

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Honors Theses

Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale
Honors College)

Spring 5-9-2020

The Marduk Archives: A Take on Thresholds

Christopher Melton

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), and the [Screenwriting Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Melton, Christopher, "The Marduk Archives: A Take on Thresholds" (2020). *Honors Theses*. 1400.
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/1400

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College) at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

THE MARDUK ARCHIVES: A TAKE ON THRESHOLDS

by
C. Brice Melton

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2020

Approved by:

Advisor: Professor Beth Spencer

Reader: Professor Matt Bondurant

Reader: Professor Alan Arrivé

© 2020

Christopher Brice Melton
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost my thanks go out to Beth Spencer for not losing her mind in the process of advising this work and for helping me keep my head on straight. Additionally, thanks to Cyrus for motivating me in this endeavor and to those supporting me despite my constant complaints of stress!

ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER BRICE MELTON: A fictional screenplay exploring the relationship between absurdity and convention as it pertains to the shifting cultural paradigms of our society. (Under the direction of Beth Spencer)

Table of Contents

Introduction	iv
The Marduk Archives	
Scene I	1
Scene II.....	3
Scene III.....	4
Scene IV	8
Scene V	9
Scene VI	11
Scene VII.....	14
Scene VIII.....	17
Scene IX	17
Scene X.....	21
Scene XI	22
Scene XII.....	24
Scene XIII	25
Scene XIV	26
Scene XV	28
Scene XVI	34
Scene XVII.....	37
Scene XVIII	38
Scene XIX.....	38
Scene XX	38
Scene XXI.....	40
Scene XXII	43
Scene XXIII	44
Scene XXIV.....	45
Scene XXV	47
Scene XXVI.....	48
Scene XXVII	51
Scene XXVIII	53
Scene XXIX.....	53
Scene XXX	56
Scene XXXI.....	62
Scene XXXII	64

Introduction

The Marduk Archives is a story crafted in order to facilitate exploration into the themes of thresholds and transformations in the broader context of literature. The main characters, Reggie and Jayden, are two young adults who set off on a hairbrained journey to discover the secrets of an Appalachian cult, one which turns out to be located more so in Mississippi than Appalachia. They encounter wacky characters who inform their tale as they travel throughout the state, and the further the pair explores, the more absurd their journey becomes. While at first Reggie appears to be calling the shots during the adventure, it becomes clear that Jayden is an equally important figure, so they wrestle back and forth over the role of protagonist. As the tale nears its climax, we discover that Reggie and Jayden were being manipulated into searching for the cult so they could be used, as pawns, to further the goals of the group itself. But we also discover that the group itself is not as unified as it might at first appear, as infighting threatens to disrupt the schemes of the cult after all. In the end, Reggie and Jayden have crossed etheric thresholds, on the other side of which they find their higher selves and emerge metamorphosed.

The origin of this idea stems back to my days in high school, during which my friends and I formed a small, self-contained art collective which we called the Lotus Garden. We were our own sort of cultural bubble within Mississippi School of the Arts, which naturally had its own cultural bubble inside of the even greater bubbles of Brookhaven and Mississippi. Our amateur philosophizing and meditations contrasted starkly with the conventional picture of Mississippi natives. A key feature of the Lotus Garden was our interest in film-making. Every once in a while, we would roll a camera and improv skits which we would post to a YouTube channel and share with the school.

The Marduk Archives is meant, in part, to serve as a tribute to the Lotus Garden. We, as a group, idealized absurdity and often when we made our skits we would assemble costumes out of any materials we had around, so the character designs of the characters in this screenplay are meant to be manifestations of absurdity and their costumes are meant to be entirely random. That is to say, there is no intentionality behind most of the default costuming. However, some accessories and articles do have significance within the context of the story, but these also contribute to the ridiculous appearance of the outfits. The costuming of many characters evolves over the course of the story, and this reflects the malleability of identity in the characters. The perceived identity of the individual at any given time only depicts a slice of their persona, but that individual as a whole can only be truly understood by looking at them in their entirety over the course of events. That is to say, the character is the culmination of all their transformations, but the transformations are not such that a prior state is abandoned in favor of a new state. Rather, the new states are evolutions of the previous states, and often they serve as expressions of states that have always existed in that character but had yet to be manifested.

To me, it seems that the strangest aspect of my screenplay is not the events which transpire nor the characters, but rather it is the setting. Why Mississippi? Well, as I explained earlier, our group the Lotus Garden acted as a cultural contrast to the traditional view of Mississippi. Through *The Marduk Archives* I wanted to illustrate that Mississippi is so much more than a rural haven for southern tradition. Rather, it is rich with contemporary culture as well, and this can be observed through the diversity of settings - from rural to urban - as well as the diversity of characters. I particularly wanted to highlight the artistic capacity of Mississippians, since the creative potential of its residents often goes overlooked by the rest of the world. Often it seems that we forget that geographical stereotypes are heuristic and do not

paint an accurate picture of locations. Instead of capitalizing on traditional southern tropes as other screenwriters might, I wanted to take a fresh look at the state. In part, I sought to prop up the paradigm that people are not defined by places so much as places are defined by the people within them.

Although location is important to the story, time plays a similar part in shaping the scenes. I envision time as an extension of geography in the sense that the same place represented at two different moments might as well be a different place altogether. If one were to visit Mississippi, they may find themselves wandering through different time periods as they move between regions, as some of the towns are slower to modernize than others. More than anything, I attempt to strip away the viewer's conventions of time and place by revolutionizing the perception they have of Mississippi, its inhabitants, its culture, and its architecture. There is so much contrast and innovation within the state itself that we would be short sighted to see only the Mississippi of tradition. We must start redefining the world and by reshaping the way we portray people and places in all sorts of media. Places do not presuppose a type of person, but rather people define the place in which they live. Uninformed people might always see Mississippi as backwards if we only ever show them a single dimension rooted in the past rather than displaying the malleable and rich nature of our culture.

Together, the geography and time period work together to create a setting which contains various thresholds, and consequently the characters have great potential for transformation upon crossing these thresholds. As Reggie and Jayden move through regions of more or less urban development, they symbolize the interaction between the rural and urban landscapes of Mississippi. They act as arbiters in this sense because they themselves lean towards an urban nature but they are able to interact with the local people and the culture in general without being

thrown into culture shock. Additionally, although they are young, they exist in an environment where the older aspects of the local society are glorified. This dynamic is only further exacerbated in the contrast between the members of the cult and the locals, as well as the contrast between the astral realm and Mississippi. The members of the cult are not opposite to the Mississippi locals; rather, the two groups are so different that they are essentially incomparable. They represent people who are foreign to the culture, who cannot understand it but attempt to exist alongside it without interaction. Reggie and Jayden, then, act as the mediators in the screenplay - those who do not embody the culture but can exist within it and interact with it harmoniously. In the same sense, the astral realm does not represent a fresh landscape which antithesizes the older nature of Mississippi, but rather it represents a lack of physical manifestation. The astral realm is simply the existence of unexpressed potential, and so when Reggie and Jayden venture there, they finally recognize their potential.

In writing *The Markduk Archives*, I hoped to provoke awareness even beyond that of geography and time. Philosophical themes appear throughout the adventure, but they are mostly presented satirically and comically. The goal of making fun of these themes is twofold: firstly, it reflects the mindset of a pop audience who would balk at the pretentious nature of philosophical inquiry; secondly, it reminds people not to take anything too seriously. Our lives are simply dramas, and we ought to enjoy them rather than dissecting them. The surreal atmosphere of the story as well as the intentionally loose plot structure are means by which I am able to integrate this idea. Often the plot developments are unbelievable and sudden, and this ideally would make the screenplay seem like a daydream. Reggie and Jayden don't often stop to think, but rather they are whisked away by their stream of consciousness.

The satirical and nonsensical nature of *The Marduk Archives* can be understood in comparison to such literature as “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll or *The Big Lebowski* by Ethan and Joel Coen. “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” is iconic for its depiction of absurdity. Rather than attempting to create a fantasy world which follows any set of rules for the sake of structure, Lewis Carroll completely tosses logic out the window and expects the reader to identify with Alice in the sense that they should not be able to make rhyme or reason of the setting, characters, or events. I draw from this feature in *The Marduk Archives* during some of the plot points, such as the Elvis circle which only serves to incite the journey and establish the sense of a Mississippi cultural mythology, and in characters such as the Gatekeeper who speaks as if he is not properly grounded in the reality of the world of the screenplay. *The Marduk Archives* relates tonally to *The Big Lebowski* in that the message these films intend to deliver is the lack of a core message at all. By the end of *The Big Lebowski*, the main character has accomplished nothing beyond retrieving his rug, so there is no profound change to the world or to the character himself. The nature of his character is that he follows the flow of life, letting his circumstances whisk him along. Although *The Marduk Archives* differs in that it does imply the theme of transformation, the screenplay rejects profundity, seeking only to amuse the audience rather than to enlighten them.

While drafting this script, I drew a lot of inspiration from a film called *The Waking Life* written by Richard Linklater. *The Waking Life* doesn’t have much in the way of plot progression, but rather it displays one nameless character wandering through a lucid dreamscape all the while encountering strange characters having deep, philosophical dialogues. The surreal nature of the film is enhanced by a unique animation style. The animations are constantly moving and transforming throughout the entirety of the film, resembling a psychedelic experience. While

you watch, you feel tripped out in the same way that you imagine the protagonist feels. I aimed to produce a similar effect through Reggie and Jayden. Whenever the characters are experiencing something strange, the atmosphere, the effects, and the music reflect the sensations which they are experiencing so that they might be projected onto the viewer.

I attempted to give *The Marduk Archives* a mythological ambience, inspired in part by religious mythos. As far as religious influence is concerned, I attempt to draw subtly on belief systems which are not prevalent in western culture. The references scattered throughout the script act more as easter eggs than significant plot drivers. The name “Marduk” for example refers to the supreme Babylonian god worshipped during the ancient era, but there are no intentional consistencies between my character Marduk and the ancient god. Ali is meant to represent a monk figure who is meant to embody an amalgamation of eastern beliefs. In general, however, I attempted to keep the mythology of my characters separate from the mythologies of extant ideologies.

Despite the fact that the characters in my script are implied to have supernatural qualities, they are never seen attempting to influence the world beyond the lives of Reggie and Jayden. More than simply conscious beings, they are meant more so to represent forces which govern and influence reality. I drew this quality, in part, from David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks*. In the show, metaphysical entities cause the town of Twin Peaks as well of its citizens to spiral slowly into an ominous disarray, yet these otherworldly beings are seldom seen interacting with the material world in any tangible way. In the same sense, I intended that my cult characters would have a psychological effect on the protagonists but would never cause change to happen in the lives of people uninvolved in the story’s self-contained series of events. This reinforces a sort of ambiguity regarding the statuses of the cult characters. There is no certainty in the physical

existence of the beings. For all intents and purposes, they could be shared projections and experiences in the minds of Reggie and Jayden.

To establish further ambiguity in this regard, the climax of the story takes place in an astral dimension, intersecting the physical realm and only accessible to a spirit which has been guided across the metaphysical veil. This also demonstrates influence from *Twin Peaks*, but the events which transpire inside the pocket world are actually heavily motivated by tropes found in the *Kingdom Hearts* video game saga by Square Enix and Disney. In these games, a person's life force is not tied to their physical body, but rather to their "heart". The protagonist, Sora, will occasionally cross into the soul world ("Dive to the Heart") where he learns truths about the nature of his world and gains the ability to restore the hearts of those who have lost them. The games have a childlike nature about them, but the metaphor is inspiring all the same so I drew from it in creating the astral world within my script. This world represents the internal states of the characters and the fabric which binds them together, and Reggie is able to use this bond to seek out Jayden, much in the same way that Sora in *Kingdom Hearts III: Re-mind* is able to move through the soul world by tracing his metaphysical connections to his allies.

As far as the tone and structure of the story goes, I drew largely from two films. Firstly I looked to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, produced by Patrick Cassavetti; Laila Nabulsi; and Stephen Nemeth, which has a similarly loose story structure. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* begins with two men driving to Las Vegas, supposedly to report on a race. This objective was set up in such a way that it seemed it would drive the plot, but as the two primary characters began their drug binge, the race quickly became insignificant. In a similar way, *The Marduk Archives* begins with a red herring. Reggie and Jayden find a ritual circle meant to channel the spirit of Elvis, and the pair heads to the birthplace of Elvis to investigate. The significance of Elvis fades

away as the story progresses since it served only as a launch point for the adventure devised by the cult. *The Marduk Archives* additionally parallels *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in that there are two characters which support each other, endure psychological degeneration, endure conflict and separation, but make it out of their senseless adventure mostly unscathed.

The second film from which *The Marduk Archives* draws tonal inspiration is *The Big Lebowski*, mainly in the development of dialogue. Dialogue in *The Big Lebowski* is witty and comical because The Dude, or Lebowski, is an overly casual man, seen by others as a bum, who has been forced into a circumstance which he has no idea how to address. He speaks to powerful and dangerous people using the voice and lexicon of a stoner, so there is a contrast between the gravity of his situation and his reactions to the events of the story. The same is true for *The Marduk Archives*. Reggie and Jayden have essentially fled home in search of a cult and are accepting rides and substances from strange people, yet they remain laid back nonetheless except for the rare occasions that the characters become frustrated with one another.

Another key similarity between my dialogue and that of *The Big Lebowski* can be attributed to character dynamics. In his story, The Dude's friends are dimwitted and the people he encounters are unconventional, so The Dude often finds himself explaining simple concepts in response to comically stupid statements. Oddly enough, The Dude is the voice of reason in *The Big Lebowski*, and this creates the opportunity for snappy and witty dialogue. My story also has this dynamic of dumb friends and strange encounters, so the dialogue serves a similar purpose, especially with regard to the way Jayden and Reggie speak to each other. Jayden has character qualities akin to The Dude while Reggie has those more closely aligned with The Dude's friends.

Symbolism is the literary feature used most prominently in my story to reflect the themes of thresholds and transformations. The first transformation in the story is characterized by the

blue suede shoes which Reggie wears after finding them in the forest. These mark the transition from Reggie as a typical person to Reggie as a seeker of cultural mysteries. Sunglasses are used by various characters throughout the story, and as objects which cover the eyes and darken the vision, these are meant to indicate a subduing of the material sense of sight and a heightening of the “metaphysical” sense of sight, a concept often depicted through the imagery of the third-eye in eastern religious philosophy. Essentially, the sunglasses represent the crossing of a threshold in that they align the wearer towards a mental state and away from a physical one.

The flattened penny which Jayden acquires at the train station serves as another significant symbol related to thresholds. The Gatekeeper refers to it as Jayden’s fare, indicating that Jayden must offer it up in order to get to where he wishes to go. This emphasizes the notion that sacrifices must be made in order to progress towards a goal. In a way, the penny acts as fuel which allows his motion to continue without the borrowed energy of Reggie. Finally, masks act as the most obvious symbols of transformation. Marduk and Bagboy never remove their masks, so they are to be understood as unchanging, eternal figures. In contrast, the mask Young Jayden offers to Reggie is one which represents the capacity for development. By donning the mask, Reggie is able to tune into the energies of the astral world and locate the red room where Jayden and the rest of the cult appears shortly afterwards. He has concealed his individual identity and thus stripped himself of the ego which had been holding him back. However, Reggie’s mask turns black as Marduk’s essence takes hold of him, further demonstrating the potential for transformation, but now in a negative way. Reggie inherits the will of Marduk and becomes corrupted. In his egoless state, Reggie was an empty vessel which Marduk could fill without resistance. Fortunately, Bagboy destroys the mask and the will of Marduk along with it, and Reggie reverts to himself.

Again, *The Marduk Archive* draws inspiration from *The Big Lebowski* in the exemplification of transformations and thresholds. *The Big Lebowski* appears to have two unique character groups which seem to occupy two different worlds. The Dude acts as the bridge between these worlds, and so he is, in a way, a junction between the mundane and sublime. In *The Marduk Archives*, Reggie embodies this role. The first group of characters in *The Big Lebowski* includes such figures as Walter Sobchak, Donny, and even the Dude's landlord. These are the individuals who occupy the mundane world in the film and play the largest roles in the Dude's daily life. In his personal life, the Dude spends his time bowling, and although he is a bum he leads a largely inconspicuous life. In *The Marduk Archives*, the set of characters which parallels this dynamic includes Reggie's old teacher, Jason and Riley, the Old Man in Brookhaven, and even Jayden. The second group of characters bring the drama into the film and drag the Dude into another world -- the sublime world. This category includes such characters as Jefferey "The Big" Lebowski, Maude Lebowski, and Jackie Treehorn. The members of Marduk's cult aim to evoke the same effect in my screenplay. At the beginning of each film, each of the two primary sets of characters remain distinct, but the connecting characters transfer influence between each world and disrupt the order which previously kept the worlds separate.

The Dude, sharing a last name with Jefferey Lebowski and his wife, finds himself drawn towards the world of this second group. As he moves back and forth between his familiar world full of simple, and often dimwitted, people and the unfamiliar world full of nihilists and avante garde artists, the Dude finds that he cannot hope to keep the two worlds separate, nor can he simply return to the simplicity of his mundane world. The Dude inevitably involves his friends in a situation which is spiraling out of his control, and the two worlds begin to mingle and affect each other. By the end of the film, the Dude's friend Donny dies as a result of the Dude's

inability to keep the worlds separate. Following a similar schema, Jayden is the one in *The Marduk Archives* who must suffer the consequences of Reggie's decisions. In his attempt to help Reggie, Jayden becomes the target of the cult's malice and nearly loses his own life in a sense, as he is meant to become the new vessel of Marduk. In both *The Big Lebowski* and *The Marduk Archives*, the connecting character appears to reside within the "eye of the storm" and does not suffer any permanent effects as a result of the chaotic events which they have exacerbated, whether intentionally or not. The impact of the mingling worlds is felt only indirectly as the associate characters are unwillfully transformed.

The concept of mingling worlds appears overtly in the *Kingdom Hearts* video game series. At the beginning of the plot, the main character Sora lives on a world called Destiny Island with his friends, and his life is in a state of mundanity. He and his friends often talk about leaving the island and venturing to new worlds, and they begin to build a raft so they can set sail. This dynamic is reflected in *The Marduk Archives* by the younger versions of Reggie and Jayden who are exploring metaphysical concepts in hopes of transcending the mundane world. On the night following the completion of the raft, Destiny Islands is thrown into utter disarray and the dream of the characters becomes manifest. Darkness swallows the world and each character wakes up individually in a new world. Reggie and Jayden experience their call to adventure immediately as they come upon the Elvis circle, but even this is a manifestation of their desires to explore beyond their mundane world, particularly the familiarity of a predictable reality and the culture of Mississippi. For both Sora's group as well as Reggie and Jayden, once the normality has been disturbed they must see their adventure through regardless of the peril which might await them.

The significance of worlds in Kingdom Hearts extends beyond the existence of various literal worlds, however, and demonstrates a further divide between the world as it appears and the world beyond the veil. As Sora progresses on his journey, he must combat the forces of darkness, but in actuality the conflict is being orchestrated behind the scenes by mysterious figures who seek to use Sora to indirectly bolster the power of darkness. These villains drive a conflict which motivates but supersedes the conflicts that Sora encounters at each stage of his journey. Sora's duty is to maintain order, or rather preserve the mundanity, of the worlds he visits, shielding them from the evil influence of the villains. Eventually, however, he must face the enemies directly in order to stop their meddling once and for all. Reggie ultimately discovers that he must do the same, as the cult has begun threatening the safety of Jayden, who Reggie cares about. Jayden, however, parallels Sora's companion Riku who finds himself influenced by the villains. They seek to harness Riku's power, and they even turn him into a vessel through which the major antagonist of the first game may carry out his schemes. The desire to save his friend is what ultimately drives Sora to fight against the darkness, just in the same way that Reggie takes on the cult on behalf of Jayden, and even despite the protests of Jayden himself. In the end, all of these characters realize that they cannot wholly sacrifice order and mundanity for unbridled chaos and surrealism.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas plays on these world distinctions as well, but this film depicts a relentless abandonment of the mundane world by Raoul Duke and his attorney Dr. Gonzo. Additionally, this film is unique in that the characters take turns acting as connecting characters, as at any point during the story one might be high while the other is moderately sober. However, these two main characters do not encounter any strange people who hail from a surreal world. Rather, they almost entirely populate this world when they come under the

influence of their various substances. As they succumb to increasingly deranged mental states, they become less and less capable of acting as connectors to the mundane world. From their perspective, the inhabitants of the mundane world are truly the otherworldly beings. In part, these characters represent what Reggie and Jayden would be if they had integrated into the cult of Marduk, but they do largely represent the fluctuating dichotomy between Reggie and Jayden whereby they switch roles throughout the story. At times, one will be lucid and the other rampant, but they trade roles as their positions within their overall circumstances develop.

“Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll is a classic text which further demonstrates this dualism between the mundane and the sublime. Like Reggie and Jayden, Alice’s adventure starts as she notices something out of the ordinary. In her case, this is the white rabbit carrying the pocket watch. Alice’s tale is one motivated by curiosity, and along her adventure the conventions of reality are usurped by the fantastical nature of a hidden world. However, in contrast to *The Marduk Archives* which aspires to strike a balance between the typical and the atypical, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” immerses readers almost entirely in a dreamlike environment, opening readers up to the interpretation that Alice’s journey represents an identity crisis. Nothing around Alice is familiar, so she has no sense of personal or environmental stability which she might anchor herself to. In *The Marduk Archives*, Reggie clearly struggles with the difficulty of defining his identity, as is evident by his thrown together outfits and his pursuit of a place to belong and a personality to adopt. This struggle only becomes overtly clear towards the end of the screenplay, firstly with the flashbacks which reveal that he fails to find security in his own identity, so, in part, he mimics Jayden and makes a show of it on social media. On the beach, he displays a sense of jealousy towards Jayden since the cult has decided to favor him, and the first few scenes in the astral plane are emblematic of Reggie

shedding his ego and ultimately realigning with a more organic identity. Once Bagboy takes the kitsune mask off Reggie, his transformation is complete, and he - like Alice - has left the rabbit hole.

The Waking Life aligns closely with “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” in that it also takes place more so in the realm of the sublime than the mundane. Viewers of this film are made to believe that the entirety of the story takes place in a dream, but from the perspective of the unnamed main character the audience sees that the division between a wakeful state and a dream state is not all that clear after all. This state of ambiguity challenges the way viewers define reality. By the end of *The Marduk Archives*, Reggie and Jayden become all too familiar with this sense of ambiguity, as the events they experience begin to seem unnatural from the time Reggie starts having visions onward. Eventually they learn to cope with this breach of convention, just as the main character of *The Waking Life* does, and they become lucid in the sense that they reclaim agency in the world, refusing to be pulled along by the whims of eclectic entities. They integrate with their strange reality without succumbing to it, and so they are able to experience the manipulation of reality while retaining an awareness of what is happening. The result of their ultimate transformation is that they can channel absurdity and use it to enhance the mundane lives to which they must return.

The Marduk Archives is a tale which aims to promote the idea that life can be ridiculous and enjoyable if we allow it to be. The screenplay does not take itself seriously, and the story is not meant to provoke any deep response from its audience because that would be antithetical to its tone and message. The piece does, however, reinforce the theme of crossing metaphysical thresholds and achieving transformation in doing so, themes which appear in various other media, all of which appear to have a whimsical nature about them. *The Big Lebowski* and *Fear*

and Loathing in Las Vegas are both comedies with unpredictable story structures and characters, and they deliberately reject the notion that a journey has to be profound. *Twin Peaks* and *The Waking Life* reflect the idea that a metaphysical world exists which is tied to the physical world, and transformation can occur within this metaphysical realm. The Kingdom Hearts franchise as well as “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” both share the concept that a person thrust into chaos can actively surmount opposition and become wiser for it. And finally, each of these films in some way supports the dichotomy of a mundane reality and a sublime reality. All of these influences promote concepts which have come together to influence and motivate the creation of *The Marduk Archives*.

The Marduk Archives

by

Brice Melton

FADE IN

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

REGGIE walks through the woods with his flashlight, his feet crunching against leaves and sticks with each step as he surveys his surroundings.

JAYDEN, filming Reggie with an old camcorder, follows behind Reggie. His camerawork is unsteady as he tries to keep pace with Reggie.

The sound of classic rock fills the air, audible only to Reggie.

Reggie stops suddenly, turning his neck to face Jayden.

REGGIE

(whispering)

I think we're getting closer. The music's getting louder.

JAYDEN

I don't know man, I still don't hear anything.

REGGIE

Shh!

Reggie goes silent for a moment, looking again into the forest ahead. He then starts humming along to the music, moving his body to the beat in a sort of half-dance.

REGGIE

Ugh! I'm sure I've heard the song before. I just can't place it. Come on!

Reggie starts again through the woods, breaking into a slight jog. Jayden's camera shakes even more as he tries to keep up.

Reggie looks back briefly.

REGGIE

Jayden, I think I saw a light just ahead. Hurry-

Reggie turns his head forward just in time to see the tree with which he collides.

REGGIE

(staggered)

Doh!

JAYDEN

You okay man?

A sudden rustling emerges from a clearing just ahead. Jayden's camera follows the sound, and the glossy light of two eyes can be seen looking back at Jayden.

The figure in the distance bolts, taking off in the direction opposite the goofs.

JAYDEN

Reggie! He's running!

REGGIE

(clutching his nose)

What are you waiting for soldier?
After him!

JAYDEN

Aye, aye!

Jayden hauls ass, stumbling over stumps and bushes, completely passing the clearing before tripping and eating dirt, more focused on his camera than his footsteps.

Jayden swipes his camera off the ground and turns it on himself to inspect the lens. He turns it back, using the camera's flashlight to surveil the area.

Jayden's camera lands on some sort of garment draped across a bush. He approaches and picks it up, seeing that it's a bedsheet with a design featuring pink flowers.

Jayden turns back, seeing Reggie now standing in the clearing, looking down at something. He starts to make his way over.

JAYDEN

Hey Reggie, I think the guy dropped this.

REGGIE

Never mind that. Get a load of this!

Jayden fully emerges into the clearing and beholds that which has captivated Reggie.

In the center of the clearing, a large circle has been drawn in the dirt. At five equidistant points around the circle are five items.

At the most distal point on the circle, a guitar stands erect on a guitar stand. At the two points preceding the guitar are a wooden heart and a teddy bear.

Finally, at the two points nearest Reggie and Jayden are... Two blue suede shoes.

JAYDEN

What the-

REGGIE

Jayden, get some pictures of this.
I think we've made a breakthrough.

EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Reggie and Jayden approach the front doors of the school, each wearing sunglasses.

Jayden wears a hawain shirt, while Reggie wears a long sleeved button up, cuffs rolled to his elbows. Additionally, he wears a faux leather vest.

After their authoritative swagger, they reach the doors and Reggie tugs on the handle. No luck.

Reggie pulls his sunglasses down to the tip of his nose and peers inside. Through the glass, he spots a janitor leaning on his mop, half-asleep.

Reggie knocks on the door, but to no avail. He tries again, knocking louder, and the janitor raises his head suddenly, losing his balance and barely catching himself from a fall.

The janitor hurries to the door, throwing his mop up to his shoulder and brandishing it like a gun. He fumbles with the lock for a second then opens to door for Reggie and Jayden.

Reggie enters first and begins looking the janitor up and down before pushing his sunglasses up once more. Jayden follows behind.

The man looks dishevelled. He has an unkempt goatie, sunken eyes, and short greasy hair.

REGGIE

Thank you good sir. It was quite hot outside.

THE GATEKEEPER

(whimsically)

Well, ya wouldn't know it from your outfit. Looking sharp though, I must say.

REGGIE

(to Jayden)

See, he likes it!

JAYDEN

(rolling his eyes)

Hey, thanks for letting us in man, we'll be out in a jiffy.

THE GATEKEEPER

Ah, no mind, no mind. Once you're in you're in.

REGGIE

A man with some sense about him! Let's go Jayden, I'm ready to present my findings.

Reggie and Jayden start towards the nearest hallway. They pull the heavy door open, and it shuts slowly behind them.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Reggie and Jayden swagger down the hall. Reggie takes the lead, trying out each door handle he passes. At the fourth one, the door opens.

REGGIE

We're in luck, my boy!

Reggie enters the classroom, followed by Jayden. At the front of the room is a whiteboard near a teacher's desk.

Reggie heads to the front of the room, taking his backpack off and setting it on the desk. He pulls from it a single manilla folder then sets the backpack on the ground.

Jayden finds a spot with a nice angular view of the whiteboard and begins setting up his camcorder.

Reggie takes a seat and props his feet up on the desk, looking through the sparse documents in the folder. The front of the folder displays a marker drawn occult symbol.

REGGIE

'Bout ready Jayden?

JAYDEN

You got it! Floor's all yours boss.

Reggie stands up and addresses the camera.

REGGIE

Right, well -

Reggie notices Jayden motioning to him to take off his sunglasses. Reggie swiftly plucks them from his face and tosses them somewhere within the room.

REGGIE

Welcome to Cult Chasers,
Mississippi's local
documentry-ists, dedicated to
solving the mysteries off all
things mystical!

JAYDEN

Yeahh, we're gonna have to work on
that.

REGGIE

Nah, fuck it Jayden, we're doing it
live!

Reggie turns around and draws a circle on the whiteboard in red marker. He draws icons of a guitar, a wooden heart, a teddy bear, and two shoes.

Reggie faces the camera once more and pulls a photo from his manilla folder.

REGGIE

Jayden, present this photo to the audience and explain what it depicts.

JAYDEN

(off)

Uhh, isn't that you're thing? I'm just working the camera.

REGGIE

Think of it as an internship. Quickly man, quickly!

Jayden sets the camera down carefully and hurries to the front of the room, taking the picture from Reggie. He steps before the camera and presents the photo.

The picture depicts the circle that the two found in the woods the night before.

JAYDEN

Well uh, last night in the woods we, well er, Reggie heard classic rock music playing in the forest.

Reggie in the background is fumbling in his backpack once again. He pulls out the flowered bedsheet.

JAYDEN

(cont.)

And we followed the sound. There was some guy, but he ran off-

REGGIE

(presenting the bedsheet)

And left this behind!

JAYDEN

Yeah, and uh, we found this circle here with all these items. It was all pretty creepy.

Reggie pushes Jayden aside, out of view of the camera. He waves Jayden away. Jayden picks the camera up once more, following Reggie's movements.

REGGIE

Now, let's look at the facts.

(pointing to the icons on the board)

A guitar, a wooden heart, a teddy bear, and two - count em two - blue suede shoes.

Jayden tilts the camera down to reveal Reggie who is in fact wearing the shoes.

REGGIE

These items remind you of anyone Jayden?

JAYDEN

Elv-

REGGIE

That's right. Elvis. Presley.

Reggie returns to the board and writes out "E L V I S". He then writes out "L I V E S" and "E V I L S" underneath the name.

REGGIE

Annagrams! Need I say more?

JAYDEN

You need not!

REGGIE

Ah, but I must! Clearly the cult association is there, but not yet certain. But a quick internet search will reveal that Mr. Presley descends from the Melungeons. That's right, the Lost Tribe of Appalachia!

On the white board, Reggie writes "ELVIS = APPALACHIA, LOST TRIBE".

Reggie opens his mouth to continue but stops himself, now squinting past the camera, towards the classroom door.

After a moment, Jayden swivels the camera and sees the janitor peering through the small window in the door. He looks directly at the camera then slips away out of view.

Jayden sets the camera down and hurries to the door, opening it and looking down the hallway before shutting the door again.

JAYDEN

Well that was fuckin' weird.

Jayden walks back to his seat and turns the camera back on Reggie.

REGGIE

Yeah, well, uh, anyway.
(taking a moment)

Right, so Appalachia. Do you know what obscure cult was last seen in Appalachia?

JAYDEN

Umm, no?

REGGIE

The migratory Cult of Marduk!

JAYDEN

I don't think I've heard of 'em.

REGGIE

Of course not, they're a pretty lowkey group. That's why we're investigating them.

Reggie returns to the board and writes "ELVIS = MARDUK".

REGGIE

Elvis's involvement with this organization would explain why someone was trying to channel his spirit last night. Tomorrow, we visit the birthplace of Elvis himself, in Tupelo, Mississippi!

Suddenly, the door at the front of the room opens. A unamused teacher walks in and glares at the pair, who are staring back like deer in the headlights.

MS. MATTHEWS

Reggie, Jayden. What are you doing here?

JAYDEN

Just a bit of research, Ms. Matthews! Nothing to worry about.

Ms. Matthews leans against the door, crossing her arms and peering over her glasses.

MS. MATTHEWS

Ya'll both graduated two years ago.

JAYDEN

Well ya know, the pursuit of knowledge never stops.

MS. MATTHEWS

Reggie, what are you doing?

Reggie has made his way over to a window, unlatched the locks, and is now standing halfway outside.

REGGIE

Just getting some fresh air! Jayden, you should join me.

Jayden looks back at Ms. Matthews and shrugs nervously. Ms. Matthews rolls her eyes and turns to leave.

REGGIE

And bring my sunglasses while
you're at it!

EXT. ELVIS BIRTHPLACE, HOUSE - NIGHT

Reggie and Jayden are creeping around the site under the cover of night. They come to a stop in front of the iconic white shack for which the site is famous.

Jayden whips his camera out of a fannypack and kneels to stabilize the shot. Reggie squats and addresses the camera, the house behind him.

REGGIE

Here we are folks, the birthplace
of the King of Rock and Roll.
Jayden, first impressions?

Jayden turns the camera on himself.

JAYDEN

Not much to it as far as I can
tell. Might feel differently if we
could go inside.

REGGIE

We're not gonna find anything
interesting during business hours
are we?

JAYDEN

Yeah, and I doubt they'd let us
film.

Reggie walks closer to the house, walking around to the side and attempting to peer through the window. He walks around behind and disappears from view.

Jayden himself checks his surroundings before proceeding towards the steps leading up to the porch. The wood squeaks under his foot as he makes the first step up.

As Jayden carefully tries the next step, Reggie emerges from the left side of the house. Jayden gasps suddenly and jumps, dropping the camera.

Jayden scurries to pick up the camera as Reggie meets him on the porch. He notices, all too late, that Reggie has begun turning the handle on the front door.

JAYDEN

Reggie, wai-

Reggie has opened the door successfully. He shrugs at Jayden and steps inside. Jayden looks around, nervous, before following Reggie inside.

INT. ELVIS BIRTHPLACE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie explores the house aided by the flashlight on his phone. The front room is small, crowded by a table with a plaid cloth and red ropes sectioning off the room.

REGGIE

Huh, not much going on in here.

JAYDEN

What, you expected a Satanic altar?
I mean, c'mon, Elvis was in a cult
that only you have ever heard of?

REGGIE

The corruption runs deep man, I'm
telling you. They've covered
everything up.

JAYDEN

Or the guy channeling Elvis in the
woods was just a lunatic.

Reggie has migrated towards a doorway further on. He steps through into the house's bedroom.

Reggie turns around, mouth wide and bug eyed, staring at Jayden.

JAYDEN

What? What is it?!

Jayden pushes past Reggie into the room but sees nothing unusual.

REGGIE

Haha, I'm just fucking with you
man. There's a ghost here, for
sure, but what makes you think I
could see it?

Suddenly a figure pops up from the other side of the bed. Jayden screams, but Reggie - still turned about - rolls his eyes.

FATIMA

You know about the ghost?

Upon hearing the voice, Reggie screams as well. Jayden punches Reggie in the shoulder, shutting him up.

JAYDEN

(harsh whisper)

You scared the life out of me. What
are you doing here?

Reggie shines the light on Fatima. Fatima has hair dyed white, a few face piercings, and wears a shirt which reads "MARDUK RECORDS".

FATIMA

Just an avid music lover. Wanted to check out the buildings without the tourist atmosphere. Also trying to commune with Elvis's dead brother, but that's neither here nor there. How bout you guys?

Fatima sits on the bed, making herself comfortable.

JAYDEN

We're just, uh, hunting a cult. His idea.

Reggie is looking around, sniffing at the air and squinting his eyes.

REGGIE

Can you smell that Jayden? Evil is near.

FATIMA

That might be chlorine actually. There's a fountain nearby.

Fatima rolls off the bed and approaches Reggie.

FATIMA

So, he's Jayden, and you're...?

Reggie absentmindedly stares out a window before realising Fatima is standing by him.

REGGIE

Oh, hi, I'm Reg-
(noticing her shirt)
Reggie. Where'd you get that shirt?

FATIMA

(looking down)
Oh, uh, I designed it for a friend actually. She's starting up a music production business, but right now she works at a music shop in Brookhaven.

Reggie steps over to Jayden, who has now found a spot for himself on the bed. Reggie begins to shake him, his face slightly crazed.

REGGIE

What'd I tell you? We found a lead!
(to Fatima)
Quick, what's the address to the music shop?

FATIMA
 (taken aback)
 Oh, uh, should be on the back of
 the shirt.

Fatima turns around to show him. Reggie whips out his camera and snaps a picture, but in the background Reggie notices that a security guard has spotted them, from a distance, through the window.

REGGIE
 Guys, we gotta go!

The other two notice a fat guard jogging towards them. Fatima is the first out the door.

FATIMA
 Smell ya later Cult Busters, we
 gotta scatter!

REGGIE
 Cult Busters, I like that.

JAYDEN
 Nevermind that, we've gotta go too!
 Come on.

Reggie and Jayden haul ass, leaving the house just as a security guard arrives on the scene. He starts to chase them but begins huffing, losing his breath - and his will to run - immediately.

The security guard folds his arms over his chest and watches as the pair disappears into the night.

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - SUNRISE

Ambient music begins quietly and slowly crescendos until it engulfs the scene. As the noise levels off, the sound of chopping and struggled slicing accompanies it.

A figure in a blue and white striped jacket stands on the beach facing the waves. His head is covered by a brown paper bag with two eyeholes.

The image of a city blurs in the background, and the crashing of the waves joins in the music. All is calm.

In the background, also on the beach, two additional figures stand, obscured by the blur.

One person stands at a table carving away at some unseen. The other stands before a canvas, finishing a painting.

Focus shifts to the woman at the painting, whose white hair resembles that of Fatima. Her face, even, is that of Fatima, but aged twenty years.

With a relaxed expression, Fatima crosses her arms and observes her work - an abstract depiction of the city.

The smaller buildings in the painting appear to be melting away while the larger structures glow radiantly. The larger buildings also seem to have roots growing, pervading the ground below them.

The ambient music fades out and is replaced by a man's voice, coming from the distance.

His voice growing louder as he approaches, Ali sings lyrics from Charley Patton's "Spoonful Blues."

ALI

(off)

Would you kill a man dead? Just
'bout a... Oh babe, I'm a fool
about my... Don't take me long! To
get my...

BAGBOY begins to sway to the song, still staring out at the ocean, and Fatima looks towards the voice. The third figure continues her task, the cutting sounds and waves accompanying the tune.

FATIMA

Ah, I say, well, pardon my cliche,
but look what the cat dragged in!

Ali's singing ceases and the other sounds dull. Ali strolls casually, raising his hands into the air in a casual but pronounced shrug.

Though Ali is hard to see against the glare of the sun, he is obviously naked as a jaybird, save for a beaded necklace with a tassel at its end.

FATIMA

How'd I beat you here? You had a
headstart.

ALI

Tsk, Fatima! Our holy Marduk does
not need a watch to tell him when
he to eat or sleep. Time is
illusory, or so the digital
philosophers say.

FATIMA

Right, well...

Fatima grabs a familiar cloth from the zenith of her easel and tosses it to Ali.

FATIMA

I snagged that for you. Might want
to put it on, our viewers are
sensitive.

Ali cocks an eye at Fatima, tilting his head.

ALI

Our viewers?

Fatima nods towards Bagboy, who has now turned about and is staring towards Ali from the beach.

ALI

Ah, right.

Ali drapes the garment over himself, a cloth with flower patterns, the very same from the forest ritual site.

Bagboy now approaches the pair, speaking in a creaky shrill voice.

BAGBOY

Has Ali found a name yet for me?

Ali stares at Bagboy strangely, then looks back to Fatima, pointing at Bagboy with an inquisitive look on his face.

FATIMA

Nevermind him. I'm afraid I've gotta pass the baton back to you.

Ali bows dramatically.

ALI

Of course. We all must play our parts. I only stopped by to pay my respects to the infinite one.

The woman at the table stops her chopping for a moment but does not turn to the pair. Fatima and Ali look over expectantly.

ISABELLA

He's not here.

Ali smiles and strides over to Isabella, placing a hand on the back of her shoulder.

ALI

Fret not, our Marduk is everywhere.

Ali recites a brief mantra in some foreign language then walks past the table, toward the city, throwing his hand up in a farewell wave but not looking back.

The sound of carving resumes and we see a slab of meat on the table before Isabella, being gouged by her knife.

In the background, Bagboy ambles back to the waterfront and Fatima resumes her position, inspecting her painting. The images on the painting swirl and morph for a moment before returning to rest.

FADE TO:

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Reggie and Jayden step onto the bus, sunglasses, blazers, and all, the mundane, underdeveloped background of the Tupelo Greyhound station at their backs.

As they step up to the main hall of the bus, the driver turns with a long yawn, donning shades of his own as well as a flat cap which excentuates his all-too-familiar goatie.

He shakes his head like a wet dog would, waking himself up, then he suddenly shoots his hand out, stopping Reggie, who is in front, from stepping any further.

THE GATEKEEPER

(with a deeper voice than
before)

Do you have your ticket, sir?

REGGIE

(fishing in the pockets
of his blazer)

Oh, um... Yes, yes, here it is good
fellow!

The Gatekeeper takes the ticket, inspecting it carefully, even biting down on it as one might a piece of gold. He scratches his goatie and nods, handing it back.

THE GATEKEEPER

(pointing his thumb
toward the back of the
bus)

Awright, go on then!

Jayden approaches next, fishing in his pockets hurriedly as the line behind him starts to lengthen.

The Gatekeeper looks forward, leaning his head back and sliding a toothpick between his teeth.

THE GATEKEEPER

Yeah, buddy, you too. You're with
him right? Take a seat.

JAYDEN

Don't you need to see my-
(recognizing THE
GATEKEEPER)

Wait a minute, don't I know you?

THE GATEKEEPER

(picking his teeth)

Me? Hum. No, don't think so mate.

JAYDEN

Yeah, you're the janitor from the school. Job hoppin' yeah? Gotta do what you gotta do.

THE GATEKEEPER

Must have been my brother. I'd be a piss poor janitor, tell ya that much.

JAYDEN

Oh, you have a brother?

THE GATEKEEPER

Course not. Whoever said that? Get on now, you're holding up the line.

Jayden hesitantly proceeds towards the back of the bus, his eyes lingering on The Gatekeeper.

The Gatekeeper shuts the door to the bus before anyone else can get on and immediately starts driving. Jayden catches himself, pulling himself into the seat beside Reggie.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - CONTINUOUS

Through the window of the bus, the Mississippi landscape rolls by, mostly trees being overtaken by kudzu.

Reggie and Jayden talk to each other offscreen.

JAYDEN

So, you're gonna pay me back right?

REGGIE

Ah, think nothing of it my boy! You're gonna be a star, a big star!

JAYDEN

Well, I'm the cameraman, so probably not, and anyway I snuck the cash from my dads wallet and I don't think he takes IOUs.

A calm chanting begins to fill the atmosphere as the bus rolls over a concrete bridge.

REGGIE

Shh!

(beat)

You hear that Jayden?

JAYDEN

Here we go again.

(frustrated)

No Reggie, I don't hear a thing.

Up ahead, through the window of the bus, Reggie spots a car parked on the shoulder of the road.

Atop the car, he sees a scrawny man sitting in the meditative lotus position, hands pressed flush together across his chest. The man is wearing a bedsheet covered with a flower pattern.

REGGIE

Jayden! Jayden, look!

Jayden peers out the window but just barely misses the man as the bus zooms by.

Reggie takes to his feet and rushes to the front of the bus, Jayden following with an obvious demeanor of annoyance.

REGGIE

Stop the bus! Sir, it's an emergency!

The Gatekeeper raises his head from the back of the seat, looking around urgently. He seems as if he had been sleeping.

THE GATEKEEPER

Sorry son, the bus stops for no one!

JAYDEN

Reggie, what are you doing? Sit down!

Suddenly the bus shakes and a loud pop rings out and the chanting in the background stops. The pop startles the few passengers sat in the back.

The bus begins to slow, but The Gatekeeper appears unphased. He simply lets out a sigh and adjusts his sunglasses.

THE GATEKEEPER

Looks like you're in luck after all, we've blown a tire. I blame the driver.

The bus finally rolls to a stop, and The Gatekeeper nonchallantly opens the door for Reggie and Jayden.

REGGIE

When you get it fixed, will you wait and let us back on?

THE GATEKEEPER

(shrugging)

Once you're on, you're on.

Reggie gives a nod to The Gatekeeper, then yanks at Jayden's arm, urging him off the bus.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie steps off the bus, immediately breaking into a jog down the roadside. Jayden unwillingly follows suit.

From Reggie's perspective, the soothing chant has resumed and grows louder as the approaches the car. Jayden still hears nothing.

The man atop the car still sits with his eyes closed, meditating, paying no mind to the approaching adventurers.

Reggie stops midway, leaning on his knees and panting heavily. Jayden catches up and folds his arms.

JAYDEN

You always been this out of shape?

REGGIE

It's the force of Marduk. It's so strong.

(cupping his ears)

And that chanting is so loud. But so holy.

JAYDEN

So why am I immune to the force of Marduk?

REGGIE

He's not calling to you Jayden! You are merely my worthy vassal.

Jayden rolls his eyes, Reggie, having recuperated, stands upright and places his hand to his brow, blocking the sun.

The chanting ceases once more. The man is now staring in the direction of Reggie and Jayden. The man holds his hand up and gestures for the pair to come over.

JAYDEN

C'mon Reggie, let's get back on this bus. This weirdo's gonna skin us or something.

Reggie pays no attention to Jayden, and instead he starts walking forward as if in a trance, his mouth hanging open.

Jayden looks towards the bus, considering returning, before ultimately heading after Reggie.

EXT. CAR, ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie and Jayden approach the car, Reggie looking mystified and Jayden looking fed up.

A closer look reveals that in addition to his flowery "shawl", the man wears a long beaded necklace with tassels at its end.

The car on which Ali sits is a beaten up Pontiac, circa 2001. Jayden looks at it as if he's amazed it even still drives while Reggie is focused on Ali himself.

ALI

Hello my brothers! Welcome to this most glorious shrine!

REGGIE

Ah, brother! I came as soon as I heard your beautiful chanting.

JAYDEN

Now wait a minute, where'd you get that sheet?

Ali looks down, grabbing his garment and inspecting it.

ALI

This is my worship shawl. I found it at a local "thrift" "store" after my last one was lost.

Jayden sets his backpack on the ground in front of him, reaches in, and pulls forth an identical sheet, holding it up silently for Ali to inspect.

Ali squints at it for a moment then has the sudden realization. He slides down from the car and snatches the sheet, taking it from Jayden and backing away.

ALI

Yes, that's mine alright. Many thanks!

REGGIE

So that was you in the woods!

Jayden pulls forth his camcorder and quickly switches it on, backing up to capture the scene.

ALI

Indeed. And so, I see, was it you in the woods as well!

REGGIE

Inde-

JAYDEN

No, no Reggie, I draw the line at indeed.

REGGIE

Oh, yeah, not really my thing, eh?
(to Ali)

Anyway, who are you? And why were you channeling the spirit of Elvis?

Ali puts his finger up to his mouth to shush Reggie, then waves the both of them around to the other side of the car, where they will not be exposed to the highway.

Reggie and Jayden follow him, and on the other side of the car Ali lowers himself, sitting on his knees.

Reggie sits as well, though not on his knees, and he props his back against the car. Jayden simply kneels, keeping his camcorder steady.

ALI

Now, I cannot say much about
brother Elvis, but I am brother
Ali.

Ali puts his hands together, giving a slight bow to each Reggie and Jayden.

REGGIE

I'm Reggie, that's Jayden. So tell
us, how long you been praising
Marduk?

ALI

I remember...

(beat)

Six years ago, I travelled in the
Appalachian mountains and found
that all I had to do was channel
the holy name of Marduk and all of
the illusions of reality would
disappear.

Reggie nods, rubbing his chin, nodding and pretending to understand.

REGGIE

Could you tell us how to, uh, how
to do that?

ALI

Of course brother! Close your eyes,
both of you!

Ali closes his eyes, and Reggie looks over at Jayden, making a gesture with his hand over his face to pressure Jayden into closing his as well.

Jayden rolls his eyes, then closes them. Reggie does as well and Ali resumes his chant once more. After a few moments, the world begins to warp as if in Van Gogh's "Starry Night".

Reggie becomes immersed, and attempts to repeat the chant as well, eventually picking it up. Once he does, Ali's chanting stops. After a moment, Jayden opens one eye and notices that Ali is gone.

Jayden stands up quickly and looks down the roadside, finding that Ali is high-tailing it towards the bus.

JAYDEN
Reggie! Reggie!

Reggie snaps to and looks up at Jayden.

REGGIE
Jayden, my brother, I am at peace.

JAYDEN
Nevermind that, look!

Reggie stands up and sees Ali climbing on the bus, Ali sticks his head back out and waves at the pair before disappearing onto the bus completely.

The bus suddenly cranks back up, and Reggie and Jayden exchange a glance before sprinting towards the bus. Alas, it begins to take off, disappearing over a hill and leaving them to gaze down the highway.

Reggie takes a moment to process what just happened. He cocks his head, rubbing his chin before looking over towards Jayden

Jayden is still staring down the road, dumbfounded, unmoving, jaw hanging to the floor.

REGGIE
So uh, do you wanna call an Uber?

The question seems to go right over Jayden's head. He looks at Reggie blankly then looks back to the road, promptly beginning to kick at the ground in a fit of rage.

JAYDEN
Shit! Shitshitshitshit!
(pulling at his hair)
Damn it Reggie!

Reggie throws his hands up defensively, taking a step back from Jayden.

REGGIE
Woah man, it's not that serious. We can just hitch-hike.

JAYDEN
(glaring)
You can hitch-hike, I'm gonna have to call my dad to pick me up.

Reggie throws his arm around Jayden's shoulder.

REGGIE

Chill, this is just a speed bump.
You can't leave me now.

(beat)

Look, just take some time to cool
off. I'm gonna go sit with the car.

Reggie lets Jayden go and begins to walk down the roadside once more, heading back to the car which Ali once sat atop. Jayden sinks to the ground and buries his head in his hands.

Jayden looks up with a sudden realization.

JAYDEN

The car.

Jayden springs to his feet and begins running back towards the car, quickly overtaking Reggie.

JAYDEN

The car!!

Reggie stops in his tracks for a moment, tilting his head before also making the realization and breaking into a run as well.

Jayden arrives at the car first, peering through the driver's seat window. He looks towards Reggie as he arrives, a wide grin on his face.

Reggie approaches, looking into the car as well and seeing the keys sitting right there in the driver's seat.

FADE TO:

INT. CAR - LATER

Ali's chant resounds dully through Reggie's mind as he struggles to keep his eyes open.

SERIES OF SHOTS - REGGIE HAS VISIONS

- A) The table on which Isabella is carving meat.
- B) The Elvis circle.
- C) A building riddled with graffiti at an abandoned golf course.
- D) Bagboy staring out at the water.
- E) A decaying church in a Mississippi ghost town.
- F) A Highway-55 exit sign.
- G) A picnic table overlooking a lake.
- H) The Elvis Birthplace.

I) Train tracks, accentuated by the growing roar of a train, and the train itself appearing and rattling along, the noise becoming deafening.

Jayden, behind the steering wheel of the car, glances over to Reggie and notices him moving his mouth silently as compulsively.

JAYDEN

Reggie?

(beat)

Hey Reggie, whatchu mumbling about?

Reggie remains locked in his trance. Jayden reaches over and shoves him to no avail.

After a moment, Reggie snaps to consciousness and looks around frantically.

REGGIE

Ay bro, what's up?

JAYDEN

You were over there mumbling to yourself. You all good?

Reggie dismisses the question, looking around, at the road ahead and at the trees to his right.

Reggie notices, coming up, a Highway-55 exit sign to Flowood, MS.

REGGIE

Yo, exit here alright?

JAYDEN

Nah, we're going to Brookhaven. That's where the address leads.

REGGIE

No, I know, just turn here.

JAYDEN

You must be about to piss yourself or something. Alright then.

The car goes silent again as the two turn their attention back to the road.

EXT. GRAFFITI BUILDING - SUNSET

Two men sit on a bench outside a building decorated with graffiti, both about 18 years old. They are dressed simply - baseball caps and shirts with sports logos.

One of the men, JASON, talks incessantly. The other, RILEY, tries to pay attention, but for the most part either directs his attention to the ground in front of him or looks around as if worried by something.

Jason's voice comes across as unintelligible chatter. He stops talking and silence takes over. After a moment, Riley realizes and looks up at him.

Riley pipes up now, revealing his distinct southern accent, which pales only in comparison to Jason's.

RILEY

Bro I didn't hear a word you just said.

JASON

(wacking RILEY's hat off his head)

Get outta space man! I'm talking about the MSU game.

RILEY

(picking his hat up slowly)

Sorry bro, I'm just baked.

JASON

No shit man, you're buggin'.

Jason reaches into his backpack and fumbles around for a bit before pulling out a small weed pipe.

JASON

Here, smoke up. That'll get you straight.

Riley stores at the pipe for a moment in contemplation. He starts to reach out for it, but footsteps and muffled voices can be heard nearby.

Jason panics and hurries to hide the pipe, but Riley ends up knocking it from his hand. It falls to the ground and shatters.

From around a bend in the concrete trail, Reggie and Jayden emerge. The hilly terrain forces them to navigate carefully, stepping intentionally over large water puddles to avoid soaking their shoes.

In fact, Reggie has removed the blue suede shoes and is now walking barefoot on accord of the muddy landscape.

A background view of the golf course, if you could call it that, shows that it is completely overgrown and is surely no longer maintained.

Reggie and Jayden approach the graffiti'd building, but now there is nobody in front of it. Reggie bounds up to the building and turns around to face Jayden.

REGGIE

See, I told you it was here!

Jayden walks right by him and sets himself down on the bench, rubbing his calves.

JAYDEN

Okay, you got me this time. You gotta admit, it did sound a little farfetched.

Jayden stands up again and steps back from the face of the building, examining the graffiti.

JAYDEN

It is pretty neat though, I'll give you that. Any idea what's inside?

CUT TO:

INT. GRAFFITI BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Jason and Riley stand inside of the building, which can now clearly be identified as a bathroom. Just as on the outside, graffiti covers the walls here.

Jason stands with his ear pressed to the door. Behind him, Riley paces back and forth frantically.

REGGIE

(off)

Just a couple bathrooms I think.

There is silence for a moment as Jason backs his head away from the door and turns to Riley.

JASON

(whispering)

Man, chill out, it's just a couple of random guys.

The door opens suddenly, letting the sunlight illuminate the room, and, ironically, Jason jumps and lets out a yelp. At the door stands Jayden, looking at them dumbfounded.

JAYDEN

Uh, Reggie?

Reggie appears in the door frame as well, and a big grin comes across his face. Jason and Riley look tense, as if they're waiting for Reggie or Jayden to speak.

REGGIE

Hey guys! You must be with the cult.

Jayden shoots daggers at Reggie, who doesn't notice?

RILEY

The cult..? Ya'll aint Mormon's are ya?

JAYDEN

Don't mind him. What, uh, whatchu guys doing in here?

RILEY

Oh, uh, we're just lookin' at the walls.

JASON

We were thinking about tagging em.

JAYDEN

Right.. Well, I'm Jayden. This is Reggie.

Reggie still wears an uncomfortable smile on his face, making him appear a bit crazy. Riley and Jason defer to defensive scowls.

JAYDEN

Anyway, we don't mean any trouble. We're just gonna chill outside for a minute.

Jayden nods his head to the side, prompting Reggie to step out of the way so he can close the door.

EXT. GRAFFITI BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Jayden sits on the bench outside, his face burried in his hands, while Reggie closely examines the images on the walls.

Riley and Jason emerge from the building and come around to meet Jayden and Reggie. They keep a moderate distance from the pair. Reggie hasn't noticed them.

JASON

So what ya'll doing out here? I don't reckon I've ever seen ya around.

JAYDEN

(shrugging)

I wish I knew. We're not from around here. Reggie here thought we should check this place out.

Hearing his name, Reggie finally turns around and joins the conversation.

REGGIE

I swear, I feel like I've been here before.

RILEY

I don't reckon you'd be able to find this place if you hadn't.

Reggie stares at Riley expressionless. Jayden notices Reggie fidgeting with the bottom of his shirt.

JASON
(to Jayden)
Hey, 's your buddy okay?

JAYDEN
(shrugging)
I ask myself that more and more
everyday.

Reggie turns and walks inbetween the party in a zombie-like state, rounds the corner of the building. The door to the bathroom can be heard opening and shutting again.

Jayden, Jason, and Riley watch Reggie walk away then look around at each other nervously.

Jayden plops down on the bench again exhasperated. Jason and Riley communicate in gestures.

RILEY
We're gonna head on guy.

Jayden gives them a halfhearted wave. Riley begins walking off, followed by Jason, who gives an inattentive Jayden a nod.

INT. GRAFFITI BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Reggie stares into a broken mirror, an ominous music swimming about his head.

The atmosphere around Reggie appears to warp slightly and the room gains a red tint.

Reggie begins to recite Ali's chant under his breath, and after a moment the scene returns to normal. Behind Reggie, over his shoulder, a shilouetted figure can be seen.

The figure appears to wear a thick coat, sunglasses, and a hat with a tall point at the top. The Gatekeeper raises his hand to the hat and raises it into the air in greeting, then sets it back onto his head.

Reggie stares at The Gatekeeper mesmerized, not recognizing the silhouette. Suddenly, the door opens.

The crack in the door partially illuminates The Gatekeeper before he vanishes, and for a slight moment Reggie sees himself in the mirror wearing a red tribal mask with a long nose.

Reggie shudders, breaking out of his state, and looks to the door to see Jayden standing there wearily.

Reggie moves to the door, frantically breaking past Jayden.

REGGIE
 (nervously)
 Forget this place, let's go.

EXT. BROOKHAVEN TRAIN STATION - DAY

Reggie stands a short distance from the rails, arms folded as he surveys downtown Brookhaven.

In the background, Jayden sits next to an Riley, speaking inaudibly.

JAYDEN
 (middle of speaking)
 ... so we came down from Tupelo a couple days back, and we've just been sleeping in the car as necessary.

OLD MAN
 Sounds mighty unsafe if ya ask me.

JAYDEN
 Maybe, but that's not really what I'm worried about.

OLD MAN
 Anybody know where y'are? How ya'll been eating?

JAYDEN
 (shrugging)
 We're getting on fine, I'm just mostly concerned about Reggie.

Reggie paces along the tracks, paying no mind to the conversation behind him.

JAYDEN
 (cont.)
 Like, I wanna help him but-

OLD MAN
 Y'don't have to stay with 'im. Probably be best to head on home 'fore he gets ya both into some trouble.

Reggie stands in place now on the tracks, wringing his hands and looking back and forth anxiously.

JAYDEN
 I'm not worried about me. It's just, he's taking this... "investigation" a little far. Like, he's getting obsessive. And he won't listen to me, so maybe I should go home. But then again...

The Old Man keeps silent, spitting some dip out beside him and promptly inserting more into his cheek.

JAYDEN

I don't know if I'm even doing Reggie any good. Especially after what happened this morning...

Reggie has stepped away from the tracks once more. The rumble of an approaching train begins to shake the air.

Reggie shoots a sideways glance at Jayden, who doesn't notice, then turns back to face the tracks, his arms folded across his chest in contemplation.

Reggie's face grows tense as the roar of the train grows.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. MARDUK RECORDS, BROOKHAVEN - MORNING

A music merchandise store is empty besides boxes of records sitting on shelves and tables throughout the room, as well as t-shirts and other such merchandise.

The room is dimly lit and an instrumental mix of hip hop and jazz plays over speakers.

The door opens and a bell chimes. Reggie and Jayden enter but stop short at the sound of the music. A grin crosses each of their faces independently and they look at each other in acknowledgement.

REGGIE

That's some funky shit alright!

Reggie steps further into the room between the crowded tables of records and starts to dance to the tune.

Jayden begins to dance as well, though with less vigor, and he peruses the aisles as he grooves along, picking up records here and there.

Reggie's moves evolve as Jayden finds a mirror in the corner of the room and begins trying on merch -- some hats, necklaces, shades.

While Jayden is distracted, a woman peaks her head out around the corner from the backroom, observing the scene.

The woman, Isabella, wears the same clothes she donned on the beach just days earlier.

Isabella's face is revealed to be decorated in piercings and she has two colored streaks going through her hair - one red and one blue.

Isabella steps out of the backroom and begins dancing her way to Reggie, who begins dancing with her unquestioningly.

After a moment, Isabella smirks at Reggie and pushes him away charmingly, grooving towards Jayden now, who is still busy gawking at himself.

Jayden catches a glimpse of Isabella in the mirror and yelps, turning about suddenly to face her. The music stops with an incidental record scratch.

ISABELLA

Op! Hey there, didn't mean to spook ya.

Jayden starts to fumble about, hurriedly removing the obnoxious amount of merch he has decorated himself with.

JAYDEN

(awkwardly)

Nah, I'm good. Sorry to be spooked, I guess.

REGGIE

Take it easy Jayden, can't you feel the good vibes?

ISABELLA

(pointing to Jayden)

Jayden, and...

Isabella whirls around, pointing to Reggie with a curious look.

JAYDEN

That's Reginald.

REGGIE

(glaring at Jayden)

Just Reggie, actually.

Isabella steps over to a counter, hopping up and taking a seat on it.

ISABELLA

Pleased to meet you both, Jayden and Reginald. I'm Isabella. Glad you're digging the tunes, they're grown locally.

JAYDEN

Non-GMO I hope.

Jayden chuckles awkwardly in coincidence with Isabella's boisterous laughter. Reggie doesn't seem amused, but rather appears aggravated towards Jayden.

REGGIE

Stop clowning Jay, what makes you think she wants you flirting with her?

Reggie attempts to come across as casual, but his irate mood comes across nonetheless. The tone of the conversation sinks as Jayden glances at him puzzled and offended.

ISABELLA

Well, uh, what brings you boys here today?

REGGIE

We're the Cult Busters.

Reggie crosses his arms and puffs out his chest proudly, but his comic attempt to regain face is lost on Isabella. She waits silently.

REGGIE

(to Jayden)

What, guess that's not funny anymore?

JAYDEN

Your friend Fatima told us to come here. I'm helping Reggie here document his investigation of some cult.

REGGIE

So you gonna make it seem like I'm crazy now? Every ti-

ISABELLA

(interrupting)

You must be seeking out Lord Marduk!

Jayden looks at Reggie enthusiastically, but Reggie refuses the glance.

REGGIE

Lord Marduk! Yes!

Reggie briefly chants the mantra he learned from Ali.

ISABELLA

Hah, follow me. We can talk in the back.

Isabella hops off the counter and bid the two follow with a wave. She disappears into the backroom and Reggie hurries by Jayden, knocking against his shoulder.

Jayden shoots daggers towards Reggie but proceeds towards the backroom after a moment despite his frustration.

INT. MARDUK RECORDS, BACKROOM - CONTINUOUS

Isabella walks around a desk and takes a seat. The room has mystal feel to it, resemblant of a fortune teller's tent.

Incense burns, Buddhist prayer flags hang across the room, a mysterious slab etched with foreign letters sits on a nearby table.

Seeing no other chairs, Reggie sits on the desk while Jayden observes the trinkets of the room, hands in his pockets.

REGGIE

Jayden, camera! Aren't you supposed to be recording this?

Jayden looks to Isabella for approval. She shrugs, and Jayden proceeds to retrieve his camcorder from his bag.

Jayden kneels slightly to get a good angle on the conversation and begins to record.

REGGIE

(to Jayden)

Is it o- Oh, okay.

(to Isabella)

So, uh, what's your relationship to the cult?

ISABELLA

I wouldn't call it a cult so much. It's more like a collective of spiritually minded people, ya know?

REGGIE

Right on, I get that. So, what's your relationship to the... collective of spiritually minded people?

Isabella turns in her chair and has started making coffee in a keurig behind the desk. She fills the machine with water and pops in a reusable pod filled with coffee grounds.

ISABELLA

I guess you could call me a "member". I cook for our parties and , but I mainly run this shop and spread the brand. I do a little herb distribution on the side.

REGGIE

Sales and marketing, you're speaking my language!

The keurig starts churning with noise as it begins to fill a mug with coffee.

ISABELLA

Sorry for the background noise, I figured you guys could use some caffination.

(grabbing the mug)

For your trusty cameraman.

Reggie hands the mug backwards, not even turning to look at Jayden. Jayden accepts it.

JAYDEN

(off)

Thanks!

REGGIE

Shh! You're a fly on the wall.

JAYDEN

(off)

Damn, chill out already. I'll cut it in post.

REGGIE

(rolling his eyes)

Anyway, what's the purpose of your group?

Isabella has already begun setting up the keurig again for its second round.

ISABELLA

We're just trying to add our own piece of culture to the world. We move around a lot, but since Mississippi seems so one dimensional to the rest of the states, we figured we could bring some flavor to the place.

REGGIE

I respect that, for sure. Maybe I could help, ya know? Do some filmwork or something.

The keurig pipes up again, filling a second mug with coffee. Isabella takes the mug and sets it on the desk.

Isabella opens a drawer and scoops what appears to be sugar into the drink. With a coffee straw from the keurig table, she stirs the coffee.

ISABELLA

Actually, we're getting together for a party on the coast tonight. Celebrating a transition of leadership.

Isabella pushes the coffee towards Reggie.

ISABELLA

(cont.)

You're welcome to join us. Fatima's coming to pick me up in a few hours by the train station.

Reggie raises the mug, preparing to take a sip. Jayden's camera shakes and he loses the shot for a moment.

JAYDEN

(off)

Reggie, wait!

(to Isabella)

What'd you put in that drink?

ISABELLA

(feigning surprise)

Oh, you're right! I didn't ask him if he took sugar.

REGGIE

I always take sugar. Quiet, Jayden!

JAYDEN

(off)

You didn't ask me either. Seems a bit strange.

Reggie fully turns in his chair and slaps at Jayden's camera. Jayden readjusts his shot.

REGGIE

I've had it Jayden! You're paranoid and critical, and you're constantly harshing my vibe. How bout this: I'm drinking this coffee, I'm going to the coast, and as a matter of fact I think I might even stick around with Isabella, Fatima, and the rest. I've been right about everything so far, but you still wanna treat me like a child to look after? Fuck off!

Isabella seems uncomfortable in the background and looks towards Jayden with sympathy.

Reggie attempts to take a gulp of the coffee, but the heat catches him off guard and causes him to drop the mug entirely, spilling the coffee and shattering the cup. He struggles the gulp down nonetheless.

REGGIE

(cont.)

Look what you made me do!

(swiping at Jayden's camera again)

Out! Go home! You're holding me back.

Jayden stands, his camera only viewing the floor.

JAYDEN

(off, bitter but calm)

Yeah, well. Call me if you need me.

Jayden turns to leave, and the scene goes dark as his camera shuts.

FLASHBACK ENDS

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKHAVEN TRAIN STATION - PRESENT

Reggie's perspective is noticeably blurring and warping as he scans the downtown. The train's roar is reaching its peak.

Reggie looks back at Jayden talking to the Old Man on the bench, but Jayden is now too preoccupied to notice.

Reggie looks back across the train tracks just before the train is due to pass. For a moment, he see's the mask of Marduk flashing, as if Marduk is standing across from him and staring back.

The train begins to pass in between Reggie and the visage of Marduk and Reggie stands mesmerized. The train's hum is replaced by a binural buzzing and Reggie's vision goes in and out until the train has fully passed.

Across the way now, Reggie sees The Gatekeeper standing outside a car. The Gatekeeper opens the passenger door and holds it for someone. Isabella can be seen stepping into the car.

After a moment, Jayden dashes past Reggie and up to The Gatekeeper.

REGGIE

Jayden!

Jayden appears not to hear Reggie. He speaks with The Gatekeeper for a moment, and The Gatekeeper opens the back door and lets Jayden in.

The Gatekeeper proceeds to the driver's side of the car, stepping inside.

REGGIE

(cont.)

Jayden, wait! I'm sorry! Stay here.
Don't leave.

Reggie runs across the train tracks towards the car, but it has begun to pull away. Reggie runs after it for a second but cannot keep up. The car turns a corner and is gone.

A moment later, Fatima pulls up beside Reggie on a moped. Fatima pulls a set of goggles off her eyes and looks to Reggie.

FATIMA

Hop on.

REGGIE

(upset)

Where's Jayden going?

FATIMA

Oh, uh, I heard about this morning.
We thought it best to keep you guys
seperate. Give you some time to
cool off.

(beat)

But we'll meet back up with him at
the party. Coming, right?

Reggie hesitates for a moment but then takes his seat on the back of the moped.

Fatima revs it and follows the route of The Gatekeeper's car, turning the corner.

In the background, the bench across the train tracks can be seen once more. The Old Man still sits there, but Jayden stands, gawking in disbelief as Reggie pulls away.

OLD MAN

(mumbling)

-not careful you'll end up dead or-

Jayden, no longer paying attention to the man, begins to step towards the train tracks.

OLD MAN

(cont.)

Now hold up a minute, don't forget
the penny!

Jayden pauses for second, unsure what to do now that Reggie has gone. He paces parallel to the train tracks, glancing down at the ground.

Jayden spots a penny flattened by the train. He reaches down and picks it up, examining it. He sighs and begins to walk back to the bench.

OLD MAN

(pointing behind Jayden)

Look't that, must be one of those
damn art kids.

(shaking his head)

Strange folks.

Jayden turns about to see a car parked across the tracks, and The Gatekeeper leaning on the hood, sitting atop the hood using his sunglasses as a mirror, picking something out of his teeth.

Once again, Isabella appears as The Gatekeeper holds the door for her. Jayden takes off towards the car.

During his sprint, Jayden can hear faint echos of Reggie calling out to him. He shakes it off and stops before The Gatekeeper.

JAYDEN

Hey, you! You were the bus driver and the janitor. Are you following us?

THE GATEKEEPER

(crossing his arms, in a pitched voice)

I've never seen ya in my life. And who's us? There's only the one of you.

JAYDEN

Me and Reggie! I know you remember us.

THE GATEKEEPER

Ah, the fellow in the blue suede shoes right? Kinda wacky?

JAYDEN

That's the one.

THE GATEKEEPER

Never known him.

The Gatekeeper begins to turn to walk away but Jayden grabs him by the arm.

JAYDEN

Please! Reggie just left with, uh, Fatima I think it was. I need to get back to him.

The Gatekeeper hums lowly, raising his eyebrows in a moment of contemplation as he looks entirely beyond Reggie.

THE GATEKEEPER

Do you have fare?

Jayden fishes through his pockets for a moment before adopting a face of utter disbelief.

JAYDEN

Ugh, Reggie had the rest of our cash!

THE GATEKEEPER

Well, what's that in your pocket then?

Jayden looks at him confused. The Gatekeeper raises his cane and points at Jayden's left pocket.

Jayden reaches into his pocket and feels the item. He pulls forth the flattened penny and holds it up in front of him.

The Gatekeeper swiftly swipes the penny and puts it in his shirt pocket. He steps past Jayden and opens the rear door.

Jayden lingers for a moment.

THE GATEKEEPER

In the car, sir, I do have a
schedule to keep.

Jayden looks back across the tracks to see that the Old Man has gone. Jayden steps around The Gatekeeper and seats himself in the back of the car.

EXT. LAKESIDE - SUNSET

Two figures appear as silhouettes against an indistinguishable body of water.

One, Ali, sits in Full Lotus beside the other, Marduk, who squats like a frog.

Ali's chant gives music to the atmosphere, but it is interrupted by sickly coughs of Marduk behind his mask.

Ali glances at Marduk sympathetically then returns to neutral position, eyes closed.

ALI

Just a bit longer Master.

Marduk looks up, recovering from the cough. His response to Ali comes across as unintelligible TV static.

ALI

(empathetically)

I understand. You're suffering. Who wouldn't be? You bear the weight of sin and decay in a weak mortal vessel. We praise you for this Marduk.

Marduk turns his head slightly to look at Ali, then slowly collapses forward, lying fetal on the ground.

Ali exits Full Lotus and pulls Marduk to him, cradling his frail body and looking down at the mask. Cracks begin to appear before Ali's eyes, and the red color of the mask begins to go greyscale.

ALI

Rest, Lord Marduk. The new vehicle
is on approach.

Ali looks up across the water again and watches as it begins to turn red.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADWAY - SUNSET

"Bottom of the Lake" by The Builders and The Butchers plays quietly as a moped makes its way towards a highway on-ramp.

The moped, carrying Fatima and Reggie, passes behind a truck and reappears as a motorcycle.

The motorcycle takes the on-ramp, speeding onto the highway.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROADWAY, ELSEWHERE - SUNSET

"Bottom of the Lake" continues. A cotton field sprawls on the side of a highway underneath the clear orange sky.

After a moment, The Gatekeeper's car comes speeding down the highway, rolling beside the field for a moment before disappearing again.

FATE TO:

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jayden sits in the back seat, looking out the window at the groups of pines and the fields which separate them.

Jayden appears to be in a daze, his eyes slowly blinking as he struggles to keep himself awake.

He sits up suddenly, his eyebrows raised as he comes to a realization.

JAYDEN
(over the music)
Hey, where are we?

Isabella looks back at Jayden over her shoulder but turns back to the road dismissively.

The Gatekeeper keeps his hands at the wheel, but he can be heard faintly snoring.

JAYDEN
(louder)
Hey! Driver!

The Gatekeeper comes to with a start. He turns around briefly to see Jayden, sunglasses still on, then turns back to the road.

The Gatekeeper reaches for the knob on the radio and shuts the music off.

THE GATEKEEPER

Oi, what's got'n into ya lad? I'm trying to focus.

JAYDEN

No, you're trying to sleep! Behind the wheel of a car! Are you insane?

The Gatekeeper straches his head and yawns into his hand.

THE GATEKEEPER

I'd sleep if I could, that's certain! Just resting my eyes is all.

JAYDEN

Might help if you took off those glasses. It's starting to get dark.

ISABELLA

(tersely)

The help him see.

THE GATEKEEPER

She's right, can't take em off. The path is clearer in my head than in my eyes.

JAYDEN

The path to where? Where are we?

The Gatekeeper takes his hands off the wheels, pushing a sleeve up to check a digital watch.

THE GATEKEEPER

Right now we are, uh..

The Gatekeeper struggles to read the time.

THE GATEKEEPER

Ah, sorry, these symbols mean nothing to me. I need to go back to analogue. Anyway, I'd wager we're about 30 out, give or take.

JAYDEN

(frustrated)

From where? I thought Reggie was headed south, to the beach. Dunno if you know this, but there ain't too many cotton fields down that way.

THE GATEKEEPER

(scratching his chin)

All the same, we're headed towards a shared destination.

Isabella begins to recline her seat until Jayden has little room to move. She tosses her feet up on the dash and crosses her arms.

JAYDEN
Hey, excuse me!

ISABELLA
(to The Gatekeeper)
Shut him up will ya?

THE GATEKEEPER
Roger that.

Jayden kicks Isabella's seat.

JAYDEN
Go on then, shut me up! Who do you think you are?

The Gatekeeper reaches for the radio, turning the music back on. He taps his hand on the steering wheel along to the beat.

Jayden watches his hand, noticing a ring with the image of a key on it. Captured by the rhythm, he falls mesmerized into a trance.

Jayden's vision begins to blur and he grows tired almost instantly. His head falls back and he blinks repeatedly, trying to keep awake.

The Gatekeeper turns around for a moment, but the blur obscures his face.

THE GATEKEEPER
Well, I'm the Gatekeeper.

The Gatekeeper smiles wide as Jayden's eyes shut completely.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A black screen is accompanied by a gentle hum - someone vocalizing an "AUM".

The word is repeated two more times, loud and with a deep vibration.

YOUNG REGGIE
(interrupting)
Hollup bro, seems kinda silly to me.

The room is revealed as Young Jayden opens his eyes. Young Reggie sits across from him, legs crossed.

In front of Reggie are a pair of bongos. Above him are a string of Bhuddist prayer flags taped to the wall.

The room is dark except for a set of candles between the two boys.

We watch from Young Jayden's perspective as he picks his right leg up and places it on the ground, leaving Full Lotus position.

YOUNG JAYDEN

Why do you say that?

YOUNG REGGIE

(shrugging)

You know I'm down with the whole meditation stuff and shit, but you and I both know the chanting is weird.

YOUNG JAYDEN

Yeah, I guess it seems weird if you've never done it before. What about church? It's all just songs and rituals.

Young Reggie picks up his phone, scrolling as he absentmindedly carries the conversation.

YOUNG REGGIE

Man that's different. They're worshipping God. They're singing to him. What are you worshipping?

Young Jayden stands up and walks to the window, looking at the rows of houses across the street.

YOUNG JAYDEN

They're singing to align their spirits with God. So am I. But my God is nature. I'm worshipping life.

Young Jayden turns back around to face the room, leaning against the window. Young Reggie glances up for his phone, then puts it down and presses his hands to the ground, leaning backwards and facing Young Jayden.

YOUNG REGGIE

I got it. So you're an athiest.

YOUNG JAYDEN

Nah, athiests are pretentious and cynical. I mean, I guess technically I am but I don't reject the idea of a metaphysical reality.

YOUNG REGGIE
 (shaking his head)
 C'mon bro, you're just making
 things up now. Where'd you learn
 all those ten dollar words?

YOUNG JAYDEN
 Books. You should try em sometime.
 But if you're lazy, look up Alan
 Watts sometime. They've got his
 lectures online.

YOUNG REGGIE
 Ugh! Lectures!

YOUNG JAYDEN
 They're more like podcasts to be
 honest.

Young Reggie picks his phone back up and fiddles with it.
 Young Jayden folds his arms and waits for him to finish.

YOUNG REGGIE
 Hey can we turn that light on now?

YOUNG JAYDEN
 Blow those candles out.

Young Reggie ignores him, typing away as Young Jayden moves
 towards the door, flicking the lightswitch on.

Young Reggie holds his phone out to take a selfie while
 Young Jayden takes a seat on the bed, watching in disbelief.

YOUNG JAYDEN
 What are you doing?

YOUNG REGGIE
 Updating my story.

YOUNG JAYDEN
 Why do you do that? Life is out
 here! Not in that stupid little
 glowing rectangle.

YOUNG REGGIE
 Relax, I'm not like all those
 robots out there. I'm just
 expressing myself so people know
 what I'm about.
 (beat)
 You know all the people you see
 everyday but don't have a chance to
 talk to? This is how you can show
 'em who you are!

YOUNG JAYDEN

Expressing yourself? What's unique about taking a selfie? Do something different. And all those people you don't have a chance to talk to? Maybe you would if you weren't glued to the screen. God. I sound like an old man. I wouldn't even care if you weren't ignoring me.

YOUNG REGGIE

I'm not ignoring you, I'm just tired! It's about time for me to head home anyway.

Young Reggie stands up.

YOUNG REGGIE

It's all good bro. I'll catch you tomorrow.

Young Reggie offers a cool-guy-handshake, and after a beat Young Jayden accepts it.

YOUNG JAYDEN

See ya then.

Young Reggie heads for the door.

YOUNG JAYDEN

Hey, hit that light on your way out!

Young Reggie opens the door, flips the light off, and shuts the door behind him.

Young Jayden notices the candles still burning in the middle of the room. He sighs, walks over to them, and kneels to blow them out.

He blows the first out, but stares at the second for a moment. He then picks it up and blows it out as well, and the room goes black.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Jayden wakes up, still in the backseat. Someone has slipped a pair of sunglasses on him, but he looks around as if he doesn't notice.

Nobody else is in the car, but everything within the cab appears black and white. Jayden looks out the window to see, in contrast, the world tinted in a red light.

Noticing the sunglasses, Jayden attempts to take them off but recoils and slips them back on as he realizes how bright the light is outside.

Jayden groans and opens the car door, sliding out and standing. Jayden looks around in awe as he begins to shut the car door.

The door closes with a slam.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

From above, we see Reggie and Fatima laying in the sand, eyes open. Reggie's hands are folded behind his head while Fatima's lie across her stomach.

The wind whistles through the air and water laps against the shore.

A ways off, Bagboy stands looking across the water at the cloudy sky. The Biloxi bridge marks his background.

Reggie sighs. Fatima glances over at him then returns her attention to the sky.

REGGIE

Some party, eh?

FATIMA

I'm sorry.

They return to the quiet for a moment.

REGGIE

Why'd you lie?

FATIMA

If I told you before, you might have done things differently. But some problems only have one solution. Hell, some have none at all.

Reggie sits up and begins running his finger through the sand, drawing a star.

REGGIE

So Jayden's the chosen one?

Fatima stands up and runs her hands through her hair, exhausted.

FATIMA

It's not a good thing. They couldn't use you. Your faith is a power source, like a battery.

REGGIE

I dunno. Seems like Jay's lucky. Maybe we should let 'em go through with it.

FATIMA

It's not that simple. You know what'll happen to him. And besides, it's bigger than that. What about him?

Fatima motions to Bagboy who stands motionless.

Reggie wipes the star away with his hand and pulls his knees to his chest, wrapping his arms around them.

REGGIE

Yeah, what about him? Seems like he'll be better off.

The scene falls silent once more. Fatima looks down at Reggie sadly then sits next to him again.

Fatima reaches out and takes Reggie's hand, holding it in her own.

REGGIE

I want to swim.

FATIMA

Haven't you heard? The water's full of flesh eating bacteria.

REGGIE

(beat)

Just like the world at large.

Fatima leans over and kisses Reggie on the cheek. He stares forward and a sudden bolt of lightning flashes over the ocean.

Reggie's eyes flash brightly for a second with the reflected light of the bolt.

Reggie closes his eyes as the world dims again, and the scene fades to blackness.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

A black screen. The sound of shuffling and chattering, followed by the noise of a bus taking off and the rattle of metal.

Deep breaths drown out the racket for a brief moment, until...

VOICE #1

Hey, isn't that Jayden?

VOICE #2

Nah, that's his stunt double!

VOICE #3

Get your own gimmick Reg!

A heavy sigh. As Young Reggie's eyes open, the world is revealed.

Young Reggie sits at the back of a bus. He looks down the aisle but keeps his eyes low.

Young Reggie looks down as he unfolds his legs, then he turns his head and looks out the window, laying against the corner where his seat meets the side of the bus.

As the bus rolls on, he looks out to the run down houses which line the street.

After a few seconds, the bus comes to a stop once more. Young reggie grabs his bookbag from the floor and shoulders it, keeping his eyes up as he makes his way to the front.

Young Reggie steps off the bus and begins making his way up the driveway where two cars are parked.

Young Reggie walks into the house and drops his bookbag by the door. He starts to walk away.

FATHER
(offscreen)
No sir, you take that bag on down
to your room.

Young Reggie stops for a moment, looking down the stairs then turns around, picking up his bookbag without a word or a glance.

Young Reggie turns to walk away again.

FATHER
(offscreen)
What you doin' home from school so
early?

REGGIE
(leaning on the wall of
the stairs, looking up)
Lets out early on Wednesday.

FATHER
(off, angrily)
I ain't your friend boy, you gon'
speak to me in full sentences.

Young Reggie stomps back up the stairs, calling louder through the house.

REGGIE
School let out early. What are you
doing home from work so early?

FATHER

(angrily)

Boy, you better go on to your room
'fore I beat your ass.

(beat)

And get ready for church!

Young Reggie huffs and stomps downstairs to his bedroom, slamming the door behind him and tossing his backpack on the ground carelessly.

Young Reggie pulls some earbuds from his pocket, untangles them, puts them in his ears, then plugs them into his phone.

He fiddles with his phone for a minute before a lecture by Alan Watts begins to play.

Young Reggie lays down on the bed and looks up at the ceiling. The light from the window hits one side of his face, making half the scene dimmer than the other.

Young Reggie picks up his phone once more and opens his camera. He takes a selfie, capturing the contrast of the light and the shadow on his face.

He posts the picture to social media with the caption, "Not everything is what it seems."

He sets the phone down once more, lays fully down, and closes his eyes.

Over the Alan Watts lecture, the sound of Young Reggie's door opening then slamming again.

The sound of Young Reggie sighing.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Reggie opens his eyes to an increasingly chaotic atmosphere. Wind is raging, thunder is rumbling.

Still standing at the waterside, Bagboy has begun to scream a sustained scream.

Reggie looks down at his hand to see Fatima has been squeezing it. He looks up at Fatima, and Fatima returns to glance.

Fatima looks worried. She sighs. After a moment, Reggie looks upward to the sky.

A crash of thunder shakes the sky, louder than any before it.

Fatima releases Reggie's hand. He looks back to her but she stares forward.

FATIMA

It's time.

Reggie looks away. Fatima crosses her legs and closes her eyes. Reggie does the same.

CUT TO:

EXT. RODNEY, MS - NIGHT

The night is quiet. The world is covered by a blood red tint.

Jayden surveys his surroundings. He stands on a dirt road with a hill to his back and a pair of buildings before him.

The buildings are a good few yards away, surrounded by water at the base and completely derelict otherwise.

Jayden's muscles begin spasming. He hugs himself across the chest but cannot stop the tremor.

With a visage of pure anxiety, Jayden begins to walk slowly down the road, checking over his shoulder.

Jayden stumbles, distracted by the gentle wistling of the wind and the occasional chirps of nearby insects.

He stops for a second and collects himself, taking deep breaths. He looks as if he has just thought of something.

Jayden pats his pants down in search of his phone, but sighs with defeat when he fails to find it.

He checks his bag and takes out his camcorder instead. Jayden sets the camera to record and begins moving slowly once more down the road.

A noise begins to emerge as he proceeds, a reverberating that gradually grows louder. Jayden recognizes the sound as binaural beats.

Jayden tries to cover his ears but this only muffles the sound. He lowers his hands, realizing the futility, and keeps the camcorder at shoulder height.

The small town around Jayden is desolate. No sign of life beyond that of the wild. Even for a transient, the buildings look like hazards more so than havens.

Jayden rounds a turn and sees a church at the road's end. A table is set up in front of the church.

Jayden steps closer towards the church, moving with even more caution and paranoia as the binaural sounds grow louder.

He sees that the table, decorated by a blue table cloth, is covered in food, banquet style. Much of it appears eaten.

Paper plates covered in crumbs are scattered about the table along with red solo cups.

Jayden begins to hear familiar voices as whispers.

THE GATEKEEPER
You're holding up the line.

FATIMA
Might be chlorine.

ISABELLA
... Grown locally.

ALI
... All I had to do...

OLD MAN
...Forget the penny.

THE GATEKEEPER
I'm the Gatekeeper!

MS. MATTHEWS
Reggie, what are you doing?

ALI
...Chant the holy name of Marduk...

RILEY
...Gonna head on.

YOUNG REGGIE
Catch you tomorrow.

THE GATEKEEPER
Once you're on, you're on.

ALI
... Illusions of reality would disappear.

REGGIE
I want to swim.

The binaural beats are overtaken by the chants once uttered by Ali.

Jayden grips his head, holding his eyes tight. He begins to see visions flashing through his head.

First he sees the graffiti house. Then the Elvis circle. Then the I-55 sign. Then a close-up of Bagboy.

Jayden gasps and tries to open his eyes, but the world has grown even brighter in this moment, so much so that even the peripherals of the sunglasses are too much.

Jayden's eyes clench tight again. Blackness for a moment, followed by a sustained image of Reggie sitting on the beach.

In this image, Reggie is breathing rhythmically and his face is notably zen.

While Jayden's eyes are tight, a hand sets down on his shoulder. For a moment he fails to notice.

Once he becomes aware, Jayden's eyes open quickly and he turns his head to see the hand on his shoulder.

The world has now dimmed, and the color has transitioned from red to grey. Jayden now removes his sunglasses and can see without issue.

Jayden now does not look panicked. His eyes are wide and his face appears uncharacteristically resolute.

Jayden takes a deep breath and turns around to face Isabella.

Isabella smiles at him. She holds Jayden's camcorder out for him.

ISABELLA
(kindly)
You dropped this.

Jayden takes it, maintaining a serious look. He examines it, noting that it is still recording. He then holds it back out to Isabella.

JAYDEN
Hold onto it for me, will ya?

Isabella nods, taking the camera.

ISABELLA
Hungry?

One corner of Jayden's mouth twists into a half smile/half smirk.

JAYDEN
Sure. Let's sit.

Jayden simply lowers himself to the dirt, crossing his legs as he sits.

Isabella walks to the table and scoops some stew into a bowl. She hands it down to Jayden before taking a seat on the ground across from him.

Jayden begins to eat and Isabella lips begin to speak, though no sound can be heard, as they sit with the church looming in the background.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASTRAL PLANE - TIMELESS

A soft piano music plays.

Reggie and Fatima sit across from each other, mirroring the image of Jayden and Isabella. They are now in a new landscape, a completely immaterial world.

The background is purple and nebulous with lights dotted all around the sky, resembling stars.

Beneath the pair, there is no floor. The "sky" reaches all around them, though they are sitting flat on an invisible surface.

Reggie and Fatima open their eyes and glance at each other. Fatima stands first, then Reggie follows suit.

REGGIE

And this is...?

FATIMA

You ever see the Matrix? Think of this as like.. The source code of reality.

REGGIE

Right.. So is it safe to assume I'm dead?

Fatima takes Reggie's hand and kisses his cheek.

FATIMA

Don't be silly.

(beat)

I have to go find (unintelligable).

As Fatima speaks the name, only chirps, clicks, and static can be heard.

FATIMA

(continued, smiling)

Let's get lost.

Fatima turns to walk away and grows increasingly translucent as she grows more distant.

REGGIE

Wait, where do I go?

FATIMA

(shrugging)

Follow your link to Jayden.

Fatima vanishes, leaving Reggie alone. He looks around for a moment, sighs, and begins to walk straight ahead.

Reggie wanders on, not making much progress, until he sees something out of the corner of his eye.

Standing off to the side is a kid in a mask of the mythological kitsune. The kid is a bit shorter than Reggie.

REGGIE
Whassup little man?

The kid doesn't respond, but simply stares at Reggie.

REGGIE
(cont.)
I'm Reg. Who are you?

Reggie starts to step towards the figure, but the kid turns and begins to jog away.

Reggie gives chase but struggles to keep up. Just as the kid begins to fade out of sight, he whirls around and faces Reggie.

Reggie stops in his tracks. A bright light pervades the scene.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Calm piano music continues.

Reggie suddenly finds himself in a playground, now surrounded by playground equipment - a jungle gym, slides, swings, a roundabout, some benches.

Nobody appears to be at this place, but as Reggie turns about he hears the sound of a swing moving.

He turns back to the swingset to see the kid with the kitsune mask swinging alone, watching him.

Reggie begins to approach.

REGGIE
(walking)
You seem a bit old for this.

The figure continues swinging. Reggie stops a few feet away.

REGGIE
(cont.)
What are we doing here?

The kid drags his feet against the ground, bringing his motion to a halt.

FIGURE
Where else would we go? The whole world is a playground.

REGGIE

That right? Where's everyone else then?

FIGURE

There's only us. Small world eh?

REGGIE

You seem familiar.

FIGURE

I should hope so. You've been following me around for quite some time.

REGGIE

It's only been a few minutes.

The figure chuckles beneath the mask. His hand reaches upward to his mask. After a beat, he takes it off, revealing his face.

REGGIE

Jayden!

Young Jayden smiles, beginning to disappear in front of Reggie. Jayden holds the mask out, and Reggie steps forward to take it.

YOUNG JAYDEN

You're right where you need to be.

Young Jayden fully disappears. Reggie looks down at the mask for a moment. A bright light shines once more, so Reggie shields his eyes.

EXT. ASTRAL PLANE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie is once again the nebulous dimension. The piano music has grown very soft, but around this world the starlike-lights begin to dim and go out altogether.

As the realm grows darker, the piano music picks up again, but now the sound is discordant.

Reggie glances at the mask once more before raising it to his face and strapping it to his head.

He looks up now and through the mask he sees a bright pillar of red light in the distance.

Reggie steps off with newfound resolve.

CUT TO:

EXT. RODNEY, LAKESIDE - NIGHT

The noise of cicadas has begun to dominate the scene.

Jayden lays on his back, eyes wide open. Slight motion in the background indicates that he is being moved to someplace.

A ground view shows two pairs of feet moving through a muddy terrain. One pair of feet - adorned by a bright pair of worn out keds - moves forward. The other, leather shoes, moves backwards.

As more of the scene is revealed, we see that Jayden is being carried on a makeshift stretcher by Isabella and The Gatekeeper.

The pair stumbles about, nearly throwing Jayden off the stretcher a few times. Jayden seems unnaturally still, while his eyes are the only things moving at all, beading around as he tries to observe his surroundings.

Soon, the group comes to a stop. Isabella and The Gatekeeper lower the stretcher to the ground and stand to either side of Jayden, as if at attention.

A new figure can be heard stepping closer. While Ali steps closer and looms over Jayden, The Gatekeeper can be seen trying to wipe mud off onto a dry bit of ground. Isabella gives him a pointed glare.

ALI
(to Isabella)
He's been fed?

ISABELLA
Stuffed with sacrament!

ALI
(to The Gatekeeper)
And the token?

THE GATEKEEPER
(raising his eyebrows)
Hm?
(beat)
Oh, right! The token!

THE GATEKEEPER begins rifling through his pockets.

THE GATEKEEPER
(stalling)
Theeeee tokeeeen. To pass through
the gate. The gate which I keep.
Yesss, that token.

Ali glances at Isabella and the two share a look of disappointment. Isabella shrugs.

At this point The Gatekeeper has taken off a shoe and is balancing on one foot. He turns the shoe upright and the flattened penny falls out onto his hand.

THE GATEKEEPER

Got it! Told ya I had it!

The Gatekeeper slips his shoe back on, kneels down, and slips the penny into Jayden's shirt pocket. He pats the pocket.

THE GATEKEEPER

A penny saved, a penny earned!

The Gatekeeper stands back up, taking the opportunity to stretch.

Ali produces from a pocket sewn into his robes a vial with a strange purple liquid. He kneels down and holds it under Jayden's nose.

Jayden sits up, taking a deep breath, able to move again.

ALI

Welcome back. Rise.

Jayden takes to his feet with a cold, calm demeanor.

ALI

(cont.)

Are you ready to meet the glorious Marduk?

Jayden simply nods.

ALI

(cont., smiling)

Perfect. Follow me.

Ali turns about and begins walking towards a lake. He begins to chant his token chant.

Jayden takes off after him. The Gatekeeper and Isabella follow at his flanks.

A glowing halo appears to surround Ali, but it is clear that the glow is coming from something in front of him, something obscured by his own figure.

The procession nears the lakeside and Ali stops, causing a cascade of halts. Ali steps aside, revealing Marduk sitting atop a wide stone.

Ali sits at Marduk's left side. Jayden steps forward before Marduk. Ali nods at Jayden.

JAYDEN

Marduk, I'm sorry for my insolence.

(MORE)

JAYDEN (CONT.)

I have doubted for so long, but only recently has my mind been opened. Until I received your visions, your holy nature was stuck in my blind spot. I did not know what I did not know. But now I understand your magnificence, and I want to join your followers in worshipping you. Please, initiate me.

Marduk remains silent for a few seconds, then raises a hand, his palm facing outward. Marduk speaks, but his words are unintelligible - otherworldly. Static, chirps, clicks.

ALI

(translating)

Do you wish to see Reggie?

JAYDEN

(shaking his head)

That would only be a distraction. He would interfere. He would envy me.

Marduk speaks again.

ALI

On your knees, sit. Dragon pose.

Jayden follows this instruction. Isabella assumes Lotus, but The Gatekeeper just squats, visibly disgusted by the mud.

Marduk extends his hand and puts his middle finger to his thumb. He snaps.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASTRAL PLANE - TIMELESS

Discordant piano music resumes.

Reggie, masked, jogs toward the red pillar of light. As he nears, he sees an arch standing near the pillar, solitary in the astral void.

The closer Reggie gets to the gate, the faster the music gets. The world begins to pulse and distort.

As Reggie passes through the arch, he finds himself in a sort of circular "room". The purple nebulous background has become red. The music stops abruptly.

Decorating the invisible floor of this room is a circumscribed unicursal hexagram, glowing light blue.

Jayden walks to the center of the room and looks around. But the room is still and silent besides him.

Moments pass. Then, a bright flash.

Now, Marduk and company have arrived, still in the arrangement they had been in beside the lake. Except Jayden.

Jayden, though still positioned ahead of Marduk, is standing once more and appears to be asleep. His body is covered in fluorescent chains.

Reggie happens to be standing between Marduk and Jayden. Ali, taken aback, stomps towards Reggie.

ALI

You! What are you doing here?

REGGIE

Not.. Too.. Sure. Must have taken a right turn somewhere.

Ali storms passed Jayden and approaches The Gatekeeper, grabbing him by his shirt.

ALI

How?! How did you get here?

THE GATEKEEPER

(adjusting his
sunglasses)

How'm I s'posed ta know?

ALI

It's your JOB! You're the Gatekeeper!

THE GATEKEEPER

Oh, now I'm the Gatekeeper! Last I checked I was your glorified errand boy. Driver, laundryman, even janitor! The humiliation. I am an eternal spirit, you are a mortal usurper!

The Gatekeeper kicks Ali in the shin, forcing Ali to release his grip.

The Gatekeeper leans on his mop-staff, looing down at Ali, when suddenly two fists clutched together, as if to hit a volleyball, come crashing down on top of The Gatekeeper's head, crinkling his tinfoil crown and incapacitating him.

Ali looks up to see Isabella standing over The Gatekeeper. Ali nods his head sideways towards Reggie, who has been watching dumbfounded.

Isabella, sighing, steps toward Reggie who begins backing away with his hands raised.

REGGIE

Hey, hey, no fair. I can't fight a
gi-

Isabella has caught up and is restling Reggie's arms behind his back, holding them their in such a way that Reggie is wincing.

REGGIE

Oh, damn, yeah I definitely can't
fight this girl.
(beat)
Ow, yield, yield! You win.

ISABELLA

Sorry about this. Could you be
quiet? We won't be long.

Ali has risen to his feet now and rubs his face with his hand in frustration. He folds his hands in front of his chest, eyes closed, and takes a few deep breaths.

ALI

Alright then.

Ali retakes his place to the left of Marduk. Marduk raises a hand and mutters something to Ali.

Ali nods. Cue Ali's chant, deeper and more sinister than ever before.

Jayden begins to wake. His eyes are fixed on Marduk as he enters a groggy wakefulness.

REGGIE

Jayden! Jayden!

Jayden completely ignores this.

REGGIE

(cont.)
Bro, I'm here to save you. Kinda cool right? I'm like a superhero. Or I guess more like a vigilante, what with the mask and all. Oh yeah, it's Reggie by the way!

JAYDEN

(unmoving)
You shouldn't have come.

REGGIE

I've had that thought myself, but I kinda had to. I mean, look at you!

JAYDEN

Green looks bad on you Reggie. Always has. How long have you wished you were me?

REGGIE

(slightly angry)

Maybe every once in a while I have,
but now ain't one of those times
dude. They're about to wipe your
mind.

JAYDEN

No, I'm about to become the newest
initiate of Marduk's order, a glory
only reserved for the most
faithful.

REGGIE

Yeah, I thought so too. Till Fatima
told me that Marduk's a fraud and
he just wants to use your boddy as
a vessel. He's getting too weak in
that one.

JAYDEN

You won't take this away from me.
You've led me here, and that is
commendable, but that's the only
use you've ever been.

Reggie falls silent, glaring at Jayden.

Marduk stretches his arms wide and emits a deep hum,
resonating with Ali's chants.

Black wisps float out of the eyeholes of Marduk's mask. They
intertwine to form a cloud-like rope floating across the
room towards Jayden.

Reggie struggles against Fatima but to no avail. He stops,
an idea crossing his mind.

Reggie begins to chant along with Ali, and as the wisps are
nearly touching Jayden, they begin to change course. They
now float towards Reggie.

As the wisps are inches away from the eyeholes of Reggie's
mask, a voice calls out.

FATIMA

(off)

Stop!

Ali and Isabella's heads turns, but everyone else remains
locked in place. Fatima and Bagboy are standing in front of
the archway.

Fatima is too late. The black wisps have crawled through
Jayden's mask and now the blue accents on the mask are
turning black.

Marduk's body collapses. Ali smirks.

ALI

Well, we got the wrong vessel. But close enough, all things considered.

Fatima shrieks, rushing towards Ali. She tackles him to the ground and attacks him relentlessly.

While everyone else is preoccupied, Bagboy slowly walks to the center of the room where Jayden is chained up and only semi-conscious.

Bagboy stands in front of Jayden and reaches out, grabbing a section of the chains. He squeezes and the chains shatter, falling to the ground.

Jayden falters, falling on a knee and looking around as if he has woken up from a daze.

JAYDEN

(looking up)

Who are you?

ISABELLA

(off)

He's just a glorified shopping bag.

Isabella has released Reggie, who stands motionless, arms outstretched with a fully converted mask. Isabella now marches towards Bagboy.

Bagboy looks down to the ground, as if saddened. He reaches an arm out toward Isabella and she is suddenly thrown back by a blast of psionic energy.

Bagboy looks down at Jayden then looks away.

BAGBOY

(sadly)

I only ever wanted a name.

Bagboy shuffles towards Reggie. Ali and Fatima stop wrestling and watch from their intertangled position on the ground.

Bagboy stands face to face with Reggie. The world begins to rumble and static rings out harshly from behind Reggie's mask.

Bagboy reaches up to Reggie's face, grasping the mask and pulling it off him. Reggie's face looks withered and he is unconscious, despite standing.

Bagboy looks at the kitsune mask then squeezes it tightly in his hand, shattering it.

Reggie falls to the ground. Jayden and Fatima rush over to him and help him to his feet. He is slightly conscious, but dazed.

ALI
 (shoving Fatima aside)
 You! What have you done! Our holy
 Marduk!

Ali falls to his knees before the shards of the mask and begins gathering them up.

ALI
 Isabella, help!

ISABELLA
 (shaking her head)
 Come on Ali, it's done.

Isabella turns and exits through the archway at the far end of the room, disappearing as she does so.

Bagboy points a finger at Ali who is still frantic on the ground. The tip of his finger twinkles and Ali disappears.

JAYDEN
 What the- Who is this guy?

FATIMA
 (shrugging)
 No one knows. He's been around
 longest.

Bagboy has made his way over to The Gatekeeper who is still unconscious on the ground, snoring. Bagboy disappears him as well.

Fatima, Jayden, and Reggie watch as Bagboy turns around to face them - notably Fatima. He begins stepping towards her.

Fatima kisses Reggie's cheek then steps forward, presenting herself before Bagboy.

Bagboy raises his arm slowly, but Reggie finally snaps out of his daze and rushes forward, stepping between them.

REGGIE
 Wait! No!

Bagboy, arm still extended - pointed now at Reggie's head - stares at Reggie, head tilted. He looks to Fatima standing directly behind him and Jayden standing farther off.

Bagboy reaches forward and pokes Reggie on the forehead. He turns toward the archway and leaves without a word.

An ariel view shows the remaining trio standing around, glancing back and forth at each other. A bright flash takes over the screen.

Images of each of the places that Jayden and Reggie have been flick across the screen in a roulette style, stopping on the image of the graffiti building.

FADE TO:

EXT. GRAFFITI BUILDING

Jason and Riley are sitting on the bench outside the building once more, glossy-eyed.

An ambient warp noise pierces their ears. They look at each other frantically.

RILEY
You heard that?

JASON
We about to bag us an alien!

RILEY
Man let's get out of here. This shit ain't funny.

JASON
Come on wuss, we're checking it out!

Jason fishes a pocket knife from his pants and flicks it open. He proceeds in the direction of the noise. Riley looks around nervously but then follows behind.

The two round a bend in the track and spot two figures laying on the ground on the path between two towering trees.

RILEY
Oh shit!

Riley runs past Jason upon recognizing the figures. Jason follows suit. Riley kneels beside the figures - Reggie and Jayden. He begins shaking Jayden.

RILEY
Heya, buddy! Wake y'ass up!

Jason has begun slapping Reggie in the face.

Reggie and Jayden both wake up slowly, then their eyes widen and they scream. Jason and Riley step back.

Reggie and Jayden look around frantically and get their bearings. They stop screaming and rise to their feet, brushing themselves off.

JAYDEN
Riley? And Jason right?

JASON
Sure are. You boys alright?

REGGIE
I need to sit down.

Riley gestures down the path with his head.

RILEY

Follow us.

Riley and Jason begin leading the way back to the graffiti building. Reggie and Jayden lag slightly behind.

REGGIE

(whispering)

What happened?

JAYDEN

Not a clue. Why'd we wake up here?

REGGIE

Like I'd know.

They walk along in silence for a moment before Reggie stops, a sudden realization coming over him.

REGGIE

Shoot. Where's Fatima?

JAYDEN

Don't worry, we'll find her somehow.

Riley and Jason round a corner.

JASON

(off)

Hey, who are you?

Reggie and Jayden look at each other, both with the same idea. They run around the bend and join Jason and Jayden.

Sitting on the bench at the graffiti building is a girl who looks just like Fatima. Reggie runs up to her. Everyone else is making their way to the bench.

REGGIE

Fatima!

GIRL

Er, Max actually. Nice to meet you.

Reggie cocks his head, but MAX looks as if she actually doesn't recognize him. Reggie sighs and sits beside her.

RILEY

Well, nice to meet you Max. I'm Riley.

JASON

Jason.

JAYDEN
 (looking at her
 strangely)
 Uhh, Jayden.

Reggie is looking at the ground.

MAX
 (Reggie)
 Well, what about you?

REGGIE
 Oh, uh. I'm Reggie.

Max smiles at Reggie as if familiar with him.

RILEY
 So, uh. Anyway, what happened to
 you guys? Whatcha doin' out here
 again?

JAYDEN
 It's kinda hard to explain. Oh! I
 can actually show y-
 (beat)
 Nope. Nope, I lost my bag. And my
 camera. Shit.

JASON
 All good brother, we've got time
 for a story.

Reggie and Jayden glance at each other. Reggie gives Jayden
 a nod.

JAYDEN
 Well, it all started with Elvis,
 for some reason...

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The Gatekeeper is sitting on the beach holding up a
 camcorder. We see from the view of the camera.

The Gatekeeper smiles widely.

THE GATEKEEPER
 (shrilly)
 Do you have your ticket, sir?
 (frowning)
 Wait is this thing on?

The Gatekeeper fiddles with the camera until he finds the
 power button, clicking it off.

FADE OUT