

THE NEXUS

A Screenplay by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY — NIGHT

The dead of winter: Wind HOWLING. Horizontally driven snow. A filthy frozen hellscape. A solitary MAN trudges through the snow, dressed in heavy layers and hunched against the elements.

He comes to a tavern, marked only by a flickering BLATZ neon sign, and reaches for the door.

SUPER — MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

INT. BAR — CONTINUOUS

The place is a dive: Dimly lit. An ancient Wurlitzer jukebox plays softly in one corner. A MILWAUKEE BUCKS game flickers silently from a TV monitor mounted above the bar. A solitary gray-haired STRANGER (60's) sits at the far corner of the bar nursing a beer.

The man from the street enters. This is JOHN (30's). He removes his ski cap, shakes off the snow and takes a seat at the bar railing. The BARTENDER approaches and pulls a draft without having to be asked.

BARTENDER

Hey Johnny. What's it like out there?

JOHN

Fucking Siberia.

The bartender chuckles, slides John his beer and returns to watching the game.

John takes a swig and then moves from the bar to a nearby booth. He settles in, removes some of his outerwear and pulls a couple paperbacks from his backpack: "1001 MOVIES YOU MUST SEE BEFORE YOU DIE," and "SCREENPLAY: THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCREENWRITING."

Unaware that the Stranger has been eying him closely the whole time, he opens the Screenwriting book and begins reading. And then, after a few seconds...

John glances up to find the man standing next to the booth holding his beer.

STRANGER  
Anyone sitting here?

John quickly scans the bar. Except for the Stranger, the bartender and himself, there isn't a soul in the place.

JOHN  
What?

STRANGER  
Anyone sitting...It was a joke. I mean is it okay if I sit here?

John looks at the Stranger incredulously.

JOHN  
Ah...sure, why not? Knock yourself out.

The Stranger takes a seat opposite John and immediately picks up the "1001 Movies" book. John continues to read the other one.

STRANGER  
How many of these have you seen, ya think?

JOHN  
How many what?

John glances up to see the Stranger holding up the book.

JOHN  
Oh I don't know. A bunch I guess. Got a long way to go though.

John continues reading and the Stranger begins paging through the "1001" book.

STRANGER  
I'll bet I've seen pretty near all of 'em.

John finally looks up.

JOHN  
(a bit testy)  
Do I know you?

STRANGER

Hmmm?

JOHN

Have we met before?

STRANGER

Nah, I don't think so. But you remind me of someone...someone I once knew.

JOHN

(under his breath)

Great.

STRANGER

So, you write screenplays?

JOHN

Sort of. I mean I try. But it's pointless.

STRANGER

Why is that?

JOHN

Are you kidding me? You gotta *know* someone. Someone in the *industry*.

STRANGER

Well, everyone is unknown...until they...ya know...aren't anymore.

JOHN

(sarcastically)

Wow, *that's* profound.

STRANGER

It's true isn't it?

JOHN

I suppose. But everyone is also *alive* until they aren't anymore, right? It still doesn't change the fact that I'm pissing into the wind here.

STRANGER

Your attitude isn't helping.

JOHN

It's called 'being realistic.' I mean, even if I did have some industry connection I still live in Wisconsin, for Christ's sake. And you sure as hell can't write for the movies from this godforsaken shithole!

STRANGER

What are you talking about? You're at the center of the entire universe. And you don't even know it!

JOHN

The center of the universe? What the fuck are you talking about?

STRANGER

*Wisconsin*, my friend. These Big Shot moviemakers may *work* in Hollywood, but they've been slipping references to Wisconsin into their movies forever. Hell, if you'd watched as many movies as I have over the years you'd think Wisconsin actually *was* the center of the goddamn universe.

(beat)

Remember "*LOVE, ACTUALLY?*"

JOHN

Sure. Fun movie...which takes place in *England*, as I recall.

STRANGER

Not *all* of it! Don't you remember that horny dipshit who goes to the U.S. to get laid? 'member where he goes?

John nods, begrudgingly conceding the point.

JOHN

Yeah, alright. He goes to Wisconsin...

STRANGER

That's right.

JOHN

...which is used as a punch line!

STRANGER

Sure, they're poking fun at Wisconsin. But then what happens? The imbecile actually *does* hook-up. And these "Wisconsin babes," as he calls them, are smokin' hot.

JOHN

Dumber than rocks, though.

STRANGER

(chuckling)

Yeah, but still.

JOHN

Yeah, okay. So what else you got?

STRANGER

Jesus, where to begin. Oh, how about that pile of crap "2012?"

JOHN

I kinda like 2012.

STRANGER

Yeah, sure. So do I. Guilty pleasure and all that. The point is that Wisconsin is all over that mess, Remember? Once the tremors start in L.A. this old lady screams something about moving back to Wisconsin. Then later after the shit *really* hits the fan, the Earth's poles reverse their magnetic fields and the South Pole ends up...

JOHN

In Wisconsin.

STRANGER

Dead *center* of the state! And at the very end of the thing Thandie Newton is reading out of that book John Cusack supposedly wrote and the last line says: "Somehow or another, we all have relatives in..."

JOHN

...Wisconsin.

STRANGER  
In Wisconsin. Exactly.

A song finishes on the jukebox, and the machine shuffles through the other discs to drop another one onto the turntable.

Beneath the MUSIC (ideally "CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'"), the conversation continues...

MONTAGE

The Stranger continues to make his case, with John listening and reacting throughout. SUPERIMPOSED over the montage is a cascade of movie titles (or perhaps movie posters) of the films being discussed: THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT, AMERICAN MOVIE, BRIDESMAIDS, A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN, DOGMA, STARMAN, etc.

END MONTAGE

STRANGER  
...and don't forget about "ANNIE HALL."  
Hell, even Woody Allen gets it!

JOHN  
That's right! Annie's from Wisconsin!

STRANGER  
Chippewa Falls, to be exact. And remember who else is from Chippewa Falls? Leo's character in "TITANIC!" *Titanic*, for Christ's sake!

JOHN  
Huh! I'll be damned. You're right!

STRANGER  
And that's just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak...

The Stranger finishes off his beer.

STRANGER (cont.)  
The stories are everywhere, kid.  
Even here. Hell, maybe *especially* here, right? Ya just gotta look for 'em. You can do it.

And he rises to leave.

JOHN  
Whoa, what's the rush? Look, I  
gotta pee. But don't go anywhere,  
okay?

After John leaves for the restroom, the Stranger rises and pays-up at the bar.

INT. REST ROOM – CONTINUOUS

John washes his hands and looks at himself in the mirror.

JOHN  
(quietly)  
Who *is* this guy?

Suddenly John's reflection morphs into that of the Stranger's and then back again. And OVER this...

STRANGER (V.O.)  
You remind me of someone...someone  
I once knew.

John bolts out of the rest room.

THE BAR – CONTINUOUS

John returns to find the booth empty, but then notices that the front door to the bar is slowly swinging shut as if someone has just left.

JOHN  
Hey, Wait up!

He races to the door and out into the night. But the Stranger is nowhere to be seen. There aren't even fresh footprints in the luxuriously sculpted snowdrifts.

John turns to reenter the bar but then sees that the storm has ended. It is utterly still and peaceful.

The urban grit has been buried beneath the pristine and sparkling new blanket of white. And, suddenly Milwaukee is beautiful beyond imagining. John takes it all in with eyes of wonder.



INT. JOHN'S APARTMENT — LATER THAT NIGHT

John pulls a bag of steaming popcorn out of a microwave, walks it over to his kitchen table, opens his laptop and logs on.

At first there is only a blinking cursor on the bright computer screen, but then the typing begins:

T-H-E N-E-X-U-S

A S-c-r-e-e-n-p-l-a-y b-y J...

He pauses, nibbles some of the popcorn, and again starts typing:

F-A-D-E I-N:

E-X-T. C-I-T-Y — N-I-G-H-T...

CLOSE ON JOHN

As he continues typing he smiles a bit, and OVER the MUTED CLICKING of the keyboard...

JOHN (V.O.)

The dead of winter: Wind HOWLING.  
Horizontally driven snow. A filthy  
frozen hellscape. A solitary MAN  
trudges through the snow, dressed in  
heavy layers and hunched against the  
elements. He comes to a tavern, marked  
only by a flickering BLATZ neon sign,  
and reaches for the door."

As John slowly writes, the scene DISOLVES to the visuals he describes: And, just as the "solitary MAN" reaches for the door we...

FADE OUT

THE END