

THE HORRIFICALLY MAGNIFICENT MENAGERIE OF MONSTERS- Full Script

ACT 1: THE SHOW QUEUE AND PRESHOW

SCENE 1: THE BIG TOP

SETTING: A once grand, now grimy big top stands crooked against the dust of this tattered freakshow. The tent is patched with mismatched fabric from previous acts gone wrong. Rough wooden signs and posters hang within the entrance promising “Marvels and Monstrosities”. Across the room with the perfect view of the show lies an empty show box, decorated and adorned with the Crowe last name. Flickering electric lanterns cast uneven light over the creaky bleachers and center stage. The air smells of sawdust, sweat, and cheap whiskey. It’s a show held together by grit and grime. A carnival of the damned.

(QUEUE SOUNDSCAPE) Traditional carny music plays from the overhead loudspeakers, with a slight reverberation and crackle in tone. Faint noise of creatures snarling and rattling.

(A CM USHERS IN GUESTS FROM A QUEUE OUTSIDE TO TAKE THEIR SEATS WHILE AMBIENT DIALOGUE PLAYS ON THE SPEAKERS)

(AMBIENT DIALOGUE) (Variations of welcoming)

CAIN BOONE V.O.: Come one, come all to the Horrifically Magnificent Menagerie of Monsters! Please, take your seats. The bastardly spectacular starts soon.

CAIN BOONE V.O.: Ladies and gents, welcome to my tent of terrors, where the unnatural meets the unbelievable!

(WHILE GUESTS ARE SEATED, SEVERAL CARNY CLOWNS CAN BE SEEN PANTOMIMING WITH THE CROWD. THEY GATHER CENTER STAGE FOR A SMALL PRESHOW, FORESHADOWING THE EVENTS OF THE SHOW. TO THE GUESTS, THEY ARE PLAYING OUT A COMEDY BIT, BUT THEY ARE REALLY PLAYING OUT THE CORRUPTION OF THE FREAK SHOW.)

MUSIC QUEUE (A music box tune begins to play.)

CLOWN 1: *(Pulls out a top hat from a trunk center stage. He begins to put it on, jesteringly jumping around the stage, barking orders to the other fellow clowns. Mimicking the ringmaster CAIN BOONE.)*

CLOWN 2: *(Pulls out a cane and a gray woman's wig (mimicking LADY CROWE), sulks around the stage with a staggered elderly walk, takes out two smaller paper dolls resembling a townsman and a monster.)*

CLOWN 2: *(Begins to act out with paper dolls the townsman being mauled by the monster.)*

CLOWN 3: *(As the townsman has been scratched, a red ribbon is whisked around the paper dolls, indicating an infection. The ribbon lands in the hands of CLOWN 1.)*

CLOWN 1: *(With sleight of hand, the clown transforms this ribbon into a bouquet of green flowers, representing money and greed.) (He presents them to CLOWN 2, on one knee, and in return, he receives the paper doll of the Townsman.)*

CLOWN 1: *(Takes the townsman doll from CLOWN 2 and cradles it, almost like a baby, its own little creature.)*

CLOWN 3: *(Takes out an obvious bottle of whiskey and pours it into an elixir bottle labeled "CURE"; he takes a drink of the whiskey himself.) (He then twirls around and places it in the outward-stretched hand of CLOWN 1.)*

CLOWN 1: *(Allows one drop of elixir to land on the paper doll, before pulling a bird cage from the trunk. He places the doll inside the cage, puts a spare cloth over the top. Then, through a magic trick, the cloth is removed and a crow sits in the cage. A trapped soul by CAIN BOONE.)*

CLOWN 2: *(Claps joyfully at the magic trick.)*

CLOWN 3: *(Magically appears with two gold coins, one is handed to CLOWN 1, and the other to CLOWN 2.)*

CLOWN 1: *(Takes CLOWN 2 hand and bows down to kiss it. He walks CLOWN 2 to the CROWE booth where they take their seats.)*

CLOWN 3: *(Alone on stage now puts on a cowboy hat (JESSE BOONE), a spotlight comes down on him, the music box intensifies and comes to a slow end, he picks up the bird cage and opens the door letting the Crow fly free.)*

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 2: MENAGERIE OF MONSTERS

SCENE 1: WELCOME TO THE BIG TOP

(FROM BLACKOUT, THE LIGHTS ARE NOW BACKLIT BEHIND THE CURTAIN, A SLIGHT DRUMROLL BEGINS, HIGHLIGHTING THE SHADOWS OF WHAT'S OCCURRING BACKSTAGE. WE SEE A SILHOUETTE OF CAIN BOONE, STAGE RIGHT, TAKING HIS

LAST SWIG OF WHISKEY, CHAOS OF OTHER ACTS RUNNING AROUND HIM, AS HE WALKS CENTER STAGE...)

SPEAKER: Ladies and Gentlemen, the moment you have all been waiting for, the wickedly insidiously icky act from the depths of hell,... (CAIN BOONE puts on his top hat, backlit gone, lights begin on stage, spotlights roam through the crowd, the drumroll intensifies.)... only the worst things your twisted mind can conjure... *The Horifically Magnificent Menagerie of Monsters!*

(TWISTED CARNY MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY. CAIN BOONE ENTERS CENTER STAGE, BOISTEROUSLY GESTURING TO THE CROWD.)

WELCOME TO THE FREAKSHOW begins to play.

CAIN BOONE: *Step right up, you sorry souls, the hours growin late. We've scrubbed the blood, we've lit the lamps, and bribed the Magistrate. The tent is patched with sin and sweat, the air is thick with lies. So grab a seat, my wretched friends, redemption's overpriced.*

(OTHER ACTS START ROLLING IN FROM CENTER STAGE, CLOWNS COME OUT ON PENNY-FARTHING'S, TRAPEZE ARTISTS DRESSED AS FLESH WINGS SOAR ACROSS THE SKY, ASSORTED CARNY ENSEMBLE FLOOD THE STAGE.)

CAIN BOONE & ENSEMBLE: *We're the cracked, the cursed, the unholy parade. The sins you denied are the bills we've paid. The world spat us out, but we fight back strong! So clap to the carnage and sing along!*

CAIN BOONE: *Welcome to the Freakshow, children of the night. Where wrong feels right and joy is but a fright. We'll sing, we'll scream, we'll burn, we'll bleed, a toast to the cursed... an unholy breed. Raise your glass to the lost and low, to the beasts that the righteous fear to know! Cain Boone's your host, and the curtains aglow... Welcome to the FREAKSHOW!*

(THE ACTS STAND THERE WAITING FOR THE FINAL ROUND OF APPLAUSE, CAIN BOONE REMAINS ON HIS STUMP, AS THE OTHER ACTS SCURRY OFF STAGE. A SPOTLIGHT BEGINS TO ROAM, TRYING TO LOCATE CAIN BOONE. HE PASSES HIM ONCE, AND TWICE AGAIN. CAIN BOONE FRUSTRATED...)

CAIN BOONE: YOU USELESS SACK OF SH-... *(the spotlight finds him)*... Ah, there it is. Welcome, friends, to the Boone and Bone Freakshow. I am your host, Cain Boone, ready to transport you through the gates of hell like none other. I cannot continue in good health without thanking the woman who made this all happen. Lady Crowe... *(gestures to her booth, a spotlight appears, a photo of Lady Crowe with a bouquet lies there in an empty booth)*. Oh my dearly beloved, my dearest friend has passed away just a couple of moon cycles ago. We can only hope she has been reunited with her dear Silas; may her heavenly soul rest in peace. *(He appears to wipe a tear, the spotlight snaps back to him only, and he is suddenly beaming from*

ear to ear.) Oh, do we have a treat for you tonight, folks. My son Wallace has recently captured a Night Howler, a beastly thing, part man, part wolf. But that's not the only thing in store for you tonight. Let us begin with our first act. The stunt-defying, acrobatically astounding lady of the night in her aerial waltz! (*Spotlights shoot from CAIN BOONE to a Flesh Wing in the sky, on red silks.*)

SCENE 2: THE WALTZ WITH DEATH

**(LIGHTS RISE ON THE SILKS. THE FLESHWING ASCENDS, ETHEREAL AND HAUNTING.)
(BACKSTAGE: TWO SILHOUTTES APPEAR BEHIND THE CURTAIN: JESSE BOONE
CLUTCHING A BOOK, CAIN TAKING A SWIG OF WHISKEY)**

JESSE BOONE: Father, I've been writing somethin'. About her. About all of em'.

CAIN BOONE: Oh, lord, son, not another poem. Save that for the whores in Abilene.

JESSE BOONE: It ain't a poem. It's a *bestiary*. But not the kind full of lies and tall tales. It's the truth about them. Their habits. Their fears. Their names.

(ONSTAGE, THE FLESHWING PERFORMS A FLOATING SPIRAL TURN.)

CAIN BOONE: (*Laughing*) Names? No one gives a damn what a monster was called before it grew fangs.

JESSE BOONE: That's just it, they had lives before you caged em'! Look-. (*He opens the book; pages rustle in silhouette.*) I wrote down her real name, Eleanor Rusk. She was a seamstress....

CAIN BOONE: (*cuts him off*) She's an act, Jesse. A draw. A ticket line. Whatever she was died the moment she turned.

(ONSTAGE: THE FLESHWING CLIMBS HIGHER, BODY FOLDING AND EXTENDING WITH GRACE, HER SILHOUETTE FLICKERS AGAINST THE TENT ROOF.)

(BACKSTAGE)

JESSE BOONE: I been talkin' to em'. Quiet-like. They remember things: family, homes, the moment they changed. Pa, they ain't beasts. They're people who suffered.

CAIN BOONE: And sufferin' sells better than salvation. You oughta know that by now. (*Cain snatches the book from Jesse's hands.*)

JESSE BOONE: Pa... don't....

CAIN BOONE: 'Gentle temperament.' 'Startles at loud noises.' What is this, a livestock ledger?

JESSE BOONE: It's who she is. Who she was. You'd see that if you ever looked past the chains.

(ONSTAGE: THE FLESHWING SUDDENLY FALLS, CAUGHT AT THE LAST SECOND. THE AUDIENCE GASPS.)

(BACKSTAGE)

CAIN BOONE: She shakes like a leaf before that drop. The tremble makes 'em lean forward...see? It's perfect showmanship.

JESSE BOONE: She cries after. I wrote that down too.

(CAIN BOONE PAUSES. A SMALL, SILENT BEAT.)

CAIN BOONE: Jesse. You think I'm fixin' to leave this show to Wallace? ...Well do ya?

JESSE BOONE: No, sir.

CAINE BOONE: And what do we always say about Wallace?

JESSE AND CAINE: Wallace is a worthless halfwit undeserving of neither the moniker son nor brother.

CAINE BOONE: Very good. I need you, son, but you can't fill your head with idealistic fantasies of these monsters. They are nothing; you will be nothing without them.

(CAIN BOONE PUSHES THE BOOK BACK INTO JESSE'S CHEST, AND MAKES HIS WAY BACK TOWARDS THE STAGE.)

(ONSTAGE: THE FLESHWING SUSPENDED, TREMBLING, AS CAIN RETURNS TO THE STAGE LIGHT.)

CAIN BOONE: Let's hear it for our soaring specter, folks!

(APPLAUSE ROARS. IN THE SHADOWS, JESSE CLUTCHES HIS BOOK, TREMBLING, MIRRORING THE FLESHWING. THE FLESHWING DESCENDS, IMMEDIATLY CHAINED BY WALLACE BOONE, AND TAKEN OFF STAGE.)

(ONSTAGE: THE LIGHTS SNAP TO A DEEP BLOOD-RED AS THE CANVAS WALLS TREMBLE WITH A GUTTURAL HOWL. CAIN BOONE STRIDES INTO THE RING.)

SCENE 2: THE LIGHTHOWLER RODEO

CAIN BOONE: Ladies and sinners... brace your trembling souls! For the next marvel of misbegotten nature: The LIGHTHOWLER! Half wolf, half nightmare, whole terror!

(A MASSIVE CAGE DOOR CRANKS OPEN. THE HULKING, SHAGGY LIGHTHOWLER PROWLs OUT, CHAINED AND MUZZLED, EYES GLOWING LIKE COLD EMBERS. A PERFORMER, PART RODEO CLOWN, PART OUTLAW, MOUNTS ITS BACK LIKE A BULL RIDER, GRIPPING A CHAIN COLLAR.)

(THE MUSIC KICKS UP A FRANTIC, OFF-KEY SALOON TUNE. THE LIGHTHOWLER THRASHES, BUCKS, DRAGS THE PERFORMER ACROSS THE SAWDUST. THE CROWD ROARS. CAIN BOONE PACES THE RING, REVELING.)

CAIN BOONE: Hold onto your hats, folks! This beast'll toss a man higher than a prayer on judgment day!

(THE LIGHTHOWLER SURGES- THE CHAIN ANCHORING IT TO A POST SNAPS WITH A SHARP TWANG. THE BEAST BOLTS, DRAGGING THE RIDER. PANIC. WRANGLERS RUSH IN WITH HOOKED POLES AND THICK RAWHIDE STRAPS. JESSE BOONE BURSTS IN.)

(JESSE BOONE RUSHES INTO THE RING, NEARLY SLIPPING IN THE SAWDUST.)

JESSE BOONE: STOP! You're hurting it, look at its leg!

(THE NIGHHOWLER LIMPS HEAVILY ON ONE PAW. ITS CHAIN HAS TWISTED TIGHT, CUTTING INTO THE FLESH. IT SNARLS IN PAIN, NOT FURY. CAIN BOONE STARES INTENTLY AT JESSE, SMILING TOO WIDE FOR THE AUDIENCE BUT SEETHING UNDERNEATH.)

CAIN BOONE: Well, now, look here! Even my own blood's eager to give you folks a closer show! C'mon then, Jesse, give our guests a wave!

(JESSE BOONE FREEZES. THE SPOTLIGHT CATCHES HIM: DUSTY SHIRT, SACHEL AT HIS HIP, NOTEBOOK STICKING OUT. THE AUDIENCE SEES HIM CLEARLY FOR THE FIRST TIME. HE STEPS CAUTIOUSLY TOWARD THE LIGHTHOWLER.)

JESSE BOONE: *(softly)* Easy now... It's alright. I see you.

(THE LIGHTHOWLER HUFFS, TENSE... THEN LOWERS ITS HEAD. JESSE KNEELS AND LOOSENS THE TWISTED STRAP WITH GENTLE HANDS. THE BEAST WHINES, NUDGING ITS SHOULDER...ALMOST GRATEFUL. CAIN BOONE'S SMILE CRACKS.)

CAIN BOONE: *(whispers)* Get away from it, boy.

JESSE BOONE: It's injured because of your stunt, Pa!

(CAIN BOONE GRABS JESSE BOONE'S ARM, YANKING HIM BACK AS THE WRANGLERS CLAMP THE BEAST WITH RESTRAINTS. CAIN RAISES HIS VOICE AGAIN FOR THE CROWD.)

CAIN BOONE: Strike up the exit music! A round of applause for the monster and the fool who tried to tame it!

(MUSIC BLARES. THE WRANGLERS HAUL THE LIMPING LIGHTHOWLER OFFSTAGE. THE SPOTLIGHT LINGERS A SECOND ON JESSE... BREATHING HARD, FURIOUS. BLACKOUT)

SCENE 3: THE HELLHOUND BROOD

(ONSTAGE: CAIN BOONE STANDS CENTER, LIGHTS ARE DIMMED ALMOST TO THE POINT OF DARKNESS.)

CAIN BOONE: Now tempt fate with your mortal eyes folks...the flame-eaters, the blister-born, the demons that dance with damnation...*(CAIN BOONE lights a match, a single flame appears.)* ...behold the HELLHOUND BROOD.

(ONSTAGE: BESTIAL, FOUR-LEGGED CREATURES WITH GLOWING EYES BEGIN TO PERFORM A FIRE SHOW WITH A WRANGLER. CAIN BOONE LEAVES STAGE.)

(BACKSTAGE: THE LIGHTHOWLER IS DRAGGED DOWN A CORRIDOR, WHINING LOW, WHILE WRANGLERS ARGUE ABOUT STRAPS AND CHAINS. JESSE BOONE STORMS AFTER CAIN BOONE, CLUTCHING HIS NOTEBOOK.)

JESSE BOONE: You didn't have to treat it like that! It's leg was torn to the bone, Pa!

(CAIN BOONE GRABS A RAG, WIPING BLOOD FROM HIS HANDS.)

CAIN BOONE: You stepped into my ring, boy. Made me look a fool.

JESSE BOONE: I wasn't thinking about you, I was thinking about it.

(CAIN BOONE FREEZES, TURNS SLOWLY)

CAIN BOONE: That thing ain't no 'it' to think about. It's a beast. A wild one. A tool. You break tools, replace them. Not coddle them.

JESSE BOONE: I've been writing a bestiary, notes on all of them. Real notes. Not the stories you bark to the crowd. They're not mindless terrors!

CAIN BOONE: NOW YOU HUSH UP BOY- (*CAIN BOONE raises his hand, if as about to strike JESSE BOONE.*)

(JESSE BOONE flinches.)

CAIN BOONE: This is the last time I'm going to tell you.

JESSE BOONE: Why? Why can't you listen for once. They're not empty. They feel things. They hurt. They remember.

CAIN BOONE: You don't know a damn thing about memory, boy.

JESSE BOONE: I know enough.

CAIN BOONE: They are monsters, Jesse.

JESSE BOONE: They are survivors.

(CAIN BOONE WALKS AWAY. JESSE BOONE FOLLOWS.)

(ONSTAGE: THE FIRE GROWS, SPREADING INTO A RING, SEEMING TO INFECT.)

JESSE BOONE: If you'd just read it, Pa!

CAIN BOONE: Read? Your scribbles? Your soft-hearted fairy tales?

JESSE BOONE: It's not softness! It's science! It's truth! If you would just let me show you, you'd see they're not what you think-

CAIN BOONE: I see exactly what they are. You think you're some kind of scholar? A monster doctor? You are a Boone! Boones break beasts. (*A flash of fire.*) Boones own beasts. (*Another flash of fire.*) AND BOONES DO WHAT NEEDS DOIN'. (*A final flash of fire.*)

CAIN BOONE: Don't look at me like I'm the villain. Every gasp, every cheer, every ticket stub in their pockets. (*The fire begins to grow as CAIN BOONE grows in anger.*) They paid to see the beasts suffer. I just delivered what they came for. Their pain lives because THEY FEED IT! (*A finale of fire pyrotechnics heats up the entire stadium. A sound quieter than silence, echoes in the theater.*)

(APPLAUSE ROARS.)

BACKSTAGE: (A WRANGLER CARRYING A BURNING TORCH PASSES BY.)

CAIN BOONE: (*eyeing at the notebook*) Give me that!

JESSE BOONE: NO! It's mine!

CAIN BOONE: Everything you have is mine!

JESSE BOONE: Not this! Not my words!

CAIN BOONE: *(Grabs the notebook. Then proceeds to snatch the torch from the Wrangler.)* I'll teach you this, son. *(CAIN BOONE raises the torch to the bestiary in the air.)* Some things ain't meant to be understood.

JESSE BOONE: Pa! No! *(JESSE BOONE lunges at CAIN BOONE. WALLACE BOONE holds him back.)*

(THE BOOK COLLAPSES INWARD, ASH DRIFTING TOWARDS JESSE LIKE SNOW.)

JESSE BOONE: *(broken whisper)* You don't understand what you've done.

CAIN BOONE: Oh, I understand exactly. I just made sure the story stays mine.

(CAIN BOONE DROPS THE LAST FRAGMENT OF THE BOOK TO THE GROUND AND CRUSHES IT UNDER HIS BOOT.)

ACT 3: THE REAL MONSTER INSIDE

SCENE 1: JESSE'S REVELATION

ONSTAGE: **(THE LIGHTS RISE ON CAIN BOONE. HE STEPS INTO THE CENTER RING, FORCING SHOWMANSHIP BACK ONTO HIMSELF. STAGEHANDS BEGIN TO SHUFFLE ON THE NEXT ACT. BRINGING OUT EQUIPMENT FOR WHAT APPEARS TO BE JACKALOPES JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS.)**

CAIN BOONE: Ladies and gentlemen... hold tight to your seats. The next marvel... *(chokes on his words, seems flustered.)* ... will be one for the history books!

(BACKSTAGE: JESSE BOONE, SHAKY AND ERRATIC.)

JESSE BOONE: You want a show? I'll give you a show. *(He storms stage left, yells and chaos erupt backstage. Wranglers protest.)*

WALLACE BOONE: Jesse! No!

(THE LIGHTHOWLER SLINKS OUT OF THE CAGE, JESSE BOONE DRAGGING ITS CHAIN OUT TO THE STAGE.)

(ONSTAGE: THE LIGHTHOWLER IS NOW ONSTAGE, JESSE DROPS ITS CHAIN, TETHERED TO NOTHING. CAIN BOONE'S FACE GOES PALE.)

JESSE BOONE: The Lighthowler... creature of twilight... not born of malice, but molded by fear. It sings when it's in pain and howls when its heart breaks. Handle with care... approach with mercy.

CAIN BOONE: *(urgently)* Jesse...stop. Stop this right now.

(WRANGLERS FLOOD THE STAGE, SCRAMBLING, TERRIFIED. THEY PROD THE BEAST WITH ELECTRIC RODS, DESPERATE TO GAIN CONTROL.)

(THE LIGHTHOWLER SCREECHES. LIGHTS BEGIN TO PULSE VIOLENTLY.)

JESSE BOONE: NO...STOP! You're hurting-. *(The beast lashes out. JESSE BOONE is struck across the chest. The lights slam to blood-red. The Lighthowler thrashes, then is yanked brutally backstage by wranglers.)*

(JESSE BOONE COLLAPSES TO HIS KNEES. HE GASPS...SHUDDERING. HIS VEINS BEGIN TO GLOW FAINTLY BENEATH HIS SKIN.)

CAIN BOONE: No... no no no...

(WALLACE BOONE BURSTS ONTO THE STAGE, SLIDING TO HIS KNEES BESIDE JESSE BOONE.)

WALLACE BOONE: Pa! The cure- GO GET THE CURE!

(CAIN BOONE FREEZES. SHAME FLOODS HIS FACE.)

CAIN BOONE: There... there ain't no cure.

WALLACE BOONE: *(horrified)* What... what are you saying?

CAIN BOONE: *(broken)* I lure 'em here, boy. Tell 'em I can fix 'em. Ain't no fixin'. Just... just more beasts for the ring.

WALLACE BOONE: *(whispers)* You monster.

(LIGHTS FLICKER VIOLENTLY. SPARKS BEGIN TO FLY FROM THE OVERHEAD LIGHTS. BULBS BEGIN TO CRACK AND POP. JESSE BOONE'S BODY CONVULSES.)

WALLACE BOONE: Jesse... JESSE!

(JESSE BOONE SCREAMS. ANIMALISTICALLY. FOG ERUPTS, TRICK PANELS IN THE FLOOR SLIDE OPEN. AS JESSE SLIDES DOWN, A LARGE LIGHTHOWLER ERUPTS FROM THE GROUND TRICK FLOOR.)

WALLACE BOONE: *(stumbling back in terror) I- I-... (He flees offstage.)*

(CAIN BOONE FACES THE TOWERING LIGHTHOWLER...THE TRANSFORMED JESSE.)

CAIN BOONE: *(drops to his knees) Jesse... Son... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for everything. For the ring. For the pain. For the lies. For makin' you into this. (JESSE BOONE circles him slowly, breath ragged, eyes fixed.)* But son... I'm your pa. Remember me?

(JESSE BOONE PAUSES. THEN CHARGES AT CAIN BOONE. CAIN BOONE BEGINS TO COWER. FULL BLACKOUT. A SCREAM ECHOES.)

ACT 4: POST-SHOW

(EMERGENCY AISLE LIGHTS GLOW SOFT RED. THE STAGE IS NOW EMPTY. LOW GROWLING CAN BE HEARD, AND SOFT HOWLING IN THE DISTANCE.)

SPEAKER V.O.: Ladies and gentlemen, we thank you kindly for survivin' tonight's performance of the Horrifically, Magnificent Menagerie of Monsters. For your safety and ours, please gather your belongings, check under your seats, and proceed to the nearest exit in an orderly fashion. On behalf of Cain Boone, the Boone Brothers and whatever's still scratchin' around backstage... we bid you a warm goodnight.