

THE SCYTHE

FADE IN:

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - THE CREOLE QUEEN - DAY

Huge gray seas roll beneath dark, glowering skies. A faint HOWLING echoes on the wind, as if screamed from far away...

A large oil service vessel is adrift in the roiling seas. The vessel's name, "CREOLE QUEEN", is visible on its stern.

A big Coast Guard helicopter, an orange flash against the purple skies, pulls to a hover above the Creole Queen's bow.

Two wet-suited Coast Guardsmen, PETE WINTERS and ANDRE RUDNER, rappel down from the helicopter to the Creole Queen's deck.

The Guardsmen are lithe, powerfully built and heavily armed -- carrying machine guns and holstered pistols. Their eyes are intense, scanning warily as they move around the deck.

WINTERS
Coast Guard! U.S. Coast Guard!

The only reply is from the crashing sea and howling winds. The ship is dead silent...

RUDNER
You sure we got the right boat?

WINTERS
Yeah -- the last transmission was pretty garbled; hell, the skipper was going ape-shit. But he did manage to ID himself like, about a dozen times -- "The Creole Queen".

Winters gestures at the Creole Queen's soaring conning tower, and the various hoists and supply lines mounted on her decks.

WINTERS
...A service boat for the oil rigs; how many of these things have we seen? Besides, the homing beacon was still flashing when the helo pulled up -- we can't be wrong...

RUDNER
Then where the hell is everybody?

WINTERS
I don't know; let's check the cabins...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - LOWER 9TH WARD - GINA'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The skies are leaden, heavily overcast. A water-logged row of ramshackle shotgun houses lines both sides of the street.

The high concrete wall of the levee fronting the Industrial Canal looms over the entire neighborhood. The words "JESUS SAVES", rendered in bright, phosphorescent paint, dominate the crazy amalgam of graffiti covering the levee's face...

INT. GINA'S KITCHEN - DAY

GINA DUPRE, an attractive black woman of 28 or so, cooks dinner in the bright kitchen of the small house that she shares with her younger sister, CLARA.

Clara, stonily beautiful, about 25 in heavy lipstick and colorful hair-extensions, sits nearby at an old-fashioned Formica dinette set, braiding her daughter RHONDA's hair.

Rhonda is a very pretty little girl of about 8 years old. An extension of her mother's ego dressed all in frilly pink, she also holds several strands of pink ribbon in her hands.

Gina's young sons MILO and DWAYNE, two crazily active boys of 5 and 11 years old, tussle in front of a TV set that BLARES a cartoon show a few feet away in the adjoining living room.

An even younger child, Gina's cherubic toddler NAYANA, dozes in a playpen nearby. A big kitchen window looks out onto the storm; it's a cold gray void carved into the cheerful walls.

ON THE TV

The cartoon show is interrupted by a weather bulletin from CRAIG CREIGHTON; a pretentious TV newsman whose affected gravitas looks even more contrived than the whiz-bang computer storm graphics swirling around on-screen behind him.

CREIGHTON (ON TV)

We interrupt our normally scheduled programming to bring you this live TV5 update on Hurricane Pam. Please stand by...

BACK TO SCENE

Gina looks up from her cooking to watch the weather report; her expression curious, but not alarmed. Clara doesn't even look up -- she remains completely focused on Rhonda's hair.

GINA

You think it's gon' come here?

CLARA

Huh!? What?

GINA

The storm, fool! The shit they been talkin' 'bout all over everywhere for the last three days! Hurricane Pam; you think it's gon' come here?

Clara carefully parts Rhonda's thick hair, neatly tracing it into jagged, horizontal lines...

CLARA

Hell, I don't know, Gina. What if it do? We get a storm down here every other year and don't shit happen. I ain't losin' no sleep over it...

GINA

Yeah well, shit, that ain't no news; you don't never lose no sleep over nothin' Clara -- sleepin' is what you do best.

CLARA

And bitch what you do best?

Both women chuckle.

GINA

Let's not go there.

CLARA

No, let's not. Besides, I work the late shift at the hotel every night -- and Mama need her beauty rest, huh Rhonnie?

Rhonda looks up at her adored mother and nods in agreement, smiling, as pretty as a life-sized china doll.

GINA

Hmph; it ain't workin'. Good thing you look like your daddy Rhonda, 'cause if you looked like yo' ol' funny lookin'-assed Mama, you'd be a tricked up child...

Clara leans in close to Rhonda and stage-whispers loud enough for Gina to overhear...

CLARA

Don't tell nobody, but your Auntie Gina fell out the tree and conked herself in the head when she was a lil' girl...

RHONDA

For real!?!

CLARA

Umm-hmmm; dropped like a rock and knocked her brains out. It was tragic. So you gotta ignore her, 'cause she crazy.

Gina wads up a dish-rag, and throws it at Clara...

EXT./INT. NEW ORLEANS - BIENVILLE INFIRMARY - DAY

ON THE DRIVEWAY

A horse-drawn carriage driven by an elderly black CARRIAGE DRIVER trundles past an oak-shrouded, antebellum building.

An ambulance abruptly screeches into the building's cobblestone driveway. Sirens WAILING and red-lights ablaze, it drowns out the rhythmic CLIP-CLOP of the horse's hooves.

IN THE LIBRARY

MISS SONDR A DUPRE, a very old and frail black woman, sits before a tall French window, gazing out into a vast, gathering storm. The intermittent RED FLASH of the O.S. ambulance punctuates her features like a macabre strobe...

SONDRA

I don't know why they bringin' you up in here, sister...

ON THE DRIVEWAY

Husky young EMT's unload an elderly white woman from the ambulance, ATHENEE' DUCHESNY.

Athenee' is elegant, even in trembling, palsied repose. Her silver hair is held by a tortoise-shell comb; she clutches an elaborate jeweled cross in her shaking fingers.

SONDRA (O.S.)

They ain't got no more sanctuary up in here...none for you, and none for me...

IN THE LIBRARY

Miss Sondra stares out the window. She sees a jumble of 18th century rooftops clustered nearby -- and the austere towers of downtown New Orleans soaring in the distance. The entire vista is shrouded by sheets of billowing rain.

SONDRA

'Cause the Shepherd done washed his hands of all of this, sister...

THUNDER echoes in, a veiled threat from a great distance.

SONDRA

And now it's the Reaper's time...

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - THE CREOLE QUEEN - DAY

Heavy rain drops splatter against Winters' wet-suit as he bangs on the door of the Creole Queen's cabin...

WINTERS

Coast Guard!! Hello?! United States Coast Guard!!

RUDNER

They could be injured or somethin' - break it open.

Winters strikes the door with a sharp kick, knocking it off its frame. The Guardsmen storm into the cabin...

WINTERS (O.S.)

Jesus Christ...

INT./EXT. THE CREOLE QUEEN - CABIN - DAY

Winters and Rudner stand just inside the shattered doorway of the Creole Queen's radio room, slack-jawed and silent, rocked by the carnage around them.

The cabin has been completely destroyed -- the instrument panels and furnishings are all smashed to pieces.

Every visible surface, including the decks and bulkheads, is smeared with great swaths of human blood, some of it thick enough to drain into puddles.

Bloody human remains -- dismembered limbs, extremities, eviscerated torsos -- are scattered about on the decks. Winters is a bit pale, stunned and breathing hard...

RUDNER

It's like a fuckin' hog slaughter!
Whaddya think happened here; Drug
runners? Pirates? Mermaids?!

WINTERS

What? With machetes?! I've never
seen --

Rudner gestures toward the devastated bulkheads.

RUDNER

You ever seen anything like that?

The Guardsmen stare at a gaping hole in the opposite wall. Bloody footprints race out through the hole and across the deck, scrambling to a jagged break in the guardrail, before disappearing over the Creole Queen's side...

WINTERS

How in the hell --

RUDNER

Fuckin' God only knows, dude. And
he ain't talkin' -- so I'll go
check it out...

WINTERS

Right. Stay connected -- and watch
out for Mermaids...

INT. BIENVILLE INFIRMARY - WARD 29 NORTH - DAY

The phone RINGS incessantly; nurses and medics scurry among hospital rooms scattered along a wide, cathedral-like ward.

RAMON, a Latino in his early 20's, pushes Miss Sondra along in her wheelchair. Ramon is wearing headphones and nods his head in time to the music, serenely oblivious to the barely controlled chaos reeling around him.

INT. BIENVILLE INFIRMARY - MISS SONDRAS ROOM - DAY

JENNY WINTERS, a cheerful blonde of 30 or so, tends to the array of IV drips and bio-monitors hooked up to another very old, frail woman -- the patient from the ambulance, Athenee'.

Ramon enters, wheeling a silent, watchful Miss Sondra...

RAMON

What's up, Nurse Jenny?

Jenny looks up and gives Ramon a warm, easy smile -- before turning right back to her patient. She adjusts the monitoring devices with cool, practiced efficiency while Ramon helps Miss Sondra into the next bed...

JENNY

Hey Ramon. Looks like we might be ridin' out the storm up here, if this don't ease up some, huh? Rain, rain go away...

THUNDER echoes in; closer, louder...

JENNY

Oh well...it's not exactly goin' away, is it?

RAMON

Nope; sounds like it's gettin' worse. The people who can leave gettin' the hell up outta Dodge, Nurse Jenny -- and the people who can't...

Ramon gestures futilely at their bed-ridden patients.

JENNY

Right. Well, we'll just have to do as much as we can for 'em, I guess.

Ramon casts a skeptical eye at the frail, near cadaverous women.

RAMON

I guess. Hell, you the one who's Miss Never Say Die White Girl, Nurse Jenny...

Jenny chuckles while carefully adjusting the pillows and bed settings on her patients.

JENNY

I beg your pardon?

RAMON

The rest of us know that at least half of these old bitches in here probably better off --

JENNY

Ramon! Look, I thought we talked about --

He throws up his hands in surrender...

RAMON

How 'bout I go down to the break room and jack 'em out of one of them excess televisions so we can watch the storm?

JENNY

Oh wow, could you?! You know, Pete's out there today and...

Ramon nods at the gray, rain-streaked windows, marching in a tall row along one side of the room; the tops of creaking, windblown oak trees can be seen swaying just outside.

RAMON

Yeah, I kind of figured as much. You know, Pete was talking to me about signin' up for the Coast Guard, and it sounded kind of cool. But on a day like today...

JENNY

On a day like today, he's in his element Ramon...But I'd be lyin' if I said I wasn't worried about him.

EXT./INT. THE CREOLE QUEEN - DAY

ON THE DECK

Heavy rain falls as Rudner steps out through the hole in the wrecked bulkhead, his weapon drawn.

He picks his way forward, moving warily around big pools of blood and viscera washing across the Creole Queen's deck...

RUDNER

Ew.

IN THE CABIN

Winters stands staring out at Rudner, carefully tracking his partner's movements along the deck. His radio BEEPS a signal from the CO-PILOT and Winters clicks it on. The cabin's shattered doorway is visible behind him...

WINTERS

(into the radio)

Winters --

A large, dark shape darts past the doorway behind Winters, silent, moving too fast to be discerned...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)
 What've you got down there, Pete?
 You going to need Med-Evac?

Winters looks at a pile of human viscera splattered on the deck and bites down the urge to retch, absently placing his hand on a console to steady himself.

There is a sticky SLURP as Winter's fingers slide through the puddle of dark blood smeared on the console's instruments; he yanks up his hand as if he'd been burned...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)
 Winters?! Do you read? Will we
 need Med-Evac?!

Winters stares at the thick blood dripping from his glove, silent questions racing through his eyes...

WINTERS
 I don't know; probably negative on
 that, Sir. I don't think there's
 anything alive down here...anymore.

He turns his gaze to the shards of bloody, broken glass that are all that remain of a row of windows that lined one side of the cabin. Beyond the ragged maw of the windows, he can see Rudner moving stealthily along the deck...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)
 Should we pull out? We're gettin'
 a lot of calls; perhaps we can just
 radio the vessel's position and --

Winters' gaze tracks Rudner to the last of the cabin's windows. Unlike all the others, this last window is still intact -- but the window pane is covered with a frenzied cluster of bloody, human handprints.

WINTERS
 Uh, maybe not just yet, Sir. There
 was definitely some kind of violent
 incident here...

As Rudner moves beyond the windows, Winters' eyes stray to the intervening bulkhead...

WINTERS
 But pirates or drug-runners would
 have taken the boat and...and...

The bulkhead is also smeared with what vaguely resembles a blood-soaked handprint. But this last print is way too big; huge, misshapen, grossly out of scale with the others...

Winters peers at the outsized print, blinking and a little unnerved. It looks more like an animal's claw than a human hand; a savage, curving slash, with three long, knife-like digits...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)

And what? Winters?! Hello?!

Winters' hand drifts toward his sidearm, absently, as if by instinct...

WINTERS

I, I don't know, Sir. I just --

CO-PILOT (V.O.)

Fine. Take a closer look. But we can't stay here too long. That storm's not sittin' still...

WINTERS

Roger that. We'll make it quick. Thank you, Sir. Winters out.

INT. GINA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Clara's still working on Rhonda's hair, her fingers nimbly weaving pink ribbons into her daughter's dark, zig-zagging cornrows. She ignores the ongoing drone from the TV.

But Gina stands arms folded, ignoring simmering pots on the stove, completely focused on the TV screen.

ON THE TV

A satellite image of the states lining the Gulf of Mexico projects on the screen behind Creighton. The image is overlain by a wide red band indicating the potential landfall areas of Hurricane Pam.

CREIGHTON (ON TV)

Meteorologists are increasingly concerned that this Category 5 storm will make landfall in or near the New Orleans area...

The red splotch washes over all southeastern Louisiana, as if the state were bleeding to death right before their eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

Clara looks up from Rhonda's cornrows to glare at the TV set.

CLARA
 Yeah right, mother-fucker --
 you wish. It'll give yo' ass
 somethin' to talk about all
 night. But oops, I'm sick of
 the fuckin' weather party...

(looking around)
 Where the remote?

CREIGHTON (V.O.)
 Civil defense officials have
 designated the following New
 Orleans area facilities as
 hurricane shelters...

The remote is visible right nearby on the kitchen table; but
 Gina dashes over to snatch it up before Clara can reach it.

GINA
 Remote my ass; we gon' leave
 that shit right where it's at
 so we can know what's
 happenin'!

CREIGHTON (V.O.)
 The Louisiana Superdome...The
 Rivergate Convention Center.

Clara snorts and goes back to Rhonda's hair.

CLARA
 Ain't shit happenin'! You
 worry too much, Gee, about
 all the wrong shit, all the
 damned time...

CREIGHTON (V.O.)
 Civil defense officials
 assure us that adequate
 preparations have been
 made...

EXT./INT. CREOLE QUEEN - DAY

ON THE DECK

Rudner's pressed tight against the bulkhead, peering around
 the corner through drizzling rain. He spies a trail of
 smeared, watery blood leading to an open cargo hold...

RUDNER
 (into his radio)
 Forward hatch is open...

WINTERS (V.O.)
 In seas this high, not likely.

RUDNER
 Exactly. I'll go --

WINTERS (V.O.)
 No!!

IN THE CABIN

Winters stands near the bulkhead, still staring at the huge,
 curving print. It's dark, slick and serrated -- a swath of
 pure rage smashed into the fractured wall. A trickle of
 congealing blood drips down the bulkhead from its center.

WINTERS
 (into his radio)
 N-No...just hang tight, Andy. I'll
 be right there...

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - CREOLE QUEEN - DAY

BOOMING THUNDER rocks the air and the SEA roils, high and frightening. A light, blowing rain swirls around the ship.

ON THE BOW

Winters and Rudner stand over the open hold, weapons drawn.

Winters trains his flashlight down into the hold; the flashlight's beam slices through the blackness to reveal a severed human head floating in a pool of dark red water.

RUDNER
 Damn. This don't look too promising, 'bro; why don't we just call it a day and get back on the helo?

WINTERS
 I don't know what to call it, Andy. But we might as well let the skipper know the glad tidings...

The WIND kicks up a notch, Winters clicks on his radio...

ON THE STERN

Drizzly rain falls on various tools and implements scattered on the Creole Queen's deck. Huge gray seas roll around the vessel, menacing -- looming over everything...

WINTERS (V.O.)
 Sir, we've found...

A THICK REPTILIAN TAIL

heavily muscled, segmented and ridged with long, sharp spines, slips up over the Creole Queen's side, searching...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)
 A survivor!? Roger that, we'll --

WINTERS (V.O.)
 No sir, not a survivor...

The tail slides sideways across the deck like a blind serpent, probing dumbly among the implements scattered on the slick surface. It suddenly stiffens when it comes into contact with the Creole Queen's guardrail.

WINTERS (V.O.)

We've found --

CO-PILOT (V.O.)

What?! The storm's breathing down my neck, Pete, what have you found?

The tail coils itself around the guardrail and...

A SCYTHER

catapults up from the sea. It is a glowering nightmare; huge, dark and HISSING -- a powerfully muscled saurian with mottled skin and pale, ice-colored eyes...

WINTERS (V.O.)

We've found the head --

The Scythe lands perfectly perched on the Creole Queen's guardrail, squatting on massive, frog-like hindquarters like a steroidal gargoyle. LOOMING SEAS roll just behind it...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)

Repeat?!

A ragged, sickle-like dorsal fin rises sharply from the Scythe's back; four sets of wide, webbed talons curve around the guardrail like meat-hooks, holding it in place...

WINTERS (V.O.)

We've found...the identifiable remains, Sir, of at least one individual...And the cause of death does not appear to be an accident.

The Scythe's jaw drops open -- and its head seems to split in half, revealing row after row of spiked, needle-like teeth. Its talons SCRAPE against the guardrail, cutting into folded steel...

CO-PILOT (V.O.)

Roger that, Winters. Get ready; we're coming to pick you up...

The Scythe springs up from the guardrail in a high, soaring arc, flying like a banshee through drizzling rain. It lands in the uppermost reaches of the Creole Queen's superstructure -- and starts stalking toward the bow of the ship...

INT. BIENVILLE INFIRMARY - MISS SONDRAS ROOM - DAY

Jenny is heading toward the door when a BOOMING flash of LIGHTNING burns the room like a white-hot strobe...

SONDRA
Girl --

JENNY
Ma'am?!

Miss Sondra points a gnarled finger at the small cupboard near the foot of her bed.

SONDRA
Gimme my bible out the drawer down there...

JENNY
Certainly! Is there any --

SONDRA
Just gimme my bible...

Jenny reaches into the cupboard and pulls out an old, tattered bible, gingerly offering it to Miss Sondra.

The old woman snatches the bible into her fingers like a life preserver, clutching it. She turns her gaze to the tall, gray-cast windows. All she sees is billowing rain...

SONDRA
You should leave now...

JENNY
Ma'am? Would you like --

Distant THUNDER rumbles against the windows, ominous, impatient, like growling demons awaiting their turn...

SONDRA
Just leave...

INT./EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - HELICOPTER - DAY

There is a BOOMING THUNDERCLAP; the helicopter rocks in a violent cross-wind, triggering the AUTO-WARNING. The startled CO-PILOT looks down to see

THE SCYTHER

creeping among the antennae and radar dishes on the Creole Queen's conning tower, silently stalking toward the bow.

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