

A BAD HAND

A Gameplay Cinematic Screenplay

Based on the Quest for
FALLOUT: CASCADIA

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FADE IN:

INT. THE MARINER CLUB - BACKROOM - NIGHT

Rain streaks down windows stained amber by dying neon. A PRE-WAR JAZZ RECORD crackles from somewhere distant, Billie Holiday, warped by two centuries of decay.

The backroom is all shadows and smoke. Leather booths. Peeling wallpaper that might have been elegant once. A single lamp casts a sick yellow circle on a corner table.

JOHNNY BRADSHAW (40s, rumpled suit, campaign pin still clinging to his lapel) sits alone. His leg bounces beneath the table. A whiskey glass sweats in front of him, untouched.

He checks his watch. Checks the door. Checks his watch again.

The door opens.

THE DRIFTER enters, silhouetted against the dim light of the main bar. We don't see their face clearly. They move with purpose, scanning the room, noting exits.

Johnny FLINCHES. His hand darts toward his hip, no gun there. Old instinct, new cowardice.

JOHNNY

(startled, voice cracking)

Huh, ? Who... who are you?

The Drifter approaches. Slides into the booth across from him. Says nothing.

Johnny's eyes dart to the exits. The Drifter is between him and every one of them.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Look, tonight's not good. Whatever you want, I can't help you.

A beat. The Drifter studies him. The sweat on his brow. The tremor in his hands. The whiskey he hasn't touched.

THE DRIFTER

You're shaking. And, your drink's untouched.

Johnny swallows hard.

THE DRIFTER (CONT'D)
Someone's already been here tonight.
The Spades, maybe?

Johnny goes WHITE. He leans forward, voice dropping to an urgent whisper.

JOHNNY
How the hell? Keep it down!

He glances around the empty room. Old habits.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Yeah. Yeah, the Spades were here.
Courtesy of Granddaddy.
(bitter laugh)
Guess I'm even deeper in the hole
than I thought.

THE DRIFTER
The Orcas sent me. Granddaddy's tired
of excuses.

Johnny's face cycles through fear, hope, despair, landing somewhere between pleading and pathetic.

JOHNNY
I told Granddaddy I need one more day.
The caps are coming, I swear.
(leaning forward)
Please... convince him to be patient.

THE DRIFTER
Granddaddy isn't patient. Convince me
your plan is solid, and maybe I'll
put in a good word.

JOHNNY
(desperate, words tumbling out)
It wasn't my fault! Commissioner
Rothwell, Security, they were backing
me. Had money flowing in. Then they
just... stopped.

He runs a hand through thinning hair.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

They set me up. Used me to expose the
Orcas' investments. I was
bait, and I didn't even know it.

The Drifter's eyes drop to Johnny's wrist. GOLD CUFFLINKS
catch the lamplight. Expensive. Too expensive for a man
drowning in debt.

THE DRIFTER

Nice cufflinks. Pretty lavish for a
broke man.

Johnny looks down at them like he forgot they existed. His
face falls.

JOHNNY

(defeated)

Sharp eyes. They're from Alicia Wu.
A gift.

(bitter)

Meant as proof that Security wouldn't
dare touch me. But she probably set
me up too. Damned Hearts. Always
two-faced.

THE DRIFTER

Tell me everything. Names.
Connections. All of it.

JOHNNY

(swallowing)

Alicia Wu handles contacts in Security.
She's got a mole, Sergeant Vickers.
He's been funneling caps for months.

(lowering voice further)

And Sawmill from the Diamonds? He
embezzles. Skims from Granddaddy's
operations. If the old man found out,
there'd be hell to pay.

The Drifter absorbs this. Johnny watches, desperate.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

That enough? Is that enough to buy
me time?

The Drifter stands. Johnny half-rises, panicked.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Wait, where are you going? What are
you going to tell them?

THE DRIFTER

That depends on what Granddaddy wants
to hear.

The Drifter turns and walks toward the door. Johnny slumps
back into the booth, staring at his untouched whiskey.

JOHNNY

(to himself)
God help me.

He finally reaches for the glass. His hand is shaking too
badly to lift it.

CUT TO:

INT. BLACKFIN LOUNGE - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Upscale decay. Pre-war art deco filtered through post-apocalyptic pragmatism. Velvet curtains. A mahogany table. Armed guards at every door.

Three figures wait:

ROCCO (50s, broad-shouldered, expensive suit straining against muscle) stands by the window, arms crossed. His jaw works like he's chewing glass.

ALICIA WU (30s, elegant, calculating) sits with perfect posture, a cigarette holder between two fingers. She hasn't taken a drag. The cigarette is a prop. Everything about her is.

And at the head of the table,

GRANDDADDY.

A ROBOBRAIN. Pre-war military chassis, brain dome clouded with age. But the voice that emerges is pure old-world mob boss, Franklin Calamari, preserved in formaldehyde and spite.

GRANDDADDY
(mechanical rasp with human menace)
Our guest arrives.

The Drifter enters. The guards close the door behind them.

Rocco SNEERS.

ROCCO
About time. You find Bradshaw?

THE DRIFTER
I found him.

ALICIA WU
(measured)
And?

THE DRIFTER
Security burned him. Commissioner Rothwell was feeding him money, then

cut him off right before the election.
They used Johnny to expose your
political investments.

SILENCE.

Rocco's hands curl into fists. Alicia's expression doesn't
change, but her grip on the cigarette holder tightens.

Granddaddy's brain dome HUMS. Processing.

GRANDDADDY
Security. Playing games with our money.
Our reputation.

ROCCO
(explosive)
I told you! I told you Bradshaw was a
liability! We should've put him down
the second his campaign tanked!

ALICIA WU
(cool)
And announce to all of Cascadia that
the Orcas backed a losing horse?
Brilliant strategy, Rocco. Truly.

ROCCO
Better than looking weak! We let this
slide, every two-bit hustler in the
city thinks they can cross us!

ALICIA WU
Johnny still has value. He knows
Security's playbook. Their informants.
(to Granddaddy)
We fake his death. Publicly, the Orcas
are satisfied. Privately, we turn him
into a weapon against the people who
tried to burn us.

ROCCO
Value? He's a coward and a failure!
The only message that matters is the
one we send when we put a bullet in
his skull!

They both turn to Granddaddy. Waiting.

The robo-brain's optical sensors swivel toward the Drifter.

GRANDDADDY

You've heard both sides, Drifter. You brought us this intelligence. Tell me...

(pause)

What would you do?

All eyes on the Drifter.

[PLAYER CHOICE MOMENT - PATH A: THE PHANTOM KING]

THE DRIFTER

Both. And neither.

Rocco scoffs. Alicia raises an eyebrow.

THE DRIFTER (CONT'D)

Johnny dies. Publicly. The Orcas send their message.

(beat)

But the body in the harbor isn't Johnny.

A long pause.

ROCCO

What the hell are you talking about?

THE DRIFTER

You fake his death. Make it loud. Make it brutal. Every faction in Cascadia sees what happens when you cross the Orcas.

(beat)

But Johnny... Johnny becomes a ghost.

He answers to Granddaddy directly. Moves in shadows. Feeds you intel from Security, from the council, from anyone who thinks he's dead.

Alicia's eyes narrow, intrigued despite herself.

ALICIA WU

A phantom asset.

THE DRIFTER

A phantom king. Politically irrelevant
to the world. Privately, your hand in
every pocket that matters.

SILENCE.

Then, a sound like grinding gears and broken laughter.
Granddaddy is CHUCKLING.

GRANDDADDY
(delighted)

Oh, I like you, Drifter. I like you
very much.

ROCCO
(sputtering)

Granddaddy, you can't be serious,

GRANDDADDY

Rocco. You think strength is a bullet.
Loud. Final.

(the brain dome swivels toward him)

But real power? Real power is a knife
they never see coming. A puppet with
their hand so far inside them, they
dance and never know the strings.

Rocco's jaw tightens. He knows better than to argue.

GRANDDADDY (CONT'D)
(to the Drifter)

Make it happen. Stage his death. Make
it believable. Make it bloody.

(pause)

And Drifter? Do this right, and you'll
find the Orcas remember their friends.

The Drifter nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASCADE WATERFRONT - PIER 7 - NIGHT

Fog rolls off black water. Industrial decay. Rusted cranes loom like gallows.

A CROWD has gathered at the pier's edge. ORCAS ENFORCERS keep them back. Word travels fast in Cascadia.

Rocco stands at the center, playing his role. Loud. Theatrical.

ROCCO

(to the crowd)

Let this be a lesson! The Orcas do not forgive! The Orcas do not forget!

Two enforcers drag a BODY BAG to the pier's edge. It's heavy. Weighted.

In the shadows nearby, the Drifter watches. Beside them,

JOHNNY BRADSHAW. Pale. Trembling. Wearing different clothes. A hood obscures his face.

JOHNNY

(barely audible)

That's... that's supposed to be me in there.

THE DRIFTER

(low)

It's a John Doe. Courtesy of Alicia Wu.

JOHNNY

Jesus Christ.

THE DRIFTER

You're dead now, Johnny. The man you were, the politician, the candidate, the debtor, he's gone.

Johnny watches as the enforcers HEAVE the body bag over the edge. It hits the water with a heavy SPLASH. The crowd murmurs. Some cheer. Most just watch in silence.

THE DRIFTER (CONT'D)

What's left belongs to Granddaddy.

JOHNNY
(hollow)
Forever.

THE DRIFTER
Forever.

Johnny stares at the ripples where his "body" disappeared. For a moment, his expression flickers, grief, relief, terror, acceptance, all at once.

JOHNNY
(quietly)
I used to think I could outsmart everyone. The Orcas. Security. Everyone.
(bitter laugh)
Turns out I was just another card in someone else's hand.

THE DRIFTER
At least you're still in the game.

A beat. Johnny pulls the hood tighter around his face.

JOHNNY
(to himself)
Johnny Bradshaw is dead.

He turns and walks into the fog. The Drifter watches him go.

On the pier, Rocco raises his arms in triumph.

ROCCO
(to the crowd)
This is what happens! Remember it!

The crowd begins to disperse. The show is over.

But in the shadows, the real game is just beginning.

FADE TO BLACK.

[ALTERNATE ENDING - PATH B: ROCCO'S JUSTICE]

INT. BLACKFIN LOUNGE - PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Same scene. Same moment. Different choice.

GRANDDADDY
What would you do?

THE DRIFTER
(cold)
Rocco's right.

Alicia's eyes flash. Rocco grins like a shark.

THE DRIFTER (CONT'D)
Johnny's a liability. He's already given
up everything he knows, Security
contacts, Orcas dirt. Once we squeeze
him dry, what's left? A coward waiting
to flip again.

ROCCO
Finally. Someone with sense.

Granddaddy's brain dome hums. Processing.

GRANDDADDY
(slowly)
Fear. Yes. Fear has always served us
well.
(to Rocco)
Do it publicly. Make it memorable.

Rocco's grin widens.

ROCCO
With pleasure.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASCADE WATERFRONT - PIER 7 - NIGHT

The same pier. The same fog. But this time,

Johnny Bradshaw KNEELS at the edge, hands bound behind his back. Two enforcers hold him in place. His face is bloody. One eye swollen shut.

A crowd watches in horrified silence.

Rocco stands over him, pistol drawn.

ROCCO

(to the crowd)

This man thought he could take Orcas money and walk away. Thought he could fail us and live to tell about it.

He RACKS the slide. The sound echoes.

ROCCO (CONT'D)

He was wrong.

Johnny looks up, not at Rocco, but past him. Searching the crowd. Hoping, maybe, for rescue that won't come.

His eyes find the Drifter. Standing at the edge of the crowd. Watching.

JOHNNY

(broken whisper)

Please...

The Drifter says nothing.

Rocco presses the barrel to the back of Johnny's head.

ROCCO

The Orcas do not forgive.

BANG.

Johnny's body slumps forward and rolls off the pier. The splash is final.

The crowd is silent. Then, slowly, they begin to disperse. No one meets anyone's eyes.

Rocco holsters his weapon and walks toward the Drifter.

ROCCO (CONT'D)

(satisfied)

That's how you send a message.

The Drifter watches the dark water where Johnny disappeared. No John Doe this time. No trick.

THE DRIFTER

(flat)

Message received.

Rocco claps them on the shoulder and walks away, laughing.

The Drifter remains. Staring at the water.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END