

First Draft
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THE INSTITUTE

Pilot Episode

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TITLE:

White against black background:

THE LAST THREE MINUTES OF HIS LIFE

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT-- DAY

A bleak, featureless expanse of sand and brush.

CLOSE-UP

A fat HORSEFLY sitting on a rock.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP--

As the FLY rubs its forelegs together furiously.

Suddenly, a huge, whip-like tongue scoops IT up.

ANGLE--

The massive, scaly head of a GILA MONSTER as it swallows the FLY.

ANGLE--

The giant LIZARD motionless on the desert floor.

After a few seconds, a faint, deep rumble.

The LIZARD's eye darts nervously.

The rumble grows louder.

ANGLE--

A wider shot of the LIZARD on the desert floor.

The sand around IT begins to vibrate.

The rumble continues to grow.

Suddenly, a clenched hand bursts through the sand.

At the same time, the LIZARD disappears as the ground beneath IT drops away with a loud sucking sound.

A MAN pulls himself out of the earth, panting heavily.

His name-- GUY MANN.

HE is strangely dressed -- in a formal suit that might have been the height of fashion in, say, 1929. The outfit is set off by a bright red ceremonial sash.

But HE wears no shoes, his face is haggard, his eyes sunken. Blood oozes from a wound in his side.

HE stands, squinting in the sunlight.

HE turns and looks down. His POV of the sand cascading into a dark, seemingly bottomless hole.

From far below, the sound of a KLAXON BLARING.

HE starts running, stumbling across the scorching sand. HE leaves a thin trail of blood behind.

After a few steps, HE collapses.

CLOSE on his face as HE hits the sand.

His eyes are wide open, but HE's deathly still.

FLASHBACK--

A DISTINGUISHED LOOKING MAN behind a desk.

DISTINGUISHED MAN

You keep this up, young man, and we're going have to make you a partner in this firm.

INTERCUT-- DESERT

GUY lying in the sand.

FLASHBACK--

Another MAN in a room.

MAN

Boy, they sure treat you right here, huh?

INTERCUT-- DESERT--

GUY gives a short, mirthless grunt.

FLASHBACK--

GUY strapped to a steel table, screaming.

INTERCUT-- DESERT--

A wince flashes across GUY's face.

FLASHBACK--

A beautiful WOMAN in a lab coat. Her mouth is covered by a surgical mask.

WOMAN

I know your secrets...

INTERCUT-- DESERT--

GUY screws his eyes shut, trying to escape the memory.

FLASHBACK--

The WOMAN again.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I know your shame...

INTERCUT-- DESERT--

GUY's eyes snap open.

FLASHBACK--

The WOMAN. SHE starts to remove mask.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I know your nightmares.

INTERCUT-- DESERT

GUY's mouth stretches into a strange smile. HE begins to laugh, quietly at first, then building to a raw, manic pitch.

His laughter echoes across the empty landscape.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING-- CITY STREET--DAY

Ritzy-looking.

SUPER TITLE:

SOME YEARS EARLIER

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING-- LOBBY-- DAY

DOORMAN standing behind desk reading newspaper. A headline reads:

12,000 DEAD IN SKYEPOINT HORROR

An accompanying photo shows a skyscraper broken in half.

DOORMAN

Mr. Mann. Hello.

ANGLE-- GUY

HE looks younger and cleaner. HE wears an expensive suit, just slightly ruffled.

GUY'S POV--

as HE sees headline. The number "12,000" looms huge.

GUY
How's tricks, Leon.

DOORMAN
Haven't seen you in a few weeks, Mr. Mann.

GUY
Traveling, Leon.

DOORMAN
Big business trip, huh?

GUY throws him a confident wink.

DOORMAN (CONT'D)
You got a fine fantastic life, Mr. Mann.

GUY gives him a tight little smile. HE starts towards elevator, then calls back.

GUY
My wife upstairs?

DOORMAN
I think she's out.

GUY
Hmm. Too bad.
(HE pats his pockets.)
Uh, I left my keys in Brussels. Let me have the extra--

LEON
No problem.
(HE tosses GUY the keys.)

GUY
Thanks, Leon.

DOORMAN
Nice to have you back!

GUY continues on.

LEON'S POV as GUY rounds corner. The detached sole of one shoe flaps against the floor.

INT. ELEVATOR-- DAY

The doors close. GUY leans against them and lets out a deep breath.

INT. HALLWAY-- DAY

GUY in front of apartment door turning key in lock.

HE opens the door and steps inside.

INT. APARTMENT-- DAY

Expensively decorated, spectacular view. GUY walks on into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM-- DAY

GUY heads over to the dresser and opens a drawer. He ignores the framed photos of an attractive woman and himself together set on top of the dresser.

HE takes out a jewelry box. HE opens it and starts stuffing his pockets with the contents.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(Off-Camera)

Don't forget the wedding ring.

HE wheels around. HE sees his wife, CASSANDRA, framed in the bathroom doorway, wrapped in a towel.

GUY

(holding necklace)

I just came for my underwear.

CASSANDRA

How'd you get in here?

GUY

Doorman gave me the key.

CASSANDRA

Oh my God. Look at you.

GUY

I'm doing fine.

CASSANDRA

That why you break into your own home?

GUY

It's not my home anymore, is it?

CASSANDRA

Whose fault is that?

GUY says nothing. HE starts putting the jewelry back.

CASSANDRA (CONT'D)
Oh, take it. If you need it that badly.

HE shakes his head and shuts the box.

CASSANDRA (CONT'D)
I can't believe what you've done to yourself. To both of us.

GUY
You got anything to drink, Cassandra? Scotch, mouthwash, drain cleaner?

CASSANDRA
That isn't funny.

GUY
Not meant to be.

CASSANDRA
You need help, Guy. Professional help. A psychiatrist could--

GUY
Perk me up? Make me feel good about murdering twelve thousand people?

CASSANDRA
You didn't murder them.

GUY
Then who did?

CASSANDRA
The developer-- we've been over this-- the construction company-- the investigation proved--

GUY
I designed that building, Cassandra. I killed them.

HE turns to go. SHE grabs him.

CASSANDRA
Guy, I...

SHE looks him at searchingly. HE stares back, completely expressionless.

GUY
Gotta go.

HE breaks away.

CASSANDRA
Where?

GUY
Don't know.

CASSANDRA
What will you do?

GUY
Don't care.

HE exits.

INT. ELEVATOR-- DAY

From hallway. GUY stands inside.

The doors shut.

An electric, turbine-like whine as the elevator drops.

EXT. NEWSSTAND-- STREET-- NIGHT

A few days later.

Among the magazines, a copy of LIFE. On the cover: TOMBSTONE
IN THE SKY, with skyscraper photo.

ANGLE--

GUY holding plastic cheese and cracker packet. HE looks
worse for wear. Several days worth of stubble on his face.

GUY
How much did you say?

ANGLE-- NEWSVENDOR

NEWSVENDOR

Seventy-five cents.

GUY looks at change in his hand.

GUY (CONT'D)
I'll give you sixty.

NEWSVENDOR
This ain't Baghdad, buddy. I don't
haggle.

GUY starts walking away.

NEWSVENDOR (CONT'D)
Gimme the money.

GUY looks at him, then gives him change. VENDOR throws him packet.

TRACKING SHOT as GUY starts down street, opening his supper. HE tears off cellophane wrapper, scoops a gob of cheese onto the enclosed tiny knife, and smears it on a cracker.

HE raises it to his mouth. A PEDESTRIAN bumps into him.

The cheese and crackers, in plastic holder, fall into a small stream of water in the gutter and float there.

GUY bends down to pick the packet up. It drifts downstream out of his reach onto a sewer grating.

A passing car squashes the packet flat.

DRIVER

(In car)

Get the hell out of the street!

GUY

(Yelling)

Watch where you're going!

DRIVER

Shut up, you bum.

GUY

What did you call me?

DRIVER

A goddamn bum!

HE drives off in a squeal of rubber.

GUY stands there.

HE takes out a pint flask.

GUY

(To himself)

Just checking, pal.

HE drinks. HE laughs.

INT. CAR-- ON STREET-- NIGHT

Two MEN in the dark interior, back of their heads to CAMERA. GUY visible across street through windshield.

MAN 1

What do you think?

MAN 2

Maybe.

EXT. STREET-- DAY

A bad part of town. Porno movies and sex shops. GUY wandering down street lined with HAWKERS.

HAWKER 1
(with leaflets)
Check it out, man... You like girls?
Check it out...

GUY shakes his head and walks on.

HAWKER 2
Rock... check out rock...

GUY sees window of donut shop.

HAWKER 2 (CONT'D)
Take you away, man, it's what you want...

GUY pushes past him. HE walks up to donut shop.

COUNTERPERSON is just placing a tray of fresh donuts on display shelf in window.

GUY stops and stares hungrily inside.

HE hears a voice behind him.

HAWKER 3
(Off-camera)
Look good, huh?

GUY
(Turning around)
What?

HAWKER 3
Donuts look good?

GUY looks at HAWKER. HAWKER looks at GUY.

HAWKER 3 (CONT'D)
(Handing him a flyer)
Here.

GUY takes it. HAWKER 3 walks off. GUY looks down at flyer. It reads:

MEN! NEED EXTRA \$\$\$? HEALTHY MALES 18-36 NEEDED FOR PRODUCT TESTING. MEALS, BEDS, STIPEND. SAFE. INFORMATION CENTER, 12000 HEFLIN PLAZA. SEE BETSY.

GUY looks up to catch a glimpse of HAWKER 3 staring at him from down the street, then disappearing into crowd.

EXT.-- OFFICE BUILDING-- DAY

GUY before entrance. The big numbers "12000" overhead.
Blare of street traffic.

INT.-- OFFICE BUILDING-- LOBBY-- DAY

Huge, empty, silent.

GUY walks up to SECURITY MAN behind high console. The squeak of his shoes on the marble floor echo loudly.

GUY
Information center?

SECURITY GUARD points to double glass doors at far end of lobby.

WIDE ANGLE--

As the tiny figure of GUY squeaks his way across the vast space to the glass doors.

GUY'S POV--

As he reaches the opaque doors. A painted sign on them reads:

THE HEFLIN WONDERTORIUM

HE opens the doors.

INT. INFORMATION CENTER-- DAY

GUY stepping inside. HE is instantly surrounded by a mass of screaming schoolchildren.

GUY looks around him. He's in a "touch and feel" exhibition room of sort run by large corporations to show how technology improves our lives.

The kids run around unrestrained, punching every button in sight, and ripping headphones out of walls.

TEACHER
Everybody together please... where's
your buddy, where's your buddy...

GUY walks over to a female ATTENDANT who is hooking up a kid to an impressive-looking static electricity generator. A colorful sign behind her reads: OUR ELECTRIC WORLD.

GUY
Looking for Betsy?

ATTENDANT
Pardon?

GUY
 (Handing her card)
 Betsy.

ATTENDANT
 (After reading it)
 Sorry, sir, there's no one here named--

MAN'S VOICE
 I'm Betsy.

GUY turns around. HE sees a well-dressed, friendly looking young man.

ATTENDANT looks at BETSY curiously. HE takes the card from her hand.

GUY
 Here for the product testing.

BETSY
 What is your name, please?

GUY
 Mann. Guy Mann.

BETSY
 One n?

GUY
 No.

BETSY
 Excellent.

GUY
 How much does it pay?

BETSY
 We're very glad you stopped in, sir...
 (To ATTENDANT)
 Thank you, thank you very much,
 miss...

HE leads GUY away from the exhibit to a quieter corner.

BETSY (CONT'D)
 Before we, let me, are you familiar
 with the Heflin Institute?

I bet you are and don't even know it.

GUY
 Is there food? It says food.

BETSY

Best way to answer your questions,
we have a little film we like to, I
think it's starting right about,
yes, here we are.

HE gestures to doorway close at hand. GUY hesitates.

BETSY (CONT'D)

Go ahead!

GUY

(Sardonically)
I get popcorn?

BETSY

Enjoy!

GUY steps inside.

INT.-- SCREENING ROOM-- DAY

Cozy, dimly lit. Projection TV in front.

GUY surveys the room, then takes a seat. As soon as he does,
a voice booms out.

ANNOUNCER

(V.O., from TV)
Hello, and welcome to a world of
knowledge!

GUY turns around sharply. Screen snaps on.

ANGLE-- TELEVISION SCREEN

We see the following film, which seems to have been made
circa 1975:

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

From the fathomless depths of our
planet's oceans...

Stock shot of bathysphere under water.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

To the farthest reaches of endless
space...

Stock shot of distant galaxy.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Man's questing mind knows no
boundaries.

ANGLE-- SCREENING ROOM

GUY stifling a yawn.

ANGLE-- TELEVISION

ANNOUNCER

Throughout human history, our most
valuable commodity-- more lustrous
than silver, more precious than gold,
has been-- Knowledge.

Shot of Raphael's painting "The School of Athens."

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

In 1924, a unique man, Lionel
Vanderburg Heflin, had a special
vision...

Still photo of elderly man in 1920's garb. Scratchy recording
underneath:

HEFLIN

(V.O.)

I believe that in the coming century,
our race may find itself capable of
achieving nothing less than
perfection. I propose the foundation
of an Institute of Scientific
Endeavour...

Silent film of an even older HEFLIN and a small group of men
taking part in a modest ground-breaking ceremony before a
Quonset hut.

HEFLIN (CONT'D)

...Whose sole aim and purpose shall
be to further the range of human
knowledge.

Old film showing HEFLIN with bowed head receiving some sort
of medal.

ANNOUNCER

The self-taught industrialist's
mandate still serves as the motto
for the Institute that bears his
name.

Shot of an archway with the inscribed words: "TO FURTHER
KNOWLEDGE."

ANGLE-- SCREENING ROOM

GUY shifts restlessly in his seat.

ANGLE-- SCREEN

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 Today, the Heflin Institute is a
 catalyst for change in all
 countries...

Shot of RESEARCHER 1 in lab coat measuring the head of a cow
 with calipers. Rustic FARMER in funny hat looks on.
 Windmill turning in b.g.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 ...And all walks of life.

Shot of RESEARCHER 2 talking to BARBER, who holds a small
 pen-like device. In looks in awe at MAN in barber chair
 with half his head cleanly shaved. RESEARCHER 1
 measuring MAN's head with calipers.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 At its main operational facility
 located in picturesque Nuh--

A sudden dropout on the soundtrack momentarily obscures the
 ANNOUNCER's voice.

Shot of a generic Ivy-Leaguish campus.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 --Stitute's international team of
 researchers continue to press

the pace of human progress. From global weather
 modification...

Shot of gentle rain over rice paddy.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 ...High-efficiency nutriment
 manufacture...

Shot of an endless, plastic-looking tube being extruded from
 a nozzle.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 To helpful products that keep your
 garden green...

Shot of a baby in a beautiful garden taking its first steps
 towards its mother.

ANGLE-- SCREENING ROOM

Two SCHOOLCHILDREN run in, yelling at the top of their lungs.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 ...The Institute is doing all it can
 to make sure Tomorrow doesn't come
 one day later than Today.

The SCHOOLCHILDREN run into GUY's aisle and start fighting
 in front of him.

HE gets up, annoyed, and exits room.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 With its Pacific Facility nearly
 reoperational...

ANGLE-- SCREEN

Shot of island native and man in hooded white radiation suit
 waving on sunny beach. Four or

five other suited figures busy in b.g.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 The Institute is ready to begin the
 next chapter of Mankind's
 greatest--

INT. INFORMATION CENTER-- DAY

GUY steps out into main hall. HE is instantly met by BETSY,
 holding a clipboard.

BETSY
 Film over, Mr. Mann?

GUY
 Nope.

BETSY
 I didn't think so! I always watch
 it to the end. The words of Mr.
 Heflin are so inspirational. You
 must be very excited about
 participating in his Great
 Undertaking.

GUY
 What undertaking is that?

BETSY
 Why, to further knowledge, of course.
 There are a number of projects
 currently in the testing stage. I'd
 like to ask you some quick questions
 to see which you'd be best suited
 for. First, have you ever been
 treated for any--

GUY

You want to know about me? I'm 34 years old. No family. No permanent address. I need food, a bed, and someplace where I don't have to think.

BETSY

About what?

GUY

You name it, Betsy. You name it.

HE takes out a hip flask and unscrews top.

BETSY looks at him with interest.

EXT.-- ROAD-- DAY

CLOSE on the wheel of a bus as it brakes to a halt.

INT. SHUTTLE BUS-- DAY

GUY sleeping in seat in back. Blind drawn over window. HE wakes up with a start. HE grabs his head as an impressive hangover kicks in.

ANGLE-- BUS DRIVER

As HE turns back to look at GUY.

DRIVER

Here we are.

GUY

Where?

DRIVER

Where do you think?

GUY tries to raise blind. HE can't.

GUY

(Holding his head)

How long were we driving for?

DRIVER

Some hangover, huh?

HE swings the doors open.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD-- DAY

Near sunset.

CLOSE to bus as the rumpled, unshaven GUY steps down from it.

The bus drives off, leaving GUY by himself. HE seems disoriented.

HE looks around. Before him, a mossy stone wall with an iron gate. Arched letters overhead read: "TO FURTHER KNOWLEDGE."

Next to the gate, a small sign: "After 6 P.M. Please Ring Buzzer."

GUY pushes the button.

Nothing happens.

HE takes out his bottle. It's empty.

HE tosses away in disappointment.

Wind rustles through the trees.

A door in the gate opens. A WOMAN in tennis whites steps out.

WOMAN

Mr. Mann?

GUY

Yes...

WOMAN

I'm Wendy. I'm here to meet you.
(SHE looks at him.)
Are you all right?

GUY

A little... dizzy... I...

WENDY

That's fairly normal. Would you come this way please?

SHE leads him through the door.

EXT. CAMPUS-- DAY

GUY and WENDY inside gate.

GUY's POV of a sloping lawn leading up to a small grouping of ivy-covered collegiate-looking buildings.

WENDY

(Glancing at clipboard)
I see you'll be participating in Dr. Blade's work. Dr. Blade is brilliant, absolutely brilliant. It's all beyond me, of course. But everybody's got their own special--

GUY
Wait. Do me a favor.

WENDY
Yes?

GUY
Just tell me... just tell me... where
I am...

WENDY
(As if HE's made a good
joke)
Why, Mr. Mann. This is the Institute.

SHE leads him up the path through lawn toward buildings.

GUY
(Trying to pierce alcohol
haze)
Oh... Yeah... Right...

The CAMERA rises up as they walk ahead, pulling back until they dwindle to tiny figures on the path. We see the cozy campus below us, with its buildings, lawns, tennis courts, trees in the fading light.

CAMERA continues to pull back. The campus is revealed as tiny speck of green perched atop a vast barren mesa, rising a thousand feet off the desert floor.

A few aircraft warning towers with blinking red lights dot the mesa's edge.

Nothing else is visible.

FADE OUT

END ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. DORM ROOM-- DAY

Morning. GUY asleep in bed.

Sunlight streaming through curtained window. A click-click sound filters in from outside.

GUY wakes up. HE surveys the room. It's tastefully furnished in rustic style. Casual clothes are laid out for him on a valet.

HE goes to window and parts curtain. HE looks out and sees a HANDYMAN trimming a hedge with garden shears.

HANDYMAN looks up and waves.

A knock on the door. GUY wraps sheet around himself and opens it. A tray is at his feet with a beautifully-laid out breakfast with a note card.

HE picks it up and reads the printed note:

"Dear Mr. Mann,

May I express my delight in your decision to join us in the furthering of human potential. I hope the prospect is as exciting to you as it is to me.

Per Ardua ad Astra, Dr. H. M. Blade"

Beneath the signature, a small insignia of an open eye over a double helix.

INT. LECTURE ROOM-- DAY

Close up of the same insignia.

CAMERA quickly pulls back to reveal it imprinted on lab coat of A RESEARCHER standing in front of a blackboard.

RESEARCHER

What's the one organ that distinguishes mankind from the rest of animal world? Anyone?

ANGLE--

On the fifteen or so VOLUNTEERS, including GUY, sitting in chairs, listening. THEY are all scruffy and wasted-looking.

THEY gaze at the RESEARCHER impassively.

VOLUNTEER 1

Ankles?

RESEARCHER

Yes, the brain. Without our brains, where would we be, exactly nowhere is correct. And yet even today, what do we really know about the squishy mister upstairs? Not a lot. That's where you gentlemen come in. Through a series of simple, non-invasive procedures, you'll be helping us determine...

ANGLE on GUY slumped in his chair as RESEARCHER goes on talking. Another volunteer, ANDY, in next chair, leans over.

ANDY

(Whispering)

Hey.