakes.

The crowd buzzes with confusion. The band look at each other, and Thorn motions them to go into their next song.

They start playing, but only for a few seconds. Then the power is cut. The only sound is Tommy maniacally banging his drums.

The crowd starts to boo and howl.

BRIAN

What the fuck is going on?

Trent's crew, escorted by the mercenary goon squad, enter from the side of the stage and start taking apart the Snakes' equipment.

The Magic Rat, Cole, and the Snakes' own road crew hop onstage and try to block Trent's crew.

A fight breaks out, and the Snakes' crew is badly outnumbered.

Brian jumps into the fray as they try to take away his guitar amps. A mercenary cracks him on the skull with the butt of his gun.

Brian collapses, unconscious.

Tommy, in frustration, starts demolishing his own drum kit, smashing it with his cricket bat, throwing pieces at Trent's roadies, all over the stage, and into the audience.

Absolute chaos has broken out in the crowd too, with some fans trying to climb onstage, and others fighting among themselves.

CORRIDOR UNDERNEATH THE COLISEUM

From above, the crowd can be heard in a near-riot state.

The band, Cole, and the crew stagger down the hall, bruised and beaten. The Rat and another roadie carry Brian.

Tommy has completely lost it- he screams obscenities and slams his fists into the walls until they bleed.

Riot police are running everywhere, some of them pushing kids in handcuffs.

Medics are carrying injured kids on stretchers to an impromptu "field hospital" which has been set up under the stadium.

The band see four cops push a long-haired handcuffed kid into a corner, and mercilessly kick and beat him with nightsticks.

TRENT'S COMMAND CENTER

Trent has a closed circuit TV hookup, and he's watching what's happening in the stadium.

Claudia sits nearby, next to Stephan, who is still keeping a very careful eye on her.

Trent's lackey rushes in, frantic and sweating profusely.

LACKEY

Trent, it's bad out there. The cops fired tear gas into the crowd. They're carrying kids out on stretchers.

Trent shakes his head in mock sadness.

TRENT

These things happen at all the big concerts. Kids nowadays just don't know how to control themselves.

A panicked POLICE LIEUTENANT enters.

LIEUTENANT

They're on the verge of a riot out there. You have to call off the show!

TRENT

No.

LIEUTENANT

I'm not asking, I'm telling you-cancel the concert!

Trent does a line of coke, then stares the cop down. Stephan and another mercenary flank Trent.

TRENT

This is my city. This is my show. And not even an act of fucking God is going to stop it.

The lieutenant goes for his walkie-talkie. Trent laughs at him.

TRENT

Who are you going to call? The chief of police? The mayor?

Trent picks up a phone.

TRENT

Allow me. They know better than to put me on hold.

The lieutenant stares in disbelief and puts his walkie-talkie away. Trent slams the phone down.

TRENT

Good. Now we'd appreciate if you'd help us out with the situation out there. You can coordinate with my security chief.

The lieutenant looks helplessly at Stephan and his automatic weapon.

LOCKER ROOM/DRESSING ROOM

The Tiger Sharks dressing room is the much more luxurious home team's locker room.

The band are sitting around in total silence, listening to the sounds of the rioting crowd from above.

They've grown fat and complacent with too much success.

Trent enters.

TRENT

Are you boys ready for the biggest show of your lives?

None of the band look him in the eye. Finally, Rikki speaks, very quietly:

RIKKI

We don't want to go on. It's a riot out there.

TRENT

You don't want to go on? You don't want to fucking go on!? Do you know what they say about you? They say you're washed-up, last years sound-you're a fucking punchline!

(MORE)

TRENT (cont'd)
But I still give you the headline
spot at the L.A. fucking Coliseum-
and you tell me you're not going
on!?

Trent stares Rikki down.

TRENT
You're fucking going on. Now.

The Tiger Sharks gather themselves and walk out of the dressing room as if they were going to their own funeral.

Trent watches as they walk down the corridor. Rikki leans over and vomits into a trash can.

EXT. COLISEUM - NIGHT

Night has fallen. It looks like a scene out of hell.

The floor of the stadium has fallen into complete chaos- there are several fires burning in the middle of the crowd.

The helicopters circling above shine spotlights down into the mayhem.

The Tiger Sharks take the stage and start playing.

They sound terrible- they're just not equipped to play a venue of this size anymore, if they ever were.

Rikki, dressed flamboyantly in shiny leather, is paler than ever, struggling to get any sound whatsoever to come out of his mouth.

The crowd starts to boo and throw things. A cup hits Rikki in the chest, and beer drips down his immaculate stage clothes.

The band struggle to the end of their first song and try to start the second.

The instrumentalists play, but Rikki freezes- he can't sing. The chorus of boos grows louder, until it drowns out the music.

Then a chant starts to rise.

CROWD
SNAKES! SNAKES! SNAKES!

Objects are raining down on the stage now. The Tiger Sharks flee. His bandmates have to practically carry Rikki off.

The stadium lights come on. When the crowd realizes the show's over, complete anarchy breaks out.

Several squads of riot police are now on the floor of the stadium, fighting with the crowd amid a cloud of tear gas.

People at the front are trying to get away from the gas behind them by climbing over the barriers in front of the stage, but security pushes them back.

There's a huge crush of bodies, smashed between the barriers and the crowd pushing them from behind.

UNDERNEATH THE COLISEUM - TRENT'S COMMAND CENTER

Trent is watching the chaos on his closed-circuit TV.

TRENT

Fuck.

He shoves the TV off its podium, and it smashes on the concrete. The sounds of rioting, sirens, and police radios, are audible from above and through the corridors under the stadium.

Trent's lackey enters, even more frantic than before.

LACKEY

Trent, you've got to do something- somebody's going to die out there!

TRENT

Put on some music.

LACKEY

What??

TRENT

I said put on some fucking music!

The scared employee activates the stereo that's been set up for Trent- music blasts out.

Trent pours himself a drink from a bottle of expensive liquor. Then he lights up a cigar.

The lackey is just standing, staring at Trent in disbelief.

TRENT

What are you looking at? Get the fuck out of here!

Trent throws the bottle at the man, and it shatters on the wall behind him. The lackey flees.

Claudia and Stephan sit silently in the background.

Trent turns up the volume on his music and lays back on the couch.

INT. COLISEUM UNDERGROUND PARKING AREA

It's a madhouse.

Kids have gotten into the parking area somehow, and they're running around, vandalizing cars, being chased by cops, or just looking for a safe place to nurse their injuries.

The Tiger Sharks are escorted into a car, which peels out as they frantically try to make a getaway.

The car pushes through the fighting cops and kids, as Rikki stares out the back window in blank-faced, stunned horror.

INT. HOURGLASS RECORDS BUILDING - TRENT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Trent sits alone in his huge office. There are no lights on, only the faint glow of a TV, broadcasting news.

TV NEWSCASTER

-turned into a nightmare, as a riot among the ninety-thousand plus fans in attendance left millions in property damage and scores of fans in area hospitals. Tempers were running high all day, with fans complaining of high ticket prices, overcrowding, and abuse by police and security. But things came to a head when the Crawling Kingsnakes, the most popular band in the world of heavy metal, played a set of less than twenty minutes.

When the mention the Snakes, a large picture of Thorn appears on the screen.

TV NEWSCASTER

Fans were reportedly furious as their favorite band left the stage. It's unclear at this time why the Kingsnakes played such a short-

Trent flips the TV off and picks up the phone.

TRENT
(into phone)
They're gone. Now.

INT. CRAWLING KINGSNAKES OFFICES - MORNING

The shabby business offices where Cole runs the Kingsnakes' affairs.

Several phones are ringing off the hook, as repossessors carry furniture out of the main office area.

COLE'S PRIVATE OFFICE

Paul Baldwin enters.

PAUL
Cole, what the fuck is going on?

COLE
It's over. We're off the label.
We've got lawsuits coming in from
all over-

Cole picks up a big pile of papers off the fax machine and tosses it in the air.

COLE
Brian's in the hospital, Tommy
disappeared- We're fucked.

One of the repossessors enters Cole's office. Cole brandishes a large and pointy music award at him, and the man quickly retreats.

PAUL
What about the album?

COLE
Trent owns the masters. I don't
think it's ever going to see the
light of day.

PAUL
Shit. What did we do to deserve
this, Cole?

Cole just shakes his head, doesn't answer.

PAUL
I don't give a shit about the
money. I just wanted to make music.
(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)
I just wanted people to hear what
we were doing.

COLE
I'll do what I can.

Cole pulls a big paper bag out of his bottom desk drawer. He reaches in and hands Paul a huge wad of cash.

COLE
Now get the fuck out of here.

They hug and Paul exits.

EXT. TRENT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Thorn drives down the street towards Trent's house. Thorn hasn't slept and is still wearing his stage clothes from the concert.

He parks a small distance away, then creeps down the street toward the house.

Thorn peeks through the window and sees Claudia and Trent eating breakfast together. Trent is talking to her quietly, earnestly.

They look neither happy nor unhappy.

Occasionally, Stephan enters the room, bringing Trent a phone call or fax.

Thorn watches for a while, then finally turns and creeps away.

INT. TOMMY'S MALIBU HOUSE - GARAGE

Tommy is buying heroin from a gold-chained DEALER. There are less cars here than before.

DEALER
Fifteen hundred, Tommy.

Tommy pulls out a wad of cash- he's way short.

TOMMY
Can't you spot me?

The dealer shakes his head. Tommy points to a beautiful sports car.

TOMMY
Take that. It drives like shit
anyway.

A look of sympathy crosses the dealer's face. He shakes his head "no."

DEALER

I can't take your car, Tommy.

His eyes fall on Tommy's huge drum kit.

DEALER

My little nephew loves the drums.
He has all your posters on his
wall.

LATER:

Tommy is alone in the garage. The drum kit is gone. Tommy sits in the cockpit of one of his sportscars, playing the radio.

He injects himself with heroin, and drifts away into dreamland, playing with the gearshift and steering wheel as if he was driving, even though the engine is off.

Eventually he drifts off into sleep.

LATER:

Tommy wakes up in the car cockpit. He climbs out and wanders the grounds of his mansion.

TOMMY

Ange? Ange? Where are you? I'm
fucking hungry! Ange?

Tommy enters the master bedroom. There are empty dresser drawers hanging open, as if someone had quickly packed and left.

EXT. HOURGLASS RECORDS BUILDING - DAY

A crowd of protestors has formed outside, marching and chanting.

Many of the signs are religious in nature, with slogans like:

"Heavy metal is Satan's music!"

"No More Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll for Our Children!"

"Hourglass Records Corrupts our Youth!"

Some of the protestors are smashing and burning heavy metal records.

A TV REPORTER is interviewing the leader of the most fervent protestors, Monica Maloney, a badly aging woman in her 30s, wearing sensible business clothes and dark sunglasses.

As they zoom in on her, it becomes clear that she was once the groupie queen, Monica Starr.

TV REPORTER

Ms. Maloney, why are protesting today?

MONICA

Heavy metal music is corrupting our youth and putting them on the path straight to hell!

TV REPORTER

But why have you singled out Hourglass Records?

MONICA

Hourglass Records is the worst of the worst. This company is second to none in corruption. Not only do they sell this devil music to our children, they finance their operations through drug dealing- each part of this evil empire feeds the other!

TV REPORTER

What do you mean?

MONICA

These heavy metal records all glorify the use of marijuana, cocaine, and hard drugs. The concerts are all dopefests. And studies have shown that people who are high on drugs are more responsive to the kind of sounds these bands make. The more drugs the kids do, the more heavy metal records they buy- and the records tell them to do more drugs!

She's burning with anger now.

MONICA

But worst of all is the phenomenon of so-called "groupies-" let's call it what it really is- this music is leading our young girls into prostitution! We urge responsible parents across the country to rise up against this music- before it's too late for your own children!

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

The usual crowds of revellers are covering the street.

A KID lights up a joint right on the sidewalk.

A COP walks up and grabs the joint out of his mouth, throws it on the sidewalk and stomps on it.

KID

Hey, what the fuck?

COP

You're under arrest.

KID

You gotta be shitting me!

The cop starts to handcuff the kid. One of the kid's friends steps up and shoves the cop- in no time flat, a melee breaks out- kids fighting cops everywhere.

The fighting spreads up and down the Strip.

Soon, riot police, on horses or marching on foot, are sweeping down the Strip, arresting or beating anyone who gets in their way, while helicopters circle overhead.

MONTAGE:

A series of drug busts.

Kids busted for smoking pot on the Sunset Strip are interrogated and give up the names of their dealers.

The police raid sleazy Hollywood apartments and bust the dealers, who are in turn interrogated.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - DESERT OUTSIDE YUMA, ARIZONA - MORNING

SUPER: Yuma, Arizona.

A small propeller plane touches down at an isolated desert airfield.

One of the recently-busted L.A. dealers drives up in a cargo truck. Ian Brown climbs out of the plane and shakes hands with him.

Several workers start unloading bricks of pot and cocaine from the plane and into a false bottom in the back of the truck.

As soon as the first bricks hit the truck, DEA AGENTS appear from everywhere- they squeal up in Jeeps, and appear out of the hills surrounding the airstrip.

DEA LEADER
(through megaphone)
YOU ARE SURROUNDED! LAY FLAT ON THE
GROUND WITH YOUR HANDS ON YOUR
HEAD!

One of the workers tries to run and is hit in the leg by a sniper concealed in the hills.

The rest lay down and surrender.

INT. TRENT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The phone rings and Trent answers.

TRENT
(into phone)
Yeah.

INTERCUTTING:

Barnett is calling from an opulent D.C. mansion.

A sexy young woman who's obviously not his wife is asleep in his bed. A box of cocaine sits on the nightstand.

BARNETT
(into phone)
Long! What the hell is going on out
there?

TRENT
(into phone)
Why don't you fucking tell me! If
Brown talks we're all going down-
all of us!

BARNETT
 (into phone)
 We'll work something out. We can-

TRENT
 (into phone)
 Who the fuck do you think you're talking to? You'll work something out- now! I want this fixed.

BARNETT
 (into phone)
 Now hold on just a goddamn minute here. I'm a United States congressman. You don't give me orders-

TRENT
 (into phone)
 I don't give you orders!? I DON'T GIVE YOU ORDERS!? I put you in that big cushy fucking office, I made you, and don't you ever forget it. Fuck Congress. I buy and sell you, like everyone else.

BARNETT
 (into phone)
 You're making a big mistake, Long. That stuff is making you crazy.

Trent starts taking paranoid glances around his office.

TRENT
 (into phone)
 What the fuck are you thinking, calling me here, anyway? They're probably listening on this line right now!

Trent pulls hard on the phone, ripping the cord from the wall and disconnecting the call.

Barnett hears a dial tone.

BARNETT
 (into phone)
 Don't hang up on me! Don't you dare hang up on me you shit!

TRENT'S OFFICE

Trent starts attacking all the other phones in his office, smashing the fax machines, ripping the wires out of the floor.

TRENT

You motherfuckers think you can bring me down? Come on! You'll have to do better than this! You want me- Come on up here and fucking get me!!

Trent's eyes fall on a copy of the Kingsnakes first album on his desk. He locks eyes with the picture of Thorn on the cover.

Trent stares at the picture with pure, paranoid hatred.

EXT. THORN'S MANSION - NIGHT

Thorn is sitting alone on his back patio, smoking, drinking, and listening to music over big speakers pointed out from his windows.

There's a cordless phone on the table next to him, only inches away.

Two figures appear, walking towards him across his dark lawn.

They emerge into the floodlights- it's Trent, escorted by Stephan, who's armed as always.

Thorn calmly smokes his cigarette as Trent and Stephan climb the steps and stand over him.

TRENT

Thorn.

Thorn ignores him and keeps on smoking.

TRENT

Thorn!

THORN

Let me finish my cigarette.

TRENT

What?

THORN

If you're going to kill me. Can I finish my cigarette first?

Trent laughs.

TRENT
I'm not going to kill you. You're
my number one seller.

Trent looks at the phone sitting by Thorn and laughs some more.

TRENT
Waiting for a call? She's never
going to call, Thorn.
(beat)
Someone once said there are no
second acts in American lives- do
you believe that?

Thorn just grunts.

TRENT
Perhaps the time has arrived for
you to give the matter some very
serious thought. Because this act
is coming to a close for you,
Thorn.

Trent looks up at Thorn's massive house in mock admiration.

TRENT
This is a beautiful home. I hope
you've made the most of it. Because
the repossessioners will be here in
the morning. For the cars, too. For
all of it.

THORN
I don't give a fuck, anyway.

Thorn lights up another cigarette. He offers one to Stephan, who shakes his head "no."

TRENT
How very noble. How very "rock
star." The cops will be here, too.
And the feds. DEA.

THORN
I'm not guilty of anything.

Trent laughs out loud.

TRENT

You're guilty of everything! Your name is on documents you've never even seen. You're part of a global conspiracy to manufacture, transport, and distribute marijuana, cocaine and heroin. Your fingerprints are everywhere. They all know who you are.

THORN

Then what are you waiting for? Bring 'em on.

TRENT

No. I'm not going to let you martyr yourself for those fucking kids. Do you believe there are worse things than death, Thorn?

Trent helps himself to a drink from Thorn's whiskey bottle.

TRENT

Of course you do. "It's better to burn than fade away?" You're going to fade away.

Trent's tone of voice turns exceptionally vicious.

TRENT

In fact, Thorn is already gone. Or should I say, there never was a Thorn?

(beat)

Your name is Scott Thornton. You were born in Chisolm, Minnesota. Your father was an itinerant worker in the iron mines.

(beat)

And now, I want to watch you crawl. Crawl back into the same nothing you crawled out of, all those years ago.

Trent drops some documents on the table in front of him.

TRENT

There's your passport. And your ticket. You're leaving tomorrow night, on the redeye. Goodbye, Thorn.

Trent and Stephan turn and leave.

EXT. THORN'S HOUSE - MORNING

An army of repossessioners, police, and FBI and DEA agents has formed outside of Thorn's iron gates.

A police "tank" uses its battering ram to knock the gates down.

THORN'S PROPERTY

Everything's deserted and seems to have fallen into disrepair some time ago.

Agents stumble over old bottles and other remnants of long-ago parties, hidden in the tall grass.

A peacock, thin from starvation, bursts out of the underbrush and surprises the cops, who point their guns and nearly fire on it.

INT. THORN'S HOUSE

The police search the house's wildly decorated rooms.

Everything's a mess, and covered in a thick layer of dust- most of the rooms look like they haven't been used in a year.

In one room they disturb a long-haired ROCKER sleeping on a couch. He wakes up and looks at the police with their guns trained on him, like he thinks it's a dream.

The lead COP questions him:

COP

Stay where you are! Where's Thorn?

ROCKER

Man, I was just crashing. I haven't seen him in months.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Cole is standing alone on a dark beach, lit only by the lights of the Santa Monica Pier in the distance.

A figure appears out of the darkness - Thorn.

THORN

Cole. How are you?

COLE

The group's over, I'm broke, and the cops have six warrants out for me, not to mention the feds, the IRS, and the DEA. Other than that, never better.

They both laugh, then go quiet.

THORN

We're a long way from fucking Minnesota.

COLE

Do you remember that apartment building in Duluth- so cold you could see your breath inside, brown fucking water, nothing to eat except what we stole.

Thorn smiles, remembering.

THORN

We used to stand up on that shitty roof and look out on the city, and say, "thank God we're not like them. Thank God we're not dead already, chained to some desk in a stupid little office for fifty years."

(beat)

From the first time I heard a rock and roll record on the radio, man, I fucking knew. I heard that big bass drum- boom! - and that guitar and I got fucking goose bumps. I was eleven years old and I knew this was it. All the rest was a lie. All the teachers and preachers and cops could talk for a million years and it would never add up to the three minutes on that record.

COLE

It's never changed. That's the one thing that's never changed.

THORN

I don't know. Sometimes I think it wouldn't haven't been so bad, being normal- A family, nice cushy job, the quiet little ranch house in the suburbs.

Cole is shocked by what Thorn is saying.

THORN
But then sometimes I'm a real
asshole.

They both laugh, then Thorn gets serious again.

THORN
Trent came to see me. He gave me a
ticket, and a passport.

COLE
What the fuck?

THORN
He just wants me gone.

COLE
Then go.
(beat)
We'll go together.

THORN
Where?

COLE
Spain. Maybe Morocco. Anywhere.

THORN
No.

COLE
Why not? That motherfucker wants to
let us run, I say we run!
(beat)
Come on! Just the two of us again,
like, the old days- plundering,
pillaging, laying waste beyond the
ramparts- Captain Blood and his
loyal first mate, terrorizing the
high seas!
(imitating Flynn in
"Captain Blood")
Up the rigging, you monkeys! Break
out those sails and watch them fill
with the wind that's carrying us
all to freedom!

Thorn smiles, but shakes his head again.

THORN

No. If I leave now, he wins. I'd be dead anyway. It'd just be slower, that's all. There's nothing for me out there.

(beat, smiles)

Anyway, the two of our ugly asses together would never make it through that fucking airport.

Thorn presses the ticket and passport into Cole's hand.

Cole stands up to go. They hug. Thorn whispers in Cole's ear:

THORN

Thank you, Cole. It was all worth it.

Cole starts to walk away across the beach, then turns back.

COLE

Thorn. You're worth more than all the motherfucking assholes in this business put together!

Thorn grins. Cole laughs his maniacal pirate laugh and walks away down the beach.

EXT. BAKER THOMAS' HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest bungalow in a modest neighborhood.

Thorn creeps up and knocks quietly on the door. Baker Thomas opens it a crack, looking shocked to see Thorn.

BAKER

(whispering)

Thorn! They're looking for you everywhere. I can't have you here!

THORN

(whispering)

Just give me five minutes. Please.

Baker considers, then finally relents and lets Thorn in.

INT. BAKER THOMAS' HOUSE

Baker's house is modest to the point of being depressing, ugly shag carpet, old, flickering TV, etc.

If it weren't for the gold records and rock memorabilia scattered everywhere, it could be the home of an unsuccessful insurance salesman.

Baker looks terrible. Evidence of a serious cocaine addiction is everywhere.

BAKER
Trent would kill me if he knew you were here.

THORN
Do you still have the tapes?

BAKER
What tapes?

THORN
From the sessions. Not McKinney's. Your mix.

BAKER
Trent will never put that album out in a million years. They're worth less than a blank tape now.

THORN
Do you have them?

BAKER
Why don't you just go, Thorn? Go down to Mexico. Do you need money? I don't have much, but-

THORN
No. I'm not going anywhere.

Thorn picks up a framed picture off the top of Baker's TV.

The picture shows a young Baker in the studio, posing with a flamboyantly made-up glam rock star, as a band lurks in the background. Everyone in the picture is stoned out of their mind, and grinning like mad.

THORN
Look at that. Diana Do-Right. I grew up on his records. The sound-it was just so fucking beautiful.

BAKER
I know. When did it all change, Thorn? What happened?

THORN

I don't know. But it's not over yet. We're not dead yet.

Baker shakes his head.

BAKER

What can we do? Trent owns everything now. He tells them how every group should sound, which tracks go on the album- the producer's nothing but a glorified button pusher. If I go against Trent now I'm a dead man.

THORN

True. If you don't step out of line, you'll stay alive. You'll stay here, and watch those pictures on the wall fade until even you can't remember what you used to be. Is that what you want?

Baker shakes his head and mumbles uncertainly.

THORN

No! You are the great Baker Thomas- you deserve more than this! We can make music again. Forget the record companies, forget Trent, forget everything. We can just make music.

EXT. TRENT'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Claudia is sitting alone in a garden behind her house.

One of Stephan's mercenaries stands guard over her.

Thorn creeps onto another part of the property. He surreptitiously approaches a servant, whispers to him and hands him a note and a wad of cash.

Thorn steals away.

The servant approaches Claudia's table with a drink, and places it on the table, subtly placing the note next to it.

INT. TRENT AND CLAUDIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Claudia is laying on their own bed, staring at the TV but not really watching it.

TV NEWSCASTER

(on TV)

Hearings began today in Congress into the music industry and its ties to drug trafficking and organized crime. The arrest of a major drug trafficker in Yuma, Arizona last week led to-

ON TV

A shot of hearings in Congress. Barnett and Rigdon uncomfortable, sweating it out.

BEDROOM

Trent enters- he looks like he's been out all night. He flips the TV off.

They do several lines of coke together. Then he lays down on the bed next to Claudia, and she holds him.

TRENT

I want things to be better between us Claudia.

She doesn't answer. Trent's tone becomes softer and more tender.

TRENT

Remember what we used to talk about? Leaving it all behind, moving up to Malibu- our own private beach, just us, and the waves.

Claudia is starting to drift away into the fantasy.

TRENT

It can still happen. But we need to be strong for each other. Everyone else leaves you in the end. That's the way this world is. It's just us now.

Claudia gets up and goes to the bathroom.

Trent's coke supply is empty- he goes to Claudia's purse and pulls out a gold makeup case full of the drug.

As he gets it out, a piece of paper falls out, too. It's the note from Thorn.

Trent opens it and reads:

VINE STUDIOS. MIDNIGHT.

INT. TRENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Trent and Claudia are sitting together- there's an uncomfortable silence between them.

The clock reads "11:30."

TRENT

Let's go.

Claudia doesn't respond, just stares like a deer in the headlights.

TRENT

I said, let's go.

Stephan, with a pistol, appears behind Claudia.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

Baker and Thorn enter the L.A. studio where the Kingsnakes recorded earlier.

Baker unlocks the control room. Thorn goes to the studio floor. All is dark, except one light shining on Thorn, where he stands at the microphone.

CONTROL ROOM

Baker pops in a tape he brought with him.

The music for Thorn's song for Claudia starts to play, performed by the Crawling Kingsnakes in all their glory (the track Thorn was supposed to sing over in the islands, but never finished).

STUDIO FLOOR

Just as Thorn starts singing, Trent, Stephan, another mercenary and Claudia enter the studio floor behind Thorn.

Thorn has the headphones on, listening to his own performance, and he can't see or hear the people behind him.

Thorn continues singing--

It's the best performance of his life. He sings it purely, beautifully, perfectly, no posturing for an audience, no distractions, singing straight from his soul.

Claudia can't do anything but watch, terrified, as Trent starts talking quietly to the unhearing Thorn:

TRENT

You stupid motherfucker, Thorn.
They'll never find your body. There
isn't even anyone to find. Scott
Thornton disappeared years ago,
from Chislm, Minnesota. There
never was a Thorn. He has no social
security number, no identification.
You don't exist.

(to Stephan)

Do it.

Thorn is coming to the climax of the song. Stephan points the pistol at the back of his head, but doesn't pull the trigger.

Claudia tries to run to Thorn, but the other mercenary holds her back.

TRENT

(to Stephan)

What are you waiting for? Do it!

Up in the booth, Baker is watching the scene horrified. But he keeps the tape rolling.

Stephan waits for Thorn to finish singing. Then he gently pulls the trigger.

Thorn's brains are scattered all over the studio. He falls forward on the microphone stand, dead.

Claudia crumples to the floor, wailing.

In the booth, Baker Thomas ejects the tape and runs for the exit.

TRENT

SHOOT HIM!

Stephan hesitates as Baker scrambles for the exit. Then Stephan fires several shots, shattering the control room glass.

But Baker has already escaped out the door.

Trent glares at Stephan, furious. Then he kneels by Claudia and puts his arms around her.

INT . BAKER THOMAS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Baker has the tape from the session, labelled simply "Thorn," along with some other tapes labelled "Kingsnakes Sessions - Thomas Mix."

He wraps them in protective plastic and puts them in an envelope, then addresses it.

EXT. BAKER THOMAS' HOUSE

Baker walks out of his house and drops the envelope into a mailbox.

He walks back. As he stands on his porch, the other mercenary who was at the studio points a gun at his head.

Baker stands serenely as the gun fires. He falls down, dead.

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE LOS ANGELES - HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - NIGHT

Some of Stephan's men carry two bodies, wrapped in plastic, onto a construction site where a new housing development is being carved out of the desert.

They throw the bodies into a huge hole and use a bulldozer to bury them.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - LINCOLN MEMORIAL - NIGHT

Congressman Barnett passes a very shady-looking Chinese man a thick envelope full of cash.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Ian Brown is standing alone as other prisoners exercise around him.

The prison guards do nothing as another prisoner approaches Brown from behind and cuts his throat.

EXT. TOMMY'S MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

Tommy wanders his property, at loose ends.

He enters the garage where his massive drum kit once stood. He stares at the empty space for a while, turns and walks away.

POOLSIDE

Tommy's laying by the pool, stoned out of his mind. He cooks up a big shot of heroin and injects himself.

Then he stands up, unsteadily, and jumps into the pool. He sinks like a stone.

INT. TRENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Trent's sitting at his desk. For the first time in ages, he looks calm and happy.

A TV is playing, muted.

He's on the phone:

TRENT
 (into phone)
 No. We don't have any comment at
 this time. I'm sorry, I have to go.
 My wife is on the other line.

Trent presses a button to switch phone lines.

TRENT
 (into phone)
 Baby. How are you?
 (beat)
 Baby. Calm down. Take a pill.
 Stephan will get you whatever. It's
 going to be OK.
 (beat)
 Baby. It's going to be OK. I have
 the papers right here on my desk.
 Malibu. We got the house. Right on
 the beach. What we always wanted.

Trent notices something on the TV.

TRENT
 (into phone)
 I have to go. I'll call you later.

He hangs up and turns up the TV volume.

ON TV

A press conference on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Congressman Barnett is addressing a mob of REPORTERS. Barnett wears a large cross around his neck.

REPORTER
 Would you like to address the
 rumors of your own personal
 struggles with drug abuse?

Barnett takes a dramatic pause.

BARNETT

I'll be the first one to
acknowledge I've made mistakes in
the past. But today, I am a new
man. The road was hard, but,
through all my struggles, there was
someone who never left my side.

Barnett's dowdy, middle-aged wife joins him. She's wearing a
cross and carrying a bible.

They pose for pictures and the press eats it up.

REPORTERS

What about the investigation of the
music industry?/ The accusations of
a massive international drug
smuggling ring?/ Do you know
alleged kingpin Ian Brown was
murdered in jail?

BARNETT

We now know that Brown was nothing
more than a messenger boy, carrying
small local shipments for the man
who oversees drug distribution for
the entire music business in Los
Angeles- Hourglass Records
president, Trent Long.

Barnett displays a diagram, showing a "pyramid" of names and
faces, with Trent's picture at the very top.

TRENT'S OFFICE

Trent is staring at the TV, boiling over with fury.

TRENT

Motherfucker.

He pulls a pistol out of his desk drawer.

TRENT

MOTHERFUCKER!

He shoots the TV, and it explodes. He stands up and looks
down into the streets below--

The building is being surrounded by police. The nearby
streets are closed with roadblocks.

Trent's secretary comes on the intercom:

SECRETARY (V.O.)
Trent, the police are on the phone.
They want you to-

TRENT
(into intercom)
Tell them to go fuck themselves!

A high-powered corporate LAWYER enters Trent's office, frantic.

LAWYER
Trent, I must advise you-

TRENT
SHUT UP!

Trent waves his pistol about wildly, and fires a shot into the ceiling. The lawyer flees.

HOURLASS RECORDS LOBBY

A SWAT team rushes through the lobby, past the stunned receptionist.

TRENT'S OFFICE

Trent does a huge line of coke off his desk, then goes to the window, screaming at the police below.

TRENT
Come on, you motherfuckers!

Trent grabs a submachine gun and loads a clip.

HOURLASS RECORDS - LOWER FLOOR

Armed and armored police storm through, passing stunned workers in their cubicles.

The police rush up a staircase and emerge on the--

SUB-PENTHOUSE LEVEL

Just below Trent's office. Trent's secretary has fled, and the area is completely deserted.

Police helicopters are circling the building and broadcasting a message to Trent:

COP IN HELICOPTER
(over speakers)
Long! Drop your weapon and lay flat
on the floor!

TRENT'S OFFICE

Trent does another big line of coke and screams:

TRENT
I am above your laws, and your
petty fucking morality! I am a God-
I will rain down on you like a
plague- I will bring down lightning
upon you!

Trent opens fire at the helicopters, pulverizing the glass walls of his office.

He hides behind his desk as the police return heavy fire from the choppers.

A few long beats of silence. The SWAT team on the floor below is scaling the side of the building, and they creep onto the balcony that surrounds Trent's floor, then storm the office.

But Trent's gone. The police notice a ladder that runs inside the shaft of the glass elevator in the center of Trent's office.

The ladder leads up, to a hatch.

ROOF

The cops climb out of the hatch, onto the roof. You can see the curvature of the earth from here.

Trent stands with his back to the cops. His arms are outstretched over the city, as if he's trying to hold it in his arms.

TRENT
(quietly, to the view)
You are mine.

Police and news helicopters are circling overhead.

One of Trent's hands still clutches his gun.

SWAT TEAM LEADER
Drop the weapon!

TRENT
(to the view)
Now fall, California. Into the
ocean. FALL!

Trent turns and opens fire the cops.

They all return fire simultaneously, hitting Trent with a barrage of bullets, and sending him plummeting off the edge of the building.

INT. LAX AIRPORT - NIGHT

Cole, with only one small bag, boards a flight.

COLE (V.O.)
After the band broke up, Paul Baldwin retired as a performing musician. Working under an assumed name, he became one of the most respected session musicians in the business.

INT. STUDIO

A very cheesy pop act, a band that can't play fronted by a girl who can't sing, is recording.

Paul is helping all the musicians through the song like a patient teacher, as a young hot-shot "producer" in a fancy suit hovers uselessly in the background.

EXT. MEXICAN VILLAGE - DAY

COLE (V.O.)
Brian James disappeared completely. Dark rumors and innuendoes swirled around him. The most persistent placed him in Mexico, where it was said he had spent several months trying to make his image disappear in a mirror. The local villagers held him in awe, believing him to be a black magician of the highest power.

The dusty streets of a tiny Mexican town.

A hunched-over, cloaked figure in black, that might or might be Brian James, makes his way down the street.

The locals point and whisper, and the young girls stare with wide eyes.

The figure fingers something around his neck- it's the charm, from the Island Woman.

EXT. TOMMY'S MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

Tommy floats in the pool, dead.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER:

The NEW OWNER of the property, a proper millionaire, is touring the grounds with his architect.

He looks at the pool and shakes his head. Keeps walking. Then he stops and looks again.

NEW OWNER
Is that... Shaped like a...

The architect nods. The new owner is struck dumb.

LATER:

The new owner watches with satisfaction as bulldozers crush Tommy's house, and earth movers fill in the pool.

EXT. TRENT'S ISLAND - THE COMPOUND - DAY

The Hourglass Records compound is now deserted. It's a beautiful ghost town- everyone seems to have just picked up and left in the middle of a party, leaving drugs, drinks, food, everything where it was.

An immense stereo system is blasting rock music.

A local construction crew moves in with bulldozers and other heavy equipment.

They flatten the compound until it might as well have never existed.

INT. CONGRESS

Congressman Barnett is making a passionate speech. He still wears the very prominent cross around his neck, and orates like a Bible Belt preacher.

COLE (V.O.)

After a series of closed-door meetings, the focus of the congressional investigation turned away from drug trafficking and towards the music itself, and its alleged effects on the youth of America.

BARNETT

I intend to prove that rock lyrics send irresponsible, violent, and anti-Christian messages to impressionable teenagers!

MONTAGE:

A series of witnesses being paraded before the committee including several HEAVY METAL STARS, some defiant, some clearly cooperative, smiling at Barnett and saying whatever he wants them to say.

The former Monica Starr is also a witness.

INT. HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT

Rikki, the singer of the Tiger Sharks, is living in a run-down apartment, a shadow of his former self.

He's watching the hearings on TV.

HEAVY METAL STAR

(on TV, very nervous)

Yes, I suppose it's possible that our lyrics could be interpreted that way, but we never meant-

Barnett thunders from the podium at the sweating musician:

BARNETT

(on TV)

So you admit, under oath, that you intentionally distributed song lyrics to the youth of America that encourage illegal drug use, promiscuous sex-

Rikki mutes the TV, and turns on his stereo to full blast. It's a Tiger Sharks album.

On TV, Barnett is still berating the musician, who's completely lost his composure.

Rikki picks up a letter from his table. It bears the seal of the United States Congress- it's a subpoena.

He listens for a while to his own voice on the stereo, screaming out the song.

Then he picks up a pistol and shoots himself in the head. He falls forward onto the table, dead.

INT. KXLA RADIO

DJ Jesse Lane is sitting at his console. His studio is almost completely empty- everything's packed into moving boxes.

One of the last things left on the wall is a picture of Lane and Baker Thomas, dating from their glory days in the 1970s.

The red light goes on and Lane is on the air, with his traditional upbeat introduction.

LANE

(into mic)

Good evening, this is Jesse Lane on KXLA radio, coming to you live with real rock and roll straight from the golden streets of the wild west!

(beat, Less upbeat)

I got some news today. KXLA has decided to change formats so... this is my last show.

Behind the glass, two corporate suits are watching Lane. They exchange nervous looks.

He takes a long pause. The envelope from Baker is sitting on his console. He pulls a tape out and pops it in.

LANE

(into mic)

This is a world premiere.

INT./EXT. TRENT'S NEW MALIBU HOME - DAY

Movers are carrying Trent and Claudia's possessions into a beautiful new beachfront house.

EXT. BEACH

Claudia is sitting alone on her private beach, staring out into the ocean.

She's listening to KXLA. The world premiere Lane's playing is Thorn's song for Claudia, (with the full accompaniment of the Crawling Kingsnakes) recorded at his last session.

It sounds perfect.

Claudia just sits there and stares into the ocean.

She turns off the radio and there's no sound at all, except the crashing of the waves.

She's utterly alone.

INT. PAUL BALDWIN'S APARTMENT

Paul lives in a modest two-room apartment.

He hears the song on the radio, and smiles slightly.

INT. KXLA RADIO

Lane signs off and walks out of the studio. He takes the tapes from Baker with him.

INT./EXT. COLE'S FLIGHT

Cole's flight is taking off from LAX.

COLE (V.O.)

Trent, and Thorn- once there were gods in this business. We followed no laws, answered to no one, did what we wanted and took what we wanted and fuck you if you didn't like it.

The plane heads east, away from California, which turns gold as the sun sets into the Pacific.

HOURLASS RECORDS BUILDING - TRENT'S OFFICE

COLE (V.O.)

Now it's a bunch of middle managers, worried about their bottom line, like they were selling fucking soap.

The new president of Hourglass, a middle-aged businessman in a three-piece suit, is watching as Trent's old office is repaired and refurnished.

He looks disgusted at Trent's ostentatious furniture and decorations as moving men carry them out.

They're bringing in new furniture, which would look right at home in an insurance claims office in Omaha.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Most of the heavy metal records have been replaced by light pop or old dinosaur bands. The few metal records that remain are prominently stickered with "PARENTAL ADVISORY" labels.

A few copies of the Kingsnakes first album are consigned to the bargain bin.

EXT. DESERT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

The spot where Thorn and Baker were buried has become Any Suburb, USA. Bored teenage kids playing in the dusty streets.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

A group of these same suburban kids enter a traditional teenage drinking spot- empty cans and bottles everywhere.

Some of the kids are trading homemade cassette tapes.

Someone pops the tape into a boombox and the bootlegged complete second Kingsnakes album (as mixed by Baker Thomas, not McKinney) plays.

Behind the kids, someone has scrawled graffiti on a wall, in ten-foot high letters:

THORN LIVES.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. L.A. COLISEUM - SIDE OF THE STAGE

The moment at the disastrous concert, just as the Kingsnakes climbed onto the stage.

COLE (V.O.)

I think we all knew, even as they walked on the stage, that it was a fucking disaster- but man, for that one moment, just that one moment as I watched them climb the stairs...

Cole stands watching them climb the stairs, silhouetted against the sun. His eyes well up with pride.

COLE (V.O.)

We all wanted it so bad, the power and the glory and the hammer of the fucking gods, a hundred thousand kids screaming for us, for us, a bunch of scumbags from nowhere nobody ever wanted and look at us now motherfuckers! Bigger than the president, bigger than Jesus, bigger than anything and the music so loud and so wild and so perfect and god we wanted it. We all wanted it.

As they take the stage, there's a tear in Cole's eye.

COLE (V.O.)

We knew how it could have been- and we knew how it would be, instead.

(beat)

But we did it anyway.

The air explodes around Cole with the Kingsnakes' music and the roar of the crowd.

THORN'S POV

Thorn, at the front of the stage, looks out over the huge crowd, filling the football stadium.

He looks down at the kids in the front, and they look up at him, and it's perfect, the way it could have been.

Now he sees Claudia moving among them, ghostly, not really there but somehow there anyway, and Thorn is singing the song he wrote for her, to her.

She looks up at Thorn, catches his eye and smiles. For the first time, they both look perfectly, completely, happy.

COLE (V.O.)

In the end, Thorn became the dream,
became the music that could never
let him down when everything else
had- pure, perfect, corrupt,
incorruptible, loud, louder than
loud, beautiful, maybe you never
saw us never understood never knew
never took even a second to listen
no matter how loud it was no matter
how hard we tried how much we gave
just to get your fucking attention-
but we're still out here- laying
low, in the weeds, but we're here-
and if you don't like it, fuck you,
because he made it, you
motherfuckers, he finally made it.

Thorn thrusts his fist in the air, in the eternal rock star
pose, in front of the crowd of kids that seems to go on
forever.

FADE OUT