

Dustbowl Xia

Episode 2: Black Sunday

Written by Daniel Bayn

INT. LIQUOR STORE -- NIGHT

A BOTTLE of wine explodes against the wall. Its remains drip down behind the counter and onto the bald pate of an OLD MAN. He presses a CROSS to his lips with quaking hands and prays.

Another bottle follows the first.

JACK

"Crap! Crap! All crap!"

The bellows belong to a man who looks like he recently passed out at a funeral. His rumpled, black suit and tie are stained with a mix of dirt and drink. His fedora is crushed onto his head, overseeing at least a day's growth of beard.

JACK

"If I wanted ta drink piss, I coulda stayed inna alley!"

A pair of POLICEMEN enter, one with his hands up and one with his hands down... carrying cuffs.

OFFICER FRIENDLY

"Hey, rummy!" the former interjects. "Just calm down, a minute. We wanna talk to ya."

JACK

(brandishing a bottle of scotch)
"Look a' this crap," he replies while brandishing a bottle of scotch. "It's crap! In'it there a law 'bout sellin' crap?! In stores?!"

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OFFICER FRIENDLY

"Health code violation, for sure."

He makes his way down Jack's aisle, his partner still hiding behind him.

"We'll get the inspector in here first thing in the morning. Right now, I just need you to put the bottle down."

JACK

"Jussa minute."

Jack uncorks said bottle with one thumb and starts pouring the contents down his gullet. Officer Friendly moves in and pulls the Jack's arms behind his back, almost spilling the bottle. Jack drops the bottle, kicks it back up with his knee, then balances it upright on top of his head.

JACK

"You guys got busy hands."

Jack juggles his scotch while he takes care of the cops. When the bottle starts to slide off his head, he leans back like a limbo champ, catches it, and takes a swig.

The policemen pull out their nightsticks and Friendly motions for his partner to go around behind. Thusly flanked, Jack puts down the scotch and picks up two big bottles of WHISKEY. He blocks Friendly's first swing and counters with a jab to the gut. The mass of booze and glass KNOCKS the wind right out of him.

JUNIOR comes to the rescue. Seemingly off balance, Jack pitches and weaves around every attack. One of Junior's wild swings wipes all the bottles off a shelf. Jack stares morosely at the carnage.

Junior BASHES him in the back of the head and SMASHES Jack's face into the liquor-soaked wood. He LAPS up a little with his tongue, then slides backward as Junior's night stick SLAMS down. Jack traps the weapon under one bottle while the other CRACKS the cop across the nose.

Officer Friendly falls on Jack like a bag of bricks, pressing him into the wood. Jack laps up some more, then hooks Friendly's knee and pushes him back. He runs up the shelf, flips over Friendly's head, and lands in the next aisle over.

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OFFICER FRIENDLY

"Fuck this."

Friendly draws his gun. They run parallel down the aisle, raising a wave of liquor and broken glass in their wake. At the end of the aisle, Jack runs up the wall and around the corner. As Friendly tries to track him, Jack reaches down and grabs the gun, yanking it away as he slips once more over the officer's head.

JACK

"Guns are bad."

Jack turns the weapon over in his hands. Almost by accident, he takes the revolver apart.

JACK

"I thought you were the good cop."

Jack lurches forward and delivers a long-range rabbit punch to Friendly's face, then grabs the cop by his ear and drags him to the front of the store. He sends him sailing through the storefront window.

Then, he gets a beer.

EXT . LIQUOR STORE -- NIGHT

SIRENS and lights appear from everywhere at once. Squad cars storm the lot and form a solid wall outside the store. Jack's ears fill with the sound of a dozen hammers being COCKED at once.

The beer slips from his hand and SHATTERS on the floor.

Headlights flare through the squad car windows. A HEARSE SMASHES into them like a freight train. It barrels toward Jack, shrugging off bullets and bits of wreckage, then SKIDS to a sideways stop. Its hubcaps kiss the curb.

The passenger door opens. FARO leans over from the driver's side.

FARO

"This is your moment of clarity, Jack. Get in."

Dodge City - 1935

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

DANTE shambles down a hotel hallway and stops before a door. He makes a token effort to straighten his fancible clothes, but he's obviously been gutter-stomped. When he finally makes his entrance, head held reasonably high, AHOTE is waiting.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

AHOTE

"I don't suppose that's what you look like after a successful date?"

DANTE

"No," Dante replies with dignity. "It is not." He collapses onto the couch.

AHOTE

"What happened?"

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

Dante falls through a table, which launches food and booze into a crowd of well-dressed SWING KIDS. He tramples a poker game. He's being hefted into the air by a giant BARTENDER, SLAMMED onto a bar, and slid all the way down its length.

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

AHOTE

"So, you were making friends."

DANTE

(glaring)
"It's been said. Anyway, Lotus held off the mob so I could escape."

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

LOTUS spins like a top. Her heel KNOCKS back a wave of ANGRY TOWNSFOLK. Dante wall-runs over the mob and bolts out the door.

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

DANTE

"I'm sure she'll be here any minute. Maybe."

AHOTE

"Maybe?"

DANTE

"Well, she was dancing with this hobo, so..."

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

Lotus spins Dante around to face Jack, who grabs Dante by the collar and sacrifice throws him through that table.

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

AHOTE

(shaking head slowly)
"What did you do?"

DANTE

"Me?! I was captivating! Downright *charming!* If she wants to make time with a hobo, that's her pejorative."

AHOTE

"Prerogative. I haven't known Lotus very long, but I doubt that's all there is to it. Oh god, you didn't disparage Buster Keaton, did you?!"

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DANTE

"What? No. Good tip, though."

AHOTE

"Why don't you tell me everything that happened, start to finish?"

DANTE

"Well, we went out to spend the rest of Ray's money, as you so kindly suggested..."

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

The nightclub's hoppin'. Swing kids dressed in their Saturday best swing away to a JAZZ BAND's tunes. FACTORY WORKERS shoot the shit while BUSINESSMEN play poker in a booth ten feet away. Others mingle at the bar opposite the stage, worshipping at an altar to alcohol. The sprawling LIQOUR RACK is two stories tall and backlit for dramatic effect.

At a table near the dance floor, Lotus scrapes her plate clean while Dante pushes his dinner around with a fork.

DANTE

"Midwestern food is so lifeless. I'd kill for some jumbalaya or a little crawfish etoufee."

LOTUS

(mumbling around a mouthful)

"Cantonese is spicy, too, but this beats the hell outta beef jerky and truck stop diners. Enjoy what you have while you have it."

DANTE

"Point taken."

He throws back the last of his wine and jumps out of his chair.

"Since you're done eating, it's time to dance!"

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LOTUS

"Aren't I supposed to wait thirty minutes?"

He's already pulling her onto her feet.

LOTUS

"Okay, okay!"

She kisses her wine goodnight and lets him lead her onto the dance floor.

Slack-jawed stares accompany them, as if the locals have never seen an inter-racial couple dressed in men's clothing before. Dante takes her chin and turns it toward him.

DANTE

"Eyes up here, honeycakes. Never mind the yokels."

The velvet tones of a TRUMPET envelope them. Dancing with Dante is effortless; he dips and twirls her, guides her hands and feet, lets the music carry them both. A few of the swing kids take notice. They throw out their best moves in unspoken challenge and Dante responds.

Then, they're in a duel and the whole club is watching. Dante throws Lotus in the air, slides her through his legs, twirls her... and frowns in frustration.

DANTE

"One second."

He hurries over to a table where three YOUNG BLACK WOMEN are sipping cocktails.

"Ladies..."

He whips the cloth off their table without so much as shifting the centerpiece. They clap as he pirouettes away and wraps the tablecloth around his waist before rejoining his partner.

Now, he guides Lotus through the male steps while he flares his skirt with the best of the ladies. She lifts him over her head, he slides between her legs. She twirls him out, then reels him back in as the song fades away. Lotus almost kisses him, but the swing kids crowd around and ruin the moment.

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When the three black women come to get their hands on their tablecloth (they don't take it back, just get their hands on it), they pointedly push Lotus aside. Dante doesn't seem to notice, so absorbed is he in his accolades. The band takes five.

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

DANTE

"It wasn't my fault, Ahote. Seriously. This crowd formed around us and they were all 'That was amazing!' and 'How did you do that thing?' and 'Let me touch your muscly arm.' What was I supposed to do? Tell 'em all to screw?"

AHOTE

"You were supposed to keep you mind on your beeswax! This is your problem, Dante."

Ahote stands up and does a terrible impression of Dante's fighting style.

"Your chi is all over the place. Always. It makes you responsive as all hell, but you gotta learn to focus sometimes."

He snaps into an even worse impression of a kung-fu stance.

"Like Lotus does."

DANTE

"I didn't know you went in for all that eastern mysticism stuff."

AHOTE

"I paint from a broad palette. The point is, you were so wrapped up in responding to your new fans, I bet you didn't even notice when she left the dance floor. She probably went over to the bar, to drown her disappointment, and saw that hobo character dancing for nickels..."

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

Lotus slinks over to the bar, orders a shot. She can hear Dante cracking jokes with his chippies. She orders another.

Then, she glances down the bar and sees Jack cutting a rug without the music. RAIL WORKERS are shouting requests:

RAIL WORKERS

"Juggle two more!"
"Catch this on your head!"
"Do another flip!"

Each completed task puts another penny in Jack's hat.

She looks closer. He's over the hill, a little filthy, and dressed in a rumpled, black suit. His shirt's untucked and his chin casts a two-day shadow. He weaves around like a drunk, but his balance is impeccable.

LOTUS

(to Bartender)
"Hey," she flags down the bartender. "Who's the juggler?"

BARTENDER

(shrugs)
"No idea. We've been calling him the Drunken Monkey. Been comin' around for a coupla days. Helped me throw out a bunch of gorillas, the first night. Guy's got crazy moves."

LOTUS

"You don't say. What's he drink?"

BARTENDER

(chuckles)
"Everything. When he's had a good night, he usually orders a Manhattan off the top shelf."

LOTUS

"I'll take two."

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While the bartender fixes her cocktails, she watches the Jack run up a wall, cartwheel with no hands, and spin on his head. She cuts through the crowd while he's still up-side down.

LOTUS

"Sorry, boys. I'm putting him on retainer."

They're too busy picking up their jaws to object. An assertive, Chinese woman dressed in a suit is a little outside of their range of experience. The monkey, on the other hand, takes one look at that Manhattan and comes to terms.

JACK

"I'm Jack. Let me help you with those."

He collects his retainer and shakes her newly liberated hand.

"What's the job, boss?"

LOTUS

"I need a new dance partner and you've got some twinkly toes, so..."

Jack looks sidelong at Dante while downing most of his drink. The band's just about ready for another set.

JACK

"I suppose I should ask you to dance."

LOTUS

"Seems like the natural course of events."

JACK

"No use fightin' it."

His glass goes back up, then slams down on the bar.

"Care to dance, boss?"

LOTUS

"Delighted."

Lotus leaves her glass next to his.

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

AHOTE

"Maybe she wanted to hurt your feelings in return, or maybe she just wanted to remind you not to take her for granted. In any case, she got your attention. What happened next?"

DANTE

"I tried to talk to her..."

FLASH

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

Lotus stands awkwardly by while Jack tears up the dance floor. Dante ignores him and walks right up to her.

DANTE

"There you are, dollface. I've been looking everywhere. Never thought you'd be hiding on the dance floor."

Jack pops up like a him in a box.

JACK

"Hey, fella. It's customary to ask before cuttin' in."

Dante's eyes bounce between the two of them, then lock onto the interloper.

DANTE

"Yeah, it is. Where were your manners? The lady's with me."

JACK

"That so, boss?"

Jack gives Lotus a chance to back out.

LOTUS

(sweetly)
"Nope."

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JACK

"From her lips to your heart, pal."

Jack turns his back on Dante and guides Lotus towards the swing kids. Dante grabs Jack's shoulder, about to protest, but the Jack throws a right hook his way. Dante lets go and leans back as the fist sails by. Jack looks surprised. He throws a few more, but Dante's a ghost.

JACK

"Huh."

LOTUS

"I know!"

She slaps Jack on the shoulder.

"Ain't it like a bad itch?!"

DANTE

(Puts both hands in front of him.)

"Come on, now, rummy. Cool it. I just need to talk to the lady for a minute."

Jack and Dante mix it up, capoeira versus drunken boxing. They trade spins kicks and leg sweeps until Dante cartwheels over Jack's head, shoving his face to the floor, and lands eye-to-eye with Lotus.

DANTE

"Had your fun?"

LOTUS

"You're doin' great!"

She takes him by the shoulders, turns him around, and shoves him towards Jack. The Drunken Monkey grabs his lapels and hops up onto Dante's chest. His weight pulls them both off balance. He kicks them apart when Dante's at his apogee and sends him flying into a table, upside-down and backwards.

Drinks get airborne, dresses get stained, Factory Workers and Swing Kids get pissed.

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Lotus goes for her guns, but her holsters are empty.

CUT TO:

Lotus' guns lying on the hotel room couch.

BACK TO:

The mob chases Dante into a corner booth. He escapes by climbing over, but ends up trampling the poker game next door. Enraged Businessmen clutch at Dante's wing-tips. He plummets over the end of the booth and tumbles into the Rail Workers by the bar.

The Bartender PUMPS a SHOTGUN and everyone falls quiet.

BARTENDER

"Do I have to call the sheriff?!"

Dante vaults over the bar and hides behind the giant's apron.

BARTENDER

"Let's all go back to our seats, get that table righted, and act like civilized goddamned people!"

Dante hops up onto the counter, crosses his arms sternly, and shakes his head in disapproval.

BARTENDER

"I'm sure this gentleman will buy you all a round!"

The giant turns, expecting confirmation, but all Dante can do is pull out his pockets. Lotus has the payroll. She steps forward, but Jack restrains her.

BARTENDER

"On the other hand..."

The Bartender puts down the shotgun and picks up the Dante, then slides him down the length of the bar. The mob follows and, when Dante hits the floor, he's all theirs.

Lotus shoves Jack aside and flies over their heads. She lands above Dante, punches his largest attacker in the face, then leaps into a tornado kick that knocks the whole mob back.

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She lifts Dante by his collar and lets him plant his feet. His lips start to move, but she cuts him off.

LOTUS

"Just get the hell outta here. You've made enough friends."

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

DANTE

"So I figure she'll be right behind me."

Dante looks at the door. It misses its cue.

AHOTE

"Or maybe she's shacked up with the hobo right now. I'll bet they're curled up under a bridge somewhere, feeding each other cold beans out of a can, making lice-ridden love beneath the stars..."

Dante hurls a pillow into the shaman's laughing face.

DANTE

"I'm sure she cut that old rummy loose as soon as she was done with him."

EXT. SANTE FE TRAIL -- NIGHT

Jack and Lotus lie beneath the stars.

FARO (o.s.)

"Can you feel it?" That's the pulse of the world, mana flowing down the Sante Fe Trail. Flowing from the past to the future, carrying us with it."

A priest sits cross-legged above their heads, parked in the back of a hearse. The hearse itself is parked in a set of wheel ruts that are etched deep in the hard-packed earth. One runs beneath Jack and Lotus, respectively, right down their spines.

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FARO

"We are all stardust. You, me, everything in and on the Earth. The only place heavy elements are born is inside the unimaginable furnace of a star. The buddhists believe individuality is an illusion, that all things are one in god. How right they are."

Lotus shifts uncomfortably and casts a glance at Jack, who looks serene.

LOTUS

"Um, yeah... I'm not feelin' it, father."

FARO

"No apology necessary. Your chi is so strong, I can't image how you'd feel anything else. Please, call me Faro. I'm not exactly in good standing with the Church."

LOTUS

"So, all this ley lines stuff... is that why Ahote can drive up the side of a building?"

FARO

"Your friend aligns his energies with those of the world. That makes him powerful."

LOTUS

"Can you drive up the side of a building?"

FARO

(Opens one eye.)

"I can't say it's ever come up. Can your friend see the future?"

LOTUS

"He thinks he can, but he's usually wrong. Why? Can you?"

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FARO

"I know how and why I will die. I can see how and why others have died. Sometimes, when fate is pulling hard in one direction, I can see how events will unfold. It's prediction, but I'm rarely wrong."

JACK

"How's tomorrow looking?"

FARO

"Cloudy. Something's on the horizon."

Lotus sits up and brushes herself off.

LOTUS

"Speaking of which, how about we get down to brass tacks on this bank heist?"

FARO

"There will be time enough tomorrow. For now, can we just soak up the chi and center ourselves?"

Lotus lies back down beside her hat, but only passes a moment in silent contemplation before turning to Jack.

LOTUS

"So, this guy who owns the bank, the Tailor... how'd he end up on your bad side?"

Jack rolls over and gives her a long look.

JACK

"He's an extortionist and a murderer... and a witch."

Lotus' laugh dies on the vine.

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JACK

"Seriously. He uses black magic to steal people's lives. I've seen it. It was the same night I saw someone who flies like you do. I came home late... drunk as ever. I slipped in through a window, trying not to wake my wife. When I got to our bedroom, I found them standing over her..."

FLASH

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

A gentle wind blows through an open window. The drapes brush up against a SLEEPING WOMAN with NEEDLES in her throat. THE TAILOR is bent over her. He plucks one of the needles out and sticks it in his lapel alongside dozens of others. THE SHOOTIST stands nearby, dressed in a yellow duster and a ten gallon hat.

JACK

"What the *fuck* are you doing?!"

The Shootist whirls around, a gun in each hand. The Tailor just turns his head a little, glances towards the door, and sighs.

TAILOR

"I thought you'd stay out later, Jack. Didn't take you for a lightweight."

JACK

"Get those things outta my wife and get the hell outta my house!"

TAILOR

(another sigh)

"You can plainly see that I'm already removing my instruments. As for leaving, well... I don't slum around like this any longer than I must."

He removes the last of the needles and reunites them with their brothers.

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TAILOR

"I'm afraid your wife is very sick, Mister Daniels. Her treatment will be quite expensive."

Jack starts forward, but the Shootist has him cold. The CLICK of a hammer stops him dead.

TAILOR

"Don't kill him. He still needs to pay us."

Then, he climbs out the window and into the night.

SHOOTIST

"I reckon you don't need your knees to sign a check."

Bullets WHIZ past Jack's legs and perforate the floor. He tap dances out of the way. The Shootist grins and aims higher, testing his opponent. Jack rolls backward into his study; bullets pass before his eyes. Then, he flips off the wall, grabs a shotgun off the wall, and fires a SHOT at the door.

The Shootist ducks back into the hallway, impossibly fast. The door EXPLODES where his head had been.

SHOOTIST

"Oh ho ho! You're a fun one! Come out here and we'll play for real."

He puts away his pistols and draws a modified Winchester rifle from its sheath. He holds it in one hand, like a sword; there's even a counter-weight where the rifle butt should be. With his other hand, he draws an enormous bowie knife. Thus armed, he advances into the room.

SHOOTIST

"En garde!"

Jack pumps his shotgun and pulls the trigger, but the cowboy lunges forward and turns the shotgun aside with the tip of his rifle, sending SHOT into the ceiling. He immediately steps in and jabs with his knife. Jack lurches out of the way and falls to the floor mid-reload. He suspends himself on one hand and aims with the other.

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The Shootist parries the SHOT with his knife and brings his rifle to bear. Jack kicks it to the side and windmills his feet around, pushing the gunman back as he twists himself upright. He holds the shotgun like a staff, blocks a knife slash meant for his jaw, then CRACKS the cowboy in the temple.

Blood drips down to the Shootist's cheshire grin.

The rifle stabs forward, almost piercing Jack's gut, but the rummy turns to the side and lets it slide past. A bullet BLASTS through the trash can behind him. Jack tries for another butt to the face, but the gunman parries and then SCRAPES his knife down the length of the shotgun. Jack lets go before he loses his fingers.

He ducks under the knife, grabs the cowboy's knee with both hands, and yanks him off his feet. The shotgun drops into his hands and Jack levels it as his prone opponent.

A boot to the sternum sends Jack flying through the window. His shot goes wide and he plunges two stories into his front yard, narrowly missing the curb.

A monstrous DUESENBERG stampedes down the block, its grill a gaping maw. The cowboy flies from Jack's window, soars over the yard, and perches on the car's hood as it passes.

Jack rolls onto his side and watches them escape. He feels something sting his chest, then a GUNSHOT shatters the air. He looks down and sees blood bubbling from a hole in his shirt...

FLASH

EXT. SANTE FE TRAIL -- NIGHT

JACK

"It's lodged right between my heart and my lung. Doctors said it'd be too dangerous to remove, so there it stays."

LOTUS

"Wow. You got lucky."

JACK

"I think he did it on purpose."

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Jack rubs his chest absent-mindedly.

"We've almost caught up to them, a coupla times, and this bullet always burns when we get close. We're connected now. We always will be... until one of us is dead. I think that's why he did it."

LOTUS

"Incredible."

JACK

"Yeah, I guess. My wife and I refused to pay any blood money. I spent my family's fortune trying to find a cure, but she wasn't sick. She was hexed. That man, the Tailor, he's a witch and his black magic put her in the ground."

FARO

"She brought me to Jack shortly thereafter and we've been tailing the Tailor ever since."

Faro gets up, walks between them, extends Lotus a hand.

"Whereas it seems I'll be getting neither rest nor relaxation tonight, I suppose we might as well meet your friends."

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DESTROYED -- NIGHT

Dante sits on a desk chair in the middle of a disaster area, formerly a hotel room. His hands and feet are bound to said chair with strips of cloth... SHREDDED BED SHEETS, judging by the floral print. Lotus leans over to look him in the eye.

LOTUS

"I'm sorry about this, really. You didn't give us much of a choice."

DANTE

"C'est la vie, ma cherie. You did what you do. Can't expect anything else."

He pulls against his restraints, leans in closer.

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DANTE

"Just tell me this: What do you see in that guy? He's a boozier, a criminal, and he's *ancient*."

LOTUS

"Ancient?! How old are you?!"

DANTE

"Twenty-six. How old are you?"

LOTUS

"... Twenty-nine."

DANTE

"What? Were you doing the math? Why the long pause?"

LOTUS

"'Cuz I'm thirty-three, that's why?!"

DANTE

"Really? You look good!"

LOTUS

"For an old hag?"

DANTE

"For anybody! Christ on a cracker, accept the damn compliment!"

LOTUS

"That was a compliment? You were much smoother with the chippies at the club."

DANTE

"Yeah, about that... I've got this thing with my chi and... old habits... Look, I'm sorry I made you feel unwanted. You're so far from unwanted, it's like... from here to China, or Australia, or whatever's on the other side of the Earth. Anyway, it's really far. You're definitely wanted."

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Louts gives Dante a peck on his bruised cheek. He tries not to flinch.

LOTUS

"That's sweet, but it's not the only thing this is about, not anymore."

FLASH

INT. HOTEL ROOM, EARLIER -- NIGHT

DANTE

"Hell no!"

Lotus stands in the kitchenette with her two new friends.

LOTUS

"Dante, watch your language! There's a priest present... sorta."

DANTE

"Pardon me, father, but there ain't no way I'm helpin' *him* rob *anything*. No sir, not this black man!"

FARO

"Will you help his wife? We're trying to bring her killers to justice. Robbing this bank is the only way to draw them out."

Ahote puts a hand on Dante's shoulder.

AHOTE

"Revenge is never righteous, but there's a more immediate reason we can't help you. What if your robbery causes a run on the banks? These people are just starting to get back on their feet after the Crash."

DANTE

"Yeah! What if that?!"

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FARO

(smiles)

"Haven't you heard? The government's selling insurance, now. The bank's customers are covered. The only one who's gonna lose their shirt is the banker, and he's got it coming."

AHOTE

"You wouldn't put so much faith in the government if you'd been to California recently. Thousands of people are still clinging to life in those Hooverville slums. Besides, I'm pretty sure you and your friend are more than capable of knocking over a bank by yourselves. There's only one reason Destiny could have brought us here: To stop you."

DANTE

"Yeah!"

Dante leans into it, shakes his fists of fury. Lotus slams her palms against the countertop.

LOTUS

"What the hell, Ahote?! I finally join you on the crazy train and now you wanna pull the brake?! Do you *enjoy* jerking me around?!"

DANTE

"He's just trying to show you what's been in front of your nose all night, Lotus! These guys are crooks!"

JACK

(drunken slur)

"Heeeeeeeey everybody! Stay cool, cats and kittens. No need to shout it out. Me and the padre will just skidaddle and you can get back to whatever voodoo you do."

He grabs Faro by the arm and sashays toward the door, but Ahote intervenes.

AHOTE

"You gentlemen should stay a while. In a few hours, I bet we can sneak you into the continental breakfast."

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Jack grabs him by his red suspenders and starts to lean back, but Faro puts a cautionary hand on his shoulder.

FARO

"Ahote's just walking his path, Jack."

The monkey lets go and backs up, almost into the middle of Lotus and Dante's continued bickering. He quickly rejoins the conversation by the door.

FARO

"I'm sure there's no need for violence. We're all fellow travelers, here."

AHOTE

"Quite."

Ahote straightens his suspenders.

"That's why you two get to enjoy the continental breakfast while I take a trip to the police station."

FARO

"Whatever you did, I'm sure it's not worth turning yourself in."

AHOTE

"To the contrary, I'm just going to let them know when to expect you at the bank."

FARO

"You'd rat out a fellow traveller?"

AHOTE

"It beats a beating."

JACK

"We won't let you do it. This is too important."

DANTE

"Go!"

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Dante leaps onto the two men's backs and grabs a collar in each hand.

DANTE

"I'll hold 'em off!"

Dante's weight pulls Faro and Jack off their feet. The three of them stumble away from the door and CRASH through the coffee table in the center of the room.

Jack and Dante spring to their feet as Lotus flies between them. She launches a kick at Dante, but he dances around and pops Jack in the kisser. The old man reels and retaliates with a backfist. Dante leans back just far enough to let it hit Lotus instead.

LOTUS

"What the...?!"

Lotus wipes some blood from her split lip and fixes Jack with a death's head stare. He puts up his hands, but they just wave to her fist as it collides with his face. Dante laughs. Jack kicks him in the gut. Lotus hits them both.

Faro slips away while the three stooges are occupied.

Dante gets behind Jack and locks up his arms. Jack tries to shake him loose, but he just ends up taking one of Lotus' kicks in the gut. Dante dances him around like a puppet and throws a few vicarious punches at Lotus. Now, it's her turn to laugh.

JACK

"Christ, lady! Who's side are you on?!"

Lotus sweeps Jack's legs, turning him sideways, then delivers an opeh-hand strike to his chest. The force of the blow sends both men toppling over the couch. Lotus' guns tumble with them. Jack pops back up with one in hand; he waves it in Dante's general direction.

JACK

"You have got to be the single most irritating person I've met this week."

He looks at his watch.

"And it's Sunday, so that's sayin' somethin'."

(continued)

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Dante takes a bow.

JACK

"God, I really should just shoot you. Wadaya say, boss?"

Lotus avoids Dante's eyes.

LOTUS

"Go ahead and shoot. He'd probably just dance around it, anyway. I'm still in for the heist, but you best put my gun down. That's like touching a samurai's sword."

Jack gives her a blank expression. She sighs.

LOTUS

"That's bad."

JACK

"Sorry, boss."

He thumbs the safety and hands her sword over.

"What should we do with..."

Dante full body tackles his ass!

EXT. CITY STREET -- NIGHT

Ahote sails down a dark road. He leans slightly forward and peers out the window at an unfamiliar skyline. He snaps back to attention when the ass end of a hearse pulls past his window. Faro rolls his window down as he paces Sweetness in reverse.

FARO

"You sure you know where you're going?"

AHOTE

"I'll find my way. You're the one who's lost."

FARO

"The wind takes you where *it* wants to go, Ahote. You need to find your own bearings."

(continued)

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Headlights and HONKING ahead. Faro tilts his wheel and swings the hearse out, popping up on the curb long enough for the oncoming traffic to pass between them, then he swings back as naturally as a pendulum. Ahote picks up their conversation without skipping a beat.

AHOTE

"You can't talk me out of this. Are you ready to use violence against a fellow traveler?"

FARO

"No, not yet, but I'm warming up to it."

Faro spins his hearse around like a top and opens up the gas, but he can't quite pass Sweetness. Ahote grins at him across the median and tips his wheel left, pushing Faro onto the shoulder and into a street lamp. Just before impact, the hearse bounces off the curb like a jumping bean and barrel rolls over Ahote. Faro lands in the right lane as Sweetness pitches left.

Ahote veers back onto the road and CRACKS the hearse at a steep angle, front bumper to rear bumper. The cars spin past each other as both driver's roll with the punch before regaining control. Back in the right lane, Ahote draws even. The vehicles arm wrestle down the thoroughfare.

A CHURCH looms ahead of them, its front doors perched on the corner of a fork in the road. Ahote lets the Faro push him right, but muscles him back over at the last second, sends him flying up the front steps.

INT. CHURCH -- NIGHT

Faro BLOWS the doors off their hinges and PLOWS his way down the aisle. Pews fall like dominoes. He crosses himself as the hearse hits the altar steps and takes to the air.

EXT. CITY STREET -- NIGHT

Outside, Ahote pets the dash and whispers sweet nothings to his girl. He looks up as he passes the church... just in time to see the hearse EXPLODE through a STAINED GLASS WINDOW.

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AHOTE

"Holy Christ on a stick!"

Faro slides onto the side street and ROARS after Sweetness. The hearse swings in behind and harries him down the boulevard. Faro flashes his lights, swerves side to side, and otherwise acts like a man possessed. Ahote forces the pedal down, desperate to get this hellhound of his trail.

Half way across a bridge, the hearse skids sideways and CRASHES through the masonry. The impact launches it into a graceful backflip. Faro lands on the railroad tracks below and vanishes into a rail yard.

Ahote drifts around the next corner and heads in the same direction, but the roads are a maze of blind turns and dead ends. When he finally pulls up to the police station, the hearse looks like it's been parked outside all night.

INT. POLICE STATION -- NIGHT

The harsh lights inside illuminate a scene of pure karma as two cops lift Faro by his arms and haul him towards the nearest cell. Ahote marches up to the DESK OFFICER.

AHOTE

"He's not a real priest. Can you arrest him for that?"

DESK OFFICER

(snickers)

"Figures. Naw, he's just takin' a dip in the drunk tank. You know him?"

AHOTE

"Not really, but he did tell me that he and this hobo friend of his are planning a bank robbery."

FARO

"Yes! YEEESSS!!! A bank heist!! I told you so!! My friend told you so!! Why won't you listen?! I am the Hand of God!! I giveth and I taketh awaaaaay!!!"

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DESK OFFICER

(waving an OFFICER over)
"Not another one. Haven't you people learned your lesson about fire water?"

AHOTE

"What? No! I mean, yes. That's just offensive! I'm not drunk and that man *is* planning to rob a bank!"

DESK OFFICER

"Sure, right after he kidnaps Jack Daniels."

AHOTE

"No, Jack's his partner! The hobo!"

Ahote inches towards the door, but back-up is already on the scene. He's yanked off his feet and dragged into the station, right behind Faro.

"Jack Daniels is a dangerous man!! You have to warn the bank!!!"

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DESTROYED -- NIGHT

Back in the disaster area, Lotus gives Dante a peck on the cheek and whispers in his ear. The bathroom door opens behind them; Jack walks out with a wad of toilet paper crammed up his nose. He pours himself a drink, then raises his glass to Dante.

JACK

"You got me pretty good, kid. Nice moves."

Lotus meets him in the kitchenette.

LOTUS

"Jeez, Jack. Hittin' the sauce again already? Drunken Monkey, indeed."

DANTE

"Ha! Drunken Monkey. That's you to a T, old timer!"

(continued)

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JACK

"Wadaya they call you? Dancin' Dante Twinkle Toes?"

DANTE

"I'm the King of Swing, daddy-o."

JACK

"Nice."

(to Lotus)

"We should go over the plan, what there is of one. You wanna take it outside or stuff him in the closet?"

LOTUS

"No need. We can talk in front of him."

JACK

"You sure that's wise?"

LOTUS

"What's he gonna do?"

JACK

"Fair enough."

They turn their backs to Dante, who quickly pulls one hand free, scratches his nose, and then resumes the position.

JACK

(whispering)

"There are only a few guards on the late shift. The lobby should be empty. Faro will back his hearse through the front doors. That'll attract some attention, so we need to act fast. If you can handle the guards while I blow the vault door, it'll save us a ton of time."

LOTUS

"This is seriously your plan? Crash through the wall and stuff the door full of dynamite?"

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Dante hides his smile.

JACK

"It'll work, believe me. We did a test run a few days ago. It'll be fine."

LOTUS

"If you say so."

DANTE

(coughing)
"Bullshit!"

JACK

"Anyway, I'll take care of the vault while you subdue the guards and any cops who drop by. Once I get the cash in the car, we're ghosts."

LOTUS

(crosses her arms)
"Then what? We wait around somewhere for the Tailor's sidekicks to show up?"

JACK

"More or less."

Lotus just looks at him, silent in her skepticism.

DANTE

"They got drunken monkeys in the Caribbean. Nasty, conniving, little bastards. They steal drinks right off the bar. Once, I caught one trying to swipe my rum frappe... Kicked it's ass."

JACK

"I doubt it."

DANTE

"Doubt it all ya want. That little punk didn't walk straight for a week."

Lotus hides her smile.

INT. JAIL CELL -- NIGHT

Ahote does a little soft shoe behind a curtain of bars.

AHOTE

"See? Clearly not drunk. No harm done, easy mistake to make. Can I be released now? Please?"

A DEPUTY sits at a desk nearby. He snaps his newspaper and raises it up to cover his scowl.

AHOTE

"I've committed no crime! You have no right to keep me here! This is America, goddamnit!"

The Deputy puts his gun on the desk next to him.

Ahote turns his back and slides down the bars until he's sitting on the floor. Faro is perched on the cot next to an actual, passed out DRUNK. He steeples his fingers, taps them against pursed lips, and regards Ahote with eyes like arrow slits.

FARO

"So... you drive around America, roll into random towns, and assume it's your destiny to foul up whatever happens to be going on at the time?"

AHOTE

"I don't *assume* anything. I see bad things happening to innocent people and I do whatever I can to help them."

FARO

"But you do make assumptions. You assume that Fate is leading you on this journey for a reason, that Fate has a plan. You assume that this plan is righteous and its outcome desirable."

AHOTE

"You don't believe the same?"

(continued)

continued:

FARO

"I believe that time is a river and struggling against the current gets us nowhere, but that doesn't mean the river knows where it's going. Even when you're swimming with the current, you have to choose your own destination. Knowledge is the only path to wisdom."

Ahote's mask of calm begins to crack.

AHOTE

"Who's working from the position of ignorance, here?! You're willfully ignoring the possibility that you'll cause a run on the banks!"

FARO

"Good *lord!* I've already explained about the damned FDIC! We're talking philosophy, now, not economics."

AHOTE

"Fine. It can't be a coincidence that we're both here at the same time, Faro, that Lotus brought you to me less than 24 hours before you planned to rob a bank. That's destiny."

FARO

"Maybe so, but who's destiny is it? Your problem, Ahote, is that you project human motives onto inhuman forces. Nature doesn't care about morality or justice! Its laws are primal: survival of the fittest, conservation of energy, action and reaction. If you want righteousness, it has to come from here."

He jabs Ahote's forehead with one, knobby finger.

"Just going with the flow gets you nowhere."

Ahote swats his finger away.

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AHOTE

"Have you ever wondered why you're having all this trouble catching the Tailor? If you're so enlightened, I mean? The righteous path never leads uphill. Maybe you're not meant to kill him. Revenge and Justice are easily confused."

FARO

"We're not after revenge, Ahote, not really. I see the fates of the wrongful dead and I try to put their affairs in order. We're trying to save the Tailor's future victims, not resurrect the dead."

The drunk stirs beside him. Faro pats his head and lulls him back to sleep.

"We're on the same path, Ahote, I've just learned a few lessons you haven't. Let me tell you about the last road shaman who tried to play by the Tailor's rules..."

INTERCUT

EXT. AIRSTRIP -- DUSK

FARO (v.o.)

"He started tracking the Tailor back in '29, when we was still just a killer."

The Tailor runs up to a plane as it taxis onto the runway. He climbs in as police lights begin to flash. SIRENS rise in pitch as the cops close in, then fall as the plane leaves them behind.

FARO (v.o.)

"He was the fastest thing on the road, but he still couldn't catch the Tailor."

The cops' windows EXPLODE as a street demon BLASTS past them. Exhaust pipes curl out and over the sides of its engine like a ribcage, exhaling angry puffs of steam. It charges at the plane, but too late. The Tailor drops a pair of fuzzy dice drop onto its hood.

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FARO (v.o.)

"So the Tailor used him. He aimed the shaman like a gun, sent him against his enemies."

INT. CASINO -- NIGHT

The demon car **PLOWS** through a casino, tossing tables and chips everywhere.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

It spins between two rumrunners on a dark street, knocking them into buildings on either side.

EXT. ROOFTOP -- DAY

It **STAMPEDES** across a roof and pounces on a motorized bandit trying to make his getaway.

EXT. CROSSROAD -- NIGHT

FARO (v.o.)

"One night, on a stretch of lonely road, he stole the shaman's destiny."

The Tailor stands at a crossroads, **HAMMERING** an **IRON SPIKE** into the center of some arcane sigil. The demon charges toward him like a lion running down its prey. The Tailor takes two steps back. When the car **COLLIDES** with the iron spike, it nearly **TEARS** the engine in half. Broken glass sprays all around the Tailor. Fire erupts from the depths of the car.

Brushing shards from his coat, the Tailor walks calmly over to the wreck. He pulls the **DRIVER'S** blood-soaked head off the wheel and whispers in his ear.

TAILOR

"The only way you'll ever get this close to me is if I let you. Come work for me, wait for your chance."

The driver's eyes open. He weeps blood.

INT. JAIL CELL -- NIGHT

FARO

"He's been the Tailor's chauffer ever since, a willing accomplice to countless crimes, but he still thinks he's on the righteous path. Can you guess the moral of this story?"

The Drunk is now awake and listening intently.

DRUNK

"A stitch in time saves nine?"

FARO

"Close, friend, but no."

Faro places a reassuring hand on the Drunk's shoulder.

"It's this: even if there is a Grand Plan, all you know for sure is that it's not your plan. If it's the Tailor's plan, trusting Fate won't take you anywhere you want to go."

AHOTE

"You sure this guy's not just a spook show?" Ahote replies. "You're making him sound like the devil himself."

DRUNK

"I met the devil at a crossroads once. Nice enough fella. Said he'd gimme one wish if I sold him my soul. I looked him right in the eye and I said, 'Nuthin' doin', beezlebub! The good Lord gives me everything he sees fit.' Biggest mistake I ever made."

Faro puts a commiserating arm around the old man's shoulders.

FARO

"The Tailor is no common criminal. He's a geomancer. He walks in the eye of his own karmic hurricane. As long as we let him dictate the rules, we'll never catch him. That's why we need to force his hand. This money is the only bait we can use and robbing this bank is the only way we can get it."

EXT. BANK -- DAY

A bank SIGN sways in the breeze. The BANK MANAGER fumbles with his keys. He drops them when he hears a loud RAP from the door, but it's just a GUARD tapping on the glass.

GUARD #1

"Hi, Mister Parrish. Workin' on a Sunday?"

Parrish straightens himself and tries to subtly wave the guard away, but poor sap's oblivious.

GUARD #1

"You shouldn't be working on a beautiful day like this. Let me get the door for..."

As soon as the lock clicks open, four ROBBERS force their way inside, carrying Parrish along in their rip tide.

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Someone pistol whips the guard and abducts his gun. GUARDS #2 and #3 emerge from a back room, but their bravado buckles when a TOMMYGUN paints the ceiling with lead. Moments later, they're cowering on the floor beside GUARD #1.

ROBBER #4 minds the hostages while the rest show Parrish to his office. They're all dressed in rail worker's cover-alls; red bandanas cover their faces.

INT. BANK OFFICE -- DAY

ROBBER #1

(to Parrish)

"Your guard was right: You really shouldn't be here on a Sunday. Get those magic fingers movin' and we can all get back to church."

Parrish opens the vault, then backs out of the way and covers his head. Again. Robbers #2 and #3 invade the vault with empty CANVAS BAGS.

ROBBER #1

"This really is God's plan, you know. There's a storm comin' that's gonna cover our escape, so we got no need to kill you or your boys. Be thankful."

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Robber #4 peers outside through the front doors.

ROBBER #4

"Holy shit. Here she comes!"

A locomotive RUMBLES over the building as the street vanishes behind a curtain of dust. The lights flicker, plaster falls. Sand curls in around the doors and windows.

ROBBER #4

"Shake a leg, fellas! She's a Dusey!"

INT. BANK OFFICE -- DAY

Robbers #2 and #3 finish their work and hoist their plunder. Robber #1 is just about to bid Parrish farewell when the lobby EXPLODES inward. The doors slide in from the right and SLAM into the teller windows. Robber #4 bounces off the bars and joins the guards on the floor. The storm HOWLS.

All three Robbers press through the door at once. They find the back end of a hearse where the bank doors used to be.

ROBBER #1

"What the hell?! Is that a hearse?!"

EXT. POLICE STATION -- DAY

The Drunk shambles out of the police station. Faro and Ahote aren't far behind. Their souls are where they left them, parked on the curb.

FARO

"If you still gotta stop me, I guess now's the time."

He spreads his arms wide and closes his eyes.

"Take your best shot, just not the face or the groin. Those were gifts from God."

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AHOTE

"I don't know. Maybe the FDIC insurance really will make it a victimless crime. Well, except for the intended victim."

FARO

(opens one eye)

"You can't be serious. The economic argument sold you?"

AHOTE

"No, but it's a legitimate point. Everything seemed so clear last night. I thought we were supposed to show people the path, not lead them into the weeds."

Faro drops his arms and puts a hand on Ahote's shoulder.

FARO

"Anyone can show you a path. Some of us can even tell you what lies at its end, but you've got to know where you're..."

He drifts off as if asleep at the wheel.

AHOTE

"What?"

Then Ahote can sense it, too. Something's in the air, a rush of wind and a green tint.

FARO & AHOTE

"Black blizzard."

Faro takes Ahote by both shoulders.

FARO

"Folks will be stranded on the highway, Ahote. I've seen people suffocated in their cars and then buried alive. You should save as many as you can. You're the only one who can drive in this."

AHOTE

"What about you?"

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FARO

"Like I've been telling you, Ahote... I'm going to rob a bank."

EXT. BANK -- DAY

The bank sign swings wildly in the gale. A hearse plows through the storm, then box slides to a sideways stop facing away from the bank.

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Inside, Robber #4 watches red lights flare through the glass doors. He squints and edges closer, not sure what he's seeing.

The hearse backs through the bank doors and hits the gunman like a pool cue. He flies into the teller windows, hits his head with a CLANG, and slumps down on the floor.

Jack and Lotus push their way inside; she tosses her hat in the car while Jack rushes ahead. When he sees the guards sitting in a circle, obviously disarmed, he slides to a stop.

JACK

"Huh."

Lotus finishes tying her hair and catches up just in time to draw her guns. Three Robbers with two canvas bags approach them from the bank manager's office. Robber #1 uses Mr. Parrish as a meat shield.

ROBBER #1

"Whoever the hell you are, you're either too late or too early. You can have the place when we're done with it."

Jack puts his hands up and approaches them.

JACK

"If we'd been any later, you'd be dead men walkin'. That money you're stealin' belongs to someone way above your pay grade. If you walk outta here with it, you'll be paintin' bulls-eyes on your foreheads."

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ROBBER #1

"We'll take our chances, fella. Tell your daughter to put her guns away."

JACK

"Listen here, boy. I'm tryin' to be polite about this. Don't make me bend you over my knee."

He takes another step forward. Robber #1 presses his pistol into Mr. Parrish's jaw.

ROBBER #1

"What's your take on this whole hostage situation, old man? If it's not working for you, I should just kill this guy now and free up a hand."

He thumbs back the hammer.

"Last chance to object..."

Lotus points her guns at heaven; Jack stops his advance.

JACK

"Those canvas bags of yours are death warrants. Even the mafia doesn't steal from the man who owns this bank. Let us take half of it and we'll draw all the attention. We want the man, not his money."

ROBBER #1

"We ain't negotiating a deal, here."

Robber #1 nods to his partners and they go to collect their unconscious friend. As they bend down to hoist him up, Guard #2 grabs a canvas bag and kicks its keeper in the jewels. The other Guards grapple with Robber #3 as he tries to bring a tommy gun to bear.

Lotus' eyes narrow as she focuses on Robber #1's exposed eye, but it's not a gunshot that ends their stalemate. It's the sound of something huge as it BANGS the hearse across the nose. The car spins around, taking another chunk off the front wall, and ends fully inside the lobby. What remains of the entryway is now blocked off by the broadside of a FIRETRUCK.

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LOTUS

"What the hell?! Is that a firetruck?"

INT. HOTEL ROOM, DESTROYED -- DAY

Jack and Lotus are throwing cards into the back of the hotel room door. Lotus holds a set of three between her fingers and launches them with a flick of her wrist. Each drives deep into the wood.

Jack empties a shot glass and draws the ace of hearts.

JACK

"Five bucks says I can split one of 'em in two."

LOTUS

"Make it ten," Lotus replies.

JACK

"You just can't wait to loose all that money, can you?"

LOTUS

"Yeah, well, the previous owner was an ass."

Behind them, Dante's still bound to a chair. His head lolls around like a bound balloon. He turns toward the window and his skull stops it's wandering. On the horizon, a wall of sand is eating the world.

DANTE

"Hey, um... guys." No response.

"Hey, old guys! Somebody check the Bible. What time is the world supposed to end?"

The three of them stare out the window for a long moment, then Jack heads for the door.

JACK

"We gotta go, boss. This is perfect. It's a sign... or an opportunity. Anyway, we gotta move."

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He plucks his hat off the rack and tosses Lotus her fedora.

LOTUS

"What about Faro? We don't have a car."

JACK

"I'm sure he'll reach the same conclusion and meet us there. It's just down the block. If we hurry, we might even beat the storm."

He takes another look out the window. The End is visibly more Nigh.

JACK

"Maybe."

Lotus follows him out the door. Before it closes, she peeks her head back inside.

LOTUS

"Be good while we're gone."

Alone with the storm, Dante lets out a long sigh. Then, with a little shake, he slips right out of the ropes. He stands, cracks his neck and loosens his joints, then picks up the chair and sends it CRASHING out the window.

EXT. HOTEL ROOFTOP -- DAY

The storm BLOWS some of the glass back at him; it's already licking the edge of town.

Undeterred, Dante swings himself onto the exterior of the hotel and scurries up to the roof. He crosses to the other side in plenty of time to watch Jack and Lotus dash out the front door. He follows them down the street, bounding from one rooftop to the next.

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

Dante drops onto the top of a delivery truck and skips across a few moving cars like they were stones in a stream. Then, he jumps onto a storefront awning and reclaims the high ground.

EXT. ROOFTOP -- DAY

He spots the bank sign just before the storm swallows him whole. It overtakes him in mid-air, between one building and the next. The next roof vanishes from sight. His foot slips and plummets, but just manages to catch himself on a window sill. He swings through a pair of shutters, obliterating them.

INT. FIREHOUSE BARRACKS -- DAY

Dante rolls through the wreckage and comes to his feet surrounded by large, angry FIREMEN.

Storm winds billow through the now-open window as FIREMAN #1 picks Dante up and tries to stuff him back through it.

Dante thrusts his limbs out in all directions to catch the edges of the window frame.

DANTE

"Wait, wait, wait! It was an accident! I'd never cross firemen on purpose! I was a firefighter in Brazil!"

FIREMAN #2 taps Fireman #1 on the shoulder, then addresses Dante.

FIREMAN #2

"That so?"

DANTE

"Yeah! Well, not officially, but I did rescue a woman from a burning building in Brazil."

He pauses while they mull it over, but he just can't hold his tongue.

"Technically... I _did start the fire."

The stuffing resumes.

DANTE

"Come on! It was an accident!"

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Dante pulls in his limbs and lets the big guy shove him out, but keeps his fingers hooked around the inside of the window. He swings out and pulls his legs up, then kicks the fireman on the top of the head and slides down his back into the room. Fireman #2 tries to catch him, but Dante rolls under his outstretched arms and bolts into the hall.

INT. FIREHOUSE HALLWAY -- DAY

Four of them follow him. With no staircase or window in sight, Dante heads for the fireman's pole. He swings around and kicks Fireman #2 in the chest, knocking them all down. Then he pulls in and slides to the ground floor.

INT. FIREHOUSE GARAGE -- DAY

Fireman #3 follows and gets a fire extinguisher to the face. Fireman #4 lands on said fire extinguisher, wrenching it out of Dante's grasp.

Dante turns tail and runs towards a fire truck, slides underneath it. The firemen split up, one going around the front while the others flank. When Fireman #2 pokes his nose around the fender, Dante breaks it with a brass nozzle.

Then, he yanks the hose connected to that nozzle and leans back, letting it cruise over him and hit Fireman #4 in the throat. The #4 chokes and stumbles backwards into #3, who shoves him aside in his eagerness to get beat.

Dante flows around a few hooks and haymakers while he reels the hose in on his hands and feet. He whips it into a wide loop that lassos both #3 and #4 around their shoulders, then pulls it tight and slams their heads together. They hit the floor like falling timber.

Dante spares a moment for a quick celebration dance, then throws open the front doors. The storm slams against his chest, kicking him back into the garage. He turns around to clear his eyes and finds himself staring at a big, red fire engine. Suddenly, it's Christmas morning.

He hops into the driver's seat and finds the keys in the glove box. The truck sputters to life, lurches forward, and dives into an ocean of dust.

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

Sweetness' windshield is a dark blur of brown and black; it's like trying to see through a potato sack. Rather, it *would* be like that if Ahote had his eyes open. Instead, he's steering with his third eye and ten white knuckles.

AHOTE

"Ommmm. Ommmm. Shit!"

His eyes snap open as a FAMILY MAN materializes from the swirling sand. His head is down, one hand holding his hat while his other arm covers his face.

EXT. BLACK BLIZZARD -- DAY

Ahote spins Sweetness around him. Her front wheel GRINDS the gravel an inch from his shoes; her chrome siding brushes past his blazer. Momentum carries the car as it SKIDS to a stop a few feet behind him.

Ahote opens the door.

AHOTE

"Hey! The meter's running!"

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

When the hitchhiker pulls the door shut moments later, every inch of the dashboard, upholstery, and driver is painted in silt.

FAMILY MAN

(coughing)

"Thank God! I left my wife and children in the car, back there somewhere, in a ditch."

Ahote turns the wheel and presses the accelerator.

AHOTE

"Let's go get them. There's no sense in thanking God, though. I expect we'll have to do most of the digging ourselves."

INT. BURIED CAR -- DAY

Inside a tomb of American steel, a MOTHER comforts her two children with cataclysmic verse.

MOTHER

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

Her LITTLE GIRL huddles atop the glove box, her back to a giant ant farm.

LITTLE GIRL

"Mommy? When Jesus gets here, will we get bikes?"

Muddy tears run down her MOTHER's face, drip onto the BABY BOY in her arms.

MOTHER

(sobbing)
"Yes dear. Everyone who loves Jesus gets a bike."

A beam of light ignites above them and shines down on the LITTLE GIRL's filthy locks. It widens as raw hands wipe away the sediment. A muffled warning reaches them through the gale before Ahote's elbow SMASHES through the rear window.

EXT. BLACK BLIZZARD -- DAY

On the street, tiny dunes of sand have already started to form along Ahote's legs and back. He holds the FAMILY MAN's ankles as he reaches down into the tomb. The storm tries to swallow them.

EXT. BANK -- DAY

Elsewhere in the same murky black, Dante's fire truck scrapes the signs, benches, and masonry off the facades of several buildings.

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When it finally finds the bank, it collides with the hood of a hearse. The smaller vehicle spins sideways as it's shoved inside the bank. Dante slams on the brakes and the fire truck comes to a stop squarely in front of Faro's do-it-yourself door, cutting off their escape route.

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Lotus and Robber #1 quickly recover their composure. She sidearms a bullet; it squishes into his pistol right between the hammer and the chamber. Robber #1 tries to use Mr. Parrish as a meat shield, but Lotus is done with her guns. She throws a roundhouse kick into his knee, then grabs the back of his collar and sends him CRASHING through the office window.

On the other side of the lobby, Jack is playing hot potato with the other two Robbers, Guards 2-4, and both canvas bags full of money. Mr. Parrish runs headling into this fracas and catches a money bag with his face.

Robber #2 punches him in the gut and nabs the bag as Parrish doubles over. Guard #2 pulls Parrish out of the fray as Jack leaps over them and plants both knees in the Bandit's chest. They SLAM into the floor together.

Guard #3 levels the tommy gun at the back of Jack's head. Jack rolls backward and kicks the bag at the Guard, who abandons his killshot to catch the cash.

Behind him, Guard #4 punches Robber #3 in the teeth. The Bandit lurches into Guard #3 and they fall in a tangle of limbs and guns. Jack kicks the tommy gun away and makes a grab for the cash, but everyone else does the same. They all hog pile on the money.

Lotus is on her way over when she sees Dante slither over the top of the truck and into the bank. He pressurizes the water tank, grabs the hose, and hops through the hearse's passenger window.

Faro's standing next to the driver's side door, inspecting the damage. He ducks his head in and confronts Dante.

FARO

"Hey! You parked me in, jackass!"

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Dante threads the hose through the front and back windows, then slips into the back seat and dives out the driver's rear window. Faro tries to tackle him, but Dante somersaults past the Ferryman and into a handstand, then kicks him into the side of his car. Faro bounces off and staggers into the lobby.

Lotus is on him like stink on jambalaya. Dante rolls under her first kick, a straight-line attack that puts a foot-shaped dent in the door. Her second kick is a roundhouse. Dante dodges back, then snags her ankle in the fire hose and hauls her off her feet. He catches her before she can catch herself. She tries to kick him in the back of the head, but he rolls his bone box out of the way just in time.

DANTE

"You need some new material, girly girl. I've seen that one before."

Faro charges in like an angry bull. Dante hoists Lotus up to her feet, spins her around, and sends her flying into him. While they're extricating, he ties the hose around a door handle.

Lotus returns with piston fists. Dante ducks sideways and down; her punches track him to the floor, then lose him as he rolls under the hearse. On the far side, he cranks open a valve and pressurizes the hose. It seizes the hearse in python coils.

Something descends on Lotus through the swirling sand. She spins and intercepts it with her heel. A canvas bag full of money careens across the lobby and lands in the office.

JACK

(from the bottom of the hog pile)
"You were supposed to catch that!"

Robber #2 breaks away with the other money bag and runs for the hole in the wall. Dante pulls the ladder off the fire truck and SMACKS one end into the Robber's windpipe.

Lotus climbs over the hearse and tries to turn off the hose, but Dante loops the ladder over her shoulders and drags her away from the truck. She snaps her arms up and splits the ladder in half, then catches each leg and twists them around with enough force to splinter the wood. The rungs shoot off in every direction. Dante lets go and staggers back.

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Robber #2, clutching his throat with one hand and his money bag with the other, resumes his attempt to leave. Lotus heads him off with a side kick that launches him into the air and leaves the money bag behind. His skull SHATTERS the wall tile.

Lotus snags the bag and stuffs it in the hearse. Dante runs around the other side, recovers the bag, and tosses it into the office. He leans back as Faro throws an ill-conceived punch, then stuffs the shaman through the hearse's window.

DANTE

"Where the hell's Ahote?!"

EXT. STORM -- DAY

The camera zooms into a satellite view of the massive dust storm. It pans eight miles outside of town, then zooms down to Sweetness.

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

FAMILY MAN

"It has to be here somewhere. We passed the tree and the fence. It should be right in front of us."

Sweetness THUMPS into something. Her wheels SLIDE in the sand. Ahote peers into the grainy not-night and makes out the silhouette of something pressed against the grill.

AHOTE

"Is that... a chimney?"

The ground/roof collapses beneath them and the car CRASHES into the family's sitting room.

INT. BURIED HOUSE -- DAY

Dirt spills in through the doors and windows, fills the fireplace, and now it pours in through the ragged hole in the ceiling.

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AHOTE

"Nuts to this! I'm taking you back to the hotel."

He guns Sweetness up a sand dune, crashes through the window frame, and explodes back into the storm.

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

The little girl tugs at Ahote's braids from the back seat.

LITTLE GIRL

"Don't forget Hoover!"

MOTHER

"That's our dog."

She pries away the girls tiny fingers, but scrunches her nose at the fetishes in the shaman's hair.

AHOTE

"Where is he?"

FAMILY MAN

"Oh no... we left him tied up in the yard."

EXT. STORM -- DAY

Family Man and Ahote dive out of the car and check the undercarriage. All clear. They fumble around in the mirk, using Sweetness' headlights as a beacon, until Ahote hears Hoover BARKING. The dog's head is deep in a hole. It digs frantically to stop the dune from swallowing the last of its leash. A SWITCHBLADE appears in Ahote's hand, slashes through the rope, and disappears like a magician's coin.

Ahote runs into the husband on his way back to Sweetness, hands over a wriggling clump of dirt and tongue. They pile back inside the car.

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

AHOTE

"I'm sorry, girl, but you'll never be clean again."

Hubby passes Hoover into the back seat.

FAMILY MAN

"What was that?"

AHOTE

"Nothing. Let's get back to town."

EXT. STORM -- DAY

The camera moves out ahead of Sweetness and follows the road as it burrows beneath the storm. It winds through the outskirts of Dodge and passes by a bank that's seen better days.

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Robber #1 shakes his head and sits up. The bank vault lies open and empty behind him. Broken glass litters the floor and two bags of money lie at his feet. He throws one over each shoulder and stands up. Out in the lobby... well, a lot of crazy shit is happening. He creeps towards the door like a cartoon burglar.

JACK

(from the floor)

"Hey, idiots! The money's leaving!"

Guards #2 and #3 break off from the melee and move to intercept, but Robbers #3 and #4 (now awake) catch them from behind and hold them back.

Behind them all, Jack flips onto his feet. He turns to his left and kicks the knee out from under Robber #3. As he starts to fall, Jack POUNDS Guard #2 in the chest and K.O.'s them both. Then, he hits the guard on his right with a back fist to the face; his skull snaps back and SMASHES the other Robber #4's nose. A flurry of punches finishes them off.

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Dante flies backwards across the lobby and catches himself on a teller window. He dives forward as Lotus' foot follows him and SLAMS into the brass bars. The two of them land almost on top of each other. Dante catches her in a leg lock and brings her down to his level, but she manages to grab him by the throat. They're half way to a double homicide when the last of the guards gets his hands on the tommy gun.

Guard #4 lets loose a spray of bullets that brings everything to a standstill... everything except the storm, which rages on outside, and Faro's frantic fiddling with the fire hose. Jack and the ringleader stop in their tracks. Lotus and Dante release their mutual death grips and get to their feet.

GUARD #4

"Get in the vault, all of you! This shit is OVER!! As soon as the storm clears, you're all going to jail, got it?! JAIL!!!"

LOTUS

"Never spray a Thompson. They run through a clip in about a minute and that one's already been fired a few times. How many bullets you think you got left?"

GUARD #4

"I told you to GET in the goddamned VAULT!!!"

Lotus eyes Twitchy's trigger finger and reaches for her guns, which sets him off. Twitchy, in turn, sets off the Thompson. Lotus shoots five bullets out of mid-air, swats two more away with the flats of her guns, and dodges an eighth before the tommy gun CLICKS empty.

She's across the room in a blink, tearing the Thompson out of Guard #4's hands. She pushes him back and clocks him across the jaw with the rifle butt, Babe Ruth style. Blood and teeth arc out of his mouth as he flips heels over head and slams face-down on the ground.

Dante's already on Robber #1, who thought he saw a chance to make his escape. He grabs the money bags on the Robber's shoulders and pulls them back as he kicks one wing-tipped shoe into the man's spine, nearly folding him in half. The bags slip off as he crumples. Dante throws them both through the office window and into the vault.

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Lotus manages to intercept one of them and tosses it back to Faro. It almost knocks the wind out of him. Dante's on him like a bad prom date. He grabs the bag and pushes Faro away with a slow kick to the stomach.

He starts to swing it around for another throw, but Lotus puts a cork in that one. She latches on tight and they wrestle for it.

LOTUS

"What devil's run off with your brain, Dante Harrison Halloway?!"

DANTE

"Me?! You've had the crazies all night! You don't know jack about Jack or his pal, but you're gonna rob a bank with 'em and then... what? Go on the lam? Seriously?!"

LOTUS

"Not until you two stood me up, I wasn't!"

She throws a few punches, but the wrestling has her off balance. Dante dodges with ease. Nearby, Faro finally convinces the hose to release his hearse. Jack emerges from the office with one of the money bags, empties it into the back seat.

LOTUS

"I wanted *all of us* to help them stop some killers."

DANTE

"Right, you and him picked a fight with me on the dace floor in the name of justice!"

Lotus flips over his head, taking the bag with her. It pulls his arms up and back, so he spins like a rolling pin and tries to sweep her leg when she lands. Lotus blocks the kick with her shin, then brings her heel down on his foot. Dante's toes slide out of harm's way in the nick of time.

Their jitterbug is cut short when Jack unzips their money bag and lets its contents spill into its recently emptied brother.

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DANTE

"Oh, fer fucksake!"

He launches a kick at the Drunken Monkey, but Lotus blocks again. They let go of the bag simultaneously and set on each other in desperate frustration.

Jack kicks his money bag to Faro and plucks the empty one out of the air, then throws it over Dante's head like a hood. He gives the King of Swing a big, old bear hug. Lotus takes the captive's legs and they manhandle him into the vault.

INT. VAULT -- DAY

JACK

"Stay in here 'til the storm passes, kid. I'd hate for you to get dust pneumonia on my account... well, 'hate' is a strong word."

He leaves Lotus to say her goodbyes.

LOTUS

"We're not done, Dante, and I'm not mad. I think it's fair to say we both screwed this thing up. Just wait here for Ahote. He'll be able to catch up to us, I'm sure."

Behind her, Faro withdraws Lotus' fedora from the hearse and holds it up for Jack to see. Then, he tosses it through the office window and into the vault. Lotus turns around with a question on her lips, but Jack is already airborne. He SLAMS into her with both feet. She hits the safe deposit boxes like a cue ball breaking a rack. Jack flips himself upright and leans into the door.

JACK

"Sorry, boss. I'm sure it's for the best."

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

The vault shuts with a BANG, but Jack doesn't lock it. Faro backs the hearse against the office wall, as if getting a running start, and Jack hops in. The wheels SQUEAL to life, tearing up tile and spraying debris before Faro releases the break. They rocket forward and SMASH through the side wall, box slide up against the neighboring building, and then rocket off into the storm.

INT. SWEETNESS -- DAY

Ahote struggles to focus his thoughts as backseat drivers, children, and a failed president run riot in his car.

AHOTE

"Shit!"

His eyes snap open as the Ferryman's hearse coalesces out of the sand directly ahead of them. It buries its nose in the road as Faro locks the front wheels. Its back end leaps up and continues forward, carrying the rest of the vehicle with it. The hood lifts off the ground just before Sweetness skids through its space.

Their windshields pass within feet of each other as the hearse somersaults over. Faro waves to Ahote. Jack clutches fistfuls of cash and screams in terror. The hearse completes its flip, lands behind Sweetness, and continues down its path.

The rest of the trip is silent.

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

When they pass by the bank and see its sorry state, Ahote has to stop. They drive in through the alley and park in the lobby.

INT. BANK LOBBY -- DAY

Ahote tells them he'll just be a minute, but the husband and the little girl tumble out anyway. The woman follows her daughter, baby boy in tow.

The vault door is closed, but not locked. The men wrestle it open while the woman tries to keep a tommy gun away from her daughter.

Inside, they find the lovers have mended their differences and then some.

Ahote, caked in dirt, regards them with the cool demeanor of a private eye.

AHOTE

"We'll be at the hotel."

He closes the door.

FADE TO BLACK

CREDITS

EXT. ROADSIDE -- NIGHT

Broken glass CRUNCHES under black leather boots. DUESEY approaches the wreck slowly, deliberately, like a man approaching the gallows. He crouches down near the front window, now a hollow frame of warped steel, and finds FARO upside-down. His neck is being bent like a toothpick, squeezed between the ground below and the remains of his hearse above.

DUESEY

"I tried hard to avoid this. You know I did.
This was your path, not mine."

Faro's smile is an open wound, raw and bloody.

FARO

"I've seen this moment coming for so long, it's like meeting an old friend."

DUESEY

"Why didn't you just back off and let me handle it?"

FARO

"Some mistakes, you have to make once... but only once."

Metal BUCKLES, bone SNAPS. The vehicle collapses, pressing down like a palm on a pop can. Something IGNITES inside the engine and the hearse becomes a pyre.

A black silhouette walks away from the conflagration, back onto the road, and gets behind the wheel of a nightmare machine. Exhaust pipes wrap around its engine like a steel ribcage; its grill is a gaping maw. The behemoth vanishes into the night, leaving the Ferryman in the past.

CUT TO BLACK

END