

HUMAN ANIMALS

an original screenplay by
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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Two men mug a third in the street. Cars avoid the fight. Pedestrians hurry past it. The two finally flee as the third crawls wounded to the gutter.

CATO (20s, a handsome Filipino) watches from the doorway of a boarded-up storefront. Backpack on his back. A camp stool and tray table under his arm.

He flees down the street. Passes a shuttered bank. A burned political office. STUDENTS begging for food.

STUDENT

I got Fortnite V-bucks for a loaf of bread. A Subway sandwich?

Cato cuts across a park with untrimmed bushes and overflowing garbage cans. A xenophobic poster screams from a tree trunk.

He rejoins the sidewalk beside a Starbucks as a crowd of rich white kids exit. They notice Cato.

RICH WHITE KID

Check out the gook who thinks he deserves an education.

Cato escapes down an alley and loses himself amid the cardboard shacks of the homeless.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CHECKPOINT - DAY

Cato waits in line. A white police officer assesses him. Skeptical. Cato sticks his ID into the card reader. It dings gleefully but the cop grabs him. Shoves him against a wall. Cato submits to the man's groping search.

INT. STUDENT UNION - DAY

Cato enters the lobby. Every chair occupied. Every student on a phone or computer. An eerie silence blankets the room.

A white FRIEND greets Cato quietly, as if at a library.

FRIEND

You sure about that, that study thing?

CATO

Free money if you qualify.

Cato jogs up a set of stairs. His friend moves to a large bulletin board full of notices – "FORTNITE BATTLE ROYALE TOURNAMENT: KILL OR BE KILLED!" "FACTORY JOBS, 12-HOUR SHIFTS, \$8.00/HOUR." – among others.

He focuses on one: "EXPERIMENT SUBJECTS WANTED. PHOBIAS REQUIRED. FREE MEAL GUARANTEED." He grabs the last phone number tab from the flyer and rips it off.

INT. MEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

A garter snake stares from an aquarium. Flicks its tongue. Slithers over an iPhone on the bottom of the tank.

A gentle COMPUTER VOICE vocalizes a social media feed as a grungy FRAT BOY (19) in a team jersey fidgets in a chair.

COMPUTER VOICE

Dude, where are you? #Loser.

He stares at the iPhone – and the snake. Sweating.

KATHLEEN GUERRERO (30s), a no-nonsense Latina with an incisive gaze, studies Frat Boy's reactions. Scribbles notes on a clipboard. Raven hair knotted. Crisp lab coat.

Cato sits on the camp stool and monitors the feed on a laptop.

COMPUTER VOICE

We scored a pizza for cleaning those grease traps. MeatEaters, your favorite. The game is amaze-balls.

KATHLEEN

Thirteen minutes without social media. Our longest yet.

CATO

This won't end well.

COMPUTER VOICE

Damn, there's six points. #Theysuck.

FRAT BOY

Who scored? Who's winning? Shit!

He reaches into the aquarium. The snake moves. He retreats.

KATHLEEN

I upped the ante.

CATO

You what?

COMPUTER VOICE

Dude, you're girlfriend's here. Who's she with? #negro #WTF

FRAT BOY

No. No, no, no...

COMPUTER VOICE

They're going upstairs, bro. #notcool

The Frat Boy freaks. Shoves the aquarium off the table – it shatters against the tile floor.

KATHLEEN

CATO! THE SNAKE!

Frat Boy snatches up his iPhone. Cuts himself. Blood runs down his arm as he frantically accesses Facebook.

KATHLEEN

It's okay! She's not there.

FRAT BOY

NO! I, I gotta talk to...

KATHLEEN

-- It was faked to get a reaction. Just breath. Slowly. In and out.

She presses a towel to his cut. Hands him a wad of money.

KATHLEEN

And thank you. Better spend this quickly.

Someone urgently pounds on the bathroom door. A key clicks against a lock.

MAN (O.S.)

Miss Guerrero! I'm coming in!

A TWEED-SUITED MAN enters and gets an eyeful: Cato with the snake; the student with the wad of money; Kathleen with a bloody towel.

KATHLEEN

Well -- you won't give me a lab.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CHECKPOINT - DAY

Tweed-suited Man waits with Kathleen and Cato at the checkpoint. Cato carries the camp stool and tray table.

KATHLEEN

My study shows social media addiction is real. It even eclipses phobia.

MAN

You want that NSF grant. I get it.

KATHLEEN

I want to peel our young away from their devices and prepare them for the coming economic chaos.

MAN

It's valuable research. Your methods, however, border on torture.

The police officer checks their ID at the gate, his smile condescending and smug – especially for Cato.

MAN

Do it off campus, or your room and board vouchers are history.

EXT. PARKING LOT - UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Kathleen and Cato push past student solicitations to a lot of run-down cars.

KATHLEEN

My father never had to deal with this crap.

CATO

Your father studied toads -- is that your car?

KATHLEEN

HEY! Get outta there!

A grimy STUDENT ransacks a tired sedan as Kathleen runs up.

KATHLEEN

What are you doing?

The student draws a gun. Points it in Kathleen's face. She quickly disarms him and drops him to the ground.

STUDENT

Easy! I was lookin' for food.

She checks for bullets and finds the gun empty. Helps the student to his feet. Shoves his gun back into his holster.

Pulls an apple from her coat and hands it to him. The student grabs it and scampers away.

CATO

Guns. Homelessness. A xenophobic police state. We are spiraling in.

Kathleen slams the car door shut. Kicks it.

CATO

Easy now. So your funding is shaky and your car is shit and some ass nearly shot you. City council will love your proposal.

KATHLEEN

It's just the constant fight of living, y'know? Maybe I just need something to eat.

CATO

You could always have Filipino...

KATHLEEN

I think I have leftovers.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Pools from the few working street lights barely cut the inky darkness. Weeds thrust from cracked sidewalks.

BABYLON FISK - (mid 50s), dapper in suit and vest - limps along the sidewalk on an ornate cane. Solidly built. Proud. Piercing eyes that miss nothing.

Two identical twins, NIALL and CONNELL (30s), shadow him. Strapping men with fiery red hair. Alert. Feral.

Babylon approaches MR. WEBER (40s, black) and joins him on a peeling park bench.

MR. WEBER
You took your sweet time.

BABYLON
Feds got eyes everywhere, y'know?

Babylon has a hick twang that belies his elegant appearance.

Niall stands in shadow behind the bench. Suddenly, the red light dot of a laser sight appears on Niall's back.

MR. WEBER
You got Bitcoin, right? None of that worthless paper shit?

The light dot drifts to Babylon's back. Niall sees it, but does nothing.

BABYLON
You think summer's comin' early?

The light dot targets Babylon's head.

MR. WEBER
The money, my friend. Do you have..?

Mr. Weber sees the light dot. Spooked.

BABYLON
I don't have nigger friends.

Mr. Weber turns. The laser dot pinpoints his forehead.

PPPSST!

A silenced bullet explodes through Mr. Weber's head, knocking him from the bench.

Niall grabs Babylon. Drags him into the darkness as Kevlar-protected AGENTS burst onto the scene.

AGENT #1
FBI! You're surrounded!

AGENT #2
Agent Weber is down! FISK..?

But Babylon is gone.

AGENT #1
Jesus... CALL AN AMBULANCE!

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Outside a shabby government building. Weeds choke a bed around the rusting "CITY HALL" sign.

COUNCILMAN ABBOTT (O.S.)
Miss Guerrero presents a well-reasoned proposal. It could be the zoo's most intriguing environment.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DAY

The ethnically-diverse council members argue in a dingy room nearly devoid of SPECTATORS.

Babylon Fisk has the center seat. He studies the council members as if plotting their murders.

Kathleen white-knuckles a podium.

COUNCILWOMAN JONES (45, black, feisty) has the floor.

COUNCILWOMAN JONES
She's proposing a degrading, racist display.

COUNCILMAN ABBOTT (30s, white) is unimpressed.

COUNCILMAN ABBOTT
We are in a depression, councilwoman. The city is \$3 billion in debt, the zoo runs a deficit.

COUNCILWOMAN JONES
You want to balance the books by putting people in cages? She better put white people in there.

Babylon pounds his gavel.

BABYLON
Cut the race-baiting crap or this debate is over.

KATHLEEN

Ma'am, it's sixteen diverse students in a zoo enclosure for three months without Internet or iPads. I plan to quantify modern human existence in a social media age, and discover paths to self-sufficiency in the event of economic collapse.

COUNCILMAN ABBOTT

And it's university sanctioned?

KATHLEEN

Um, no. They couldn't fund it.

COUNCILWOMAN JONES

This gets better and better.

BABYLON

Put a sock in it, Councilwoman. Thank you, Miss Guerrero. Very intriguing.

Kathleen strides to Cato in the back of the room.

BABYLON (O.S.)

I need a vote, please.

KATHLEEN

Why is everything about race?

CATO

Said the Latina to the Asian-American.

Behind them, a free-for-all of accusations and grandstanding.

BABYLON (O.S.)

I want order! ORDER!

KATHLEEN

Do you think I convinced them?

CATO

If anyone could...

Babylon pounds his gavel, breaking it in two.

BABYLON

DAMN IT, life is too short for this time-wasting bullshit. Give me your vote, or by God your constituents will know why.

INT. CITY HALL - MAIN STAIRCASE - DAY

Kathleen paces. Cato holds her briefcase.

KATHLEEN

Idiots! My work will not be shut
down by bickering political hacks.

CATO

But Babylon Fisk? He's...he's...

KATHLEEN

He's corrupt but connected. I have
to take a chance.

Babylon Fisk bursts from the council chamber. Unwilling to
bow to his bad leg, he heads toward the stairs.

He sees Kathleen. Tries to avoid her. She pursues Babylon up
the stairs.

KATHLEEN

My experiment appeals to you.
Intriguing, you said.

BABYLON

Ain't a chance in hell the city will
fund that ethnic hot potato.

KATHLEEN

I hear you have private sources.

BABYLON

You're barking up a very thorny tree.

KATHLEEN

(loudly, publicly)
I thought the great Babylon Fisk
could make anything happen?

BABYLON

(as publicly)
Anything I want to happen, happens.

OUTSIDE A CITY HALL BATHROOM - DAY

Babylon limps down the tiled hallway toward Connell. We see
the long scar that bisects Connell's voice box.

Babylon pauses in front of Connell. He notes the "CLOSED FOR CLEANING" sign.

BABYLON

Nice touch. Your charming twin
completing our business in there?

Connell simply nods. He indicates Babylon's knee. Concerned.

BABYLON

I think it's gonna rain.

INSIDE THE BATHROOM

Babylon enters as Connell stands guard outside. Avoids a "Wet Floor" sign. Steps to a urinal.

Inside a stall, a struggle of legs and arms. A MAN screams. Niall presses for information.

NIALL (O.S.)

Who set up the FBI sting?

MICKEY JOHNSON (mid 20s, solid, lumberjack-handsome) exits another stall. Rubber gloves. Bottle of Tilex. Coveralls. A guy with potential who had the rug pulled from under him.

He sees Babylon. Removes his ratty baseball cap.

MICKEY

Jesus, sorry. Didn't get the memo.

BABYLON

No worries, Mick. I ain't the best
scheduler myself.

Babylon zips up. Moves to the sink. Washes his hands.

MICKEY

So, I got skinny on a construction
job. A word from you would...

BABYLON

I know cleanin' urinals is a job for
niggers, but you're my eyes and ears.

NIALL (O.S.)

I want a name.

The man scrambles to escape.