

THUNDERBIRD SWAP SHOP

1X01

"PILOT"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THUNDERBIRD SWAP SHOP - DAY

From behind WE SEE a man at the edge of a bluff, decked-out in the khaki clothes of a big game hunter, complete with binoculars, satchel over a shoulder, sidearm, and Australian Outback hat.

He looks down at the zoo sprawled across the valley.

Some are fully realized habitats with boulders, plants and pools of water. Others are merely chainlink fenced enclosures. It all seems half-done.

A massive dome of netting forms the aviary, while a thick stand of pine trees form a large cluster that acts as a natural barrier with a tall fence around the entire property.

At one edge of the zoo, standalone buildings sit with emblazoned names like CAFE, GIFT SHOP, REPTILES, AQUARIUM.

The man uses binoculars to scan the cages and that's when we see the zoo is not inhabited by the usual assortment of monkeys, giraffes, or big cats. Instead, it's populated by fantastic creatures from myth, legend and assumed extinction: Thunderbird, Tasmanian Devil, Mothman, Naga, etc.

In one cage, a man in tattered clothes sits, head buried in his hands, a large steel manacle around one ankle attached to a length of heavy chain.

A Centaur in a safari shirt with the zoo's logo dumps feed into a chute attached to one of the cages, a unicorn trots over to eat.

Then, the man notices something move through the forest habitat, the trees shudder as if something huge walks through them.

A PRIMORDIAL HOWL sends the other creatures into a panic, causes the man to fumble his binoculars, they plummet over the edge, bouncing off the rock, the lenses shatter in a rain of glass to the floor below.

EXT. LOS ANGELES, HOLLYWOOD SIGN - NIGHT

STROBE EFFECT as the scene flashes between the booted feet from the cliff, and bare feet at the edge of a narrow, metal structure, high in the air.

A pair of brown loafers falls to the ground as the shattered glass rains down.

The scene-switch ends on the bare toes curled over chipped white paint.

Wind sweeps through wavy, brown hair.

Arms extend to maintain balance.

Beams from spotlights hit the man in the legs and chest, his face remains obscured.

White dress shirt, untucked, frayed.

Brown slacks, unbelted, sagging.

As the spotlights converge upward, he hides behind an arm over his face.

MAN

(O.S. from bullhorn)

Sir? I'm with the Los Angeles Police Department. I'm sure we can come to an understanding. I get the sense you don't want to be up there. It's a long way down, but I've been told it's not quite far enough to ensure a quick death. At best, if you swan dive, your head will be driven into your spine which itself will be shot out of your-

The SOUNDS OF A SCUFFLE and FEEDBACK as the bullhorn exchanges hands.

OFFICER

I apologize for that. We're not sure how he got beyond the police line. But... he did make some salient points.

Another tug-of-war with the bullhorn.

SGT. FRISQUE

Hello there. I'm Sergeant Frisque (Fris-kaye).

A hand pulls an antique pocket watch from the brown trousers, flips it open, sees it's half-past 11pm.

ELI
(sotto)
Shit.

Below, men move an air-mattress to the base of the structure. Not the kind stuntmen or firemen use, but a queen-sized air mattress used for house guests.

One of the officers stomps on a foot-pump to inflate it.

Sgt. Frisque must have his finger on the bullhorn trigger, we can hear what he says to the officers.

SGT. FRISQUE
(leak from bullhorn)
Jesus Christ, he's not Colt Sever. He hits that thing wrong and we'll have to visit him in the ICU every day. You want to throw him a bouncy ball during physical therapy for a year? I hate signing get-well cards. Are you supposed to be funny, or keep it serious? A little of both?

OFFICER
Sir?

SGT. FRISQUE
Aw fuck.

The bullhorn lets lose a blast of FEEDBACK.

SGT. FRISQUE
Ignore that! We're here for you. You're perfectly safe. Just try to roll and hit the airbag with your back flattened out. Stay loose. Everything is fine.

Once again, the sergeant's editorial comments leak out of the bullhorn.

SGT. FRISQUE
He is so fucked.

OFFICER
Sir?

SGT. FRISQUE
Aw shit. (out loud) Disregard that. I was talking about someone else. (leaked) Let's hope he's dumber than he looks.

OFFICER
It's still on.

SGT. FRISQUE
Goddamit, someone take this thing
away from me.

Another blast of FEEDBACK causes one of the man's feet to slip off the edge.

A GASP from the crowd below.

ELI
(sotto)
What to do, what to do.

A third spotlight suddenly flashes in his eyes. His head rocks back, his arm goes up to block the light, his feet lose balance, his body shifts backward.

He starts to fall...

INT. SOLOMON HOME, BEDROOM - MORNING

The morning light through a crack in the blinds hits ELI SOLOMON (30s) full in the face.

He stirs, grimaces, covers his eyes.

ELI
(sotto)
Fuck me.

He goes to swing his legs over the side of the bed but gets them tangled in the sheet.

After a pathetic struggle, he finally escapes.

His work clothes have been laid out for him.

He stares at them with the kind of loathing reserved for NFT salesmen.

INT. SOLOMON HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Eli arrives, white short-sleeved dress shirt, brown slacks, brown belt, brown socks, brown shoes, brown thick-rimmed glasses, you get the idea. The same outfit from the scene with the police.

His wife MARY-JOE (30s), and twin daughters CODY (12) and MONTANA (12) sit at the breakfast table.

They eat in silence, small bites, dainty dabs with their napkins. It's all very civilized.

Eli notices his wife's knuckles are bruised.

She catches him staring and turns her hands away from him.

Eli takes his place, looks down at the plate of perfectly arranged and curated turkey bacon, egg whites and a wedge of un-buttered wheat toast, juice on the side.

Next to it is a folded newspaper, the classifieds section with job opportunities aggressively circled in red sharpie.

MARY-JOE

Thought I'd save you some time.

ELI

I like looking through these with my-

Glances at his glass of chunky green vegetable juice.

ELI

No coffee?

The girls stop eating and turn to stare at their dad.

MARY-JOE

I guess my help isn't needed. I guess keeping you alive long enough to see your daughters graduate high school isn't appreciated.

ELI

That's not what I meant. I just mean, it's a morning ritual I look forward to. (BEAT) You only need me to live six more years?

He can't take their stares any longer.

ELI

But, this should get me on my way and save me some time. So, thank you.

The girls go back to their breakfasts.

Mary-Joe finishes and washes her plate.

She turns and stares at Eli's plate.

He stuffs the toast into his mouth, then follows it with a spoonful of egg-white.

Mary-Joe steps over and grabs the edge of the plate but doesn't take it away.

She waits while Eli chews and chokes down his mouthful of food, then grabs the bacon.

Mary-Joe takes it away and washes it.

ELI
I can do that.

Mom and the girls SNORT as if to say, "Sure you can, idiot".

MARY-JOE
Your briefcase is at the door. I've
put this month's bills inside for
you to look over.

He walks over to give her a kiss, she ignores him by continuing to wash an already clean plate.

He passes by the girls, pats them each on the head.

ELI
Well, I'm off. Wish your dad luck.

GIRLS
(happy)
Good luck.

Eli smiles.

GIRLS
(unison, under their
breath)
You'll need it.

He retreats to the front door, grabs his briefcase, a light jacket, and slinks out.

EXT./INT. ELI'S CAR, DRIVING - DAY

Eli cruises down a busy Los Angeles street, strip malls and palm trees pass by.

He chomps on a strip of turkey bacon like it's a cigar.

A talk radio station crackles from the stereo.

DJ SAM
So, I'm here with celebrated
cryptozoologist Dr. Cormac
Vandezande.

DR. CORMAC
Vandezan-dee.

DJ SAM
Yes, Dr. Vandezande. You have some
rather startling news for our
listeners.

DR. CORMAC
I do indeed. I would also say it's
earth-shattering as well as mind-
blowing.

DJ SAM
All that and more coming up in the
hour, but first, a word from our
sponsors.

DR. CORMAC
Are you kidding m-

A commercial blares from the radio.

Eli pulls into an aging strip-mall.

He parks across from an employment office, walks straight for
it, then veers off-course and goes into-

INT. MAGGIE'S GRUB HOUSE - DAY

A bell DINGS as Eli enters the ancient diner.

He takes a seat in the back corner, a booth all to himself.

An exhausted waitress walks up with a coffee pot.

She flips over a mug and starts to pour.

Her nametag reads: YVONNE.

YVONNE
The usual, Eli?

ELI
Yes, please.

YVONNE

Double stack of pancakes, extra
butter, extra syrup, extra bacon.

ELI

The whipped kind of-

YVONNE

Butter, I remember. You've only
ordered the same damn thing every
day for a month now.

ELI

That long?

She digs in her apron and pulls out a fistful of creamers,
drops them on the table. Another dive into a pocket yields a
pile of sugar packets.

She trudges away as Eli turns his coffee white.

From the kitchen he hears:

YVONNE

(O.S.)

Double stack heart attack!

Eli sips his coffee, takes out a small, FM radio and places
his earbuds.

Opens his newspaper, peruses the want ads.

DJ SAM

We're in studio with Dr. Cormac
Vandezande, lead researcher and
director of the Vandezande
Institute. So, doctor, you say
you've discovered something that no
one else has been able to locate in
thirty years.

DR. CORMAC

That is correct, Mr. DeeJay.

DJ SAM

Sam.

DR. CORMAC

DeeJay Sam.

DJ SAM

Just Sam.

Eli takes his earbuds out when Yvonne returns with his food.

YVONNE

One Eli special, widowmaker with everything.

ELI

Thank you.

YVONNE

I'll have the paddles ready.

He smiles, she walks away, earbuds back in.

Stares blankly at the want-ads.

Digs into his second breakfast.

INT. RADIO STATION, DEEJAY BOOTH - DAY

DJ "Wham Bam Thank You" SAM DONNER (40s), and DOCTOR CORMAC VANDEZANDE JR. (60s) sit across a small table, microphones in front of them.

Sam is in some sort of promotional jumpsuit, the kind race car drivers wear. It has patches with the radio station's logo.

The doctor wears a tweed suit, apropos for an aging academic and all-round nutcase. A small fedora sits askew on his head, barely hanging on over the bulky headphones.

Through a large glass window sits the ENGINEER at the mixing board controls.

DJ SAM

-and this discovery means what, exactly? Just say you don't know. Why is everyone so afraid of that? Do you think it makes you look stupid, so you have to say you believe, which is a cowardly way of admitting you don't know.

DR. CORMAC

Means what? It proves everything, or rather, disproves it all.

DJ SAM

Proves what? That people are really bad at finding things?

A sound effect of PEOPLE LAUGHING plays.

The doctor looks around the booth.

DR. CORMAC
Where is that coming from?

DJ SAM
Isn't it true, doctor, that your
discovery is nothing more than a
blurry photo?

Another sound effect, this time a studio audience OOOOOOOH.

DR. CORMAC
Not at all. It's a fairly clear
photo of a-

DJ SAM
Of a *what*, doctor?

DR. CORMAC
Well, it appears to be part of an
elbow.

DJ SAM
An elbow?

DR. CORMAC
Part of.

DJ SAM
I am shocked, doctor. And what does
this elbow belong to?

DR. CORMAC
I believe it is an Achillobator.

The canned LAUGHTER.

DR. CORMAC
Who's doing that? Is it you?

DJ SAM
A what-bator?

DR. CORMAC
Ah-chill-o-bay-tor. Something akin
to the velociraptor.

DJ SAM
That stuff in Jurassic Park is
real?

DR. CORMAC
Well, to an extent-

More CANNED LAUGHTER.

The doctor stares at the engineer in the adjoining booth, who shakes his head and shrugs.

DR. CORMAC
Fools, all of you. They should call
you DeeJay Philistine.

The canned audience BOOOOOOOOs.

DJ SAM
You're right doctor, you're right.
Please, enlighten us.

DR. CORMAC
We've also had several witnesses
see a Dromornithidae.

A pause, over which a CRICKETS sound effect plays.

DJ SAM
Woah, hold on, doc. What's a
Dromorthidthingy?

DR. CORMAC
In layman's parlance, it's a
thunderbird, some call it a demon
duck.

Canned CHUCKLES, QUACK noise.

DR. CORMAC
Laugh all you want, but it could
lead to discoveries of living
dinosaurs and very well disprove
evolution.

DJ SAM
Woah, hold on, doc. Disprove
evolution? Are you one of those
(checks notes) late Earth
creationists?

A GASP from the crowd.

The doctor looks surprised the neanderthal deejay knows that
term.

DR. CORMAC
Well, yes, it's one area of study.
But I think you're missing the
point. An animal officially listed
as extinct has been found alive and
well.

(MORE)

DR. CORMAC (CONT'D)

A creature that once roamed
Australia in the Pleistocene Epoch
has returned.

A YAWN sound effect.

DJ SAM

That spinning thing from the
cartoons?

DR. CORMAC

That's a grossly exaggerated
version of a Tasmanian Devil, you
dolt, creatures very much *not*
extinct.

DJ SAM

So, why should we care?

DR. CORMAC

You sound like all the fools who
dismiss me for believing in the
existence of cryptids. Bigfoot,
Lock Ness-

DJ SAM

Count Dracula, Godzilla.

A sound-effect of Godzilla's ROAR followed by BATS SQUEAKING
receives canned LAUGHTER.

DR. CORMAC

This is outrageous. They told me
this show was infantile but I had
no idea the level of malpractice.

DJ SAM

What kind of doctor are you?

DR. CORMAC

If you must know, I received my
honorary doctorate of pedagogy from
from Ithaca A&M.

Audience CHUCKLES.

DJ SAM

So, you're not one of those life-
saving doctors.

More audience BOOOOOOOOOOs.

The doctor rips off his headphones, his hat falls upside down
onto the table, the inside lined with aluminum foil.

He stands, replaces his hat and storms out.

DJ SAM

Well, the pedo *doctor* has left the building.

Audience AWWWWWWWWWWs.

DJ SAM

Too bad, I wanted him to look at my tennis elbow. He seems to a specialist.

CANNED APPLAUSE.

INT. MAGGIE'S GRUB HOUSE - DAY

Eli finishes the last big bite of pancake, uses the remaining piece of toast to sop-up the syrup.

DJ SAM

So, if you give a crap about demon birds, Russian zombies, or whatever, check out the new exhibit over at the natural history museum all month. This is Wham Bam Thank You Sam taking you through the drive-time hour with some Foreigner. Eli? Eli?

He looks up and sees Yvonne.

Earbuds out.

Pancake syrup coats his lips like a little kid who's eaten his first popsicle.

YVONNE

Check?

He looks down at his clean plate.

ELI

Yes, please.

YVONNE

You're here every morning, circling those want-ads. Haven't you found a job yet? There's gotta be something out there for a middle-aged white man. Hedge fund manager. Paint matcher at a hardware store.

(MORE)

YVONNE (CONT'D)

I bet there's an old timey ragtime band that needs a clarinet player.

ELI

I see you're a graduate of the Nute Rockne School of Pep-Talks and Go-Get'ems.

YVONNE

You want me to lie to you like you probably lie to your family?

ELI

Jesus, I don't think I ordered my breakfast with a side of harsh reality.

YVONNE

Consider it on the house.

She tears off a check from her pad and slaps it facedown on the table.

She notices the syrup on his face, licks a napkin and wipes it away.

Eli looks up at her like a helpless child.

EXT./INT. ELI'S CAR, DRIVING - DAY

Eli merges onto a highway.

A billboard approaches.

"MYTHICAL CREATURES! Exhibition all month at the Natural History Museum."

The billboard features lurid illustrations of Bigfoot, Loch Ness Monster, Mothman, a giant carnivorous plant, and a massive winged creature that looks like a giant chicken.

As he passes by, he's startled by a shadow that flies over his windshield.

He leans forward over the steering wheel and looks up to see a low-flying small plane pull a message banner that reads: "O BAAL HEAR US! BUT THERE WAS NO VOICE, NOR ANY THAT ANSWERED".

In smaller print underneath is a URL: "www.YoungBaalers.com"

EXT. COUNTY LIBRARY, PARKING LOT - DAY

Eli prowls the tiny lot, looks for a space.

A large, white Cadillac slowly pulls out of a spot.

It misjudges the distance and turns too soon, its front bumper scrapes along the side of the car next to it.

The Caddy pulls back in, tries turning the other way and repeats the hideous scrape down the car on the other side.

Another try and it finally makes it out of the spot, only to back into the metal book return.

The car stops, its bumper against the tilted box.

Eli sees it's a little old lady in the driver's seat, her head barely above the wheel.

If she pulls forward, the box might rock forward and back into place.

The woman looks straight ahead, then floors it, backing over the box before hitting the brakes.

She glances in the rearview and rolls forward with a sickening METALLIC CRUNCH.

The return box is a crumpled mess, her bumper seems untouched.

Eli takes her spot as she exits the lot.

He gets out, looks at the nasty scrape down the length of the cars next to him.

He reaches into his car, grabs a notepad and pencil and writes: "I didn't do that, it was the lady before me."

Eli adds her license plate number, tears out the page and slips it under the windshield wiper of the damaged car.

He walks to the other side and does the same to the second car.

On his way to the library entrance, Eli passes a small crowd gathered around the ruined book return box. They stare at it as if it were a dead body.

WOMAN

Should we call the police?

OLD MAN
For this?

YOUNG WOMAN
We should do something.

OLD MAN
Should we?

OLD WOMAN
Who would we call?

OLD MAN
The library police?

OLD WOMAN
Is that a thing?

MAN
I don't know.

YOUNG WOMAN
I feel so helpless.

They stare down, frozen by indecision.

INT. COUNTY LIBRARY - DAY

Eli makes his way to the stacks marked "Literary Fiction".

He runs a finger down the spines until he picks a well-worn, hardcover "Lord Of The Flies".

Eli finds a quiet spot in a back corner, slumps into a large beanbag chair to read.

DISSOLVE TO:

Eli has sunk deeper into the bag, snores softly, the book facedown on his lap.

Someone's shadow falls over his face.

A small hand taps Eli on the shoulder.

He stirs, eyes flutter, mouth agape with a yawn.

Looks at his '80s digital watch: 11:30am.

Folds a corner of the page where he left-off.

He suddenly notices RICKY ROSARIO (8) stands next to him. The kid has one of those orange crossing guard belts that go around the waist and across the chest. A shiny badge catches the light and blinds Eli for a moment.

RICKY ROSARIO
You shouldn't do that.

ELI
(rubs eyes)
Do what?

RICKY ROSARIO
Defile a book like that.

ELI
Defile? That's a big word for a small kid.

RICKY ROSARIO
Is it?

ELI
It's ok, I'm allowed.

RICKY ROSARIO
Should we ask someone?

ELI
Who are you?

RICKY ROSARIO
Who are *you*?

ELI
I asked first, and due to international "Who Asked First" laws, you are duty-bound to answer.

RICKY ROSARIO
(eye roll)
I'm Richard, but people call me Ricky.

ELI
Well, Ricky, adults are allowed to do things that kids aren't. That's just the way things shake out.

Ricky turns toward the main floor of the library.

RICKY ROSARIO
This man is touching me!

ELI

Jesus, kid. Keep it down. What the hell are you trying to do?

RICKY ROSARIO

This is the children's section. You know, for kids like me.

WE GO WIDE to reveal Eli is slumped in a section surrounded by children's books and paintings of fairytale creatures. Small, multicolored tables and chairs are spread out in the open area ringed by the low shelves.

ELI

Are there more like you?

Eli looks around, fortunate the library is mostly empty at the moment.

RICKY ROSARIO

You were saying something about things shaking out?

Eli makes a show of flattening the corner of the page.

ELI

Happy?

RICKY ROSARIO

Please fluff the chair for the next person. (BEAT) I've got my eye on you.

As he leaves, the kid huffs on his badge and shines it with a shirt sleeve.

Eli struggles to get out of the beanbag chair.

IN THE STACKS

Eli returns to the literary fiction section, looks around for the kid, then re-folds the page, smiles to himself, slides it back onto the shelf.

ELI

(sotto)

Little brat.

He thinks about it, retrieves the book and stuffs it into his jacket pocket.

He walks to the entrance and sees the kid next to a librarian.

The woman leans down, Ricky whispers something into her ear.
Their accusatory stares follow Eli out.

EXT. COUNTY LIBRARY, PARKING LOT - DAY

Eli is about to get into his car when a voice calls to him.

VALERIE

(O.S.)

Eli?

He looks around and sees his wife's best friend VALERIE
HARPER (40s) wave to him. She's parked opposite his car.

VALERIE

That *is* you. What a surprise.

ELI

Hey, Valerie.

VALERIE

Mary-Joe said you were out,
pounding the pavement on a job
hunt.

ELI

Yeah, you know, the usual.

Eli shakes his head at his own moronic response.

VALERIE

Looking to be a librarian? I think
you have to have special training.
The whole Dewey Decimal system
turns my brain to mush.

She laughs at her own joke.

ELI

I don't think they use that
anymore.

Valerie suddenly turns adversarial.

VALERIE

Oh they don't? Well, maybe you can
get a job calling people on the
phone and letting them know the
Dewey Decimal system is a relic of
the past. Because I'm soooooo glad
you enlightened me.

ELI
Ok, you too.

He gets in his car and drives away.

In the rearview, he watches Valerie stare as she makes a call on her cell.

Ricky walks up next to her, sunlight hits the kid's badge, sends a flare of light into the rearview and blinds Eli.

He rubs the stars from his eyes and pulls away.

EXT./INT. ELI'S CAR, DRIVING - DAY

Eli turns onto the main street just as his cell rings.

The caller ID says: MARY-JOE

ELI
(sotto)
Valerie, you fucking snitch.

He lets the cell ring a few times before answering.

ELI
Hi, honey ... I was there for a few minutes, checking their job board ... no, I'm not going to work at the library ... gee, I wonder where you heard that ... I'm pretty sure male librarians aren't all pedophiles ... I don't give a shit what Valerie says ... The job hunt is going fine, I left a resume at that investment firm downtown ... I know about investments ... because I don't want to play with our money, but I could if I wanted to ... this isn't helping my confidence ... I'll grab it on the way home ... the usual time ... love y-

The call hangs-up.

ELI
(at cell)
Jokes on you, I'm not job hunting.
How d'ya like that?

He's startled by a winged shadow that flies over his windshield.

He looks up at another small plane, a banner flows behind it that reads: "FOR HE SERVED BAAL, AND WORSHIPPED HIM, AND ANGERED THE LORD". The same YoungBaalers URL underneath.

He doesn't notice the homeless man jaywalking.

Slams on his brakes, his car stops inches from the man.

Panic swiftly turns to anger.

ELI

Watch where you're going! I could
have killed you!

The homeless man turns, puts both hands on the hood, and vomits a torrent of syrupy liquid that looks like chunky motor oil.

The goop splashes up the hood and onto the windshield.

Eli crosses his arms over his face as if it might hit him.

The homeless man calmly wipes his mouth on his jacket sleeve and continues across the road where he is hit by a truck speeding in the opposite direction.

Eli is paralyzed by the moment.

SCREAMS and CALLS FOR HELP come from somewhere behind him.

He blinks rapidly, finally comes to his senses and hits the windshield wipers which smear the goop all over.

He rolls forward, unable to see.

He spots a car-wash on his right, pulls in.

EXT./INT. CAR WASH - DAY

The attendants wear matching outfits: Light-yellow jumpsuits with a strange logo on their breast pockets of an elephant skeleton encircled by an atomic symbol.

They wave him forward as multicolored foam covers the car.

Giant, rotating brushes surround him, more foam, then a spray. It becomes disorienting, psychedelic.

Eli looks out the side window and glimpses strange sights in the moments between foam and brushes:

A jumpsuit man flashes cryptic hand gestures.

An orgy of half-dressed attendants, their jumpsuits either off or tied around their waists.

Another homeless man, laid out in a dentist's chair, head back, funnel inserted into his mouth, a hose pumps a dark liquid into him as he convulses. More homeless wait their turn.

The last wash of foam hits his car, washed away by a blast of water before a dryer blows away the droplets.

The car emerges, a swarm of attendants wipe the car down, wave goodbye.

EXT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, PARKING LOT - DAY

Eli finds a spot and pulls in.

He gets out and examines the car.

It looks shiny and clean, he's impressed.

Eli lifts one on the windshield wipers and runs a finger along the bottom edge, leaves a black line of goop down the finger.

He sniffs it and immediately regrets doing so.

Looks around for a place to wipe it off while he dry-heaves.

Gives up and wipes his finger on the hood of the car next to his.

Just as he does so, he notices it's the white Cadillac from the library. The dented front bumper tells the story.

He looks back and forth between the Caddy and his car.

ELI
(sotto)
Fuck it.

INT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LOBBY - DAY

Eli walks in to the expansive, high-ceilinged entry hall.

People line up at the reception desk to buy tickets.

Eli walks straight to a card reader and swipes his member pass.

A security guard JEREMIAH KYLL (50s) nods.

GUARD JEREMIAH
Good morning, Eli.

ELI
Hey, Jeremiah.

GUARD JEREMIAH
Here for the new exhibit?

ELI
Thought I'd check it out.

GUARD JEREMIAH
Jess is leading the noon tour.

ELI
Oh, well, I'm not even sure I was
going to take a tour. Brought a
book to read.

Eli pats his coat pocket.

GUARD JEREMIAH
Roger that.

Eli walks away, Jeremiah watches him round a corner.

INT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, DINOSAUR WING - DAY

Eli strolls through, runs his hands over the fossilized
displays, ignores the many DO NOT TOUCH signs.

A group led by JESSE-BELL "JESS" VAN ROSE (30s) make their
way through the area.

JESS
In a moment we will enter the
exhibit. Please, no flash
photography, or molestation of the
animatronic creatures.

A SHITTY TEEN snorts at the word "molestation", his GRANDMA
scolds him.

GRANDMA
(stage whisper)
That's not what she means, you
little shit.

Eli falls in behind the group.

INT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, CRYPTID EXHIBIT - DAY

The group enters a large room filled with life size animatronic representations of the various creatures of legend.

Informational displays accompany each one, the Young Baalers URL underneath.

The first is an animatron of an old man in a safari costume.

Jess stands next to it and reaches behind to press a button in the robot's back.

The thing comes to life, arms move, eyes scan left and right, head nods, mouth gapes as the recording begins.

PROFESSOR RITTLE

Hello there. I am Professor Phineas J. Rittle and if you are seeing me, then I am already dead. Hopefully I have experienced a memorable demise, possibly dismembered by Bigfoot, or dragged down to a watery death by the Loch Ness Monster, or-

The animatron freezes while another voice makes an addendum.

PROFESSOR RITTLE

(Jess's voice)

Professor Rittle died of a pulmonary embolism due to complications of advanced syphilis whilst residing in the Honeymoon Suite at the Flamingo Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. He was eighty-two.

The animatron springs to life as the original recording continues.

PROFESSOR RITTLE

-perhaps swallowed whole by a Megamouth shark. Oh what a glorious end that would be. In any event, allow me to welcome you to the wonderful world of cryptozoology.

SHITTY TEEN

(sotto)

Aw yeah, I want some of that hypno crypto sticky icky weed.

His Grandma whacks him in the nuts with her knuckles.

He cradles his crotch, bends over in pain.

PROFESSOR RITTLE
The study of mythical creatures,
lost to time in the annals of
history.

SHITTY TEE
(sotto grunts)
Annals.

Grandma swipes at him but he ducks just in time.

PROFESSOR RITTLE
On today's tour, I leave you in the
capable hands of (Jess' voice)
Jesse-Bell Van Rose.

The animatron sputters a bit before it shuts down.

JESS
This way.

She leads them to the first display that features an eight-foot animatron of Bigfoot.

Once again, she stands beside it and hits a button on its back.

The creature comes to life, slowly swings its arms, hideous grin to show fanged teeth, eyes leer at the group, a low GROWL leaks from a hidden speaker in its mouth.

A few of the people take a step back as the scene is quite effective.

Eli lingers at the back of the group.

JESS
Now don't be afraid. Legend has it
that Bigfoot, or Sasquatch as it is
known to our native Americans, is
thought to be a gentle creature.

The display screen lights up and shows various representations of Bigfoot.

JESS
Here we see Bigfoot's snowy
brethren, the Yeti. The Skunk Ape
and Bardin Booger of the southern
swamps.

The teen GIGGLES, Grandma rolls her eyes.

JESS

The Grassman of Ohio. In fact, many cultures around the world have their own version of our furry friend.

The display screen shows a map of the world with info boxes pointing at the various sightings.

JESS

The Barmanou in Pakistan, the fabled Mono Grande of Guyana, and Greenland's Homo gardarensis.

Before the Shitty Teen can crack a joke, Grandma shoots him a murderous look.

JESS

It's a common sighting, and as such, we can't rule out the possibility of its existence. Any questions? (BEAT) No? Let's continue on.

The group follows Jess to the next exhibit.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, CRYPTID EXHIBIT - DAY

The group have moved on to the last display.

Jess presses a button on the back of a prehistoric bird. It looks like a cross between a raptor and a giant chicken.

It's massive beak opens and closes with a hideous SQUAWK, it's short wings move a bit.

JESS

And finally, allow me to introduce you to the fabled Thunderbird, also known as the Demon Duck, or formally, Dromornithidae. It has been officially extinct since the end of the Pleistocene era, about 20 to 50,000 years ago, but some believe they still live in the most remote regions of the Australian frontier. At a height of nine feet, it would have been a terrifying creature to encounter.

SHITTY TEEN

(sotto)

Mmmmmmm, Alice Springs chicken.

GRANDMA

(stage whisper)

Shush.

Eli CHUCKLES under his breath, thinks he's sharing a moment with the kid. The brat looks at him and mouths "Fuck you."

Grandma gives Eli a look that says "Why are you staring at a child?"

Jess grabs a coconut from a basket behind the display and places it in the beak of the bird.

JESS

Some believe the creature is a carnivore due to its enlarged, crushing beak.

The animatron splits the coconut.

The group is thoroughly impressed.

JESS (CONT'D)

But due to its lack of talons and the presence of gizzard stones used to process plant material, most are of the conclusion that it was a herbivore.

Several people wipe bits of coconut off their faces and clothes.

JESS (CONT'D)

Thank you for being such a wonderful and inquisitive group. You may linger with the exhibit, or exit to your left, through the gift shop. Paper towels are at your disposal.

The tour group files out to the shop, tear off paper towels at the dispenser outside the exit.

Without cover, Eli hides behind the nearby Mothman animatron.

JESS (CONT'D)

Sir?

He peeks out.

JESS (CONT'D)
Did you have a question?

Something triggers the Mothman and it jerks.

It startles Eli who proceeds to land punches on it.

The animatron seems to fight back before it winds down with a pathetic WHIMPER.

Eli walks over to Jess with measured, sheepish steps.

JESS (CONT'D)
I think you won that round, killer.

ELI
Sorry.

Jess meets him halfway.

JESS
I see you don't have a tour pass.
Are you some sort of museum bandit?

ELI
Me? No.

JESS
Might have to turn you in.

ELI
Museum jail?

JESS
It's just a janitor's closet with a
folding chair and some old
Highlights magazines.

ELI
I remember those. Goofus and
Gallant.

JESS
I bet they come in handy for your
basement lair where you keep
kidnapped kids to feed off their
life essence.

ELI
Jesus, no. Why-

JESS
You seem to know a lot about a
children's magazine.

ELI

I mean, I used to read them when I was a-

JESS

I'm just yankin' your chain. Take it easy. If you could see your face.

ELI

Oh, well...

He manages a weak CHUCKLE.

JESS

So, did you have any questions about the exhibit?

ELI

I, uh, I was wondering, I wondered, what, uh, what you think about, um...

He looks around, desperate to find something with which to extend the conversation.

ELI (CONT'D)

The Mothman. What's the deal with that?

JESS

Well, it's apparently a sucker for a right hook.

ELI

Again, sorry.

JESS

The crypto folks can't decide on whether it's an alien, a supernatural entity, or some undiscovered species. There were sightings in the Point Pleasant area of West Virginia between 1966 and '69, popularized in John Keel's 1975 book "The Mothman Prophecies". But you already heard me say all of this when you snuck onto the tour. I think there's a movie with Richard Gere.

ELI

Is it true?

JESS
The gerbil thing?

ELI
Huh? No, about the Mothman.

JESS
Your guess is as good as mine. The exhibit is kind of confusing, considering some of the specimens are actual creatures that have gone extinct, with fossil records, while others are the stuff of myth and too much moonshine and in-breeding.

ELI
Any other monsters I should be worried about?

JESS
I hear The Jersey Devil has a powerful left jab, so circle to your right and you should be ok.

Jess steps closer, an overhead light illuminates her face, Eli smiles.

JESS (CONT'D)
I think I've seen you around. You a member?

He shows her his membership card.

She grabs it out of his hand and studies it, compares the photo to his face, hands it back.

JESS (CONT'D)
I believe you. (BEAT) So, are you a student of cryptozoology?

ELI
Not sure about that. I heard a professor on the radio talk about it. The billboards are all over. I was obsessed with In Search Of when I was a kid.

JESS
Oh, that theme, so good.

ELI
Right? And Nemoy's voice, it was so soothing and-

JESS

Professorial, like he really knew what he was talking about and not just reading a script.

ELI

Exactly.

A moment of silence. Is there a connection?

ELI (CONT'D)

So, you believe any of this? I mean, I'm not saying you shouldn't, I'm curious as to what you think.

JESS

It's all possible. People will do anything for attention, so sightings without physical or photographic evidence can hold only so much truth. But they thought the coelacanth was extinct and a fisherman found one in 1938. The giant squid, tree lobster, Goblin shark, loads of creatures science assumed were gone forever.

ELI

What about-

He looks around, settles on...

ELI (CONT'D)

-the Thunderbird.

JESS

You never know. People say they've seen Tasmanian Tigers, even though they've been officially ruled extinct since 1936. In fact, I'm heading to Australia to take part in a survey of the witnesses who claim to have seen a living Thunderbird.

ELI

That sounds exciting.

JESS

I can't wait. I mean, it's great here at the museum, but sometimes you need to do something that doesn't feel like a job, no matter how much you love it, ya know?

His face lights up to show he knows exactly what she's talking about.

ELI
I couldn't agree more.

JESS
Just waiting on the last bit of funding and I'm off.

ELI
I confess, I'm jealous.

JESS
Twenty days in the outback, you might regret that.

She looks at her watch.

JESS (CONT'D)
I have another tour, it was nice talking to you. Guess I'll see you around.

ELI
Yeah, you too.

Holy shit, did he just say that again?

She leaves him alone in the exhibit, he stares at the Thunderbird.

EXT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, PATIO - DAY

Eli is asleep on a bench, his book over his face.

A nightstick taps him on the shoulder and he stirs.

Eli looks up at the security guard.

GUARD JEREMIAH
Got a tip there was a vagrant out here. You him?

ELI
I guess it looks that way.

GUARD JEREMIAH
You're usually out of here by four.

Eli looks at his watch.

ELI

Shit.

GUARD JEREMIAH

Got somewhere to be?

ELI

Not really, but, see you tomorrow.

GUARD JEREMIAH

Sure thing.

Eli pats out the wrinkles on his clothes and slides the book into his jacket.

Suddenly, a horrific sound of SOMETHING LARGE DROPPING OUT OF THE SKY. It stops with a CRASH and the sickening CRUNCH of metal.

Several museum goers rush out onto the patio and make their way toward the parking lot.

ELI

Jesus, what the hell was that?

Jeremiah jogs toward it, Eli follows.

EXT. NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, PARKING LOT - DAY

The crowd of onlookers are gathered at what looks to be the crash site of a small plane.

The plane stands tail-up, the front end crumpled like a stubbed-out cigarette, the ashtray being...

ELI

My car!

JEREMIAH

That's some shit luck. You born under a bad sign or somethin'?

Eli examines the damage. The cars around him look untouched, the wings stopping just short of hitting their roofs.

The white Cadillac sneers at him.

ELI

(sotto)

Oh, fuck off.

JEREMIAH

That sucker is totaled. At least
you won't be paying for a new one.
Make sure you get the pilot's
license and insurance.

ELI

Pilot?

Jeremiah nods over to a dazed man in a flight suit who wanders near the gathering crowd of onlookers. Instead of helping him, they back away as if he's contagious.

Eli jogs over to him, places a hand on the pilot's shoulder.

The pilot turns, his eyes unfocused.

PILOT

Who's there?

ELI

You landed on my car. You couldn't
have aimed for the Caddy?

PILOT

Who... who are you? Where am I?

The pilot appears to be blind.

He reaches out, probes the air, finds Eli's face.

ELI

Are you the pilot?

PILOT

Yes, yes, I'm a pilot. Are you God?

ELI

What?

PILOT

An angel. Am I dead?

ELI

No, unless I am too.

Eli pats himself down, for a moment he is convinced by the pilot's pleading eyes.

PILOT

Perhaps you were in your car when
it happened and we're just
phantoms, waiting to be judged and
sent to Heaven, or Hell.

ELI

No, I'm pretty sure we're both
alive. But, you look fine, except
for your eyes.

Eli waves a hand in front of the pilot's face.

The pilot describes the incident, flashes of what happened
are interspersed with his story.

PILOT

My eyes. Yes. There was a flash of
light, searing, from somewhere
below, something... someone on the
ground. Oh God. It hurt, it burned.
I felt my stomach rise into my
throat as the plane dropped. It
plummeted, you see. I had no
control. You believe me, don't you?

ELI

Can I get that on video? It's the
only way my wife'll believe me.

Paramedics push a gurney through the crowd.

ELI (CONT'D)

It'll be ok. People are here to
help you.

PILOT

What was that flash? Has the world
ended? What about the boy?

ELI

Calm down. Help is here.

PILOT

I captured it.

ELI

What?

PILOT

The flash. I have it. Look in my
plane. Tell me what did this.
Please.

The paramedics take over and place the pilot on a gurney.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Tell me.

Eli watches him wheeled away, swallowed by the growing crowd.

The police have just arrived, Eli has only a moment to do something crazy.

ELI
(sotto)
Fuck it.

He squeezes into the crumpled cockpit, the dashboard pushed back into the seats, barely enough room to maneuver.

Every time he adjusts his position he has to pause as the plane sways back and forth.

He searches for anything that might be relevant.

And then he sees it: a Go-Pro camera on the floor.

He grabs it, stuffs it into his jacket and climbs out just as officers arrive to cordon-off the area.

An officer with sergeant stripes walks over to Eli. His badge reads: T. FRISQUE.

SGT. FRISQUE
Sir, you'll have to move back.

ELI
That's my car.

SGT. FRISQUE
Holy shit. Were you in it?

ELI
Of course not.

SGT. FRISQUE
I was gonna say, you're the luckiest son-of-a-bitch there ever was if you escaped without a scratch.

ELI
How am I gonna get home?

SGT. FRISQUE
I could give you a lift.

ELI
Really? That's very kind of y-

Eli receives the response from the non-plussed look on the officer's face.

ELI (CONT'D)

Oh, right.

A few more officers stretch yellow caution tape in front of him.

SGT. FRISQUE

Back. A little further. That's it.
Now even further. Good. Now keep
going.

Eli retreats to join Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH

Fuckin' civil servants, am I right?

ELI

Do I take a bus home?

JEREMIAH

What are you, a 1950s JPL nerd?
Don't you have one of those car
service apps?

ELI

No.

JEREMIAH

Here.

He takes Eli's phone and adds the "Pickup Artists" app.

JEREMIAH (CONT'D)

Put in your info, credit card,
location and they'll pick you up.

Eli fiddles with his phone, taps "Call For Driver".

A DING from the phone.

ELI

He's on the way.

JEREMIAH

I'd go to the corner, he won't be
able to get to you here.

ELI

Right. Thanks.

JEREMIAH

Sure thing, pal. See you tomorrow?

ELI
Yeah, I guess I'll have to sort all
this out.

They watch as officers inspect Eli's mangled car.

JEREMIAH
You don't have any contraband in
there, do ya?

ELI
Like what?

JEREMIAH
Drugs, guns, counterfeit money-

ELI
Counterfeit money?

JEREMIAH
-snuff DVDs, a bounty of bootleg
Bulgarian boner pills. Hm, say that
five times fast.
BountyOfBootlegBulgarianBonerPills,
BountyOfBootlegBulgarianBonerPills.

ELI
No, why-

JEREMIAH
That's good. Wouldn't want them
popping the trunk and a dead hooker
wrapped in a throw rug rolls out.
You'd be in a pinch. Of course,
when it comes to disposing of a
body, that's just amateur hour.
Nothing you can do about it now,
the sky narcs will be out soon,
they'll want to interview you.

A DING from Eli's phone.

ELI
Ride's here.

JEREMIAH
Gimme your info and I'll pass it on
to the FAA investigators.

ELI
Yeah, I can't stick around here.

Eli writes down his name and phone number on his pad, tears
off the page and hands it to Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH

Take it sleazy.

Eli nods, walks around the caution tape and into the crowd, past a news crew filming the mayhem.

Trailing behind the crashed plane is a message banner crumpled over the untouched cars.

He slowly walks along it, reading as he goes.

ELI

And they brought forth the images
out of the house of Baal, and-.

A small fire ball explodes from the plane.

The crowd GASPS, flames and smoke reach up to the sky.

The hellish scene is reflected in Eli's glasses.

ELI (CONT'D)

(sotto)
-burned them.

FADE OUT.

THE END.