

FADE IN:

INT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE-AFTERNOON

DECEMBER, 1995

The University of Central Florida in Orlando. A smart and flustered-looking student, NATHAN, 22, and his professor HAMILTON, 50s, are watching a movie on a small television with a built-in VCR, blue light on their faces. The rest of the office is dim but clearly the dwelling of an academic, cluttered with books and videotapes. Film equipment and stacks of "American Cinematographer" magazine cover a dusty couch. Film reels, a rack of pipes, ash tray, and a late 80s PC are on an old wooden desk, littered with papers. HAMILTON is tweedy but eccentric; smoking his pipe, and wearing a cap from a movie he worked on in the 70s. NATHAN keeps nervously glancing over at HAMILTON to see his reactions.

The angsty and sanctimonious film the men are watching shows a gloomy ACTOR, late 20s, standing by a lake in a pea coat and stocking hat, talking to no one.

ACTOR

Why should he get everything he wants?

The ACTOR looks down at his hands. They're covered with mostly dried blood.

ACTOR (CONT'D)

Friends, love, a family, sex, respect,
love, dignity, the career that he
never deserved. I did.

The movie flashes back to a murder scene in a parking garage. The victim is NATHAN.

ACTOR (CONT'D)

I couldn't take them away from him
so I took him away from them.

NATHAN is unintentionally mouthing the lines with the film.

ACTOR slowly walks into the lake with his clothes on. The movie keeps flashing back and forth from the murder to ACTOR going deeper into the water.

ACTOR (CONT'D)

And . . . no guilt. No guilt. No
guilt . . .

HAMILTON is bored. The movie's ending music starts to play and the credits start to roll. HAMILTON makes a light fart sound with his tongue, stops the tape, hits rewind, and clicks on a lamp on his desk.

NATHAN

You're not gonna watch the credits?

HAMILTON

What'd you re-edit those, too? I don't see how watching your little name scroll fifteen times will change my mind.

HAMILTON grabs his big, leather, man-purse and begins shoving stuff into it, preparing to leave.

NATHAN

You still think it sucks.

HAMILTON

Nathan, it doesn't matter how many times you manipulate this thing. I can predict every line. Every shot.

NATHAN

Cause you've seen it before.

HAMILTON

(snippy)

I watch every movie as if I'm watching it for the very first time. Yours makes me sleepy.

NATHAN

You're looking at it through the wrong lens. There's . . . there's an element of satire. My character lets us laugh about success, about fame. People who strive for greatness usually don't even want it. And those who-

HAMILTON

You asked for an hour of my time. I've given you two. I have other students. And a life.

HAMILTON leaves his office. NATHAN ejects his tape and chases him.

INT. CORRIDORS OF ACADEMIC BUILDING--AFTERNOON

NATHAN is still chasing HAMILTON past tall, bright windows and other faculty offices. HAMILTON acknowledges colleagues as he walks past them, embarrassed that he has this agitated student buzzing around him.

NATHAN

You told me to show my soul on film.

HAMILTON

If it was there, I didn't see it. I saw pomposity. I saw laziness and exploitation. You borrowing from at least ten other films.

NATHAN

What if that is my soul?

HAMILTON

Then you're a sorry filmmaker.

INT. STAIRS OF ACADEMIC BUILDING-DAY

Their voices and footsteps echo up and down the stairway.

NATHAN

These characters are living, tangible- some of them based on actual . . . the things I took from other films are me paying homage . . . me winking at the audience, because I know that they-

HAMILTON

You can never anticipate how your audience is going to react. I can appreciate that Tarantino has allowed half the slacker population in the country to believe that they, too, could make movies.

NATHAN

wanted to do this way before-

HAMILTON

You showed promise early on. Film school isn't for everyone. Maybe we've already over-educated you.

NATHAN

Then can I have my money back?

They reach the door that leads outside, and exit the building.

EXT. CAMPUS--AFTERNOON

HAMILTON moves down the sidewalk past students who are studying, skateboarding, smoking, lying in the grass. Afternoon campus life in Orlando. It's still bright outside and light-jacket warm.

HAMILTON

Look, you're just gonna have to live with the grade I gave you. Suffering builds character.

NATHAN

It isn't the grade. It's that I think you're missing-

HAMILTON finally stops walking, looks at NATHAN, and parentally holds his hand up like "enough of this, young man."

HAMILTON

The more you pester me about it, the more I want to lower it. Go out of your head. Come back after winter break. Show me what I think you're capable of. The tapes you made before you got here? That was good shit. Honest, soulful, brave little films. Quit trying to puke out Kubrik.

He walks away from NATHAN.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

Stop following me. See you in January.

NATHAN watches him leave. There's no use going after him. He suddenly feels very small and out of place among these other students around him. A skater almost knocks him over.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT OVER THE GARAGE-LATE MORNING

JACK's pad is cluttered with laundry and videotapes. JACK, 22, is on his couch, watching TV in his underwear, eating cereal and drinking Mountain Dew. He's recording a Stanley Kubrik movie from one VCR to another while watching. JACK is a thin, pale, baby-faced chap with a head-full of messy blond hair. He has a fine, colorful collection of bongos and bottles on the end table by his couch, walls covered with movie posters and a shrine to Val Kilmer and Jim Morrison. JACK is at peace with the nothing that he has achieved in his life to this point. His phone rings. He grabs the receiver. He even talks like Val did in *The Doors*.

JACK

Speak.

The voice on the other end of the call is his boss, WENDY.

WENDY

Jack, it's WENDY. Are you not feeling well? I have you on the schedule.

JACK

Yeah, I was seconds away from calling to say I'd be a minute late.

WENDY

You were supposed to be in half an hour ago. I was a little concerned.

JACK

Almost out the door. I'll be there soon. Okaay. B'bye.

He drops the receiver onto the cradle and keeps watching the tv.

INT. NATHAN'S DORM/ON-CAMPUS APT.-AFTERNOON

NATHAN unlocks and shoves the door to his dorm/on-campus apartment. It's hard to get in because his roommate is making a movie inside and equipment is blocking the door. The room itself is well-kept with movie posters on the walls. Inside the room is NATHAN's roommate, AARON, 23, a long-haired, graceful and confident Asian-American guy who looks like "Big Head Todd." He's holding a camera, aiming it up and down the body of a full-figured naked girl, ALEXIS, 23. She is writhing, partially covered by the sheets. Revealing bits and pieces here and there. AARON's helper, DUDE, is just another scruffy, bearded film-student. He's holding a big light wearing thick gloves, gawking a bit too lecherously at ALEXIS.

NATHAN starts to back out of the room.

NATHAN

Oh. Sorry.

AARON

No. No, no, no. It's cool. No sound. Keep going, Alexis. We're almost done. How'd it go? What'd he say?

NATHAN

Still hates it.

AARON

What a dick. Less nipple, Alexis.

She adjusts the sheets to cover her nipples.

NATHAN moves past the action and sits.

NATHAN

You making porn?

AARON

No. Part of the flashback sequence. I'll distort it so it's not so porny. What are you gonna do?

to DUDE, holding the light

AARON (CONT'D)

Dude, turn the light; I'm getting too much shadow.

DUDE adjusts the light.

AARON (CONT'D)

Other way.

He readjusts.

NATHAN

don't know. Take a break. Take
time to . . . maybe I'm not being
realistic with-

AARON

Cut.

(turning off the camera)

That was pretty much awesome, Alexis.

I think we're all done.

(swiveling to towards

DUDE)

Dude, don't just stand there, ya
perv. Get her robe. God.

DUDE grabs her folded robe off of an arm-chair.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE-LATE MORNING

An old single-screen movie theatre from the early 1970s in disrepair. The poster cases on the walls by the entry way contain sun-faded posters for *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Big Trouble in Little China*, The marquee, likewise, advertises *Big Trouble*, and the late night screenings of *Rocky Horror*. It's chilly, but not snowy. Somewhere between suburbia and a mid-sized city.

We follow JACK as he casually walks up to the front door and enters the theatre.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE-LATE MORNING

The décor of the interior of the theatre is as '70s retro as the exterior. The carpet is stained and worn, the walls are all appetizing oranges, browns, and golds. Faded photographs of soft drinks, wieners, and popcorn flank the concession menu. The rest of the wall space is taken up by more movie posters-true classics next to cult films.

The concession stand is well-stocked and brightly lit. There are benches, near the box-office; videogames near the restroom doors. JACK is a mere employee, but he owns this space. He is in his element. He stops by the box office where LAUREL, 20, is biting her nails and reading. She is cheerful and elegant, dressed in gothic black, but her demeanor is warm and light.

JACK

"You keep eating your hand, you're
not gonna be hungry for lunch."

LAUREL

What?

JACK

Nothing.

He casually, ritualistically, snaps his fingers and points.

JACK

Breakfast Club. Whatcha reading?

She shows him her book. It's "Tropic of Cancer."

JACK (CONT'D)

They talk about that in Cape Fear.

LAUREL

That's why I decided to read it.
Wendy's looking for you.

JACK

I know.

LAUREL

She had to tear tickets.

JACK

Poor thing.

JACK continues across the lobby and we follow. He takes off his outer-coat, revealing his uniform: a dark jacket and white shirt. He pulls a black bow-tie out of one pocket and a walkman out of another.

SHANE is at concessions. He's around the same age as JACK, a blonde, good-looking enough fellow. There's just something not cool about SHANE. He's too eager and starved for attention. If he had more ambition and intelligence, he'd be selling condos in Vegas.

Two 30-something film-dork customers with matching spectacles are bickering at the counter. SHANE is speechless. JACK is on his way past them but stops to listen, putting on his tie and walkman.

MAN

Well if you'd been on time, then we could've gotten lunch before the movie.

WOMAN

I grabbed something.

MAN

I know you did. I wasn't being self-centered, now I'm the one who got screwed.

WOMAN

I told you to go ahead and eat without me.

MAN

Well I didn't, so I'm hungry.

WOMAN

You're not gonna make this garbage your meal.

MAN

I'm hungry. I don't have any other options, do I?

JACK

Hey, you can go ahead and order a pizza or something if you want. I'll take it in to you.

MAN

You do that?

JACK

We're not supposed to, but . . . Just don't let our manager see you. Shane never thinks outside the box. He'd rather gouge our customers, right, Shane?

MAN

Right on. You wanna go snag our seats?

WOMAN

Yeah.

She heads into the auditorium, a little pouty.

JACK

Phone's right over there at the box office. Tell her I said it was cool.

MAN

Thanks.

JACK continues over to his post, opens it up and counts tickets, puts them in a plastic bag, scribbles on a sheet on a clip-board.

SHANE

Why so late? Hungover again?

JACK

Nope, just underwhelmed.

SHANE

I was out all night and I still made it in on time. Went to see Dennis Miller's stand-up.

JACK

No you didn't.

SHANE

Actually, yes I did. Then we got to meet him at-

JACK

His show's tonight. My brother has tickets.

SHANE

You know, I could have handled those two.

JACK ignores him.

INT. NATE & AARON'S APT.-EVENING

After DUDE and ALEXIS have left, NATHAN is sitting at his computer. He has typed "FADE IN" and nothing else. He thumbs through his mail: a "Movieline" magazine, loan information, and a couple letters. One is from JACK, with maniacal drawings of Native American totems, and crooked doors, and cow skulls all over the envelope. He looks at the envelope, turns it over in his hands, but doesn't open it. He flips through the magazine instead. AARON is packing up the equipment he had been using.

NATHAN

Are you sticking around over break?

AARON

Why would I?

NATHAN

I don't know. Think about it. I have money saved. We can develop something together.

AARON

I can't, man. My uncle called today. Told me I got that assistant-assistant gig.

NATHAN

No way. Who's directing? Who's in it?

AARON

Not supposed to say. I think they signed Bridges, though. Shh.

NATHAN

Shit. Jeff?

AARON

Beau.

NATHAN

Oh. Congrats. Hope it leads to more for you.

AARON

Doesn't pay squat, but it might be a credit.

NATHAN

I'll rattle around here. I'll bet some of the acting majors will want some material for their reels. Something like that.

AARON

I'm heading over to the Union for that *Year of the Dragon, Angel Heart* double. You going to that?

NATHAN

(still reading his magazine)

I'll try to be prolific.

AARON

I'd say to hell with Mr. Hamilton. His irrelevant condemnation wouldn't keep me from living my life.

NATHAN

Easy for you to say as you beat at the door to success. It's my grade, Aaron. My future.

AARON

Whatever, bro.

NATHAN looks back at his computer screen, discouraged. Catches AARON as he's about to leave.

NATHAN

Hey, that girl, Alexis-is she single?

AARON

No. Want her number?

CUT TO:

INT. NATHAN & AARON'S APT.-EVENING

NATHAN and ALEXIS have just finished screwing, or at least heavy, heavy petting-it's hard to tell.

They're still panting and then there's that kind of shared, shy, awkwardness that might occur after having sex with a relative stranger. They look at each other like "yep, we just did that," then they both get up and dress. NATHAN goes back to his computer and starts typing a scene.

ALEXIS
(brushing her hair)
What's that?

NATHAN
I'm in development-mode. Nothing solid yet. In a sort of slump right now, if you wanna know the truth.

ALEXIS
Ditto.

NATHAN
Looking for inspiration, I guess.

ALEXIS
Did I inspire you?

He smirks at her.

ALEXIS (CONT'D)
I'd be happy to collaborate, if I didn't have other plans. I don't know what to do about my career.

NATHAN
Yeah?

ALEXIS
No, or school, or . . . relationships, obviously. Gotta go re-find my muse.

NATHAN
How're you planning to do that?

ALEXIS
Go back. Figure out where I wandered. Where it all got damaged.

NATHAN
You don't seem especially damaged.

ALEXIS
Well, I'm not "especially." It's just not all falling into place like I hoped it would.

NATHAN
(stops typing)
Yeah.

ALEXIS

I have to go meet my boyfriend.

NATHAN

Of course. What're you doing over break?

ALEXIS

We're going to my mom's. Then to Mazatlan. You?

NATHAN

I have to figure this shit out.

ALEXIS

Your slump? Do what I'm doing.

NATHAN

I don't like Mexico.

ALEXIS

No, get out of here. Go home-whenever home is to you.

NATHAN

I don't even know if it's still there for me.

ALEXIS

That's my prescription for you. I lost touch . . . with myself. Hopefully there's still an actress in here somewhere. Maybe we can end up working together.

NATHAN

Sure.

ALEXIS

This was fun.
(on her way out the door)
Oh, that number Aaron gave you?

NATHAN

Yeah?

ALEXIS

Don't dial it.

NATHAN

No, I wouldn't dare.

ALEXIS

If you see me around campus, and I'm alone, that's lovely. But . . . you know.

NATHAN
One-time thing. Got it.

ALEXIS
Good luck.

NATHAN
Yeah, you too.

She leaves. NATHAN looks at what he's written. The flame of inspiration he had earlier has clearly gone out. He looks at the unopened letter he got from Jack and opens his desk. There are other letters from Jack rubber-banded together. NATHAN deletes everything on his screen, and then throws his videotape into a trash can.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT-NIGHT

JACK is in a similar arrangement as before, lounging on his couch. This time he's eating fast food and wearing a "SPAM" t-shirt and sweat pants. He's recording a different movie from one VCR to the other. His phone rings. He answers

JACK
Speak.

We hear NATHAN's voice through the receiver.

NATHAN
Jack?

JACK is expressionless at first . . .

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Jack, it's Nathan.

. . . Then really happy to hear from him.

INT. A GREYHOUND BUS, PULLING TO A STOP-EVENING

NATHAN is on a Greyhound bus-the end of his long journey. The usual array of colorful souls is seated around him, but the bus isn't packed. He has two adjacent seats to himself and has been scribbling ideas into a spiral notebook.

INT. JACK'S OLD BEDROOM-DAY

FLASHBACK, 1991

A grainy and distorted memory of a younger JACK and NATHAN, both 18. Clearly the same two guys, but everything is broken up, confusing, and out of focus-like memories. NATHAN is sitting on JACK's bed in his old room. JACK is standing in front of him, about to perform for him.

NATHAN
What's your audition piece?

JACK

After Hours. Griffin Dunne's insane explanation of his whole night.

NATHAN

Aren't you supposed to use something from a play?

CUT TO:

JACK is in the middle of his *After Hours* monologue, and he is on fire. It is an amazing performance, and NATHAN is transfixed. He is in awe of this incredible actor in front of him, who should already be famous.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS (STOPPED)-EVENING

1995

The driver announces the stop, and everyone starts grabbing their bags and subtly racing towards the front door.

EXT. BUS STATION-EVENING

NATHAN is getting off of the bus. He looks around for a taxi or a pay-phone and something else catches his eye. It's JACK. He's sitting on the hood of a little blue Honda, smoking weed from a little pipe-right out in public. JACK hops down when NATHAN sees him. Without speaking, they approach each other and embrace-NATHAN hugs like brother-to-brother, JACK holds onto it a moment longer.

NATHAN

You didn't have to pick me up.

JACK

(offering him a hit)
Saves you money.

NATHAN

No, thanks.

JACK

All aboard.

NATHAN throws his bags into the back seat.

NATHAN

You ok to drive?

INT. JACK'S CAR (MOVING)-NIGHT

JACK is driving, emotionless. He hasn't seen or heard from his best friend, NATHAN, in two years. But he is casually driving along as if they've been hanging out all along, humming or singing under his breath. NATHAN is more aware of the awkwardness. He breaks the quiet.

NATHAN

So?

JACK

(snapping out of space)
Yeah, so. How is it? What's good?
What's crap? Been to Disney World?
Been to jail?

NATHAN

I'm beat. Things are slipping. For
the most part, better than at my
last school, but a little fucked for
now.

JACK

Well, now you can unwind, get your
shit together.

NATHAN

That's essentially the problem. Too
much unwinding.

JACK

It's good for ya.
(quoting again)
"It's a moral imperative."

NATHAN almost instinctively snaps his fingers and points,
the same way JACK did earlier.

NATHAN

Real Genius.

This is, of course, huge for JACK. He's been playing their
movie game by himself for two years. And it's suddenly back.
NATHAN is back, and it's good to see him.

JACK

I talked to my manager. About you
working with me. At the theater.

NATHAN

Why?

JACK

To help you. Surround yourself with
it. That's how it all started for
you anyway.

NATHAN

That's not why I came back. I was
hoping . . . I have some money saved,
rented some cheap equipment. You
and I could throw a couple shorts
together.

JACK

Shorts?

NATHAN

Film shorts.

JACK

I know what a short is.

NATHAN

Like what we used to do.

JACK

You want my help?

NATHAN

You're more removed from it. All instinct; I've apparently lost mine.

JACK

Only writing I've done is letters.

NATHAN

Hey, I'm sorry I never wrote back. It just got so busy there.

JACK

I know.

JACK turns onto NATHAN's old street.

NATHAN

Well, this is what I was jotting down on the ride up. Take a look at it. See what you think. Add or subtract, whatever.

JACK

I don't want our only time together to be toiling over an assignment. Arguing about a vocation that has nothing to do with me.

NATHAN

It doesn't yet, but it can.

JACK

I don't need that kind of pressure. I don't need any pressure. The theater is a dump, but at least it's stress-free.

NATHAN

Yeah, I don't have time for that.

JACK

You're not gonna work on a crap-load of vague, conceptual movies twenty-four hours a day, right? Half the time in my world, half the time in yours. That's a good deal. You help me, I'll help you. I go bonkers there some days.

NATHAN

Nice endorsement.

JACK

No, it won't be boring if you're there. And it'll get you back on our side of the movies.

NATHAN

That's not unattractive.

JACK

Shane works there. We can give him shit together. You can use the extra cash.

They've stopped at NATHAN's house.

NATHAN

Hm.

He gets out of the car and collects his gear from the back seat.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Thanks for the pick-up.

JACK

Wanna come over before you face your parents? Get high with me one night. We can chat about the movies we've seen over the past two years.

NATHAN

Not tonight. Guess I'll see you tomorrow.

INT. MR. VINCENT'S '83 OLDSMOBILE (MOVING)-DAY

In an unimpressive but well-kept family-car are MR. VINCENT, 60, and his wife, DIANNE, 50s. They're both inherently tired. MR. VINCENT is driving. The car radio is playing lame old music. They've not spoken the entire drive, but DIANNE suddenly turns the radio all the way down, which is irritating.

DIANNE

She wants me to go out there for a visit.

MR. VINCENT

Yeah?

DIANNE

After the holidays. For a week or so.

MR. VINCENT

Good time to go.

DIANNE

That's what I figured.

You wouldn't want to go, would you?

MR. VINCENT

To your sister's? No. I . . . I have too much going on here. No, I couldn't. Couldn't get away.

DIANNE

I assumed.

She stares out the passenger window. Her face tightens.

DIANNE (CONT'D)

When you slow down and speed up back and forth like that I get sick to my stomach.

MR. VINCENT

Didn't realize-

DIANNE

You do it all the time. It's aggravating.

MR. VINCENT

I'll try to stop.

DIANNE

You should have just let me drive. I could've dropped you off at work. Then I wouldn't have to beg for a ride from one of the other ladies.

MR. VINCENT

I don't know how late I'll be.

DIANNE shakes her head. She's just innately, overall disgusted.

DIANNE

You're doing it again.

INT. MOVIE THEATER AUDITORIUM-DAY

Big Trouble in Little China is playing, and JACK is watching from the back of the theater. Staring, in his own world. There are about twenty viewers scattered among the seats. JACK opens his movie theater beverage, pours in some rum from a little flask-sized bottle, and shoves the bottle into his inside pocket. He takes out a prescription pill bottle, pops two pills and washes them down with his drink.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY-DAY

NATHAN is cleaning the concessions counter, but is distracted. He's wearing the theater uniform—light purple jacket, white shirt, black tie and pants. He keeps looking up at LAUREL. She's counting money in the box office, looks up and catches NATHAN looking. They smile at each other.

LAUREL

How do you like it so far?

NATHAN

Not much to report.

LAUREL

Had any cranky patrons yet?

NATHAN

Tell ya the truth, they all seemed a little on edge.

LAUREL

They get aggressive for action flicks. Although it's a comedy, too. They're usually pretty chipper for those. So it's a conundrum. Jacket looks good on you. Not many people can wear that color, and it usually doesn't fit so well.

JACK interrupts. He's overall excited that NATHAN is here.

JACK

Hey, you should come watch.

NATHAN

Is that allowed? How many times have you seen it?

JACK

A bunch. You don't have to do that.

NATHAN

There's artificial butter-product-crap all over the glass.

JACK

So, you don't have to. Who's gonna give a shit?

NATHAN

If I'm gonna work here, I might as well do what's expected of me.

JACK

Did you see that chick with the plaid skirt? Whew. Did you notice who she looked like? Tell me who she looked like. I mean, exactly.

NATHAN

I didn't see her.

JACK

Yeah, you did. Her boyfriend's breath smelled like he gargled with diarrhea. I was trying to get your attention when I was ripping their tickets, but you were arguing with "Limping Guy" about peanut M&Ms.

NATHAN

He told me there were fewer M's in the boxes than there were in the bags.

JACK

I heard.

NATHAN

That's just not true.

JACK

Customer's always right.

NATHAN

He's wrong. We could sit here and count 'em if he wanted.

JACK

He probably would.

INT. WENDY'S OFFICE-DAY

WENDY, early 40s, is talking on the phone while plugging candy inventory into her computer. She is uptight and commanding, has teased, bleached blond hair, and wears revealing clothes.

WENDY

All I asked you was why you didn't show up after told me you were going to. How does that translate to you as nagging?