

FRONT MAN

FADE IN:

INT. L.A. - LONG BEACH ARENA - BACKSTAGE BATHROOM - NIGHT
(2004)

Close up of beautiful blue eyes. A fine line *Sharpie* writes a few music notes on top of them. Fingers tap a beat. Pull back shows the notes are written over a picture of a girl's face in a magazine.

A voice hums. It sounds like the opening bars of *Barracuda*.

STEPHEN (O.S.)

Damn.

Thick black pen crosses out the notes, covering the girl's eyes with what looks like a blindfold. The pen drifts down the page, finding a pair of large naked breasts. Notes soon appear all over the breasts. The humming continues. This time it gradually begins to sound like *Living on a Prayer*.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Shit.

A second crossing out ensues, this time covering the breasts. The pen drifts down to a neatly trimmed V of pubic hair. The humming continues, this time the beat is tighter, more insistent. Unfortunately it begins sounding like *Smells Like Teen Spirit*.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Fuck.

The man crosses out everything yet again, effectively forming the bottom half of a bikini for the model. He opens the centerfold picture of the magazine, *Heavy Metal Women*, and checks out the curvy, black-bikined, blind-folded young lady.

FURIOUS KNOCKING.

ERIK (O.S.)

Move your ass! Showtime!

Stephen reaches in his jacket and pulls out a small pipe and a glass vile filled with a sticky black tar. He scrapes a small spoonful into the pipe, lights a match and dances it on top of the black tar until it liquefies. He takes a long, slow pull, holding it in his lungs.

He releases the smoke, playfully blowing a large smoke circle.

FURIOUS KNOCKING.

STAN (O.S.)

Let's go, lad. Time for our big announcement.

STEFANOS STAVROS (Stephen), late twenties with long fierce black hair, gets off the toilet he sits on with the top down. He leaves the magazine neatly hanging over a handicap bar and puts away his pipe.

On back of his leather jacket *BackFire* is written out in silver studs. He staggers slightly as he exits the stall. Stephen checks his appearance in the mirror. He is six-foot, mid-twenties, with sharp, hard features and arresting sky blue eyes.

He adjusts a lock of his hair.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

In between bands, the crowd is in great spirits.

A half dozen roadies scatter like cockroaches across the stage, positioning guitars and microphone stands.

A huge neon yellow beachball, batted around by fans, sails up to hit the stage lights. It explodes from the heat.

INT. DRESSING ROOM IN THE BOWELS OF THE STADIUM - NIGHT

The spartan dressing room is furnished with floppy couches, beanbag chairs and a large mirror surrounded by light bulbs.

A folding table boasts a buffet of carved ham with mashed potatoes and Brussels sprouts, bottles of whiskey and tequila, and a bucket full of cold beer.

RUMBLING BUZZ of a crowd of thousands seeps through the door.

BackFire is in the final stages of preparing to go on stage. The band sprawls across the chairs and couches trying to relax. Several beautiful girls with bushy, streaked hair and heavy mascara are sprawled all over the band.

STAN "The Man" PATTERSON, the group's rotund, balding manager, 50, places a cup of tea in front of Stephen. Stephen pours a liberal shot of tequila into it. One of the girls, JIA, 15, dark and beautiful, sits in Stephen's lap.

Stephen grabs her hair, pulls her head back, and pours a large shot of tequila down her throat. She sputters and coughs. Stephen laughs.

STEPHEN

Rock and roll...

ERIK WRIGHT, early thirties, is clad in leather head to toe. He has an expensive camera around his neck and snaps off several shots.

ERIK

Maybe you should throw this one back.

STEPHEN

Do you think it's true what they say?

ERIK

What's that?

STEPHEN

(Singing)

BEEN LAID WOMAN AIN'T GOT NO SOUL.

ERIK

You'd be the one to know.

JIMMY BINDEN, 30, wiry, looking like he's had a hard life, struggles to apply eyeliner while seated in front of the mirror. He is clearly drunk.

STEPHEN

Jimmy.

No response. Stephen throws a towel at him.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Jimmy, goddamn it! Make sure you stay with me and Cozy on the break in *Fire Walk*. You've been a half beat behind lately.

ERIK

Man, why do you say shit like that? To remind us all that we're replaceable?

STEPHEN

I'm the meal ticket here. You guys are just backup. Off-key backup I might add.

Erik stands and confronts Stephen.

ERIK

You're more of a fuck-up than any of us. You've missed a few highs lately.

Stephen leans back in his chair and laughs.

STEPHEN

Liar. I've never been stoned enough
to be off-key.

Erik grins.

ERIK

Yeah. Hate to admit it. But you
never miss a note. You're a goddamn
freak of nature.

FAINT KNOCK at the door. A long-haired roadie opens it a
crack. He is shirtless, sweating, wearing only jeans covered
with patches from seemingly every band to ever cut an album.

ROADIE

Five minutes guys.

Stan moves to the door, holds it open. He speaks with a
Scottish accent.

STAN

(yelling)
Ladies! Ladies! Time to leave us.

He makes herding gestures with his arms.

STAN (CONT'D)

Band business. So sorry.

A dozen young ladies wearing tight pants and halter tops
migrate out of the room.

STAN (CONT'D)

This is a big night for our little
band.

ERIK

Yeah, how so?

STAN

"How so," he asks. Next month we,
BackFire, will be opening for one of
the biggest bands in the world...

COZY JORGEN, 26, a stocky powerful man with pure black eyes,
stands. His badly worn jeans are held up with a steel chain
belt and a large brass padlock. Cozy folds his arms, stares
at Stan.

COZY

Who? Not lame-ass *Concussion* again.
They should be opening for us.

Cozy grabs a Brussels sprout from the buffet, throws it at Stan. Stan smiles broadly.

COZY (CONT'D)
Who in the hell ordered fucking
Brussels Sprouts for us? Am I wrong?

Affirmative MUMBLE.

STAN
Bleeding hell, can we get off the
buffet for once, Cozy? I swear,
every night...

Stan sputters, centers himself.

STAN (CONT'D)
How about *Jacob's Ladder*?

He is met with stunned silence.

STAN (CONT'D)
I'm not kidding. Thirty-four
confirmed dates. Every night a sell
out.

ERIK
Bullshit.

A barrage of Brussels sprouts hit Stan. He remains all smiles.

COZY
Fifteen thousand people a night? No
shit.

STAN
And the record sales, lads. Think
of the record sales!

They move together triumphantly, hands raised, high fives everywhere. Cozy twirls his drumsticks and slams them rhythmically together.

COZY
(singing)
NA, NA, NA, NA... NA, NA, NA, NA,
HEY, HEY, HEY, GOODBYE

BAND
(singing)
NA, NA, NA, NA... NA, NA, NA, NA,
HEY, HEY, HEY, GOODBYE.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

The crowd is restless. Far up in the nose-bleed seats someone releases another neon beachball, this one blue. It is batted a single time, falls toward the second tier seats. A knife flashes and the balloon shreds. The crowd cheers.

A slow buildup, the swell of a wave, as the crowd of nine thousand chant:

CROWD
BackFire. BackFire. BackFIIIREEE!

The band leaves the room, heading onstage. Stephen and Stan hang back.

STEPHEN
Jump Cozy and Jimmy a bill. Keep Erik where he is. Got my scratch?

STAN
Right here.

He gives Stephen an envelope. There is a cashier's check inside with a large red post-it covering its face. It reads: *As always-KEEP THIS TO YOURSELF*. Stephen flips it up, just far enough to see the amount: *Fifty-one Thousand Six Hundred Eleven Dollars and 04 Cents*.

INT. ARENA BACKSTAGE RIGHT

The band heads on stage. Stephen lags a few steps behind, humming to himself.

JESSICA MADISON, late twenties, a tall beautiful woman with long brown hair, comes running up to him, smiling broadly.

STEPHEN
Jess! Hey babe, I didn't think you'd make it.

They embrace.

JESSICA
It's been too long since I've heard you sing.

She kisses him, then looks at him sideways. She pushes him away.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Damn it Stephen! I can taste it. I thought you were going to stop this bullshit.

STEPHEN

Shit, babe. I had to say something
to shut you up.

He grabs her, pulls her to him and tries to kiss her violently. Jessica keeps her mouth closed. Stephen tongues her lips, laughing. She smiles for an instant, then twists away from him.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

What did you come here for?

JESSICA

To hear you sing...

Sound of drumsticks pounding together, ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR.
BLAST OF ROCK MUSIC.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

So go. Sing.

Stephen turns and sprints onstage.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

BackFire is ripping through their set: Erik and Stephen on guitars, Jimmy on bass and Cozy behind the drums. The crowd roars back. The band is tight, heavy and playing extraordinarily well.

Stephen sprints from one side of the stage to the other, singing without ever being out of breath. The crowd sings with him. That is until Stephen gets to the seriously high notes. His voice climbs to almost unbelievable highs, full of vibrato and resonance under superb control. The crowd applauds wildly. Between songs, the band swigs beers and tunes up. Stephen toasts the crowd, bottle of whiskey in hand.

A stunning, tall, teenage girl, CASSANDRA, is in the front row. She has long, bright pink hair. She locks eyes with Stephen.

STEPHEN

Erik, man. Hey Erik.

Erik nods in response.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Check out the rack on this one.

Murmur of laughter. The girl, whose blouse has several top buttons open, unbuttons two more. Then she opens her mouth wide and points into it.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Yeah, you bet sweetie. Here it comes.

He holds the phallic whiskey bottle at groin level and humps his hips forward, splashing whiskey all over the top of the girl's breasts.

INT. LONG BEACH ARENA - BACKSTAGE RIGHT WING

Stan laughs. Jessica stares at the floor.

INT. ARENA

Stephen takes a swig of whiskey, pulls out a lighter, spits the whiskey in the air and ignites it. The band blazes into their next song, the beat so fast it's almost speed metal. Stephen headbangs at a furious clip his long hair flying up and down. He pulls the mike free of the mike stand, and swings it around his head in a blurred circle while stamping up and down.

He reels in the mike but the cord slips through his sweaty hand and sails out into the crowd. It smacks a heavy set girl with tattoos dead on the mouth. Blood flows from her split lip. Stephen jerks the mike cord hard, and the microphone flies back toward him. He catches it one-handed and sings the verse without missing a beat.

As Erik starts his solo, Stephen sprints to a stage wing. Stan gives him a fistful of cash.

A pair of massive security guards flank Stephen. They make their way out onto the arena floor. An overly zealous fan jumps on Stephen from behind and gives him a big bear hug. The security guards drag him off and throw him like a bowling ball across the concrete floor. He crashes into a row of chairs.

Stephen and the guards make their way along the front row to the girl who was hit by the microphone. Stephen hugs her and she leans back willingly. He sticks his tongue out as far as he can and wiggles it to the crowd. Then he french-kisses the girl's bloody mouth and shoves a wad of hundred dollar bills down her top.

The crowd roars its approval.

INT. BACKSTAGE RIGHT WING

Jessica turns and walks slowly away, headed toward the building exit.

INT. ARENA

The stage goes black for several moments. It is silent. They begin softly playing one of their biggest hits, *Someone Else*.

A single spotlight illuminates the microphone stand. Stephen, however, is not there. The spot searches the stage. Shouts from the audience and hands point skyward.

Stephen is at the top of a lighting tower, thirty feet in the air. The band continues playing- louder, harder. The lighting tower wobbles, supported only by three small wires tethered to the catwalks.

Stephen jumps ten feet down to a lower cross beam. Far up at the top of the tower a wire snaps. It whips against the metal structure. Stephen jumps again to a still lower strut. A second wire snaps.

Pyrotechnics explode above the band, sparks shower around them. The tower shakes and Stephen grabs one of the main supports.

The band plays all out. Stephen hangs off the lowest beam, does a pair of pull-ups, then drops to the stage floor. The last wire snaps. The tower wobbles but no one notices. Stephen sprints across the stage.

As the song nears its chorus, Stephen grabs the opposite lighting tower and swings out over the crowd.

Cassandra is once again a few rows in front of him. Her shirt is now open to the waist, fluttering as she walks. She flips her pink hair and winks. Stephen is so taken with her he momentarily forgets his preamble.

STEPHEN

Yeah, yeah... Alright, alright! You all know how this one goes. I sing one...

He waves the microphone out over the crowd.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

...then you sing one.

He winds up for the chorus, looking as if he is going to belt it out from his toes.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

(singing)

YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU SAID YOU WOULD
BEEEEEEE!

CROWD
 (singing)
 YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU SAID YOU WOULD
 BEEEEEEE!

Stephen runs to the other side of the stage. He grabs the untethered tower and swings out over the crowd.

STEPHEN
 This time make it loouuuddd!
 (Singing)
 YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU SAID YOU WOULD
 BEEEEEEE!

CROWD
 (singing)
 YOU'RE NOT WHO YOU SAID YOU WOULD
 BEEEEEEE!

Stephen hangs above the crowd at a forty-five degree angle, supported by one hand clenching the tower struts and the toes of one foot pushing against a monitor. He swings himself back on stage.

STEPHEN
 (singing)
 YOU'RE SOMEONE ELSE, SOMEONE ELSE,
 YEAAAHHHH!

The tower wobbles a single time and then falls directly in line with where Stephen is walking across the stage.

Jimmy is the only one who sees it and he yells a warning, pointing furiously. Stephen looks back over his shoulder.

A ton of metal struts and stage lights hit him.

The impact is so great that his head is pushed straight down until his ears are level with his shoulders. He collapses and is driven into the stage. Two teeth fly out of his shattered mouth. There is an audible gasp from the crowd as if it had been punched in its collective gut.

STEPHEN'S POV

White light of a stage lamp. The white light becomes his whole world followed by a huge bass rumble like THUNDER.

INT. LONG BEACH ARENA - NIGHT

STAN
 My god... my god.

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For the complete script (for production or representation consideration only)
please contact Jennifer Brooks at: info@filmmakers.com