

Thermal

by

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INT. CAR -- AFTERNOON

A nondescript American-made sedan with one person inside.

Behind the steering wheel is MICKEY DEVEREAUX. He is in his mid forties and the over twenty years as a cop shows in his slightly worn out face.

Gray streaks invade the sides of his dark hair. He is a little more than average height but stocky and aside from the tired appearance, he looks to be in mostly healthy shape.

Mickey is dressed in a dark leather jacket and dark slacks.

The car passes through mostly deserted streets of Phoenix, sometime in the near future.

A bouquet of flowers sit in the passenger seat of the car.

A small video monitor in the dash above a CD player and a fold down computer keypad shows a city street with a riot in progress. Angry, psychotic mobs are turning over cars, breaking storefront windows, looting and setting fires.

Groups of people fight in the street with fists, rocks and anything they can possibly use as a weapon. It is absolute chaos.

The sound is off on the dashboard video monitor but the interior of the car is a cacophony of anxious, desperate voices on the police band radio calling out for reinforcements while reporting what the rioters are up to.

Even with the chaos of the images on the video monitor mixed with the sounds coming from the radio, Mickey looks oddly at ease.

Mickey twists the steering wheel and turns into the parking lot of a large concrete building.

INT. MORTUARY -- MOMENTS LATER

Mickey enters a waiting area made up of cold stone benches and white marble floors. He holds the bouquet of flowers loosely in one hand.

At the far end of the waiting area is a small room walled in with thick, bulletproof glass.

A heavysset security guard sits in the small room intently watching a wall of video monitors attached to security cameras but his focus is on a couple of screens showing the riot in progress shot from several different angles.

Mickey taps on the thick glass of the room, partially startling the security guard.

The security guard shakes his head in recognition and amazement.

SECURITY GUARD

Oh, hey, Detective. That's some crazy shit that's going on out there, huh? Looks like the whole city's on fire.

Mickey doesn't answer. The guard buzzes Mickey through a security door.

On the other side of the security door is a video monitor and a retinal scanner next to a set of elevator doors.

Mickey leans forward and puts his eye to the retinal scanner.

A moment later, the CGI face of a friendly-looking old man appears on the screen.

OLD MAN

Good afternoon, Mr. Devereaux. So nice of you to join us today and spend some time with a loved one.

The elevator door slides open. Mickey steps inside.

INT. ELEVATOR -- CONTINUOUS

The walls are dull, smooth steel with no buttons or consoles of any kind, only a single camera mounted in the upper left hand corner above the sliding doors.

After a moment the doors slide open.

MORTUARY HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey steps into a long, almost blindingly bright white hallway with very tall ceilings and white marble floors.

The walls are lined with two foot by two foot smooth stone tiles.

The stone tiles are headstones though the lettering is barely legible.

Other than the CLACKING of Mickey's shoes on the marble floor, the hallway is quiet.

CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The riot is still in progress. The violent turmoil is the complete opposite of the quiet stillness inside the mortuary.

SIRENS wail and police in black riot armor start marching toward the rioting crowds.

GUNSHOTS ring out.

Large amounts of glass SHATTERS nearby.

INT. MORTUARY -- CONTINUOUS

A faint blue light burns in the corner of a stone tile on the left side of the hallway. Mickey stops in front of the tile, which is three tiles up from the floor, at his eye level.

When he faces the tile, the name on the stone lights up in a slightly darker blue lighting.

It reads "Lisa Devereaux".

Mickey stares at the name on the stone for a few moments with a solemn expression.

He lifts his right hand and holds his open palm inches above the tile. A holographic image that takes up about half of the tile appears.

It is a photo of LISA, Mickey's sister. She is dressed in casual clothes, sitting in a chair and leaning forward, arms clasped between her knees, a large smile on her face.

She is pretty, with smooth features and looks to be in her late thirties.

Mickey stares at the holograph with a slight, sad smile.

SUPER: "SIX MONTHS EARLIER"

INT. PARKING GARAGE -- EVENING

A police car bearing the insignia of the Phoenix Police Department is parked perpendicular to the faded yellow lines designating each parking space.

The engine is off and the driver's side faces the low concrete barrier wall. The car is sportier and sleeker than today's police cars, more like an Italian sports car than a typical cop car.

A dim light filters out of the car windows.

Snow falls outside of the garage, mingling with the colors of the last little bit of sunshine and the orange-brown haze of pollution.

INT. POLICE CAR -- CONTINUOUS

The dim light inside the car is an illuminated computer monitor attached to a swiveling metal arm mounted into the glove compartment. A cell phone sits in a docking station next to the monitor

Mickey sits in the passenger seat, staring intently at the monitor, which is tilted in his direction and is lit up with lines of text and photographs.

Mickey's partner, SERGIO MENDOZA, is in the driver's seat. Sergio is a few years younger than Mickey and clean cut. His dark eyes and charming features make him look like he could have stepped off the page of a fashion magazine.

Sergio holds a mug of coffee and stares out the side window at the snow falling past the car.

The steering wheel sits flush with the rest of the dashboard, allowing Sergio to sit in a comfortable, partially reclined position with his legs crossed, his left ankle resting on his right knee and an insulated cup of coffee in his hand.

Mickey taps his finger on the lower right corner of the monitor and the screen fills with more text and pictures.

Sergio watches the snow and shakes his head.

SERGIO

Wonder when all this is gonna stop?

Mickey's eyes stay locked on the computer monitor.

MICKEY

When what's gonna stop?

Sergio gestures out the window.

SERGIO

This. The crazy fuckin' weather.
We live in the damned desert. It's
not supposed to snow here. Not for
a week straight, anyway.

Sergio turns to Mickey.

SERGIO

What'd you think I was talking about?

Mickey continues staring at the monitor.

MICKEY

Anything. Everything.

He nods at the monitor.

MICKEY

Especially this.

The photos illuminated on the monitor are of a grisly crime scene where a woman was beaten to death with a hammer-like instrument.

MICKEY

Ever look at pictures like this and
wonder what the hell's wrong with
the world?

SERGIO

All the time.

Mickey leans back in his seat, continuing to stare at the monitor.

MICKEY

Like this guy for instance. Three fuckin' times he's beaten some poor girl's head in. And those girls let him in their homes, oblivious to what kind of monster they opened their doors to. He's gotta be cute or some kind of real sweetie.

Mickey rubs his face with a fatigued gesture that suggests he's been staring at the monitor for quite a while.

MICKEY

No signs of struggle and he just casually lets himself out afterward. Bastard even knows the security codes somehow 'cause he sets the security system before leaving so the girls aren't found for a few days. What kind of person can be both sides of the spectrum like that?

Mickey exhales and touches the corner of the monitor. The screen changes to more grisly photos of the same murders and more text.

MICKEY

He picks the girls up at dance clubs but the girls can't remember leaving with anybody so he's obviously drugging them. There's no record of his DNA is on file so he's never been busted before. Ever wonder what causes someone to decide to one day out of the blue just start killing people?

SERGIO

I've given up trying to understand what runs through people's minds. All I know is I'm here trying to do something positive and honorable for the world.

Mickey turns to Sergio and smirks at him.

MICKEY

Ever the idealist.

Sergio smirks back at him.

SERGIO

So why do you do this job then?

Mickey flashes a slightly sarcastic smile.

MICKEY

If I don't, who will?

A window pops up on the monitor, covering the photos. It flashes brightly a few times and announces an INCOMING MESSAGE that says they are needed at a homicide scene.

Sergio starts the car. The steering wheel lifts out of its notch in the dashboard. Sergio shifts the car into drive.

CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The car leaves the parking garage. The sirens go on.

Palm trees and saguaro cacti poke out of two foot tall snowdrifts on the side of the road.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- LATER

Mickey and Sergio exit a stairwell into a hallway on an upper floor of a highrise apartment building.

The carpet is faded and the paint is peeling off the walls in many places but the decor of the hallway suggests that at one time the building was a nice place to live.

Toward the end of the hall, two police guards in black body armor holding machine guns stand on either side of an open apartment door. They wear black helmets that completely cover their heads making them look almost robot-like.

Mickey and Sergio remove their badges from their belts to show to the guards. The badges light up and produce a holographic image of their faces and lists their rank and badge number.

Neither of the guards flinch or even seem to acknowledge Mickey and Sergio's presence.

Both men walk past the guards and into the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

The apartment is ripped apart by gun fire.

What looks like hundreds of bullet holes riddle the walls along with large bloodstains. All the windows are blown out.

Three bodies lay on the carpet. The biggest of which is barely recognizable as human and lies in an immense pool of blood that is beginning to freeze over.

In the middle of the mess is a coffee table littered with trash. Several small, inch tall plastic vials with a white powder inside are scattered across the table and floor in a way that looks like they were thrown in a fit of anger.

Two uniformed cops are in the apartment. HODGESON, is the younger of the two. He stands next to one of the smaller bodies, staring at it with a blank expression.

The other cop, NEIMER, approaches Mickey and Sergio. He is several pounds overweight, his face a shiny, oily, bright red. He blows into his hands to keep them warm.

NEIMER

Some fuckin' mess, huh?

He claps his hands, rubs them together a few times and blows into them again.

NEIMER

Fuckin' cold in here. Never thought I'd find myself wishing for summer. A hundred and twenty don't sound too bad right now, does it?

MICKEY

Other than the obvious, do we know what happened here?

NEIMER

Looks like a drug hit. My guess it's that Bosnian gang, the Liberators or whatever they're calling themselves these days, 'cause they left their typical calling card. All the vic's throats were slit before they were turned into meatloaf. Neighbors said there was a long barrage of gunfire and that's about all they could tell us...or want to tell us.

While he talks, Neimer walks slowly around the bodies and stops to point at the coffee table.

NEIMER

Looks like they were after the vials on the table. They grabbed as many as they could and got the hell out in a hurry. As far as our friends here, they all had I.D.s on them. We ran a quick check on them and didn't find much. The apartment belongs to the big guy who was a scientist at a research facility in town. The other two worked there as well.

He puts his palms up in a surrendering gesture.

NEIMER

And that's all I know other than it's really fuckin' cold in here. I'll be out in the hall where it's warmer.

Neimer leaves the room.

Hodgeson pulls on some latex gloves, kneels next to the body by him and carefully turns the head to the side.

HODGESON

This one's wired.

Sergio crouches next to the body.

Attached to the back of the neck at the base of the skull, wrapped across the spinal cord is a small, smooth, chrome colored machine about the size of an index finger. Data ports sit on either end of the machine.

The smooth face has two small lights on it, one red, the other green. The machine is called a "rack" or a "mod". It is a small computer wired directly into the cerebellum.

SERGIO

I couldn't imagine getting one of these things.

HODGESON

Me neither. Too many things could go wrong. I saw this one guy whose rack shorted out and it cooked his brain. That was shortly after it started leaking this stinky green pus everywhere. Nah, I'll pass. I do just fine without one.

SERGIO

Seems like I'm seeing a lot more of these things and most of them look like hack jobs.

Mickey wanders through the apartment, which is a small and unkempt two bedroom unit. Only the living room is completely demolished by gunfire. The other rooms are free of bullet holes but are untidy.

Sergio calls out to Mickey.

SERGIO

Hey, Dev, two of those girls who got hacked up by the guy with the hammer were wired with racks, weren't they?

Mickey enters the living room and gives Sergio a nod. He chews his lip like he is lost in thought.

Hodgeson stands, pulls the latex gloves off his hands and gives the bodies one final glance. He shivers and leaves the apartment.

Mickey picks up one of the plastic vials from the coffee table and holds it up toward the ceiling light, inspecting it. He twists it back and forth a few times, staring at the white crystalline powder inside.

SERGIO

Finding anything good in there?
Secret messages, maybe?

MICKEY

Can you get me a baggie from Hodgeson? Before all of these disappear somewhere inside the pit of no return known as the evidence room, I'd like to have one analyzed and see what it is.

Sergio exits the room. Mickey watches him go. Knowing he is alone in the apartment, he picks up two of the vials from the coffee table and pockets them.

Sergio returns with a plastic evidence baggie in his hand. Mickey drops the vial inside the bag and seals it.

Voices are heard and two forensics officers, BARRETT and WESTMAN, enter the room.

Personality wise, they are on opposite sides of the spectrum. Barrett is a wisecracker, which helps him cope with the disturbing nature of his job, while Westman is grouchy and intensely serious, which is why most cops try to avoid him.

Barrett has a digital camera hanging around his neck on a lanyard and is carrying a rectangular case full of forensics equipment. He sees Sergio and Mickey and his eyes light up.

BARRETT

Hey, they told me you got something special for me here.

Barrett sets down the case near the doorway and focuses on the remains of the largest body.

BARRETT

They didn't say anything about needing a spatula, though.

He smiles a twisted grin.

BARRETT

Say, can I get some grits with my smoked breakfast meat?

Barrett begins snapping pictures of the scene.

Westman slips on latex gloves and waits for Barrett to finish with his photographs before approaching the bodies. He is frowning, obviously not pleased with the sight in front of him.

WESTMAN

Jesus. Can someone tell me what the fuck is wrong with people these days? What the hell happened to the good ol' days when one or two bullets did the job?

BARRETT

He's even frozen into the carpet.
Maybe we can leave him until the
Spring thaw just like how they leave
bodies on the sides of mountains.

Barrett goes to one of the blown out windows and looks across an overdeveloped Phoenix skyline. Snowflakes fall lightly past the windows.

Barrett grins at Mickey.

BARRETT

So much for that theory of global warming, eh? Took my kid sledding at the old golf course by my house today. That was a blast. Anybody got an ice pick so I can start chipping this guy out of the carpet?

Mickey signals to Sergio that it is time to leave. He then turns to Barrett and points at the body wired with the rack.

MICKEY

When they take him down to the freezer, be sure to have them remove the rack and have the contents scanned.

BARRETT

You got it, boss.

SERGIO

Have fun.

Westman shoots him a scathing expression. Sergio gives him a small, mock polite smile. Barrett waves to Sergio and Mickey, who both exit the room.

EXT. APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey and Sergio make their way back through the hallway. Barrett's voice is heard inside the apartment.

BARRETT (O.S.)

Smile for the camera. There you go.
Beautiful. I'm gonna make you famous,
baby.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- LATER

Mickey steps out of an elevator into sparsely decorated, drab-colored hallway of another apartment building. He is by himself and looks tired from the evenings events.

He walks down the short hallway to the end unit. A one foot squared black pad is mounted on the wall to the right of the metal door, as they are next to all the doors on the floor.

Mickey holds his right palm to the black pad. A beam of light from the black pad scans his hand from top to bottom. The beam shuts off and the door clicks open, swinging forward a few inches.

Mickey pushes the door open and enters.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey steps into a small living room with old photos hanging on the walls, a couple of overstuffed chairs and a large sofa sitting in front of a flat screen television that looks several years out of date.

A tiny kitchen and two bedrooms sit off the living room. One of the bedroom doors is partially open, a dull light emanating from inside.

Mickey opens the other bedroom door and enters the room. He removes his jacket and shoulder holster, hanging both from hooks on the wall.

He removes the gun from the holster. A tiny red light on the side of the barrel above the trigger blinks lazily. Mickey touches the index finger of his other hand to a smooth surface on the handle of the gun below his thumb.

The red light on the gun flicks off and Mickey puts the gun back in the holster.

He goes to the kitchen, fixes himself a drink and wanders to the sofa where he sprawls out, enjoying the feel of the cushions beneath him.

After a few moments, the other bedroom door opens completely and Lisa enters the living room. Her hair is cut very short, though not quite a buzzcut.

She looks excited, yet kind of dazed, like she's been staring at a computer or possibly a television for a very long time.

She sees Mickey sprawled out on the sofa. She grins and sits next to him.

LISA
Thought I heard you come in. Catch
any bad guys today?

Mickey shakes his head.

MICKEY
Just the usual shit. Death,
destruction and, as of a few days
ago, lots of snow.

LISA
I was going to say that I've been
here working all day and would really
like to go out for a while, maybe go
dancing or something, but from your
tone of voice I'd say that's a no
go.

MICKEY
Why don't you call a friend? I really
don't feel like going out right now.

Lisa shakes her head and smiles sarcastically.

LISA
You never feel like going out anymore.
Guess you're just getting old, huh?

Lisa turns her head, exposing a small chrome rack fixed to the back of her skull.

Mickey makes an expression like he is trying to hide his disgust at the sight of the rack.

Lisa notices Mickey's displeasure and turns to face him.

LISA
Sorry. I know how much you hate
that.

Lisa produces a long, thin, plastic-encased wire with metal tips on the end. One tip looks like a standard USB connection, the other is smaller, like a banana plug. Lisa waves the wire playfully in Mickey's direction.

LISA
See this? I can connect myself
directly into the computer.

Lisa tone becomes mocking.

LISA
Machines wired into the brain? Who
could do such a terrible thing to
their body? I mean with those horror
stories and all...

Lisa drops the wire and leans on Mickey in a friendly,
affectionate way.

LISA
I wish you could understand how cool
it is having this. I can work the
net faster than you ever could 'cause
your fingers could never move as
fast as what I can do. Almost
completely eliminates the use for
keyboards.

Mickey sighs and runs his fingers through his hair.

MICKEY
I understand all of that but wiring
something mechanical directly into
your brain? And for what, playing
games and surfing the net?

LISA
You know that they're good for more
than that. You just don't like them
'cause of all the criminals, addicts
and street trash who have them, 'cause
no sane person would ever dream of
inserting wires into their brains,
right? Whatever. I can always get
it removed.

Lisa shrugs with a lazy gesture.

LISA
Things have changed a lot since the
days of the old racks with the hit
or miss processors. So stop acting
like my big brother for a change.

She smiles playfully.

LISA

Even if you have no choice genetically. Speaking of which, Mom called today.

MICKEY

What'd she have to say?

LISA

The usual. Paranoid about money as always but she's all excited 'cause some of the women she plays cards with are all going on vacation together. They got a group rate for a cruise on the Atlantis.

MICKEY

A cruise on a decommissioned nuclear submarine hardly sounds like Mom's style. She'd be better off getting wired with a rack so she could spend all day in a virtual garden somewhere.

LISA

The cruise is perfect. She knows she won't like it ahead of time so it gives her something to bitch about when she gets back. She also asked if you were a good roommate.

MICKEY

What'd you tell her?

LISA

That you were great except for the dirty underwear on the floor. And you always being mister happy twenty four hours a day can get to be unnerving at times.

Lisa grins in a mocking sort of way.

LISA

Oh yeah, and the scores of sleazy girls you bring home are sometimes distracting. Just kidding. Imagine how Mom would shit if I said that.

Mickey reaches out and ruffles her hair.

LISA

Mom says she really appreciates you opening your doors to me while I'm between things and getting my shit together. About getting my shit together...I've been good like you asked me to. You haven't, you know, been able to find anything lying around that nobody would notice is missing, have you?

Mickey reaches into his pants pocket, retrieving the two plastic vials, which he hands to Lisa.

Lisa looks them over.

LISA

Where'd it come from? Or don't you know?

MICKEY

Some drug hit we got called into tonight. I'm not even sure what it is.

LISA

It come from that hit where three guys got mowed down over in one of the Quad Towers?

MICKEY

Yeah. How'd...?

Mickey stops and nods acknowledgement when Lisa taps a finger on her rack.

LISA

The eyes in the back of my head. I'm telling you, the amount of info and the speed at which you receive it with these things is great.

Lisa opens one of the vials and taps a very small amount onto her pinkie. She carefully touches her tongue to her finger, tasting the powder.

She waits a couple of moments and licks her finger clean.

MICKEY

Verdict?

LISA

It's definitely a synthetic but way better than a lot of shit that's out there. This one doesn't burn at all. At least I know that some kids didn't make it in their bathroom.

Lisa stands and goes to the kitchen, where she opens a cupboard door and removes a device with a large black handle that doubles as its base.

Sprouting from the top of the device's handle is a short piece of metal with a clear chamber attached to the top and a short pointed attachment jutting from the side of the metal.

The device is an injector and looks like a kind of hookah without tubing.

Lisa returns to the sofa with the contraption, which she sets between her legs. She empties half of one of the vials into the clear chamber on the top of the injector. She closes the lid on the top of the chamber.

Lisa holds the injector in her left hand. Above where her thumb rests are two buttons. Lisa presses one of them. The white powder in the compartment liquefies.

Lisa lifts the injector, holding the pointed attachment to the side of her biceps. She presses the other button and the chamber quickly empties.

Lisa sighs and lazily sets the injector on the sofa, almost knocking it over. Mickey picks it up and sets it on the floor.

Lisa takes a few deep breaths, blinks and smiles. She leans back, partially draping herself over Mickey, who is slouched into the sofa, head thrown back, staring at the ceiling, not paying much attention to her. He's seen her get high many times before.

Lisa twists her head toward Mickey with a stoned smile.

LISA

This stuff is incredible. Don't think I've had anything like this before and I guarantee you haven't.

Lisa blinks with stoned bliss.

LISA
I think you need to try this.

MICKEY
I'll pass.

Lisa sits up and empties the remainder of the vial into the chamber on the injector. She holds it toward Mickey.

LISA
C'mon. It'll make you feel good.
Looks like you need something to
make you feel good.

Mickey stares at her tiredly.

MICKEY
I just want to finish this drink and
go to sleep. Maybe some other time.

Lisa lies down almost on top of Mickey, holding the injector just inches from his biceps.

LISA
It's much better than passing out in
front of the TV. Just give it a
try.

MICKEY
I don't do that stuff anymore. You
know that.

LISA
You've never done this stuff. Just
try it. If you don't like it, you
can blame me later.

Mickey shrugs at her with an expression that says he gives in.

Lisa presses the button on the injector, liquefying the contents and presses the injector into Mickey's biceps. The chamber empties, which causes Mickey to flinch slightly.

Lisa sets the injector on the floor but continues to lie across Mickey. She closes her eyes, appearing to shiver with delight.

Mickey blinks several times, enjoying the effects of the drug.

LISA
Whatcha think? Nice, huh?

The tension seems to leave Mickey and he lets out a murmured "yes".

LISA
Makes me feel so anxious. So...

Her voice trails off as she starts playing with the buttons on Mickey's shirt. She undoes the top two buttons and puts her hands lightly on Mickey's chest. She plants two small kisses on his chest and reaches up to caress Mickey's face.

Mickey seizes both of Lisa's wrists, a look of shock and worry on his face.

His breathing becomes irregular, a BUZZING sound burning in his ears. His expression of worry goes slack. He stares at Lisa as if he's staring right through her like she's not there.

He loosens his grip on Lisa's wrists.

Lisa caresses Mickey's face and moves to kiss him. Their lips meet. It is a stoned, passionless kiss from Mickey's end.

Lisa continues kissing him. His hands rise and stroke the sides of Lisa's head.

The buzzing in Mickey's ears intensifies and as if he were instantly plugged in, Mickey comes to life and the kissing becomes fast and frantic, but he still doesn't seem to recognize or realize who he is kissing.

They both look like they're in a trance where the only thing on their minds is sex.

Lisa tears open Mickey's shirt, while he claws and yanks at her clothes.

They are both soon undressed and Lisa is on top of Mickey. The sex is frantic and they are both in their own worlds where who they're having sex with isn't important, only the act of having sex itself.

Both of them climax, though they are still high and unaware of what is happening. They clutch each other, each letting out loud gasps.

Only a couple of moments pass before they start with the frantic sex again.

INT. PEOPLE MOVER -- MORNING

Public transportation that is a cross between a bus and the subway. It is packed with people on their way to work. All are bundled up in warm clothes.

Mickey stands next to a window, half looking out at the clear morning and the sun sitting above the mountains to the east, half looking at his reflection in the window.

His reflection shows a man even more tired than the night before, mixed with an expression of shame and disgust.

TV monitors attached to the ceiling loudly advertise the new Mega Mall and all of the stores it features.

Mickey pulls up his collar and shrugs his neck and shoulders together. Even with all the bodies in the people mover, it still looks cold inside the cabin.

CITY STREET -- LATER

Mickey steps off the vehicle and heads toward the police station. His hands are jammed in the pockets of his wool trenchcoat. Steam puffs from his mouth as he walks.

Snow sits off the sidewalk in drifts a foot to two feet deep.

Mickey walks up the steps of the gray, four story police station and goes inside.

INT. POLICE STATION -- CONTINUOUS

The waiting area is packed with people sitting in uncomfortable plastic chairs or milling around, many of whom are pacing impatiently.

Mickey makes his way through the crowd to an access door. He opens his badge and holds it to a pad at the side of the door and the door slides open.

As Mickey steps through, a disheveled woman of indeterminate age with soot smeared skin, wearing a faded silver down jacket stuffed with rags latches on to his arm.

She looks almost like a walking Jiffy Pop container that popped most of its contents.

SOOT FACED WOMAN
Please, officer. My little boy
disappeared last night and I...

Mickey gestures to the guard in black body armor standing by the access door. Before the woman can finish speaking, the guard drags her back into the waiting area.

Mickey climbs the steps to the second floor, stopping at a vending machine to get a cup of coffee and a plastic wrapped food item that advertises on the label in big, happy letters, "Tastes Like Real Sausage".

Mickey walks into the Homicide Department and sits at his desk, a hulking metal structure that looks ancient.

Sergio's identical desk faces Mickey's. Sergio sits at his desk, intently scrolling through documents on the computer in front of him. He is also drinking coffee and eating the mystery food that tastes like sausage.

Sergio looks up from the monitor briefly and turns his attention back to the screen.

SERGIO
Hey, Dev. You're gonna like this
one. You ready?

Mickey speaks with his mouth full of food.

MICKEY
Sure. Hit me.

Sergio leans back slightly in his chair.

SERGIO
Someone went on a spree last night
shooting winos and other street trash
with an anti-tank cannon. They've
found the remains of five people so
far. If you can call them remains.

MICKEY

Anti-tank cannon? Very creative.

SERGIO

And it's a model that hasn't been produced in ten years. Used to be popular with terrorist groups in the Middle East. Before the bomb ended their Holy War, anyway. What do you want to bet the killer bought the thing on line?

Sergio types a couple of commands on the keyboard. He pauses for a moment and stares at the monitor with disgusted awe.

SERGIO

Man, there's nothing left of them.

Mickey turns on the computer on his desk.

MICKEY

Anything new on those three meat jobs from last night?

Sergio peers up from his monitor.

SERGIO

Nothing so far. No prints were found in the room that didn't belong to one of the three. Like Neimer said last night, the background check on them didn't turn up anything. All three of them had clean records. Though I did think it interesting that the research lab they all worked for is a drug testing facility. They're supposed to be close to curing the common cold.

Sergio points at Mickey's computer.

SERGIO

There's a report for you to check out on that one guy's rack. I looked at it but there's nothing all that special.

Mickey accesses his files on the computer and opens the file pertaining to the dead man's rack.

An illustration of the dead man's rack lights up the screen and begins to slowly rotate counterclockwise. Text begins to scroll to the side of the illustration.

INSERT -- TEXT

"Rack was specially designed for complex mathematical computations. A thorough examination of the rack found nothing more than mathematical figures and notations. Rack is tagged and in storage if further tests and inspections are required."

RETURN TO SCENE

Mickey stares at the monitor for a moment and begins typing.

INSERT -- COMPUTER TEXT

"Awaiting results of analysis of powdered drug found at same scene as the corpse wearing the rack. Assume it's only a standard synthetic narcotic but want to know for sure."

RETURN TO SCENE

Mickey hits the SEND function on the computer. He opens a file on the computer and the screen fills with the same pictures he was looking at in the police car the night before: photos of the women killed with a hammer.

Mickey leans back in his chair, staring at the pictures and carefully reading the text with his chin resting on a closed fist.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Mickey is still at his desk, staring at the pictures on the computer monitor.

A small window appears in the upper corner of the monitor, signaling that there is an incoming call. A face appears in the window.

The window increases to the size of the screen, showing the face of EVAN CHANDLER. He is in his fifties, with black-framed glasses and long, gray hair that is tied back but still sticks out wildly in a few places, making him look a little bit like a mad scientist.

EVAN

Hey, Dev, got some results on that powder that you wanted. It's a synthetic, like you said, but it's a new one. I haven't seen this one before.

MICKEY

What is it?

EVAN

Aphrodisiac, mostly. There's also something else in there that I'm not really sure about. Might be some kind of effect enhancer. You know, something to give it a little extra kick.

MICKEY

Is it dangerous?

Evan smiles politely.

EVAN

All this shit is dangerous, my friend.

MICKEY

I mean are we going to see a bunch of people oh-deeing on it like that Chinese stuff a couple years ago?

EVAN

Always a possibility but it isn't the same kind of stuff. You want me to run more tests or just call it another drug made for the party crowd and leave it at that?

MICKEY

If you have some extra time, it would be nice to know what it is and if it's lethal.

EVAN

Can do. I'll let you know what I find.

Evan's face disappears and the window closes, returning the photos and text to the monitor screen.

EXT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- EVENING

Sergio's car stops in front of the building. Mickey climbs out of the passenger side. He shuts the car door and lightly taps on the roof. The car drives away and honks twice.

Mickey walks toward the gated entrance of the building.

EXT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Mickey stands in the hallway outside his apartment. He starts to lift his hand to the palmpad next to the door but stops.

He is visibly nervous. He looks up at the ceiling and rubs his hands together a couple of times. He takes a deep breath and lifts his hand to the palmpad.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

The apartment is empty. Mickey breathes a sigh of relief.

He retreats to his bedroom, ditches his gun and shoulder holster, kicks off his shoes and heads back into the living room and into the kitchen. He pours himself a drink and takes a seat on the couch where he sinks into the cushions.

He takes a sip of his drink and notices a handwritten note on the coffee table.

INSERT -- NOTE

"Gone out for the night. Looking for some trouble."

BACK TO SCENE

Mickey continues to look slightly nervous and fidgety.

After a few moments he turns on the television. He flips through the channels, sees nothing that interests him and shuts off the television.

He drains his glass and lies down on the sofa. Within moments, his eyes are closed.

MICKEY'S DREAM -- INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Mickey and Lisa are having sex on Mickey's bed. As with the night before, there is little or no sense of recognition on either of their faces.

A woman steps from the shadows. She is naked, her hair cut short, a rack fused to the back of her skull.

She silently climbs into the bed behind Mickey and caresses both Mickey and Lisa's bodies.

CITY STREET -- VIDEO SCREEN -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

The screen flips on. It is a slightly fuzzy screen set up like a computer monitor with tool bars lining both the top and bottom of the screen and a couple of icons sitting on the far left side.

The image on the screen appears to be video shot at night by someone walking down a street with a video camera.

Only the sounds of a BEATING HEART and BREATHING is heard.

A few people walk by the screen, not paying attention or are unaware they are being filmed. It is evident that the camera is the eyes of the killer.

He continues walking while surveying the area. More people are seen in the distance standing in front of what looks like an upscale nightclub.

The killer stops walking.

The words "LOAD: PERSONALITY 2" appear in the upper right corner of the screen and disappear after a moment.

He continues walking, stopping at the doors to the nightclub. The people around the entrance are also unaware they're being filmed.

He opens the doors to the club and enters.

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- VIDEO SCREEN -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

A pair of hands removes money from a wallet to pay the cashier.

The cashier, a woman in her twenties, chews gum with a bored expression on her face.

He moves through the club, which is packed with people on a dance floor. Loud ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC is heard over the beating of the heart and the breathing.

The killer surveys the crowded bar.

Two women standing next to each other at the bar come into view and are focused on. They're both in their late twenties, extremely attractive and dressed to impress. He scans them top to bottom.

He moves toward the bar, stopping when he is next to the women.

He turns toward the women. After a moment the woman closest to him makes eye contact and flashes an overly flirty, very sexual smile. A moment later, the woman next to her also gives him a flirty smile.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- MORNING

Mickey lies in his bed face sticking out from under a thick quilt. He looks tiredly in the direction of the clock sitting on the nightstand next to the bed.

He sits up and swings his legs off the side of the bed, head hanging down. He rubs his face and runs his fingers through his hair a few times.

He looks at the clock again and something catches his eye: an injector and an empty vial sitting behind the clock.

Mickey twists his body around, facing the other side of the bed. He grabs the quilt and slowly tugs it down. The back of Lisa's head comes into view followed by the head of the woman she is curled up with.

Mickey closes his eyes with a pained expression and stands. He takes one more quick glance at the sleeping women and stares upward, as if looking at an unseen god.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Mickey walks toward the doors marked "HOMICIDE" with a cup of coffee in his hand. The doors open and a middle aged Detective named REESE walks through and makes a slight frown while passing by Mickey.

REESE

If it isn't Detective Devereaux, the walking autopsy. Looks like your boy struck again.

Reese continues down the hall.

Mickey pushes the door open and goes to his desk. Sergio reclines in his chair with a cup of coffee in his hand.

 SERGIO
 Have a rough one last night?

 MICKEY
 Not any worse than any other. Just
 didn't sleep at all.

Sergio smiles slightly and holds up a wrapped food item from the vending machine.

 SERGIO
 Have a hangover remedy and cure for
 insomnia in the form of an artificial
 food product. It works like a charm.

Sergio tosses the package to Mickey, who snatches it out of the air with his free hand.

The package reads, "Tastes Like Real (Chinese Characters)".

Mickey opens the wrapper and takes a bite.

 SERGIO
 Three bodies were found this morning.
 Looks like our guy. You ready to
 head over there or do you need a few
 to eat and caffeinate?

 MICKEY
 I'll medicate in the car. Let's go
 see what we got.

INT. APARTMENT -- LATER

Mickey and Sergio enter. The apartment is lavishly furnished. It is evident the residents had a lot of money to spend. Plenty of expensive artwork hangs on the walls.

Two sheets of black plastic cover bodies on a bloodstained, light colored carpet.

A handful of cops, including Barrett, are in the apartment.

Barrett kneels next to a third body, a woman, covered with black plastic up to her neck.

The body is one of the flirty women from the nightclub.

Barrett wears latex gloves and inspects the woman's skull, the side and back of which is completely smashed in.

He snaps a photo of the body, looking up when Sergio and Mickey approach.

BARRETT

Good morning, gentlemen. Your boy's at it again, though he seems to be getting sloppy or has decided to become an equal opportunity killer.

Barrett jerks his thumb over his shoulder at the two covered bodies.

BARRETT

He iced his first guy last night. Here's what I figured happened. The girls invite your guy over for a little party. The drugs come out. They start fooling around and at some point during all the fun he loses it, goes out of control and does 'em all in. I'm not sure where the dead guy fits into all this. The killer didn't molest him, nor did the dead guy see any sexual action prior to death.

Barrett shrugs and shakes his head.

BARRETT

The girls on the other hand, he really did a number on them. Maybe I'm mistaken but with the other victims, he did them in, fucked them once and called it a day. With these girls, he did both of them several times after he smashed their heads in. And the sex was especially ferocious. He left blood streaks in the carpet from thrusting into them.

SERGIO

And none of the neighbors heard a thing?

BARRETT

Negative. Nothing there. Neighbors on both sides weren't any help. Funny 'cause the neighbors on that side have called in noise complaints on her before for loud music and loud sex.

He points at the body of the flirty girl from the night club and motions at the body of the other woman.

BARRETT

That girl has strangle marks so maybe that's why she didn't make much noise but this girl here wasn't strangled.

Barrett stands and pulls the gloves off his hands.

BARRETT

When you going to get this guy off the street so the first thing I see in the morning isn't this really messy stuff? Good old fashioned bullet wounds. I'll take those any day.

Barrett gestures at the partially uncovered body.

BARRETT

You recognize her?

MICKEY

Should I?

BARRETT

Exotica Brite. Porn star. She's huge. Or was for a while, anyway.

Barrett taps an index finger on the back of his skull like he is tapping on an invisible rack.

BARRETT

Her thing is she's wired and for a price, other wired people could jack into a link and feel exactly what it felt like to be Exotica Brite fucking someone. Sensations, smells, tastes, sounds, everything. All fed from her rack into the net and into other people's minds. If she was fucking someone with a rack, the audience, if you want to call them that, could chose which partner they wanted to be. Pretty wild, huh?

Barrett smiles like teenagers do when they talk about sex.

BARRETT

Ever been curious to know what sex feels like from a woman's perspective?

MICKEY

Not really.

Mickey glances around the room.

MICKEY

I take it this is her place?

BARRETT

Oh yeah. The other girl is her live-in girlfriend. The guy, his name's Stevens. Used to be in the porn biz but recently decided to start doing something a little less seedy. My guess is he was a friend staying here for a while or was brought here before your boy specifically to join in the orgy. Your boy probably had no idea Stevens was here. Poor bastard walks out of the bedroom expecting a party, surprises the hell out of your boy and it was about that time that he decided to start doing his work.

Mickey slips on a pair of latex gloves and lifts the sheets from the faces of the other bodies. The dead man's skull is crushed into a pulp.

Sergio disappears into a bedroom.

BARRETT

I already sent in fingerprint and semen samples but being that I'm pretty sure it's your boy, like before, it probably won't turn up anything.

Mickey turns the head of the dead man and sees he is wired with a rack, which is little more than crushed metal now.

Turning the head of the girl next to him reveals she too is wired but her rack is intact, though the side and back of her skull is shattered.

Mickey points at the rack.

MICKEY

How much you know about these things?

BARRETT

I don't know, a bit I guess. You know, what I read about them or hear from the loonies I run into who have them. Ask Hodgeson. He's the gaming fanatic. If anyone would know about them it would be him.

MICKEY

If they can be used to feed data from the net directly into the brain, can they be used to record data as well?

Barrett purses his lips together.

BARRETT

Interesting idea. Keep talking.

MICKEY

If it's got it's own power supply and it's wired directly into the brain, it can still bounce information from the brain and back even when it's not hooked to the net, right?

Mickey points at Stevens' body.

MICKEY

If this guy here walks in on our boy while he's killing the girls and our boy kills him right at that moment, could there be an image of the killer left in the rack, especially if the killer is the very last thing Stevens sees before having his head smashed in?

Mickey touches a piece of the rack dangling from Stevens' skull.

MICKEY

And if so, would that be the reason why he destroyed Stevens' rack even after he'd already hit him from the front and killed him? He wouldn't need to destroy the girls' racks cause he hit them both from behind, so he wasn't the last thing they saw. Could it be that he smashed in the rack and the back of his skull as an afterthought, maybe a form of protection?

BARRETT

Destroying the rack 'cause it could be almost like a camera? Crazy but interesting idea. So if we remove what's left of Stevens' rack and can retrieve any information from it, we could possibly be looking right at a photo of our guy? Let's give it a try. Nothing to lose.

Sergio emerges from the bedroom carrying a baggie with plastic vials full of a powdered drug. The vials are identical to the vials Mickey took from the apartment with the dead men inside.

SERGIO

He isn't the materialistic type. There's money and all kinds of expensive things lying around in there. That girl could spend money. You should see all the stupid shit in there.

Sergio shakes the baggie.

SERGIO

There's a bunch of these things that are empty and you can bet it isn't cheap, either. Looks like she'd been partying for several days.

Sergio hands the baggie to Mickey.

SERGIO

Look at the vials. Looks like the same shit from that hit the other night.

Mickey holds up the baggie and looks at the vial inside with a blank expression.

Sergio's cell phone goes off. He answers it on the second buzz.

SERGIO

Mendoza. Whatcha got for me?

Sergio listens for a couple of moments and hangs up.

SERGIO

The word's already leaked about this Exotica Brite girl. Station's gotten a few phone calls from people who said they saw her last night at a club she frequents.

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- LATER

Mickey and Sergio follow an employee through a nightclub called "PROTOTYPE", which is several hours away from opening. With the lights off and no patrons inside, the place has a cavernous, almost spooky feel to it.

The club employee leads the way to a closed door marked "PRIVATE". He knocks once and opens the door. He enters and Mickey and Sergio follow.

The nightclub's owner, BENNY BOYER, sits behind a desk, on top of which is a computer monitor that is more than half as wide as the desk. A long cord connects the rack on the back of Benny's head to the computer.

Benny is middle aged, with the beginnings of a large belly, black crew cut hair, hairy chest, a beard and mustache. He wears a black leather jacket with no shirt underneath.

He is leaning back in his seat with an intense expression on his face as the computer rapidly scrolls through screens during the downloading process. He takes his time acknowledging the presence of the cops.

The monitor goes black and Benny turns to face the cops, not bothering to unplug the cord from his rack. He crosses his hands across his chest and assumes a business-like air.

EMPLOYEE

Benny, these are the guys who called
a little while ago.

The employee leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

Mickey starts to open his badge but Benny waves at him to close it.

BENNY

That's not necessary. I think I
already know who you are.

MICKEY

Then let's get right to it. You
know one of your patrons was killed
last night?

BENNY

There's all kinds of rumors buzzing
around the net but now I guess I
know it's true.

SERGIO

Then you know who she was?

BENNY

Know?

Benny smiles with a lascivious smirk.

BENNY

Oh, I knew her. Fucked her many
times. 'Course lots of people fucked
her. Or were her while being fucked.

He taps on his rack twice with an index finger.

BENNY

The wonders of technology. Safe, disease-free sex and you never have to fuck with getting shot down by somebody you really want. All you have to do is jack in and you can be whoever you want to be and fuck whoever you want to fuck. And you never have to play games or deal with shitty attitudes from people who think they're better than you are. But I suppose you probably already know all that.

SERGIO

Did you know her outside of the net?

BENNY

Exotica? Sure. She was a regular. Guys get word that she hangs out here, you can bet they show up to see for themselves. She was actually a much nicer girl than what you might expect.

MICKEY

You see her talking to anyone last night?

Benny scoffs.

BENNY

Only about half the fuckin' bar. You think whoever deleted her was here last night?

MICKEY

Strong possibility. See her leave with anyone?

BENNY

Just that girl she's always with. Now that girl needs to be on the net. She's very fuckable. That way she moves when she's dancing? I'd skip the net and fuck her in person if I could.

MICKEY

You see a lot of drugs in your bar?

BENNY

It's a nightclub. I just supply people with the legal drugs and hope they keep coming back for more. Whatever else they put in their bodies or do to themselves is none of my business.

MICKEY

You seen a new drug being passed around?

BENNY

You kidding? There's a new drug on the market every week. Why should I worry about the latest synthetic or shit that some kids cooked up with things they stole from the store? I got better things to concern myself with.

SERGIO

We'd like to talk to the bartender who served her last night.

BENNY

There was lots of bartenders taking care of her and her friend. One of 'em brought you up here just now. If that's all, I have business to attend to.

Benny turns his attention back to the monitor on his desk, obviously expecting Mickey and Sergio to show themselves out.

SERGIO

Not at all concerned by what might happen to your business if people find out a killer was here last night?

Benny's expression is slightly bored irritation.

BENNY

Why should I be? I'm sure there's killers in here every night. There's killers everywhere, pal. As long as they come in here and spend money, I could give a shit.

TV NEWSCAST

A female anchor in her late forties is reporting. She's had so many facelifts that she looks like a talking skeleton and a store mannequin and everything about her, especially her smile, is unnatural.

FEMALE ANCHOR

In a few minutes we'll have updates on the thousands killed in Brazilian mudslides and the Mafia coup in Russia. But first, here at home, our news is about the unusually cold weather here in the Valley.

Images of striking sanitation workers floats next to the woman, followed by video of downed power lines.

FEMALE ANCHOR

Sanitation workers are currently on strike because of the cold weather and homeless shelters are overflowing, filled to over two hundred percent capacity. Several residents of the Sunshine Mountain neighborhood in north Phoenix froze to death overnight when ice and frozen rain brought down power lines late yesterday afternoon. Temperatures are expected to rise tomorrow.

The image on the screen next to the Anchor changes from a picture of a frozen thermometer to an illustration of a hand wielding a hammer.

FEMALE ANCHOR

In other local news, the madman now being dubbed the "Hammer Killer" claimed three more victims last night. The identities of the victims are still not known and there are no leads in the case so far. Last night's homicides brings the number of murders attributed to the Hammer Killer to six.

The anchor smiles and speaks in an overwhelmingly cheery tone.

FEMALE ANCHOR

And now sports!

The television is turned to a different station.

TV COMMERCIAL

A fast talking, smarmy-looking salesman fills the screen along with the logo for a store called Fast Eddie's Electronix Emporium (FE-3)

FAST EDDIE

Are you scared of rack-based or rack-enhanced forms of pleasure? If so, we have just the thing for you.

Fast Eddie is replaced by a picture of a short, squat machine that looks like a cross between R2D2 and a modified trash can with various sized holes in it and several different arm-like electronic attachments sticking out of the side.

FAST EDDIE (V.O.)

The LOVEBOT 7000XR, the newest in non rack-based pleasure systems. Available in "his" and "hers" models and just in this week is the "couples" model that's guaranteed to please both partners.

A tanned, muscular, scantily clad and extremely happy couple walk on either side of the trashcan-like LOVEBOT. They gaze lovingly at the machine and smile a sexy, all-knowing expression at one another.

Fast Eddie returns to the screen.

FAST EDDIE

Come on down to Fast Eddie's Electronix Emporium. We're about a lot more than just stereos and we'll rock your world in more ways than one.

TV COMMERCIAL

Two very wealthy, overly happy couples stand on a bright and sunny golf course. One of the women picks up a club and gets ready to tee off. Her male partner grins at her and turns to the camera.

GOLFING MAN

Do you want to improve your golf game? Of course you do. Who doesn't want to improve their swing? Now, with help from the--.

The television station is switched again.

NEWS FOOTAGE

A shot of the mass chaos created by the mudslides in Brazil that was mentioned by the female anchor.

The television station is changed once more.

TV NEWSCAST

A different broadcast, with a female anchor who is just as much of a plastic surgery disaster as the previous female anchor. Her enormous breasts make her look more like a porn star than a news reporter.

FEMALE ANCHOR #2

Today saw the official creation of the Republic of Texas following their succession from the Union less than a month ago. A local economist had this to say about it.

The anchor is replaced by an older man dressed in a business suit.

ECONOMIST

I say fuck 'em. I'm glad to see them go. Maybe they'll stay the hell in their new country or whatever they call it and leave the rest of us alone. And if we're real lucky they'll stuff their politicians and their sports teams up their asses while they're at it.

The camera returns to the female anchor.

FEMALE ANCHOR #2

Utah is the next State asking for succession. Nobody is currently opposing the measure.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

The door opens and Mickey steps inside to find the apartment is dark other than little bits of light from the setting sun filtering in through the blinds.

Mickey walks toward his room passing the couch where Lisa is lying still in a fetal position staring at the wall.

Mickey turns on a lamp by the couch and sees Lisa. She has been crying. Her eyes are red and raw but dry.

Lisa doesn't look at him. Her focus remains on the wall.

MICKEY

I think we need to talk.

Lisa continues staring at the wall.

LISA

They found Exotica Brite murdered this morning, didn't they?

Mickey nods.

MICKEY

We're pretty sure she was killed by a guy Serg and I are trying to catch.

Mickey eyes Lisa with a slightly confused expression.

MICKEY

What does that have to do with how you're feeling right now?

Lisa angrily twists her head toward him.

LISA

What does it have to do with how I'm feeling right now? It has everything to do with how I'm feeling. I was there at that club last night. I saw her. I even watched her for a while. I watched people talk to her. She looked so good...All those people wanting to meet her and be near her.

MICKEY

I still don't see what that has to do--

Lisa sits up and interrupts him.

LISA

Don't you see what I'm saying? I was there last night. Whoever killed her was probably there too. That could have been me last night instead of her. Whoever killed her probably looked right at me at some point. That could have been me, Mickey! That could have fucking been me that got murdered last night!

MICKEY

That's what you're upset about? Somebody deleting a porn star?

LISA

Aren't you listening to me? What if that was me last night? This is your case, right? What if that was me you had to scrape off the floor of some apartment?

Tears roll down Lisa's cheeks.

LISA

I looked right at her and she looked back at me. Her eyes were so... hungry.

There is a couple moments of silence. When Mickey finally speaks his words come out awkwardly.

MICKEY

We need to talk about what happened between us the last two nights. It's really fucking with my head.

LISA

What is?

MICKEY

What we did.

Lisa leans back into the sofa cushions, crosses her arms and stares at Mickey.

LISA

And what exactly is it do you think we did?

MICKEY

Why are you playing this game with me? You know what we did.

LISA

And what did we do?

MICKEY

Okay, I'll play your game. What did we do? We fucked. There. I said it. You're my sister and we fucked. And last night we both fucked that girl, whoever she was.

LISA

I didn't fuck you and I know you didn't fuck me. I'll agree with the statement about you fucking the girl, though who knows who she was at the time.

MICKEY

What does that mean, who she was at the time?

LISA

Just like it sounds. Let me ask you a question. You say you fucked me two nights in a row. Do you remember fucking me?

MICKEY

No, because of the drugs.

LISA

So you don't remember fucking me because of the drugs. Then how do you know you fucked me?

MICKEY

Because, God damn it, both mornings
I woke up naked in bed next to you
wrapped in stained sheets. If it
wasn't you I was having sex with,
then who the hell was it?

LISA

It was my body but it wasn't me.

Mickey closes his eyes, upset.

MICKEY

Why are you doing this?

LISA

Let me try to put things into
perspective for you. Let's pose a
hypothetical question: what makes
you who you are, your personality,
that is? You are the information
that the computer called your brain
carries inside of it.

Lisa taps an index finger on her forehead.

LISA

Everything's in there. Your sense
of who you are, emotions, memories,
intellect and so on. What if you
removed your brain temporarily and
replaced it with something else?
Would you still be you?

MICKEY

Physically, yes.

LISA

You might look like you but you
wouldn't be you anymore.

Lisa points a finger toward her rack.

LISA

See this thing that you hate so much? This rack or mod or enhancer or whatever you want to call it, allows me to temporarily change personalities if I so desire. If I want to be someone else, I can be someone else. I just download a personality and use it when I want to. I always use different personalities when I have sex. It makes sex more exciting and sometimes mysterious.

MICKEY

So you're telling me that you weren't yourself but rather some downloaded fake personality while we were having sex.

Mickey smiles bittersweetly.

MICKEY

So who were you pretending to be?

LISA

Not pretending. Was. Last night I was Exotica Brite, actually.

Lisa smiles with a small shrug that implies "your loss".

LISA

Too bad you were all zoned on powder to realize you were fucking Exotica Brite. She's every guy's dream date and last night you got to share her with another girl. Most guys would kill for that.

MICKEY

And you think that makes what happened both nights okay? Because you were borrowing someone else's personality?

LISA

Well, sure, 'cause I wasn't me, I was her.

MICKEY

If you can switch between personas that easy, how do I know you're really you right now?

LISA

You'd know, trust me.

MICKEY

And what does it do to my head when I wake up knowing I had sex with my sister the night before and was so high I didn't realize what I was doing?

LISA

We're going in circles. When are you going to realize that we're little more than bags of meat? If you were wired we wouldn't be having this conversation. As it was, you didn't remember anything from the last couple of nights anyway, right?

MICKEY

Just small, vague details.

LISA

But I'll bet you remember how intense the sex was, though, don't you? It's that drug. It's good stuff. I'd like to get more.

MICKEY

I can't do this. It's morally wrong.

LISA

Morally wrong? Since when are you the moral and righteous one? Besides, what's morally wrong about sex with someone who looks like your sister but isn't? Is that incest? I wish you'd see it really isn't a big deal. It was just sex.

Mickey's voice bleeds with sarcasm.

MICKEY

Sex between strangers.

LISA

That's right. Just a little fling.

MICKEY

That girl last night was wired too, wasn't she? Who was she pretending to be?

LISA

Who knows, who cares? But you can bet that she probably wasn't the person that she is if you talked to her right at this very moment. If we had more of that stuff, tonight I could be anyone you wanted me to be.

Mickey makes a repulsed expression.

LISA

I don't have a problem with it and I don't see why you should either.

MICKEY

That's why people get wired, so they can forget about who they are?

LISA

There's all kinds of reasons for getting it done. Here, try this one out. You keep calling your killer a "he". Who says it can't be a woman with a downloaded personality?

MICKEY

The blows to the victims' heads are too powerful. Now you're just fucking with me, aren't you?

Lisa shakes her head.

LISA

I'm serious. What if you could download things like strength enhancers?

MICKEY

Through the net? Now I know you're fucking with me.

LISA
Just something to think about.

Mickey sits on the opposite side of the sofa. He and Lisa stare at each other.

SHOPPING MALL -- DAY

The mall is an open air building that looks like an extremely large strip mall.

The snow has melted from the ground, but it still looks cold outside.

Mickey walks toward the mall, head hunched down into his trenchcoat, hands jammed inside the pockets.

He walks past the shops, stopping at the last one, a place covered in bright neon with blazing red letters above the door that says "TechniKation".

Mickey enters.

INT. STORE -- CONTINUOUS

The place is filled with electronic devices, different styles of racks/enhancers, software and programs. The neon lighting is as bright as the outside lighting.

A sign hanging on the doorway to a back office advertises, "Discount Tattoo Removal."

Only one other customer is in the store. He is occupied, looking intently at the display cabinets.

A moment later, KELTON emerges from the back room.

Kelton is a burly man built like a pro wrestler. He wears jeans and a short sleeve shirt with arms covered in tattoos bulging out of the sleeves. His head is shaved. A shiny chrome rack on the back of his neck gleams in the neon.

Kelton stops in his tracks when he sees Mickey. He produces a cigarette and lights it.

After Kelton takes a couple of drags off his cigarette, he moves toward Mickey.

KELTON

Long time, no see, Officer Devereaux.
Detective Devereaux now, isn't it?

MICKEY

How're things, Kelton?

Though both men speak in polite tones, there is an underlying feeling of animosity between them. They don't get any closer to each other than is necessary.

KELTON

Not bad, but I've been better.

Kelton makes a snorting noise and smiles mischievously.

KELTON

Did you come in to finally get wired?
I'm telling you, man, you'd love it.
There's all kinds of things you can
do with it. We could set you up
with any kind of system you wanted.

Kelton reaches into a display cabinet and pulls out a paperback book-sized box with a suggestive picture of Exotica Brite on the front.

KELTON

Like this for instance. You could
stay home and do nothing but fuck
her for days on end and she'd never
do you the same way twice unless you
asked her to. Can't get that kind
of action without a rack. Or most
guys can't, anyway.

MICKEY

I've kinda had my fill of her lately.
Shame she won't be making any more
of those.

KELTON

So I heard. At least some of us
will always have her fresh and young
whenever we want her. I'll bet you
don't even remember when we busted
her several years back. She wasn't
calling herself Exotica yet and she
wasn't dying her hair.

MICKEY

You're right, I don't remember.

KELTON

Solicitation and carrying synthetics with the intent to sell. You almost broke my nose when I tried to get her to blow me in the car.

MICKEY

That was her?

KELTON

Yeah. That was right before...Things went bad.

Kelton takes a long drag on his cigarette.

KELTON

But I'm sure you ain't here to bullshit about the old days so whattaya want?

MICKEY

I actually wanted to know what you could tell me about a new powder that's out on the street.

Kelton folds his arms across his stomach, takes another drag on the smoke and makes a smile that is halfway between sarcastic and mischievous.

KELTON

And why do you think I'd know anything about street drugs, Officer Devereaux?

MICKEY

'Cause I know what kinds of people shop at your store and because it's an aphrodisiac that might rival racks as far as sexual stimulation is concerned. Never seen it before a couple of days ago but now it seems to be everywhere I look.

Kelton stares lazily in the direction of the lone customer, who is still intently looking in the display counters on the opposite end of the store. Kelton focuses his attention back on Mickey.

KELTON

I think you're looking for what the street kids and the wireheads call "Thermal" or "Heat".

MICKEY

Any idea where it came from?

KELTON

Heard a few rumors. Nothing concrete. Might be coming in from Eastern Europe. Why you want to know? You looking to relive some of the old days or something?

Kelton's smile is almost dangerous.

KELTON

You want to score some?

Mickey ignores him.

MICKEY

Like I said, until a few days ago I'd never seen it or heard of it before. I just wanted to see if you knew anything about it.

Kelton shrugs.

KELTON

Just rumors, though from what I hear, the stuff is a killer high and turns you into a non-stop fuck machine.

MICKEY

But you don't speak from experience?

KELTON

Being awfully nosey, aren't you? C'mon, Mick, we go way back but we're on different ends of the badge now.

MICKEY

I didn't come here to bust you. Even if we had our falling out, you were once a friend and I'm not here to cause trouble.

At the word "friend", Kelton lifts an eyebrow.

MICKEY

I just thought that if anybody could answer a few questions for me, it'd be you.

KELTON

I'm touched that you think so highly of me.

MICKEY

One other thing, you know anything about three guys who got iced a couple of nights ago possibly because of their connection to Thermal?

Kelton shakes his head with a slight frown.

KELTON

Is that it? How 'bout we get you wired now? Think about this for a moment: racks are going to make most drugs passé because with a rack you can simulate the highs of most drugs without any of the negative effects on the body, basically eliminating the dangerous side of getting high. Not to mention that the sex you can have when you're wired takes the meaning of orgasm to a whole new level.

Mickey starts walking toward the exit.

Kelton calls after him.

KELTON

Imagine it, Mick, even a guy like you could have instant, complete success with women all the time. You stop back by and let me know if you need me to get a hold of some Thermal for you.

Mickey leaves the store.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Mickey approaches his desk. He undoes his jacket, tosses it over the back of his chair and sits.

Sergio sits at his desk, scrolling through files on the computer.

After a moment Sergio looks up at Mickey.

SERGIO

Did your lead pan out?

MICKEY

Not really, but I found out that our mystery drug is called Thermal.

SERGIO

As we expected, the finger prints and DNA from last night are a match with the others but we still can't find any records of either. I decided to skip looking through arrest records and start on the DNA files from hospitals. Interesting thing about this Thermal. Our boy's addicted to the stuff.

MICKEY

How do we know that?

SERGIO

Evan said our boy's semen has high concentrations of it. Weird, huh? Wonder what the hell the stuff is.

MICKEY

Aphrodisiac of some kind.

SERGIO

You ever curious about what any of this stuff is like? From what it sounds like, some of these synthetic drugs are a great high. I wouldn't mind giving some of it a try if I knew the side effects weren't bad.

Mickey stares at his computer monitor, pretending to be disinterested in talk about drugs.

MICKEY

Sure. Who wouldn't want to boost their sex lives? Did Evan say anything about being any closer to finding out what the mystery component of the drug is?

SERGIO

He didn't mention anything about it. Hey, I don't mean to change the subject but Marissa asked me if you and Lisa were free for dinner this weekend and I said I didn't know. Want to come over? There'll be food and beverages and talking about work isn't allowed.

MICKEY

I don't know about Lisa but it sounds good to me.

SERGIO

How's she doing?

MICKEY

Fine. She's gone back work doing freelance jobs from home.

SERGIO

Is she, you know...?

Mickey blinks.

MICKEY

Clean? She lapses a little now and then but for the most part she's turning herself around.

SERGIO

I don't mean to pry into your family business, Dev. Marissa wanted me to tell you that Lisa can call her if she ever needs anyone to talk to.

MICKEY

I'll pass it on to her. Lately she's been getting out more and meeting people.

SERGIO
She seeing anyone?

Mickey tenses slightly.

 MICKEY
Not sure. Don't think so.

 SERGIO
When are you going to find yourself
a girlfriend? You could use a woman's
touch in your life, Dev.

Mickey relaxes a little.

 MICKEY
You should know by now that I'm no
good at the relationship thing.

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- VIDEO SCREEN -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

The image on the slightly fuzzed out screen is that of hands pushing open the door of a graffiti incrustated toilet stall in what is otherwise a clean bathroom in a fancy nightclub.

The bass thumping of DANCE MUSIC is heard through the walls.

The stall door is locked behind him. He produces a large vial of white powder and an injector. He fills the chamber and it disappears from view.

Outside the stall someone pounds on the door frantically asking the occupant of the stall to hurry up.

A cursor appears over a square on the horizontal control bar lining the top of the video screen. The square blinks twice and the word "MUTE" appears briefly.

The sounds of the nightclub are replaced by silence other than BREATHING and HEARTBEATS.

The stall door opens. The killer looks directly at a man with a punk haircut who looks like he is ready to burst from having to piss.

The guy's lips move, saying something to the killer but nothing is heard other than the beating heart and breathing.

On the screen, the cursor moves toward another square.

The words, "LOAD: PERSONALITY 4" appears and winks out after a moment.

The killer leaves the bathroom.

In the hallway leading to the dance floor, he bumps into a young woman who gives him a look of slight recognition. From her facial expression, she is evidently very high on something.

The woman says something but her words are not heard. She motions him to follow and he does. She takes his hand and looks like she's yelling something at him.

They approach a circular table littered with cocktail glasses, where four women, all of whom are in their mid to late twenties, sit in a booth that bends three quarters of the way around the table.

The woman sitting on the end of the booth gives the killer looks of recognition. The others wave polite greetings.

The woman on the end of the booth stands. She puts her arms around the killer.

The cursor clicks on the "MUTE" square. Silence is replaced by loud music and the voice of the woman speaking into the killer's ear.

WOMAN

You have something for me, baby?

The killer produces the injector, which only he and woman see.

WOMAN

If you have enough to share, we could really party later. You like that idea?

She drops the injector into the purse hanging at her side.

WOMAN

Don't go anywhere, baby.

She turns and heads toward the bathrooms. The other women sitting at the table smile flirty, seductive smiles and motion the killer to sit down.

The killer sits and the woman next to him points at him. Her words are lost in the noise of the club.

The woman points directly at herself and leans her head forward, lifting her long hair off her neck. Her hair is a wig. The wig covers a rack attached to the back of her skull.

She smiles at him and continues to talk, though her words are lost in the noise of the club.

The killer's hand reaches out and touches the woman's rack.

The cursor on the screen blinks to life. It clicks on a square and "LOAD: PERSONALITY 5" lights up the screen but doesn't disappear quickly like the last time. The words flicker, replaced by the words, "SYSTEM ERROR".

The killer drops his hand from the woman's skull.

The woman gives him a curious, almost concerned expression.

Again the cursor blinks to life. "LOAD: PERSONALITY 1" blinks on the screen, followed shortly after by "SYSTEM FAILURE".

The screen goes black for a moment and flips back on.

The killer is still staring at the woman, who looks at him with a puzzled expression.

"PERSONALITY 1 REBOOT COMPLETE" blinks in the corner of the screen.

The woman's expression turns to a smile. She leans forward and whispers into the killer's ear.

WOMAN #2

You look like you've had enough of
this place. You want to get out of
here and go someplace where we can
really have some fun?

She smiles and leans in to give the killer a kiss.

The screen goes fuzzy for a moment. "LOAD: PERSONALITY 2, PERSONALITY 3" blinks on the screen followed moments later by several lines of gibberish and the word "SYSTEM OVERLOAD" and the screen goes black.

The word "RESTART" appears on the black screen.

INT. APARTMENT -- MORNING

A large but not overly fancy or well furnished apartment. Several empty vials of Thermal and an injector sit on a coffee table in front of a sofa.

Three bodies lie on the floor, two covered with sheets, the other is covered with a sheet up to her breasts. It is WOMAN #2 from the club.

Hodgeson, Neimer and two other uniformed cops are near the bodies.

Hodgeson taps on the screen of a hand-held computer a little larger than a cell phone. He waits a moment and hands the computer over to Neimer, who carefully reads what is on the screen.

Mickey and Sergio enter the apartment.

SERGIO

What do we got?

Neimer looks up from the hand-held computer with a sigh.

NEIMER

Your friend with the hammer has decided to change his method of destruction. We got three girls here. All erased in different ways. One strangled, one bludgeoned with a kitchen appliance and one stabbed repeatedly. And before you ask how we know it's him, he left his usual calling cards.

Neimer rubs his face with a motion that is part tiredness, part disgust.

NEIMER

We sent in a scan of some fingerprints and they immediately turned up a match with those from the other victims. The girl on the end there, the one he decided to hack up, at least she put up a fight. She must have scratched him up pretty good judging by the amount of skin under her nails.

Neimer points at the front door.

NEIMER

There's a camera in the hall. We got him on tape coming in with a group of five girls. Unfortunately he's got a heavy coat and a hat on so his face isn't on tape. Later in the night we got two girls coming out of the apartment. I already have people working on finding them.

He makes a pursed lip, hopeful expression.

NEIMER

So we might actually be able to get a description for the first time. I guess that's good news. Of course the bastard disconnected the cameras before he left this morning but lucky for us he didn't erase the tape from last night.

Sergio starts inspecting the apartment. He yells over his shoulder.

SERGIO

You find anything else different about this one?

HODGESON

He remembered to shut off the cameras but he forgot to set the alarm like he has in the past. This is your case, why would he change his methods now and go for three completely random modes of killing and forget to set the alarm? Or more importantly, why did he let two girls leave unharmed?

MICKEY

No idea.

Mickey points at the bodies.

MICKEY

We know who these girls are?

HODGESON

According to their work I.D.s, they all worked together at a restaurant downtown. If you want to run their names, feel free, but my guess is they were probably just like the rest of the victims, just girls who party a lot and probably didn't think twice about bringing the guy home. Maybe he offered them some of that shit over there on the table. Maybe he's a dealer.

NEIMER

You think he might be foreign born and that's why his fingerprints and DNA come up negative?

MICKEY

Possibly, but not likely. You said you have somebody looking for the girls that left the apartment?

NEIMER

They'll call when they find them.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- LATER

An older apartment building with open-air hallways and a large black iron fence topped with barbed wire.

Sergio and Mickey approach the front of the building, where a big security door is locked shut. On a wall next to door is a blank television monitor next to a list of tenant names.

Mickey stops in front of the tenant list and scans the list until he sees the name he is looking for. He presses a button with the tenant's name on it and waits.

After a moment, Mickey presses the button again. He turns to Sergio and shrugs.

They start to walk away when the television monitor on the wall flips on, revealing the groggy, grumpy face of SOPHIE, one of the women sitting at the table in the club the night before.

SOPHIE
Who's there? This better be really fuckin' important, waking me up early on my day off.

MICKEY
Are you Miss Sophie Egan?

Sophie squints at Mickey and Sergio.

SOPHIE
Maybe. Do I know you?

MICKEY
Miss Egan, I'm Detective Devereaux and this is Detective Mendoza. We'd like to ask you a few questions, if that's possible.

SOPHIE
How do I know you're cops? A couple of months ago a girl here in this building was raped and beaten to death by two guys claiming to be cops.

Mickey flips out his badge, as does Sergio.

SOPHIE
Okay, so what do you want?

MICKEY
We'd like to talk to you about Christine Teschner.

SOPHIE
Who?

MICKEY
The girl whose apartment you were at last night.

Sophie looks slightly puzzled. After a moment, the television monitor shuts off and the security door buzzes open.

INT. SOPHIE'S APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

The place is a mess, clothes scattered around, ashes overflowing in an ashtray and so on. Sergio and Mickey sit on the one sofa in the room.

Sophie sits across from them on a metal chair that looks like it was rescued from a trash pile.

SOPHIE
So what did you want to ask me about?

SERGIO
Christine Teschner. You know her well?

SOPHIE
Nah, she's a friend of Kayla's.

SERGIO
Kayla the girl you left Christine's place with?

Sophie tenses slightly, surprised that they know.

SERGIO
Video cameras filmed you leaving Christine's apartment with a girl. Was that Kayla?

Sophie nods, still nervous.

MICKEY
Relax, we're not here to bust you or anything like that, we just need to know a couple of things. Do you know where we can find Kayla? We'd like to talk to her as well.

Sophie's eyes dart nervously between the floor and the closed bedroom door.

Mickey looks behind him at the closed door and back at Sophie.

MICKEY
She here right now?

Sophie nods nervously.

SOPHIE
She's...sleeping.

SERGIO
Can you wake her up, please?

Sophie stands, goes to the bedroom door and raps her fist on the door.

SOPHIE

Hey, Kay, get dressed and come out here. There's somebody out here who needs to talk to you.

Sophie returns to her seat. As she sits down, the glint of a rack on the back of her neck catches Mickey's eye.

MICKEY

You wired?

Sophie stares at him dumbly.

SOPHIE

Yeah...What of it?

MICKEY

Nothing. Just curious. Mostly curious about why people get them.

SOPHIE

'Cause they're fun. Until you have one, you won't understand. Then when you get one, you'll want to know why you waited so long.

MICKEY

You into that personality altering thing?

SOPHIE

Sometimes.

The bedroom door opens and Kayla, another one of the women from the club the night before, enters the room, wearing a thick white robe. She too is wired with a rack and she too looks very tired, probably hungover.

Kayla sits on the floor next to Sophie.

SERGIO

You know Christine Teschner well?

KAYLA

We worked together for a while but we don't anymore. I just party with her sometimes.

SERGIO

And that's what you were doing at her place last night?

SOPHIE

Don't you already know the answer to that already?

MICKEY

Who else was at the party last night?

KAYLA

A couple of girls that Chrissy works with. Don't really know them that well.

MICKEY

Anybody else?

KAYLA

And there was this guy that Chrissy picked up and brought over. I don't know who he was and don't know how she knows him. Chrissy knows all kinds of people. He was kinda...

She trails off and throws one shoulder up with a lazy shrug.

KAYLA

I don't know. I don't remember much about him, really. Just that he had this stuff.

SERGIO

What kind of stuff?

KAYLA

This intense powder.

Kayla's eyes widen and she is quickly defensive.

KAYLA

But I don't think it's illegal or anything. I'd never even heard of the stuff before.

SERGIO

Why'd you two decide to leave the party?

KAYLA

'Cause we wanted to come back here.

SERGIO

And you came straight home from the party?

SOPHIE

Yeah. We took a cab back here and called it a night.

MICKEY

We need to know what this guy at the party looked like. Can you describe him?

KAYLA

He was...

Kayla trails off, looking confused.

KAYLA

I don't know.

SERGIO

Don't know? Short? Tall? Skinny? Fat? Help me out here.

Kayla blinks, genuinely puzzled by her lack of memory.

KAYLA

I don't remember.

Sergio glances at Sophie.

SERGIO

You remember what he looks like?

SOPHIE

He was...

Sophie trails off, looking perplexed, then almost upset.

SOPHIE

I can't remember.

Sophie closes her eyes, frowning, trying to recall anything about the guy.

SOPHIE

I think he's tall, but I'm not sure.

MICKEY

And that's all either of you remember about him? What was the last thing you remember before leaving Christine's apartment?

Both women stare at him blankly.

KAYLA

We played this game where all of us jacked in to a computer simulation at the same time but I don't really remember all the details of it. I'm not even sure if it really happened. It feels like it was part of a dream or something.

SERGIO

Please try to remember more. We really need to find out as much about this guy as possible.

SOPHIE

What'd he do?

Sergio and Mickey glance at each other.

SERGIO

He murdered Christine and the two other girls sometime after you two left.

Kayla is on the verge of tears.

KAYLA

What? He did what?

SERGIO

Think. Please. We need to catch this guy. Anything you can give us would be helpful. Do you remember his name?

Kayla cries partly from grief, partly at her inability to remember anything.

KAYLA

I wish I could but it feels almost like my memory was...erased.

Sophie looks shaken but isn't crying. She reaches down to stroke Kayla's hair.

SOPHIE

It's weird. The only thing I can remember about him was how charming he was. Everything else is a blank.

INT. POLICE CAR -- LATER

Sergio drives.

SERGIO

You think they're protecting him for some reason?

MICKEY

I don't think so. There's gotta be some way he's removing pieces of someone's memory just like he's erasing a hard drive and it's gotta be connected to the rack somehow.

The monitor on the dashboard lights up with the words INCOMING MESSAGE. The words give way to Hodgeson's face. His expression is hopeful.

HODGESON

Okay, so after you two left that apartment this morning I started thinking about the whole thing and for some reason I had the feeling that I'd seen all those modes of killing before. So I went digging and it didn't take me long to find what I was looking for. It dawned on me that I'd read something about this one underground wirehead game. Guess what the name is. It's called "Serial Killer".

MICKEY

Catchy. And what is it?

HODGESON

Just like it sounds. You kill people in a wide variety of fucked-up ways. It supposedly creates an exact simulation of what it's like to kill someone. But that's not the weirdest thing. You want to know what the first couple of choices of murder while playing the game are?

MICKEY

Let me guess.

HODGESON

Yup. Strangling, bludgeoning and stabbing. Your friend is a gamer.

MICKEY

Is bashing in someone's skull with a hammer one of the choices in the game?

HODGESON

Yeah, but it's one of the last, and least used choices. There's all kinds of weird, sick shit options on the game. You want me to check around for more games like this one? Like maybe another underground game where you kill people with hammers?

MICKEY

Can't hurt.

HODGESON

One other thing. Barrett was here a little while ago looking for you. He was all excited and said something about your theory about residual images left on the racks of dead people being correct, though he was only able to get shadows off the one rack he tested. He said he's going to see if he can find anything on any of the racks from this morning.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Mickey stands in front of a mirror in his bedroom, getting dressed in nice but very casual clothes.

As he puts his shirt on, the video-phone in the living room rings.

Mickey goes to answer it. On his way to the phone, he notices an empty vial of thermal on the coffee table. He does his best to ignore it.

Mickey activates the video-phone. Barrett's face lights up the screen.

BARRETT

Looking sharp there, old man. I know you probably don't want to talk business but I was able to pull an image off of one of those girl's racks and with a little bit of manipulation I was able to put together a picture of our boy. I just started running the picture so I haven't found a name yet. Here, check him out.

On the screen, Barrett's face is replaced by a slightly blurry headshot of an average-looking, very pale-skinned Anglo man in his thirties with a shaved head, a couple of days of facial stubble, cold blue eyes and an angry, distant expression.

Barrett returns to the screen.

BARRETT

We'll have him in no time.

MICKEY

You sure that's him?

BARRETT

The girl who was strangled? What you just saw was the last thing stored on her rack. It was very brief and kinda fuzzy but I was able to get that image. Fuckin' creepy shit. Gimme a holler later and I'll let you know if we found a match.

The screen goes black.

Mickey walks back toward his room while doing the buttons on his shirt. He pauses at the coffee table and picks up the empty vial.

He turns his head toward the closed door to Lisa's room.

MICKEY
You almost ready in there?

LISA (O.S.)
I'll be right out.

A moment later, Lisa's door open and she steps out wearing a tight black dress and a long haired, very real looking wig that covers her rack.

MICKEY
You're okay with going over to Sergio's tonight?

LISA
Of course. Anything to get out of here for a little while.

Lisa sees Mickey holding the empty vial.

LISA
I've noticed you've been locking your doors at night. Scared of what might happen if you leave them open?

MICKEY
I can do without it.

LISA
You still think it's something morally wrong, don't you?

MICKEY
Can we not talk any more about it? What happens tonight if you let it slip about what happened between us tonight at dinner?

LISA
I'm not the one bothered by it so why would I bring it up? You worry too much.

Mickey sets the vial back on the coffee table.

MICKEY
One question. You're not high right now, are you?

LISA

Why waste it? Besides, Sergio seems to be about the only friend you have and I wouldn't want to ruin dinner or your friendship by going there trashed.

Mickey goes into his room.

He finishes tucking in his shirt, slips on his shoulder holster and gun and puts on an older but well-maintained sport coat.

Mickey goes back into the living room.

LISA

I don't have to go with you tonight if you don't want me to.

MICKEY

I want you to go. Honestly. I just don't want anything...embarrassing to happen. I also wish you'd just lay off of that stuff for a while.

Lisa smiles playfully.

LISA

You're funny when you get all concerned brother on me. It's kinda cute. C'mon, let's go. We're going to be late.

INT. SERGIO'S HOUSE -- LATER

The interior is well kept and looks almost old fashioned with older wooden furniture and plenty of photographs on the walls.

The doorbell rings and Sergio goes to answer the door.

The door opens. Mickey and Lisa stand on the porch. Sergio ushers them in.

SERGIO

Glad you could make it. Lisa. It's been too long. You look great. Like what you're doing with your hair.

Sergio grins at Mickey.

 SERGIO
 You too. Nice hair.

Sergio and Mickey shake hands warmly.

Lisa looks around the house.

 LISA
 Great place you have here.

 SERGIO
 Everyone else is moving into the
 highrises or the gated communities
 for security reasons. Me, I like
 this old place. Besides, I have
 something none of them have; a
 backyard. Okay, I have dirtbag
 neighbors but they leave me alone.
 I'm not being very host-like. Let's
 get you two a drink.

The three of them walk to a small wet bar next to the kitchen,
where many pots and pans, in preparation for dinner, sit on
the stove or in the sink, dirty.

 SERGIO
 Treat the house as your own and feel
 free to make your own drinks. I'll
 be the good host and make the first
 round but after that, you're on your
 own. I know what Mickey drinks.
 How 'bout you?

 LISA
 I'll have what he's having.

 SERGIO
 Easy crowd tonight.

Sergio fills two rocks glasses with ice and pours liquid
from a frosted black bottle into the glasses. He hands the
glasses to Mickey and Lisa.

 MICKEY
 You hear what Barrett found earlier?

Sergio holds up his finger in a silencing gesture.

SERGIO

The rule is no talk about work.
We're off duty and we don't need to
bore the girls with it.

Sergio leads the way to the living room. The three of them sit.

MARISSA, Sergio's wife, leaves their bedroom quickly, in route to the kitchen. She's in her mid-thirties, Chicana, very beautiful. She waves a greeting as she hurries past.

MARISSA

Hi. Not being rude. Promise. Just
have to check on something real fast.

Sergio smiles at his wife's hurried and worried state.

SERGIO

She always wants everything to be
perfect.

A moment later Marissa enters the living room and sits next to Sergio, planting a small kiss on his cheek.

MARISSA

Sorry about that, I could've sworn
that I smelled something burning but
I guess it was just my imagination.

Marissa turns to Lisa and Mickey.

MARISSA

It's been a long time since we've
had anyone over. I guess I always
make things more stressful than they
have to be.

Marissa smiles warmly at Lisa.

MARISSA

How are you doing? You're looking
good. I heard you're working from
home now.

LISA

It's Net-based work. Pays good and
it's a good way to get me back on my
feet and into a daily routine.

MARISSA

Then it isn't too bad living with your big brother?

LISA

He's never home and when he is he's usually asleep or zoned-out in front of the TV.

MARISSA

I know how that is.

Marissa gives Sergio a playful expression and he shrugs with a comical gesture.

A buzzer sounds in the kitchen and Marissa jumps to her feet.

MARISSA

Be right back.

SERGIO

So what else is new with you? That big lug over there doesn't talk to me much about things outside of work and I have extract information from him at certain times.

LISA

Outside of work, not much. Spend most of my time on the Net. I'm trying to get more...more...more...

Lisa's voice trails off. She blinks and rubs her eyes.

MICKEY

You okay?

Lisa speaks with a dazed tone of voice.

LISA

Lost my train of thought. Sorry about that. What was I saying? Work. I'm trying to get more freelance jobs. Get my name out there and stay busier than I am right now.

SERGIO

Sounds like you got it all planned out.

Mickey looks at Lisa with an expression of concern.

MICKEY
You sure you're okay?

LISA
It was nothing. Don't worry about
it.

MARISSA (O.S.)
Dinner's ready. Come on in.

INT. SERGIO'S HOUSE -- LATER

Mickey, Lisa, Sergio and Marissa sit at the dining room table, where there are place settings for five and several dishes of food in the middle.

ALEJANDRO, Sergio and Marissa's son, enters the room and sits at the empty chair. He is a lively twelve year old with dark, attentive eyes and short brown hair.

MICKEY
There's the big guy. What's new,
Alejandro?

ALEJANDRO
Hey, Dev, I mean Mickey. Nothing
much is new. Is this your sister?

Lisa holds up a hand in greeting.

LISA
I'm Lisa.

ALEJANDRO
Hi.

Alejandro watches her for a moment longer, looking like he might have the beginnings of a crush on her.

Everyone begins eating.

Mickey smiles at Alejandro.

MICKEY
Your dad mentioned something to me a
while back about you playing ball
now. How's that going?

Alejandro speaks with excited animation.

ALEJANDRO

My team's in first place. I love playing the game. It's so much fun.

SERGIO

He might not have the size yet but he really puts up a fight out there. His games are a blast. You should come to one sometime.

MICKEY

I'd like that.

ALEJANDRO

Was Dad serious when he said you were somewhat of a sports hero back in the day? Dad said you even went Pro for a while.

MICKEY

Semipro. And I wouldn't say I was a hero. I played for two years until my knee got wrecked. That's when I became a cop .

Alejandro addresses Lisa excitedly.

ALEJANDRO

Dad says you work with computers. You must know a lot about them. You know anyone who's wired? Having a rack looks like the coolest. Too bad you have to wait until you're eighteen. I'd like one now.

MARISSA

You don't need one right now. Besides, you know how I feel about them.

LISA

This probably isn't what your parents want to hear, but they've actually gotten a lot safer than they used to be. Your Mom's right, though, you probably don't need one right now.

ALEJANDRO

Then you know people who have them?

LISA

Yeah, I know a few people who have them.

Lisa blinks several times, looking woozy.

MICKEY

Are you sure you're okay?

LISA

I'm fine. I just had a feeling of lightheadedness. Maybe it's just 'cause I haven't eaten anything today.

Mickey nods a sympathetic smile and looks at both Sergio and Marissa with a questioning shrug.

CITY STREET -- VIDEO SCREEN -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

He walks along a downtown street, a few people pass by him walking the opposite direction. One of them gives him a confused look.

The cursor on the screen clicks on a box, followed by the words, "LOAD: PERSONALITY 3". The words flicker, and are replaced with "SYSTEM ERROR".

Those words fade out, replaced by the blinking red words, "VIRUS ALERT".

The screen goes to static and is replaced by a scrolling screen of gibberish letters and symbols.

After a couple of moments, the screen is back to normal. The cursor clicks on a box, followed by the phrase, "LOAD: PERSONALITY 2,4,7,12".

He continues walking, eventually stopping in front of a highrise apartment building with a big security gate at the entrance.

He looks down into a jacket pocket, producing a small plastic cable, one end of which he plugs into a jack at the base of the television monitor at the entrance. The other end is plugged into his rack, offscreen.

A moment later the security door opens.

INT. SERGIO'S HOUSE -- LATER

Everyone is still sitting around the dining room table, though everyone is either finished or close to being finished.

Sergio is in the middle of sharing a story to entertain, much to Alejandro's delight.

SERGIO

...Keep in mind that we're not partners yet. I'd never even met him before. Just heard a couple of stories about him, that's it. I didn't even realize who he was. A bunch of us are at this place called Jimmy's where a lot of cops and various desk-jockeys used to hang out after work until they bulldozed the place. A few of us are having fun acting kind of stupid, not letting anybody by our barstools without at least bugging them a little bit.

Sergio lifts his arms and pretends to flex his muscles.

SERGIO

Here comes Mickey and I tell him he has to get through me before he can go to the other side of the bar. There's maybe six inches of space between us and in that little bit of space he hits me hard enough to send me flying and knock the wind out of me. That was the first day I met him and that's when I found out that he used to be a tough guy ball player.

Sergio and Marissa stand and start clearing the table.

SERGIO

You two stay put. Give me two minutes to heat up dessert. It's bread pudding. My Nana's recipe. I used to eat this stuff all the time when I was a kid.

MICKEY

Thanks for dinner. It was great.

SERGIO

Don't thank me. I just did dessert.

LISA

Thanks, Marissa, that was the best meal I've had in months.

MARISSA

What, they don't feed you where you live?

Sergio's cell phone rings and Sergio answers. A cop named PRICE is on the other end.

PRICE (O.S.)

Are you Detective Mendoza?

SERGIO

Who am I speaking to?

PRICE (O.S.)

My name is Officer Price. This afternoon a composite of a man who is the main suspect in a murder case you're working on was distributed around police stations and on the Net. A man matching that description set off an alarm a little while ago in a new highrise downtown. We have men on the way there but we were told to notify you.

SERGIO

I assume they also gave you the number for my car?

PRICE (O.S.)

Yes sir.

SERGIO

I'm on my way out the door. Send the directions and any other info you think I might need to that number.

Sergio shuts off the phone and heads into the dining room.

ETCHISON

Hardly. He didn't even notice the guy come in. The building has those new body heat-activated video sensors. This guy sets them off 'cause he can't turn them off like any of the tenants can. The automated system calls us, tells us of a break-in at which time we call the manager right there who gets a big surprise when we tell him there's an intruder in his building. Swift, huh?

SERGIO

What's our guy been doing up there so far?

ETCHISON

Kicked in the door of two vacant apartments. Most of the places on the fifth are empty. The couple of tenants who are home were warned to stay inside with the doors securely locked. I think he knows something's up 'cause he's been wandering the hallways like he's trying to figure out what to do next.

The image on the video monitor switches to a different camera in the hallway. The man on the monitor approaches the elevator, presses a button and waits.

The man looks up at the digital numbers above the elevator doors. When the number doesn't change for a few moments and the elevator doesn't appear to be moving, the man begins to get impatient.

Mickey grabs Sergio.

MICKEY

Let's go up a couple of floors so he doesn't think anything is wrong.

They go to the elevator and step inside the car. After a moment, the doors close.

On the video monitor, the man stands in front of a control panel next to the elevator door. He opens it, puts his hands inside. A moment later, the video monitor turns to static.

INT. HIGHRISE APARTMENT BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

Mickey and Sergio step out of the elevator at the third floor, in time to see a figure run past the glass window of the stairwell on the other side of the hallway.

Both men draw their guns and rush to the stairway door. Sergio pushes it open before venturing in. Mickey points his gun upstairs, Sergio down.

One flight of stairs up, an arm attached to an unseen body dangles lifelessly over the edge of the stairs.

A flight and a half down, a figure runs down the stairs. Mickey and Sergio give chase.

The figure kicks in the back door at the bottom of the steps and disappears.

A moment later Mickey and Sergio follow.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

The door opens to a short passageway and to a door that feeds onto the street.

The man in the trenchcoat barrels into a couple of people on the sidewalk. He continues running, shifting direction to run up the closest lane in the street.

Mickey stops as he reaches the street. Sergio continues running up the sidewalk.

Mickey screams at the man and draws his gun.

MICKEY

Stop!

The man in the trenchcoat continues running. Mickey gets in a firing stance and pops off two shots, both of which hit parked cars, blowing out windows.

CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

He runs up the street. The words, "SURVIVAL MODE" blink across the screen.

CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey fires another shot at the fleeing killer.

The shot hits him in the back just below the shoulder but doesn't appear to effect him at all. He continues running.

A moment later, the killer's running speed increases to an incredible, superhuman speed.

Mickey jogs up the street, watching in awe as the killer runs directly at an incoming car, jumps over the car, lands on his feet and continues running at superhuman speed.

Mickey approaches Sergio, who is standing on the sidewalk, bent over, out of breath.

SERGIO

What the fuck is that guy? I've never seen anybody run like that.

Sergio stands upright, a slightly angry expression on his face.

SERGIO

Sorry we lost him, Dev.

MICKEY

I'm using tracers in the gun tonight. Providing the slug didn't pass through him, we'll find him.

Sergio's expression turns from a frown to a slight grin.

SERGIO

Good man.

Mickey unzips a pocket on the side of his shoulder holster, producing a flat, handheld GPS tracking device about the size of a business card.

The screen on the tracking device lights up with a grid, a blinking dot and coordinates that continue to change as the dot moves.

Mickey and Sergio jog in the direction the killer ran.

MICKEY

He's slowed down. Looks like he's entered a building a little way up the street and is going up the stairs.

SERGIO

I want to know how he runs that fast.
Some kind of speed download in his
rack?

MICKEY

Undoubtedly.

They continue jogging until they reach a building with it's front door sitting partially open.

Mickey scans the area. He goes the side of the building, looking down the alley, but sees nothing.

He checks the tracking device and slowly lifts his head, seeing that directly above him is a walkway several floors up connecting the building with the open door to the building directly across the alley.

Mickey backs up, looking up into the darkened glass of the walkway but sees nothing.

He joins Sergio at the open door, handing him the tracking device.

MICKEY

These two buildings are connected.
I'm going to radio for backup but I
don't want to lose this guy. You
take this building and I'll take the
other one.

Sergio goes inside the building. Mickey heads over to the building on the other side of the alley, disappearing into the shadows.

INT. BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Sergio climbs the stairs quickly but cautiously, gun drawn, GPS tracking unit in the other hand, eyes darting between the GPS unit and the stairs in front of him.

He reaches a stairway door several flights up. He slides the tracking unit into a jacket pocket and carefully opens the door.

Sergio steps into the hallway, holding his gun with both hands.

Several meters up the hallway are a couple of vending machines where a lifeless figure hangs ass-out of the shattered front of one of the vending machines.

Sergio approaches vending machine and sees that man's head is partially smashed in. Broken plastic and glass is scattered around.

Farther up the hallway and around the corner, a loud SMASH of glass is heard.

Sergio moves forward, reaching the corner. He hugs his back to the wall, inhales deeply and spins around the corner, aiming his pistol.

The hallway leads to the walkway between the two buildings.

Sergio walks forward slowly, entering the walkway, stopping next to a window in the walkway that is shattered, a large gaping hole in the middle of the large pane of glass.

Sergio peers out the hole in the window, staring several stories down into the alley, which is in shadows but looks empty.

He removes the tracking unit from his pocket, an expression of bewilderment on his face when the unit and coordinates tell him the killer is in the alley.

He points his gun into the alley but sees nothing.

ALLEY -- MOMENTS EARLIER

The same SMASHING of glass that Sergio heard, louder now, as a raining of glass hits the alley below the walkway.

Mickey emerges from the shadows at the mouth of the alley and proceeds into the alley, gun drawn with both hands. He takes one quick glance at the walkway above him and focuses his attention back on the alley in front of him.

ALLEY -- VIDEO SCREEN -- KILLER'S P.O.V.

A blurred screen, showing the alley and the faint image of Mickey walking almost directly toward the killer.

On the screen is a collection of gibberish letters and symbols, frequently flashing the phrases "SURVIVAL MODE," "LOAD PAIN BLOCKERS," "VIRUS ALERT" and "LOAD: PERSONALITY 4".

All is quiet except for heavy, animal-like BREATHING.

ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey continues moving forward slowly, his feet CRUNCHING on broken glass from the walkway window.

Looking down, he can see blood mixed with the sparkling glass.

Mickey stops walking, shifting into a firing stance, facing into a dark area on the left side of the alley. He can hear the animal-like BREATHING that is almost like a growl, not very far in front of him, though he sees nothing.

MICKEY

Okay, asshole, c'mon out of there.
Slowly. Come out slow--.

The killer rushes out of the darkness, a hammer raised above his head, SCREAMING.

Mickey fires several shots into the killer's body but the but the bullets don't have any effect on him.

Mickey backs up, almost stumbling, firing a shot into the killer's throat, snapping his head back. The body falls heavily, the hammer CLANGING to the ground.

After a couple of moments trying to catch his breath, Mickey approaches the body with a wide-eyed, almost frightened expression.

The killer's eyes are open with a dead stare but the body twitches. A slight WHIRRING noise emits from the rack on the killer's skull.

Mickey nudges the killer with his foot. The twitching continues, though it is obvious the body is dead. He leans over, looking at the chrome rack on the back of the killer's head. It is much larger than any previously seen.

Mickey puts his gun in his holster. His hands tremble.

ALLEY -- LATER

Police cars and an ambulance mob the mouth of the alley, which is now lit by collapsible flood lights. Many onlookers hover around to get a glimpse of what is going on.

Two medics lift the now-still killer into a body bag.

Mickey and Sergio stand nearby. Mickey wears a dazed, blank expression.

When the body bag is zipped closed, Mickey approaches one of the medics.

MICKEY

I need you to remove the rack from the back of this guy's skull 'cause I want to take it to a guy who specializes in these things to get analyzed in the morning.

The medic nods an affirmation.

MEDIC

Who is this guy? Must have one hell of an amazing pain tolerance. Broken ankle, some crushed bones in his foot, cracked shoulder, not to mention all the holes you put in him and he still kept kicking. Hope you don't run into anymore guys like this tonight.

Both medics lift the bag and take it to the ambulance where it is loaded in the back with the body bag containing the man thrown through the vending machine.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Mickey enters the darkened living room, closing the door behind him.

Lisa lies curled up on the couch, wrapped in blanket with an empty, slightly stoned expression on her face.

An empty vial and an injector sit on coffee table in front of her.

Mickey trudges past the sofa toward his room.

LISA

You had me so scared tonight. I kept thinking about how you were out there trying to catch someone who commits horrible crimes and what if he got you instead of the other way around.

Lisa sits up.

LISA

Can you come over here and hold me?
I need...I need...I need you hold me
to let me know that you're really
here and this isn't some kind of
dream.

Mickey sits down next to Lisa. They embrace and Lisa rests her head on Mickey's shoulder.

Lisa holds a full vial of Thermal in one of her hands.

INT. STORE -- DAY

Mickey enters TechniKation. There are no customers inside.

KELTON (O.S.)

We're not open for business yet.

MICKEY

Then you should lock your front door.

Kelton emerges from the back room, a slight smile on his face and a half-burned cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth.

KELTON

Detective Devereaux. How nice to
see you again so soon. You finally
decide to get rigged up to the modern
world?

Mickey approaches him.

MICKEY

Actually, I have something I want
you to take a look at for me.

Mickey produces a plastic bag with the killer's rack inside and sets it on the counter in front of Kelton. Kelton lifts the bag, inspects the contents and sets the bag back on the counter.

KELTON

What do you want to know?

MICKEY

Ever seen a rack like that before?

KELTON

It's a custom design. Very expensive. And no, I've never seen one quite like it. Somebody with this kind of money isn't going to bother with a store like mine.

MICKEY

You know who makes these?

KELTON

There's several companies and a few individuals who do custom work like this.

Kelton opens the bag, removes the rack and looks it over.

KELTON

Most manufacturers put their stamp on them, usually on the underside. This one doesn't have a stamp so either the person who made it is new at the game or this is an experimental prototype for a new design.

MICKEY

Any way you can tell me what's in it?

KELTON

You mean what's been downloaded? Sure.

Mickey follows Kelton into a back room, where an elaborate computer set-up sits on a large desk.

Kelton sits down in front of the monitor. He plugs a cable into one of the input jacks on the rack. The rack starts its slow WHIRRING noise.

KELTON

Where'd this come from?

MICKEY

Off the body of a murder suspect.

Kelton nods and types on the keyboard.

MICKEY

Wouldn't it be easier just to plug
it into your own rack to find out
what's on it?

Kelton smirks.

KELTON

Not if it's broken or defective in
some way.

Kelton types a couple more commands on the keypad. His eyes
widen.

KELTON

This thing has a mindblowing amount
of memory on it. Never seen one
with this kind of capacity. Whoever
bought this was serious about their
hardware. And what's this?

Kelton watches the monitor for a moment. His eyes widen
again and he quickly unplugs the rack from the computer.

KELTON

Jesus, Mick, this thing is completely
eaten up by a virus. Overloaded and
fucked doesn't begin to describe
this thing. Whatever was in there
before ain't there now.

Kelton turns to Mickey.

KELTON

You said someone was wearing this?
It musta scrambled their fuckin'
brains. I've seen small viruses get
into racks before but nothing like
this. It almost looks like the virus
was trying to rewrite the entire
memory structure. Poor fucker
probably had no idea what this was
doing to him until it was too late.

Kelton is suddenly very angry.

KELTON

You aren't fucking with me, knowing damned well that there's a nasty virus in there, were you? If I'd jacked into that thing like you said, it woulda toasted me too.

Mickey puts up his hands in defense.

MICKEY

I had no idea. I just thought you could tell me what was on it. I mean, I know about downloading software, gaming personalities and that sort of thing, but this guy last night, I'd never seen anyone run as fast as he did or take as many bullets as he did and not be affected by it. I thought it had something to do with the rack.

Kelton nods slightly, easing up on his anger.

KELTON

It did. Pain blockers can be downloaded and so would a speed enhancer, I suppose, though I've never heard of it before.

Kelton hands the rack to Mickey and stands.

KELTON

I had a guy in here yesterday I thought you might be interested in. Know him sort of through a client of mine. Comes in here, buys a bunch of shit like software upgrades and expensive rack add-ons and tries to sell me some Thermal. I started thinking about you and your interest in the stuff.

MICKEY

I'm not a vice cop. Not my area of jurisdiction.

KELTON

I wasn't talking about busting him.

Kelton smiles deviously.

KELTON

I thought you might've changed your mind about scoring some. I remember when we used to do stuff like that. But you're clean now, aren't you? Right, of course you are.

Mickey puts the rack back in the plastic bag and turns to leave.

MICKEY

Thanks for your help, Kelton. Stay out of trouble.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

Mickey approaches his desk and sits.

SERGIO

What'd you find out about the rack?

MICKEY

Custom designed and completely eaten up by a computer virus.

SERGIO

Meaning?

MICKEY

Meaning the guy's brain was fried just like the rack was. Any closer to figuring out who he is?

Sergio shakes his head.

SERGIO

Not yet. Our news of the day is there's a copycat killer out there now. Two bodies were found a little while ago, same M.O. as before but even before running the prints and DNA from the scene, they figured the times of death at around two a.m., hours after you gave that guy his tracheotomy. As for us, it's not our case 'cause we got our guy last night. His prints and DNA are a match with those from all the crime scenes.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Mickey stands in the kitchen with a vodka on the rocks in one hand and an empty Thermal vial in the other. He stares down at the vial, rolling it around in his palm.

The video-phone rings and Mickey answers it.

On the screen is an image of a man pixilated to the point where he is unrecognizable and his features are hard to make out. His voice is altered and machine-like.

PIXILATED MAN

I was wondering if you could help me out. Do you know a man named Kelton?

Mickey eyes the pixilated man suspiciously.

MICKEY

I don't know. Maybe. Name sounds slightly familiar. Refresh my memory.

PIXILATED MAN

Mister Kelton says you might be interested in something I have to offer.

MICKEY

Which is what exactly?

PIXILATED MAN

Energy, my friend. Geothermal energy, heat, if you understand what I'm talking about.

Mickey nods slowly, playing along.

MICKEY

You mean thermal emissions?

PIXILATED MAN

Precisely. Now, Mister Kelton says you are interested in thermal products, possibly in quantities.

MICKEY

That's what he told you? What else did he tell you?

PIXILATED MAN

That you're a man of his word. With that in mind, are you a cop?

MICKEY

What if I was?

PIXILATED MAN

Then I would have to pay Mister Kelton a visit sometime very soon.

MICKEY

In his line of work, you really think Kelton would associate himself with cops? Guess you really trust him.

PIXILATED MAN

You trust him?

MICKEY

I don't trust anybody. How do I know you're not a cop? I'm curious why I should listen to someone trying to sell me product over a vid-phone and won't show me what he looks like. Put yourself in my position. Little suspicious, isn't it?

PIXILATED MAN

If you're the customer that Mister Kelton says you are, I think we can work out an arrangement.

MICKEY

So you're saying I should trust you? I already told you that I don't trust anybody. You're asking a lot from me. Trust doesn't come easily.

PIXILATED MAN

If you're interested in what I have, I will make it worth your while to trust me.

MICKEY

You have my attention. Keep talking.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- LATER

A hallway in disrepair, old carpeting and paint peeling on the wall, a low-rent and uninviting kind of place that looks like an old budget motel converted into an apartment building.

Mickey walks down the hall, stopping in front of a door where the fake wood paneling on the door is warped and peeling up in places.

Mickey unholsters his gun, sets his thumb on the pad on the side of the gun handle. The red light on the side of the gun winks off and he places the gun back in his holster.

He rings the doorbell.

After a moment, an intercom next to the door answers.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Whattya want?

MICKEY

I'm here to see the Doctor. He called me earlier.

The door opens and Mickey steps inside.

INT. APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

The door closes quickly behind Mickey and a tall, heavysset, man built like a linebacker begins roughly frisking him.

Mickey steps back slightly, pushing the hands off of him.

MICKEY

I'll save you the hassle.

Mickey slowly lifts his gun out of the holster and pops the clip out of the gun. He hands both to the linebacker.

MICKEY

I'd be stupid not to be packing in this neighborhood.

The apartment is shabby and rundown but there is a wall of expensive computer set-ups and electronics.

Other than the linebacker, three men in their early to mid twenties are inside, sitting on thrift store furniture.

The DOCTOR is tall, skinny, nerdy and looks more like a computer hacker than a doctor or a drug dealer.

LEO is medium-sized with a slightly hyper, aggressive attitude, that is probably more posturing than anything.

MARS is a young-looking 20 year old with a punk haircut.

All three are wired with racks.

Leo points an uzi fitted with a large banana clip at Mickey.

The Doctor motions the linebacker to bring Mickey's gun and clip and set them on the table in front of where the three men sit.

LEO

Any stupid shit and I'll vent you something good.

The Doctor gives Leo a stare that tells him to mellow out.

DOCTOR

Take it easy, Leo. We don't want to do anything that will upset our potential customer here.

The Doctor stands and approaches Mickey. Mickey eyes him carefully.

MICKY

You're the Doctor? You look too young to be a doctor.

The Doctor stares at Mickey with a relaxed and casual expression.

DOCTOR

I fix some things and create others. That's why they call me the Doctor.

The Doctor holds his hand out to be shaken. Mickey just stares at him and the Doctor drops his hand.

DOCTOR

All business and no fake attempts at friendship. I can respect that.

The Doctor steps away from Mickey.

DOCTOR

If you've been doing much Thermal then you know how good it is and when you try what we have, you'll see how much better this batch is than the last one.

MICKEY

Better how?

DOCTOR

You'll see.

The Doctor motions to Mars, who gets up from the couch and goes into one of the side rooms.

MICKEY

Since I first tried it, I've been curious where it comes from.

DOCTOR

Comes from Europe but it won't be long until we're making it here.

Mars returns from the room with a large vial and an injector. Mars taps a small amount of powder from the vial into the chamber of the injector and hands the injector to the Doctor. The Doctor takes it and holds it out to Mickey.

DOCTOR

Here. Try a little and tell me what you think.

MICKEY

Am I supposed to do a hit, wait a few moments then go into the bathroom and jerk off and see how good it feels?

The Doctor smiles and laughs. The rest of the men except Mickey laugh too.

Mickey smiles but the smile is serious.

MICKEY

You know what I'm talking about. Sure, the high's good but the reason you take it is for sex and no offense but none of you guys are my type.

The men laugh again, though this time it is a nervous laughter.

LEO

We got ourselves a comedian here.

The Doctor nods at Mickey.

DOCTOR

I know what you mean so I got just the thing you need for your test drive.

The Doctor motions to Mars again, who goes into a bedroom.

A moment later he enters the living room, holding the wrist of a girl who looks to be in her late teens. The girl is skinny, with a rodent-like face and drugged-out, glassy eyes. She is also wired with a rack.

Mars takes the girl to the wall of computers and electronics. He sits her in a chair next to where he sits in front of a large monitor. The monitor lights up and Mars plugs a cable into the girl's rack.

DOCTOR

Meet Ginny. She's been nice enough to donate her services to us for a while.

The monitor lights up with several pictures of young women and scrolling lines of text.

The Doctor nods at Mars.

DOCTOR

This is Mars, our resident electronics guru and master hacker. Mars, would you be so kind as to set this gentleman up with his dream date?

MARS

I can make her be anything you want. What are you into? If none of these downloads excite you, maybe you'd rather just jack directly into her rack and see what she's feeling while you're screwing her. Ever curious to know how good a fuck you are?

DOCTOR

How 'bout Exotica Brite? She'll
know how to please you.

A picture of Exotica Brite pops up on the monitor. Mars types a few commands in on the computer, waits a couple of moments and unhooks the cable from Ginny's rack.

Ginny is a little more lively than before but not much, though now she is smiling. She stands, as does Mars, who takes her hand and leads her to Mickey.

The Doctor hands Mickey the injector and smiles.

DOCTOR

There you go. The test drive is all set. Have fun but don't take too long in there. I know how good Exotica can be sometimes. And don't forget to share the goods with her. The more you share the better she is.

Ginny takes Mickey's hand and leads him into the bedroom, closing the door behind them.

INT. BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Ginny sits Mickey on the bed, looking him over with a hungry expression. She strips off her clothes without taking her eyes off of him.

Mickey turns on the injector, waits a moment and holds it up his biceps. He does a quick hit and hands the injector to Ginny who finishes the rest of what is in the chamber.

She sets the injector on the floor and climbs onto the bed next to Mickey. She kisses him while undressing him.

When he is undressed, they begin exploring each other's bodies, though it is Ginny/Exotica doing most of the work.

Mickey's eyes begin to glaze over and his expression of sexual hunger mirrors Ginny's.

Mickey rolls the girl onto her back and starts screwing her from behind.

All goes quiet except the rapid POUNDING of Mickey's heart and less audible MOANING of Ginny.

After a few moments, Mickey arches his back and opens his mouth in ecstatic sigh, though none is heard.

Mickey rolls off Ginny and stares blankly at nothing. His body shakes slightly. Oblivious to his shaking, Ginny leans into him and begins kissing him.

GINNY

That was amazing, baby. Your cock is so big. You want to fuck me again?

Mickey stares at the girl with a mildly confused expression, still feeling the after effects of orgasm.

GINNY

What's the matter, baby? You don't like fucking me? 'Cause I really like fucking you. C'mon, let's do it again. Let me suck your cock and then I want to get on top of you and fuck you 'til you forget your own name.

Mickey sits up and rubs his eyes. Ginny stares at Mickey with a seductive stare while tracing patterns on his skin with her finger.

MACHINE GUN FIRE erupts in the other room.

The blasting shakes Mickey out of his daze. He begins pulling on his clothes when the bedroom door bursts open. The figure in the doorway points a machine pistol at Mickey and speaks with a Russian accent.

THE RUSSIAN

Why don't you come out here and bring the girl with you?

Ginny slowly gets to her feet and wraps herself in a sheet from the bed with a slow, stoned motion.

Mickey holds up his open palms at face level and steps into the living room to find it torn apart by bullets. The Doctor, Leo, Mars and the linebacker are all dead.

The Russian and two other men are in the room. All are armed, all look like professionals and all are stocky, pale white men.

Mickey motions to Ginny not to enter the living room.

MICKEY

Let her stay in the bedroom. She doesn't need to see all of this.

The Russian shrugs a lazy agreement.

Ginny stays in the bedroom looking stoned and confused.

The Russian scrutinizes Mickey.

THE RUSSIAN

You don't look like the kind of person who hangs out with these kinds of punks.

MICKEY

I was here buying something they had to sell.

THE RUSSIAN

Something that wasn't theirs to sell. The girl, she a part of that sale or was she just something for you to have fun with?

Mickey doesn't answer.

The Russian lowers his gun and motions Mickey to sit on the sofa. Mickey's gun sits on the table in front of him with the clip jammed inside.

One of the other gunmen leaves the room and goes into the kitchen where he is heard rummaging through the refrigerator and the cupboards.

THE RUSSIAN

Your friends here took something that belonged to me and were selling it, thinking I wouldn't know who ripped me off. We spent a long and hard time creating the stuff and are not about to be ripped off by a bunch of amateur punks.

The Russian locks his eyes on Mickey.

THE RUSSIAN

Thermal, you've tried and you like it, right? Very addictive. Very fun stuff. Perfect for all the people who like to party because it just makes you want to fuck all night long. But see, I can't have people cutting me out of the selling part. You bought from these guys before?

MICKEY

First time here. Other times has been...

Mickey's voice stumbles slightly.

MICKEY

...In small amounts from people at night clubs.

THE RUSSIAN

But never from these guys?

Mickey shakes his head.

THE RUSSIAN

We tested it for a real long time in Eastern Europe.

MONTAGE -- EASTERN EUROPE -- FLASHBACKS

--Mafia-looking men dealing drugs and black market goods.

--Men in a dimly lit, unsanitary room installing a cheaply made rack on the base of another man's skull.

--Close up of the man's rack when installed. The installation is faulty and the base of the man's skull oozes a pus-like fluid.

--Pale, very Eastern European-looking woman wired with a rack lying on a dirty mattress having sex with a man. Her mouth is open in silent ecstasy.

THE RUSSIAN (V.O.)

All the black market activity and people who will do anything for money. And all those people with cheap, illegal racks there. What we wanted to be able to do with those people.

BACK TO PRESENT

The Russian peers around at the back of Mickey's head.

THE RUSSIAN

You're not even wired. Interesting.

The Russian eyes Mickey carefully for a moment.

THE RUSSIAN

We thought about racks and how much they're used for sexual activities. Then we thought about how to control the both of them. Thermal was our answer. Of course, for you, you just get the effects of the high. Everyone who's wired gets everything else.

MICKEY

Meaning?

THE RUSSIAN

Computer virus. Nanoprobes in the form of a powdered drug. Hacking computers is boring and often too easy. Hacking the human mind is hacking the ultimate computer. The virus restructures the memory systems of the rack into what we want them to be.

The Russian cocks his head.

THE RUSSIAN

Ever thought about controlling people, I mean really controlling people, not just in an emotional torture kind of way? The ultimate terrorist activity is that in which the most people are effected, in this case hitting everyone directly in their pleasure centers and literally turning them into the machines that they seem to want to be anyway.

The Russian smiles politely.

THE RUSSIAN

And why do I tell you all of this?
Because nobody would believe you if
you told them. Please do tell them.
All the anti-technology people and
religious fanatics would love to
hear what you'd have to say but all
the wireheads would think you're
crazy and would probably be all the
more anxious to try Thermal if they
haven't done so already.

MICKEY

What if the virus only shorts out
those people's racks and doesn't do
anything else?

The Russian waves him off.

THE RUSSIAN

Small price to pay. With every large
scale experiment there are always a
few mistakes made here and there.
The new batch is much better and the
virus code is more stable. Besides,
why should you care? You're not
even wired. There's no effect on
you. With no computer to invade,
the virus just simply passes right
through you and you piss it out in a
couple of days.

Mickey eyes his gun on the table.

The Russian looks at the gun and picks it up.

THE RUSSIAN

Nice weapon.

The Russian inspects it lazily and lifts it, pointing it
directly at Mickey's head. He pulls the trigger but nothing
happens.

THE RUSSIAN

Lucky for you it's empty.

The Russian tosses the gun on the table.

THE RUSSIAN

I'm thinking that I'm the only one who brings Thermal into this city, so you must've bought from other people who've stolen from me. Maybe I let you go and you can tell these other people about what happens to them when they steal my product.

The Russian once again eyes Mickey carefully.

THE RUSSIAN

Or maybe I'll just take care of you now. No messy loose ends. What to do about the girl, though.

The Russian cocks his head at Mickey once again.

THE RUSSIAN

Why do I get the feeling I've seen you somewhere before?

INT. TECHNIKATION -- FLASHBACK

Flashback to first Mickey's first visit to the store. The lone customer on the other side of the store turns briefly to look at Kelton and Mickey. The Russian is the customer.

Kelton exhales cigarette smoke and mouths the words, "Long time, no see, Officer Devereaux."

BACK TO PRESENT

The Russian makes an expression of recognition.

In one quick motion, Mickey swipes his gun from the table, presses his thumb into the pad on the handle and shoots The Russian squarely in the chest.

The Russian crumples to the ground as Mickey shoots the other gunman twice and dives onto the floor.

The third gunman swings into the kitchen doorway, unleashing a barrage of machine gun fire.

Mickey shoots the gunman. The gunman stumbles and falls.

Mickey gets up and checks both the Russian and the closest gunman.

Mickey goes into the bedroom where he finds Ginny huddled in a corner, still wrapped in the sheet with a stoned, dazed expression.

Mickey waves his hand in front of her face and she barely acknowledges it.

Ginny speaks hoarsely, though she doesn't seem to be speaking to Mickey.

GINNY

I want to be me again. Tell them to
let me be me again.

Mickey studies her for a moment, pockets the injector and leaves the apartment.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Mickey stumbles inside the apartment, closes the front door behind him and proceeds to his room.

Laughter is heard from behind the closed door of Lisa's bedroom.

As Mickey approaches his room, Lisa's door opens and Lisa steps into the doorway. She looks drunk or stoned, maybe a combination of the two.

Lisa hugs the door in a seductive gesture and her sultry voice doesn't sound like Lisa but someone else altogether.

LISA

Hey beautiful. Never seen you around here before. You want to join me and my friend in here? The party's just starting.

MICKEY

I don't feel like playing this game right now, Lisa.

LISA

Game? What game is that? Looks to me like you just need to unwind and I know we can help you do that.

The other person in the room passes Lisa an injector and Lisa holds it out for Mickey, who just stares at it.

MICKEY

I'm really not interested in doing this, Lisa.

LISA

You keep calling me Lisa. Who's Lisa?

MICKEY

Last I checked you were, but if you aren't, who are you supposed to be right now?

Lisa's facial muscles twitch slightly and she regains her seductive tone.

LISA

Supposed to be? I'm not supposed to be anyone. I can be anything I want to be. You can call me whatever you want but my friends call me Exotica.

Mickey stares at her tiredly.

MICKEY

Exotica is a download of a dead porn star. You're not her. You're Lisa. Or maybe you're not anymore, I'm not sure.

Lisa's facial muscles twitch again and she speaks in a flirty tone.

LISA

For someone who has two women who want to make his fantasies a reality, you sure talk a lot. Stop talking and come inside.

MICKEY

Reality? You're going to tell me about reality? Sorry to ruin your party but that stuff your doing is infected with a computer virus.

Lisa contemplates Mickey's words for a moment.

MICKEY

I'm serious. The stuff's dangerous, maybe lethal. Please. No more. If there's any left I want you to throw it out.

LISA

A computer virus. That's original. C'mon, just do a little bit and play ...play...play with us.

Lisa's demeanor changes. Her seductiveness is replaced by a blank, almost machine-like expression.

Mickey eyes her closely.

MICKEY

Now who are you?

LISA

I don't know. Anything I want...to be. Anything you want me to be. We'll both be...both be anything you want us to be.

MICKEY

I want you to be yourself. No more pretending.

The machine-like expression and voice vanishes, replaced by a personality that sounds and acts like Lisa but might not be.

LISA

If you could be anybody right now, who would you be? Think about it 'cause it wouldn't take...take...take that much to be able to do it.

MICKEY

I don't know what I'd want.

LISA

You don't have any imagination.

MICKEY

At least that lack of imagination is all mine.

Lisa's face twitches and she flips back into an empty, machine-like tone.

LISA
Or so you think.

Mickey raises his voice.

MICKEY
What does that mean exactly? Then who am I? What am I if I'm not who I think I am?

LISA
What if you could choose who and what you are instead...instead of being forced to live with your imperfections and insecurities all the time?

MICKEY
Those imperfections are what makes us who we are and you're not choosing to be an individual, you're choosing to be a download of somebody else, which is like choosing to be a clone.

Lisa becomes herself again.

LISA
How many of us are truly individuals? We talk, act and think like so many other people. What if after...after ...after being groomed by society like that you could choose to think and act and be anything you want to be?

Mickey watches her closely, worried about her schizophrenic behavior.

MICKEY
Are you okay? I know you're high but you're acting strange.

Lisa is Exotica again.

LISA
Come in and join us. This is the
last time I'm going to offer. Most
men wouldn't think twice about saying
yes.

Mickey walks into his bedroom.

MICKEY
I've had enough excitement for one
night.

He closes the door behind him.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- LATER

The sounds of a woman CRYING mixes with a POUNDING on Mickey's
bedroom door.

Mickey quickly jumps out of bed and opens the door to find
MARY, the woman that had the threesome with Mickey and Lisa,
half clothed and almost in shock, sobbing.

MARY
Something's happened to Lisa.

Mickey pushes his way past her and into Lisa's room. Lisa's
eyes are wide open but stare off into space. Her body
twitches with small convulsions.

Mickey waves his hand over her face but she doesn't blink or
acknowledge it.

Mickey shakes her but she continues to stare off into space.

MICKEY
What happened?

MARY
We were fooling around, linking
ourselves to each other's racks.
Then she was acting weird and she
unplugged and started...unplugged
and started...unplugged and...

Mary begins to twitch, though not as badly as Lisa.

MICKEY
Talk to me. She unplugged and what?

MARY
And started shaking...

Mary collapses to the floor, her eyes open, body twitching.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- LATER

A group of paramedics are in the living room and Lisa's bedroom. One leans over Mary, shining a light in her eyes.

The medic shuts the light off and approaches Mickey, who sits on the sofa with his head buried between his hands. Mickey looks up when the medic is next to him.

MEDIC
Both of them are gone. Their brains are fried. You know what did this?

MICKEY
I'm guessing a problem with their racks.

MEDIC
That's right. You know what the problem was?

MICKEY
Computer virus cooked both of them. One of them had the virus in an advance stage and because their racks were linked at one point, it quickly spread to the other.

MEDIC
How'd you know they were linked together?

MICKEY
The girl told me before she slumped over. If you test that stuff they were taking last night, you'll find it has some kind of computer virus in it.

MEDIC
In the powder? You knew this and didn't stop them from taking it?

MICKEY
I didn't know until it was too late.

Mickey gives the Medic a sideways glance and puts his face back into his hands.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT -- LATER

The last paramedic leaves the apartment, closing the door behind him.

Mickey paces, appearing to be lost in his own apartment.

He walks into Lisa's room, inspecting the mess of the unmade bed and clothes on the floor, among other things.

The monitor on Lisa's computer emits a faint BUZZING.

Mickey sits down in front of the computer.

The monitor flips on and Mickey stares at all the various icons on the screen.

He clicks on one entitled "LISA".

He sees a bunch of files named for business associates and projects. At the bottom is a file called "MICKEY" that catches his eye.

He clicks on it. It opens a window with two files inside. The files are named "MICKEY" and "MICKEY and MARY".

He clicks on "MICKEY"

It takes a few moments to load. When it begins, Mickey watches a silent, close-up but slightly blurred video of himself in the throws of passion.

He closes the file and opens the other one.

After it loads, it plays a close-up, slightly blurred image of him and Mary having sex. Mary frequently looks directly at the source of the film with a knowing smile.

Mickey watches with a dead expression knowing that Lisa was using her rack to record them having sex.

After a moment, Mickey picks up a cable with a jack fitted for a rack. The other end is plugged into the computer. He inspects the cable for a moment, looks briefly at himself and Mary on the screen and sets the cable down.

He closes the file, turns off the computer and leaves the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

INT. MORTUARY -- AFTERNOON

Continuation of opening scene. Mickey stands in the bright white hallway, staring at the hologram of Lisa in casual clothes, sitting in a chair.

Mickey holds his hand out like he is going to caress the hologram.

CITY STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The rioting outside continues. The rioters smash windows, turn over vehicles and set fire to anything they can find. More than anything, the rioters look like angry zombies. All of the rioters are wired with racks.

INT. MORTUARY -- CONTINUOUS

Mickey drops his hand to his side. From the inside of his jacket he produces the small bouquet of flowers, which he sets on the floor below Lisa's grave marker.

Mickey waves his hand over the holograph. The holograph of Lisa and her illuminated name on the stone vanishes.

Mickey looks upward with a solemn expression, as if thinking about something.

After a moment, he turns and walks the way he came from in the opening scene.

A rack attached to the back of his skull gleams in the bright whiteness of the hallway.

FADE OUT: