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JAKE AND THE HAWK

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## ABSTRACT

“Jake and the Hawk” is the story of Jake, an inattentive eight-year-old who attends school in a depressed neighborhood, living with his single mother, Linda, and older brother, Scott. Jake has problems at school: his lack of concentration gets him in trouble with his teacher; he is bullied by two students in his class. Jake has problems outside of school: he meets with a doctor who cannot quite put his finger on what is wrong with Jake; Scott is rarely around, and when he is, he fights with Linda. An avid reader with a penchant for the natural world, Jake spends his time at home playing outside, collecting twigs, leaves and flowers. One day as he plays, he happens upon a hawk that has landed on the street—a rare sight in Jake’s neighborhood. Jake follows the hawk as it skips through alleys and backstreets, but soon encounters his brother running the opposite direction. Jake now follows Scott. He learns later, as Scott confides in him, that his brother is in trouble with a local thug and drug dealer, Tyler. Scott has stolen Tyler’s money. At night, Jake starts to have bad dreams. He sees visions of the hawk being shot. At school, Jake experiences subtle hallucinations. Day by day, they grow more severe. All of this terrifies Jake—his dealings with bullies, his hallucinations, his nightly premonitions, his brother in danger. One night in his room, an otherworldly yellow light starts to pulsate from the closet. Out bursts a giant blue panther. Horrified at first, Jake soon finds the panther, Max, to be an amicable gentleman. Max takes Jake through a portal and into another world, a fascinating one where Jake discovers all the animals and landscapes he has read about together in one place. He also finds the hawk and finds it is in trouble with a terrible dragon, the villain of Max’s world, Teel. Later, Max reveals that he knows about Jake’s dreams. They are not simple nightmares, but rather prophetic. However, Max also knows a way to prevent them from coming true, a way to save the hawk. He charges Jake with a series of quests that will pit him against the most frightening characters and situations of Max’s world. Jake is mortified, but gradually swayed by Max (the only person to ever call Jake “friend”), Jake accepts. The rest of the script sees Jake through a chain of adventures that will test and develop his courage: to stand up to bullies, to think under pressure, to put oneself at risk for the benefit of another. Jake follows Scott in his own world and the hawk in Max’s. Characters and events in both worlds start to run parallel. As the story progresses, the two worlds blend together for Jake. Will Jake have the depth of conviction and strength of will to pass the tests put before him?

The poet Komunyakaa asserts, “Don’t write what you know. Write what you are willing to discover.” That is what I did. I set out to discover previously unfamiliar characters and events. More than that, I set out to discover my own limits and abilities as a writer. I wanted to craft a story of courage—a discovery of courage. In some ways “Jake and the Hawk” is a classic tale of bravery, of fear overcome. It is not a story of bravery for bravery’s sake, but bravery for a more noble purpose: for the sake of another. It explores classic themes in a unique context and within individuals I have made my own friends and villains.

When I ask myself what I learned from this experience, I look back to the questions I had when I began writing. Will I be able to complete an entire feature-length script? Through research and invention, will I be able to craft believable characters and a compelling string of developments, actions and events? Is this something that I will want to do again? I discovered the answer to all these questions: yes.

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY-DAY

A hawk glides through gray clouds, high, suspended above the world. We see it close up. It's feathers are ragged and scratched, yet it retains beauty and a noble air.

Gradually it descends and emerges high above the city. The hawk flies lower over a dirty, depressed neighborhood--gray streets like the clouds and buildings beaten like the hawk itself.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE-DAY

JAKE--8, small even for his age, brown hair--sits in a chair, staring out the window at the edge of the room. He sports a plain yellow t-shirt and jeans with holes in the knees.

The office is warm, dressed in cozy furniture, toys and bookshelves.

With one hand Jake clutches a book to his chest: a thick "Wildlife" hardback with a picture of zebras on the cover.

He opens the book and glances at it for a second, but, easily distracted, he looks around the office, briefly at the two adults in the room, then returns to staring out the window.

DR. HAMMOND--49, round, glasses, white coat, navy turtleneck--sits on the other side of the room. Clipboard on his thigh, he perfects an easy demeanor, one that would calm anxious patients.

LINDA--39, weary with graying brown hair, dull white sweater--sits opposite the doctor. They speak as if Jake can't hear them, and, to their credit, Jake appears consumed in tracing his finger back and forth along the windowsill.

Suddenly Jake's face lights up. He sees something.

DR. HAMMOND

(hesitant)

It's hard to say at this point...what exactly we're dealing with.

Linda looks confused.

(CONTINUED)

DR. HAMMOND

Jake exhibits advanced emotional development and well-above-average intelligence.

LINDA

Intelligence?

Jake stands on his chair, nearly falling, to get a better view out the window. Linda and the doctor see.

Now we see what Jake's looking at. A caterpillar crawls along the windowsill just outside the glass.

LINDA

(almost whispering)

He does so poorly in school.

DR. HAMMOND

Yes, well-

LINDA

But he does like to read. I can't tear him away from those animal books.

DR. HAMMOND

Yes, well, based on this first meeting, I-

LINDA

A.D.D.?

DR. HAMMOND

Like I said, it's hard to tell... I'd like meet with Jake again to clarify a few things, maybe put him through a few simple tests. He shows some of the signs of Attention Deficit Disorder--inattention, inability to focus--but he doesn't fit the classic model.

Jake fumbles with his book to flip to a certain page. He looks back and forth between the book and the window.

Linda looks even more concerned.

DR. HAMMOND

(taking note of Linda)

At this point, you shouldn't be worried. I'm not recommending

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DR. HAMMOND (cont'd)  
medication...yet--just some further  
study.

Linda appears unconvinced. Dr. Hammond takes note.

DR. HAMMOND  
Look, other than this attention  
thing, Jake's a very normal boy. If  
we discover something down the  
road, we'll deal with it then. I've  
had children like this before. Most  
of them grow out of it.

Linda looks slightly comforted.

Now we see what Jake's turned to in his book: a large  
picture of a caterpillar, similar to the one he sees  
outside.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE-SAME

Caterpillar in the foreground, we see Jake through the  
window from the outside of the building. Ever-so-slightly,  
he smiles.

EXT. CLASSROOM-DAY

We see Jake looking out through the window of a trodden  
brick elementary school. The smile is gone.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

We see Jake still looking out the window, this time from  
inside the classroom. In a class of twenty or so students,  
he is the only one not facing forward.

Jake's entire body faces the window; he pays no attention to  
MS. JANE--28, shoulder-length blonde hair--who lectures at  
the head of the class.

Jake continues to stare, absorbed in his own daydreams. We  
see briefly what Jake sees--glimpses of blue sky and bright  
sunlight cut into the perpetual drabness.

MS. JANE  
Jake!

Jake snaps his head around to meet Ms. Jane's stern,  
unflinching gaze. She turns back to the blackboard.

(CONTINUED)

MS. JANE  
See me after class.

EXT. CLASSROOM-DAY

We see Jake again through the window from outside the building. He stands in front of Ms. Jane's desk. We cannot hear the conversation, but it is clear that Ms. Jane is dealing Jake an animate reprimanding.

Jake endures it, slumped, staring at the floor. Ms. Jane snaps at him, and we see his head shoot up, as though she yelled "look at me, Jake!"

INT. HALLWAY-DAY

Jake walks alone through the hallway. Other students walk together, laughing and talking. Jake watches them as he walks.

Against the other students, he appears sad or lonely, as if he would try to enter their conversations had he only the words to do it.

He tries to ignore them. He frowns and stares at the ceiling.

EXT. PLAYGROUND-DAY

On a paved basketball court, Jake stands alone at the edge of a dodge ball game. Other students mill about, jumping, dodging and throwing. In contrast, Jake is still, disconnected.

Smack! A dodge ball smashes Jake in the face. As he stumbles back and clutches his wound, we see BROCK--8, chubby, buzz cut, camouflage sweatshirt--and his skinnier counterpart, Joe--8, same haircut--laugh and slap hands on the opposite side of the court.

BROCK  
Pay attention, dick!

Jake walks slowly off the court. He keeps walking until he's alone, far from the other students, in a grassy area.

Jake spots something on the ground. Quickly, he drops to his knees to inspect it.

## INT. CAFETERIA-DAY

Jake stands alone at the end of a line of students waiting to pick up trays. He leans against yellow brick peppered with posters boasting brightly-colored nutritional facts and advertisements. Brock walks up to Jake, Joe beside him.

Brock perfects a menacing sneer; Joe grins. Brock moves closer and closer, until inches separate his face from Jake's. Visibly frightened, Jake's mouth hangs open.

BROCK

I saw you digging in the grass...  
What did you find? Money?

Jake is petrified.

BROCK

Give it to me.

Jake doesn't move.

BROCK

Give it to me!

Jake slowly reaches into his pocket and pulls out a closed fist. A grin grows on Brock's face. Jake uncurls his fingers. A large acorn rests in his palm.

Brock's smile disappears as he snatches the acorn from Jake. He shakes his head in confusion. Confusion turns to anger.

Brock takes a sharp step forward and pulls back his fist to strike Jake. Jake cowers back against the wall, holding his hands in front of his face.

Brock steps back. He and Joe bellow deliberate chuckles.

BROCK

Here, you want your stupid nut  
back?

Brock extends it to Jake, and Jake reaches his hand out. Brock turns and throws the acorn across the cafeteria. He and Joe walk away laughing.

## EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-DAY

Jake treks home, carrying his backpack. Free of school, he skips and hops a bit through the dingy street, where trash cans lie tipped and cars look as if they've been out of use for years.



Jake rounds a corner into a slightly nicer branch of the neighborhood. Here things are cleaner but still gray. We see Jake from far behind as he ascends the stairs to a modest apartment.

INT. APARTMENT-SAME

The apartment is sparsely decorated but contains nice things--a painting of a sunset, a pretty blue lamp. It's fairly neat, save a pile of mess on the living room coffee table.

Amid the mess rest numerous children's wildlife books--one entitled "Frogs," one "Wolves," one "Desert Animals," each with a large matching photo on the cover.

There are other topics too. We see "Hurricanes and Tornadoes," "Medieval Knights," as well as "Dragons."

Linda sits on a green couch before the table, neither reading nor watching TV. She sits nervously, her chin resting in her hand; she chews one index fingernail.

Jake clicks the door open and Linda stands to meet him. Jake tosses mail onto the already cluttered coffee table.

LINDA

Have you seen Scott?

Jake shakes his head. Linda looks concerned, almost fearful.

Jake drops his backpack, picks several books and skitters to the door.

LINDA

Stay where I can see you, okay  
Jake?

Jake looks back at his mother. He pauses. Sensing her uneasiness, he runs back and plants a hug around her waist before heading outside. Through some anxiety, Linda manages a smile.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-AFTERNOON

Jake's on his hands and knees. He's left his books on the steps to the apartment. Now he focuses intently on a tiny patch of grass poking through a crack in the curb. Carefully, he plucks a single blade.

Far away, we hear cars, a dog barking, industrial noises, perhaps the faintest of sirens.

(CONTINUED)

Jake crawls a few feet. After sniffing the blade, he sets it with a small collection of other found items: a rock, a leaf, an empty peanut shell.

As Jake organizes the collection, we hear an odd ruffling sound, one that doesn't fit with the usual neighborhood noises. Jake's head shoots up.

Acutely aware, Jake scans the neighborhood for a long moment, but he finds only empty streets, tattered newspaper and dirty brick. He goes back to his business.

Again we hear the ruffling noise, but this time it's louder and closer. Jake's head jerks up. This time his eyebrows jump. Wide-eyed, he leaps to his feet.

Some ten yards from Jake we recognize the hawk from the opening sequence. It stands still, at alert. Its piercing black eyes meet Jake's. The two stare at each other for a long moment.

The hawk looks away. Then it turns the opposite direction. It begins to hobble and flap its wings, as if it's trying to take off but unable. The hawk appears injured but displays no visible wounds.

Fixated, Jake creeps after the hawk, then runs as the hawk picks up speed.

The hawk skips toward an open alleyway. Jake follows.

EXT. ALLEY-SAME

The hawk shoots down the long alley, past dumpsters and an abandoned bicycle. Jake sprints, struggling to keep up.

The hawk rounds a corner out of sight. Jake nears the corner.

Woosh! Jake is almost flattened by someone trucking the other way. It's SCOTT--17, tall and skinny, buzzed head. Scott wears a loose, ill-fitting tank top. A chain swings from his belt to the back pocket of his black jeans.

Scott pauses, but more for his sake than Jake's. As if Jake is merely an obstacle, once Scott's sure he's missed it, he keeps running.

Now Scott has Jake's full attention. Jake reverses and sprints after him, trying to catch up.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-SAME

The alley spits Scott out into the street. Recognizing his neighborhood, Scott slows to a jog. He looks around. After assuring himself the danger is gone, he slows to a stop.

Scott pants and wipes sweat from his face with his shirt. He examines his scraped elbows, which bleed lightly. Nothing serious. His cheek is also scratched.

Jake finally makes it.

Ignoring him, Scott starts to walk back to the apartment, Jake in tow a step behind. Neither says a word.

INT. APARTMENT-SAME

Jake scampers in, books in hand, as Scott nearly shuts the door on him. Scott clicks it gently closed, as if to keep his entrance a secret.

LINDA (O.S.)  
Where have you been?

Scott sighs as he turns to find Linda, hands on her hips.

LINDA  
Where have you been, Scott?

Scott rolls his his eyes and begins to walk past her. Linda gets in his way.

LINDA  
You didn't come home last  
night...or even the night before!

Scott tries to step around her, but she counters.

LINDA  
Where have you been? What have you  
been doing out there?

Scott looks away.

LINDA  
Answer me!

Scott steps back to glare at his mother. A moment of silence.

Anger grows on Scott's face. He pushes past Linda; she attempts to hold her ground. Noticing his scraped elbows, she takes his arm in her hands.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA  
(softer)  
You're bleeding.

SCOTT  
It ain't none of your fuckin'  
business!

Scott speaks with a forced urban accent. He swings his arm fiercely to free it, knocking Linda back into the wall.

For a moment we see a hint of softness in Scott's eyes and surprise in Linda's. Scott didn't mean to do this.

The moment is gone. Scott's face hardens.

SCOTT  
What? What are you gonna fuckin'  
do?

Scott starts down the hall.

LINDA  
(yelling)  
I'll change the locks!

Scott stops at his mother's voice. He turns, surprised, like he didn't expect her to stand up for herself.

LINDA  
I don't have to let you stay here.  
You think you're a tough guy. You  
can see what it's like when you  
don't have a bed to come back to!

Scott looks taken aback, but he snaps out of it and continues down the hall into his room.

Linda stands up off the wall. She is hurt--not physically. She purses her lips to keep from crying in front of Jake.

Jake watches her, frozen, helpless to do anything.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake lies in bed with an open book. A single reading lamp lights the space. Jake's room lacks decoration--no posters, no pictures. More books, mostly about nature or animals, clutter the floor, the dresser, the bookcase.

(CONTINUED)

We see stuffed animals and animal figurines of all sorts--along the windowsill, lining the dresser. We also find items Jake's collected, all natural things--rocks, twigs, leaves, flowers.

The door to Jake's room creaks open. Scott enters and shuts it behind him. Puzzled, Jake closes his book.

Red-eyed, Scott looks like he could have been crying; he does his best to hide it. He perfects a tough guy facade: puffed out chest, head cocked to the side. He struts back and forth across the carpet, stays on his feet, keeps moving.

Jake looks confused. Scott does too. Despite Scott's efforts, he looks scared. He glances about the room, as though he's looking for some reason to justify being here. He spots Jake's book.

SCOTT

What's this?

Scott walks to Jake and takes the book gently from his hands.

SCOTT

Giraffes?

He turns the book in his hand, examining the picture of giraffes on the cover. A tiny smile.

SCOTT

This was mine back in the day.

Silent for a few moments, he struggles for words as he sits on the foot of Jake's bed. He nods to a nearby stack of books.

SCOTT

Yo, what's your favorite one?

Jake lowers his eyebrows and stares at Scott for a second. Deliberately, he turns toward the pile. He hands Scott a book. Scott looks over a book titled "Hawks."

Jake pays close attention as Scott sets it down and picks up another book. Scott flips open and points to a page.

SCOTT

Now a lion, there's a killer...

Scott looks at Jake.

SCOTT

But you don't wanna be a lion.  
You're too smart for that.

Scott turns a few pages, working from memory. He points to the picture.

SCOTT

A hyena, that's what you want. It's every man for himself on these streets, and a hyena knows that. A hyena's a survivor...Let the lion do all the work. The hyena just swoops in for the reward. Before the Lion knows what hit him, the hyena's long gone. The hyena makes bank. The stupid Lion has to get up and work again the next day.

Jake frowns. His focus wears.

SCOTT

You gotta be tough.

Scott shows off his scraped elbows. Jake stares blankly.

SCOTT

And you gotta use this.

He points to his head. His voice cracks. Scott continues, as if Jake didn't hear it.

SCOTT

Cause no one likes hyenas. They're all jealous they ain't one.

Scott's voice cracks again.

SCOTT

It's every man for himself...Even if the whole fuckin' world's against you.

Scott fights to keep his composure. He gathers it a little.

SCOTT

But I'm too smart for these cats.

For the first time, his forced accent breaks down. Now he sounds like a white suburbanite. Jake's blank stare softens.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

I'm gonna get what's mine.

Scott stands up and turns the other way. Book still in hand, he starts to leave the room.

SCOTT

All right, little bro. Keep it real.

JAKE

Scott?

Scott stops in his tracks and faces Jake.

JAKE

Why did you push Mom?

Scott sighs. His face contorts a little.

SCOTT

She...I...You'll understand when you're older.

Scott leaves the room.

EXT. SKY-DAY

We see the hawk soaring through clouds, peacefully, gracefully. We see it close up. The hawk is still in the air, almost in slow motion. BANG! A gunshot!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake jolts awake from the dream. Breathing hard, he jumps out of bed and runs out the door of his room.

INT. LINDA'S ROOM-NIGHT

The door to Linda's room swings open. Jake stands in the empty frame.

Linda's room is very average--a mirror, a bed, a TV. She sits awake in bed, under the covers. A bedside lamp provides the room's only light, but she has no book; the TV is off. Surprised, she turns to find Jake.

LINDA

Hey honey, what's wrong?

Jake is silent for a second before responding.

(CONTINUED)

JAKE

I had a bad dream.

We see Linda up close. Stress lines rest above her eyes, bags below. She looks older than we guess she is. She gives Jake a sympathetic smile and pats the bed next to her.

LINDA

Come here.

Jake climbs onto his mother's bed. He nuzzles into her hip.

LINDA

Do you want to talk about it?

Jake is quiet, but eventually shakes his head. Linda puts her arm around him.

LINDA

Okay.

Silence between the two.

Eventually Lisa speaks to fill it. Talking for therapy, she answers questions Jake doesn't ask.

LINDA

Yeah...I couldn't sleep either.

A clock next to Linda's bed shows 3:06 am. Jake's fading. Safe in his mother's embrace, he tries to look at her, but his eyelids droop.

LINDA

I don't know, sometimes I think  
I...just think too much...Maybe I  
should let things go.

Linda sounds like she doesn't believe what she's saying. She sees that Jake's eyes are now all the way closed.

LINDA

What can I do?

Linda runs her fingers through Jake's hair. He's asleep. She smiles somberly.

Linda glances at a picture on her bedside table. It's a photo of a younger Jake and Scott, both dressed in shirts and ties, Scott with his arm around Jake.

Worry shows through Lisa's smile.

We move from Linda. We see the door to her room.



INT. APARTMENT, HALLWAY-SAME

We move down the hallway. We see the door to Scott's room, slapped with profane posters.

INT. APARTMENT, SCOTT'S ROOM-SAME

We creep into Scott's room. It's black save one tiny reading light. We see only Scott's face and what he holds in front of it: Jake's animal book. Scott's face is twisted.

Scott catches himself, and his face hardens. He throws the book away from him.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Jake sits turned toward the window, paying no attention to Ms. Jane, who goes over math problems at the head of the class. Ms. Jane notices Jake's not paying attention.

MS. JANE

Jake!

Ms. Jane's voice sounds off, a shade deeper than usual. This catches Jake's attention. He faces her.

As Ms. Jane continues to speak, her voice grows abnormally slow and deep.

MS. JANE

(getting deeper)

If you can't concentrate on the lesson...

Jake shakes his head, as if to wake himself up. No success.

MS. JANE

(slow and deep)

Perhaps you would be more comfortable in the front office.

Jake shakes his head harder. He stares hard at his teacher.

MS. JANE

(back to normal)

Jake?

## INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE-DAY

The office is small, with one window high on the back wall. Bookshelves surround a modest desk on all sides. Jake and Counselor Stevens sit across from each other in chairs in the little space left in the center of the room.

COUNSELOR STEVENS, 47, is trim and balding. He wears a tie and a collared shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He clasps his hands in front of him.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
So why do you think Ms. Jane was  
talking funny?

Jake shakes his head.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
Did anyone else notice?

Jake shakes his head.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
Did you tell anyone? Did you talk  
to Ms. Jane about it?

Jake shakes his head again.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
Why not?

Jake takes a moment to answer.

JAKE  
She doesn't believe me.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
(frowns)  
Well, how do you know if you didn't  
tell her?

Jake doesn't answer.

COUNSELOR STEVENS  
Jake, did it scare you, what you  
described?

Jake nods slowly.

Counselor Stevens shifts in his seat. Now he speaks in a lighter tone of voice.

(CONTINUED)

COUNSELOR STEVENS

What kind of music do you like?

Nothing from Jake.

COUNSELOR STEVENS

(smiling)

I love jazz. I like to just relax in my favorite chair and crank up the volume until my wife gets home from work. But sometimes, when I listen to it for a long time, I start to hear it after I've turned off the stereo. Sometimes I think it's still playing when it's not. Is it possible-

JAKE

(the most passion we've seen from him)

It really happened! No one else heard it, but it really happened!

Counselor Stevens is caught off-guard. This is unexpected from Jake. Now he says nothing.

Jake stares sullenly, the closest we've seen him to angry.

JAKE

Do you believe me, Mr. Stevens?

The counselor's expression grows pensive. He takes his time to answer.

COUNSELOR STEVENS

Jake, if this happens again, I want you to try something. Try closing your eyes and taking four deep breaths. See if, by the time you finish, everything goes back to normal.

Jake crosses his arms. He looks frustrated, disappointed.

EXT. COURTYARD-DAY

Several class-fuls of elementary students sit on picnic tables. A lone tree marks the center of the school's courtyard. Children eat, talk, laugh. Some play football in the grass. Jake sits alone, a table removed from the others.

Jake stares into space. He's finished the food on his tray.

(CONTINUED)

The wind starts to blow. The tree's branches sway. The wind increases. Jake looks up. The other students don't seem to notice.

The wind blows even harder. It catches napkins, wrappers and bits of paper. Eventually the noise of the wind drowns out the students' chatter.

Jake watches as the debris swirls into a mini twister. He looks around. Still no one else notices. Jake shakes his head. He closes his eyes and breathes deeply in an effort to make the twister disappear.

When he opens them, the tornado is only bigger.

Jake grunts, closes his eyes and turns around in his seat, facing the other direction. His chest heaves four times. We see his hair start to blow in the wind.

When he opens his eyes, the napkin tornado has swelled to fifteen feet tall and is directly before his face. Jake's mouth hangs open. The twister rushes toward him.

Jake stumbles over the bench and backpedals through the grass. The tornado keeps coming. Jake starts to run but trips and falls. He swivels onto his back. Eyes closed tight, he paws and kicks the air.

JAKE

No! Stop!

We hear the bell ring. Quickly the twister dissipates. Napkins fall back to the ground. The wind stops altogether. Eyes closed, Jake still squirms and squeals.

Student after student scampers past Jake to the door to the courtyard. They notice his odd behavior. There is no tornado, nothing to torment the writhing boy.

Some students point and laugh. Others join in. Eventually Jake opens his eyes to find them. He shudders, frowns, immediately stops kicking and screaming.

Jake closes his eyes again. He takes four deep breaths, this time in hopes his classmates will disappear. When he opens his eyes, the students remain--pointing, laughing and taunting.

## EXT. PLAYGROUND-DAY

The kids are back playing dodge ball. Jake stands in the corner of the court staring at the ground.

BROCK (O.S.)  
Hey freak!

Jake whirls around to find Brock mid-throw. He ducks out of instinct.

The ball whizzes just over Jake's head and nails a girl standing behind him. The rebound rolls to Jake's feet. He picks it up.

Now Brock stands right in front of Jake, wearing the same camouflage sweatshirt from before. An easy shot. Brock freezes and, to Jake's surprise, nearly looks scared.

In an unfamiliar motion, Jake raises the ball. Brock's expression grows more confident. Jake cocks back his arm but doesn't throw. Now Brock smiles.

BROCK  
C'mon, I'll give you a free shot.

Jake's arm starts to quiver.

BROCK  
(taunting)  
You won't do it!

Jake's arms shakes harder. Brock waits expectantly.

Jake looks at the ball in his hand. He looks at Brock--Brock appears large, intimidating. Jake looks back at the ball. Jake lets it drop to the court.

Brock picks it up. He grins. He cocks his arm back, then slings it fast forward.

## EXT. STREET-DAY

Today Jake doesn't skip on his way home from school. He walks with his head down. He gradually he grows more content. Free of the shame of the day, he raises his head, satisfied to be by himself.

Coming around the end of a building, Jake sees Scott on the other side of the street. Jake waves, but Scott doesn't see him. Instead, Scott ducks into a tight alley.

Jake pauses for a second. He looks across the street, then back toward the school and his usual route home. He takes a long moment to look both ways before he takes a deep breath and decides to run after his brother.

EXT. ALLEY-SAME

Jake enters the alley cautiously. He sees Scott standing with two men farther down the alley. Their appearance is authentically street, whereas Scott's wants to be. A shady scene.

Without much room to maneuver, blocked by garbage and cardboard boxes, Jake crouches behind a fire escape staircase and peeks through the space between two stairs.

The two men look calm, but Scott peers nervously around. Scott hands something to the men--money.

The men look it over and hand something back--Jake squints but can't make it out. Scott puts it in a backpack. Trying his best to spin this as a routine transaction, Scott gives the men awkward fist bumps.

The three part company. Scott exits at the far end of the alley. Jake waits a moment then follows at a distance.

EXT. STREET-SAME

Jake tracks Scott, who continues to fidget and look around (yet fails to notice his trailing brother), through several backstreets. Jake, too, looks nervous. He steps carefully and examines his surroundings. He's never been to this part of town.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

Jake parts two buildings to find his brother half-circled by a group of hoods. There are five of them. Four henchmen crowd Scott on either side.

Jake creeps up behind the mob. He hides behind a car with no tires.

The obvious leader of the group, TYLER--tall, lean, muscular, black spiky hair, black tank top, black jeans, covered in tattoos, a shiny stud in one ear--faces Scott.

Closer to the action, Jake has a better view of the transaction this time. Without words, Scott pulls a small, plastic bag of white powder from his backpack.

(CONTINUED)

Tyler snatches the bag and flips open a sizable knife. He cuts a slit in the bag, dips the knife in, then brings it up to his mouth.

Tyler grins, revealing his tongue. His tongue is long with a metal stud. More notably, it's been surgically split: it's forked like a snake's. Tyler licks the powder off the tip of the knife.

He runs it through his mouth for a moment, then rights himself. On his face, a pleasant smirk hardens to a tough, business cool.

A small, skinny but fierce-looking underling, who appears to be Tyler's right hand man, hands Tyler a rubber-banded wad of cash. Tyler steps closer to Scott and extends the money.

TYLER

I want two grams for next time.

Scott reaches for the money. Tyler lets him grab it but doesn't release it yet.

TYLER

Give this to your man. There's enough for exactly two grams.

Now Tyler looms over Scott like a bulldog over a chihuahua. Scott appears threatened, but he also looks irritated.

SCOTT

Where's my cut?

TYLER

You'll get a cut when I get two grams.

SCOTT

That's bullshit. You owe me--

Sneering, Tyler presses the knife to Scott's stomach.

TYLER

You work for **me**! I decide when you get or don't get a cut of **my** money.

SCOTT

(indignant)  
Calm down.

Scott rips the money out of Tyler's hand. Tyler grins an evil grin.

(CONTINUED)

TYLER

There's enough for exactly two grams. If the bags come back light...or if any of my money goes missing...

Tyler presses harder on the knife--enough to scratch the flesh through Scott's shirt.

Tyler leans in close and speaks in Scott's ear.

TYLER

(harsh whispering)

Don't fuck me Scott.

Jake is paralyzed. We see the pain on his face as he watches a small spot of blood form on Scott's tank top.

Scott steps back and bats the knife away.

SCOTT

*I'm* not a fuckin' snake.

Tense pause.

TYLER

(now nearly chipper)

Good...I'm glad we understand each other.

Tyler starts to walk away, and his gang follows. He calls back to Scott over his shoulder.

TYLER

Stay on your phone, bitch.

Scott displays a mix of fear, rage and relief to be rid of Tyler.

As Tyler passes the car, he spots Jake. His grin grows larger. He makes his hand into the shape of a gun. He pulls the trigger as he winks at Jake.

INT. APARTMENT-AFTERNOON

Scott stumbles in through the door. Jake follows sheepishly after him. Seeing blood, Linda jumps from the green couch, panic in her eyes.

LINDA

What happened?

(CONTINUED)



SCOTT  
I'm fine. It's nothing.

Scott tries to walk to his room, but Linda rushes to put her arms around him. She looks him over. Scott turns his shoulder.

LINDA  
(hurried)  
Let me help you...I'll get towels  
and antiseptic.

SCOTT  
I can take care of myself.

LINDA  
Scott, please...

Scott pauses for a moment. Linda quickly wets a towel and tries to dab the wound. For a moment, it looks like Scott will let her.

LINDA  
(firmer)  
I know you weren't in class today.

Beat.

LINDA  
Tell me what happened.

SCOTT  
(yelling, out of nowhere)  
I don't need this shit!

Linda is taken aback, wounded.

SCOTT  
I don't need your help!

Scott starts to his room, but Linda won't have it this time.

LINDA  
Obviously you do!

Scott stops midway down the hall and turns.

LINDA  
(more composed)  
Look at you! Every time you come  
home, you're bleeding! Scott,  
whatever you're doing, you're in  
over your head. Can't you see it's  
getting worse? I can.

(CONTINUED)

Scott appears mildly captivated.

LINDA

Maybe I can't give it to you, but,  
Scott, you need help.

Linda points to Scott's forced ghetto getup--chains, baggy jeans, bloody stain. Linda stutters, working up the stomach to curse.

LINDA

This...this...shit!...It isn't  
you...For heaven's sake, look at  
yourself. You didn't grow up on the  
street. You grew up here.

Linda points to a comfortably furnished living room.

SCOTT

(accent thicker than normal)  
Pssssh...you know I from the hood--

LINDA

(overpowering Scott)  
Scott! You won second prize at the  
science fair in fourth grade.  
Hoodlums don't make volcanoes.

Scott's eyes acknowledge the truth of what Linda's saying. It takes a concentrated effort to shrug it off. Scott shakes his head and resumes his apathetic visage. He runs from his mother's piercing words and slams the door to his room.

LINDA

(shouting at closed door)  
You're not a thug!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake sits in bed with his lamp on. A stack of books lies untouched next to him. He looks sad, but he tilts his head to see about the room, as if pondering. His door cracks open.

Scott slips in with barely a sound. He wears a loose, gray sweatshirt. This time, he doesn't stall before taking a seat on the end of Jake's bed.

When Scott speaks, he looks Jake in the eyes. His tone of voice is earnest, nearly apologetic.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

Yo, you saw some messed up shit today, bro...and I just wanna be straight with you.

Scott looks around the room for a second.

SCOTT

That cat, Tyler, the one that did this...

Scott winces theatrically and lifts his sweatshirt to reveal his stomach. He hasn't cleaned the caked blood; he flaunts what's really a tiny scratch.

SCOTT

We used to be real tight...It's fucked up how people change...We used to run shit together, back before I moved across town...even since we was your age...I mean, we tore shit up in 5th grade football!

Scott smiles a little, but the smile dies.

SCOTT

That crew didn't used to be there. It was just me and Tyler in charge...I won't get into the shit we did, but we were some hard motherfuckers.

Disgust takes his face.

SCOTT

Then he stabbed me in the back!

Jake pays close attention, like any detail of Scott's life is priceless treasure.

SCOTT

Now I ain't gonna go into details, but we planned shit for a couple months. After we pulled it off, we had some money on our hands, and once the heat died down, I came to Tyler to pick up my share.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

...But there were four big fucks with him--his new crew. He said he hired these motherfuckers with my share of the money. He said he was runnin' things alone now. I said, why? Why's it gotta be like that? Why can't we just do what we was doing? Guess what that rat-shit said? He said, "I'm sorry. That would be bad business."

Scott takes a long break.

SCOTT

...But you know what? Now I'm glad he fucked me over, cause he taught me the most important lesson I'll ever learn.

Scott scoots closer to Jake and leans in.

SCOTT

He taught me, you can't trust no one but you. It's every man for himself. You gotta TAKE what you want!

Scott smiles. He pulls the rubber-banded wad of beaten cash out of his sweatshirt pouch.

SCOTT

This belongs to the fucker himself. Now he needs me. He wants me to get some shit for him that no one else can get. Cause my supplier don't trust Tyler. He don't want nothing to do with that rat-fuck.

Scott waves the money as he talks.

SCOTT

So Tyler gives me the money, and I get him the stuff. He gives me more money, and I get him more stuff. He gave me this today.

Scott nods toward the wad in his hand.

SCOTT

This is twice what he gave me the last time. This time I'll get him twice as much product. I'll do it tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

Scott chuckles awkwardly. He grins. There's something mildly crazy in his eyes. Jake sees it and recoils a little.

SCOTT

I'll get him his shit. But after this shipment--after he thinks I'm too scared to stand up to him--then he's gonna give me ten times this much.

Scott nods again to the money in his hand.

SCOTT

See, I got that fucker right where I want him. And I'm 'a make bank! Cause when he gives me cash for the next shipment...when he gives me the big, fuckin' jackpot money...I'm gone! Fffft!

Scott slices the air with his hand.

SCOTT

I'm fuckin' gone.

Scott takes a deep breath. He sighs and turns his head away from Jake.

SCOTT

One day, I'm gonna fly outta here.

EXT. SKY-DAY

We see the hawk soaring through clouds--peacefully, gracefully. We see it close up. The hawk is still in the air, almost in slow motion. We see the city below it.

BANG! A gunshot! A blood splatter. A bullet tears through the hawk's wing!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake shoots up in bed, pale-faced. He jumps out and runs to the door.

INT. LINDA'S ROOM-NIGHT

Again, Linda lies awake in bed. Jake bursts through the door and runs to his mother. He jumps in with Linda and grabs her tight.

Linda looks confused, worried, but she embraces Jake and rubs her hand up and down his back.

DR. HAMMOND (V.O.)  
Tell me about what you saw.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE-DAY

We see Jake's face up close.

LINDA (O.S.)  
Go ahead, Jake. Tell Dr. Hammond  
what you told me.

We pull out to find Jake sitting opposite Dr. Hammond. Linda leans forward in a chair along the wall, her arms crossed.

Jake hesitates.

JAKE  
I saw a tornado.

Silence.

DR. HAMMOND  
What kind of tornado.

Silence.

JAKE  
A tornado made of napkins.

Dr. Hammond lowers his eyebrows and makes a note on his pad. Jake notices and responds.

JAKE  
(slightly angered)  
It was a tornado made of napkins in  
the courtyard at lunch.

DR. HAMMOND  
Did anyone else see the tornado?

Jake shakes his head adamantly.

Dr. Hammond writes another note. He ponders for a second.

(CONTINUED)

DR. HAMMOND  
Jake, is there anyone special  
you enjoy spending time with?

Jake thinks for a second.

JAKE  
My mom.

Dr. Hammond looks to Linda. Linda smiles.

DR. HAMMOND  
What about at school? Is there  
anyone you like to eat lunch with  
or play with during recess?

Jake is silent and motionless.

Linda's smile fades.

Dr. Hammond leans in.

DR. HAMMOND  
(very gently)  
Jake, is there anyone that you  
would call your friend?

Jake looks upset. He remains silent and still for a long  
time. He points at his mother.

Linda smiles again, this time a very sad smile.

A long silence.

DR. HAMMOND  
(much lighter)  
Your mother tells me you like to  
read.

Jake is still for a moment but gradually nods.

DR. HAMMOND  
She says you like to read stories  
about animals and nature.

A tiny grin from Jake.

DR. HAMMOND  
Have you ever read about tornadoes?

Jake nods, now with a suspicious expression.

DR. HAMMOND

Jake, do you ever make up your own stories?

Jake shakes his head, no.

Dr. Hammond pauses, trying to think how to articulate the next question.

DR. HAMMOND

Do you ever feel like you want to share something, but you can't?

Jake looks confused. He nods cautiously.

Dr. Hammond makes a note. Now he seems to move confidently, satisfied, like he's put his finger on the problem.

DR. HAMMOND

Do you ever feel like you need somebody to listen to you?

Jake looks upset, like he's holding something back. He remains silent and motionless.

DR. HAMMOND

If you did make up a story, who would you tell it to?

JAKE

(blurting)

I don't make up stories.

Dr. Hammond's face scrunches, unsatisfied, but he forces a smile.

DR. HAMMOND

Thank you, Jake.

Dr. Hammond moves to sit next to Linda. Jake stays put. Dr. Hammond speaks with Linda, but their conversation fades off in the background.

We see what Jake sees: the floor, part of a chair, a light. He doesn't stay on anything very long. His focus shifts in and out. The room is faraway and hazy, like seen through a sheet of water.

Dr. Hammond makes his way back to Jake. He hands him a pencil and a few sheets of paper and leans in close.

(CONTINUED)



DR. HAMMOND

Now, Jake, I would like you to...

Dr. Hammond's voice starts to morph. It grows deeper and slower, like Ms. Jane's was in the classroom. It gets worse.

Dr. Hammond gives Jake some kind of directions, but now his words are unintelligible. Jake stares at him, half-afraid, half-confused.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-MORNING

From far away we see Jake with his backpack walking to school, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Jake's whole class labors quietly: an exam. Students crouch over single sheets of paper and scratch away with pencils. Jake is the only one not buried in his test.

Jake's eyes wander the room. He looks out the nearby window. A caterpillar drags across the edge. Suddenly, he notices a similar caterpillar on the corner of his desk, then another, then another.

As Jake looks up, he spots caterpillars all over the room--20, 50, hundreds, crawling on chairs, the blackboard, the teacher's desk. His peers continue working. Ms. Jane reads. No one else pays attention to the bugs.

Jake scans the room for the source of the caterpillars. He soon finds it--his desktop is nearly black with furry, wriggling bodies.

Now Jake sees that the caterpillars are eating. One munches the corner of his desk. Three work on his pencil. His exam disintegrates before his eyes. Tiny holes form in the desktop. We start to hear noisy crunching and shuffling.

The caterpillars leave tiny yellow spots where the desk has worn through. Wide-eyed, Jake bends for a closer look. As the holes grow, we see that an otherworldly yellow light pushes through. Jake positions himself to see inside the desk.

We see Jake's face. His wide eyes grow wider. His mouth drops open. His face is lit bright yellow from whatever's in the desk.

(CONTINUED)

Now we see the inside of the desk. Bright, pulsating yellow light extends infinitely deep back inside, like the desk contains an entire universe.

The shuffling noise crescendos. Jake continues to stare as all the caterpillars in the room run back inside the desk and disappear into the light. The pulsating light blinks faster and grows fainter.

We see Jake up close again. The light wavers and fades gradually until it disappears from his face, leaving him still staring and stunned.

EXT. COURTYARD-DAY

Jake eats lunch alone at the end of the bench. Jake looks around the playground. He looks up.

A hawk--the hawk--flies over the courtyard. No one else sees but Jake.

He stares, fascinated, until the hawk is out of sight.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-AFTERNOON

From far away we see Jake walking home, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake lies in bed with a reading light on. He reads a book, "Jungle Cats," with a picture of a leopard on the cover.

The room is quiet, but then we hear the faintest of rumblings. Jake looks up from his book. The rumbling stops. He resumes reading.

Again, we hear the rumbling, this time slightly louder. Again, Jake looks up and peers around the room. He returns to his book.

Things are calm for a moment, but then the rumbling starts, now accompanied by the faintest of lights shining through the slits in Jake's closet doors. Once more, it disappears. Jake closes his book and turns off his reading light.

When the commotion begins again, it's more pronounced. Standing against the pitch black of Jake's room, bright yellow beams pulsate from the closet. The wooden doors shake and clatter. They burst open!

(CONTINUED)

A lone figure occupies the door frame. We hear a low, rumbling growl. Pure light blasts from behind the black shape. The figure isn't tall--it's roughly Jake's height--but it's wide, massive. As it creeps forward, we make out a head with two triangular ears.

As the figure closes on Jake's bed, we hear another deep growl. The figure's shadow falls over Jake's face. Jake, stricken with panic, squeezes his eyes shut and takes deep breaths in a desperate effort to make the figure go away.

The light fades out behind the figure. Now Jake is alone with this thing in the pitch black. We hear nothing but Jake's breathing, now rapid and shallow.

FIGURE  
(Growling--a deep purr)  
M-m-m-m-mmmmmmmmmmmhshshshh.

Jake's breathing stops.

A long pause. Jake flicks the light on. The figure's face is right in front of Jake's.

FIGURE  
Good evening, Jake.

Jake gasps and jumps back.

The face is that of a panther--MAX, thick legs, giant paws, long whiskers that look like a mustache, a wide grin bearing two sharp fangs and a well-groomed coat that shines blue, as if kissed by moonlight.

Max continues to smile--a great, reassuring smile. He appears good-natured, jovial even. Jake's terror eases the slightest bit. He starts to realize Max comes in peace.

MAX  
My name is Maxwell Dobbins.

The enormous panther holds a paw to his chest and bows.

MAX  
I hail from a land faraway, but  
closer than you think, where the  
trees grow like houses and the moon  
is made of milk.

Jake looks incredulous, confused. He stutters.

JAKE

How-how do you know my name?

Max takes two steps back but still faces Jake. His full, muscled figure comes into view.

MAX

I know many things...

Max sits on his hind legs and motions with his front paws as he speaks.

MAX

I know where the rainbow touches  
the ground, where unicorns still  
run free. I know how to turn honey  
into stone. I know how to cut a  
hole in the sky...

Jake's eyes grow wider. His fear is gone. His confusion gradually gives way to enchantment.

JAKE

Where did you come from?

Max smiles a big smile.

MAX

Let me show you...

Still on his hind legs, Max walks to the wall near the closet. He reaches out a paw and extends a single claw. He traces it along the wall, making a large rectangle.

Where his claw touches, yellow light peeks out. Max gives the wall inside the yellow lines a slight prod, and it peels back; it falls away to reveal a pure portal of yellow light.

MAX

Come with me, Jake.

Max reaches a paw in his direction.

Jake remains in bed. He shakes his head.

MAX

What's the matter?

JAKE

I'm afraid.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

A wise man said, "Don't be afraid  
to go out on a limb..."

Max smiles again.

MAX

...That's where the fruit is."

Slowly, hesitantly, Jake crawls out of bed and makes his way toward the portal. He creeps closer, inch by inch, until he stands at the edge. He peers in. He gasps and runs back to his bed. He pulls the covers over his head.

We see what Jake sees, a dark enclosure of sheets. Slowly, he lets them down.

Now Max is next to the bed on all fours. His body points away from Jake, facing the door, but he turns his head over his shoulder to speak.

MAX

Climb on.

Max nods his head, motioning to his back.

Jake still looks scared but lowers the covers. Max gives him reassuring nods as Jake gradually climbs aboard.

Once mounted atop Max, as if on a horse, Jake looks petrified. He stares into the portal.

MAX

Hang on tight.

Jake scrambles to find something to grab. With no better alternative he leans in and squeezes his arms around Max's thick neck.

MAX

Are you ready, my friend?

Jake still looks scared, but something in the word "friend" touches him, as if he's never been called that before. It gives him what he needs to nod the go-ahead.

MAX

Here...

Max starts to stomp his feet up and down, like a locomotive building up steam.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

...we...

He moves his feet faster and faster.

MAX

...go!

He takes off. He and Jake dive into the portal.

EXT. OPEN AIR-DAY

All-consuming bright, yellow light gives way to fainter white light. Jake and Max pour through clouds. They break into the open air.

Now we see they're riding on a long slide that reaches down from the sky. It's nearly vertical; they fall quickly toward a thick, colorful forest canopy.

MAX

(joyful, howling)

Ooowwwwwwooooooooooh!

Wind flushes back Jake's hair and distorts his cheeks. Clutching Max for dear life, he displays a look of sheer terror--he's too scared to scream.

Fast-approaching the treetops, Jake shuts his eyes. He and Max blast through; leaves fly in their wake.

EXT. FOREST-DAY

Discovering himself still alive, Jake opens his eyes to find a breathtaking forest, vibrant, full of life.

Bright reds, oranges, blues, greens, yellows, browns. Life moves in all directions. The trees are enormous with trunks 20 feet wide. Ferns rise 10 feet high.

Jake looks around. His fear gives way to wonder. He sees the animals he's studied so often in his books, but they're all larger-than-life versions: beetles the size of footballs, toucans the size of Jake. Spiders, zebras, koalas, deer, monkeys, parrots, squirrels, antelope, kangaroos, rabbits, leopards, frogs.

The slide bottoms out and runs horizontally along the forest floor. It ends, shooting Max and Jake out along the ground. They lose no momentum. Max continues running at the same speed they were sliding. Max howls again.

(CONTINUED)

As they bound through the forest, Jake, caught in awe, starts to ease his grip around Max's neck. Gradually he sits up. He holds his arms out to either side to steady himself.

Max howls. Jake waits a second. Pleasure swelling, he replies.

JAKE

Ooowwwwwwooooooooooh!

MAX

Ooww-Ooww-Ooowwwwoooooooooh!

Jake throws his head back.

JAKE

Ooww-Ooww-Ooowwwwoooooooooh!

The forest thins. Now the two run through green and red grass and bushes, which stretch well over Jake's head. Growing amid the grass lie small, star shapes of many different colors. Jake gives a puzzled look. He swivels frantically to see them all as they fly past.

He looks down at Max and notices that Max is gleaning the stars with his mouth, chewing and gulping them as he runs.

Jake reaches out and snatches a star. He examines it, holding it close in front of his face. He makes an expression as if to say, "oh well," and pops it into his mouth.

As he chews, Jake's face lights up: an obvious delight. Jake picks more and more. Grinning, he gobbles them down.

Jake picks as many stars as he can fit in his hands. He scarfs one after another. He crams enough in his mouth to fill both cheeks.

Eventually Jake's smile fades. He starts to look sick. He holds his stomach. He drops the stars from his hands. He turns and spits out his cheek-fulls. Queasy, he grabs onto Max's coat.

EXT. OVERLOOK-DAY

Max and Jake break out of the grass onto a high cliff. Max skids to a stop at the edge.

Sickness erased, Jake is breathless as he beholds the view before him: enormous mountains rise high over a plain that lies hundreds of feet below Jake and Max's perch.

(CONTINUED)

The mountains are different colors--purple, green, brown, white, blue, black. Some are completely snow-covered with jagged peaks; some are rolling, mossy slopes; some are rocky; some are lined with trees. It's as if all Earth's mountains have gathered around one valley.

Jake stares. He dismounts and continues to stare as he walks about the ledge. His gaze meets Max's. They both smile.

EXT. FIELD-DAY

Jake and Max lie on their backs in a beige field of what looks to be yellow grass or stalks of grain. They share the fruit of a nearby bush, which contains simultaneously bananas, strawberries, grapes, apples and oranges, as well as exotic fruit we don't recognize.

Gorged, Jake sets an orange peel down in a pile of other fruit remains. Mimicking Max, he leans back and laces his hands behind his head. At this cue, a troupe of tiny birds hops in to pick at the heap of half-eaten fruit.

As the two rest, Jake notices a brilliant red flower next to him, as if it just appeared. Jake looks it over. Confusion grows on his face. He doesn't recognize this kind.

JAKE

What kind of flower is this?

Max's eyes light up when he sees the flower.

MAX

Aah, a Nevosin. This is a very rare species...

Max shifts and inches closer to the flower.

MAX

...a very precious strain of the Morevosa family.

Jake watches as the flower grows before his eyes.

MAX

This flower demands the utmost care... In fact, it requires a vigilant caretaker--a servant--even to survive.

Thorns pierce the ground and begin to rise at the base of the flower.

(CONTINUED)



MAX

For this flower carries a curse. It is, by nature, self-destructive.

The thorns curl quickly upward, encasing the flower and poking into the flesh of the red petals.

MAX

It requires someone to brave the thorns. It requires a selfless, courageous act: someone must risk their own welfare to keep the flower from hurting itself.

As Max speaks, he gingerly reaches down and picks away the thorns. He pricks his finger and holds it briefly to his mouth, but then he's back at the thorns, pulling them away from around the flower.

MAX

And if one possesses the nerve to help it out of its own treachery...

Once the thorns are parted, Max carefully digs the flower's roots out with his claws. Scratching a new hole, Max lifts the flower from its original spot and places it in a new home--one free of thorns.

MAX

...then he will behold something truly beautiful.

At once, the flower blooms, revealing a striking white, blue and yellow stigma.

Max smiles a small smile; it's plain to see this act has given him tremendous satisfaction.

Jake stares contemplatively at the flower, and then he looks up at Max.

MAX

Come, it's time for you to get back to bed.

Max shepherds Jake to a knobby, nearby tree. Like before, he traces a large rectangle in the bark, which peels away to bright yellow light.

Jake and Max start to walk through the portal, but just before they're all the way in, we hear a loud CAW! Jake turns his head over his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

In the distance, he can make out a bird flapping low in the sky: the hawk!

Jake jumps as everything is absorbed by bright, yellow light.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake finds himself standing in his room, which is lit by the still-open portal. Max stands in the middle of the yellow light.

MAX  
Goodnight, Jake.

The portal vanishes, Max with it, to leave Jake alone in the dark.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-MORNING

We see Jake walking to school, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall. He skips and dances on his way.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Jake sits at a desk amid his fellow students.

MS. JANE (O.S.)  
(droning)  
...so if the last digit is a five  
or higher, then we round up...

For the first time Jake appears to be paying attention to the lesson. Other students yawn and look bored; yet, hand posed pensively on his chin, Jake focuses his attention straight forward.

We see Ms. Jane up close. She notes Jake's apparent model-student behavior. It takes her slightly aback. She pauses mid-sentence.

Jake smiles.

Ms. Jane smiles back. The least likely suspect seems to be the only one interested in her lesson.

MS. JANE  
(added pep)  
...and if the last digit is lower  
than five, we round down...

(CONTINUED)

Now we see what Jake sees. He's not paying attention to the lecture.

Hundreds of large brown buds--cocoons--line the wall behind Ms. Jane and cover the chalkboard, over top a series of numbers Ms. Jane has drawn. Ten or so have been broken open by large red butterflies that struggle to push their way out.

Soon all the cocoons give way. Butterflies sprout and fly, eventually filling the front of the classroom: a swell of fluttering, flowing red.

INT. CAFETERIA-DAY

Jake stands in a long line of students waiting to get their food, nose buried in a hardback: "Dragons." On the front cover a knight in a suit of armor battles a fire-breathing beast. Suddenly Jake is shoved against the wall.

BROCK  
(mocking)  
Hey, queer.

Jake looks surprised, afraid. Brock stands in front of him, wearing his patented camo sweatshirt, flanked by Joe.

Brock sees the book in Jake's hand.

BROCK  
(slight trouble reading title)  
Dr-ag-ons...Isn't that cute?

Brock and Joe look at each other and laugh.

We see an idea light up Brock's face. Brock speaks loudly, making sure Jake can hear his aside.

BROCK  
Hey Joe, you think I could get some  
kid to pay three bucks for this  
book?

JOE  
You know what? Maybe you could.

Brock is suddenly severe. He sticks out a stiff, open hand.

BROCK  
Give it to me.

(CONTINUED)

Jake looks at the book. He appears desperate. This book really means something to Jake, unlike the other mere objects Brock has taken from him.

A long pause.

BROCK  
(slower, menacing)  
Give it to me.

JAKE  
Can I please keep it?

Brock smiles.

BROCK  
I'm sorry, Jake. That would be bad business.

Jake looks defeated as he hands over the book, but Brock's words trigger a quizzical expression. As Brock and Joe stroll away, a hint of determination shows on Jake's face.

EXT. STREET-DAY

We see Jake hunched over, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall, trekking home from school.

Another, taller silhouette runs up behind Jake and grabs him. It's Scott! He motions excitedly and urges Jake to follow, then he takes off. Jake runs after him.

INT. APARTMENT-SAME

Scott breaks through the door and bounds through the living room. A second later Jake comes through, visibly excited. He scampers after Scott, leaving the front door wide open.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-SAME

Scott waits eagerly for Jake to enter behind him. Scott shuts and locks the door, leaving Jake panting in anticipation. Scott's usual street accent is absent.

SCOTT  
I did it, Jake! I really did it!

Scott slings his backpack down on Jake's bed, unzips it and dumps out the contents. Money! Wad after wad of cash tumbles out on Jake's covers.

(CONTINUED)

Giddy, Scott loses control of his face muscles to an enormous grin. He looks like he wants to jump up and down.

Jake looks stunned. Almost in shock, he picks up one of the folds of bills.

Scott snatches it from his hand. He still looks happy, but his face shows warning.

SCOTT  
(accent returning)  
Hands off, little bro. This is my  
money.

Scott looks over the cash. His eyebrows slant.

SCOTT  
'Bout fuckin' time that snake got  
what he deserved.

Jake looks up at him, still shocked. We stay on his face.

SCOTT(O.S.)  
I already dropped my first bones.  
Check it out...

Jake's look goes from shock to worry, from worry to fear. He now realizes Scott's gone through with his plan. He knows the implications of stealing from Tyler.

SCOTT  
I got this...

Scott unzips another backpack pocket. He pulls out an ipod with big earmuff headphones, holds them up in front of Jake, then tosses them on the bed.

Jake does not enjoy this. He looks increasingly disappointed in his brother.

SCOTT  
I got this...

Scott unzips the last pocket and pulls a small knife, which he flips open with flair.

SCOTT  
If Tyler even tries anything, I'll  
fuck him up!

Scott thrusts the knife in a stabbing motion and laughs.

SCOTT  
Best of all...

Scott's voice swells with excitement. He pulls off his baggy white t-shirt, revealing a pasty, untoned, nearly skeletal frame. There's a large gauze covering taped on his upper arm. He rips it off.

SCOTT  
...I got this!

A tattoo! Jake, again, looks shocked.

We get closer to the tattoo. We make out a giant bullet hole. Cartoon blood trailing from the hole runs down Scott's arm and spells out "T-H-U-G."

SCOTT  
Ha! Let any-fuckin-body try and  
tell me I ain't a thug now!

Scott grins.

We see Jake's face up close. Shock has worn to fear, disgust.

Scott's backpack still lies on Jake's bed. We see a large bottle of liquor tip halfway out of an open zipper. Jake sees it, too.

Scott rushes the bottle back in his bag, attempting to hide it from Jake.

A long pause. Jake stares at Scott. Both know his attempt failed.

SCOTT  
Look, I want you to know I don't  
condone none a' this drug shit. I'm  
just doing this to get back at  
Tyler.

Scott points a cautionary finger at Jake.

SCOTT  
You're a good kid. You stay outta  
this game.

Jake watches Scott pack his things back in the bag.

SCOTT  
It could take them a couple days to  
find out, but I'm gonna have to lay  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT (cont'd)  
low. You might not see more for a  
little bit. Tyler will come looking  
here.

Scott smiles naively.

SCOTT  
Don't worry, though...I got this!

EXT. SKY-DAY

We see the hawk soaring through clouds--peacefully,  
gracefully. We see it close up. The hawk is still in the  
air, almost in slow motion. We see the city below it.

Now the hawk flaps frantically, as if trying to escape  
something. The hawk climbs higher, like it's running from  
the city itself.

BANG! A gunshot! A blood splatter. A bullet tears through  
the hawk's wing.

The hawk fights to stay airborne but loses the fight. Its  
momentum slows. Its flight peaks, and it begins to fall. It  
plummets--faster and faster toward the city!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake jolts awake. Max waits beside him, leaning against the  
wall next to his bed. Yellow light pulses in the open  
closet. Max lets Jake catch his breath before he speaks.

MAX  
I know about the dreams you have.

Max speaks sternly. Yellow light and shadow render his  
appearance severe, like someone telling ghost stories with a  
flashlight. He is calm but serious. The joyful, playful  
nature he displayed at their first meeting is gone.

Jake quickly calms. He focuses all his attention on Max.

MAX  
They are not dreams, Jake, but  
visions.

Max looks straight ahead, not at Jake.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

What you have seen will come to  
pass...unless something is done to  
prevent it.

Jake stares at Max.

Max pauses for a long time. Finally he turns to face Jake.

MAX

You want to save the hawk.

Entranced, Jake slowly nods.

Max looks deep into Jake's eyes.

MAX

You can.

A slight spark of hope on Jake's face.

MAX

However it won't be easy...

Max uproots himself from the wall and strolls the room.

MAX

You must endure a series of trials.  
They will test your character, your  
intellect and your courage.

Jake's fascination looks more and more like fear.

MAX

I can help you to start...

A hint of hope from Jake.

MAX

...but you must face the final  
chapter alone.

Max gradually stops pacing and comes to the edge of Jake's  
bed. Standing on his hind legs, towering over Jake, Max's  
appearance, twisted by shadow, is particularly intimidating.

MAX

My world, like yours, contains both  
beauty and disfigurement, good and  
evil, light and dark. Should you  
return with me, you will find a  
much different place than the one  
you found before.

(CONTINUED)



The hope begins to fade from Jake's expression.

MAX

I promise that you will enter the darkest dwellings and meet the most wicked villains my world has to offer.

Jake now displays something near terror.

MAX

...that is, if you decide to accept the challenge.

Max is silent. He gives Jake time to think over the charge.

Jake makes no indication one way or the other.

MAX

Jake, you must decide now. Will you come with me?

Silence.

JAKE

If I don't, what will happen to the hawk?

MAX

He will die.

More silence.

JAKE

If I don't...will I ever see you again?

A pause.

Max shakes his head a somber "no."

Clearly saddened, Jake frowns. He looks into the daunting yellow light in the closet.

Max reaches out a big paw.

MAX

Will you come with me?

Jake pauses. Finally, perhaps comforted by the notion of company, Jake takes the paw.

Max pulls Jake up and out of bed. Max looks pleased, but remains serious.

He drops to all fours. He and Jake walk slowly toward the portal. Jake looks over at Max. Max gives a firm but sober nod. They step into the light.

INT. CAVE-NIGHT

The portal dumps Jake and Max in a shallow cave. Lightning! Thunder! Flashes outside the cave's broad mouth light its interior. We see pounding rain outside and jagged, dripping rock on the inside.

Jake turns and tries to run back through the portal, but it has vanished. Max gives him a stern look and continues to move forward. Tentatively, Jake follows, crouching behind him, as if it could shield him from water falling inside the cave or the storm outside.

EXT. ROCKY LEDGE-SAME

Max continues steadily forward. Jake winces as the full force of the rain hits him. Max doesn't look back. Jake runs to keep up.

The two come to a ledge. Max starts over without hesitation. He picks his way down through boulders and wet, angular rock. Jake pauses at the edge.

We hear a loud caw! Jake looks up to see a large shadow against the bright lightning bursts fighting through the storm: the hawk! It looks larger than it has before.

MAX

Come, Jake! We haven't much time!

Jake looks down and takes one final deep breath before following Max through the rocks.

EXT. GRASSY FIELD-SAME

Jake reaches the bottom of the rocks, where Max waits for him in a field of knee-high yellow grass that churns like whitewater under the wind and rain.

MAX

Jump on.

Jake climbs on his back, and Max takes off. Soaked through, Jake struggles for a grip on wet fur. He manages to grab around Max's neck.

(CONTINUED)

Max runs fast. They cover the length of the field in no time. Jake squints and ducks as low as he can to avoid the pounding rain.

The two approach what appears to be a sheer rock wall. As they get closer, Jake's eyes grow wide; he breathes hard. Max speeds straight at it. Closer. Closer! Feet away, Jake closes his eyes and pulls his face tight against Max's back.

Max leaps straight up. He still appears to be headed right into the wall. Instead, just before impact, he and Jake land perfectly in a crack in the wall.

INT. TUNNEL-SAME

We hear loud, high-pitched screeching--bats!--accompanied by the frightening, deep moans of some larger beasts and Max's rapid galloping. Jake opens his eyes to find that he and Max have landed in a long, narrow cave.

The tunnel is dark, and there's barely enough room to run. We see nothing, except when lightening flashes through a tiny opening at the far end of the tunnel.

Jake tentatively lifts his head, but he quickly learns better when he's pelted by several large, shrieking bats.

The flashing light grows larger as Max and Jake near the end of the tunnel. Closer still, we see no ground or trees--only black sky and rain, punctuated by yellow blasts. Max speeds up. Jake gasps as they burst through the opening.

EXT. CANYON-SAME

Jake and Max soar through the air, hundreds of feet off the ground. They fly over a wide canyon. Far below we see tumbling, glacier-blue waters.

Terrified, Jake holds his breath. Finally, as the two start to fall, the other side of the canyon comes into view. A different landscape: an earthy ledge covered by redwoods.

Max and Jake fall and fall; it looks like they won't make it!

...They barely do. The two crash through the treetops. We hear crunching branches.

EXT. FOREST-SAME

Max and Jake hit the ground like a crashing meteor: bam!

It's brighter in the forest; the trees and the floor maintain an uneasy red-orange glow. Here the rain is barely a drizzle. Aside from light dripping, everything is silent.

When the cloud of leaves and needles settles, we see that Max has landed agilely on his feet. He and Jake stand unharmed, though Jake is nearly hysterical, nearly crying--petrified and wheezing loudly.

MAX  
(firm but not harsh)  
Silence, Jake. He will hear us.

Max's tone is serious enough to set Jake straight after a few final gasps.

MAX  
We must move quietly. Do you see  
the red light on the trees?

We see closer the flickering light on the enormous, thick trunks.

Chest still heaving, but quiet now, Jake nods.

JAKE  
What is it?

MAX  
Fire.

Beat.

MAX  
Teel is burning down the forest.

Still on Max's back, Jake looks scared and confused. Max moves stealthily through the trees as he talks.

We start to see smoke as Max goes deeper into the forest.

MAX  
My brothers and sisters of the  
woods are hiding. They have called  
down rain to drown the flames and  
coat the trees...They appear to be  
succeeding.

The smoke grows thicker.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

But look at the damage he's done.

Max and Jake enter an area where a large section of forest has been felled by flame. The smoldering embers of giant trees produce smoke and steam. A little ways off we hear a great crack and see a several-hundred-foot-tall trunk collapse.

MAX

The ground is too hot here. We'll have to climb.

Max picks an intact tree. Large claws spring from his paws and he sets them into the bark. Steadily, he ascends the trunk. Daunted, Jake looks up the towering behemoth.

When they've covered fifty or so feet Jake peers down behind them at the ground. The look on his face tells us he won't repeat the mistake. He tightens his grip around Max's neck. Were he stronger, he'd be strangling Max.

EXT. TREETOPS-SAME

They reach a branch with the diameter of a two-lane road. Max treads out along it. Eventually Jake settles enough to ask questions.

JAKE

Who's Teel?

Max stops. He sighs a heavy sigh.

MAX

Teel is a dragon, the only living one. He is the enemy of the forest, the dark leviathan of this world.

Max pushes back a smaller branch, an offshoot of the one they stand on, revealing a mass of rock in the distance. It's only visible because a section of forest has been cleared by fire.

Smoke rises in the foreground but seems to curl around the castle-like mountain. The rock sports giant, jagged spires. More notably, it is completely engulfed in flame.

MAX

(pointing a claw)

Teel lives there, in the oily boulder field called Rashan.

(CONTINUED)

Max lets the small branch swing back into place. He resumes moving along the large branch.

Max runs gingerly from branch to branch, tree to tree, easily traversing the forest hundreds of feet above the floor. As the two progress along their path, the red glow on the trees grows more severe. Jake takes note.

JAKE

Why is he burning the forest?

MAX

He's looking for the hawk...as are we.

Max suddenly comes to a stop. There lies in the branches before them a huge bird's nest, 20 ft. in diameter. It's empty.

MAX

This is the hawk's nest. I fear he's abandoned it.

Now Max bows down and motions for Jake to dismount. Cautiously, he does.

JAKE

(frightened)

Why is he looking for the hawk?

MAX

Some evil creatures fancy themselves to be so great that they perceive the slightest offenses unforgivable. Other creatures, who rarely live long enough to become wise, offend the evil ones in ways that reach far beyond the limits of "slight."

JAKE

What will happen if he finds the hawk?

Beat.

MAX

He will kill him.

In the distance we hear a terrible hiss. It's accompanied by a plume of dark red fire that shoots out above the treetops. Jake shudders.

(CONTINUED)

As the forest falls quiet, Jake's fear gives way to curiosity. He looks over the hawk's nest.

The nest, made of sticks and larger branches, is covered in feathers. We also see pools of blood. Jake, forgetting for a second his precarious perch, drops to his hands and knees to eye the nest.

We see several Nevosin flowers. They grow out from the sticks, all in different stages of life. None are healthy. All are choked by thorns.

One has shriveled inside a thick thorn casket. We see where thorns have poked through the petals of two others. Now we understand where the blood comes from: the punctured petals bleed like human flesh.

Jake takes in the scene. He lowers his eyebrows, as if he feels eyes on his back. He whirls around.

We see a tiny head poking out of a hole in the trunk of the tree next to the nest. It stares back at Jake. We can't make out much of the animal, but it's face is shadowy and distinctly sad.

Slowly, never breaking eye contact, the animal emerges to a small branch adjacent the hole. It's a stark white squirrel with a pink nose and a long, feminine tail like a fur coat.

Jake and the squirrel share a long, intimate gaze. Though pretty, upon closer inspection, the squirrel's face is worn and weary.

We see some emotion swelling in Jake. The squirrel gives Jake a familiar sad smile.

Jake stands up.

JAKE

We have to find the hawk!...Before  
Teel hurts him!

MAX

Yes, but first...

Max points to a long, long, skinny branch, one much different from the others. He walks Jake over to where the skinny branch splits from the main shaft.

MAX

At the end of this branch grows a  
single Joon fruit.

Jake looks at Max, confused.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Teel has injured the hawk. The juices of this fruit contain a strong healing power--one able to patch the hawk's wounds. You will need it if you want to help him.

JAKE

Okay, let's get it.

Jake tries to climb on Max's back, but Max doesn't let him.

MAX

I'm too heavy. The branch would break. **You** must retrieve the fruit.

Jake's eyes show surprise. He is still for a long moment, dazed by fear.

MAX

Do you want to help him, Jake?

Jake remains still, but this snaps him out of his daze. He doesn't answer, yet he meets Max's gaze.

Max nods.

Very slowly, Jake turns and moves toward the branch. The branch is skinny--half the thickness of a telephone pole--and long--30 yards. He takes a tentative first step.

Inching, one foot in front of the other, Jake makes it five steps. He slips on the wet bark, but catches himself. Jake looks over his shoulder. We see Max look on patiently.

Gradually, Jake makes it to within ten feet of the end of the branch. The branch bends under Jake's weight; the tip sags. Again, Jake slips! This time he falls! He manages to grab the branch on the way down.

Jake hangs underneath the branch, arms and legs wrapped tightly around it. He pants and doesn't move.

MAX

You're okay, Jake. Don't be afraid.

Max's words help Jake regain his composure. He starts moving again, working his hands and legs along the branch, staying underneath.

Jake reaches the end of the branch. He finds a cluster of green leaves. Among them lies a yellow, oval-shaped fruit with a single purple stripe and a hard shell like a watermelon.

(CONTINUED)



Jake reaches for it, but it's too big to grip with one hand. His hand slips off.

MAX

Careful...

Jake pauses for a second. Slowly he releases his other hand. Now he hangs upside from the branch, held only by his legs. Jake grabs the fruit with two hands. He pulls it off the branch.

Moving more confidently, Jake holds the fruit in one hand and reattaches his other to the branch. He's able to wedge the fruit under his shirt and tuck his shirt into his pants.

Jake grabs the branch with both hands and starts to work his way back. Eventually, he reaches his starting point. Max grabs Jake with a single paw and pulls him up onto his feet.

MAX

Well done, Jake. Now come.

Max bows his head, and Jake mounts up. Jake carries the fruit in one hand and grips Max with the other. Max takes off running.

EXT. FOREST FLOOR-NIGHT

From a distance we see Max running with Jake on his back. Now closer. The forest floor's relatively clear. Max dodges a few bushes and some underbrush but is able to run freely through the trees.

Booshh! Suddenly something explodes in front of Max, launching Max in the air, tossing Jake on the ground! Booshh! Booshh! Two more explosions. One sends up leaves and needles to Jake's left; another splinters a tree behind him.

Frantically Jake looks himself over. He's unhurt, but his hands are empty. The fruit! Jake scans the ground as he gets to his feet. He sees the fruit lying several feet away.

Before Jake can grab it a slimy-looking lizard (about Jake's size)--JAI--scurries from behind him and snatches the fruit in its mouth. Jake watches as the lizard runs to the feet of a larger lizard--BACKEN--and drops the fruit.

The latter lizard is ten-feet tall and slimier than the first. It's bulky, with thick limbs like a body builder. It's colored a splotchy green/brown and covered in mud. It picks up the fruit with a chubby, scaly hand.

(CONTINUED)

The larger looks at the smaller. They exchange something like smirks and the smaller climbs onto the larger's shoulders. The larger looks at Jake, leans its head back and emits a high-pitched croak--something like a laugh.

The large lizard sets the fruit back down. It scoops mud out of the ground and packs it into a massive ball. It hands the ball to the smaller lizard, who sets it on the tip of the larger's thick tail.

Without warning, the larger lizard drops to all fours and, like a catapult, flings the mud ball from its tail. The mud ball, three feet in diameter, heads straight for Jake!

Paralyzed Jake watches wide-eyed as the mud ball approaches. Just as it reaches Jake, Max's paw grabs him and pulls him behind a tree. Boossh! The mud ball explodes where Jake was standing.

Jake's no longer paralyzed but still visibly afraid. He breathes hard.

JAKE

Is that Teel?

MAX

No, Teel is a much larger, more fiendish opponent. You will meet him soon enough.

Jake peers around the tree to see the hulking lizards packing mud balls.

JAKE

(in disbelief)

Larger?

MAX

That is Backen and his accomplice Jai--simple bullies. They come to the forest from the swamp when Teel comes from the boulder fields. They use the panic Teel induces to steal from the forest animals.

Now Max peers around the tree. He assesses the situation.

MAX

Okay, Jake. I will distract Backen. You recover the fruit.

Jake glances at the lizards another time.

(CONTINUED)

JAKE  
Do I have to?

Max looks Jake in the eyes.

MAX  
Bullies wear frightening disguises.  
Confronted, they are soon unmasked.

Jake looks unconvinced.

MAX  
You defeat a bully by looking  
through his camouflage and standing  
up to the coward beneath.

Jake's fearful, skeptical expression eases a little.

MAX  
Remember, I am always with you.

This gives Jake what he needs. He nods firmly.

MAX  
Wait until I have their attention.

With this Max steps from behind the tree. Jake peeks around and watches.

The lizards see Max slowly walking toward them. They glance at each other--the briefest of conferences--before Backen launches a mud ball. Max reaches up a paw and catches it with ease. He places it on the ground and continues to walk.

The lizards look at each other again. This time we see panic in their eyes. Hastily, Jai loads and Backen fires three more mud balls.

We see Max gingerly dodge the first. The second two kick up large clouds of dust, mud and pine needles.

Backen and Jai wait expectantly. Max emerges unharmed. He continues steadily forward.

Now the lizards squabble with each other in unintelligible croaks and hisses.

A deep breath, a final glance at the bickering lizards, then Jake makes his move. He dives from behind the tree to a nearby bush. He army-crawls through dirt and pine needles, staying covered by ferns and shrubs.

We hear constant explosions as Jake wriggles forward. Jake stops and parts the bushes just enough to see through them.

(CONTINUED)

He sees Max adeptly dodging explosions. Max darts from tree to tree, hiding behind one, reappearing from behind another. He seems to be toying with the bullies.

Jake keeps crawling. Soon he finds himself close to the lizards. Looking around a bush, he can see the Joon fruit. Busy with launching mud bombs, the lizards have moved. The fruit lies unguarded, ten feet behind them.

Jake makes a final dash. Now he crouches behind a rock that's as close to the fruit as the lizards are. He takes a good look at the fruit then cranes his neck to see the massive Backen and Jai.

Jake leans with his back on the rock. He takes deep breaths, working to throttle his nerves. He closes his eyes. After a few seconds he reopens them. He's finally ready.

Jake crawls out on his hands and knees, inching toward the fruit and toward the lizards. Jake keeps his eyes on the lizards. He looks scared but focused.

Now he looks at the fruit. He crawls faster. Almost there. A sly smile. He reaches...and grabs it.

Now Jake kneels. He brings the fruit up to his face. After looking it over, smiling, he lets his hands drop. Replacing the fruit is Backen's giant smiling face, a foot from Jake's. Jai smiles the same from Backen's shoulders.

Jake shows great surprise, fear even, but he doesn't gasp or jump back. Gradually, he stands straight up on his feet. We see on his face that he struggles to keep his composure, but he does.

Backen croaks an evil laugh. He reaches out a hand with thick, stubby fingers and sharp nails. He grabs the fruit.

Jake looks scared, but he doesn't let go. Now he shows determination. A standoff.

A few tense moments pass. As they do, we see something unexpected from Backen. His smile fades. It turns to worry, then alarm; Jai's does likewise. Backen lets go of the fruit.

We pull back to see that Max is right behind Jake. On his hind legs Max reaches eight or nine feet. Chest puffed out, fangs bared, a frightening sight.

Max puts a paw on Jake's shoulder. Jake grins.

MAX  
 (deep growling)  
 Mmmmmmmmmmmmmhrrrrrrrrrr.

Now the lizards' expression is something past alarm.

Max lets out a terrible, ground-shaking roar. It blows forward Jake's hair, ruffles leaves and kicks up pine needles.

Backen and Jai sprint off in the other direction.

Jake and Max smile at each other.

EXT. TREETOPS-NIGHT

From afar we see Jake riding on Max's back through the treetops. Jake sits straight up, like a rider on a horse. Closer, we see he wears a confident expression, high from defeating the lizards.

We start to see smoke again. The smoke grows thicker. Max slows from a steady trot to more cautious strides.

Max moves gradually forward. Even more smoke. We see the red glow on the trees flare. Now Jake looks unsettled.

As Max continues, the trees grow progressively redder. Soon a red light envelopes everything: the trees, the leaves, Jake, Max.

MAX  
 Keep vigilant, Jake. We're getting close.

It's hot. We see sweat pouring down Jake's forehead, soaking his hair, his t-shirt. Rid of his confidence, Jake leans down and holds Max around the neck. This right light, this anticipation, is perhaps the scariest yet for Jake.

THE HAWK (O.S.)  
 Caaaaaaaw!

The hawk's call is not like the ones we've heard earlier. It's distressed--a shriek. Jake and Max whip their heads to look at each other.

MAX  
 He's in trouble!

Max turns and runs in the direction of the hawk's cry.

EXT. BURNING FOREST-SAME

Max halts. A sizable patch of forest burns before the two! The fire's an unearthly dark red. Tall tongues of flame swallow the trees and the forest floor.

Through and above the immediate flames, where there must be a clearing, we see an enormous moving figure, a huge black mass. We hear a loud, awful screech--the snarl of a dragon--and see a plume of fire shoot above the treetops.

MAX

**That** is Teel.

Jake is frozen stiff.

Max runs on branches around the edges of the burning area. He spends brief time on several trees that are partially on fire.

Once on a good tree, he slows and crouches low. Trying to stay out of sight, he creeps to the edge of a large branch. He lets Jake down from his back.

He and Jake peer over the branch. Below is a clearing. Though surrounded by flame and cast in red light, the clearing remains unburned. The hawk!

The hawk (about 5ft. tall) flaps its wings and hobbles backward, facing something on the other side of the clearing. It looks injured but not beaten--the tips of its wings are singed, it favors one leg.

It looks scared. Now we see what he's running from. TEEL pushes through a wall of fire.

An enormous, black, serpentine dragon, 40ft. tall on all fours. He has a triangular head with eyes the same color as the flame. He has the long, sleek body of a snake, with no wings but four scaly, muscular legs.

Half slithering, half stalking, fire pours from his mouth and nostrils with each breath. Jake watches. He looks stunned, concerned.

In two steps Teel is upon the hawk. The hawk looks around. Nowhere to go.

Teel spews a large fireball, well over the hawk's head. A tense pause. Slowly Teel reaches a long claw and presses it closer and closer to the hawk. The hawk doesn't move.

The claw touches the hawk's wing. We see blood, yet the hawk remains still, staring Teel in the eyes.

(CONTINUED)

Jake looks pained as he watches. Max's eyebrows are lowered in concentration.

Teel leans his long neck down and brings his head closer. The fire from his breath nearly reaches the hawk. Teel grins, baring sharp, yellow teeth with black gums. He sticks out a long, forked tongue.

Emotion builds on Jake's face. He can't take it.

Teel twists his claw, pushing it a little farther into the hawk's wing. The hawk winces, but remains motionless.

Teel brings another claw to the hawk's chest.

JAKE  
(shouting)  
Stop it!

For the first time Max looks surprised. He stares at Jake through wide eyes. Jake looks just as surprised at what he's done.

Using the distraction, the hawk swipes a talon across Teel's face, catching him in the eye.

Teel rears and shrieks. The hawk flaps away into the dark.

One eye closed, Teel whirls around. He shrieks again and shoots a sharp string of fire that heads right for Max and Jake.

Much like before, Max snatches Jake away at the last second. He slings Jake on his back and sprints through the tree branches. The fire follows them. Max jumps a large gap and barely makes it to another tree.

Jake looks behind them. Teel follows. Trees fall as he plows through them. Fire shoots ahead of him. Jake clutches the fruit tight.

Max flies through the treetops. Fire nearly catches them several times and Max is forced to turn on a dime. Teel's gaining.

Jake looks back again. Teel is upon them. He takes a swipe with colossal claws. The swipe catches the base of the tree. Max and Jake move across. It starts to fall.

Max skids to a stop. As their branch tips vertical, Max leaps to the trunk. He rides it down as it falls. Max springs off just before it hits the ground. Now he sprints along unburned forest floor.

Max and Jake break out of the thick forest.

EXT. RAVINE-SAME

The rain has stopped. We see by the waning moonlight.

Max dashes into an area of thinner trees and soon no trees at all. Now only high, lush grass. Jake looks ahead. The grass ends ahead, dropping off into what looks like a sheer cliff.

Max slows as they reach the end of the grass. Teel fells a few final trees as he struggles into the open. He fires a beam of flame toward Max and Jake, but it doesn't reach.

Now we see that the grass drops into a muddy ravine, a couple hundred feet deep. A single, thick tree has fallen and stretches over the gap, making a bridge.

Max expertly scans and assesses his surroundings. Jake breathes hard, panicked. Max pauses a moment to think and then maneuvers around the tree's exposed roots (which reach well overhead) and onto the trunk.

Max sprints. He makes it three quarters of the way over the ravine.

Teel reaches the downed tree and pauses. He rises high on his back legs and shoots a stream of fire that lands in front of Max and Jake, setting their remaining path aflame.

Max stops on a dime. He turns around, but Teel shoots a second stream that burns the part of the tree they've already covered. Jake and Max are trapped between two burning ends of the tree.

Max looks back and forth. Jake frantically whips his head each direction. Max takes action: he turns around to again face away from Teel, he backs up a few steps and then runs toward the flame.

MAX

Duck.

Jake pulls himself close to Max.

Max leaps and the two fly over/through the flame. Coming down on hard on the bank, Max tumbles and Jake falls off his back, but both stand, unscathed.

Teel looks furious. He roars. He sets a tentative foot on the downed tree. It holds him. He starts across.

(CONTINUED)



Jake sees Teel slithering across the tree. Jake turns and readies himself to run. Sitting on his haunches, Max puts up a paw.

MAX

Wait.

Jake looks confused, but he obeys.

Teel is nearly to the other side. We hear the tree start to crack. It has almost burned through. Just before Teel reaches Max and Jake, the tree gives way. Teel tries to stop, but both he and the tree plummet down the ravine.

Jake jumps behind Max, who has sat completely still through the whole ordeal. Collected, he strides to the edge of the ravine. Jake follows slowly.

Teel jumps. He claws at the walls, trying to climb his way out, but the mud is too soft. He roars, sends up smoke and fire. He's trapped. Defeated, Teel roars again and stalks away, walking along the ravine floor.

MAX

He'll have to take the long way out, but he'll be back.

Max bows and Jake hops aboard.

The sun has not risen, but the night's now brighter. Dawn is coming. Max runs along the edge of the ravine.

EXT. FOREST-DAWN

Jake and Max arrive back at the clearing. The trees that were burning earlier are now charred remains, still smoking. But in the lessening darkness we can start to see the color of green grass, ferns and shrubs.

Toward the edge, we make out the hawk, a small, still figure in the big clearing.

Jake jumps off Max's back and runs to the hawk. The hawk grooms itself with its beak. It glances up when Jake arrives, looking him over with a hard stare.

There's a deep gouge in the hawk's wing where Teel stuck his claw--a fair amount of blood, but nothing life-threatening. Yet, looking closer, we see that the hole goes all the way through the wing. We see trees and grass through the hole.

Jake pauses. He peers deep into the hawk's harsh eyes; Jake looks confused as to what to do. Max strides up behind him.

(CONTINUED)

Jake looks at the fruit in his hand. He looks at the hawk and then turns to Max. Max acknowledges Jake's glance, but he makes no motion and gives no instruction, as if he's waiting to see what Jake will do.

Jake searches the clearing with his eyes. He spots a sharp rock sticking up from the ground. He jogs over to it.

Pausing to think, Jake looks the fruit over again, closer this time. Tentatively he raises the fruit over the rock. He looks back at Max one last time. Max makes no signal, but we detect the slightest satisfaction in his face.

Jake brings the Joon fruit down on the rock, splitting it in two. He runs the two halves, a half in each hand, back to the hawk.

Jake slowly leans closer to the hawk, studying it for a reaction. The hawk stiffens, but allows Jake to proceed.

Now Jake looks like he knows what he's doing. He scoops mushy blue pulp from a half of the fruit. He rubs a liberal portion on the hawk's wound.

Steam. A small cloud rises. The hawk screeches. This takes Jake slightly aback, but he keeps at it. We see the gash gradually close.

Left is a sizable patch of skin without feathers and a red splatter of a scar, but the wing has healed. Gradually the hawk rises and flaps a few times, testing it out. Jake stands back. The hawk settles, satisfied.

Jake watches, somewhat awestruck, as the hawk sits back and grooms itself. The hawk notices his staring and stops. The hawk stares back. Jake approaches shyly. Now close to the hawk, he reaches a hand to touch its wing.

The hawk shrieks and flaps again, knocking Jake onto his back. The hawk flaps a few more times and takes off. Jake looks up and watches as it clears the trees. Jake's not hurt, but looks about to cry.

Jake looks to Max with an expression that says, "Why?" Max reaches a comforting paw and hoists Jake to his feet. He keeps the paw on his shoulder. Dawn is breaking.

MAX

We can only help those who will let us.

Jake looks downcast, Max serious. Now Max smiles and draws his paw to Jake's chin.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

But the more we offer our aid, the harder it is to refuse. You have not seen the last of the hawk...

Jake looks up. He appears less defeated.

MAX

...or Teel for that matter. You've done a good job, Jake.

From the edge of the clearing we see a mother rabbit hop into the grass, soon followed by three babies.

The morning grows brighter still.

MAX

You have shown courage and compassion.

We see more animals step into the clearing: beavers, deer, frogs.

MAX

You have passed the first set of trials.

Soon many forest animals--bears, grasshoppers, cardinals, blue jays, antelope, moose, squirrels, mice, many more--form a ring around the clearing, surrounding Jake and Max. They begin to make noise, an applause of sorts.

Jake looks about, mesmerized. He looks to Max.

Max smiles.

MAX

They're showing you their appreciation.

Max's words sink in for a moment, and then Jake smiles. Max starts to walk out of the clearing. Jake follows.

Jake keeps looking around, keeps smiling. He gives a little wave. The animals' clamor crescendos. Jake's smile grows.

As Max reaches the edge of the circle, animals peel back to allow his passing. He and Jake leave the circle.

Jake sees the white squirrel from before walk out along a branch. She doesn't make noise like the rest of the animals, but looks on somberly. Jake stares.

(CONTINUED)

He and Max come to a boulder on the clearing's edge. Max draws a familiar box with his claw. Yellow light pushes through.

MAX

Say goodbye, Jake.

Jake turns his attention briefly away from the squirrel. He waves a big wave, and noise from the crowd crescendos again. He stands, grinning ear to ear, staring at all the animals.

Jake looks back at the squirrel. She returns his gaze, displaying something like pride.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-MORNING

Early morning light shines through Jake's blinds.

Jake and Max step out of the portal in Jake's wall, which seals up behind them. With one big paw, Max pulls back the covers of Jake's bed. Jake climbs in.

Max looks like he's about to say something, but there's a knock on the door.

LINDA (O.S.)

Jake, it's time to get up for school.

Jake and Max both show surprise. Jake tries to hurry Max under the bed, but he won't fit.

INT. APARTMENT, HALLWAY-SAME

Linda knocks again on Jake's door.

LINDA

Jake?

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-SAME

Max scrambles for a hiding place. He won't fit in the closet either.

INT. APARTMENT, HALLWAY-SAME

Linda looks confused. She starts to open the door.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-SAME

Jake shoves Max off screen. Linda enters.

LINDA

Honey, it's time to get up.

Linda gets closer to find a frantic look in Jake's eyes. It's clear he hasn't slept a wink.

LINDA

Jake, are you all right?

Jake looks back and forth from his mother to the corner of the room. Linda looks concerned.

JAKE

(curt)

Yes. I'm fine.

Now we see what Jake's looking at. The shade is missing from a nearby lamp. In the corner of the room, Max stands perfectly still, posing as a lamp, with the shade on his head.

Linda looks at the corner where Jake keeps glancing. We see what she sees: nothing, just the corner of the room.

LINDA

What are you looking at?

Jake stares at his mother. He looks completely dazed. His mouth hangs open.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE-DAY

MONTAGE: We see Jake undergo a series of medical tests.

INT. TEST ROOM-SAME

Now we watch as Jake gets a cat scan.

INT. OBSERVING ROOM-SAME

Linda stands with Dr. Hammond and watches her son from a separate room through a glass window.

Linda, who stands with her arms crossed, appears more nervous than Jake, who stares blankly, almost contently inside the intimidating tube.

Dr. Hammond takes note of the demeanor of both. He presses an intercom button, more for Linda's sake than Jake's.

INT. TEST ROOM-SAME

DR. HAMMOND (O.S.)  
Almost done, Jake. You're doing great.

Jake makes no physical reaction to the doctor's reassurance.

INT. OBSERVING ROOM-SAME

Dr. Hammond turns to Linda, who bites her lip.

DR. HAMMOND  
We'll have the results in and analyzed in a day or two.

Linda nods, still staring at Jake.

An effort to reassure, Dr. Hammond puts an arm on her shoulder.

INT. TEST ROOM-SAME

Jake remains calm as the cat scan machine emits loud metallic bangs and clicks. He appears to be looking at something outside the tube.

Now we see what Jake sees: Max sits in the corner of the room, concealed by shadow, behind medical equipment, hidden from Linda and Dr. Hammond. He wears an encouraging smile.

A tiny smile, likewise concealed from his mother and doctor, cracks Jake's lips.

## EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-MORNING

From far away we see Jake walking to school, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall.

He passes. We wait a moment...We see the silhouette of a large panther bound stealthily after him.

## INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY-DAY

Jake strolls amid other students. His stride displays a new-found confidence.

We see several oddities. A tropical bird flies over the students, nearly scraping the ceiling. A spider monkey dangles from a doorknob by its tail.

Jake smiles but pays the animals no special attention.

## INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Jake sits at his desk. Outside we see an elephant in the courtyard. It sucks water out of a rain trough with its trunk, then blows it out over its back.

Jake glances out the window, but Brock leans intentionally into his line of vision. He holds up Jake's book and smiles. He opens it and pretends to read, making a mock-studious face.

Jake stares at Brock. Jake shows no hint of submission. His expression grows into determination.

## INT. CAFETERIA-DAY

Jake stands at the end of the lunch line. Brock approaches, Jake's "Dragons" book in hand, Joe in tow. Jake takes a deep breath.

BROCK

Hey, queer. The top offer on your book is two dollars, but since I'm such a nice guy, I'll let you buy it back for five.

Brock grins at Joe.

Jake is silent, but he glares at Brock. We see in Brock's face that he didn't expect this.

(CONTINUED)

BROCK

What do you say? It's in mint condition. Five dollars is a steal.

JAKE

Give me back my book.

Now Brock shows blatant surprise. He quickly regains his senses and chuckles, but there's something uneasy in his voice.

BROCK

What?

JAKE

(loud)

Give it back to me! It's one of my favorite books, and you can't have it.

Brock looks taken aback. Jake's raised voice has caught the attention of a nearby lunch lady. Brock sees her glance in his direction.

Jake takes a step closer to Brock. We see his face up close.

JAKE

(firm but softer)

Give me back my book.

We see Brock up close as well. He glances around nervously.

We pull out to find Max standing behind Jake, a paw on Jake's shoulder, towering high over Brock. Jake crosses his arms.

Brock looks at the lunch lady, who now stares intently back.

BROCK

Is this a setup? Did you tell on me? Here, have your stupid book, you tattletale.

Brock tosses the book at Jake. Jake catches it, un-rattled. He stares Brock down as Brock retreats. Max does the same.

Jake glances up at Max. Max winks and Jake smiles.



## EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-AFTERNOON

We see Jake and Max walking back from school, silhouettes against a scarred brick wall.

We see that they're talking. Jake says something, and we see Max throw his head back and guffaw. Faintly, we hear his laughter.

## INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM-LATER AFTERNOON

Jake and Max sit on the living room floor next to the coffee table stacked with books. The "Dragons" book Jake retrieved from Brock lies open on the floor. Jake points to it while conversing with Max.

Scott bursts through the door, chest heaving. He's sweaty and his elbow is scraped. He looks terrified. He pauses to catch his breath, but then runs to the window.

Scott peers out the window, scanning the street, then strides quickly to his room. We hear the door slam.

Jake looks at Max. Jake picks up the book. He closes it and studies the cover: a striking Japanese painting of a snake-like dragon. He looks toward Scott's room.

## INT. SCOTT'S ROOM-SAME

Still breathing hard, Scott ducks, trying to stay out of the window while he peeks outside. He drops the blinds.

Scott lies back on his bed and sighs. His face scrunches with worry.

Three loud knocks at his door!

Scott springs up. He holds his breath. He moves slowly, trying to stay quiet. He eases open a dresser drawer and pulls out the knife he earlier showed Jake. Scott slips it into his pocket and approaches the door.

Slowly Scott opens the door: no one there. Scott takes a step into the doorway and peers down the hall. Looking around, something on the floor beneath him catches his attention.

Scott bends down. When he comes back up, he's holding a hardback book: "Dragons."

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, PATIENT ROOM-DAY

DR. HAMMOND

Here you go, Jake. I need to talk to your mother. We'll be back in twenty minutes.

Jake sits on a paper-covered diagnostic table. Dr. Hammond hands him several pieces of paper on a lap-board and a box of colored pencils. He steps out of the room.

Jake wastes no time pulling out a few pencils and setting one to the page.

INT. MEETING ROOM-SAME

Dr. Hammond closes the door behind him as he steps into a small room with two chairs and a desk. The patient and meeting rooms are connected; we see Jake through a large window behind Dr. Hammond.

Dr. Hammond carries a manila folder, thick with papers. Linda stands with her arms crossed, looking expectant and somewhat worried.

DR. HAMMOND

Please have a seat.

Linda takes a seat, as does Dr. Hammond. He scoots his chair in, so that he can be as close to Linda as possible. He rests his elbows on the table.

Linda watches his every move. Maybe his posture or expression will give a hint to whether he has good or bad news.

DR. HAMMOND

(stern but not grave)

Linda, we found a tumor.

Linda looks pale, her worst fears realized.

Dr. Hammond opens the folder and pulls what looks like a colorful x-ray of Jake's brain. He points to a spot that looks mildly discolored and out of place compared with the area around it.

DR. HAMMOND

It's a primary tumor, meaning it originated in Jake's brain, rather than spreading there. You can see it here, between the frontal and temporal lobes.

(CONTINUED)

Linda leans in and looks.

DR. HAMMOND

Now there are four grades by which we categorize brain tumors. From the CT scan, the tissue looks barely abnormal, but it's certainly there. We'll need to do some further examination--get a small sample of the affected region...

Linda's face shows she doesn't like where this is going.

DR. HAMMOND

...but from what I can see, I estimate a grade two.

Linda looks a little lost. She holds her breath for the doctor's next words.

Dr. Hammond looks up from the CT scan.

DR. HAMMOND

Grades one and two are benign.

Linda lets out a half-relieved sigh.

DR. HAMMOND

However...

A single word erases any relief on Linda's face.

DR. HAMMOND

...any tumor in the brain is still very serious...more so than elsewhere in the body. Just because a tumor is labeled "benign" doesn't mean that it's harmless. A grade two tumor can develop into a grade three.

Linda gives a hesitant nod. She looks at Jake through the window. He appears consumed in his drawing.

DR. HAMMOND

Benign tumors aren't stagnant, but merely slow-growing. Jake's is small but tricky because of where it's situated.

Dr. Hammond again points to the CT scan.

(CONTINUED)

DR. HAMMOND

The pressure it's exerting on several parts of the brain may be responsible for his inattention and some of the recent changes in behavior you said you've been noticing. As the tumor grows, even slightly, these symptoms could worsen and Jake could experience memory problems, loss of motor skills...Sometimes, brain tumors can even cause hallucinations.

Dr. Hammond looks back up at Lisa. He gives a tiny smile, the first since he started this discussion.

DR. HAMMOND

But I haven't seen anything to indicate that for Jake.

Linda looks past doctor Hammond to her son in the next room. Jake appears to be talking and sharing his artwork with an imaginary friend.

DR. HAMMOND

At any rate, I recommend surgery. The sooner the better.

Linda's attention snaps back to Dr. Hammond.

LINDA

Isn't surgery dangerous?

Dr. Hammond leans back in his chair.

DR. HAMMOND

(exhaling)

It certainly has it's risks.

Linda looks worried.

DR. HAMMOND

But the longer the tumor sits in Jake's head, the greater the chance of permanent brain damage or even...

Dr. Hammond tenses a little.

DR. HAMMOND

...or even death.

Linda's face registers fear, but she still has questions.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

Is there any way to avoid surgery?

DR. HAMMOND

Well, some people with stage one and two brain tumors can live normal lives, but almost all tumors in the brain require surgery at some point.

LINDA

(hopeful)

Maybe Jake's won't?

Dr. Hammond thinks for a second.

DR. HAMMOND

No, it's usually a question of postponing surgery rather than avoiding it.

He sits up and picks up a pen.

DR. HAMMOND

I could schedule an operation as early as next week.

Linda looks very concerned. She looks at Jake again.

Dr. Hammond goes over his schedule.

Silence.

LINDA

Can I have a few days to think about it?

Dr. Hammond looks surprised, unsatisfied. He closes the folder, swallowing disappointment.

DR. HAMMOND

Of course.

Dr. Hammond exhales through his nostrils.

DR. HAMMOND

We'll monitor Jake this week. We'll do the tests we need to do, and I'll give you some informational material to read.

Linda nods.

DR. HAMMOND

Right now I just need to administer  
a few preparatory supplements.

Linda looks ill. She nods again as Dr. Hammond exits the room.

INT. PATIENT ROOM-SAME

Jake is putting the final touches on his drawing. We see over his shoulder as he looks at his mother through the glass.

He finishes his picture. We see he's drawn a white squirrel with a pink nose.

Jake looks up from the finished product and at his mother again. Dr. Hammond re-enters behind Linda. He carries a syringe with a long needle.

Linda stares back at Jake. A look of fear and worry.

A gunshot rings out!

EXT. SKY-DAY

A bloody hole in the hawk's wing! The hawk fights to stay airborne but loses the fight. Its momentum slows. Its flight peaks, and it begins to fall. It plummets--faster and faster toward the city below.

The hawk hits the ground with a sickening slap!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Jake jolts awake. Max waits in front of him, clearly ready for action. Yellow light pulses in the open closet.

Jake takes a moment to catch his breath. Resolutely, he climbs out of bed.

EXT. WATERFALL-DAY

A blast of yellow light fades. Jake sits atop Max's back, loud, rushing water before his face!

Jake blinks and shakes his head to orient himself. He discovers that he and Max stand under an overhang, closed in by a wall of gushing water: the backside of a waterfall.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Ready?

Jake looks at Max wide-eyed but soon calms and gives a firm nod.

MAX

Hang on tight.

Max springs through the water. An enormous drop lies ahead. Headfirst, the two fall and fall and fall.

Jake looks scared, but he bares down, gritting his teeth.

The two continue to drop and increase speed. Now, from the mist at the bottom of the fall, we make out giant, jagged rocks that rise out of the water. We also see tall, viney trees along the bank--jungle.

It looks like Max and Jake are headed for the rocks. However Max, ever so smoothly, reaches out his hind legs, catching the water on the face of the fall. This slows their momentum.

As the two reach closer to the rocks, just before impact, Max grabs a vine from a nearby tree. He and Jake swing through the bottom of a big arc, bringing them within feet of the sharp boulders.

Now swinging upward, Max releases the vine like it's a big rope swing. He and Jake fly high through the air, completing a back flip.

MAX

Yeeeeeeeeehoooooooooooooooo!!!

Max tucks into a cannonball as the two land with a mighty splash in a hazard-less pool beyond the rocks.

EXT. BANK-DAY

Max, who looks joyful, splashes up from the water and onto dry land. Jake trudges behind. He doesn't look so happy.

Max shakes himself dry, and Jake wrings out his clothes. The more we watch the two, the more we see a difference in their moods: Max appears content, while it looks like something's eating Jake.

Eventually Max notices Jake's unusually sober temperament.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Jake, are you all right?

Jake nods slowly. Clearly he's not.

MAX

Is there anything you would like to talk about?

Jake pauses a moment, then gives a slight nod.

MAX

Walk with me.

EXT. JUNGLE-DAY

Max and Jake stroll through vibrant neons. The jungle is bathed in life--plant and animal. We see palm trees with thick trunks; koala bears; ferns of red, green, blue; bright-colored centipedes and snails; orangutans and more.

Max appears lively enough, but Jake walks with his head down.

MAX

What seems to be bothering you?

Jake stares at Max for a hard second, as if Max has somehow betrayed him. Jake looks back at the ground.

MAX

Jake?

Beat.

JAKE

My mom says I have a knot in my head.

Max shows a hint of surprise, but it's clear he understands Jake's situation.

JAKE

She says it might make me feel different or act funny.

Now Jake raises his head to stare at Max.

JAKE

She says it might make me imagine things...

Jake looks down again, then back at Max.

(CONTINUED)



JAKE

...things that aren't really there.

For the first time, Max looks hurt. He looks away for a second. The two walk for a moment in silence.

They approach and stop next to grove of alien-looking plants, each with four tall leaves that droop about a fleshy pink circle.

MAX

Look around you, Jake. Is this real?

Jake lifts his head and glances around the jungle. Seeing its sights and hearing its sounds, his expression grows slightly less skeptical. He runs his hand along one of the plants' long leaves.

The plant purrs, and the leaf uncoils a little. Jake's moved to a tiny smile, but suddenly he pushes the leaf away.

JAKE

My mom says we can't always believe what we see and hear.

Jake crosses his arms.

Max smiles while maintaining an air of seriousness.

MAX

That's true, Jake.

Max looks deep into Jake's eyes.

MAX

But we must always believe what we know in our hearts.

Now Max looks up and away; he looks around at the trees and the animals. Pride swells in his chest. He holds his head up and shoulders back.

MAX

My world is not so different than yours. Like your world, mine existed long before you entered it.

Beat.

MAX

(returning to Jake)  
And it will be here long after you're gone.

(CONTINUED)

Jake's expression begins to soften.

Max stares, again, deep into Jake's eyes. He puts a paw on Jake's shoulder.

MAX

Jake, time in any world is precious, and the decisions we make are of the utmost significance. You are trying to do something good in this world. Is your doubt worth giving it up?

Now Jake appears guilty--on the cusp of coming around.

Max rests a finger on Jake's chest.

MAX

What does your heart say?

Jake looks convicted. Max removes the finger and smiles.

MAX

And remember, Jake, like the world in which I dwell, though you may not see me, I am here for you as well.

Jake returns Max's smile, but he still needs a second. He walks back toward the four-leaved plants. He strokes the same leaf he did before. Again the leaf purrs and uncoils. Jake's grin grows.

MAX

Try touching the pink center.

Slowly Jake reaches in his hand. Now all four leaves appear alive. Jake touches the pink circle.

The four leaves snap together! Jake yanks his hand away just in time. The leaves snap straight up over the center of the plant, forming a giant bulb--an enclosure large enough to fit an animal Max's size.

At this Jake gives a little gasp. He looks alive, energized. He turns to Max with wide eyes but nearly chuckling.

JAKE

Are they...?

MAX

(grinning)  
Carnivorous? No. Just playful.

(CONTINUED)

The plant relaxes, and its leaves fall back down. It emits small exhalations--something that sounds like laughter. The plants behind and around it follow suit.

Jake grins a wide grin. Playfully, he presses the pink center and jumps back as the plant snaps closed again.

Jake turns and smiles at Max.

MAX  
Goodbye, friends.

We hear chatter and see movement in the plants. The plant that teased Jake lifts a single leaf and waves.

Smiling, faith restored in this odd world, Jake waves back as he and Max leave the jungle.

EXT. PLAINS-DAY

Jake and Max wander through green, grassy plains. From where they walk, several landscapes are visible. Faraway on the left, we see sand that gives way to sea. Far to the right we see snow.

Straight ahead the plain continues. Gradually the grass yellows and builds into rolling hills. Behind the hills, mountains.

Jake trudges slightly behind Max. Max sets a difficult pace for Jake to maintain.

JAKE  
(nearly whining)  
Where are we going?

MAX  
To find the hawk.

Jake's fatigue appears to lessen.

JAKE  
(curious)  
Where is the hawk?

MAX  
I don't know.

Max keeps chugging ahead. Jake slows, confused.

Max turns his head. Seeing Jake, he stops. He turns back and looks straight ahead.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

This is the way to Rashan.

Jake appears to be thinking, trying to place the reference.

MAX

Teel's home.

At this Jake's eyes show fear. His breathing quickens.

As they approach the hills ahead, the grass turns from yellow to gray. The vegetation looks dirty, ashen. The color scheme echoes that of the area around Jake's neighborhood.

JAKE

(slowly)

Why are we going there?

MAX

Because Teel's after the same thing we are.

A pause while everything sinks in.

MAX

However, I doubt we'll make it the whole way.

Jake waits for Max to finish the thought. Jake isn't sure how to take this.

MAX

I have a sneaking suspicion that the hawk will come to us.

Crash! Twenty feet from Jake a flailing, fiery object hits the ground at a 45-degree angle, sending up dust and bits of flame.

The hawk! Its wing is on fire! The hawk beats it on the ground to put it out.

A large plume of fire rises in the nearby hills--not close but nearer than the mountains.

One of the hawk's wings is singed and smoking. The hawk looks shaken, perhaps injured by the fall. More than anything, it looks exhausted. It falls to its back and passes out, chest still heaving.

We start to hear rumbling in the quiet plain. The rumbling gradually gets louder. Jake and Max both turn to look up the nearest hill.

(CONTINUED)

The ground shakes. Rocks unearth and tumble down the hill.

JAKE  
What's happening?

Max continues to stare at the crest of the hill.

JAKE  
Teel?

MAX  
No. Rhinos.

Jake makes a face that says, "aahh," but then realizes the potential danger.

MAX  
Teel's henchmen.

A massive cloud of dust pours over the hill. Now the earth shakes so much that Jake has a hard time standing.

MAX  
Now would be a good time to run.

Max whirls around. Jake is already sprinting to the hawk. Jake helps shovel the unconscious hawk onto Max's back, then he hops on, too.

Max takes off. Fast as he is, the cloud gains on him. The ground shakes harder.

Jake looks over his shoulder. Leaving the dust behind, we see the rhinos are large as elephants. They grit yellow teeth and pound the ground with massive hooves. Horns point at Max and Jake.

The ground cracks beneath Jake and Max. Now it splits wide open. Max leaps from one solid spot to the next, avoiding long black crevasses.

Jake looks over his shoulder again. The rhinos are closer still. They seem to have no trouble dodging the holes they make. One rhino runs faster than the rest. It pulls away from the group.

This rhino is smaller than the others. It grits an evil grin. Notably, a large chunk misses from one of its ears.

Max runs through the grassy plain they walked earlier, but now he comes to a ledge. He skids to a stop at the edge of a large cliff.

Below lies sand and an eventual beach on the right; past the sand, palm trees; past that, the trees push together and form the mouth of the jungle. There rests a lone palm tree and tuft of sand on the ledge next to Jake and Max.

MAX

(urgent)

It's too big to jump, Jake. What should we do?

Jake looks surprised that his mentor-friend is asking him for advice, but he has no time to think about it. He frantically looks about, scanning for a solution to their problem.

The smallest rhino gets closer still; the hoard's not far behind.

Then Jake spots it: a small trickle of water darkens sand under the palm tree. It's an odd place for it. Jake jumps off Max's back. Jake follows the trickle with his eyes. It seems to disappear under a large rock. Max studies Jake.

Jake runs to the rock. Max follows. Jake peers behind it: no water. Jake tries to roll the rock away, but he can't budge it. Max steps in and uproots it with a single paw.

Under the rock is a round hole. Jake can see light coming from the hole. He inspects it: inside is surprisingly smooth and well-lit. Jake ponders a moment.

Jake runs to the edge of the cliff. Looking along the cliff, where it curves so its underside is visible to Jake, he sees a similar hole, over the sand, much closer to the ground. He squints to see further. Water trickles out the hole.

MAX

Hurry, Jake.

The rhinos are uncomfortably close.

Jake looks up and scans his surroundings. He finds the palm tree. Coconuts! Jake runs and grabs one lying at the base of the tree. Max surveys intently.

Jake returns and tosses the coconut down the circular hole. He moves to the edge of the cliff, eyeing the lower hole. He waits. The ground shakes harder. Rumbling becomes pounding.

Jake watches the hole despite the approaching storm. Max watches Jake. The rhinos are dangerously close, but Jake stays focused.

(CONTINUED)

There it is! The coconut drops from the lower hole and hits the steep sand bank, rolling downhill toward the shore.

Without hesitation, Jake jumps feet-first down the hole. Without hesitation, Max follows headfirst. No sooner has Max made it in than the small, jagged-eared rhino arrives. He narrowly misses spearing Max's hind legs.

The small rhino stomps at the ground around the hole--he's too big to fit. His comrades catch up and bellow in frustration.

INT. HOLE-SAME

We see what Jake sees. He careens on a downward slant through the narrow tube, as if inside a water slide. The rock is slick, wet, smooth. Light peeks in enough from cracks to break up shadow.

Max follows right behind. His tail braces the hawk on his back. The heavier of the two, Max gains on Jake until he runs into him and holds him with his front paws.

The tunnel twists and curves. The two do spirals, then a loopdy-loop.

JAKE

WhooooooooOOOOooaaa!

Now the tunnel gets increasingly brighter. We see a circle of bright light. Jake and Max quick shoot toward it and through.

EXT. SAND-DAY

Jake and Max fall through the air--a longer drop than it looked from above. Poof! They hit the sand, sending up small, granular explosions.

Jake somersaults down the the steep, sliding surface. Max is able to land on his feet and slip down on his stomach, still pinning the hawk to his back.

Jake rolls to a stop at the bottom of the hill. He coughs and spits out sand. Gathering, he locates Max, who grooms himself and shakes sand from his fur.

The two have landed on a brief plateau. Over the sharp crown of a dune, only feet further, the flat ground drops out into another steep, sandy hill.

(CONTINUED)

The two take a moment to rest and breathe. Jake examines the area. Sand dunes, beach to the right, thickening palm trees at the feet of the dunes, jungle noises beyond.

Max starts to walk, unhurried. Jake scurries over and walks with him. Following along the sandy ridge, they come upon a giant boulder--more than a boulder, a smaller brother of the cliff behind them.

Quickly the boulder squeezes them into a several-foot wide space between rock wall and a long drop down the dune. Max motions ahead.

MAX

We can follow this ridge down to  
the the beach, then curl back  
through the palms on firmer ground.

Jake sees before them where the ridge takes a long time to curve and descend, ending on the beach.

Max stops. Jake follows suit.

MAX

(nodding over the ridge)  
Or...there's a more direct route,  
if you prefer.

Jake peeks over the the ridge. The sandy slope is much steeper and longer than the one he just tumbled down.

As he looks, he becomes visibly irritated. He scratches and tilts his head. More than a trickle of sand pours from his ear. Jake turns back to Max and shakes his head a vehement, "no."

Max smiles, but the smile fades. He points with his eyes to the hawk on his back.

MAX

Back in the jungle we can gather  
treatment for our friend.

Jake takes a step closer and looks the hawk over. The hawk is conscious now, but weak. Its chest throbs; it gets little from its breaths.

We see the hawk's oozing burns. We recognize the bald spot and the blood-scar on the hawk's wing. The hawk looks Jake in the eyes. It looks scared, helpless.

The hawk wears resignation like a lead blanket it can't push off. This time it won't refuse Jake's aid. Jake's eyes and mouth shape a pity-filled grimace.

(CONTINUED)



Max starts to walk again. Jake follows behind.

JAKE  
(looking at the hawk)  
Is there more Joon fruit in the  
jungle?

MAX  
No. We used the last one. There  
won't be more until the growing  
season.

JAKE  
When is that?

MAX  
In nine years.

Jake looks broken. Max takes note. Max faces him.

MAX  
Wounds of the flesh mend more  
easily than lapses of character.

Jake is blank. Max nods again to the hawk.

MAX  
These injuries will heal. And I  
even suspect that this time our  
friend has...

Max looks over his shoulder to stare at the hawk.

MAX  
(loud)  
**...learned his lesson not to fool  
with unsavory individuals!**

The hawk lets out a weary moan. Max returns to Jake.

MAX  
He'll be all right, Jake.

Beat.

MAX  
...his body at any rate.

Following his moment of firmness, Max gives Jake a gentle look and nods ahead. This seems to put Jake at ease. Jake comes next to Max, and now they continue walking side by side.

The two walk silently for a moment. Jake looks behind him.

(CONTINUED)

Far, above, the rhinos stand one next to another, spread in a long, uniform line at the cliff's edge--like soldiers awaiting orders. Max sees them, too.

JAKE

Is there another way down?

MAX

(pondering a second)

Yes. It's slightly longer...and far less exhilarating than our course of travel.

Jake furrows his brow.

JAKE

Why don't they take it? Why are they just standing there?

Max stops walking and looks again at the rhinos. They remain content to merely watch. Now Max looks puzzled.

MAX

I'm not sure.

Max appears to think for a moment, then proceeds warily.

MAX

Teel's underlings are usually more persistent.

Jake keeps staring at the rhinos until the boulder eclipses them. He and Max come to the end of the boulder.

Max continues to tread carefully. Now, as Jake finally gives up staring at the rhinos, Max looks back one last time. He speaks with his head cocked around, looking at the angle he would to see the rhinos were the boulder not blocking them.

MAX

Hmm...Perhaps we tired them out.

Max is still looking back. Jake sees him first--Teel! Eyes wide open, his scaly, hulking head rests on the ground just beyond the edge of the boulder, five feet from Jake. He's been waiting for them!

Flame curls from Teel's nostrils: a warning! Jake shows obvious terror, but springs into action. He throws his body into the still oblivious Max--a shoulder check with all he can muster.

(CONTINUED)

Usually Jake's meager frame would fail to budge Max, but on this sandy cornice, Max's footing crumbles and they both fall over the ridge, narrowly escaping a hot blast from Teel!

Again, Jake tumbles--this time more violently. Max's reflexes kick in; he catches himself and slides down on his paws and stomach, keeping the hawk clear of the sand.

Jake thuds into soft sand at the dune's bottom. He tries to stand up. Too dizzy, he falls. He tries again.

We see what Jake sees. Three wobbly dragons breathe three wobbly flames. Gradually the three converge to form one.

Before Jake can fall again, Max snatches him onto his back and sprints away. Flame scorches the spot where Jake stood.

Jake finds himself riding backwards in the saddle, watching Teel.

Teel makes his way down the dune with some irritation. He's not built for this. His giant appendages sink deep into the sand. Eventually he, too, tumbles--two great somersaults to the bottom.

Max blazes as fast as he can on soft footing, as if he were only jogging from the rhinos, but Teel is really worth running from.

Teel wriggles to his feet. Now he's after Max, Jake and the hawk. Jake watches as he gains ground, a black mass on the white sand, night swallowing day.

Max flies. He darts past occasional palm trees. Jake shakes off dizziness. Fighting wind resistance, Jake turns himself forward. He leans down and grabs around Max's neck, bracing the hawk to Max's back.

Max's tail lets go of the hawk. Now, if possible, Max runs even faster.

Thicker palm trees. Jake glances back frequently. Behind him, palm trees are torn out and tossed 50 feet overhead. Smoke. Teel's patented fireballs land all around.

The trees thicken further and we start to see green vegetation. Even further and we see the colors of the jungle.

EXT. JUNGLE-SAME

The jungle's empty. The animals have fled. Jake can't see Teel, only the carnage in his wake: trees are mowed down, thick chunks of plant life uprooted and flung. Fire.

Max plunges deeper into the jungle. Teel's awful snout emerges, then the rest of his face, his shoulders--all frighteningly close.

Teel's flames tickle Max's tail. Jake looks down at the hawk, who rides along, eyes wide, limp, petrified.

Max leaps up and grabs a vine. He and Jake swing, not far above the jungle floor. They land, and Max keeps running.

Jake looks confused: what was the point of that? However, he sees Teel's head jerk and crash into the ground, as if someone chopped off his feet.

We hear what sounds like a muted splash. Teel shrieks.

Jake looks at Max. As if Max can sense Jake's gaze through the back of his head, he squeezes words between deep breaths.

MAX

Quicksand! One of your many allies  
in the jungle--if you're ready for  
it!

Max glances over his shoulder. We no longer see Teel.

MAX

It won't stop him for long.

Max persists through the jungle, never slowing. A moment of silence. Teel breaks it with a shrill roar. We hear the heavy plod of his footsteps as they start again and quicken to something more agile.

Hope leaves Jake's expression.

MAX

I can't outrun him, Jake.

Jake looks back. He doesn't see Teel, but smoke and flame creep through the trees.

Jake is back in familiar territory. He looks about as Max chugs on. We recognize the scenery.

(CONTINUED)

Jake and Max approach the grove of playful, four-leaved alien plants. They've nearly past it when an idea alights on Jake's face.

JAKE

Stop!

Max skids to a halt. He turns and looks expectantly at Jake. Jake studies the plants for a hard second, then the helpless bird he holds in his hands. We hear louder cautions of Teel's approach.

Jake uses all his might to drag the hawk from Max's back to the nearest flower. Exhausting strength he didn't know he had, Jake lifts the hawk onto the plant's pink center.

The plant snaps up, encasing the hawk in a tall bulb, hiding it from sight.

Jake throws a glance at Max. A slow grin breaks on Max's face. Jake jumps and lands with his feet on the pink center of the next plant over. It snaps up, hiding him as well.

Max struts to the plant adjacent Jake. Before he hops in, he whistles to a particular plant further down the front line; it appears to waken at his signal. Max jumps in.

Wasting no time, the plant Max signaled taps some friends, using its leaves like hands, then snaps itself shut. The two fiends do the same.

A quick rustle throughout the patch. One by one, the plants all snap shut, leaving a uniform grove of bulbs rather than three conspicuous standouts.

Preceded by fire, Teel bursts through the closest trees. He tramps quickly along, but he's clearly on the lookout for stowaways. He pauses in front of the grove.

Teel moves his head side to side like a snake as he scans the jungle. He examines a tree opposite the plants. Nothing there. He turns to the grove. He puts his head down close to the plants.

He expels fire through his nostrils with each breath. The flames land just above the plants themselves. He flicks his long, forked tongue.

We see Jake inside his bulb, frozen still, careful not to move or breathe.

Crack! A twig breaks. We hear movement far off. Teel snaps to attention. He gives the grove one last skeptical look before deciding it's not worth a second inspection.

(CONTINUED)

Teel chases after the noise, bulldozing jungle as he goes.

Once satisfied Teel's gone, the plants holding Jake, Max and the hawk peel back, revealing their heads like the tips of bananas. Max and Jake peer around before exiting their capsules.

The hawk's plant peels all the way down, leaving the hawk lying face-up on its pink center. The hawk stares what looks to be a grateful gaze at Jake before dropping its head and passing out. Jake's eyes show compassion.

Max puts a reassuring paw on Jake's back.

Ever-so-gently, the plants shape their leaves into waves that carry the hawk to the center of the grove. There, many plants combine to form a bed for the hawk to lay on.

Jake sees the white squirrel emerge from a nearby rock. One of the plants lets down a leaf. The squirrel walks up the ramp and across the bed of leaves.

MAX

His struggle persists, but you've put him in good hands for the moment.

The squirrel looks at Jake with twice the gratefulness of the hawk and looks at the hawk with twice Jake's compassion. Motherly movements and expressions. She caresses the hawk's forehead and beak while he sleeps.

MAX

(deep, joyful)

Congratulations, Jake. You have conquered new challenges.

The plants rustle and whisper with excitement.

MAX

You have displayed discretion, even through impending danger. You have been brave enough to see your plans through to completion. You have been prudent enough to improvise when the situation demanded a creative solution.

Beat.

MAX

(gentler)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAX (cont'd)

And you were attentive enough to help a friend who failed to watch where he was going.

A gradual smile from Jake.

MAX

You have passed the second series of tests, and you have earned one of the highest honors bestowed by the order of the forest.

We see an object is passed from the back of the grove, carried by the leaves up to the front. We can't yet make out what it is.

The plants hand the object to Max and he kneels before Jake, resting it across his palms.

MAX

The sword of discernment!

Jake looks down at what Max holds. He blinks a few times. It's a stick--a stick that mimics the blade and handle of a sword, but it's just a wooden stick, fallen from any tree.

MAX

Only those who've proven their judgment wise and swift may possess such a weapon.

Still confused, Jake takes it slowly from Max's paws. Jake looks it over. He slices the air a few times, then looks at Max.

JAKE

It's a stick.

Max grins.

MAX

Is it?

When Jake looks back to his hand, he no longer holds a stick, but a bright white-silver blade. The light it emits is mesmerizing, like the sun and moon in one.

Jake swings it a few more times. It's big for his body, but he seems to have no more trouble swinging the sword than he did the stick.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

This instrument will guide you and  
protect you. From now on...

Max raises a paw and brings it down. The sword changes back  
to a stick in Jake's hand.

MAX

...the sword will only wield a  
blade when your life or the life of  
another is in danger.

Now the squirrel hops off the bed of leaves. She makes her  
way to Jake, carrying something in her mouth.

MAX

Its power will not be abused. Use  
it wisely, Jake.

The squirrel climbs up Jake's pant leg, up over his shoulder  
and onto his arm. She ties a fine, pink vine to the handle  
of the stick.

MAX

I know that you will.

The squirrel looks up at Jake. They share an intimate gaze.  
In the background we see Max drawing a large box with a  
claw.

A blast of yellow light!

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NIGHT

Yellow light fades. We see Jake in his bed. He takes a quick  
look out the window, at what appears to still be night sky,  
before passing out.

INT. LINDA'S ROOM-SAME

Linda sits atop the covers, wearing white pajamas with pink  
dots. Papers spread over her bed. She reads from a packet.  
We see the title: "Treatment Options for Tumors: Grades 1 &  
2."

Linda gives an anxious sigh and lets the packet fall. It's  
too much to take in right now.

She moves to the edge of the bed and sits for a long moment,  
worrying more than thinking. She rubs her temples and stands  
up.



## INT. JAKE'S ROOM-SAME

Linda cracks the door open just enough to stick her head in. She finds him completely knocked out, snoring nasally roars. This brings a smile to her worried face.

Assured he won't wake, Linda opens the door wider. Light pours onto Jake's floor, runs up his sheets, over his legs and feet, stopping at his chest.

Linda squints and blinks to make sure she's seeing right. She takes a few steps into the room. Closer, she confirms that Jake is sleeping with a stick clutched to his chest.

Linda walks to the edge of Jake's bed. Gingerly she slips the stick from his fingers. No reaction from Jake.

Holding it like a cross, Linda inspects the stick. Finding the pink twine, she smiles again. Linda places it at the edge of Jake's room among his other collected items--rocks, leaves, flowers.

Linda kisses Jake on the forehead, tucks his covers tighter and exits the room.

## INT. LINDA'S ROOM-NIGHT

With new-found determination Linda resumes reading. She comes a section titled, "Alternatives to Surgery." Her face lights up.

## EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-MORNING

We see Jake walking to school against a scarred brick wall.

Jake walks alone, but on the wall we see the shadows of many animals. We see antelope, small birds, rodents, raccoons--grazing, flying, scurrying, galloping.

## INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Jake sits at his desk. Ms. Jane lectures. We see his classmates, the classroom. Things appear normal.

Now we see what Jake sees. The classroom is half-overgrown: tall grass between desks, large green leaves. The rest of the students are still there but amid plant and wildlife.

(CONTINUED)

We see Brock and what he sees: Jake sits facing forward, nodding big nods--there's something unnatural in Jake's demeanor. Brock's expression shifts from quizzical to antagonistic.

We see what Jake sees: baby bunnies hop high in the air in front of Jake's desk, obscuring his view of Ms. Jane. Jake watches them, nodding his head to follow their up-and-down trajectories.

Brock continues to stare at Jake.

MS. JANE  
Brock, eyes forward!

Brock snaps out of his gaze, embarrassed. Ms. Jane returns to the lecture. She smiles at Jake, who nods as she talks.

Now Brock stares hatred at Jake. Jake's humiliated him again.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-AFTERNOON

Jake strolls back from school.

Clang! A clatter in the trashcans in front of Jake. The hawk has crash-landed, sending a lid banging on the ground!

The hawk hobbles its way from the mess. It looks as bad as Jake's seen it. It favors one leg. It flaps its wings but fails to take off. We see blood on its wing.

The hawk, seemingly unaware of Jake, hobbles into a nearby alley.

EXT. BACKSTREET-AFTERNOON

Clang! Scott tumbles into trashcans, knocking them over, spilling garbage. Shaken, he sits up. He wears a tattered tank top and a backpack.

Scott's in the backstreet of a backstreet, the alley of an alley. Dark, shadows, red brick sooted black. No one comes back here.

Tyler approaches slowly. Two thugs step back. They threw Scott into the cans.

TYLER  
You broke my heart, Scott.

(CONTINUED)

Scott scoots backward on his butt to keep distance between himself and Tyler. No use.

TYLER

I gave you an easy enough job,  
didn't I?

No answer from Scott. Scott glares at Tyler, as if he wants to spit on him but knows better.

Tyler kicks him hard in the ribs. A sickening thud!

EXT. ALLEY-AFTERNOON

Jake reaches the alley, but the hawk's not there. Jake scans the lane before racing down it. Soon he's got something to go on--blood.

Specks turn into drops, then splatters. Jake follows the trail around a corner.

Where the alley continues Jake spots the hawk sputtering along. He runs after it.

EXT. BACKSTREET-AFTERNOON

Scott curls almost fetally and nurses the kick to his ribs. Tyler kneels next to him. He puts a mock-friendly hand on Scott's shoulder and speaks in a quiet voice.

TYLER

I was generous enough to give you  
this chance...

Tyler draws a deep breath.

TYLER

...and you stole from me!

Beat.

TYLER

I should've known you'd do it  
again.

Scott's jaw drops indignantly. What did Tyler just say?

Tyler stands up. He nods to two underlings. They go to work on Scott--shoving, kicking, punching. Scott struggles in vain to avoid their blows.

EXT. ALLEY-AFTERNOON

Jake's catching up. The hawk moves slower. With each step it looks more beat up.

Blood spots on the dirty cement grow larger still.

EXT. BACKSTREET-AFTERNOON

Tyler's thugs withdraw, leaving Scott in much worse shape than when we last saw him. He lies surrendered on his back, riddled with cuts and scrapes. Blood pours from his mouth, nose, ears.

Scott's backpack has fallen during the beating. It sits next to him on the ground. He pulls it to him with a feeble arm.

Tyler's footsteps.

TYLER (O.S.)

Stand up.

Tyler stands over Scott. Scott looks at him but stays on the ground.

Tyler flips open a large knife.

TYLER

On your feet, you piece of shit!

Scott slowly rises, bringing the backpack with him.

A pause before Tyler speaks.

TYLER

You heard me right. I know you stole from me before. After we rolled that 711...back when I thought you were my brother.

Scott still looks astonished, but we see guilt now. He can't look Tyler in the eyes.

TYLER

We were supposed to split everything 50/50, but I know you took extra!

A long, tense silence.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT  
(apologetic, desperate)  
It was just 40 bucks. I needed it.  
It didn't mean shit!

TYLER  
(shouting)  
It meant everything to me! How  
could I fuckin' trust you after  
that?

Scott looks ashamed. Tyler takes a step closer.

TYLER  
You know, I almost felt bad for  
you. Why do you think I gave you  
this fuckin' job? You think I  
couldn't get someone else to do it?  
You think I needed you?

For the first time Tyler loses his cool. His anger is no longer calculated, but emotional.

TYLER  
If you did this for me, you  
would've been back in, Scott. I  
would've taken care of you.

Through pain, Scott looks surprised.

TYLER  
(crumbling)  
But you fucked everything up!

Tyler turns and takes a long breath. He puts his game face back on. No emotions now.

Tyler raises the knife to Scott's neck. He doesn't whisper but speaks softly enough that only Scott can hear him. This is between the two of them.

TYLER  
Scott, I'm gonna get my money back.  
I'm going to come with you and  
you're going to show me where it  
is.

EXT. ALLEY/BACKSTREET-SAME

Jake rounds another corner. He sees puddles of blood but no hawk. He looks around. Jake's wound himself too deep into the maze of alleys. He's lost.

Trying to locate the hawk or any recognizable building, street or feature, Jake proceeds much slower now.

Down yet another alley, Jake spots Scott, Tyler and his group of hoodlums! Tyler holds a knife to Scott's neck.

Jake ducks behind a wooden crate. Wide-eyed, he observes from afar.

We're back in Scott and Tyler's shared personal space. Tyler spots Scott's new tattoo. We see on his face that it sickens him. He jabs his knife into it, not too deep, but enough to make Scott scream with pain.

TYLER

If you cooperate, that'll be the  
end of it. I'll let live, as long  
as I never see you again.

Jake turns and sinks, back against the crate. He starts to hyperventilate.

Tyler gives an evil smile. The smile turns turns to contorted anger.

TYLER

Consider it a favor for an old  
friend.

Tyler pulls the knife out. Scott grunts and puts his hand to the wound.

Jake breathes harder and harder. He looks terrified--more scared than we expect or than we've seen him in a long time.

TYLER

If you refuse to tell me, or in any  
way hinder my progress, then I'm  
going to beat you within inches of  
your life with a rusty hammer. I'm  
going to make you tell me where the  
money is. While my boys fetch the  
cash, I'm going to pull out all  
your fingernails. If I run out of  
fingers, I'll do toes. If I run out  
of toes, then I'll cut out your  
kneecaps. When my boys get back and  
I have the money in my hand...

(CONTINUED)

Tyler leans in even closer. As he speaks, he makes his free hand into the shape of a gun. He points it at Scott.

TYLER  
...then I'm gonna take those last  
few inches.

We see Tyler's forked tongue. He pulls the imaginary trigger.

Breathing even harder, Jake looks frantically around, like someone might come save Scott. No one does.

TYLER  
Where's the money, Scott?

Scott looks beaten, too weak to make eye contact.

SCOTT  
(softly)  
I have it.

TYLER  
(shouting)  
I know you have it! Where do you  
fucking have it?!

SCOTT  
I have it here.

Scott starts to unzip a backpack pocket.

Tyler looks skeptical. He presses the knife closer to Scott's neck.

TYLER  
Slowly!...Show it to me.

Scott pauses. Slowly, he reaches into the pack. Slowly, he pulls out a rubber-banded wad of cash.

Tyler looks amazed, disgusted. He shakes his head. He lets the knife fall from Scott's throat. We see Scott slip his hand back in the bag. Tyler doesn't.

TYLER  
Only a dumb fuck like you would--

Psssssssst! Tyler takes a blast of pepper spray to the face. Scott keeps his finger pressed on the button. He follows Tyler down with the can as he goes to ground.

Jake gasps.

Writhing, Tyler coughs and chokes. Scott doesn't let up, as if he wants to Tyler's eyes out.

One of Tyler's henchmen lunges at Scott. Scott gives him a sharp dose, too. The thug doubles over and coughs. The others mask their faces, trying to avoid residual mist.

Scott takes off sprinting. He exits the space in Jake's direction. Jake jumps up.

EXT. ALLEYS-SAME

Scott runs down an alley parallel to Jake's. He's got more strength than he let on but runs with a limp. Jake can almost keep up.

Every twenty or so yards a perpendicular alley connects Jake's and Scott's. Every twenty or so yards Jake gets glimpses of his brother running in the adjacent path.

Scott looks behind him. Tyler's thugs have gathered themselves and now chase after him.

Fortunately, Scott's faster than most the thugs, but one presses ahead of the pack: a particularly small, skinny hood with facial piercings and sleeves of tattoos. He wears a black beanie.

Out of the corner of his eye, Scott catches a glimpse of someone running in the parallel alley. He readies his pepper spray. Jake! Immense surprise from Scott, but he keeps running.

SCOTT

(waving his hand the other way)

Jake, get out of here!

Scott takes a sudden turn. Jake loses sight of him. Jake tries to make a similar turn from his alley, but still he doesn't see Scott.

We see what Jake sees: brick after brick flies by as Jake speeds down seemingly endless corridors.

EXT. STREET-SAME

Finally the alley spits Jake out by the entrance to a tiny church with modest stained glass windows. The church is tucked in with shops and eateries on a street with moderate traffic. Desperately, Jake looks about--no Scott.

(CONTINUED)



Jake readies himself to keep running, but Scott hobbles out from a different alley, yards away from Jake.

The brothers see each other. Scott heads toward Jake. At this point Scott fights to remain upright.

SCOTT  
(frantic, panting)  
Jake, you gotta peace! They'll hurt  
you!

Jake takes in a pitiful, horrific sight. Scott's battered and bruised. He spews blood when he speaks.

SCOTT  
Go home!

Jake stares at Scott, not sure what to do.

Suddenly a rumbling catches Jake's attention. The ground starts to shake. Jake gasps. He looks beyond Scott. Cracks open up in the street and the sidewalk, much like when the Rhinos chased Jake and Max.

Scott sees his brother's reaction. He looks behind him. Everything looks normal--no rumbling, no shaking, no cracks. Scott looks confused.

SCOTT  
Jake!

Jake snaps out of his daze and into action. Quickly he assesses his surroundings. He looks up and down the street--some poor apartment buildings, a Chinese restaurant with a tiny potted palm tree outside the door, a pawn shop.

Jake looks at Scott. A small puddle of blood's formed beneath him. He leans against the wall to support himself. Jake looks at the church doors.

The rumbling is deafening. Without words, dodging splits in the sidewalk. Jake pushes Scott, steering him into the church.

INT. CHURCH-SAME

No shaking or rumbling. Scott takes three steps before collapsing in the middle of the aisle between two sets of pews.

The church is a small and unceremonious. A wooden cross rests above a podium at the head of the room. Worn wooden pews. A table with a bible on it.

## EXT. STREET-DAY

Jake sees Scott's blood on the ground--a dead giveaway to his location. Jake's head swivels back and forth as he searches for a solution on the quaking avenue.

The rumbling grows louder, the shaking stronger. Jake spots the palm tree outside the Chinese restaurant.

## INT. CHURCH-SAME

MARTA--16, Hispanic, faded sky-blue dress, no makeup but staggeringly beautiful--opens her eyes. She turns her head and spots Scott face down on the floor. Her hands, clasped for prayer, un-twine and drop.

She stands up from the end seat of a front-row pew. She starts toward Scott.

Closer, seeing blood, she runs to his aid.

Scott lifts his head wearily. Looking up at Marta, he sees a blurry angel. Things go black.

## EXT. STREET-SAME

Struggling to pull the heavy pot, Jake works the plant from the restaurant to the church doors. It covers Scott's blood without looking conspicuous. It looks like it belongs where he's set it.

Now Jake hears rhino bellowing and heavy hooves pounding cement. He backs inside the church doors, keeping watch on the alley.

## INT. CHURCH-SAME

Rumbling outside. Jake jumps to the nearest window and peers through stained glass.

He sees Tyler's small, black-beanied henchman pop out the alley. He stops in front of the church doors, scanning the street. Jake ducks down, trying to stay out of sight.

EXT. STREET-SAME

Sneering, the small thug whips his head left and right, scanning the street. No hint of Scott anywhere. Frustrated he removes his beanie. We see that he misses a large chunk from his right ear.

INT. CHURCH-SAME

Crouching below the window, Jake peeps through to see the small thug put his beanie back on and continue down the street.

Rumbling crescendos as the rest of the thugs jog past the church. Jake sees and hears the church doors rattle. A few seconds back, Tyler brings up the rear.

Seen through red stained glass, Tyler looks particularly menacing. He pauses momentarily and appears to look right at Jake. Jake gasps and jumps away from the window.

We hear familiar noises outside. Screeching. The footsteps and heavy breathing of a huge beast. Sounds we associate with Teel! Jake looks to the church doors. Smoke sneaks in underneath.

Jake freezes, back pressed against the flip side of the pew closest the window. He looks terrified.

Gradually the smoke dissipates. The breathing and footsteps become fainter until we no longer hear them.

Very slowly, Jake crawls back to the window and peeks out. Tyler's gone. Jake lets out a big sigh.

Jake takes a few moments to gather himself, then stands up. He looks around the empty church.

JAKE

Scott?

Scott is gone.

INT. MARTA'S APARTMENT-NIGHT

Scott comes to. He squints. His eyes barely open.

The same blurry angel from the church leans over Scott. She gradually comes into focus.

(CONTINUED)

Scott looks much better. Blood's been wiped away, cuts cleaned and tended to. Marta smiles when Scott opens his eyes. She's been waiting for him.

SCOTT  
(weakly)  
Where am I?

Marta speaks with a tantalizing Mexican accent.

MARTA  
My apartment.

Scott finds himself on a bed. He sits up, cringing with pain. He gradually gains his bearings.

MARTA  
Drink this.

Marta hands Scott a steaming cup of tea. He takes it but doesn't drink.

Scott looks around. Marta's apartment is no more than a single room with a bathroom and a kitchenette in the corner.

Paint peels on the walls. There are cracks and water stains on the ceiling, but it's decorated with beautiful, bright-colored blankets and hangings, a lone cross high over the single bed.

SCOTT  
Do you live alone?

MARTA  
Yes.

Scott's voice is free of urban tint. He seems relieved to not have to put on a front for Marta.

SCOTT  
Your family?

MARTA  
My parents died when I was five. I  
get my meals at the church.

Scott nods, still assessing his situation. He looks nearly suspicious.

MARTA  
My name is Marta.

Scott looks up. He hesitates.

SCOTT

Scott.

We hear sirens far away. This catches Scott's attention. He looks to the window, searching.

MARTA

(smiling)

It's a pleasure to meet you. Where do you live?

Scott's focused out the window. He doesn't respond. Marta furrows her brow and prepares to fire again. She touches Scott's leg. Scott turns and looks at her.

MARTA

Do you live with your family, Scott?

Scott nods.

MARTA

You're very lucky.

This catches Scott off-guard. He thinks a moment.

SCOTT

(blank)

Yeah.

INT. LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

Linda paces back and forth, hair out of place, bags under her eyes. She's worked herself into a worried fever. The telephone receiver's pressed to her ear.

LINDA

...he's 4'4," thin, brown hair...this morning before school...

Jake comes through the door.

LINDA

(furious)

Jake! Where have you--

Linda sees Jake's clothes are scuffed and sweaty. He has blood on his hands. A blast of motherly instinct, Linda drops the phone. She rushes to Jake.

INT. LINDA'S ROOM-SHORTLY AFTER

Linda cleans Jake with a wet cloth. It's clear the blood on his hands isn't his. Still, she looks increasingly worried as Jake talks her ear off.

JAKE

...and then the rhinos almost  
caught us, but I hid the hawk in a  
flower...

Linda looks worried, confused. She almost grasps what Jake's trying to tell her. She walks to the phone. Jake keeps talking in the background. We see Linda dial 9-1-1.

INT. MARTA'S APARTMENT-NIGHT

Marta concentrates as she wipes a wet cloth over a cut on Scott's face that's started to ooze. Scott stares at her, guilty, appreciative, but like he doesn't understand her kindness.

Marta gives a cute smile as she finishes cleaning.

Now she puts her hands on her hips and looks Scott over. He wears the same clothes from the street, now dirty, tattered rags.

She pauses, then sniffs him, not quite quickly enough for Scott to miss. A pensive frown from Marta. She looks up at Scott.

INT. MARTA'S APARTMENT-MINUTES LATER

Marta sits on the edge of her bed, her nose in an open bible. The bathroom door is closed and we hear a shower going.

INT. MARTA'S APARTMENT-MINUTES LATER

Scott slowly exits the bathroom. He wears a shirt that would be big on anyone, a gown on his skinny frame. He wears way-too-tight sweatpants--obviously Marta's--the cuffs of which only touch his shins. Marta sets her reading aside.

Scott looks down at himself then meekly up for Marta's reaction. She bursts out laughing. She fights to contain it, but it's no use; that makes it worse.

(CONTINUED)

Scott looks embarrassed, almost hurt. Marta snorts and now laughs at herself, too. At this, Scott can't help but smile. Seeing Marta's lack of self-consciousness frees something in him.

Scott starts to laugh with Marta. There's nothing forced about it. The most genuine happiness we've seen from him.

Eventually the laughter dies down. Marta hops up.

MARTA

Come here, Scott.

Marta grabs Scott's hand and pulls him to a seat next to her on the bed. It shows that Scott doesn't quite know how to react.

Marta picks up her bible. She glances coyly at Scott before starting to read.

MARTA

"But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port.

There's a sincere, enchanting quality to Marta's voice.

MARTA

"After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD."

Scott pays close attention, engaged by both the message and melody of Marta's words.

INT. MARTA'S APARTMENT-LATER

Scott gazes at Marta. He looks increasingly convicted as she reads.

Marta finishes. She shuts the book and lays it on the bedside table. She notes Scott's broken posture, his look of guilt.

Marta makes a familiar trip from her bed to the floor: she kneels, resting her elbows on the mattress. Again she takes Scott's hand and pulls him along. Scott moves awkwardly but takes a place next to her.

Marta clasps her hands and starts to pray. Nothing aloud, she just bows her head, closes her eyes. Scott stares at her, perplexed.

(CONTINUED)

Marta peeks to check on Scott. She flashes a kind glance and returns to prayer. Scott's face hardens. Lowered eyebrows. A tense frown.

He takes a breath. He turns, lowers his head and closes his eyes. We see all the muscles in his face tighten. He doesn't know what he's doing. Moreover, he can't do it--not yet, at least. He turns back to look at Marta.

MARTA  
(whispering)  
Amen.

Marta opens her eyes to find Scott staring at her with a hard face. She looks like she expected this. She sits back on her knees and holds his gaze.

Scott still leans on the bed. Marta slowly lifts a hand and rubs it along Scott's back. Scott, too, sits up. He continues to stare at Marta. His face softens. He doesn't deserve her compassion.

Though she may not have before, Marta sees something attractive in Scott. Her chest pumps in a way she's not used to. She doesn't hide surprise. Scott shows the same; he doesn't see in himself what she does.

Marta runs her hand over Scott's head. The two lean a little closer to each other. For a moment we think they'll kiss...but they don't. Rather, a soul-sharing gaze.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM-PRE-DAWN

Linda sits at the kitchen table. She looks like she's been up all night. We see loose papers spread over the table; many contain info on clinical drugs. A laptop sits open.

The research is more to distract her, but she appears unable to focus. Linda puts her head down.

The door opens. Linda looks up. Scott stands in the doorway. Linda would shout at him, but he looks different. She sees his bandaged wounds. More than that, she sees a humbled posture, a meekness on his face. Linda says nothing.

Slowly Scott enters and makes his way across the living room. Keeping his eyes low but maintaining eye contact, like a dog with its tail between its legs, Scott takes a seat opposite his mother at the table.

A long, long silence between the two.

(CONTINUED)



Scott can't help but notice the papers on the desk. He picks a few up.

SCOTT  
(softly)  
What's all this?

More silence.

LINDA  
Jake has a brain tumor.

Scott's jaw drops.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-LATE MORNING

Jake opens his eyes, waking from a long, much-needed rest. We see him in his bed, his normal room surroundings. We see his stick/sword, handle wrapped in pink. We see Jake's eyes up close.

Now we see what Jake sees.

INT. TREE HOUSE-SAME

Jake sits up on the edge of a wide cot woven from large green leaves and bamboo. Wiping sleep from his eyes, he finds a plain, spacious hut, an empty space decorated only by the leaves and branches that run throughout: a living house.

This makes no apparent impression on Jake. Things like this are normal now.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM-SAME

Linda sleeps on the couch.

Scott steps quietly into the room, careful not to wake his mother. He looks different than we've seen him before. He wears khaki pants and a polo shirt that's barely small on him--maybe something he hasn't worn in a long time.

Scott sneaks a granola bar from the pantry in the kitchen. The wrapper crinkles as he opens it.

Linda wakes. She immediately rights; she's taken aback by Scott's attire.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA  
What are you doing?

SCOTT  
(timidly)  
I'm...I'm going to church.

Beat.

SCOTT  
(embarrassed)  
Try anything once, right?

Linda looks suspicious for a second, but Scott's polished appearance seems to make her believe him.

Linda stands and approaches Scott. She crosses her arms, looks concerned. She wants to say no, but how can she? This is so different. As much as she desires he stay, she doesn't want to get in the way of something good.

Linda's face softens a little.

LINDA  
Be careful.

Scott smiles--Linda shows further surprise.

SCOTT  
Don't worry, I'll be all right.

Beat.

SCOTT  
I'm all right.

Something in Scott's new-found easiness allays Linda's reluctance. The two stand awkwardly for a moment. We almost expect them to hug, but maybe it's too early for that.

SCOTT'S ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Scott pulls the blinds up on his window. Vigilant, he scans the street before opening his window and climbing out.

EXT. APARTMENT-SAME

Scott descends the fire escape.

INT. TREE HOUSE-SAME

Max sits, waiting for Jake in the corner of the room. He nods for Jake to follow him out the open entrance. Jake gets up and walks after him.

MAX

Aren't you forgetting something?

Jake stops, confused. He looks behind him. The sword of discernment rests centered on the back wall. Jake jogs over, grabs it and follows Max out of the hut.

EXT. TREETOPS-SAME

Max and Jake walk out along thick branch. The tree house is on the edge of the forest. Jake and Max can see far into the distance. From among the hills and mountains one thing stands out: fire.

Jake and Max stare at Teel's flaming castle in Rshan.

MAX

Jake, you have but one place to go,  
one foe to conquer before your  
trials are complete. I need not say  
where nor whom.

Jake continues to stare.

EXT. TREE TRUNKS-DAY

Max and Jake repel to the forest floor, vines wrapped around their waists. They kick off the tree on their way down.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-SAME

We see Jake alone as he climbs down the fire escape outside his bedroom window. He carries with him his stick-sword wrapped with pink. The sky appears ominous, grayer than usual.

EXT. FOREST FLOOR-DAY

Jake and Max land on the forest floor. They release the vines and begin to walk.

EXT. FOREST EDGE/PLAINS-DAY

Max stops where tall ferns change to tall, green grass. Teel's castle is no longer visible. From this vantage point, it lies somewhere behind large hills and mountains.

MAX

You lead the way from here.

Jake is taken aback. He pauses for a second. He looks suspicious. Should he know where to go? Is this is part of the last test? Jake examines the hills before him.

JAKE

(hesitantly)

How...do I know where to go?

MAX

Your sword is more than a weapon.  
Throw it on the ground.

Jake follows Max's instructions. The stick begins to rattle in the grass and dust. It rattles faster and rotates. It snaps to a stop, its "blade" points to an area in front of Jake and to the left.

Jake looks to Max. Max nods. Jake picks up the sword and walks in the direction it points.

EXT. HILLS-DAY

Jake reaches the top of a tall, grassy hill. Max follows close behind. Jake breathes more heavily than normal. He pauses, sets down his sword and watches. The stick shifts and points to a much larger hill in front of Jake.

EXT. CHURCH-DAY

Scott arrives at the entrance of the tiny church from before. Now it has a palm tree next to the door. Marta is there waiting by the tree.

She's wears a similar dress to the one she wore before (sky blue), but this one is brighter, crisper, dressier. Marta smiles when she sees Scott.

Scott gives a shy smirk. Marta grabs his arm and leads him into the church.

We stay outside, even after they go in. We see several others enter the church, then we creep around the corner. We see the small thug! No beanie today. We see his mangled ear. He takes note of Scott's entrance and scurries away.

EXT. HIGHER HILLS-DAY

It's still daytime, but thick clouds overhead render the day dark.

Jake reaches the top of the hill, this time panting and sweating. Max trails behind. Here the grass has worn away to dirt and rock. The inclines of the surrounding hills are more extreme.

Jake holds the sword above the ground for a long time, reluctant to drop it. Finally, he does. His fears are confirmed: it points dead ahead, to what could no longer be called a hill. A daunting, steep mountain peak.

Jake lets out a frustrated sigh.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, MEETING ROOM-DAY

Linda sits across from Doctor Hammond at the same table they occupied last time. She's turned it into a mess of papers and folders, much like her table at home.

Doctor Hammond looks somewhat overwhelmed. Linda awaits an opinion as he leans back in his chair--like he could escape the pile before him--and browses through several loose sheets.

DR. HAMMOND

Well...you've certainly done diligent research.

Dr. Hammond picks one paper out and sets the rest down on the table. He leans forward. He speaks tactfully, afraid to disappoint Linda.

DR. HAMMOND

In my professional opinion, surgery is still the right way to go.

Linda looks around the room, like she's looking for an excuse.

LINDA

I've researched surgery. I...it...

An idea lights on her face.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

I don't make much money, Dr. Hammond.

Dr. Hammond looks a little confused.

DR. HAMMOND

Yes, but you have excellent insurance. It should all but pay for--

LINDA

(stern)

I don't want you cutting into Jake's head!

Silence between the two. Dr. Hammond lowers his eyebrows. Linda's let her tongue slip. She holds her breath, waiting for the doctor's response.

DR. HAMMOND

...One of the drugs you've researched, Protosil, could be appropriate.

LINDA

(suddenly excited)

I knew it. That's the one I picked, too.

DR. HAMMOND

It's new...and appears to be effective about 50% of the time in slowing tumor growth. One of my colleagues has used it here with...somewhat positive results. I could write Jake a prescription, provided that we have him in regularly to keep track of his progress.

Dr. Hammond shifts in his seat. He looks uncomfortable with what he's proposing.

DR. HAMMOND

I should warn you that Protosil is expensive and most often a supplement to surgery, not a replacement.

LINDA

(no time to think or hesitate)

I would like the prescription.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PEAK-DAY

Huffing and puffing, Jake takes a rest. He can see a plateau ten meters above. The surrounding area is jagged rock. No more walking; it looks like Jake and Max have been climbing for a while.

Eventually Jake regains his strength. He presses through the final stretch till there's just one more rock to reach the plateau. It's just out of Jake's grasp. He makes one, two unsuccessful attempts.

On the third attempt Jake gets a great boost and grabs the rock. He looks down to find Max's forehead under his foot. He's given Jake a nudge.

EXT. PLATEAU-SAME

Jake pulls himself up onto the ledge. Max hops up next to him.

Scrapes adorn Jake's forearms and elbows. He's covered in what looks like soot. He takes inventory of his bruises as his breathing calms. Jake looks up.

Looming large overhead, but still a ways off is Teels palace. A mountain in itself, it looks like a thousand-foot bonfire. Squinting at the bright red Jake starts to make out twisted structure: caves, spires. A terrifying fortress.

The plateau soon breaks into boulders. Past the first few rocks, the boulders are black, covered in oil. To the right, oil runs from the boulders down into cracks and further down into a great bubbling lake of oil.

There look to be paths through the boulders, but Max starts to walk toward the gassy lake. Jake stands still. We see in his posture and face that fear runs through Jake's veins.

A gas bubble bursts with some force on the lake. Jake stares skeptically at Max. Max pauses and returns Jake's glance with a look that says, "trust me."

Jake's sword shakes in his hand. It stiffens, pointing away from the direct route through the boulder field. It points to the oil lake.

A huge mushroom of fire bursts from the nearby boulder field. Jake runs to catch up with Max.

## EXT. CHURCH-DAY

People exit the church. Scott walks out with Marta. Time to say goodbye. Both wear sheepish grins.

Scott raises a hand, then looks like he'll go for a hug, but he pulls back, unsure of what's appropriate.

Marta grins wider. She looks around at her fellow churchgoers. None are paying attention. She tugs Scott into the alley left of the church--a familiar one for Scott.

## EXT. ALLEY-SAME

Marta glances around again. She swoops in and plants a kiss on Scott's cheek, much like a first-grader might do. She giggles as she scampers away.

## EXT. OIL LAKE-DAY

The sky here is darker still. Smoke and ash form a canopy high overhead. The top of Teel's castle hides in black cloud.

A boat waits for Jake and Max at the edge of the lake--a wooden canoe, almost like a viking ship, with a dragon head carved at the bow and a tail at the stern. It has two oars inside.

Max and Jake board the boat. Jake sets his stick next to him on the bench. Both take an oar. They push off into the rippling black liquid.

Silence has characterized their trip so far. As the two row farther across the lake, we see a dread swell in Jake's pale face. He looks straight ahead.

All of a sudden the stick sitting next to Jake morphs into a stunning blade. It sticks into the bench. Jake works to pull it out. His jaw drops. He realizes the implications.

Jake raises the blade and spins around, on guard for a fight. There appears to be no threat. The sword shakes wildly in Jake's hands, not by its power, but from Jake's nerves.

MAX

You are not the one in danger,  
Jake.

We hear the distressed cry of the hawk far away.



Jake gasps. His sword turns back to a stick.

EXT. ALLEY-SAME

Scott's strong-armed by several of Tyler's thugs. Marta has left. The thugs restrain Scott's arms. His fighting is no use. They pull him down the alley.

EXT. OIL LAKE-DAY

The boat draws closer to the opposite shore--to the inevitable. Jake's hands still shake the stick. He appears unable to control them.

Max puts a paw on Jake's hands, easing their quivering. Max looks Jake in the eyes.

MAX

Jake, Teel's power lies in  
fear...in commanding it, in making  
others fear him.

Max removes his paw. Jake's hands shake, but the shaking as slowed.

MAX

Now fear is a devastating weapon,  
but it contains one great weakness.

Jake still looks terrified, but he devotes his full attention to Max.

MAX

Fear is, ultimately, out of Teel's  
hands. Fear is your decision.

Hints of easing from Jake.

MAX

He can't impart it if you won't  
accept it. You must choose to  
decline intimidation. For Teel is  
just one of many battles you will  
fight...but defeat fear and you've  
won the war!

Jake needs these inspiring words. It looks like he's starting to believe them.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

The key to that victory is inside you. That's why Teel's power will never be as great as yours.

With this Jake and Max reach the shore. Jake still appears on edge, but his hands no longer shake. A dash of confidence shows in his movements.

Jake and Max step out of the boat. On this shore we see black oil, black soot, black ash. Small fires burn here and there. A long, broad pathway leads to Teel's fortress.

The two pause where it begins.

MAX

Are you ready?

Jake gives no verbal answer. Instead, he starts up the path ahead of Max.

EXT. FORTRESS-AFTERNOON

As the two draw closer to a gaping entrance at the front of the castle, they can see two rhinos standing guard. Jake and Max duck behind an oily boulder.

They communicate briefly through eye contact before continuing on a path behind several rocks. Soon they stand close to the rhinos, separated only by a single rock and flame.

Jake holds up his sword. It remains a stick. Jake looks confused.

JAKE

It's not working.

MAX

On the contrary, Jake. Never pick a fight when you don't have to.

Jake ponders a moment, then sets the stick on the ground. It points to a nearby hole in the fortress's outer wall--one barely clear of flame. Careful not to disturb the guards, Jake and Max move toward it.

The hole is large enough for Jake to crouch in and for Max to crawl in. The two enter and creep through a short tunnel.

## EXT. CHURCH-SAME

Two thugs stand watch at the entrance to the alley left of the church. Jake makes his way along the street, crouched behind cars, hiding from their view.

He peeks up, waits until Tyler's men aren't watching, then dashes across the sidewalk, ducking into an alley to the right of the church.

## INT. FORTRESS, CAVERNS-SAME

Wide open caverns. Jagged rock juts from ceiling and floor. Startlingly the inside of Teel's fortress is nearly as ablaze as the outside. There's fire on the walls; a low moat of flaming oil rings a large empty space in the middle of the room.

Jake and Max hide behind a jagged rock spike. Jake peeks out and peers around. At the far wall is an entrance to crude stairs. Jake doesn't see anyone. Cautiously he makes his way out. He takes a deep breath. With a running start he jumps the moat.

As soon as Jake's feet hit the ground a monster bursts through rock, flying over the moat and onto the open floor! It's a giant lizard-like creature but with patches of fur, pointy ears and sharp teeth.

It wears a spiky metal collar attached to a large chain rooted in the wall. The beast half growls/half screams as it charges Jake. Its chain clangs behind it.

Jake races for the stairs. Maybe he can beat the beast there! Max follows.

## EXT. OPEN PLAZA-SAME

Jake sprints across a small open plaza between alleys--a rectangular space ringed by dumpsters. He aims for an alleyway. A chained German Shepherd chases Jake, barking and growling.

Jake reaches the alley just in time. The chain catches the vicious dog.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

Two thugs pull Scott by his arms into a narrow backstreet. It's vacant, but not particularly well hidden--a large space compared to the twisting alleys around it. Scott struggles to free himself. He fails.

We hear a German Shepherd barking somewhere in the background.

The thugs pull Scott into place before Tyler. Tyler glares an evil glare. Next to Tyler stands the small thug with the mangled ear. Tyler puts out his hand. The small thug pulls a pistol from his waistband and hands it to Tyler.

TYLER

(to small thug)

Go cover the alley. Make sure no one's coming.

The small thug jogs off. Tyler faces Scott, gun in hand. He starts to walk toward him.

Again we hear the German Shepherd barking.

INT. FORTRESS, STAIRWAY-SAME

Jake stands up on the third step of the serrated stairs, just out of the beast's reach as he catches his breath. Max stands next to him. The hideous creature hisses and growls, yanks at its chain.

Jake watches it but eventually turns and starts up the stairs.

The craggy steps soon smooth into a ramp. Jake steps carefully, holding his stick/sword at ready by his side. The tunneled ramp splits into three different hallways.

Jake reaches his sword out in front of him. It snaps to point at the rightmost entrance. Jake takes it.

INT. HALLWAY-MOMENTS LATER

The hallway twists, cuts and curves. Jake and Max track through it with careful, quiet steps. The hallway is dark with occasional boulders. It's lit by thin lines of flame on the floor, like the lights in a movie theater.

A vast maze of similar halls and tunnels. Every time Jake comes to a fork, he holds out his sword and follows its directions.

EXT. ALLEYS-SAME

Jake creeps through winding, intersecting alleys, stick in hand. He hears the scuffle of feet, two voices talking. He looks around. There's not much cover. He dives behind a broken-down sofa.

INT. HALLWAY-SAME

Jake and Max crouch behind a boulder as two rhinos trudge past.

Jake and Max wait until they no longer hear footsteps. They stand, make eye contact and continue up the tunnel.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

As Tyler approaches, he nods to his henchmen. They release Scott and peel off to the sides.

Scott tries to make a run for it. He gets little more than a step. Bang! Tyler fires and hits the ground in front of Scott's feet. Scott freezes.

INT. HALLWAY-SAME

We hear the cry of the hawk.

Jake and Max poke their heads around one final corner. There, guarding an exit to the fortress's exterior, is the small rhino with the mangled ear.

It's not paying attention. It licks at a puddle of tar on the floor.

We hear the hawk cry outside--louder now. We hear Teel's heavy snarling. They're close.

Jake's stick becomes a sword. Jake's eyes widen at sight of the dazzling blade. He looks at Max.

MAX

There's only one way out, Jake.

Jake nods. He pauses. He looks at the skinny rhino; he knows what he must do.

EXT. ALLEY-SAME

The small thug leans nonchalantly against a brick wall, where the alley opens into a backstreet. He smokes a cigarette.

JAKE (O.S.)  
 (a battle cry)  
 Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

The small thug jumps at the sound. Instinctively, he cowers and raises his hands. He turns to see Jake charging toward him, stick in hand, but it's too late.

Jake swings the stick as hard as he can, delivering a brutal crotch-shot as he charges past.

EXT. FORTRESS EXIT-SAME

Jake stops at a low wall just outside the fortress exit. Jake breathes hard, more exhilarated than afraid. He finds blood on the blade of his sword.

Jake looks back. The rhino stands still for a second but then crumples to the ground. Max hops over the fallen animal and joins Jake.

The rock wall looks a tad too high for Jake to reach. He looks to Max. He raises his foot so Max can give him a boost, but Max doesn't move.

JAKE  
 (motioning upward)  
 Let's go.

MAX  
 As I told you before, you must  
 complete the final chapter on your  
 own.

We see shock from Jake. A huge blow to his confidence, to the momentum he's built. He nods and looks up at the ledge.

MAX  
 Jake--

Jake turns back.

MAX  
 I cannot help you from here on, but  
 remember...

Max puts a paw to Jake's chest.

(CONTINUED)

MAX  
...you're not alone.

Jake nods again. He appears only slightly consoled. We hear shrieks from Teel and the hawk. Jake and Max stare at each other a hard moment before Jake turns, finds a hold on the wall and starts to climb.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

Jake finds spots between flames and giant rock spires. He times his runs as geysers of fire shoot from the ground. All is aflame. Where flame is absent, there's thick smoke. The sky is black.

Jake breaks past a final fireball and into an area free of fire. He sees Teel and the hawk ahead. As he's done many times today, he ducks out of sight behind a rock and pokes his head out to watch.

Two rhinos stand watching as well. Teel, menacing as ever, crawls toward the standing hawk. The hawk has nowhere to go. Behind him the surface drops off--a sheer cliff.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

Tyler draws within feet of Scott. He points the gun at Scott's face. Scott raises his hands in surrender.

TYLER  
I've given you too many chances.  
Your time is up.

SCOTT  
(fast, panicked)  
I'll give you the money...for real  
this time.

There's urgency in Scott's pleading. He speaks like he now has something to lose.

TYLER  
It's not about the money anymore.

SCOTT  
Tyler, things are different. I--

Tyler smashes Scott's face with the butt of his gun. Scott falls to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

TYLER

You made me a fool, Scott!

We hear some of the rare, unchecked emotion in Tyler's voice that we recall from last time.

We see Jake's head poking over a trash can, fear on his face.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

We see Jake's head poking over a rock, fear on his face. The hawk's been knocked on its back. Bloodied, it lies face up. Teel leans over it, sneering, exhaling flame that comes within inches of burning the hawk.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

TYLER

(still emotional)

Never again.

Tyler checks around. He takes a step forward and aims the gun.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

Jake's chest swells. We see intense fear, but Jake's eyes narrow. His face shows focus.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

TYLER

Goodbye, Scott.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

Jake leaps from his hiding place and sprints toward Teel. Lifting his sword, he throws himself between Teel and the hawk, just in time to stop a lethal blast of fire.

When the flames hit the sword, they flatten. A sort of blue force field protrudes from the sword, acting as a wall to stop the fire. Jake and the hawk stay un-scorched.



EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

Jake stands between a surprised, confused Tyler and Scott, stick held high. Tyler's gun points at Jake's chest.

Tyler gets over his shock. His expression returns to anger.

TYLER

Get the fuck outta my way, kid!

Jake doesn't budge. We see that he still works to throttle his fear.

Tyler raises the gun, pointing it at Jake's face. Bang!

He's fired a shot just to the left of Jake's head, missing intentionally.

Jake reacts to the noise, but, surprisingly, he doesn't budge.

TYLER

(rage building)

Move!

We hear police sirens. They're a ways away but approaching quickly. Now we see a flash of fear in Tyler's eyes.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

Teel screeches, shrieks, the force of which blows Jake backward several steps. Jake gathers himself and steps back up to face Teel.

We see surprise in Teel's huge red eyes. Jake's resolve makes him visibly uncomfortable.

With a hint of desperation, Teel swipes a huge claw at Jake. Clang! Jake strafes and fends it off with the sword--a blue flash when claw and blade collide.

Teel swipes again. Again Jake blocks his blow. Teel lunges forward, but he brings his face too close to Jake. Jake swings and cuts a gash in Teel's nostril. Teel rears and roars.

Teel sends a barrage of fireballs, bites, swinging claws and tails toward Jake and the hawk. Jake dodges or defends each one, picking carefully his times to attack. He cuts Teel on the tail, the leg.

(CONTINUED)

Every effort gives Jake more strength. As the fight progresses, we see his movements, his expressions grow smoother, calmer, more confident.

Teel pauses. He pants. For the first time, he truly looks nervous. One last attempt: Teel sucks in a huge breath. He shoots out a steady, forceful stream of fire voluminous enough to consume the entire mountaintop.

Jake meets it with the sword. The sword stops the fire from hitting him and the hawk, but the flame continues over his head, forming a bubble that encases the two.

Jake does his best to press against the massive force. It pushes him back a step. The protective bubble shrinks. Jake closes his eyes, struggling with all his might. He fights for several moments.

Jake's eyes open. We see determination grow on his face. He starts to push back. He regains his ground and takes a step forward. He takes another step forward.

Rage in Teel's eyes crumbles to worry. He pumps out even more flame, but Jake still advances.

JAKE

I'm...

We hear sirens.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

JAKE

(increasingly louder)

...not...afraid...of...

Tyler is taken aback by Jake's steadiness. He glances away from Jake, well aware of the approaching sirens.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

JAKE

(shouting)

...you!!

Jake throws the sword forward as hard as he can. A giant blue blast from the sword neutralizes the fire. It shoots straight up in the air like a lightning bolt. An immense blue dome comes down from the sky and covers the whole mountain.

(CONTINUED)

The dome disappears. No more fire. The blue blast has extinguished all the flame in and on Teel's fortress.

Teel shows downright terror. Slowly Jake brings the blade down from over his head. We see the sword up close as it descends.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

The stick continues to descend until Jake holds it at Tyler's neck.

Tyler looks confused and scared at once. The sirens are blasting now. Tyler pauses a long moment, conflicted.

Sirens.

Tyler turns and starts to run.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

We see Teel's tail and backside as he flees. His rhinos run behind him.

Jake stays perfectly still for a long moment. Jake smiles.

EXT. BACKSTREET-SAME

Now it's just Scott and Jake. Scott stands up. He looks as baffled as Tyler did. At the same time, he looks grateful. Sirens.

SCOTT

Come on, Jake. We gotta get outta here.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

The hawk stands facing Jake, looking grateful. Jake reaches out and touches the hawk's wing. The hawk accepts.

The hawk starts to flap. It starts to take off. Jake runs alongside.

EXT. ALLEYS-SAME

Jake runs alongside Scott. Scott checks intermittently to make sure Jake keeps up, but now he starts focusing on choosing the correct path through the alleys.

Jake stops running, but Scott doesn't notice.

EXT. FORTRESS ROOF-SAME

Jake stops at the edge of the cliff. The hawk flies off. Jake grins.

EXT. ALLEY-SAME

Scott, running, checks to make sure Jake's with him. He's not. Scott stops and whirls around.

SCOTT

Jake?

We still hear sirens. Scott sighs. He runs back to look for Jake.

Scott checks alley after alley. No sign of Jake. He frowns.

EXT. HILLSIDE-DAY

Bright blue sky and sun. No more dark clouds.

Jake stands next to Max on the wide, flat top of a tree stump. The tree stump is at the top of a grassy hill. Gathered below on the hillside, in the valley, we see every kind of animal imaginable.

The surrounding hills are covered completely in animals as well. An immense crowd. A natural stadium filled to overflowing.

Max smiles a giant smile.

MAX

You've passed the final test.

Jake returns the smile. He looks to the crowd. He thrusts his sword--again a stick--high above his head. Deafening salutation from animals miles around!

EXT. ALLEYS, STREETS-LATER

It's dark now. Scott continues to search for Jake.

SCOTT  
(calling out)  
Jake!

No answer. Scott moves on.

SCOTT  
Jake! Where are you?

Scott looks frustrated, worried. He's been at this for hours. He shakes his head and sighs.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-NEXT MORNING

Jake lies in bed. Linda walks in. Jake opens his eyes.

INT. TREE HOUSE-SAME

The white squirrel stands over Jake.

INT. KITCHEN-SAME

Linda stops at the table, where Jake eats a banana. Almost guiltily she removes a small pill container from her pocket.

LINDA  
Here, Jake.

Linda takes out a pill and hands it to him. Linda pauses and ponders. How to explain this...

LINDA  
This will--

Jake gulps down the pill with orange juice.

Linda's face says, "oh." She smiles. No explanation needed. Satisfied, she walks away from the table.

Jake continues eating. We watch him for a few moments. Suddenly his face contorts. He puts a hand to his left temple--a sudden pain! It leaves quickly. Jake shakes it off and keeps eating.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET-MORNING

From far away we see Jake walking to school with his backpack, a silhouette against a scarred brick wall.

EXT. FOREST-SAME

We see what Jake sees. He walks through short yellow grass next to high red rocks. Trees to his left. (The colors mirror what we've just seen on the street).

Suddenly, another head pain! We hear a loud, shrill tone. Jake presses his hands to his temples and closes his eyes.

When he opens them, we see frightening change: the trees to his left are black and dead. The grass is now sand. The red rock oozes a sickening green liquid. Jake stiffens. He closes his eyes.

Jake opens them. Things are back to the way they were: living trees, a grassy path, dry rock. Jake looks suspicious, confused. Gradually he loosens and walks on.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

Ms. Jane lectures at the front of the class. We see Jake sitting in class.

EXT. MEADOW-SAME

Jake sits in tall grass, surrounded by dandelions and other flowers. An ostrich squawks in front of him.

A shrill tone! Jake grabs his temples. The ostrich grows hairy arms; its beak becomes a snout! It bares sharp teeth; its squawking turns to growling! The grass around Jake turns black, the dandelions to little snapping mouths.

Jake breathes hard. He glances about nervously, bewildered.

INT. CLASSROOM-DAY

We see Jake breathing hard, looking about.

Behind Jake, Brock sits watching him. His eyes narrow to a glare, and he grits his teeth: more bizarre behavior from this boy Brock despises.

INT. CLASSROOM-LATER

Ms. Jane leads a line of children out of the classroom. Jake stands at the end of the line. He still glances around, nervous, disoriented.

Ms. Jane doesn't see that he fails to follow her out the door. One other student also remains in the classroom.

Jake wanders randomly but appears to make his way toward the door. The door slams! Brock stands before Jake.

EXT. SOMEWHERE-SAME

Backen looms large in front of Jake, but he, too, looks different than we remember. His color, his physique morph constantly before Jake's eyes. He laughs an evil laugh, but it comes out deep and slow, like he's underwater.

In the background, different colors flash. We hear buzzing, whirring. It's like Jake is on a bad trip.

INT. CLASSROOM-SAME

Brock takes slow, menacing steps toward Jake.

BROCK

No lunch lady to help you this  
time, freak.

He slaps his fist in his hand.

Jake steps backward. He breathes hard. This pleases Brock. Maybe he doubted himself after his last encounter with Jake, but now he feels a clear advantage.

Brock takes a few more steps toward Jake. Jake fumbles backward. Now he's trapped in a corner.

EXT. SOMEWHERE-SAME

We see a disfigured Backen up close. He cackles slow, evil cackles. His face starts to drip off.

INT. CLASSROOM-SAME

Brock takes one step too many. With a single motion and surprising strength, Jake rips a chair from a nearby desk and delivers a blow to Brock's face. Brock falls to the floor and curls up, holding his face.

MS. JANE (O.S.)

Jake!

Ms. Jane stands in the doorway, confounded.

Jake looks up, a wild, crazy look in his eyes.

INT. OFFICE-DAY

A plain office. Linda sits behind a desk with a computer on it. The phone rings. She picks it up, still watching her computer screen.

LINDA

Hello?

Linda listens. Her eyebrows jump. She looks away from the screen. Her expression shows increasing concern.

LINDA

He did what?

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, MEETING ROOM-AFTERNOON

We see through the window of the meeting room to where Jake sits on a table in the next room. He sweats and shivers. His eyes are wide and bloodshot. He looks dazed, insane.

Linda and Doctor Hammond peer through the window. Both look worried, Linda more so than Dr. Hammond. Dr. Hammond holds a folder of papers--test results. We see a colorful CT scan on top.

DR. HAMMOND

The tumor doesn't appear to be any larger. However, our cognitive assessments show reaction to absent stimulants, moderate delirium.

Linda doesn't react. She keeps looking at Jake.

DR. HAMMOND

We suspect he's hallucinating.

(CONTINUED)



This doesn't surprise Linda. She crosses her arms. Somehow, she knew.

A long silence as Dr. Hammond waits for a reply.

DR. HAMMOND

Linda, we could have him in for surgery tomorrow.

Linda exhales. We see her face for a deep moment of thought.

INT. BATHROOM-SAME

We see Scott, fresh from a shower, standing in a towel before a mirror.

INT. GARAGE-SAME

We see hands unlock a metal chest. They open it and draw an over-sized revolver.

We see they belong to Tyler. He wears a black ski mask like a beanie, not pulled down over his face.

The garage is a dark, grungy space. Cracks and stains on the floor. No cars but plenty of tools, cabinets, storage boxes.

Behind Tyler, his band of thugs gathers assorted weaponry. The small thug tucks a gun into his waistband behind his back. We see one with a knife. Others pick pipes, baseball bats.

MONTAGE:

1) Scott dresses himself in the bathroom.

2) Tyler sits in the front seat of a driving car, his thugs in the back, small thug at the wheel. Tyler loads his gun, bullet by bullet.

3) Scott rubs on deodorant. He picks up a toothbrush.

4) A car comes to a stop in front of Scott, Jake and Linda's apartment. It quickly empties. Tyler steps out. He pulls down his ski mask. His gang runs past him, also wearing masks.

A particularly large thug reaches the door first. He kicks it in.

(CONTINUED)

5) Scott spits toothpaste. He hears something. He looks up at the closed bathroom door.

6) Thugs tear through the apartment living room and down the hall. They peel off into open doorways, searching for Scott. Tyler comes in last. We walks through the living room, holding his revolver pointed at the ceiling.

Tyler finds a closed bathroom door his gang has run past. He raises a foot to kick it in.

7)The bathroom door swings open! Scott turns his head, surprised.

8) Tyler pulls off his mask. An angry frown. There's no one in the bathroom. The lights are off.

9) Scott finds Marta standing in the doorway. She points to her her watch but smiles before walking away. They're in Marta's apartment.

10) It's evening now. Linda drives. Jake twitches and jerks his head around in the back seat. The car stops on the street outside the apartment. Linda sees the door's wide open and the lights are on.

11) Linda speaks with a police officer inside the apartment. The place is trashed. The officer takes notes as Linda talks. She picks up a framed photo of her two sons and points to Scott as she shows it to him.

12) It's dark now. We see Scott and Marta at the bus station, standing in front of a boarding bus. Scott's handing a suitcase to an attendant. He turns to Marta with a look saying, "well, this is it."

13) Still nightttime, Linda sits alone at the kitchen table. No papers, no computer. She holds the lone, framed photo of her boys. She looks scared, ill, deathly worried.

14) Scott looks out the bus window. City lights end. The bus climbs a ramp onto the freeway. Scott looks conflicted. He turns his body to stare at the city behind.

15) At dawn Linda wears the same expression but this time with her chin in her hand from a chair in a waiting room.

16) Jake, still with a crazy look in his eyes, wears a hospital gown and lies strapped to a table. A hand holds a plastic mask to his mouth and nose. Gradually, he falls asleep.

His head is shaved with clippers, slathered in foam and then shaved with a razor.

We see doctors and aids around the room, wearing scrubs, masks, latex gloves. A surgeon turns on a high-pitched circular saw.

INT. RECOVERY ROOM-DAY

We see Jake's closed eyes up close. They open.

We see what he sees: Linda, Dr. Hammond, a red-haired nurse leaning over him.

DR. HAMMOND

Welcome back, Jake. How do you feel?

We back out--a small room with white walls and one window. Jake is hooked to an IV and heart rate monitor that sit next his bed. Bandages swathe his head. A small tube and sack, also attached to his head, drain blood.

Jake's eyes no longer look crazy; he no longer twitches. Jake blinks a few times. He doesn't respond to the doctor. He looks at the people around him. He looks away. His eyes move to the window.

Jake's gaze stays there. Bright sunlight. We hear birds outside. Jake closes his eyes.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-DAY

Jake's propped up with pillows in his bed. He still wears bandages but is free of tubes and machines. A few books on his bed. A board rests on his lap along with paper and colored pencils. He holds a pencil in his hand.

Jake sits perfectly still. He faces straight ahead. He stares unwaveringly out the window directly across the room. In the lower corner of the window, Jake can see a few tree leaves.

Jake looks blank, empty.

Finally Jake turns his head. He sees his stick, wrapped with pink twine, leaning against the wall. He turns the other way. He sees his open closet. No yellow light--nothing but clothing and shoes.

Jake looks down. We see the lap board. We see what he's drawn: a large blue panther.

Linda enters the room. She carries a few books and a glass of water. She sets the glass on Jake's bedside table.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

I brought you some more books.

She puts them down next to Jake. Linda looks worn out. She spots Jake's drawing. Her eyes light up. Linda lifts his work and examines it in the sunlight.

LINDA

Jake, this is wonderful.

The first smile from Linda we've seen in a while.

LINDA

I'm glad to see you're feeling better. I'm going to go hang this up.

Linda leaves the room, still smiling. Now Jake looks sad, heartbroken.

He looks at the books his mother's brought. "Dragons" sits on top.

Jake picks it up. When he does, a piece of paper falls out. With a curious look, Jake lifts it. It's a handwritten note. Jake's eyes light up as he runs them over the page.

SCOTT (V.O.)

Dear Jake: I wish I could be there to tell you this in person, but I've caused you and Mom too much trouble already. If I stayed, it could only put you in danger, too...I'm writing to tell you two things--the first is that I'm sorry.

INT. BUS-MORNING

We see Scott up close, riding on the bus, still looking out the window. He looks tired. He watches the sun rise.

SCOTT (V.O.)

I'm sorry I haven't been the kind of brother you can look up to, the kind that can teach you about girls and help you with your homework. I'm sorry that I exposed you to the stuff I did. I'm sorry I wasn't around most of the time and that I'm not there now, when you need me most. But I always knew that you

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT (V.O.) (cont'd)  
were tough deep down, and, seeing  
the things you've done, I know that  
you'll beat that tumor no problem.  
The second thing I wanted to say is  
thank you.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

We see Linda in the kitchen. She opens the fridge. She reaches for milk but notices a large paper bag with a folded note taped to it. She picks it up.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-DAY

Now we're back to Jake reading.

SCOTT (V.O.)  
Thank you for being there those  
nights I needed someone to talk to.  
Thank you for chasing after me. As  
hard as I tried to run, you always  
followed.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

Linda removes the note and unfolds it. It reads, "For Jake's treatment. I love you. - Scott."

Linda melts. She puts a hand to her chest. Linda opens the bag. It's full to the brim with rubber-banded wads of cash.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-DAY

Back to Jake reading.

SCOTT (V.O.)  
Thank you for having the courage to  
save me from that awful  
monster...myself. If it wasn't for  
you, I would've never met the  
wonderful woman who's continuing  
what you started.

INT. BUS-MORNING

We see Scott on the bus, still looking out the window, but now we see that Marta sits in the seat next to him. Eyes closed, she nuzzles into his shoulder. This steals his gaze from the window. He looks at her and smiles.

INT. JAKE'S ROOM-DAY

Back with Jake.

SCOTT (V.O.)

I won't be able to come home for a while, but I'll write every week. Please know that I love you. When the time is right, I can't wait to see you again...Scott

Jake looks astonished, not quite sure how to react. He looks about, clearly excited. Jake glances out the closest window. Something's caught his eye.

We see what Jake sees: high, high above, a hawk flies through the air.

We see Jake up close. Slowly, his open mouth closes. It stretches into a thin smile, then we see teeth, then a grin so big it barely fits on Jake's face.

EXT. SKY-DAY

A hawk glides through gray clouds. We see the city below it. The hawk flaps its wings, it climbs higher. The city shrinks and shrinks until we no longer see it. The hawk keeps flapping. Slowly, the sky turns from gray to dazzling blue.

The hawk soars, free, through endless crystal. Now we see another bird: a beautiful owl, blue like the sky around it. It catches up to the hawk. The two birds glance at each other.

They fly together--up and up and up.

FADE OUT.

## ACADEMIC VITA

**Eric Lee**

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### **Education**

Senior at Penn State University

- Film-Video Major; B.A. Spring 2010
  - Minors: English, Spanish
  - Student in Schreyer Honors College
  - Cumulative GPA: 3.80/4.0
  - Graduate of State College Area High School, Class of 2006
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### **Experience**

Study Abroad in Sevilla, Spain—CIEE Program	Summer 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Studied Spanish and History</li><li>- Volunteered at a local retirement home 4-5 hours a week</li></ul>	
Internship at WPSU Television Station	Summer 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Produced video for several television shows</li><li>- Researched various election candidates and social issues</li><li>- Wrote for station website and database</li></ul>	
Employed as Private Tutor	2009-Present
Employed as Lifeguard, State College YMCA	2004-06
Employed as Counselor, Penn State Soccer Day Camp	Summers 2007-09
Special Olympics Volunteer	Summers 2007-09

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### **Activities**

Member of Harvest Global Mission Church	2006-Present
Penn State Varsity Soccer	2007
Penn State Club Soccer	2008-Present
Springfield THON (philanthropy: benefits children with cancer)	2007-09

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### **Honors**

Academic Excellence Scholarship	2006-2010
Member of Phi Beta Kappa honorary society	
Member of Phi Kappa Phi honorary society	
Selected for Dean's List every semester at Penn State	