

FADE IN:

EXT. LOUISIANA - MISSISSIPPI RIVER NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Grimy industrial wasteland. We work our way upriver. TITLES roll as factories dump glowing goo into the Mississippi. Huge culverts spew foaming slime as underwater poisons boil around dead fish. Ugh.

We see a gigantic industrial complex silhouetted against glowing sky: the Omnivor Corporation. Six massive tunnels pour steaming chemicals into the river. It's horrible. END TITLES.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - FRENCH QUARTER NIGHT

The usual suspects. Rain.

INT. NEW ORLEANS - ART GALLERY NIGHT

Jammed with the finest looking people New Orleans money can buy. Trendy, unexplainable art graces high white walls.

Guests entering from the rainy street must pass through a metal detector.

It's a snap to pick out the PAINTER, surrounded by gaga admirers of every conceivable sexual persuasion. Hard to say what his might be...

Much hilarity and glad-handing as everyone attempts to have a delightful time.

Looks like a real swell party.

EXT. BUS STEPS - SHOES NIGHT

More rain. Huge dark puddles. Hustling feet charge out of bus.

A pair of shoddy wingtips is jostled down the stairs, fighting for position. Just when it appears they will clear it, they get shoved into a river of muck. The owner seems philosophical - he steps off the curb into ankle deep water, and rinses them briskly.

EXT. ART GALLERY NIGHT

The wingtips approach the above mentioned hyper-hip gallery. TILT TO REVEAL their owner, ARTIE WILLOUGHBY, a nice enough looking guy wearing a ridiculous fishing hat.

He's not real well dressed. He's self-employed and has terrible credit. He doesn't stand up too straight, either.

From the way he timidly whistles, it is obvious he would rather be anyplace else. We hear a tiny VOICE, indistinct but strident. Artie picks up his dangling earphone, places it in his ear.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

You inside?

ARTIE

(to throat mike)

Not yet.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

He ain't gonna sit around all night.

INT. ART GALLERY NIGHT

Artie reluctantly enters. Passes through the metal detector. Jams his hat in a torn raincoat pocket. He takes in the sights cautiously.

People chat here, there and everywhere. Pay Artie no heed.

ART PATRONESS

(blowing kiss to friend)

Love you... Mean it...

The Painter has his picture taken repeatedly, basks in fawning adulation.

ARTWORK / BUFFET TABLE

Artie tilts his head gently to see if perhaps the paintings take on any meaning when viewed from a new angle. Sadly, they don't. He meanders over to a food table. Stacked high with the best New Orleans caterers can offer, it's an imposing sight. After all, for Artie, kraut on an hotdog is a rare treat.

Artie wanders anxiously past a vicious-looking uniformed cop, McALPINE, who grabs a quick feel from the undulating Art

Patroness.

McALPINE

(critiques painting)

It's got a real visceral, primal quality, don't you think? About as immediate as kickin' a guy's teeth against a concrete curb.

ART PATRONESS

Oh, yes. Lovely.

A waiter passes a tray of artichokes. Artie takes one, inspects it inquisitively, and pops the entire leaf into his mouth. Big mistake.

The pointed leaf damn near chokes him to death. McAlpine nearly breaks apart with stifled laughter. Finally, Artie is able to cough it up and semi-casually drop it in a flower arrangement. To calm himself, he swipes a carnation, slips it into his lapel.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

It's party time.

Artie twitches with worry.

ARTIE

What if I mess up?

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

Don't sweat it; you'll do your old man, may he rest in peace, real proud. Get the heater.

ARTIE

Now?

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

Gotta bust that cherry sometime.

EXT. LINE OUTSIDE MEN'S ROOM

Uncomfortable in a strange land, Artie stands on line for the loo with a bunch of culture hounds.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Much like the little bathroom in THE GODFATHER -- with old-

fashioned high mount toilet tanks... Artie shuffles in, waits nervously amid curious glances until stall #3 comes vacant.

INT. STALL #3

Grasping for confidence by whistling "The Godfather" theme, Artie reaches up behind the toilet tank and removes a revolver. Unlike Michael Corleone, Artie is jittery as hell. He fumbles the gun - right in the commode.

Really worried now, he fishes it out. Withdraws a voluminous handkerchief. Standing there, trying to look nonchalant, he begins, one by one, to dry his bullets. A toilet flushes two stalls down. The man stands up. Artie watches in horror as he dons a policeman's cap.

ANGLE ON BATHROOM

A dim cop, DUFFY, ambles over to wash his hands.

STALL #3

Terrified, Artie drops a bullet. Grabs desperately. It skitters under the door and across shiny tile...

BATHROOM / ARTIE

...comes to a stop beside Duffy's scuffed shoe.

Crouched over, watching, Artie dies a thousand deaths as the little bullet rests quietly beside Duffy's shoe. The shoe taps to invisible music.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

Artie! What's goin' on!? Check  
in!

Artie desperately turns down the volume.

Barely registering a brain wave, Duffy sloooowly looks down. Sees the bullet. Wonders what it means. Scans the stalls. Artie vanishes. Duffy picks it up. A .38. He slips it in an empty loop in his gun belt, departs.

Artie mouths "Thank you" to Jesus. An agitated PATRON shifts from one foot to another. Yells at Artie.

PATRON

Hey, BUDDY! God only needed six  
days to create the world. Shake a  
leg!

Artie hurries apologetically past a much disgruntled full-bladdered art patron into the gallery. A long line of disgruntled full-bladdered art patrons glares at him with little warmth. Artie scurries away.

INT. ART GALLERY

Louder, more tightly packed than before. Artie has trouble getting close to the Painter -- his intended prey.

ARTIE

(in throat mike)

I'm losing him. I'm gonna lose  
him.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

That candelabra? Fat chance.

Artie jostles toward the Painter. A skinny MODEL spies his pistol.

MODEL

I like the look.

INT. QUEUE OUTSIDE MEN'S ROOM

Swooping up to the bathroom, the Painter takes one look at the line, shudders. The Great Unwashed...

PAINTER

(revolting English accent)

Are there no prisons?

He lilts toward the Exit. Artie pursues reluctantly.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND ART GALLERY NIGHT

The Painter enters the alley. Clown murals adorn two walls.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)

(whisper)  
It's just like shootin' a beer  
bottle off a fence. Hold your  
breath and squeeze real slow.

His back to us, the Painter takes a leak. He HUMS as he pees.

Artie moves quietly out the door, draws his weapon and stalks toward the Painter. He slowly raises his gun and aims at the Englishman's bony noggin.

The alley door SLAPS open! An ART LOVER gasps, ducks inside!  
The Painter whirls. Artie hesitates--

The Tutor SHOUTS!

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)  
So shoot him already!

Artie FIRES. He misses. Enraged, the Painter SHRIEKS and kicks the gun into the ionosphere.

ARTIE  
Uh oh.

PAINTER  
(malevolent, femme)  
There are two things I love to do  
in this world. One is to...  
(whispers to Artie)  
The other is to kick ass.

ARTIE  
I hope you wanna kick my ass.

The Painter jabs with his right - Artie falls like souffle.

TUTOR'S VOICE (o.s.)  
I'm outta here. Have a nice life.

McAlpine and Duffy blast into the alley! The Painter's breath is taken by McAlpine, a splendid man in uniform.

PAINTER  
Officer, this man tried to murder  
me!

Artie grabs his pistol and scrambles toward the crowded street!

McALPINE

STOP OR I'LL--

He FIRES FOUR TIMES!!

McALPINE

--SHOOT!!

PAINTER

(thrilled)

Gunplay! I'm shivering!

Two pedestrians fall wounded. Artie loses himself in the downtown hubbub... Incredulous, McAlpine inspects his weapon.

McALPINE

Huh. Missed.

McAlpine does not like the adoring look he's getting from the Painter.

EXT. CITY STREETS NIGHT

Artie, thoroughly dejected, wanders rainy streets. Stared at by drug dealers, YELLED at by newshawks, BARKED at by dogs -- he's a pretty miserable guy. The entire city seems against him.

In front of a department store, Artie pulls a shopping list in feminine handwriting. Studies it ruefully in the rain. Enters store. Gets bashed by an aggressive FAT LADY on her way out.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT & BAR NIGHT

Artie passes, across street from a little eatery. It catches his eye, but he decides against it. Then changes his mind and heads across the street. A CAB DRIVER nearly runs him down.

CAB DRIVER

GET A LIFE, FATHEAD!

Artie hops back to the sidewalk and gives up on the restaurant.

Then, after a bit, changes his mind again, starts back, then hesitates and pulls the shopping list. "Eyelash curler" is the only item not checked off. He debates, tosses the list.

He hurries across street into bar.

INT. RESTAURANT NIGHT

Artie takes a seat at bar. Business is off. BARTENDER serves a customer at the far end of the bar.

Something in the mirror compels Artie to look around -- out of the bar -- through the window -- across the street... There, waiting for the light to change, stands the most beautiful woman Artie has ever seen. WEEGIE WEITZ. She's probably the most beautiful woman you've ever seen too...

In SLOW MOTION she runs her fingers through windblown hair, ties it in a loose knot. She looks friendly. She makes a call on a cellular phone, starts across the street.

Halfway across, an open manhole with a little barrier around it. A taxi blows through the intersection, oddly missing Weegie, sweeps the little barrier away - leaving the manhole gaping.

Weegie, conversing intently, doesn't see the manhole! Artie starts up to warn her! Weegie walks directly toward it -- but doesn't fall in. Artie gently double takes. Why didn't she fall in?

She enters, plonks her huge purse and sack of big dog bones one stool away from Artie. Nods at him, shoots some quarters in the bar juke box, picks some songs. Wraps up her call.

WEEGIE

(on phone)

... I realize that's how the

(MORE)

WEEGIE (cont'd)

Sierra Club operates. And the Nature Zone would too, if we had their budget... Well, see what you can do. Thanks.

She eats some beer nuts.

Acutely aware of her beauty, Artie is a live nerve. He tries to look without her noticing, but can't manage it. He satisfies himself with watching in the mirror. She certainly is pretty.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

ARTIE

(flustered)

Dr. Pepper please.

WEEGIE

You don't have lemon pie?

Bartender shakes his head. The bartender watches as Artie, oblivious to the outside world, inclines toward Weegie a micro-millimeter-- panics and leans back. After a moment, he glances over. She is looking straight at him. He whips around, stares at his drink.

Nervous, he shreds his cocktail napkin.

WEEGIE

Like the hat. It's a great one.

Swimming in her adorableness, Artie takes off his hat. Sets it on the bar, fiddles with the lures.

ARTIE

It was my dad's.

BARTENDER

So. What'll it be?

Weegie points --

WEEGIE

Some of that coffee looks--

--and knocks her overstuffed purse to the floor! Junk goes everywhere. Artie scrambles down to gather her things.

His hand reaches for a strange looking book: "Ecological Voodoo: Activism in the '90's." A black man with dreadlocks and a beard graces the cover.

WEEGIE

Excuse me...

He glances at her.

WEEGIE

Nothing. Never mind.

Artie looks back; the book is gone. Mystified, he looks around, and, in a hurry to be with her, crams her stuff in her handbag. He drops her silver comb, quickly dusts it off, sits down.

ARTIE

Sorry about that.

WEEGIE

N.P.

He points to her bulging Filofax -- crammed with Post-it notes, extra pages, etc.

ARTIE

You don't hurt yourself, carrying that around?

WEEGIE

(laughs)

I am a tad overbooked, but it gets me there on time.

ARTIE

In my business, you don't have to be all that punctual.

WEEGIE

You must work for one of the airlines.

ARTIE

(laughs)

I'm kind of a gardener.

WEEGIE

Got a specialty?

ARTIE

Same as Dad's. Pruning.

WEEGIE

You good at it?

ARTIE

I'm not so hot at client relations.

WEEGIE

Repeat business is key.

ARTIE

Mmm, yeah. Well.

He smiles. She's very nice.

WEEGIE

Tell me about your dad.

ARTIE

I miss him fifty times a day. He made me feel like everything I did was right.

Bartender serves her. We barely notice as she casually puts four spoons of sugar into her coffee.

WEEGIE

If my folks died, I don't know what I'd do.

Artie doesn't want the conversation to end. He summons his courage.

ARTIE

If you're lucky, even though the person is gone, the relationship never dies. It sounds goofy, but that's the way it is with my dad.

WEEGIE

It doesn't sound goofy.

ARTIE

I never told anyone before.

In an effort to lighten the mood...

ARTIE

(notices sack of bones on bar)  
How many dogs do you have?

WEEGIE

Only Sinbad. He's full grown.

She catches bartender's eye. Another round.