

INT. SALT MINE -- DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Fifteen hundred feet beneath Lake Erie A MINER (48) in salt-encrusted coveralls and hard hat maneuvers an ATV through cavernous tunnels, past huge salt pillars (40 feet on a side) left in place to support the mine's ceilings. The ATV's dim headlight and the miner's headlamp play off the two-story tall white-grey rock salt walls, dwarfing man and machine.

From the rear "Salt of the Earth Cleveland" logo is seen on the ATV.

He checks his communicator -- only static. He stops the ATV, bends over in place to focus his head lamp on a map on a small clipboard velcro'd to his knee. The ATV idles, the only sound.

The miner makes his guess, heads into the tunnel on the left. Gaining confidence, he accelerates. The floor becomes mushy. Just as he slows, the ATV disappears into a quicksand mix of water and dissolving salt. He hits his communicator, struggles to save his life.

MINER (Screaming)  
Help. Goddamn it. Tunnel 55 Alpha,  
Marker 12. Help. Tunnel 55 ...

Only static. He vanishes into the mush. The tunnel returns to blackness.

EXT. LAKE ERIE -- DAY

A pristine day. A recreational fishing boat rocks as it drifts, no shore in sight. TEN ANGLERS, lines in the water, stand at the rails and wait for strikes. No hint of a breeze.

EXT. ON THE BOAT -- CONTINUOUS

CHASE HARMON (35), lanky, handsome, fishes beside his nephew, JEREMY (12). One of the anglers coughs.

JEREMY  
Uncle Chase, what's that smell?

Chase coughs, then coughs again. Jeremy coughs, sinks to the deck. Three other anglers bend over, coughing.

CHASE (Yelling)  
Marty, get us the hell outta here.

Chase puts a kerchief over Jeremy's nose. The boat's engines roar and the boat lumbers away.

INT. MINE MUSTER AREA -- DAY

Large dump trucks and skip loaders look tiny in the huge assembly and motor pool area, a classic example of "room and

pillar" mining. Elevator systems are nearby. Flood lamps and overhead lights make the cavern bright as a WalMart.

A SUPERVISOR (58) in salt-encrusted coveralls tallies on his clipboard the NINE MINERS (Males, mixed ages) in similar coveralls in front of him. All clutch black lunch buckets and wear hard hats.

SUPERVISOR

Where's Cliff?

The miners look around as though Cliff is nearby.

MINER

He took the ATV at last break.

INT. HOSPITAL, LONDON, ONTARIO -- NIGHT

THEODORE RYE (47), ambles on a hospital floor. He's portly, rumpled clothes, nondescript -- his best weapon. He passes the Nurses Desk. A nurse there updates a chart, doesn't look up.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Rye enters a four-person room. FOUR MEN (20s) watch TV in hospital gowns; they sport wrist tags. Their clothes and hard hats are nearby in clear plastic bags on the beds.

RYE

I'm from the company. You're coming with me. Now.

MAN #1

A doctor okay'd it?

RYE

There's one where we're going.

MAN #2

Yeah, where's that? Not back out on the lake, right?

RYE

Just get dressed. You're getting overtime right now.

Man #3 coughs several times. All four are nearly dressed.

MAN #3

Still got that damned rotten egg smell in me.

RYE (peremptory)

This way. Quietly. Boots stay off.

Rye leads them away from the Nurses Desk into a stairway exit. The nurse focuses on paperwork and doesn't see them.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM, HARMON HOME -- NIGHT

Chase, in sweats, types at a keyboard. Three large computer monitors scream "geek." His brother, JEFF (42), similarly lanky, enters, waits. Chase is oblivious. Jeff rattles keys in his pocket. Chase looks up.

CHASE

Hey. How's Jeremy?

JEFF

Melissa wants me to take him to Urgent Care. Seems Okay to me. Says it smelled like rotten eggs?

CHASE

Hydrogen sulfide gas. Wicked-mean stuff. Right out on Erie. Weird.

Chase points to a monitor.

CHASE (CONT'D)

I'll post it; maybe someone else can chime in. I'm sorry about Jeremy. I didn't know a fishing trip would end like that?

JEFF

Could've been me with him. Don't worry.

(a beat)

Mel said to remind you rent's due.

Chase hands Jeff a wad of bills.

CHASE

That's almost all of it. Unemployment comes next week. Tell Mel she's the best sister-in-law ever.

INT. CLEVELAND SALT STORAGE AREA -- DAY

JACQUELINE ("JACKIE") STRICKLIN (57), CEO of Salt of the Earth, Inc., hard hat perched on her head, stands near a huge salt mound housed in an open-sided but roofed structure. She's dumpy, limps, bright eyes darting everywhere.

Jackie meets with TV Reporter NELL HAGARTY (28), perky, assertive. A CAMERAMAN (40), jeans and hoodie, sets up.

A huge dump truck pulls in as salt blows off the mound.

JACKIE

God, I hate that stuff.