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THE LAST ORCHARD

A Thesis

by

Caleb David Camacho

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2012

Major Subject: Creative Writing



# THE LAST ORCHARD

A Thesis  
by  
Caleb D. Camacho

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May 2012



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## ABSTRACT

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*The Last Orchard* is a screenplay about two rival groups of ten-year-olds in 1989 Pharr, Texas. Their elementary school conflicts create a neighborhood war within their mobile home park, coinciding with the entire park's wide eviction and land ownership crisis.

The story is written with a *mythic fiction* approach – a method I learned through Carl Jung's and Joseph Campbell's works on archetypes, mythology, and the hero's journey; it is a practical tool for storytelling. *The Last Orchard* is based on Homer's *Iliad*: the Trojan War, its heroes, and gods.

Some plays and numerous films have their mythic counterparts, along with those that have employed mythic fiction in the same manner that I have for my script. These films include: *Pygmalion* (1938) and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000).





## DEDICATION

House number 403 on "Any Way" Street in Citrus Bay Mobile Home Park in Pharr, Texas has been home to me since 1986. Though I would come and go being away at college in California, New York City, and Europe from 1997 through 2005, this place remained a refuge for my creative writing from 2005 till 2012 – especially throughout my years as a UTPA graduate student.

*The Last Orchard* is based on my childhood memories growing up in Citrus Bay, and so, I dedicate this fictitious project to Citrus Bay Mobile Home Park. May its narrow streets, cul-de-sacs, lakes, vacant lots, grassy alleys, and funny street names continue to provide a foundation for much exploration, imagination, and heroic dreams to all its children.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my parents, Hugo and Martha Camacho, who have supported me for far too long in my creativity and pursuit of becoming a writer - someday. I see now how that *someday* occurred several years (perhaps two decades) ago, but it took me this long to realize it.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Pharr Memorial Library for allowing me to have a partial reading of the screenplay, *The Last Orchard*, on Thursday, December 1, 2011. I am thankful for a good public turnout, along with the feedback of family, friends, and my thesis committee. I am also very grateful for the readers of my script: Yvonne Rodriguez, Vanessa Chapa, Marisela Valle, Alex Garcia, Thomas De La Cruz, Victor Gutierrez, Blake Hall, Jesse Garza, and Richard Edmonson.

I am forever indebted to my undergraduate, creative writing professor, Dr. Laura Shamas, from Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. Thank you for introducing me to the power and importance of myths.

Across the continent are two other professors who helped shape my dramatic creativity, as well. Thank you, Dr. Michael Dinwiddie and Dr. Jill Claster from NYU for helping my talent grow with your lessons and mentorship that have guided me to *this* very day.

And finally, I thank you, Dr. Philip Zwerling, Dr. David Carren, and Dr. Brian Warren from UTPA for your help and guidance in seeing me through the completion of this thesis and screenplay.



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## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

The plots, characters, narrative elements, and themes found in Greek or Roman mythology create a suitable design for modern-day screenwriting. This approach is called *mythic fiction* – as it was labeled in an undergraduate course I took at Pepperdine University. The method can fit most creative writing genres. The idea originates in Jungian philosophy and is further guided by Joseph Campbell's mythic, heroic template in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. In one of his essays from *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Jung probes the psychological origin and unconscious drive that fuels art, and he discovers the "secret of creativity" (315). It is in the *archetype*.

In the mythic fiction course that I took as an undergraduate, our objective was to select an ancient, classic myth, read it, learn it, and *update* its archetypes to a short story set in modern times. We were taught to deliberately steal the plot, themes, and characters, reinterpret them, rename them (if needed), and utilize them in a modern rendition as directly as possible or as subtly as needed. One would immediately think that this is adaptation, but it is not. Greek and Roman mythology have provided some of the most accessible, utilized material and archetypes within the western traditions and works of poetry, drama, prose, painting, sculpture, and film. The use of myth and archetypes is not adaptation. Nor is it to see how they are reproduced, but rather, to simply see that a *good*, impacting, and lasting story is made (Frauenfelder 210).

For the creative writer, Jung deduces that his art has its source "in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images [become] the common heritage of mankind"



(319). This "sphere" is the *collective unconscious*, and the *primordial* images are archetypes – themes, forces, ideals, characters, narrative elements, and stories that have pervaded the human psyche for time immemorial. The mythic fiction writer's job is to translate these archetypes "into the language of the present" (321), and in my case, it is through the screenplay.

Moreover, "[t]he primordial image, or archetype, is a figure – be it a daemon [or spirit], a human being, or a process – that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure" (Jung 319). This figure facilitates the screenwriter's task in storytelling. Archetypes derive from the "psychic residua" of typical occurrences that project myth, its stories, and characters, and as these moments occur in all humanity, they propose the same steps, release the same energy, and create the same powerful relationships throughout humankind (319). "The individual man," Jung continues, "cannot use his own powers to the full unless he is aided by one of those collective representations we call ideals [or archetypes]" (319), which plant the seeds for my creative work, and Campbell's mythological template provides a path.

Mythic fiction can utilize the shortest of Greek or Roman tales, but the epic works are appropriately fitting for film since "movies are the modern equivalent of one of the world's oldest art forms, the oral epic" (Sowa). They are portable art forms of public spectacle that are improvised (in their production and filming) just as the oral epic poets did with their works from town to town over hundreds of years and generations, "[b]ut the most important traditional elements [from films] are the mythic themes" or archetypes (Sowa). Thus, my artistic aim is to write a screenplay based on and inspired by the Trojan War as told in Homer's *Iliad*. This is what you will find in *The Last Orchard*, which is in itself based on a first-draft novel of the same name I completed in 2003.

According to Frauentfelder, "[t]he method [of mythic fiction is]... to recognize that good stories have a profound effect on all cultures and that comparison of similar stories from different cultures can illuminate both sides in ways otherwise impossible" (210). These comparisons often unearth striking parallels, as Campbell explains throughout his arguments on mythology: "...myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation... Jung and [his] followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times..." (3-4). The following will explain the way I utilized Homer's epic work for my purposes.

Throughout the drafting of my script, I made the following choices. I reduced the number of characters or consolidated them and reorganized the events of my novel and Homer's war to fit to the script's mobile home park *war* and eviction motif in one summer between two rival groups of ten-year-olds (except for Hector who is 12 years old). Just as the Trojan War is at its peak in its tenth year of fighting, so too are these children in their *tenth* year of their lives, battling for similar things at stake as the Greeks are with the Trojans. Love, the home, coveted land, vengeance, and justice encapsulate the children's objectives throughout their mobile home park rivalry over the span of about 3 months – also the approximate time length of the events narrated in Homer's *Iliad*.

At the beginning of Homer's epic poem, we read the vast listing and fantastic descriptions of warriors, along with a taste of Homer's aesthetic for war, his great theme and argument:

On the armies came  
as if the whole earth were devoured by wildfire, yes,  
and the ground thundered under them, deep as it does  
for Zeus who loves the lightning...

armies trampling, sweeping through the [Trojan] plain at blazing speed.

(II.887-894)

If mythic fiction calls for an effective use of archetypes, this passage brings enough material to imitate in the script's opening when the Zappers charge forward at the unsuspecting Haters across a vacant, demolished lot. This scene, however, is a glimpse of the climax, a flash forward of what is to come, which is similar to epic poetry's convention of beginning in the middle of things, *in medias res*, taking the reader right into the story's central problem. In like manner, *Orchard's* opening scene in the near future establishes the story's crux: the fierce rivalry between these two opposing gangs of boys.

Mythic fiction in films calls for characters to possess the qualities of their archetypal counterparts. The characterizations of Homer's war heroes were specifically assigned to the children of *The Last Orchard*. *The Iliad's* main character is the wrathful Greek *Achilles*, and in *Orchard*, I make him into the angry, prideful ten-year-old Zaqueo. *Patroclus*, the admired best friend of Achilles, becomes the sturdy and faithful Peter. The crafty, talented *Odysseus* is Angelo. *Hector*, prince of Troy, remains Hector in Pharr, Texas, and his younger brother, *Paris-Alexander*, is the little brother, Alex, in my story. Tony is a fusion of several Trojan soldiers. Other numerous, important soldiers became part of my story drafting, like *Agamemnon*, *Ajax*, and *Menelaus*, along with the Trojan *Aeneas*, but there were far too many to apply to my script.

The presence of my character, Elena, who is, of course, *Helen* from the Trojan War is a major facet I incorporated into *The Last Orchard*. The face of the legendary Helen, Christopher Marlowe wrote, "launched a thousand ships," or whose yearbook picture in *Orchard*, "could scare a thousand cockroaches." Homer hardly incorporates a female presence into his epic poem, and he doesn't need to. His focus is on war and all that comes with it, like pride, loyalty,

sacrifice, and fickle, trifling matters that escalate into overloaded, bombastic sequences of events; ancient warriors quarrel over war-prizes (their female captives); they break truces easily; they cower; and they overestimate their strengths and talent for battle. Could there be any more obvious resemblances or parallels to boyhood, as these ancient heroes have to offer?

*The Iliad* provides a treasure trove of adaptable personalities, usable archetypes, and transferable settings for *The Last Orchard*. The famed city of Ilium is another name for "Troy," hence, the title of the epic poem. Ilium, or Troy, thus becomes a mobile home park in my story. Troy's *King Priam*, who reigns over the city of Troy, becomes *Orchard's* Ram Riojas, father of Hector and Alex and righteous owner of this realm and coveted piece of land. What began with the mythic rapture of Helen in ancient poetry is similar to the love triangle between Elena and Zaq and Hector. In the end, however, love's petty details tend to disappear when the war escalates and transforms into showcases of pride, brave acts, vengeance, immature reasoning, and a quest to justify the misplaced ownership of several acres of land that were once an orchard.

Helen, however, is the cause of Homer's war – initially. Though he alludes to her abduction, Homer does not detail Helen's back-story. We know it better through other sources, like in Euripides' play, *The Women of Troy*, and through the Roman text, *The Library of Apollodorus*, from the 1st or 2nd century, AD. The events are as follows: Helen is already married to the Greek, Spartan king, Menelaus, but Paris-Alexander (or just Paris) was determined to claim Helen as his own. She was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the world, and Aphrodite had promised her to Paris (when Paris favored Aphrodite over Hera and Athena in a debate over which of the three goddesses was the fairest and most beautiful). Thus, Paris takes his divine-ordained possession of Helen. However, "[w]hen Menelaus heard of the

abduction, he went to Agamemnon in Mycenae, and asked him to assemble a force to attack Troy and to levy troops in Greece" (Apollodorus II.13.3).

At the outset, I followed this in the plotting of my script. Alex was doing the "abducting" and stealing of Elena, and Hector and Zaq were held back from the script's inciting incident, the catalyst of jealousy. For a screenplay, this was quickly pushing the main characters off-course. A script must reveal characterization with action in a swift, concise, and straightforward manner, especially through the protagonist and antagonist who must be at the central fray and heart of the conflict from beginning to end. Zaq and Hector had to step forward, and this was an issue discussed during a partial reading of the script several months ago. Consequently, I swapped Alex's role with Hector's so that Hector would be the one in love with Elena, which, in turn, sparks the jealousy we need from Zaq to get this "epic war" launched. Zaq primarily hopes to win her back by being the best at sports and games – all of which are specific elements akin to Greek pastimes, festivals, or the honoring of fallen war mates, as the Greek soldiers do for Patroclus's death (Homer, *The Iliad* XXIII).

In his brief essay, "Popular Culture and Classical Mythology," Frauenfelder explains how elements in *The Iliad* can smoothly connect with our concept of professional sports or quite possibly, any film on a sports story. Both concern rival groups attempting to defeat an opposing team. In *The Iliad*, we have two closely-knit armies fighting, dueling, and often participating in games and sports when not consumed by battle. I combined all of these ingredients in my mythic fiction approach of *Orchard* through the anticipation of Field Day at the school year's end. It also serves as Zaq's motivation to get Elena to like him again. His competitive drive increases, and doing so gets his closest friends more involved in the looming conflict away from the grassy plains of soccer balls and footballs. Zaq will take and use his friends' loyalty and actions in order

to get the girl. Hector is actually unperturbed about all this, as long as Zaq and his team simply let him be and do as he wants – which is to get the mobile home park back to the rightful owner, his dad, Ram Riojas. Hector could really care less if Elena falls for him or not, but Zaq does not see this and is willing to start a fight.

Throughout *The Iliad*, we find "long sections and even whole books to detailed and often gruesome descriptions of the heroes' exploits to win everlasting glory... [and throughout other mythological stories] the hero is also adept at slaying monsters... [and] often rescues beautiful maidens" (Winkler 516). In *Orchard*, this is manifested through the various battles and in Zaq's continuous imaginative scenes, and vivid dream sequences. These begin when Zaq contemplates and pines for Elena at the beach. Zaq mopes and converses with the bus drivers, when all of a sudden, we see a castle, a lake, some mountains, and a chimera flying above a tower. This, along with the other visions, are ways for Zaq to cope with his fear of losing and fighting for Elena. She becomes part of a fantasy story imbedded in visions of Greek mythology and Zaq's reading of a child's picture book of *The Iliad*. In essence, Elena is his inspiration to fight courageously, show off acts of valor, and win her heart by beating anyone who opposes or stands in the way – even if it means war.

Nonetheless, Elena also serves as Zaq's female guide and muse-like force, as females tend to do throughout mythology: "[a]las, where is the guide... Ariadne, to supply the simple clue that will give us courage to face the Minotaur, and the means to find our way to freedom...?" (Campbell 23). In this Greek myth, Ariadne is the love interest of the revered Theseus, and she gives him a ball of string to roll through the darkness of the Cretan labyrinth in order that he find his way out after fulfilling his mission of slaying the man-eating minotaur. In my script, Elena's presence disappears from the end of the school year up until she is able to send her cousins to

help Zaq fight Hector's gang. Help from the outside, a coincidental event, is similar to the way heroes throughout stories receive supernatural aid or immediate mediation from the gods.

Campbell further writes

The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into [the adventurous battle or conflict]... The hero may have to be brought back ...by assistance from without.

That is to say, the world may have to come and get him. (97; 207)

One mysterious form of aid that the Zappers receive is through a quiet, disfigured, elderly neighbor named Mr. Terrence, an ironsmith and carpenter. Since he lives next to the lake, he is often able to overhear the conversations between Zaq and Peter, but his presence and calm demeanor usually frighten them; he constantly works at his trade in his front yard. At the end of the story, as if by magic or such supernatural aid, as Campbell describes, Mr. Terrence silently provides uniquely-wrought shields for each of the three main Zappers: a shield with a "Thundercat" for Zaq; a knightly shield of faith for Peter; and a scientifically-based shield for Angelo. The elated boys take these gifts without question just before their final battle takes place.

Originally, I was unable to figure a way to fit this into the script, but it was vital for *Orchard's* warrior children to be rewarded and prepared like the classic, mythic heroes when it came to weaponry. "In accordance with his warrior-like nature," as Winkler notes, "the hero's basic skill is with weapons... Heracles, Achilles, and Aeneas all receive shields forged by [the god] Hephaestus," (519-520). Hephaestus is a fiery god and physically ugly, but Homer elevates his status, establishing him as the architect of the gods' home on Mount Olympus. He also creates shields and swords out of the terrestrial, volcanic sources he is known for handling, and

in my story, he is simply an ironsmith and carpenter. In the *Iliad*, we find a great deal dedicated to the shield that Hephaestus creates for Achilles: "blazoning well-wrought emblems all across its surface/... he made Achilles a breastplate brighter than gleaming fire (Homer XVIII.558-561; 711). With that, Achilles is prepared to work his famous fury against Hector, and in the same way, the Zappers are set for the climactic battle. Placing Hephaestus into the script as Mr. Terrence is similar to the way in which I utilized other gods, who are personified as school teachers.

In *The Iliad*, various gods step in and out of the battle, favoring different sides, saving a warrior here and there, and sometimes mingling where they are not supposed to. Throughout Greek mythology, the gods are known for their humanlike qualities, rambunctious escapades, occasional, terrifying transformations, lustful trysts, violent duels, vows, and broken promises. They possess qualities that are easily transferable to dramatic situations. I decided to apply such divinities for the adult world in *Orchard*. Just in the way in which many Trojan and Greek characters were omitted for my script, so too were many of the gods I had originally included as teacher/school faculty personifications in the drafting. Some of those gods excluded are Apollo, Athena, Hermes, and Ares. Mythic fiction requires one to make such choices, especially through the concise, economizing of story that a screenplay demands. A two-hour film must focus on one central question and cater to four to six major voices.

The almighty, reigning Zeus becomes Principal Zamora in *Orchard*. Though lechery is often ascribed to Zeus, he is the thunderbolt-bearing, storm-brewing, supreme ruler of Mount Olympus – a role that can be difficult to maintain for all eternity. Our Principal Zamora is similar; he is a man so caught up in rules and regulations, that he can't truly run his own universe, and his god-like staff does not always get along. They are also easily caught up with



their own willful desires, wishes, and behaviors to maintain or please their students, just as the Olympian gods do when they end up choosing sides between the Achaeans (Greeks) and Trojans.

The often-jealous wife of Zeus, Hera, becomes Mrs. Zamora. She is always at odds with Ms. Road, who is the personification of Aphrodite, goddess of love *and* supporter of the Trojan cause – in my case, the main supporter of her "Trojan" students and team, the Haters, who are undoubtedly in constant opposition with Mrs. Zamora's "Achaean/Greek" team, the Zappers. The god of the sea, Poseidon, is represented through Coach Ponce. Poseidon is a brother of Zeus and usually at odds with Zeus's authority – as is Coach Ponce, always disagreeing with his boss's way of handling things when it comes to the children who are simply *playing* and having innocent fun. Homer's Poseidon helps both Trojans and Greeks (eventually, siding with the Greek cause), but this is why I decided to make Coach Ponce a neutral force between the Zappers and the Haters, especially when their conflict explodes in a fierce fight on the last day of school.

The god of the underworld and also a brother of Zeus is Hades. In *Orchard*, he is loosely characterized as Lucy, the Rottweiler. It is important to note that Hades was never the equivalent of Death, who was another persona. Zeus rules all but is really only in charge of the skies and clouds; Poseidon has the ocean (and some parts of the earth); and Hades has the underworld, where the dead souls reside. It is also not the equivalent of *Hell*, though some individuals are justly punished for very unique and terrible crimes – usually an abominable offence against a god. All of this was complex to translate to *The Last Orchard*, but I wanted to personify palpable fear and threatening death. I found no better way to represent this for these children than through that one neighborhood dog that is vicious, angry and unleashed into a child's neighborhood world and safety net, which completely alters their course, decision-making, and strategies. Thus, a

blend of Hades and Death becomes the character of the Rottweiler, Lucy; her physical aspects, furthermore, actually resemble the three-headed Cerberus more than anything, which is a vicious, Rottweiler-type guardian of one of the underworld gates.

The gods are often not the best role models. The Greek and Trojan soldiers do not necessarily fear them, but they do not wish to anger them either. Early on in *The Iliad*, a truce is made between the two armies when Paris-Alexander and Menelaus fight alone; the winner would claim Helen, and the fighting would cease. The gods, especially Zeus, are fond of this idea, but Zeus is easily manipulated in the same way that Principal Zamora is in *Orchard*. At first, he has Zaq and Hector make a truce, and he feels that this would stop all their squabbles and brawls. The Principal then gives in to a request he should *not* have approved. As is customary in mythology, sacrifices are made to please the gods; these gifts are given to them. We see this in Book II of *The Iliad* when Agamemnon appeases Zeus by sacrificing a young ox to him:

"Zeus, Zeus, [Agamemnon pleads]...

don't let the sun go down or the night descend on us!

Not till I hurl the smoke-black halls of [Troy] headlong –

torch his gates to blazing rubble – rip the tunic of Hector

and slash his heroic chest to ribbons with my bronze –" (II.478-494)

I followed a similar request in the drafting – a Zapper asks for help to beat the opposing Haters, but in bringing Zaq and Hector up front into the script, I made the "sacrifice" come from Hector instead. Thereafter, Zaq nabs it to make it his own gift so as to please his principal and persuade him to allow teams for Field Day. This, of course, backfires on the principal and Zaq's conscience when all are punished after fighting in the last moments of the school year.

One of the most important scenes from the Trojan War that I highly anticipated using in my mythic fiction approach was the death of Patroclus. In *The Iliad*, Patroclus asks for and wears Achilles' armor during a shoreline mission, so as to scare off the Trojans. The mission momentarily works when the enemy foolishly believe him to be Achilles, but Patroclus desires to help the Greeks advance in the conflict. He chases and kills several Trojans in the direction of the city, and the angered god, Apollo (who is on the Trojan side), intervenes and strikes Patroclus, knocking his helmet off. All can then see that it is not really Achilles, so Hector takes his chance, thrusting a spear into Patroclus, killing him quickly (Homer XVI).

In the script, Peter not only wishes to help the Zappers win a battle against the Haters but also pretends to be Zaq (like Patroclus does by wearing Achilles' armor) to prove to himself and the villains that he isn't that weak, frail, "church boy." His valorous, risky act is foiled quickly, though, when Zaq and Angelo cannot get to him on time; Hector punches Peter repeatedly and could have severely injured him or killed him had it not been for the house going up in flames from the firecrackers Zaq and Angelo toss.

Other vital components I borrowed from *The Iliad* are scenes in which the warriors spy at night, plan tactics, and bond. By this point in the story, it may be obvious how strongly *The Iliad* influences the entire script. Both the Zappers and the Greeks have similar issues at stake, and though Achilles reenters the war with bloodthirsty fury after the death of Patroclus, *Orchard's* Zaq has been a part of it all along – as a means to have the protagonist drive the story from beginning to end.

*The Iliad* ends with the death of Hector, and Priam asks for his son's body from Achilles. We learn of the Trojan Horse through other mythological sources, like *Apollodorus* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. This was something I could not leave out of the story. If the Greeks win the battle by

hiding inside a wooden horse that the Trojans take for as a gift, then my Zappers were to win the war by hiding inside *something*. The ice cream van was perfect, and they spill out into the heart of "Troy," the center of the mobile home park and the nucleus and gathering of all of the story's conflicts: residents protesting their eviction; elderly retirees basking in a party to celebrate their new homes; and the Haters and Zappers chasing, fighting, and injuring each other with no means to an end.

Zaq has led the Zappers through a long, drawn-out, communal journey, which "serves as [a] catalyst for the film's heroic theme, just as [the] hero's journey is a common motif in both classical and later mythology" (Winkler 524). In Joseph Campbell's text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, we learn that many religious and mythological stories throughout cultures, time periods, and geographical locations all share common elements and archetypes of the hero's journey and his or her quest. The hero is often called on an adventure, given practical (or magical) tools, helped by a mentor, and led through thresholds into new worlds. He learns new skills, confront new enemies, and makes allies. After a climactic battle, the hero experiences a death and resurrection and thereafter earns or is able to possess a gift, an elixir, he/she will give to help the new or old world. There are many ways at interpreting or applying Campbell's hero into new, mythic fiction stories, but that is because "[t]he outlines of myths and tales are subject to damage and obscuration... Imported materials are revised to fit local landscape, custom, or belief... Furthermore, in the innumerable retellings of a traditional story, accidental or intentional dislocations are inevitable" (246). *The Last Orchard* is the product of such "intentional dislocations," especially when it is far removed from its original source, an ancient, epic poem.

In *Orchard*, Zaq is the primary hero, but the three boys are ultimately a collective hero, who save Hector from drowning at the end, a feat that Hector never forgets for the rest of his life;

however, the heroes have also indirectly saved Hector's family's land by stopping the invasive, illegal actions of the perpetrator, the villainous under-current of the story. This has long-term, positive effects on the fate of the characters, their families, and pieces of land. Campbell explains how "[the cosmic, heroic] cycle is now to be carried forward, therefore, not by the gods, who have become invisible [to later generations], but by the heroes... through whom the world destiny is realized" (315). Without them knowing it, The Zappers essentially become cultural heroes by helping preserve one of the last citrus orchards in south Texas – a world that, in the Zappers' future, is forlorn of accessible paradise and naturally-grown fruits. For Hector, the Zappers have helped prevent demise on the family and the citrus industry. The heritage of Hector's family has also continued to exist in their rightful land, and Hector knows the Zappers earn recognition.

He honors them and immortalizes the Zappers through their statue, which is similar to what we normally see throughout European or American or Latin-American cities – a statue of a local hero who helped preserve or establish something for the area's proud people. These types of heroes "are the culture heroes, the city founders," as Campbell explains (316). Such founding heroes are present throughout countless myths, stories, histories, and religions. One need not to look far to see where such pioneers have made their mark, such as those who end up naming their city after their surname (like Pharr or Mcallen, Texas). In classical myth these founders include kings, women, demi-gods, and heroes, like Aeneas – founder of the Latin peoples of Rome after his exile from the defeated Troy – or Brutus, colonizer of Britain and bearer of the family line leading to King Arthur, all of whom derive from the noble, exiled Trojan War leaders (or so we are told through the anonymous medieval author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

Elixirs, gifts, and treasures are at every angle at the end of the story. Third Base is preserved inside a greenhouse-like structure, along with the original shields, Zaq's map, Elena's

note, and the children's toys – all relics and reminders of a period long-gone. However, one treasure does not yet exist: the actual, penned story of the war for the last orchard. This is why Hector has asked Zaq to step in, so that he can write it down since Hector admits lacking such skill and talent. As Hector converses with Zaq about this potential writing project, Hector pulls a copy of *The Iliad* off a shelf, alluding to having lived "some epic war over love, anger, pride, stupid gods, and land." I wanted to connect this scene with the actual tradition of *The Iliad*, which was a story that was told and retold, recited repeatedly and passed through and recycled over many generations before finally finding itself permanently on paper.

In the same light, *Orchard's* Hector has also been telling and retelling an epic war story – *their* childhood war, but it has never been written down. Naturally, retellings will alter things, and "totally fictitious heroes take over with adventures only loosely grounded in any accurate historical situation" (Winkler 517). In ancient Greece, the epic poems were wholly recited by rhapsodes, the equivalent of medieval bards. These grand events must have been fantastic productions since music, food, and celebration were often the cause for such epic retellings, just as music, food, and celebration form the denouement in the future world of *Orchard*. Hector needs his rhapsode, or rather, his Homer, to make this childhood war story official since he knows he cannot write it, and our Zaq takes on the challenge to make a text out of their childhood war surrounding the summer of 1989. In a way, Zaq will write a fictitious rendering based on a "legendary" childhood war just as I have put together a script inspired by a legendary war.

As a mythic fiction screenwriter, myth works like a secret weapon. A plethora of myths exist for the taking; it saves the writer from *getting stuck*. One need only to look at almost any myth and extract its exemplary attributes and essence, and for an aspiring screenwriter of the

early 21st century, the concept of modern myth-making and use of archetypes couldn't be more timely, especially now that "films [have] signified a new tendency toward the mythic and the symbolic that was just beginning to surface into the mainstream" since the late 70s and early 80s (Ebert 747). Ebert explains how film "has been primarily realist in its aesthetic – at least until the last three or four decades of the twentieth century," but this was only because of the way *Realism* had affected 20th century arts in much the same way that Romanticism affected the arts of the 19th century. If the movement of Realism is coming to a close, then envisioning a higher, more meaningful, and lasting model takes over, which is where mythology steps in. Through mythic fiction, I aim to rise above the decline of art as perceived through *Realism*. "Mythologically inspired works of art... have *never* been rendered realistically, for myth is the visionary modality par excellence, and most of the history of art in civilization has been composed in the symbolic mode," which is why film fused with archetypes help to elevate it above the "realist carapace" (748). We have seen the way mythic fiction works through *The Iliad* and *The Last Orchard*, but I will now discuss the tradition of mythic fiction in other films.

Greek mythology is vast, and characters' stories can differ from text to text. Nonetheless, Greek mythology begins with the origins of the world, and we find this in Hesiod's *Theogony*; he is a contemporary of Homer. The story of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus is labeled as a "Succession Myth, one of mankind's oldest myths... [it] covers three generations -- grandfather, father, and son" (Sowa). Kronos ousts Ouranos by cutting off his father's genitals, and Zeus ousts Kronos – or rather, fools him when Kronos swallows his children whole. Kronos does this to prevent one of his children from taking over. Zeus later saves his siblings, who become the majority of the gods we know of as the Olympians. This, according to Sowa, is the principle myth of *The Godfather*, the Oscar-winning film of a son's inheritance and heritage of a crime-and-

punishment-plagued Mafia family. Sowa explains this parallel: "Like Zeus, *The Godfather's*, Michael Corleone is a youngest son, who inherits his aging father's position as head of an organized crime family," and just as Zeus is hidden from his father, so to is Michael – taking refuge in Sicily, but he is soon discovered. His two brothers, one dead, and the other incapable of leading, leave Michael as the only option left "to head the family" (Sowa).

Within the same vein of myth-to-film equivalents, one can see the following parallels. The myth of Hercules can be compared to *Predator* (1987); *Titanic* (1997) is the story of "Ariadne, or other broken romance" myths; *What Dreams May Come* (1998) is the myth of Orpheus (Frauenfelder 211). The story of myth's greatest musician, Orpheus, is one of the most inspirational and beautiful myths. He is a devastated hero forlorn of his lover, Eurydice; she dies from a snake bite shortly after marrying him. Orpheus then attempts to recover her in the underworld, using his miraculous, musical talent (with his lyre) as a means to please Hades, Cerberus, and other underworld personalities, and though Hades grants his wish of giving Eurydice back to him, Orpheus looks back at her in their ascent from the underworld. This was the one thing he was instructed *not* to do, and he loses her forever. The myth of Orpheus, a popular subject with many of the famous English poets and French operas and plays (Zimmerman), is perfectly fitting for the guise of mythic fiction, as it does with *What Dreams May Come* (1998). In this story, a husband dies in a wreck, and from heaven, he learns of his wife's suicide. However, she has been condemned to hell, and the husband descends and attempts to retrieve her.

Other films along the same lines of visits to the underworld include *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004). This also shows an obvious comparison to Hades and his aggressive abduction of Persephone. In the myth, she is tricked and condemned to live a third of her year with him after



taking a seed from a pomegranate he offers. Persephone is the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and springtime growth, and though Hades allows Persephone to return to her mother, Persephone must return to live in the underworld every year for four months. During that time, Demeter mourns and withholds fruits and spring from mankind, which for the Greeks bring on the season of winter ("Hymn to Demeter"). Hades insists on Persephone's yearly visits, making her the official queen of dead.

The Phantom is thus the personification of Hades. When he urgently demands that the opera house reserve one of its boxes for him, he vows that terrible things will ensue, and they quickly do when he lets a chandelier fall into the audience. The Phantom lives in a fantastic, underground, and cavernous place below the opera house, and it is here where he brings his enchanted, beloved, Christine, the girl he aids with her angelic singing. The Phantom's threats (on the opera house) and aggressive nature increase if Christine does not refuse to live with him forever until Raoul, her heroic lover, comes to her rescue, like Orpheus does for Eurydice.

As we have seen, films can be understood through their mythic counterpart, but all of this is seen in light of these film's post-production and analysis. Though the parallels are easy to find, it is important to note that such filmmakers may not have consciously used archetypes and myths in the same way I have, but what I have done through mythic fiction is comparable to some of the achievements in stage drama, like that of the Elizabethans. Many different sources, like historical texts, older plays, and Greek and Roman works influenced several of Shakespeare's plays, and one can argue that *Hamlet's* genesis is within one particular Greek myth. Hamlet, as a character, bears some of the components of Sophocles's Oedipus, but these connections are tenuous. Hamlet does not desire to kill his father and marry his mother like the tragic Oedipus; instead, he wishes to avenge his uncle, Claudius, for the murder of Hamlet's father. Hamlet does

accost his mother, Gertrude, in an angry, aggressive, almost sexual manner at the end of Act III, which can be analyzed to be like the Oedipal archetype of a son's desire to oust his father and wed his mother, but Hamlet is better linked with the myth of Orestes in Aeschylus's trilogy, *The Oresteia*.

Orestes is the son of the great, Greek general, Agamemnon, but Agamemnon had committed a serious offence on his way to the Trojan War. He sacrificed his own daughter, Iphigenia, to appease Artemis and the wind gods in order to get to Troy safely. Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, and her cousin-lover, Aegisthus, avenge Iphigenia's sacrifice and murder Agamemnon when he returns from the war. Orestes retaliates by killing *them* – his own mother and cousin-uncle, Aegisthus, but madness overtakes him, literally and figuratively. The "Furies," which are frightening, female spirits from the netherworlds, pursue Orestes for the matricide and sin. However, after taken to trial at Athens, Orestes is acquitted.

Though rage consume his interactions with his mother, Hamlet does not kill her. Hamlet *does* kill his uncle just as Orestes does. At first, Hamlet only wishes to extract – through trickery and play – Claudius's confession of having murdered King Hamlet in an orchard by pouring poison into his ear, but when Gertrude dies from accidentally drinking a poisoned cup meant for Hamlet, he (Hamlet) stabs Claudius and forces the rest of the poisoned drink down his throat. Hamlet thereafter dies from his wounds from the poisoned sword and duel with Laertes (Shakespeare). *Hamlet* strongly rings with similar archetypes from *The Oresteia*, qualifying it under the mythic fiction approach, and yet, another myth that could have inspired Shakespeare is that of *Pyramus and Thisbe* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

It is a tale of two young, beautiful, near-Eastern/Babylonian lovers – both forbidden by their parents to marry each other. The pair, of course, continue forth with their secretive, *star-*

*crossed* meetings and trysts under a mulberry tree but end up dead through the coincidental, despairing, suicidal errors of one thinking the other is dead from a lioness's attack (Ovid 113-116). Gregory, editor of Ovid's work, is "inclined to believe that Shakespeare... [used] Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe in *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*" (xxiv). The latter also concerns parents conflicting with their children's betrothal wishes; as in *Hamlet*, *Midsummer* also shows a play within the play, and here, it is Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe.

It is important to note that mythic fiction does not denote film remakes or adaptations but rather, wholly original works inspired by or based on myths and their archetypes just as I have with *The Iliad*, as Shakespeare would have with *Orestes* and *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and as George Bernard Shaw does with Ovid's myth of Pygmalion for his 1938 film, *Pygmalion*. Shaw wrote the screenplay based on his own play by the same name.

In this film, the archetype concerns "that of the artist who falls in love with a work of his own creation" (Gregory in *Metamorphoses* 272). In the myth, Pygmalion is a sculptor who is sad and upset from his experiences with women, so he vows to live alone; he then creates a sculpture of a woman so beautiful and human-like that he begins to wonder if it is alive. He brings her small gifts: birds, semi-precious stones, and flowers. He even dresses her in regal attire until one day, he prays for Venus (Aphrodite) to bring him a wife as beautiful as his creation. Sure enough, the sculpture comes to life. They have an amorous, passionate encounter and wed with blessings brought down from Venus (Ovid 281-282).

In Shaw's film, a woman is *created* as well but not in the literal sense like in the myth; instead, it is a woman's (Eliza's) rise from the lower class through her transformation of character and speech. It all begins with a linguist professor, Henry Higgins, and his fascination with the

poverty-stricken, flower-selling Eliza and her cockney accent, which was culturally looked down upon as the dialect of the lower classes in London. Higgins promises to help change her dialect, but on the side, he also bets with his friend that he can literally pass her off as a princess. Eliza is anxious and hesitant but willing to cooperate.

Ovid's Pygmalion works with art materials, and Shaw's Higgins works with scientific instruments that study sound, the ear, phonetics, and language. Ovid's Pygmalion offers little gifts to his wondrous statue, and Professor Higgins gives Eliza lavish dresses, jewelry, and a ring. He truly does make her into a princess, and at a reception, many guests conclude that she must be one. This proves Higgins' experiment true. Higgins creates something out of chaos, out of nothing, out of a woman who will never amount to anything in this world. Eliza, however, retaliates at his insensitivity and way of objectifying her – of using her for his experiment. She feels lost and betrayed and has nowhere to go, for she cannot return to selling flowers on the streets. Eliza runs off declaring she can be her own woman, and Higgins is determined he can live alone and that he never needed her in the first place (like Pygmalion's vow to live without women). He was able to change this girl, *but* he ends up falling for her.

Ovid's myth focuses on an artist not being able to love to falling *deeply* in love, and Shaw's film parallels that. In the end, we see that Higgins does truly desire her. His heart aches for her when he listens to her old cockney-accented voice on his scientific instruments and just then, Eliza returns to him, leaving viewers satisfied that this stubborn, rude professor found love just as the dissatisfied sculptor did in Ovid's myth.

The application of mythic fiction must be a conscious decision in the creation process, and Shaw's film *Pygmalion* opens with the following:

Pygmalion was a mythological character who dabbled in sculpture. He made a statue of his ideal women – Galatea. It was so beautiful that he prayed the gods to give it life. His wish was granted. Bernard Shaw in his famous play gives a modern interpretation of this *theme*. (italics mine)

Not too many films will admit at their use of themes or archetypes. Shaw may have done this to better situate the audience's expectations, especially if they had been familiar with his earlier, staged play of *Pygmalion*, which ends differently. At the end of the play, the relationship between Eliza and Higgins remains ambiguous, and we never know if she will return to him. However, Shaw's intention is clear for the film. He brings the two into a loving companionship and creates a satisfying closure to the film. Shaw employs myth in a modern translation, explains this to the audience, and the archetypes permeate through the fictitious work, meaning the love between the two main characters must match that of the myth's plot.

Though I do not utilize such a direct explication of how I used *The Iliad* in my script, there are several allusions and references to *The Iliad* and Greek mythology throughout *The Last Orchard*. These occur throughout Zaq's imagination, his reading of a children's version of *The Iliad*, and the classroom's wall decorations. However, some readers (or viewers) of *The Last Orchard* may feel that this story strongly resembles other films on childhood, neighborhood rivalries, loss of innocence, and wars between boys. Such films of this kind include: *The Red Balloon* (1956); *The War of the Buttons* (1962 and 1994); *The Lord of the Flies* (1963 and 1990); *The Outsiders* (1983); *Stand by Me* (1986); *The Goonies* (1985); and *The Sandlot* (1993). These films did furnish me with the earliest ideas and drafting notes for *The Last Orchard*, but I intended for mythology to guide my *childhood war*. In doing so, the use of *The Iliad* as my mythic basis not only adds on to the tradition of mythic fiction for film but also creates a unique

story. No other film on a childhood rivalry purportedly uses the archetypes from *The Iliad*. In fact, there are less than a handful of films that can compare to having used *The Iliad* as basis and inspiration, and none of them concern a story about children fighting.

From Frauenfelder's article, we learn that *The Iliad* can possibly be paired with *Platoon* (1986) and *Top Gun* (1986), with the latter being more fitting. War and its gruesome revelations as prominent subject matter are perhaps the only links between *The Iliad* and the Vietnam-War-based film, *Platoon*. Its plot is not necessarily like that of Homer's gods and heroes. *Top Gun* may align better. This film concerns Maverick's trials and rewards from "jet school." Problems arise from his pride (like that of Achilles') and defiance, but what story set in war-like themes is not concerned with Achilles-like pride? There is a romance, of course, and it is between Maverick and one of the instructors. She can be considered a "war-prize," just as the Greek soldiers would have thought of women they took throughout their exploits; she is definitely not like the character of Helen, though.

The strongest connection I find between *Top Gun* and *The Iliad* is with the death of Maverick's best friend, "Goose," which is like the death of Patroclus. Goose dies in an accident while flying a jet, and Maverick's guilt overwhelms him. In the end, details about a heroic deed his father did in flight school rejuvenate him and help him overcome his best friend's death. He and others then help defeat enemy jets, and Maverick becomes an instructor at this school. In all, these may not be the strongest comparisons to *The Iliad*, but their Homeric archetypes are there and effectively used.

Perhaps a film that is most closely related to my project is not necessarily one that makes mythic fiction out of *The Iliad* but on the other epic poem by Homer: *The Odyssey*. The Coen brothers' comical film, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" (2000) is a film that accomplishes this.

Like Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the Coens' film opens with an inspirational reference to the foundation of their story. The following are quoted from *The Odyssey*:

O Muse!

Sing in me, and through me tell the story

Of that man skilled in all the ways of contending,

A wanderer, harried for years on end...

Shortly after, the credits reveal that the film is based on *The Odyssey*, which later qualified it a slot under the Oscar category for best screenplay "based on material previously produced or published," but the Coen brothers repeatedly admit that "they never read the purported model for their film adaptation" (Siegel 213). The confession is unrealistic as the parallels are easy to find, even if Homer's archetypes are arbitrarily selected and loosely sprinkled throughout the film's episodic, dusty road journey in the deep South during the Depression era.

Homer's *Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus's post-Trojan-War, ten-year, homeward journey and challenging reunion with his wife and child. The Coens' film is also about the homebound travels of a man and his reunion with his family, but "[t]he Coens' comic vision also transforms every violent confrontation in Homer's model text into a comic enterprise in *O Brother*" (Siegel 218). Homer's Odysseus is none other than Ulysses Everett McGill (played by George Clooney), but he goes by Everett throughout the film. He is linked (literally) to two fellow wanderers, Pete and Delmar – all jail mates, who manage to escape when working on a dreadful, roadside, backbreaking chain-gang. Together, the three set out, not only to get home, but to find a treasure Everett supposedly stole and hid before their prison sentence.

Along the way, they encounter some Homeric versions of characters. Tiresias, the blind prophet in *The Odyssey*, is a blind, black man in *O Brother* who tells of their future. They will

find fortune, the black man foreshadows – but not the one they initially set out to seek. Another Odyssean reference is that of the Lotus-eaters, a people who "ate a honey-sweet fruit [that] made [them] lose all desire to return home" (Zimmerman 153). They are on an island that Odysseus and his men land on in their sea travels; in *O Brother*, the "Lotus-eaters" are the congregation of Baptists who sing harmoniously and walk past them to get baptized in a nearby river. Their baptism, a symbol of death and renewal and confirmation of heavenly citizenship, is like that of eating the lotus fruit, with the metaphor being that a baptized individual will not desire to go back home but stay in "heaven" instead. In this scene, Pete and Delmar get baptized, thrilled at being forgiven of their past crimes, but Everett reminds them that the state of Mississippi will keep their criminal records forever. This constant search for redemption and absolution drives the trio, fueling them with reason to go forth despite all obstacles and temptations.

Shortly after, they come across three mysterious, seductive "prostitutes" bathing and washing clothes in a river. These are counterparts to the Homeric sirens, those deathful, beastly sea maidens who lure sailors with their singing and kill them. In *O Brother*, the men too are seduced as the women sing and encircle them, but we are not sure what really happens. The scene quickly switches to that of Everett and Delmar waking up, as if from a dream. Pete is gone. Only his clothes remain, and a toad jumps out. Delmar panics and says: "Them sigh-reens did this to Pete! They loved him up and turned him into a horney-toad!" (*O Brother*). Delmar carries this toad, insisting it is Pete, and it reminds us of the way Odysseus's men are transformed into pigs in *The Odyssey*.

Then there is the Coen's version of the Cyclops, who becomes a large man with a patch over one eye in *O Brother*. His name is Big Dan Teague, a rude, aggressive salesman of Bibles who lures the ignorant Pete and Delmar into thinking he is going to help them make money. He



beats them violently, steals the only money they have and squishes their toad, "Pete," in his hands.

Their hopes of making some money begin when they encounter a radio station after picking up a hitchhiker, a black guitarist named Tommy. At this station, the four perform the song, "Man of Constant Sorrow," and label themselves as "The Soggy Bottom Boys." The travelers depart unaware that over the course of the next few days and weeks, this song becomes famous. The whole state of Mississippi falls in love with it when it is syndicated throughout the radio, and "The Soggy Bottom Boys" become a sensation; they remain completely unaware of this until the end of the film. The owner and manager of this radio station is metaphorically connected with Homer's Alcinous, a hospitable king who befriends and helps Odysseus and listens to his recitation and stories about the Trojan War. Odysseus sings his poetic songs of Troy, and in *O Brother*, Everett (and his two companions and guitarist) sing a catchy song about their lives full of sadness, troubles, and a luckless heritage (Siegel).

One of *O Brother's* most important archetype is *katabasis*, a Greek word that literally means "a going down, a descent" into the mythological underworld (Holtsmark 25). The katabastic hero is often accompanied and helped by a companion," and this occurs numerous times throughout mythology (26) and twice within the Coens' film. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus "descends" when he offers libations and sacrificial offerings to the dead, beginning with the spirit of Tiresias, who will tell him how to get home, but in the process, the spirits of Heracles, Achilles, Agamemnon, and others come up from Hades to speak with him (Homer, *The Odyssey* XI). In film, the "descent" is usually a metaphor of the protagonist learning to discover his true, personal identity. It is also literal in the sense that a descent into the underworld can be a hero's risky leap into the darkest and most terrifying corners throughout his adventures, but it is

nonetheless, a rewarding experience. The theme of katabasis is usually unavoidable and necessary to the story.

Two scenes of katabasis, or "descent," occur in *O Brother*. Everett and Delmar "retreat to the local cinema and perform a kind of stylized *katabasis* from which they emerge with crucial information that will affect their future. The theatre and the underworld are alike in that they both lie beyond the reach of the sun" (Siegel 230), and in this scene, Pete comes in, lined up with new prisoners sent to watch a movie to pass the time. This proves he had not been turned into a toad but just recaptured by the police. Everett and Delmar rescue Pete, and they continue traveling together when suddenly, chanting fills their ears. There is a large Ku Klux Klan rally in an open area nearby, and they are about to hang Tommy, their guitarist. The three men stop their fighting and decide they must rescue Tommy. This is the second katabastic scenes of this film, and "[i]t should come to no surprise that Cyclops-character Big Dan Teague turns out to be a Klansman," along with other key characters from the nearby town (Siegel 231). In *The Odyssey*, the heroes deceive and escape from the Cyclops by hiding under his sheep; in *O Brother*, the trio accomplish a similar thing. They beat up the nearest Klansmen, take their garb and flags, dress like them, run into the circle, save Tommy, and let a large burning cross fall over the white-hooded group, bringing chaos to the ritual.

Perhaps the most important part of *The Odyssey* that the Coen Brothers use in their mythic fiction approach is that of Odysseus' reunion with his wife. In *The Odyssey* and in *O Brother*, "[e]ach hero is driven to prevent his wife's impending marriage to another man" (Siegel 226), and in both stories, the wandering hero meets his children before seeing his estranged wife. However, in *O Brother*, Penny (like Homer's Penelope) is already engaged to another man, and though Everett's six daughters are overjoyed to see him, they insist he was hit by a train – which

is what their mother has told them. Everett then argues with his wife and loses a fight with her fiancé inside a nearby department store.

He does not win her heart over until the end of the story when "The Soggy Bottom Boys" sing their now-famous song in front of an excited crowd in a great hall celebrating a campaign to elect "Homer Stokes" mayor. This is similar to how in Homer's *Odyssey*, "the final showdown between the hero and his rival(s) occurs in a great hall (the palace of Odysseus, King of Ithaca – the town hall of Ithaca, Mississippi). True to the comic nature of the adaptation, unlike Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors, Everett's victory will be a bloodless coup" (Siegel 234). The rest of the blind, black man's prophecy finally comes true when the governor pardons their crimes in front of the excited crowd. He has known of them because of their popular, catchy song. The film ends with Everett's retrieval of Penny's original wedding band after a final katabastic scene: a sheriff who had been looking for them is about to hang them when a great flood sweeps them all away. The trio emerges as renewed men, having escaped death several times.

The katabasis theme is a useful archetype, and Campbell describes it to be like the Biblical hero Jonah within the "Belly of the Whale," where he is trapped for three days in a "sphere of rebirth... self-annihilation," only to come out alive, relieved, thankful, and now ready to fulfill his God-ordained duties (90-91). The hero's descent into the crisis or dark corner is necessary, for it is here where the treasures, boons, and elixirs are stored and withheld from the world by their villainous, selfish owners, which is why they are often guarded by monstrous beings, gargoyles, dragons, and defending spirits (Campbell 92), as noted with the myth of Orpheus, and the films, *What Dreams May Come*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Moreover, who cannot forget the intense, climactic scene from the Oscar-winning film, *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), when Clarice enters the terrifying, ghastly, pitch-black basement of

the murderous, cannibalistic Buffalo Bill? It feels as though she will never make it out alive, but because of her training, skills, and bravery, she is victorious in slaying the beast just as the mythic Theseus is in killing the minotaur in the dark labyrinth. A similar scene occurs in the film, *Disturbia* (2007), starring Shia LeBeouf, who plays Kale, a teenager under house arrest. He discovers that his shady neighbor is a serial killer, who ends up kidnapping his mom, and Kale descends into the swampy basement in the climax of the movie and rescues her.

In *The Last Orchard*, two scenes of katabasis occur. The first is when the children enter the clubhouse at night, only to discover the history and secrets of their mobile home park, which is about to be destroyed. This is crucial information that further fuels their need to fight, and later, Zaq (and the other Zappers) jump into the lake to save the drowning Hector; the event is paralleled in Zaq's fantastic, imaginative linear sequence, where he sees a dragon coming at Hector in a body of water. Zaq-in-armor and his comrades jump in to kill the beast, just as their children counterparts do, rescuing Hector from his near-death experience.

As one can note, the stories found in Greek and Roman mythology can lead toward endless inspiration for mythic fiction, but one can also draw from any mythological sources throughout the world. They include Norse, African, Asian, Native American, Pre-Columbian, Pacific, and Mexican, among countless others. The process also applies to the borrowing or updating of Biblical stories or even that of the fairy tale and legend, but "it is in film, and most especially in the mythologically inspired film, that the great questions, which were once posed by the contemporary [nineteenth century to twentieth century] novel, are now being asked" (Ebert 753).

For Campbell, the new myths of the world that are being created today and over the coming decades will pose questions of even greater universality and imminence, for they will not involve singular groups, cultures, and peoples but the whole world and all of its inhabitants (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 32). Film's immediacy and worldwide community – fused with the explosive *omnipresence* of the Internet and social media – are already proving Campbell's words (from the late 1980s) true.

Film may be one of the youngest or newest art forms, but "[w]hat is there about the movies that make them outstanding carriers of mythic themes, that attracts these remnants of an ancient imagination [and archetypes], buried within our brains?" (Sowa) The answer lies in the medium. As noted earlier, movies are like the ancient recitations of epic stories. Both are for the community; both speak of, are based on, and inspired by the times and current events; both interpret and translate heroes for the current audience's needs; both are performed in one sitting; both "deal with archetypal anxieties of human existence: loss, competition, and power...[and] myth provides a pattern for actions and reactions toward personal survival" (Weinlich 106). Thus, myth is didactic in nature.

The characters of oral epic supply role models of what to *be*... The mythic themes [and archetypes] with their unchanging sequence of events, supply action models of what to *do*. Generations of young Greeks and Babylonians got their ideas of how to cope with life by listening to the oral bard, just as our children learn what the world expects of them (and what to expect of the world) by watching movies and TV. (Sowa)

*The Last Orchard* is an attempt at creating a lasting story that Pharr (or Rio Grande Valley) children and audiences can learn and draw from in much the same way that I have used myth and

archetypes from Homer's *Iliad*. My work, as demonstrated throughout here, is distinct because of the similar content between *The Last Orchard* and *The Iliad*. No other story about a children's war is a subtle reflection of *The Iliad*, and so, this is what I add on to the tradition of mythic fiction – to that *secretive* method of practical archetypes that Jung and Campbell propose.

### **A NOTE ON THE TEXT:**

*A standard of all screenplays is to use the Courier New font, sized 12, and with the page numbers appearing on the upper right, but because of formatting purposes for this thesis, the following screenplay is typed in Times New Roman. Thus, the text is altered throughout, and unlike the traditional screenplay, some dialogue in the following script begins at the bottom of certain pages and carries over without re-identifying that character's name. Also, you will find some master scene headings at the bottom; their action/description carry over immediately.*

### **THE LAST ORCHARD**

FADE IN.

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD – DAY – PHARR, TEXAS – JULY, 1989

A small, white truck clunks over several potholes and turns where a crooked, faded spray-painted sign reads: "Orchards of Paradise Bay Mobile Home Park – your Retiring Haven for Sunshine and Rest!"

Then... everything but the road dissolves to reveal rows upon rows of florid orange trees. We've jumped into a hazy vision.

Two elderly hands pick oranges off a tree. They're tossed into a crate. A robotic device attached to the crate illuminates the fruit in a bright, purple light. BEEP. A pair of different hands takes the crate and closes it shut.

EXT. FRONT DOOR – DAY

That same crate, now wrapped in special packaging, is placed at a doorstep. An OLD MAN in his 60s, in slacks and a polo, opens the door. He looks down at the parcel. Behind him is an OLD WOMAN, also in her 60s. She stares at the box.

INT. KITCHEN – DAY

The old man places the crate on top of a counter that acts as a plasma-like television screen. It is muted, and a weatherman shows a stretch of stormy clouds over the middle of the state of Texas. The old woman swipes the screen – as if wiping crumbs away – and the screen disappears, revealing a marble counter top. Similar plasma screens play images of photographs and news/television throughout the walls of this futuristic kitchen.

OLD MAN  
(opening crate)  
Oranges!

The old woman grabs one and slices it with a knife. She gives the other half to the old man.

OLD WOMAN  
(tasting orange)  
Nectar from the gods. These are so expensive  
now! So rare.

The old man lifts a clear, plastic sheet. It acts just like the screens on the wall. Handwriting moves across, as if it's being written at that moment:

INSERT – LETTER

"I hope this letter finds you well. It would be my greatest honor for you and your wife to attend this year's celebration of the last orchard in the entire Rio Grande Valley..."

OLD MAN  
(walking away)  
Aaah – just another one of those stupid, historic  
things.

OLD WOMAN  
(glancing over letter)  
Oh, my God. Hon... we have to go!

She shows him the rest of the letter. He reads it to himself, and a wide smile spreads across his face.

BACK TO ROAD

The orange trees disappear; it becomes paved. The mobile homes and white truck come back to view. The DRIVER (19), a dark-complected Hispanic, parks before the "Mobile Home Park Office and Clubhouse" a large, cavernous building. Outside it is a large, festive tent decorated with balloons, streamers, chairs, and tables. Several elderly people are gathered under it.

EXT. PARK OFFICE BILLBOARD

The Driver sets a pile of flyers down and hesitates. Cars pull up, and more elderly guests walk toward the canopy. One of them, SUE, steps out of the office and picks up a flyer.

SUE  
(overjoyed)



This place is finally seeing the light...We're winning this back! It'll be a 55 and older community!

DRIVER

(saddened)

My little *primos* live here, ma'am. There's no places for them to go.

He staples the flyer onto the board. It shows a "City of Pharr" logo on top, and it reads:

INSERT – BILLBOARD

"All residents in *Orchards of Paradise* are asked to immediately get rid of yard trash, abandoned cars, broken furniture/mattresses on curbs, and all junk before your..."

A long paragraph follows (in a fuzzy speed-read), stopping with this word: "EVICTION."

EXT. SIDEWALK – DAY

Several Hispanic families picket and PROTEST outside a small building. Their signs: "YOUR GAIN? WHAT A SHAME!"... "OUR LAND IS FOR OUR CHILDREN"... "PREJUDICED EVICTION"... "LET RETIREES CLAIM THEIR OWN LAND"... "FIGHT WRIGHT AND FAIR"... Above the building is a logo: "City of Pharr – On the Rise!"

It is an increasingly, loud non-coherent mess when a man in his late 50s, MR. WRIGHT, steps out of a parked, black Cadillac. He zooms past the menacing crowd.

A group of elderly white people walks by; they are all wearing the same t-shirt: "Not Pharr from Home: Winter Texans are Summer Texans!"

BACK TO PUBLIC BILLBOARD

The wind topples the pile of flyers at the driver's feet and hundreds of sheets of paper flip and flap like an exploding accordion. They descend a

LOW HILLSIDE

and the driver runs after them. They rise with the gust, and the driver gives up chasing them. He leans against a wooden fence next to an eight-shaped lake the size of a football field; it has a small island in the middle.

He leans away from the fence; it is spray-painted with letters and symbols. And across the way are mobile home walls surrounded by litter-filed, overgrown backyards. Everything is spray-painted and tagged.

EXT. DEMOLISHED LOT – DAY

Shoulder to shoulder, standing in front of a partially destroyed mobile home, nine boys wait. Face paint, camouflage colors, and bright stripes fill their arms, legs, and faces. They hold plastic swords, and resting against the chests of three boys are elaborately colored, shiny, metallic shields.

The boy with the "Thundercat" shield, ZAQUEO DELIRA (10), steps forward. He is a boy of determination but with much-fumbled speech and word usage (a speech disorder)... along with, a wrathful drive. Orange and black stripes are his mark.

He turns to the boy nearest him, also striped in bright colors. He is the one with the golden, blonde hair: PETER BUENROSTRO (9). Peter wears a "G.I. Joe" shirt, a green helmet, and a shield with a cross and scriptural references all over it.

ZAQ

Hey, Peter, what'd you say all this was like?

PETER

Oh... Zaq – the ummm – the...

(taps his forehead)

Armageddon – the field where Apocalypse happens.

Peter is a Bible-school boy. He knows every Old Testament battle by heart and every New Testament metaphor symbol of victory and love.

ZAQ

(to boys)

It's up to all of us now, Men. Run the Haters away!

The boys YELL and lift their toy swords. Zaq looks toward the *next-in-command*: ANGELO COVARRUBIAS (10), a boy-genius and walking encyclopedia (and proud owner of one, too!). He can't help but take things too literally sometimes. He wears a "Care Bear" shirt and a shield with stars, math equations, and scientific elements on it.

ANGELO

What if all our parents and/or legal guardians come back to see us fight? We'll be in biiiig trouble!

ZAQ

Angelo, don't keep worrying. They're gonna be at City Hall to win us back the streets and neighborhood. So it's up to us to beat the Haters –

PETER

– if it is in God's will.

ANGELO  
(fearful)  
Zaq, look at the signs!

The eviction flyers cross high above them, careening into

AN IRRIGATION CANAL

where six dark-complected, Hispanic boys are collecting rocks and filling up water guns with greenish, irrigation water. One exceptionally tall boy spray-paints the word "HATERS" above a wide sewer entrance.

This is HECTOR RIOJAS (12) – cocky, vengeful, acne-cursed, and just moments away from explosive puberty. He turns to the ten-year-olds below.

HECTOR  
*Chingao* – hurry up, Alex!

The boys scurry and follow Hector up the steep canal.

ALEX  
Ok, ok... Hector, Papá want us back already or what?

HECTOR  
*Si, hambreee....* we need to drive him to city hall.

Hector's little brown-haired brother, ALEX RIOJAS (10) is a bold but fragile and unreliable member of all teamwork, but behind Alex is TONY DEL MONTE (9) – smart, quiet, and the embodiment of pure child mischief and trickery.

TONY  
Guys, you hear that?

There are HOOTING and mariachi-like GRITOS above the way.

INT. HECTOR'S MOBILE HOME – DAY

A man in a wheelchair hears these *gritos*, rolls toward a window, and moves a dusty curtain aside. He shakes his head and SIGHS. This is RAM RIOJAS (42), bitter, frustrated, and bottled up inside a filthy home.

RAM  
*¡Niños fregados!* They won't stop all this fighting,

will they? Damn city should see this... kick them and their families out first!

He swings his arm to knock over a pile of letters from a table. Their return addresses show a hospital's and also a law firm's name. From his POV and out the window, we see Zaq, Angelo, Peter, and the other boys running forward.

EXT. DEMOLISHED LOT – DAY

Hector, Alex, Tony, and the rest of their gang appear at the top of the canal.

TONY  
¡*Los gringos!* Crap... the ZAPPERS!

The source of the screams: Zaq and his boys, "THE ZAPPERS," rush forward, throwing, tossing, sling-shooting, HOOTING, CURSING, and LAUGHING...

... "THE HATERS" are exposed to the shrapnel: water balloons, tree limbs, rotten oranges, Lego blocks, rocks, dismembered action figures, Nerf darts... Alex and Tony attempt to use their water guns, but the hits are too intense. All the Haters, except for Hector, dart through an alley.

A rolling tire knocks down Hector, and Zaq approaches with his sling shot.

HECTOR  
Zaqueo Delira... you're gonna lose, *ese*. Don't you get it?  
We all are! Piece of dumb sh – OW!

A tiny Lego block strikes Hector on the forehead. He rubs his face and runs off as Zaq prepares his sling shot again.

ZAQ  
(victoriously)  
ZAAAAPPERS!!

Zaq reunites with this team, high-fiving them...

EXT. SCHOOL BUS WINDOW – DAY – THREE MONTHS EARLIER

Zaq's little eyes focus on the avenue before them. On the hazy window reflection is a large "H-E-B" grocery store parking lot and then a "What-a-burger" restaurant.

INT. SCHOOL BUS – DAY

Zaq and Peter share a seat, but Peter has his knees against the backrest of the green, faux leather.

ZAQ  
We're gonna beat them. We better.

PETER  
(whispering)  
Dude, Mrs. Zamora said she'd have Coach Ponce  
do tug-of-war!

MRS. ZAMORA (35), their 4th grade teacher is suddenly before them. She is a large matronly woman with a lion-mane of an obnoxious, 80s hairdo rising above her plastic-like, heavily make-upped face. She thinks she has control of her students.

MRS. ZAMORA  
Peter Buenrostro!

Startled, Peter sits himself down appropriately.

MRS. ZAMORA (CONT'D)  
What did we say about how we sit all the way to  
South Padre Island?

PETER  
On our tush. Facing forward. Like every other field trip.

MRS. ZAMORA  
Thank you, Peter.

She continues down the aisle. Three rows ahead are two giggling, brown-haired girls. ELENA (9) stares at Zaq and sticks her tongue out.

ZAQ  
She keeps doing that!

PETER  
It doesn't mean she likes you, Zaq.

ZAQ  
But ever sine last week at the library when we were  
reading that mythology book – Elena! – Aaaah, she  
always wants to sit closer to me.

PETER  
She's not even close, dummy. Hey, man I think she likes Hector.  
They were right next to each other in the cafeteria before we left.

ZAQ

But we're not supposed to –

PETER

– sit with other classes. It's not gonna stop him!  
Or Alex. I don't even know why Principal Zamora  
let them come on the field trip after all the fights  
they've started.

ZAQ

It's their Dad's. He's on a wheelchair or something, so they  
have automatic special permission, I guess... They call themselves  
the HATTERS like, you know, the Mad Hatter in *Alice  
Inside Wonderland*, Hector's favorite story.

PETER

No, but he misspells it! Leaves one "t" out and he's  
graffitying "Haters" everywhere!

ZAQ

(laughing)

He's failed 4th grade two years.

PETER

Yea, he's supposed to be passing into 7th already.

ZAQ

What a dummy retard! Never even has passed the  
TEAMS test, and – OW! OW!

Mrs. Zamora has grabbed his ear. She is twisting it, and when she lets go, Zaq immediately  
follows her to the front.

CHILDREN ON BUS

OOOOOOOOoooooooohhhhhh!

Their *he's-in-trouble* noise diminishes to sporadic giggling. Mrs. Zamora turns. Her giant hair  
reaches the ceiling, and her fierce look silences the kids.

MRS. ZAMORA

(with failed authority)

The bus driver will turn around right now if  
all of you keep misbehaving.

The BUS DRIVER (47) looks up at his rear-view mirror. He SCOFFS and shakes his head.

MRS. ZAMORA (CONT'D)

You are here because you passed the state TEAMS test,  
and you are expected to be on your best behavior.

But none of her students are paying attention. They are too busy ducking, whispering, or looking out the window.

INT. FRONT SEAT – DAY

Zaq is doing just this, facing away from Mrs. Zamora.

MRS. ZAMORA

Zaq, remember you were taking out of G.T. and put into  
my class because –

Zaq is not listening. The roadside is an agricultural panorama of rows upon rows of corn, and then onions, and then floral orange trees.

MRS. ZAMORA

Zaq?

ZAQ

Yes, I know, Mrs. Zamora. I shouldn't sometimes use it.  
The "R" word is against classroomed rules. Cuz of the way  
I talk and everyonez specially unique and worth it.

EXT. MCDONALD'S PARKING LOT – DAY

The five children-infested school buses GURGLE in... JOYFUL SHOUTS... LAUGHTER...  
TEACHERS SCREAM incoherent instructions.

INT. MCDONALD'S LOBBY – DAY

Peter and Angelo follow Zaq to a corner table. Zaq takes the chair as Elena and her girls sit nearby. A female McDonald's worker passes by with an overflowing tray of French fries and cheeseburgers. She sets them down, and the kids gobble them.

ANGELO

(with fries in his mouth)

Zaq, I dare you. Go kiss her!

Zaq licks his ketchup-covered fingers and blushes.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

DO IT!

PETER  
Stop screaming, Angelo!

Hector, Alex, and Tony join the table next to Elena. Zaq's focus is immediately upon Hector who hands Elena a folded piece of paper. McDonald's employees pass in a hurry. One suddenly trips. Burgers and fries fly...

... the food fight and SCREAMING is instantaneous. Hector, Alex, and Tony have thrown themselves into the center. Others run in, slipping, LAUGHING, tossing and throwing fries, burgers, and ketchup packs.

Angelo GIGGLES like a broken toy. Peter yanks him under the table. Zaq lunges his soda cup at Hector, misses, and it lands on Elena! She gasps, screams, and begins to cry.

ZAQ  
(bewildered)  
Elena, *hay* sorry – I'm – I'm –

Her girlfriends have huddled around her, wiping her with napkins. One of them flicks her tongue out at Zaq when – THUNK!

HECTOR  
(shoving Zaq)  
Why you do that to her? Eh? ¿*Pinche onda, ese?*  
Eh? EH!

Children have gathered around – some hunched over the booths – while others mount the tables and plastic seats.

SCHOOL CHILDREN  
FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!

Zaq backs off quickly and slides

UNDER THE TABLE

He joins Peter and Angelo.

ANGELO  
Get over here! I think it's GOD!

A sudden stillness follows. Children rush away. Zaq, Angelo, and Peter can see two tree trunks of legs, followed by a huge, hairy arm help the McDonald's worker stand up.

EXT. MCDONALD'S PARKING LOT – DAY



With their arms behind their backs and French-fry-tidbits stuck to their faces, Zaq, Angelo, Peter, Hector, Alex, and Tony are before the hairy, crossed arms of this "god," PRINCIPAL ZAMORA, a large Hispanic man in his 40s. He carries the identical look of a Mexican Revolutionary Soldier. It seems as if his horse could be anywhere nearby – ready to whisk him into a battle zone.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(angry)

Don't you remember the rules? You need to show an example everywhere of the kind of students Rodriguez Elementary has.

ALEX

(pointing to Zaq)

Siiiiir, it was him!

Zamora stares intently at Zaq.

ZAQ

(robotically)

The rules, sir, is that we respect our teachers, classmates, and all our best friends – even the girls. We listen in class, in the hallways, in the cafeteria, on the monkey bars, and in P.E. We are readers, scientificists, historianists, and English-ers and always do all our homework. We are the hope and rising run of our families and Pharr, Texas. We are the super leaders of tomorrow. We are Rodriguez Elementary School!

Zamora continues pacing.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Thank you, Zaqueo for your ... interpretation of the rules and the school song. But that, young men, is dedication – the voice of what we stand for at Rodriguez. And what, tell me, what are you going to do when you no longer have a song to guide you? Or rules and teachers to tell you what to do? Or a school that cares for you a lot? A playground you deserve after getting all the good grades every six weeks? How do you think it'll be when you move on to junior high? Or high school? Or college? Or the real world – the one that takes away all your youthful freedom and nature? Or what will you do when you have families? What will your wives do if you keep misbehaving? What will you do, young men... when you are responsible for your whole world, your lives, your families... when you are thirty? Forty? Seventy? Ninety? Do you think anyone'll put up with any misbehavior

like today's?

The boys shake their heads – except for Angelo.

ANGELO

Sir, you skipped fifty, sixty, eighty, and... umm, twenty. You know – the life expectancy of the average Hispanic male is now eighty, so I won't be around to answer your question in the year...

(counts with his fingers for a moment)

... 2069.

Alex bites his lip and leans toward Tony.

ALEX

(into Tony's ear)

He said sixty-nine!

Tony HOWLS out an explosive laugh, but Zamora is too concerned with Angelo. He stops before the boy, clenching his eyebrows into a mixed look of confusion and anger.

ANGELO

Now that I think about it... neither will you, sir. You probably have twenty or thirty years left... Or five.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(stern composure)

I asked all of you a question!

BOYS

(in unison)

YES, SIR!

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Oooh – so you think they'll tolerate your behavior? This? Any of it when you're older?

ZAQ

No, Sir! We all meant to say no.

ANGELO

(hoarsely)

Noooooo, Zaq. I was confused and said yeeees.

Peter smacks Angelo's shoulder.

PETER

*Yaaaaa*, Angelo. Be quieeeeet!

HECTOR

(suddenly loud)

I tripped the McDonald's lady. I started the fight, sir.  
It's all my fault, Principal Zamora.

Zamora pauses before Hector. The fat man's face drips with sweat as he gets close to Hector's gaze.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

You will go in there right now and apologize, do you understand? And come Monday – Oooo, Monday –  
(to the six boys)  
A paddle may be waiting!

Hector walks off. The buses kick their HUMMING engines, and the buzz of the school children and teachers fill the space around them. All eyes are on the guilty party as they parade to their buses.

INT. MCDONALD'S LOBBY – DAY

About eight employees scrub, wipe, pick up, and clean the chaotic dining area.

INT. MCDONALD'S FRONT COUNTER – DAY

Hector looks toward the rear, behind the register and beyond the burger and fry machines. No one is in sight. He darts around the counter, SLAMS a few buttons on the register, and the till pops open. Hector grabs a wad of cash and coins. He closes it and runs.

EXT. CAUSEWAY – DAY

The buses trek over the long, high-rise structure that crosses over a sparkling lagoon. Up ahead is a sandy sliver of an island several miles in length. Half a dozen high-rise hotels fill the skyline that face the jet-blue, frothy seas – just an edge of the expansive, warm Gulf of Mexico.

INT. BUS – DAY

Elena and her girlfriends are YELLING (not singing) a *New-Kids-on-the-Block* song. Zaq and the rest of the punished boys fill the first two rows. When Mrs. Zamora walks up to tell the bus driver something, Hector gets on his feet and waves at Elena. He sits back down quickly, and Zaq witnesses this.

ZAQ  
(to Hector)  
What was in that note?

HECTOR  
*Este vato.* It's my business!

Hector gets up, spreading his chest like some tropical bird in a mating ritual. Alex rises – bird-like, too. Peter stretches his arms across Zaq's chest, protecting him. Mrs. Zamora turns, and everyone gets back to their normal sitting positions.

ZAQ  
(flinging Peter's arm away)  
What's your problem?

PETER  
You're my best friend. Sorry. Geeez.

INT. BUS – DAY

The children shuffle out in a single-file line. Zaq tries to get Elena's attention when she passes by, but she ignores him. Mrs. Zamora ushers the last of the children and waits before the six punished boys.

MRS. ZAMORA  
Mr. Zamora put me in charge of you six, and we're walking straight to the pavilion. I am not hearing another word from all of you. Or you'll stay inside the bus the whole time!

ANGELO  
(as Mrs. Zamora exits)  
Mrs. Zamora, that's against the law, and –

Peter slaps him on the back, and the boys exit, passing the

STRAIGHT LINE OF CLASSMATES

Zaq eyes longingly at Elena. She turns the other way. MS. ROAD (29) gets in front of Mrs. Zamora. She is that young, hip, and quite exceptionally beautiful, elementary school teacher – the one all the boys crush over – and of course, Hector and Alex love her – anything to get their way.

HECTOR  
Hi, Ms. Road! The best teacher.

MS. ROAD  
(harshly toward Mrs. Zamora)  
I would have appreciated a notice that my  
students were in your bus!

MRS. ZAMORA  
Ms. Road, you knew that if any problems would  
happen, students would ride with me.

She continues forth with all the punished boys.

MS. ROAD  
Where are you taking my students?

Mrs. Zamora ignores her.

ALEX  
(turning back)  
We love you, Miss!

EXT. PAVILION – DAY

The school children sit throughout various picnic tables, sipping on sodas and juice boxes. On the farthest one are Zaq, Angelo, and Peter with Hector, Alex, and Tony. Principal Zamora towers above them.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
Boys, you will go back to your friends and  
classes now, but if one thing happens – ONE – we  
will all go back to Rodriguez Elementary.

ALEX  
(to Hector)  
They say the same shit every time. I'm so suuuure  
we're gonna return.

The boys return to their respective class groups.

PETER  
(walking with Zaq)  
Look, I saw Hector give Elena that note, too, but forget it.

ZAQ  
No, what's he thinking? Elena likes me. Me!

PETER

YAA! Forget it! You're starting to get all mad. This is supposed to be a fun day.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(on a megaphone)

WELCOME TO SOUTH PADRE ISLAND!

CHEERING.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (CONT'D)

Here's the day you've earned, students. After a whooooole year of classes and tests. This is the day for you – all of you who passed the TEAMS test!

CLAPPING. WHISTLING.

ZAQ

(under his breath)

Hector never ever did passed it.

PETER

Sssh! Zaq – you're gonna get in trouble again! Just give Hector a chance. He's already here. Just leave him alone and have fun with us. And stop being all mad.

ZAQ

Ooooh, give him a chance? Ok. FINE.

Zaq walks away from Peter.

PETER

Zaq?... Zaq!

Angelo joins Peter, jumping up and down with sheer excitement. He suddenly stops. A silence has swept the crowd. Ms. Road makes a GARGLING sound of utter DISGUST. Principal Zamora is shirtless.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

We still have rules to follow, children. Your teachers have explained them, and you should know them all by heart. Now go – have fun on your day of celebration!

His wife is the first to cheer and clap. Her colleagues have glanced away from the beastly sight of their half-naked principal.

EXT. BEACH SURF – DAY

Peter and Angelo run alongside the oncoming waves. COACH PONCE (30) wears a Dallas Cowboys cap, and though he looks like he's in shape, a large beer-belly shows otherwise. He holds a hand out, preventing Peter and Angelo from passing.

COACH PONCE

Nope – kids gotta stay within the boundaries.

He points toward a stretched piece of caution tape. It forms a large square, the size of an acre, in front of the shoreline and past the pavilion.

ANGELO

Aaaah, but Coach, JAWS was spotted along the coast of Maine. We know how to swim! We went to "Gus 'n Goldy."

(singing)

"Well, the water is fine, so come on in..."

Peter LAUGHS, and Angelo jumps over a dead jelly-fish.

COACH PONCE

(laughing)

No sharks here – I promise – but sorry, little man. Those are the rules by your principal.

He gawks at Ms. Road passing by in her one-piece bathing suit. She smiles at him.

ANGELO

You two should get married.

COACH PONCE

(laughing)

Whaaat? Kid – get outta here before Zamora sees you all out of bounds.

ANGELO

She's not married. You're not married. So there.

COACH PONCE

You've been paying too much attention. You all should be getting ready for tug-of-war! Isn't Zaq your team-leader?

ANGELO

Yeah, but he's in loooooove. So he'll probably start a war like Achilles and the Greek soldiers did. All for one stupid girl... Always happens when a madman falls in love.

COACH PONCE

Kid, what are you talking about? Where's Zaq, anyway? Heard he started the food fight.

PETER

He didn't do that. But he's over there by the pavilion being a little baby.

COACH PONCE

Well, the games are gonna start in five minutes!

EXT. PAVILION – DAY

At a picnic table, the five bus drivers drink out of giant, 64-ounce, plastic cups. They eat tacos or sandwiches out of bundles of tin-foil. Zaq sits quietly nearby.

BUS DRIVER

(to Zaq)

What happened to you, *chavito*? Saw you were in trouble on 'da bus. Is that why you're depressed?

ZAQ

You all have many wives at home, don't you?

They all stop munching and look at Zaq.

BUS DRIVER

Of course, *mijito*. Got my wife and seven kids – four of them *ya* in college *allí en Edinburgo* – *gracias a Dios* that none of them ended up in trouble or drugs.

(to the other bus driver next to him)

I knew they'd be all right after me and *mi vieja* moved here from Mexico, ¿sabes?

ZAQ

What did you do to steal the hearts of the woman you got married to?

The drivers laugh softly.



BUS DRIVER

*Haaay, niño.* You're waaaay too young to know.  
Get out there! Have fun.

EXT. CASTLE (ZAQ'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

It rises high above a lake. Mountains surround it. A shadow passes over the land.

ZAQ (O.S.)

A battle. Maybe she was captivated in a castle or  
a walled city.

A large, beat-like chimera flies and circles the towers of the castle. It ROARS, spitting flames and smoke.

ZAQ (O.S.)

You fought and fought for her... killed all these  
big monsters, or titanics, evil spirits – stabbed  
bad guys ... bad guys and gangsters –

BACK TO PAVILION

BUS DRIVER

– and the border patrol, too.

The six men LAUGH, buckling backwards and sideways.

ZAQ

The bad guys who can't spell, good-for-nothing  
trashers wanting to steal your girl.

Zaq walks away to overlook the various groups of children – some playing volleyball, a few feeding pieces of bread to seagulls, others playing tag, some boys (including Hector, Alex, and Tony) playing touch-football, and then – Elena and her girls – building a sandcastle.

EXT. SANDCASTLE AREA – DAY

Elena waters the edge of a large mound. Three other girls decorate it with seashells and with their fingers, they scribble: "Jordan, Donnie, Joey... *New Kids on the Block!*" Elena sees Zaq coming.

ZAQ

Elena, I can help you construct.

ELENA

It's only for us.

Zaq stares at the mound and notices its shape: a heart.

ZAQ

I can bring seashells.

All the girls ignore him. Elena pulls out the note.

ELENA

I know what you said about me! – That my yearbook picture could scare away a thousand cockroaches.

ZAQ

(pointing to note)

Hector's lying. I never. EVER said that!

Elena reaches for her bucket of water and tosses its contents at his chest. One of the girls writing on the sand adds the name: "Hector"... They laugh to themselves.

ELENA

Go away! I don't like you anymore. Hector knows how to treat me right.

Hector is suddenly there, his hand interlocking for a tiny millisecond with Elena's. A whistle BLOWS. Zaq runs off.

EXT. TUG-OF-WAR PIT – DAY

All the school children and teachers have gathered around Coach Ponce. The principal climbs onto a picnic table.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

All right kids, if Mrs. Zamora's side wins... umm...

His large hand is directed to one side of the rope, where five boys, including Peter and Angelo stand ready.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (CONT'D)

... if this side wins, we'll eat Nachos, and if the other wide wins, we'll have Tacos!

He looks at the opposing side, where Hector (up front), Alex, and Tony are ready with two other classmates.

HECTOR  
(to Peter)  
Hey, Church Boy – ¡no vales nada!

Hector makes a vulgar sign with his fingers. Peter clenches the rope and yanks it twice.

PETER  
I've done my prayers, loser!

Mrs. Zamora waves her hands and rushes to her husband.

MRS. ZAMORA  
(whispering into his ear)  
We got the taco orders messed up this morning, honey! It's just nachos.

Principal Zamora steps aside with his wife and inspects a large ice chest. Coach Ponce grabs hold of the center of the tug-of-war rope.

COACH PONCE  
On your marks!... Get set!....

Zaq jumps in! And gets in front of Peter.

PETER  
Heeey!

HECTOR  
Heey, that's not fair. They have six now, and –

COACH PONCE  
GOOO!!

SCHOOLCHILDREN  
(simultaneously throughout)  
Nachos! Tacos! Nachos! Tacos!

ZAQ  
Pull! PUUULLL!!

PETER  
We are. We aaaarre!

They drag and sink into the sand, yanking and straining, showing signs of winning, when Hector SCREAMS and tugs hard, almost knocking down everyone with the momentum. Then he bolts toward the back of his line and yanks again.

ZAQ  
Coach, look! That's not fair!

But Coach Ponce has lost his attention with Ms. Road right next to him.

SCHOOLCHILDREN  
(wildly in background)  
NACHOS! TACOS! NACHOS! TACOS!

ZAQ  
(raging, looking back at his team)  
YOU'RE NOT PULLING HARD ENOUGH!  
PULLL!

PETER  
Shut UP! WE ARE!

Hector pulls the whole line a couple of feet toward him.

ZAQ  
No, no... NO!

Zaq pulls even harder, and Hector is suddenly surprised (and fatigued); he tumbles forward. The weight of this five-foot-tall boy is too much for the little fourth-graders in front of him. They topple, losing to Zaq and his team.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
The nacho-side wins!

UPROARIOUS CHEERING.

ZAQ  
(rising)  
Did you see that, Peter?

He reaches his hand to help Peter stand up.

ZAQ (CONT'D)  
Did you see how I helped us win?!

Zaq's palms are bleeding. Peter hoists himself up on his own and flicks Zaq's bloody palm away.

PETER

Screw you.

ANGELO

(to Zaq)

Blood, sweat, and ... you're just missing the tears.

Zaq finally notices his palms as Peter and Angelo walk away. Ms. Road grabs Zaq's hands.

MS. ROAD

Oh, Zaq... Ponce, go get the first aid kit!

Coach Ponce dashes through the crowd.

EXT. PAVILION – DAY

The first-aid kit lies open next to a sulking Zaq. He inspects his bandaged hand. All around him is a feast of nacho-eating. Hector approaches.

HECTOR

This isn't over, you know?

ZAQ

(startled)

Yeah, there's still the games on the final last day of school. Field Day. We'll beat you guys and win the whole school.

HECTOR

You cheated today.

ZAQ

I did not!

Students notice Hector inching closer to Zaq. Mrs. Zamora walks toward them, so Hector begins to move away.

HECTOR

(taunting)

The Nacho team won today. Zaq's Nachos!  
Nachos!

Alex, Tony, and others rock out laughing.

EXT. BUS-LOADING AREA – DAY

The sun is low. Haggard, tired, sandy students, teachers, and staff buzz in and around the buses. Zaq waits in line with Peter.

ZAQ

Why didn't you all wait for me at tug-of-war?

PETER

(without turning to Zaq)

We didn't need you.

ZAQ

Yes. You. Did.

PETER

(turning fast)

You were pouting over there under the pavilion, and I told you to calm down and have fun today.

Angelo butts in.

ANGELO

We won didn't we? We'll do the same on Field Day.

PETER

Stay out of this, Angelo!

ZAQ

(to Peter)

You knew I was super excited about tug-of-war. I wanted to play.

PETER

And you did!

Peter walks into the bus.

ANGELO

He's right. You were pretty miseryable. I mean miseRR-ABLE.

Zaq is not listening. Elena is at the end of the line, laughing and talking with her friends.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

You need to learn how to control your emotions and

anger. You know – like Mister Miyagi says.

ZAQ

I don't have any anger or wraff, like you always say.  
Angelo, we should probably have a meeting  
at Third Base.

EXT. THIRD BASE – DAY

It is a shed that leans – ready to collapse with a push – and it has a small doorway. Dusty windows surround its perimeter.

BACK TO PARKING LOT

ANGELO

Yeah, it has been a while since we played baseball!

BACK TO THIRD BASE

Next to it is a vacant lot. Angelo darts, HUFFING and SLAMS himself against the wall of the shed (Third Base). It sways. Peter rushes in, holding a baseball.

ANGELO

I'm safe – safe!

Zaq is pitcher in the middle of the lot. Second base is a tree, and first is a designated piece of cardboard. Then there's the shed – *third base*.

ZAQ

Don't hit the wall so hard, Angelo!

Third Base GROANS and CREAKS.

BACK TO PARKING LOT

ANGELO

All right. I'll talk to Peter. He seemed rather  
perturbed, though. Oh, and it's wraTHHH.

ZAQ

Will you stop it with the vocabulary from accelerated  
reading books? Look, we need to all talk about  
Field Day.

ANGELO

I should make a sign for our team, so we won't be called NACHOS.

SCHOOLCHILDREN

Nachos! Nachos! Nachos!

The name sounds out from several buses. Zaq looks up and around. He spots Ms. Road's class, and Hector and Alex have half their bodies sticking out of bus windows. Hector reaches his hand toward Elena who jumps up to grab it. The "NACHOS" chanting continues. Zaq runs into the bus. Ms. Road's class points and laughs.

INT. HECTOR'S MOBILE HOME LIVING ROOM – DAY

Hector sifts through his pockets, placing bills of cash and loose coins on a table.

ALEX

Whoaaa!

Alex touches a silver dollar, and Hector slaps his hand.

HECTOR

Get away! This is for Dad.

Ram rolls into the living room, and Alex goes down the hall.

RAM

What's for Dad?

HECTOR

Money, Papá. I brought you some.

Ram gets closer and backhands Hector's face.

RAM

Do you think I'm stupid?

Hector rubs his cheeks.

HECTOR

For the bills!

Ram rolls forward, running over Hector's toes.

HECTOR

Oww!



RAM  
You think I can pay the hospital and lawyers with  
stolen money? You good-for-nothing... where'd you  
get this??

He knocks over the table. Coins and bills fly.

HECTOR  
I didn't steal it. I didn't!

RAM  
You're a fucking liar!

Hector picks up the money, and runs down the hallway into his bedroom.

EXT. ZAQ'S BACK YARD – DUSK

Zaq pours milk into several bowls as three thirsty cats drink. He pours dried cat food in a neat pile nearby. Angelo and Peter appear; the cats – frightened – dart under the mobile home.

EXT. THIRD BASE - DUSK

Zaq yanks the shed door open. The three boys enter

THIRD BASE

Soggy boxes, cracked floorboards, buckets, and garden tools.

PETER  
Look, I'm sorry for yelling at you.

Zaq shakes Peter's hand. Angelo unfolds a piece of cardboard. It is brightly yellow with blood-red letters: ZAP

ANGELO  
(beaming)  
Great. Now that you two have stopped being  
children...

Peter and Zaq look at the cardboard creation.

ANGELO (CONT'D)  
Whatcha'll think?

Peter reaches his fingers toward the red letters.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

It's blood.

Peter pulls his hand back quickly.

PETER

Where'd you –

ANGELO

The instructions told me to use blood-red, so the other day that I went fishing –

ZAQ

– all right. All right! Wait, what instructions?

ANGELO

I checked out a library book on advertising signs, and well, we don't wanna be called the Nachos on Field Day. Why not the "Zappers"? Z for Zaq. A for me. P for Peter.

ZAQ

Perfect!

PETER

(forcing a smile)

It's okaaay.

Zaq fumbles with a large, hand-drawn map of the mobile home park. In the center is the 8-shaped lake, and around it are the perpendicular streets. A fly buzzes around.

ANGELO

(looking at map)

I should get home soon. My kitty is waiting.

PETER

Yeah, I gotta go too.

ZAQ

We haven't even planned any single thing!

PETER

At least we have a good team name.

FOOTSTEPS outside. Zaq looks out through one of the broken windows. The shed CREAKS and WOBBLES.

HECTOR (O.S.)

They're in there! *Pinche* faggots are probably kissing.

Zaq peeks in through the cracked window, meeting eye to eye with Hector. The other two boys, Alex and Tony, are behind him.

ZAQ

GET DOWN!

Zaq pushes Angelo and Peter down. They all tumble in between old boxes when a string of black-popping fireworks are tossed in. BAM! BAM-POP-BAM-BAM-POP-POP-BAM! The Haters LAUGH, SHAKE the shed, and STOMP away.

Zaq gets up, massaging his bandaged hand. Angelo has his hands pressed to his ears. Peter is squashed under a box. One last firework POPS.

ZAQ

(livid)

How'd they know we were here? They coulda  
enfired this place down. They're not gonna  
FUCKING get away!

ANGELO

Zaq, calm down. Look, they must've followed me.  
I live down the street from Hector.

EXT. ANGELO'S LAWN – DAY

Angelo hops around with his white kitten. Angelo LAUGHS hard, and Hector, passing by on the street, stops and stares. Angelo grabs his kitten and runs into his house.

EXT. LAKE BANKS – MORNING

Zaq is walking and tossing bread pieces at a couple of ducks. He pauses before the BUZZING sound of an electrical saw and drill in someone's yard. There are pieces of wood, metal, and iron wrought in curving, intricate designs. Their creator, a fence-maker, MR. TERRENCE (50s) – also an ironsmith and carpenter – wears a large helmet and plastic visor.

He stops his work, slides his visor up, and Zaq jumps back. Mr. Terrence's face is disfigured. Zaq runs off.

EXT. LAKE DOCK – MORNING

Peter and Zaq throw rocks across the waters.

ZAQ

Hey, man've you seen the face of the man  
who makes the fences?

PETER

Oh, Mr. Terrence? Yeah. I don't know him, but I see  
him from far away sometimes. He's always in his yard.  
My mom told me his wife was very beautiful. She died  
a long time ago... Hey, my parents got some letter  
about evic-shun yesterday.

ZAQ

Mine, too.

Zaq looks at his rock before throwing it in the water.

ZAQ (CONT'D)

What is it? My Mom looked very sad.

Peter tosses a pebble. It skips across and sinks.

PETER

Means you have to move out. But we can't  
afford to move our mobile home. Can your  
parents?

ZAQ

Our mobile home isn't even mobile. Been there  
since 1973, my parents say. I'm not gonna let  
evicShun happen. What we need to do is defeat.

PETER

The adults who want to eviction us out?

ZAQ

Maybe. But beat Hector first. Kill them.

PETER

Zaq, don't ever wish that on anyone!

ANGELO (O.S.)

Zaq! Peter!

Angelo races onto the dock. He's wearing a torso of a "He-Man" Halloween costume. A wild  
look possesses him. In his hand is a "Lucky Charms" cereal box. A small knife protrudes from it.

ANGELO

They wanna attack Third Base again! I overheard them. I hid behind their green air conditioner all night long!

ZAQ

Wait, are you sure?

ANGELO

Yes, let's go stop them. Let's go!

PETER

(to Angelo)

You hid all night?

ANGELO

Well just thirty minutes. I got stuff at home we can throw at them in a surprise attack!

ZAQ

Yes, great idea. We can hide in the alley behind their house. Let's get a bunch of eggs.

ANGELO

(excitedly stabbing cereal box)

I'm a cereal killer! Let's go!

EXT. ALLEY – DAY

Peter and Zaq are ducked low behind a large green air conditioner; it's rusty, and part of its cover is missing, exposing the AC's blades. Zaq places a brown bag down. Peter peeks into it. It is full of eggs.

PETER

You think it'll work?

ZAQ

Eggs'll ruin anything. They'll stink forever and ever!

Zaq looks down the alley and fidgets.

PETER

Just wait for Angelo. Wait. He said he'd give us the sign.

In front of the AC is Hector's decrepit, spray-painted mobile home. Trash and a frayed couch occupy the dusty, patchy lawn that has dried-up flower bushes and one dying tree. Hector steps out the front door and sits on the couch.

ZAQ  
(whispering)  
He's right there. We can get him!

PETER  
Waiiiit...

Far down the alley is Angelo coming toward them with two large, plastic bags. He wears a camouflaged facial mask and goggles.

PETER  
What in the...?

The air conditioner WHIRS on. Zaq peeks to see that Tony and Alex have joined Hector on the couch. They're smoking cigarettes.

Angelo WAVES his hands at Zaq and Peter.

#### MONTAGE – ZAPPERS ATTACK

- Zaq SCREAMS. Eggs fly.
- Peter throws eggs and rocks...runs around the house.
- Tony follows Peter. SCREAMING. SHOUTING.
- Hector and Alex hide behind the couch.
- Eggs splatter the walls.
- Alex dashes out, tossing rocks at Zaq.
- Peter is wild and circling around the mobile home, tossing rocks, debris, eggs.
- Zaq runs about, ducking, and doing the same.
- Hector lunges at Zaq.

Zaq runs, but a large stone CLOBBERS Zaq. He tumbles forward. Hector grabs him from the back of the shirt and presses Zaq's face into the dirt.

HECTOR

(turning Zaq, face-up)

You. Fuck-face. I was gonna wait till Monday,  
but why should I?

ZAQ

You leave us alone! We're the Zappers, and you  
all suck! Your team's gonna lose all the games on  
Field Day, and Elena likes me. Me!

Hector spits into Zaq's face and pushes him down. Hector rises. Zaq MOANS and coughs to the side. He attempts to crawl away, but Hector drags him back.

HECTOR

(laughing)

Zappers? If it weren't for all you... white people,  
we'd have this park. Everything would be back to  
normal.

Tony and Alex help to press Zaq's arms down. Hector sits on Zaq, lifts his fist, and...

Peter rejoins Angelo who is on top of the AC. He LAUGHS and SCREAMS. The blades WHIR and spin. Hector turns. A flying brownish goo hits his shoulder... his face, eyes – blinding him!

It splatters onto Alex, too; he spins, turns, and VOMITS. Tony YELLS in disgust, runs, slips, and disappears into the grassy alley.

Hector falls over, spitting and THROWING UP. Angelo is CACKLING above the AC unit's blades. Peter has ducked to the side. Zaq crawls away from the flying substance. It lands all around him. Angelo tosses the empty bags and runs with Zaq down the

ALLEY

Zaq wipes his face, shirt, and arms. He spits to the side, half-throwing up and coughing. Peter rejoins them; he is spotless and LAUGHING at them.

ANGELO

(overjoyed)

It worked! The dog and cat shit hit the fan and flew!

INT. PRINCIPAL ZAMORA'S OFFICE – DAY

The six boys sit in a large spacious office. A huge clock ticks on the wall. A shelf full of binders and books. Photo frames fill the desk. A paddle hangs on the wall. The principal is at his throne.

They all look to the ground, fidgeting with their fingers.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

I just got off the phone with each of your parents, and –

PETER

(panicked)

Mr. Zamora, what did they say?

ANGELO

Hey, it's okaaaay. Don't you always say God's on your side?

Peter is shaking.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Peter, now Peter. All I did was talk to them about the fight at McDonald's and how I did not really know who or what started it. I also talked to them about how well you all behaved after that.

INT. THIRD BASE (Zaq's MEMORY) – DAY

BAM! POP-POP-POP! BAM! Zaq is pressed on top of his two friends.

EXT. ALLEY (Zaq's MEMORY) – DAY

Angelo is laughing wildly on top of the AC unit. Shit flies. Peter is throwing rocks. Zaq is rushing toward Hector.

BACK TO OFFICE

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

There is still one week left of school. ONE WEEK.  
And if aaaaanything happens, boys...

He picks up the paddle and SLAMS it against the desk, startling them. Peter twists to the side and VOMITS inches away from Hector!

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE – DAY

Angelo sits on a chair near Peter who's on a high bed, drinking out of a small cup. A middle-aged NURSE then hands him a small, candy-like pill.

NURSE



Just nerves. There, now just take this next one.

ANGELO

Nurse, you should have seen it. It was all iridescent, shiny, and metallic!

Peter COUGHS. The Nurse wipes Peter's forehead.

NURSE

We don't need a reminder, Angelo!... Aren't you all Zaq's friends?

ANGELO

Nurse, we're the Zappers!

NURSE

Zappers? Fun name. So you all live at Orchards Park?

They nod.

PETER

Yes, ma'am. We're all neighbors.

NURSE

Oh, I was so sad to hear many of our students who live there are moving and going to different schools next year. Are you all moving, too?

ANGELO

(shocked)

Noooo. We're there forever! Why are they all moving?

NURSE

New owner won a lawsuit and got some land developer from Canada to help out with the plans. Seems like it's happening all over – all this construction everywhere down here.

PETER

How do you know all this, Nurse?

NURSE

It was in today's paper.

INT. MRS. ZAMORA'S CLASSROOM – DAY

Colorful science and math posters. A large bulletin board displays a collage: "GREEK MYTHOLOGY"... Hercules with a club; Medusa; Theseus and the Minotaur; a walled city labeled "TROY" and an army fighting before it; "Achilles and Hector" dueling with swords... The Pantheon of Gods and a temple...

Vocabulary words are taped onto other walls. The class is full of... lobster-red, sun-burnt students. Peter and Angelo join a group painting over a large banner.

Mrs. Zamora walks by Elena and her friends writing: "MRS. ZAMORA'S CLASS IS #1"

MRS. ZAMORA

Aww, I am going to miss every single one  
of you, ladies.

Elena and her friends wipe tears off their cheeks.

ZAQ

(to Peter)

I wanna make her feel better.

Peter looks up from drawing a football.

PETER

Is that all you think about? That stupid girl?

Angelo SNIFFS and looks away.

MRS. ZAMORA

Angelo?? Are you crying, too?

All eyes on him. Some laugh.

ANGELO

Noooo, Miiiiis! We still have –

A bell rings. The kids get up to form a line.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

– five days of school.

(crying to Peter)

I wanted to roll you in the stretcher from  
the nurse's office.

PETER

Shut up, man. I didn't even need the  
stretcher! You cry for the dumbest things.

Their line turns down a long

HALLWAY

Tony and Alex rush up, passing by.

ZAQ

Hey, where are they going?

INT. CAFETERIA – DAY

A HUMMING hive of children... Mrs. Zamora's class waits near the serving area, and Zaq, Angelo, and Peter have gotten out of line up front. Ms. Road gets in their way.

MS. ROAD

Boys, you need to wait!

MRS. ZAMORA

(butting in)

I think I can handle my own class since your  
students are the ones all over the place... with  
caps on.

Mrs. Zamora points at Hector, Alex, and Tony huddled away from the line. They are wearing caps.

ZAQ

(to Peter)

I wonder what they're up to.

Tony places something in his pocket. The two teachers continue to ARGUE with each other.

ZAQ

I think they have fireworks. I should tell the principal.

PETER

Zaq, no! We could get in trouble over what we did  
with the eggs.

ANGELO

Our freedom has nothing to do with the school!

Peter stares at Angelo.

ZAQ

They attacked us too, you know. And they can't be bringing fireworks into school. Could fire it down!

PETER

Well, maybe they don't have fireworks. Maybe...

Tony and Alex are now at the far end of the cafeteria helping Coach Ponce with a bag of soccer balls.

ZAQ

Something's not right.

The food-tray line continues moving. Elena already has her tray, and she looks for –

ZAQ

(handing her a chocolate milk carton)

Here it is.

Elena looks at him. She takes the chocolate milk.

ELENA

(smiling)

Thanks.

EXT. CITRUS ORCHARD (ZAQ'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

The sun shines. A flock of grackles flies by. Buzzing bees dance and hover. And Zaq... runs hand in hand with Elena through a row of orange trees.

BACK TO CAFETERIA

The vision is interrupted with ...

MS. ROAD

(to Mrs. Zamora)

My students have special permission to help with Field Day preparation.

MRS. ZAMORA

As if I haven't been teaching for fifteen years. There are still cafeteria rules!

Zaq picks up his milk carton. He walks to the table with Angelo and Peter.

PETER  
(afraid)  
I've never seen teachers fight.

EXT. PLAYGROUND – DAY

Elena and her friends are jumping rope, and behind them is a group of first-graders playing soccer. Zaq approaches Elena, and she smiles.

The soccer ball is kicked off-grounds toward Zaq, knocking down a red flag on a stick. A little boy goes after it, but Hector rushes in front and kicks it away.

LITTLE BOY  
Hey, that's ooouuurs!

Zaq picks up the flag.

ELENA  
(to Hector)  
That was mean!

Hector races after the ball... and Zaq goes after Hector.

ZAQ  
(to little boy)  
I'll get it for you!

Zaq looks back to see if Elena is watching. The rest of the first-graders PROTEST and run too, and suddenly, all of the children in the playground are running, CHEERING, and LAUGHING – most not capable of seeing what the chase up ahead is for in the first place.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS/FENCE – DAY

The throng of children makes it all the way to the ends of the school grounds. They follow the perimeter of the fence, with Hector, and now Alex and Tony, in the lead, kicking the ball farther. Peter and Angelo run alongside Zaq.

From Elena's point of view, it is a dust cloud. Coach Ponce BLOWS the whistle at them. They're too far away.

ZAQ  
(charging up against Hector)  
YOU SUCK! Elena likes me. She likes me!

Zaq gets ahead of him, kicking the ball toward the far left.

HECTOR

Get him, Alex!

Alex is closer to Zaq and is just about to trip him when Angelo tackles him to the ground. Peter pushes Tony out of the way. Their caps fly off. They all fall, blocking the swarm of riotous children behind. Zaq – now in the lead.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN (Zaq's IMAGINATION) – DAY

An adult-version of Zaq with shiny armor raises his flag – now a long, shiny spear – and the soccer ball has transformed into a large, horse-sized, frightened chimera. The school buildings ahead have turned into a beautiful walled city on a hill.

From the parapets are dozens of women in elegant, flowing dresses. They wave, cheer, and dance.

The chimera pauses from exhaustion and turns its beast-like head. It gazes behind him: a charging army of ROARING, armed soldiers led by Zaq.

ZAQ

(yelling)

It's ours, men!

The chimera SQUAWKS, ROARS, and continues forward, but Zaq launches his spear, piercing the creature's neck. It SCREAMS.

BACK TO GRASSY FIELD

ZAQ

(holding ball)

I got it...

(breathing heavily)

Elena, I got it!

The red flag has, somehow, pierced the soccer ball! The gleeful first-graders surround him, CHEER, and YELL for their victorious soccer-ball savior. They tap him, hug him, and almost knock him down.

Elena is also CHEERING, and Zaq notices her from the center of the crowd. Hector spits on the ground and walks away.

EXT. DRINKING WATER-FOUNTAINS – DAY

Zaq, Angelo, and Peter gulp water.

COACH PONCE  
One, two, three – Okay, next!

Zaq is still drinking.

COACH PONCE (CONT'D)  
(nudging Zaq)  
C'mon Zaq. Just 3 seconds. Lotta thirsty kids.

A whole line of excited, CHIRPY kids waits behind. When Zaq stands up, Coach Ponce taps his shoulders.

COACH PONCE (CONT'D)  
Children, children... listen.

They have his attention.

COACH PONCE (CONT'D)  
This is one brave warrior. This is the kind of energy  
I want to see out there on Field Day!

CHEERING.

COACH PONCE (CONT'D)  
All that running. Exercising. Playing. And good  
sportsmanship.

Hector, Alex, and Tony are to the side.

COACH PONCE (CONT'D)  
(to Hector)  
And you....you need to play fair, Hector. Especially because  
of your size. There was no need to steal their  
ball like that!

FIRST GRADERS  
ZAQ! ZAQ! ZAQ! ZAQ!

ANGELO  
C'mon, Peter. Guess we're not superheroes, yet.

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

Students march down to their classrooms. Zaq is next to Elena. She hands him a note. Zaq opens it:

INSERT – ELENA'S NOTE

"I'm sawrry bout wat happened at the beach. My best friend heard that Jenn said that Belinda saw like she heard that how Hectorr kissed some gurl from junior high this morning on the bus stop. I cried. Wanted to see youuu right away."

The bottom of the note has her name in a heart. Zaq smiles widely. He stops in a daze. It becomes completely silent; he can only hear his HEARTBEAT.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(interrupting)

This way, Zaq.

ZAQ

Huh? What? Where?

Zaq follows him down the hall. Coach Ponce appears.

COACH PONCE

Mr. Zamora, Zaq saved the day! They were all just playing out there.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Mr. Ponce, the sports equipment and soccer balls are not to be taken out during lunch recess, and – NO – these kids don't play anymore. Not like when we were kids. All they do is fight nowadays.

COACH PONCE

What fighting? It's the laaaast week of school. And I had already asked some of Ms. Road's kids to help me with setting up equipment. Zaq and the others just wanted to help.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Thank you, Mr. Ponce. Bell's about to ring. I'll handle this.

Coach Ponce SIGHS and walks away. Zamora opens a doorway to a

WINDOWLESS CLASSROOM

Several rows of desks fill the room. Sitting throughout the room are Hector, Alex, Tony, Peter, and Angelo. It looks as though Peter has been crying. Zaq sits.



PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Children. What has possessed you? What is all this fighting about that you keep starting? Did you all steal each other's girlfriends? Nintendo games? What?!

ZAQ

Wasn't a fight. I was just getting the ball back to return to the first-graders. And then they wanted to just beat us up.

Hector and Alex PROTEST all at once.

ZAQ (CONT'D)

Sir, they all have stuff in their pockets. They have fireworks!

PETER

Zaq!

Hector, Alex, and Tony SIGH and readjust in their seats.

HECTOR

We no got fireworks, stupid!

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

SILENCE! ALL OF YOU!... Boys, empty your pockets. AND remove your caps. You know the rules.

They obey and empty out their pockets. Alex pulls out a sharpie. Tony – some crayons. Hector: his wallet and a set of keys.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(to Zaq)

What made you think they had fireworks?

From behind everyone is wide-eyed Angelo, signaling for Zaq to "cut it out."

ZAQ

I don't know. Just.

A knock at the door. The principal steps out with his hand holding the door half-way open.

HECTOR

(to Zaq)

Yo, what's your fucking problem, *esee?* *Eeeh?*

Peter has his eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer.

TONY

Peter's gonna blow chunks again, dude.

PETER

Shut up. All of you. Shut the HELL up!

TONY

(taunting)

Ooooh, little church boy said a baaad word.

ZAQ

(standing)

You leave my best friends all alone! You three just gangsters – stupid. Ruin the school and Orchards. Get out already. Go to another school! Leave Orchards Park too! And you, leave Elena alone!

HECTOR

(rising)

You think you know what you're talking about, eeh? You think you got problems, man? Well, we're gonna give you shit back! Like you all did last weekend! We're gonna give you problems if you white boys don't SHUT THE FUCK UP.

ANGELO

We're white, Mexican-Americans, you moron!

ZAQ

You kissed a girl from junior high. Yesterday.

Hector looks shocked for a split second.

PETER

(joining Angelo)

Don't you all know Columbus brought white Spaniards, and Jesus, and the church... into what is now Mexico?!

Hector is silent, and Alex looks up at his big brother, waiting for a signal. The principal re-enters with several stapled packs of paper; the boys sit instantly. Zamora hands each of them a packet.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
You cannot leave detention until you finish  
this science test.

GROANS. Angelo squeals with excitement to himself.

MONTAGE – THE BOYS TAKING EXAM

- – The principal sits at a front desk, reading the newspaper.
- – Peter concentrates hard and bubbles in an answer.
- – The clock ticks, and the hour dissolves to 6:45.
- – Angelo gets up and turns in his packet. He leaves. Then Tony.
- – Alex is next to leave, followed by Peter.

Hector gets up and turns in his packet. The principal looks through it. It is entirely blank.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
You didn't answer a single one!

HECTOR  
(turning away bashfully)  
I tried.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
(looks at watch)  
It's almost seven!

Zaq turns in his packet.

ZAQ  
I need three more.

The principal is at a loss for words.

ZAQ (CONT'D)  
(to Hector)  
And you wonder why you're a flunkee.

Hector steps forward, and Zaq clenches his fists. The principal rushes in between them.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

ENOUGH! Zaq, you know better than to make fun of someone like Hector when you yourself were taken out of G.T. and placed in a regular classroom.

ZAQ  
(blushing)  
Not my fault.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
(breathing heavily)  
Do you boys know what a truce is?

They don't respond.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (CONT'D)  
It's when an agreement of peace is made between two fighters, two armies – any two sides – over something, anything!... I want the two of you to make a truce between your two little teams, gangs – whatever you all are... Do it now!

Zaq looks to the side. Hector stares at the floor. The principal clasps their hands together in a handshake.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
And you shake hands and look at each other in the eye and say: TRUCE!

They shake hands and mumble the words to each other.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
SAY IT!

HECTOR AND ZAQ  
TRUCE. Truce... truce.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
There. Now...is all this silly fighting finally going to end?

EXT. STREET – NIGHT

The school bus BURPS down the dark street, and Hector stares out the window. Zaq gets off and makes his way toward his house. He massages his hand and sits on his

## PORCH

A television MURMURS from inside. Kitchen noises: plates and silverware clink. Zaq slides his backpack forward, opens it, and takes out a colorful, illustrated book that he thumbs through... ancient, Greek soldiers march on a large plain... Next few pages: a beautiful maiden sits at a table, eating fruits... a soldier puts on golden-colored, detailed armor... he lies face-down with a pool of blood around him... a large, wooden horse rises.

ZAQ'S MOM (O.S.)

Zaaaq? Dinner's ready.

Zaq closes the book. The title: "The Iliad for Children."

## INT. ZAMORA'S OFFICE – DAY

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(sternly)

No, honey. It's causing even more rivalry between the students.

MRS. ZAMORA

But the use of team names is a tradition!  
The kids have been making signs all week.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(turning away)

I have decided.

She SIGHS and leaves the office.

## INT. MRS. ZAMORA'S CLASSROOM – DAY

The students are in various groups drawing and coloring on large posters. Angelo sits aside and pulls out a newspaper from his backpack. He shows it to Peter and Zaq.

ANGELO

Look, guys.

## INSERT – NEWS HEADLINE

"Mobile Home Park Eviction Imminent"

ZAQ

I don't know what "imm-in-ent" means.

PETER

It's like Apocalypse – the end of the world.  
Imminent means it's going to happen, and us  
getting kicked out is just one sign of the  
fight at Armageddon.

Zaq and Angelo look at Peter with utter fear and confusion.

ZAQ

Arma -what?

PETER

Armageddon – yeah, the last battle.

The school bell rings.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S. OVER INTERCOM)  
GOOD MORNING, RODRIGUEZ ELEMENTARY!

SCHOOLCHILDREN

(up to ceiling/air)

Good morning, Principal Zamora.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)

Today's vocabulary word is truce – an agreement  
between two opposing teams...

The students move about...talk with one another...

ZAQ

Oh, yeah. He wants us to truce with Hector.

PETER

But how?

Mrs. Zamora is at her desk.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)

Students and teachers, I have a very – VERY –  
important announcement.

Every student, including Mrs. Zamora, freezes, and look up with wonder at the intercom speaker.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)

Teams will not be allowed this year.

A LOUD PROTESTING GROWN. It redoubles and ECHOES from within the walls and classrooms around.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)

We will have many play-stations, and students will take turns competing with each other as fairly and cooperatively as possible.

INT. MS. ROAD'S CLASSROOM – DAY

Several groups of students stare at their hand-made posters. Hector has his arms crossed.

HECTOR

(to Alex and Tony)

Zaq play fair? Yeah right. Zamora wanted me to keep a truce with Zaq and them – today's stupid word.

Hector SCOFFS. Alex and Tony imitate.

HECTOR

We're still gonna be the Haters.

TONY

Like in the book about Alice?

ALEX

That book is for giiiirls!

HECTOR

(to Alex)

Fuck you!

MS. ROAD

HECTOR!

HECTOR

I'm sorry, Miss. Sorry. Won't say bad words again!

He gets up and helps her erase the board. The rest of the class begins to pick up and put markers and paintbrushes away – following Hector's role.

MS. ROAD

Yes, thank you, children. Just like Hector here – very helpful student.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)  
Again – I repeat – Teams will not be allowed for our  
end-of-the-year Field Day Games.

EXT. VACANT LOT – DAY

Zaq, Angelo, and Peter step out of Third Base and cross the lot.

PETER  
I don't know, Zaq. I mean – what if they want to  
beat us up. Don't think they'll want to make a truce.

ZAQ  
Let's just go try, man. Just so that Zamora  
knows we at least tried.

PETER  
Oh – good point.

EXT. GRASSY ALLEY – DAY

A large construction vehicle crosses their path. It turns and plows through someone's front yard, creating a fresh path. The Zappers duck when Hector, Alex, and Tony run ahead of the vehicle and jump over piles of lumber; they spray-paint them.

ZAQ  
Yeah, why are we getting evicted  
when they're the ones damaging?

PETER  
I wonder if they have a home base or  
something like our Third Base?

The Haters run down the alley.

ANGELO  
I always see them go that way. Toward  
the water tower. Maybe that's where they  
kiss their older women girlfriends.

In the distance rises a large, white water tower with the words: PHARR ON THE RISE!

EXT. END OF ALLEY – DAY



At the bottom of the wire fence is a gaping hole. The Zappers crawl through it. Before them is a trail that snakes into grass taller than the boys. They go forth.

EXT. GRASSY TRAIL – DAY

Zaq leads. Cicadas BUZZ. Insects dart in and around them.

PETER

We should go back, guys. I don't like this.  
There're probably snakes here.

ZAQ

I saw them go this way. I think there's...

A flock of mourning doves FLAPS and swooshes out from the side.

ZAQ

What is thiiiiis?

They enter an enclosed, wide, circular area – rusty cars, piles of lumber, empty beer cans, broken glass, and a large, decrepit, wooden, one-story house with a wrap-around-porch. Grass overflows from all cracks and edges of this old house.

ANGELO

It's a secret house! How coooool!

PETER

Ssssh!

Hector appears from the side of the porch. Alex and Tony peek out from a pile of lumber.

HECTOR

Hey!

He holds a chain in his hands.

ZAQ

We came to truce.

HECTOR

We're not trucing nothing! And how'd  
you get in here? Get out!

ZAQ

Look, Hector –

A GROWL and BARK. The chain moves, and Hector pulls it to reveal a Rottweiler. It ROARS and charges at the Zappers. They bolt back into

#### THE GRASSY TRAIL

They make it to the fence, and Zaq and Peter hurtle over it. Angelo crawls through the hole. The Rottweiler BARKS and HOWLS into the trail, reaching the end of its chain.

#### INT. MRS. ZAMORA'S CLASSROOM – DAY

The students are watching a movie: "GHOSTBUSTERS." Mrs. Zamora is at her desk, handwriting into a spreadsheet. Zaq approaches her.

ZAQ

Mrs. Zamora... do you know why Mr. Zamora canceled  
team names? Can I go talk to him?

She hands him a long, plastic ruler decorated with her name and the classroom number and continues working on the spreadsheet.

#### INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICES – DAY

Zaq is before a hustling maze of rooms and narrow hallways where staff workers come and go. Phones ring. A copy machine vibrates in a corner. A young secretary at her desk answers her phone and doesn't see Zaq.

Zaq notices a small gift basket on the floor. It's filled with fruits, cookies, and chips. Zaq reads its note:

#### INSERT – NOTE

Dear Principal Zamora,

I'm very very sorry about the fight on the feeeld trip at McDonald's. I promise to be the best student at Rodriguez Elementary. Please allow team names, so that my Dad can be very happy. You're the best principal.

Sincerely,

Hector.

Zaq GASPS. The secretary is turned away, and no one is around for a moment. Zaq nabs Hector's note, takes a pencil, erases Hector's name and writes his own over it.

SECRETARY

Oh – we were wondering who brought that!

ZAQ

(nervously)

Yes, ummm... Principal Zamora's office is?

SECRETARY

Just leave it right there, *mijo*. I'll get it to him.

INT. ZAQ'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Several movie posters, "The Neverending Story," "The Dark Crystal," and "The Goonies," hang on the walls. Stuffed toy animals line a shelf with books. "He-Man" and "G.I. Joe" action figures are scattered throughout the floor. Soft moonlight illuminates Zaq sleeping in a bed in the corner.

He turns, moves, tosses, and turns. BARK-BARK! Zaq moves and slides. MEOW-HISS-HISS - -MEOOOWW! Dissolve into

ZAQ'S DREAM

Dressed in his armor as before, Zaq stands before a large, dark pit: cat-like creatures the size of cars ravage and fight with dog-like monsters. There are dozens of them biting, snipping, scratching, ROARING, hissing, and rolling around.

BACK TO BEDROOM

The noise of these creatures continues from his dream and ECHOES into his room; Zaq sits up in bed... ROCKING noises, as if bricks or blocks are falling or being thrown underneath the mobile home floor.

EXT. YARD – NIGHT

Two cats run in and out from under the mobile home. A medium-sized dog runs out, YELPING. A number of cats hiss, scratch, and roll in the shadows. Dogs GROWL and roll around, knocking down debris, hitting the mobile home's floor from underneath.

ZAQ

HEY! SHOO! SHOOO!

Zaq is in his pajamas, holding a flashlight into the fray: cats' eyes glow. Dogs' teeth flare. A bloody cat limps. And then... the Rottweiler from before. It BARKS and makes his way toward Zaq. Zaq falls back in fright and drops his flashlight, but the Rottweiler passes him, meeting up with a trio of shadows: boys running and LAUGHING down the street.

EXT. ANGELO'S LAWN – DAY

Angelo is on his knees on the grass. Before him is a white, stiff, bloody kitten. ANGELO'S DAD walks by, sets a shovel down, and massages Angelo's hair. We only see his back.

ANGELO'S DAD  
He's in Kitty Cat Heaven, son.

A little grave has been made nearby.

EXT. BUS STOP – DAY

ZAQ  
It was them. I promise!

PETER  
Are you sure?

ZAQ  
Yes, the Haters brought all these dogs  
to attack my cats!

The bus arrives. They all climb into the

BUS

Angelo is late boarding. He covers his teary-eyed face and sits next to Peter.

PETER  
Angelo, what's wrong?

ANGELO  
My kitty cat.  
(sobbing)  
Some dogs killed it last night.

Peter places his arm around Angelo.

ZAQ  
To HELL with them!

PETER  
Zaq, calm down.

Several excited children have stopped talking. They turn toward Zaq and a crying Angelo being held by Peter.

EXT. SCHOOL BUS LOADING AREA – DAY

Coach Ponce boards the bus.

COACH PONCE  
(on megaphone)  
ARE YOU REAAAADDYYYYYY??!

Schoolchildren SHOUT and CHEER as they get down with the coach. He enters the next bus and RILES up the kids. Zaq looks toward the school entrance. Hector, Alex, and Tony lean against the wall and put on their caps.

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

Zaq catches up with Coach Ponce.

ZAQ  
Coach, umm...  
COACH PONCE  
(still on megaphone)  
YES, ZAQ?

Zaq jumps.

COACH PONCE  
(removing megaphone)  
Sorry, kid.

ZAQ  
Just wondering if my friends could help you  
set up and pick up stuff for Field Day like Hector, Alex, and Tony?

COACH PONCE  
Sure thing! I'll let your teacher know. We have the first  
round of games this morning, and then the last one  
after lunch. Meet me outside the cafeteria.

EXT. CAFETERIA WALKWAY – DAY

Principal Zamora is wearing shorts, a school t-shirt, a ball cap, and lots of sunscreen. Zaq walks by.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
Zaq, thank you for the gift basket.

ZAQ

(confused)

Oh... oh, yes! You're welcome, sir. Umm, so can we use teams and team names?

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(smiling)

Zaq. You're one step ahead. I'm going to allow them for the laaaaast rounds of Field Day games. So after lunch – get your team and names ready!

Zaq smiles and walks away.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Oh, and Zaq? Is your Dad coming, after all?

ZAQ

My Dad?

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Yes, you said in the note you wanted to make your Dad happy, so I'm assuming he'll come by?

A sudden shock takes over Zaq's eyes.

ZAQ

Oooh, um. No, he can't make it out today after all.

He turns without looking and bumps into Coach Ponce. He's holding a mesh-cloth bag of sports balls and cones.

COACH PONCE

(to Zamora)

Hey, this time I can have this stuff out, Mr. Zamora.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

(annoyed)

Yes, yes... get going.

Zaq and a number of other boys follow Coach Ponce through the double doors.

MONTAGE – FIELD DAY GAMES

– – Bright green and white ribbons stretch across the halls.

- Zaq and several students set up cones in various places over a large soccer field.
- Giant hand-painted banners and posters hang throughout: "Rodriguez Elementary ROCKS!"... "Goodbye, 5th-graders"... "Field Day!"
- Kindergarten students fill the playground.
- A game of dodgeball under a small pavilion.
- Jump-rope contest with Elena and her friends.
- Relay races with a group of fifth-graders.
- Kids cross and hang on the monkey bars.
- A tug-of-war game

Zaq and Peter sit with their class, drinking sodas under the pavilion. In the distance is Ms. Road's class, running the relay races. Coach Ponce blows the WHISTLE. Kids line up.

INT. CAFETERIA – DAY

Zaq and Peter finish eating their burgers. Angelo has barely touched his food. He picks at it.

PETER  
I hope Angelo's all right.

ZAQ  
Never seen him down.

MRS. ZAMORA  
(to her class)  
Students, before we go outside for the last  
games and our last hour of our last school day...

She bursts into tears. A small group of girls CRIES. They hug each other.

MRS. ZAMORA  
(wiping tears)  
I just wanted to say you – all – have – been  
the – best – the ...

Elena and her friends surround Mrs. Zamora and hug her. A CRACK OF THUNDER. Principal Zamora enters the cafeteria. The lights flicker on and off. Children SCREAM and CHEER.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
(on megaphone)  
STUDENTS!

No one has noticed him. THUNDER rolls. Kids scream, whistle, and CHEER.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
STUUUUDEEEEEENTS.

They finally notice him. He has the floor.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
We will have to continue the afternoon games  
inside the gym.

The rain pounds the windows. THUNDER. The power goes out. SCREAMING.

ZAQ  
(to Angelo)  
We're the Zappers – like you said. Let's go...  
Let's get Hector back, especially for what they  
did to your kitty.

ANGELO  
(smiling)  
But where? How?

ZAQ  
When we go help Coach Ponce pick up stuff  
for the games. We'll get them.

PETER  
(joining in)  
I don't know, guys. We probably shouldn't  
mess with them at school.

ZAQ  
C'mon, Peter. We're just gonna throw rocks  
at them!

The lights come back on, and Zaq notices Hector, Alex, and Tony staring at them from across two tables.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
(still on megaphone)



Now listen, students! Teams and Team Names will  
be allowed for the last hour and a half of games today.

OUTBURSTS of joy. Zaq does a quick, vulgar gesture with his hands toward Hector. Alex picks up a small cardboard sign: HATERS.

Angelo BURSTS out LAUGHING.

ANGELO  
(to Zaq and Peter)  
They're idiots! Zappers RULE!

He rolls out a long cloth the size of two t-shirts.

PETER  
(to Angelo)  
Oooh, cool – where'd you get that?!

ANGELO  
Sewed it yesterday with my Mom.

Zaq holds the cloth sign up: "ZAPPERS!" Ms. Road and Mrs. Zamora and several other teachers help pass out signs to various excited groups. The signs: "THE TACOS," "ROARING DINOSAURS," "COMETS," "THE HE-MEN," "THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING CATS," and for Elena and her cheering group of girls: "THE RAINBOW BRIGHT STARS."

COACH PONCE  
(on megaphone)  
This way students – this way!

It is a wild mess of kids and lines that shuffle out of the glass doors.

INT. GYM – DAY

The rain pounds; music plays from a stereo. Kids and teachers sit throughout bleachers, chairs, and tables. Children play at various stations: one with the game, Twister; another with jump ropes and dancing; a television set plays the movie, "GREMLINS," in one corner; and the fourth-graders are in the middle, dribbling and shooting around basketballs.

LATER

It is a half-court game of basketball: the Zappers versus the Haters. Elena and her "RAINBOW" girls cheer the Zappers on. Tony takes a quick break near the bleachers.

TONY  
NACHOS SUCK!

All of his classmates – including his teacher, Ms. Road – snicker and LAUGH. Zaq stares at them all. Peter comes up from behind.

PETER  
C'mon – don't let it bother you!

MONTAGE – BASKETBALL GAME

- – Zaq shoots and scores. The crowd CHEERS.
- – Peter tosses the ball to Angelo. It is intercepted by Alex. Alex passes it to Tony.
- – Elena and the girls dance to a "New Kids" song while Zaq, Angelo, and Peter take a break, huddling by the bleachers.
- – Coach Ponce blows the WHISTLE for an intermission.

INT. RESTROOM – DAY

With a large sharpie marker, Alex writes "HATERS" over the mirror. The Zappers enter.

ANGELO  
Hey, that's vandalism!

ALEX  
Shut up, NERD.

Angelo tosses water at Alex from the sink. Alex runs out. Zaq and Peter laugh.

INT. GYM – DAY

The game is intense now. All the school is scattered throughout the bleachers watching. Principal Zamora observes from courtside. The Zappers dash and run, pass, duck, and slide, but the Haters are winning. The THUNDER continues. Hector tosses the ball. The Coach blows the WHISTLE. Hector scores. Students CHEER.

COACH PONCE  
Ms. Road's class wins!

Zaq wipes his sweaty forehead and steps aside. Elena comes up to him and kisses him quickly on the cheek, taking Zaq by surprise.

ELENA  
Call me this summer.

She hands him a little piece of paper and walks away. Hector is suddenly in front of Zaq; he nabs the paper from Zaq's hand and stuffs it in his shorts.

ZAQ  
GIMME THAT! IT'S MINE!

A bell RINGS...THUNDER. Zaq is lost in the midst of a sea of children.

EXT. COVERED WALKWAY – DAY

Hector, Alex, and Tony join the coach on the edge of the sidewalk.

ZAQ  
I said GIMME THAT!

HECTOR  
(flaring chest)  
What? I got nothing!

Children begin to surround them. Peter and Angelo regroup with Zaq.

TONY  
(to crowd)  
Nachos suuuuuck! NACHOS!

LAUGHTER - SNICKERING.

ZAQ  
Shut up, HATERS!

HECTOR  
It's Hatters!

ANGELO  
You all can't even spell your own stupid team name. It's haaaatters. Two t's!

HECTOR  
(to Peter and Angelo)  
Look, it's the church boy and... the pussy.

More students gather. Confusion. Teachers call out INSTRUCTIONS. The chaos simmers.

ANGELO

I bet you all can't even spell pussy... you  
walking, bleeding vaginas!

SCHOOLCHILDREN

OOOOOOOOOOH!!! FIGHT! FIGHT! OOOOOHH!

Alex pushes Angelo. Peter intervenes. Tony strikes Peter, knocking him down. Angelo punches Tony; Alex hits Angelo; Peter punches at both. Then... Zaq swings at Hector, attempting to reach his pockets.

ZAQ

Gimmee back her number!

Hector drags Zaq into the rain. Schoolchildren form a ring around them all.

SCHOOLCHILDREN

FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!

It is a massive ball of kids around the pandemonium. Zaq lunges at Hector and grabs his hair, pulling him down to the mud.

ZAQ

You brought those dogs last night and killed  
Angelo's cat! And ELENA IS MINE!

Zaq attempts to reach into Hector's pockets, but Hector squirms and slides out of the way. Zaq gets on top of him and punches him.

ZAQ

(maniacally)

ZAPPERS RULE!

Zaq pushes Hector into the mud. Hector regains control and throws Zaq off, rising quickly and kicks him. Zaq bends over. WHISTLES BLOW. MEGAPHONE VOICES SCREAM OUT. Coach Ponce yanks Zaq away. Ms. Road grabs Tony and Alex. Mrs. Zamora has Peter and Angelo. With his other hand, Coach Ponce pulls at Hector.

MS. ROAD

(to Mrs. Zamora)

Not even on the last day of the school year  
can you keep your students from fighting  
with my students!

MRS. ZAMORA  
(twisting Peter's and Angelo's arms)  
Shut up, you bitch!

Ms. Road's mouth gapes wide open. Children are SCREAMING, LAUGHING, and moving about. The principal moves through the crowd like an ANGRY, fuming bull. Hector attempts to escape, but Zamora grabs his shoulders.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
ENOUGH! ALL OF YOU! INSIDE!

CRACK OF THUNDER. Students SCREAM, run, and disperse toward the building.

INT. WAITING AREA OUTSIDE ZAMORA'S OFFICE – DAY

The drenched, mud-encrusted, filthy ZAPPERS and HATERS (except for Hector who is in Zamora's office) sit on long benches. The Nurse tends to a long scratch on Peter's arm; Angelo attempts to remove some mud. Zaq scratches around a wound. Tony and Alex clean their caps.

ALEX  
*Pinche* church boy – ruined my cap.

PETER  
(rushed)  
You will not refer to me in that way anymore!

TONY  
You finally grew some hair today, church boy.

NURSE  
QUIET! All of you.

SWAT! (from inside the closed door of Zamora's office). SWAT! SWAT! Hector WHIMPERS from inside. SWAT!

ANGELO  
(panicking)  
I thought – oh – I thought paddling students was illegal.

SWAT! Hector SOBS and SHRIEKS.

RAM (O.S.)  
Not unless they have parental permission.

Ms. Road pushes Ram in his wheelchair. His hair is unkempt, clothes damp, and wheelchair caked with grassy mud.

ALEX

Papá!

Zaq, Angelo, and Peter look terrified at the presence of Ram. SWAT! Hector weeps more.

RAM

I hear your stupid brother.

HECTOR (O.S.)

(weeping)

I'm sorry – sir. I'm sorry! Didn't you get my apologies?

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA (O.S.)

I don't need apologies! I need positive progress from you. Change. Radical change from you. You need to move on and pass school. You should already be going into seventh grade! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

The office door opens. Hector limps out. Zamora steps onto the threshold.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Mr. Riojas! I wasn't aware you were coming.

RAM

Wanted to see my boys playing and racing. They knew I was coming! But shoulda known they'd make trouble.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA

Well, then. You will be able to hear their punishment.  
(to Alex)  
This way, Alex.

ALEX

No!

HECTOR

(to Alex)

It don't hurt that much.

ALEX

(shaking)  
No, pleeeeeease... NO!

Ram rolls forward and grabs Alex's arms, pulling him toward Zamora. Tony gets out of the way.

ALEX  
(crying)  
No, Pa. Nooo! Let go! OW!

Mrs. Zamora and Coach Ponce enter.

MS. ROAD  
All right – my duties here are done. And, Mrs. Zamora, I'll be in the lounge making phone calls to our superintendent – about the word you chose to call me.

Coach Ponce stares at Ms. Road's wet shirt and chest. Tony gets behind them all.

MRS. ZAMORA  
Go ahead, Ms. Road. School is over.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
And then we wonder why our kids behave the way they do? Look at you two!

Ms. Road and Mrs. Zamora fall into a MURMURING ARGUMENT.

COACH PONCE  
(interrupting)  
Just let these kids go home already! Let children be children, Mr. Zamora. Punish them a different way. But please – save them from this humiliation.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
I've heard enough of your opinions, Mr. Ponce. You have your realm – the gym, the sports, the games, and the weather for all I care.  
(to all)  
Let me run this school! These children have gone too far, and –

All the adults: a BICKERING mess! Tony ZOOMS through the doorway and breaks free. No one notices.

RAM

(raising arms)  
I'll handle them. Let them go!

The teachers get quiet and stare at Ram.

ANGELO  
(to Peter)  
Oh, my God. We're next. How do you pray?  
Show me!

But Peter already has his eyes closed with hands clasped.

ZAQ  
(suddenly)  
I stole Hector's apology.

All eyes on Zaq. Hector looks confused.

ZAQ (CONT'D)  
Hector's gift basket. I made it seem  
like it was mine.

PRINCIPAL ZAMORA  
(to Angelo and Peter)  
Boys, get on out of here. Now!  
(snapping fingers to Zaq)  
You, sir. Over here.

Angelo and Peter SIGH loudly and stare quietly at Zaq. He steps forward...

PETER  
Zaq, it's not the end – yet.

Zaq is in a haze...

EXT. CAVERN ENTRANCE (ZAQ'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

Behind Zaq-in-armor is his large army of men, waiting with swords and shields up and ready. Zaq steps forward. A piercing SHRIEK echoes from within. Zaq shudders and inches closer to the cavern's entrance. Just then, a tall, monstrous Cyclops with a club BANGS and SWINGS his way forward. Zaq unsheathes his sword...

INT. ZAMORA'S OFFICE – DAY

SWAT! Zaq's eyes water.



ZAQ

I tried the truce-ing, sir. I did!

SWAT! He clenches his teeth. SWAT! SWAT! Scene dissolves into...

EXT. MOBILE HOME – A FEW WEEKS LATER

Hector spray-paints lines and large letters across the wall. Alex joins in and sprays: "HATERS" across the door. A car pulls up, and a middle-aged man flies out, leaving the car on. Hector and Alex flee.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

You shit-heads, come back here!

MONTAGE – HECTOR, ALEX, AND TONY SPRAY-PAINTING

- – They spray-paint an entire wooden fence with lines.
- – HIIIISSSS.... a fresh line over a manicured garden.
- – Lines over air-conditioners, lawnmowers, and parked cars.
- – They LAUGH and talk to themselves, spray-painting a doghouse, including the small, whimpering dog's tummy.
- – HIIIIIISSSSSS.... across the park office billboard.
- – They dart from Sue, who's YELLING at them. She turns to read: "HATERS HERE 4EVER" across the wall near the office door entrance.
- – It's night. They spray-paint lines and obscure symbols across the park entrance sign: "Orchards of Paradise Bay..."

EXT. LAKE DOCK – DAY

Peter dangles his legs over the dock's edge, reading the Bible. Plastic bottles, debris, and a family of ducks floats by. Zaq limps forward and sits next to him. He throws pebbles into the murky waters.

ZAQ

Have your parents gotten more evicting things?

PETER

They're packing stuff. Said the neighborhood's gone to crap and needed to leave anyway.

ZAQ

I read a story one time – people getting kicked out of their houses. Their homes were destroyed. New people built on their land.

PETER

Sounds like a crappy story.

ZAQ

Well, it was in the newspaper.

PETER

Ooh. Well, we can turn this into a real story.

ZAQ

Yeah! Like the kind with heroes and swords and damsels and dragons and –

PETER

– a war?

ZAQ

Yes!

Peter and Zaq turn their hands into "guns," and they laugh and shoot each other.

ZAQ

Yeah, if it weren't for Hector, we'd be okay, no?  
We needa stop them from all the damaging.

PETER

(thrilled)

If we do, does this mean we'll be heroes?

ZAQ

Yes! All heroes were children, no? I mean  
when they were kids before they were heroes.

PETER

(pondering)

Heroes cause trouble. They're born out of angels that fall in love with earthly women – like it says here in Genesis chapter 6.

ZAQ

But there's aaaall kinds of heroes! I wanna be like a...  
a Thundercat!

PETER  
Then I can be a... umm, a Knight!

ZAQ  
Guess that makes Angelo a... a mad scientist!

They LAUGH, continue talking, and throw rocks into the water. Nearby on the lake bank is Mr. Terrence staring at the boys. They notice him. Mr. Terrence walks away.

ZAQ  
You think he heard our plans?

PETER  
I don't know. He wouldn't tell on anyone, though.  
He's a quiet man.

EXT. LAKE BANKS – DAY

Zaq and Peter walk past the DRILLING in Mr. Terrence's yard. He pauses and turns his helmeted visor at the boys. They run off in a hurry.

EXT. LAKE ISLAND – DAY

Zaq follows Peter across a short, broken bridge. They climb a large, cypress tree. The lake stretches before them. The sun hides behind the white water tower in the distance.

ZAQ  
I wonder why this lake is here.

PETER  
(staring across)  
Maybe an asteroid hit the earth here and then rain  
filled the hole.

ZAQ  
You're starting to sound like Angelo!

PETER  
Zaq, I don't wanna live anywhere else. I think  
this place is beautiful.

Angelo comes up to the tree.

ANGELO

Hey, Zaq, get down from there! You too, Peter.

Zaq and Peter jump off.

PETER

Speak of the devil or ...angel.

ANGELO

The office lady doesn't like anyone climbing these trees. Why don't you all come get me to play?

ZAQ

Sorry – just you're always reading or doing science stuff.

ANGELO

Yup....true.

EXT. LUMBER YARD – DAY

Hector and Alex lift long beams of wood. Tony pulls another.

TONY

(dropping lumber)

Sooo heavy!

HECTOR

Pick it up, *pendejo*! The house aint that far.

Tony and Alex GROAN and pull the long pieces of wood next to the secret house we saw before. The Rottweiler wags its tail and barks happily.

HECTOR

All right, that should do it.

Alex and Tony pick up their spray-paint cans.

TONY

My favorite time of day!

HECTOR

Hey, Alex... where are the smoke bombs?

ALEX

Inside. What're we gonna need one for?

HECTOR

Let's go check out the clubhouse! Scare the office lady!

The boys CHUCKLE and run.

INT. MOBILE HOME PARK OFFICE – DAY

A wire fan BUZZES and oscillates. Sue sifts through a mail bundle. A familiar, old man steps in.

SUE

Mr. Wright! What a splendid surprise.

MR. WRIGHT

Afternoon, Sue.

He unrolls a hand-drawn map across a table – it's the mobile home park but with winding, curving roads, larger lots, and patches of greenery.

MR. WRIGHT

(pointing on map)

A renovated pool here! Ten large, two-story homes per street instead of the sixteen, cramped mobile trash homes! See the design?

She looks over it.

MR. WRIGHT (CONT'D)

The streets will curve. Six of them adjacent to the main roads. Oh, and here is the community garden. A new clubhouse right here where we're standing. It'll overlook the...

He stares out the window at the eight-shaped lake. Trash and tires float over it. Ducks fly about and over.

MR. WRIGHT (CONT'D)

...new lake. We'll get that cesspool cleaned, refilled, and up to par. Have the water circulate. Bring new ducks, fish, turtles...

SUE

What is this greenish area?

MR. WRIGHT

A mini-community orchard. With trails and fruit-picking stations!

SUE

How lovely!

MR. WRIGHT

And did you notice...

(running finger through map)

Sidewalks!

CRASH! A large rock rips across the map. Dust flies. Sue SCREAMS. Mr. Wright falls over... A whirling ball of smoke rolls in. The ball rolls. Smoke rises and fills the room. Mr. Wright stand up and COUGH.

HECTOR

(into office)

This place is ours!!

Hector, Alex, and Tony run off as Mr. Wright COUGHS into the smoky mess. He stumbles out

THE EXIT DOOR

MR. WRIGHT

Damn KIDS!

EXT. LAKE ISLAND – DAY

The Zappers see all this and duck under a picnic table as the Haters run across the opposite banks and turn into a yard.

PETER

You think they saw us?

ZAQ

It doesn't matter. They need to stop  
all this damaging!

ANGELO

Why don't we just call the police on them?

PETER

My parents say police don't come here.  
Not after they know we're all supposed to leave.

ANGELO  
(determined)  
I guess we can be the police.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN – DUSK

The Rottweiler gnaws on a piece of chicken. The Haters sweep in through the trail, LAUGHING and CHATTING.

HECTOR  
(smirking)  
That was him. Mr. Wright, or whatever.

ALEX  
(out of breath)  
*Pinche Gringo!*

HECTOR  
No way he's gonna take Dad's land.

ALEX  
Hector, you think we have a chance? I mean...  
People moving out already and giving in to him.  
That evictioning thing.

TONY  
Yeah, most people just leaving behind their  
houses.

ALEX  
Can't afford to move 'em.

HECTOR  
Yeah, but we still need to beat Mr. Wright ...and  
the fucking Zappers need to stay out of all this.

TONY  
(to Hector)  
Why don't we just really kick their asses, you know?  
Hospitalize them and shit. Your cousins could help us  
again with their dogs. Have those dogs attack the  
Zappers instead of just their pets like last time.

HECTOR  
(scoffing)

Yeaaaaah, now you're talking, Tony. Those dogs'r from hell! Let's call them.

TONY

Yeah, aren't they planning a big dog fight, man? Over in Las Milpas. They win lots of money betting on them. Scary sons of bitches – those dogs.

ALEX

They can jump on the Zappers the same way!

Hector pets the Rottweiler's head.

HECTOR

Like that, Lucy?

LUCY, the Rottweiler, looks up and SNEEZES. She continues to gnaw and bite her treat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

All right. Alex, look. Why don't you keep moving this lumber near the house? I'll be right back.

ALEX

I guess. C'mon, Tony.

Hector disappears into the trail.

INT. THIRD BASE – NIGHT

Zaq holds a flashlight over the map on the floor.

ANGELO

(pointing)

They've spray-painted all of these houses. And this whole street is gone. All the people left!

PETER

Not over here...

(pointing at map)

There's my house, and my neighbors want to picket city hall very soon.

ANGELO

Ooh, can we go?! I want to throw parts of picket fences at city hall!



PETER

Nooo, dummy, it means they're going to protest.

ANGELO

Against the Catholic Church?

PETER

(sarcastically)

Yes, Angelo. We're gonna start the  
Second Reformation.

Angelo SQUEAKS with excitement. Peter SIGHS and plays with a couple of lightning bugs that have entered the shed.

ZAQ

Guys, look, look. The adults have their thing. We have ours. As long as we beat the Haters out the ...door. Out the park, our parents'll be able to fix things.

A KNOCK. Zaq opens it and almost falls back. It is Hector.

HECTOR

I'm not here to fight! I saw you all at the lake island.

The Zappers stare wide-eyed.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I'm here to let you know... it's almost over, man.

ZAQ

(nervously)

Get outta here!

HECTOR

No. You all are almost outta here. You all need to get out of our business and get the hell out of Orchards. For good!

PETER

Not without a fight.

HECTOR

Shut up, church boy!

Peter grabs a sling shot, but Angelo pushes Peter's hands down. Peter breathes HEAVILY.

ZAQ

What the hell do you want, Hector?

ANGELO

To bully us – that's all!

HECTOR

I'm just here to tell you all that if you just don't leave us alone in peace and quiet, then guess what... we'll fight you *pinche* fair!

ZAQ

We're no cowards!

HECTOR

Oh, yeah. We'll see about that! And you know what? This whole land, man. The ground you step on and sleep over. It's my Dad's, and it belongs to him!

ZAQ

What do you mean this is your Dad's land?

ANGELO

Your Dad is a cripple!

Silence... a moment... Hector stares.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

You don't even know what that means, do you?

The Zappers laugh.

HECTOR

Fuck you! FUCK all of you! You know what, Zaq...  
(inching closer)

You all know nothing, man. Nothing! I haven't forgotten about everything – the gift basket you stole, the fights at school, and Elena! She's mine, dick.

Hector runs off. Zaq watches him trek through the vacant lot. Zaq SLAMS the door shut.

ANGELO

What if we pretend we've given up? And then  
...surprise attack somehow?

Zaq GROANS.

ANGELO

And... we'll go to their fort. Whatever that old house  
is in the field... and, and, and –

PETER

I could pretend to be you, Zaq!

ZAQ

What? Why? But how?

PETER

(determined)

I hate being called church boy! We'll see how they  
feel once the wrath of God is upon them! Ooooooh, yeah  
– church boy can fight. I can! And I can pretend to be you, Zaq.  
....and it'll confuse them, and then you all can do a  
surprise attack like Angelo said. And then I'll shock  
them when I reveal myself. It'll be a secret attack everywhere!

ZAQ

Yes! Angelo and I could sneak up from behind the secret house!  
And throw fireworks while you lure them the front.  
See how they like fireworks.

Zaq ponders over the map.

ANGELO

And I'll stuff a piece of steak with laxatives!

....confused looks from Zaq and Peter.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

For the Rottweiler!

ZAQ AND PETER

OOooooohh...

Zaq picks up the map.

ZAQ

Their secret house is ... over here, and the water tower is  
over there. Angelo, we'd have to go all the way around  
the water tower to get behind their secret house.

ANGELO

There's a fireworks stand a block from Orchards.

Angelo, Zaq, and Peter empty their pockets and pour some coins into a pile.

PETER

And Fourth of July is tomorrow, so we can't  
be breaking the law by throwing some innocent  
crackers!

ANGELO

Brilliant, oh Saint Peter!

Peter SMACKS him.

ZAQ

(gathering coins)

Let's see how much we can get with this.

EXT. FIREWORKS STAND – NIGHT

"Motley Crue" rock music BLARES where three young men attend to a large, DRONING crowd of children and adults gawking and buying. Zaq, Angelo, and Peter look at the wide arrangement of rockets, sparklers, and boxes of tanks, lantern-like rods, and mini-bombs. Zaq hands over all the change.

They walk away from the stand. Zaq pours over the brown bag.

ANGELO

Wait, for tomorrow, guys – how in tarnations  
(to Peter)  
are you going to pretend to be Zaq?

EXT. ANGELO'S LAWN – DAY

"ELENA LOVES ZAQ!" – in the same blood-red paint but in cursive letters.

Two little hands grip the edge of this huge cardboard sign. Peter lowers it, revealing his camouflaged-painted face. Zaq and Peter are before him, shirtless and covered in camouflage.

PETER

So I'll wait for you signal, Zaq?

Zaq places two fingers against his lips and does a HIGH-PITCHED WHISTLE.

ZAQ

Okay, so here's the plan, men. They always go out around 4 p.m., and spray-paint houses.

ANGELO

They're usually back at the secret house by 5 p.m.

PETER

It's 3:30 now.

ZAQ

So, Angelo –

ANGELO

(saluting)

Yes, SIR!

ZAQ

To the water tower!

PETER

Okay, Zappers. See you in a bit!

The water tower rises behind them.

EXT. VACANT MOBILE HOME – DAY

Alex and Tony slowly spray-paint on the wall. Glass BREAKS inside. Furniture TUMBLES. Hector opens the door, holding a large piece of ply wood.

HECTOR

Look, Alex! Perfect for a wheelchair ramp.

ALEX

Cool, man. Needed that for sure.

EXT. HATERS' SECRET HOUSE – DAY

Lucy slinks out from the broken door and SNIFFS around, dragging her chain. BARK! BARK! Cicadas BUZZ. Flies move in and out of Lucy's nose. She sneezes.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN TRAIL – DAY

Peter inches forward. He takes several breaths.

PETER  
(whispering)  
And though I walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death...

EXT. UNDER THE WATER TOWER – DAY

Zaq and Angelo climb over a fence. The tower looms above.

ZAQ  
Look, there's the roof of the secret house.

Before them is a high pile of wooden beams and plywood. BARK! BARK!

ANGELO  
The steak! Let's climb the pile of wood to get a better  
view of our mission.

ZAQ  
(hoarsely)  
No! The Haters may see us.

ANGELO  
Zaq...  
(SIGHING with utter disbelief)  
We are camouflaged! NO ONE can see us!

Zaq looks at his greenish arms with wild, excited eyes. BARK! WOOF! WOOF! – across the  
way.

ANGELO  
Well, except for animals... they can see us.

BACK TO SECRET HOUSE

Lucy SNIFFS at the ground and drags the entire length of her chain.

Angelo's little face appears just over the falling fence about five yards away.  
RARRRARARARR–WOOFWOOF! Lucy gets on her hind legs and ROARS, SNIPS, AND  
BARKS at Angelo.

ANGELO  
You hungry, boy?! Hungry??

Angelo flings the bloody steak. It flops on a dusty patch inches from Lucy. She sniffs it and GOBBLES it up. Angelo slithers back.

BACK TO WATER TOWER

ZAQ

Did he get it?

ANGELO

YUP!

ZAQ

(nervously)

Umm, what if ...no one's there?

EXT. STREET – DAY

Hector and the boys make their way to the wire fence, lift, and enter through the hole into the

TRAIL

Peter holds the sign high up toward the house, but the voices of Hector and Alex come from behind.

PETER

Oh, LORD!

He throws himself into the tall grass, just as Hector turns the bend.

BACK TO WATER TOWER

Zaq leads Angelo through the tall grass. Insects BUZZ and fly around. Zaq scratches a bite on his arm. Lucy licks her chops and spots Zaq. ARRRRARAR-WOOF!

BACK TO TRAIL

Peter is able to completely hide behind the large sign that Hector stares at.

HECTOR

Whaaaat in the woorld?

(to Alex)

Can't read that...

ALEX

When are you gonna learn to fucking read, retard?!

Hector SLAPS his little brother's shoulder and thrusts him in front of the sign.

HECTOR

Tell me what it says! It's in cursived letters.

ALEX

Says "Elena loves Zaq!"

PETER

(dropping sign)

HELP! ZAQ! ANGELO! AAAAAHH!!

Peter jumps out and startles the Haters.

BACK TO SECRET HOUSE'S JUNK YARD

Zaq and Angelo tip-toe over mangled, rubber tires and rusty car pieces. Lucy lunges at them but suddenly plops herself down, unable to move.

PETER (O.S.)

HEEEELP! ZAAPPPERS!

Zaq and Angelo dart. Zaq WHISTLES.

ZAQ

Angelo, start the fireworks!

ANGELO

The lighter. Where's the lighter?!

BACK TO TRAIL

Peter is cornered but attempts to run into the thicket. Hector holds him from running off.

HECTOR

(turns to Alex and Tony)

I hear Zaq! Go over there!

Alex and Tony hurry off.

HECTOR

What are you doing here, church boy?

Peter squirms and attempts to free himself, but Hector easily grabs hold of him and shoves him against the ground.



## BACK TO JUNK YARD

Angelo finds the lighter at the bottom of the bag. Zaq tosses rocks at Alex and Tony. Angelo flicks the lighter on, throws it into the plastic bag and tosses it through a window into

## THE SECRET HOUSE

The bag rolls and rolls... bombs, tanks, "black cats", sparklers, and rockets roll out – stopping right in front of a stove.

## BACK TO JUNK YARD

ZAQ  
(to Angelo)  
WHY'D YOU DO THAT?!

ANGELO  
I don't know!! I'm sorry. I panicked.

Tony helps Alex release Lucy's chain. She runs forward a few feet. Zaq and Angelo SCREAM, but then... she suddenly stops, sways sideways, GRUMBLES, crawls, and wags her tail. She hunches to poop. The dog HOWLS in pain.

ALEX  
Lucy!

Angelo and Zaq point and LAUGH at the dog.

ALEX  
What the FUCK did you all do with my dog?

## BACK TO TRAIL

Peter is pressed down on the grass, struggling, and swinging.

HECTOR  
I see you all planned some sort of attack...  
you faggots.

PETER  
I'm not afraid!

Hector punches... and punches... at Peter.

## BACK TO JUNK YARD

Tony runs forward, and Zaq and Angelo duck behind a pile of lumber.

ZAQ

Did you at least light one cracker?!

ANGELO

I did! I promise!

Rocks and debris are thrown about.

ZAQ

(tossing a beer bottle)

We gotta get Peter! Where's Hector?

They rise, duck, and run, tossing rocks, trash, and anything they can get their hands on. Tony and Alex have gotten on top of a car, and do the same – toss rocks and pieces of metal.

ALEX

HECTORRR!

Tony jumps down, and Zaq and Angelo bolt toward the trail. Tony trips.

ZAQ

Peteeeer, we're coming!

ANGELO

Wait, wait...Zaq, maybe Hector's got him inside the –

– BOOOOOOOOM!

A large flame and black cloud shoot up from the center of the house. All the boys tumble. BAM-BAM-POP-POP-POP-POP! Firecrackers EXPLODE and FLY in all directions: toward the sky, into the house, the junkyard, the cars, the lumber piles, the field... windows BREAK – and then again... BOOOOM!

Zaq and Angelo get up and run into the

THE TRAIL

They bump into Hector.

HECTOR

(hysterical to Zaq and Angelo)

WHAT DID YOU ALL DO?!

Hector is distraught, staring at the burning house, and behind him...

ZAQ

PETER!

He lies face-down with a bloodied, bruised face and torn clothes.

Hector runs toward the house. Angelo and Zaq HEAVE and pick Peter up. They dash into the trail as flames dance in and around the arid, brown grass.

The house BURNS, and Lucy HOWLS. Hector and Alex pick up Lucy and race toward the water tower with Tony. Fire truck SIRENS sound out in the distance.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN TRAIL – DAY

Ram rolls his wheelchair over scorched, blackened patches. He stops before the house: a mangled, smoky mess. Ram shakes... reaches forward and falls off his wheelchair.

HECTOR (O.S.)

Pa?... Papá!

Hector and Alex hasten through the torn fence and trail to reach their Dad.

HECTOR

You shouldn't have rolled out here on your own!

They help him back into his wheelchair. Ram's eyes are swollen and red.

ALEX

Pa?

Ram is looking away as if the boys aren't even there.

HECTOR

Pa... I wanted to fix your old house.

Papá, we tried.

Hector gets on his knees before them.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I promise we didn't do nothing wrong. Me,  
Alex, and Tony were going to fix your old house.

Clouds above brew with thunder.

RAM  
Hector...Alex. Come here, *mijitos*.

Alex frightfully kneels alongside Hector.

RAM (CONT'D)  
You go and beat their fucking asses, you hear?  
That little team, the Zappers. You give them a  
lesson they'll never forget, do you hear me?

Hector and Alex smile. They stand and trudge with their Dad through the grass and mud.

EXT. STREET – DAY

A red ice cream van playing the tune, "Pop Goes the Weasel," rolls down a very empty street. A bulldozer and a cement truck work in an area behind a white picket fence.

The teenage, male driver looks at the construction, the overgrown grass, and spray-painted mobile homes nearby. He speeds up and turns the street, where Zaq and Angelo wait. The driver gets down.

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
Man, what's happening to this place?

He takes a quarter from Angelo and hands him the frozen treat.

ZAQ  
Don't worry. We'll get all the people to come back.

Raindrops tap their faces. Zaq purchases two ice cream cones.

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
Stay safe, kids!

Rain POURS. The van drives off.

INT. THIRD BASE – DAY

Zaq hands one cone to Peter – showing signs of old bruises and crusty scars. Rain BEATS the shed.

ZAQ  
(pointing at map)  
If we attack them from over here –

PETER

I'm sick of this.

ANGELO

Well, try a different ice cream.

PETER

No, stupid.

(points to map)

THIS!

Zaq and Angelo are quiet.

PETER (CONT'D)

What's the use with all of these stupid battles?

ZAQ

Oh, now they're stupid?

PETER

I could have died! The stupid Hater's secret house is gone. Didn't we finish this already??

ANGELO

But, Peter – we just have to be ready.

PETER

For? We're moving already.

The Zappers are quiet. Water drips in at various corners.

ZAQ

But if we defeat the Haters and have Hector give in and have him leave Elena alone –

PETER

Yeah, stupid Elena. She's the reason all this war started! What does she matter? You haven't even talked about her for weeks! All you ever care about is being this great, amazing warrior-wanna-be-leader or something! Why can't we just have fun and not fight like abandoned children on an island?

ANGELO

Oooh, I read that book!

PETER  
Shut up, Angelo!

ZAQ  
Look, Peter – you did an amazing thing fighting, and –

PETER  
Well, it sucked pretending to be you!

Zaq is quiet.

ANGELO  
I've got the ammo ready.

Angelo sorts through a large box: tree limbs, oranges, Lego blocks, rocks, action figures, Nerf darts, and ready-to-fill water balloons.

ANGELO (CONT'D)  
My parents were gonna throw all this away, anyway.

PETER  
(finishing ice cream)  
This is all soooo stupid!

ZAQ  
Well, fine. Then just leave, Peter! Who cares about you?!

Peter is stunned. He rushes out.

ANGELO  
You're so stubborn, Zaq.

ZAQ  
(exiting)  
I don't know what that means.

ANGELO  
(following)  
It means you argue too much.

EXT. ALLEY – DAY

ZAQ  
Peter!

PETER

(sobbing)

Go awaaaay... you don't care about me!

ZAQ

Peteeeer... I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

PETER

Angelo decides everything for you, doesn't he?  
He decided on our name, the attacks, the fireworks,  
and just – everything.

ZAQ

Are you jealous?

PETER

Well, I want to help, too! Want to be a hero like  
we said. But besides... we're moving – for sure  
by next week. I won't have any friends.

ZAQ

Peter, where are you moving to?

PETER

To San Antonio.

The rain stops. Angelo joins them.

ZAQ

I need you till the very last rain drop. You're  
my very best friend. Look, we can beat them, Peter!  
If it weren't for your prayers, I don't think we could  
be heroes and win and defeat. We're gonna win, Peter.  
And then you won't have to move. We wouldn't have  
gotten this far without you.

PETER

(laughing)

We're just stupid kids – fighting.

ZAQ

No, Peter. We used to be children. We're almost  
teenagers now. When that happens, we'll be all  
grossed and big and different and hairy.

PETER  
(glowing)  
Yeah, we can defeat them now before we get all  
old and tired. I don't wanna move houses either. We can do this.

Zaq pats him on the back. Peter hugs Zaq.

ANGELO  
Are you two lovebirds done? I need to show you  
something.

EXT. THIRD BASE – DAY

The wall is spray-painted: "ZAPPERS DIE – FRIDAY". Zaq throws a rock at the message.

ZAQ  
I hadn't seen this!

ANGELO  
They must've spray-painted yesterday or  
something. Or earlier this morning.

PETER  
Friday is –

ZAQ  
– tomorrow.

PETER  
How are we going to do this?

Across the lot and from the alley are six tall boys with blonde hair. They're about 11 or 12 years  
old...familiar faces for us. Angelo lifts a tree branch up like a spear. Peter does the same.

PETER  
Stop there!

The new kids pause.

ANGELO  
Who are you? What do you want?

TALL BOY  
We're here... to help the Zappers?



Zaq steps forward.

ZAQ

I'm Zaq. Yes, welcome to our headquarters,  
Third Base.

TALL BOY

I'm Edward... Elena's cousin. Well, we all are.  
She's been trying to get a hold of you forever!

EXT. HECTOR'S YARD – DAY

Hector, Alex, and Tony smoke cigarettes as two trucks pull up. Several teenagers step out of the vehicle. One of them is the Driver (who will post eviction flyers). He approaches Hector.

DRIVER

*¡Primo!*

HECTOR

What's up, Danny?

They hug and slap each other's backs. Two Pit-bull dogs on leashes are led out. ARR-ARR-ARR-BARK! BARK! Alex jumps up onto the tattered, torn, moldy couch. The teenagers LAUGH.

DANNY

(snickers)

Relaaaax! That's how they say hello.

They are all smoking now. A small chest is rolled out – full of beers and soft drinks.

DANNNY

Man, this mobile home park has gone to shit!

HECTOR

Thanks to us.

DANNY

(toasting a beer)

So these... Zappers are fucking homos, right?

HECTOR

Yeah, man. We needa beat the shit outta them.

LAUGHTER. One of the teenagers opens his passenger door and turns his car radio on to LOUD, BOOMING, TEJANO music. The nine boys sit back, drink, smoke, talk, and relax.

EXT. BEACH SURF (Zaq's IMAGINATION) – DAY

Hundreds of boats sweep up ahead of the splashing waves. A countless number of men charge forward upon a vast, sandy plain. Leading them is our fearless adult version of Zaq clothed with a golden breastplate, shield, and flashing silver sword.

Up ahead is the enemy: an army lined up with large spears, shields, and swords poised for the attack. Their leader is an adult version of Hector – on horseback and dressed in regal attire – But... they cower, HOLLER, and run from Zaq's men.

The army reaches Hector's fleeing men. Swords clash; blood runs down the dunes...

Up ahead of Zaq is a beautiful princess. It is Elena! She wears a long, shimmering dress. And then – Hector comes by on his horse. He lifts her up. Elena SCREAMS. Zaq runs after them toward a nearby lake and castle.

INT. ZAQ'S BEDROOM – DAY

Zaq wakes up. His heart is BEATING FAST.... then there is a distant BEEPING and RINGING that echo into his room from somewhere outside.

EXT. ANGELO'S WINDOW – NIGHT

With a flashlight in hand, Zaq taps on Angelo's window.

ZAQ  
(hoarsely)  
Angelo!

TAP-TAP-TAP! The distant BEEPING continues – it is the sound large vehicles make when backing up. The bedroom light turns on, and Angelo peeks out. Zaq waves his hands excitedly.

EXT. LAKE BANKS – NIGHT

ANGELO  
I couldn't sleep because of all that beeping either.

ZAQ  
Yeah, I'm nervous about tomorrow. Let's go see Peter.

EXT. LAKE ISLAND – NIGHT

They pass by a covered-up well.

ANGELO  
(peeking into well)  
I heard a little boy drowned in there.

ZAQ  
Look! The mobile homes are all gone over there.  
And there's Peter.

Ahead is a wide, brightly-lit area. A group of bulldozers and trucks move dirt about. As they reverse, they make the loud, BEEPING noises. A larger bulldozer works at the far end, PUSHING a vacant, mobile home. It CRUNCHES, bends, and CRACKS. Zaq and Angelo walk by the

#### CONSTRUCTION SITE

And sit with Peter on his porch steps. A bulldozer HUMS by, rolling over some flower pots and small bushes. Nearby is a group of men wearing construction helmets. Mr. Wright is with them, showing them something on a clipboard.

MR. WRIGHT  
(anxious)  
This is the area for the community garden – hurry up, now.  
We need the foundations in quick for tomorrow's  
guests at the party!

The workers disperse, and Mr. Wright spots Zaq, Angelo, and Peter approaching.

ZAQ  
(to Peter and Angelo)  
What party is he talking about?

Mr. Wright looks at his watch.

MR. WRIGHT  
(disturbed)  
Boys?... Can I help you?

He pulls out a walkie-talkie and whispers into it.

ZAQ  
Excuse me, sir. Hi. We live here. Umm, well, we  
were curious – what happened to the houses there?

MR. WRIGHT

(coldly)

They had to leave. All of the houses on this side.  
That other side of the park is next. In two days.

ZAQ

What you mean? That's where I live!

MR. WRIGHT

(rushed)

Why don't you delinquent kids just get home?

ZAQ

Not until you tell us why you're doing this.

The boys stare at him.

MR. WRIGHT

If you three don't step away from this site, I will  
have the police here. This is my land, and I've had  
it with you kids terrorizing around here!

ZAQ

We haven't done anything, Mister!

PETER

We are no delinquents!

Mr. Wright fumbles with something in his pocket.

MR. WRIGHT

What am I saying? Why am I arguing with  
children at 4 in the morning? Look.

(handing them cookies wrapped in plastic)

Freshly baked.

Peter SLAPS the cookies out of his hands.

PETER

You think sugar is going to just keep kids happy?  
If God takes care of the birds, will he not worry  
about this injustice and for us who are going to  
be without a home?

(inching closer to Mr. Wright)

How are cookies going to get my house back

for my parents, huh? You want me to take these cookies to them to our hotel room in a few days?

Zaq and Angelo pull Peter from Mr. Wright. Peter's eyes are sore, red, and teary. The Zappers shuffle away.

ANGELO  
(turning back)  
We can't take treats from strangers, Mr. Wright – if that is your real name.

EXT. LAKE BANKS – NIGHT

They sit by a cluster of cypress trees.

ZAQ  
Not gonna let this happen.

ANGELO  
I don't get it. How can they just destroy our houses like that?  
We have to stop this, Zaq.

PETER  
It all really is all the Haters' fault. They ruined everything!  
(rising)  
It's time we ran them away. Just like you said, Zaq.

Zaq looks toward the Mobile Home Office and Clubhouse looming in the distance.

ZAQ  
Remember when Mr. Wright said something about a party?

A RUSTLING nearby. The Zappers turn; a shadowy figure is nearby walking toward them. The boys SCREAM.

Zaq runs off with this flashlight. Peter and Angelo follow. The shadow is Mr. Terrence, just strolling on by and pausing before the trees. He stares at the boys running away.

EXT. MOBILE HOME OFFICE/CLUBHOUSE – NIGHT

The boys scrape at the window the Haters had previously broken.

CRASH. The rest of the window falls through, and the boys climb, crawl, and JUMP into the OFFICE

Zaq, Angelo, and Peter overlook a pile of papers scattered on the table.

PETER

Zaq, it's like your map!

Zaq pulls at the blueprint and shines his flashlight at it.

ANGELO

This is what they're going to build over our park, Zaq. This is why they want us out of here. My parents never told me about this!

Angelo looks at a large poster: "Welcome to your new, 55+ older community!" He reads through a letter.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

Look, it says here that all current residents must be gone by July 14, 1989.

ZAQ

That's in two days.

They stroll through a large, vacuous hall. It is decorated with balloons, streamers, and posters on tripods full of black and white photos.

ZAQ

Look – a picture of the city back in the 1920s... and over here is a bird's eye shot of –

PETER

– our mobile home park! There's the lake. This whooooole area used to be a huge orchard!

INSERT – PHOTO OF ORCHARD/LAKE

Rows upon rows of orange trees surround the body of water. A large sits nearly at a far corner, where the large grove ends.

ZAQ

Hey, is that the house that –

ANGELO

– we burned down!

(sighing)

So sad such a fine piece of history went

to waste. Fire is never the answer.

PETER

What do you mean piece of history?

Angelo points to a caption card under the photo.

ANGELO

Well, the owner of the orchard, of course.  
Their family had this land since the 1940s,  
and the owner's husband created this lake  
for his wife. She loved living by bodies of  
water, and this was her place to go and walk  
around with her children until one of them...

(breathing in)

...drowned!

ZAQ

So a kid did drown in the lake!

ANGELO

(reading)

The man had seven children, and after one of them  
drowned, the family was never the same. A lot of  
family problems and economic troubles made the  
family sell the land to make up for the loss.

Zaq peers over and reads to himself – then out loud.

ZAQ

(reading slowly)

When the children grew up, they moved... across  
the Rio Grande Valley and up north – except for one.  
He promised his dad he'd care for the land that was  
sold. He vowed to have it become an orchard once  
more. But it was out of his hands and turned it into a  
mobile home park meant for retiring, permanent Winter  
Texans... until local families began to move in the late  
1970s. Today, we are celebrating the establishment  
of a beautiful, new, permanent, retiring community –  
as it was meant to be. To keep the original owner's wish,  
however, a small community orchard will exist here...

Zaq and Angelo point at a mini-orchard on the map.

PETER  
Over where my house is at.

Peter stares out the large bay windows that overlook the lake and the construction site in the horizon. Several men with flashlights are running up toward the clubhouse.

PETER  
Guys?

ANGELO  
So that's why the entrance says it's a retiring haven  
for sunshine and rest! I always wondered.

ZAQ  
But this isn't right for people to get kicked  
out so fast.

Zaq leans against the wall, accidentally opening the emergency door exit. An alarm BUZZES. Emergency lights flash on and off... the Zappers run out... moments later, Mr. Wright enters, OUT OF BREATH.

MR. WRIGHT  
(slamming alarm door)  
Goddamn those kids!

INT. THIRD BASE – DAY

MONTAGE – ZAPPERS PREPARE

- — Peter dabs green paint on his arms.
- — With a permanent marker, Angelo stretches red and black lines across his legs.
- — Plastic swords are polished.
- — Edward and the other boys draw lines and symbols across their arms and chest.
- — A hand helps draw camouflage spots and orange, tiger-like marks over close-ups of cheeks, eyebrows, eye sockets, foreheads, and ears.
- — Zaq puts on a "Thundercat" shirt. His whole body is tiger-like and striped!
- — Angelo finishes a red stripe next to a black one across his face.
- — Peter puts on a green helmet to match a G.I. Joe shirt and green camouflage.



-- All laugh at Angelo's "Care Bear" shirt... but Angelo raises a plastic, "He-Man" shield.

PETER

Angelo, your shirt doesn't match your shield!

ANGELO

(joyful)

Who cares! These were all Halloween costumes  
I wanted to use again.

LAUGHTER. Edward and the other boys murmur and talk with each other, sorting through Angelo's large box of "ammunition." Edward steps aside with Zaq.

ZAQ

So she isn't mad at me?

EDWARD

(putting on a bandana)

No, man! She says she can't wait to see you.  
She's coming today!

ZAQ

But today's the big fight.

EDWARD

You'll need a lady's kiss to help you win, won't you?

Edward pulls out a folded piece of paper: an image of a dressed-up knight on horseback, caressing a maiden's cheek as she hands him a red flower.

EDWARD

Wait, not that one... this one.

Edward unfolds a magazine ad: it's the "New Kids on the Block." Above it is Zaq's name written inside a heart.

A KNOCK on the door.

The boys hush and move about in a panic. Zaq rushes toward the door.

ZAQ

Guys, guys – I mean – Men, calm down...  
... it might just be –

The door BURSTS open. The boys SCREAM and fall back. It's Mr. Terrence. He stares intently at the boys, squinting his eyes over his disfigured face. In his hands are three flat packaged objects the size of pillows. Mr. Terrence doesn't say a word and hands them all to Zaq, who heaves at their sudden weight. Mr. Terrence limps away. Zaq closes the door, and the boys gather around in excited CHITTERING. Zaq lays the objects down. They CLINK.

PETER  
What is all that? Open it!

The Zappers rip open the packaging to reveal detailed, ornate, metallic, glowing shields. One of them has a "Thundercat" symbol. The other has a cross and Biblical scriptures around it. The last has scientific elements on it. Zaq, Angelo, and Peter grab their respective shields. They all GASP, LAUGH, and stare at their gifts of armor.

ANGELO  
Gifts from the gods!

PETER  
(tossing aside a piece of cardboard)  
Guess we won't need our cardboard shields now!

ZAQ  
(to Peter)  
Mr. Terrence did hear all our plans!

EDWARD  
Man, you kids are lucky! But shit, this is fun!

INT. HECTOR'S MOBILE HOME – DAY

It is a rancid mess: spoiled left-overs, opened chip bags, dirty laundry, a broken Nintendo console, torn comic books, and empty beer bottles are scattered. Hector's cousins are sprawled asleep across the floor. Ram rolls in.

RAM  
Taaaa! GET UP – ALL OF YOU!

They jolt and crack their eyes awake.

RAM (CONT'D)  
I need to get to City Hall this afternoon.  
That fucking Canadian has already begun  
construction.

HECTOR

Papá, but we're gonna beat up the Zappers today!

Alex rises, COUGHS, and then HURLS. Ram reaches for a beer bottle and tosses it at Alex.

RAM

I told you two – you're too young to drink!

Alex runs down the hall. Tony joins him. Ram rolls his wheelchair over several sleeping hands. They SHOUT with pain and wake up.

EXT. HECTOR'S YARD – DAY

Danny and the boys attend to and feed the Pit-bull dogs tied up to a tree. Alex and Tony watch from a safe distance.

DANNY

(to Hector)

Come here. Need to show you something.

Hector walks with Danny toward his white truck. Danny pulls out the flyer. Hector looks at it.

HECTOR

What is it?

DANNY

Read it!

Hector stares at it. Sweat rolls down his face. Danny tears the flyer up.

DANNY

I know, right?! Can you fucking believe that shit?

HECTOR

(feigning)

Yeaah, man.

DANNY

Look, I'm sorry, man, but I got assigned to put up all these flyers at work. When I read it, I was like shocked –

ALEX

(butting in)

You know Hector can't read, right?

Alex LAUGHS, and Hector SOCKS him across the head.

HECTOR

Fuck you, light weight. Go throw up.

And Alex falls over in a dizzy spell. He spits and COUGHS.

DANNY

(laughing)

You can't read?

HECTOR

I can't! I try. Just can't. I can read  
some words.

Danny gets a new flyer.

DANNY

(showing flyer to Hector)

It's about the eviction thing. The sign shop has  
me put up flyers all over town, man. And this  
was one of them.

TONY

(joining them)

We're supposed to clean up our yards?...  
The bulldozers are making a bigger mess  
anyway! Just put them up. Who cares?  
Everyone's leaving already.

DANNY

Look, why don't you guys get your shit  
ready, while I put up the flyers?

Danny takes the Pit-bull dogs and leads them into the bed of his white pick-up.

HECTOR

All right, Danny. We'll see you in a little while.

Danny drives away as Alex gets a large water gun.

ALEX

We should fill these up with canal water.  
And make the Zappers drink it. Get 'em sick like me!

EXT. ALLEY – DAY

Ducked low in a large, overgrown patch of grass are Zaq, Angelo, Peter, Edward, and the rest.

ANGELO

Ooooh no!

ZAQ

SSshh!

ANGELO

(whispering)

We didn't put on the real camouflage! This stuff doesn't make us invisible.

ZAQ

It's okay, Angelo. We've got all our armor now!

The Haters appear in the alley about ten yards away and walk down the opposite direction. The Zappers slink and follow them.

EXT. STREET – DAY

A bulldozer PLOWS through a mobile home as a family drives off. A dog barks out the car window at the rolling machine. The Haters pass by. Hector grabs pieces of debris and throws it at the construction worker driving.

HECTOR

This is my Dad's land!

The rest of the Haters join in and throw pieces of wood and dirt at the man. The construction worker opens his door, and the Haters run off toward

THE WATER CANAL

The boys descend.

EXT. DEMOLISHED LOT – DAY

The Zappers line up shoulder to shoulder. Zaq, Angelo, and Peter grip their shields and stand up front.

ZAQ

Hey, Peter, what'd you say all this was like?

PETER  
Oh... Zaq – the umm – the...  
(taps his forehead)  
Armageddon – the field where Apocalypse  
happens.

Zaq walks in front of the boys.

ZAQ  
It's up to all of us now, Men. Run the  
Haters away!

YELLING. CHEERING.

EXT. PHARR CITY HALL – DAY

Mr. Wright drives up in a black Cadillac. It is the scene from the beginning: several Hispanic families picket and PROTEST outside City Hall. Mr. Wright steps out of the car, zooms past the increasingly-loud, menacing crowd, and the elderly white people follow.

EXT. PUBLIC BILLBOARD – DAY

The wind topples the flyers at Danny's feet. He chases after them... he stops next to the spray-painted mobile home walls.

BACK TO DEMOLISHED LOT

ANGELO  
What if all our parents and/or legal guardians  
come back to see the fight? We'll be in biiig  
trouble.

ZAQ  
Angelo, don't keep worrying. They're gonna  
be at City Hall to win us back the streets and  
neighborhood. And it's up to us to beat the  
Haters –

PETER  
– if it is in God's will.

The flyers cross high above them.

ANGELO  
(fearful)

Zaq, look at the signs!

EXT. CANAL – DAY

The Haters are collecting rocks and filling up their water guns with the canal's filthy irrigation water. Hector spray-paints "HATERS" above a sewer pipe entrance.

HECTOR

*Chingao* – hurry up, Alex!

The boys scurry forward and follow Hector up the steep canal.

ALEX

Ok, ok... Hector, Papá want us back already or what?

HECTOR

*Si, hambreeee....* we need to drive him to City Hall.

BACK TO DEMOLISHED LOT

The boys prepare slingshots. Angelo and Peter HOOT and scam Mariachi-like GRITOS.

BACK TO CANAL

TONY

Guys, you hear that?

They ascend the steep canal and into the

DEMOLISHED LOT

...The Zappers rush forward, throwing, tossing, sling-shooting, HOOTING, CURSING, and LAUGHING... The shrapnel: water balloons, tree limbs, rotten oranges, Lego blocks, rocks, dismembered action figures, Nerf darts.

Alex and Tony attempt to use their water guns, but the hits are too intense. All the Haters, except for Hector, run into the alley. A rolling tire knocks down Hector, and Zaq approaches with his sling shot.

HECTOR

Zaqueo Delira... you're gonna lose, *ese*.  
Don't you get it? *We all are!* Piece of dumb  
sh – OW!

A tiny Lego block strikes Hector on the forehead. He rubs his face and darts off as Zaq prepares his sling shot again.

ZAQ  
(victoriously)  
ZAAAAPPERS!

Zaq reunites with his team, high-fiving them.

ZAQ  
That way... c'mon – after them!

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN NEAR BEACH SURF (ZAQ'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

Zaq chases after Hector. The abducted Elena SCREAMS. They pass a large lake... part of a moat before the large walled city with the parapets.

EXT. HECTOR'S YARD – DAY

The Haters rush through, grab bats, tree limbs, and pieces of broken wood.

HECTOR  
Shit, Danny has the dogs.

Ram looks out the window.

RAM  
Boys... where are you going?

HECTOR  
Beating up the Zappers, Pa.

They run away...

RAM  
BOYS! I need to get to City Hall!

INT. HECTOR'S MOBILE HOME – DAY

Mumbling and cursing to himself, Ram pulls a large piece of plywood and drags it to the front door. He struggles sliding it over the wooden steps. Once it's set, Ram CRIES OUT... and pushes himself through out onto the...

YARD



He almost falls off his wheelchair but manages to reach the rocky, dusty driveway. Lucy crawls out from under the mobile home, wags her tail, and follows him.

INT. CLUBHOUSE – DAY

There are now more balloons, streamers, flyers, cookies, and a large, festive cake set up, and on every table are baskets of mandarins, oranges, and grapefruits. An old jukebox plays soft jazz music. Outside the bay windows is a flock of elderly, white-headed people... gathering and growing under a large tent, drinking punch, mingling, talking, eating cookies, and tidbits of orange and grapefruit slices.

Servers attend to them with napkins, plates, and cups of orange juice.

The wind picks up; the white folks are CHEERFUL; men stumble sideways; women's dresses flare up. Sue joins the group and speaks into a microphone.

SUE  
Don't be alarmed, folks! Just a little south Texas  
breeze to welcome you. Isn't it just gorgeous  
out here?

Paper plates, napkins, and plastic cups fly off a table. Servers run after them. A basket of oranges falls over.

EXT. PUBLIC BILLBOARD – DAY

Danny steps back to see the rest of the billboard signs: "Can't afford to move? Help a neighbor today"... then there are some ads promoting the sales of personal items: a lawnmower, a Nintendo game set, several cars, dogs/cats, multiple flyers on now-expired garage sales, barbecue plate-sales, and a few signs read: "HELP STOP THE ORCHARDS EVICTIONS."

Danny walks back to his car. The Pit-bull dogs wag their tails and BARK at him.

EXT. ORCHARDS PARK STREET – DAY

The Haters RUN down the street... to their right and left are remnants of mobile homes, construction work, overflowing broken water pipes, and torn trees.

Far behind them – about two blocks away – run the Zappers in full pursuit.

INT. ICE CREAM VAN – DAY

The teenage driver turns the large steering wheel into the mobile home park. He puts on some headphones. Heavy metal music blares into his ears. He pushes the play button: "POP GOES THE WEASEL" song comes on.

He slows down as the Haters approach.

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
You all want ice cream?

The Haters STRIKE the van as they pass him.

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
(sticking head out window)  
Hey! HEY STOP THAT!

They've turned a corner.

EXT. ROAD – DAY

The Zappers stop for a breath.

ZAQ  
The Clubhouse – they're going to the clubhouse!

ANGELO  
Where that party's probably happening.

PETER  
We can't just run up near that party.

ZAQ  
We may have to.

EDWARD  
What if we...  
(waving hands)  
Use this?

The ice cream van slows down. The driver removes his headphones and looks at the various t-shirts, camouflage designs, bright shields, spears, and swords...

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
(wild-eyed and LAUGHING)  
What – the – HELL – is – going on here?!  
WILD KIDS!

ZAQ  
Mister, we need your help.

EXT. STREET – DAY

Sweating profusely, Ram trudges through. Ahead of him is the ice cream van... driving away. The Zappers are nowhere in sight.

RAM  
(petting Lucy)  
C'mon, girl.

EXT. CLUBHOUSE – DAY

The same Hispanic families from City Hall have arrived. They picket, protest, and fill the grassy area. Amidst the crowd is Elena.

EXT. STREET – DAY

Danny meets up with the Haters and parks on the roadside. They jump onto the back of the pick-up and duck.

HECTOR  
Zappers'r behind us. BEHIND! Just wait...  
wait for them.

DANNY  
I don't see 'em....but you want my dogs to  
attack them here? Near that damn party?

The ice cream van WHIRRS by. Zaq and Peter peek out the windows, meeting eye-to-eye with Hector.

HECTOR  
There!... they're in there!

EXT. CLUBHOUSE GROUNDS – DAY

All sorts of people surround the place: Hispanic families protesting; elderly people partying; and Mr. Wright....pulling into the parking lot, gets down.

MR. WRIGHT  
(at protestors)  
You people need to GET out of here. NOW!  
This is against the law.

The families YELL and march around in a circle.

INT. CLUBHOUSE – DAY

Double-doors are pried open. The party-goers walk in and out, eating, talking, and laughing... they dance to the soft jazz.

A car's engine ROARS... the ice cream van hurtles through a patch and parks near the

TENT

The music, "POP GOES THE WEASEL" continues playing. People approach... Mr. Wright staggers into the festivities.

SUE

How splendid of you, Mr. Wright  
(leading an elderly couple  
to the van)

What a great way to introduce our  
new residents to tasty *raspas*!

The driver bobs his head up and down to his heavy metal music... Danny PLOWS up to and stops next to the ice cream van... The Haters and the Pit-bull dogs leap out just as the side door of the ice cream van bursts open. The Zappers spill out – SHRIEKING, YELLING, and jumping to confront the Haters.

EXT. CASTLE (Zaq'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

Zaq chases Hector across a bridge... crossing the moat into a courtyard – where a large festival is interrupted. People scatter in FRIGHT, SCREAMING... dissolving into...

CLUBHOUSE/TENT

...people running, SCREAMING, tripping... the Zappers and the Haters.... punches, kids, swords swing, water gun streams... Zaq and Hector climb a table. Zaq shields himself from Hector's punches... the cake falls over. The Pit-bull dogs BARK, terrify some people but just CHOMP at the frosty mess.

Citrus fruit rolls everywhere. It's squished, kicked, and people slip. A WIND GUST – the tent flips over.

HECTOR

You won't beat us. NEVER!

Zaq is wild, BELLOWING...

ZAQ

(victoriously)  
SUCK IT! ELENA IS ALL MINE!

He and Hector go at each other like rabid dogs. They tumble over the table. Zaq lifts his shield from a spraying water gun stream.

Peter knocks Alex's gun with his sword. The water gun breaks. Peter punches and shields himself from Alex's punches.

Mr. Wright runs into the mess... followed by the protestors.

Hector and Zaq wrestle and slide about... Hector gets up and reunites with the Hates who stand a few yards off from the tent. The Haters run from the charging Zappers.

Confused, frightened, adults follow. The ice cream van driver sips on orange juice and munches on some fallen cake. A server hands him a napkin.

ICE CREAM VAN DRIVER  
Had always heard this city had some  
historic riots, but maaaaan!

SERVER  
Look at them – like warriors...

The Zappers are by the lake banks right behind the Haters.

SERVER (CONT'D)  
I don't know what's going on, but shit –  
I'm rooting for the tiger kid. Did you see  
his stripes?

Several people sort through the fallen tables.

MR. WRIGHT  
(finding Sue)  
Get the police... now, Sue!

She runs into the clubhouse.

EXT. LAKE ISLAND – DAY

The Zappers follow the Haters across the bridge... Coming up behind the Zappers are the many spectators, families, and elderly adults... including Elena. She runs toward Zaq, hugs him, and kisses him on the cheek.

ZAQ  
(pretending he didn't know)  
Elena! Where are you coming from?

ELENA  
Was helping out my aunt in the protests... and then  
I saw my cousins with you.

She looks at them and LAUGHS at their warrior paint and costume... The Haters line up in front of the Zappers. The Zappers line up before them. Elena moves to the side.

HECTOR  
You all think you're all still gonna win?!

ZAQ  
We're not the ones running away like chickens.

Hector CHARGES at Zaq but trips. The Haters point and LAUGH... Ram comes through, rolling into the island... Lucy attends to Hector and licks his face.

RAM  
Get him, son! Beat up Zaq!

Lucy BARKS at Zaq, and Ram falls off his wheelchair. It rolls backward into the lake; Alex helps his Father up. Hector gets up. He faces Zaq, GASPS and pushes him. Zaq pushes back.

ELENA  
You all can stop now, boys!

Zaq doesn't move. He gets closer to Hector, shielding his shoves and punches, and Hector backs off... nearer and nearer to the lake bank behind him.

INT. CASTLE (ZAQ'S IMAGINATION) – DAY

Zaq and Elena are hugging. The city and towers around them burn... and Hector falls into a large pool of water...

He flails and bobs up and down. A large dragon BUBBLES out of the water and swims up to Hector.

HECTOR  
Help me, please!

Elena SCREAMS. Zaq unsheathes his sword...

## BACK TO ISLAND

Zaq swings his shield sideways and flings the plastic sword into Hector's chest, shoving him back into the water.

ZAQ

Look at you now!

Hector flails his arms. Alex, Tony, and the rest of the Haters laugh at their own leader in the water.

PETER

Why aren't they helping him??

ZAQ

Help him? Let the dragon get him!

Hector floats farther away from the bank... sinks – bobs up – sinks – bobs up...

PETER

Zaq, oh my, God... Zaq, he's drowning!

HECTOR

(choking)

Helpfff....

(GURGLING)

*¡AYUDENME, PENDEJOS!*

Edward and the others lower their swords. Angelo throws his shield aside.

ANGELO

(exasperated)

Can't read. Can't spell. Can't swim.

What's wrong with this kid??

PETER

(tossing shield)

We need to save him!

## BACK TO VISION

Zaq jumps **SPLASHING** into the lake, **FLASHING**, **SWINGING**, and **STABBING** at the water creature. Several of his mean join him, swimming, striking, and stabbing at the dragon... Hector's arm reaches for Zaq...

## BACK TO LAKE

The Zappers are all in the water, swimming together in a row; Peter has Angelo; Angelo has Zaq; and Zaq... reaching and reaching for Hector's arm... Hector sinks below the surface... People SCREAM. Hector does not come back up... Zaq takes a HUGE BREATH, lets go of Angelo and DIVES IN.

ANGELO

Zaq, no!

PETER

Wait... wait! Wait for him!

All are silent, waiting, watching... Police cars speed through and park next to the lake. Mr. Wright gets to the edge of the lake banks... Zaq BURSTS upward... holding Hector, GASPING and COUGHING. Angelo and Peter swim forward and grab Hector and Zaq. The rest of the Haters jump in to get the wheelchair nearby.

The Zappers swim together ashore and place the faint, white-faced, haggard Hector down. He COUGHS up water and vomits. The Zappers step aside... their bodies drip with watery camouflage. Their shirts are torn; their armor and shields scattered about.

It is a motley crowd now: elderly people... Hispanic families... several policemen walk through the crowd. Mr. Wright marches up to them, YELLING INCOHERENTLY.

The Zappers stand there, watching Hector come to his senses. The Haters help Ram back onto his wheelchair. Ram – with an embarrassed look – just glares at the Zappers. A loud COMMOTION behind... Mr. Wright and two policemen are ARGUING. They turn him, lean him against a tree, handcuff him and lead him toward one of their cars. Sue and other confused stare and follow the policemen.

POLICEMAN

(holding arms in the way)

Back – now – PLEASE – STAY BACK!

Mr. Wright is pushed into the back of a police car.

SUE

(to policeman)

These VIOLENT kids! Take them in, please!

The cop looks at the camouflaged, feral-looking Zappers and gangster-like Haters.

POLICEMAN

Ma'am – I don't know who these – wild kids are...



but you've been making business with a criminal here  
– William Konigsburg. One of Canada's smartest,  
TOP WANTED. For forgery, stealing lots of people's  
money, buying their land, kicking people out – it's not  
the first time he's done this. And he's here illegally.  
When you called, we finally figured out all the evidence  
– and realized this was the guy we needed all along.

Sue faints into the ice cream van driver's arms.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
(reading from a piece of paper)  
Ram Riojas? Ram?

The crowd splits. Ram comes forward in the wheelchair. The wind BLOWS through. Everyone holds on to their caps, or dresses, or shirts...

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
(to Ram)  
Mister Riojas – here's the title – claiming  
you as the rightful owner of this damned place.  
The Court has officially closed this twenty-year-old  
case, and you can make this back into an orchard or  
grove ...a neighborhood, an amusement park – whatever.  
This is your land once more.

The crowd MURMURS and WHISPERS with each other. Hector and Alex run up to and hug their Dad. Tony and the other teenagers get closer. The Zappers back away...

ANGELO  
He was the one!

PETER  
Who vowed to make this back into an orchard  
for his family.

ZAQ  
(dejected)  
And Hector and them were just trying to  
return it all back ... to him. That's why they  
were always fighting us.

EDWARD  
But you saved Hector!

Zaq walks away, looking down at the ground.

PETER

I think he feels embarrassed.

ANGELO

I would too if I led a whole army of men into...  
nothing!

Peter smacks Angelo's shoulder. They walk to Zaq.

PETER

Zaaaq?

Elena runs up to Zaq... but her face and body morph into the older lady we saw at the beginning. Zaq turns to face her; his childhood figure transforms into that of a man in his 60s – the one next to Elena in the

FUTURISTIC KITCHEN

OLD ZAQ

(reading letter)

"Childhood Heroes and Defenders of the city's and the Rio Grande Valley's last remaining, healthy orchard: Zaqueo, Angelo, and Peter... to be honored in this week's ceremony at the Citrus Museum of South Texas... and I would love for you to attend, my ancient enemy... and savior from my ruthlessness (and lack of swimming skills) – sincerely, Hector."

Zaq looks down at the counter top and flicks his fingers. The weather report swings and adjusts into view over the plasma screen.

ZAQ

Why would a childhood event be so important? For Hector, the city, the –

ELENA

Honey, this is the last orchard in the entire Rio Grande Valley! Its history is so important! And you being a retired professor of English – well maybe –

INT. LIBRARY – DAY

HECTOR

I want you to write our childhood war, Zaq. Make it into a novel, a play – something – anything! Use this place! My library, the orchard...

It is Hector – in his 60s. Hector places his hand on Zaq's shoulder.

ZAQ

The laaaast orchard, huh?

Hector hands a glass of iced orange juice to Elena and one to Zaq. They sip.

ZAQ

(squeezing cheeks)

We love your oranges, by the way! Been so long since we tasted all this fresh orange juice these past couple days! All there is now is that scientifically-altered crap that's supposed to be the real thing.

HECTOR

Zaq... you know. I never got to thank you.  
For saving my life.

ZAQ

(shocked)

Hector, all of this was so long ago! What made you remember me? Us? Angelo and Peter?

HECTOR

I've never forgotten our battles! It's the only thing that kept me going – the memory of that. I turned it into a legend, and my grandchildren love hearing it over and over... and over and over. So I felt I needed to write it down.

Zaq looks around: shelves of books fill the space. Windows overlook where rows of orange trees begin.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Filled up this library with as many books – when I finally learned to read! My wife helped me *chingos*!

He pulls out a nearby book from the shelf and blows its dust off.

He shows the cover to Zaq and Elena: "THE ILIAD BY HOMER"

HECTOR (CONT'D)

It's like... we lived this, Zaq. We... US! Some epic war over love, anger, revenge, pride, and land. I don't know. You interpret it, English professor! You know how it is – *chingao*, after the cyber-attack in '19 and then all the fucking wars and diseases of the '20s. I mean the city of Pharr and the world's new fascination with handwriting stories like the old times before the Internet and cyber-living. And handwriting history and especially preserving nature with these new government acts and strict laws. Global warming happening everywhere and shit, too, man.

ZAQ

You were always good at protecting what was yours.

HECTOR

(placing book down)

Yeah...

(scoffs)

But I absolutely just SUCK at writing! And I've read your short stories.

Hector, Elena, and Zaq laugh.

ZAQ

But my stories have always focused on mythic monsters, heroes, battles... and historical fiction, too.

HECTOR

Exactly! So that's why I needed to find you. To tell you – thank you...

(patting and hugging him)

...and to give you some homework!

INT. LOBBY – DAY

A huge, flashy plasma wall screen reveals: "The Citrus Museum of South Texas welcomes you to the last orchard!"... images whiz by of oranges, birds, the lake, floral trees, insects, and then... artistic, cartoonish images of the Zappers running, dueling, shielding... the Haters fighting them on a hillside.

Standing next to Hector are Zaq, Angelo, and Peter... Angelo wears bright, fashionable colors, glasses, and a hat; Peter has a conservative look: a shirt showing "Episcopal Church."

CLAPPING... lights illuminate a staged area.

HECTOR

(pointing to screen)

As you just learned, ladies and gentlemen – this place,  
this orchard, this piece of history and preservation...  
my life and family owe it all to my childhood heroes:  
Zaqueo Delira, Angelo Covarrubias, and Peter Buenrostro.

Hector unfurls a colorful statue of three boys, running – as if in battle – each holding toy swords up and shields protect their breasts. Their arms are covered in swirling colors and bright stripes. Below it is inscribed: "The Zappers."

EXT. PAVILION – DAY

The museum crowd is large and mingling. Servers pass out small cups of orange juice, smoothies, and cakes. A child unwraps a plastic sword from a bag and joins a group of others running amok, also with swords. They mimic the poses of the statues, raising their arms up; some mothers help put on face paint and camouflage on some of their children.

EXT. ORCHARD – DAY

Zaq holds hands with Elena. They walk down the soft dirt.

ZAQ

I had a vision of this... us walking here  
exactly like this. Imagined it a long time ago.

ELENA

(giggling)

You and your imagination!

HECTOR

This way! Need to show you something.

Sprinkling rain... Angelo lifts up a flat device to the sky. He puts his hands down, and the device moves under his sleeve.

ZAQ

What is that, Angelo?

ANGELO

Oh – it's one of those chip bands – you know.  
The ones that fit to your body and won't work  
if someone else steals them. Can't leave the lab  
without this one. It helps me with the 15-minute  
tornado predictions.

ZAQ

Aaah, I see! Read your article on my way down here.  
You've saved lots of lives and communities with that!

Angelo shows the glowing chip-band to Zaq and Peter.

PETER

(looking around)

Can you two believe this? This place that we grew up in.  
I can't believe our homes used to be here where these trees  
are at! It's so ....suddenly and immensely important!

ZAQ

We spent a whole summer fighting and planning!  
Homes are gone, yeah, but just wish we could have saved –

HECTOR

– this!

There in the middle of a row of orange trees, preserved under a greenhouse-like building is Third Base. The side of the shed is spray-painted: "LONG LIVE THE ZAPPERS." Angelo's original "ZAP" sign hangs above the base's entrance. Zaq puts his hand to his mouth. Elena hugs him. Peter MUMBLES a soft prayer to himself. Angelo turns away... SNIFFS.

Hector leads them before a door that WHOOSHES open. They enter the greenhouse-like structure, and Zaq reaches for the door of Third Base.

HECTOR

Go ahead!

Zaq pushes it open...

INT. THIRD BASE – DAY

It is refurbished and almost intact. Newer, cleaner dry boxes fill an area toward the back. Upside down buckets work as seats in a round circle. In the middle and under a glass case is Zaq's hand-drawn map.

ZAQ

I can't believe this... Hector!

They all look around.

ANGELO

Our shields!

Hanging on the walls are Zaq's "Thundercat" shield, Peter's knightly-Christian shield, and Angelo's "science" shield.

ELENA

(amused)

Now why wasn't I ever allowed in here?!  
Look, hon – your toys –

ANGELO

Correction – ammunition!

Behind a glass shelf are dismembered action figures, Lego blocks, Nerf darts, water guns, a baseball, and a spray-paint can.

HECTOR

After that day that I almost drowned. Well,  
you guys –

ZAQ

We all just left! Moved that evening or  
the next day.

PETER

(smiling)

I'll never forget that day! I talk about it  
often in my sermons – this war of our youth.

Angelo is turned away from them all. They notice and look at him.

ANGELO

I know!

(sniffing)

I cry for the dumbest things!

Hector taps Angelo's shoulders

HECTOR

I'm sorry for your cat, Angelo.

(then to Peter)

And for kicking your ass – err –  
um, I mean – beating you almost to death.

(handing him his shield)

You can take it.

Hector hands the rest of the shields to Zaq and Angelo.

ZAQ  
(feeling the shield's texture)  
Hector, don't you want these for the museum?

HECTOR  
Naaah, go ahead, Zaq. It's yours!

They all sit down.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Well – the whole place was – just abandoned in a matter of days. My Dad slowly got back in good health. After we finally got some money, we managed to clear out the land...and you know, I dropped out of school, but we cultivated the land, planted the seeds and trees, watered them, preserved them...watched the trees grow... My cousins all ended up in jail, man – stupid drugs and shit. When I turned 18, I became a man fast! I knew I had to to care for this place and help out Papá. It's what he wanted in his life. He was so happy the rest of his life...

(smiling and pondering)  
And then the government saw what we did here and with the state, we got all this help and money and shit to help preserve this, man! It's the only citrus patch of land in all south Texas! Then the museum stuff fell into place. Other valley people started to help, too – when they lost their orange trees and land and stuff. Man, so much changed.

(tapping walls)  
And for some reason, I wanted to keep this really cool shed!

ELENA  
Oh, my God!

Elena points to an aged piece of paper behind the glass. It shows Zaq's name written in a heart. Next to it is the image of the "New Kids" and then the image of the knight and the maiden.

ELENA  
This is from a million years ago!

ANGELO  
Actually, the last dinosaurs were dying out at about that –

Peter smacks Angelo's shoulder. LAUGHTER.



HECTOR  
(opening glass and  
removing the pieces of paper)  
You can have these, Elena!... So Alex took care  
of Papá until he passed away twenty years ago... And  
next year is the 100th anniversary of our family  
owning this land!... speak of the devil.

Alex appears at the doorway.

ALEX  
Hey, guys!

EVERYONE  
Alex!

ALEX  
The people are going crazy with the orange juice  
drinks and treats!

He places a white, BEEPING crate down. It's full of oranges and mandarins.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Been picking for hours! Anyone wanna help  
before the thunderstorm hits?

ZAQ  
Let's go, Men!... and Elena!

Zaq, Angelo, and Peter each hoist their shields up. All exit Third Base... the exterior door  
WHOOSHES shut... it begins to pour...

Their bodies dissolve and disappear into the downpour. Their childhood voices ECHO in  
LAUGHTER, SHOUTING, HOOTING, and CHEERING.

CHILDHOOD ZAQ (O.S.)  
Zaaaaappers!!

More LAUGHTER.

FADE OUT.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Caleb David Camacho was born in Monterrey, Mexico in 1979 but moved to Pharr, Texas in 1982 with his parents and three older siblings. Throughout his childhood, he began to write stories that he and his friends reenacted at home. He graduated from P.S.J.A. North High School in 1997, attended Pepperdine University, and studied abroad in Israel (1999), Heidelberg, Germany (2000), and Madrid, Spain (2001). These experiences would strongly impact his love for history, his Christian faith, other religions, mythology, drama and their influence on and power over storytelling and creativity. In 2002, he graduated from Pepperdine with the Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing, the Humanities, and a minor in Spanish.

In 2002, he was accepted to NYU's Gallatin Graduate School of Individualized Study. He devised a Master of Arts in the historical film set in the Middle Ages and graduated in 2005. His thesis-screenplay, *The Dance of the Living*, concerns two physicians – one Jewish and the other, a Christian – who attempt to find the means to heal victims and stop the ravaging bubonic plague in 1349 Germany. This screenplay won a semi-finalist award at the 2009 Blazing Quill Screenwriting Competition, the 2009 Landlocked Film Festival in Iowa City, and at the 2010 Los Angeles Film and Script Festival.

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