

RAPTOR'S GOLDEN HITS

Screenplay by Linton Robinson
Music and Lyrics by Linton Robinson

Registered WGAw

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FADE IN:

INT. CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT

MUSIC OVER: ELECTRONIC DIN

It's the face of a guy being electro-sonically fried. His mouth is a gasping rictus, his hair stands on end, pulsing. He vibrates wildly, spastically to the music.

The MUSIC is death rock, a skreel of feedback and katzenjammer. "Vocals" are his screams PLAYED BACKWARD, an ululating banshee wail.

Everything moves in REVERSE MOTION, but that's not noticeable this close in.

Moving back away from the guy reveals that he's doing his St. Vitus slam dance on a concert stage. Which explains why he wears headphones and clutches a microphone, but not the predatory circle of rock musicians that surrounds him.

He's beset by three Guitarists and a Pianist whose portable keyboard trails cables to a megaboard of monitors and gizmos. They stare intently, beating him down with music.

Behind them, the Drummer also zeros in, slashing out a bodyblow beat. The band is obviously going in for the kill.

The widening view now shows Two Women just outside the circle of musicians, gyrating violently to the beat.

ED (V.O.)

If you can keep your head when
everybody around you is freaking out
and blaming it on you...

(Beat)

...it might just be your fault

The REVERSE MOTION has been subtly eerie, but once the audience becomes visible, it's obvious. People writhe in horror and panic, screaming and tearing their hair, a scene out of Bosch. Bodies "fall" up to balconies, people run backwards towards the moshpit of horror.

ED (V.O.)

And maybe it was. Let's back
things up and see what you think.

The MOTION REVERSES, moving back in towards the stage at an accelerating rate.

ED (V.O.)

Because the next question is: If we
didn't cause all this...who did?

As the twitching singer rushes close, the viewpoint "POPS THROUGH" to next scene as SOUND ABRUPTLY STOPS.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Instantly everything is white and hauntingly silent, broken only by the beeping of an unseen vital signs monitor.

The ceiling is a featureless white rectangle.

The white rectangle jerks upward, then again. A corner comes into view, then a mirror. A hospital bed is being cranked up, making more of the room visible to the patient.

CODY (V.O.)

Once I figured out that the body in
the bed was me, everything else
started falling into place.

(Beat)

I even remember dying.

EXT. WHITEWATER RIVER - DAY

CODY DELF, handsome mid-twenties athlete in red life jacket and helmet, paddles his kayak into a drop full of erupting water and threatening rocks.

CODY (V.O.)

It was pretty simple: I had a life...

Several shots of brilliant, dangerous kayak moves.

CODY (V.O.)

I fucked up...

Several shots of Big Trouble. A paddle spins up, the kayak batters into rocks, plunges beneath the raging water. Cody's helmet pops to surface and swirls away.

CODY (V.O.)

I died...

The kayak remains submerged. Below the hard, clear water the current mauls the red life vest around.

Cody's arms flap limply. His eyes stare up from the water, his mouth bubbles inches below the surface. His eyes close.

The insistent beeping slows, falters, becomes one flat tone.

CODY (V.O.)

And now I've got another life to
deal with.

(Beat)

Far out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Cody lies in the bed, damaged and bandaged. His eyes seem to stare past everything, into a private hell.

After a moment of silence in the white room, the beeping climbs back up to heartbeat frequency.

CODY (V.O.)

It took a long time to remember being dead. And when I did, I wondered if the guy in the bed was me, after all.

EXT. THE NEEDLE ARMS - DAY

Cody, wearing cowboy hat and boots with a "COLORADO HOCKEY" shirt, is recovering but still leans on crutches. He hobbles to the entrance of a forbiddingly under-maintained apartment house, stops, looks through glass doors up the long stairs.

CODY (V.O.)

I've done a four sixty forty and now a few stairs kick my ass.

CHILO SANDOVAL, a muscular young Chicano with gang tattoos at his throat, exits the building. He stops, holds the door open for Cody as an afterthought. Cody glares at him.

At that moment NUTSO, a wizened lunatic, careens out the door, jostling both men. The sight of a length of broken conduit sagging from the facade causes him to howl in fury.

NUTSO

Cocksuckers tore the motherfucker down! I'll break their goddamned necks!

He brushes by Cody and Chilo, sprinting with eye of flame at two Young Toughs in leather jackets, who take one look at the charging madman and run, Nutso in fevered pursuit.

CODY

What the hell was that?

CHILO

Nutso. He manages the Needle Arms.

CODY

Perfect name for it. I just moved in, but I never saw him before.

CHILO

He looks better when he's on meds.

CODY

So who were those guys?

CHILO
Cocksuckers, hear him tell it.

CODY
And that's the broke motherfucker?

CHILO
Worse, it's the boiler control
motherfucker. More cold water.

CODY
This whole town is cold water.

CHILO
Orale. Hey, I'm Chilo. Come on to
the Park. Catch the Peace Concert.

Cody falls in with him and they move down the sidewalk.

CODY
Cody Delf. What's a Peace Concert?

CHILO
Maybe where we can get a piece.
Can you... you know... do it?
Those crutches and shit?

CODY
I'm all about finding out.

EXT. GASWORKS PARK - DAY

Chilo and Cody join a crowd of boogying hippies. Drums throb, gauzy girls spin in "Dead-ly" dances, nylon comets wave overhead. Love and tie dye abound.

Chilo takes it in, smiling and ogling, but abruptly straightens up, glances around, moves purposefully towards a young drummer straddling a conga.

Little drummer boy looks up, sees a compelling Hispanic hero striding towards him. He dismounts, bows Chilo to his drum.

Chilo squats on the drum and starts to play. He immediately picks up the beat and dominates it. Other drummers follow him, everyone starts swaying in synchronous waves.

Cody, also gripped by the rhythm, stares at this. He stands taller, features relaxing into a different mold.

Cody turns to a lanky, dreadlocked hippie whiteboy playing wispy bleats on a tin whistle. The flute looks ornate and mystic, shines with attraction. Cody points at it.

The kid sees a golden western star, hands the flute over. Cody examines it, fumbles, blows a note or two. His eyes harden and he steps over to Chilo. The crutches fall away.

Cody blows in upper register, steely spikes of sound stabbing into the pulsing drumbeat.

The hippies bob and weave in unison like Chinese dance teams. Girls whirl a wild fringe in front of a synchronized swarm. All move in patterns: ordered, assured, spooky.

Cody slams out a final icepick note and the drums stop. The group exhales together like an orgasm. Several girls roll their eyes up and swoon, are caught and passed overhead.

Cody snaps out of it, looks at Chilo, shrugs. Chilo stands, shaking his head, both unaware of the hush around them.

CHILO

Musician, huh?

CODY

First time I touched one of those.
But yeh, I just got a guitar, play
all the time.

CHILO

Then we should talk. Twist one up.

Cody absently hands the whistle back to the hippie, not noticing the reverent way the kid cradles it or the way other kids move in to stare at it. It's golden and gleaming, enchanted in the kid's grubby grasp.

Chilo and Cody walk off towards the Needle Arms, unaware that the crowd opens around them, trails after them like the wake of a boat.

CODY

Beats me. It just came over me to
get a guitar and move to Seattle.

CHILO

Right after your life fell to shit
and took a bite outta your ass?

CODY

Okay, we definitely oughta talk.

CHILO

And twist one up.

CODY

Absolutely. Crack us some brews.

They saunter off through a corridor of kids moving in patterns like a school of fish, walk into sunset.

INT. CHILO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The place is a pigsty except immediately surrounding the custom drum kit augmented with dual congas, timbales, a steel drum and an assortment of blocks and bells. Chilo sits at the kit, Cody looks around, holding a sunburst Les Paul and suitcase-sized amp. Chilo points to a pile of junk.

CHILO

Just kick that shit outta there.
Look like you've kicked some shit.

CODY

Yeh, I'm a little bit country...
and a little bit rock and roll.

He finds the outlet and plugs in the amp, jacks in the guitar, and starts fiddling with tuning and knobs.

CODY

I've been dying to play with
somebody, but first you got to tell
me about what you said at the park.

CHILO

About your life goes booyah, then
suddenly you're hot to play music?

CODY

Or even Beyond Booyah.

CHILO

Like maybe Flatline City? Shit,
tell me about it amigo.

CODY

How about you tell me?

Chilo pulls his shirt open, revealing a crosshatch of scar tissue against his dark skin. His Old English gangbanger tats are unreadably defaced.

EXT. EAST L.A. ALLEY - NIGHT

MUSIC OVER: BASS AND DRUMS CUT, with Chicano ejaculations.

Chilo's on the run. And with good reason: the half-dozen homeboys behind him have knives and attitudes. He's scared shitless, but stays ahead of the problem by pounding through a breakneck maze of barrio alleys and yards.

He does okay until he vaults a fence into a snarling pack of pit bulls. He goes down in a fight so uneven that it's almost a relief when the gangbangers jump into the yard and cut the slavering dogs to ribbons.

Chilo staggers to his feet, tries to jump the fence. His tattered, bleeding hands fall short of the top and he turns to face his saviors, bleeding and gasping for breath.

The ring of bangers also pant heavily, weightpile muscle heaving as they treat him to the Last Stare-down.

Chilo licks torn lips. He plunders through his pockets and pulls out a roll of bills, throws it at the feet of the biggest homey. He tugs a handful of crack vials from his jacket pocket, throws them into the pot. He lifts bleeding hands, palms out. He waits.

The Warlord picks up the dope and money, weighs them in an unforgiving hand, gives Chilo the look. They all move forward, steel darting like bright fish in the dark.

Chilo goes down swinging under a feeding frenzy of blades. The tableau freezes as the warlord slams a long knife right into his chest. Chilo spits blood and slumps to the ground.

One banger starts to kick him, but the Warlord cuffs him away and gives Chilo a nodded salute. Hey, the guy stood up and fought. The gang bails over the fence.

A Hispanic Homeowner inches into the yard, slingblade in one hand and cellular phone clapped to his ear. He yells at the phone in Spanish, shaking. He's appalled by the dogs and Chilo lying in a widening pool of blood.

CHILO (V.O.)

They all said I was dead. Except one fucking guy.

INT. CHILO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CHILO

I'm down to a shot glass of blood, machines say nobody's home. Know what this *pendejo* paramedic said?

CODY

Chuck this wetback in a dumpster?

CHILO

Chale, homes. He was Latino, *pura raza*. He said, "The present day *pachuco* refuses to die."

CODY

So you didn't.

CHILO

Fuck, I didn't! Deadern doggie dirt, *compa*. But dig, I walked out of that hospital alive. And kept walking. Far from "Los" as I could get. I been here a year now. You hardly notice the scars.

CODY

Right. Could you maybe cover them up there? You're grossing me out.

CHILO

I'm saying, we got shit in common.

CODY

Yeh, Dead Men Walking.

CHILO

Hey, check out the alternative.

CODY

I got a look at the alternative, thanks. All I wanna do now...

CHILO

...is jam, right? I'm down.

Chilo grabs his sticks, slashes a circle of detonation around his scarred torso. Cody slips on his guitar strap, slides his fingers down the fretboard, starts to play.

INT. ROGER'S APARTMENT - DAY

MUSIC: Cody and Chilo's jam filters through the ceiling.

ROGER MAIN, a slender black man, twenties, with steel glasses and technogeek look, sits at a workbench covered with components and tools. He tinkers with a gadget, stops to look at the ceiling, taps a tiny screwdriver to the beat.

ROGER (V.O.)

I normally never notice how I feel.

Behind his bench, shelves cram the entire wall with computers, speakers, test gear, and uber-nerd electronics.

ROGER (V.O.)

What I do is think. About machines.

His room is all black, including the compulsive futurist furniture. The bed is a tight slab with black sheets. A rod holds black shirts and pants like the ones he wears.

An intimidating Plush amp and black fretless bass dominate the opposite wall.

ROGER (V.O.)

I built machines to produce and alter signals. I was good at it. Music is a program that can run on some of my hardware.

INT. ELECTRONICS LAB - DAY

A larger, industrial-strength version of Roger's home lab, all white except the huge selection of gear and instruments.

Roger, in white lab coat, white slacks, white running shoes, rigs a complicated device on a rack connected to computers, dials, gizmos... and Roger himself, through dermal electrodes. A polygraph sweeps regularly. The rack hums.

ROGER (V.O.)

I didn't really plan to build a machine that could kill a person.

He runs down a clipboard, checking the rack. The device is intricate and compelling, flickers with diodes and screens.

ROGER (V.O.)

It was experimental R&D, but I thought it had promise. Simple idea, modulating output based on feedback from fluctuations in bioelectric potential.

He reaches into the rack with a tool. The hum modulates. He hits dials, tries again...more tone. He taps his fingers, tears a Velcro ground strap off his wrist and reaches again.

ROGER (V.O.)

"Bioelectric" involving a variable I hadn't taken into consideration. The resistance of a random human being. In other words, me.

He tinkers a moment, then goes rigid with electric shock. The hum modulates dramatically, warbling up and down. The device emits smoke and sparks. The needles go crazy.

ROGER (V.O.)

I won't say getting electrocuted didn't have interesting elements, but I can't really recommend it.

As Roger convulses, the polygraph needles follow the spasms with wild swings and spikes. He yells a blunt, involuntary syllable and the hum harmonizes with him.

ROGER (V.O.)

What really struck me was how each convulsion blacked everything out. I'd see the world. I mean, light, objects, everything there is.

CUT TO BLACK SCREEN

ROGER (V.O.)
 Then there would suddenly be
 nothing. I don't mean just
 darkness. I mean nothing at all.

CUT BACK TO LAB

Intercuts back forth between the scene and a black, silent screen continue, increasing in frequency.

The white lab half of the alternation is loud with the hum and Roger's ejaculations.

Something moves in the blackness, scary, but subliminal.

ROGER (V.O.)
 I saw the two conditions as equally
 valid. I have a graph of exactly
 when I died and for how long.

The cuts between black and white reach a flicker point, like a strobe light. Then they stop cold, leaving...

INT. ROGER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Roger stands in the middle of the floor spotlight, playing his bass along with Cody and Chilo above him. He has a mechanical style. His head is back, looking up.

ROGER (V.O.)
 When the burns on my hands healed I
 built an amp and bought a bass.
 You don't hear it, you feel it.

INT. NEEDLE ARMS HALLWAY - DAY

ED STREETER, tall, around thirty, shaved head and a vaguely Buddhist robe, carries a bag of organic rice down the filthy hall, easing around a smoldering crackhead.

ED (V.O.)
 After Sonora, and the sanitarium, I
 wanted to go anywhere but the
 desert. Someplace wet, cloudy and
 unconscious. Seattle did nicely.

He sets down the rice, keys a door with a sign: "BASIC".

ED
 Everybody calls The Bridgeview the
 Needle Arms. I found out why.

INT. ED'S APARTMENT - DAY

He opens the door to a Spartan cell: single mattress on the floor, no belongings except the black concert grand piano.

ED (V.O.)
 But I don't feel superior to
 junkies. The salient distinction is
 the amount of self-delusion.

He sets the rice down beside some Asian-looking pots and utensils, puts on a teapot, walks to the piano.

ED (V.O.)
 I fancied myself an investigator,
 an explorer. Maybe they do, also.

Ed starts to play.

ED (V.O.)
 I smoked the *ayuhasca* instead of
 just eating it because I'd been
 told I could see more, understand
 more. What's the difference?
 (Beat)
 Well I did take notes.

INT. BRUJO'S HUT - NIGHT

A central fire gives flickering light to the hut of the Mexican medicine man in front of Ed, who sits in the lotus position, very attentive. A notebook lies beside him.

ED (V.O.)
 Totally useless. Everything
 happened in the dark, blank divide
 that separates my life. The last
 line in my field notes said I would
 attempt to actually see "The
 Guardians" of absolute reality.

Ed's view of the hut is distorted, probably by the contents of the gourd in his hands. Colors are too bright, details vibrate, the shaman's movements are oddly fluid as he waves a pipe in front of Ed's eyes, blows smoke up his nose.

The light dims, Ed's vision narrows into a tunnel. In the dark around the tunnel there is a hint of movement.

ED (O.S.)
 What is that? *Que es eso?*

The shaman's face appears in the dwindling circle of vision, fearful. He tugs and yells at Ed.

The dark creeps with flashes and shadows: twisting coils, claws and beaks, malicious eyes.

ED (O.S.)
 I see them! The Guardians!
 They're...

The tunnel chokes down to swarming, teeming blackness.

ED (O.S.)
 And they see me! Oh, God! Help me!

INT. ED'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ed stands at his door, Roger just outside.

ED
 You seriously suggest I perform
 with those grunge idiots upstairs?

ROGER
 With all three of us.

ED
 And what, bang on the floor?

ROGER
 No man. On your piano.

ED
 Do you have any idea the people
 I've studied under?

Roger considers this a moment, becomes somber. He stands very erect and moves just inches away from Ed. He looks at Ed's eyes and speaks in a stern, mechanical voice.

ROGER
 You learn much under The Guardians?

Ed recoils, sits down on the piano bench, staring at Roger.

ROGER
 (Relaxing)
 Sorry, Ed. I have no idea why I
 said that. Or what it means.

ED
 Don't apologize. I think it means
 I should listen to you. When the
 pupil is ready, the master appears.

ROGER
 I'm just talking music here, man.

ED
 Do you really believe that?

ROGER

And various other weird shit.

MONTAGE: ED'S KEYBOARD

MUSIC OVER: ACOUSTIC PIANO SOLO that gradually takes on a more electronic sound, melding into a jam with the band.

ED'S PLACE - Roger and Ed jam, Roger fixated on Ed's fingers on the keys.

CHILO'S PAD - Roger introduces Ed to Chilo and Cody. Chilo obviously clowning, Ed wooden but making nice.

ED'S PLACE - Ed looks at his piano, then the ceiling.

MUSIC STORE - Ed browses keyboards, his distaste obvious.

SECOND MUSIC STORE - Roger and Cody examine synthesizers with Ed. Cody mugs with an over-the-shoulder Korg, doing Hendrix moves, teeth on keys. Ed scoffs, but takes and examines it, fingering the portmanteau on the neck.

STREET SCENE - Ed walks along the sidewalk with the Korg around his neck, doing wild arpeggios. The guys walk beside him, highsiding, applauding, commending him to passers by.

ED (V.O.)

If one stoops to mass spectacle,
one might as well go all the way.
And with a little panache.

END MONTAGE

INT. CHILO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Chilo, Cody, Roger, and Ed hook up and prepare to jam. Roger gets nothing from his amp, examines the wall socket.

CHILO

Yo, Rog, only that one plug works.
It's cool, I got extension cords.

Lots of extension cords. And cube taps and multis and such. Roger eyes the overloaded outlet suspiciously.

ROGER

What you've got, you've got a one
ten AC gangbang.

He plugs in and straightens. Everybody's ready to rock.

CHILO

Oh, man, this is gonna be great.
Uno, dos, one, two, three, cuatro.

The band emits one blast of synchronized sound before a fuse blows, plunging the room to blackness.

CODY

I love it.

ROGER

It'd be hard to follow.

A rimshot from Chilo's drum kit.

EXT. GASWORKS PARK - DAY

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER

The band skulks through the post-industrial Gasworks maze, carrying amps and instruments.

They set their gear on the low stage. Chilo bounds over to a lockbox, pulls out criminal implements and quickly opens it to reveal electric outlets. He gestures invitingly.

EXT. GASWORKS PARK - LATER

The band wails, Cody and Chilo bare-chested, Ed and Roger black-robed and stolid. Passing joggers, skaters, jugglers and picnickers form a small but extremely intent audience.

WEASEL, aptly-nicknamed aging punk/goth festooned with articulated rings, piercings, and unwholesome tats, bolts upright from the crowd. As he approaches the stage, mesmerized, he starts to shine, his metalware reflecting a golden glow. He draws closer: the golden glow increases.

He spreads his arms in a spiritual posture as he stares into the gold gleam. He starts shaking, falls to his knees. His face rapt, his posture that of a penitent, he bobs to the beat, spasms. He falls on his face, arms over his head, kowtowing to the source of gold light. Then he stops moving.

The band look at Weasel, but keep playing. He pulls himself upright and stares at them. He produces a business card from his pocket and cleans it on his sleeve.

He approaches the stage holding the card like a tribute. Bending low, he places the card at Ed's feet, backs away in the subservient posture. Back in the crowd he sits, spreads his arms into the same asana, basks in the music and light.

Ed picks up the card. It says: "TOO HIGH" and, smaller, "WEASEL". He looks at Cody, who rolls his eyes then concentrates on his fingers.

INT. TOO HIGH TAVERN - DAY

It's a hole, but it's apparently their hole. The band looks around as Weasel makes welcoming motions.

WEASEL

Just leave your equipment here.
It's safe, really. You can use it
for practice during the day.

ED

Thanks, Weasel. But how about the
other bands...

WEASEL

What other bands? You guys are the
new House Band at the Too High. As
many nights as you want.

INT. THE TOO HIGH - NIGHT

The band stands in a circle, playing for their own
edification, not for the crowd of cruisers and derelicts. .

JAXI enters: young and pretty with a curly blond mop and a
gymnast's body filling out alt.dot mufti. She carries a
rucksack.

She sits up front, pulls out firechains. She stands, drags
the balls over a candle: they burst into flame. She moves
out on the floor, her fire dance clearing a space around her.

The band notices the flare-up, open ranks to play for Jaxi's
agile, inventive dance with the balls of flame. She and the
band fall into a groove, working off each other.

Her dance climaxes, the flames go out. She drops the
chains, stands still for a beat, steps closer to the band.
A gold glow lights her, her face goes slack and rapturous.

She reaches to embrace the band, who she sees as sexy
supermen bathed in gold light and doing holy rituals before
a gold back altar elaborate as any Spanish cathedral.

She drops to her knees in front of them, clutching her
breasts. She collapses backwards, head touching the floor.
She spasms, trembling and thrusting as though in orgasm. She
arches off the floor and collapses, obviously unconscious.

She jerks, slowly rises to her knees, then to her feet.
Shaky, she walks right to the band, swaying to the music.

She wobbles, puts a steadying arm around Cody's shoulders.

The band signals a break, moving towards their table, where
Weasel sets down five beers. The band and Jaxi sit, all
five pick up a schooner and drink simultaneously.

CODY

Hi, we're the band.

Jaxi has a southern accent with trailer trash overtones.

JAXI
Hi, I'm the groupie.

Cody slops beer from his schooner.

CHILO
Sobres! About time.

ED
That dance was beautiful. Could you do another one for us?

JAXI
If you tell me to.

ROGER
Not from around here, honey?

JAXI
Not even close. Mississippi. Can't you tell by my name?

CODY
Mrs. Ippi? Is there a Mr. Ippi?

JAXI
My daddy was from Jacksonville, supposedly. So mama named me Jaxi.

ROGER
Hello, Jaxi. I'm Roger. Cody, Ed. El Macho Muchacho there is Chilo.

CODY
But you can call him Mexi.

ED
So where do you live now?

Jaxi reaches under the table to heft up her rucksack.

JAXI
Y'all are gonna tell me.

CHILO
Hey, I got a place up in the Needle... I mean the Bridgeview.

ROGER
We all live at the Needle Arms.

JAXI
So that's where we live.

CHUCO
I've got a double bed.

ROGER

Yes, but I have sheets.

JAXI

That's a nice plus. But I think...

(Pauses, browses)

You first.

She leans over to pat Cody's thigh.

JAXI

Nice muscles. Good eye, Jaxi-ville.

CHILO

No es nada. You wanna see a body
born to please *chicas*, I give
private tours.

JAXI

Okay. You're second.

ED

I thought you had to have sales and
limos before these things happened.

JAXI

You've already happened. Don't
tell me you don't feel it? Y'all
are the max. Like... gods. Man,
I'm glad I came in tonight. I
almost passed.

ROGER

That does it. You're our fan club
president. We've got one more set,
so take notes and pictures.

She smiles at Roger.

JAXI

I hope you don't think I'm
forgetting about you.

ROGER

The only reason we black folk do
music is to get into white girls.

Jaxi laughs, Ed studies her closely.

ED

Is this how you treat every band
you meet?

JAXI

Well, a little bit. I've been
around. I've done things I'm proud
to be ashamed of.

ED

What?

JAXI

But this is different. Y'all are it. All the way, all time.

ROGER

You make it sound like we're getting married here.

ED

With certain incest/pedophile undercurrents.

JAXI

I know. The altar... the way... I've been looking for something as long as I can remember. As soon as I lost it, I knew I'd found it.

ROGER

So I guess we can kiss the bride.

CODY

Hot damn.

EXT. DRIZZLY STREET - NIGHT

Roger and Ed, hunched against a light rain, walk towards the Bridgeview. Cody walks ahead, arm around Jaxi, Chilo beside them trying to cozen her away.

ROGER

You're a doctor, right?

ED

Dr. Streeter. PhD. DPsy.

ROGER

Some kind of headshrinker, right?

ED

Yes. But enough about me, let's talk about your mother.

ROGER

Your mama. Look, you got any shrink ideas on this thing? What the hell we're doing to people?

ED

Entertaining them, I suppose. I see all this as trance music.

ROGER

That's what we're seeing? Trances?

ED

Do they look entranced or don't they? It's ancient, probably the first human music. I've heard records of Vedic drumming, Islamic devotional chants, Native American drones, Hindu modal ragas...

ROGER

Africa, Haiti: Religious trances, then? Spiritual?

ED

It's also used in art compositions. Phillip Glass has done it extensively. Terry Riley, Eno, let me think, Cheb Sabbah.

ROGER

Music to affect the mind and body.

ED

Repetitive rhythm can regulate brainwave patterns, motor areas. Create euphoric disassociative states that sometimes mimic the effect of medications or drugs.

ROGER

Damn. Clinic description of beat. That explain this shit for you?

They walk quietly for a few paces.

ED

Studies only take you so fat.

INT. CLUB LE GRUNGE - NIGHT

Another cruddy venue. MUSIC is mediocre slam from a would-be hardcore band. Ed and the boys sit with Weasel, sweating from opening for the punks on stage.

WEASEL

Management.

ED

You've done fine so far.

WEASEL

Real management. Who knows me? See? Can I call up and book the Arena? Shit, you don't even know me.

ED

Good point.

WEASEL

Look, you guys are the kind. But you play shitholes like this, or my place, because nobody knows you since you don't play anyplace else.

ROGER

Ah.

WEASEL

Most of these groups...
(Indicates stage)
...suck as bad as those dickheads.

The band's crudely lettered banner reads: "THOSE DICKHEADS".

WEASEL

Not a chance. Sometimes I manage groups myself, but you're scary. Over my head. First time I heard you play, know what I thought?

INT. BIG RED OFFICES - DAY

Understated, but projecting success, power and exclusivity. AVIS, the expensive Brit receptionist, has ash blonde looks and Delft blue stare that could stop people in their tracks. And does. The band fidgets outside the glass doors.

WEASEL (V.O.)

I thought... Big Red.

ED (V.O.)

Big Red?

Roger points at the imposing logo on the doors, repeated on the wall behind Avis' desk. It says, "BIG RED".

ROGER

This is the place, all right.

CODY

Looks pretty big time.

CHILO

Let's get some.

ROGER

They say it's all about getting your foot in the door.

Ed crosses to the desk with the band trailing him. Avis looks up at them: Roger in black coat and glasses, Cody and Chilo athletic and hard, Ed shaven and robed like a Kung Fu flashback. She holds up an exquisite finger and they stop like they ran into a wall.

AVIS

Can I help you gentlemen?
(She rather doubts it)

ED

We're a three o'clock for Big Red.

AVIS

(Deepening doubt)
Do you know who with?

ED

The message said to ask for "Red".

AVIS

A message from...

ED

Actually, it sounded like you.

CODY

Just not as snotty.

AVIS

(Doubts vanished)
Ah, you're the Band With No Name.

Chilo whistles Eastwood's theme from "Fistful of Dollars".

AVIS

We're very excited about meeting
you. If you'd please wait right
down there in the Conference Room,
I'll send somebody with coffee.

The guys head down the hall, gaping at the trappings of
influence on the walls. Chilo lingers, perches on the desk.

CHILO

Hey, listen, *mamacita*. I look at
you and you know what I see?

AVIS

A woman who wouldn't touch a man
with tattoos.

CHILO

For you, I could remove them.

AVIS

Actually I never touch men at all.
I'm a frigid lesbian android.

CHILO

I caught that right off. But I
thought I'd give you a shot.

AVIS

I don't like getting shots. That's
why I don't touch men with tattoos.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Corporate idea of functional luxury. The guys lounge
recreationally. BIG RED enters, a tall, imposing, flaming
redhead in her late twenties with a model's face and killer
body setting off by a power suit. She eyes them critically.

RED

Not so shabby. Better than I hoped.

CHILO

I was thinking that, too. But first
can you get me a beer? You guys?

Red's look removes all doubt of who's in charge.

RED

I asked you here today. Thanks so
much for coming.

ED

So you're...

RED

Please call me Red. I'm hoping to
act as your agent and manager.

She shifts her weight slightly--into a ravishing pose that
combines cold command with a pronounced desirability.

RED

In fact, I insist.

The guys look at each other, back at Red.

ED

We were persuaded you could make us
rich and famous.

RED

Beyond your wildest, sickest
dreams. And so much more.

CODY

Works for me.

ROGER

You go, girl.

CHILO

Oye como va, Nena.

RED

Here's Plan A: I run you down on what we do with you, you sign up.

ROGER

What's the B Plan, just in case?

RED

We skip the rundown, you shut up, sign, get your butts to work.

ED

Not without its own brusque appeal.

CHILO

Hey, run me down all you want.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Red stands at the head of the table, the guys sit on either side reading or signing contracts. Red stands stiffly erect, they bend over the table, graphically depicting the power balance. She collects contracts with a businesslike smile.

RED

So glad to have you all aboard.

CODY

Do we really just call you Red?

RED

You'd prefer something that better reflects our future relationship?

CHILO

Simón. Just what I was thinking.

RED

Then, just among ourselves you understand, you may call me "Boss".

CHILO

Andale, jefecita.

She tucks away the contracts, strides to the door, turns.

RED

We'll be in touch about a few little improvements.

She's gone and the door's closed. The guys look around, as if snapping out of a nap. What the hell just happened?

ROGER

We're about to be New and Improved?

CHILO
Shit, I can't wait.

CODY
How much makeover do we need?

INT. RED'S OFFICE - DAY

Her hairdo is different, but not her business machine demeanor. She touches the tip of an upraised first finger.

RED
Numero Uno. The practice studio.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - DAY

A grungy basement in the belly of the Needle Arms. The guys check it out, kicking debris, while Red hands cash to a goggling Nutso. He exits, cackling like Gollum. Red turns to them, spreads an arm.

RED
Boys, welcome to Hell.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - LATER

The cellar is now white and ratty rugs cover the floor. White foam planks are stapled overhead. Chilo's drums, Ed's piano, and a wall of amps and speakers are in place, as well as a low table and a few old chairs and sofas.

The guys fiddle with knobs, tune drums, arrange guitar stands and examine racks and booms that have appeared.

They look around at one another, start to play.

INT. BIG RED'S OFFICE - DAY

She ticks off her second finger.

RED
Number two. The Name.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - DAY

The band sprawls around except for Chilo, who writhes at the drums as usual, experimenting with heavily padded sticks.

CHILO
Was Band With No Name so bad?

ROGER
We go pro, we need a brand.

CODY
Too High House Band sucks?

ED
Not very exclusive.

CODY
Got it. Cody and the Core.

CHILO
Sounds like Marine homo porn.

CODY
The X Team.

ROGER
Low Self Extreme?

ED
Aren't a lot of names like Boston
and Alabama and such?

CODY
Yeh, but Seattle?

ED
All right... Tukwila?

CHILO
Rainier Draft.

ROGER
Starboeing.

CODY
Microbucks.

WEASEL
That one has the ring of truth.

INT. THE TOO HIGH - NIGHT

The band is cooking, but Cody signals and they break as Jaxi approaches the stage with a roll of gaffer's tape.

Cody has a bloody finger, which she tapes. The band laugh.

JAXI
He earned that sore finger
honestly.

CHILO
Probably diseased.

ROGER
Put that one down on that list of
names.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

CODY
The Puds

CHILO
Pus

JAXI
Yeast. No, wait... Clamydia.

ED
Smegma?

Cody and Jaxi raise inquisitive eyebrows.

ROGER
Head cheese.

JAXI
Yuck.

CHILO
You're saying we're Yuck?

JAXI
No, more like, Goldilocks and Three
Barelies.

CODY
That's it young lady. Shut up and
go to your room.

Jaxi's expression freezes. She rises slowly, fighting the impulse. She tries to speak, but can't.

She runs to the door, but halts in confusion. Hand on the doorknob, she turns panicked, beseeching eyes to the guys.

ROGER
Ah shit man, she's got no room.

ED
Call it off, Cody!

Alarmed, Cody jumps to his feet and runs to her.

CODY
No, no, stay here, Jaxi. Say what
you want. I didn't mean it.

ROGER
Yeh, here, sit down. Just forget
the whole thing.

Jaxi's troubled expression clears up immediately. She comes over and sits, looking around the band with her usual cheerfulness. Ed watches her closely.

ED
 Couldn't get the door open, Jaxi?

Jaxi looks at him, blank.

JAXI
 What door?

ED
 She forgot the whole thing.

CODY
 Whoa.

CHILO
 The girl of my dreams.

JAXI
 In your dreams, wetback.

ED
 Jaxi, could you do me a favor? We need a copy of today's "Times". Think there might still be one down at Still Life?

JAXI
 Sure, Ed. Anybody else want anything?

She pops up, grins at the bunch, and exits.

ROGER
 I don't think you needed to say, "can you do me a favor".

CHILO
Jesucristo, I guess not.

ED
 We need to be really careful what we say to that child.

ROGER
 You got that right. I wouldn't want to tell her to get lost.

CODY
 Or drop dead.

CHILO
 Or go fuck herself.

ROGER
Unless Red told you to.

That has a chilling effect on everybody.

ED
I don't see how I can accept such
responsibility for another person.

ROGER
Another person? A nother person?
How many are there out there?

CHILO
Damn, man.

ED
That's just too much karma.

ROGER
And that's just so far.

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS -- WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A series of quick shots as band members spontaneously blurt
out names while rehearsing, eating, kicking back.

LAUNDRY ROOM

CODY
Something like Slash.

ED
Further up the keyboard. Asterisk.

ROGER
Colon.

CHILO
Los Pachucos. Nopalitos.

ROGER
Too Latin.

CHILO
What's wrong with Latin?

ED
In that case how about Post Mortem?

CHILO
If you're going to go there, why
not just Flat Fucking Line?

FAST FOOD JOINT

CHILO

Elvis Presley and the Beatles.
That's draw some crowds.

CODY

Free Beer would draw more.

ROGER

Various Artists. We'll already
have a bin in the stores.

JAXI

Blue Light Special?

STUDIO

ROGER

Ohm.

ED

I certainly like it.

ROGER

I meant just the resistance symbol.

ED

It can't just be a symbol, can it?

ROGER

Sure. But everybody will really
call us The Artists Previously
Unknown as Dogshit.

CODY

Om's good, though. Eddie and the
Perusers. Ed and the Meditators.

CHILO

How about just The Meds?

ROGER

HWA. Honkies with Aptitude.

CHILO

Batteries Not Included.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - DAY

Everybody chilling on sofas, playing the name game.

WEASEL

See if you dig where I'm coming
from here. The Chosen.

ROGER

Too Jewish.

ED

Or Korean.

CODY

Toe Jam.

WEASEL

Too retro grunge.

CHILO

Tepezcoloyo.

CODY

Will you get real? Sounds like...

But Chilo is onto something. He stiffens, sits up.

CHILO

No wait, I get this Native American
thing. Aztec monster... God...
something. Like this big claw.

ROGER

Interesting. So maybe... Talon?

ED

Yes. That's the idea. Very close.

CODY

Oh, we're sitting around
brainstorming, and suddenly you
know when we're getting warm?

Ed ignores him, becomes very fixated, trance-like.

ED

The basic idea. Claws, talons,
carrying away like rapine birds...

CHILO

Chin, Ed's having a flashback.

ROGER

Should we call a therapist or a
Kung Fu master?

CODY

Some sort of *déjà vu*.

JAXI

If you've seen one déjà vu, you've seen them all.

Ed returns to focus, shakes his head, stares at Jaxi.

ED

Raptor. We are Raptor.

CHILO

Shit, peeps'll think we're rappers.

ROGER

Good.

CODY

Sounds like somebody from Castle Greyskull. What is it?

ED

A bird of prey.

JAXI

A holy bird?

CHILO

That's what I was getting at.

ED

I know. It's a bird that snatches up food in its claws. From the Latin "*rapere*"...to carry away.

CODY

The hell's that got to do with it?

ED

Gives us words like "rapture".

CHILO

Carried away, huh? OK, I see it.

ED

Also "rapt". And "rape".

JAXI

That explains a lot.

ROGER

It works for me.

ED

That's who we are. The falcon is the talon of the falconer.

CODY
 Shit, dig deeper, will you? OK, we
 got "the" studio, "the" name and
 "the" groupie. What else we need?

INT. RED'S OFFICE - DAY

The third finger lifted. Red produces a leather case,
 suggestively molded, opens it and pulls out a microphone.

RED
 The Songs.

ED
 Songs?

CHILO
 You mean like, fucking songs?

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - DAY

The boys sit on sofas, Red stands.

RED
 You're one of the great jam bands
 ever, already. Not opinion: fact.
 Trust me. But we can't sell jams.

CHILO
 So? We're doing good.

RED
 You need songs for airplay.

JAXI
 Right. On radio if you don't turn
 them on, they just turn you off.

Red ignores her, indicating annoyance.

RED
 Radio, MTV, CDs, all that. You need
 lyrics to get people interested.

ED
 It's spooky how interested people
 already get, actually.

CODY
 We're going to do albums and MTV?

RED
 If you stick with me, do what I
 say, don't screw up.

ROGER

Like we got a choice. So where do we get songs? And who sings them?

RED

Both questions, same answer.

CODY

Now we gotta write and sing?

RED

You can. Trust me on that one, too.

ED

The more you say that, the more I wonder.

RED

Wondering isn't part of my set. Don't stress it. I'll be back Wednesday. Intrigued to hear what you come up with.

She spins on her heel, exits.

CHILO

(Calling after her)

How about a reggae La Bamba?

CODY

Wednesday?

JAXI

If she'd slow down a little, she wouldn't be in such a hurry.

ED

What?

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - DAY

ROGER

Maybe we should take the whole "alternative" angle?

CODY

Fuck that. Alternative to what? Alternative to life is what. And we all saw what that is.

ROGER

It's just an expression of non-mainstream...

CODY

Bull pockey. It's patchy-beard
white college boys who can't rock
sitting in the corner losing their
religion and wishing they were
"special". Like we give a shit.

ED

So what should we do, Cody? In your
humble, if foul-mouthed opinion?

CODY

Duh. Paaaaar Tay, Spanky! Boooooo
Tay. Or-fay Enty-tway.

ROGER

Like... "Louie, Louie"?

JAXI

Yeh! Like, "Boogie Til Ya Puke".

WEASEL

Right on. "Snort Til Ya Die".

CHILO

"Fuck Til Ya Bleed".

CODY

Oh, yeh! These twerps need to come
alive! Doesn't anybody play
football anymore? Or race bikes?

CHILO

Or build pussy wagons? They need
the Beach Boys on steroids, man.

CODY

You got it. They need like...
(Fumbling for it)
you know... pedal to the metal.

CHUCO

Andale, Mano! Balls to the wall.

ROGER

Sure. More stupid expressions like
that, put together so they rhyme.

MONTAGE: "PEDAL TO THE METAL"

ON STAGE

The MUSIC carries Raptor's signature flood of drums and bass
across the low end, but with a clean rock sound on top... a
motorhead song for a new generation.

In a blaze of lights and crowd noise, Cody crouches over his guitar, driven by the bass as he yells into a mike.

CODY

(Sings)

Pedal to the metal
 Balls to the wall
 Brute acceleration
 Mute anticipation
 Of the thrill of it all.
 Flattens out your eyeballs
 Kicks at your crotch
 Turbo ventilation
 Tricky carburetion
 Move it out another notch.

In the wings, Big Red looks at the crowd, vibing it out. JULIAN STYLES, a sleek, predatory suit in his forties, shows her a complex instrument. She reads it, nods.

CODY

Burnin' up the blacktop
 Blowin' down the white line
 Flame out of the chrome pipe
 Punchin' it over the redline.

Lips to the mike, he howls ala Beach Boys' "Surfin' USA".

CODY

Take it over a hundred
 And her eyes'll sure shine
 Open her up now
 Tear along the dotted line.

RECORDING STUDIO

Behind the glass Cody wails into a mike as an Engineer mixes it up. Roger, Red, Ed and Julian watch the process. Julian leans over the Engineer, pointing and evaluating results.

CODY

Putting down the hammer
 Blowing off doors
 Going for the action
 Anywhere there's traction
 For the feel of the force.
 Looking for the limit
 Bat outta hell
 Just within a fraction
 Feeling satisfaction
 'Cause it's throbbin' so well.

TELEVISION SCREEN

By this point the footage is a TV video. Band footage alternates with visuals of fast cars burning out, Chilo bouncing a "lowrider", Cody slamming a powerful motorcycle through the gears while a bikinied bod clings behind him.

CODY

Burnin' up the blacktop
Blowin' down the white line
Flame out of the chrome pipe
Punchin' it over the redline.

Shift it and pop it
She'll feel it way up inside
Motorized meltdown
Move her past the Yield sign.

Final seconds of the song show, in lower left corner:

MTV SUPER: "PEDAL TO THE METAL / RAPTOR / BIG RED RECORDS"

END MONTAGE

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

As Cody finishes the song, Red gives him a big thumbs up from behind the glass of the booth.

CODY

Rockin' Fuckin' Roll, Baby!

In the booth Big Red turns a look on Ed and Roger.

RED

There's one in the can. What are you boys doing for the cause?

ROGER

How about a nice Barry White thing?

RED

I don't think so.

ROGER

(Wetpants voice)

You don't mean that, baby.

ED

You've heard my voice. You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear.

BIG RED

(Feral grin)

Matter of fact, that's exactly what we do. Ed, do you take showers?

The amplified chant fills the studio. Ed touches the keys, driving a matching bassline, that creates a beat between the strings and his voice, an overpowering mood.

Red smiles, gives Ed a high sign. She motions Engineer to continue, exits through the hallway door.

INT. INNER STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

Julian waits outside. He raises an eyebrow, Red returns a brisk nod.

BIG RED
Coming along right on time.

JULIAN
I'm so glad. I need it yesterday.

BIG RED
These are our boys.

JULIAN
Looks like it. But there's still something... It needs more surface highlight, you know. More punch.

RED
I'm sure you'll take care of it.

JULIAN
It's already being taken care of.

Red laughs and starts to turn away. But Julian lays his hand on her nape and turns her around.

JULIAN
But who will take care of Julian?

Red's face shows nothing, but her reluctance is obvious.

RED
Do we have to?

JULIAN
Yes. You do.

He pushes her back to arms length and releases her. He stands more erect and takes on the hard, hawkish look.

She sees him as a statue of a living god cast in dark gold, like hematite reflecting gold highlights.

She falls to her knees, leans back spreading her hands, then leans forward to embrace his legs and bring her mouth to his groin.

Julian looks down at her and smiles, touches her hair tenderly, then wraps a skein of it around his fist.

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

A somewhat upscale young crowd pogos frenetically as Raptor noodles out percussive dub.

NICK FONTANA stands watching in the foyer, cell phone to his ear. Raincoat and bluesbro hat, Stratocaster slung behind his back, he's an old school bluesrocker in the Richards/Woods bisexual/bum tradition. Have ax, will travel.

NICK

Yeh this is the place, but...

(Listens briefly)

Got it. I'm your headhunter, baby.
I'm your huckleberry.

He steps into the wall of sound and bodies, takes in Raptor, a sneer on his painstakingly ravaged face, heads up front.

He stands directly in front of Ed, stiff and erect on the Korg. He reaches down and pulls his guitar around to present arms. And waits for a break.

When the band breaks... mostly because he's getting to them... he shakes his head melodramatically.

NICK

I heard you signed with Big Red.

The moshers edge away. The band are taken aback. Ed nods.

NICK

Hard to believe. You need a lot,
but vocals is worst. And guitar.

He steps onto the low stage and pulls out a patch cord.

NICK

Hi. I'm Chicago Nick Fontana. Let
me show you something, boys.

The band dithers, in unfamiliar territory. Except for Chilo, who bolts to his feet, knocking his stool over. He does a quick flex, spins his sticks and poises to attack.

CHUCO

How about we show you, homes?

Obviously "under the influence" Chilo slashes viciously at the drums, stomps on the pedals to push a gutpunch beat.

The rest of the band are immediately with the program... focused on Nick and out for blood. The sound pounces out claws first, nailing Nick in his tracks.

No foreplay, just wham, bam, fuck you man. The climax comes quickly. Nick is knocked to his knees, then blown back until his head touches the floor, his guitar sliding off the stage. He does the flutter, the heave, the freeze.

The band knock off, snap out, look at each other and the recumbent Nick. What did we do now?

Weasel arrives on the scene, creeps out. He looks at Nick, shudders, waves at the staring crowd.

WEASEL

Stand back people. Give the man
some secondhand smoke. You never
saw bands assassinate fans before?

The band edges up to Nick. Cody prods him with his boot.

Nick's eyes pop open, swim up from death to panic to wonder.

NICK

Christ, my life flashed in front of
me and I didn't even get a hard-on.

He crawls to his knees, shaking his head and trembling.

ROGER

So. Get the picture, white boy?

NICK

Yeh, I saw it loud and clear.

He staggers to his feet, steps up to Ed, glares in his eyes.

NICK

And guess what else? It saw me.

Shocked, Ed steps back. Chilo steps in, braces Nick.

CHUCO

See, wey? You don't fuck with us.

Ed recovers, stares at Nick. He steps up and speaks.

ED

Chilo, I think he is us.

CHUCO

Say what?

ROGER

I think you're right.

CODY

Yeh. Weird. He's on the team.

NICK

Rah rah rah, sis boom bah.

CHILO

Wait. *Esperate!* What we need Blues Brother for?

NICK

Hey, even homeboys get the blues.

CHILO

Fuck does that mean?

NICK

I get 'em every single day.
Occupational hazard.

ROGER

Could you patch him in, Weasel?

WEASEL

You dudes do some drastic recruiting practices. So you'll all play together nicely? Like... now?

CHILO

Unless you need a second, Nick?
Get your shit together?

It's been a tough ten minutes, but Nick rises to that one. He hefts his Strat meaningfully, shows his teeth.

NICK

Listen up, *ese*. Then talk smack.

Weasel patches Nick into an amplifier. He flicks switches, does a fingerdance on the tuning pegs. He looks up at them.

NICK

So. What else ya got?

INT. BIG RED OFFICES - DAY

Julian leans against his desk, facing Red, listening to a recorded Raptor jam with biting, bluesy second lead.

RED

I don't understand, is all. He's not in the original constellation.

JULIAN

So I'm improvising. He's a quickie, already plays. Adds a major vibe and a solid slice.

RED

But he's a sub-generation. He won't ever have an equal valence.

JULIAN

Except for musically.

RED

What about projection-wise? Basal energy? He's queer as a choirboy.

JULIAN

True. I suppose you'll have to do something about that.

RED

How the hell can I do anything about that?

JULIAN

Easy. Like this.

Julian takes her hands, leads her into a slow swing dance. He spins her, bends her over his desk, pushes up her skirt.

JULIAN

You underestimate your own powers.

Red submits mechanically, her distaste visible on her face.

RED

Gee, I wonder why that is.

INT. RED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Red at her desk, Nick in a straight chair, neither at ease.

RED

Is it even real, or just style? Some mod-rock bi affectation?

NICK

Hard to know what gets you hard. Is this what you called me in for?

RED

Afraid so. It's hard to explain it all, but sexual... polarization affects what we're doing here.

NICK

So... Don't Ask, Don't Tell?

RED

By no means. Here at Big Red we say Don't Argue, Don't Struggle.

She stands, walks to him, taking on aspects of a luminous, red-gold goddess. She motions, her dress falls away. She stands before him, pulsing worship and desire.

RED

Think we can straighten you out?

NICK

I'm getting straighter already.

Red lowers to her knees, hands in his lap.

RED

Aren't you, though? You know, Nick, a mouth is a mouth is a mouth.

NICK

Bone appetit. You already blew my mind.

INT. RED'S OFFICE- LATER

Nick lies on his back beside his overturned chair and a shambles of files and offices supplies. Red straddles him, now back to normal. Nick is blissed out.

RED

Welcome to Mandatory Hetero World.

NICK

So far, so good.

She leans close to his ear, whispers.

RED

You love me now. Your ass is mine.

NICK

Definitely. And yours is mine?

RED

It doesn't work quite like that.

NICK

What a gyp.

RED

Look at the fans tonight. You own their ass. They love you to death.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

The band sits around the room, serious and nervous. Chilo leans his chair against the door, arms crossed, on guard.

Ed leans forward, "chairing" the meeting.

ROGER

So we're there in the studio, we think we play guitar, drums, whatever. The engineers think they play studios. When what we all really play is speakers.

ED

And what we really, truly play is the basilar membrane of the inner ear. We're using very specifically pitched pulses to massage nerves that go straight to the cortex.

CODY

Who figured this shit out?

ED

It's nothing new. Quite the contrary. It's what music was for in the first place.

ROGER

What's new is that we're doing it with electromagnetic fields that show peculiar characteristics. Influencing nerve discharge, straight-out current induction.

NICK

What's new is doing it on purpose.

Nods all around for that one. Ed breaks the silence.

ED

We think a lot of the effect comes from wave interference between the aural nerves and brain waves. Alpha. Theta. Even subtler waves.

ROGER

That aren't in fraternities.

CHILO

Hijole! Right into our console!

ROGER

I've also identified interference beats that follow the same cadence.

ED

A rhythmic foot known as the stopped anapestic. Studies have shown that exposure to music in that form causes bodily fatigue, lowered volition, suggestibility.

CHILO

Fuck! Where do you get this shit?

CODY

And so what? It's like saying the murder was done by a bullet.

NICK

Fuckin' A. It's a conspiracy. So... what, who, why?

CODY

It's plain as the peckerprints on your ass. The work of the devil.

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS -- "WHO ARE THESE GUYS?"

Dialog bounces between shots in various locations, with some or all of band characters present.

CHILO'S APARTMENT

CHILO

I'm thinking aliens.

CODY

Without green cards?

CHILO

Fuck you. I mean *vatos* from space. That could explain anything.

CODY

So could the devil. That's what he does, explains things.

TABLE IN TOO HIGH

JAXI

So what can we do if it's the devil? Go to an exorcist?

ROGER

We'd probably just get repossessed.

BASEMENT STUDIO

ED

On the other hand, if it is aliens, what can we do about it?

CODY

Easy. What red-blooded American guys always do. Dig in, resist, use muscle and know-how to fuck them off and save the earth.

CHILO

Good one.
 (Ala Three Stooges)
 Martians, eh? Lemme attem.
 (Ala Cowardly Lion)
 I'll fight 'em with one hand tied
 behind my back.

GASWORKS PARK ESPLANADE

ROGER

I think they're a program.

ED

Now there's a surprise.

ROGER

More specifically, a virus. What
 "they" are, is software.

CODY

And what does that make us?

ROGER

Hardware.

He points from Chilo to Ed to Nick to Cody to Jaxi.

ROGER

Resistor, capacitor, transistor,
 data module, virtual soft drive.
 We're components in a PA system
 that tells people what to do.

COFFEE HOUSE TABLE

ED

To justify the way of Gods to man.

CODY

Now there's a best-case scenario.

ED

Maybe that's all anybody's ever
 been. Elements in a circuit of
 uncertain design and unknown user.

BASEMENT STUDIO

ROGER

Artificial intelligence. A lot of
 this stuff feels like programming.
 Recursive informational shit.

ED

But what's the interface? How'd it get into our brains?

NICK

Teach you morons guitar in a year.

ROGER

Eyeball protocol. Who gets viruses? Eyes are windows of the soul and windows are the best place to break and enter.

ED

Hmmm. We map the brain using light beams to drive retinal cells.

CODY

So now we have the soul of Windows?

ROGER

Version 666.2. Ed, what do you call bacteria or viri grown under glass?

ED

A culture.

ROGER

Think on that a little, man. You being a culture vulture and all.

CODY

Saviors of true pop culture. Rolling Stone called us that.

NICK

They're New Yorkers. What do they know about culture?

FREMONT BRIDGE

JAXI

One thing for sure. We're dead.

ROGER

But are we grateful?

CODY

More like the Undead, actually.

TOO HIGH, AFTER HOURS

ROGER

Night job of the living dead. That's what we're thinking?

NICK

I think it's a scam.

ED

Very helpful.

NICK

Serious. They're gangstahs. Look how they operate, all mobbed up.

ROGER

Yeh, Red sure looks Sicilian.

NICK

Shit, that "Mafia" thing was just when The Mob first got noticed. It's always been around. How else would anything ever work?

ED

Interesting evolutionary theory.

NICK

How you think those pyramids and ruins and shit got built? "Vote for King Tut and get a project."?

ED

I can agree with that.

NICK

There had to be a real power structure for that kinda shit.

ROGER

"Chariots of the Godfathers"?

LAUNDROMAT/BAR "SIT AND SPIN"

CODY

So how should we deal with them?

NICK

Give 'em what they want, take what they kick down. Everybody's happy.

ED

Like fixing a ticket.

NICK

Okay, Mr. Spock, what's your logical conclusion? Come on.

CODY

It's the devil! We are damned! The Anti Goddam Fucking Christ!

ROGER

Why didn't you think of that when we were trying to dream up names?

IVAR'S SALMON HOUSE DOCK

They eat and drink at picnic tables on the floating moorage, boats passing in the Ship Canal.

ROGER

So you think this the hand of God?

ED

Or synthesizing an artificial God.

CODY

Holy shit! What could be more Satanic than that?

ED

The subconscious speaks to us in many ways. How can we distinguish that small voice inside us from the word of God? How different from the "collective unconscious"?

NICK

"Unconscious Collective" would have made a good name.

ED

But what happens when you take on God's voice, and speak to others. Are you a holy man? A shaman? A psychotic? What is the difference?

JAXI

Right. The differences don't make any difference.

ED

And notice the many similarities.

JAXI

Which are all pretty much the same.

ED

(Gritting his teeth)

I once read that religions are predators that feed on humans.

CHILO

Shit, that stuff's just too squash. Like, "Believe It or Not".

JAXI

That's not the problem. It's the stuff you have to believe that's just unbelievable.

ED

Oy. Look, the point is, if we're dead...

JAXI

We're ghosts? Or Beetlejuice?

CODY

More like demons.

ED

So maybe if we can figure out why we're here and deal with it, we'll be able to move on.

NICK

To being dead.

ED

To our karma, off the wheel of life and death.

CHILO

Fuck that. I'll play these.

NICK

You bet. Sittin' heah in limbo, mon.

BASEMENT STUDIO

JAXI

Angels. Shining angels.

CODY

That's how you see us? Them?

JAXI

Angels are like God. Just because you fuck up doesn't mean you aren't perfect. When you guys play, the whole world is one big gold orgasm.

CHILO

Wow, a half-hour set of orgasm?

JAXI

There's no time. It's like infinity just goes on forever.

ED

What?

CHILO

Nothing goes on forever, *chiquita*.

JAXI

Bull, there's no end of things that go on forever.

ED

Oh my God.

INT. STUDIO FOYER - DAY

The band tries to ignore a skirmish between Chilo and Nick.

NICK

You've got chops, but no game, Beanbrain. There's shit you actually gotta learn.

CHILO

Fuck that, Elwood. I'm Mexican. I got rhythm in my blood.

NICK

Shit, I got blood of the greats in me. Shared spikes with legends.

CHUCO

I'm sick of your shit, man. Let's go in there and see who walks out.

Shorter and outgunned but unflappable, Nick nods.

NICK

After you, Wetback Wonder.

INT. STUDIO FOYER - LATER

Ed and Roger sit serenely, Cody fidgets, chain-smoking.

CODY

Lets at least see whether we need the ambulance or the hearse.

ROGER

So look. Nothing's stopping you.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

Cody cracks the door, peeks. Chilo sits at the drums, staring at Nick's hands sliding on the lower guitar neck.

NICK
So modal is just playing a scale.

CHILO
Instead of a progression.

NICK
Bingo. So you'd...

CHILO
...box the groove, same as if...

Chilo sees Cody at the door, breaks off.

CHILO
Yo, Cody, this shit's the bomb,
man. You should pick up on this.

CODY
I have been. Welcome to the world
of paying attention to anglos.

CHILO
Hey, if they got anything to say.

INT. BIG RED OFFICES - DAY

The band stroll in, relaxed and happy, but halt when Avis
raises a manicured finger.

She shows them the front page of a trade magazine, headline:
"RAPTOR DEBUT SHIPS PLATINUM". She then completely breaks
character with a fist-pumping, foot-pedaling, head-banging
wriggle of delight.

MONTAGE - TOUR DE FORCE

MUSIC: RAPTOR'S "NE SELLEZ PAS"

A swirl of vignettes, stills and establishing shots show the
band on a whirlwind tour with rave reviews. On stage,
motels rooms, planes taking off and landing, newspaper
pages, posters with American cities.

ROGER
(Sings)
You can't sell out
What you ain't got
If you don't know that
That says a lot
About the state of mind
You're likely to find
Up in the big time

INT. ON STAGE - NIGHT

After show. The band stand around an empty stage while roadies break down.

ROGER
You noticing the same faces?

CODY
And they lead the waves. Drill sergeants.

ED
Mahatmas.

CHILO
So they follow us to all the gigs?

NICK
Great. Undeadheads. They should get a life.

CODY
At least they don't goose step.

ED
There's always been a certain fascism about rock music. Look what goes on, like Nuremberg rallies.

NICK
Any music. Any tune you dance to.

ROGER
But we're a different drummer.

MONTAGE AND MUSIC CONTINUE

ROGER
You can't sell out
Something you ain't got
If you don't know that
Then you don't know squat
Because talent talks
And bullshit walks
Up in New Yawk

More establishing posters, "on the road" antics.

EXT. OUTSIDE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A band of hippie/Rainbow types drum in a circle outside an arena announcing "TONIGHT: RAPTOR".

Chilo and Roger walk into the circle, stunning the freaks into silence.

CHILO

Oye, if you got a drum and can
play, come in now, those side
doors. Sit up front and join in.

The hemp crowd scrambles for the entrance with their drums.

ROGER

Same deal, all our shows. Show up
to drum and you're on stage.

INT. BIG RED OFFICES - DAY

Avis shows them a trade mag ad: "RAPTOR: MOON SHOT TOUR".
Artwork of owl sweeping down from the moon, talons set.

At bottom a list of venues and dates, stamped: "SOLD OUT".

Avis tosses the magazine in the air, pumps her arms over her
head, falls over backward behind her desk. Her feet appear,
kicking wildly. Chilo is in love.

MONTAGE CONTINUES, SAME MUSIC OVER

ROGER

You can't sell out
Nothing you don't got
If you don't know that
Then you just best not
Because the stuff you say
Ain't enough to play
In San Tropez

The tour has moved to Europe, as shown by the establishing
posters and flashes among the stage shots and touring
clichés. From this point all performance shots show the
stage and pit crammed with dozens, hundreds, of drummers.

INT. ON STAGE - NIGHT

The band and Jaxi stand in the wings watching a hall fill.

CODY

Christ, look at this crowd.

JAXI

Lots of virgins.

They look at her, questioning.

JAXI

You know, newbies. Live ones. That
we haven't taken out yet.

CODY

Right. The sheep.

Scattered around the table is a new Raptor CD with "RIMFIRE" spelled out in .22 cartridges over a photograph of glowing lava outlining the caldera of Mt. St. Helens at night.

Dinner is over and Red cuts a cake. The frosting reads: "Top Of The Charts". It's a festive time, everybody happy.

CHILO

You aren't having seconds, Jax?
It's "all you can eat."

JAXI

I'm can't really eat all I can eat.

Ed rolls his eyes at that, smiles at her.

JAXI

If I start helping myself, I just
can't help myself.

ROGER

And don't gain an ounce. There are
women would strangle you for that.

RED

Good reason as any.

Julian taps a spoon on his glass, gathers eyes.

JULIAN

Can I really say more than the
icing on the cake?

JAXI

Rilly. Being on the charts is just
off the charts.

JULIAN

Well said. But the operative thing
now is that you're not a new wave
or spike on the graph. You're a
break in the pattern. A new
paradigm like Elvis or the Beatles:
the ones everybody likes.

RED

We own the alts and hempies and
college station dweebs. And are
mopping up the oh so desirable
twenty-something males.

ED

Might that alienate our original
fans, that hippie Rainbow bunch?

JAXI

Yeh, everybody hates you if you're too popular.

JULIAN

I don't think that's a worry. But you know what demographic has always driven pop music sales?

ROGER

Cretins with suspended licenses?

JULIAN

Close. Teenaged girls.

JAXI

What y'all looking at? I'm no teenager. I'll be twenty in March.

RED

(Aside to Julian)

Two digit scores, math and verbal.

JAXI

I'd appreciate it if y'all wouldn't talk behind my back right in front of my face.

RED

Simply amazing.

She leans over to whisper to Julian, who laughs.

JAXI

Hey! Anything you don't want me to hear, you can tell me yourself.

RED

Could you stifle, Ellie Mae? Grownups are talking.

JAXI

Fuck you, Copperhead bitch.

RED

Unbelievable. That you're even here instead of handcuffed to a bed in a singlewide. You're not even a component, kid. All you are is Purina Band Chow.

That does it for the Jaxter. She's up and across the table, fists clenched and ready to rumble.

Except that Red yawns, stands and turns to face her charge, manifesting the aspects that set the band and management apart from normal humans. She looks like an Oscar in red gold, rimmed with a flickering Tibetan flame.

Jaxi hits a wall a yard from Red, her face awash with emotions from hate to fear to awe... to worship. She sinks to her knees in front of her, bowing. Red extends a regal hand over Jaxi's head, flooding her in the gold glow.

Across the restaurant a middle-aged Wife and Hubby watch Jaxi sink to her knees, adore the apparently normal Red.

WIFE

Bizarre. Why would somebody bow down at her feet like that?

HUBBY

Apart from the obvious?

Wife is miffed, Hubby continues to stare.

JULIAN

That's enough, Red. No scenes.

Red extends both hands, Jaxi drops to a prone asana.

Julian flickers into his own manifestation, broadcasting his dark guilt radiation across the table. Red falls back, relaxes, looks at the recumbent Jaxi, drops into her chair.

Julian sighs, makes a "what can I do" movement with his hands, stands.

JULIAN

Don't let any of this throw you, boys. And girls. It's just show business. And you're stars.

He turns to leave, speaks gently to Red.

JULIAN

Coming, my dear?

Ed signals for his attention.

ED

Julian, could you tell me one thing about this... structure?

JULIAN

Probably not. And not a good thing to worry your head over.

ED

Nevertheless. How far up does the "chain" go?

JULIAN

Great question, actually. I used to waste a lot of time on that one.

He leans over Ed, speaking confidentially.

JULIAN

You understand I'm just a local... functionary. But from my perspective I have a sort of feel for how far up it reaches.

ED

And?

JULIAN

To the heart of the sun.

ED

Oh. Wow. I suppose...

JULIAN

Yes. And Ed? There are only five levels higher than my own at which the... components... are human.

ED

Thrones, principalities, powers.

JULIAN

I told you not to think about it.

He walks away, motioning to Red, who stands and retrieves her purse from under her chair.

ROGER

(Blurts out)

Yo, Red?

RED

(In no mood)

What, Roger?

ROGER

Is there a name for, you know, people who are "made"?

She stares at him a beat, mutters an audible response.

RED

Parasites.

Flustered, she starts off, gives Jaxi an enigmatic look.

RED

You'll see what I mean, kid.

Jaxi gets up, beaten and humiliated. She stares after Red, like a little girl about to cry in shame and frustration.

JAXI

How does that bitch do that?

The guys are attentive, sit her down and hand her a drink.

CODY

Julian does it to her, she does it to us, we do it to you.

JAXI

Yeh, but you guys are good assholes, she's an evil asshole.

ED

Watch out for that knowledge of good and evil. It's tricky.

JAXI

Yeh, you never know about knowlege.

ED

It's all in your point of view.

ROGER

He's right. We can't even judge the higher levels. It'd be like dogs critiquing people.

JAXI

And she's always going to be ahead of me, huh? I'll never get to be "older" than her.

Ed looks at her, suddenly pops upright, his face glazing over.

CHILO

Reason Ed never says, "snap", like real people, he doesn't have to.

NICK

Yeh, you can see it happen.

ED

That's what this whole thing is all about. Older.

CODY

Then you got it made, Pops.

ED

The ancients: before all this.
It's about what's been around the
longest. Cthulu mythos. Nyarleth
Hotep, the crawling chaos. Arkham
House books. Lovecraft's Old Gods.

ROGER

More good band names wasted.

CODY

Whoa up a second. There's books
about this shit?

NICK

Why not? There's CD's about it.

JAXI

If this is all so unheard of, why
haven't I ever heard about it?

ED

What did we see when we were in the
dark? Looping appendages drawing us
into the fearsome octopussy eyes
and omniverous beak?

NICK

Oh fuck. That's what I saw. And
vice versa.

ED

It works on projections of our
internal tortures. The ultimate
nightmares. Like being eaten alive
by savage animals.

CHILO

Been there, done that.

ED

H.R. Geiger territory. Where we'd
be falling if we weren't too smart
to look. Twists of guts steaming
in the body cavity, cans of worms
and maggots, nests of squirming
snakes. Greedy, writhing tentacles.

NICK

Sure glad I got the spaghetti.

CHILO

Lucky you. I got menudo.

JAXI

And that fucking coppertop works
for this piece of shit?

ROGER
We all do, girl.

JAXI
Well, she's a no-good twat. And so
is Julian. But you guys are
angels. You shine for me and make
me all I am. You'd never hurt me.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

MUSIC OVER: HEAVY CLASSICAL

Ed sits alone at his piano, listening to a symphony over the PA system. He lifts his hands from the keys, starts conducting the music.

He stands, strides around, moving his hands in sweeping conductor motions. At the peak of a crescendo, he throws his hands wide in a violent gesture.

Just as Jaxi pulls open the door and steps in behind him. His right hand slams into her throat like a karate chop.

She falls, staring at him, clutching her throat, gasping for air. He jumps to her, frantic, tries to blow air into her mouth. No good. She flops around in panic.

Ed leaps to his feet, looking around the room. He starts towards the door, then pulls a pen from his pocket. He kneels by Jaxi, grabs her hair to steady her, raises the pen like a sacrificial knife. She stares at him in terror.

He stabs the pen down into her throat. She passes out. He unscrews the top of the pen, bends over to blow into it. He raises his head, sees her take a deep gasp of air through the hole in her throat. When she exhales, a bubble of blood emerges from the pen, pops.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The room is festooned with flowers, but Ed sits in a lone vigil, fixed on Jaxi and the soft rasp of her breath.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Jaxi leans on pillows, her throat bandaged, struggling to talk to Ed, who hangs on her every hoarse sibilance.

ED
So you can speak all right?

JAXI
Some people have their doubts.

ED
Sorry. I...

JAXI

Anytime I can't talk, I'll say so.

(Beat)

If it didn't hurt I wouldn't even feel it.

ED

That will improve. But you'll never be a singing star.

Jaxi smiles. Ed looks pained, starts to speak.

ED

I feel so...

Jaxi puts her hand over his mouth. She picks up a steno pad and writes on it, hands it to him.

He reads: "IF YOU'RE REALLY SORRY, THERE'S NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE".

Ed stares at the message, trying to get a grip on it. He looks at her, confused. She snatches the pad, writes again.

The note now says: "IF YOU'RE REALLY SORRY, THERE'S NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE, ASSHOLE". The final "O" is a valentine heart.

Ed shakes his head, smiles, drops the pad, gazes at her.

She shares the gaze and smile, then a cloud crosses her face. She writes again, hands him the pad.

He reads: "THEY KNEW".

ED

I think so, too.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

Jaxi and Ed exit hospital, enter park. He holds her things.

EXT. VOLUNTEER PARK - DAY

Jaxi and Ed walk through the trees, chatting in a friendly manner. Jaxi leans close so her whispers can be heard.

JAXI

You mean you actually played music before this shit hit the fan?

ED

Oh, yes. I was a bit of a prodigy. But in my family, one doesn't entertain, one becomes a doctor. Or a prominent analyst. Or else.

JAXI

So did you like shrinking heads?

ED

Ironically, I never found out. I just kept going to school forever.

JAXI

Ew! Eight years was enough for me.

ED

I've got more postgrad than that. But I just couldn't enter the field. Play God with minds. All I wanted to do was perform.

JAXI

So now you're playing music and playing God with our heads.

ED

Neither is quite what I expected.

JAXI

You'd rather be in some symphony, right? Boston Pops or something.

Ed winces, but maintains.

ED

Actually, it's been extremely interesting. I just wish the sound... It needs more... majesty.

JAXI

How do you do that? What is it?

Ed looks off through the trees, grabs her hand.

ED

Come on, I'll show you.

He half drags her into the trees, toward the street. They burst out in front of St. Marks Cathedral.

JAXI

That? It's some kind of a church.

ED

With some kind of a pipe organ.

Excited, he pulls her towards the street.

INT. ST. MARKS - DAY

Jaxi and Ed approach a guide, splicing the magnificent pipe organ to a tour group. Ed leaves Jaxi with the tour and steps right up to the organ, examining it avidly.

GUIDE

Excuse me sir. You shouldn't...

Ed sits down, flips stops and switches on the console.

GUIDE

Sir! Please... Only qualified...

Ed caresses the keys, then pitches in. The vestry fills with deep, colored tones of rococo magnificat.

The guide bristles, glances at Jaxi, shudders. Ed pauses, smiles at Jaxi, who is thrilled and overwhelmed.

GUIDE

Sir! What are you doing?

ED

Toccata and Fugue in D Minor.

He hits the keys and organ gives a grand squawk.

ED

And variations on the theme.

(To Jaxi)

This is how they moved people's souls before electricity.

JAXI

Well, it still works.

ED

That chanting Red keeps pestering me about? I think I just got it.

MONTAGE: THE GREATEST OF ALL

MUSIC OVER: ORGAN SOLO with Ed chanting Corinthians 13.

CATHEDRAL -- In the lush light of stained glass windows, Ed builds a powerful counterpoint, then chants over it, a recitation regular and impactive as a bass drum.

ED

(A basso profundo)

Yea, though I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

ED'S APARTMENT--Ed sits meditating... a lonely figure in an empty setting.

ED (V.O.)
 If I have the gift of prophecy and
 can fathom all mysteries and
 knowledge, if I have faith that
 moves mountains, but have not love,
 I am as nothing.

THE BRUJO'S CAVE--A flicker of shots as Ed downs the potion, is terrified by his vision, recoils into the fire.

ED (V.O.)
 If I give away all I have and
 surrender my body to the flames,
 but have not love, I am nothing.

SEATTLE CENTER--Jaxi and Ed walk, talking affectionately, in front of the explosive glory of the Fountain.

ED (V.O.)
 Love is not proud, delights not in
 evil, but rejoices in the truth.

BASEMENT STUDIO--Quick shots show Jaxi clowning with the guys, laughing, staring at Ed in awe.

ED (V.O.)
 Where there are prophecies, they
 will cease; where there are
 tongues, they will be stilled;
 where there is knowledge, it will
 pass away. But love never fails.

THE TOO HIGH--Ed, playing on stage, watches Jaxi dance with fire. The flames blend around her, form a blazing flower. In the center, she glows in beauty. She catches his eye and smiles, spins the flower up over her head.

ED (V.O.)
 Love always protects, always
 trusts, always hopes, always
 perseveres.

BASEMENT STUDIO--Ed watches as Jaxi exits with Chilo, his arm around her ass. She looks back at him, shrugs, smiles.

ED (V.O.)
 Now we see as if in a mirror; then
 we shall see face to face. Now we
 know in part; then we shall know in
 full.

BASEMENT STUDIO--Ed stows his Korg, turns to leave. Jaxi sleeps on the couch: he squats, studies her face. He moves to brush stray hair from her face, but can't touch her. He pulls a throw over her and leaves, turning out the light.

ED (V.O.)
All these things remain; faith,
hope and love. But the greatest of
all things is love.

END MONTAGE

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

Jaxi and Roger sit on the coffee table, Ed cross-legged on the sofa. Roger shows Jaxi an Ipod-like device.

ROGER
This is like, Mark One. I cobbled
it up from stuff I was working on,
you know, before. Converting
neuron discharge to audio signals.

JAXI
That should be worth money.

ROGER
In a perfect world. The sensors
have to contact your larynx.

JAXI
Cool, they look like earphones.

ROGER
Here's bass, treble, sustain.
Here's your volume control.

ED
At long last.

ROGER
Patch it into a synthesizer or
board and you've got total control
of the signal.

ED
Wonderful. State of the art non-
sequiturs.

ROGER
This switch filters those out.

ED
What?

ROGER
Gotcha. But seriously, with the
equipment here, you can do almost
anything with your voice.

JAXI
Then what do they need us for?

ROGER

That's a good one, all right.

ED

The prison of flesh still exerts a certain obscure charm.

Roger places a portable radio on the table, extends the antenna and turns it on.

JAXI

So I just...

ROGER

Sub vocalize.

Jaxi nervously clears her throat, opens her mouth and...

BIG FEEDBACK SQUEAL from the radio. Ed lunges, turns it off.

ROGER

Still needs some work. Jaxi what do you know about "techno" music?

ED

Sounds right up your alley.

ROGER

More hers, actually. She can just be herself. With minor mods.

ED

You know you're creating a monster? Psycholinguistic Armageddon?

ROGER

Well, God forbid we do that.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

Lights low, the band huddles around Cody, kicked back in a beatup recliner, and Ed, sitting beside him looking grave.

CHILO

Shit, he channels anything, it'll be the Playboy Channel. Or ESPN.

ED

So call it "guided meditation".
(To Cody)
Just tell me what you see.

CODY

Wait. I see an old man. In white clothes. White hair and beard.

ED
Good, anything else?

CODY
He's has friendly, sparkly eyes.

ED
What else about him?

CODY
He has a secret.

ED
Excellent.

CHILO
Damn. This shit might be working.

ED
(Shushing Chilo)
Tell me more.

CODY
A secret recipe.

CHILO
You asshole! *Chinga tu madre!*

ROGER
Yeh, what he said.

ED
Very droll, Cody. I was only...

CODY
You don't get it, do you? We can't
be hypnotized. We are hypnotized,
see? We are the hypnotists.

ROGER
About the size of it. We don't
trance, we are the trance.

CODY
You go down, check the oil in your
subconscious and you're going to
see one thing. And you know what.

ROGER
He's right. Big Bad Red.

CHILO
Naked, I hope.

Cody shoots him an unseen glare.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

An impromptu bull session in the empty studio.

ED

It doesn't matter what we play.
The package is the beat itself.

ROGER

The virus. Leads and vocals are
contrapuntal dissonance to create a
holographic interference pattern.

CODY

The words don't matter, huh?

ROGER

Remember those pictures you would
stare at long enough, you'd see a
3-D pyramid or something? Kind of
like through the picture?

CHILO

Yeh, what happened to those? My
cousin had one was so tight, had
the Raiders logo...

NICK

I get it. Anything we sing is like
tinsel to grab people. Meanwhile
underneath, the holo noise is
resetting their ticker.

ROGER

Top end means nothing. But it has
to be attractive.

JAXI

That's what I'm saying. It's the
stuff in plain view that's totally
out of sight.

ED

And if you want people to see your
pyramid or smile face or whatever,
you choose a picture they like.

ROGER

You got it. You want Catholics,
use a pic of Virgin Mary, want
Democrats, use an anti-Bush
cartoon, you want guys, use...

CHILO

...Jaxi's tits.

JAXI

Your ass, beaner!

ROGER

Much more limited appeal.

NICK

We'll probably end up doing techno
and rap. For the demographics.

ED

Whatever catches their ear long
enough to induce the death.

JULIAN (O.S.)

(On monitor speakers)

Actually, it's not death that
matters: it's ego-death. This can
happen a lot of ways: drugs, sex.

The band jerks around, sees Julian behind the booth glass,
spookily bottom-lit by the panel lights.

ED

The dread the mind will do anything
to avoid.

JULIAN

It can even be bred in to happen
from embarrassment, of all things.
That's been exploited for years.
Japs. Religions I could name.

ED

And the gate to enlightenment.

JULIAN

But that's low grade. Actual
flatline of cerebral function gives
us a cold boot, so to speak. And
we end up as what Roger might call
the default setting.

ROGER

Root access. Which means... user.

JULIAN

A semi-friendly warning, fellahs.
You can waste a lot of time picking
at this. The flow and show is the
way to go. You know?

He smiles around the group, turns off his lights.

CODY

Shit! It just gets more sci-fi.

ED

If you believe Mr. "Trust Me".

CODY

Hey, here we are, Dr. Theory.

ED

That could be a cover story. We could have been harvested from rehab wards and hypnotized. Our pasts could be custom-built fakes.

ROGER

We could be a band that hired a hypnotherapist to do this.

CODY

Fuck that... the real world's out there. Just because you never...

ED

Then give me a real world explanation. Julian just did.

CODY

You really think this is all in our heads? Just memory chip stuff?

JAX

Well, if this is all just about memories then we should forget it.

ED

What?

JAX

See, if you just stay in your mind, you'd be out of your mind.

ED

What are you talking about?

JAXI

What I just said.

ED

Oh. What was I thinking?

JAXI

Same as always. That everything I say is some figure of speech.

ED

Well, technically...

JAXI

I just can't communicate with you,
if you see what I'm saying.

ROGER

He's crippled by intellect, Sugar.
What you trying to say?

JAXI

I always thought... you know, like
we have this reality and all? But
what if there's something else?

NICK

What if?

JAXI

Wouldn't that be something else?

INT. ED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ed sits at piano, jotting on tablature. Jaxi knocks, enters,
wearing Cody's shirt: "CRUSTED BUTT SKI PATROL".

ED

Isn't it past your bed time?

JAXI

Ah, tonight I'm too out of it to
get into it.

Ed looks askance.

JAXI

No point having sex if you're just
fucking around.

ED

That's something I've wondered
about. If you don't mind my asking.

JAXI

I wondered if you ever wonder.

ED

Well... how do you sort it out?
You have sex with people, have
feelings with people. But you're
like a slave, can't disagree,
can't...

JAXI

I may be blond, Doc Shrinkenstein,
but I've thought about that. You
know what I came up with?

ED

What's the probability of that?

JAXI

Ask an unborn baby if he loves his mother. You see? What's to sort?

ED

I don't think any adult understands what babies feel. I just can't... Is it worth living without.. well... Free Will.

JAXI

Didn't we play at that rally?

Ed goggles, she giggles.

JAXI

Come on, Ed, I'm not that blond.

ED

And I'm not all that logical.

She sits down beside him, gives him a look.

JAXI

Ed, have you ever been in love?

ED

Not that I recall. Have you?

JAXI

Constantly. And there's no logic to it. You just gotta close your eyes, bend over and pucker up.

ED

Sounds like a... "chick thing".

JAXI

Anybody. You have to hang on and let go.

ED

I see.

JAXI

Get ready to be unprepared.

ED

Just what I was going to say.

JAXI

It's so sensual, it wouldn't make sense to make sense.

ED
Since when?

JAXI
Hey, Spock! You're getting it.

ED
Spock to Seuss, great progress.

JAXI
Hey, if it wasn't for progress,
we'd never get anywhere.

Jaxi looks him over, moves around the bench, straddles his lap. She leans towards him, intoxicating him with her proximity. She stretches her throat, brings it to his lips.

JAXI
Make it well, Ed.

Hesitantly, he brings his lips to her skin, then moves them downward. He shudders, clutches her as she closes her eyes. Ed breaks the embrace, stares into her smiling face.

ED
All this time, all it was, I...

He breaks off in horror as her face twists in to greedy, triumphant leer. He jumps up, dumping her on the floor.

Jaxi looks at him, sees a brutal, tumescent beast. She tucks, rolls and leaps to the door.

They face each other, looking normal.

ED
My God! I just wanted to say I...

Jaxi screams, backs to the door, claws it open, exits.

Ed sinks to the piano bench, shaken. He stares at his hands, touches fingers to his lips.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

Jaxi stands by the sofa as Ed enters. They eye each other with understandably mixed emotions.

She edges towards him, touches his arm. He pats her hair, takes her hand. So far so good.

ED
Listen, about last night...

Jaxi stiffens, yelps and runs from the room. Ed stares after her, totally nonplussed.

Cody sits up on the sofa, his head coming into view.

CODY

Eddie, Eddie, Eddie. Never start a sentence with, "About last night."

(Beat)

You ol' dog, you.

MONTAGE - "DON'T LETS TALK"

A series of shots and mini-scenes establish Jaxi and Ed's dilemma. They love each other and can touch, be together, but can't talk about their feelings. When they do, they see each other morph into horrors. Others see them normally.

JAXI

(Sings, husky whisper)

Don't ever tell me to my face
Bite your tongue, consider it done
Let's just go through the motions
Keep it to yourself this once
Just don't speak the words you seek
If I don't hear your voice
Then I'll still have a choice

Jaxi ruffles Ed's hair, starts to open her mouth. He turns to her, his face cruel and demeaning. She jumps up, freaked out, then edges back beside him, gingerly pats his thigh.

Jaxi speaks to Cody, then to Roger, both indicate reply with "what can I tell you" gestures.

Ed talks to Roger, then to Cody. Both nod, then shrug him off, slugging his shoulder for support.

JAXI

We can't talk now
It's not the time
We can't talk here
It's not the place
We can't talk straight
It's not the same
Don't talk, dear
Not to my face

In the recording studio, Jaxi steels herself, faces up to Ed and starts talking. He turns into a demonic sex monster. She can't help ducking away from him.

He sees her as an evil spider-like bitch scuttering into the woodwork, obviously out to fuck him over.

Through studio glass, Red and Julian see Ed and Jaxi going nuts, totally normal in appearance. Red is touched, sad. Julian laughs his ass off.

JAXI

Don't try to write it down in words
 I read just fine between the lines
 Let's just scratch the surface
 I'd be crazy to get wise
 I don't read what I don't need
 If it's not black and white
 Then it can't be right

Jaxi carefully writes a note, sets in on a table. Ed picks it up, takes one glance as it twists around his hand in an obscene grabbing motion.

He drops it, a normal piece of paper. She picks it up, throws it in the trash can.

JAXI

Don't draw me any pictures, please
 I see it all scrawled on the wall
 Let's just keep this civil
 Don't do me any favors now
 It won't be hard to play that card
 I'll be last to know
 Don't tell me though

Ed's apartment is completely dark. Suddenly the light comes on, Jaxi and Ed staring at each other in terror.

She runs to him, embracing him in fear. She leans her head back to speak, he puts a hand over her mouth.

JAXI

Don't tell me so
 Tell it to the night
 Don't come too close
 We might catch our death
 Don't tell me no
 I'll never hear it right
 Don't even move
 Don't take a breath

The last few shots of the montage show Jaxi whispering into microphones, booth activity. She just put down a single.

END MONTAGE

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO: MUSIC CONTINUES OVER

Ed sits listening to the last bars of "DON'T LETS START". Jaxi enters and he warily removes his headphones and speaks to her very carefully.

ED

I know what you're trying to say.

JAXI

Thank God for that. All this stuff
we can't do is just impossible.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

The band, now including Jaxi, are in position.

NICK

So that's our new vocalist? The
hoarse whisperer?

JAXI

Fuck off, Little Nicky.

NICK

Only if you'll say, "Make them an
offer they can't refuse," for me.

CODY

What, it's worse than Ed grunting?

NICK

Chick singer, man. Danger! Run!

ED

Don't be absurd.

NICK

How many chick singers does it take
to change a light bulb?

Nobody answers, so he does.

NICK

She holds the bulb and the world
revolves around her.

The guys chuckle, Chilo laughs out loud.

JAXI

Oh yeh? What do they call assholes
who hang out around musicians?

She leans into Chilo's face, hands on hips.

JAXI

Drummers.

Big laugh all around, Nick applauds.

ED

And what do you call musicians who
can't read music?

Nick grins ruefully, points a pistol finger at Ed.

NICK
Guitar players. OK, OK, I'm cool.

Red enters, carrying a stack of DAT tape and discs.

JAXI
So am I still just rent-a-meat?

RED
You sure are, sweetie. It's just
that we found a more lucrative use
for your throat than you did.

She catches Cody's eye, blushes. Looks at Jaxi, softens.

RED
Listen, kid, I'm sorry. This isn't
a fair fight. We're just cattle on
the lot here. Myself included.

Cody hears that, gives her a long look as she hurries out.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

The band in position. Red hands out lead sheets, exits.

NICK
Damn, is she one fine-looking head?
And a redhead! Hidden fires, you
catch my drift.

CODY
We get it. Why don't you get an "I
Fuck The Boss" shirt and shut up?

Nick looks around, reads the guys' looks.

NICK
You got eyes for that, too, huh?
Well, I'm open to a challenge.
Best man win, all that jock jazz.

Cody comes up squared off, fists and teeth clenched.

CODY
In case you didn't notice, it's not
exactly the Mens Open around here.
We get what they toss us. So why
don't you just piss off and thank
the powers of darkness for what you
got and are too lame to appreciate?

Cody turns and stomps to the door. He pauses there,
examining Nick more closely.

CODY

But that ain't shit for you blues
assholes, is it? You already go to
the crossroads, sign your waivers
with the Devil. Working for evil
doesn't bother you, does it?

ROGER

I thought we agreed they were alien
cyber-mafia.

CODY

Ha, ha, bushers. But I think we're
coming right up on a crossroads our
own selves. See who'll hang in
when we get the real playbook.

NICK

Look, she's a stone fox. I'm a
lucky guy. What you want from me?

CODY

How about you drop dead? Again.

He exits, slamming door. Unseen in the booth, Red has seen
and heard, takes it in with mixed emotions.

EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY

A banner identifies "STREET WEED", a hybrid rap/metal posse
in the Ice Cube mold, a barrage of pose and 'tude. The
audience responds with fevered applause and mass movement.

BACKSTAGE

Raptor watch Street Weed perform, taken somewhat aback.

ROGER

Loud enough for you?

JAXI

God, if it was any louder I
couldn't hear it at all.

CODY

I don't get it. What's their point?

ED

Pointless movement. Based entirely
on rhythm, the most primitive
element in music.

NICK

Get laid now and then and you'd
appreciate primitive movement.

CHILO
So what's hipper than beat?

ED
Melody. Most advanced is harmony.

ROGER
What about holographic metaharmonic
neuroprogramming?

NICK
The fuck is that?

ROGER
That would be what we do.

CHILO
I think, so do they.

They look out at the audience, the front rows mostly Black,
and moving in familiar, though different wave patterns.

With a frenzy of noise and mass adulation, Street Weed
finishes their encore and troop offstage.

As they pass Raptor, they morph into scary Afro-monsters,
glaring and snarling at Raptor in hostile positions.

CODY
Holy shit, look at those guys.

CHILO
The fuck we doing here?

ED
I think I see it. They're a
competitive brand. It's like
renting somebody's mailing list.

ROGER
Could be. Trolling for customers.

CODY
Some rough fucking customers.

CHILO
So are we, homeboys.

Nick nods, brandishes his guitar.

NICK
O-blue-terate those yapa dapas.

ONSTAGE

Not a pretty sight. Much of the audience are hippie/yuppie/rockers, but up front it's all Black, and none are friendly. Some morph. The sound is hostile, threatening. The band take positions gingerly, unsure of themselves.

Cody suddenly snaps into his powers, steps to the mike, cruises the crowd. He turns to the band.

CODY

I read their play. I can stunt 'em.

ROGER

Should we ask for requests?

CODY

No fear. I got it going here, gonna bulldog these heifers. Just follow my audibles. Lay down the junk.

CHILO

Say what?

CODY

Funky junky boogulation.

ED

What are you talking about?

CODY

What those dickweeds did. Hand it to me and get outta my way.

The band kicks into a chunky imitation of the beat from the previous act. Within two bars it coagulates to dangerous rap dub. Cody grabs the mike, launches into a shuffle-beat rap.

CODY

Come on rednecks and peckerwoods,
join in the Aryan Brotherhood
We don't like Niggahs and we don't
like Asians
Don't like anybody ain't Caucasian.
If you think your ass is ready for
buryin'
Just get in our face if your race
ain't Aryan

The crowd is stunned, then laughs. Then starts to move.

ROGER

Play that funky music, white boy.

CODY

We don't like Jews or Arabs or
Catholics
We don't like Denzel or Lopez or
Affelecks
Don't like Al Queda or Al Sharpton
Don't like fresh boyz come out of
Compton
Don't like Spike or Rastafarians
Get it together cause we be Aryans

Applause from the hippies, normals and some Blacks, but increased yells and menace from core Street Weed disciples.

ROGER

Jaxi! Get out here, girl!

Jaxi trots over, eyes wide, wearing her throat sensors.

ROGER

That thing we were working on?

Jaxi nods, expectant but intimidated.

ROGER

Might be a real good time for it.

Gulp. She scans the crowd, stage-spooked. Roger steps to his boards, flutters his hands across them.

ROGER

Break it off, honeychile.

In the oppressive silence, Jaxi stammers, starts to speak, jumps as her voice booms out of the PA system.

JAXI

Hi. Jesus! Oh, that was me. Hey...

The crowd is milling, starting to snicker and catcall.

JAXI

I just want to ask y'all...

More hoots from crowd.

BLACK MALE VOICE

What you want to know, bitch?

JAXI

Well...

She cocks a hip, chiseled buttocks below skintight shorts.

She touches the device on her belt and her voice turns into an electronically optimized chirrup.

JAXI
Do you like my ass?

MONTAGE: "UDIGMYASS"

Raptor throb with synth/tech vocal ala "Making Sandwiches".

ON STAGE - Jaxi prances, flashing her butt outrageously while singing in her modulated voice.

JAXI
Do you like my ass?
Because it's so damn fine.
Just take a look, what do you say?
You say, "Wow!" You say, "Tight!"
What a tight, luscious ass.
Well check this out...

She punctuates that with a exceptional bootie move. She's winning the crowd over. Synchronized movement starts.

JAXI
Hey what are you looking at?
You want to touch my ass, huh?
Fess up, now... this so fine ass
Just too atrocious.
You wanna stroke those cheeks.
With the little dimples
Peach fuzz upholstery.
Lotta hot cleavage.
Wanna get a handle. Don't you?
Well can you handle this...

MTV/BET STYLE VIDEO - More punctuation--in skimpy thong.

The vid is Jaxi prancing her buns in various shorts and much less. Raptor members appear, cartoonishly smitten by her "bootay". Ed cameos, scowling in prudish disapproval.

JAXI
Why don't you kiss my ass?
It's one tasty ass.
Just a tight, hard peach.
A little sweet salty sweat.

CLUB DANCE FLOOR

Beautiful bodies gyrate in a frenetic techno club. Jaxi's voice pounds, her grainy image fills several big screens.

JAXI
It's so calipigious. That's Latin.
It means "super fine ass".
So present those lips!
I want to feel some... tongue.
Does this make you drool?

BEDROOM TV SCREEN

Jaxi's keister fills a TV screen at Adolescent Girls' slumber party. All sport imitations of Jaxi's hairdo and outfits. Several wear necklaces imitating her electrodes.

JAXI

Do you get an itch sometimes?
I think you do.
Like that itch "down there"?
There must be something.
You can't put your finger on.
Wait, what we got here?
Hey, it's a nice, fine, tight ass!
Don't you just wish?
You bet your sweet ass!

She steps to the edge of the stage, waving and jiggling.

JAXI

Come on, buttheads, let's hear it!
Look at that ass!

CROWD ROAR

Look at that ass!

JAXI

Look at that ass!

CROWD ROAR

Look at that ass!

JAXI

And don't you forget it!

The piece ends, Jaxi bows deeply, cartwheels offstage.

The band immediately tears into "Pedal To The Metal".

The crowd roars as one, moves in one stylized surge.

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT - DAY

The band exits the ramp jubilant and chattering. Julian and Red are with them, both showing approval all around.

Beside their bus the Street Weed driver finishes changing a tire, the players and management standing around, dejected. They aren't scary now: just degenerate and unappealing.

The manager bitterly salutes Julian, who responds, smiling. Street Weed snarl and troop onto their bus.

ED

I misjudged what this thing was all about. It was a pit fight.

CHILO

You got it, "Om Boy". And we were the big dogs.

ROGER

So we're the main studs in the mindfuck standings for now.

JULIAN

(From behind him)

That's right. Very good. And very well done. I'm proud of you, boys.

ED

So why did you do this? Why...

JULIAN

Ed, how many Americans are black?

ED

Approximately twelve percent.

JULIAN

That's right. Not a big number, is it? But not a small number either.

ROGER

The Rainbow Coalition, that's us.

ED

Just one big tent, bwana.

JULIAN

For the greatest show on earth.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

Ed enters, catches Jaxi watching her own video, blown away by her oeuvre. She clicks it off. Ed smiles indulgently.

ED

Classic. Timeless.

Stung by that, Jaxi stiffens.

JAXI

That timeless stuff is so passé.

ED

I just meant...

JAXI

"Everlasting" is kinda dated, too.

ED

You did fine. It's a great ass.

JAXI

(Now really angry)
If you're serious, you'd better be kidding. I don't see you playing opera at Carnegie Hall.

ED

We're just pop stars, Jax.

JAXI

Are we even that? We're just their hand puppets. It's like cheating. None of it's really us.

ED

If those aren't really your buttocks, then...

JAXI

Hey, fuck you!

She stomps out, colliding with Cody at the door.

JAXI

What can I say to somebody I'm not speaking to?

CODY

I'm the last one to ask.

INT. RECORDING BOOTH

Red and Cody stand by the mixers, talking earnestly.

RED

You can't get your feelings involved in this. Believe me, please. Any personal emotions you have are just on the sidelines of the game plan. Understand?

CODY

So we're talking a game, huh? And there's plans that are more important than how I...

She snaps back to Big Red, speaks "ex officio".

RED

Yes, Cody, there is. And not just important. Inevitable.

Cody is rigid from her command presence. And megabummed.

RED

(Softening)

But it's not a hundred percent thing. There's always a little slack around the edges.

CODY

And that's where I come in? A little slack on the sidelines?

She touches his face a fleeting moment, then moves away.

RED

I hope so, Cody. I really do.

She exits, closes the door softly. Cody screams out:

CODY

Then stop fucking everybody around here except me!

The door opens, but it's Ed who enters, hears the outburst.

ED

I know precisely what you mean.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

The guys sit around, stressing and unhappy. Again Ed leads.

ED

After that show, It's pretty obvious something has to be done.

ROGER

Roger that. We're weapons of mass deconstruction.

CODY

Bingo. I didn't sign on as some psychic mercenary assassin.

ED

Anything you signed was a formality. You enlisted on that river. Like I did down in Sonora.

ROGER

But yeh, we gotta call a halt.

NICK

So what do you think we can do?

CODY

I think it's pretty obvious.

JAXI

No question about it.

INT. - BIG RED MANAGEMENT - DAY

The elegant Avis sits typing into a computer. Past her, through the glass doors and down the marble hallway, a dark metal elevator door slides soundlessly open.

Ed, Roger, Cody, Chilo, Nick, and Jaxi exit the elevator in measured, ominous SLOW MOTION. All wear long black dusters, "Matrix" sunglasses, and stony game faces. All are armed, carry menacing black dufflebags. Six abreast, they stride purposefully towards the doors, heading for the showdown.

Chilo and Cody are at the center. Reaching the doors, they extend black, fingerless gloves to push the doors. The pull-only doors give, then bounce them back.

ED (V.O.)

Seriously, though...

INT. RAPTOR'S STUDIO - DAY

The band sits around a long table, tense and determined.

ED

...we need to put our minds and talents to work on this. There has to be a way around this thing.

NICK

Maybe. I'd say tangling with these guys on their own turf is the last thing we wanna do.

JAXI

Situations like this, the last thing you'd want to do is the first thing you want to do.

ED

That's very stalwart, Jaxi. But some of us are interested in surviving this thing.

JAXI

Surviving? I've lived on the street since I was thirteen, Mr. Preppie. You couldn't survive if your life depended on it.

ROGER

Let's everybody keep cool.

JAXI

Thanks so much, Mr. Roboto.

ROGER

And remember who the problem is.
Let's not become one with them.

NICK

Why's that a problem? It's not like
we're vampires or anything.

CODY

How do you know? We got no damn
idea what they are, what we are.
We could be sump pumps for like...
life energy. Advance scouts for
oxygen-stealing pussy pirates.

NICK

Or maybe it's not "Bad", just the
way things work, but more so. You
see anybody unhappy out front? Why
blow a great gig?

ROGER

Sure. Could be nature taking over
because we're fucking up. Maybe
we're the saviors of the planet.

JAXI

You really believe that, Roger?

ED

I admit it's not as sound as The
Hell's Angel Mafia from Mars...

JAXI

If you got nothing to say, say so.

NICK

But the main thing is, I don't see
a damn thing we can do about.

ROGER

Hey Ed, how do you psychologists go
about extinguishing behavior?

ED

Through negative feedback.

ROGER

That's what I'm thinking.

INT. BIG RED OFFICES

Red stands looking out her view window, very agitated. Nick
hovers behind her, confused. He reaches for her.

RED

I mean it. Please don't.

NICK

Well, if you're going to turn around and give me deathray eyes.

RED

It could come to that. Pulling rank. Not because I'd want to.

NICK

Yeh, in this gig you have to do things you don't want to. Like me?

RED

There's no point in doing that.

NICK

Cause I feel different. Say the least.

RED

I'm sorry, Nick.

NICK

So you guys can dial it on, but can't turn it off?

RED

Is that how you want it?

NICK

(Long pause)
Nah, I'll hang with it.

RED

How many people get that choice?

NICK

I'd say anybody in the world gets more choice than we do.

RED

It's all the Big Biz, Nick. And business has changed to ramping up for the tour. And New Orleans.

NICK

Or maybe it's about changing guitar players. Way I change strings to get a different response.

RED

Do you hear what you sound like?

NICK

Total square, huh?

RED

Worse. Breeder square.

NICK

How about this? I used you up,
bitch. Get over it.

RED

We'll always have the Needle Arms.

Both smile, but as Nick walks out, but his face reveals that he is not taking it that lightly, or all that well.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

Dim lighting. Ed lies on a sofa, an arm over his eyes, almost asleep. Jaxi perches on the other end of the sofa.

ED

The songs are sung, the stories
told. The same ones over and over:
behind the things we see and know
are personages and powers beyond
understanding, more meaningful than
we. Forging our lives and fates.

His voice diminishes, Jaxi leaning forward to hear.

ED

Heroes come to seek them, fight
them, cheat them. To die and live
forever. The only thing that
changes is our technology. Just a
more exact vocabulary to help us
pretend that we understand.

His arm falls as he sleeps. Jaxi turns off the light.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

The band prepares to play when Red enters. She sees Nick, starts to leave, but he raises his guitar to stop her. He plays, drenching the room in a heartbreaking blues solo. He falls to his knees in front of Red, still playing. She hovers, then bolts from the room.

The band stands frozen. Red trembles, agonized. Engineer is avidly taking it down, his face awed and delighted.

Nick lifts his head, gets to his feet, using the guitar for support. He discards a broken pick, pulls out a new one, looks around the band, gives a nod.

Gently, tentatively, Chilo taps a dragging beat. Roger comes in with a bittersweet riff. Ed adds diminished minor chords. Nick starts the solo from the top.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

Julian, Red and Engineer watch through the glass. Nick finishes playing his heartbreak solo and leans up to the mike to sing the blues: "Been Some Times".

NICK

Been times that I loved
 Been times that I lost
 Been times that I lied
 Been times that were cruel
 Been times I got crossed
 Been times that I cried

NICK

But I thought that this time
 It was my time for love
 Love, love, clean and true
 But you let them blues
 Get ahold of you
 You're just gonna lose

INT. CONTROL BOOTH

Red watches. Her face shows nothing, but a single tear tracks down her cheek. Julian sees the teardrop, chuckles, catches in on his finger and sucks it off. Red's stares fixedly out at the studio, her face hard.

NICK

These times gotta change
 These times gonna pass
 The time's gonna fly
 The time's gonna come
 The time never lasts
 These times go on by
 But I thought there'd be time
 Somewhere between the lines
 Some kind of love we could find
 Guess I thought that I
 Would get something right
 One of these times

INT. CENTRAL AREA BAR - NIGHT

A Black after-hours club. People drink cheap whiskey and listen to a radio. A couple dance very close.

NICK (O.S.)

(From radio)

I thought it was high time
 To be my time for a love
 Sweet like I never knew
 But then when the blues
 Get their hands onto you
 There ain't nothing to do

The couple moves without music as the announcer comes on.

DISK JOCKEY(O.S.)
 Hi ho, bluzoids. That's "Been Some Times", a KPLU First Play from local band Raptor. But blues aren't always sad, just blue. Here's Freddy King to shake it up.

INT. NICK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nick lies in bed, smoking, listening to the KPLU DJ's tag.

NICK
 And what is "dues" but another way to say, "Grist for the mill"?

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

The gang is gathered, Nick strides in, sets his ass down.

NICK
 Fuck it, I'm in.

CHILO
Orale. Fight the fear, *ese*.

NICK
 Hey, I just live for my death wish.

ED
 Roger was just saying this thing's like a psychic chain letter.

NICK
 And what happens if you break it?

CODY
 You get sick, go broke, your dick falls off and a dog eats it.

CHILO
 But look, if we aren't vampires, will doing Julian get us off?

NICK
 Good thought. Maybe we just get our contracts passed upstairs to some even totaller assholes...

JAXI
 You notice how the higher it goes, the ruder they get?

CHILO
 ...and they're pissed off because we totaled their district manager?

CODY
Yeh, but there's another angle.

ED
What would that be?

CODY
I can't stand that cocksucker.

ROGER
There is that.

NICK
Sure the fuck is.

ED
So be it.

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

A break from practice, band members only.

NICK
Okay, look. We wanna take it down,
what cards can we play?

ROGER
We're not powerless. We're
resonant elements in a field. A
field that's mostly generated by
Julian. It's all over him when
he's around the equipment.

CHILO
So?

ROGER
So I think there's a way to...

As he speaks, he takes on very negative aspects, every
gesture and feature becoming malevolent and untrustworthy.

NICK
Holy shit!

CHILO
Pinche Roger, you're in this with
them, aren't you? Fuckin' *cabrón*.

JAXI
Christ, Rog. Look at your face!

ED
It's the morphing. I've seen it,
too. Ignore it, just listen.

Roger speaks again, every word obviously a lie, obviously aimed at harming them. He's also getting big and ugly.

ROGER

It's mostly a matter of equalizing polarization through intrusion of out-of-phase modalities...

NICK

Shit! He's one of those Street Weed fucks!

CHILO

Just shut the fuck up, Roger. Or I'll shut you up!

CODY

Knock off the technical shit, Rog.

Roger morphs back to normal.

ROGER

You guys sound like my mama.

INT. GASWORKS PARK - DAY

The band are on the hill, look at the bay, not each other.

CHILO

Okay, we're talking now, no problem. Why aren't we going Godzilla?

ED

They don't read minds. We've just acquired fields, like magnets. Put us together one way we attract, another way we repel.

ROGER

Or maybe because we aren't coming up with any ideas that might work.

ED

That's an edge for us, right there. It shows us which ideas...

Cody on one side of Ed, Nick on the other, glance at him and flinch away into defensive postures.

CODY

Christ, Ed! Not you, too.

Ed morphs into a distillation of treacherous evil.

ED
I'm not really Beelzebub. I'm just
drawn this way. Trust me.

CHILO
Fuck you, man!

JAXI
Ed, you did that on purpose.

ED
It's not just electronic. There
are also important principles of
cerebro/neural function involved.

The whole group backs away, creeps out. Jaxi forces
herself to come close to the totally villainous Ed.

JAXI
It's too hard to take, Ed. We need
other ways to communicate.

ED
Did you and I figure out anything?

JAXI
Only for the important stuff. Not
the vital information.

ROGER
We hear you man. So please shut up.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - NIGHT

The band slumps at their table, somber.

ROGER
You know there's more than circuits
and mental activity here, right?

ED
What else would be involved?

ROGER
It takes a emotional reaction.
Some intangible inner thing to kick
it over the edge.

NICK
Soul, man. It has to kick in to
throw the switch.

CODY
Like sports. There's your stats.
Then there's heart.

JAXI

Just like sex. There's more to
getting it off than getting it on.

ED

I'm starting to get a glimmer.

INT. - BASEMENT STUDIO

The band sprawls around, scheming, during a break.

CODY

If it's paranoid to think they're
out to get you, what do you call it
when they already got your ass?

NICK

That would be The Blues.

ROGER

Lawdy hep me mama, got dem ol
paranoid blooze agin.

NICK

Somebody oughta write that one.

"It" hits him. He goes rigid, snaps to his feet.

CHILO

Tuning in, bro?

NICK

Check it out: that somebody is me.

MONTAGE - MUSIC OVER: RAPTOR'S "PARANOID BLUES"

[Note: This video is composed of two elements: performance
shots of band and individuals, and shots of the band trying
to rebel against the "machine" controlling them.]

NICK

(Sings)

We're working late in our garage
Building you the last mirage
The words and tunes are camouflage
To set you up for our basic barrage
We're gonna treat you too tough
We're gonna rough you right up Uh huh

Interspersed shots show more attempts at plotting
interrupted by horror morphing. Some show the morphs,
others normal view of people reacting to what they see.

NICK AND CODY

(Harmonizing)
 We're tight and we're tasty
 And the latest in style
 We gotcha where we wancha
 With the twist of a dial
 So yeh if you wanna rock
 Then you are in for a shock
 We gotta nasty little number
 Just for stopping your clock
 We'll attack you and we'll jack you and
 we'll knock off your socks
 And play you the paranoid blues

Cody and Ed stand back to back, noodling on instruments. Ed speaks to him unheard. Cody turns to speak, suddenly screams and falls backwards on his ass.

Roger writes something on note paper, hands it to Ed. Ed looks at it, the paper bursts into flame. Ed freaks, but Roger smiles calmly, points to his own head. Ed holds up his hand, showing burns. Roger looks grave.

NICK

We're bashing out your baffled brains
 With rusty motorcycle chains
 You'll see the sights
 You'll feel the pain
 You're are set up to get deranged
 We're gonna rip out your pipes
 We're gonna plumb you up right Oh yeh

Nick and Cody talk, back to back. Nick has had it, heads for the door. Cody turns to follow him, still talking.

Nick jumps away, his back to the door. Cody comes closer. Nick pulls a snub-nosed pistol from his overcoat and sticks it into Cody's face. Cody freezes, makes a gentle mellow-out gesture with his hands.

Still covering him, Nick fumbles the door open and splits.

NICK AND CODY

We're not taking prisoners
 We're just copping slaves
 We're a religious disease
 Spread by radio waves
 So if you wanna get wrecked
 We can write you a check
 We keep it low profile
 But we shred it high-tech
 We'll screw you and tattoo you
 Do you right in your neck
 Catch it tonight on the news

A school chalkboard has been installed in the studio. Roger enters, rubs his hands together, starts chalking some very technical-looking material on the board.

Ed enters, works up his nerve, reads the blackboard.

Roger tinkers at his bench, building something reminiscent of the device that zapped him out.

CODY

Let's turn out the lights and flick on the projector
 We'll take the wheel of the image selector
 You might call us criminals
 You might call us cancer
 You can call us collect
 And never get a straight answer
 Or write to Central Command
 Care of a rock and roll band

Cody writes something unseen on blackboard, slashes an underline.

The band stand around the blackboard reading the underlined phrase: "IT'S SATAN, STUPID!"

Weasel squints at handwritten note while fixing a mike stand to a large square metal floor plate.

NICK AND CODY

We're the midnight cruisers, subconscious invaders
 We're what you hear about the hidden persuaders
 Cognitive cannibals
 Subliminal rapers
 The ultimate news you never read in the papers
 We make your myths on the spot
 And we call your cheap shots
 And we call it all the paranoid blues

An intense band BS session comes to a hasty close when three members morph... and the room around them becomes a hallucinatory horror show.

Weasel and Roger work on a distinctive set of red earphones, placing electrodes in each ear.

NICK

We're hooking up the sleep machines
 We're sure you'll all have pleasant dreams
 What it all means, we got into your genes
 And are taking things to the rudest extremes
 It's all the big bang heat
 To us you're just so much meat Uh huh

Roger places some tech manuals, bristling with bookmarks, on a table, exits.

Ed enters, gingerly opens a book and starts reading. The books melt in his hand, drip on his legs, dissolving clothing and flesh. He throws the book away, shaking.

NICK

So if you wanna dance
We're gonna give you a chance
We gotta another little number
That's a kick in the pants
We'll zap you then we'll wrap you
in electrical trance
And play you them paranoid blues

Jaxi sits reading aloud from one of the books. Ed faces away from her, gritting his teeth, but jotting notes.

Jaxi reads aloud to Roger from a heavy neuropsych book, obviously have trouble with the words. Roger holds up the microphone to a tape recorder.

NICK AND CODY

We'll jump right off the bandstand
For a kick in your face
We'll eat you and excrete you
We're the new human race
So if you want a buzz
We'll just turn up the fuzz
If you wanna get wasted
Hey, that's just what it does
It's the oldest and the coldest stuff
that there ever was
Listen up, this is one of the clues

Each of the following lines of dialogue is a separate shot of the musician who is singing the line.

CHILO

To them cryptomorphological

CODY

Pyramanizodiacal

ROGER

Kodachromozomal

ED

Schizofrebeephiliac

JAXI

(Augmented sustain)
Paranoiandroidal blues

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO

The band is strewn around the room, exhausted. The chalkboard is shattered.

NICK

Can we really hack this shit?
Whatever the fuck it is?

ROGER

The New Possession.

ED

Actually, it's old hat. A peculiar form of possession called "Art."

NICK

Shit, my cousin's called Art and he doesn't turn into big hairy fuckin' monsters on you. Well, sometimes at Bulls games.

CODY

Great. This is what I get for my immortal soul? Playing hippie line dances with a bunch of numbnuts?

CHILO

Hey, what's low bluebook on souls?

ROGER

Ask Ed. Our resident theologian.

ED

This whole idea of something bigger than reality is nothing new. And the people who sense it always scare us and compel us. But there's always something bigger and older yet. That can't be touched or corrupted.

NICK

You on that God kick again?

CODY

Beats Satan's Hayride every time.

ED

Past the engines of fear, there is only the love of creation itself. Call it whatever you want.

JAXI

I don't want to call it anything! I'm sick of always talking about the stuff we can't talk about.

NICK

I hear that. What I don't understand is why Ed and Jaxi were going through this monstervision shit before the rest of us.

ED

I was always precocious.

ROGER

I've been thinking about that. The picture I got, the only thing trips you out is talking about your feelings. For each other.

ED

Correct. What's threatening about that?

ROGER

You're a real purist, Ed. You can't accept the inequality. And neither can Jaxi.

JAXI

You got that right. Fuck anybody thinks they're more equal than me.

ROGER

The rest of us have no problem having relations with hierarchal inferiors.

NICK

You mean women being inferior? What else is new?

CHILO

Chick doesn't talk shit? Make my day.

ROGER

But you two, in order to get what you want, have to disrupt things. So you trigger your psychic delimiters. And start trippin'.

ED

You might be right.

CODY

Oh, so Ed's Mister Pure of Heart and the rest of us don't mind inequality if it works for us? Is that what you're saying?

ROGER

Is that who you are? Then why are you trying to fuck with the system? Don't rock the boat and you're a big star. But you're ragin' on the machine.

ED

And you Nick. You're rebelling even though there's nothing to gain. How about you, Chilo? What we're trying to do here, is be heroes.

CODY

Works for me. Nick, lose the black hat.

CHILO

So what's our next move?

ROGER

New Orleans. Superdome. Megagig.

NICK

Be there or be square.

INT. ED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ed enters, turns to close his door, but Jaxi appears, leans on the door under his BASIC sign. She smiles at him shyly.

JAXI

I just wanted to ask you...

ED

Please do. Come on in.

They enter, Ed sits on the bed while Jaxi paces.

JAXI

Was it true, what Roger said about you and me? Equality and all that?

ED

It's an interesting theory.

She laughs at that.

JAXI

You're really something, Ed.

ED

Well, technically, there are no facts, just theories that haven't been disproven.

JAXI
What people believe?

ED
That's it.

JAXI
I believe anything you tell me. I
don't really have a choice.

ED
That disturbs me.

JAXI
It's all good. You said good and
bad are just my point of view?

ED
That's all any of us have. It's
what morality is, what art is, what
love is: the eye of the beholder.

She moves close to Ed, looking into his face.

JAXI
Want to hear something my mama told
me lots when I was little?

ED
I certainly would.

JAXI
She'd say, "May the Baby Jesus shut
your mouth and open your eyes."

Ed starts to speak, but Jaxi covers his mouth with her hand.
She leans down to him, eye to eye. Slowly she pushes him
backwards, down on the bed, and crawls on top of him.

JAXI
Don't talk. Just behold.

INT. SUPERDOME - NIGHT

The last preparations are underway, turning the vast stadium
into a concert venue.

Behind the elaborate stage, an enormous banner reproduces a
CD cover with band name and "MISSION PEAK". Artwork is a
spreadwinged eagle with wing tanks and gun turrets like a B-
29 releasing a rack of bombs over a mountain church amid
flowers of flack and a web of spotlights.

Random sound elements echo, lights flash tentatively. Huge
video screens alternate feed from roaming cameras, videos,
and blimp shots of the round, domed stadium from the air.

Roger, Ed, and Nick stand on stage, watch roadies rig their set. Weasel approaches, holding tools and shaking his head.

WEASEL

Amazing design. Completely horn-driven except ultra-high end electrostatics.

ROGER

Tiny distortion matters to them.

WEASEL

You have no idea. The stage, bleachers, everything, had to be shifted a couple of inches to line up with some planetary GPS grid.

ED

Orientation matters to them, too.

NICK

Hey, tell me about it.

WEASEL

Half the overall signal is subsonics, hypersonics and shit.

ROGER

Covering all bases. And trebles.

Weasel gives them a look, blows a deep breath, points to the control boards in the upper deck. Ed and Roger nod.

ED

Break a leg.

Weasel flashes a metal-encrusted victory fist, jogs off.

ROGER

We've got a shot. Neuromancing and geekery will save the day.

ED

We're quite the team.

ROGER

Yeh, they'd look a long time to find two guys with better qualifications to fuck them over.

He hears what he said and looks at Ed, stricken.

ROGER

Aw, shit, man...

Ed also freaks, but takes a breath, makes a calming mudra.

ED

We can't worry about that. Just
hope we're as good as we think.

Roger spreads his hands, gives a shaky smile.

ROGER

Hey, what have we got to lose?

Ed looks across the stage at Jaxi, warming up with her
firechains.

ED

More than I'll ever understand.

INT. SUPERDOME STAGE - NIGHT

MUSIC: RAPTOR'S "VIDEO GAMES"

The concert is reaching its climax. Spotlights and lasers
pulse a web through the smoke, the screens flash provocative
video clips in accelerating frequency.

The crowd is in tumult, reaching for some imminent peak.
They are moving like one huge amoeba, a violent wave form.

CODY

(Sings)

Electric bandits
Have come and landed
Illegal aliens
Have come and set you on stun
You're in the data
That's all that matters
We'll get your number
When your program is run
Just playing video games

Get reflexes
Learn the nexus
Your solar plexus
Is tuned to the screen
Your only means
To beat the machine--
Become a better machine
Become a better machine
Become a better machine

Cody steps from the mike into jam position with Nick, full
attention on the instrumental coda building off the song.

As the music builds to climax, the trademark golden glow
surges and roils like flames in a furnace. The band look
like firebirds dancing in a solar flare.

A ring of white spots placed around the floor snap on. They sweep the crowd, raise to converge at the roof peak, reflect from a faceted, mirrored, gold hemisphere.

The globe turns, spraying gold light on the crowd. The notes move faster, a whirlpool of gold. All heads tilt up.

At that moment, the music reaches its culmination: a complex, powerful chord that rings the hall like a bell.

And the release comes. With a unanimous gasp, thousands of shafts of light dart up towards the globe in the roof.

VIDEO SCREENS

All the big vid screens suddenly show an exterior blimp shot of the Superdome, like a huge eyeball staring skyward. At the climax chord, a massive column of gold light beams straight up from the center of the "eye" and disappears into the sky.

INT. CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT

Roger and Ed share grim looks, nod.

ROGER

Still ruling out space aliens?

Roger takes a deep breath, steps over to his rack of gear. Ed moves to the mike, hits a sharp chord for attention.

ED

Thank you, New Orleans.

A shaky response swells into a deep roar.

ED

But there's somebody else who has some thanks coming tonight. Let's have a big hand to our producer...

(Points grandly)

...Julian Styles!

Julian, in red headphones, eagerly showing Red his mystery gauge, looks up startled.

ED

Come on out here, Jules. It's about time somebody got credit for the work behind the scenes nobody sees.

Julian is beyond reluctant, he's pissed. But Weasel throws a tight white spot on him and the crowd whoops and cheers. Cody works the footlights, whipping them into a frenzy.

Julian glowers, but takes a step towards center stage. He starts to remove his headset, but Jaxi, laughing cheerfully, grabs his arm and tugs him out, the spotlight following.

Julian stalks towards Ed, scowling and taking on aspects. The crowd calms as he manifests the black gold luster.

Ed extends the mike and Julian steps up to take it... stepping directly onto the steel plate Weasel installed earlier. He looks at the seething crowd, taps the mike. Instant, motionless silence.

JULIAN
(With minimal charm)
Listen...

Roger scans a console on his rack: two scopes, readouts, switches and sliders. Julian's single word flutters a blue graph on the bottom scope. The top one displays jittery red waves composing a ghostly trace of his body.

ROGER
Gotcha! Jiveass motherfucker.

He touches a slider and Julian's voice echos in feedback.

Julian turns toward Roger, pissed off and growing menacing.

Roger sees the movement on the scope. He starts playing bass with one hand like Stanley Jordan, the other hand madly modulating the feedback fields.

Suddenly the vocal fingerprint matches up, imposes itself as static waves over the frequencies of Julian's body scan.

Julian freezes, gives a yelp. The waves tracing the yelp turn inside out, creating a squeal of feedback through the PA. Julian now yells in an accelerating cadence of intervals described by the fibonacci series.

Roger flips the scope to an EEG pattern. The red diodes now trace a brain with an electrode on either side. The modulation continues at a deeper level, the midline gradually centering on the image.

Roger slams all the sliders up, amping the system to howling overload. He steps out to play, closing in on Julian with the rest of the band.

The situation--and Julian's predicament--are now exactly as shown in the opening scene. His howls are his destiny.

Ed looks at Roger, who nods and yells to him.

ROGER
Full Circuit.

At that moment, the golden glow the band projects takes on completely different properties. It expands like a supernova, engulfing the stage and much of the seating area. It is no longer the pleasant, worshipful gold, but an angry hellfire. And it writhes with hellish forms, malignant versions of the visions people see in embers.

The band looks up into a seething cloud of imagery individually selected to scare them pissless. They are swarmed by squirming mass of tentacles, menaced by beaks and claws striking in from the burning air, inundated with gross, degrading, threatening hallucinations on all sides.

ROGER

Keep playing! Get your gut into it!

The band battle desperately, but their playing seems to feed the fire. The images grow more graphic, more solid. Sparks and smoke emerge from Roger's boards, lights wink out.

Julian's eyes pop open and his presence starts radiating within the seething umbra of light. He fixes evil eyes on the band and starts swelling.

Offstage screaming causes Nick to glance out front, where he sees the horrible repercussions this psychic chaos is creating in the audience.

NICK

Holy fuckin' Christ on a crutch!

He jerks his head towards the crowd. Roger yells.

ROGER

We have to finish this, we're destroying those people!

This is the gut check the band had lacked. Their faces harden with a desperate determination, their auras strengthen, they step up and take tougher stances.

Chilo nods, stands, brutally hammers out the knockout punch.

A hundred hippy drummers around him grab their congas and djembes and pound them on the floor in unison.

Jaxi, surrounded by a gruesome mass of sexual mutilation, moves staunchly to the twitching Julian. Her hand on her voder device, she leans over to scream in his face.

JAXI

Stop it, you prick!

Her augmented voice feeds back, stabs out in a shrill squeal, a decisive element drilling into Julian.

Roger resists a cyclone of putrescence to twist knobs. Jaxi's augmented voice feeds back, stabs out in a shrill, rising squeal, a decisive element drilling into Julian.

A massive spasm levitates Julian a foot off the floor. The band jumps in, their playing pounds him to his knees, then knocks him flat. He spreads rigid, splayed into the "Canon of Proportion" pose. His eyes close and he goes limp.

Instantly the hurricane of hallucination vanishes.

Roger leaps to the console, which displays a flatline, slams the sliders back. He steps into the spot and waves up to Weasel, making "cut" motions at his throat. The PA shuts off: the sudden silence is the final broadside.

The audience freezes, then begins milling aimlessly, far from all right. Julian lies motionless, *hors de combat*.

In the wing Big Red teeters, stunned, then collapses. The band look at one another, dazed.

CODY

Did we win for the Gipper, Coach?

NICK

I'm thinking... TKO.

Julian lies alone in the tight white spot. He jerks spasmodically and the guys move in, crouch around him.

Downstage, Red sits up, wide-eyed and vulnerable. She tugs her skirt missishly, smoothes her top. She sees the band, blanches. Jaxi approaches her. Red grabs at her hand.

RED

Oh, God. I don't know what to do.
What do I do?

JAXI

Just breathe. Keep calm.

RED

No, I mean...all this.

She looks at the band, flinches when Chilo glances at her.

RED

I got you all into this... those
guys must hate my guts.

JAXI

They'll understand. Look, let me
go get you some water and...

RED

No! I mean... Listen, can you hang with me a little? Please?

She looks around, shudders.

RED

You must really hate me. I'm sorry I was mean to you. It wasn't you...

JAXI

And it wasn't really you. Anyway, it feels like that's all over.

RED

Thank God. You know I was your age when Julian first took me out? Wow.

Ed approaches, squats beside them.

ED

And she's your age now. Everything she's learned, everybody she was since then, is gone and she's back to being a scared kid. That's what I think's happening.

RED

Maybe. Oh, man... How about Julian?

ED

He seems all right, physically.

JAXI

Just forgotten more than he ever knew.

RED

Yeh, okay, fine. Just keep him away from me.

JAXI

Don't you worry, honey.

Jaxi looks at Ed, who is watching her closely. She steps to him for a closer scan.

JAXI

Wow, Ed. This is weird.

ED

You'll have to be more specific.

JAXI

From the time I met you you were this... God. Now all of a sudden you're just a nerd with a bad haircut and sweaty pits.

ED

Ah. Well, then...

JAXI

You just look like, like you...

She steps in close, gives him a quick kiss.

JAXI

Like you'll probably do.

ED

Meaning we still... You still...

JAXI

Barely. I think you just become a fixer-upper.

Ed relaxes, beams with relief. He touches her gingerly.

ED

Good luck with that.

Cody approaches, starts to move to Red.

ED

Jaxi, why don't you girls go hit the washroom? Freshen up a little.

Jaxi helps Red up. Red smiles shakily at Cody, walks off practically clinging to Jaxi. Cody starts to follow.

ED

Let her get sorted out a little. When was the last time you had a teenage girlfriend?

CODY

Last month, remember?

ED

Then you know how it works.

CODY

Not really. Is she gonna be like Julian? He's just a dumbass little kid now, wearing somebody's suit. Sybil didn't seem as bad off.

ED

Sybil?

CODY

Like her parents named her "Red"?

ED

Of course. Why's she better off?

CODY

He can't really remember any of it. There might be like a thirty year gap in his game plan.

ED

I think he was younger when he got "made". And he was in it longer. Maybe he's better off.

Roger and Nick approach.

ROGER

Better off than us, maybe. We just blew a concert, ruined a bunch of rented equipment, emptied the hall, maybe killed some people, and are on the road with no management.

NICK

I've done worse. Back in the day.

CHILO

The point is... is it over?

ED

How can we know?

Cody yells into the darkness of the wings.

CODY

Hey Jaxi, get your ass back over here, right now.

JAXI (O.S.)

Go fuck yourself, cowhumper.

ED

I'd call that conclusive.

ROGER

We're never going to know what this was all about, are we?

ED

I doubt it. They came, they did... whatever they did, they left.

ROGER

Maybe. Did you see our itinerary?
Tokyo, Peking, Koala fuckin'
Lumpur. See what I'm getting at?

CODY

So maybe we did save the world?

CHILO

Or destroyed it.
(Points offstage)
That look like a savior job to you?

NICK

Maybe we just lost a fat gig and
some replacement assholes somewhere
are getting the time-share death
experience?

ROGER

I see two possibilities. Someday
we'll find out what it all means.

CODY

Sound like the preacher back home.

ROGER

Or we'll never know shit.

Something occurs to Nick. He waves up to Weasel, points at
the monitor, motions upwards. Colored lights flick on in
the dark outside the spotlit circle.

Nick runs a quick riff, nods. Ed does the same. Checking.

CHILO

But you two played... before.

ROGER

Still got hair, Cody?

Cody's hands hover nervously above the strings, settle down,
tear off a lick. He beams as Roger comes in.

NICK

It's all in the fingers.

CODY

But it's missing some chrome. No
more powerband at the top end.

ED

Not a bad thing, maybe.

The five men stand in a circle inside the dazzling cone of
the spot. From the high balcony, seen over banks of mixer
boards, they look isolated and abandoned.

CODY (V.O.)
So what do we do now?

ROGER (V.O.)
We're artists. We'll think of something.

NICK (V.O.)
You got that right.

CUT TO BLACK:

CREDITS/EPILOGUE SEQUENCE - PLUSH HOTEL SUITE

Credits crawl on black screen, windows open to show these partying shots--all date-stamped, handheld video footage.

OUTSIDE SUITE DOOR

HILLARY, obnoxious titsy MTV twit, and her PartyCrashers™ co-host JASON, cute brain-dead eunuch du jour, prep and preen outside the door to the hospitality suite.

HILLARY
Paul, this time remember they call them steady-cams for a reason? And Jason, don't step on my lines. Or your dick. OK, ready to rock?

Jason starts to knock, but a Bouncer opens the door.

HILLARY
Yo, it's just... Party Crashers!

The Bouncer slams the door in their faces. Hillary recovers to make a sly moue at the camera.

INSIDE HOSPITALITY SUITE

MUSIC: RAPTOR'S NEW SINGLE "AUTO EROTICISM"

Amid a swirl of hip/trash/glitz party-hearty, Hillary breathlessly addresses the camera.

HILLARY
...gala release party for a CD that has already produced the instant club classic "Auto Eroticism" and the hit single "Video Games".

JASON

(Obvious rote spiel)

The first Raptor album since the spectacular fan riot disrupted their Mission Peak tour. Leading to bans from major venues and a change of label and management.

WEASEL (V.O.)

Management more suited to their artistic goals, *n'est-ce pas?*

HILLARY

(Stage-whisper)

Road manager Egon Weitzell, who rocketed from nowhere to become Morris Agency's new starmaker.

Weasel cleaned up well, resplendent in underground velvet and dripping elegant Goth trimmings.

WEASEL

Not nowhere. The Old World.

He smiles enigmatically, holds up a CD to fill the screen: "CITY OF REFUGE". The cover painting shows a village sloping up a cliff, roofs becoming the neck feathers of a stone hawk staring balefully into the viewer's eye.

HOSPITALITY SUITE

Hillary, microphone at ready, blunders through a conversation pit full of hippies playing hand drums.

HILLARY

The band that started the whole NeoTribal, DanceTrance phenomena moves in the same circles as trendsetters and international stars, but still welcome street kids to drum and dance on stage.

JASON

Actually, I think one of those "street kids" is Chilo Sandoval.

(Smirk at Hillary)

You know, Raptor's drummer?

HILLARY

And just look what he's wearing!

Her drive to pester Chilo is cut off by the arrival of Nick, who gives Chilo the finger/thumb "party on" sign. Nick's date is the luxuriant Avis. Chilo, wounded, spreads his arms in shocked supplication. She turns to tug up her tiny skirt, showing a tattoo of a generic bluesman in hat and glasses.

Chilo is devastated... but his two dates solace him.

HOSPITALITY SUITE

The PestCam pans by, then jumps back to Roger leaning in a corner in deep conversation with a young Asian Woman. She would be attractively exotic if she wasn't totally nerded-out, including unsightly glasses and unfortunate hairdo.

As the camera stalks toward the pair, Roger quickdraws a calculator, and punches in numbers. She looks back and forth between his calculations his infra-cool person.

HILLARY

(Soto voce)

Roger Mains plays bass and produced the new album. Said to have a genius IQ and amazing endowment...

As the camera approaches, Roger looks up, cocks an annoyed eyebrow. Without taking her eyes off his number-crunching, Ms. GeishaGeek extends her hand to cover the lens.

HILLARY (O.S.)

Hey! Excuse me? Could you... Hey, watch out Paul! Ah, shit!

HOSPITALITY SUITE

Hillary and her cameraman badger Ed, now sporting a dapper ponytail. Ed tries to edge past them carrying drinks.

HILLARY

...but is that what we're hearing, Ed? In his tell-all book "VelociRaptor", former producer Julian Styles alleges that...

ED

Julian's accounts of his own experiences are strictly hearsay.

Jaxi, stunning, arrives to rescue Ed from Hillary.

JAXI

Yeh, who you want to believe? Us or some unauthorized author?

HOSPITALITY SUITE BALCONY

Ed, Jaxi, Cody and Red stand on the lanai with the drinks Ed brought them. Hillary tries to push outside to join them.

HILLARY

And here's another hot couple... Cody Delf and gorgeous former manager Sybil Rollins.

RED

Just call us CodeRed.

HILLARY

Aw. Are they cute? But do intra-band hookups really work out?

CODY

It worked for Fleetwood Mac.

RED

Didn't they all get divorced?

JAXI

But then they all got married.

HILLARY

So. Now who's "managing" who?

RED

Oh, we manage.

JAXI

We're music biz kidz in love. Like Sid and Nancy, Kurt and Courtney.

ED

Siegfried and Roy.

HILLARY

Uh... So after working together full time for two years, you suddenly fell in love?

JAXI

Forever after just took forever.

HILLARY

What? Well, I mean, any future plans musical or... domestic?

JAXI

Who cares?

She touches the control of her vocal device.

JAXI

(Donald Duck voice)

Our happy ending's just starting.

THE HAPPY ENDING