

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Michael Bay's America, Part IV
By Jerzy Gwiazdowski

After a large offer from an unexpected celebrity buyer, an industrial artist seeks advice from his former business manager, who also happens to have inspired the piece being sold.

Running time: 15 minutes

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IN BLACK: We hear a sound that is distinctively Hollywood Blockbuster-y, accompanied by pseudo-Wagnerian action movie music.

Lights up on a large industrial space. The light is overhead florescent. Additional light from skylights, but waning with the sunset. Around the room are scattered various welded sculptures, between three and six feet tall. Most of them are packed for moving, but not proffessionally. Some are completely toweled, taped, and bubble wrapped. Some are completely covered in brown paper, with the work's title written in black marker on the outside: Tabloid Zeitgeist, Letters From Baghdad, and Italian Man, 2002, to name a few. Additional smaller works poke from boxes on the floor. Metal wall hangings lean against the cinder block walls. Stage right: an entrance. We know this because this is where we hear the offstage voices of CHRIS and LUTHER.

LUTHER: Watch it.

CHRIS: Yeah.

LUTHER: Watch it!

CHRIS: I am.

LUTHER: It's fragile.

CHRIS: I'm fragile. It's steel.

LUTHER: You're a big boy. It's aluminum.

CHRIS: I know what it is. It's metal, I mean. It's sharp.

CHRIS, 36, in a green military jacket and combat boots, backs into the room two steps, losing grip on his end of yet another large, wrapped sculpture. His long hair is falling into his eyes. Backpedaling slowly, he glances behind him.

LUTHER: There we go. Yeah, boy.

CHRIS eyes the space, looking over his shoulder for a landing spot.

CHRIS: Hold on.

LUTHER: *Andale! Arriba!*

CHRIS stops, Just inside the room. LUTHER is just offstage.

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CHRIS: Do you want me to speed up, or be careful?

LUTHER: Both.

CHRIS: Here. Let me re-grip.

LUTHER: Grab the middle there. *There.*

CHRIS: Hold on. Let's put it down for a sec.

LUTHER: Pussy. *(CHRIS laughs as he sets the piece down.)* Come on, were almost in.

CHRIS: Okay.

LUTHER: Ready? Lots to do, let's go. Let's go, heave-ho! One two three...

The men carry the sculpture further inside. LUTHER, 38, full of energy appears wearing sweatpants, sneakers, and a tee shirt with a pocket. He has been taken out of New Jersey. The New Jersey has not been taken out of him.

CHRIS: *(Backing in)* Okay, where to? The wall?

LUTHER: Nah nah, Down there, near Freddie Mercury.

LUTHER nods his head toward a sculpture that vaguely resembles a human being.

They set the piece down. CHRIS looks around the space.

CHRIS: Wow.

LUTHER watches CHRIS look at the studio.

LUTHER: As good as you remember?

CHRIS: Yeah.

LUTHER: Yeah...

CHRIS: Well, I mean... it is like I remember. Exactly. You haven't touched it.

LUTHER: Yeah I kinda liked it the way it was, you know? Don't you?

CHRIS: I like it, sure. I liked it in March.

LUTHER: Do you like it now?

CHRIS: Yeah I like it. I expected that you would spruce it up a little, though.

LUTHER: Well I had priorities, Chris! Artsy first, Smartsy last. I needed to move everything in and get started.

CHRIS: Well how are you gonna get started now? There's shit everywhere. *(Take two)* There's art everywhere. Do you have a plan?

LUTHER: Piece by piece.

CHRIS: Yeah, okay, but babe. You haven't installed the new lighting. You haven't re-done the floor. *(Looking around)* And now you're gonna, what? Slide it under tons of metal? Luther...

LUTHER: Hey, you wanted a new floor, genius. I didn't. Remember? I'm keeping the cement. We're not trying to fool anybody. It's raw.

CHRIS: Raw. Yeah. It's filthy. I thought I was coming to help tidy up.

LUTHER: You are. I told you I needed help.

CHRIS: Help. Which implies that you have done something. Fuck help, this is disaster relief. *(Indicating a can on the floor)* This soda can was here when we looked at the place!

LUTHER: So?

CHRIS: Jesus.

LUTHER: Come on, I know, its a mess. But this ain't my shit. Renovating, real estate. Organizing my messes. That was your shit.

CHRIS is silent.

LUTHER: So, you know, I've been trying to do double duty. But I can't.

CHRIS: Clearly.

LUTHER: And this sale is about to go through, and I knew I couldn't do it, and you were the first person I thought of. Cause this is your shit, you know?

CHRIS: Yeah.

LUTHER: You think I was gonna turn into Martha Stewart? Still a mess. And you said you were in. Now, it's slightly more FUBAR in here than I might have suggested. So if you want out, I understand. You're a bigshot now, you probably don't have time. But I don't think anyone else could do it. Just help me make this sale?

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CHRIS: Alright, alright. I'm in.

LUTHER: Yeah?

CHRIS: Of course.

LUTHER: I fucking love you. *(Beat)* Thank you.

CHRIS: You're welcome. *(Sizing up the task at hand)* O-fucking-kay. You're gonna have to listen to me, now, if you're asking for my help.

LUTHER: That's why I asked for it, Doc Hollywood.

CHRIS: No- shut up- no arguments. No calling me a control freak. And do everything I say.

LUTHER: Oh yeah baby.

CHRIS: Can it.

LUTHER: Yes sir.

CHRIS: Jesus. Let's unpack these babies and make 'em look expensive.

LUTHER: Boom. *(He starts ripping tape, paper off of a piece near the wall. CHRIS is uncovering the humanoid sculpture near the door, which is wrapped in a blanket and duct tape.)*

CHRIS: *(the sculpture)* Freddie Mercury?

LUTHER: Yeah.

CHRIS: I thought it was supposed to be your father.

LUTHER: Well, yeah. Him too.

CHRIS: Oh. You never told me that.

LUTHER: No? Well, I'm like, really deep. You probably missed some shit.

CHRIS: *(Looking at the sculpture)* Probably. *(Begins to take smaller works out of boxes on the floor. He is conspicuously avoiding the large piece they just carried in.)* When is your multi-millionaire buyer coming?

LUTHER: *(As he works)* Tomorrow.

CHRIS: Jesus, Luther.

LUTHER: *(Looks up)* What?

CHRIS: *(Stares at LUTHER)* You.... Okay. *(He sizes up the room)* So, no time to the lighting. Paint. Anything, really. So. So this is how we're showing it. Like this.

LUTHER: Raw.

CHRIS: In a not-up-to-code warehouse. Raw. Fuck it. Let's do it. Where's the piece he's interested in?

LUTHER: Right here. *(LUTHER indicates the large sculpture they just moved into the room)*

CHRIS: So, yeah, what is this? I haven't seen it before.

LUTHER: Yeah. You wouldn't have.

CHRIS: Oh. A new one?

LUTHER: Yeah.

CHRIS: Had no idea.

LUTHER: *(Points at himself)* Deep.

CHRIS: Cool. Well. Let's see it.

CHRIS looks at the piece, still wrapped in brown paper. He moves in and reads what is written in black permanent marker on the sculpture's upstage side.

CHRIS: That's a hell of a title. Even for you.

LUTHER: I guess so. Maurice hates it.

CHRIS: I like it.

LUTHER: It's perfect. When you see it. Unwrap it.

CHRIS: I didn't even know you were working on it.

LUTHER: Yeah well, I was. A lot.

(beat)

CHRIS: Okay, here's what we're gonna do. Come here and help me move this thing.

LUTHER rises and joins CHRIS at the statue.

LUTHER: *(Grabbing hold of it)* Where we going?

CHRIS: Just over there behind you. One, two, three. *(The men lift the sculpture)*

LUTHER: Over here?

CHRIS: That way. A little more. Stop.

LUTHER: We there yet?

CHRIS: We are. I think. *(They set it down.)* Hit the lights.

LUTHER does so. The harsh fluorescent light from above is shut off, leaving only the late afternoon sun spilling in from skylights above and highlighting Luther's new sculpture. CHRIS tears the paper off, revealing the work. He looks at it. LUTHER looks at CHRIS.

LUTHER: There she is.

CHRIS: Jesus, Luther.

LUTHER: I'm sorry I didn't pick up the soda can.

CHRIS: It's fine.

LUTHER: It looks good here.

CHRIS: Do I get it?

LUTHER: The title? I think so. I think you would. It's us, you know?

CHRIS: Yeah.

LUTHER: No, I mean it. It's us.

CHRIS looks at LUTHER.

LUTHER: That's it. That's. The one.

CHRIS: What one?

LUTHER: You know. Come on. The one. The "us" one. The "boo-hoo-I-broke-up-with-Chris-I-need-to-create-art-to-feel-alive" one.

CHRIS: Oh. That one.

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LUTHER: Yeah that one.

CHRIS: Damn.

LUTHER: I couldn't sell it until you saw it.

CHRIS: Uh, thanks.

(Beat)

LUTHER: I was also secretly hoping you'd get your 'Interior Makover Brigade' in, and like, do an episode here.

CHRIS: Oh, really? What about 'raw?'

LUTHER: I was joking, Neck.

CHRIS: Yeah, well, joke's on you. I quit. Sort of. You'd think people who handle flowers all day would be less inclined to be assholes.

LUTHER: Too bad. I thought you were gonna be the new king of reality TV.

CHRIS: Nope. Archduke, maybe. I'm working on my own show.

LUTHER: Yeah? What is it?

CHRIS: It's stupid.

LUTHER: From you, with that fuckin' lawyer brain of yours? Can't be.

CHRIS: It sure can.

LUTHER: Try me.

CHRIS: Don't fucking call me a lawyer.

LUTHER: Sorry.

CHRIS: Okay. It's just a pitch right now, but. It's a talent competition. For dogs.

LUTHER: That is stupid.

CHRIS: Told you.

LUTHER: My sister would definitely watch that.

CHRIS: I know. I was thinking of her the whole time, actually. Like, "would Kath be into this?" She was my litmus test.

LUTHER: I don't get her taste. I never understood how you did. Do. (*Beat. re: the sculpture*) I'm dying here. What do you think?

CHRIS: It's gorgeous, babe.

LUTHER: Gorgeous? It's not supposed to be.

CHRIS: It's great. You know what I mean. (*CHRIS circles the statue*).

LUTHER: We're not fucking anymore. You don't have to pretend to like this shit.

CHRIS: Shut up, babe.

LUTHER: Do you get it now? The title.

CHRIS: Yeah. I get it.

LUTHER: You're the one.

CHRIS: Hah. It's weird. To see one I wasn't a part of.

LUTHER: You were, though. The whole time.

CHRIS: It's different.

LUTHER: Yeah it felt different. It felt good though. I mean, I really cooked on this one.

CHRIS: It looks great.

LUTHER: It looks beeter in this lighting situation. You made it look like it's actually worth what I'm asking for it.

CHRIS: I hope it's a lot.

LUTHER: It is.

CHRIS: Who's the buyer?

LUTHER: Top secret.

CHRIS: Is it the Opera again?

LUTHER: No.

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CHRIS: Collector?

LUTHER: Sort of.

CHRIS: Who is it?

LUTHER: It's Val Kilmer.

(beat)

CHRIS: Val Kilmer?

LUTHER: Val Kilmer.

CHRIS: Val Kilmer.

LUTHER: Crazy, right?

CHRIS: This sculpture is going to be sitting in Val Kilmer's like, mansion?

LUTHER: In his study.

CHRIS: He has a study?

LUTHER: Yeah.

CHRIS: What does he study?

LUTHER: Whatever. It probably won't happen.

CHRIS: I hope it does. It's just weird.

LUTHER: It's not a done deal. Maurice wants me to change the title. He doesn't think Kilmer will go for it.

CHRIS: It's a great title.

LUTHER: Yeah, but Maurice seems to think that Kilmer will have a problem with it...professionally.

CHRIS: Professionally? Oh. Well, fuck that. Right? That's the piece. Title and all. Fuck Val Kilmer. Maurice has your back on this?

LUTHER: He has his own back. He sent an email to Kilmer's people with an alternate title.

CHRIS: What a fuckstick.

LUTHER: "*Les Papillons du Champagne*."

CHRIS: I don't speak French.

LUTHER: Neither do fucking I.

CHRIS: How can he do that?

LUTHER: He sees dollars. Movie star might not like title. Change the title. Pass Go, collect Fifty-five thousand dollars, move to Park Place. He doesn't give a fuck.

CHRIS: Fifty-five?

LUTHER: Yeah.

CHRIS: Babe.

LUTHER: What?

CHRIS: It's fifty-five thousand.

LUTHER: Yeah?

CHRIS: Real dollars. It's not Monopoly money.

LUTHER: I fucking know, Neck.

CHRIS: I mean. He's not asking you to saw it in half.

LUTHER: What?

CHRIS: It won't mean anything to him anyway. It's just a title.

LUTHER: Just a title? What? It's not. It's us. It's this. That's the fucking title. It has to be. You understand that!

CHRIS: Yes. I get it, babe. But I'm the only fucking one who gets it. And you didn't sell it to me, did you? You sold it to Val cocksucking Kilmer. And if you're going to sell it anyway, what's the crusade? Change the title. Collect your money. Quit bitching.

LUTHER: I'm sorry, alright? I didn't pick it out. Maurice did. It's the last one I wanted to move. But it's the one Kilmer wants. And it's a chance to get some influence. To get some important- to get some rich pricks interested in my stuff. Isn't it goddamn time someone was interested in this shit?

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CHRIS: Great! Do that. Sell it. You're right. That's what you want. It's what you deserve. So do it! If that's what you want.

LUTHER: I'm not doing it for my health. I'm selling it. That's what it's for! Always. That's why we're here. To shine spotlights on it and sell it. To rich fucking assholes. Look who's talking. With your dog talent show? And you're looking down your nose at me.

CHRIS: I know exactly what the fuck I'm doing. I don't have any illusions about it. I'll name my TV show whatever the hell they want. And I'm not gonna throw a tantrum and bitch about my integrity.

LUTHER: What, so I shouldn't try? I should just change it, and be like you? I should give up?

CHRIS: I never gave up. You did. Don't you fucking say that.

LUTHER: That's what you're telling me. Boom, just give up like me. It will all be easier.

CHRIS: You gave up. You gave up. You gave up on me. You gave up on a family with me. You gave up on me. Fuck you.

LUTHER: Hey. No. I tried. I tried to compromise with you. And you said it was fine. You lied to my face for a year and said it was all fine. For a year. I tried to meet you halfway.

CHRIS: Well, I'm sorry, but the fucking dog doesn't count! Sorry. I wanted a child and I got a fucking poodle. That's not halfway. Not even close.

LUTHER: I love that fuckin' poodle, you asshole. I thought you did too.

CHRIS: Come on. I do.

LUTHER: Well you abandoned us. I can barely take care of him. I can't even take care of myself. And you wanted me to adopt a kid? Have you met me? You want him to turn into a serial killer?

LUTHER's cell phone rings. He switches it off in his pocket.

CHRIS: Luther, I wanted to have a child with you. That's not unheard of. I wanted to have children with you. Together. I wasn't asking you to do it alone. And you're doing pretty fucking well, babe.

LUTHER: I don't know what the hell I'm doing.

CHRIS: Yeah you do. *(toward the sculpture)* Look at this perfect fucking monstrosity. Somebody wants it! Sell it! Name it something else! Name it '*A Year's Salary!*' Leave me out of it. You don't need my help anymore.

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LUTHER: Yes I do.

CHRIS: Fuck you for showing me this. Why did you have to do that? You should have just sold it. I wish I'd never seen it.

(pause)

LUTHER: Bullshit. Don't say that.

CHRIS: Get rid of it.

LUTHER: I'm trying to get rid of it! That thing breaks my stupid fucking heart. I wish I'd never seen it either. It gotta get it out of here. But it needs to leave intact.

(beat)

CHRIS: Okay.

LUTHER: Help me.

CHRIS: Don't make me do it.

LUTHER: I can't do it, Neck. I can't.

CHRIS: Yes you can.

LUTHER: Not if you're not with me on this. It's not mine.

CHRIS: Of course it is.

LUTHER: It's ours. All of this shit. I couldn't have done this without you.

CHRIS: I was just watching you. You did it all.

LUTHER: I would still be doing etched glass if I hadn't met you. This whole approach came from you, Neck.

CHRIS: I'm not an artist, Luther. I don't have your ability. I'm a shitty lawyer-turned shitty manager-turned shitty producer. I'm just-

LUTHER's cell rings. He checks the ID, ignores the call, and puts it back in his pocket.

CHRIS: You don't need me. Go sell this thing.

LUTHER: He'll call back. Chris. I'm sorry. I couldn't do it. I wanted to. I never met anyone that I wanted a baby with. But I wanted it with you. I just can't do it.

CHRIS: I know.

LUTHER: I mean, we kind of did, though. (*indicating the sculptures*) A whole family of fucked up metal baby monsters.

CHRIS: With weird names.

LUTHER is about to ask a question. His cell rings.

LUTHER: (*re: phone*) Fucker.

He answers. During the following conversation, CHRIS walks among the sculptures, spending some time with each one as he passes it.

LUTHER (*into phone*): Heyya Maurice... Yeah. Yeah, it's all here. Not set up, but all here... I was fucking moving shit around, I didn't want to drop it and come to the phone! It's fine... I'm just focusing on this right now. Yeah it is good... Yeah... I'll do what I can. It won't be perfect, but movie stars, they get what they want, right? ...Sure. Yeah I'll just pull an all-nighter and set this shit up. Okay alright. Hey, though. Maurice? I thought about it, and I need to keep the title... It's the title... Because I'm not gonna change it. Just tell him you gave him the wrong title, alright? Because that's the fucking... It's the title. It's mine. I don't have to explain it to you. It's my work! ...No. I mean that's it. Don't fucking ask me to explain myself to you. I'm not gonna Sorry. I'm sorry, it's just. Here let me get my... (*LUTHER approaches CHRIS*) I want you to talk to my.. There's someone you need to talk to. (*LUTHER is trying to hand the phone to CHRIS.*) He can explain it better than me. He'll explain it...Here he is...

LUTHER holds out the phone to CHRIS, pleading.

CHRIS gives him a look, and takes it.

CHRIS: Hi Maurice? This is Christopher Ambrose. Mr. Giovanonne's... attorney. We'd prefer not to make a legal matter out of this; hopefully we can clear everything up before it goes that far.... No, no. It's not a threat at all. I... I just want to explain where we are coming from. Luther feels that the title is integral to the piece, as much as any of the physical components are, and to remove or change the title would... alter it in such a way that it would no longer be the piece that he created, that you're trying to sell, or that Mr. Kilmer has expressed an interest in buying... I understand your concern. It is, admittedly a strange title... Sure. Right. But it is the title the artist gave the work. I'm sure you understand the significance of that. Luther has spent seven months developing this piece. It's intensely personal to him. And he wants to make sure that when it leaves his studio, it leaves intact. And he cannot imagine that an artist such as Mr. Kilmer wouldn't understand that... Yes. Right, right. Well, I think it's clear that Luther has chosen not to explain the title... Yes. Well, that is his right. I agree. Sure, that might make it easier to sell the title to Mr. Kilmer, but that's simply not where we are. So we're going to have to work with- I'm

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sorry? Well, I'm not the artist, I wouldn't want to presume.. to know what his intent was in naming the piece. *(CHRIS looks at LUTHER. LUTHER nods.)* Great. Great. Let me just say this first. I am not the artist, so any explanation of the title will only be my interpretation. I am, however, very familiar with the artist's work, so hopefully my take on the title will satisfy Mr. Kilmer's curiosity. So. Maurice... Think of it this way. Ah. It's like in the movies, you know. Summer blockbusters. Action movies, right? They're very exciting. But it's a movie, you know? After the movie is over, someone has to clean up the rubble. After the explosions and the robots and the computer graphics, and the city gets destroyed. After all that happens, and the lights come up, and the credits roll, and everybody leaves, what if somebody had to clean up that city? And identify the dead? And build a new society? I mean, nobody wants to see that movie. It's not exciting. The explosions are exciting. But they only last half a second, you know? The cleanup takes years. That's what the title is about. That's what the piece is. It's a shrine to the people who do the cleaning up when the cameras aren't rolling. *(pause)* Yeah. Exactly. Okay? Oh... good. Well, I'm glad you think so. I will. Yeah, I'll get it from Luther. I'll tell him. Uh-huh. Sure. We will. In that case, maybe we should get to work. What? Um, that one I don't have an answer to. Nope, just the one, as far as I know... Maybe. I think you'll have to take it up with Luther. *(Laughs)* Good luck with that. Yeah. Take care. Nice to talk to you too.

CHRIS hangs up. Beat.

CHRIS: You get good reception in here.

CHRIS holds LUTHER's cell phone out to him. As LUTHER reaches for it, CHRIS pulls it back.

LUTHER: *Merci beaucoup. (Beat) Arigato.*

CHRIS hands the phone to LUTHER.

LUTHER: You still got it, Neck.

CHRIS: Thanks. Was I close?

LUTHER: Eh. Close enough. *(Beat)* It sounds like he went for it.

CHRIS: Yeah. He really did. He fucking ate it up. And he thinks "Val" will love the title.

LUTHER: He better.

CHRIS: I think he will.

LUTHER: You fucking lawyer.

CHRIS: Watch it. I'm a dog talent scout, now.

LUTHER: Sorry. *(Beat)* Chris.

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CHRIS: Yes, Luther?

LUTHER: Fuck am I gonna do without you?

CHRIS: That's your problem.

CHRIS hugs LUTHER. LUTHER holds on. CHRIS gives him a few pats on the back.

CHRIS: Aw, dont be a pussy. We have a mess to clean up.

Blackout. Pseudo-Wagnerian action movie music plays.

END OF PLAY