

Shea Man

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DESCRIPTION

On a farm in Upstate New York, 1900s, fossil bones are found that point to an American version of the Piltdown Man -- a scientific and political victory for the New World. When a P.T. Barnum-style entrepreneur comes into town, a struggle ensues over who owns the bones and what they mean.

CHARACTERS

- Johnson Shea, farmer
- Sarah Shea, his wife
- Thomas Shea, Johnson and Sarah's son
- Professor Harlan Jordan
- Fletcher Calvin, Thomas college roommate and friend
- Dan Moran, reporter
- L.T. Houseman, entrepreneur
- Miss Jennings (Jordan's assistant)/Reeves (Houseman's assistant)/Secretary/Betty's Voice
- Porter's Voice/Conductor/Gravel Digger/Daniel Golenbock/PR Director/Professor Charles Herrnstein

SOUND DESIGN

Throughout the play, sound cues/affect are indicated. Others can be added as needed

VISUAL DESIGN

Rear projections are used throughout the play. Others can be added as needed.

Scene 1

On a rugged upstate New York farm in the 1900s.

Downstage JOHNSON SHEA and his son THOMAS SHEA sift dirt through a wire mesh until they sieve out two perfect Indian arrowheads. They inspect the artifacts.

JOHNSON

Can you see it?

THOMAS

I can see it.

JOHNSON

The whole arrow nocked into the sinew --

THOMAS

-- sinew tied to a bow drawn by the lean hands of
an aboriginal --

JOHNSON

-- sighting along the arrow's length and ready to
release it.

THOMAS

Which he does.

JOHNSON

Thwack!!

SOUND: Arrowhead strikes.

JOHNSON holds up the arrowheads.

SOUND: Second arrowhead strikes.

THOMAS

Thwack!!

JOHNSON

Keepers.

THOMAS

For sure.

PROJECTION: A barn wall, on which are arrayed arrowheads of all
shapes, each resting on two brass brads and labeled by a strip of
stiff white paper perfectly lettered with date and location.

To the side are shelves lined with fossils, also dated and located:
trilobites, mastodon bones, etc.

THOMAS moves to a workbench and sits.

MIMED: THOMAS prints in perfect miniscule letters.

SARAH SHEA enters, drying her hands.

SARAH

You two will have more arrowheads than all the
Indians ever had.

THOMAS

Mom, that is a logical impossibility.

MIMED: THOMAS hands a label to JOHNSON, who holds it with tweezers while THOMAS applies a thin line of glue. Together, they press the label home under the new arrowheads.

SARAH

I wonder how many mothers get insulted like that in a day.

JOHNSON

He wasn't insulting you.

MIMED: They put up the second label.

JOHNSON

Come see.

SARAH SHEA joins them, drying her hands on a towel, and the three look at the admittedly impressive, if amateur, scientific display.

SARAH

(tousles THOMAS' hair)

My little scientist.

(snaps JOHNSON's suspenders)

My big scientist.

JOHNSON grabs her towel and playfully snaps it at SARAH's behind.

JOHNSON

And the woman who keeps 'em fit.

JOHNSON and SARAH laugh as she tries to get the towel away from him. Suddenly he turns and faces her.

JOHNSON

Come dance with me, Sarah Shea.

SOUND: A reel played on a fiddle.

They dance a jaggedy reel over the rough floorboards. THOMAS can't conceal a smile at his foolish parents.

JOHNSON

C'mon, Thomas -- give the belle of the ball a whirl!

JOHNSON pulls in his son, and THOMAS and SARAH high-step around the barn as JOHNSON claps time and LAUGHS.

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Scene 2

SOUND: Fiddle reel fades out.

SOUND: A breeze, a rustle of leaves, a wind chime.

PROJECTION: Barn wall out.

On one side of the stage, THOMAS' bedroom. THOMAS at his desk, schoolbooks open, studying.

On the other side of the stage, JOHNSON and SARAH at the kitchen table. Between them is what looks like a new book. Also two mugs and an accounting ledger.

SOUND: A clock ticks throughout the scene.

As THOMAS hears their voices, he moves to overhear them, as if sitting on the stairs.

JOHNSON

He is going to go to state university after next year -- I don't care what it costs.

SARAH

Not if you keep buying books --

JOHNSON lays his hand on the book, strokes the spine.

JOHNSON

We will find the means.

SARAH

Not if you keep buying books the cost of which would feed us for a month.

JOHNSON

This book -- He is not going to turn into a dirt farmer.

SARAH

You're not just a "dirt farmer."

JOHNSON opens the accounting ledger.

JOHNSON

Look at this, Sarah.

SARAH

I know what it says.

JOHNSON

Look at it.

SARAH

I know what it says -- I write it there!

JOHNSON

And all our work has gotten us what? That's it.
That's all. And will it get any easier?
Everything in this town is drying up -- us
included. But not for him. Not for him.

JOHNSON lets the ledger close with a thud.

SOUND: Thud of a heavy book. Clock is still ticking.

JOHNSON

We'll make it fine for this year, and probably
the next couple, as long as the crews keep
digging the gravel for the roads and the cows
milk clean.

SOUND: Along with the clock ticking, the house creaks.

SARAH

I want him to go, too, you know.

JOHNSON

He's got the head for it.

SARAH

Just look at his parents.

JOHNSON

But you and I never wrote a paper. A paper! A
goddamn -- A scientific paper at fifteen. And
he sends it to the state university museum
director.

SARAH moves the two mugs around, like they were dancers.

JOHNSON

Sarah?

SARAH

Yes?

JOHNSON

Am I still the guy with all the big plans you
married? No, I'm not.

SARAH

Plans have changed, the man hasn't.

JOHNSON lets his finger trace over the book.

JOHNSON

It's me, you know --

SARAH

I know --

JOHNSON

-- who wants to go.

SARAH

I know. Freshman Johnson Shea -- now, that would be a sight!

SARAH hands JOHNSON a mug, and they clink them together, then put them down. JOHNSON takes up the book and they move to THOMAS' room.

SOUND: Ticking clock out.

THOMAS moves back to his desk.

JOHNSON

Thomas?

THOMAS

It's open, Dad.

JOHNSON and SARAH enter, JOHNSON holding the book.

JOHNSON

Special delivery.

THOMAS takes the book, but when he sees the title, his whole attitude changes -- his face softens, his eyes shine.

He hands the book back.

THOMAS

Hold this.

In a rush he clears off his textbooks, then re-takes the book and lays it gently on the desk, like some sacred text, which, to him, it is.

THOMAS

"Geological Evidences of -- "

JOHNSON

-- of the Antiquity of Man"

THOMAS & JOHNSON

By Sir Charles Lyell.

JOHNSON

I wanted to go for the three volumes of his Principles of Geology, but --

THOMAS leafs through, his face filled with wonder and joy.

THOMAS

This is amazing. Look at this.

SOUND: Breeze, wind chimes.

JOHNSON and SARAH join him on either side, and they leaf through the book, THOMAS and JOHNSON exclaiming, as if leafing through a volume of family pictures.

Lights fade on them all.

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Scene 3

THOMAS moves away from his desk, grabs a lantern.

PROJECTION: As he does, a sheared-away cliff flies in, revealing a perfect layering, each layer labeled with its proper geological name.

The sky fills out with stars.

THOMAS names the ages out loud.

THOMAS
Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene, Pliocene,
Pleistocene, Holocene --

MIMED: And as he says "Holocene," he reaches up and pulls from that stratum a perfect fossil.

JOHNSON enters, lantern in hand.

THOMAS
Who's there?

JOHNSON holds up his lantern to show his face.

JOHNSON
Late night geology?

THOMAS
The book -- couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON
I couldn't sleep because you couldn't sleep
(refers to fossil)
Nice find.

THOMAS puts it in his pocket.

THOMAS
I heard what you and Mom were talking about
tonight.

JOHNSON
Our voices do travel, don't they?

They sit.

MIMED: They throw stones.

SOUND: Thrown stones

THOMAS

And that means I'm going to have to travel,
doesn't it?

JOHNSON

Only if you want to. There's no "have to" about
it, Thomas. You can stay here and raise dirt and
no money --

THOMAS

I should stay and help you and Mom.

JOHNSON

-- or you go to state university and raise your
chances of being somebody. Dirt -- or success.
Simple as that.

THOMAS

Simple?

JOHNSON

If you stay to home out of being scared or you
think you're betraying something or out of
loyalty to me and your mother -- then you're
being a fool. And we didn't raise a fool.

THOMAS

It's not that bad here, Dad --

JOHNSON

Then you are going to make one terrible scientist
because the evidence is all around you. Property
auctioned off every day, mastitis running through
herds -- you're not blind, Thomas, I know you
know this stuff.

THOMAS

Would you come visit?

JOHNSON

I am going to embarrass the hell out of you, I'm
going to visit you so often. I will miss you.

SOUND: Footsteps on the road.

SARAH appears, carrying a lantern and a basket.

SARAH

Couldn't sleep.

JOHNSON
Tea, bread, jam -- a moonlight picnic.

SARAH
Would you mind serving us, Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON
'Twouldn't mind at all, Dame Shea.

As JOHNSON serves, SARAH caresses THOMAS' cheek.

SARAH
You will do us proud.

They drink, eat, talk, laugh as the stars wheel overhead.

PROJECTION: Stratigraphy out.

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Scene 4

Spring semester freshman year: the lecture hall of PROFESSOR HARLAN JORDAN, museum director and department head, who stands at a table with various items on it.

THOMAS sits next to FLETCHER CALVIN, his roommate.

PROJECTION: A blackboard. On the blackboard JORDAN has written "Lines of Ascent." Under that he has drawn parallel lines labeled "Neanderthal," "Cro-Magnon," "Java Man," "Piltdown," and "???".

JORDAN
The Piltdown Man's fossil remains show clearly that modern man arose from the apes and gorillas.

FLETCHER raises his hand.

FLETCHER
Professor --

THOMAS
(whispering)
Fletch, don't.

JORDAN
I'm well aware, Mr. Calvin, that God and Mr. Darwin may differ about how you evolved enough to end up in my class, so let me finish before you bring the wrath of the Almighty down among us.
(to the rest of the class)
Mr. Calvin resents that he may be a descendant of apes.

FLETCHER
Human beings are not just animals.

THOMAS
(whispering)
Fletch, hold off.

JORDAN
We don't yet know, however, what the apes think
of having such a cousin as Mr. Calvin.

SOUND: A small ripple of laughter.

JORDAN
The ways of God are mysterious, Mr. Calvin -- but
he's not a trickster.

JORDAN picks up a pair of knuckle bones from his desk and rolls them
across the tabletop.

JORDAN
He does not play dice with our minds. Everything
is available to us if we only put our minds to
finding it out. Which should give us a good dose
of that Christian humility you prefer.

JORDAN picks up the skull of an ape.

JORDAN
And who knows? Perhaps in some jungle
university, as we speak, an orangutan Harlan
Jordan is holding forth to a group of primate
freshmen --

JORDAN wiggles the jaw.

SOUND: Laughter.

JORDAN
-- about this creature called Homo fletcher
calvinus and wondering if he, indeed, despite his
protests, is really the be-all and end-all of
God's creation. Which leads us to -- Thomas
Shea, would you stand up?

THOMAS, startled at hearing his name called, stands.

SOUND: Murmuring of the audience.

JORDAN
Ah, good. Quiet please. Mr. Shea, who is Mr.
Calvin's roommate, if I'm not mistaken.

THOMAS
Yes, sir.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea wrote an excellent response to my question to you all last class about Neanderthal, Java Man, Piltdown Man, and the "missing link."

SOUND: Rustling of the audience as it turns to face THOMAS.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

You made a point about human nature, Mr. Shea, that I would like you to repeat to the rest of us.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

The chimpanzee need not be afraid of this old orangutan. Mr. Shea -- your point. For the rest of us.

FLETCHER

(whispering)

Should've let me keep talking.

THOMAS

My -- point. If the "missing link" exists --

JORDAN

It does -- it just hasn't applied for admission to my class yet.

SOUND: Laughter.

THOMAS

If it did show up for class -- then we have some hard questions to ask about -- whether it is human, if it would be our brother.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea is modest. He said that we would have to re-define what it means to be human -- even better than that --

THOMAS

Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

He said that this thing we call "human nature" doesn't exist at all but that we make it up as we go along. A story we tell ourselves about who we are. Mr. Calvin, that would seem to put God out of a job.

FLETCHER

I don't think God has a job, Professor.

JORDAN

Not in Mr. Shea's universe.

FLETCHER

Though He wouldn't mind being a university professor.

JORDAN

I'll see if I can get him tenure, Mr. Calvin. Thank you, Mr. Shea. If all of you can't find the missing link by the next class, at least read the next chapter and give me the usual 2-page summary of its major points.

SOUND: Lecture hall emptying out -- voices, movements, etc.

PROJECTION: Blackboard out.

THOMAS and FLETCHER stand. FLETCHER punches THOMAS playfully in the arm.

FLETCHER

Teacher's pet. Teacher's pet.

THOMAS

(punching back)

Lucky me -- I get the missing link for my roommate.

JORDAN approaches them.

JORDAN

(to FLETCHER)

No lightning bolts yet.

FLETCHER

That's Zeus, Professor.

JORDAN

I cannot keep all those gods straight.

FLETCHER

That's okay, professor -- they'll keep you straight.

JORDAN

How do you like him as a roommate?

THOMAS

Give him enough bananas, he's fine.

JORDAN

You've got a sharp tongue, Mr. Calvin -- we'll convert it to science yet.

FLETCHER playfully cowers, looking up at the ceiling, then snaps his fingers.

FLETCHER

Can't get a lightning bolt when you need one. I might lose faith after all.

JORDAN

It's a start. Mr. Fletcher, would you allow Thomas to come with me?

FLETCHER

I release you. Just be sure to get back in time to write the literature essay for this poor gorilla.

THOMAS and JORDAN leave and circle the stage. FLETCHER watches them walk away.

FLETCHER

I think he is one star worth hitching a wagon to.

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Scene 5

JORDAN's table becomes the desk of MISS JENNINGS, JORDAN's secretary, who is opening mail, the opener deftly slicing the envelopes.

Another table with chairs is set for JORDAN -- the desk is vastly over-burdened with the paraphernalia of a famous anthropologist. Prominent is what looks like a misshapen skull and jawbone.

SOUND: Envelopes being opened.

JORDAN and THOMAS enter, THOMAS in awe.

THOMAS

Are you sure I'm supposed to be here --

JORDAN

I am Virgil, guiding you through.

JORDAN sees that THOMAS doesn't get the reference.

JORDAN

Dante? Divine Comedy? We have to expand your reading. Remind me to make you a list.

(to THOMAS)

Miss Jennings. My muse and savior.

JENNINGS

You have a letter here from Dawson, in England,
and --

JORDAN

I'll get to that later.

JENNINGS

Should I give him the helmet before he goes in
there?

JORDAN

It's a bit of a mess.

SOUND: The zip of the opener through a thick envelope.

JENNINGS

They never found the last student.

SOUND: Another deft slice.

JORDAN

Actually, they did -- his femur's in drawer 4A,
in the west annex.

JENNINGS

(to THOMAS)

It was nice to have known you.

They move into JORDAN'S office.

During their conversation, JENNINGS files, sorts, writes, etc.

JORDAN

Plato had his cave, and I have mine.

(sees THOMAS' puzzlement)

Not Plato either?

THOMAS

My school only had one room.

JORDAN

And thirty students and half that number of
books, excluding Bibles. And one teacher. Do
you know how remarkable it is for you to be here?

THOMAS

I never forget it, sir.

JORDAN picks up an arrowhead and hands it to THOMAS.

THOMAS

Susquehanna group.

JORDAN takes it back, looks at THOMAS.

JORDAN
Most would have guessed --

THOMAS
It's easy to confuse -- the edges --

JORDAN
I know the differences. And so do you.

JORDAN tosses the arrowhead back onto the mess on the desk.

JORDAN
That isn't why I brought you here.
(points to skull)
Do you recognize that?

THOMAS
Piltdown -- a cast of --

JORDAN
I went to England to see the pieces for myself.
Would certainly like more of him. But -- our
supposed missing link.

THOMAS
May I?

JORDAN
Of course.

THOMAS turns the skull in his hands, looking at it from all angles,
immediately absorbed.

JORDAN
Alas, poor Yorick -- it'll go on the list.

But THOMAS doesn't hear him. As he puts the skull back, utter
amazement wreathes THOMAS' face.

THOMAS
I can't believe --

JORDAN
A lot of people still don't. He is just too
oddly built for their tastes. But Mr. Darwin
said we need him, Mr. Charles Dawson of Piltdown,
England, has delivered him, so what can mere
mortals do? Come, let us reason together.

THOMAS
That saying I know.

JORDAN

Did you also know that somewhere in one of those drawers out there are fossils your father sent to us? Mastodon bones, I believe.

THOMAS

My father?

JORDAN

Correctly named, dated, measured. Not bad for a dirt farmer, eh? And like father, like son -- I'm sure I could dig up that paper you sent me --

THOMAS

You still have that?

JORDAN

Courtesy of your teacher. That's why you have a scholarship -- courtesy of this teacher, impressed with father and son.

THOMAS

Thank you.

JORDAN

And that's why I want to talk to you, Thomas. I have a proposal. I didn't bring you here just for the exercise.

THOMAS

Yes, sir.

JORDAN stares out of what would be a window.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN turns to scrutinize THOMAS.

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Like you, Thomas, I got hooked as a child. For fifty years the search for man has never disappointed me.

JORDAN takes up something from the desk and drops it from one hand to the other, then puts it back.

JORDAN

Thomas, I am going to say something I've not said to anyone else -- yet. Piltdown -- that supposed "missing link"? I think we can do better.

THOMAS

Better?

JORDAN

Why should Europe and Asia have all the glory?

THOMAS

Sir?

JORDAN

Boule with his Neanderthals, Breuil with his Cro-Magnons, Dubois with his Pithecanthropus. Haeckel predicted a missing link, but he never said where. Well, why not here?

(gesturing to office)

Well, not here -- but in the United States.

JORDAN paces.

JORDAN

They called Piltdown "Dawn Man" -- eoanthropus. Why not our own "dawn man?" What do you say to that? The New World, the New Man -- eoanthropus libertatis. Doesn't our nation deserve it?

JORDAN is now thoroughly caught up in his vision.

JORDAN

The American Dawn Man -- the origin of what has become good and fine in the world. It'll take a lot of hard work -- but think of the glory if we can do it. The pride of America. And not just that -- the pride of the American race. Just imagine if we find it!

THOMAS

Do you really think --

JORDAN

Without a doubt. We are not a doubting people, Thomas, are we? Those storage rooms? We have stuff no human has ever cleanly examined. I need a keen eye next to mine to sift through it. I need a good brain to read and analyze. That would be yours.

THOMAS

You want me to work for you.

JORDAN

Not work, Thomas, not work -- this is discovery, exploration -- a grand journey. I want you to travel that journey with me. I want you to be my assistant, my protégé -- Watson to Holmes.

(look of incomprehension)
We have to work on that reading list. Accept?

THOMAS

I would be paid?

JORDAN

You would have money enough to send home -- where I understand it would do a lot of good. You'll start now, stay here for the summer. Yes?

THOMAS

When's my first payday?

JORDAN walks to the office door.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings -- an employment application, if you please.

JENNINGS

He's still alive?

JORDAN

Yes.

JENNINGS

Will wonders never cease.

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Scene 6

SOUND: Music to study fossils by.

JORDAN helps THOMAS put on a white lab coat, then wheels over JENNINGS' table for THOMAS' work space.

Each cast member comes onstage holding a ledger, on top of which sits a box full of bones.

CHOREOGRAPHY: THOMAS takes the box and ledger, empties out its contents, catalogues it in the ledger, puts the ledger to one side, returns the box with the contents to the actor, takes the next box and ledger and does the same.

When one ledger is done, the actor gets another, puts the box on top of it.

At times, JORDAN sifts dust over the enterprise, causing THOMAS to sneeze, and smears dirt on the lab coat, hands, face.

The ledgers pile up.

In a separate light, SARAH stands next to JOHNSON as he opens an envelope and pulls out money. Paperclipped to the money is a note-card, which JOHNSON shows to SARAH.

JOHNSON

My mastodon bones -- he sent me the catalogue card --

Lights off them as THOMAS continues his work.

This choreography can go on as long as it needs to until THOMAS is done.

He straightens the pile of ledgers a hair.

THOMAS

Done.

SOUND: The thud of a heavy book being closed.

Everything goes away.

THOMAS, still wearing the white lab coat, reads a letter, a burlap bag of books at his feet. FLETCHER pops in.

FLETCHER

Coming to the pep rally?

THOMAS

No.

FLETCHER

Hey, doom and gloom, what's the matter?

THOMAS hands him the letter. FLETCHER reads.

THOMAS

My father has never said a word.

FLETCHER

How long has the bank given him?

THOMAS

I don't know -- he and the banker know each other pretty well. I figure -- I don't know what to figure.

FLETCHER hands back the letter.

FLETCHER

I'm sorry.

THOMAS

I don't know what to do.

FLETCHER
So come to the pep rally.

THOMAS
Can't -- got to get back to work for Jordan.

FLETCHER
He slaved you all summer --

THOMAS
Without Jordan's money --

FLETCHER
I'll shout extra hard for you, my friend.

SOUND: A pep rally, rising in volume.

FLETCHER
I want to say "don't worry" --

THOMAS
Don't worry -- go.

FLETCHER leaves. THOMAS picks up the bag of books, moves to JORDAN's office through shifting autumn light.

SOUND: Pep rally to crescendo.

SOUND: Pep rally out. The wind, the rustle of leaves.

THOMAS takes out a set of keys, unlocks a door.

SOUND: Keys in lock, door unlocked.

THOMAS closes the door, locks it.

SOUND: Door locked, keys put away.

JORDAN sits at a work bench, the lamp on, room full of autumn light.

THOMAS
Professor? I've brought back the books.

JORDAN turns and smiles when he sees THOMAS.

JORDAN
You are one glutton for punishment. Come in.
Sit.

THOMAS pulls up a chair.

On the workbench THOMAS sees sepia bottles labeled with chemical names, pots of paints bristling with brushes, pieces of bone scattered, an electric drill.

JORDAN

Thomas, I want to show you something. And I will pay you for the showing -- consider this a paid night off.

THOMAS pulls his chair closer. He wrinkles his nose at the strong chemical smells.

JORDAN

A hobby of mine -- faking fossils. Keeps me on the look-out.

THOMAS

Fakes?

JORDAN

A big business in forgery. And we're always a step behind.

JORDAN holds a piece of fresh bone. In front of him is a piece of fossilized bone, much darker in color.

JORDAN

Fresh bone, unfossilized -- full of organic matter. Feel how light compared to this.

THOMAS balances them, nods yes. JORDAN clamps the bones into a vice, takes up an electric drill with a thin bit.

JORDAN

Now this.

SOUND: Electric drill

JORDAN

Smell that?

THOMAS

Like burning horn.

JORDAN

Now this.

JORDAN drills into the fossil.

SOUND: Electric drill.

THOMAS

Nothing but powder, no smoke at all.

JORDAN

But now watch this.

JORDAN takes out the fresh bone, then takes a brush from a pot and paints the fresh bone.

JORDAN
Potassium bichromate. Watch.

Slowly the bone colors like the fossil.

JORDAN
It's only skin-deep, so to speak. When it dries, you can wash it off with hydrochloric acid -- or scratch it with a pin. But if you don't -- it'll look real. And it hardens the bone, too. Give me that tooth there.

JORDAN takes a tooth no larger than a little fingernail, dabs into another pot, and paints the tooth.

JORDAN
Now that one.

JORDAN holds them both up, and they look remarkably alike.

JORDAN
Van Dyke brown adds a couple of thousand millennia in an instant.

THOMAS
How many --

JORDAN
In this museum? Don't even want to think about it, even though as director I have to.

JORDAN stretches, gets up from his chair.

JORDAN
But a question for another time. Let's call it a night, dear friend. The discovery of the spectacular can wait until tomorrow.

THOMAS
Professor, I got a letter from my father today.

JORDAN
Let me see.

JORDAN reads, then hands it back.

SOUND: Wind, rustle of leaves.

JORDAN
Don't worry, Thomas. Things will work out. Go get some rest.

JORDAN shakes THOMAS' hand.

JORDAN

Lock up for me?

THOMAS

Of course.

JORDAN

You can leave the books on the bench. See you tomorrow.

JORDAN walks into the darkness. THOMAS sits for a moment in the quiet punctuated by the autumn wind. He takes the books out of the bag, puts them on JORDAN's bench. He stares at the paints, chemical bottles, drill, bits of bone. Sifts through them. Handles them.

Then a look of realization comes across his face. He picks up the bag. He digs the keys out of his pocket. He moves off into the darkness.

JORDAN's bench goes away.

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Scene 7

SOUND: Train whistle, train idling.

FLETCHER holds a suitcase. THOMAS enters, breathless, duffel bag slung over his shoulder.

SOUND: Train sounds, PORTER's voice.

PORTER

All you jackasses goin' home better geeetttt aboard!

THOMAS

That's my call.

THOMAS and FLETCHER pause, then give each other a "masculine" embrace, with a sharp slap on the back.

FLETCHER

You're coming back, you hear?

THOMAS

Wild horses wouldn't keep me from arguing with the preacher's son.

THOMAS shoulders his duffel bag.

FLETCHER

What would I do if I didn't have the heathen to convert?

THOMAS

You can always tell a religious man --

THOMAS & FLETCHER

But you can't tell him much.

They shake hands.

FLETCHER

Good luck.

FLETCHER leaves.

SOUND: Train up to speed.

THOMAS sits on a bench in one of the train's cars. He is startled by the CONDUCTOR leaning over his shoulder.

CONDUCTOR

Ticket?

THOMAS hands it to him, and the conductor, with a brisk succession of pops and snaps, punches it, hands it back.

CONDUCTOR

University?

THOMAS

Second year.

CONDUCTOR

Lot nicer there than out there.

THOMAS

So many For Sale signs. Auction signs.

CONDUCTOR

Sad sight, eh? Like that all along the line.
Drying up and blowing away.

THOMAS

You live around here?

CONDUCTOR

I live on the rails -- a lot safer.

THOMAS

Lonelier.

CONDUCTOR

I'll take lonely over starving.

CONDUCTOR salutes THOMAS, toddles off.

JOHNSON and SARAH enter.

SOUND: Train coming in to the station.

THOMAS grabs his duffel bag and joins JOHNSON and SARAH. They embrace, happy to see one another.

They enter THOMAS' room: Desk, chair, simple bed.

JOHNSON
Kept it just the way you left it.

THOMAS
Sounds like I've been on a world tour.

JOHNSON
Compared to around here, you have. You saw?
Never great even in the best of times, and these
are not the best of times.

THOMAS opens the duffel bag and sets his clothes. He carefully puts a burlap bag down next to his desk.

THOMAS
I wish --

JOHNSON
Don't even say it, Thomas. Not a thing you could
do that would make it any better. The only thing
keeping the wolf from the door is your money and
that gravel pit -- the road crews are digging it
out and laying it down as fast as they can.

THOMAS
So, some "stones in your pocket" --

JOHNSON
The bank's pocket, you mean.

JOHNSON pats the bed.

JOHNSON
Sit down.

THOMAS sits down. SARAH sits on the chair.

JOHNSON
I just want to tell you how proud I am of you.
Proud that my son --

SARAH clears her voice.

JOHNSON
She thinks she had a little something to do with
it.

SARAH

We're both proud.

THOMAS

I just wish --

SARAH

We've always survived -- no reason to forget that we know how to do that.

JOHNSON

Yes, well -- you must be tired.

SARAH

Sleep well.

Awkwardly, JOHNSON kisses his son on the cheek.

JOHNSON

Sleep well.

JOHNSON and SARAH leave.

THOMAS grabs the burlap bag. THOMAS' room goes away. He has a lantern in his hand, and he is outside the house.

SOUND: Wind, rustle of leaves.

PROJECTION: The sky is full of stars.

THOMAS grabs a shovel and pick, a geologist's hammer and a small garden spade. He moves several steps downstage, then puts everything down. The lantern throws out a circle of light.

THOMAS moves to the trench of dirt downstage.

He picks up the pick, loosens the dirt.

SOUND: Pick in gravel.

With shovel, THOMAS moves the dirt aside.

SOUND: Shovel in gravel.

From the burlap bag THOMAS pulls out three pieces of discolored skull bones he had lifted from the museum.

SOUND: Mucking about in the gravel.

He scoops out some dirt and rubs the bones, then works them down until the dirt grabs them tight. Then a skim-coat of gravel to cover them.

THOMAS moves to another part of the pit with the lantern, does the same type of seeding.

THOMAS moves to third part of the pit with the lantern. He takes a partial skull and a partial jaw with two teeth out of his bag. The bone fragments already salted come from this skull, but the jaw is of a very different size, even though it shares the brownish patina of the skull.

THOMAS tucks them into a hole and covers them up.

THOMAS sits back and stares at the sky as it turns to dawn.

* * * * *

Scene 8

JOHNSON enters, pulling on a pair of work gloves, accompanied by the GRAVEL DIGGER, also pulling on gloves.

GRAVEL DIGGER

We ready to dig some gravel today?

GRAVEL DIGGER makes a gesture.

SOUND: Truck engines roar to life.

JOHNSON

(shouting)

Gravel digging it is.

THOMAS, kneeling, geologist's hammer in his hand and small spade by his knee, looks up as the growl of the trucks turns into a loud roar as they close in. Then he starts testing rocks with his hammer.

JOHNSON and GRAVEL DIGGER see THOMAS working.

GRAVEL DIGGER

What's he doing?

JOHNSON

What is he doing?

THOMAS sees his father. He does a few flicks of his spade to expose the tips of the first planted skull bones, then stands, waves his arms, yells.

THOMAS

Dad! Dad! Come here!

JOHNSON sprints to THOMAS. GRAVEL DIGGER makes a gesture, and the trucks gear down.

SOUND: Idling trucks.

THOMAS points to the ground, and they both drop to their knees.

THOMAS

Look.

JOHNSON presses his face close to the ground, an inch away from the bone tip. He sniffs. He rests a very light fingertip against the bone, feels the rough edge.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Mr. Shea!

JOHNSON, without taking his eyes off the bone fragment, holds up his hand, as if to say "Wait."

GRAVEL DIGGER walks up to them.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Those better be emeralds you're looking at.

JOHNSON

(to THOMAS)

Dig it out.

THOMAS carefully pulls the bone out of the muck with a "pop."

SOUND: Small sucking sound.

The second and third pieces appear, and THOMAS pulls them out as well.

He lays all three pieces in JOHNSON's hand.

JOHNSON

You tell me -- you're the expert now.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Mr. Shea.

THOMAS

Probably skull pieces. See how thick it is.
Fossilized.

JOHNSON

Real, then. Human?

THOMAS

Probably.

JOHNSON lets out a WHOOP.

JOHNSON turns to GRAVEL DIGGER, cradling the bones as if they were glass.

JOHNSON

See these?

GRAVEL DIGGER

Look like bones.

JOHNSON

Skull bones.

GRAVEL DIGGER

So?

JOHNSON

No, you don't understand --

THOMAS walks up, lays a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS

Dad.

JOHNSON

(ignoring THOMAS)

These are ancient!

THOMAS

Dad --

JOHNSON

I mean, ancient. Feel how heavy they are.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Older than my foreman over there, who's older than dirt?

JOHNSON

Aren't they beautiful? And he found them, right over there, my son, he found them.

THOMAS again puts a hand on his father's shoulder.

THOMAS

Dad.

JOHNSON turns on THOMAS with an unusual fierceness.

JOHNSON

What?!

THOMAS freezes as he hears the anger in JOHNSON's answer. And several beats behind, JOHNSON hears it himself, his face melting immediately into apology.

JOHNSON

(to GRAVEL DIGGER)

They're just some old bones -- really old, probably 50,000 years old.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Well, I think that's really interesting.

JOHNSON
(lame)

Probably older than your foreman.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Not by much.

The tension breaks.

THOMAS

We used to do this when I was kid.

JOHNSON

Would you mind -- I know it's a hell of a thing
to ask -- but could you dig over in the south
forty?

GRAVEL DIGGER

You really like those bones?

JOHNSON

It'd just be for today -- promise. Promise.

GRAVEL DIGGER gestures, and JOHNSON hands him one of the fragments,
which he weighs in his hand.

DRIVER

Fifty thousand?

JOHNSON

Give or take a birthday or two.

THOMAS

Dad --

GRAVEL DIGGER hands the fragment back.

DRIVER

All right, Mr. Shea. Adds 10 minutes at either
end of the day, but --

THOMAS

That's 20 minutes of sunshine in December -- how
often do you get that?

GRAVEL DIGGER

You got a smart son.

GRAVEL DIGGER gestures.

SOUND: Trucks come back to full throttle, then move off.

GRAVEL DIGGER exits.

The day becomes quiet.

JOHNSON
Let's dig.

THOMAS
Dad --

JOHNSON
They don't need me -- I dig with 'em just to keep myself from going stir-crazy. Get paid whether I dig or not.

JOHNSON walks up to the dirt.

JOHNSON
Like old times, eh?

JOHNSON and THOMAS sift dirt -- they find the bone fragments hidden by THOMAS. With each one JOHNSON lets out an exclamation and adds it to the pile.

SOUND: Music to find bones by.

SARAH, carrying a basket, enters. She looks at JOHNSON and THOMAS, grimed and grinning.

SARAH
Johnson and Thomas Shea.

JOHNSON looks up, sees her, whoops, and embraces her with a twirl.

JOHNSON
Look at what I found. We found!

SARAH
Eat first.

JOHNSON
Eat?

SARAH
Eat.

SARAH lays out the lunch.

JOHNSON
(to THOMAS)
Help your mother.

THOMAS helps SARAH while JOHNSON carries in the burlap bag, on which are the bones. They sit, they eat.

SARAH

All right, let me see one.

JOHNSON hands SARAH one of the bone fragments.

JOHNSON

Fifty thousand years old.

SARAH

Are you sure?

JOHNSON

Of course I'm sure -- I mean, he's sure -- he's being taught by the best!

SARAH

But can you really tell?

JOHNSON

Of course he can!

SARAH

Eat your sandwich. I just mean, all that digging you two did here -- and then the road crews, all their digging -- and never once --

JOHNSON

It's like that -- big haystack, one needle. Most of the time -- straw.

(to THOMAS)

Right?

THOMAS

Right.

JOHNSON

That's how it works.

SARAH

Well -- there's a smile on that face I haven't seen in a while.

SARAH bounces the fragment in her hand.

JOHNSON

Her skeptical mind works.

SARAH tosses it back to JOHNSON, who catches it.

SARAH

Look, muck about with bones if you want. I've got to do such boring things as clean your underwear and cook some food for your ordinary bones.

JOHNSON
(mock Irish accent)
Ah, what a fine woman she be, eh?

THOMAS watches his parents joke. For the moment, his face looks completely relaxed.

JOHNSON
All right, off with you. We have work to do.

THOMAS helps SARAH put everything into the basket.

SARAH
Please be careful --

THOMAS
I know -- I will -- he's --

SARAH
At least he's happy for today.

SARAH exits. JOHNSON slaps his hands together.

JOHNSON
Let's dig!

THOMAS
(pointing)
How about over there?

JOHNSON
Let the maestro conduct.

They move to where THOMAS had salted the skull and jaw.

JOHNSON
This looks good -- a turn in an ancient river,
water slows down, things settle in.

THOMAS
Want to try?

JOHNSON
Give me the spade.

JOHNSON, using THOMAS' small spade, pulls away dirt and stone.

SOUND: Scraping.

Then JOHNSON stops.

THOMAS
What?

JOHNSON points, and THOMAS sees the protruding end of the jawbone.

THOMAS

Maybe just a branch. From the trees.

JOHNSON carves around the jawbone, exposing more and more of it. He leans in to smell the bone, then points with the shovel-tip.

JOHNSON

This isn't a branch.

Together they unearth the bones and lay them on the burlap. JOHNSON handles them as if they were glass.

SARAH sets up the kitchen table. JOHNSON carries the burlap bag while THOMAS gathers the tools. He lays the bag on the table.

JOHNSON

(whispering)

Goddamn!

SARAH

Johnson.

JOHNSON

Sorry.

JOHNSON points at the bones.

JOHNSON

Missing link -- that's what I think.

(to THOMAS)

And we're going to go to Professor Jordan and get him to say that. Because it's true.

SOUND: Trucks accelerating up a hill, then grinding to an idling halt.

GRAVEL DIGGER enters.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Just wanted to let you know -- Hey, more bones, I see.

JOHNSON

Not just bones, you see -- the Missing Link.

THOMAS

Dad --

GRAVEL DIGGER

You don't say.

JOHNSON

I do say.

GRAVEL DIGGER

Maybe you've got my foreman's great-great-great
aunt right there.

JOHNSON

My son and I -- we have found the missing link.

GRAVEL DIGGER

You don't say.

JOHNSON

I do say, again.

SOUND: Cacophony of different voices all saying the phrase "missing
link."

THOMAS catches SARAH's eye. She looks at him as if to say, "What
gives?" But he shrugs and looks away.

MIMED: JOHNSON looks absolutely ecstatic as he explains to GRAVEL
DIGGER about the missing link and geology and so forth and so forth --
as if he were Professor JORDAN in front of his freshmen.

Lights out as voices continue.

* * * * *

Scene 9

Lights up.

SOUND: Voices fade, followed by knuckles rapping on a door.

DAN MORAN, reporter, enters, a fedora cocked back on his head, pad and
pencil in hand. He mimes knocking on the door again.

SOUND: Knuckles rapping on a door.

SARAH, as if looking through a window, sees MORAN. She opens the
door.

SOUND: Door opening.

MORAN

Morning.

SARAH

Morning.

MORAN

Is Johnson Shea around?

SARAH

Not within shouting distance.

MORAN

How far would I have to go to be in shouting distance?

SARAH

Who are you?

MORAN

Dan Moran, newspaper reporter.

SARAH

There's been no killings around here.

MORAN

I am here for the missing link. I understand Mr. Shea has one?

SARAH

How can you have a link that's missing? If it's missing, you can't have it, so leave.

MORAN

If I lose something, I still have it, even if it's missing.

SARAH

Who told you?

MORAN

I got a call at the paper from someone here in town.

SARAH

Who?

MORAN

Confidential.

SARAH

He's off digging.

MORAN

How can I get there?

SARAH

See that grove of trees over there?

MORAN

I can't walk down that road over there?

SARAH

You saying I don't know my own property?

MORAN

All right -- that grove of trees.

SARAH
Go through that grove of trees.

MORAN
Through those trees -- I can't just, you know,
the road? All right, the trees it is.

MORAN enters the grove of trees and is immediately lost and thrashing.

SOUND: Thrashing through branches and brambles.

MORAN
Fuck! Fuck! Goddamn --

JOHNSON enters at the gravel pit. MORAN stumbles out of the woods.

JOHNSON
Who are you?

MORAN
Who the fuck are you? Goddamn --

JOHNSON
Johnson Shea.

MORAN
Oh.

JOHNSON
And who, as you say, the fuck are you?

MORAN
Dan Moran, reporter -- newspaper.

JOHNSON
Why didn't you just come down the road?

MORAN
Your wife -- I assume she was --

JOHNSON
Evil-looking woman, sneer on her face?

MORAN
Wouldn't go that far.

JOHNSON
Some would.

MORAN
She told me to come that way.

JOHNSON
My house is a half mile that way.

MORAN

I walked --

JOHNSON

You've had a good long jaunt, Mr. Moran. And for what purpose?

MORAN

The missing link. I want to do a story about you and the missing link.

JOHNSON

You don't say.

MORAN

Do say.

(takes out pad)

S-H-E-A or S-H-A-Y?

Lights out on them.

Lights up in the SHEA house, kitchen. Table, chairs, the bones.

PROJECTION: The front page of the newspaper: "The Sun Times" with a headline: "Is This America's 'Missing Link'?"

Under the headline, a sub-headline: "Local farmer got a crop he didn't expect."

Under the sub-headline, a sketch of the skull and jawbone, along with an artist's rendering of what the "missing link" might look like, wildly inaccurate and a hoot to look at.

JOHNSON, SARAH, and THOMAS look at the newspaper.

JOHNSON

Now that is beautiful.

SARAH, arms crossed, scowling, gives THOMAS a "look."

SARAH

Based on this, the bank will now forgive the mortgage --

JOHNSON

(with affection)

The wet blanket. I wonder what else is out there, Thomas? What else haven't we dug up yet?

THOMAS

Dad, don't go getting yourself --

JOHNSON

I'll bet you there's more out there. I'll just bet you. Shea Man. We're gonna call it Shea Man.

JOHNSON continues to admire the front page of the newspaper. SARAH looks at THOMAS, who can't give his mother a straight look back.

SOUND: Telegraph keys

SARAH pulls a telegram out of her pocket and hands it to THOMAS, who scans it.

SARAH

Came earlier.

JORDAN enters, carrying a small leather satchel. He knocks on the door. Just behind him is MORAN.

SOUND: Knuckles on wood.

SARAH moves to the door. THOMAS hangs back.

JORDAN

Mrs. Shea?

MORAN

Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

How do you know who I am?

MORAN

Name's Dan Moran.

SARAH

He's our intrepid bloodhound.

JOHNSON

And you wrote the article.

MORAN

I am the perp.

JORDAN

How did you know I was --

MORAN

Investigators investigate.

SARAH

Telegraph clerks take bribes, right?

MORAN
Investigator's investigate. Thought I'd tag
along.

SARAH
Like a tick on a dog.

By now, THOMAS is at the door, behind SARAH.

JORDAN
Thomas.

THOMAS
Professor.

JOHNSON
Who is it?

SARAH
Come and see for yourself.

JOHNSON does.

PROJECTION: Newspaper out.

JORDAN
Mr. Johnson Shea, I presume?

JOHNSON shakes his hand.

JOHNSON
Professor Jordan!

MORAN tips his fedora.

MORAN
Remember me?

JOHNSON
I like your style.

SARAH
If you like blood-sucking.

JORDAN
Mr. Shea -- we have some business together -- and
we can't do it --

MORAN
(to THOMAS)
Thomas Shea, right? You were with --

JOHNSON
Leave the boy alone.

MORAN

Then let me tag along, and I promise to bother only those people who should be bothered -- on my mother's grave.

SARAH

A shame some parents die before their children.

JOHNSON
(to SARAH)

Can't blame a bull-dog for biting.

JORDAN

She's right -- this is not how to do things.

JOHNSON

But it's how things are being done, Professor -- new age, new ways. Mr. Moran -- you're in.

SARAH

Will you at least invite them inside?

Which JOHNSON does -- and they find themselves in front of the bones. SARAH and THOMAS get chairs.

An intense bright light from overhead lights the bones on a white cloth, the dirt still clinging to them.

JORDAN sits before the bones, JOHNSON, THOMAS, and MORAN in the background.

SARAH brings a cup of tea to JORDAN.

JORDAN

Many thanks, Mrs. Shea.

The cup shakes in JORDAN's slightly nervous hand, nervous because what he sees looks as genuine as it does improbable.

THOMAS gnaws on his fingernails. SARAH gently but firmly pushes his hand away from his mouth.

JOHNSON

We didn't wash them. Tried not to handle them much.

JORDAN does not take his eyes off the bones as he speaks.

JORDAN

Did you mark the site?

THOMAS

Not exactly.

JORDAN

I taught you --

JOHNSON

They all came from the gravel pit, within yards
of each other.

JORDAN

But stratigraphy -- for dating --

But his voice trails off as he looks ever more closely at the bones.
He puts the cup down but just on the table's edge, and SARAH moves to
catch it -- but JORDAN completely ignores her.

MORAN

Professor --

JORDAN ignores him as well as he reaches into his bag and pulls out
white cotton gloves and a small leather roll, which unrolled is full
of what look like dental tools.

He uses the tools to turn over the bones, poke at them, scrape them.
Only when he's done this for a minute or so does he actually pick up
one of the skull fragments and the jaw and weigh them in his hands.

JORDAN

(to THOMAS)

The first way to test if bone is new or ancient?

THOMAS

By its weight -- fresh bone, full of organic
matter, is light compared to --

JORDAN

(hefting fragments)

Compared to fossilized bone.

JORDAN abruptly puts them down and pulls back, as if catching himself
at the edge of a cliff, and takes a deep breath.

JORDAN

Thomas, your theory.

THOMAS surveys everyone around him.

JOHNSON

Thomas.

THOMAS

Well -- the end of the jaw --

JORDAN

The condyle -- use the right term.

THOMAS

The condyle. Is missing, so it's hard to know how the jaw hinges to the skull.

JORDAN

I noticed that right away.

THOMAS

But all the bones were found close to each other.

JORDAN

The jaw, Thomas -- the jaw.

THOMAS

The color of the jaw and the skull are close. The densities are close.

MORAN scribbles. THOMAS hesitates. He looks up at his father, whose face is set in anticipation and delight.

THOMAS

I think we may have eoanthropus, Professor.

JORDAN

Mr. Shea, would you sit down, please?

JOHNSON sits, and everyone waits, tensely.

JORDAN

More tests, of course -- more tests -- these will have to go back to the lab. But --

MORAN

Does that "but" mean what I think it means?

JORDAN

This is the Dawn Man --

MORAN

(to himself, writing)

Shea Man is Dawn Man --

JORDAN

Today, Mr. Shea, America triumphs.

MORAN scribbles "America triumphant."

JORDAN

(laughing)

Take that, Piltdown!

MORAN

Piltdown?

THOMAS

The missing link found in England.

MORAN scribbles.

MORAN

"Take that, Piltdown!" Don't know what it means,
but it makes a corker sub-head.

JORDAN stands -- he is now in a lecture hall, the bones before him.
The others actors, standing to the sides, will play his questioners.

THOMAS, squirreled against the wall, watches everything with eyes that
look frightened and cornered. He gnaws his fingernails without pause.

JORDAN

And my laboratory has confirmed, by the most
modern methods of analysis, that these bones are
genuine, and that their proximity at the site
indicates they come from a single individual.

SCHOLAR 1

But have you done the necessary stratigraphic
analyses --

JORDAN

I have visited the site myself.

SCHOLAR 2

In the face of evidence that, to me at least, is
quite incredible and hard to swallow --

JORDAN

Most bitter pills are, my friend -- I've been
swallowing a few of them myself lately.

SCHOLAR 2

(undeterred)

You are willing to, well, bet your reputation on
this Shea Man?

JORDAN

My good friend -- I already have.

SOUND: As if JORDAN's voice is on a record that is slowing to a stop.

THOMAS turns abruptly and moves downstage. The lecture hall goes
dark.

THOMAS stands unsteadily. He closes his eyes and gulps hard several
times, as if trying to not throw up.

FLETCHER enters.

FLETCHER

You okay, pal?

THOMAS

It was hot in there.

FLETCHER

You look green!

THOMAS

I'm fine, I'm fine -- I've just got to get some air.

FLETCHER

Yeah, definitely green. Must've been really hot in there.

THOMAS

I'm fine.

FLETCHER

Always been a bad liar.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

But FLETCHER ignores the request.

THOMAS

I'd like to be alone.

FLETCHER

You shouldn't lie to a preacher's son.

THOMAS

Fletch -- is it wrong if something you did wrong makes someone else happy?

Silence, thoughtful.

FLETCHER

How happy is happy if you always got a sword hanging over your head?

More silence.

FLETCHER

I have no idea if that's a good answer.

THOMAS

Neither do I.

FLETCHER

How about this? Mixing sugar with shit doesn't make the shit taste any better.

THOMAS looks back at JORDAN as the lights come up in the lecture hall.

SCHOLAR 2

(undeterred)

You are willing to, well, bet your reputation on
this Shea Man?

SOUND: The record with JORDAN's voice on it comes back up to speed.

JORDAN

My good friend -- I already have. For science,
for the greater glory of my country, for my race
-- I already have. Now, let me review the
findings in more detail --

THOMAS

(to FLETCHER)

It sure does not taste any better.

Lights out. Stage clears.

* * * * *

Scene 10

PROJECTION: "The L.T. Houseman Museum of Amazing Wonders." With some
appropriately garish logo and cartouche to go with it.

Underneath the headline is a line of display cases filled with
humanoid shapes, all with fanciful titles, such as "Orangutangu Man"
and so on. Over the display cases is a placard: "The Hall of Missing
Links."

Lights up on the office of L.T. HOUSEMAN -- as furnished with curios
and quiddities and oddities as the budget permits.

In the midst of this garish office sits REEVES, HOUSEMAN's assistant,
filing papers and separating the morning mail with practiced wrist-
flicks and hand-tosses.

As HOUSEMAN enters, Reeves holds her arm straight up, and HOUSEMAN
tosses his hat, which settles neatly on top of her outstretched
fingers. In turn, Reeves stands and places the hat on top of a coat
pole topped with a rack of antlers.

HOUSEMAN

Unbroken record.

REEVES

Don't forget your dinner tonight.

HOUSEMAN

I never forget a dinner with rich businessmen.

REEVES

And they never forget you.

HOUSEMAN

Which is why I can pay you such a handsome salary for being such a good target.

HOUSEMAN holds up a newspaper.

REEVES

That's old news.

HOUSEMAN

New story, though -- professor certifies them as authentic.

HOUSEMAN says nothing, continues to hold the paper.

REEVES

I'll get Chalmers Diggs on the phone.

HOUSEMAN

I am always ready to speak to the owners of the Fourth Estate.

REEVES calls.

REEVES

Mr. Chalmers Diggs, please? From Mr. L. T. Houseman.

REEVES and HOUSEMAN wait, then REEVES holds up the phone for HOUSEMAN to take.

HOUSEMAN

Thanks, Reeves. Chalmers! No, no, no, this is not about La La, the Siamese twin -- that has been take care [of] -- I'm glad to hear the relief in your voice. No, I have a favor to ask. You have a reporter on your staff -- Dan Moran. Right, your front page on the missing link. About Shea Man. I need to get in touch with him.

HOUSEMAN listens.

HOUSEMAN

Many thanks.

HOUSEMAN hands the phone to REEVES, who writes down what she hears and hangs up without saying anything. HOUSEMAN goes to say something. REEVES interrupts.

REEVES

I'll have him here as soon as I can dig him up, pun intended.

HOUSEMAN chuckles and moves to his "inner office," a sitting area upstage.

Light up on MORAN reading a telegram and his subsequent arrival in front of REEVES, who is typing a letter and completely ignores MORAN.

REEVES
(without looking up)
Your hat. You can't wear it in here.

MORAN
All right.

MORAN takes off his hat but doesn't know where to put it.

REEVES
Toss it here.

MORAN hesitates, then sails it toward REEVES, who catches it, stands, and settles it on one of the antlers.

SOUND: Something like the Westminster CHIMES played on a bunch of tin cans.

REEVES
(without looking up)
He'll see you now.

MORAN moves to the "inner office" and finds HOUSEMAN standing in front of the wall of missing links. MORAN doesn't know whether to be impressed or appalled.

HOUSEMAN
Don't worry -- no family resemblance to you.
I've liked your stories.

MORAN
(still transfixed)
What?

HOUSEMAN
Mr. Moran.

MORAN tears his eyes away from the display.

MORAN
Yes -- sorry -- my editor says you wanted to see me. Why would you want to see me?

HOUSEMAN
Could you read me the quote from Professor Jordan -- the one you ended your piece with?

MORAN pulls his pad out of his pocket.

MORAN

I quote to you Professor Jordan's quote: "I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth."

HOUSEMAN

He really said that?

MORAN

Words to that effect.

HOUSEMAN

I like their effect. Would you care to take another visit to the countryside? Your editor won't be a problem.

But MORAN is still mesmerized by the display.

HOUSEMAN

Mr. Moran.

MORAN

Sorry -- sorry -- what? Why would you need me?

HOUSEMAN

I need someone to introduce me to Johnson Shea.

MORAN

I could do that, but --

HOUSEMAN

What's in it for you, except for a nice trip upstate? And a good meal? Excellent liquor?

MORAN

I don't drink.

HOUSEMAN

A newspaperman who doesn't take the sauce?

MORAN

Makes me like one of your monsters here.

HOUSEMAN

Don't be so quick to judge what is a monster and what isn't.

MORAN

That's sort of my job.

HOUSEMAN

For now. What about my offer?

MORAN

What about "what's in it for me?"

HOUSEMAN

Reeves?

REEVES reaches into a desk drawer and pulls out a manila envelope, brings it to MORAN.

REEVES

It won't explode -- unfortunately.

MORAN opens it, looks inside, seems satisfied.

MORAN

Mr. Houseman, this is the kind of distilled spirits I like -- meet Mr. Johnson Shea.

SOUND: A telegram being sent.

* * * * *

Scene 11

HOUSEMAN's office off, the SHEA dining room on.

REEVES helps HOUSEMAN put on a coat -- a coat made from the pelts of some unnamable exotic animal.

MORAN has his hat and little more. REEVES hands him a tubular carrying case, inside of which are rolled up architectural plans on tracing paper.

REEVES exits.

They move to SHEA's door.

MORAN knocks on the front door.

SOUND: Knuckles rapping.

JOHNSON answers the door.

HOUSEMAN

Mr. Shea?

JOHNSON

I got your telegram.

HOUSEMAN

May we?

JOHNSON stands back as they enter the house and sit in the dining room.

SARAH brings in tea, bread, and jam, then sits. A tense silence, though HOUSEMAN does not seem tense at all.

SARAH
Would your driver like anything?

HOUSEMAN
He's quite self-sufficient. Do you like the car?

JOHNSON
It's --

HOUSEMAN
A model not even on the market yet -- I know the manufacturer personally. He made it just for me.

SARAH
Mr. Houseman, we are very impressed. Our neighbors are impressed.

HOUSEMAN
"Now what?" your voice means?

SARAH
Exactly.

JOHNSON
It doesn't do to be rude.

SARAH
This is a man who made the money sitting in the yard out there from being rude. And crude.

HOUSEMAN
And lewd. Money in all three. But the funny thing, Mrs. Shea? The money stays innocent, free and clear, because you can put it to anything you want. I have seen money start out crude and end up angelic -- washed clean. Money is the true universal solvent.

SARAH
And you want to help us get our wings?

HOUSEMAN
As you said: Exactly.

SARAH
Well, we are not interested --

JOHNSON
Sarah. I think we should let our guest speak his mind.

SARAH
Johnson --

JOHNSON

Do you know where the next few mortgage payments are coming from? I don't.

SARAH, without a word, gathers up the tea, bread, and jam.

SARAH

If you'll excuse me --

SARAH moves toward the kitchen.

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be the cause --

JOHNSON

She'll be fine.

In the "kitchen," SARAH puts down the tray and turns to face the three men at the table, her breathing heavy, her hands shaking.

HOUSEMAN

I don't want to be hypothetical about this, Mr. Shea. Mr. Moran here has confirmed for me that Professor Jordan has authenticated the bones.

HOUSEMAN gestures to MORAN, who recites from memory.

MORAN

"I have bet my fortune and honor on the truth." Exact quote.

HOUSEMAN

The question that comes to me is this: who owns Shea Man? Because he who owns the bones -- do you see my drift?

JOHNSON

What would you want with the bones?

HOUSEMAN

What would I want with the bones? Mr. Johnson, you worry about your mortgage payment -- how would you like to never hear the word "mortgage" again?

SARAH, tense, her right fist smacked into her left palm.

SARAH

Don't.

SOUND: "Don't."

JOHNSON

That would be a word worth losing.

HOUSEMAN

Then let me show you how.

SARAH

No.

SOUND: "No."

HOUSEMAN gestures again to MORAN, who pulls the roll of tracing paper out the tube he brought in and hands it to HOUSEMAN. HOUSEMAN spreads it open on the table.

PROJECTION: The architectural plan.

HOUSEMAN

Let me explain.

JOHNSON

Wait.

(reading)

The Museum of the Missing Link?

HOUSEMAN

Right here -- well, in town at least.

JOHNSON pores over the sketch.

JOHNSON

How much did Hotchkiss ask for these properties?

HOUSEMAN

It doesn't matter.

SHEA

Why? Money always matters.

HOUSEMAN

Here's why. Spend much time in the city?

JOHNSON

I don't --

HOUSEMAN

Not the little podunk you have here, but "the city," in capital letters, the one we come from?

SARAH enters.

SARAH

You mean the one filled with horseshit and bums -
-

JOHNSON

Sarah --

SARAH

-- the city that you can drive away from any time
you want.

HOUSEMAN

And there are many who would do just that if they
could -- and why not provide them with such a
chance -- a chance to get away from the putrid
and the poisonous --

SARAH

And come upstate --

HOUSEMAN

By special train --

SARAH

To the Museum of the Missing Link.

HOUSEMAN

An outing, carefree -- cheap -- stay in the hotel
overnight if they want to --

SARAH

Eat in the restaurant --

HOUSEMAN

Buy some items in the gift shop --

SARAH

"Shops" you mean.

HOUSEMAN

Always good to diversify.

SARAH

And all can be done in a day -- here and back in
a flash.

HOUSEMAN turns to JOHNSON.

HOUSEMAN

She has the architectural sense -- the
entrepreneurial verve --

SARAH

I just know how schemers scheme.

HOUSEMAN

All the same.

(to JOHNSON)

But -- but -- this all depends -- this all
depends -- on who owns the bones. Mr. Shea, I
think you own the bones -- do you think you own
the bones?

JOHNSON scans them all, lingers longest on SARAH. SARAH wants to speak but doesn't.

SHEA

We do own the bones.

HOUSEMAN

So would you like to do some business together?

SARAH and JOHNSON move into a different light, SARAH taking the architectural plan with her. HOUSEMAN and MORAN exit.

PROJECTION: Plans go away.

JOHNSON

Don't say a word.

Several moments of tense silence.

JOHNSON

Well, say something!

SARAH

I'm not supposed to say a word.

JOHNSON

I'll give you ten.

SARAH

How's it feel to sell your soul to the devil?

JOHNSON

Pretty good, actually.

JOHNSON suddenly looks very deflated, not able to keep up this tough stance at all.

JOHNSON

Sarah, we got no pot to piss in -- and this Houseman is giving us the pot.

SARAH

And the piss.

JOHNSON

What do you want me to do? I'm supposed to take care of my family -- what do you want me to do?

SARAH strokes his hair.

SARAH

We'll make it through -- we always do.

But this angers JOHNSON.

JOHNSON

No we won't! You know we won't! We're in that handbasket that's always going to hell -- and there's no fooling ourselves. I am going to license those bones -- they're mine --

SARAH

And Thomas'. And mine, don't forget.

JOHNSON

Then we, all of us, are going to license those bones, and I'm going to let this Houseman guy set up his museum, and we are going to make ourselves some money!

SARAH

We should call this house the museum of missing links.

JOHNSON is not pleased with her words, but he doesn't respond.

* * * * *

Scene 12

JORDAN's office, as in Scene 5, with JENNINGS sitting perfectly still listening as JOHNSON, HOUSEMAN, MORAN (with a leather portfolio), and DANIEL GOLENBOCK, HOUSEMAN's lawyer, sit in a tense half-circle around JORDAN. GOLENBOCK wears pince-nez attached to a cord strung with small pearls and also has a leather briefcase. THOMAS stands off to the side, chewing on his fingernails.

JORDAN

You can't take the bones!

HOUSEMAN

And again I'll have Mr. Golenbock render his legal opinion.

GOLENBOCK

The bones were found --

JORDAN

I know where the bones were found! Mr. Shea, you can't --

JOHNSON goes to speak, but HOUSEMAN halts him and gestures to GOLENBOCK, who opens his briefcase, takes out a legal document, and hands it to JORDAN.

HOUSEMAN

That, Professor Jordan, now speaks for Mr. Johnson. You'll notice that it's a power of attorney.

JORDAN

(to HOUSEMAN)

So, you own the bones now.

GOLENBOCK

No -- we simply speak for the bones. Mr. Johnson still owns them.

JORDAN

Mr. Johnson --

HOUSEMAN

Look at me. We have come for their release. Unless you want the police to take them away for me, which we have every right --

JORDAN, seething, sweeps the legal document off the desk.

JENNINGS, sitting up straight in her chair, begins to shadow-box, throwing jabs into the air.

JORDAN

You don't know what you're doing.

MORAN retrieves the legal document and hands it to GOLENBOCK, who takes out a handkerchief and cleans his pince-nez.

HOUSEMAN

I -- we -- know exactly what we're doing.

JORDAN

I've staked my reputation!

HOUSEMAN

'Tis bitter -- I understand. Would there be anything that would sweeten life for you at this moment?

JORDAN

What -- what do you mean?

HOUSEMAN gestures, and GOLENBOCK retrieves another document from the depths of his briefcase, hands it to JORDAN.

JORDAN

What is this?

HOUSEMAN

A contract. That would allow you sole access to Shea Man for research. Only you, Dr. Jordan. Only you would be able to publish about them, talk about them, pontificate about them.

JORDAN

That goes against everything I've ever believed -
- about sharing knowledge --

HOUSEMAN

I commend that. Don't you commend that, Mr.
Golenbock? But if it's facts you deal in, deal
in these: either you sign, or you will never
handle the bones again.

JENNINGS mimes that she has just been knocked out by a well-placed
punch. She starts boxing again.

JORDAN

Why me?

JOHNSON

Dr. Jordan --

HOUSEMAN

(holding up hand)

A gift from Mr. Johnson. He thanks you for what
you've done for Thomas.

JORDAN

I can't -- I can't --

HOUSEMAN

I don't really care about scientific advancement,
the search for knowledge, and all that. But when
a scientist like yourself blesses these bones --
opportunities arise.

HOUSEMAN gestures again to MORAN, who takes a poster out of his
portfolio and holds it up -- the usual garish HOUSEMAN poster, for the
new "Museum of the Missing Link."

PROJECTION: The garish poster.

HOUSEMAN points to a line on the poster.

HOUSEMAN

I had this made up to show you something -- right
there. "As verified by Dr. Harlan Jordan" --

JORDAN

I can read it.

HOUSEMAN

A new approach for me -- truth in advertising.
Your name, right there -- stamp of approval --
that's worth money. To me. And to you.

JENNINGS bobs and weaves, takes a hit.

JORDAN

I don't care --

HOUSEMAN

Simple math, Dr. Jordan -- you will make more money than your pitiful salary will ever bring you, and you can apply that money to your "work." Make contributions to young scholars like Thomas -- opportunities that otherwise will never exist as long as you wait upon the kind heart of the legislature. Dr. Jordan, more money -- more freedom. More glory for America.

JORDAN takes a slow look at everyone, then down at the legal document.

GOLENBOCK offers him a pen. He takes it.

JENNINGS is knocked out for the final time.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings?

JENNINGS pops awake.

JENNINGS

Yes, Professor?

JORDAN

I need you in here to witness something.

JORDAN's office off.

HOUSEMAN's press conference/unveiling.

On a large table is a model of his new Museum of the Missing Link.

PROJECTION: New Museum of the Missing Link from various angles.

MORAN with a clipboard, now HOUSEMAN's public relations go-to guy for this project. JOHNSON and THOMAS stand by awkwardly, unsure.

HOUSEMAN

And the newest amusement for the well-to-do. Travelers will catch the train here in the city, then end up here --

HOUSEMAN points to a renovated train station.

HOUSEMAN

Take up their hotel rooms here --

Points to a grand hotel, ornamented and ornate.

HOUSEMAN

Be driven out to the site of the world-famous
find --

Points to the black ribbon flowing out to the Shea house.

HOUSEMAN

On the newly macadamized road. And visit the
newest addition to the L.T. Houseman caravan of
wonders: the Museum of the Missing Link. Mr.
Moran?

THOMAS catches his father's eye, and JOHNSON smiles wanly at him,
completely at sea, a little stunned.

THOMAS' VISION

All the other actors appear on stage wearing skeleton costumes and
skull masks, holding drinks and plates of food.

SOUND: Grotesque chatter and the sound of bones clacking underscored
by demonic music.

HOUSEMAN and MORAN also have skull masks on, and HOUSEMAN has horns
attached to his.

THOMAS turns away in fear, and when he looks back at JOHNSON, he, too,
wears a skull mask.

SOUND: A voice, thick and gross.

VOICE

Are you all right? Are you all right?

The stage clears, masks go away, and THOMAS turns to look at JOHNSON,
who is shaking his arm.

JOHNSON

Thomas, are you all right?

THOMAS

I'm -- fine. I'm fine.

MORAN

We have a new name for what we plan to do --
we're calling it a "theme park" -- and --

MORAN continues to talk in mime.

JOHNSON

This is out of our hands, isn't it?

THOMAS nods yes, afraid, as MORAN and HOUSEMAN gesture at the model.

* * * * *

Scene 13

PROJECTION: Museum goes away.

The dorm room of THOMAS and FLETCHER, night, THOMAS and FLETCHER sitting. There is a liquor bottle on the floor between them. They each hold glasses.

THOMAS

Fletch.

FLETCHER

Yes?

THOMAS

You any good at confessions?

FLETCHER

Is that what we're drinking?

THOMAS

Are you?

FLETCHER

That's really my old man's game --

THOMAS

Because I am sitting in the dark.

FLETCHER

What are you talking about? We're not --

THOMAS

The museum opened last night.

FLETCHER

We missed it.

THOMAS

And people are happy, and some money's coming in.

FLETCHER

Not just "some," from what you say Houseman says it's going to bring in.

No response from THOMAS.

FLETCHER

Is there an "and" built in to this silence of yours?

THOMAS

Yes there is.

FLETCHER

Should I try to do the confession thing?

THOMAS

I'd appreciate it.

FLETCHER

You got my two ears.

THOMAS

And it's all a lie. A big, fat, sweaty lie.

FLETCHER

There's a beginning buried somewhere in those sentences, right?

THOMAS

Yeah.

FLETCHER stands and grabs the bottle.

THOMAS

Where are you going?

FLETCHER

It's not my ears that need to hear this.

FLETCHER pours himself a shot, then one for THOMAS. They each down that shot and move to JORDAN's office, JORDAN at his desk.

JENNINGS has a water glass stuck to what would be the office door.

JORDAN

You stole the bones? You stole the bones?

THOMAS

Yes.

JORDAN

Why? Why? Why?

JORDAN leaps from his desk toward the office door.

JORDAN

Miss Jennings! Miss Jennings!

JENNINGS hides the glass as JORDAN slams open the door.

JORDAN

Houseman, on the phone -- now! And train tickets!

JORDAN's office away. The SHEA dining room.

JOHNSON, SARAH, JORDAN, THOMAS, FLETCHER, HOUSEMAN, MORAN -- everyone tense. Except for HOUSEMAN, who cleans his nails with what looks like a well-filed shark's tooth.

HOUSEMAN

Have we all eaten a big enough meal of doom and disaster?

JORDAN

You don't have a reputation that's ruined.

HOUSEMAN

Who outside this room knows what we know? Hmm?

A pause.

JORDAN

My secretary, Jennings. She eavesdrops through a water glass.

HOUSEMAN

And is she a poor working girl with something like an aged mother at home?

JORDAN

Father with lung disease.

HOUSEMAN

A generous contribution to his health care would go a long way. My assistant Reeves -- but she knows who owns her tongue. So, no one, then, outside our little circle.

SARAH

I know what you're getting at.

HOUSEMAN

Do you?

SARAH

Do you know what he's getting at?

But silence greets her because everyone knows the answer.

SARAH

You won't get away with it.

HOUSEMAN

Thomas --

SARAH

You leave him out of this.

HOUSEMAN

(ignoring her)

Thomas, everything you did, you did out of love -
- isn't that right?

THOMAS

Yes.

SARAH

You don't have to talk to him.

HOUSEMAN

Love, yes?

THOMAS

Yes.

HOUSEMAN

And the hotel manager, whom your family knows,
has known for a long time -- I bet you right now
his family is counting up more money than they
have ever known. And would you want everything
good that's now happened to the people you love -
- money for your parents, for the town, for
Professor Jordan --

JORDAN

Tainted --

HOUSEMAN

Would you want all of that to go away?

THOMAS

But I stole and I cheated and it's all a lie.

HOUSEMAN

You didn't answer my question. Would you want
things to go back to the way they were before?
Banks foreclosing. People moving away -- friends
you'd known all your life gone. The town you
grew up in dying.

SARAH

You are the devil!

HOUSEMAN

(ignoring her)

Would you?

All eyes focused on THOMAS.

THOMAS

No.

HOUSEMAN
Because you love them.

THOMAS
Yes.
(to SARAH)
It's true!

HOUSEMAN
Because you did what you did out of love.

THOMAS
Yes.

HOUSEMAN
Would any of you? Want to go back? I'm going to
take your collective silence as a "no."

JORDAN
Not from me. My reputation as an honest
scientist is shot full of holes.

HOUSEMAN
I was getting to something for you.

JORDAN
You're getting to me, all right.

HOUSEMAN
Don't bite the hand that feeds you just yet. Let
me ask you this, Professor: so what if it's all a
fake?

JORDAN
So what? So what? You can't do proper science -
-

HOUSEMAN
False things are not a part of science? I
thought that --

JORDAN
Well, of course they are -- you cut out the false
things to get the truth.

HOUSEMAN
Is there a timeline for that?

JORDAN
What?

SARAH
Man --

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Man, oh man alive. You are slick, Mr. Houseman.

HOUSEMAN

(smiling)

The son obviously gets part of his intelligence from his mother.

JORDAN

What?

SARAH

Let's say that at some future date --

HOUSEMAN

Twenty years.

SARAH

-- it becomes known --

HOUSEMAN

Even by the scientist who "proved" it twenty years earlier --

SARAH

That eoanthropus libertatis was an elaborate hoax --

HOUSEMAN

And that science --

JORDAN

Wait, wait --

HOUSEMAN

In its ever-onward quest for truth --

MORAN

I get it!

JOHNSON

What?

JORDAN

Wait!

HOUSEMAN

Uncovers and corrects, reveals and re-directs --

JORDAN

You're suggesting --

SARAH

He is definitely suggesting.

MORAN

Professor, if it's a couple of double fins down
the road --

HOUSEMAN

Science, ever self-correcting.

MORAN

You talk or don't talk as you see fit!

HOUSEMAN

And since you control access to the bones, by
contract -- a legal contract, which you have
signed, by the way --

MORAN

Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones!

HOUSEMAN

The professor makes a tidy sum with the
publication of his popular history of human
evolution --

HOUSEMAN gestures to MORAN

MORAN

"Onward and Upward: A Popular History of Mankind,
by Prof. Harlan Jordan. Published by L.T.
Houseman Press."

HOUSEMAN

Very popular, I hear.

MORAN

I get to keep my book on the hook: "How The
Missing Link Was Found, by D. Moran."

HOUSEMAN

Published by --

MORAN

"L.T. Houseman Press."

HOUSEMAN

The museum -- which has never pretended to be a
model of science anyway -- continues to roll on.

SARAH

The town keeps cashing in --

HOUSEMAN

Thomas gets a fine education all the way to a professorship if he wants.

JOHNSON

And everyone becomes happy.

HOUSEMAN

On board everyone?

(to FLETCHER)

And you, son of a preacher man?

FLETCHER

"Mum" has now become my word of the day every day.

HOUSEMAN

All right.

(to all)

So? Now that we all know the truth -- we band of brothers -- does anyone else need to know? Hmm?

Everyone looks squarely at each other.

* * * * *

Scene 14

The dining room goes away.

The stage becomes several locations.

PROJECTION: Beach In Florida

SOUND: Gentle waves on a beach, seagulls.

Under dual umbrellas on lounges lay JOHNSON and SARAH, cool drinks by their side, eyes closed, breathing easily.

Beach goes away.

PROJECTION: Bookstore, with easel announcing the signing of copies of "The Apeman Cometh" by Harlan Jordan, the fifth in his series of Apeman science fiction novels.

SOUND: Buzz of a crowd

JORDAN sits at a table, beaming, pen in hand.

Book signing goes away.

PROJECTION: Front page of "The Daily Tab" with headline "Baby Born Reciting The Bible" and a front-page "photo" of a three-headed goat.

A stogie-chomping DAN MORAN at a desk.

SOUND: MORAN's voice barking out orders to copy boys, writers, and others as they get the next issue of "The Daily Tab" ready.

Daily Tab goes away.

PROJECTION: Deck of a ferry.

SOUND: A ferry.

REEVES holds a burlap bag.

REEVES

Dem bone, dem bones --

HOUSEMAN

It's time.

REEVES, standing by the railing, with no one looking, lets go of the bag, and it disappears into the river.

SOUND: Burlap bag disappearing into water.

Ferry goes away.

PROJECTION: Logo of a major university.

SOUND: Busy office.

THOMAS and FLETCHER huddle with the PR DIRECTOR of a major university fleshing out the upcoming giving campaign. Charts, potential slogans, graphics -- shirtsleeves rolled up, brisk pace.

DIRECTOR

(pointing at chart)

Now, let's see what Houseman Advertising plans to do to increase the endowment by 30 percent --

SOUND: A business-like knock on the door.

DIRECTOR

Excuse me. Come in!

A SECRETARY carries in both a poster and a worried look.

SECRETARY

Sir --

DIRECTOR

What is it?

She hands him the poster. A frown settles on DIRECTOR's face.

SECRETARY

I've got reporters crawling everywhere, I've got radio people wanting to set up a broadcast, newsreel people --

THOMAS

What's the problem?

DIRECTOR

(handing over poster)

Academic freedom.

As THOMAS and FLETCHER read the poster, they struggle to keep the horror off their faces.

PROJECTION: Poster announcing the following lecture: "Shea Man, Negroids, and Evolution: The Scientific Case for Segregation." Under that: "Professor Charles Herrnstein, Department of Anthropology."

DIRECTOR

Supposed to be just a simple keynote address at an obscure conference.

THOMAS

I can see your problem.

DIRECTOR

(to SECRETARY)

Okay, the usual protocol for these things --

SECRETARY backs out of the office.

DIRECTOR

Keep me updated, every couple of hours. We don't need a race war inside the ivied walls.

(SECRETARY leaves)

Now, back to getting the wealthy alumni to cough up.

PROJECTION out, DIRECTOR's office away.

THOMAS and FLETCHER move into their own office. They throw down their charts and briefcases, loosen their ties, unbutton their jackets, and stare.

FLETCHER

I need a drink.

THOMAS

A drink would help.

But they don't move an inch.

THOMAS
I have to make the call.

FLETCHER
I know. Bourbon or scotch?

THOMAS
One for each hand.

MIMED: THOMAS punches the intercom button on his phone.

SOUND: Intercom button punched.

THOMAS
Betty? I need your special magic. In two minutes I want you to track down the phone number of one Harlan Jordan.

SOUND: "The science fiction writer?"

THOMAS
That very one.

SOUND: "I have his newest Apeman book right by my bed."

THOMAS
To each his own bedside partner. Put him through directly to me.

SOUND: "Up, up, and away!"

FLETCHER brings over three glasses.

FLETCHER
Scotch for the right, bourbon for the left.
(hold up his glass)
Vodka for me, right down the middle.

They both sip and stare until the phone rings.

SOUND: Phone rings.

THOMAS punches in the speakerphone button as if it were dynamite.

SOUND: Speakerphone button pushed in.

SOUND: "Harlan Jordan on the line."

On another part of the stage, JORDAN sits at a desk completely bare except for his typewriter and a neat pile of finished pages, along with a phone on speakerphone.

THOMAS
Hello, Harlan. I've got Fletch here.

FLETCHER

Hel-lo.

THOMAS

Sorry to bother you on what is probably a nice day where you are, but do you believe in ghosts?

JORDAN

If you're calling me now, then I am going to have to believe.

THOMAS

Because we are having a visitation.

FLETCHER

The sins of the fathers --

THOMAS

By way of Charles Herrnstein -- you've heard of him?

JORDAN rolls a piece of paper into the typewriter.

JORDAN

Yes.

THOMAS

We have seen a poster --

JORDAN

I know. I heard. I still have ties.

THOMAS

Were you going to do anything?

JORDAN does not answer, simply taps the "X" key on the typewriter.

FLETCHER

What's that sound?

JORDAN

"X" marks the spot.

FLETCHER

Ah.

THOMAS

So?

JORDAN

So it's time to put the old ghosts to rest, isn't it?

FLETCHER

An exorcism.

JORDAN

Reserve me a room at the Plaza. Leave a message where to meet you. I can get a plane out of here tomorrow.

THOMAS

You once told me that fossils never stop talking.

But JORDAN has already hung up. He takes out the piece of paper and crumples it as light goes dark on his office.

FLETCHER

(finishing vodka)

Goddamn fossils never shut up.

THOMAS

I'll call my parents.

FLETCHER

I'll call Moran. And Houseman, speaking of fossils.

A heavy silence between them.

FLETCHER

Did you really think it would never come back?

THOMAS

I had hoped.

FLETCHER

Me, too.

THOMAS

Stupid, eh?

FLETCHER

Ah, the right thing -- why doesn't it feel so good?

FLETCHER takes the bourbon and downs it while THOMAS does the same with the Scotch. Lights out on their office.

* * * * *

Scene 15

THOMAS and FLETCHER move into a lighted space -- perhaps the back booth at a Chinese restaurant -- where they are joined by JOHNSON, SARAH, JORDAN, and MORAN.

SARAH

It's about time.

MORAN

Just in case, I got a reporter covering the conference for my upscale rag.

From the darkness they hear the familiar boom of HOUSEMAN's voice, and then the force that is HOUSEMAN sweeps in. The only difference between then and now is that he carries a polished walking stick as tall as he is.

He also holds a burlap bag.

HOUSEMAN

When shall we seven meet again, in thunder, lightning, or in rain?

THOMAS

When the hurlyburly's done, when the battle's lost and won.

(to JORDAN)

I finally read your list.

HOUSEMAN lets the bag drop onto the floor with a thunk. The same puzzled look crosses everyone's face. JORDAN kneels down and looks into the bag -- and an involuntary smile crosses his face. He holds open the top of the sack so that everyone can look in.

THOMAS

They're the originals.

MORAN

I thought you had --

HOUSEMAN

I had Reeves drop a bag of shrunken heads over the side.

JOHNSON

And you kept --

HOUSEMAN

Insurance policies come in many shapes.

SARAH

Shrunken heads -- appropriate.

HOUSEMAN

Sarah, I knew you would appreciate it. Now, besides having dinner and getting reacquainted, what is our plan?

JORDAN

I have some thoughts about that.

Another part of the stage becomes a lecture hall.

CHARLES HERRNSTEIN stands triumphant behind a lectern. A small table, filled with books and papers, stands next to the lectern.

PROJECTION: A slide of Shea Man's skull thrown up on a large screen.

HERRNSTEIN

Though the actual Shea Man bones have been mysteriously lost, innumerable casts of the reconstructed skull exist, one of which you see here. Next.

PROJECTION: The slide changes -- Shea Man as drawn by an artist.

HERRNSTEIN

That speaks for itself. Next.

PROJECTION: The slide changes -- Shea Man on the left, a Negroid drawing on the right.

The seven move smoothly into the hall, JORDAN in the lead, HOUSEMAN holding the burlap bag.

HERRNSTEIN

Modern anthropologists have tried mightily to erase what they believed was the racist science of the 19th century -- but they were wrong to do so. Races do exist, and they differ in their abilities, and the dark-skinned races rank lower than the white race, with Shea Man --

HOUSEMAN bangs his walking stick three times.

SOUND: Three resonant booms of the walking stick.

THOMAS

Now I know what the sheep feels like when the wolf comes knocking.

HOUSEMAN

Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye.

JORDAN

Mr. Herrnstein.

HERRNSTEIN

Doctor. And who are you?

JORDAN

You are seriously, seriously mistaken.

HERRNSTEIN

Who are you?

HERRNSTEIN watches the group moves towards him.

HERRNSTEIN

You can't --

But HOUSEMAN moves HERRNSTEIN aside easily with his stick, and JORDAN steps up to the lectern. HOUSEMAN drops the burlap bag on the table beside the lectern.

SOUND: Thunk.

JORDAN

My name is Harlan Jordan. Formerly Professor Harlan Jordan. Some of you may know me. The -- what? -- well, whatever I was, my name has been attached to that thing up there.

SOUND: Whispering in the crowd, pop of flashbulbs.

JORDAN nods to HOUSEMAN, who hands his stick to THOMAS, opens the bag, and gently pulls out Shea Man.

JORDAN

And to these as well.

HERRNSTEIN

They were lost.

FLETCHER

Once was lost has now been found. Hallelujah!

HERRNSTEIN goes to touch them.

HOUSEMAN

Off!

JORDAN

Professor HerrNSTEIN -- whatever your ideas -- no matter how wrong they are -- and they are very wrong -- you can't base any of them on Shea Man. Because he never existed. Never. Existed. We -- the seven of us -- have a story to tell you. Let me start.

Stage goes to black.

* * * * *

Scene 16

SOUND: The sound of film going through a projector.

LIGHTS: The flicker of a movie projector.

Seated amidst the light and sound are The Seven.

PROJECTION: Part of a trailer for "ShaMan," a superhero who combines in himself both animal and human and fights against prejudice everywhere.

Credits follow the trailer. Clearly emblazoned on the screen is the following: "Screenplay by Harlan Jordan. From a story conceived by Johnson Shea, Sarah Shea, Thomas Shea, Fletcher Calvin, Dan Moran, And L.T. Houseman."

Lights come up, and they all turn to JORDAN.

SARAH

Like it a lot.

JOHNSON

I second that.

MORAN

It's got the juice.

HOUSEMAN

Already booked into my theatres for its opening.
With expert publicity by --

THOMAS

Thomas/Fletcher Inc.

FLETCHER

And a great print campaign in --

MORAN

The Daily Tab's family of newspapers and
magazines. And a top-dog product line of toys
and stuff --

JOHNSON

By J&S Manufacturing Enterprises, based in sunny
Miami, Florida.

HOUSEMAN

(to JORDAN)

You're looking pensive, my friend.

JORDAN

I was just thinking what a good friend Shea Man -
- ShaMan -- has been.

HOUSEMAN

Here, here.

ALL

Here, here.

JORDAN
(quoting)
"With a clarion call -- "

SARAH
"ShaMan fights -- "

THOMAS
"For justice to all -- "

FLETCHER
"And everyone's rights."

THOMAS' VISION: On the screen in a packed movie theatre ShaMan swoops through the sky defeating evildoers while MARCHING MUSIC prompts the movie audience of old and young alike to applaud wildly.

END OF PLAY