

STREET DREAMS

Pilot: "The World is Yours"

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Based Upon the Life and Music of Nasir "Nas" Jones

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FROM BLACK

We streak over Manhattan to the plaintive opening chords of the Chili Peppers' "Under the Bridge"--early 90's, radio-friendly, white as fuck. Camera hurtles through the Financial District, where the Twin Towers stand tall, and up through the Village, to Central Park.

VOICE (O.S.)

Gooooood mornin' New York! Scott Shannon, WPLJ, here on a beautiful morning in the Tri-State area. Spring is here! So get outside and enjoy yourselves, people! Unless you're a squeegee man, in which case you can stay home, because Mayor Giuliani has announced a zero tolerance--

We zoom east, toward the 59th Street Bridge, AKA

THE QUEENSBORO BRIDGE

We streak across it, and DJ Red Alert's voice rises on the soundtrack just as Shannon's fades away. Red Alert represents a different kind of NYC: the outer boroughs. Hip hop.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

New York City! This is Kool DJ Red Alert commin' atcha on the 1s and 2s. You make 'em, I play 'em! Next up, we got Pete Rock and CL Smooth--

"They Reminisce Over You" swells. As our camera skims the East River. Up, up and away toward the **Queensbridge Houses**, a campus of uniform, gray buildings that slice a sharp line through the streets of Queens. And a super:

"QUEENSBRIDGE HOUSES.

**Largest Public Housing Development in North America.
Spring, 1992"**

CL Smooth's voice disappears from the track, leaving only Pete Rock's beat. As we push in on one Queensbridge apartment in particular. Apartment 5D. From the outside, it's just like any other. But within...

INSERT on a BOOMBOX. A hand plugs a janky MIC into a jack, presses PLAY on one deck, PLAY and RECORD on another deck. A Maxell tape with the words "KID WAVE DEMO" scribbled on it begins to rotate on its heads. ECU on a pair of lips,

Spitting RAP LYRICS with rapid-fire intensity. Complex rhymes, unique technique, and a flow that breathes hunger.

This is NASIR JONES (17). And he's on a roll:

NASIR

*Jesus cursed me since a
fetus/Churches mislead us/
Stephen King's pen, New Benz my
feet up/Like a magic carpet float
thru the Sahara--*

Until a VOICE interrupts him:

VOICE (O.S.)

*Man, shut the fuck up! I'm trying
to sleep!*

POP OUT to reveal Nasir in MCU. He's handsome, soft features framed by short dreads. He's dressed in Champion sweatshirt, Karl Kani jeans. We're in his childhood bedroom, where he huddles in the corner over a boombox. He looks to his little brother, JUNGLE (14), in the top bunk of a bunk bed. The source of this annoyed voice:

NASIR

*Your ass shoulda been up an hour
ago. Real quick, tell me what you
think of this--*

Nasir proceeds to SPIT A FEW MORE VERSES:

NASIR (CONT'D)

*I do it my way/Like comrade Che-
Guevara./On 95-I high-way cops with
scanners/They locked my man up
/Streets is hot as the closest
planet to the sun is--*

Jungle turns away from his brother, to our camera:

JUNGLE

*(mouths)
Daaaaamn...*

NASIR

What you think?

He turns back to his brother, adopts a poker face:

JUNGLE

Gotta be honest--it's kinda wack.

NASIR

You serious?

JUNGLE

Yeah. Sorry. It's aight, but you know, I was thinkin, maybe you should hit up my friend Gary's cousin William. He's a rap producer and he goes to John Baum high school and he's supposed to be crazy dope. I told him all about you. I said, "My brother's aight, but he could use some help. A little guidance."

Nasir looks at his little brother. He doesn't need any help from a 14-year-old:

NASIR

I'm cool.

JUNGLE

If you're so cool, then stop wakin' me up with that weak-ass bullshit.

Jungle pulls the covers over his head. And Nasir looks at his brother, annoyed. Turns the music WAY up.

JUNGLE (CONT'D)

Man! Come on!

And now, JANET, the boys' mom, opens the door. She's in her late 40's, with a pretty, serene face and a no-bullshit demeanor.

JANET

Turn that down.

Nasir immediately complies.

JANET (CONT'D)

Breakfast is in the kitchen. I am so late.

(kisses him goodbye)

That the sweatshirt I bought you?

(off his nod)

Handsome.

Janet pulls the covers off Jungle:

JUNGLE

Hey!

JANET

I want you out of this house in 20 minutes.

(gives Jungle a kiss)

Don't be late for school again.

JUNGLE

Dad says we're smarter than the teachers and we don't even have to go to school if we don't want to. He gave me this book by W.E.B. Dubois and said I should learn that instead. He says that the school system is broken for young black men.

JANET

Well, in this house, young black men go to school.

And with that, she's gone. Jungle looks at his brother:

NASIR

You heard her, Jungle...

Jungle shuffles to the bathroom. Nasir watches to make sure mom is gone, takes off the Champion sweatshirt, revealing a Nautica polo and a giant GOLD ROPE.

Nasir opens his top drawer, slides his socks and underwear out of the way to reveal a GLOCK. Nasir grabs the gun, tucks it into the waistband of his jeans. He throws on his ARMY JACKET.

NASIR (CONT'D)

Time for school.

WE FREEZE ON HIM:

NASIR (V.O.)

*It's like my boy Henry Hill said:
As far back as I can remember I
always wanted to be a gangster.*

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE PROJECTS - DAY

Nasir and Jungle walk across the basketball courts of the Queensbridge projects. It's early morning. The sun is shining bright:

NASIR (V.O.)

It was the first nice day of the year.

(MORE)

NASIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*That's like a holiday in New York
 City. Soon as the sun comes out and
 the temperature hits 70...*

CLOSE ON an IRON moving in precise alignment over a POLO.

NASIR (V.O.)
*That's when motherfuckers break out
 their flyest gear.*

CLOSE ON cleavage in a tanktop. A bead of sweat forming on a sunsoaked breast.

NASIR
*That's when girls start rockin'
 their tanktops. Even the crackheads
 have smiles on their faces today...*

CLOSE ON a THRONG of CRACKHEAD ZOMBIES, shuffling across the asphalt. Nasir and Jungle walk past them. Nasir keeps his eyes low, but Jungle can't help but look at a couple CRACKED-OUT MOTHERFUCKERS getting into a CRAZY BRAWL.

NASIR (V.O.)
Some of them, at least.

Jungle looks at the crackheads, starts pointing and laughing:

JUNGLE
 Yoyo! Check it out!

NASIR
 Don't clown them.

JUNGLE
 So fucking stupid.

One crackhead STABS another with a bottle.

NASIR
 Keep moving. Look down.

Jungle and Nasir pass a New York Post vending machine. On the front cover, Rudy Giuliani. On the back, Patrick Ewing. They reach the North Tower, stop at the base, look up, as Nasir calls:

NASIR (CONT'D)
 Ayo, Will!

Immediately, a window swings open on the third floor, and WILL, 17, charismatic as fuck, looks down, smiles a dangerous smile:

WILL
 (breathes in)
 Damn. It's mad nice out.

FREEZE ON Will.

NASIR (V.O.)
*That's my best friend Will. If any
 shit goes down in your life, Will's
 the dude you want in your corner.
 He had the heart of a lion. He
 wasn't afraid of nothin'.*

INT. WILL'S ROOM - DAY

Wall-to-wall POSTERS: "New Jack City", Brand Nubian, Big Daddy Kane. Will opens his drawer, grabs a GLOCK, tucks it into the waistband on his jeans.

EXT. QUEENS PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Nasir, Jungle and Will walk to school, past a slew of factories and industrial buildings that spew smoke into the air.

WILL
 Yo, that girl Jessie's gonna be at
 the block party tonight...

NASIR
 Word.

WILL
 She told me not to tell you, but
 she's, like, coming specifically to
 see you--

NASIR
 Cool.

Nasir absentmindedly flips his PAUSE TAPE in his hand:

WILL
 You should play her that tape.

NASIR
 Nah.

WILL
 Damn, kid--what good is you rappin'
 if you don't rap for nobody?
 (MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

You know music was invented by people for the express purpose of getting pussy, right? You're defeating the point of the whole shit.

JUNGLE

Hahahaha. Good one, Will.

NASIR

Jungle, don't speak.

JUNGLE

Ayo, Will--I was telling my brother, my friend Gary's cousin William is a dope producer--

WILL

(ignoring him)

How 'bout you let me play your tape and say it's me rappin'. Shit, at least help me get laid--

JUNGLE

Will! I was telling my bro, like, maybe he could work with Gary's cous--

WILL

(fed up)

Shorty, can't you see we're having a motherfucking conversation here? No one cares about your friend William's cousin Gary...

JUNGLE

Gary's cousin William.

WILL

What?! Man, shut the fuck up!

JUNGLE

Fuck you, Will.

And now, Jungle grabs Will's Mets cap, runs off with it.

WILL

I will beat your prepubescent ass.

Will chases Jungle, who laughs, runnin' down the block.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON birds chirping on tree. The early blossoms of Spring filter late morning sunlight. Now, ZOOM OUT to reveal we are looking through the cinderblock windowframe of a Queens Public High School. The loud din of dozens of teenagers wilding out flood onto our soundtrack.

ANGLE ON Nasir. Staring out the window. Lost in his own world.

NASIR (V.O.)

It was way too nice to be in school today. Not that I needed an excuse. Queens public school was a fuckin' horror movie anyway.

Rows and rows of desks sit in a classroom overflowing with students. Everyone's screaming, yelling, fighting. In the corner, a BOY AND GIRL make out so hard, it's like they're basically fucking. A seen-it-all male TEACHER, (50's, overweight, white) recites roll in a monotone. Not even looking up.

Nasir sits at a desk next to Will. Now, his pager starts vibrating. He reaches into his pocket, pulls it out, checks it. Will turns to him, and Nasir gives him a nod.

NASIR (V.O.)

Besides, me and Will were young entrepreneurs. We were what you call foot soldiers for my man Bo. Nothin' too stressful. Sold some shit. Did a little dirt. Put a little extra money in our pockets...

TEACHER

Nasir Jones.

NASIR

Here.

And Nasir and Will promptly get up and walk right out of the classroom, dodging a PRETTY ILL FISTFIGHT on the way out.

INT. PROJECT HALLWAY/EXT. BO'S HOUSE - DAY

Will and Nasir stand in a dingy, fluorescent-lit project hallway. Nasir knocks on Bo's door: 3 short knocks followed by a long one. A code. The door swings open, revealing BO (20).

BO

Sup.

He turns, and they follow him through the

LIVING ROOM

It's a mess. His MOM is asleep in all her clothes, empty Heinekens in front of her, TV still on.

BO

Mom, we got company.

(no response)

MOM, WE GOT COMPANY!

She wakes with a start, looks at him--a cracked-out mess. He shakes his head as they move into his bedroom.

INT. BO'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bo weighs out some CRACK COCAINE on a small scale, placing it into vials.

BO

Page me when you moved all of it.

WILL

Cool.

And now, from the other room:

BO'S MOM (O.S.)

Baby! C'mere!

INT. BO'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bo puts some CRACK into a CRACKPIPE for his mom. She grabs a lighter:

BO'S MOM

Thank you, sweetheart. You're a good boy.

Nasir and Will try not to make eye contact as they exit.

EXT. QUEENBRIDGE PUBLIC HOUSING - DAY

Nasir and Will walk across the basketball court, eyeing other rival dealers as they walk.

NASIR (V.O.)

I was cool with the hustle. But Will wanted more. Will always wanted more. I mean, I understood where he was comin' from. We were surrounded by motherfuckers who had shit like this--

NASIR'S POV: his eyes lock on dealers working different corners, displaying various spoils of the hustle:

THREE FINGERED RINGS.

GOLD ROPES.

PHAT FARM POLOS.

PRISTINE JORDANS.

NASIR (V.O.)

You peep those Jordans? Damn.

(beat)

And that's why Will wanted us to go into business for ourselves. He was always saying--

WILL

We need to go into business for ourselves. I don't wanna work for Bo no more. He's a fucking clown. We could run this shit better than half these fools.

NASIR

Yo, I'm just tryin' to make this money and not think about what we're doin' at all. I don't need to be good at this shit. As long as we don't get into trouble--

WILL

Fuck that. We should be the best in the world at everything we do.

NASIR

I want to be the best rapper in the world. That's what I want to be.

INT. PROJECT HALLWAY - DAY

A dimly-lit hallway on the first floor of a tower in the QB Houses. Dotted with crackheads. Nasir's absent-mindedly flipping through "The Source." On the cover, a black and white picture of a young Dr. Dre holding a revolver to his head.

NASIR

...Besides, if we went into business for ourselves, we wouldn't have Bo protectin' us no more.

WILL

Forreal? You think Bo protects us?! Bo's soft as fuck. *I* protect us.

A WOMAN approaches Will:

WILL (CONT'D)

Yo, I told you, Nicole: it's not happening.

WOMAN

C'mon, Will. I got money. *Please*.

WILL

Bitch, get your pregnant ass out of here.

We now see that she's pregnant. She turns, exits.

WILL (CONT'D)

But it would be so easy. Just head up to Harlem, get a cookie, flip it back home. Double our money in two hours, tops.

NASIR

Nah, man.

WILL

Why not? You scared?

NASIR

Damn right. Fuckin' terrified.

A SINGLE MOM holds her KID's hand, bringing him home from school.

SINGLE MOM

Excuse me.

Will and Nasir slide out of the way so she can put the key in her front door...

Now, Nasir looks up. The world freezes...

NASIR

Yo! Yo! Check it out!

As he sees:

NASIR (CONT'D)

It's Shante.

ROXANNE SHANTE (24)... Outside in the courtyard, signing autographs, smiling.

NASIR (V.O.)

Roxanne Shante was one of the most famous rappers ever to come out of Queensbridge...

"Roxanne's Revenge" rises on our soundtrack as the words ROXANNE SHANTE spray onto our screen like old-school graffiti and images of Shante flood our field of vision: Shante rapping onstage at a block party, Shante rapping at a club, the cover of her album. An article from Rap Pages spins toward us:

NASIR (V.O.)

She was only 24, but, like Marley Marl, she owned a piece of hip hop history. Her first album--
 (beat)
You know what? If you don't know who Shante is, that's on you. Google her ass.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE HOUSES, COURTYARD - DAY

Nasir steps out into bright sunlight, walks over to the crowd, speaks softly:

NASIR

Miss Shante...

Roxanne glares at him:

ROXANNE

Yeah. What you want?

NASIR

I want... Um. Well...

(beat)

--see, I'm kind of a rapper--

ROXANNE

No shit? Cuz You look like kind of a crack dealer to me.

NASIR
 (ignores her, pushing on)
 ...I was just--I was wondering if
 you ever, like, need people to open
 for you, or whatever.

She looks at him, smiles:

ROXANNE
 You think you could open for me?

NASIR
 Yeah. I do. Maybe.

ROXANNE
 What kinda stuff you rhyme about?

Nasir fumbles into his pocket, grabs his mixtape, hands it to her:

ROXANNE (CONT'D)
 A pause tape?

She laughs, examines the label:

ROXANNE (CONT'D)
 Kid Wave, huh?

NASIR
 You don't like it?

ROXANNE
 You sound like an R&B singer. You
 should do a duet with Anita Baker
 or some shit. Who produced this
 shit? Jimmy Jam? A fuckin' pause
 tape...

NASIR
 Just listen to it. It's nice.

ROXANNE
 I don't think so. Thanks, though.

She hands the tape back to him.

NASIR
 Really?

ROXANNE
 Really. I don't have time to listen
 to some bullshit pause tape, Kid
 Wave...

(beat)

(MORE)

ROXANNE (CONT'D)
But you could spit for me right
now...

NASIR
Right now?

ROXANNE
Or you can wait thirty seconds 'til
I walk away and rap for them
squirrels and pigeons right there.

NASIR
I, uh--I need a beat.

He looks around. Will is standing in the project hallway.
They make eye contact. Nasir nods his way, urging him to come
outside.

ROXANNE
That's right. Get your little crack-
dealin' partner out here--

Will comes up.

WILL
Sup, Miss Shante?

ROXANNE
I should fuck both y'all up for
selling drugs in our neighborhood.

NASIR
But that's the whole point. I don't
wanna be doin' this. I wanna rap.

ROXANNE
Then rap. Go ahead. Show me what
you got.

Nasir looks at Will, nods. Will starts to beatbox. But he's
too nervous. He can barely get a noise out. Spit flies
everywhere.

WILL
Sorry. My mouth is just a little
dry.

Roxanne starts cracking up.

ROXANNE
Here, I'll help you.

She starts beatboxing. And Nasir nods along. He scans the
crowd. His neighborhood, looking at him...

As he starts to spit:

NASIR

*Jesus cursed me since a
fetus/Churches mislead us/
Stephen King's pen, New Benz my
feet up/Like a magic carpet float
through the--through the--*

(beat)

Sorry. I fucked up. Lemme start
over...

(beat)

*Jesus cursed me since a
fetus/Churches mislead us--*

ROXANNE

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Hold up. You
gonna just start over onstage? Cuz
the crowd would fuck your ass up.
And then I'd fuck your ass up for
you even associating that wack-ass
shit with me.

(long beat)

Question: do I make you nervous?

NASIR

Nah.

ROXANNE

The correct answer is yes I do. But
that's OK. I used to get nervous
too. It goes away. Long as you're
not nervous in the studio...

(beat)

Good news is, your flow was nice.
All four seconds of it. And I'd
love to help get your crack-dealin'
ass into a more positive life
situation. So I'ma help you. You go
rap without me lookin' at you, see
how it goes. Make a demo.

Nasir goes back into his pocket for the tape--

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

Not that ghetto shit. A proper
demo.

(beat)

I got a meeting with my label in a
couple days. Get me something--4, 5
songs. I'll play it for them, and
maybe they'll put you on...

NASIR
Really? Damn. OK. Cool. Thank you
so much, Miss Shante.

But Roxanne's already walking away.

NASIR (CONT'D)
Wait! Wait up!

But she's disappeared. Nasir turns to Will:

NASIR (CONT'D)
How the fuck we gonna do this shit
in 2 days?

INT. BODEGA - DAY

Will puts 2 40's of O.E. on the counter, along with White
Owls, Funions and a couple quarter waters.

NASIR
First we need to find a studio...

WILL
I guess we can check the phone
book.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Will and Nasir smoke a blunt, huddled in a phone booth. Nasir
checks the white pages.

NASIR
Which one do we go to?

WILL
This is mad confusing.

NASIR
...And what about beats? We don't
got no beats. We need a producer.

WILL
Hot Day's DJing the block party
tonight. He's a dope producer.

NASIR
We need him.

WILL
(stoned)
I need some of those funions.

MUSIC: "In a Sentimental Mood", Coltrane, up on our soundtrack, initiating a

STONED AS HELL SMOOTH MONTAGE

A stoned Nasir and Will walk through Queensbridge at dusk, pulling on an L. Through their squinted eyes, they see:

-A couple Crackheads screaming at each other. We don't hear what they're saying...

-Some OLDER MEN, sitting in folding chairs and talking shit on the street.

-Late day sun shooting flares of sunlight through trees.

-Homeless people sleeping in a makeshift bed of cardboard on a park bench.

-Crack dealers, eyeing our boys as they walk by.

Will and Nasir glare right back, slits for eyes and thin smiles on their faces, as the sodium vapor lights of the New York City night fire on...

END OF MONTAGE.

A COUPLE OLDER DUDES CARRY A LONG EXTENSION CORD AND SPEAKERS out of their apartment. Early preparations for the big park jam. Nasir and Will walk past them, continuing to smoke a blunt on their way home.

NASIR

Ayo. Headsup. It's my moms.

Across the projects, Janet walks with GROCERY BAGS. Nasir slides the gold off his neck, slips it to Will. He throws on his Champion sweatshirt. Will stubs out the Blunt.

NASIR (CONT'D)

Mom!

She looks at Nasir and her eyes light up.

INT. NASIR'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A civilized dinner. Nasir, Jungle, Will and Janet. Nasir's home is better appointed than other Queensbridge apartments: crystal chandelier, marble coffee table. Floor model Zenith with wood paneling on it and antenna sticking out and framed photos of Nasir and Jungle atop. Wallpaper looking like it might peel any day, but clinging on for now. Nasir flipping through the yellow pages.

JANET
Put that book away.

He does.

JANET (CONT'D)
Will, how's your mother?

On Will, stoned as fuck, stuffing his face:

WILL
Real good, Miss Jones.

JANET
Give her my best.

WILL
I will. How's your mother? I mean,
Miss Jones, how are you--uh, Miss
Jones?

She looks at him, curious. Furrows her brow.

JANET
Fine. Thank you.
(to her boys)
How was school today?

Nasir and Jungle look at each other. A silent beat.

Good. ESCO Good. JUNGLE

Now, in the distance, the sound of BASS entering the night.
And a DJ scratching. Nasir and Will look at each other.

NASIR
May we be excused?

JANET
Baby, we just started eating...

NASIR
Mom, we gotta go to the party. My
man Hot Day's DJing and we need him
to produce a demo--

JUNGLE
What about Gary's cousin William,
from John Baum?

JANET
Demo? You should be focusing on
schoolwork.

WILL

This is actually a project for school.

JANET

OK, that's a terrible lie, Will. Give me a little more credit.

JUNGLE

Mom. They never listen to me. I told them about my friend's cousin who could produce their demo. He's an amazing producer--

JANET

You should listen to your brother more.

NASIR

I will Mom.

JANET

Don't just "yes" me.

NASIR

So what do you want me to say?

JANET

I want you to think about the fact that you don't consider your brother's advice as much as you could--

NASIR

Fine. I'll think about that.

JANET

...And I want you to finish your dinner. I took the time to cook it. You take the time to eat it.

NASIR

Yes, ma'am.

JUNGLE

Can I go to the block party too?

JANET

You know you can't be out that late, sweetheart. Next year.

JUNGLE

That's bullshit!

JANET
No swearing.

WILL
Jungle, please. Such language is
offensive to your elders.

Jungle looks at Will, fuming with anger. Will winks at him,
mouths "FUCK YOU."

JUNGLE
Mom! Will just mouthed "Fuck you"
to me!

JANET
Jungle! Language!

JUNGLE
Fuck that! I mean--

JANET
Jungle, go to your room.

JUNGLE
Ugh. Fine.

He gets up, goes to his room. As he does, Will winks at him.

JANET
I'm sorry. I don't know what got
into that boy.

WILL
Oh, it's OK, Miss Jones. He's
young. He'll grow out of it. And
while I am mildly offended, I have
heard such language before.

JANET
Shut the fuck up, Will.

MUSIC UP: Father MC's "Everything's Gonna Be Alright"

EXT. UNDER THE QUEENSBORO BRIDGE - DUSK

Old school park jam. Music pulses through the cool April
night. Sodium vapor light mingles with strung-up Christmas
lights. People cook off makeshift grills. Smoke dances into
the night air.

And Nasir and Will move through the park in slow motion, in
silhouette, until they step into the light of the party...

Their eyes land on BO, who is standing with their friend SNACKS (22), overweight, laid back, puffing on a blunt. They all exchange pounds. Snacks hands Will and Nasir Heinekens.

SNACKS

Yo, check out how big that dog's balls are...

ANGLE ON a PITBULL WITH GIANT BALLS. The guys eye them, in awe. And start laughing.

NASIR

Yo, I'll be right back.

SNACKS

Where's you goin'?

NASIR

To see Hot Day.

SNACKS

Check it. Them girls are here--

Three GIRLS, dressed in Carhartt jackets, jeans and tanktops, wander the party. These are JESSIE, LISA, and MARY. Nasir makes eye contact with JESSIE. She gives him a smile, demurely looks away, as he disappears into the crowd.

SNACKS (CONT'D)

TLC! Whaddup!

JESSIE

Who you callin' TLC?

SNACKS

Y'all look like TLC.
(almost to himself)
Overalls. Backwards hats and
shit...

JESSIE

(to Bo)
You must be the skinny one. I'm
Jessie. Nice to meet you.

BO

The skinny one?

JESSIE

You guys are PM Dawn, right?
(beat, to Snacks)
Cuz you're definitely the fat one.

Everyone cracks up at this. Snacks reaches into a cooler:

SNACKS

Drink, ladies?

They each take a Heineken. Jessie looks up:

JESSIE

Where's Nasir?

MEANWHILE--

Nasir approaches the stage. Hot Day is up there on the wheels of steel SCRATCHING up a storm. Nasir clears his throat:

NASIR

Yo...

(no response)

Ayo, Hot Day!

DJ Hot Day turns around, nods at Nasir. And we FREEZE:

NASIR (V.O.)

Hot Day was a DJ slash producer slash hustler. He was starting his own label, at the same time he was runnin' guns and crack in the neighborhood. If anyone could help me record my demo, it was him...

HOT DAY

Look at you with them nasty dreads!
When's the last time you washed
that nasty-ass hair, kid?

NASIR

Yesterday.

HOT DAY

Then you ain't doin' it right.
Lather, rinse, repeat, my man.
Damn. Nasty Nas with them nasty-ass
dreads. Nasty Nas. Can't you see
I'm busy?

NASIR

I just had one quick question--

Now, a COUPLE KIDS come up. Hot Day reaches into his pocket for some crack. His shirt lifts to reveal a nickel .22.

HOT DAY

What is it?

NASIR
 You know where's the best place to
 record a demo?

He scratches one record into another.

HOT DAY
 Power Play Studios.

NASIR
 Where's that?

HOT DAY
 Really? It's right around the
 fuckin' corner, man.

NASIR (V.O.)
*Right around the corner and I never
 knew it existed. That's how small
 my world was...*

NASIR
 Cool. Thanks.

A long beat.

NASIR (CONT'D)
 Yo, you think maybe you wanna
 produce it for me?

Hot Day turns, looks at him:

HOT DAY
 Do I want to produce your demo?

NASIR
 Yeah.

HOT DAY
 No.

NASIR
 Why not?

Hot Day sizes him up and down.

HOT DAY
 What you gonna rap about anyway?
 How much crack you sell?

NASIR
 Nah. I mean, yeah. Maybe? Like,
 just about our lives...

(MORE)

NASIR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Write what you know, right?

HOT DAY

Well, y'all don't know shit. People don't want to hear about your small-time wannabe gangster bullshit. This is 1992! People wanna dance, have a good time. That's what hip hop's all about. Always has been. Rapping about guns and drugs--that shit is way too dark. The audience ain't never gonna accept shit like that. You gotta rap about how dope you are. It's about your flow. Your look. The whole package. And, no offense--

Will approaches, overhears:

HOT DAY (CONT'D)

But y'all don't look like much.

WILL

You're not gonna do it?

(off their looks)

What? Forreal? C'mon. My boy's nice. You know he's nice.

HOT DAY

He's just a kid. Both of y'all are. Come back when you got some hair on your dick.

WILL

Man, fuck you! Who needs you anyway? We're gonna run this whole fucking city when we're done. And you're gonna remember this moment. You're gonna think about it for the rest of your life. This was your chance. And now you're just gonna be fucking garbage.

HOT DAY

Watch your mouth, son.

WILL

Or what?

Nasir steps in between them.

NASIR
It's cool. We're cool. Thanks for
the advice.

They walk away.

WILL
Did he tell you a studio at least?

NASIR
Yeah.

WILL
Nice!

EXT. PARK JAM - MOMENTS LATER

Nasir and Will approach their crew. He sees Jessie.

JESSIE
Hey.

NASIR
Hey.

They lock eyes. Nasir smiles.

JESSIE
You all right?

NASIR
I'm sorry, but I gotta go
somewhere.

JESSIE
Well, I kinda came here just to see
you.

NASIR
You did?

She smiles.

JESSIE
Your man didn't tell you that?
C'mon, I know he did.

NASIR
(smiling)
Nah. He didn't say shit.
(beat)
You should come with us...

Now, Hot Day scratches into Rakim's "Know the Ledge"...

JESSIE

(fucking with him)

I don't know, man. I mean, I did
come here specifically to see you,
but you kinda dissed me and now I'm
having a real fun time here.
Without you.

NASIR

Really? This is what you look like
having fun?

She smiles a forced smile.

JESSIE

Yep. See? Fun.

NASIR

Shit. I believe you. That's good
acting. You're a good actress.

JESSIE

Thank you. So I'm just gonna stay
here. Because I'm having so much
fun.

She does a little dance.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Time of my life.

(beat)

I love this song.

And now, someone kills the lights. And the music. All eyes
turn to see New York's Finest. A cop in those old light blue
uniforms proclaims:

COP

OK. Let's wrap it up.

Everyone groans.

COP 2

We said *WRAP IT UP!*

She looks at Nasir,

Who smiles.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE BLOCK - NIGHT

Rakim's "Know the Ledge" rises on the soundtrack, as we STREAK OVER THE BUILDINGS OF QUEENSBRIDGE. Night falls over New York City. We INTERCUT WITH: The opening credits of "Juice." Jungle watches a VHS along with 10 OTHER KIDS. Janet puts a bowl of popcorn on a table, whispers to him:

JANET

(whispers)

I don't understand why you can't watch this at someone else's house...

JUNGLE

We're the only family with a VCR.

YOUNG FRIENDS

This quality is terrible!/Fix the tracking!/This sucks!

JUNGLE

It's a bootleg. It gets better.

Janet turns, grabs a basket of laundry. We follow her, as she enters Nasir and Jungle's room.

INT. NASIR'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Janet starts MATCHING the boys' socks. She slides open the sock drawer--

Puts the socks away. Now, she feels something, beneath a pile of underwear. She moves the underwear to the side, revealing...

A GLOCK. She looks down at it.

She reaches for it, troubled.

Just then, she hears SCREAMING OUT THE WINDOW. She looks outside to see:

A GROUP OF YOUNG MEN BEATING THE SHIT OUT OF ANOTHER MAN.

It's brutal, goes on for far longer than it should. Screams and profanity fade into the cool night air.

Janet backs away from the window, looks down at the gun in her hand...

EXT. QB STREETS - NIGHT

Nasir, Will, Snacks, Jessie, etc. walk down the street, toward Power Play studio:

JESSIE
So, what? You sing or something?

NASIR
No. I don't sing.

JESSIE
Don't tell me you rap?

NASIR
C'mon. It's like that hard to imagine?

JESSIE
I mean, a little. It's just--
(beat)
You're so quiet.

NASIR
Just sometimes.

JESSIE
So if you rap, how come I've never seen you do it? Like, why didn't you just get up on stage and rap back there?

NASIR
It's not time yet. I'm not ready.

JESSIE
My sister just had a kid. And my pops told her, "you're never going to feel ready."

INT. POWER PLAY STUDIOS - NIGHT

Will and Nasir and their crew stand in the studio, when something catches Nasir's eye.

He moves across the room, to a door, with a little glass picture window in the middle of it. He peers through the window.

NASIR'S POV: The studio, packed with people. Nasir scans the crowd... Where Rakim spits on the mic.

NASIR (V.O.)
Eric B and Rakim?

And Nasir's eyes land on an UNASSUMING KID, wearing BIG-RIMMED GLASSES, sitting at the controls. He looks through the window, at Nasir, gives him a polite nod. PAN OVER to ERIC B, right next to him, who gives Nasir THE FINGER.

OLDER GUY (V.O.)
 Sorry, kiddos. We're all booked up.

Nasir quickly turns.

Across from him, an OLDER GUY (white, most likely Jewish) who's running around, doing five things at once, completely frazzled:

NASIR
 Really? You don't have nothin' in,
 like, the next couple days?

OLDER GUY
 Next couple days? We've got nothing
 for four months. I can schedule you
 for late August.

NASIR
 It's gotta be sooner than that.

OLDER GUY
 What's the rush? You're a kid!
 You've got plenty of time!

NASIR
 All I need is like, half an hour or
 somethin'--

OLDER GUY
 30 minutes?

NASIR
 Please, sir.

He checks the LOG, more closely this time. A long beat.

OLDER GUY
 I'll squeeze you in tomorrow at 6.
 But if you're here a second late,
 no dice. And you'll have to wait 4
 months, just like everyone else. I
 know sometimes you people aren't
 the most time-conscious, so--

Nasir and Will both scowl at him.

OLDER GUY (CONT'D)
Oh, don't get indignant. I deal with black people all day. Jews are cheap. Blacks are late. It's a stereotype because it's true.

NASIR
I'll be here at 6. Promptly, sir.

OLDER GUY
We'll see.

NASIR
Uh, sir, one more question: how much will that cost?

OLDER GUY
Two.

NASIR
Hundred? For half an hour?

OLDER GUY
Two hundred dollar minimum. That a problem?

NASIR
Uh--

WILL
No. It's no problem at all, sir.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

The roof of the QB houses. The Manhattan skyline twinkles in the distance. Nasir puffs on a blunt, passes it to Jessie. Further off, Will pisses, drinking a 40. He returns, sits next to Nasir. They stare out into the night.

JESSIE
How the fuck y'all gonna get two hundred dollars?

WILL
I know exactly how.
(to Nasir)
And so do you.
(beat)
Hot Day's right. We're living too small...

NASIR

That's not even what he said. And who gives a fuck about that fool anyway?

WILL

I do, man. I'm sick of other people telling us what to do. I'm sick of being smarter than everyone else and not doing nothin' about it. I'm sick of working for Bo. I'm sick of these fucking projects. I'm sick of sitting up here at Pebble Beach and looking at that city so far away when I know we could be running this whole motherfucker. Look out there...

Their eyes land on a GOODYEAR BLIMP. And LCD display runs across it, reading: "*The World Is Yours*". Will jumps onto the ledge, his back to the city:

WILL (CONT'D)

All this shit could be ours, man. I'm telling you.

JESSIE

Get down. You're crazy.

Nasir eyes his friend, standing on the ledge, with concern:

NASIR

Fine, man. Fine. We'll do it. Just get down.

Will immediately jumps down.

WILL

That's whassup.

A long beat. Nasir looks at the blimp again, blinks. The display now reads, "GOODYEAR TIRES \$5.99"

NASIR

Fuck! I just thought of something...

WILL

What?

NASIR

I'ma have to ask Jungle to hook us up with that producer kid.

WILL
So?

NASIR
So he's gonna be a dick about it.
Man, I'm drunk as fuck.

Will sits down next to them:

WILL
Word? I feel pretty good.

Will pukes all over the roof.

EXT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Nasir and Jessie hook up on the stairs. She breaks the clinch:

JESSIE
Whatever it is you're about to do,
you sure about it?

NASIR
Yeah.

JESSIE
You're lying.

They smile at each other. An electric moment. She gazes into his eyes.

JESSIE (CONT'D)
You're so lying...

NASIR
Yo, stop looking into my eyes like
that. You're bugging me out.

JESSIE
I just want to get to know you. I
don't judge you. You don't got to
lie to me. Really. I don't care
what you do.

NASIR
Then let's just do this.

They kiss a little more. He unbuttons her fly, tries to put his hand down her jeans.

JESSIE
Nah.

NASIR
Forreal?

JESSIE
We shouldn't.

NASIR
But I heard you let that dude
Khalil fuck you...

JESSIE
First of all, I don't know who told
you that, but that's none of your
business. Second of all, I like you
more than I like him.

NASIR
Wait, hold up. You like me more, so
I get to do less?

JESSIE
Just right now...

NASIR
That's not fair.

JESSIE
In the long term, you'll get to do
everything. If you're in it for the
long haul, it'll all work out...

He looks at her. A long beat.

NASIR
OK. So maybe I could just get a
hand job then?

She laughs.

INT. JANET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Janet lies in bed, asleep. And now, she hears the front door open. Her eyes flutter. She thinks about getting up, going to talk to him, but she hears the door to his bedroom click closed. She stares into the night, worried for her son. A POLICE SIREN streaks by outside as we

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. NASIR'S HOUSE - MORNING

Morning in Queensbridge. Again, we push in on Nasir's window. He's making a new PAUSE TAPE, rapping for his brother. Again, his rhymes are indisputably dope and again...

JUNGLE

Wack.

NASIR

Wack?

JUNGLE

I liked the one yesterday better.

NASIR

But you said the one yesterday was wack!

JUNGLE

Yeah, but not as wack.

...Again, Janet enters.

JANET

Breakfast is on the table.

She pulls the covers off Jungle, looks at Nasir:

JANET (CONT'D)

Have a nice day.
(gives him a kiss)
Be careful.

He nods. And with that, she's gone.

NASIR

You heard the woman, Jungle! Time for school!

Jungle groans, gets out of bed. Nasir moves to his top drawer, slides his socks to the side, revealing--

The Glock. He grabs it, tucks it into the waistband of his jeans.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE PROJECTS - DAY

Nasir, Will Jungle walk across the basketball courts on a rainy day. Quiet this morning. Jungle looks at his brother, whose eyes are glued on the horizon:

JUNGLE
You aiiight?

NASIR
Yeah. I'm cool.
(long beat)
So, uh, listen--

JUNGLE
Yeah?

NASIR
Remember that kid you were talking
about? The producer?

Jungle looks at his brother, smiles:

JUNGLE
Uh huh--

NASIR
You think he'd, like, work with me
today? I got some studio time at
6pm.

JUNGLE
I don't know. I don't know his
schedule.

A long beat. They keep walking.

NASIR
But can you, like, ask him about
it?

JUNGLE
Ask who about what?

NASIR
Yo, stop fucking around.

Jungle cracks up:

JUNGLE
Yeah. I'll ask Gary.
(beat)
Just don't waste his time with
those weak-ass rhymes.

NASIR
Yeah. OK. Fuck you.

JUNGLE

Fuck you too. I'll page you when I know.

NASIR

Thanks.

NASIR (V.O.)

Now came the hard part. I'd never done nothing like this before. I was more likely to shit a brick than sell a brick. But at least we had a plan:

(beat)

Take the 1, 2 up to 145th street. Get a cookie. That's like 2, 3 z's of crack. Cut it up into rocks and sell that shit back in Queens.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Nasir and Will sit on the subway.

NASIR (V.O.)

But as long as we were going up to Harlem...

He turns to Will:

NASIR

Just wanna make one stop first.

EXT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - DAY

Nasir and Will stand outside. Nasir rings the bell. And someone BUZZES THEM IN. Nasir moves to the front door, knocks...

And a SCANTILY CLAD WOMAN answers. She's wearing nothing but a silk robe. She smiles at Nasir and Will:

SCANTILY CLAD WOMAN

Can I help you?

NASIR

Is Duke in?

SCANTILY CLAD WOMAN

And you are...?

NASIR

His son.

Will jumps in--

WILL

And I'm his son's friend, ma'am.
And I think I speak for both of us
when I say it is a true pleasure to
meet a mature lady as fine as you--

SCANTILY CLAD WOMAN

I'll get him.

She turns around, her robe sliding up to reveal her bare ass
as she walks away.

DUKE

Son!

Now, from the other room, Duke enters, pulling on his slacks,
buttoning up his shirt.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Will. To what do I owe the
pleasure, gentlemen--?

NASIR

We were just in the neighborhood.

DUKE

Shouldn't y'all be at school?

NASIR

It's a holiday.

DUKE

No it's not. That's OK. Y'all want
something to drink?

They nod.

INT. DUKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Thelonius Monk plays. Sunlight cuts through smoky air.
African masks on the walls. Filled with books: black history.
Arithmetic. Egypt. The Bible. Duke smokes a cigarette. Nasir
and Will sip brown liquid from a tumbler. Nasir makes a face:

NASIR

Aarrgh. What the fuck is that?

DUKE

Bourbon.

WILL

It's good.

DUKE

How's your mother?

NASIR

Alright.

DUKE

Send her my regards. So what kind of scheme y'all cooking up today?

NASIR

Nothing.

He studies his son's eyes:

DUKE

That's fine. Keep it to yourself. I don't mind that you're not in school. I want you to be independent thinkers. So long as you don't get yourselves into trouble. I'm looking at you, Will.

(to Will)

Don't get my son in trouble. He's a good kid.

NASIR

Actually, we're gonna record some music today.

DUKE

Some music, huh? What kind of music?

NASIR

I'm gonna record a rap demo. We're just heading uptown to pick up some equipment.

DUKE

Well, a lot of people are gonna give you bullshit advice on that, I imagine. And I don't know much about rap. But I do know music, so here's my bullshit advice:

(beat)

Be yourself. Tell them a story they've never heard before. Show them what makes your perspective on the world unique...

Nasir looks at his dad, smiles, nods.

DUKE (CONT'D)
And maybe learn how to play the
trumpet. That's real music. None of
this Hammer Time bullshit.

Will nods. He finishes his drink. Looks at his watch:

WILL
We should go.

DUKE
Let me give you two some books
first.

Duke moves to his bookshelf. Will and Nasir look at each other. The weight of what they're about to do finally landing on them...

Dark jazz swells, as we CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Nasir and Will ride in between cars on the 1 train, kinda drunk.

They look down, beneath the cars...

And see OCEAN... shimmering with strobing sunlight.

And now, SKY... And the skyscrapers of New York City receding below...

Nasir and Will look at each other. They're flying.

NASIR (V.O.)
*We didn't know what was gonna
happen when we got up there. We
didn't know how we were gonna find
what we were lookin' for...*

BACK TO REALITY.

EXT. 145TH STREET - DAY

Nasir and Will POV: THEY move past SKETCHY PEOPLE ON ALL SIDES, all of them whispering:

SKETCHY PEOPLE
Smoke? Dose? Trip? Rock?/I got that
coke for you/You want that
herb?/Nickel bag? Dime?

NASIR (V.O.)
Turns out they made that shit easy.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

-Will nods at a CRACK DEALER.

-Will, Nasir and the Crack Dealer step around the corner into an alley. Crack Dealer looks from side to side.

CRACK DEALER
Hurry up yo. Hurry up.

-Nasir pulls a hundred bucks from his jean pocket. The Dealer counts it out, quick.

-The dealer hands Will the cookie, bunched up TIN FOIL.

-Will tucks it under the tongue of his sneaker.

And now, we're back on the

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - DAY

Nasir and Will sit next to each other, stare at their reflections strobing in the black subway picture window, as the 9 train rumbles downtown.

PAST 96th.
PAST COLUMBUS CIRCLE...

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT

A kid on the subway plays the buckets. Nasir and Will stand nervously on the platform, as the N Train rumbles into the station...

INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Will and Nasir, in the bedroom, cutting the cookie up and splitting it into vials.

NASIR (V.O.)
*There was only one place to move
that kinda weight: the Terrordome.*

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE BLOCK - DAY

Public Enemy's "Welcome to the Terrordome" assaults our soundtrack as we trail Nasir and Will around a corner and into

THE TERRORDOME

An open-air drug market in the middle of Queens. All around them, shady figures lurk.

NASIR (V.O.)

*Now we just try not to piss off any
of the other dealers who think
we're movin' in on their turf.*

Will assumes a more gangster stance as he stalks down the street, standing taller, glaring at everyone. He turns to Nasir, who appears terrified:

WILL

(whispers)

You look like a fucking pussy. Look harder.

Nasir nods. Adopts his hardest looking glare.

NASIR

Yo, where we supposed to go?

Will's eyes take in the lay of the land. He's got court vision.

WILL

That corner.

As Nasir and Will amble across, past a few RIVAL DEALERS who eye them. Nasir and Will eye them right back.

Nasir's PAGER VIBRATES. He checks it.

NASIR

It's Jungle. I'll be right back.

WILL

OK. Just remember, don't look like a pussy. These dudes smell fear.

Nasir moves off, hard lookin'.

WILL (CONT'D)

Now you look like you have to take a shit. Dial it back.

INT. NASIR'S HOUSE - DAY

The phone rings. Jungle picks up:

JUNGLE

Yo.

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:

NASIR

Whassup?

JUNGLE

Meet him at John Baum at 5pm.

NASIR

5pm. Got it.

JUNGLE

He said don't be late or he'll leave.

NASIR

OK. How do I know it's him?

JUNGLE

I don't know. I never met him.

NASIR

You never met him? You never heard none of his beats?

JUNGLE

His cousin swears he's dope, though. I trust him.

NASIR

Shit, Jungle.

JUNGLE

Just look for the motherfucker holding a bunch of records.

(beat)

And don't give him none of those weak-ass rhymes--

Nasir hangs up. He checks his watch:

3:15. Shit.

Public Enemy swells and we watch

Nasir AND WILL UNLOAD ALL THEIR SHIT IN FAST-MOTION

Over the course of the next hour or so. A throng of crackheads come and go. As the sun begins to set...

EXT. TERRORDOME - DUSK

Will stands against a brick wall, surreptitiously counts out some money. He smooths out his billfold, puts it in his pocket. Behind him, a CRACKHEAD waits.

WILL
Aight. We cool.

Nasir slips the CRACKHEAD a vial. The Crackhead shuffles off. A beat. Nasir checks his watch-- 4:13...

He looks at Will:

WILL (CONT'D)
That's the last of it.

NASIR
Let's bounce.

Will smiles big. And they move down the street, together.

NASIR (V.O.)
Four hundred bucks in under an hour. And I still had plenty of time to get to John Baum. Will was right. Everything was out there for us. We just had to take it...

Just then--

An ARM REACHES OUT, grabs Will by the throat. ANOTHER ARM grabs Nasir, as they are pulled into an--

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

TWO THUGS stand across from them. One THUG holds a gun to Will's head. The other holds a KNIFE to Nasir.

NASIR (V.O.)
Fuck!

WILL
What y'all want?

THUG ONE
All of it, nigga. Now. Now.

NASIR (V.O.)
Stick up kids. Forgot about them.

Will looks at Nasir, nods. And we PUSH IN ON Nasir's eyes. He shakes his head, almost imperceptibly:

NASIR (V.O.)
This is what we asked for. This is what we wanted. We didn't want to be kids no more. And now, look at us. Guess there was a lesson to be learned here...

We PUSH IN on Nasir Right into his eyes. Beads of sweat form on his temple.

Our CAMERA MOVES INTO THE GUN that's pressing into him.

And back to his eyes. As they narrow.

NASIR
Scared money don't make none.

NASIR (CONT'D)
 Man, fuck y'all.

THUG ONE
 What?

Nasir pulls his gun.

WILL
 Y'all got in the wrong nigga's way today.

Will pulls his gun too.

WILL (CONT'D)
 You think you can fuck with us? Who THE FUCK you think you're dealing with...?

Nasir starts to back away, but Will just stays there:

NASIR
 OK, cool. Let's go...

WILL
 Nah, fuck that.
 (beat)
 All of it, motherfuckers. All of it.

THUG TWO
All of what?

WILL
Your money.

THUG TWO
Man, what the fuck do you think
you're doing?

WILL
Y'all see *Pretty Woman*? I'm robbin'
you right back.

They groan, and turn over all their money to Will...

Who PROCEEDS TO PISTOL WHIP THEM.

WILL (CONT'D)
Pussy-ass, bitch-ass motherfuckers.
You don't fuck with Ill Will!

He pounds the shit out of them. It's brutal. Blood flies
everywhere. It's almost as if he actually likes it.

WILL (CONT'D)
I don't ever wanna see you sellin'
over here.

THUG TWO
OK. OK. Don't worry about it.
You'll never see me do this
again...

WILL
EVER!

NASIR
Will, c'mon. Let's go.

Nasir and Will back out together, guns leveled at the TWO
THUGS. Now they turn the corner, breathing heavy. They look
at each other...

A long beat. Silence.

WILL
Damn, that was exhilarating as
fuck.

Nasir looks at his friend: excited and scared all at the same
time. And now, from O.S.

VOICE (O.S.)

HEY!

Will and Nasir turn to see:

NASIR (V.O.)

Robocop.

(beat)

Homeboy was a legend. Stood like seven feet tall. He could kill you with one hollow-point bullet from like three blocks away. And he liked to kill young niggas for fun...

ANGLE ON a NYPD officer, 10 FEET TALL, clad in the light-blue uniform of the period, but head concealed in a ROBOCOP HELMET. His eyes glow red:

ROBOCOP

Dead or alive, you're coming with me.

ROBOCOP STRAFES THE BLOCK WITH GUNFIRE. Nasir and Will are riddled with bullets. Crackheads fly backwards into windows, shattering them. It's carnage. Blood, glass, bullets everywhere.

BACK TO REALITY.

Nasir and Will stare at an NYPD cop. Not Robocop, not 10 feet tall, but paunchy and with a moustache and, most importantly, a gun. He chases them down the street.

Nasir and Will haul ass.

They turn the corner... See a FIRE ESCAPE...

They leap up onto it...

Climb up. The COP trails right behind them...

They land on the ROOF.

WILL

Split up!

Nasir checks his watch: 4:52...

NASIR

Yo! Hold up! We gotta divide the loot first!

Will reaches into his pocket, pulls out a stack of bills. He eyes out about half, hands it to Nasir.

WILL
Give 'em hell.

NASIR
Peace.

Now, the COP crests the roof. Nasir and Will run off, each one jumping onto the roof of a different adjacent building. Will runs to the door that leads to stairwell, opens it, descends.

Nasir runs to the DOOR atop the roof of his BUILDING. He tugs at it. Shit. It's locked. The Cop sees this, and jumps across to that building. Headed to Nasir...

Nasir turns. Shit. He's closing in.

Nasir eyes a brick on the ground next to him. He grabs it, uses it to PUNCH OUT the square pane of glass in the middle of the door...

He reaches through the pane for the door handle.

It's just out of his reach. He steps onto his tiptoes. The Cop closes in.

Finally, Nasir GRABS THE HANDLE, turns it, runs into the building. Right before the cop grabs him!

Nasir runs...

Down STAIRCASE...

After STAIRCASE...

EXT. QUEENS STREET - NIGHT

Streetlights fire on. It's quiet. And now, Nasir BURSTS OUT onto the street. He looks from side to side. No sign of the cops...

Nasir BOOKS IT DOWN THE BLOCK.

Never looks back.

EXT. JOHN BAUM HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Nasir runs up to the front entrance of John Baum, doubles over, breathing heavy.

He looks around. It's empty. He checks his watch:

5:35.

VOICE (O.S.)
You're late. I almost left.

Nasir turns, sees a really NERDY LOOKIN' DUDE. Big, bifocal glasses. Unassuming.

We've seen this guy before. In the studio with Eric B and Rakim.

WILLIAM
You're Jungle's brother, right? I'm William.
(beat)
They call me Large Professor.

NASIR
You're...Large Professor?

NERDY
Yep.

NASIR
I'm Nasir. Nice to meet you.

NERDY
Jungle's friend Gary's my cousin.

NASIR
Yeah, uh, he told me that.

They look at each other a beat.

LARGE PROFESSOR
Let's go. We don't want to be late.
Arthur hates it when we're late.
Helps reinforce his stereotypes.
(beat)
As luck would have it, I booked the next hour myself. I have a few friends meeting me there.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Large Professor drives. Nasir rides shotgun. Quiet between them. Finally:

LARGE PROFESSOR
Your brother tells my cousin you're
going to be the greatest rapper of
all time.

NASIR
He said that?

LARGE PROFESSOR
Says your flow is beyond reproach.

Nasir allows himself to smile a little bit.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Nasir and Large Professor enter the studio. Nasir looks around, scans the crowd: Eric B, Rakim. The studio teeming with other people.

LARGE PROFESSOR
Hey, guys. This is Nasir. We're
going to be working together.

They nod hello.

ERIC B
This that kid you told me's s'posed
to be, like, the greatest rapper of
all time?

LARGE PROFESSOR
That's what his brother says.

NASIR
My brother's only 14. And he's kind
of an idiot.

ERIC B
Come on. I wanna hear the greatest
rapper of all time.

Nas takes a deep breath. And...

NASIR
Fuck it.

INT. STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Nasir steps to the mic.

He looks across to Large Professor, who nods. Nasir puts on a pair of BIG HEADPHONES...

Clears his throat...

And Large Professor drops a beat. Nasir hears it. We don't. We just see him SMILE. And...

NASIR

*Jesus, cursed me since a
fetus/Churches mislead us --
Stephen King's pen, New Benz my
feet up/Like a magic carpet float
thru the Sahara-- I do it my
way/Like comrade Che Guevara./On 95-
I high-way cops with scanners/They
locked my man up streets is hot as
the closest planet to the sun is --*

He's warming up now, preparing to go 0 to 60.

NASIR (CONT'D)

*Someone said my birth was a
myth/But I exist...*

He is completely tuned in. Nothing around him matters. It's just him and the beat.

NASIR (CONT'D)

(Cathartic release)

*The scent of Mercury's mist with
Hercules strength--that combination
intricate phrasing of words paint a
pic/Ain't I Sick?/inadvertently
ripped off faces/Destruction to
stage's a curse n a gift.*

And now, the MIC from the other room clicks on interrupting his flow...

LARGE PROFESSOR

Yo... Yo... Stop. Stop!

Nasir stops. In a daze he looks up, at Large Professor. Eric B leans into the mic:

ERIC B

What'd you say your name was again?

Nasir thinks. A long beat.

NASIR

Nasty Nas.

ERIC B

Well, you dope as hell, Nasty Nas.

Nasty Nas smiles. As the opening strains to Ahmad Jamal's "I Love Music" (the sample used in Illmatic's "The World is Yours") swell on our soundtrack...

INT. NAS' BEDROOM - DAY

A new morning in Queensbridge. The demo finishes. Ill Will sits, in awe.

ILL WILL

Wow, man. Wow. Yo, you sure you still wanna do this today?

NAS

Fuck yeah, I'm sure. I ain't done shit yet.

ILL WILL

Yeah, but--

NAS

I'm cool. Plus, I got in on LP's studio time, so I still got that 200. Which means I can stake the next cookie.

ILL WILL

You're really sure?

NAS

Positive. I need more shit to rhyme about.

Nas ejects his CD from his discman. On it, professionally printed, the words: NASTY NAS DEMO. He opens his top drawer. Where the GLOCK was, there's a stack of professional CDs. He puts this one on top of it...

And slides them to the side, revealing the GLOCK.

The opening strains to "The World is Yours" play faintly on the soundtrack. As he tucks the gun into the waist of his jeans.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE BLOCK - DAY

The familiar intersection from the cover of "Illmatic".

Nasty Nas and Ill Will walk across it like it's Abbey motherfucking Road. As we go...

BLACK.