

# cult

"You're Next"

(Pilot)

Written by

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CULT

ACT ONE

STRAIGHT DOWN ON A DESKTOP, CAMERA SPINNING

The desktop is awash with freaky CRIME SCENE PHOTOS, BLOODY CLOTHES SCRAPS, PD FILES, MAPS. The SPINNING makes us feel like we're looking into a nightmarish kaleidoscope.

PAZ (O.S.)

C'mon - don't make yourself nuts.  
You don't even know for sure that  
Billy Grimm's followers have them--

CAMERA stops spinning, and PUSHES IN on a MUG SHOT stamped with the name: BILLY GRIMM. He's 45, eyes filled with intellect. And *madness*. Staring right at us. WIDEN to:

INT. LAPD - COLLINS' OFFICE - NIGHT

1 a.m. Lit by harsh lamp light. Detective ERIC COLLINS (mid-30s, sleepless good looks) leans intensely over his littered desk, cell phone to his ear. Nobody's answering his call. His partner, detective PAZ HALDERON (30s), stands nearby--

COLLINS

I had Jen's brother move them. He was going to hide them somewhere new, somewhere *safe*. Then he was supposed to call me.

Collins slams off his phone in frustration. Paz glances at a TV monitor nearby: A RECORDING of Collins intensely interrogating Billy Grimm on some previous occasion. Collins looks wound tight; Billy looks supremely at ease.

PAZ

This thing between you and Billy has turned seriously twisted, man. The way you've dogged him, if he was dirty, you'd have something on him by now--

COLLINS

He gets other people to do his dirt for him.

(beat)

Like kidnapping my family to get me to stop.

(staring at the chaos  
on his desk)

Nobody knows Billy's mind like I do...

Paz studies Collins -- worried about his partner's mental state. Collins labors to make sense of the disjointed clues before him. Suddenly a thought flashes--

COLLINS

What was it that latest vic kept repeating before he died?

PAZ

It was really weird, he said -- "These things snap off." What *things* was he talking about--

COLLINS

No, that wasn't it. Not exactly.  
(straining to remember)  
He said, "Well -- *hey* -- these things just... just snap *right* off."

PAZ

But these Billy Grimm whack-jobs are always saying nutty junk, like they're revealing the secrets of the universe--

COLLINS

"Well, Hey, These Things..."

Collins puzzles it out...

COLLINS

W.H.T.T.--

And he quickly shoves through the papers on his desk, finds a wrinkled-torn GAS STATION MAP. Handwritten in what looks like BLOOD: letters scribbled all around the map. Collins grabs a marker, starts finding and circling initials --

PAZ

Uh, that's evidence you're marking up--

COLLINS

"...Just Snap Right Off." J.S.R.O...

Collins finishes. Considers the pattern. Then -- he quickly draws spokes between them. Circles the point where the spokes all intersect. He looks at Paz. He may've figured it out.

On the TV monitor, the RECORDED IMAGE of Billy Grimm now stares at the interrogation camera... seemingly right at Collins in this room. Right at *us*. Eerie.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Foggy. HEADLIGHTS strobe between tree trunks. Collins' LAPD SEDAN bounces madly down a barely-existent dirt road.

INT. COLLINS' SEDAN - NIGHT

Collins drives way too fast for this road. Paz, the map in his lap, just holds on for dear life.

PAZ

Even if this map means something, it  
*doesn't* mean Billy's people have  
taken your family--

COLLINS

They *wanted* me to find this place.

PAZ

What place? There's nothing out  
here--

COLLINS

Yes there is...

UP AHEAD: a rough-hewn ISOLATED CABIN. Dark, ominous. Lit only by the full moon. A 70's PLYMOUTH VALIANT, a distinctive dull-orange color, is parked in front.

INT. ISOLATED CABIN - NIGHT (ONE MINUTE LATER)

The door is KICKED open. It's Collins -- WEAPON and MAGLITE in hand. He enters the shadowy cabin -- and freezes at what he sees. Paz is a step behind him. He also freezes.

EVERY SURFACE - WALLS, WINDOWS, TABLES, FLOOR -- IS COVERED IN WORDS AND DRAWINGS. Crazed. Chilling.

Collins eases into the hellish environment. Paz follows.

COLLINS

Definitely the work of Billy's  
followers.

Collins is at a section of the chaotically-painted wall where the ancient wallpaper has buckled, creating an uneven texture. Then, suddenly, as he's watching: A PAIR OF HUMAN EYES OPEN - INSET IN THE WALL. Collins and Paz react in shock: A MAN'S BODY is inset in this wall, painted to perfectly blend in.

PAZ

My God!

COLLINS

Help me--

Collins and Paz pull the man free, leaving a perfectly-shaped indent in the wall. The man, nearly dead, stares up at Collins, barely any voice--

MAN

Eric...

PAZ

He knows you?

COLLINS

(horrified recognition)

-- It's Jen's brother.

(leans closer)

Douglas, we've got you now, you're okay...

(then, intense)

...Where's Jen?

The man tries to form words, straining...

COLLINS

*Jen and Andy -- where are they?*

MAN

I... did everything I could to protect them...

Collins' worst nightmare has just come to life.

COLLINS

It was Billy Grimm's people, wasn't it? Where did they take them?

(no answer)

*Douglas-- !*

The man meets Collins' eye. And with his dying breath, says--

MAN

Well hey... these things just...  
snap right off...

The man falls back, lifeless. Collins stares in gathering horror. HOLD on Collins. And then...

Something completely unexpected happens: we suddenly HEAR appreciative LAUGHTER. Then, from seeming nowhere, PEOPLES' VOICES CALL OUT: "Whoa!" "Total freak out!" "I knew it!" "Say buh-bye, Collins - your wifey and son are his-tor-y!" "The cult's got 'em now!"

And we slowly PULL AWAY from Collins TO REVEAL... a WALL-MOUNTED 70-INCH TV. Collins is now on the TV. What the hell is happening? We PAN OFF to reveal we are actually in--

INT. UPSCALE DOWNTOWN BAR - NIGHT

A good CROWD. Everybody drinking, having a good time. Watching the bar's 70-INCH. A banner reads: "CULT" NIGHT at Henri's. Every Weds Nite. Be Here - Or bleed!

On the TV: Collins is outside the cabin, face ashen, trying to catch his breath. And it begins to sink in on us...

*Everything we've just watched with Collins and Paz - is a television series called "CULT".*

And we CUT AROUND TO:

MONTAGE - VARIOUS SHOTS - NIGHT

-- In a SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM, a YOUNG COUPLE draped on the sofa, watching "CULT"...

-- In ANOTHER HOME, TWO SISTERS, 30s, glasses of wine, watching...

-- In an OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY, two SECURITY GUARDS (one male, one female) watching on a small TV...

-- In a TEENAGER'S ROOM, TEEN GIRLS on the bed, laptops open, simultaneously on LIVE CHATS about the show while watching...

And finally --

INT. FANDOMAIN CAFE - NIGHT (SAME TIME)

A brightly-colored, cool-retro place - dedicated to TV and its FANS. FOLKS lounge, drinking coffee, watching TV on various wall-mounted sets. We PUSH PAST other sections where different TV shows, past and present, live and recorded, are being watched and enjoyed. To:

A section in the back. The section dedicated to "CULT".

The "CULT" FANS are a cross-section. Most just watch and enjoy the show. But there are a few others who are far more engrossed -- they actually have notebooks or laptops open... their focus on the show much more serious.

We SWEEP through the "CULT" fans - finally coming upon: NATE SEFTON, 25, scruffy -- with a certain lost puppy dog vibe. He's rapid-fire texting with somebody.

His eye goes to his well-worn "CULT"-centric notebook in his lap -- filled with arcane writing and drawings. Then he looks at the TV -- with a very different expression than anyone else. His is a look of excitement mixed with -- nervous uncertainty.

He has to find his voice, calls over to a conservatively-dressed woman seated across the way with her own filled notebook and pen at ready as she watches the show--

NATE

M-Merriam...  
(louder)  
*Merriam.*

The woman looks up, sees Nate's expression, reacts, and instantly hurries over. This is MERRIAM LIVINGSTON, 47.

MERRIAM

Nate? What--

NATE

I've... unlocked it...

Merriam stares, wide-eyed.

MERRIAM

Seriously?  
(almost afraid to  
utter it aloud)  
...The Next Level? You can reach  
them?

NATE

I think so...

Merriam's expression tells us: whatever this is, it's huge. Nate rapidly starts gathering his things.

MERRIAM

C'mon, you and I are in this together.  
You gotta include me in this--

NATE

We don't know exactly what the Next  
Level means. You should just --  
just go home to your husband--

MERRIAM

Nate--

But Nate is already rushing for the exit. He slams into buoyant coffee server KIRSTIE, 20. Kirstie turns to watch Nate exit, and we SEE a moment of worldly-awareness in her face that we don't expect from someone so young. *Has she overheard what Nate just said?*

Kirstie delivers a coffee to Merriam, and she clocks Merriam's anxious expression, as well.

We PUSH IN on one of the TVs, where "CULT" plays. And we --

EXT. SANTA MONICA - SOUTH OF THE PIER - DAY

The next morning. We're CLOSE on a billboard advertising "CULT". Featuring a distinctive, insanity-inspired BOX DRAWING (the show's logo - and our show's logo, too). Jagged psycho letters announce: "Weds nights 10pm on ABC".

PAN TO: the Strand in sunny, colorful SoCal. In direct contrast to the billboard.

CUTS: ROLLERBLADERS, SUNBATHERS, VOLLEYBALLERS. Young, carefree. The "real" world -- blissfully unaware that there could ever be anything unseen out there that's dark and unexpectedly dangerous...

And we find ourselves in front of the funky, faded-pastel offices of: *The Word*. The beach community's decades-old local paper.

INT. *THE WORD* OFFICES - MORNING

As funky inside as out. The STAFF is an eclectic group befitting the area. We SWEEP through this bullpen, as--

JEFF (O.S.)

C'mon Bert -- I wrote the article  
you assigned to me: "Secrets of  
Finding Weekend Beach Parking"...

FIND JEFF SEFTON, 32 -- more educated and urban than the rest of the staff, with a wryness that masks an intensity, a haunted quality, that he can't completely hide. Presently, he's in the midst of his daily spirited verbal sparring match with his editor, BERT QUINN, 55, ex-radical. Bert holds a print-out of Jeff's latest article--

JEFF

I wrote it the way you wanted me to  
write it. With that fun "sand between  
the toes relaxed feeling"...

Bert keeps moving, Jeff chases after him--

BERT

Jeff, pal o'mine, I'm only cutting  
two paragraphs--

JEFF

The only two that *mean* anything.  
There are political reasons why the  
weekend parking around here stinks--

BERT

It's not like when you worked here before. The new owner wants to try to turn at least some profit with this dinosaur of a paper. That means light and airy--

A SMART-ASS YOUNG REPORTER passes, throws to Jeff--

YOUNG REPORTER

Hey, Sefton -- if you want to write *real* substance, want to be short-listed for the Pulitzer two years in a row, why don't you just go back to your wildly-impressive job at the Washington Post?

(snide grin)

Oh, that's right. You *can't*.

Jeff tosses a look. Meanwhile, Bert takes his red pen and crosses out the two paragraphs.

BERT

Glad to have you back, buddy. And I know you'll get into the swing of things around here again in no time...

HOLD on Jeff. The last thing he wants is to get the swing of things around here again. And--

AT JEFF'S DESK

Jeff plops down in his wobbly desk chair. Looks at a FRAMED PHOTO of himself in front of the Washington Post building. All smiles. He lifts the photo. Tosses it in the trash.

Then he notices a Phone Message Post-It on his desk phone: "Brenda Wyle -- D.C. -- called -- 2x". Jeff's heart takes the hit. This is the last thing he wants to see. Moment... then he crumples the message. And -- his cell phone RINGS. Jeff takes a beat before he checks the Caller I.D. It reads: Nate. Jeff answers--

JEFF

Hey Nate--

NATE (over phone)

Jeff? Thank God I got you! Where are you, man?

Jeff recognizes a quality in Nate's voice. Breaths a SIGH. He doesn't want to ask, but--

JEFF

...What's the matter, Nate?

INTERCUT - INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE as Nate's hand anxiously checks the deadbolt and door lock. PAN UP. Nate is even more on edge than last night. Into his CELL PHONE--

NATE

I'm... it's just that I'm freaking  
out here a little... definitely  
freaking out...

Instead of being concerned, Jeff just shakes his head.

JEFF

C'mon, bro. We talked about this.

There's a NOISE beyond Nate's door. Could be nothing. But it totally spooks Nate that somebody might be out there.

NATE

I've got to see you--

JEFF

You agreed. We're not going to start  
this up again.

NATE

*Please.* It's maybe a matter of life  
and death.

(another NOISE outside)  
*Definitely* life and death--

Jeff has been here with Nate too many times before. But he also can't stop himself from caring for Nate. Resolved SIGH--

JEFF

You want me to come to your apartment?

NATE

No. Uh, someplace public. The *pier*.

JEFF

...Half an hour.

And with a resigned look, Jeff hangs up.

ON NATE. Also hangs up. Glances at his messy desk. Eyes his "CULT" NOTEBOOK. Stares like it's a coiled rattlesnake.

We PUSH IN on the cover. Among the other chaotic drawings is Nate's hand-rendering of the insanity-inspired "CULT" box logo. OFF this--

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

CLOSE on that same insanity-inspired box - this time it's the official "CULT" logo, posted on a SOUNDSTAGE DOOR. Beneath it: CLOSED SET - PRODUCTION I.D. MANDATORY.

WIDER - CREW & CAST, wearing photo badges, wander in and out of the open stage doors.

SKYE (O.S.)  
-- Mr. Fisher!

And we PICK UP -- SKYE YARROW, late 20s, smart-cute, laptop case over her shoulder, morning Starbucks in hand, hurrying in to work. She has called out to GARY FISHER, 45, the show's Co-Executive Producer, reading script pages as he walks.

FISHER  
'Morning, Skye. You're in early this morning.

SKYE  
Yeah, I've got some research for the art department I need to get in.

FISHER  
How's the job working out for you?

SKYE  
Second week and I couldn't be happier. Already I've done deep background on several truly twisted aberrant cult-psychology studies. I'm in total heaven...

Skye's interest in all-things-creepy is in direct contrast to her straight-forward, bright-eyed good looks.

FISHER  
Well, glad you're happy.

He turns to walk away. But there's something on Skye's mind this morning. And when she's got something on her mind, she has a hard time restraining herself. She just kind of moves along beside him. Fisher looks over--

FISHER  
Is there something else?

SKYE  
Well, actually... yeah...  
(beat)  
I was surfing the web last night --  
checking out sites devoted to the  
(MORE)

SKYE (CONT'D)

show. The ones made by the fans.  
Looking to see if there might be  
some social networking something we  
could tap into--

Fisher is *really* trying to read those script pages, only  
half paying attention to Skye--

FISHER

Our fans put up some wild stuff...

SKYE

Yeah -- and most of these fan sites  
are amazing and cool and fun. But  
then there are... the other ones.

FISHER

What other ones?

SKYE

The ones you find if you follow  
certain links. The ones that actually  
make it *hard* for you to get into...

FISHER

We put up webisodes, send out special  
phone content, specifically to  
*encourage* fans to get involved...

SKYE

Yes, but these hard-to-get-into sites --  
the people who post seem to have  
some sort of -- of *special connection*  
to the show. Some of them actually  
seem kinda...

(beat)

...scared.

FISHER

Scared? Scared of what exactly?

SKYE

The show. Other fans. Maybe both.  
I'm not really sure...

Now Fisher fully regards her -- but his look says he's  
wondering if maybe she's a little meshuga. Skye reads his  
look, quickly backpedals a little--

SKYE

I just thought, you know, that we  
might want to at least know a little  
more about who's behind these sites,  
what they mean, or might mean--

But he so doesn't need this added hassle at the moment.

FISHER

Skye... I appreciate your initiative.  
And I was happy to help you get this  
gig -- over the *forty* others who  
applied. You're bright, you've got  
a future.

(beat)

I started in local L.A. television  
and your father was very helpful to  
me when I was first starting out--

SKYE

I know--

FISHER

And I'm asking you, as a favor...  
cut me some slack here, okay?

(beat)

We're just a television show and  
they're just fans...

Skye actually opens her mouth to say something more. But catches herself. Fisher smiles -- glad that she gets it. He moves off.

HOLD on Skye -- part of her is pissed at herself for bugging her boss like this. But she still can't shake this feeling of hers...

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - DAY

Beautiful, colorful. RELAXED FISHERMEN at the rails, KIDS chasing each other with gooey bait. And in contrast --

Two adult brothers trying to work out their own childhood pasts: Jeff with Nate. Nate paces, that "CULT" notebook of his held tightly, very on edge--

NATE

I swore I wasn't going to come to  
you anymore. Not like this. But  
this is different.

JEFF

Nate. Dammit--

NATE

I know, I know. You did your part,  
more than your part, when we were  
kids. After Mom and Dad died, you  
were there for me, every time--

JEFF

You're twenty-five years old. When  
I was twenty-five--

He stops himself.

NATE

I'll never be you, Jeff...  
(moment)  
I'll always be your goofy kid brother,  
always getting into trouble...

JEFF

Don't say that. It's just... I've  
got my own problems these days...

NATE

(truly sympathetic,  
he really loves his  
brother)  
I know. Your job... and Brenda...

JEFF

Forget Brenda... Brenda's over...

Nate knows what hard times Jeff is going through.

NATE

You have no idea how much I don't  
want to get you mixed up in this.  
But I made contact with them last  
night and I -- I think they're after  
me now.

Jeff breathes a deep sigh--

JEFF

Made contact with who? Who's after  
you?  
(suddenly suspicious)  
Do *not* tell me--

And Jeff starts shoving up Nate's sleeves looking for tracks,  
roughly pats his pockets. Nate pulls away.

NATE

No! It's not that! I'm clean! I  
swear--

JEFF

-- *Then what is it?*

Nate knows how his brother is going to react. He gives a  
manic little, paranoid laugh--

NATE  
It's... a TV show.

Jeff can't believe his ears.

NATE  
I know how it sounds. But it's not  
*just* a show--

Jeff stares. He's got so much going on in his own life right now, and now *this*.

NATE  
(fast, manic)  
The... the show is called "Cult".

JEFF  
(wary grimace; never  
heard of it)  
-- "*Cult*"?

NATE  
But it's not just a TV show, it goes  
beyond that! Way beyond that!

Suddenly Nate sees something that makes his jaw drop in real fear.

NATE  
That car... the orange one...

Jeff turns, SEES it down in the pier parking lot: an orange Plymouth Valiant (identical to the one we saw in our opening scene, in the "CULT" TV show). The windshield facing this way, though we can't see who -- if anybody -- is inside.

JEFF  
(a sigh)  
Okay, so who's in the car...?

Nate just backs away, afraid of that car. Jeff watches as the car drives slowly away. No evidence it had anything to do with Nate.

NATE  
I want out! Please, help me get  
away from this!

JEFF  
-- From a TV show?

NATE  
I even tried contacting the people  
who make the show. Nobody would  
(MORE)

NATE (CONT'D)  
talk to me. It's like this whole  
big conspiracy--

JEFF  
When I moved back from D.C., we said  
things between us were going to be  
different...  
(beat)  
Crazy as it sounds, I was actually  
hoping to get some support from you  
for a change. Or at least a break  
from the drama--

Nate looks around, tentatively holds up his "CULT" notebook--

NATE  
Just let me explain--

Jeff looks at the crazy writing and drawings on the cover.  
He's had it.

JEFF  
No, Nate. I've been through these --  
these *obsessions* of yours too many  
times. Not this time. No.

And staying strong, Jeff just starts away.

NATE  
*Jeff--*

Nate rushes to Jeff and shoves something into his hands.  
Jeff looks. Bizarre. It's: a pair of old-fashioned red/blue  
3-D GLASSES.

JEFF  
What--

NATE  
Just take them! You -- you might  
need them!

Jeff stares at the glasses, then at Nate. We can tell this  
is very hard for Jeff, but he turns -- and just keeps walking.

EXT. SKYE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

One story, courtyard pool.

LEXI (V.O.)  
C'mon, Skye. Come with Todd and me.

INT. SKYE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

LEXI, 25, Skye's roommate, is getting ready to go out. Skye sits at the kitchen table, working at her laptop.

LEXI

Todd's lame connections actually came through. Scored us backstage passes and everything.

SKYE

That's okay. You guys go.

LEXI

But it's Channel X -- you love them. And this is their last L.A. performance until like forever.

SKYE

I've got work to do.

LEXI

All you do is work.

SKYE

This is something for me...

And Lexi looks at her suspiciously--

LEXI

Not those websites again...

SKYE

(indicating laptop screen)

Look at this--

LEXI

No way! I couldn't sleep after what you showed me last night...

(closing Skye's laptop)

C'mon. Laptop stays. You come. Social interaction. *Men*.

SKYE

(reopening laptop)

What, talking like a robot is suddenly supposed to convince me...?

LEXI

I swear, when you get something stuck in your head, when you want to *know* something, you just can't control yourself--

(MORE)

LEXI (CONT'D)  
(frustrated)  
You have like... Inquisitive  
Tourette's.

SKYE  
-- Inquisitive Tourette's? Did you  
really say that?

LEXI  
Am I wrong?

Skye opens her mouth to deny it. But stops. Cuz --  
ultimately she knows Lexi isn't wrong. HOLD on Skye, and--

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

The lights and colors of the Strip swirl around Jeff as he  
fills up at the AM/PM at San Vincente. He's lost in thought  
about all that's going on in his life right now. Suddenly --  
A SCREAM. Jeff spins. A GROUP of carefree young CLUB GOERS  
hurry past. It was one of the GIRLS who screamed -- Jeff  
realizes the scream was just a fun squeal. Then, loud--

VOICE (O.S.)  
*Hey you!*

Jeff looks around--

VOICE (O.S.)  
*Yeah, I'm talking to you.*

And Jeff realizes the voice is coming from -- the GAS PUMP  
TV SCREEN. The SCREEN is full of STATIC. Then -- JAGGED  
CUTS of NIGHTMARE IMAGES. Then -- PSYCHO LETTERING flashes  
madly. "CULT". It's a promo for the show.

Jeff stares.

A MAN'S FACE pops on. Piercing eyes that appear to be staring  
right at Jeff. With a chilling smile. His voice mesmerizing--

BILLY (ON TV)  
My name is Billy. Billy Grimm.  
People say I'm dangerous. Me? I'm  
completely... harmless...

More NIGHTMARE IMAGES culled from the show. Jeff stares--

BILLY (ON TV)  
But my followers? Can't really vouch  
for them...

(MORE)

BILLY (ON TV) (CONT'D)

(beat)

And they seem to be everywhere. You never know where... or *who*. Co-workers, neighbors, friends. Maybe in your very own family.

Just a coincidence, but the way he says this, seemingly looking directly at Jeff, it's freaky.

Then CAMERA jumps in on Billy as he stares out and says--

BILLY (ON TV)

And you know what? It could just be that --

(beat)

-- *you're next*.

GRAPHIC: "CULT" WEDNESDAYS ABC

Jeff can't help but get a little pang. Sure, it's just a TV promo. But -- *holy shit*.

JEFF

Wow Nate... *this* is the show you're into...?

Jeff puts the gas nozzle back, climbs into his car.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - NIGHT

Jeff starts up his car, about to pull out. When -- HIS CELL PHONE RINGS.

JEFF

Hello?

And he HEARS -- STATIC. Not unlike what he just heard on the TV. Gotta be just a bad-timing coincidence...

JEFF

Hello? Is anybody--

NATE (over phone)

*Jeff--*

JEFF

-- Nate? Nate -- this connection sucks. If you're calling about today--

NATE (over phone)

*Jeff! Listen-----me-----warn you-----*

JEFF

Nate? Let's not go there--

NATE (over phone)

*JEFFFFF!*

There's no misinterpreting the apparent true terror in that cry. And the line just DIES.

JEFF

-- Nate?

Jeff stands there a moment. Not sure whether Nate is bullshitting him or not. He hits auto-dial. Pause. And the call goes directly to VOICE MAIL.

Jeff doesn't know whether he should be royally pissed -- or sincerely worried. Right now, he's both. HOLD, and--

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

On a small side street in Hermosa Beach. Jeff hurries up to Nate's apartment, still trying the phone. Nate still isn't answering. Ready to ream his brother, Jeff reaches Nate's door -- and pauses. The door is already ajar. Jeff frowns.

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jeff eases open the door. The place is a neglected mess.

JEFF

Nate...? You in here?

The TV is ON. We notice that "CULT" (muted) is playing as Jeff moves past. He checks the kitchenette, opens the bedroom door. Nobody home.

He moves to the cluttered desk and -- finds Nate's CELL PHONE still here. Jeff's expression darkens.

While Jeff tries to fathom all this, his hand accidentally brushes the desk chair. It slowly turns. And Jeff jumps.

THE CLOTH CHAIR IS SOAKED THROUGH WITH BLOOD.

Jeff stares in gathering horror. ON the TV beyond him: "CULT" plays...

*END OF ACT ONE*

ACT TWO

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

After midnight. A couple of COP CARS in front now.

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Two UNIFORMED COPS, a pair of DETECTIVES. Jeff, very troubled, watches as a CSI GUY takes a sample from the blood-soaked chair. Too-good-to-retire LAPD detective ROSE SAKELIK, 55, eases around the room, taking it all in, listening to--

JEFF

He called me around nine. He sounded --  
distressed. It was a bad connection.  
The call ended... or was cut off.  
So I decided to come over and talk  
to him face to face...

Sakelik studies him.

SAKELIK

You think the call was cut off?

JEFF

Could've been. I don't really know.  
(eying the room)  
No signs of aggressive contact. No  
forced entry. The blood is contained,  
no splatter.

Sakelik looks at him curiously. Jeff explains--

JEFF

I'm a reporter. My first job outta  
college was working city crime in  
Philly. When will you have DNA on  
whether the blood is Nate's?

SAKELIK

Soon enough. You and your brother  
get along?

She says it quickly, to throw Jeff off. Jeff realizes --  
he's under suspicion.

JEFF

Fine. We got along fine.

Sakelik studies him. Her feelers out. Jeff hates to go  
there, but...

JEFF

Look... my brother was capable of  
getting caught up in some pretty  
(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)  
screwy things. When I saw him  
yesterday afternoon, he was troubled  
then, too. Thought people were after  
him. He kept talking about...  
(embarrassed to say)  
All of this may have something to do  
with some tele--

UNIFORMED COP (O.S.)  
Lookee here.

A UNIFORMED COP is exiting the bedroom -- holding up an  
evidence back containing a DRUG PARAPHERNALIA KIT. He hands  
it to Sakelik.

SAKELIK  
Your brother into self-administered  
street pharmaceuticals, Mr. Sefton?  
  
Jeff isn't sure -- *could Nate be using again?*

JEFF  
He's been clean over a year...

UNIFORMED COP  
Found it hidden behind the heat  
register.

JEFF  
He could've forgotten it was there...

Sakelik gives one of her patented wary looks. Re chair--

SAKELIK  
Pissed off drug dealers love to leave  
messages...

The CSI Guys glance at Sakelik now. They've gotten the  
message. Jeff realizes the search is taking a new direction.

Jeff is near Nate's desk -- sees a sliver of Nate's CELL  
PHONE showing beneath some papers. He glances at Sakelik  
who is now poking in the kitchenette.

Jeff decides. And covertly slips the cell phone into his  
pocket. Suddenly--

ZAVALA (O.S.)  
You turn this on?

Jeff jumps. Sakelik's partner, detective MARIO ZAVALA, 35,  
is referring to the TV. He didn't see Jeff take the phone.

JEFF  
No...

ZAVALA

Playing something he recorded. Got  
it set to keep repeating.

Zavala looks at what's playing. Means nothing to him. He  
moves off. Jeff glances at the TV -- and reacts to the sight  
of: Billy Grimm, that creepy guy from the "CULT" promo.

This is Jeff's first real look at the show.

Frowning, Jeff eases closer. Eying the screen. Curious.  
Uncertain. Moment, then he turns up the SOUND enough to  
hear. We PUSH IN on the TV. And suddenly we're watching--

EXT. BILLY GRIMM'S COMPOUND - DAY

Billy Grimm crouches, pleasantly engaging one of the happy  
TODDLERS who are part of the tapestry that is Billy's  
Compound.

The compound itself is a large clearing among the lush  
greenery of Topanga Canyon. The buildings are different-  
sized and aged trailers. Billy's faithful FOLLOWERS, ages  
17-70, tend gardens, hang out wash.

Billy himself is about 40, sinewy -- his lined, tanned face  
brimming with humor, intelligence, and, of course, that  
mesmerizing stare. He wears jeans and a very distinctive  
worn leather vest. Most disconcerting is the well-used 10-  
inch bowie knife prominent on his belt.

Billy glances up, and a smile of recognition breaks on his  
face. Detective Collins walks determinedly toward him.

BILLY

Eric. Ignoring your department's  
interdiction about not coming  
physically near me...?

Collins grabs Billy hard.

COLLINS

*Where are they, Billy?*

Billy's Followers instantly turn. Billy looks at them -- an  
unspoken command. They start this way to help him. Collins  
sees this -- knows he's outnumbered. It takes everything he  
has to pull his hands from Billy. Billy straightens his  
clothes, looks at Collins with "sincerity" --

BILLY

I heard about your wife and son.  
Missing. How very distressing that  
must be for you.

COLLINS

It's Joey Keller and his group, isn't it? Joey took my family to protect you. To get me to stop--

BILLY

Joey knows how you've made me your own little personal *cop* mission...

COLLINS

Joey took them because he'll do anything you tell him to.

BILLY

Just as *you* used to...

This strikes an unsettling cord in Collins -- exactly the cord Billy wanted to strike.

BILLY

All those times your parents left you alone... who was always there for you...?

(beat)

You were obsessed with me then, and you're obsessed with me now...

COLLINS

Because I know what you're capable of.

Billy offers just the smallest of smiles.

COLLINS

Joey Keller will return my family -- if you tell him to.

BILLY

Joey *is* very loyal. But there are really so many faithful out there now...

Billy motions towards: an area of mismatched tables under a canvas overhang. At the tables: FOLLOWERS working computers. Lots of them.

BILLY

What you have to understand is even I have no idea the full number. The internet, global communications, pop culture have united the world. *And* pushed us all farther apart.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

(beat)

I reach out to them all, in every  
tiny, grim little corner of the world.  
Offer them family. *My* family. Where  
they'll find only unconditional  
acceptance and love.

COLLINS

As long as they do whatever you ask.  
Including kidnapping... and murder.

Billy's knowing gaze bores into Collins. Billy truly is  
this amazing enigma of charm, intellect, and madness.

BILLY

The strong must protect the weak,  
the smart must stand for the simple,  
the bold must lead the timid. My  
followers do what must be done -- to  
protect each other. To protect *me*.  
(smiles)  
You know that as well as anyone...

COLLINS

This is between you and me, Billy.  
Don't make *my* family part of it.  
(beat)  
Especially my son...

Billy shifts his weight.

COLLINS

We both know how you feel about kids.  
How the loss of your own son started  
this all...

Billy tenses slightly -- his preternatural calm broken for  
this nanosecond. Collins has knowingly pushed this hot  
button. He sees his opening, and--

COLLINS

Give me back my family.

Billy stands there a moment, absorbing this. Then--

BILLY

I wish you all the luck in the world  
finding them...

Collins knows Billy isn't going to help. His expression  
sets. He's about to turn, when -- Billy reaches into his  
pocket. Collins stiffens, ready for anything.

Billy holds out his hand. Palm down. Collins looks. And there on the back of Billy's hand is a self-carved BOX TATTOO (which is where the show's logo comes from). Billy turns his hand over, to reveal: a pair of old-fashioned RED/BLUE 3-D GLASSES.

BILLY

Take them.  
(beat)  
You just never know when something  
like these will come in handy.

Collins knows Billy is mind-fucking him. But he takes the glasses. Billy just smiles. As always -- madness.

HOLD on Collins, and--

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Jeff staring, absorbing all that he just witnessed. Not to mention: he reaches into his jacket -- and brings out the identical 3-D glass. The ones Nate gave him at the pier.

He looks around at the cops, to say something. But they're all across the room, with the drug paraphernalia kit in hand, in hushed conversations. Jeff glances back at the 3-D glasses. It's all so crazy.

Sakelik heads this way, and Jeff instinctively shoves the glasses back into his pocket. HOLD on Jeff, his head swimming. He looks back at the TV. The TITLE SEQUENCE of a new episode is just ending. The credit comes up--

CREATED BY  
STEVEN RAE

Jeff takes this in. And--

INT. CULT PRODUCTION OFFICES - BULLPEN - DAY

CLOSE on some leathery human skins hanging on a wall. A very unsettling CUT. And they'd be deeply disturbing --except for the "CULT" crew caps on their heads and unlit cigarettes hanging from their mouths. Props from the show.

WIDER - the place is hopping in the midst of a production day. The door to (Co-EP) Gary Fisher's office opens. Fisher walks out network exec KYLE SEGAL, 32--

SEGAL

It's all about the numbers, my friend.  
Only the numbers.

FISHER

Our audience is crazy passionate.

SEGAL

Sure, and the network loves the fan  
passion.

Nearby, Skye is working a copier. She can't help but  
eavesdrop--

SEGAL

Look, I'm new at the network, and  
new to this show. But at Fox I was  
the guy who kept Joss on the air  
more than one season -- and I've got  
some definite ideas on how to course-  
correct "Cult" so it doesn't just  
end up--

SEGAL

-- a cult show.

FISHER

-- a cult show.

They're moving away from Skye -- and she can't hear them.  
She instantly grabs up some pages and moves closer to them,  
"dropping" the pages so she has to kneel to pick them up...

FISHER

As you know, Steven writes every  
episode. You buy a show like this,  
you're buying one man's vision.  
Especially on this show...

SEGAL

And it's Steven Rae's vision that  
*makes* the show. I respect that.  
Seriously. But it would be in  
everyone's best interest for Steven  
to hear what I have to say. And the  
sooner the better.

Skye freezes in her paper-gathering. She knows Segal is  
speaking blaspheme. Fisher sighs--

FISHER

All I can do is e-mail Steven and  
ask him.

SEGAL

Super. I knew you'd understand.  
(all smiles)  
Let Steven know I definitely look  
forward to getting creative with  
him.

Skye watches Segal exit. As he's exiting, someone else is  
entering. It's -- Jeff. Escorted by the show's publicist,  
TERI McNABB, 45. Skye stands up with her papers -- and she  
bumps directly into Jeff. Their eyes meet.

SKYE

Sorry. Wow.

JEFF

No problem.

The slightest moment passes between them -- then Jeff moves off with Teri.

TERI

I must say, I'm so glad that the Post is willing to give a fresh look at our show.

JEFF

Happy to do it...

TERI

Unfortunately your Mr. Shales thought we were a tad on the dark side. But, as you know, today's television is just so competitive. And we're justifiably proud that "Cult" is truly like nothing else presently on the air.

JEFF

I'm particularly interested in knowing about the show's impact on the people who watch.

TERI

The fans. Our fans are the greatest. Very passionate. Word of mouth on this show is fabulous. Makes my job as a publicist so much easier.

JEFF

Are you aware of any particular -- influence the show has? Anything that goes... beyond the show itself?

TERI

Beyond the show? I'm not sure what you mean.

Jeff studies her expression. She seems to sincerely have no idea what he's talking about.

Then Teri's young assistant, ANNE, 23, hurries up to Teri. Anne throws Jeff a nervous look, whispers to Teri, handing Teri a business card. Teri's expression hardens. To Jeff--

TERI

Funny thing. Anne here went to e-mail you some promotional materials. Used the e-mail address off your Washington Post business card here. And much to her surprise -- the e-mail bounced back.

Jeff knows where this is going.

JEFF

I can explain--

TERI

So she *called* the Post. And discovered a very interesting piece of information. Namely -- *you don't work there anymore.*

JEFF

Look, I'm sorry. I just -- I need a few minutes with this Steven Rae. I need to ask him about his show--

Now Teri figures she has him pegged--

TERI

You fans will do absolutely *anything* to try to get to Steven--

JEFF

I honestly don't give a damn about your show. I know how it sounds, but... my brother's the fan, and he -- *he's disappeared.*

Jeff feels like a jerk saying this. Meanwhile, Skye perks as she hears this. Teri regards him -- is he potentially dangerous? To Anne--

TERI

Call Security. Tell them we have an intruder. Tell them to make it fast.

Jeff wants to try to rationalize with her. But knows he can't. Everyone is staring at him now. The only one with a different expression is -- Skye.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Jeff, lost in frustrated thought, charges out of the office. And -- bumps directly into Billy Grimm! Jeff freezes. Moment, then -- Billy smiles uncharacteristically. Because this is really ROGER REEVES (the actor who plays Billy).

ROGER

In quite a hurry there--

Roger continues into the Production Office. Jeff, reeling, continues on. Then--

SKYE

Excuse me! Hey!

Jeff, still a little off-kilter, turns. Skye is hurrying toward him. She moves up fast. Then -- doesn't know exactly what to say.

SKYE

I was in, you know--  
(indicates office)  
And -- I heard what you said about  
your brother.

There's something about this that has particular significance for Skye. Now Skye sees something o.s. Jeff looks. TWO STUDIO SECURITY MEN hurry toward the production office. Thinking fast, Skye grabs Jeff--

SKYE

C'mon!

And she quickly pulls him toward an open SOUND STAGE door. Jeff has no idea who this dervish is, but -- they disappear into the stage as the Guards race past.

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

As they race inside from the stark sunlight. Jeff's eyes adjust -- and he reacts to the chaotically-painted surrounding. THEY ARE IN THE ISOLATED CABIN SET from the show (as seen in our opening). Empty now, lit by worklights.

JEFF

Is this... from the show?

SKYE

Yeah. You don't watch?

Jeff eyes the walls with ill-ease, and definite distaste.

JEFF

No. But my brother does. A lot,  
apparently.

SKYE

...And he's disappeared?

And, again, that sense that this holds special meaning for Skye. Jeff nods, still eying the surroundings.

SKYE

Just because he watches the show, it  
doesn't mean--

JEFF

I saw him yesterday -- before he  
disappeared. He was scared.

(beat)

And, bizarre as it sounds, according  
to him, it had *everything* to do with  
this show.

Skye considers this.

JEFF

You work on the show?

SKYE

I'm a researcher.

JEFF

So you'd know--

(can't believe he's  
asking this)

*Is there any reason my brother's  
disappearance could be related to...?*

Skye doesn't answer. But Jeff reads the uncertainty in her  
eye.

SKYE

Did you go to the police?

JEFF

They think his disappearance might  
be drug related. My brother's had  
some problems in the past. But I  
don't think that's what this is.

(pulls out Nate's  
phone)

I held onto Nate's phone. In case  
there were calls to dealers...

SKYE

And-- ?

JEFF

Nothing. The Call History, all texts --  
completely erased.

Skye considers a moment, then holds out her hand--

SKYE

May I?

Not sure what she's up to, he hands it over. She immediately starts working the buttons--

SKYE

When you delete something off your phone it doesn't permanently get erased, the space is just freed-up as reusable. Until the space is overwritten by new data, the old data can be easily retrieved...

(shrugs)

I used to do research for a Bruckheimer show...

(then)

Who's Jen?

JEFF

Jen?

SKYE

(handing back the phone)

Recent call History and texts. Almost all of them from someone named Jen...

Jeff looks at the cell screen.

JEFF

At least two dozen calls -- from Jen. All yesterday.

(scrolling through phone)

And the texts. All from her. Progressively more...

(reading)

"Don't do this." "You don't know what they'll do to you." "Call me."

"Where are you?" "Where are you?"

"Where are you?"

(his anxiety ratcheting)

Who the hell is *Jen*?

SKYE

Funny. Probably just be a coincidence, but -- there's a character on the show, the wife of the main character, Collins. Her name is Jen.

Jeff clearly feels like he's fallen down the rabbit hole. Skye studies him. Then--

SKYE

Look -- there's a place you might want to check out. People there -- they might be able to help you.

She finds one of her "CULT" business cards, scribbles on it, hands it to him.

SKYE

It's a start maybe...

He reads what she's written. Frowns. Completely unfamiliar. Then he looks at her.

JEFF

Thanks...

Skye meets his eye -- gives a sort of "I hope it helps" nod. Their eyes hold a nanosecond longer than expected. And--

INT. FANDOMAIN CAFE - DAY

CLOSE ON the neon wall sign: FANDOMAIN CAFE. ANGLE ADJUSTS as -- Jeff comes through the door. His cell phone RINGS just as he's entering. He checks the Caller I.D.: Brenda Wyle. He so *wants* to answer. But -- he sends the call to Voice Mail. Play the moment, then...

Jeff glances around the Fandomain. His attention soon drawn to the main feature: all the wall-mounted TVs. As he moves through, suddenly -- bubbly server Kirstie is at his side.

JEFF

I'm looking for -- does anybody here know anything about a show called... Cult?

KIRSTIE

(grins knowingly)

You're one of *those*. In the back...

She points. Jeff heads that way. HOLD on Kirstie, her curious eyes following him...

Jeff moves into the "CULT" section. Jeff notes playing on the multitude of TVs: a SNIPPET featuring Collins in a seedy motel office -- grilling an equally-seedy NIGHT CLERK:

COLLINS (ON TV)

*"Where's Joey Keller?! Tell me, dammit!"*

Jeff looks around curiously at the smattering of FANS watching, a couple of them working their laptops or smartphones. He glances at all the creepy SCREEN CAPTURES pinned to the walls. More strangeness.

OLDER MAN (O.S.)

Are you a fan?

Jeff turns. An older man, GLEN, 60s, seated at one of the tall-stool cafe tables. Beside him is VIRGIE, also 60s. Both wear blood-red t-shirts featuring the "CULT" box logo.

JEFF  
No, not really.

VIRGIE  
Not really. And yet you're here.

JEFF  
It's actually my brother...  
(then, can't help but  
ask)  
You two watch "Cult"?

VIRGIE  
(with a grin)  
Indeed we do.

She indicates her mobility scooter parked nearby -- every inch adorned with "CULT" imagery (photos, arcane symbols). Jeff stares -- his expression saying it all.

GLEN  
You said your brother's a fan?

JEFF  
His name's Nate--

The two of them are all smiles.

GLEN  
You're the reporter.

JEFF  
You know Nate? When was the last time he was here?

VIRGIE  
Two nights ago. When the latest episode aired.

JEFF  
...Did he ever mention a woman named Jen?

The couple grins.

JEFF  
You know her?

VIRGIE

I'm surprised your brother never mentioned her. The two of them are thick as thieves.

GLEN

Jen's not her real name, a'course. But she liked to be called that.

JEFF

Do you know her real name?

VIRGIE

Merriam.

Jeff frowns. He's never heard the name.

JEFF

Do you have any idea how I can get in touch with her?

VIRGIE

(nodding)

We used to drive her home all the time. Poor thing doesn't like to drive at night. It scares her.

GLEN

Strange. Now that you bring her up... neither she nor Nate have been in the last couple'a days...

CLOSE ON Jeff. As this sinks in on him. And--

EXT. BLAIR HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A sweet little house on a pleasant residential street.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE on a framed photo of Merriam.

KIRK (O.S.)

I've tried everyone she knows. The police say she has to be missing forty-eight hours for them to do anything...

WIDEN -- Jeff is looking at the photo, one of many family photos on the piano. KIRK BLAIR, 48, stands nearby, as neat and proper as his home. He's clearly confused, distraught...

KIRK

When you called, I was hoping you might know something. Considering that your brother's also--

He doesn't finish the thought -- clearly troubled that his wife may be missing *with* Jeff's brother.

JEFF

When was the last time you heard from her?

KIRK

She called me yesterday afternoon. She said she was running errands. But there was a tone in her voice. And she just... never came home.  
(almost afraid to ask)  
How old did you say your brother is?

JEFF

Twenty-five.

KIRK

Merriam is forty-seven...

It's obvious what Kirk is thinking. Jeff treads carefully--

JEFF

Look -- if my brother and your wife are someplace together, I... I don't think it's like that.

KIRK

(trying to fathom it)  
Six months ago, after our daughter's wedding, Merriam just seemed... lost. It happens, I know. Facing the empty nest. Didn't know what to do with herself.

(beat)

But then, all of a sudden, she just -- just got over it. Last couple of months she's actually been perkier than I've seen her in years.

Jeff weighs this. Then--

JEFF

...Does your wife watch a lot of television?

Kirk frowns. What a strange question.

KIRK

No. Neither of us do. We only have the one set. It's in the den. I'm not even sure it's plugged in.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Kirk leads Jeff inside. Points to the TV off to one side, books stacked on top. Kirk glances around the room--

KIRK

Merriam spent so much of her time in here. It was supposed to be my den, but Merriam made it into her sewing room.

Jeff notes the decor -- so warm and wholesome.

KIRK

She was always making clothes and such -- whatever members of our church needed.

(beat)

This was her little hideaway.

Jeff looks at the TV. Its presence somehow ominous. The phone RINGS o.s. Kirk says anxiously--

KIRK

Maybe that's... Excuse me, please--

And he hurries off. Jeff glances at the completely wholesome sewing room. He notices Merriam's large sewing box, with a needlepoint decoration inlaid in the top. And he freezes --

Hidden in the needlepoint pattern: the "CULT" box logo.

Chilled, Jeff reaches out, opens it. All the typical sewing accouterments. Then Jeff sees a flap of material, and pulls it. Revealing -- a false bottom. Jeff lifts it and sees:

Screen captures from the show, pages of madly-scribbled notes, sketches. Beneath these: a folded green dress. Then he sees: a photograph. In the photo is Merriam -- wearing the dress Jeff just found. And beside her stands -- Nate.

The hair on Jeff's necks stands up. His brother is wearing the outfit cult leader Billy Grimm wears on the show -- with the 10-inch bowie knife held prominently in his hand.

Jeff stares. Suddenly -- his cell phone RINGS.

JEFF

...Hello?

INTERCUT - INT. LAPD OFFICES - SAKELIK'S OFFICE - DAY

Sakelik behind her desk, a lab report open before her, that perpetually wary look in her face--

SAKELIK

Mr. Sefton? It's Detective Sakelik,  
LAPD. Regarding your brother's  
disappearance?

JEFF

Yes? What--?

SAKELIK

Sorry. We don't have anything new  
on his whereabouts. But we did get  
the report back on the blood found  
in your brother's apartment.

(beat)

Definitely human blood. But *not*  
your brother's.

JEFF

(a sliver of hope)

So that means... Nate could be okay.

SAKELIK

Oh, he could be just dandy. Questions  
remain -- where is he? And who's  
blood is it in his apartment?

ON JEFF -- absorbing this. Moment, then his eye goes to the  
photo in his hand. And he focuses on Merriam. Standing  
next to his brother. His brother holding a very big knife.

As Jeff's anxiety now takes a very big turn...

*END OF ACT TWO*

*ACT THREE*

EXT. LA BREA TAR PITS - NIGHT (MAGIC HOUR)

HIGH ANGLE of an elaborate crime scene. LAPD cars, red/blue lights swirling, CORONER WAGONS, dozens of COPS and CRIME SCENE WORKERS. The sky beyond is perfect CRIMSON DUSK. CAMERA SWEEPS DOWN to REVEAL oil-smearred BODIES being extricated from the tar pits. Several of them.

CAMERA GLIDES THROUGH all the activity to: Collins standing with Billy Grimm at the edge of the tar pits.

BILLY

I really wish you hadn't called me down here for this, Eric. You know how easily I get queasy at sights like this.

(beat)

It would be truly terrible, wouldn't it, if your precious wife were among these unfortunate souls...?

Collins has a hard time masking his anger -- and especially his anxiety. And suddenly something crosses in front of us -- THE CAMERA. Riding its JIB ARM. Now our own ANGLE adjusts to reveal--

The CREW of the "CULT" production unit. All watching this scene from "CULT" being filmed. A good-sized CLUSTER of ONLOOKERS is held back behind sawhorses by SET SECURITY.

Our CAMERA MOVE takes us past network exec Kyle Segal, who is visiting the set -- murmuring into his phone despite the fact that the scene is still filming. The MOVE takes us to--

-- Skye. She holds some faxed pages, whispering to the director, DEAN, 30s. He looks at the pages, and calls out in frustration--

DEAN

Okay, cut! Cut it!

Nearby, Segal glances up, moves to join Dean and Skye as they make their way to the actors, MATTHEW LOGAN, who plays Collins, and Roger, who plays Billy--

MATTHEW

What happened? What's wrong?

DEAN

(sour)

It's the graffiti behind you. It's the *wrong* graffiti--

They look around. There's some painted graffiti on a rock. Skye hands Dean a faxed page, and he shows it to the actors.

ROGER  
Oh, for the love of--

DEAN  
This was sent down this afternoon.  
(glares at the SCRIPT  
SUPERVISOR nearby)  
Guess we missed it.

Skye gives the Supervisor a "Sorry" look. Segal grabs the faxed page, looks at it. There's a symbol: the LETTER "M" inside a CIRCLE.

DEAN  
(walking away)  
Give us a few minutes, guys, to get the stinking graffiti right.

SKYE  
(trying to help)  
This symbol is apparently very important to Steven. Some whole new story thread he's opening up--

ROGER  
Who the hell's going to notice the damn rock behind us?

Matthew glances at the ONLOOKERS behind the sawhorses, many of them snapping PHOTOS of the set with their phone cameras.

MATTHEW  
Some'a them, that's who...

Segal makes a big play of crumpling up the faxed paper--

SEGAL  
It's exactly this b.s. I'm going to take care of. Guys, trust me, I am completely on your side on this.

And he throws the paper to the ground. The actors exchange a look -- they know they're being handled. Skye sees the crumpled paper starting to blow away. She starts for it. When -- her phone rings.

SKYE  
Hello? Uh, yeah, sure, of course I remember you...

And off Skye's somewhat surprised look, we FOLLOW the blowing crumpled paper as it approaches the ONLOOKERS.

The majority of onlookers are flashing their photos. However, one YOUNG WOMAN isn't snapping photos -- instead she kneels down and scoops up the paper. As she rises, we SEE it is--

-- Kirstie. The Fandomain waitress. She uncrumples the paper, looks at it. And her eye goes to the actors standing with Segal.

Cameras FLASH all around Kirstie as she simply stares at those men. HOLD, and--

INT. FANDOMAIN CAFE - NIGHT

CLOSE on an iPhone SCREEN -- featuring the Facebook page for "CULT". Over 4 million "Likes".

WIDER - it's Jeff's phone we're seeing. Jeff, lost in concerned thought, scrolls the countless Discussion threads about the show. Around him -- the cafe is busier now. Jeff looks up, notices something, and hurries to--

-- Skye. She's just entered the cafe. Jeff reaches her--

JEFF

Thanks for coming...

SKYE

Okay. Sure. I mean, you sounded pretty freaked on the phone.

JEFF

I didn't know who else to call. You know about this show. And I can't go to the police with any of this, not until I have at least *some* idea what Nate's mixed up in. And, well--

Jeff hands over a photo. Skye looks: Nate and Merriam in costume. Skye instantly knows what has Jeff so troubled.

SKYE

This is your brother?  
(off Jeff's nod)  
He's dressed like--

JEFF

...I know. The psycho cult leader.  
(indicates Merriam)  
That's Jen. The woman who sent him all those texts. Her real name is Merriam.  
(beat)  
And she's missing, too.

Skye absorbs this. Then--

SKYE

She's wearing a green dress --  
identical to the one the character  
of Jen was wearing when she was  
abducted on the show.

JEFF

What does all this mean? How the  
hell can a TV show make people--

SKYE

(it dawns on her)  
I've heard of this. Fans -- who  
like to roleplay the show. Dress up  
like characters.

JEFF

Once they're dressed up, what do  
they do...?

SKYE

It's all extremely underground. I'm  
not sure. I mean, maybe I can--

JEFF

Can what?

Skye stares at Jeff. Considers a long moment. Then--

SKYE

I need a computer...

JEFF

What for?

SKYE

A little research.  
(beat)  
I've got my laptop in the car...

And she hurries off. Jeff's eyes follow her. Not exactly  
sure what to make of her. HOLD, and--

INT. FANDOMAIN CAFE - NIGHT (LATER)

Skye sits hunched over her laptop, deep in concentration.

While she works, Jeff can't help himself. His eye is drawn  
to one of the TVs. Where a new snippet from "CULT" plays...

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

Side-by-side cabins (think Bates Motel). Detective Collins'  
PD sedan out front. We PUSH IN FAST on Room #5.

INT. ROOM #5 - NIGHT

Collins kneels in this darkened room, holding JOEY KELLER, 35, who lies on the floor beside the bed, absolutely terrified--

COLLINS

*Dammit, Joey -- where's my family?!  
Where are they?!*

Joey stares -- but Collins isn't who he's afraid of...

JOEY

*If Billy finds out I let you find  
me... he's gonna be mad at me... I  
don't want Billy mad at me...*

COLLINS

I'll see that you're protected--

JOEY

*(manic laugh)*  
You -- protect me? From *Billy*?

COLLINS

*(slapping Joey hard)*  
*What have you done with my wife and  
boy?*

Joey sees the desperation in Collins' eyes. Perhaps hoping for some sort of redemption, he finally says...

JOEY

*...in a cabin... Meyer's Woods...*

COLLINS

I've been to that cabin! They're not there!

JOEY

But you didn't really see. You gotta look *beyond* what's right in front of you -- or you'll never find the answer...  
*(looks plaintively  
into Collins' eyes)*  
I don't want Billy mad at me...

And, suddenly, Joey pulls a gun from behind his back. Collins instantly grabs for it -- but Joey doesn't aim it at Collins, instead swings it against his own temple, and--

INT. FANDOMAIN CAFE - CONTINUOUS

-- Jeff flinches at the REPORT and FLASH of the gun. Jeff grimaces at what he's just watched. Then, breaking in:

SKYE  
I got something!

Jeff looks over. On Skye's LAPTOP SCREEN: scrolling live  
I.M. MESSAGES against a background of "CULT" SCREEN CAPTURES--

SKYE  
Had to go through half a dozen ghost  
sites to find this.

JEFF  
What is it?

SKYE  
A site dedicated to Cult roleplayers.  
Have a look...

She indicates one of the POSTED PHOTOS -- it's Nate and  
Merriam, in their "cult" outfits. Smiling. Happy. Jeff  
takes this in.

SKYE  
There's an event tonight.

JEFF  
An event?

SKYE  
Roleplaying event.  
(scrolling the site)  
I recognize the place. One of the  
locations from the show. Up past  
Flintridge. Pretty out of the way.  
(beat)  
Do you know Flintridge?

Jeff, frustrated, isn't familiar. Skye considers, then--

SKYE  
I could show you.

Jeff regards her.

JEFF  
-- You'd go with me?

SKYE  
I'm kinda curious myself what they  
do at these things...

Skye starts quickly closing up her laptop. Jeff studies  
her. Despite current circumstances, he can't help being  
intrigued by her--

JEFF

You get curious like this easily?

SKYE

Actually, my roommate calls it...  
Inquisitive Tourette's.

This brings the tiniest of smiles to Jeff's face. And as they start for the door--

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - NIGHT

Dark. Deserted. Then -- Jeff's car sweeps past.

INT. JEFF'S CAR - NIGHT

They drive in silence. The weirdness of where they are headed -- combines with the plain oddness of being alone like this. Skye has to break the silence. With a query, of course--

SKYE

So, you're some kind of reporter?

JEFF

...Some kind.

Skye glances at him.

SKYE

But you used to work for the  
Washington Post...?

JEFF

Used to. But not anymore...

He clearly doesn't want to talk about it. Skye studies him. Knows there must be a story here. But actually manages to find the wherewithal not to pursue it. Moment, then--

SKYE

My father was a newsman...

Now Jeff glances her way.

JEFF

Yeah...?

SKYE

Not print. He worked in television.

Jeff can't completely hide his reaction. Again --  
television.

SKYE

He worked local news. Here in Los Angeles. Clint Yarrow.

Jeff looks at her with a small smile--

JEFF

Yeah, I remember him. When I was growing up. He was good.

SKYE

He was *great*.

(beat)

Always digging. Deep into whatever story he was working on. He just had this...

(self-aware moment)

...this compulsion to *know*. Mom called it Moth-to-the-Flame.

JEFF

I remember... something about him... just around the time I was leaving for college.

Skye continues to stare out the window. She knows exactly what he's referring to...

SKYE

I was still in high school. He was working on a story... on union corruption. Everybody told him to back off. But, my Dad... no way. And one night...

(beat)

...he just didn't come home.

(beat)

Never was a single clue to what happened to him. He just... disappeared. To this day, I don't know if he's alive or...

The word "disappears" hangs heavy in the air. Jeff nods with understanding -- and with a better insight into why she's here with him tonight. Play the moment. And--

SKYE

We're here...

Jeff looks out his windshield. And his psyche is instantly whipsawed. Because he is suddenly staring out at--

The roadside motel that he just saw on the show.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

A few middle-class cars, a plumber's truck, parked around.

Jeff and Skye step from their car. Suddenly -- SEVERAL PEOPLE come rushing from one of the rooms.

Many of the MEN are dressed like Billy Grimm. A few of the WOMEN wear Jen's green dress. But unlike the characters on the show, these people are all different ages, sizes, races. Jeff stares -- it's both strange and bizarrely funny at the same time.

JEFF

Trekkies have nothing on these guys...

The roleplayers all run toward their cars. Now Jeff and Skye see the panicked look on their faces. Jeff snags an overweight FAUX BILLY GRIMM--

JEFF

What's the matter-- ?

The Faux Billy Grimm just looks scared, leaps into his car. The cars are all racing away. Jeff and Skye regard the open door to that room. It's dark inside.

Jeff and Skye exchange a look. And slowly ease toward that door.

The door is ajar. Jeff notes: it's Room #5 -- same as in the show. Bitter irony. They hear a WOMAN'S FRIGHTENED WHIMPERING.

JEFF

Hello? Are you all right in here...?

WOMAN (O.S.)

(beyond terrified)

*Leave me alone!*

SKYE

Do you need help?

No answer -- just more FRIGHTENED WHIMPERING. Jeff and Skye exchange another look. Then Jeff steps tentatively over the threshold. Skye follows...

INT. ROOM #5 - NIGHT

Shadowy. Jeff reacts: the room is exactly as it was on the show. Skye points. We just barely make out a WOMAN on the floor, pushing herself into a corner. Jeff and Skye step gingerly toward her...

JEFF

We're not here to hurt you...

And now they are close enough to see the terrified woman's face. Jeff recognizes her--

JEFF

-- Merriam?

Jeff is extremely relieved to find her. But the condition he's found her in is another matter. Merriam tries to pedal even farther into the corner, trying to protect herself.

MERRIAM

I don't know you! Who are you?! I don't know you!

JEFF

My name is Jeff Sefton... I'm Nate's brother...

Merriam's eyes narrow, filling with instant paranoia.

SKYE

Let us help you -- please.

MERRIAM

Nobody can help me!

JEFF

Let us get you to a doctor. Your husband is worried to death--

MERRIAM

No! I don't want my husband a part of this! I must protect him!

Jeff just keeps easing forward.

JEFF

Do you know where Nate is? Merriam?  
Is he all right?

MERRIAM

No he's not all right!  
(beat)  
And they'll be coming for me next!

JEFF

Who will be coming?

Merriam doesn't answer. And they are close enough that Skye spots something. She GASPS. Jeff looks. Merriam is holding a gun at her side.

JEFF

Merriam, whatever this is, we will  
see that you're protected--

MERRIAM

I had no idea what I was letting  
into my life... no idea...

Merriam looks up at them with ineffable sadness, tears filling  
her eyes. And she says--

MERRIAM

Well, hey, these things just snap  
right off.

Jeff stares -- it's such a completely bizarre non sequitur.

JEFF

What-- ?

SKYE

(chilled)  
It's something from the show.

And suddenly -- Merriam swings the gun up toward them! Jeff  
and Skye freeze. Then -- Merriam snaps the gun against her  
own temple, and--

CLOSE - we're ON Jeff with Skye at his side as Merriam FIRES!

SKYE

(spinning away)  
Oh my God! Oh my God!

Jeff can't pull his eyes away. He just stares in gathering  
horror. And--

*END OF ACT THREE*

ACT FOUR

INT. LAPD OFFICES - SAKELIK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

FRAMED in a doorway, we SEE Merriam's husband, Kirk, ashen, out in the bullpen, talking to a pair of DETECTIVES.

ANGLE ADJUSTS -- Jeff, shaken, looks out at Kirk with sympathy. Skye sits beside him, also wearing the effects of what they witnessed. Sakelik stands behind her desk, her natural suspicious expression even more pronounced now...

SAKELIK

First the missing brother -- *with* the still-unexplained chair full of blood. And now you're front row center for this apparent suicide...

SKYE

Apparent *nothing* -- she did it right in front of us!

JEFF

There were other people there when we arrived. They left in their cars. There must be tire tracks--

SAKELIK

It's a motel -- there are lots of tire tracks.

(beat)

The motel manager said there were no others there. Only the lady in number five.

JEFF

*He's lying.*

SKYE

*He's lying.*

JEFF

(knows how this sounds)

We told you, Merriam watched this -- this particular show, and she and these others liked to roleplay--

Sakelik gives him a look. Then indicates Kirk outside--

SAKELIK

We talked to the husband. And when I asked if some *TV show* could've been the cause of her taking her own life, he looked at me -- well, like I'm looking at you right now.

JEFF

I'm telling you--

SAKELIK

I know. You're the one telling me  
*all* of this. And I've got a very  
big problem about that...

She drops a file in front of Jeff. Jeff looks -- it is a  
file on Jeff.

JEFF

You've been investigating me?

SAKELIK

You used to be a reporter with the  
Washington Post. Very well regarded.  
That is -- until they fired you.

Jeff doesn't reply.

SAKELIK

You lied on a story. Just fabricated  
a central source, that's all...

Skye looks over at Jeff, surprised. And she's further  
surprised when -- Jeff doesn't deny it.

SAKELIK

And word is six D.C. cops went to  
jail because of that story.

JEFF

They went to jail -- and are still  
in jail -- because they were *dirty*.

SAKELIK

But to get the story out, you *lied*.  
Big time. And here you are back in  
L.A. So tell me -- how do I know  
you're not lying to me now?

Jeff has no reply. Skye studies him.

SAKELIK

You want to clear this up, I suggest  
you find your brother and get his  
ass in here. *Fast*.

Jeff meets her eye. HOLD, and--

EXT. LAPD OFFICES - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Jeff and Skye walk into the parking lot. Both still wearing  
the effects of what they've been through.

JEFF

I'm sorry I dragged you into this.

SKYE  
You didn't drag me into it...

JEFF  
You gonna be okay?

SKYE  
There was no way of knowing that she  
would--  
(beat)  
What do you think could have scared  
her so much that she'd--?

Jeff shakes his head. He's truly baffled. But he also knows--

JEFF  
Whatever it is, Nate's right in the  
middle of it. That is, if he's even  
still...

He doesn't let himself finish the thought.

SKYE  
So what are you going to do now?

JEFF  
Just keep searching. I have to. If  
Nate's still out there, I need to  
find him. I'm all that he's got.

They've reached a waiting car. We see Lexi behind the wheel.

JEFF  
Listen. Thanks for -- you know.

SKYE  
(kind of shrugs,  
finding a shred of  
gallows humor)  
You sure know how to show a girl an  
interesting time...

Jeff offers his own small smile. Their eyes hold a moment.  
Then -- Skye climbs into the car. Jeff starts away.

INT. LEXI'S CAR - NIGHT

Lexi gives her a stern maternal look--

LEXI  
I'm picking you up at the police  
station--?

SKYE  
I don't want to talk about it.

LEXI

The *police* station--?

But Skye is already staring out the window, lost in puzzled thought. Then her eye goes to Jeff walking back to his car.

CLOSE - SKYE ... and we see the deeply-felt sympathy she feels for him playing clearly on her face. HOLD. Then we: PRE-LAP SOUND of urgent searching, and--

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

SERIES OF SHOTS -- as Jeff fiercely tears apart Nate's apartment: the mattress is upended, drawers are yanked out, the medicine cabinet rifled, etc. Until--

Jeff stops. Breathing hard. He's exhausted every possible hiding place. HOLD. He doesn't want to go there. But--

His eye goes to the one place in the room where the true answer might lie. He looks at Nate's television. The dark screen staring back at him blankly. Ominously.

Jeff finds the remote. Considers, then -- switches ON the TV. STATIC and SNOW. Jeff scrolls the DVR menu. And sees: every recording is "CULT". He moves to the last recording--

JEFF

Okay, bro, let's see exactly what you were watching the night before you disappeared...

ON THE TV: "Previously on CULT..." and Jeff watches snippets of previous episodes: Collins and his wife JEN and their 3-year-old SON playing in a park (pre-disappearance)... The orange Plymouth Valiant parked ominously near Collins' house, following as Jen drives their son to preschool...

Jeff hits JUMP on the remote.

ON THE TV: Now we SEE that scene of Collins confronting Billy Grimm at his compound (the scene he watched earlier).

Jeff JUMPS again. ON THE TV: Collins with Joey Keller in the motel room--

JOEY (ON TV)

*You didn't really see! You gotta look beyond what's right in front of you -- or you'll never find the answers!*

This sinks in on Jeff. He hits JUMP again. ON THE TV: it's a scene he hasn't seen before: Collins ripping past CRIME SCENE tape to get back into that isolated cabin in the woods (from our opening scene).

Curious, Jeff stops, let's this scene play...

INT. ISOLATED CABIN - NIGHT

Collins moves purposefully into the cabin. His partner Paz is with him. There's the man-shaped space in the wall, but otherwise the room is unchanged.

PAZ

C'mon, Collins. There's no way your family were ever here. After we found your brother-in-law, the whole place was combed and combed again--

Collins keeps pacing the room, drinking in the madness on the walls, desperate for an answer. The answer.

Then, suddenly, a thought hits him. And he pulls out the 3-D glasses that Billy Grimm gave him. Puts them on and begins to scan the chaotic images on the walls.

PAZ

Collins -- c'mon--

COLLINS

(with desperation)  
*Look beyond what's right in front of you...*

Finally, Collins looks down at the floor. And--

SOMETHING SUDDENLY JUMPS OUT AT HIM FROM THE FLOOR -- startling him. It is: A 3-D IMAGE hidden among the overlapping graphics. It's a representation of a trapdoor.

Collins falls to his knees, starts urgently feeling around.

PAZ

*What is it? What did you see?*

Collins' hand touches -- A RECESSED HANDLE. Completely obscured. Paz stares in amazement. Collins pulls his gun.

Collins yanks open a trap door. The trap door is lined with insanely thick sound-proof padding. Jagged wooden stairs lead down. Collins starts down--

INT. A MUD-LINED CELLAR - NIGHT

Dark and disturbing. Collins hears -- a tiny WHIMPER.

Across the room is a sealed box. Collins races to it. He smashes the latch, throws it open. And FREEZES.

Inside is his SON. Dirt-streaked, disheveled -- but alive.

COLLINS

Andy-- !!

Collins sweeps him up, hugs him tightly with streaming tears.

COLLINS

It's okay, son... it's okay...

Paz spies something taped to the inside of the box. He reaches for it. It's a slate-black DVD -- blank, except for that CIRCLED M SYMBOL carved on it (Steven Rae's important "graffiti" symbol from earlier).

Then Paz notices something else -- as little Andy clings to Collins, his t-shirt has ridden up.

PAZ

(quaking voice)

Look...

Collins looks. There's something on the boy's skin. Collins lifts the shirt. And his blood runs cold: there's a large box tattoo on his son's abdomen.

As Collins stares in horror and anger, the boy says weakly--

ANDY

Where's mommy...?

HOLD on Collins, and--

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Back to Jeff, staring at the TV. He plops back against Nate's desk, trying to fathom it. He glances over, sees a photo Nate has kept of the two of them as boys. In their bedroom at home. Happier times. Then something tucked in the shelf beside the photo catches his eye--

The spine of a brightly-colored book. Jeff thinks he recognizes it. He pulls it out, revealing--

Nate's "CULT" notebook. That book Nate had with him that day at the pier. Jeff looks at the psychotically-drawn "CULT" box logo on the front. Jeff really doesn't want to open it. But he does...

INSIDE: Nate's copious notes, drawings, pasted screen captures, Nate's own matching photos of the same locations.

Jeff keeps flipping pages. And he comes to -- a page pasted with a repeat pattern of baseballs. Odd. Then, slowly, Jeff begins to recognize it. He grabs the photo of Nate and him in their childhood room. Behind them -- the wallpaper is the exact same pattern of baseballs.

*MEMORY HIT - INT. CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT*

*12-YEAR-OLD JEFF and 5-YEAR-OLD NATE -- as they peel back a section of the wallpaper. There's a hidden hole -- their childhood hiding place -- full of candy, baseball cards, comic books...*

BACK TO SCENE

Jeff stares at the identical baseball pattern on the page. Puzzling it. Then he touches the page, and notes: there's a slight unnatural thickness to this page. It's actually two pages glued together. And there's something hidden between them.

JEFF

*Look beyond what's right in front of you...*

Jeff quickly tears at the page. And his eyes widen at the sight of: a slate-black DVD disc, with the CIRCLED M SYMBOL carved in it. Identical to the one he just saw on TV. Jeff's heart immediately jumps.

He looks over at the TV. Where "CULT" continues to play...

*END OF ACT FOUR*

ACT FIVE

EXT. JEFF'S RENTED HOUSE - NEAR THE BEACH - NIGHT

A fog diffuses the narrow street near Jeff's rented place, eerily isolating: Skye, outside her car, checking a hastily-scribbled address in her hand. A figure emerges from the fog, approaching fast. It's -- Jeff.

JEFF

You came.

SKYE

You didn't think I would?

JEFF

You didn't have to.

(beat)

I don't mean to keep involving you--

SKYE

I'm already involved. I *work* on this show. And until I fully understand what's really going on, *and who's behind it*, I'm as alone in all of this as you are.

Jeff regards her. But that clearly isn't her only reason. Her voice softens--

SKYE

And I know... there is nothing worse in the world than losing someone you love... and never knowing what really happened to them...

Jeff realizes she's talking about the disappearance of her father. Skye meets his eye, and--

SKYE

So -- where is it?

HOLD, and--

INT. JEFF'S RENTED HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE - the black DVD. In Skye's hands.

JEFF (O.S.)

Nate had it hidden. In a place he had good reason to believe only I would find it.

WIDEN - Jeff and Skye at Jeff's desk. Jeff lives in a small, one-bedroom place near the beach. Windows open to the SOUND of the surf.

JEFF  
He *wanted* me to find it.

SKYE  
It's identical--

JEFF  
--to the one Collins finds on the show.  
(indicates symbol)  
What's this mean?

SKYE  
It's a new symbol Steven is introducing. It's supposed to lead into some whole new story thread.

JEFF  
Thread to what?

Skye doesn't know. Jeff turns the disc in his hand--

JEFF  
What's on the disc that Collins finds on the show?

SKYE  
Collins puts it in and it -- it co-opts his computer. Uploads all his personal information.

JEFF  
Uploads it where? To whom?

SKYE  
It lets Billy Grimm's people totally hook into his life.

(beat)  
Collins does it because he knows -- the only way he's going to find his wife is by stepping completely away from his normal life. Completely immerse himself into this... this shadow world.

(indicates the Circled M)  
My guess is this symbol represents some sort of... of *next level* of this shadow world.

Jeff studies the disc. Skye sees his expression and realizes -- *he's considering playing the disc himself.*

JEFF

And what does Collins find?

SKYE

Nobody knows. Steven hasn't sent us that part yet.

JEFF

Just who the hell is this Steven Rae anyway?

SKYE

He's written for TV for years. Then, a couple of years ago, he came up with the idea for this show...

JEFF

He's the one I need to get to.

SKYE

You'll never get to Steven.

JEFF

Watch me.

Skye appreciates his certainty -- but she just shakes her head. She knows better. Moment, then her eye goes to a photo of Jeff and Nate on the desk.

SKYE

Is this Nate?

Jeff nods.

SKYE

He looks sweet...

Jeff considers this. Moment, then -- Jeff lifts the DVD. Skye looks at him, concerned--

SKYE

Are you sure you want to...?

JEFF

It may be nothing. Or it may have all the answers...

(beat)

It's my only connection to Nate. I'm all he's got in the world. If I don't try to find him, no one will...

Pause. And -- he reaches forward, slips the disc into his laptop. Moments, then... the drive engages with a WHIR. Suddenly -- a flurry of BLURRY IMAGES appear.

SKYE  
-- What is that?

Jeff studies it. And -- it dawns on him. He reaches over to his hanging jacket and takes out -- the 3-D GLASSES that Nate gave him. Skye recognizes them from the show--

SKYE  
Those are like--

JEFF  
(nodding)  
Nate gave them to me. Said they might come in handy...

Jeff slides on the glasses and looks at the SCREEN. And--

JEFF'S POV -- the BLURRY IMAGES now extend in 3-D from the screen. Coming right into the room with Jeff. Blank spaces:

\_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ /  
\_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_

SKYE  
(anxious)  
What do you see?

JEFF  
It's blank spaces. Like I'm supposed to enter in letters...

Jeff puzzles it. Then -- a look of uneasy recognition hits.

JEFF  
Merriam told us exactly what it is...

Jeff leans forward and begins typing.

JEFF'S POV -- And we WATCH as he taps out:

W E L L / H E Y / T H E S E / T H I N G S / J U S T /  
S N A P / R I G H T / O F F

Jeff takes off the glasses, hits ENTER. The drive WHIRS anew. And Skye notices the RED WI-FI LIGHT starting to BLINK--

SKYE  
It's connecting to the internet--!

She reaches to stop it. But Jeff grabs her arm.

JEFF  
Whatever it's going to do... let it.

Jeff and Skye watch and wait. Ready for anything. We PUSH IN on the BLINKING RED LIGHT. And CUT AWAY TO:

EXT. AN ALLEY - NIGHT (SAME TIME)

We're CLOSE ON a different RED LIGHT. This one on a cop car. WIDEN. Several PD cars line a grungy alley. That disquieting fog is here tonight, too.

Detective Sakelik has just arrived.

DETECTIVE ON DUTY  
Trash guys found it thirty minutes ago.

A CSI WOMAN is working an open dumpster. Sakelik looks: inside is a BODY. ASIAN MALE, 35. He's wearing one of the red t-shirts with the Box graphic. His face ghostly pale, left leg of his jeans ripped and soaked with blood.

SAKELIK  
So tell me--

CSI WOMAN  
Dead maybe forty-eight hours. Massive blood loss. Looks like an open femoral. Blood dropped out fast. But it didn't happen here.

DETECTIVE ON DUTY  
Didn't you catch a call recently where there was a ton of blood and no body...?

Sakelik stares down at the body.

SAKELIK  
Yeah... good bet this one's connected. Better let me handle this case, too. Cuz we already have a direction on that other one.  
(beat)  
We're looking at the brother...

INT. JEFF'S RENTED HOUSE - NIGHT (SAME TIME)

ON Jeff, Skye beside him, watching the laptop screen. The drive is working, but the screen remains blank, interrupted only by occasional strange FLICKERS. The anticipation is unnerving. Then--

SKYE  
...Why did you lie?  
(off Jeff's look)  
On your story. You must've had a reason.

What a strange time for her to ask. Then Jeff realizes -- it's her way of dealing with the tension. Long moment, then--

JEFF

I lied to protect my source. My real source...

(beat)

The story never would have run without a source. And I couldn't use the real one. These scumbag cops would've killed him for sure.

Skye studies him.

JEFF

It was a judgment call. And I'd do it again. But... it cost me a lot, too.

(moment)

There was a girl in D.C. I never told her the truth...

(beat)

Never even told Nate...

SKYE

(surprised)

But you told me...

Jeff looks at her. Yeah, he did. He somehow trusts her in a way he hasn't trusted anyone else. Play the moment. Then--

Jeff's laptop begins to go wild. Rapid-fire IMAGES, wild, insane, begin to FLASH. Jeff and Skye stare. It's like reaching the top of the roller-coaster, when you have no idea what's about to come.

The IMAGES FLASH faster and faster -- building to -- something. Then--

Jeff's CELL PHONE RINGS. Loud. Startling them. And very bizarre timing. Jeff tentatively opens his phone. HEARS -- that distant STATIC again.

JEFF

Hello...?

NATE (over phone)

Jeff? Jeff... it's me. It's Nate...

Skye realizes. She leans in. Jeff cants the phone so she can hear, too. Their faces very close as--

JEFF

My God. Are you all right?

NATE (over phone)

You put in the disc!

JEFF

Yes. How did you know? Where are you? Nate-- !

NATE (over phone)

(frantic)

*When I left you the disc, I had no idea what it really meant! It isn't at all what I thought it was! You never should have put in the disc!*

(beat)

*They'll be after you now!*

JEFF

Who'll be after me?! Nate--!!

NATE (over phone)

*...Jeff... walk away... whatever you do... do not...*

And then -- only STATIC.

JEFF

*NATE?! NATE?!*

The connection is dead. Skye sees Jeff's devastated expression. Moment, then she notices--

SKYE

Look...

She indicates the LAPTOP SCREEN. The craziness has stopped. RED LETTERS are beginning to appear.

JEFFREY SEFTON

3107-A Pielar Court  
Santa Monica, California

Then, suddenly -- Billy Grimm's face appears. It's the promo for the show -- but eerily distorted now, as if copied multiple generations. Billy stares out at us...

BILLY

You're next.

(the IMAGE jumps and repeats)

You're next.

(jumps)

You're next. You're next. Next.

Next. Next...

Jeff and Skye stand frozen, side by side, trying to fathom the import of this. Wherever this is all destined to lead... it has begun. HOLD. And--

INT. SAKELIK'S PD SEDAN - NIGHT

Back at that alley, we WATCH Sakelik slide into her sedan, leaving the crime scene. She puts in the key, then notices that her detective's notebook has fallen from the passenger seat. She reach for it, her sleeve rides up. And--

THERE IS ONE OF THE BOX TATTOOS ON HER FOREARM.

She casually pulls down her sleeve, fires up the car, and--

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - NIGHT

Foggy here, too. Network exec Kyle Segal exits one of the clubs. Feeling like master of his universe. He hustles across the street, past the AM/PM gas station where we saw Jeff earlier. We GLIMPSE the Billy Grimm PROMO playing on the multiple PUMP TVs as Segal moves past the station.

EXT. SMALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Segal enters this small lot behind the AM/PM. Apparently deserted at this hour. Segal is almost to his Porsche. When --

A very hot YOUNG WOMAN, in sexy black club clothes, seems to appear from nowhere. Stumbling drunkenly. Segal is surprised as -- she trips. Literally falling into his arms.

SEGAL

Whoa!

She looks up into Segal's eyes. It's Kirstie. Segal smiles his smarmiest smile at this very cute, very drunk, young woman. And, suddenly -- a DARK FIGURE engulfs the distracted Segal from behind.

INT. BACKSEAT OF A CAR - NIGHT

A bundle is thrown in. It's Segal. Bound psycho-style with duct tape. Eyes wide with fear. His SCREAMS muffled.

Kirstie is already in the front seat. Now someone climbs in behind the wheel. Kirstie snuggles close. We don't see the driver's face -- but we do SEE: CLOSE STUDIES of what the driver is wearing. Jeans, and that very distinctive vest. Billy Grimm's clothes. And, of course, that 10-inch knife.

CAMERA PULLS OUT THROUGH the car window--

EXT. DESERTED SIDE STREET - NIGHT

-- and continues PULLING BACK to reveal: the orange Valiant. Parked on this deserted street. And as it fires up and glides unhurriedly away... we SUPER:

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
STEVEN RAE

FADE TO BLACK