

THE JOURNEYMAN

Episode 01
Chapter One: The Shelter

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Draft_2.0

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Application Note: The following screenplay opening began as a game prototype (playable on itch), which I adapted into a more traditional pilot screenplay. The following act emphasizes environmental storytelling, atmosphere, and survival tension in a post-pandemic setting where the majority of humanity has perished.

ON BLACK.

Wind. The faint creak of rope.

FADE IN:

SUPER: The Northern Line - Seven years after the pandemic.

EXT. ROAD - FLATLANDS - DAY

A pair of BOOTS dangles from frayed rope on a tilted highway marker - leather split, soles rotted - swaying in the wind.

Beyond, a frostbitten highway runs through barren flatlands - pavement cracked, half-buried in snow. The road vanishes into a low haze.

CALEB MOORE (30s) walks down the ruined road, shoulders bent under a heavy PACK, a .308 BOLT RIFLE slung across his back.

He wears worn outdoor gear - patched canvas, sun-bleached, layered for the cold. His face is lean, marked by silence, weathered by years on the road.

He passes the dangling boots without slowing, studying dark clouds gathering overhead - his breath misting in the mounting cold.

A low THUNDER echoes, deep and rising.

He adjusts his shoulder strap against the wind.

Presses on as the first SNOW begins to drift down.

EXT. ROAD - FLATLANDS - DAY

Down the road. The snow falls faster now, driven by the rising wind.

Caleb pulls his coat tighter, scanning the empty horizon:

Nothing. Flatland. Barren. No sign of shelter. A nowhere place.

He keeps forward, head down as the snow thickens.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - FLATLANDS - DAY

Caleb pushes onto a dirt road through the low burnt scrubland. The snow drives harder now, slanting sideways in fierce gusts. The light fading.

Each step takes effort - his boots sinking into deepening snow. He braces, shoulders hunched, forcing through the drift.

Then - suddenly he halts. Looks out.

Through the storm he sees a faint SHAPE on the horizon. Still, distant. Uncertain through the snow and haze.

He raises weathered BINOCULARS, hands shaking from cold. Glasses it.

BINOCULAR POV:

A HOUSE. *Shelter*.

Its dim silhouette just visible in the gathering darkness on the horizon line. The first shelter he's seen in days.

He starts toward it, pushing harder.

EXT. HOUSE - FLATLANDS - EVENING

The storm drives in heavy sheets across the flats, the wind howling.

His boots sink deeper, the road disappearing. His coat and pack heavy with damp.

But the shelter looms close now - a lonely mid-century house stranded on the open plain.

EXT. HOUSE - PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Then he's there - and climbs the porch steps, boards groaning underfoot as he comes out of the storm.

He hesitates at the door, listening through the wind, scans the ground: No tracks. No voices. No movement.

It feels abandoned. But he draws a six-cylinder REVOLVER from his belt. Cocks it.

INT. HOUSE - ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

The door groans against the wind as he steps inside, pulls it shut, muffling the storm to a dull whine.

A barren hallway looms ahead, cloaked in shadow, air thick with mildew and rot.

He stands still. Listening. The pistol at his side.

Only the wind, whistling through decaying wood.

He does not call out.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He steps into the abandoned living room, boots creaking on moldering boards. Looks around:

One window, boarded up - planks nailed unevenly. Shafts of dusty light stab within. Spare planks piled below, the work unfinished. No furniture.

Another window, uncovered. The glass intact, soot-blackened and iced.

His eyes settle on the hearth: soot, filth, debris. Long cold.

He glances out the uncovered window.

Outside the storm churns - thick gusts of snow. Wind whistles through the walls.

Better in here than out there...

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

He steps in, looks from the doorway. Light spills through begrimed windows across an old dining table, something rotted, unidentifiable, lingering on the surface.

A mahogany cabinet holds teacups and dusty mugs. A clock on the wall, stilled. Everything coated in dust and soot.

He eyes the chairs, still tucked into the table, undisturbed.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

He searches the ruined kitchen - the counter-tops buried under silt. A rusted pot on the stove.

He opens the cupboards - stripped bare.

He moves into the pantry.

It's picked clean, save a lone jar on the shelf, sealed and unlabeled. He takes the jar in hand and turns it over.

Dark reddish lumps float in thick paste, the glass clouded. No expiration. Apricots, maybe. Figs? Impossible to say.

Whoever came before must have left it behind. He does the same - sets it back on the shelf.

INT. HOUSE - REAR HALL - EVENING

He steps into a narrow rear hallway. Two doors, one to either side. Both shut. He tests the first door:

INT. HOUSE - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He peers into a small home office. Air thick with age. Everything covered in dust.

A dead computer, the screen smeared with grime. A broken radio. A printer, gutted open. Strewn wires.

He tries the drawers - one jammed shut. Another with corroded batteries and water-logged papers. Nothing of use.

INT. HOUSE - REAR HALL - CONTINUOUS

He tries the last door - opens it.

Dim light stretches across dust-choked air.

A BEDROOM.

His eyes fix on the bed where a WOMAN'S BODY lies on a filthy mattress, stripped of clothing, rotted. The skull shattered at the mouth. Dried blood pooled around the head the color of dirty iron.

Caleb covers his nose and mouth - the stench of decay lingering.

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He searches through drawers in the bedroom, eyes down.

In the top drawer he finds a plastic bottle of pills, label faded but still readable:

"EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE PROTOCOL B- 7. TRIAL PARTICIPANT #4261."

He reads the label. Tosses it aside.

He finds a laminated card beside it. He glances at it, a vestige:

"PANDEMIC PROTOCOL: If symptoms appear, ISOLATE IMMEDIATELY. Notify designated medical center. DO NOT attempt self-medication. Compliance is mandatory under Federal Emergency Act 2026."

Caleb closes the drawer quietly, his face grim.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Back in the living room he sets his pack by the hearth - weary, cold. He props his rifle against the stones.

The house is clear. This is where he'll make camp.

FADE TO:

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - FLATLANDS - NIGHT

The house just visible through wind and snow.

A lone window glows with dim firelight against the darkness.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A fire crackles in the revived hearth, shadows flickering across stripped walls.

Caleb, in dry clothes, sits by the fire. Bedroll spread, gear drying.

He eats from a can - green beans, dried venison - and drinks from a metal canteen warmed in the flames.

Finished, he flexes his fingers and toes, checking circulation against frostbite, his feet rough and heavily calloused.

Then he lies back on his cot, using his pack as a pillow, pistol within easy reach. He listens - wind, fire, the house settling.

He stares at the ceiling - water stains that look like continents on a map he'll never see again.

Then he reaches, takes the pistol in hand. Opens the cylinder - brass catching firelight.

His thumb traces the cylinder's edge.

A long moment.

Then he snaps the cylinder shut. Sets the gun beside him.

His eyes close. His breathing slows.

FADE.

EXT. CALEB'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

A modest house beside a creek. Trees, greenery, cul-de-sac charm. Well-kept. From before.

A man (40s) in a suit and tie - CALEB'S FATHER - stands on the porch.

He looks at Caleb impassively as he comes up the driveway, enters into -

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Caleb drifts down a dark hallway.

At the end of the hall, a WOMAN (30s) in a summer dress stands in a doorway, back turned. Long dark hair hangs down her back.

She turns slightly toward Caleb. Shadow hides her face.

WOMAN (O.S.)
You shouldn't have come this way.

CALEB

Why?

WOMAN (O.S.)
Because you'll freeze.

Caleb moves toward her, but she steps out of frame, beyond the door.

He follows, drifting forward -

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb peers from the doorway into the dark room. The fire is low, down to cinders.

The same woman sits by the hearth, back turned, her breath misting in the cold.

CUT TO:

A boy, YOUNG CALEB (9), kneels beside the woman at the hearth, warming his hands by the fire.

He turns to look at her - but she's gone.

He looks back at the fire. Then the boy is gone too.

Caleb sits in his place - grown, alone, his breath misting in the cold.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb wakes with a start, back in the real.

The fire is down to embers, pulsing faintly. The room has gone dark. Cold. The storm howling outside.

He sits up, disoriented, breath fogging in the cold.

He kneels at the hearth, stirs the coals, adds the last of the firewood. Watches as flames catch, light crawling up the rotting walls.

Then - movement suddenly flickers at the edge of his vision.

He turns to the uncovered window - more by instinct than anything.

Beyond the glass, he sees only streaks of snow flitting in near total darkness.

A beat.

He rises. Steps to the window. Peers out.

At first, nothing. Just the swirling storm.

Then - MOVEMENT. A FIGURE.

A man's shape trudging toward the house, bent in the wind and sleet.

Caleb stiffens. Drops away from the window. Tensed.

CALEB

No. The fireglow. If he's looking, he's already seen you. Foolish.

He moves to his bedroll, kneels, grabs the revolver. Opens the cylinder - six rounds, loaded. Twelve left in all.

CALEB (cont'd)

You can't hide now, Cal.

He snaps it shut. Stands as the sound of boots creak on the porch. Then the front door opens. Closes.

Footsteps in the hall...

Caleb raises the gun as a MAN steps into the dark gap of the doorway, his shadow lit only by the firelight, his silhouette forming a hunchback's monstrous shape in the darkness.

Close enough that Caleb can smell the wet stink, hear his shivering breath.

He cocks the hammer.

CALEB (cont'd)

I have a gun on you. Move closer I'll shoot.

The figure stops. Silence.

Then a voice - hoarse, weary, speaks out from the darkness. That of an OLD MAN.

OLD MAN

I saw the fire.

Beat.

OLD MAN (cont'd)

There was nowhere else.

CALEB

Are you armed?

OLD MAN

No. I'm not armed.

Caleb motions for him to step into the firelight.

CALEB
Step in so I can see you. Do it slow.

An old man emerges from the shadows - stooped, wrapped in sodden layers, walking stick in one gloved hand, heavy coat hanging to his boots. A huge dripping pack on his back, shoulders bent under its weight.

This is JOSEPH "JOE" ROTH (77).

Caleb studies him in the shifting light - how he survived the freezing darkness he can hardly imagine.

CALEB (cont'd)
You came through the storm?

Joe nods slowly.

CALEB (cont'd)
What's in your pack?

JOE
Just what I travel by. I don't have much.

CALEB
A gun?

JOE
No. No gun.

CALEB
No gun. What do you have then? A knife?

Joe nods, wearily - skin raw, cold-burnt, eyes half-lidded.

JOE
I've got a knife. But I don't use for that.

CALEB
(steady)
Don't use it for what?

JOE
You know what.

Caleb's grip on the revolver stays firm.

CALEB
All right. Until you do.

JOE
...I don't mean any harm.

Caleb watches him: trembling, half-frozen, near spent with exhaustion.

CALEB
I'd like to believe that. I'd like to let you get warm.

The old man waits, searching his face for a verdict.

A long beat.

CALEB (cont'd)
Christ...

Caleb lowers the gun, motions him in.

CALEB (cont'd)
I'm not going to let you freeze.

JOE
(softly)
Thank you, sir...

Caleb keeps the pistol in hand as Joe shuffles in, sets his pack down with a grunt, and lowers himself to the fire.

Caleb watches him.

CALEB
If I sit, am I going to regret it, old man?

Joe turns his hands over, shows empty palms.

CALEB (cont'd)
I don't want to hurt you. But if I have to, I will.

JOE
If someone came on me from the dark, I'd do the same.

Caleb studies him a moment more. Then he moves to the fire and sits, pistol resting across his lap.

CALEB
Gun stays out. You understand.

Joe nods. They sit in silence, watching the coals - an uneasy truce seemingly forming between them.

A beat.

JOE
What's your name?

CALEB
I don't think you need to know that.

JOE
My name's Joseph. For what it's
worth. Some call me Joe.

CALEB
All right.

Another silence. Caleb's eyes drift to Joe's pack.

CALEB (cont'd)
You have something to eat in there?

JOE
Some. Though the cold does dull the
hunger.

CALEB
Good. Because I don't have much.
(beat)
...go ahead.

Joe nods.

He digs into his pack - produces a tin of tuna, dry bread, a
jar of sun-dried tomatoes, almost empty.

He breaks off a modest piece of bread, spooning out the
tuna. He eats with gloved hands, drinking from a battered
canteen - a relic from another century's war.

Caleb waits until Joe finishes. Then-

CALEB (cont'd)
Listen, old man. I'm gonna ask you
some things now, all right? You'd do
well to answer me honest.

Joe nods, wary.

CALEB (cont'd)
Where'd you come from?

JOE
South. Near the central coast.

CALEB

Alone?

JOE

I came here alone. Yes. Three, four weeks now, on foot.

CALEB

What about before?

JOE

When before?

CALEB

Before you were alone. Were you with a group?

JOE

...I was. That was a while ago now.

CALEB

How many?

JOE

Nine, ten. We were more before. Thirty of us, maybe. I'm not sure how many are left...

CALEB

Before what?

Joe lifts his hands, lets them drop.

JOE

(soft)

I don't know.

CALEB

Starvation?

Joe nods. Looks into the fire.

JOE

Yes. Hunger. Illness... Worse when the food ran out. There were good people with us...

Caleb takes this in. Then he nods, slowly.

CALEB

I've seen it happen.

JOE

Is that why you're traveling alone?

CALEB
I didn't say I was.

Joe eyes Caleb's drying gear.

JOE
You keep a pack like that, I'd guess
you're moving.

Caleb glances over - the faintest hint of amusement.

JOE (cont'd)
You've seen the markers, then? Boots
on posts. Trees.

CALEB
(admits)
I've seen them.

JOE
So we're both headed north.

CALEB
That doesn't make us pals.

Joe smiles faintly.

JOE
I've heard they follow the old
highway. Up near the old border.
Maybe past it.

CALEB
Yeah, I've heard the stories.

JOE
Maybe we've heard the same things
then. Rumors of a settlement. Land
that hasn't gone to salt.

CALEB
Or more mouths, starving slower.

Joe quiets. The fire snaps between them.

CALEB (cont'd)
You believe it?

JOE
(shrugs)
I believe people need to. Whether it
real - that's something else.

CALEB
So why keep walking?

Joe looks at the fire for a long time.

JOE
(carefully)
...there's someone.
(beat)
She was part of my group. But we got
separated. Not long before.

CALEB
Before you all went Lord of the
Flies. A woman? How old?

Joe hesitates, trying to remember.

JOE
A little older than you, maybe. She
has dark hair. Pale.

CALEB
What else?

He scratches his beard.

JOE
Her name's Anne. If that means
anything to you. She was a doctor -
before.

Caleb thinks, then shakes his head. His reply is genuine.

CALEB
I'm sorry. I haven't seen her. Why
chase her?

JOE
We were together a long time. Since
almost after the first wave. I
suppose I just wanted to see her
again.

CALEB
That's all?

JOE
Does there need to be more?

Caleb studies him.

CALEB
I guess not. You aren't mad, are you?

Joe scratches his beard, smiles thinly.

JOE

Maybe. Maybe. Who can say?

CALEB

Nobody would have to say it. It would
just be the case.

Joe's thin smile lingers.

JOE

As far as I know, I'm not.

With that Joe leans back against his pack, shuts his eyes.

JOE (cont'd)

You can keep the gun out.

Caleb, seemingly satisfied, turns to watch the fire.

When he looks up Joe is asleep where he sits.

Caleb lets him be. He hasn't the heart to wake him now.

FADE.