

ROADSIDE PICNIC

Pilot Script

"Full Empty"

by

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Based on the novel ROADSIDE PICNIC
By Arkady & Boris Strugatsky

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ACT ONE

EXT. HARMONT - PRE-DAWN

Heavy rain pelts the TENEMENTS and NEW CONSTRUCTION in equal measure. A post-contemporary boom town. *

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
*... I suppose that your first
important discovery, Dr. Pillman,
was the celebrated Pillman radiant?*

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

DR. VALENTINE PILLMAN doesn't want to be here.

PILLMAN
I wouldn't say so. The Pillman
radiant wasn't my first discovery,
it wasn't important and, strictly
speaking, it wasn't a discovery. *
It's not entirely mine either.

The INTERVIEWER realizes she's going to spend the rest of the interview grasping for a life raft.

INTERVIEWER
You must be joking, Doctor.
Everyone knows about the Pillman
radiant! Even schoolchildren.

Pillman may be the least charismatic person ever on camera.

PILLMAN
That's not a surprise. In fact, it
was discovered by a schoolboy.

EXT. HARMONT - DAWN

An abandoned building stands at the edge of a high, barbed wire wall. ARMED SOLDIERS patrol this perimeter.

A bespectacled man named FOUR EYES, hunched under a poncho, hides in an alley. A HUMVEE rolls through the soaked streets. When it's safe, he darts into the abandoned building.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
*I'd tell you his name but,
honestly, it's slipped my mind.*

INT. ABANDONED TENEMENT - DAWN

*

Four Eyes navigates over the debris of the stairwell. Reaching the third floor, he moves to a locked door. Working quickly, he uses his breaching tool to CRACK open the lock.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

So-

PILLMAN (V.O.)

- So the radiant was discovered by a schoolboy...

INT. ABANDONED TENEMENT APARTMENT - DAWN

*

Four Eyes removes the wooden planks that board up a shattered window. An alley separates him from the top of the barbed wire wall. Beyond it, obscured by the downpour, is the Zone.

*

*

*

PILLMAN (V.O.)

... the coordinates were published by a college student, and somehow it was named after me.

Four Eyes pulls a CABLE LAUNCHER from his kit bag. Aims. Fires it into the Zone.

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

The Interviewer blinks over her fixed smile.

INTERVIEWER

You can never tell who'll get credit for a discovery. Dr. Pillman, could you please explain to our viewers-

Pillman slouches even further back into his chair.

PILLMAN

- Of course. The Pillman radiant is very simple. Imagine taking a large sphere, giving it a spin, and firing a few rounds at it.

Pillman vaguely pantomimes bullets impacting a sphere.

PILLMAN (CONT'D)

The bullets would land on the sphere in a smooth curve.

(MORE)

PILLMAN (CONT'D)

The crux of my important discovery is the following simple observation: all six Visit Zones are positioned on the surface of the planet like bullets shot by a gun located somewhere between Earth and Deneb.

The Interviewer stares. Pillman obviously needs to clarify.

PILLMAN (CONT'D)

Deneb is the alpha star of Cygnus, while the Pillman radiant is just our name for the point in space from which, so to speak, the shots were fired. Which is how we've theorized the point-of-origin of the aliens.

EXT. HARMONT - DAWN

Four Eyes secures himself to the zip line. Steps out of the window and SLIDES, high speed, through the torrents of rain.

But, as Four Eyes passes OVER THE WALL... the rain stops. Four Eyes lands in the Zone. Outside the walls, the downpour continues. But inside them it's dry. Beautiful. Tranquil.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Thank you, Doctor. Dear viewers: finally, a clear explanation of the Pillman radiant!

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

The Interviewer leans forward.

INTERVIEWER

We know where they came from. We know they came and left without even attempting to communicate. So the world still wants to know: *why* did they come?

Pillman stares at her. Nobody understands what he knows. It's annoying. Frustrating. Small minds. He tries to be polite.

PILLMAN

I don't have an answer for that.

EXT. THE ZONE - PLAGUE QUARTER - DAWN

Four Eyes creeps through the empty streets. At some silent cue, he stops and stares off. Alert. Fight or flight as he sees, a few feet away from him, a fist-sized rock floating in the air. Weird.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

The day before yesterday was the nineteenth anniversary of the Visit. Would you like to say a couple of words on the subject?

Four Eyes, noticing the phenomena, cautiously presses on.

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

Pillman goes silent. Thinking. The Interviewer feeds him-

INTERVIEWER

What, in your opinion, is the most important discovery of the last two decades?

PILLMAN

The fact of the Visit.

INTERVIEWER

Pardon me?

PILLMAN

The fact of the Visit is not only the most important discovery of the last nineteen years, it's the most important discovery in human history. It doesn't matter who these aliens were. Doesn't matter where they came from, why they came, why they left so quickly, or where they've vanished to since. What matters is that we now know for sure: humanity is not alone in the universe. I'm afraid the Institute of Extraterrestrial Cultures could never make a more fundamental discovery.

EXT. THE ZONE - DAWN

Four Eyes CRUNCHES through the frosted green sprouting from the asphalt. An urban locale taken back by nature. Decades-old military TANKS lay abandoned all around him.

*

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Actually I was referring to technological discoveries. Discoveries that our engineers on Earth can use.

Four Eyes stops. Staring at a pile of rubble. Rebar sprouts out of the concrete. But what's cool is: the large block of concrete is suspended in the air. Floating. Fascinating.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

After all, many distinguished scientists believe that the items we've found could completely change the course of human history.

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

PILLMAN

I'm afraid I don't belong to their number. And I'm not an expert on specific discoveries.

INTERVIEWER

For the last two years, you've acted as the director of the International Commission on the Problems of the Visit.

Pillman blinks at her. This may not be a simple puff piece.

PILLMAN

Correct. Although that hasn't been announced publicly. In any case, I'm not involved in the research on extraterrestrial culture. I, along with my colleagues, represent the international scientific community on decisions about the internationalization of the Visit Zones. We make sure no one outside the Institute gets access to the alien, um, artifacts discovered in the Zones.

INTERVIEWER

There are others with designs on them?

PILLMAN

Yes.

INTERVIEWER
You mean "stalkers"?

Pillman is very familiar with the term. He condescends with-

PILLMAN
I'm not familiar with the term.

EXT. THE ZONE - DAWN

On full alert, Four Eyes bends down to grab a bit of broken asphalt. He tosses it at the floating debris. It HITS and CLATTERS to the ground.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
That's the slang term for the men and women who, despite the grave risks, sneak into the Zone and smuggle out whatever they find.

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

"Stalkers" are one of Pillman's areas of expertise.

PILLMAN
That's outside my area of expertise.

INTERVIEWER
What exactly is your area of expertise, Dr. Pillman?

Pillman, now certain he's underestimating her, hedges with-

PILLMAN
There's a constant leak of materials from the Visit Zones into the hands of irresponsible people and organizations. We deal with the consequences of such leaks.

INTERVIEWER
Doctor, could you be a little more specific?

PILLMAN
Wouldn't you rather move on to the arts? Aren't your viewers interested in-

INTERVIEWER

People hear amazing things about
these artifacts.

INT. THE ZONE - DAWN

Four Eyes stares at the enigma. Satisfied, he starts to move forward, but he can't. It's like he's caught on something. This *something* is pulling him. He tugs at it but it's *strong*.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

*That, in them and their study, we
may find the cure for cancer.*

Four-Eyes' eyes go wide with fear. As he's being pulled up, he reaches for the zipper of his coat and tries to slip out of its confines, but he's already caught by whatever the *shimmering* is... and he's lifted-

Fifteen feet into the air, where whatever unnatural thing begins to GRIND INTO HIM. Like a *meat grinder*.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

*Or a technology that could unlock
faster than light travel. Or an
infinite energy source.*

His limbs begin to FLAIL and Four Eyes SCREAMS. A gurgling wail of pure agony... *

Four Eyes, suspended in mid-air, is *battered* by the thing. The bones of his arms SNAP into unnatural angles. His legs bow and BREAK. All the while, Four Eyes WAILS.

Finally, something SNAPS - a bone or an esophagus we can't be sure - but Four Eyes, mercifully, goes silent.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

*Aren't you, as a scientist, tempted
to study these forbidden alien
treasures yourself?*

The Zone, once again, is peaceful. Tranquil. Beautiful.

INT. TELEVISION MORNING SHOW SET - DAWN

Pillman takes a moment to consider his response. Then, he gets honest. Like the confession of an addiction.

PILLMAN

... I suppose I am. I suppose we
all are. But I'm not a stalker.

INT. HARMONT COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT - OFFICE - DAY

RED sits in the cluttered office. Calloused hand charisma. An enigmatic, blue-collar contradiction in his thirties.

PATTERSON sips from her cup of Burger King coffee. Red's probation officer. Red stares out the window. Taking in the sun. Patterson notices.

PATTERSON

Look at you. Loving the sun. Like a little plant.

Red glances at her: what the fuck is she talking about? She gets back to business.

PATTERSON (CONT'D)

Have you entered the Zone in the past six months?

RED

Nope.

PATTERSON

Have you fraternized with criminals?

RED

Uh-uh.

PATTERSON

How's the job?

RED

Good.

Patterson, frustrated, expresses it with-

PATTERSON

You see, Red, I got this bullshit detector in my head. And it's wailing so bad it's vibrating the inside of my skull. Which pisses me off... How's the job?

Red takes a second. Gets honest with-

RED

It's like a cut on the top of my mouth. And I need to tongue it for eight hours a day.

PATTERSON

What are they paying you?

RED
Barely enough to afford living in
the stacks.

PATTERSON
What about the Zone?

RED
You already asked me about that.

PATTERSON
I can ask you anything I want as
many times as I want. What about
the Zone? You feeling the pull?

RED
Not at all.

PATTERSON
Skull's buzzing. Buzz. Buzz. You
feeling the pull back to the Zone?

Red goes silent. An internal debate ends with-

RED
A little. Maybe.

PATTERSON
You doing drugs to compensate?

RED
Never was my poison.

Patterson, doubtful, sips her coffee. Red leans in with-

RED (CONT'D)
I'm not going back to it.

Patterson crosses her arms. Freezing over.

RED (CONT'D)
I hate the Zone. Sure I ran it.
Lotsa times. Every time I went in,
I nearly got killed. Look what it
got me. Nothing. Worse than
nothing...

Red's earnest.

PATTERSON
You talking about Marie?

Red's eyes flash: *stay away from this subject.*

PATTERSON (CONT'D) *
 When you say "Worse than nothing." *
 Are you talking about your *
 daughter? *

Red ends the line of inquiry with- *

RED *
 No. We're not talking about my *
 daughter. *

Patterson gets it. Shuts up. Red looks out the window. *
 Patterson follows Red's stare and sees, in the parking lot, a *
 WOMAN and a LITTLE GIRL leaning on a beat up car. *

PATTERSON *
 She drove you? *

RED *
 Yeah. *

PATTERSON *
 You got a good thing there. *

RED *
 Yeah. *

PATTERSON *
 You got a choice, Red. You can go *
 back to running the Zone. Get *
 killed. Get caught. End up in State *
 again. Doing *serious* time. Or you *
 can get your life together. Provide *
 for your family. Point is: you *
 can't do both. You can't be both. *
 You have to choose. *

Red goes quiet. Tenses slightly. Considering. He nods. *
 Patterson stares at him. Finally, she nods approval. *

PATTERSON (CONT'D) *
 See you in two weeks. *

Red stands, leaves the office and- *

INT. HARMONT COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY *

Shoves a handful of pills into his mouth. Swallows. *

EXT. HARMONT COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT - PARKING LOT - DAY *

Red moves for the beat up car. The little girl starts running for Red. Red crouches and scoops her up in his arms. Her name is MARIE. His daughter. An eight-year-old girl wearing kid's sunglasses. They talk in gangster voices. *

RED
Hey, ya little monkey. *

MARIE
Hey, ya big gorilla. *

Red smiles, looks up at- *

GUTA. Red's wife. She's in her thirties, too. Guta's street-wise. Tough and stubborn. Never fell to the trappings of her beauty. Holds her own with Red. He loves her for it. *

GUTA
She do the ringing in her skull thing again? *

RED
(Laughing)
Yep. And she called me a plant. *

MARIE
(Confused)
Like a dandelion? *

RED
I guess. *

They move to the car. Red gives his attention back to Marie. *

RED (CONT'D)
Let me see you. *

Marie shakes her head. *

RED (CONT'D)
Come on. Lemme see you. *

Marie pulls off her sunglasses and we see her eyes are LIQUID MERCURY. Wet silver. Reflecting everything like fun house mirrors. She looks *alien*. *

Red smiles. Holds her tighter. Guta looks away. *

END ACT ONE *

ACT TWO**INT. BABS' DINER - DAY**

Red, Guta and Marie eat breakfast. Marie and Red have a staccato.

MARIE
Guess what?

RED
Chicken butt.

MARIE
No. Willy tore Dolly's leg off.

RED
Jerk.

MARIE
There's a new kitten on the third floor. It's all white but it has red eyes.

RED
Prolly snuck into the Zone.

MARIE
Why don't fish drown if they're always underwater?

RED
Fish have gills that let them breathe underwater.

Red spots a BUSINESSMAN staring openly at Marie. Repelled. Guta sees him, too. She grabs the kid's sunglasses, about to offer them to Marie. Red stops her hand. Guta stiffens.

Marie's entirely focused on Red.

MARIE
So how come we have ten fingers but only two arms and one nose?

RED
Because that's how God makes monkeys like you.

Guta takes something personally about this last bit. She checks her watch. Makes a show about the time.

GUTA
Red. It's time.

Red glances at Guta. She's interrupting Quality Time.

RED
What?

MARIE
Chicken butt.

Marie giggles. She totally got him.

GUTA
You gotta go.

Marie checks-in with Red. Red checks the time. Nods.

Red stands. Lays a few bills on the table. Gives Marie a peck. Guta a kiss. Steps away. On his way out...

The Businessman's still staring at Marie. Red stops at his table. Leans in. And becomes *someone else*. Someone with a dangerous edge.

RED
You keep staring at my daughter,
I'll gouge out your eyes and shove
them down your throat.

The Businessman goes pale. Lowers his head to his plate of food. Red turns, gives a wave to his family.

Guta, knowing exactly what he's done, shakes her head as Marie waves back.

He exits. Guta and Marie watch him walk off into the cold.

When he's gone, Guta slides Marie the kid's sunglasses. Marie wordlessly puts them on.

GUTA
Drink your juice.

EXT. HARMONT - DAY

Red, walking to work, stops to take in-

THE ZONE CHECKPOINT: a high, barbed-wire wall. ARMED GUARDS. Signs read: WARNING. And: NO ACCESS BEYOND THIS POINT.

Red stands there, staring at them. Staring past them. Into the Zone. We just see run-down industrial buildings. But, from his expression, Red's seeing something else entirely.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABOVE THE ZONE - DAY

We glide above the tranquility of the Zone. Silent beauty.

BACK TO:

EXT. HARMONT - DAY

Red glances around. Nobody's paying any attention. He swallows some more pills. Strides on toward-

*
*

EXT. THE INSTITUTE - DAY

A big, gleaming building. New. Red makes his way toward it.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - PILLMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Pillman stands at a window, watching the workers enter the building. He spots Red. Checks his watch. All is well.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Red pulls on his coveralls.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - HALLWAYS - DAY

Red mops the floors. Lab-coated SCIENTISTS pass him. They ignore Red entirely.

EXT. JOHN HASTINGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

PARENTS relay their KIDS off to TEACHERS. Guta, just having dropped off Marie, emerges from the building to see-

A group of MOTHERS huddling together. The lead mother, a woman named SAL, hands out colorful envelopes to the other mothers as she says-

SAL

And there will be a big piñata. So.
Next Saturday. The whole class will
be there. Mimosas for the moms...

One of the mothers braces when she sees-

MOTHER

(A warning to the others)
Guta.

The mothers subtly hide their colored envelopes. Guta tries
to smile through the awkward beat, realizing she's not going
to get one of the colored envelopes. *

One of the mothers, a woman named JENNIFER, rolls her eyes,
breaks rank, and steps toward Guta.

JENNIFER

I'm parked next to you, Guta.

Jennifer pulls Guta away from the gaggle. They walk into the
parking lot. Guta smiles at the expression of sisterhood.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

They're all nervous Nellies. But
you're safe with me. Just the other
day my little man Trevor was asking
me if Marie was a vegetarian -
where he got that in his little
kopf I don't know.

WITH SAL AND THE OTHER MOTHERS: As Guta walks away, they
can't help but talk shit.

SAL

Poor Guta. I feel terrible.

MOTHER

Don't feel bad. It's not your
fault. What can anyone do? *

WITH GUTA: Jennifer is an oasis. Guta drinks her in. *

GUTA

Marie eats meat. Just like normal
people. She's normal.

JENNIFER

Of course. Totally. You should tell
Trevor yourself. No. Better: Marie
should tell him. Why don't we come
over this weekend? *

Guta warms up to the idea. She glances back at the gaggle. Who needs them?

GUTA

I know how to make a mimosa.

JENNIFER

See? That's what I'm talking about.
It's a plan. *

Jennifer grabs Guta, turns back to face the mothers, and waves goodbye. Through her smile she whispers- *

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

They're all such bitches.

Jennifer and Guta laugh as Sal and the other mothers put on their own shit-eating smiles and wave back.

Jennifer climbs into her car. A nice SUV. Guta, standing next to her beat-up clunker, waves as Jennifer drives off.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - ARCHIVES - DAY

Red, pushing his trash can and supplies, enters the long office. ARCHIVISTS sit at stations, transcribing footage and recordings associated with the Zone.

Red, emptying wastebaskets, comes upon a station where the ARCHIVIST watches footage of the night of the VISIT. Red's transfixed by the-

HANDHELD FOOTAGE: Of the night sky. Flashes of - what? - meteors? Space ships? - light up the sky.

Red moves on. Seeing, at another station:

NEWS FOOTAGE: Of what, a riot? No, people are panicked. Running and screaming through the urban darkness.

Red's fascinated by the media. He moves to-

VIDEO FOOTAGE: a MAN on the street, raving and weeping about something unspeakably beautiful. *

Red becomes aware of RONDA, the bored archivist, looking up at him. We can't tell if she likes it or not that- *

RONDA *

I can feel you. Breathing. On my neck.

Red comes back to reality. Moves on.

INT. WAL-MART ENTRYWAY - DAY

Guta, wearing her employee bib, greets CUSTOMERS.

GUTA
Hello and welcome... Welcome...
Welcome to Wal-Mart...

She spots, outside, two people who look like missionaries, handing out pamphlets.

GUTA (CONT'D)
Hi there... Welcome...

Guta moves to confront them.

EXT. WAL-MART - DAY

Guta marches toward THOMPSON and WASLOW, both wearing short-sleeved button downs and forced cheer. Guta greets them with equally forced cheer.

GUTA
I've told you people before: I'm
really sorry, but you can't do that
here.

WASLOW
"Us people?" We've never met you.

GUTA
You hafta go somewhere else, okay?

WASLOW
We're emigration officers. With the
Office of Zone Relocations.

GUTA
I know. You can't do it here.

Thompson, perhaps more empathic than Waslow, asks-

THOMPSON
Can I ask you something?

GUTA
Not here.

THOMPSON
Did you grow up in Harmont?

GUTA
Yes. But you still hafta leave.

THOMPSON
Have you been affected by the Zone?

GUTA
This is Harmont. Everyone's
affected.

THOMPSON
I grew up in Detroit.

GUTA
Good for you then. *

THOMPSON
On a scale of influence - one being
not much and ten being severely
influenced - how would you rate the
Zone's impact on your life?

Guta, considering, goes quiet. Thompson goes sympathetic. *

THOMPSON (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry.

GUTA
(Covering)
Why? You don't even know me.

THOMPSON
Ma'am. I've been doing this a
while. *

GUTA
Do you want me to call my manager?

THOMPSON
Do you ever wish you had a normal
life?

GUTA
This is Wal-Mart.

THOMPSON
Have you ever considered moving
away from Harmont? Getting away
from the Zone?

WASLOW
The government has generous
subsidies and tax incentives-

GUTA
- My manager will call the police.

WASLOW
We're with the government!

THOMPSON
Lemme give you a brochure.

GUTA
I don't want a brochure.

THOMPSON
Yes you do.

GUTA
Quit pushing me.

THOMPSON
Take a brochure. Then we'll leave.

Guta thinks it over. She takes the pamphlet. It reads: ZONE RELOCATION SERVICES... AND YOU!

She looks up from the brochure. Thompson and Waslow are already walking away.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - REPOSITORY - DAY

Red, pulling a dolly loaded with wooden boxes, finds-

DR. KIRILL. Kirill's a big deal at the Institute. Right now he's hunched over a long lab table. The older man fiddles with a series of alien artifacts. These are called *empties*.

Each is made of two copper-like disks, each about a quarter inch thick, suspended about eighteen inches apart. There is nothing between them. They float there, suspended. It's a mysterious and fascinating sight, these empties.

And studying them is absolutely killing Kirill. He has deep circles under his eyes. He's thin and pale and... defeated.

Red starts unloading the boxes, watching-

Kirill, who runs his hand through the empty space between the two disks. There appears to be nothing there.

TECHNICIANS ready a cylindrical piece of hardware reminiscent of a cannon. They point this at the space between the two halves of an empty, which is held down in a vise.

Red keeps unloading boxes, but, seeing all this preparation, he tenses slightly.

*

Kirill, seeing the janitor, gets a soft smile and gives a wave. It's good to be friendly with the help.

Red nods back. Keeps unloading boxes. Watches the assistants load a big .50 caliber round into the cannon. Red, nervous, shifts his weight.

They're lining up the cannon to fire at the mounted empty. Kirill's placing himself behind the cannon's trigger.

RED

Excuse me. *

Kirill looks over. Surprised the janitor is interfering.

KIRILL

Can I help you?

RED

Those are empties...

Kirill blinks at him. Not comprehending.

RED (CONT'D)

From the Zone.

KIRILL

Hydromagnetic traps. Object seventy-seven B.

RED

Yeah. Sure. I don't think firing a bullet at it is a good idea.

KIRILL

We're not shooting at it. We're shooting through it.

Red gives a look. The doctor has no fucking idea what he's doing. Kirill goes on to condescend with-

KIRILL (CONT'D)

And, even if we don't disrupt the field, this specific failure may teach us something where all the other failures failed. *

Red shrugs off the *Alice in Wonderland* logic Kirill likes to call "science". Red moves for the door. Opens it.

Stops. Turns back. Sees Kirill's finger dropping to the trigger. The technicians watch, clipboards at the ready. Kirill moves to pull the trigger... Red steps forward as... *

A few things happen: Kirill FIRES the cannon - the bullet HITS the empty's force field and SLOWS DOWN TO A STOP. Red TACKLES Kirill - and the bullet REVERSES COURSE - gaining speed - blasting RIGHT BACK INTO THE CANNON - SHATTERING IT - and SLAMMING a crater into the wall - right where Kirill was. *

Kirill, under Red on the floor, blinks through the explosion of plaster raining down on him.

When things settle, Red removes himself from Kirill. Offers a hand. Pulls Kirill up. *

KIRILL (CONT'D)
How did you know? *

Red wants to end the conversation. He does so with- *

RED
What do you mean? Didn't want to clean up a hell of a mess is all. *

Kirill blinks at the gallows humor. As Red turns to leave- *

KIRILL
You've had run-ins with hydromagnetic traps before. *

Red tenses slightly. Caught. *

RED
Empties? I guess. *

KIRILL
In the Zone? *

Red's on edge. *

KIRILL (CONT'D)
I'm a scientist. Not a cop. *

Kirill's genuinely curious. Red relaxes. *

RED
Maybe. Yeah. *

KIRILL
You've been here how long? *

RED
Six months or so. *

KIRILL
You stay pretty quiet. *

RED *
 I'm a janitor. You're a big deal. *
 Kirill laughs. Shrugs. Red smiles. *
 RED (CONT'D) *
 You ever seen a full one? *
 Kirill raises an eyebrow. *
 KIRILL *
 A what? *
 RED *
 A full empty. It's like your *
 hydromagnetic trap. Only it has *
 some stuff inside. Blue stuff. *
 Kirill looks at Red. A glimmer of recognition. Excitement. *
 RED (CONT'D) *
 They're pretty rare. I've only ever *
 seen one. In the Zone. Not too far *
 in, either. But it was something. *
 Kirill goes still. Like someone just told him a secret so *
 big, so profound, that it's incredibly difficult to believe. *
 RED (CONT'D) *
 Anyway. What am I saying? You're *
 the expert. I should, uh, get back *
 to rounds. *
 Kirill, still in shock, watches Red push his cart out... *
 Finally, he turns to his technicians. Beside himself. *
 KIRILL *
 A full fucking empty!?! *

EXT. THE INSTITUTE - HALLWAYS - DAY

Red pushes his dolly along. The ghost of a smile forming. *

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. JOHN HASTINGS ELEMENTARY - PLAYGROUND - DAY**

Recess. CHILDREN play. Marie, wearing her sunglasses, tries not to pay attention to KIDS chanting-

KIDS
(Singsongy)
Zonie... Zonie... Zonie...

Among them stands TREVOR TALLOWAY, Marie's age, staring at her with particular intensity.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - SECURITY OFFICES - DAY

MAJOR HERZOG, a big boar of a man, gets a sour expression.

HERZOG
Red? Redrick Shuhart? Is he causing you problems?

Kirill's deaf to the edge in Herzog's voice. CAPTAIN NOONAN, Herzog's second (among other nefarious things) certainly hears it. He remains quiet.

KIRILL
The problem is that I can't seem to find out who he is or where he came from. His employee file is sealed.

Herzog tries to cover his frustration with-

HERZOG
I've noticed that as well.

KIRILL
But you know him?

HERZOG
He's a felon.

KIRILL
A stalker?

HERZOG
Give me cause, Doctor Kirill, and I'll have him back in the State System before day's end.

KIRILL
Oh, please. Nothing like that.

Kirill, finally realizing Major Herzog has a major one for Red, steps for the door. As he leaves, he turns back to say-

KIRILL (CONT'D)
Red saved my life.

Herzog seethes as Kirill leaves. Noonan moves after him.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - HALLWAYS - DAY

Noonan falls into pace next to Kirill.

NOONAN
Dr. Kirill? Captain Noonan. We've met a few times.

Kirill obviously doesn't remember.

NOONAN (CONT'D)
With all due respect: why are you asking about Red? Red works hard. Keeps his head down.

KIRILL
Is he a stalker?

NOONAN
See there? I don't know if you know how tricky that makes it for Red, throwing words like that around.

KIRILL
He saved my life!

NOONAN
All the more reason.

Kirill doesn't understand.

NOONAN (CONT'D)
With respect, Doctor: You and Red come from different worlds. Red's taken some knocks. He's down and trying to get back up.

KIRILL
I'm on the board of this Institute. I'm in the position to-

NOONAN
Make promises. I know. But that's the thing. Red's down. Everyone's in the position to make promises.

KIRILL
I don't think you understand how
important this is. If Red's a
criminal, how is he even working at
the Institute? In any capacity?

NOONAN
You don't know?

KIRILL
Apparently you do?

NOONAN
I have my guesses.

Kirill waits. Noonan leans in with-

NOONAN (CONT'D)
This Institute studies all things
Zone related. Red's been huffing it
in and out of the Zone since he was
ten. I bet there's a connection.

KIRILL
You know Red?

NOONAN
Came up together.

KIRILL
Can you tell me who he is?

Noonan gets a charming smile.

EXT. HARMONT - DAY

Red walks along the high walls of the Zone's border. He holds
out a hand, tracing his fingers along the wall as he goes.

He dials his cell. Connects with-

GUTA
Hey.

RED
How's Marie?

GUTA
Fine. At school.

RED
Did you make her wear the
sunglasses?

GUTA
No. So. What's up?

RED
Nothing. Thinking. How we doing?

Guta takes a moment. Red reads the ambivalence.

RED (CONT'D)
Yeah. Just holding on.

GUTA
It's better than before.

RED
Where are you?

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Guta sits in a doctor's waiting room.

GUTA
At the grocery store.

RED
Buy the place out.

GUTA
Yeah, right.

RED
Okay. See you.

Guta hangs up. Stares at her phone. Slips it away.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONSULTATION ROOM - NIGHT

DOCTOR JAMES "THE BUTCHER" CUTTERFIELD has a well-practiced bedside manner. He watches Guta keep up appearances with-

GUTA
She's improving. Her condition. I really think it's getting better-

THE BUTCHER
Not better. Not worse. We need to stop thinking like that. We've discussed this, but I continue to believe the next step-

Guta's already shaking her head.

THE BUTCHER (CONT'D) *
 I need their help with Marie. *
 They're equipped for exactly this. *

GUTA *
 Red would lose his mind if he found *
 out we were even having these *
 sessions. *

The Butcher, vaguely concerned, wonders- *

THE BUTCHER *
 How is Red? *

GUTA *
 You know. He's trying. Settling in. *
 It's good. He still thinks I don't *
 know he's popping the pills. So... *
 we were talking about Marie's *
 prescription. I need it refilled. *

The Butcher makes a show about deeply considering it. Then *
 tries a different approach with- *

THE BUTCHER *
 Guta. The medication can only do so *
 much. It can slow certain *
 developments. But not permanently. *
 And there's risk to Marie's long- *
 term health. The Institute can give *
 her the help she needs. They're the *
 experts in the field of Zone *
 children. Outside of the Institute, *
 there really isn't much *
 information, except that long-term *
 exposure to the Zone affects *
 reproduction. *

Guta looks down. Burying a deep, old wound. *

GUTA *
 The Institute is no children's *
 hospital. *

THE BUTCHER *
 No. It isn't. *

Guta looks him in the eye. *

GUTA *
 So why do you keep pushing it? *

The Butcher takes a second too long to respond, but he's *
 saved when Guta's cell RINGS. She picks up. *

GUTA (CONT'D) *
Hello? *

The VOICE on the other end sounds panicked. *

GUTA (CONT'D) *
Wait - stop - I can't understand *
you - what? *

As she listens, everything stops for Guta. *

GUTA (CONT'D) *
I'll be right there. *

Guta hangs up. Already gathering her things. *

THE BUTCHER *
What's wrong? *

GUTA *
It's the school. I have to go. *

EXT. THE SOUP - DAY *

Red, braced against the cold, enters the anonymous bar. *

INT. THE SOUP - DAY *

People - *stalkers* - fill the place. THE BUZZARD is fifty-five, he's the wealthiest of the group, which he interprets as de-facto leadership. *

The Buzzard hands a Polaroid of Four Eyes to EARNEST the bartender. Earnest nails the photograph to the wall, where a dozen others hang. *

The Buzzard turns from the wall and scans the crowd. He spots Red entering. He gives Red a cold stare before moving on with the memorial. *

THE BUZZARD *
Four Eyes was a bastard, just like *
everyone here. He wasn't the best *
of us. Wasn't the worst. But he had *
heart. Gotta give him that. Even *
though, in this business, having a *
heart can get you killed. *

THE BANKER, always dressed in a suit, can't stand poetics. *

THE BANKER *
That why you're still with us? *

The Buzzard reads from the scrawl he wrote on a napkin. *

THE BUZZARD *

Four Eyes found his peace with the
Golden Sphere- *

Red rolls his eyes at the mention of the Sphere. Others
scoff. A few GROANS. *

THE BANKER *

Enough with the bullshit. *

THE HAMSTER *

He got himself caught in a meat
grinder. *

THE HAMSTER's body will forever be contorted and badly
scarred. He knows about meat-grinders. *

THE HAMSTER (CONT'D) *

Bad way to go. *

The Buzzard, feeling the crowd pulling away from him, does
away with the speech. Lifts his glass. *

THE BUZZARD *

To Four Eyes. May he rest in peace. *

The others drink. Red spots LUCKY CARTER at a table. Red sits
down. Lucky used to be Red's mentor. Seeing his wayward
protégé saddens him. Red's aware of the stares. Everywhere. *

LUCKY *

Every one of them is wondering how
you can show your face here today.
Half of them think you're wearing a
wire. *

RED *

You? *

Lucky thinks it over. Shrugs off his doubts. *

LUCKY *

How's the life of an ordinary
schmuck treating you? *

RED *

Looking up. *

LUCKY *

They give you a better mop? *

Red shrugs off the dig. Leans in. *

RED

There's this guy at the Institute.
He's a big deal. He wants me to
take him in.

LUCKY

You. The janitor. Just like that.

RED

I may have made some implications
about a certain bit of swag.

Lucky blinks at Red. Kind of relieved to realize-

LUCKY

You're not working for the
Institute - you've got the
Institute working for you!

Red smiles. Lucky's praise matters.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

This guy been in before?

RED

I'm thinking no.

Lucky takes this in, processing. Red watches THE CREON, the
youngest of the assembled stalkers. The kid is flipping a
SPACESHARD in his hand. A big splinter of blackness, like
space itself was shattered.

LUCKY

Odds are he's not coming back. You
know that, right?

Red shrugs. Untroubled.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

You're using him as a lamb.

Red gets a soft smile.

RED

You sound like the Buzzard. You buy
that sacrificial crap?

LUCKY

You don't?

Red's smile fades. He shrugs. The Creon slips, and the shard
LANCES THROUGH HIS PALM. But, weirdly, there's no blood. It's
like the shard just PHASED through the kid's living flesh.

The Creon is nonplussed. Nobody else gives a shit, either.
These people are *stalkers*.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

So. You take this chance to get
back into the Zone. Clean and
legit. Or you let it go and let the
guy live. That's the choice.

RED

I got it.

LUCKY

Can't have it both ways.

RED

I got it, Lucky.

LUCKY

And it's gotta be his idea. You
don't want to be responsible for
what happens. He has to come to
you.

RED

I said I got it.

Lucky shrugs as the front door JINGLES. The bar goes silent.
Everyone stares at the door, where Kirill steps in, a fish
out of water in this low life bar. Kirill spots Red. Waves.
Red gives a nod. Gets to his feet, pulling on his jacket.
Lucky connects the dots.

LUCKY

So far so good.

INT. JOHN HASTINGS ELEMENTARY - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Guta sits facing THE PRINCIPAL, a stocky and exasperated man,
and MARIE'S TEACHER, who knows that, somehow, she's the
victim in all this.

GUTA

Let me get this straight-

THE PRINCIPAL

Marie got in a fight with another
student. She gave the boy a bloody
nose...

MARIE'S TEACHER

Just too awful-

THE PRINCIPAL

- Trevor Talloway-

MARIE'S TEACHER

- And this isn't the first time-

GUTA

No, but every time it was the other kid who started it. They pick on her. They tease her-

*

MARIE'S TEACHER

- Can you blame them? Mrs. Shuhart, your daughter is a m-

*

THE PRINCIPAL

- Exceptional. Marie is an exceptional little girl... with exceptional needs... And John Hastings Elementary doesn't have the exceptional resources to guarantee her education...

*

*

MARIE'S TEACHER

Or the safety of the other children... Or their teachers...

THE PRINCIPAL

So we're suspending her-

MARIE'S TEACHER

Indefinitely-

THE PRINCIPAL

- Until we find a solution to her, uh... unique problem...

Guta sits there... *angry*... she stands. Grabs her things and-

*

EXT. JOHN HASTINGS ELEMENTARY - ADMINISTRATION - DAY

- SLAMS the door behind her. Marie, sitting on a plastic chair and wearing her glasses, jumps at the sound. Looks up.

*

INT. JOHN HASTINGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Guta leads Marie toward the exit, but stops short at Jennifer, her friend, standing there. She's holding the hand of her son, Trevor Talloway. Jennifer is ice. Guta sees that Trevor's fine, now, but dried blood radiates from his nose.

*

*

GUTA
Are you okay, Trevor?

JENNIFER *
Don't talk to him.

GUTA
Jennifer-

JENNIFER *
Nope. No. Uh-uh.

Jennifer spins on her heel and drags Trevor away. Guta knows that Jennifer, her friend, is walking out of her life. She looks around, perhaps searching for answers. She finds Marie. *

INT. THE INSTITUTE - REPOSITORY - DAY *

Kirill moves to a cabinet. Pulls out a bottle of whiskey. Pours it into plastic cups. *

KIRILL *
Millions of dollars in grants. The *
faith and trust of my colleagues *
and professional peers. Dozens of *
papers published that, if you read *
between the lines, all say: I *
can't, for the life of me, figure *
it out. I don't know what they're *
for or what they do. *

Kirill pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Taps one out for Red. *

RED *
We allowed to smoke in here? *

KIRILL *
Absolutely not. *

Kirill leads Red underneath a ventilation shaft. Kirill flips a switch, turning it on. They light up. Kirill takes a deep drag and sighs out the smoke. They share a smile. Bad kids. *

They stare at the empties. *

KIRILL (CONT'D) *
I've tried dismantling them. *
Dissolving them in acid. Crushing *
them under pressurized vices. *
Melting them in furnaces. Pulling *
them apart with every tool and *
technique I can think of. I haven't *
accomplished anything. *

(MORE)

KIRILL (CONT'D)

Except exhausting myself. My eyes
water. Like a sick dog... I'm only
human. And these are alien.

Red waits for it. And it comes.

KIRILL (CONT'D)

You know, we should go in for the -
what you called it - the full
empty.

Red plays along.

RED

Sure. I'll just break parole and
take you in.

KIRILL

No. Nothing like that. We would go
in legally, of course. An official
excursion. I could file the
paperwork. Get a pass. Request the
necessary equipment...

Red does his best to stay callous.

RED

You know the risks? They put walls
around the Zone, they patrol it for
a reason. It's dangerous.

KIRILL

Yes.

RED

You're willing to die for this?

KIRILL

I'm telling you that I'm dying,
here, already. I need this to live.

Red thinks it over. Takes in Kirill's earnest desperation.
Something shifts in him.

KIRILL (CONT'D)

They don't make any sense. And that
not-making-sense is infecting
everything now. Everything that
used to be simple before... Before
the Visit. Nothing matters like it
used to. Everything is just...
Small potatoes. And everything that
isn't is so... Strange. You ever
feel like that?

Red thinks about it. Long and hard. And confesses-

RED

Yes. I feel that way. All the time.

Kirill studies Red. Perhaps they're not so dissimilar.

KIRILL

They say the Zone calls to stalkers.

RED

Most are in it for cash.

KIRILL

But not you?

Red thinks it over: No. He's different.

KIRILL (CONT'D)

Red. It's calling me now, too.

Red hesitates. Thinks about it... He doesn't want Kirill's blood on his hands. Not after all of this.

RED

I'll take you in.

KIRILL

Thank you.

RED

Under one condition. We take a third man.

KIRILL

The Institute likes to keep the teams as small as possible. Risk analysis. I'm not sure they'll sign off on-

RED

We need a third man. That's the deal. You in?

Kirill considers this. Nods. Raises his plastic cup.

KIRILL

To the third man.

Kirill smiles. Red doesn't. Drinks to it all the same.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. THE INSTITUTE - "THE DISPENSARY" - DAY**

High-tech hardware covers the walls of the space. Red and Kirill inspect their specsuits, which look like futuristic space suits. Kirill's proud of them.

KIRILL

They're light. Comfortable. Not too tight. And you don't sweat in it from the heat. Fireproof. Air-tight. They're even bulletproof.

RED

In the Zone you have other worries.

KIRILL

Well, they won't let us go unless you wear one.

RED

Seriously?

KIRILL

Insurance purposes.

Kirill hands Red a device.

KIRILL (CONT'D)

GPS guidance system. State of the art. Field tested. Zone specific.

RED

These things are useless in there. I heard, a few years ago, they gave one to a team leader. GPS kept showing his position was in old town. When he got back, they grilled him. Turns out, while he was in the Zone, he kept thinking about the church he got married in. In old town. The GPS wasn't tracking where he was in the Zone. It was tracking where he was in his mind.

Red slides the GPS back onto the table. Kirill pushes it back, insisting that he pack it because of-

KIRILL

Insurance purposes.

Red rolls his eyes. Packs the GPS. *

KIRILL (CONT'D) *

I filed the paperwork. Kept it as
vague as possible. Routine recon.
Hoping it slips through. Processing
usually takes a few weeks. *

RED *

A few weeks? *

KIRILL *

Yeah. Unless Pillman takes an
interest. Gives it "Special
Priority" then it'll be months if
it happens at all. *

(Shrugs. Smiles) *

Gives us time to find our third
man. *

DR. WALTERS, one of KIRILL'S AIDES slips in. Signals to
Kirill. Kirill waves her off. *

RED *

Any prospects? *

KIRILL *

How about Austin? *

RED *

No. Anyone but him. The man decided
he's got the Zone figured out. If
he goes, he'll get us all killed. *

KIRILL *

How about Tender? He's in security. *

RED *

Does he have kids? *

KIRILL *

He's been in the Zone already. *

Red mulls it over. *

RED *

I'm gonna need to talk to him. *

Walters steps forward with some urgency. *

WALTERS *

Dr. Kirill? Director's office wants
to see you. *

KIRILL
Tell them you couldn't find me.

WALTERS
You're only ever in one of three places.

KIRILL
Well go check the other two.

WALTERS
Dr. Kirill. It's Pillman himself who requested you.

Kirill deflates a little. Red realizes "Pillman" is-

RED
The "Special Priority" guy?

INT. THE INSTITUTE - PILLMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Pillman looks out at the spectacular view from his office window. We see the border of the Zone. It cuts right through the city. One side a buzzing metropolis. The other a silent ghost town. Kirill's reporting-

KIRILL
He said he could lead me to an object he calls a full empty. A variant of object seventy-seven B. Except with stuff inside.

Pillman's surprised at the choice of the word-

PILLMAN
Stuff?

KIRILL
Blue stuff. That's what he said. Maybe the quantum locking field contains plasma of some type.

Pillman thinks it over.

PILLMAN
And you think this janitor can ensure your safety?

KIRILL
He's not just a janitor. He's Redrick Shuhart. The stalker.

Pillman's a neutral mask. He picks up a document. Kirill's excursion request. Pillman flips through it.

PILLMAN

What's your requested time horizon?

KIRILL

As soon as possible.

PILLMAN

Have you decided on your team?

Kirill, knowing the hole is getting deeper, winces out-

KIRILL

Three total. We're interviewing candidates.

*
*

Pillman picks up a pen. Signs the document.

PILLMAN

I approve your excursion. You'll leave at dawn tomorrow.

Kirill can't quite cover his open shock.

PILLMAN (CONT'D)

Is there something else?

Kirill's starting to realize-

KIRILL

You already know. About Red.

Pillman's poker-faced.

KIRILL (CONT'D)

You've known he works here. You sealed his files. You've been studying him. Why?

*

Pillman shrugs. Slides over the form. Bait. Kirill grabs the documents. Pillman watches him go.

*
*

INT. THE INSTITUTE - "THE ARMORY" - DAY

Red interviews TENDER. Tender's in his thirties, has a crew cut and was raised on meat, corn, and Wonder Bread. Tender's showing Red the operation of a quadruped robot, called a FIDO. Tender gets off on the tech.

*
*
*

TENDER

With the FIDO, they'll be able to see what we see, hear what we hear, and take samples.

RED

We don't need a robot.

Tender, as if to prove Red wrong, KICKS the FIDO. The robot's spider-like legs adjust and rebalance the machine. It's lifelike. And unnerving. *

Tender, proud, stares at Red with a "fuck you" attitude.

TENDER

Things'll make stalkers obsolete.

Red isn't impressed by the tech or Tender's testosterone.

RED

You've been in the Zone before?

TENDER

I can't confirm or deny those operations.

Red sighs. These officious asshats. *

RED

What can you confirm or deny?

TENDER

I was a soldier. 82nd Airborne. Served in Afghanistan. Iraq.

RED

For this excursion, you'll be the third man. You have a problem following my lead?

Yes. Tender has a problem.

TENDER

You're the janitor, right?

More tension.

RED

We're going in for a full empty.

TENDER

Don't need to know.

RED
 Don't you want to know why you're
 risking your life?

TENDER
 As I said. I served in Afghanistan.
 And Iraq.

Kirill enters. Red looks up at him.

RED
 We good?

The Pillman encounter has made Kirill more curious about Red. *

KIRILL
 It went well. Better than well. We
 leave at dawn tomorrow.

Tender, at this news, swallows down whatever's in his mouth.

TENDER
 Tomorrow? *

RED
 Getting cold feet?

Tender plays it off with-

TENDER
 Someone's got pull around here.

Kirill watches the exchange. Turns to Red.

KIRILL
 How are you guys doing?

Tender checks a 9mm.

RED
 You're not gonna need a gun.

Tender, with another "fuck you" stare at Red, picks up a second weapon. An assault rifle. Red shrugs. Whatever.

RED (CONT'D)
 (Regarding Tender)
 He's perfect.

EXT. THE INSTITUTE - SUPPLY CLOSET - DAY

Red rifles through the supply closet. Grabbing hardware. A handful of bolts and nuts. He stuffs these in his satchel. Noonan steps behind him. *

NOONAN

You're going in for a full empty.

RED

Just helping Dr. Kirill out. *

NOONAN

Yeah, right. Just the good janitor lending a hand. *

RED

It was his idea. Guy's a genius. Why wouldn't I help? *

NOONAN

You're underestimating Herzog. He's looking to put you back in prison. *

RED

Kirill's on the board of directors. The excursion has been approved. Herzog can't touch me. *

NOONAN

Maybe so. But what happens when Brickman finds out? *

Red considers this new threat. *

RED

I'm not a stalker. I'm an employee of the Institute. *

Noonan shrugs with a smile. A group of SCIENTISTS pass by. When they're are out of earshot, Noonan gets a softer tone.

NOONAN

Look: You're going in for swag. That makes you competition. All I'm saying is, when you come out, if you come out, you gotta be careful. *

Red stops. Looks Noonan in the eye. Shows his steel.

RED

That's between me and Brickman. *

Noonan steps more carefully with-

NOONAN

Does Guta know you're going in?

At the mention of Guta, Red goes still. Cold.

RED

You looked after her while I was
inside. Thanks. I'm outside now.

Noonan hears the "back off" loud and clear.

RED (CONT'D)

There's no secrets between me and
Guta.

Noonan smiles. Cheshire. Red walks off.

INT. RED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Red and Guta, in the kitchen, fail to keep their voices down.

RED

What did he do to her?!

GUTA

She hurt Trevor. Really *hurt* him.

RED

What did the little bastard do to
my daughter?!

GUTA

What are we going to do?! I have to
work! How are we gonna take care of
her?!

Red, realizing Guta needs him, says-

RED

Call in sick. It's gonna be okay.

GUTA

How is it going to be okay? I'll
have to quit my job! We need that
money!

RED

We'll solve it. Call in sick. It's
gonna be okay.

Guta does an internal check, and realizes-

GUTA
I'm scared.

RED
I'll take care of it, okay? Don't
worry.

Guta calms down. We see a flash of her love for him.

GUTA
I called Lincoln Hall, the private
school. For Marie. Tuition is
thirty grand a year!

RED
For elementary school?

Red takes in the apartment: the ancient refrigerator, the
worn rug, the poverty.

RED (CONT'D)
What about financial aid?

GUTA
(Doubtful)
They would have to interview Marie.

Red goes silent. He knows what that means.

RED
I just need a couple of days.

GUTA
For what?

Red considers how to tell her-

RED
There's this guy. Kirill. Doctor
Kirill. He's a big deal at the
Institute. He needs my help. If
everything goes well, it'll change
things for me. For us. Maybe I'll
get a promotion, even.

GUTA
People don't just give janitors
promotions. That's why it's a job
and not a career.

RED
Good things will come out of it.

Guta tenses. Suddenly afraid-

GUTA

You're not going into the Zone, are you?

Guta stares into Red.

GUTA (CONT'D)

Red. It's not just the Zone. It's everything that goes with it.

Red stays silent.

GUTA (CONT'D)

Suppose you don't die. You don't get caught. You don't do years. Great. I still lose you. To The Soup. To Brickman. And to the Zone. I don't. We can't. I can't do-

She makes a general wave around the apartment.

GUTA (CONT'D)

This - by myself.

She leans in toward Red. Insisting that he-

GUTA (CONT'D)

Look what the Zone did to you. Look what it did to Marie. This didn't have to be our life...

Marie, who has been eavesdropping from the hallway, runs to her room and SLAMS her door. Red and Guta realize she heard.

GUTA (CONT'D)

Shit.

Red moves off to Marie's room. Guta watches him go.

INT. MARIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Red enters to find Marie nowhere in sight. He takes in the pink and the plastic. The normal little girl's room.

He sits down on the bed. We see Marie on the other side of it, with a ball cap pulled low over her eyes.

RED

Hey.

MARIE

Go away.

RED
She didn't mean that.

MARIE
So?

RED
She loves you very much.

MARIE
So?

RED
Listen, monkey-

MARIE
My name's Marie.

Red leans over, picks her up, and holds her close. She's unresponsive.

RED
Things are gonna change for us. Any day now.

He stares off, worried. Hoping what he's saying will be true.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. RED'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Guta wakes up to find herself alone in bed.

INT. RED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Guta finds Red, pulling on his work boots.

GUTA
It's four in the morning. *

RED
Gotta get that worm. *

GUTA
Did you sleep on the couch? *

Red stays quiet. Pulls on his coat. Moves for the door. *

GUTA (CONT'D)
Hey, Red? *

RED
What? *

GUTA
Get that promotion. *

Red understands he just got permission. Nods. He gives her a kiss. She kisses him back. Loving. And we see, here, the stuff that keeps them together. *

INT. THE INSTITUTE - PREP ROOM - NIGHT

Red yawns as he pulls on his spec suit. He looks over at Kirill, checking his helmet. His hands are trembling. Kirill sees that Red sees. *

KIRILL
Excited, I guess. *

RED
Where's Tender? *

INT. THE INSTITUTE - "ARMORY" - NIGHT

Tender, in his spec suit, loads up his guns while listening to Herzog. The FIDO waits patiently. *

HERZOG

Stalkers do this thing. They bring
people in. Use 'em as human shields
against the dangers of the Zone.
You understand? You're there to
die, so the stalker can live.

Tender thinks it over.

HERZOG (CONT'D)

Watch your back is all I'm saying.
Keep an eye on Red. He'll be as
dangerous to you as the Zone
itself.

Tender slams a magazine into his rifle.

TENDER

Don't worry about me.

Herzog smiles. He likes this kid.

EXT. THE INSTITUTE - ENTRANCE TO THE ZONE - DAWN

Red, Kirill and Tender, wearing the specsuits, move through
the courtyard. The FIDO robot trails after them.

In the windows of the Institute are ONLOOKERS, impressed by
their daring, curious about their mortality.

IN A HIGH WINDOW: Pillman watches the excursion team.

Kirill's grinning. Tender glances back at the robot.

TENDER

Come on, boy.

As the FIDO trots to keep up, Tender swells with pride.

The group passes Herzog. Herzog gives a little nod to Tender.
Tender nods back. Red leads them to-

THE CHECKPOINT. The heavy steel doors, topped with barbed
wire, are secured by heavily armed GUARDS. PARAMEDICS and
their ambulances, and FIREMEN with their engines all wait at
the border to the Zone. They watch Red and the others move
toward the gate.

Kirill hands over their passes to the gate's commanding
officer, a LIEUTENANT. The Lieutenant takes his time with the
papers. Making absolutely sure. Then he nods to a GUARD in
the gate's booth. This man OPENS THE GATE.

Red looks into the Zone. From here, it looks like an abandoned industrial neighborhood. *

Red leads Kirill and Tender into the Zone. After a few yards, Red glances back. He sees the guards, the firefighters, and the paramedics all standing in respect. The Lieutenant even gives them a salute. *

RED
(To himself)
Idiot.

Above the checkpoint hangs an enormous banner, now faded by almost two decades of exposure. It reads: WELCOME TO EARTH! Red turns from it and leads Kirill, Tender and the FIDO on.

EXT. THE ZONE - PLAGUE QUARTER - DAY

Red, Kirill, Tender and the FIDO move through the abandoned neighborhood. Grass sprouts from irregular cracks in the sidewalks and streets.

Some of the houses look the worse for wear but, what's really strange is that other houses look pristine. Rusted cars are parked next to others that don't look a day old. A baby stroller, left on the street nineteen years ago, looks new.

Tender leads with his rifle. This annoys Red. Kirill's fascinated. Red plays tour guide. *

RED
See that brick house? My old math teacher used to live there. We called him the Comma. His daughter had a cataract in one eye. During the initial panic, he ran in nothing but underwear all the way to the bridge. Just like everyone here. Ran four miles nonstop. *

KIRILL
They lived here? In the first quarter? Did he survive somehow?

RED
No. They all got the plague. Peeled their skin right off.

Kirill's amazed. Tender spits. The group moves on. *

INT. RED'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marie, wearing her sunglasses, sits at the kitchen table. Guta hands her a juice box and sits down with the weight of a "we need to have a talk" moment.

GUTA

Marie.

Marie's fussing with the straw.

GUTA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. About saying what I said last night. *

MARIE

Okay, Mom.

Marie would be totally happy if that was it. But Guta has more to get off her chest.

GUTA

I love you Marie. You know that? *

Marie nods. *

GUTA (CONT'D)

And I want you to be happy. It's hard to be happy. It used to not be but now it is. Now people go to work, or school, or shopping, or to the park, and they pretend they're happy. They pretend things still matter. But, even as much as we try to forget, all of the things we do now are after the Visit. And you, Marie, remind people of the Visit. And nobody wants to be reminded. I know that's hard for you. And it sucks. It's what they call a burden. A responsibility... *

Marie drains her juice box. She continues to suck on it, making it GURGLE, until Guta says- *

GUTA (CONT'D)

This is important, Marie.

Marie stops. *

GUTA (CONT'D)

You're going to have to decide if you want to help them.

(MORE)

GUTA (CONT'D)

Or if you want to scare them all
the time. By reminding them.

Marie thinks about it. Long and hard.

MARIE

I don't really know what you're
talking about, Mom.

GUTA

I know. I know. But, one day,
you'll understand. And, until then,
you have to trust me, okay?

MARIE

Okay.

GUTA

Okay. Now go and do your homework.

MARIE

But I don't have to go to school.

GUTA

But you still need an education.

MARIE

But you just said nothing matters.

GUTA

Don't play games with me, girl.

Marie slides off her chair and heads to her room.

EXT. THE ZONE - URBAN "BATTLEFIELD" - DAY

Even though it's autumn outside the Zone, there are spring
flowers blooming everywhere. Gorgeous. The flowers grow over
rusted tanks and abandoned, overgrown military helicopters
peppering the landscape. The remains of a small army. *

Red stops. Kirill and Tender follow suit. The robot continues *

on, until Tender whispers-

TENDER

Stop.

FIDO stops. Red signals for them to look a few feet away from *

them, where a fist-sized rock floats in the air. Weird. Red's *

on alert. Tender's trying to be unimpressed. Kirill openly *

oogles at the phenomena.

KIRILL

What does it mean? *

Red motions for them to follow. Rounding a corner they find-

A large block of concrete, suspended in the air. Floating. Fascinating and majestic.

Red pulls a few nuts and bolts from his satchel. These are tied with bits of ribbon for visibility. He tosses a bolt at the floating debris. It HITS and CLATTERS to the ground. *

Kirill, reading this as permission to move forward, takes a step, but Red grabs him and holds him still.

RED

Don't move.

Kirill and Tender do as they're told. Red focuses on the empty space between them and the floating concrete.

He throws a second bolt. This one arcs higher than the others. As it crests and falls-

It CATCHES on some kind of *shimmering*, which animates and grabs the bolt - mid-air - and the little hunk of metal looks TUGGED to one side and it SHOOTs - like a bullet - into the ground with a THUD and an EXPLOSION of dirt.

Tender and Kirill's eyes go saucer-sized.

Red, an old pro, takes a handful of bolts and chucks them at the anomaly. These spread out as they arc forward and get caught up in the *shimmering*, which turns out to be very large, at least fifteen feet long, hovering above the street. The bolts get caught up and SHOOT OUT, IMPACTING the ground.

Kirill's realizing-

KIRILL

You use the bolts to look for graviconcentrates.

Kirill gives a nod of self-satisfaction. Nobody gives a shit.

RED

Weird that it's so close to the border.

TENDER

We should go back.

Red watches the tall grass. It's waving, like a breeze is pushing toward them. Red pulls some grass. Drops it. The grass floats TOWARD the waves in the grass.

RED
The breeze is behind us.

KIRILL
What does that mean?

Red drops to the ground. He pulls Kirill after him. Tender holds up his rifle. *

RED
Get *down!* *

Hearing the edge in Red's voice, Tender drops. But FIDO cannot lay flat. Tender, worried about his toy, starts to get back up. Red catches him and pulls him back. *

Above them, the anomaly *shimmers* and emits a faint *buzzing*.

As it sweeps over on them, the robot TREMBLES. Then, it's hoisted into the air and whatever the *shimmering* is *grinds* into the machine. The life-like robot CRACKS and BENDS under the pressure of the anomaly.

Tender looks miserable as he listens to his robot's motor WHINING like a dying animal, before CRACKING into silence. *

The *shimmering* passes over them. As the *buzzing* fades... *

Red spots a pair of glasses in the vegetation. Four Eyes' glasses. Red reaches for them. Stands. Breathes. Takes in his surroundings. He gestures for Kirill and Tender to stand. As they do, Red pulls off his helmet. Drops it. *

KIRILL
What are you doing?

Red takes a deep breath. In. Out. *Smiles*.

RED
Feel that?

Kirill's neutral. Tender's worried-

TENDER
Feel what? Is that thing coming back?!

Red ignores Tender. Stands up straight. Grinning. At ease. Kirill watches him, seeing an almost different man. *

KIRILL

They say the Zone calls to stalkers.

*
*
*

Red, feeling expansive, gives a smile. Kirill's about to ask more about it when Red starts walking. As he walks, he strips off the pieces of his specsuit. Kirill and Tender share a glance: *this guy's hard core*. Kirill follows Red.

*
*
*

Tender takes in the debris of the FIDO. Looks after Red. The man just saved his life. Unsure, he grips his rifle. Follows.

*
*

INT. THE BUTCHER'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

The Butcher scans an image of Marie. Another image: a close up of her exceptionally weird eyes. He moves to his computer.

INT. THE INSTITUTE - PILLMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Pillman, studying the images of Marie on his computer, speaks into a digital recorder.

PILLMAN

A thought occurs to me...

INT. THE SOUP - DAY

The Buzzard and The Creon sit across from Noonan. Noonan examines the spaceshard.

PILLMAN (V.O.)

*The Zone plays on our curiosity.
Our human need to understand...*

Noonan, impressed, slides over an envelope thick with money.

INT. RED'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Guta sits at the table, reading the pamphlet: ZONE RELOCATION SERVICES... AND YOU!

PILLMAN (V.O.)

*The more excursions there are into
the Zone...*

Guta, suddenly emotional, RIPS the pamphlet in half. As her tears flow, she RIPS it again. And again...

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Marie, wearing her glasses, does homework. There's a TAP at the window. Marie looks over, curious.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
Legitimate or otherwise...

Another TAP at the window. Marie stands, opens her window.

EXT. RED'S TENEMENT - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Trevor Talloway stands in front of the sandbox. He's ready to hurl another pebble. He sees Marie. Stops. Marie whispers-

MARIE
Hey.

TREVOR
Hey. What are you doing?

MARIE
Homework.

TREVOR
But you don't hafta to go to school.

Marie shrugs.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
The more the Zone escapes its confines...

MARIE
Why are you here?

TREVOR
Because. I don't know.

MARIE
Okay.

Marie, non-judgemental, waits as Trevor tries to figure out how to express himself.

TREVOR
Take off your glasses.

MARIE
Why?

TREVOR
Cause I wanna see.

Marie takes off her glasses. Her mercury eyes glimmer in the sunlight. Trevor smiles up at her.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
*No matter how tall we build the
walls to contain it...*

TREVOR
You think, maybe, you could do it
again?

MARIE
Maybe.

TREVOR
Try.

MARIE
I really shouldn't.

TREVOR
I promise I won't tell anybody. *

Marie thinks it over.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
*No matter how fortified the
boundary...*

Marie goes still. She stares at Trevor. Trevor's lifted into the air. A few inches. A foot. His eyes widen in awe. Then, he's knocked back FIVE FEET. He lands, hard, in the sandbox behind him. He lays there. Marie's worried. *

MARIE
You okay?

Trevor, disoriented, stands up. Dusts himself off. His eyes find Marie. They're full of wonder. The kid is stoked. *

TREVOR
Do it again!

Marie smiles.

PILLMAN (V.O.)
The Zone is growing.

END PILOT