

# THE EXHIBIT

by Daryl Henry

FADE IN:

EXT. ALASKA CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Midsummer on the barren North slope. For hundreds of miles In all directions Nothing rises above the dead-flat tundra higher than the room-sized blocks of pack ice still clogging the shores of the Arctic Ocean. There are No trees, No bushes, Nothing but shards of brown Grass pushing up through the countless patches of thinning snow, a few meandering rivers and a scattering of circular lakes pocking the wasteland.

We are on the shore of the Topagoruk River, 56 miles south-east of the town of Barrow, the northernmost in North America, where two workmen and a muddy D-8 CATERPILLAR are gauging out the foundations for a bridge. Driving the cat is an elfin cowboy, a former Wyoming wrangler named BRISCO, who jabs his scarred blade at a stubborn clump of permafrost on the shallow riverbank. Watching him is a rotund renegade named GORANIC, a recent immigrant from the Adriatic.

While Brisco backs up to get a better angle on the clump of black earth and muddy ice blocking his path, Goranic feeds a nibble of cheese to an independent lemming who lives semi-permanently in the pocket of his plaid shirt. Now Brisco shifts to neutral, climbs down from his steel saddle and waddles through the mud on bowed legs to examine the obstacle.

BRISCO

Hey, Goranic, come here...

Goranic squishes up to the blade of the cat. The lemming retreats to the bottom of her pocket.

GORANIC

What you got, Billy?

Brisco is staring at the block of ice that's nearly as tall as he is. Grass and gravel cling to its sides. The dull blue sky is partly reflected from its surface, outlining a darker shape locked inside. Goranic peers closer, then pushes his hard hat to the back of his balding head.

GORANIC (CONT'D)

Goddamn. You got a dead Eskimo.

ANGLE ON BLOCK OF ICE

Frozen inside is the unmistakable figure of a MAN-- legs, arms, a thick torso partly clothed in what could be sealskin, black head of hair, no shoes.

BRISCO (O.S.)

How'd he git in there?

GORANIC (O.S.)  
Must have fell in the river, maybe last  
summer.

BRISCO (O.S.)  
We better call the Sheriff.

ANGLE ON THE TWO WORKMEN

They both nod agreement, then return to staring into the block  
of ice.

ANGLE ON BLOCK

The pale arctic sun is beginning to melt the ice, but we still  
can't see too much.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE IN BARROW - DAY

What appears to be a rock musician inside a fur parka exits the  
Sheriff's office, a wooden prefab on three-foot stilts, high  
enough above the living permafrost to stay horizontal all year.  
He is BEN GRAYSON, tall, long-haired, bearded, wearing a star  
above a name tag on his jacket. He climbs into a mud-brown  
jeep.

EXT. TOWN OF BARROW - DAY

We follow the Sheriff down the main street, a winding ribbon of  
black gumbo fronted by wooden houses in various stages of  
disrepair. Clusters of garbage add color to everybody's muddy  
yard, garbage thrown out in the deep snow all winter, sinking  
conveniently out of sight until now.

In every yard is at least one snowmobile and a rusty barrel of  
gas. In every other yard, a couple of dead seals, a chunk or  
two of the community whale catch, a caribou or Polar bear hide  
drying, maybe an upside-down umiak dripping blood and salt  
water.

All the pipes carrying water, sewage and natural gas are  
propped high above the permafrost, all miniature versions of  
the great Alyeska pipeline farther east. When the pipes meet a  
street they climb over it, making the Sheriff's passage out of  
town more like the run of a croquet ball under a tunnel of  
hoops.

He passes few inhabitants; it's a listless town stuck on the  
fulcrum of two ages, Stone and Nuclear.

At the ice-clogged beach are groups of children playing. The  
boys are chasing lemmings, the girls are bouncing high into the  
air from one or the other ends of an old plank resting across a  
chunk of rock. All are smoking cigarettes bought clandestinely  
at nearly two dollars a pack. A few of them wave at Grayson as  
he drives by.

Suddenly he's at the outskirts of town-- the tundra stretches endlessly ahead. The old town cemetery is the last evidence of man for hundreds of miles, the cemetery that was abandoned when the permafrost pushed everybody's grandparents to the surface and the bones were scattered by wolves.

Grayson sets course for the Topagoruk River, south-east.

EXT. US NAVY ARCTIC RESEARCH LAB - DAY

A sprawling base on the coast not far from Barrow, well stocked and staffed to study anything the navy might need to know about the far north. Not much different from a military installation anywhere-- prefab offices, labs, dormitories and mess halls. Lots of trucks and a couple of staff cars. Animals in cages, an airstrip scoured from the tundra out back. As in Barrow, all the plumbing is above ground, safe above the heaving earth.

ANGLE ON ANIMAL CAGES

Behind a lab designed to study Arctic fauna is a row of cages. Inside each cage is a wolf. Inside the cage with the biggest wolf is a man named DANNY QUARLES, on his knees, arms around the animal's shaggy neck, wrestling with him.

Quarles looks up from his play when the Sheriff's jeep slides to a stop in the mud outside the cage. In the back of the open jeep is the muddy block of ice containing the body.

ANGLE ON JEEP

As the Sheriff climbs down, Quarles exits the cage to join him.

GRAYSON

How you doing, Danny?

QUARLES

Don't get too close, I've got fleas.

GRAYSON

You've always got fleas. Whyn't you take a bath?

QUARLES

I'm going to, when the weather warms up. What have you brought me?

Quarles advances to the back of the jeep, striding through the mud on long, thin legs that don't even fill out his undersized jeans. He is a civilian on loan to the navy, a graduate from the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, an expert on everything to do with cold animals. Over six feet tall, unkempt straw-colored hair, grey eyes.

GRAYSON

Dead body. Standard Oil crew bulldozed it up on the Topagoruk River. Eskimo, by the looks of him.