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Scenario (1/1/01)



Le Petit Soldat. [Jean-Luc Cocktail, 2K++.]

The credits roll over an assortment of bikini-clad babes, cavorting in a variety of tropical settings — white beaches, tall palm trees, silly cocktails with little umbrellas on the swizzlesticks, big bright smiles, big white teeth, deep blue water, deep brown cleavage.

With every provocative pose, a clicking noise and a freeze-frame. Somebody is taking photographs. Somebody is taking a lot of photographs.

Beneath, the voice of our protagonist and narrator:

“Man is for woman a means, said Nietzsche; and asked then: what is woman for man?”

Babes standing on their heads. Babes walking on their hands along the beach. Babes juggling chainsaws.

“A real man wants two things, he said: danger and play. Therefore he wants woman as the most dangerous plaything...”

Babes modelling army fatigues, bearing automatic weapons. Babes piloting helicopter gunships. Babes with bazookas, wearing howitzer brassieres. Their smiles are terrifying.

“You are going to women? Do not forget your proton guns.”

Astronautical babes in bubble helmets and bikini spacesuits contest the advance of a phalanx of bug-eyed monsters.

“The magazine of extreme sports,” the narrator remarks, “should also be the magazine of extreme poseurs.”

A couple of babes in bikinis are fencing. With a grand climactic flour-

ish, they simultaneously run one another through. Their boobs explode.

Three girls balanced on surfboards smile for the camera — which, apparently mounted on a helicopter, swoops rapidly up and away to reveal an oncoming tidal wave. The girls are abruptly propelled out of shot.

Eight scuba girls wrestle with an octopus. It rips off all their tops at once.

“Build your lovelives under Vesuvius,” he suggests.

An abrupt cut. The film stock changes to grainy black-and white.

Winter. Gray sky. Leafless trees. A plume of smoke from a lone chimney.

Whip pan to:

A border checkpoint. A convertible pulls up to the gate. A uniformed guard inspects the papers of the driver.

The driver wears a hat and trenchcoat, and smokes an unfiltered Lucky Strike. It is, but of course, John (Wild Buffalo) Craig.

He continues his narration in world-weary tones:

“I only found it harder as time went on,” he says. “the endless photo shoots with the endless procession of beach bunnies — young, nubile, filled with boundless lust...”

He glances down at a stack of photographs on the seat beside him. Holds one up: Laetitia Casta patting the trunk of an elephant, with an inscrutable expression. Shrugging, he tosses it back onto the pile.

“...prisoners of the weakness of the flesh.”

He lights another cigarette. Perhaps he is reflecting that there are worse prisons than the flesh of Laetitia Casta.

“But this was only my cover: sports photojournalist, football correspondent for the *Review of Sporting Metaphysics*. In reality I was an agent in the secret war...”

Montage: a rather different series of stills, these in grisly black and white — scenes of war, famine, pestilence, death. Shots of John in jungle settings with Che Guevara characters. Shots of John with a Bowie knife between his teeth. Wrestling alligators. Torturing bankers.

“...the war that pitted good against evil, east against west, Buffs against Huskers...”

Shots of John in the endzone coolly taking photographs as several tons of steroid-swollen beef heave back and forth about the goal line.

“Of course, what was reality.”

Let the camera pull away as the convertible zips down the highway through an autumnal European landscape in the direction of a distant city.

“The war was endless now, and international. And so was the football season. Just when you thought it was over, just when you thought the last faux-platinum Sears national championship trophy had been handed out to the last Gatorade-soaked coach in the last corporate-sponsored stadium in the last league on Earth, another one popped up and you had to go and cover it. And in between the endless swimsuit issues to be filled with endless photographs of endlessly cavorting

bimbos. It was always winter somewhere, and that meant it was always summer somewhere else. The seasons might have been ephemeral, but the antipodal oppositions, and the wants they created, were eternal.”

Abrupt cut to a chaotic montage: Zeppelins going down in flames.

“The facts, though incomplete, were undisputed,” John says. “It had happened during the halftime of the Adobe Acrobat/Stuffit Expander Fuchsia Bowl, just after the Suck.com trivia question and just before the Team Compliance consultants from the TCP/IP/JPEG 2000/IEEE 1394 Standards Bowl gave the Burger King update to the Valvoline Slick Presentation of the Morgan Stanley Dean Witter executive summary of the Tommy Trojan/K-Y Jelly Penetrating Analysis of the Half.com midpoint statistics. Details later obtained by imaging with the Danni’s Hard Drive/Victoria’s Secret/Double Bubble Toil And Hubble Space Telescope revealed the kind of problem that wasn’t going to fall for one of those superficial Dell solutions... .”

Something confusing transpires on what appears to be a microscope slide: infinitesimal amoeboid bugs, their tendrils flailing, surround a larger ovoid and tug it away.

“A crack squad of terrorist fanatics had hijacked the Sun Microsystems/Java Virtual Machine Leaden Zeppelin — the flying machine everyone agreed was destined to revolutionize transportation, as soon as it actually got off the ground. No one was sure how they’d managed to crank up the Imodium/GasAid inflation apparatus and get the blimp into the air, let alone escape unnoticed, even if they had managed to wind it out to its full design speed of four miles an hour. But somehow they had.”

John stares straight ahead, his hand upon the wheel. Behind him, out the window, the passing European landscape.

“It was my job to find it and bring it back, in time for the halftime

show at the American Beauty/Suburban Midlife Crisis Rose Bowl.”

Confused images of two teams trying to play football in a blinding blizzard of rosepetals. All the cheerleaders look like Mena Suvari.

“Many saw in this the hand of Microsoft. Of course, many now blamed Microsoft for the decline of the Holy Roman Empire and the vanishing of the cosmological constant. Still, it could hardly be a coincidence that the product launch of Balloons 2001 had been advanced and was now scheduled for the Natural Monopoly Bowl in Redmond April first...”

Footage of the famous adjustably-inclined Level Playing Field, which swivels and gimbals to ensure that the visitors must advance up a sixty-degree slope against Team Microsoft. A partisan crowd of geeks jeer and hurl the contents of their pocketprotectors at the underdogs.

As a marching band plays “Up Up And Away” and arranges itself into the semblance of a balloon the face of Gates appears on a hundred gigantic video screens ringing the stadium. “You will believe, that a brick can fly!” he declares triumphantly.

PR flacks with pointers gesture at their presentations with broad artificial smiles and paint a colorful picture of red, yellow, and blue balloons floating away upon the wind.

Meanwhile in the locker room a gang of geeks are frantically spray-painting concrete blocks. Microsoft managers are shooting the stragglers.

More stock footage: the Death March from Bataan; a plain darkened by the Mongol Horde; goosestepping soldiers of the Red Army passing in review. with the stolid gray men of the Kremlin watching them impassively.

In closeup, the heel of a soldier’s boot crushes a bug.

Rapidly jumpcut urban montage: bridge, river, plaza covered with pigeons, sidewalk newsstand, railroad station, etc.

A city street, in Geneva. John and another guy in a trenchcoat (but of course, this is Leonardo Garbonzo) stand in front of the Circle K, eating microwaved burritos and guzzling enormous soft drinks. They speak in code: — “The progress of this investigation has been most untriumphant,” says Leonardo. — “If we fail to discover the whereabouts of the Lost Zeppelin, we shall flunk most egregiously,” says John. — “The girl must know something.” — “Excellent.” — “But you will totally have to interrogate her.” — “This is most unacceptable.” — “She is totally insistent.” — “No way.” — “Yes way.” — “Women are a most heinous distraction.” — “But they serve a most essential evolutionary purpose.” — “No way.” — “Yes way.” — A telephone booth materializes from an electric-blue cloud of ionization. — “Whoa!” (in chorus.) — Two figures emerge. They look exactly like John and Leonardo, but are dressed like beach bums instead of spooks. — “How’s it hanging, John and Leonardo?” — “How’s it hanging, doppelgängers?” — “We us are present here in flashback from our most triumphant retirement in the south of France, in which we us recall the riddling twist of fate which led you us to accept the necessity of cross examining this most phenomenal babe to advance this most resplendent plot beyond this utterly non-non-heinous moment of second-act stasis.” — “No way.” — “Yes way.” The phantom doubles expatiate, relating an uncanny tale of giant robots, artificial intelligence, bubble helmets and blasters, and a conspiracy involving the Illuminati with Radar Men from the Moon. — “But thus to interfere with the events in one’s own past light cone entails the existence of a closed timelike curve which must violate causality most grievously, a possibility not admissible unless the local energy density is totally negative,” Leonardo objects. “This is most unacceptable,” says John. — Bogus John and Bogus Leonardo look at one another and exclaim “Wrong movie, dude!” They vanish in another blue flash of ionization with an electric trilling noise. — Unbogus John and Unbogus

Leonardo regard one another with wonder. — “Strange things are afoot at the Circle K.” — “You and I have witnessed many things, John, but none so bodacious as what just happened.” — They munch reflectively on their burritos. — The babe appears. She is Monica Bellucci. — “Whoa!” they exclaim in chorus. — “How’s it hanging, most excellent babe?” — “How’s it hanging, Johnny Cocktail?” — She adjusts her very savory décolletage. John’s eyes grow large. He crushes his Egregiously Big Gulp absently in one hand. — “This is a most world-historical babe,” he mutters. — “She embodies the evolutionary imperative most triumphantly,” agrees Leonardo. — “Catch you later, Leonardo.” — “Catch you later, Johnny Cocktail.” — John leaves with the babe.

A barren urban apartment, suggesting a motel room. Light enters from the window. The camera circles John and the babe one way as he circles her the other, taking photographs: a metatextual commentary, photographing the photographer. Or maybe it’s just another fucking quote from *Vertigo*.

As he snaps a series of fabulously artistic black-and-white shots which capture her in a variety of pensive poses, she tells a tale of action and adventure which necessitates a complementary series of flashback stills in lurid living color: “Abandoned in infancy when my parents, famed European archaeologists, were captured by piranhamouthed aliens, spirited away to a distant galaxy, and hurled into the maw of a black hole as sacrifices to the cannibal god, I was adopted by a tribe of gorillas and, in keeping with the legends held among them of an Italian goddess who would wield uncanny psychic power over the denizens of the animal kingdom, raised as Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, reigning over the lost city of Angkor Wat. Then one evening as I bathed in the Moon Pool sacred to Khonsu, attended by my handmaidens and my palace guard of beady-eyed man-apes, the lunar god appeared to me in a vision and told me to descend into the labyrinthine catacombs beneath the ancient temple, where I would find a ring, a key, a staff, a

golden book with silver leaves, a left-handed Stratocaster, a letter of introduction to the director of Marilyn Manson's videos, and a magic ticket for the teleportation chamber that would transport me to Hollywood by nanofax. Following these instructions to the letter, I was dismayed to discover that low-level errors in the implementation of the transmission software caused me to be transported instead into a nested series of selfreferential movies about making movies whose reference to Hollywood was, in consequence, not direct, but lay hidden within a baffling thicket of parentheses and quotation marks. Condemned, as it seemed, to an eternity of suffering/"suffering" in the postmodern cinema, I seized this chance to take a role within an improbable digression from an unmotivated narration within an abbreviated scenario posing as a review of a motion picture of an actual text of the French New Wave which though perhaps engaging was hardly coherent, since it offered me the opportunity to phrase these questions: What remains here of the supposed verisimilitude of film? What grounds our cinematic fabrications? What substance can they have, if they only refer to one another? If this is poetry, can poetry be truth? And what is truth?"

"Photography is truth," says John. "Film is truth twenty-four frames per second." — Shooting continuously as he speaks. — "Football is truth ten yards to the first down, four quarters to the contest, and three fifths of Southern Comfort to the postgame celebration."

Another series of stills, frozen poses: she hangs in midair, brandishing a pair of AK-47s like pompoms, her legs kicked out in a variety of splits. Her outfits are various, but include cheerleading uniforms and nuns' habits.

John has circled to the rear of the babe. The lens of his camera is directed at the lens of our camera. There is an instant when they photograph one another: a loud click and a flash —

An abrupt cut. John is coming out of a movie theater. On the mar-

quee, the legend: "Showgirl Instinct." Two figures in trenchcoats emerge from a nearby alley and surround him, one on either side. They gesture with their revolvers. John is shoved into the cab of a pickup truck and driven away.

"They cornered me as I was coming out of the theater," says John. "I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings. I was still trying to decipher that trailerpark peroration by the existentialist biker. What had Garbonzo been trying to say about Eszterhas? Or was it something Eszterhas had already implicitly said about the possibility of Garbonzo saying something about the reality of Eszterhas?"

Interior of the cab. He is seated between his captors.

"It was like Lemmy Caution always said. You never understand anything...then suddenly one evening, you end up dying of it."

Montage: highways, cornfields, railroad tracks; the endless expanses of the Midwest.

"They'd torture me first, of course. They were barbarians."

John stares out the window.

"Garbonzo told me when he fell into the hands of the executive recruiters they chained him in the front row of an empty theater and screened the three-and-a-half-hour director's cut of *Tango And Cash*...after the first hour or so his spirit had seemed to depart from his body and enter into the world beyond the screen, like Keaton in *Sherlock Junior*...Fred Olen Ray busted him out with the B-Girl Brigade, but for months afterward he'd awakened thrashing in the middle of the night, mumbling dialogue in the voice of Stallone... ."

Jumpcut montage: rusting farm equipment; windmill; abandoned silo; decaying barn; sheep wearing lingerie.

An old farmhouse, apparently abandoned. Within, a chaotic jumble. The walls are covered with pinups clipped out of the special Midwestern Barnyard Edition of the Victoria's Secret catalogue.

There is a perfunctory struggle as they haul John through the front room and into the bathroom. They stuff a gag into his mouth and handcuff him to the bathtub.

Montage: cattleprods, Zippo lighters, pliers. Forcefeeding him cans of Spam and pouring plastic cups of watered stadium beer down his throat. The television. The VCR.

"They tried fire, water, electric shock," says John. "Finally they just strapped me into a chair in front of the television and looped the Season 2000 Colorado highlight reel to play over and over again. I saw the last forty-seven seconds of the Nebraska game two hundred eighty eight times...They had to gag me at first, but toward the end there was no need...I was too weak...I thought I was screaming, I thought my voice could be heard, but it was no louder than a whisper... ."

Jumpcut footage of John, alone in a darkening room, struggling with his bonds in slow motion.

Fade to black.

"After that the hallucinations came," says John.

Jumbled visions:

Nebraska cheerleaders clad in scarlet. Their faces are porcine and sinister. Making oinking noises in an ominous lower register, they leap in slow motion, flail their arms, land heavily upon the ground, and lumber ponderously on all fours to group about a trough on the sideline.

Grainy old stock footage of the maiden flight of the Netscape Naviga-

tor Blimp 3.0. Panicking crowds stampede away from the wreck as it crashes in flames. Oh, the humanity.

Garbonzo in trenchcoat. "All we are is dust in the wind, dude," he says.

John, gun in hand, staggering through a hall of mirrors. Surrounded by images of a woman who is pointing her own gun at him. He fires at the images again and again. Mirrors shatter. Fragments of the woman's image tumble to the floor in slow motion and vanish.

John comes to. He perceives that he is alone in the house, which looks like it has been deserted for some time. The tables are littered with stale Twinkies and emptied cans of Spam. He gnaws the ropes from his wrists, looses the bonds about his ankles, staggers to the window, throws open the curtains. The light blinds him for a moment. He hurls a chair through the glass, and leaps out after it, a dark outline against the blinding white light.

Dusk. A small plane bores through the ether.

The camera (presumably mounted on a Whooping Crane) swoops in toward the cockpit, revealing our protagonist slouched behind the controls.

As a concession to aviator fashion, in addition to his signature trenchcoat he is wearing a leather flying helmet topped with goggles. This cannot possibly make him look like Rocky the Flying Squirrel.

"I was wondering why she'd sold me out to the Huskers," he is saying. "Greed? envy? angst? could I not provide a mate for her tormented artist's soul?"

He takes a reflective pull upon his cigarette.

“Or was it just that she knew I couldn’t get her on the cover of the swimsuit issue? I didn’t know. Perhaps now I never would.”

A hissing noise! Something hurtles past the windshield! Turbulence!

A strange light surrounds the plane. The engines fail. It seems to hang suspended in space, held up by some kind of tractor beam.

Weird flying creatures surround him: bodacious babes in bikinis, suspended in the air by propeller-beanies. They brandish very impressive rayguns.

These are the dreaded Bimbos of the Stratosphere.

His engines frozen by their tractor beams, John is forced down on Laputa, the Flying Island of the Bimbos. From here no man has ever returned.

He is dragged from his plane, forced to run the gauntlet, and heaved staggering into the brig, a windowless steel cage where he languishes for an indeterminate period. Communicating by Morse code with the occupants of nearby cells, he hears fantastic tales of time travel, alien abduction, cosmic conspiracy, and war among the planets, from which he gathers material for future story conferences with his producers.

“I don’t know how long they kept me there,” he says, “but it seemed like a century at the drivein.”

Finally he is unchained and hauled to the bridge for an audience with the Captain of the Bimbos (played by Nikki Fritz.) Flanked by her numerous entourage, she receives him with apparent hostility. Later, however, in a private audience, she offers him the opportunity to dwell with her upon Laputa as her consort and gigolo.

Negotiations are proceeding well until they stick upon insurance and

portfolio issues.

Spurning her final offer as a negotiating ploy, he is somewhat taken aback when Ms. Fritz abruptly decides to post the opening on Monster.com, and, reverting to buccaneering type, makes him walk the plank.

“So much for your golden parachute,” she says.

He steps off into empty space!

The empty air. John’s falling body rockets into shot.

“Fortunately I’d managed to ingratiate myself to my jailer with a few lessons in prose stylistics. She’d reciprocated with a few lessons in aerodynamics,” he says.

His leather flying-helmet has been retrofitted with a propeller. He gives the starter cord a pull. The propeller spins. He ceases to fall.

Drifting slowly away north by northwest, he lights a cigarette.

Exterior. Afghanistan. Dawn.

A vast barren empty plain. Mountains in the distance.

A tiny figure alone in the center of the emptiness. It is John.

Closer as he trudges onward.

He’s still wearing the propeller-beanie above his trenchcoat. The impact of this fashion statement is difficult to evaluate.

Series of dissolves, suggesting time and distance.

Fade in again upon John, still trekking through the desert.

Indistinct noises in the distance. Loud rhythmic grunts, like an army performing calisthenics.

John comes to the top of a ridge and pauses, obviously astonished by what he sees in the valley beyond. The camera swings around him to reveal:

A vast encampment, plainly the lair of an enormous terrorist army.

He produces binoculars from within his trenchcoat and studies the site assiduously.

But abruptly we realize, as does he, that he has been surrounded by an armed patrol.

Cut.

The guards lead him through the encampment, past practice fields where coaches shout instructions through megaphones at hordes of towelheaded linemen who are heaving blocking sleds around and ripping the heads off dummy quarterbacks. They pass rows of tents covered with the logos of the many corporate sponsors of terrorism; at first the names amaze John, but then it all begins to make a sick kind of sense. Finally they pass a stadium, where under camouflaging tarpaulins he finds the missing blimp at last, tethered to a mooring mast.

They take him to an imposing tent, obviously that of the leader. One of the guards pulls a silken rope hanging at the entrance. A distant bell is heard within.

A dramatic pause. Many of the army have gathered, to witness the judgment that plainly lies at hand.

Four bellydancers armed with automatic weapons appear first. They take their stations, two on either side of the entrance.

A tall figure, beturbaned and clad in flowing robes, emerges from the tent.

He has a familiar aspect. He may remind us of — dare we say it? — the former offensive coordinator of a once-formidable college football program.

John regards him with wonder. “Dog?” he asks.

The leader does not respond immediately. Plainly it costs him a great effort to recall his former life.

“Once, perhaps,” he says. “Now I am known as...Osama bin Dog, the Sword of Allah!”

There is a roar of approval from his assembled army; they raise their AK-47s over their heads and shake them. Many demonstrative rounds are fired into the stratosphere. Birds, aircraft, and cometary debris drop from the sky.

Acknowledging his followers with waves and bows, the Dog beckons John to follow him back into the interior of his tent. Here the bellydancers serve glasses of the native beverage, a strange golden bitter tea distilled from the agave plant (which grows here in profusion), and the Dog relates a tale replete with twists, surprises, and discoveries whose narrative thread John finds difficult to trace — perhaps because of its complexity, perhaps because of the intoxicating power of the native beverage, perhaps because the bellydancers provide so consistent a distraction — whose elements include the baffling case of amnesia which left him stumbling as a door-to-door computer salesman through the Balkan civil war, the miraculous recovery of his memory in Sarajevo when a street urchin played “Misirlou” on a broken balalaika, his return from exile, the subsequent premiere of his

Concerto for Rocket Launcher in D Major at the Van Halen Competition in Paris, Texas, its uncertain reception by the critics, the black-tie reception that degenerated into a food fight, the days and nights of soulsearching (aided somewhat by controlled substances) that followed, and the pilgrimage to Culver City, California — where, standing over the grave of Mack Sennett, he swore vengeance upon the bankrupt civilization that had abandoned and betrayed him.

There followed his negotiations with venture capital. His return to the steppes of central Asia. His ability to recruit first-rate talent with pre-IPO incentives. His vision of comic jihad against the godless West.

Montage:

A fat lady runs through a dinner party, firing a gun randomly into the air. Servants and guests run into one another and fall down.

A large open car full of policemen with walruslike moustaches waving their nightsticks in the air flies off the end of a pier and into the water.

The leaders of the World Trade Organization greet one another with joybuzzer handshakes.

An army of martial artists drills on a goldlit beach at dawn, performing precision exercises in unison — hurling cream pies, kicking one another in the backside, slipping on virtual banana peels and turning backflips.

Swelling music. The Dog, standing atop a mountain as the camera swoops in toward and around him, throwing his arms out to embrace the world, bursting into song:

The hills are alive
With the sound of slapstick...

“Really,” says John hastily, interrupting this flashback before it can go

any further. "But what is the role of football?"

The Dog explains that Islamic law prohibits television journalism, programming languages which violate referential transparency, and sexual congress with nonconsenting ruminants. It does, however, permit unrestricted defensive contact on bump-and-run pass coverage and the flying wedge.

His recruits scrimmage constantly. In time they will return in glory to rule the Big Eight, Ten, Twelve, or Forty-Two, as the case may prove.

"I realized then that this was it," says John. "The long-sought nerve center of international comic terrorism. The brain trust that had trained the infamous shock corps that had attempted to blow up the World Trade Center by lighting farts in the parking garage. The fiends who had planted whoopee cushions on the bench of the Supreme Court. The cleaners who handled the blue dress, the consultants who formed the environmental policy of the Bush administration, the detectives who trained the Boulder police."

Clapping his hands, the Dog summons an entourage which accompanies the two of them as they tour the camp, serving drinks from a bottle which John now strongly suspects contains Jose Cuervo Gold.

The Dog points out the athletic facilities, the practice fields, the weight rooms, the stadium skyboxes for highrolling supporters, the library, the supercomputer complex, the genome-sequencing laboratory, and the volcano into which they toss human sacrifices. "Virgin blonde cheerleaders would be best," says the Dog, "but one must make do with the materials available."

With the computers concealed within the tents, the Dog explains, his legions are preparing to face the Pepsi Computational Challenge: the simulation of the collision of a black hole with the Writer's Guild. The resultant Hawking blackbody radiation of mutant highconcept scenarios will enable the production of motion pictures that will evoke shame

even from Jerry Bruckheimer...biological warfare in a new key...weapons of mass distraction.

“Today this stinking desert,” proclaims the Dog. “Tomorrow the world!”

His followers, who have massed in the course of this exposition, roar their approval. They fire a few thousand more rounds into the air.

“And the blimp?” John asks.

“A joke, of course,” says the Dog. “It will never fly. If Allah had meant for us to have automatic memory management, he would not have given us hard pointers. — No, it was a ruse. They needed you out of the way while Eszterhas and his henchmen fixed the Indonesian XFL playoffs and kidnapped Bellucci.”

“Eszterhas?!” John exclaims, recognizing the name of his sworn enemy. “The Hungarian fiend?”

“Of course,” says the Dog. “Cheney made him head of Covert Ops in return for delivering Cleveland. And promised him the babe, of course. She’ll star in *Showgirls Two: Ninja Boogie*.”

“Now I understood everything,” says John, over. “The babes, the blimps, the bowls, the betatesting of the brick balloons, the bogus beach bums, the bodacious Bellucci, the boffo box office for the *Basic Instinct* sequel, the bleating, the beating, the beanies, the bellydancers, the broken balalaika in the Balkans, *The Brain from Planet Arous* as a product of black hole entropy; everything but the Bush administration, which would never make sense. If only Nikki and I hadn’t quarreled over my stock options. This could only end ugly.”

“So,” says John to the Dog. “That’s the way it is.”

The Dog shrugs. “A temporary alliance only,” he says. “At the moment we need Eszterhas and his Hollywood connections. When the moment is right, we’ll crush him like a bug. But for now —”

“I can’t be allowed to leave,” John finishes.

“My sponsors would object,” the Dog admits. “I’m looking for a quarterbacks coach. We need you here. But if not — ” He indicates the fiery pit.

“Sorry,” says John. “But you know how it is.”

“Well,” says the Dog. “It’s the volcano then.”

He gestures. The guards escort John to the brink. The army gathers to witness the execution.

“Have you any last wishes?” asks the Dog.

John ponders this. “Peace on Earth, but a plague upon the ruling classes. The death penalty for anyone who uses the apostrophe to form the plural. More Tequila.”

The Dog hands him the bottle. John takes a lengthy pull.

“There wasn’t any particular design involved,” he says. “If nothing else I figured the fucking beanie would save me again. But when I handed the bottle back to him...”

He drops it.

It plummets into the abyss.

Without thought for consequence, the Dog lunges after it.

John stares, fascinated.

A long shot of the falling Dog, his robes swirling about him as he recedes from sight into the bottomless pit of the volcano.

Calling out as he falls: "Need....salt...need...limes..."

The Islamic horde stand stunned for an endless pregnant moment, gazing into the fiery pit.

Then as a man they lift their weapons and shout: "Osama bin Cocktail!"

In a speech not lacking in Churchillian grandeur, John refuses the leadership of the army. His is not the path of political activism, he explains. No, he is an intellectual terrorist; as such he must walk alone.

They are baffled. "But who will lead us? What are we to do?" asks one of the harem girls.

"Be excellent to each other and party," John advises.

And turning up the collar of his trenchcoat, he walks away into the desert of postmodernism.

Fade out.