

THE ADVENTURES OF NEGATIVE ERIC

Episode Two

"Negative Eric and the Belly of the Beast"

written by

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INT. MOTEL 6 - NEW ORLEANS - DAY

The room is trashed. Fast food bags, empty bottles of beer, loose sheets and pillows litter the ground. The bed is unmade, the fridge is open and empty mini bar vials of liquor are strewn everywhere. We move through the room as we hear a SINK being turned on. We keep tracking through the room. The sink is turned off. We waft into the bathroom, the door to which is open.

INT. MOTEL 6 - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

NEGATIVE ERIC (20s) stands before the mirror above the sink. His face is red and streaked with tears as he gazes at himself. He sports what looks like a permanently situated ski cap and sunglasses (that never leave his face). He wears a slightly too big, untucked white dress shirt and a loose tie, a poor attempt at formal wear. He keeps staring at himself in the mirror as we stare right back at him.

Music Cue: "Oh, Louisiana" by Chuck Berry.

CUT TO BLACK

TICKER (PRE-LAP)
I'm a card-carrying Casual.

EXT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

INSERT - An old, liver spotted hand brandishes an "INTERNATIONAL LONGSHOREMAN'S ASSOCIATION" card with a photo ID of a skin-and-bones thin man around 75 years old with a scraggly beard, unkempt hair and loose generic clothes. He is JOHN MCKENZIE, the man we're listening to. His name on the ID card has the moniker "Identified Casual" underneath.

Reveal the man in the photo is the man holding the card, who now tucks it in his back pocket. The man sits at a patio table amongst the other restaurant patrons, a mint julep in front of him. Negative Eric, nursing a mint julep of his own, sits across from Ticker, politely listening and wearing the same clothes we just saw him in.

TICKER
Haven't logged enough hours to be one of those bona fide, silver spoon type longshoremen. Didn't have the time since Marlene got sick. Had to take care of Marlene.

Ticker puts a cigarette in his mouth and lights the match by flicking it with a thumbnail.

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TICKER

Regardless, I was discriminated against on account of my heart. My ticker. You see, in the eyes of the law I'm a dead man. And that's not euphemistic or anything. I mean a dead man. Legally. Keeled over one day. Massive heart attack. Unbelievable. Stopped my heart cold. I should be a vegetable. Stopped the old ticker so long the quacks gave up on me. Wrote me off. You know when my time of death was? Midnight even. No bullshit. Twelve Zero Zero, Zero Zero. No kidding. At Twelve Zero One I woke up to an empty room. No quacks in sight. No hustle, no bustle, no nothin.' You know what I did? I got up and walked myself out. No wheelchair or nothin.' Me and my faulty ticker. My palpitous...my palpitual...me and my palpitations. Warts and all. That's why they call me that.

NEGATIVE ERIC

People call you "warts"?

TICKER

People call me "Ticker" McKenzie. Legally dead.

He raises his mint julep to Eric. Eric halfheartedly raises his own in kind.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Eric. Financially destitute.

Ticker smiles. One of his front teeth is missing. Both men sip their drinks and both subtly recoil. Ticker leans back in his chair.

TICKER

(trying it out loud)
Eric. I knew that. You don't look like a grandson.

NEGATIVE ERIC

You don't look like a grandfather.

TICKER

We don't look like each other.

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NEGATIVE ERIC
 You look like her. Well, I guess
 she looked like you.

Ticker forces a smile and swirls his drink. As he does, his eyes go glassy and he stares without seeing into the liquid vortex. Suddenly he looks up to Eric. He smiles and nods.

TICKER
 Ticker McKenzie. Legally dead.

A confused Eric politely nods back. They both take sips of their drinks and they both look at them disapprovingly.

TICKER	NEGATIVE ERIC
This is the worst mint julep I've ever had.	This is the worst mint julep I've ever had.

Eric and Ticker lock eyes.

TICKER
 Let's get a real drink.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

As "Oh, Louisiana" reaches the 1:45 mark, we cut from the fancy-pants patio with the stuffy mint juleps to a SLOW MOTION title sequence featuring Eric and Ticker on Bourbon Street.

Holding classic New Orleans cocktails (Eric, a Hurricane, Ticker, a Grenade) Eric and Ticker dance amongst the drunken crowd, neon bar lights, flying Mardi Gras beads and topless women. Both obviously drunk, Eric appears mostly stone faced and mechanical while Ticker seems more fast and loose.

INT. BAR

Eric and Ticker do shots in a crowded bar while people cheer them on. Eric has significantly more empty shot glasses in front of him than Ticker.

EXT. BOURBON STREET

Eric and Ticker walk down the congested street, a single Mardi Gras bead necklace around both of their necks as they take swills from souvenir cups of booze. Ticker cajoles Eric along.

INT. BAR

END SLOW MOTION. In another bar, Ticker and Eric knock back a shot when a DRUNK MAN approaches their table. The man points to Ticker.

DRUNK MAN
Hey, it's yo-ho McKenzie! Where's
the doubloons, McKenzie?!

The man grabs Ticker's arm. Ticker violently shrugs him off. The man grabs at Ticker's lapel. Ticker gets up, poised to fight, when Eric pulls him away.

INT. BAR

RESUME SLOW MOTION

Ticker rides a mechanical bull in yet another. Ticker and the surrounding action plays in slow motion WITH THE EXCEPTION of Eric, who moves in real time. He unabashedly leans over the bar and steals a mostly full bottle of gin.

END SLOW MOTION

The slow motion around Eric snaps back to real time in the middle of Eric turning from the bar back to the crowd, holding his stolen booze. Ticker is no longer riding the bull. Eric opens the gin. A hand drapes itself around Eric's shoulders.

NEGATIVE ERIC
Shove off.

The hand belongs to Ticker, who supports his drunken body against Eric's. Eric takes a slug of the gin. The room is spinning. The noise cacophonous. Ticker shouts into his ear but we can't make out what he says over the noise of the bar. Eric halfheartedly tries to shrug Ticker off him.

NEGATIVE ERIC
Shoveee offfff...

He passes out.

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER - NIGHT

Close on Eric's unconscious face as he slowly opens his eyes. He's in the sidecar of an old motorcycle being driven by Ticker.

ERIC POV

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The night sky, which in Eric's current state looks like nothing more than a blurred mosaic. His eyes close as he slips back into unconsciousness. The song ends.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MORNING

The small houseboat is comprised of one room with a couch, a small television and a cramped kitchen. Whatever furniture that's there is decades old and the floor is covered in clutter: piles of paper, bankers boxes, and maps. A GIANT MAP OF MEXICO covers almost an entire side of the boat, making the light from the portholes behind it muted.

Eric stirs on the couch and slowly rises. The floor underneath him wobbles and the entire inside of the boat subtly undulates back and forth as Eric fights for balance. Ticker is busy in the kitchen, poring over several notebooks and other texts, pencil in hand. Eric moves over to the map of Mexico and examines it. Ticker doesn't notice him.

The map features a circle drawn in red sharpie around a reef off the northern coast of Yucatan. There are several red sharpie-d arrows pointing to one spit of land in particular, on the outskirts of the reef. "Isla Desterrada" is written next to the arrows.

NEGATIVE ERIC
(sotto)
Isla Desterrada.

Ticker JUMPS.

TICKER
Holy shit!

Ticker turns and stares at Eric in panic, not recognizing him. Eric winces and rubs his temples.

NEGATIVE ERIC
Hey, not so loud.

Ticker brings a hand up in a finger gun and points it at Eric. After a beat, he realizes the futility of this and puts both hands on the kitchen counter behind his back.

TICKER
Who are you?

NEGATIVE ERIC
What?

TICKER
Where did you come from? How did
you get in here?

Eric takes a step forward.

NEGATIVE ERIC
You must ha--

TICKER
(sheer panic)
WHO ARE YOU?!

Eric freezes. Ticker breathes heavily. His eyes start to tear
up. He's scared.

NEGATIVE ERIC
I came for Marlene.

TICKER
Marlene's dead.

NEGATIVE ERIC
I know.

TICKER
We buried her. I buried her.

Ticker turns his back to Eric and leans over the counter.

TICKER
She's dead. They buried her.

Eric looks at Ticker for a beat before slowly making his way
toward the door.

NEGATIVE ERIC
Look, I think I have to--

He opens the door to reveal nothing but OCEAN AS FAR AS THE EYE
CAN SEE. Eric takes in his surroundings, deadpan. The boat
undulates with the tide and Eric leans on the doorframe for
support.

NEGATIVE ERIC
I thought I was just still drunk.

TICKER (O.S.)
Oh, kid. Good, you're here.

Eric closes the door and turns back to Ticker.

TICKER
Someone can't handle their liquor!

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TICKER

Thought we'd go toe to toe all night. Guess maybe you're not my grandson after all. Don't worry, we'll get you up to snuff. Up to ol' Ticker McKenzie's standards. They're lofty but you might make it.

NEGATIVE ERIC

What the hell is going on? Where are we? And what was that?

TICKER

What was what?

NEGATIVE ERIC

You didn't recognize anything about me.

TICKER

I'm old, give me a break. That's just the old timer in me. The old timer forgets sometimes. But I've still got my screws, get me?

NEGATIVE ERIC

We're in the middle of the ocean.

TICKER

Calm down, it's the Gulf of Mexico. And you were the one who said 'shove off,' so off we shoved. To be honest, I was surprised. Thought I'd have to convince you.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Convince me to what?

TICKER

Eric: financially destitute. That got me thinking. Well, it supplemented my thinking, anyway.

Ticker takes one of his notebooks from the pile and opens it. Eric leans in. There is a drawing of the same reef from the map of Mexico with several numbers written at the top of the page. Ticker points to the drawing.

TICKER

"Arrecife Alacranes." Scorpion Reef. A series of islands off the coast of Yucatan. Mexico.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 (re: numbers)
 Got big plans for the latitude and
 longitude?

TICKER
 That's the phone number for the
 Bureau of Tourism.

He points to the bottom of the page, where other numbers are
 written.

TICKER
 This is the latitude and
 longitude.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 What's it got to do with you?

TICKER
 With us. It's where we're going.
 Specifically here.

He points to a small island adjacent the larger reef. He looks
 up at Eric.

TICKER
 Isla Desterrada.

Ticker removes himself from the counter and crosses to the foot
 of the couch. Eric stays where he is.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 What does that mean?

TICKER
 What's it translate to? I guess
 "desperation island."

NEGATIVE ERIC
 (sotto)
 Jesus.

TICKER
 A few months ago ago I'm working
 the port of New Orleans back home.
 I'm a casual, remember. Not
 guaranteed work. Have to wake up
 and hope they got something for me
 every day. Us casuals, we ebb and
 flow together. Try for jobs
 together. So I got a network, see?
 Some confidants.

Eric opens the notebook Ticker was showing him. He flips to a random page and sees it's covered with TIC-TAC-TOE games. Some won, some lost. Eric looks to Ticker, who retrieves a thick book from a box near the television and crosses back to Eric.

TICKER

Anyway, one day I get wind of a certain rumor spreading around the port. I'm old but I ain't stupid, understand? I know a big fish story when I hear one. I'm privy to hyperbole, know what I mean?

NEGATIVE ERIC

Not yet.

Ticker puts the book down on the counter and opens it to an ear marked page. It features Scorpion Reef.

TICKER

Those idiots. I would have kept it to myself. But a few of 'em come up and tell me there's treasure buried here. On Isla Desterrada. Real treasure. Sunken treasure. Buried treasure! My eyes go wide but I bite my tongue. They all laugh at me but the joke's on them. None of 'em have the stones to go for it. Besides, they think I'm too old. But I told Marlene and Marlene and me made our plans. Right there in the hospital. Every day we made our plans. We were going to...it kept her going. Until she died.

NEGATIVE ERIC

This is a high school geography textbook.

Ticker angrily closes the book.

TICKER

You try getting your hands on a detailed map of Mexican archipelagos.

Ticker crosses back to the box by the couch.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Which is it? Buried or sunken?

TICKER

Don't believe me?

Ticker points to the notebook.

TICKER
I did my research.

NEGATIVE ERIC
I guess it could be both buried
and sunken but that would be
really hard to find.

TICKER
Fine! You said shove off, but
fine. Forget it.

NEGATIVE ERIC
So the plan was to sail across the
Gulf of Mexico in a houseboat?

TICKER
Forget it!

He sits on the couch and puts his head in his hands.

TICKER
Forget it...forget it...forget...

Eric crosses to Ticker.

NEGATIVE ERIC
What's wrong with you?

Ticker looks up with tears in his eyes. For a beat, he doesn't recognize Eric. We see his mind working to place the face. Then he snaps back to reality.

TICKER
We're blood, aren't we? She was
your mother, wasn't she?

This lands on Eric. He hesitates for a beat.

NEGATIVE ERIC
Yeah. We're blood.

TICKER
I'm scared. Scared of the Old
Timer. I don't know anything about
him. And he doesn't know anything
about me.

He gestures halfheartedly to the papers books, maps amongst them.

TICKER

I have to do this. I don't have
my...she...before I forget. It
kept her going, until....Let's
honor her memory. Together. Before
I lose mine. Come on. This dead
man's got one last tale to tell.

Eric turns and looks at the map.

ERIC POV

We slowly zoom into the map, zeroing in on Scorpion Reef, as sounds of SEAGULLS, WAVES, and the first few RINGING BELLS of the Fruit Bats' song "FLAMINGO" hypnotically grace the soundtrack, pulling Eric in, only to fade out as quickly and clandestinely as they faded in.

EXIT POV

Eric turns back to Ticker and offers his hand.

NEGATIVE ERIC

(matter of fact)

Isla Desterrada.

Ticker smiles and reaches up to clasp Eric's hand.

TICKER

Isla Desterrada.

On the SLAP of Ticker and Eric's hands clasping together, we...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - DAY

A BOOMING THUNDER CLAP pushes in sheets of rain as a BURST OF LIGHTENING ignites the sky. There is no land in sight as the houseboat makes its long journey to its island destination off the coast of Yucatan.

Eric, in a yellow rain slick and matching wide brimmed rubber hat, is standing on the roof of the boat reaching down to grab a flag from Ticker, who is reaching up through a hatch in the roof. Eric attaches the flag to a flag pole adjacent him and hastily hoists it up. The flag is all white with a crudely painted RED HEART in the middle.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MOMENTS LATER

Eric closes the hatch to the roof and descends a small staircase leading back down to the main area of the boat. Ticker is sitting at a messy desk near the boat entrance using a mathematical compass to track the miles of their journey,

TICKER

(re: flag)

You like that? I made it myself.
So people know we're friendly.

NEGATIVE ERIC

It makes us look like some Harvey
Milk pleasure cruise.

TICKER

He's dead.

NEGATIVE ERIC

So are you.

Eric peels off the rain slick and throws it to the ground before collapsing onto the couch. Then he takes off the yellow hat to reveal he's still wearing his ski cap underneath.

TICKER

Perk up. This storm's working in
our favor. We're making good time.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Until this jalopy springs a leak
and we're left for the sharks.

TICKER

I don't think so. We're deep in
the dead zone now.

NEGATIVE ERIC

What?

TICKER

No oxygen in the water here. No
life to speak of. Sediment from
the Mississippi drowned the sea
around these parts. This area of
the Gulf, for the next eight
thousand miles, may as well be a
grave yard. An empty graveyard. A
graveyard's graveyard. Big as New
Jersey.

NEGATIVE ERIC

That sounds like poetry.

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TICKER

Hungry?

NEGATIVE ERIC

Yeah.

Ticker moves past Eric to the makeshift kitchenette, turns on a stove burner and starts preparing a can of beans. Eric crosses to Ticker's desk.

TICKER

Won't be that long. Feels like no time. In no time we'll be up to our ears in it.

Eric peeks at the compass work Ticker had been doing, only to find several PERFECT CIRCLES drawn all over the page.

NEGATIVE ERIC

In what? Empty promises?

TICKER

I didn't promise anything.

NEGATIVE ERIC

You guilted me with all that blood talk. Now I'm here. And I'm all wet.

TICKER

You're helping me. I need you. Don't you *remember*?

Ticker throws his head back and laughs for a few beats before he stops and falls quiet. He holds this position for a beat too long, prompting Eric to cross to him in the kitchen. Eric takes the handle of the pot of boiling beans and turns the heat down, shaking the pan to loosen its contents.

TICKER

(snapping out of it)
South southwest. I know where we're going. South southwest. Stop worrying.

He takes the pot from Eric.

TICKER

It stopped raining.

EXT. TICKER'S HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

A quiet, post-rain evening. Eric leans over the railing, smoking a cigarillo. The houseboat rises and falls with the tide. The roof hatch opens behind Eric and Ticker climbs up to join him against the railing.

TICKER

Gimme a drag on that.

Eric hands Ticker his smoke. Ticker takes an impossibly long drag, leaving the cigarillo looking like a singular stick of ash. He hands it back to Eric and exhales but no smoke comes out of his mouth.

NEGATIVE ERIC

How long did you say your heart stopped for?

TICKER

I don't remember. I was dead.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Right. You and her weren't dead at the same time, were you?

TICKER

No. This was before she got sick.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Before you got sick?

TICKER

I'm not sick, I'm dying. But yeah, that too.

NEGATIVE ERIC

I bet you're sick of dying.

TICKER

That's what she used to say.

Eric flicks the butt of his smoke into the Gulf.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Eric and Ticker sit at a table together just off the kitchen, an open bottle of gin and two glasses before them.

TICKER

Do you remember anything about her?

NEGATIVE ERIC

I don't remember what I had for breakfast.

TICKER

We didn't have breakfast.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Oh, yeah.

Ticker gets up and turns to the sink, his back now to Eric.

TICKER

Look, you didn't hear this from me and you'll have to keep quiet about this. It's a secret. But...wait. You promise?

He turns back to Eric.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Yeah.

Ticker sits back down.

TICKER

At this very moment, buried beneath the sand off the coast of Mexico lies treasure big enough to make us both rich.

Beat.

TICKER

We couldn't go after it together. She was too sick. She was the one who told me about it, you know. One day I come in just like any other. I sit down next to her and her lips curl up all cute and keen, like this.

Ticker places his two pointer fingers on each of his jowls and guide them up into a smile.

TICKER

And she opens the book and points to the island. And she gives me the notebook we play tic-tac-toe in and points to the coordinates. Day after day we made our plans together. It kept her going...until she died.

Ticker gets up, crosses to the kitchen, and rummages in a cabinet.

NEGATIVE ERIC

But I thought--

TICKER

But I can do it now. Couldn't 'cause Marlene was sick. Had to take care of Marlene.

Ticker turns back to Eric, holding a full bottle of gin.

TICKER

You know I...I had to bury my daughter this week. I had to bury Marlene. She was sick. And she died. And she had to get buried just like anyone else. Just like everyone else. I'd never done that before. I only had one daughter. Just the one.

Ticker sits back down across from Eric.

TICKER

I wish you could have met her. She was real good at first impressions. I remember...she used to sing this song to her boy. She only had one boy. Just the one. My grandson.

Ticker chuckles. A single tear falls beneath's Eric's sunglasses as he lets Ticker continue.

TICKER

I wouldn't know what he looks like now. He sure wouldn't recognize me. Not this old timer. Think last I saw him may well have been between verses of that song. That song. I never knew what it meant. I think it was Spanish. I never asked. I wish I remembered the lyrics. It was such a pretty song. I think it was something about home. About going back home. You know I...don't remember a lot. But I remember she'd sing him right to sleep. And his name was Eric. And her name was Marlene. And I had to bury her this week.

Ticker uncorks the bottle of gin and pours himself a refill.

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TICKER

I'm sorry. Look at me rambling and I didn't even catch your name.

Eric sits motionless for a beat.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Eric.

Ticker chuckles.

TICKER

That's a coincidence. I wish you could have met her.

Ticker gets back up and crosses to a window behind Eric. Taking advantage, Eric raises his palms and wipes the tears from his eyes (in spite of this motion, we still don't see them).

TICKER

We've passed the Tropic of Cancer.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Isn't that what killed her?

TICKER

She never left New Orleans. But yeah. Ovarian.

Suddenly the boat shakes and rattles against a mysterious COLLISION. Ticker stumbles back to the sink and grabs the counter to break his fall. Eric looks to the window, startled.

NEGATIVE ERIC

I thought you said this was a dead zone.

TICKER

It is.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Eric and Ticker emerge from the hatch in the roof and look out at the Gulf from the railing at the head of the boat.

TICKER

Whatever you do don't say it's too quiet.

Suddenly a forceful JET STREAM OF WATER erupts from just beneath the surface of the Gulf in front of the two men, soaking them.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Ok.

The boat is knocked once more. Ticker and Eric fall back and slide to the opposite end of the boat, hitting the railing to prevent them falling into the water. As they regain their composure they see a colossus of a WHALE breach the water and block out the moon as it crashes again into the Gulf, causing another explosion of water to shoot skyward.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MOMENTS LATER

Ticker and Eric rush down the small ladder from the roof into the living room. Ticker throws open a closet door next to the kitchenette.

TICKER

This'll do it...this'll do it...

NEGATIVE ERIC

I thought this was a dead zone.

TICKER

It is, I said!

NEGATIVE ERIC

Do you even know where we are?

TICKER

Yeah. In trouble. That's all I--

NEGATIVE ERIC

You don't know where we are, do you?

TICKER

South southwest! It's what I said all along. Passed the Tropic of Cancer. South southwest. Don't you think I *know who I am*?!

NEGATIVE ERIC

I didn't--

Ticker emerges from the closet and throws Eric a HARPOON. Ticker carries one for himself as well.

TICKER

Got any elbow grease?

NEGATIVE ERIC

Why do you have harpoons on a houseboat?

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TICKER
Solicitors.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Eric and Ticker stand back-to-back on the roof, keeping an eye out for the whale.

TICKER
Don't fire until you see the
whites of its eyes.

NEGATIVE ERIC
I don't think they have whites in
their eyes.

TICKER
Are you kidding?

Another PLUME OF WATER erupts from the nearby surface of the Gulf. Ticker takes aim but before he can fire at the spot, the boat is RAMMED again, throwing Ticker off his feet and sending his harpoon flying to the opposite end of the roof. Eric is also thrown back and slides to the edge of the boat clutching his harpoon, but the railing prevents him going overboard.

Ticker, on his hands and knees, frantically crawls after his harpoon and grabs it just as its about to fall overboard. The whale suddenly rises from the water and THROWS ITSELF down onto the boat itself, the force of which causes the vessel to RISE UP OUT OF THE WATER in a nearly 90 degree angle.

Ticker clutches the railing for dear life while Eric, who had been standing on one far end of the roof, is PROPELLED INTO THE AIR like a projectile fired from a circus cannon. The boat falls back to the water and levels into place as Eric falls out of the sky INTO THE WHALES' OPEN MOUTH.

Satisfied, the whale closes its mouth and sinks again under the water. All falls quiet. Ticker is left huffing and puffing in the same position, clutching his harpoon.

TICKER
Kid?!

Silence.

TICKER
Eric?!

The boat sinks ever so slightly in the water. Ticker gets up and frantically looks around the still waters. He leans over the railing and looks down at the hull of his boat, then runs back toward the hatch in the roof.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MOMENTS LATER

Ticker jumps down into the boat, ignoring the stairs. The cabin is a complete mess. Ticker cranes his neck to and fro and, at the faint sound of flowing water, zeroes in on TWO SMALL HOLES in the wall just off the living room, slowly filling the houseboat with water. He sprints over to it and frantically looks for something to plug the holes.

He grabs a nearby cup and starts scooping up the water and hurtling it toward the sink. When he sees this is futile, he stands and looks around. He throws himself against the same desk he was working at earlier and rifles through the drawers. He removes his notebooks and searches. He sees what Eric saw: pages and pages of tic-tac-toe games. Some lost, some won.

TICKER

What...? I...

He crouches down, opens another drawer, and removes a SATELLITE PHONE. He rifles through his notebook again, finds a number and dials. As the phone rings, Ticker brings his free hand to his temple and rubs it in pain.

PHONE

Yucatan Bureau of Travel and
Tourism, how may I help you?

TICKER

My grandson! My boat! A big, a
giant whale! In the deadzone...my
boat...in the deadzone!

Ticker keeps rubbing his temple and wincing, his pain intensifying.

PHONE

Sir? Hello, sir? I don't...are you
alright, sir?

TICKER

Hello?

PHONE

Do you need directions?

TICKER

What? South southwest. Isla
Desterrada! The deadzone...the
whale...the boat. The...Eric.
Marlene. I'm sinking. I'm sinking!

PHONE

Isla...? Sir, do you...

PHONE

I'm going to call the police, ok?
Tell me exactly where you are.

Ticker is frozen. His brow furrowed. His mouth opens and closes. He gently begins to cry.

TICKER

I don't know...I don't know...

INT. WHALE - MOUTH - CONTINUOUS

TICKER (V.O.)

...I don't know...

The inside of the whale's mouth is pitch black. Digestive murmurs and other bodily functions from deeper inside the mammal echo intermittently.

Suddenly what sounds like it could be a large sack clumsily lands onto the surface of the gullet with a soft THUD.

It's Eric.

We hear him exhale, with a cadence more of annoyance than concern. He rummages through his pockets for a beat before flicking a lighter. The space comes alive with fire light.

His surroundings are cavernous and barren. He stands on the impossibly large tongue which features about two inches of water resting on its surface. Eric is in complete darkness save for the aura of light his lighter emits around him. He turns in place, taking in the surroundings as we PUSH IN on him.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Great.

He picks up his fallen harpoon and takes a few steps forward, his firelight slowly throwing its glow upon the towering bristles of the whale's teeth, which dwarf Eric in comparison. He takes another step forward, stops, and looks down.

He crouches out of frame and re-emerges holding the end of a ROPE, frayed and broken. He pulls on it and turns to see more of it rise up from the thin layer of water/mucous covering the tongue, continuing out of the lights' range, into the abyss and away from the teeth.

Eric follows the rope until he comes to the edge of the GAPING ESOPHAGUS of the whale. He gazes down into it, putting one careful foot forward and straining to make out anything below but is only met with the sight of the rope extending into the dark unknown recesses of the beast. The whale's punching bag like uvula hangs above in the distance.

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ERIC POV

The now taught rope leads down into the depths of the whale. As Eric gazes into the esophagus, once more the sounds of SEAGULLS, WAVES, and the first few RINGING BELLS of the Fruit Bats' song "FLAMINGO" hypnotically grace the soundtrack as we slowly ZOOM INTO the black abyss, mimicking the moment Eric gazed upon Isla Desterrada on Ticker's map in the houseboat.

END POV

Music Cue: "Flamingo" by Fruit Bats

The hypnotic ambient sounds fade from the soundtrack with the notable exception of "FLAMINGO." Eric takes the end of the rope and ties it to the middle of his harpoon. As the song comes to life over the soundtrack, he takes a deep breath.

And jumps.

INT. ESOPHAGUS - WHALE - CONTINUOUS

ERIC POV

As Eric falls through the darkness. A faint light ahead of him slowly glows brighter and brighter until, in shocking swiftness, the light is upon him as he's thrust underwater, now bathed in the translucent glow of the roving esophagus.

Lit up in the waterpark flume-like phosphorescence, Eric, holding his breath, suddenly finds himself amidst DOZENS OF FISH in varying sizes of small and medium, each more colorful than the last, sharing in Eric's voyage toward the belly of the beast.

END POV

Eric holds his harpoon with the rope tied to it as he flails dreamily in underwater gravity further and further into the depths of the whale, following the taught rope to its mysterious final resting place.

As the bouquet of minnow, krill, and rainbow fish accompany him, the translucent walls of the esophagus betray the ghostly impressions of membranes, veins and tendrils of biology that make up the life force of the whale.

These images, in addition to "FLAMINGO" over the soundtrack, overwhelm the senses as Eric's face begins to turn pale blue as he struggles to hold his breath. All the while Eric clutches the harpoon as the rope seems to be pulling him along.

Suddenly, as Eric's eyes begin to droop in fatigue, the fish amongst him swim RAPIDLY IN UNISON ahead of him in a school of seemingly thousands. Eric watches as they contort their collective body into a singular amorphous shape, then into an unmistakable depiction of TICKER. A crude representation at first, somehow the image locks into place and ghostly, smoke-like inlays superimpose over the fish to create a clearer, dreamy scene before Eric as a faint, almost imperceptible AMBIENT VOICE echoes from the distance.

TICKER (AMBIENT VOICE)
Don't you think I know who I am?

ERIC POV

The fish reposition their school into another scene: a terrified Ticker standing in front of a WOMAN, who is lying in a hospital bed before him.

TICKER (AMBIENT VOICE)
WHO ARE YOU??

THE SCENE SHIFTS AGAIN to the woman's hand writing the coordinates for Isla Desterrada into the tic-tac-toe filled notebook.

THE SCENE SHIFTS AGAIN to depict the woman holding the open notebook out for an apprehensive Ticker, who inches forward, takes the notebook, and gazes at it in incredulity.

THE SCENE SHIFTS AGAIN to a depiction of the drunk man who bullied Ticker in the opening montage bar as he holds the notebook above Ticker and laughs with several others around him. Ticker tries in vain to grab the notebook as he yells noiselessly at the bullies.

THE SCENE SHIFTS A FINAL TIME to Ticker sitting in the same hospital bed the woman was lying in, though she is nowhere to be found. He clutches the notebook, empty and alone.

END POV

Eric's eyes droop again. He's on the verge of passing out when the fish suddenly break their cohesive form and SWARM TOWARDS him, engulfing him in their mass.

ERIC POV

Eric is overwhelmed by the MULTICOLORED SWARM of fish, a kaleidoscopic milieu visually akin to going through hyperspace in Star Wars or the end of 2001: A Space Odyssey. Eric careens through this psychedelic warp speed until suddenly...

END POV

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INT. BELLY OF THE BEAST

SPLAT. The song abruptly ends as Eric falls from an orifice onto the soft, fleshly surface of the belly of the beast. He is in stark darkness once again, aside from a gentle aura of light emanating in front of him.

He lies unconscious for a beat before he comes to and gasps for air. As he regains consciousness, he notices his harpoon sitting atop the FULL LENGTH OF ROPE in a coil next to him. Eric slowly looks up into the glow before him to see the LUMINESCENT SPECTER OF THE WOMAN FROM THE VISIONS MOMENTS AGO.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Mom?

The specter of Marlene smiles down on him.

MARLENE

Don't forget to say goodbye.

Eric blinks and the vision is gone. He remains in his position, trying to comprehend the last few minutes when Marlene's voice echoes softly about him once more.

MARLENE (V.O)

If I were the trachea, where would
I be?

Eric furrows his brow, the gears spinning. After a beat, he rises to his feet and picks up the harpoon and the full length of coiled rope next to him.

NEGATIVE ERIC

If I were the trachea, where would
I be?

Eric SNAPS the harpoon in half over his knee.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MORNING

Ticker SNAPS his harpoon in half over his knee as the pink rays of the breaking dawn begin to fade in through the portholes. He frantically tries to jam both pieces of the broken harpoon into the two holes spouting water in the hull, but the rods aren't big enough. He throws both pieces to the ground, runs to the couch, and pushes it up to the wall where the leak is.

TICKER

Eric, help me with this!

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Suddenly Ticker is thrown backward by the force of YET ANOTHER collision from outside.

TICKER

Help me!

INT. TRACHEA - WHALE - CONTINUOUS

Eric inches his way through the trachea, which convulses slightly as the whale struggles to expel him from its breathing passage. Eric takes one piece of his broken harpoon with the long length of rope tied around it and props it horizontally across the small confines of the trachea, the fleshy walls of which expand to accommodate it.

Eric gently uncoils the rope that's tied to the harpoon. When he's ready, he clears his throat, pulls his ski cap down further over his sunglasses covered eyes, reaches into his pocket and retrieves a cigarillo and a lighter. He lights it up and soon the trachea fills up with smoke and tremors significantly.

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - CONTINUOUS

SMOKE RINGS waft out of the whale's blowhole for a few seconds before Eric EXPLODES from the hole in a magnificent stream of water and vapor as the whale blows Eric from its body. He rises above the surface of the Gulf still holding the rope as it uncoils out of the blowhole. Eric lands in the water and begins to swim toward the houseboat.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MOMENTS LATER

The holes are now covered with several kinds of tape, furniture, books, appliances, etc in an attempt to stop the leak. The floor is covered with nearly two inches of water as it continues to get past the obstructions. Ticker keeps throwing things against the wall with the holes in it when he hears a KNOCK at the door. He crosses and opens it to reveal Eric, wading in the water and holding the rope.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Hello.

Ticker blinks.

TICKER

You're all wet.

NEGATIVE ERIC

What else is new?

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INT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Ticker follows Eric, who reels in the slack of the rope.

TICKER

We'll never make it with these holes. We're sinking.

Eric ties the now taught rope to the railing at the front of the roof. The rope leads out into the Gulf where it disappears, taught, beneath the water.

NEGATIVE ERIC

We'll make it.

He gives the rope a good tug. Nothing happens.

TICKER

It's like I said--

Suddenly the boat LURCHES forward at double its speed, throwing Ticker on his back. Eric braces himself and keeps his footing. The whale BREACHES in front of them and we see the rope leads into its distant blowhole, stuck inside tied to the other end of the harpoon Eric wedged in the trachea.

The whale is now effectively towing the boat. Ticker looks to Eric, incredulous, rejuvenated and determined. Eric turns to him and offers his hand to help him up.

Music Cue: "Highwayman" by The Highwaymen.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Isla Desterrada?

Ticker takes his hand.

TICKER

Isla Desterrada.

MONTAGE

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MORNING

The front door open, Ticker and Eric take turns filling buckets with the water flowing into the boat and tossing it out into the Gulf.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - BATHROOM

Eric lies underneath the sink in the kitchen as Ticker hands him tools.

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They're arguing over how best to remove the sink, until it suddenly falls down onto Eric's crotch. Ticker laughs.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Eric and Ticker hunch over a desk, gazing at a map of North America. Eric uses a compass as he and Ticker discuss their route. Ticker's eyes go glassy as he fades out of presence and Eric snaps his fingers in front of him. Ticker snaps out of his episode and resumes consulting.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - AFTERNOON

A trail of floating books, furniture and other objects float out from the boat as more discarded objects are tossed out into the Gulf from the front door, including the sink and the Mexican geography textbook.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Eric and Ticker take turns chucking all of the furniture inside the boat out into the Gulf. The water inside is up to their knees.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Eric rummages through the closet where Ticker had stored the harpoons. He emerges with a can of RED PAINT and a paint brush.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - BEDROOM - LATER

Eric and Ticker strip the only bed of its sheets and gather other blankets and linens.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - SUNSET

Each end of the bed sheet is tied to each end of the railing on the roof that runs horizontally alongside the length of the boat, so that most of the sheet dips down like a hammock parallel to the side of the boat.

Eric sits nestled in the sheet, the bottom of which nearly touches the surface of the water. He has his paint can and brush and is painting "MARLENE" on the side of the boat.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - NIGHT

Illuminated by the moon, Eric and Ticker smoke cigarillos and dance arm in arm on the roof as the boat continues to be towed by the whale.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Eric and Ticker hack away at the kitchen table with axes. There is nearly nothing left in the boat now.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - MORNING

Eric and Ticker throw pieces of the kitchen table out the door before struggling to shove the sheet-less bed out of it as well. The water inside is up to their waist.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - DAY

Ticker hoists a large (about 10 feet long) gaff hook upright on the roof against the front railing where it meets the side. Eric ties the hook to the railing in several places to make sure it's secure.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

The whale continues to tow the boat, which is now half sunk. The roof of the boat now has a second gaff hook standing upright in the opposite corner of the other hook. A second bed sheet is tied across both the hooks, severing as a makeshift mast to aid the boat's speed against the wind.

Ticker stands with one foot on the taught rope leading to the whale and the other on the roof railing, facing out toward the whale. The wind whips his long hair back as he contentedly gazes out toward their distant destination.

Eric, on the ground floor, pokes his head out the window and gazes up at Ticker. His ski cap FLIES OFF HIS HEAD against the wind, so that both men are facing the same direction with their hair blowing behind them. The painted moniker "MARLENE" is clearly visible between them.

END MONTAGE

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - ROOF - MORNING

The whale continues towing the houseboat, which is now almost completely submerged in the Gulf.

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Eric stands on one corner of the roof railing while Ticker stands on the opposite corner, the makeshift mast between them. Land is in sight on the horizon. They're finally approaching Scorpion Reef.

TICKER

Water should get shallow soon. We have to cut it.

NEGATIVE ERIC

It's too far to swim.

TICKER

We'll make it.

NEGATIVE ERIC

I'll make it. You won't.

TICKER

I was born upon the tide, kid.

Ticker brandishes a knife and brings it to the taught rope leading to the distant whale. He pauses.

TICKER

What'll it do with the thing in its blowhole?

NEGATIVE ERIC

Expel it like a bad student.

Ticker cuts the rope. What's left of the boat immediately slows to a lazy drift as the impression of the whale upon the Gulf disappears. The boat begins sinking into the water.

TICKER

Ready?

The whale BLOWS just above the surface and the piece of wood with the rope tied to it that was stuck in its trachea shoots skyward and lands in the water in front of the two men.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Ready.

Eric and Ticker hop into the water, push off the railing and begin swimming toward the land. Eric notices Ticker struggling and gets in front of him, grabs his right arm and attempts to hoist him onto his back.

TICKER

I don't need any help. I was born upon the ti--

NEGATIVE ERIC
You said that already.

Ticker gives in to Eric's help and lets himself be hoisted onto Eric's back. He cranes his head to the sky.

TICKER POV

The myriad clouds against the blue sky, a point of view mirroring Eric's when he was in Ticker's motorcycle side car after their Bourbon street bender. As Eric, struggling to swim with Ticker's weight, occasionally dips below the surface, Ticker's POV sporadically is engulfed in water.

EXIT POV

Suddenly, the sounds of POLICE SIRENS gradually fill the air. Eric and Ticker look back and see several police boats approaching from the horizon.

TICKER
What the hell is that?

Eric, using all his might to keep afloat with Ticker on his back, can't answer through his huffing and puffing and intermittent mouthfuls of water.

TICKER
Oh my god. The phone...the satellite phone...can you track a...? There are cops. Faster, kid, the cops!
(then, slipping out of presence)
What's that noise?
(slipping back into presence)
It's the cops!

NEGATIVE ERIC
I know...I know....I know...

TICKER
They're gonna take it away from us! Don't let them take it away. Don't let them take her away!

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Eric begins to sink with Ticker on his back. As they descend deeper, Ticker detaches himself from Eric and grabs a handful of the clothes on Eric's back. He kicks furiously and slowly the pair begin to rise to the surface.

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EXT. ISLA DESTERRADA - CONTINUOUS

Eric and Ticker breach the surface, gasping for air as they lunge, using the last of their strength, onto the sodden sand of the beach. The waves break and recede on them as they sit motionless for a beat.

Suddenly, Ticker gets to his feet, rejuvenated, and runs up the beach. The waves continue lapping gently upon Eric as he slowly gets up and stumbles up the beach toward Ticker, who is on his hands and knees frantically digging with his hands in the sand.

The police boats in the distance get closer. Eric approaches Ticker and gingerly puts a hand on his shoulder. Ticker gradually stops digging, his body heaving and out of breath.

TICKER

They buried her.

Without looking up at Eric, Ticker throws a hand up and clasps Eric's hand that's still resting on his shoulder. Eric kneels down next to Ticker.

NEGATIVE ERIC

I know.

TICKER

I'm a card-carrying casual. Had to take care of Marlene. South southwest.

NEGATIVE ERIC

Just like you said.

TICKER

Just like she said.

The police boat engines get steadily louder. Eric turns his head back and sees the red and blue lights approaching. As his head turns, Ticker softly begins to sing.

TICKER (O.S.)

(singing)

*Que lejos estoy del suelo donde
nacido.*

Eric turns. He's heard that song before, and so have we. It's the song that played over the soundtrack in the previous episode when Eric took his penultimate jetpack flight at the end of the story. It is "*Cancion Mixteca.*"

TICKER
 (singing)
*Inmensa nostalgia invade mi
 pensamiento...*

He trails off.

TICKER
 I remember...I remember.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 What's that?

Ticker looks up at Eric and smiles.

TICKER
 That song.

Ticker closes his eyes. The police boats kill their engines as they land on the beach. Eric places his hand gently behind Ticker's head, the sounds of the sea behind him.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 Hey, old timer.

Ticker opens his eyes. He smiles softly, lovingly, at Eric. Then he subtly frowns and furrows his brow.

TICKER
 Who are you?

Eric gazes into Ticker's eyes as he watches the life leave them. The police approach from behind.

POLICE OFFICER
 Stand up, son. It's alright.

Eric stands up. The police officer is holding a blanket and attempts to put it around Eric's shoulders.

NEGATIVE ERIC
 I don't need a blanket, it's
 ninety four degrees.

The police officer tosses the blanket to one of the cops investigating Ticker. The cop catches the blanket and drapes it over Ticker's body.

POLICE OFFICER
 What in the hell were you two
 doing?

NEGATIVE ERIC
 Looking for buried treasure.

POLICE OFFICER
You were...what? Why?

Eric turns and looks at Ticker one last time.

NEGATIVE ERIC
It kept him going. Until he died.

The police officer gently ushers Eric down the beach toward the police boats. The other officers tend to Ticker's body.

Music Cue: "Cajun Moon" by J.J Cale

Eric stops at the water's edge and looks down to see his ski cap, wet and sandy, as it washes up on the shore. He picks it up and places it back on his head. The distance carries the echo of a whale song as the sun sets over the Gulf.

THE END

NEGATIVE ERIC WILL RETURN IN
NEGATIVE ERIC AND THE MAN OF THE CLOTH

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