

City on the Edge  
Of Tomorrow

by  
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FADE IN:

INT. PARENTS BEDROOM -- NIGHT

In a typical suburban domain, darkness covers the entire house as the LED on the clock by the parent's bedside flips over to 3:05 AM. NICK WARNER, snores softly, next to his wife.

Over the hump of Nick in bed, as viewed through the door into the hallway, a shadow flits quickly into the room across the hall. It moves too quickly to be identified.

Nick, in deepest dream, is suddenly woken by the sound of his son, ROBBIE in the next room.

ROBBIE

(O.S.)

Christian! No, let him go! Dad!  
Help!

Nick sits up in bed and looks over into the boys bedroom in time to see his other son, CHRISTIAN, being pulled into the closet. Robbie continues to scream as Nick jumps off the bed.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

Dad, something's got Christian!  
Dad! Wake up!

MARIE, the mother, sits up in bed as well, wiping the sleep from her eyes, but otherwise alert as Nick heads for the door.

MARIE

Nick, what's wrong?

Nick doesn't answer as he hurries into the boys room and flicks on the light. Blinking in the sudden light, he inspects the boy's beds.

Robbie is sitting up in bed, terrified. He points to the closet.

ROBBIE

Something took Christian in there.

Quickly, Nick slams the slightly open closet door farther open and sticks his head inside.

At the top of the closet, past a few board games, the door to the attic is a gaping void and flashing through that void is one of Christian's feet as he is pulled up and into the depths of the attic.

NICK

Christian!

Suddenly, Marie is beside Robbie, comforting him. She is slowly becoming hysterical.

MARIE

Nick, what is it? Where's Christian?  
Where's my baby?

Nick turns back to her and allows anger to become his only emotion.

NICK

I don't know. He's up in the attic.

Without another word, Nick, still dressed in his pajamas, begins to crawl on top of the dresser in the closet, reaching toward the hole in the ceiling.

ROBBIE

Dad, what's got Christian?

MARIE

Nick, where are you going? What has  
my son?

Nick reaches the attic and sticks his head inside. Seeing only darkness, he turns back to his wife and remaining child.

NICK

Where's my flashlight?

MARIE

What? What are you...

NICK

Damnit, where is my...Nevermind!

Nick jumps down from the dresser and strides quickly into his bedroom.

MARIE

Nick, what are you doing?

NICK

Flashlight.

Nick reaches under his bed and fumbles around until he finally fishes out a flashlight. He turns it on and waves the beam around as if trying out a light saber. Satisfied, he walks quickly back into the boys' room.

Robbie is cradled within his mother's arms as Marie slowly shakes the sleep out of her eyes.

MARIE

Okay, so what is going on here?  
Does something have my boy? Robbie,  
honey, what did you see exactly?

Nick enters the room and immediately heads toward the closet,  
climbing toward the attic opening.

ROBBIE

I don't know. I woke up and something  
black was dragging Christian to the  
closet.

Nick's legs can be seen hanging from the attic hole and are  
soon enveloped into the inky darkness above.

MARIE

Something black? Robbie, what was  
it?

ROBBIE

I don't know, mommy.

MARIE

Well, think harder.

In the attic, there are boxes and various holiday odds and  
ends. Nick shines his beam of light, playing quickly over a  
box identifying Christmas decorations, several bats and  
gloves, and finally over each corner.

NICK

Christian! Where are you?

Hearing no reply, Nick pulls his body fully up into the attic.  
The ceiling is only four feet tall, which forces Nick to  
pull himself along on hands and knees.

MARIE

Nick, do you see him?

Nick looks down the attic door to see Marie looking up.

NICK

No. There's a lot of boxes up here,  
but I don't see him.

Nick turns around and pushes a box back, looking around it  
with the flashlight beam.

MARIE

What do you mean, you can't see him?  
He's got to be up there. Look harder!

Nick, growing frantic, throws another box to the side.

NICK  
Christian, where are you?

Nick crawls further into the confines of the attic, waving the beam frantically from one side of the attic to another.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Christian!

MARIE  
(O.S.)  
Nick, I'm going to call the police.

NICK  
Christian!

MARIE  
(O.S.)  
Nick!

Nick turns back, angry at being constantly interrupted.

NICK  
What!

MARIE  
I said I'm going to call the cops.

NICK  
Do it. Do something, but let me find my son.

Marie turns away from the closet, slightly hurt.

MARIE  
He's my son too.

Nick flashes the light, tracing the wood panels of the attic, until something catches his eye. One corner of the attic does not reveal the wood of the ceiling, but instead reveals nothing but more darkness.

Nick crawls quickly to the section of darkness and aims his light beam directly at the blackness. His light traces the wood up to a line when black simply takes over.

Bringing the flashlight closer does nothing to dispel this darkness. Curious, Nick reaches out and his fingers disappear into the darkness. Quickly, he jerks his hand back and inspects it.

Finding nothing, Nick looks around and notes a baseball bat. He reaches out with a free hand and grasps the bat firmly, pushing the bat toward the darkness.

Like pushing through murky water, Nick jabs the bat into the black and watches it disappear slowly in the darkness.

Suddenly the bat is jerked forward, pulling Nick slightly off balance.

Getting on his knees, Nick braces and yanks backwards, fighting resistance from within. After fighting with a denizen of the darkness over possession, the other sets the bat free, which knocks Nick hard on his rump.

Nick takes a moment to examine the bat, then jabs it several times in the blackness. Finding no resistance, he pulls the bat completely out and looks around resolutely.

NICK

Marie!

ROBBIE

(O.S.)

She's in the living room, dad. I think she's on the phone.

NICK

Okay. Listen Robbie, I'm going to go, look, there's something up here. I don't know what it is, but I think it's where Christian may be

Robbie is below the attic, looking upwards.

ROBBIE

What is it?

NICK

I don't know, Robbie. But I've got to get him back from wherever he is.

ROBBIE

Get him back, dad.

NICK

I'm gonna try, Robbie.

Nick looks back once more at the spot of blackness.

NICK (CONT'D)

Okay, so he can't be anywhere else. And this is...what? A door? Water? Ah, screw it.

Nick, swallowing a large lump of courage jumps, frog-like, into the blackness, disappearing entirely from the attic.

Underneath the attic hole, Marie looks up into the darkness.

MARIE

Nick? Nick, where are you?

ROBBIE  
He's gone, mom.

Marie, surprised, glances at her son.

MARIE  
Where did he go?

ROBBIE  
He went to get Christian.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK -- CONTINUOUS

Blackness.

Then speeding lights, like many stars, fly past.

More Blackness

CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR THE GATE -- MOMENTS LATER

Nick is lying on his back on sand with his arms spread out above his head. All around him is barren wasteland with no distinguishing items.

Nick's eyes crack open and before he can register the near star-less sky, a huge four-prong pitchfork slams down on his upper torso, pinning his arms and neck.

But it is not a pitchfork. It is the end of a tail that belongs to the GATEKEEPER. The Gatekeeper is a monstrosly large beast, roughly eleven feet high, shaped like a boulder with legs. It is covered in a thick, tar substance, and its booming voice echoes in the grotto.

GATEKEEPER  
Ho, what have we here? An intruder?  
But we haven't had anyone from your  
side for a while.

Nick's voice grunts under the pressure of the tail.

NICK  
Where is my son?

GATEKEEPER  
Why would I know or care about  
anything of yours, little stick?

NICK  
Something took my son.

GATEKEEPER

Again.

NICK

What are you?

GATEKEEPER

I am the Gatekeeper. Nothing comes  
in or out without passing me.

NICK

Then you're blind. Where is my son?

The Gatekeeper bends down a little lower toward Nick, with a  
derisive sneer.

GATEKEEPER

If I were you, little stick, I would  
leave this land the way you came in  
and forget all about it.

The Gatekeeper nods his head to a large stone arch that sits  
at the top of the bowl that the Gatekeeper and Nick are in.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

If your son is past my gate, he's  
beyond your reach.

The Gatekeeper flicks its tail and the tines rip out of the  
ground, freeing Nick's arms and neck. Nick quickly moves  
his hand up to rub his throat as he sits up. The Gatekeeper  
turned to walk back toward the stone arch.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

Go home, little stick.

Nick rises to his feet.

NICK

I'm not going anywhere without my  
son.

The Gatekeeper reaches the arch, turns and sits with his  
back to the stones.

GATEKEEPER

Then amuse me, little stick. Maybe  
I'll let you pass.

NICK

Really?

GATEKEEPER

None may pass.



Nick begins to climb up the bowl toward the arch. Looking left and right, he can see only blackness as if a wall of dark surrounded the bowl and the only way out was through the arch.

NICK

I don't even know how to get home.

GATEKEEPER

That's simple. Go back the way you came in.

NICK

I came in through my attic.

GATEKEEPER

If only I knew what an attic was then maybe I could help you. Not that I would, of course.

Nick looks at the open arch.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

I know what you're thinking, little stick. What's to stop me from running right through?

As quick as a lightning flash, the Gatekeeper flicks its tail out to stab in the ground in front of Nick's feet.

NICK

Why do you keep calling me little stick?

GATEKEEPER

If I were a dog, you would be a stick.

NICK

Where am I?

The Gatekeeper cocks his head to one side in curiosity.

GATEKEEPER

It must be sad to not know where you are. Where did you come from? That should give you some indication.

NICK

Something grabbed my son and fled into the attic. There was a spot of blackness there that I jumped into to get here.

The Gatekeeper ponders this information for a moment.

GATEKEEPER

That is not a very amusing story,  
little stick.

NICK

I'm not trying to be amusing.

GATEKEEPER

Then why am I keeping you around?  
Quick. Climb into my mouth and amuse  
my taste buds.

Nick kicks at the ground.

NICK

No thank you. Look, my son could be  
in danger and the longer...

GATEKEEPER

If he's in this place, he's not in  
danger. He is beyond help.

Nick takes one step toward the gate.

NICK

Then let me through.

GATEKEEPER

I would not be much of a gate keeper  
if I could not keep you from entering  
the gate, now would I?

Nick turns and ponders silently for a moment before  
continuing.

NICK

And haven't you ever seen people  
pass through.

GATEKEEPER

No one passes through.

NICK

But wasn't there ever a time when  
you saw others?

GATEKEEPER

Others? Yes, there have been others.  
They have come from the gate and  
they go to the beyond...out there.

The Gatekeeper waves his hand at the blackness to illustrate  
"out there".

NICK

And why didn't you stop them?

GATEKEEPER

I...do not know. To keep the gate is my purpose. Nothing goes in or out that should not be in or out.

NICK

Then why do you allow them to go out and not me to go in?

GATEKEEPER

Hmmm.

The Gatekeeper rests his enormous head on his hands to think. The thinking goes on for some time as Nick gets more impatient. However, he keeps his cool and paces.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

If your son came from the beyond and entered the gate, then I have failed in my duties.

NICK

Yes. That's right.

GATEKEEPER

But I have no proof that he entered the gate.

NICK

But why would I want to go into the gate after him if he didn't go in?

GATEKEEPER

If you had ever gone beyond the gate, little stick, you would never want to go back in. The blackness within is oppressive. It would consume you till there was no ounce of you left.

NICK

Right. So, why would I ever want to enter the gate?

GATEKEEPER

Why indeed? What is your game, little stick?

NICK

My son! He's only seven and he has autism.

GATEKEEPER

Autism?

NICK

Yes, it's a...It doesn't matter.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

He's in danger and I need to help him.

The Gatekeeper ponders this information for a moment.

GATEKEEPER

You intrigue me, little stick. No one cares for anything but himself in the darkness. And what is the harm in allowing you to pass? If you pass, you will certainly be overcome.

NICK

Right. So, it's kinda like you never let me go through.

GATEKEEPER

Hmmm.

The Gatekeeper walks away from the arch.

GATEKEEPER (CONT'D)

I will play a game with you, little stick. I will go away from the gate and pretend that I have never seen you.

The Gatekeeper continues to walk away as Nick stops directly outside of the arch.

NICK

(quietly)  
Thank you.

The Gatekeeper does not turn around.

GATEKEEPER

Go.

Nick steps into the arch.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK -- NIGHT

Blackness.

Then speeding lights, like many stars, fly past.

More Blackness.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DARKNESS -- NIGHT

Nick opens his eyes. He is lying on a large rock surface.

Slowly, he rises to his feet and looks around. There are mountains in the distance and a shallow stream flowing not five feet from where he woke. Everything is muted and shadowed as if light has never reached this place.

He turns around. More mountains loom in the distance and the stream winds off into oblivion.

However, there is a light of a small fire burning sickly green. Nick begins walking toward it, calling as he travels.

NICK

Hey! I need help! Is anyone there?  
Help!

Nick reaches an area roughly ten yards from the fire, which is surrounded by a ring of stones. There is no one in evidence.

Looking around, he's sees no evidence of anyone and no help.

Quiet footsteps are heard behind him. A fist holding a rock is raised and brought down heavily on Nick's head.

He falls to the ground. Before he blacks out completely, a fuzzy, distorted face enters his field of image.

VOICE

Is it tender? Does it bleed?

Darkness

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DARKNESS -- LATER

Nick's eyes crack open. He is seated and facing the campfire.

A dark, roughly five-foot tall, human-shaped thing, RAT, is in front of him and tending to a pot that hangs over the fire.

It mumbles to itself as it stirs whatever is in the pot.

RAT

It can't smell so it can't reach us.  
It thought it caught us before but  
it was wrong. It can never reach  
us.

Nick attempts to raise his hands and finds that his arms are bound behind his back and to the tree he is slumped up against.

The figure continues to disregard him.

RAT (CONT'D)

And it tries. Oh, it tries so hard.  
But we are too clever. Far too  
clever.

NICK

Excuse me.

Rat gives a quick scream as it jumps, then turns to confront Nick.

RAT

We knows it now. Do not think that  
it is deceived.

NICK

I'm looking for my son--

Rat approaches, with its stirring stick held high.

RAT

Does it want another?

NICK

No!

RAT

Then it will keep still.

Rat turns back to its cooking.

RAT (CONT'D)

Oh, it considers its clever. But we  
know. We will not be fooled. Not  
us. The master knows and we will  
take it to the master. Get reward.  
Get what we deserve.

Nick glances around the campsite. Besides the fire and a few extra logs, there is not much going on. He looks outside the little clearing, but there is nothing but darkness.

Rat turns around to face him. It has a bowl in its hands.

RAT (CONT'D)

Now, it will be quiet or it will be  
gagged. Does it understand?

Nick nods his head, then winces at the pain.

NICK

Ow!

Rat sits down across the campfire from Nick and begins to eat from the bowl.

It sticks its mouth straight into the bowl and slurps loudly.  
Nick narrows his eyes as he surveys this scene.

NICK (CONT'D)

What are you, some kind of rat?

Rat screams and drops its bowl. It quickly grabs its ears.

RAT

No! No! No! Does it seek to hurt  
us? We should have gagged it. We  
should have.

NICK

Hey, rat!

Rat screams again as its mouth begins to stretch out and it  
grows pointed ears, starting to resemble a rat.

RAT

Look what it did! Oh, we are in  
misery. We should have...

Rat turns on Nick and brandishes the stirring spoon again.

RAT (CONT'D)

You!

NICK

What's the matter, Rat?

Rat screams again as its face distorts, completing the  
transformation. Now it looks like a five-foot tall human  
with a rat's head.

RAT

Look what it has done!

Rat strides forward and strikes Nick in the head with the  
spoon, knocking his head back.

Then, it reaches down and begins to tear a strip of cloth  
from its shirt.

NICK

Now, hold on just a minute. I'm  
just looking for my son--

Rat wraps the cloth around Nick's head, effectively gagging  
him.

Satisfied, Rat steps back as its hands go up to feel its  
newly formed face.

RAT

Al ruined! All ruined. We did not act soon enough. You! Does it not know that words have power? That speech can change? Does it not know what it does? Or did it? Perhaps it seeks to confuse us, to enrage us, so we will make a mistake. Ah.

Rat bends over and retrieves its discarded bowl.

It then makes its way back to the pot to heap more soup or whatever into his bowl.

Rat sits back down.

RAT (CONT'D)

Oh, but we will deliver it to the master. And then. But son, does it say? Child of light, more likely. Ah, but it will not find child of light. The master has darkened them all. No more light.

Rat stands up and points the stirring stick at Nick.

RAT (CONT'D)

No more I say. The master has triumphed. The light has met the darkness and the darkness knew it not. Now, who calls rat? Stupid man.

Rat concentrates on slurping from its bowl and remains quiet.

After it slurps for a moment, a shriek is heard that splits the night.

Rat looks up, alarmed. Quickly, it looks toward the camp fire.

RAT (CONT'D)

Ah, light! We are undone!

Rat runs over and begins kicking dirt at the campfire.

In the middle of one kick, something swoops down on Rat from the dark sky and carries it high up in the air.

After a few moments, a falling scream is heard as Rat falls heavily to the ground.

On the ground, Rat's eyes dart back and forth as it holds itself still.

Suddenly, it jumps to its feet and races toward Nick, struggling to untie his hands.



As he works on the knots, Rat's eyes continue to look furtively around the darkness.

RAT (CONT'D)

Quickly. Oh, we are undone. We must make haste. We must run. We must--

With one hand free, Nick punches Rat in the face, knocking it on its back.

Nick unties his other hand as Rat begins to swing its body to a sitting position.

Nick, with both hands free, swings his fists, knocking Rat over again.

He begins to tie Rat's hands together.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DARKNESS -- LATER

Nick is sitting on the log across the camp fire from where Rat is tied up

Rat tenderly raises its head and blinks its eyes open.

RAT

Ow. Our head. What has it done to us?

NICK

You're finally awake? Took long enough. Now, you're going to answer some questions for me.

RAT

No, it should be quiet and untie us.

NICK

No, I will not untie you until I can trust that you won't hit me again.

RAT

We will not hit. Only untie us now. Quickly.

NICK

No, Rat. I will not. Now, tell me this, why did your face change when I called you a rat?

RAT

Oh, it is stupid. We are undone. We have been captured by an idiot.

NICK  
Why did your face change?

Rat sighs.

RAT  
We will explain, as to a child. Its  
speech has power. Its words has  
power.

NICK  
Why don't your words have power?

RAT  
It shouldn't interrupt if it desires  
explanations. Child of light has  
power. Child of darkness loses power.

Nick shakes his head, as if to clear it.

NICK  
Look, I don't care.

RAT  
It asked.

NICK  
I just want to find my son. He has  
brown hair and is wearing  
pajamas...like mine.

Nick gestures toward his clothes.

Rat stares back blankly.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I don't know what happened to him.  
We were at home and something got  
him and dragged him to this place.  
I just want to find him and bring  
him back home.

RAT  
It lost its son? Then maybe it should  
let us go so we could help it find  
its son. Hmmm?

Nick stands up.

NICK  
No. I don't know what you are and I  
don't trust you. You hit me in the  
head and tied me up. What were you  
gonna do with me?

RAT

Oh, we were going to let it go once we were safe.

NICK

I don't believe you.

RAT

Then why did it ask?

Nick walks toward the pan over the fire.

NICK

Okay, this is getting nowhere. Is there a city somewhere near here or someone else I can talk to?

RAT

Yes. Let us free. Then we can guide it.

NICK

No, Rat. I'm not setting you free. What's in your soup? It looks like mud and rocks.

RAT

Is mud and rocks!

NICK

You eat mud and rocks?

RAT

No!

Nick looks around the edges of the camp site.

NICK

I've got to wait till morning and then we'll get out of here.

RAT

What is morning?

NICK

Don't you...

RAT

No morning. Nothing but darkness and other.

NICK

Then we might as well go now. But how are we going to see?

RAT

With its eyes maybe?

NICK  
I've had just about enough of you,  
Rat.

RAT  
Good! Then let us go.

NICK  
No, not yet.

Nick approaches Rat and grabs a rope that is attached to Rat.

He pulls and slowly raises Rat to its feet.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Now, which way is the nearest city?

Rat peers in one direction, then the other. Finally, Rat nods his head toward the left.

Nick motions to the right.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Okay. Then we'll go this way.

Rat rolls its eyes.

RAT  
It is stupid. It cannot follow directions.

NICK  
No, I just don't trust your directions.

RAT  
Does it want to find its son?

NICK  
Of course.

RAT  
Then it will go that way.

Rat nods its head to the left.

Nick looks first one direction, then the other. Finally, he comes to a resolution.

NICK  
Okay. I don't have much choice but to trust you a little, Rat. But you better not be leading me into a trap.

Nick leads Rat off, into the darkness.

RAT

Oh, we would never do that. It is too smart. Too wily to ever be fooled by us.

NICK

Oh, shut up.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DARKNESS -- LATER

Nick and Rat continue their trek through nondescriptive darkness.

NICK

How can you tell one way from another in all this blackness?

RAT

Rat is familiar with the darkness. Rat knows its way.

NICK

You're starting to call yourself Rat.

RAT

Rat is not an idiot. Rat realizes.

Abruptly, Nick stops.

In the distance, there is a line where the darkness gives way to a vast yellow plain.

NICK

What is that?

Rat peers intently.

RAT

Sand.

NICK

Sand?

RAT

Is it deaf as well as stupid? Rat has named it. It is oceans of sand.

NICK

An ocean of sand. Is there any way around or can we walk across?

RAT

No, it would suck us under. Then where will it be?

NICK

Then how do we cross?

RAT

Maybe it can speak a boat into  
existence like it changed Rat. Or  
maybe it can grow wings and fly  
across.

NICK

Can I do that?

Rat gives a grunt of impatience and drops itself to the  
ground.

RAT

Maybe it can turn itself into soup  
and give rat a meal.

Nick stares at the line of sand, then glares at Rat.

NICK

Get up. I'll think of a way across  
by the time we get there.

Rat rises to its feet and they continue forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN OF SAND -- LATER

Nick and Rat stand on the edge of a vast ocean of sand.  
Nick gazes on its depths while Rat sits down in boredom.

Deciding, Nick throws his arms out in a wizard's pose.

NICK

Boat! Boat materialize! Hey boat.

Rat rolls its eyes and snorts.

Nick, in frustration, turns to Rat.

NICK (CONT'D)

So, tell me how I'm supposed to do  
this.

RAT

If it needs telling, it will never  
get done.

NICK

So? I'm doing exactly what I did  
with you.

RAT

Maybe it needs to sit back and think harder.

NICK

What are you, my teacher?

Nick sits down, defeated.

He looks down the line of sand to the right and left. It stretches out as far as the eye can see.

NICK (CONT'D)

Was this place always like this?  
Full of darkness

Rat stares wistfully at the sky.

RAT

The enemy pursues us. He crushes us to the ground. He makes us dwell in darkness like those long dead.

NICK

The enemy? The enemy did all this?  
Who is the enemy?

Rat looks around again, afraid that it might be overheard.

It whispers its answer.

RAT

He has driven us away and made us walk in darkness rather than light. We look for light, but all is darkness. We seek brightness, but we walk in shadows.

NICK

Does this enemy have my Christian?  
Does he have my boy?

Rat stares at its feet.

Nick rises and stands before Rat.

NICK (CONT'D)

I can't just stand here and wait for a boat. I need something now.

Behind Nick, something begins to rise out of the sand.

NICK (CONT'D)

Rat, I need to get to my son now. You don't understand. He's autistic. He's probably scared out of his mind right now.

Behind Nick, the shape begins to coalesce into a boat.

Rat's eyes widen.

NICK (CONT'D)

Anything out of the routine scares  
the hell out of him. I have to find  
him. And if I need to cross this  
ocean of sand, then I'll need a...

Nick turns around and sees the boat made out of sand.

His jaw drops.

NICK (CONT'D)

Boat.

Rat motions its hand toward the boat.

RAT

There. Now, will it get in or will  
it sit waiting for a bug to fly in  
its mouth?

Nick's mouth shuts.

He glances at Rat then heads toward the boat. Boarding the  
boat, Rat seats itself on the floor.

As Rat takes its seat, Nick looks around at his new vessel.

NICK

But there's no oars, no sails. How  
do we...

He turns to Rat, who shrugs, then waves its arms.

RAT

Go!

NICK

Go.

The boat begins to move swiftly across the sand.

As the boat picks up speed, Nick whoops and hollers with joy  
while rat sits glumly on the bottom of the boat.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN OF SAND -- LATER

Nick is now seated on the floor of the craft as well. He  
looks out occasionally over the side.

Suddenly, he spots a darker patch of sand in the middle of  
the ocean. They seem to be headed directly toward it.



The dark patch of sand has some sort of structures on it.  
Nick rises to his feet and squints into the distance.

NICK  
Hey, is that a city?

RAT  
No!

Nick looks down at Rat in alarm.

NICK  
What are you talking about?

RAT  
Should not go to city.

NICK  
But they may have seen my son.

Rat rises to its feet.

RAT  
No! Child of light is not there.  
Not there!

Nick starts to reply but is stopped by the sound of rising wind. He looks around, frightened, and sees a tornado of sand and wind barreling toward the ship.

In the direct center of the tornado, two black eyes and a large black mouth stand out.

TORNADO  
Who dares intrude upon my domain?  
For your insolence, I will scour the  
skin from your bones.

The tornado strikes with massive force, restricting sight and burning Nick's flesh with flung sand.

He cringes down into the bottom of the boat, next to Rat.

NICK  
What is it?

Rat remains silent, curled in a fetal position.

The wind howls and faint laughter can be heard within its moans.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Rat, what do we do?

Suddenly the wind stops.

Mysteriously, the tornado is gone, leaving the boat stranded on the dark patch of sand.

Nick cautiously raises his head and looks around. No evidence of the tornado exists.

He stands up.

RAT

No! No! Go!

NICK

Go? But, we're on--

The boat sinks back into the sand under them until there is nothing left but Nick standing and Rat curled up.

Nick walks a step toward SAND TOWN.

Sand Town is made entirely out of sand. Its buildings, fountains, etched walkways, and even its decorative plants are composed of sand.

Nick wanders slowly toward a fountain directly in front of him.

The fountain is two dolphins back to back, each spitting a stream of sand from their mouths to the circled enclosure.

Nick admires it as Rat gains its footing behind him.

RAT

Oh, we are undone. We are no more.

Nick turns to Rat.

NICK

What's the matter with you? Why are you so frightened of this place?

Breathlessly, Rat exhales two words.

RAT

Sand King.

NICK

Sand King? Come on. We have to keep moving.

Rat lowers its head and begins to walk down the main street.

Nick follows at a distance behind and allows himself to take in the sights of this town built entirely of sand.

Finally, they reach the town center, which is a square area, devoid of any architecture.

Taking two steps into the town center, Rat stops suddenly, causing Nick to run into him.

NICK (CONT'D)

What?

Rat motions ahead toward the middle of the square. Nick follows with his eyes but can see nothing out of the ordinary.

A rumbling and shaking begins as, in the direct center of the square, a gigantic throne made from sand pushes its way out of the sandy ground.

Seated on the throne is a giant human figure, also made entirely out of sand, with gaping black holes where its eyes should be.

In its right hand, SAND KING holds a sandy scepter and on its head rests a giant crown.

A crowd of sand-formed spectators surrounds the throne, having risen out of the ground slightly after the arrival of the Sand King.

SAND KING

Why have you come?

Rat falls to its knees and motions for Nick to do the same.

Sand King's eyes grow fierce and his next words blast a hot wave of air toward Nick, pushing him slightly backwards.

SAND KING (CONT'D)

Who are you!

RAT

Mighty Sand King, we are--

SAND KING

Silence, creature! Dare you open your craven maw in my presence?

Nick steps forward.

NICK

I'm looking for my son.

The Sand King rises from his throne.

SAND KING

Your son? Your son! Why is that a concern of mine? Why are you here?

Another hot blast of air pushes at Nick, but he doesn't fall.

NICK

Someone has taken my son.

Sand King stomps heavily toward the pair.

SAND KING

That is no concern of ours. However,  
you did intrude upon my kingdom and  
that is very much my concern.

Nick takes another step forward.

NICK

Look, I don't know who you are and  
I'm sorry for entering your kingdom.  
But I have to find my son.

Sand King, enraged, pounds the ground with a mighty fist,  
knocking Nick over.

He steps closer to Nick, whispering menacingly in his face.

SAND KING

You should be frightened, puny man.  
Why are you not frightened?

NICK

I don't know. Maybe I don't know  
what I'm dealing with. Maybe I'm  
too worried about my son or just too  
plain stupid.

Nick smiles slightly, turning to Rat, who isn't there.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAND TOWN -- CONTINUOUS

In another part of Sand Town, Rat is huffing down a side  
street as quickly as his legs can pump.

RAT

Oh, we are undone! We said go, but  
it wouldn't listen.

Rat rounds a corner and runs on.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAND TOWN CENTER -- CONTINUOUS

Sand King looks around quickly for Rat, then turns to Nick.

SAND KING

Where is your putrid companion?

Nick shrugs.

The Sand King turns to rage at his minions.

SAND KING (CONT'D)  
Storms! Barriers! Stop the creature!

Sand King then turns to face Nick.

SAND KING (CONT'D)  
And you shall...

Nick has fled while Sand King was giving orders.

The Sand King screams in frustration.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAND TOWN -- CONTINUOUS

Nick is running down a deserted side street, when a low wall of sand suddenly pushes itself out of the ground and blocks his path.

He leaps over the wall, but a second wall pushes out, carrying him upwards.

Nick leaps forward again, but is pushed upward again. The sand is carrying him forward and up like newly-formed stairs.

Reaching the height of the nearest building, Nick leaps to the side and on top of the roof.

As soon as his foot touches the roof, it begins to collapse in the center, sucking Nick toward the ground like he was in the middle of a batch of quicksand.

Nick is drawn under until only his head remains out of the sand. Then that too disappears under the sinking sand.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAND TOWN -- CONTINUOUS

On the far side of Sand Town, Rat comes to a halt at the border, where a line of prairie grass runs on one side and sand down the other.

Rat stops momentarily.

Deciding, Rat leaps across to the prairie grass and disappears as soon as it crosses over.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAND TOWN -- CONTINUOUS

One of the buildings in Sand Town melts down to a mound. Slowly, it melts even further, consuming itself into the ground.

As the building completely dissipates, it reveals Nick on the ground, with two massive loops of sand covering his wrists and two more loops covering his ankles.

As the last of the sand ebbs away, Nick begins to cough violently.

The sand next to Nick rises up and forms itself into the Sand King.

SAND KING

Puny man, did you really believe you could stand against the might of the Sand King? There is nowhere you could run. Your companion will soon be--

A tornado rises to the side of the Sand King.

TORNADO

Lord, fire beetles have broken into the city!

SAND KING

He would not dare!

A brief blast is heard in the distance.

SAND KING (CONT'D)

Seal up the streets!

The Sand King turns and walks away from Nick, continuing his conversation with the tornado.

SAND KING (CONT'D)

Release the Sand Spinners and the Tendrils!

TORNADO

Yes, sire!

They disappear around a corner as Nick is left alone, still fastened to the ground by the thick ropes of sand.

He struggles against his bonds.

Turning his head, Nick sees several of the sand people running furiously toward the center of town.

As they run past the alley entrance, a blast of fire erupts from behind them. Following the blast, lumbers a giant beetle.

It stops, throws out another burst of flame from its antennae and then walks ponderously slow after the retreating sand men.

Another beetle follows the first, but on this beetle's back rides a man.

CAPTAIN REYNARD is a giant of a man, with ruddy cheeks and a large bushy beard. He wears a long, blue overcoat, loud boots, and a captain's hat thrust jauntily to the side of his head. He also wears wraparound sunglasses.

The beetle stops in the middle of the alley entrance as Captain Reynard spots Nick.

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
What ho? What's this?

Captain Reynard slides effortlessly down the back of the beetle and onto the ground. The beetle continues on.

As Reynard reaches Nick, he drops to one knee.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)  
Can this be a spoil of war?

NICK  
Please help me.

Reynard considers Nick slightly.

Nodding, he waves his hands over the ropes of sand, coating them in a muddy substance.

When all four ropes have been coated, Captain Reynard slams his fist down on the one covering Nick's right wrist, breaking it apart.

He does the same for the remaining ropes.

Freed, Nick sits up and rubs his wrists.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I don't know how to thank you.

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
You're not out of the woods yet,  
laddie. Let's get you up and out.

Reynard assists Nick to his feet as another blast is heard.

He cranes his head, as if listening.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)  
We need to move right now.

Reynard leads Nick to the mouth of the alley just in time for a blast of hot sand to rush past.

He turns quickly and heads in the opposite direction.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Not that way.

They run down another alley and stop as Reynard looks around the corner. Seeing nothing, he guides Nick away from the town center.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

You're lucky I found you when I did.  
No telling what the Sand King might  
have done with you. Name's Captain  
Reynard.

As they run down another alley, a wall of sand pushes up from the ground, blocking their retreat.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Sand King! Darkness take you!

Reynard bends forward and quickly coats the wall with mud that pours from his hand.

As soon as it is fully coated, he kicks it and sends it shattering.

They run on.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

We don't have much time. The mighty  
Sand King is too ignorant to realize  
what he has lost.

Rounding a corner, they come in sight of the barrier between Sand Town and the grasslands.

Reynard looks around, sees no one and takes off a full run toward the border.

After a few steps, a Sand Spinner, a large sand tortoise that stands on its rear legs, rises from the depths of sand to block their way.

Reynard and Nick slide to a stop.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Sand Spinner. I've had enough of  
this. He made darkness his canopy  
about him - the dark rain clouds of  
the sky.

Captain Reynard waves his hands in the air and the sky turns black. Lightning strikes through the sky.

Rain composed of mud begins to fall only on the Sand Spinner. Within a short amount of time, the Sand Spinner is completely covered.



Reynard takes off at a run.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Come on.

NICK

That's quite a trick you have there.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

We all have our...abilities.

They reach the border, jump across and vanish.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCRIMSHAW'S MEADOW -- MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Captain Reynard appear in Scrimshaw's Meadow, where they are shrunk to the size of a field mouse. Grass blades wave high in the air above their heads and dirt clouds are the size of small boulders.

Nick glances around, startled.

NICK

What happened? Where are we?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Don't be alarmed. This is Scrimshaw's Meadow. Scrimshaw designed it so you enter small and grow as you walk toward the far side. You exit your right size. Don't ask me why. I don't know what he was going for.

NICK

This place is incredible. It's hard to take everything in.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

I suppose it would be for someone who isn't supposed to be here.

NICK

What do you mean?

They pause for a moment as Reynard considers a log that has fallen across their paths.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

That wasn't here a moment ago. Have to get a handle on that Scrimshaw. Too out of control, if you know what I mean.

NICK

No, I--

Reynard climbs up a rotten part of the log.

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
How long do you think it took  
Scrimshaw to build this? It isn't  
as long as you think.

NICK  
I have no clue.

They reach the top and begin to descend.

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
Who cares really? You give someone  
like Scrimshaw a wad of play dough  
and they're happy for hours.

They reach the bottom of the log and continue on down the  
path. Captain Reynard begins to gain a rough edge to his  
voice.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)  
People like Scrimshaw are springs  
without water and mists driven by a  
storm. Blackest darkness is reserved  
for them. Them and all their kind.

A tremble shakes the ground.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)  
Don't worry. Just stay close.

NICK  
What is it?

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
Wait a moment.

The shaking continues and strengthens until an enormous dog  
appears and bounds over them. It continues running into the  
distance.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)  
Dog.

NICK  
Yeah.

Reynard moves on.

CAPTAIN REYNARD  
Come on. We're almost there.

NICK  
Where are we going?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

You'll see.

Nick looks around at the foliage. They have now grown twice as tall. Now they are roughly the size of guinea pigs.

NICK

Look, I am seriously tired. Can we stop for just one moment?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Boy, you complain a lot. We're almost there, cry baby.

Nick looks puzzled, but continues after the Captain.

A row of shrubs blocks their path.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

And here we are.

NICK

Where?

Reynard pushes through the bushes into a small clearing with Nick following.

As he enters the clearing, the first thing Nick sees is a small fire burning in the center of a ring of rocks.

The second thing he sees is Rat sitting quietly on a nearby rock.

NICK (CONT'D)

Rat!

Nick starts to rush forward, but is stopped by Captain Reynard's hand on his chest.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Oh, no, no, no. We can't allow that yet. It needs its rest.

NICK

What have you done to--

CAPTAIN REYNARD

I like what you've done to him. He used to be just an ugly, wart-faced boy. But you've gone so much farther than I ever would.

NICK

Who are you?

Reynard motions to a rock.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Have a seat.

Nick remains standing.

NICK

Look, I asked you--

Reynard yells like a petulant child.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

I said, have a seat!

As soon as he yells, the flesh of Reynard's face begins to slide away, revealing only mud underneath. His clothes begin to melt as well, revealing a full-bodied man made of mud.

Reynard looks at Nick through the eyes of his sunglasses, which have remained on his face.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Now, look what you've done.

NICK

What are you?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

What am I? What am I? Some say that I come without meaning and depart in darkness. In darkness, my name is shrouded.

NICK

Where is my son?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Your son. I knew you'd get around to that sooner or later. Have a seat, so we can discuss this.

NICK

I want my son right now.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Or what? What are you going to do, smart guy? Nothing can stand before me. Go home!

NICK

Not without my son.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Well, you can forget about that right now. He's mine. Now go home! You don't belong here.

Nick steps forward.

Quickly, Reynard shoots out a hand and engulfs Nick's legs in mud.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Stop!

Nick begins to struggle with his mud-packed legs as Reynard strolls casually around the clearing.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Now, I was simply going to let you leave. You really don't belong here and you'd cause more harm than good anyway.

Nick reaches down and attempts to lift a leg with his upper body strength.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

I could just cover you with darkness and send you out, but I don't know what that would do to you. And I can't afford to do anything to attract the attention of others. It's really best if you leave on your own.

NICK

I'm not going anywhere without my son.

Reynard sits on a rock and contemplates for a moment.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Now this is a pickle. What to do. What to do.

Reynard snaps his fingers, flinging mud everywhere.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

I've got it.

Nick drops his head, momentarily defeated.

NICK

Why are you doing this?

CAPTAIN REYNARD

He sent darkness and made the land dark. For had they not rebelled against his words?

Nick strains suddenly and gives an angry shout.

NICK

Give me my son!

Sudden light shines from Nick and part of the mud surrounding his legs shatters.

CAPTAIN REYNARD

Hey now!

Reynard rises to his feet quickly and steps toward the bushes as Nick struggles to gain more of his freedom.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Leave while I still have patience.

Reynard disappears through the bushes just as Nick frees his legs completely and falls to the ground

Quickly he gains his footing in time to see a giant raven fly off, carrying Reynard on its back.

CAPTAIN REYNARD (CONT'D)

Go home now!

The bird gains height and banks to the right, slowly disappearing.

Nick sighs and turns to Rat.

NICK

Rat!

When Rat doesn't respond, Nick smacks it in the face.

Rat's head flies backwards, and a large chunk of mud flies off of its eyes.

Rat shakes its head and sighs. It quickly looks around the clearing.

RAT

The master?

Rat turns to Nick, who is staring off in the direction Reynard flew.

NICK

Apparently, your master has no more use for you.

Rat drops its head.

RAT

We are undone.

Nick turns on rat quickly.

NICK

You!

Rat screams and falls off the log.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 You know where he took my boy. And  
 you're going to help me.

Rat begins to struggle toward the nearest bushes on all fours.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 What do you want to be next, Rat?  
 Want me to turn you into a slug or  
 how about a rock?

Rat stops in its tracks and drops on its back.

RAT  
 No, don't hurt us.

NICK  
 Then you better start talking.  
 Where's my son?

RAT  
 Its son is in Cloud Castle. But it  
 can't reach there. Oh no.

NICK  
 And you're going to guide me there.

RAT  
 No, let Rat be.

NICK  
 You've done enough damage. Now,  
 you're going to help me find my son.

RAT  
 But it can't reach.

NICK  
 Let me worry about that. You just  
 get me there.

Rat glances around, scared, but doesn't move.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCRIMSHAW'S MEADOW -- LATER

Nick and Rat are following a path through the grassland.  
 They are roughly the size of a large dog, with the grass  
 coming up to their chests

NICK  
 Of all the places I've been in this  
 world, this seems the least harmful.  
 I mean, it's just a meadow.

RAT

It shouldn't judge what it doesn't know.

They continue in silence for a moment.

NICK

What were you before, before I turned you into a rat? Everyone around here seems to be some kind of king or god or something.

RAT

We had recently entered the darkness. We had nothing.

NICK

Do you have some kind of ability?

RAT

No.

NICK

How do you know? Have you tried--

RAT

Rat knows. Rat is rat.

NICK

Well, you might--

Something dark pushes Nick to the ground. Rat screams.

RAT

Scrimshaw!

Rat quickly takes off.

Seated on Nick's chest is SCRIMSHAW, a spider with the head of a man, roughly the size of a goat. His eyes are black holes.

SCRIMSHAW

Hello, little morsel.

Scrimshaw looks over his shoulder where Rat ran off.

SCRIMSHAW (CONT'D)

Don't worry about your little rat-faced friend. He can't get far.

Turning back to Nick, Scrimshaw licks his lips, revealing two sharp fangs.

SCRIMSHAW (CONT'D)

Now, where were we? Ah, yes. Dinner time.