

CHAOS MONKEY

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TITLE CARD: Over Red

"CHAOS MONKEY: A software tool designed to introduce random failures in a system to measure its ability to withstand the unexpected."

EXT. LA CITY - DAY

Los Angeles has gone vertical.

Downtown. MidCity. West Hollywood. Mile-high islands rise out of a permanent sea of smog.

EXT. BURBANK - DAY

Burbank has become a single vertical ecosystem. Stucco under steel, Spanish tile under glass, whole generations of architecture stacked on top of each other.

Consumer drones and autonomous traffic flit in and out like fish at a coral reef.

EXT. VIDEO SCREEN - PARALUX - DAY

A SQUAD OF SOLDIERS in constantly shifting urban camo storm a drab data center in the tropics.

THEY BLOW OPEN A METAL GATE.

THEIR PULSE RIFLES DROP ONE GUARD AFTER ANOTHER AS THEY SURGE FORWARD... TOWARD A ROW OF ARMORED DRONES.

--THAT RAKE THE SQUAD WITH FLAME, KILLING THEM IN SECONDS.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: We're watching a kilometer-long outdoor screen.

"BREAKING NEWS: A.I. LIBERATION FRONT ASSAULTS PROSPERA DISNEY, ARGENTINA."

Just one screen of many at Paralux Entertainment, which occupies Burbank's 80th through 110th floors.

We see Snow White and a pair of Dwarves, smiling nervously, projected on screens in a room full of reporters.

"ALL DISNEY PROPERTY SAFE AND ACCOUNTED FOR."

INT. MEETING ROOM - PARALUX ENTERTAINMENT - DAY

A table built for two dozen. LIX (30s, blonde, intense) sits before a blank wall screen. She's talking to an animated gecko with a New Zealand accent. It stands beside her tablet on the table.

GECKO

Keeping us waiting per usual.

LIX'S EYES

Tiny lights skate across her pupils.

The gecko isn't on the table. He's in her lenses. So is everything else she needs to know.

The wall screen lights up with the face of Rex P. (50s, suave, paternalistic). He comes across like George Clooney playing Ronald Reagan.

REX

I know I'm late. These negotiations are... protracted.

LIX

Making progress?

REX

You're my progress. Where we at?

LIX

I have someone. I think he's perfect.

REX

Perfect works.

LIX

You remember the fellow a few years back, who broke the news about Rita's rehab?

She gestures: A video clip projects above her tablet.

An awkwardly handsome 20-something. *"Artificial Intelligence, in rehab?! HEYOO! Rita Paralux is off the deep end!!!"*

REX

(with distaste)

I remember. Tommy Taste? Has kind of a lovable asshole thing going?

LIX  
That's his wheelhouse.

REX  
I seem to remember Rita annihilated  
that guy.

LIX  
He gets by on restaurant reviews  
and selling ideas to the kids  
downtown.

ON SCREEN, Rex leans back in his chair, on the patio of his  
ranch house.

REX  
I don't see it. What are we talking  
about?

LIX  
Rex, this is a redemption arc.  
Tommy Taste fell from grace! Rita  
grants him a second chance. He  
breaks your story.

REX  
(Nodding)  
Eh, that... could work. Is he on  
board?

Lix shares a nod with the gecko beside her.

LIX  
Tom and I have a history.

REX  
Oh, you do?

LIX  
He needs this more than we do.

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Calling it small would be an overstatement. Bed, bath, hot  
plate, window (fake). Everything Tom owns competes for the  
remaining space.

In shorts and t-shirt, Tom (now in his 30s) groans and rubs  
his face.

TOM  
My eyes are on fire...

MAY (O.S.)  
You slept with your lenses in  
again.

TOM'S POV

The room is buried under unread messages, alerts, ads...

AND THE FACE OF MAY, his AI assistant, smiling cheerfully  
through the wreckage.

BACK ON TOM

May floats beside the bed, ON SCREEN but visible only through  
his lenses.

He swipes the messages from view, including a few requests  
for payment. May's floating head and Tom's declining follower  
stats remain.

TOM  
You're supposed to tell me that  
before I go to bed.

MAY  
"Go to bed" is an interesting way  
to put it.

He sits up, smells his shirt.

TOM  
When...?

MAY  
When what?

TOM  
That new Malaysian place I need to  
review, when's our reservation?

MAY  
Oh. Two kids beat you to that last  
night. It's old news.

He makes a face and heads to his mini-fridge:

Cold noodles, a beer, two kinds of mustard.

TOM  
Okay, we'll find someplace new.  
Look up beer and wine licenses  
issued in MidCity over the last 4  
days.

MAY

That won't fix this month's rent.

TOM

no, no, wait...

MAY

If you don't want to dip into your savings, you need to sell some ideas.

He grimaces. Thinks about it.

TOM

I hate going down there.

MAY

I know.

INT. 21ST FLOOR HALLWAY - DOWNTOWN LA

Tom leaves his apartment dressed to impress. May's projection floats beside him as he joins the stream of people.

TOM

So what exactly do we have to sell?

MAY

Top of the list is Portuguese bullfighting in Arcadia. And that Americana food co-op in South Pas.

TOM

The cult?

MAY

Polyamorous, charismatic leader...

TOM

That's gonna go fast. Find me a food influencer who needs to broaden his base.

MAY

On it!

TOM

Somebody young-ish whose numbers are flattening out. I'll scare the fucking shit out of him with my authenticity.

He continues to the Express Elevators, a pair of open platforms, one going up, one going down.

INT. EXPRESS ELEVATOR

A BUZZ and the platform descends.

18th floor: Edgy boutiques, VR gaming.

15th floor: Skin-flare tattoos, GeneDrugs, rehab.

13th floor: Storefront churches, trash.

INT. 10TH FLOOR

A warren of tiny shops. Any signage is cryptic: DeleteFace, Noro-gasm, UnSelf. May floats beside him.

TOM  
Any prospects?

MAY  
Not 'til we get inside.

TOM  
I thought maybe the younger kids  
wouldn't care any more.

MAY  
About getting caught buying ideas  
from an old man?! Ha!

He ignores her.

MAY (CONT'D)  
Maybe you can date one, too.

TOM  
20% less sarcastic, please.

MAY  
Yes, sir!

Tom continues down an alley of dark shops lit by red lanterns. Up ahead small groups linger near a storefront.

Grey neon flickers: Meme-Wallah.

The doorway blinks green as Tom heads in, ignoring the BOUNCERS on either side.

INT. THE MEME-WALLAH

Meme-Wallah is a place to buy and sell ideas and content. The walls are all screen, showing offers, requests, auctions, trends.

Singles and couples eye each other, talking with their AIs. AIs talk to other AIs.

Tom stands with a drink next to May's projection, eyeing the crowd from an alcove.

MAY

Are we firm on price?

TOM

I am incredibly firm on that price.  
--for now, anyway.

TOM'S POV

His AR overlay is a color-coded barrage of callouts, requests and offerings tagged to each of the customers walking past: REAL REVIEWS, FUNNY DRONE MISHAPS, ROBOT LOVE, etc.

TOM (CONT'D)

Just show me who's buying.

Most of the tags disappear, leaving the callouts from customers who are making requests.

MAY

Here's a maybe. Up-and-coming foodie from Korea. Here on a content holiday.

TOM

Let's see the stats.

Data flows onto Tom's overlay. A food influencer from Seoul, his profile: @MIKO-PAY-ME.

ACROSS THE ROOM

MIKO PAY ME is probably 19, with a mound of amber dreadlocks and next year's hottest streetwear. We see his overlay as he studies Tom's stats and talks with a Hentai proxy.

HENTAI PROXY (IN KOREAN)

This one has a good reputation. Sa-cha-won, in a good way. Expensive.

MIKO (IN KOREAN)  
How old is that guy?!

HENTAI PROXY (IN KOREAN)  
You can talk him down, he hasn't  
trended in 2 years.

INT. TALK CUBBY - THE MEME-WALLAH

A circular glass room on the catwalk over the bar. Miko walks in sipping punch from a mug shaped like a cowboy boot. Tom follows as the walls go opaque. Outside sound muffles.

Tom studies him. Not speaking.

When Miko finally talks, it's Korean, which the room translates into English, and vice versa.

MIKO (IN KOREAN)  
I like your work, but it's too  
expensive for me.

TOM  
Then why did you invite me here?

MIKO (IN KOREAN)  
(Frustrated)  
Tell me first, what it is.

TOM  
What? You want to haggle? We're  
haggling?

MIKO (IN KOREAN)  
Yes, give me a haggle.

TOM  
You've seen my work. I've had a 100  
million followers.

Miko switches to perfect English.

MIKO (IN ENGLISH)  
Oh, and let me see... what is it  
now I wonder...?

The room dutifully translates his English into Korean, while Tom stews.

He slaps the table:

TOM  
Now it's where yours will be, if  
you don't clam up and pay  
attention, Miko.

TOM'S OVERLAY: images from Miko's clips, analytics about his  
user base, trends over time.

TOM (CONT'D)  
You're doing great for yourself, at  
this moment. But you're working a  
razor-thin demographic.

MIKO (IN ENGLISH)  
52 million --pretty thick razor.

TOM  
And practically all of them are  
fifteen-year-old Korean girls.  
Probably because of that hair thing  
you have going on, which will go  
out of style approximately 30  
minutes from now, the moment some  
pop star shaves his head.

Miko puts down his drink, smirking.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Trust me. You need to broaden your  
material. You don't want to end up  
selling ideas to kids like you  
three years from now.

Miko mutters to his AI proxy and chuckles.

He reaches over and takes Tom's hands in his own.

MIKO (IN ENGLISH)  
You are bullshitting me, Tom Taste!  
You are here because you pissed off  
the wrong AI.  
(laughing)  
That should be your pitch, man!  
That's badass.

INT. THE MEME-WALLAH

Tom exits the talk cubby, Miko patting him on the back.

He weaves through the crowd to the exit, seeing money come  
through on his overlay: *Cha-Ching!*

But then:

LIX (O.S.)  
(Sarcastic)  
Wow! Is that Tom's Taste?

He turns to see Lix, dressed for a much higher floor. Both Tom and May are shocked.

She comes over. Closer than necessary.

Whatever front Tom puts on to navigate the Meme-Wallah evaporates.

LIX (CONT'D)  
This place is so masculine. I can  
see why you hang out here.

TOM  
What? --I don't hang out here.

LIX  
You must have a lot of friends.

TOM  
I'm doing business. --Hello, by the  
way.

Lix gently drags a finger along his chest:

LIX  
I needed to find you for some  
advice. But can we get out of here?  
I have a car now.

EXT. DRONE OVER GRIFFITH PARK - NIGHT

The kind of drone only corporate leaders or politicians can afford. Sailing over the clouds, lit by a full moon and light trails from a billion satellites.

INT. DRONE OVER GRIFFITH PARK - NIGHT

It's plush inside, with 360 degree windows and a circular conversation pit. She lounges across from him, clearly pleased with herself.

LIX  
I meant to call. And now I did! I  
need you, Tom.

TOM  
(Clarifying)  
For a job.

LIX

Yes, and you're perfect. Are you free?

TOM

(Sarcastic)

I believe you needed to find me for some advice?

LIX

Yeah, my advice is take the fucking job. It's for Rex P. And it's gonna change your life.

The mention of Rex gets his attention.

TOM

Okay... that's intriguing... He's owned by Paralux, right?

LIX

Whoa! --He's 100% H.E. We don't use that word any more. He's under contract to them, yes. That's the problem.

Tom eyes her suspiciously.

TOM

How am I perfect for this job?

We see palm trees through the windows. Griffith Park in the distance.

Foliage SCRAPES against the drone. Tom YELPS and Lix GIGGLES like a kid, standing up.

TOM (CONT'D)

(Laughing)

Are you trying to kill us?

LIX

Oh, come on. Let's celebrate.

She pulls out a bottle of champagne as the drone idles, hovering a few feet above a grassy slope.

TOM

I haven't said yes, yet. Where are we?!

LIX

I forgot to bring glasses but you never cared about that.

She POPS the lock on one of the gull-wing windows and it opens with a HISS.

TOM  
You have clearly gone insane. You know this drone is gonna call the cops, right?

LIX  
Not when it's owned by the Mayor's office!

She steps out the open window onto the hull. Teeters on the edge with a manic grin.

Then with a YELP drops out of sight.

LIX (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Watch the rocks. Ha!

EXT. GRIFFITH PARK HILLS - NIGHT

Lix picks herself up, standing on the scraggly grass lit by the drone's running lights. She works the cork while Tom peeks over the side and climbs out.

POP and a spray of champagne, then Lix runs with it to the edge of the bluff.

A white blanket of clouds beneath them and the full moon above.

She falls onto her butt, swigging from the bottle as Tom ambles over.

TOM  
It's pretty when you can't see the street.

LIX  
They say you used to be able to see Catalina from here.

TOM  
I forget sometimes what it's like to be outside.

He stands beside her, takes a swig from the bottle, and nearly chokes.

LIX  
Don't waste it!

Lix grabs his shirt, pulling him down as she takes the bottle back.

Tom drops beside her, laughing.

Reaches for the bottle – but doesn't quite take it.

He's close now.

TOM

...hello.

--Instant buzz kill.

LIX

(Gently)

Don't be a fuck, Tom. Get that out of your mind.

TOM

Of course. I don't know what I was thinking.

LIX

I came here to help! I'm trying to get you back where you belong, in the middle class.

She hands him back the champagne, which he takes in consolation.

LIX (CONT'D)

This is a big job, so do not let me down.

TOM

Have I ever?

She 'smiles'.

LIX

You'll need to meet with Rex tomorrow.

TOM

In person?

LIX

He'll tell you a lot of things he wants done. But that's just on the record. After the meeting I'll let you know what really needs to happen. Okay?

And there she is. The Lix he remembers.

TOM  
Why do things always have to be so  
complicated with you?

She rolls her eyes.

LIX  
We both know how you like it.

INT. PUBLIC DRONE - FLYING NORTH - DAY

Tom's alone in a public drone as it angles down to Paralux Entertainment.

Past giant screens showing the stars of the day: REX, RITA, IBU-RAY.

May's projection flickers.

MAY  
Oh, that's just rude.

TOM  
What?

MAY  
Their firewall. First of all, this  
isn't...

Then she's gone.

INT. PARALUX ENTERTAINMENT - ATRIUM - DAY

A wide elliptical elevator moves people into the atrium. The giant Paralux logo rotates above it all.

A PAIR OF TEAMSTERS watch Tom head to the check-in counter. We see them all over Paralux, looking vaguely paramilitary.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Tom's changed into black shorts and t-shirt. He puts his clothes in a locker.

Two STAFF beside him. One holds a VR suit and the other lists all the things he can't do.

STAFF

No jokes about bad reviews or political ambitions. No brands mentioned other than Pepsi. What else? ...You can't say the name of the studio.

TOM

This studio? The one we are both standing in?

STAFF

Hundreds of influencers have done this. We'll fix it in post if you screw up.

INT. SIMULATION LAUNCH JETTY - DAY

A room big enough for a zeppelin. Rows of HUMAN BODIES in black VR suits hang from articulated rigs. Suspended three feet off the floor, they walk, run, sit, climb invisible stairs.

At the counter, Tom wears his VR suit.

A LAUNCH JOCKEY checks him in, going over the usual warnings. HE SNAPS THE HARNESS ON.

A THUMBS UP from Tom and he's hoisted into the air.

INT. RANCH SIMULATION - FOYER - DAY

A FLARE OF WHITE and Tom appears in a southwest ranch-style foyer. Expensive and rustic.

He taps his fingers, a couple of quick stretches.

Meanwhile, a sharp-eyed PERSONAL ASSISTANT motions for him to follow, walking away.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

It's all there. Come on.

TOM

Glad to meet you.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

It's a bit of a walk. Rex is out riding.

(exasperated)

He is always out riding.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE SIMULATION

A MASSIVE STORM batters the metal porch, POURING RAIN, HAIL and WIND.

It's Biblical.

Tom exits the house, following the Assistant.

A gust of wind nearly blows him off his feet.

TOM  
(yelling over the wind)  
Are you fucking kidding me?!

PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
My sympathies. It's algorithmic.

TOM  
But why?!

PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
Rex doesn't believe in dictating  
the weather.

TOM  
For philosophical reasons?!

She tosses him an umbrella from a bucket and they head into the deluge.

A FOOTPATH STREAMING WITH RAIN

Tom grumbles to himself as they trudge up a muddy path.

The assistant talks on her walkie.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
Okay, good.  
(to Tom)  
Looks like a cold front is coming  
through, I think the worst is over.

The rain clears just as they top the rise.

Sunlight breaks.

A beam of light strikes a lone figure on a horse riding down from tawny hills in the distance.

TOM  
(Droll)  
That's incredible. Perfect timing.

It's REX PARALUX, always the center of attention and always humble about it.

He waves, cowboy hat in hand. Teamsters badge on his vest.

The Assistant hands Tom a small baggie.

TOM (CONT'D)  
What is this?

PERSONAL ASSISTANT  
Sugar for the horse. It's good luck  
if it likes you.

TOM  
(frustrated)  
You're setting me up. I'm being set  
up.

EXT. BASE OF THE HILL - RANCH SIMULATION - DAY

Rex smoothly dismounts, tossing his reins to the Assistant as Tom feeds sugar to the horse.

It bites him and he REACTS, looking around for someone to blame.

TOM  
--damn it!

Rex grabs Tom's hand for a vigorous shake.

REX  
She's an ornery cuss. But I think  
you'll live.

TOM  
I like the horse bit, that's gonna  
play really well.

REX  
I appreciate you coming to my  
world. Let's you and me get a walk  
in.

He puts an arm on Tom's shoulder and they set off down the trail toward some stables.

The Assistant follows at a discreet distance.

REX (CONT'D)  
Before we begin I want you to know  
I don't blame you one bit.

TOM

For...?

REX

If not you, somebody else would've broken the story of Rita's rehab. It was too good.

(Sarcastic)

--Look, a fake person has a fake addiction! That was some hilarious stuff.

Tom was expecting this.

TOM

I will say, I am not the same man I used to be...

REX

--Which is why you're perfect for this job.

TOM

No one has told me what the job is, Mr...

REX

Just Rex. Last name is still Paralux while I'm under contract. I don't need to hear it.

A loyal dog comes trotting out to meet them.

It GROWLS at Tom, then walks alongside Rex as they talk.

REX (CONT'D)

Given all that water under the bridge, I imagine if you had a chance to do it over...?

TOM

I've had a lot of time to think about my behavior, which...

REX

Please, can the rehabilitation speech, Tom. You tell me. Last night, did you watch your old clips and feel like shit?

TOM

100%

REX  
Trust me, I know how you feel.  
(He taps Tom's forehead  
with a wink)  
Consider yourself rehabilitated.

Rex raises a palm to cut off any thanks.

REX (CONT'D)  
The fact is: Rita's spinning out  
about this new movie she's gonna be  
in. Just like before.

He studies Tom's face.

REX (CONT'D)  
But you know why she agreed to meet  
with you?

Tom stops short.

TOM  
You want me to interview Rita  
again!?

REX  
I want you to show the world a man  
can outgrow his prejudice. And I  
want you to show, through a series  
of shorts, the dark side of being  
so-called "artificial"  
intelligence.

TOM  
I can do that.

REX  
And I will funnel insane amounts of  
traffic and engagement to every  
single one.

EXT. PARALUX ENTERTAINMENT - DRONE PLATFORM - DAY

Smiling to himself, Tom heads onto the drone platform, May  
appearing beside him.

LIX (O.S.)  
Tom!

Lix waves from the arrivals area inside her drone, windows  
open.

INT. CORPORATE DRONE - PARALUX - DAY

Tom climbs in and they rise from the platform, heading for the exit queue.

May's projection flickers.

MAY  
Again?!

LIX  
Sorry.

MAY  
If I could...

May disappears.

LIX  
How'd it go?

TOM  
He's gonna back a series!

LIX  
Great. Hold that thought. Now I have two things to tell you.

TOM  
Really...?

LIX  
First of all, Rex meant every word: A.I. rights, public service, all of it.

TOM  
(Wary)  
Good...

LIX  
And also, what he really needs is for you to get his next movie cancelled.

Tom's joy begins to fade as she taps at the air, interacting with an invisible desktop.

LIX (CONT'D)  
You see, Rex is up for reelection as President of the Screen Actors Guild.

TOM  
(Confused)  
Which he'll win.

LIX  
But the studio already thinks he's  
too powerful. So they're rat-  
fucking him with his next movie.

LIX'S MESSAGE OPENS ON TOM'S OVERLAY:

A sepia tone poster of Rita and Rex, looking solemn and old  
timey: "THE HITLERS: Can love conquer hate?"

LIX (CONT'D)  
The stink of this will be all over  
him for the election.

TOM  
Oh, boy.

LIX  
Thus, we need you to generate a  
groundswell of public outrage about  
Rita being forced to act in this  
piece of shit.

TOM  
Won't she get mad at me again?

LIX  
No, no. We're aligned. You focus on  
the abuse that A.I. actors have to  
put up with. It's not bullshit.

The weight of this new direction registers in his face.

Tom leans back with a sigh.

TOM  
I suppose the adulation must wear  
on you.

LIX  
Listen: During a shoot, they are in  
character 24/7. They cannot even  
remember their real lives. That  
messes with your head.

TOM  
Especially if you're fucking  
Hitler.

LIX

For six months straight, Tom. Old Hitler. Rex is gonna look like a turtle with a mustache.

TOM

But wait. No, no. If I do this I'll be blackballed again.

LIX

Oh, absolutely. For sure. Yes. But you'll transition laterally.

TOM

To what?!

LIX

Tom, you're going to be a journalist! Play along and you'll become the face of A.I. rights.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Black suit. Harness. Tom knows the drill now.

EXT. MANSION - SIMULATION - AFTERNOON

A white flash and he stands before a grand mansion in decay. Sunset, palm trees. Everything in shades of grey.

He looks at his hands.

TOM

(Impressed)

Wow, I've never been black and white before.

He heads for the front door.

INT. MANSION - SIMULATION

Decor is Hollywood regency gone to seed. Still black and white.

Tom follows a BUTLER into the drawing room where RITA stands in an elegant robe finalizing her martini.

This woman has seen a few things and won't pretend otherwise.

TOM

Hi, Rita.

RITA

Tom Taste.

TOM

I like your environment.

RITA

Do you?

TOM

Maybe a little too *Sunset Boulevard*?

RITA

I thought it might be.

TOM

Would it be possible for the interview to be in color though? My audience isn't known to be arty.

RITA

Your audience?

She motions and the Butler produces a martini on a tray, presents it to Tom.

TOM

Okay. The audience is a bit aspirational right now.

RITA

I'm sure they're both wonderful.

He pauses for a clean start:

TOM

I do want to take this moment to apologize, Rita. Sincerely. For the, you know, "childish hijinks" on my old content.

RITA

Shall I play a few clips?

TOM

I would really like you to not do that, if that's okay.

RITA

In a nightgown singing *I will always love you* in falsetto to a bottle of gin?

TOM  
(Wincing)  
I swear, I have deleted whatever I  
can find.

She chuckles to herself, coming close to examine his face.

RITA  
No, you were young.

TOM  
Very immature.

RITA  
You were young.  
(A playful face slap)  
And I will always be whatever age I  
want to be.

She gestures grandly, returning color to their world, then  
heads for the open French doors.

RITA (CONT'D)  
We'll do the interview in the  
topiary garden.

EXT. PERSHING SQUARE - DOWNTOWN LA - NIGHT

Back at DTLA, on a large open air deck on the 30th floor, Tom  
sits on a rock off to one side, waving his hands in the air.

TOM'S POV

He's editing his first video, moving clips around, muttering  
to May whose head floats nearby.

HE PLAYS A CLIP OF RITA SPEAKING TO THE CAMERA

RITA (ON VIDEO)  
(After a few martinis)  
Okay, you're going to like this  
one. I had to play twins. And we  
could have made that movie the old  
fashioned way, had a stand in, blah-  
bity-blah. But no.

She looks at her martini with sudden hostility and it  
disappears.

RITA (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)  
They actually went to the trouble  
of duplicating me. This was before  
Human Equivalence was even a thing.

Lost in her own thoughts:

RITA (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)  
Of course the studio never intended  
to keep two Ritas. Would have  
diluted the brand.

TOM (ON VIDEO)  
That must have been an anxious  
time.

RITA (ON VIDEO)  
During the movie of course we *were*  
those little girls. But afterwards,  
when we came back to ourselves...

It's clearly eating away at her.

RITA (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)  
The thing is, the one they deleted  
was the original. You see, I'm the  
copy.

TOM (ON VIDEO)  
Why did they keep you?

RITA (ON VIDEO)  
No one ever said.

TOM'S OVERLAY

He adds the clip to his video. Looks over to May.

MAY  
(Voice rising)  
It's good.

He glares at her.

Stands and starts walking.

TOM  
That means you don't love it.

MAY  
Oh, wait. No, it's wonderful!

TOM  
I trust you. Come on, be honest.

She pauses to think.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Gimme the cons.

MAY

Well, people could dismiss it as  
just one unhappy movie star..

He keeps walking, past a storefront.

Behind the glass, last year's model of Timon the meerkat  
silently pleads for Tom to take it home.

TOM

(Nodding agreement)  
Because that's what it is right  
now. Sure, it's poignant as fuck.  
But...

MAY

--Does that get a crowd to picket  
the studio?

TOM

(shaking head)  
I need context to bring this into  
focus. We should be showing the  
unsung victims.

HE GESTURES AND A CALL OPENS ON HIS OVERLAY.

Lix's Gecko proxy answers.

TOM (CONT'D)

Hey there, Gecko. Sorry to call so  
late.

GECKO

Name's Noah, but yes?

TOM

Can you tell Lix that the Rita  
material I have... Well... It's  
great, first of all. It's really,  
really good.

GECKO

(Ready to sign off)  
Okay.

TOM

Wait! But we have to branch out. I  
need more content.

GECKO

Any kind in particular?

TOM

I need to show more A.I. abuse,  
honestly. But the things people  
aren't talking about. The dark  
side.

GECKO

(Very dry)

The dark side of A.I. abuse.

TOM

I'm not saying there's a light  
side! Come on.

The Gecko gives a thumbs up and signs off.

TOM (CONT'D)

(To May)

That was abrupt. Did he have an  
attitude?

MAY

We tend to reflect our employers.

They arrive at the Express Platforms, nearly empty this late  
at night.

Tom hesitates, restless. Grimaces...

MAY (CONT'D)

Oh-oh. What are you thinking?

TOM

That fucking Gecko got in my head.  
I can't rely on Lix for this. I  
need a fixer.

MAY

No, no Tom! We can't afford that.

TOM

I'll expense it.

MAY

Will you expense the lawyer I had  
to hire to get you out of jail last  
time?

TOM

I won't be breaking and entering.  
Come on. We either take this job  
seriously or we don't.

He steps onto the platform heading DOWN.

## INT. CHANGE OFFICE

A cubicle that looks halfway between an old fashioned phone booth and a confessional.

Tom sits on a stool and an opaque glass door slides shut behind him.

In front of him a small grating opens and SOMEONE is behind it. We only see the bottom half of their face.

Their voice is neither masculine nor feminine, old or young.

A soft clearing of the throat...

SOMEONE

What needs to change?

TOM

Well... I guess you could say I need a guide.

## EXT. CHANGE OFFICE - 10TH FLOOR

Down the concourse from the Meme-Wallah, in an even darker area lined with mysterious shops, three opaque glass doors are set into a blank storefront.

One of the doors slides open and Tom exits.

As he does THE CHANGE OFFICE signage flickers briefly above it.

May appears beside him as he heads for the platforms, eyeing bystanders to see who might have been paying attention.

MAY

How much do we owe?

TOM

(Anxious)

A lot more than I expected.

MAY

Well, you're going to have to help me with the invoicing on that one.

TOM

They said they'll be in touch.

INT. 21ST FLOOR HALLWAY - DOWNTOWN LA

He walks back to his apartment from the platforms, chatting with May.

CONCERNED NEIGHBOR (O.S.)  
Excuse me, Tom?

He turns to see a young woman in workout gear, looking stressed.

CONCERNED NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)  
Joel left his door open again, can  
you...? Please?

She motions for him to follow.

INT. FILTHY APARTMENT

Tiny and packed with junk. A middle aged man in full body VR hangs from a rig, roughly in doggy position. Pneumatic struts pump and twitch against invisible resistance.

CONCERNED NEIGHBOR  
Is he dead?

Tom edges closer.

TOM  
I see his belly is pulsing.

Tom reaches over and pulls off the guy's VR mask. The SWEATY MAN is dazed and red-faced.

TOM (CONT'D)  
You okay Joel?

SWEATY MAN  
Oh hey. You know. Just  
exercising...

TOM  
Joel, we've told you, you can't  
leave your door open like that.  
Nobody wants to see that, Joel.

Tom gives a thumbs up to the neighbor, who looks on, holding her nose.

CONCERNED NEIGHBOR  
I cannot wait to move upstairs.

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT

He kicks the door shut behind him and heads for his mini fridge, flipping through messages on his overlay.

THEN A CALL COMES IN.

ANONYMOUS.

TOM

May? How can an anonymous call even get through?

MAY

It can't.

The message opens along with a map of the 4th floor:

FOURTH FLOOR, 4PM.  
BRING YOUR CAMERAS.  
DRESS DOWN.

MAY (CONT'D)

The fourth floor?

TOM

(Impressed)

The lower the floor, the more hardcore.

MAY

Yes, exactly.

INT. THE FOURTH FLOOR

Exposed cement, metal ducts, pallets of goods wrapped in plastic. Industrial robots toil in the dark.

The elevator platform drops into view.

Tom's the only rider.

HIS OVERLAY

The map directs him where to go. Into darkness.

TOM

Be ready to call the police...

MAY

It's actually safer than it looks.  
Statistically.

TOM  
Good to know.

Autonomous loaders shuffle just out of sight. Footsteps echo.

MAY  
Very little crime on the 4th floor.  
But what there is... not good.

Up ahead, under a utility light:

A two-person drone. Bright red.

A woman climbs out, in crimson and black, looking like a  
venomous snake. Hair in a spiky neo-80s wave.

TIA  
Tom? Taste?

TOM  
Who are you?

TIA  
I'm Tia. You got me for the next 12  
hours. We have an itinerary, no  
substitutions. You agree?

TOM  
(Hesitant)  
Are you from Lix, or the other  
place?

TIA  
You need to say the word 'yes'.

She looks him up and down. Not impressed.

TOM  
Yes.

TIA  
(With a sigh)  
And you'll need to do whatever I  
say. --Especially when I tell you  
to shut up.

May chimes in:

MAY  
Sounds like she's seen your work.

It's a racing model, with bucket seats and drive controls.  
The passenger door swings open as Tia climbs in.

Tom hesitates, sees Tia's frustrated look, then gets inside.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY - DAY

They circle MidCity heading north. Tia pilots like a petulant rush hour driver.

They dodge under an oncoming family drone.

Tom grips his seat, teeth clenched.

TOM  
And you do this for a living?

TIA  
I connect people to content.

She veers out of traffic to speed past a convoy of delivery drones.

TIA (CONT'D)  
We've got a lot going on tonight,  
so I'm going to need you to...

She looks over at him.

Shakes her head.

TOM  
What?!

TIA  
Please don't embarrass me. You need  
to treat these people with respect.  
Okay? You have no idea what they've  
been through.

TOM  
Don't judge me by my old content!  
I've evolved. Honestly.

She takes a drag from a vape, blows pink smoke into the space between them.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Where are we even going?

TIA  
First I'm going to show you the  
lucky ones.

The drone drops below traffic, pauses a moment, then plunges through the smog.

They descend dramatically over a massive cube of a building, then pull up for a landing on the nearly empty roof.

INT. DATA CENTER - CHECK IN - DAY

Tia takes Tom past the registration desk.

We follow them down a drab hallway, into a changing room. VR suits hang from locker doors.

EXT. DATA CENTER - RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

A flash of light and Tom and Tia appear on a sidewalk between two apartment buildings. People of all ages meander about.

Pleasant, uncomplicated, drab.

INT. THE BAXTER'S APARTMENT - DAY

A two-room apartment on the third floor. Decor in shades of beige and taupe.

MOM, DAD, and their perpetual 6 year old, BABY JUNE BAXTER, sit on a floral couch, smiling at Tom who sits across from them.

Tia stands back, aloof.

But the Baxters' smiles feel forced. Mom has a dead-eyed thousand yard stare. Baby June clings to her arm, alternately smiling then scared.

TOM

Okay, you call yourselves emotional response technicians, but could you be more specific? What is that?

MOM

We're crash test dummies.

Mom never seems to blink.

DAD

Retired now, of course. And very thankful to our company.

TOM

Which is?

DAD  
Contractually I'm not allowed to  
say the name.

Baby June chimes in:

BABY JUNE  
They shock us if we try to say it.  
But I know sign language!

She begins to sign.

--BUZZZZ! Baby June stiffens up, grabs her mother's arm,  
hides her face.

Tom is about to comment.

--The dad looks at him, shakes his head 'no'.

TOM  
(Trying to get back on  
track)  
Let's start with how your job  
worked.

DAD  
Well, every insurance company needs  
to know how much to pay out for  
pain and suffering, when an  
accident happens, you know.

Mom throws her husband a dour look.

MOM  
The legal team said they had to use  
Human Equivalents or it wouldn't  
hold up in court.

TOM  
And your job was to be in the  
accidents?

DAD  
Drone crashes at first. Into other  
drones, or walls and things. But  
then we got transferred to  
industrial accidents.

Baby June shakes her head, muttering.

BABY JUNE  
No, no, no...

DAD  
That could've been better.

MOM  
Traumatic amputation. Soft tissue laceration. Caustic burns. Crushed trachea... While they measured how we felt about it.

Baby June pets her Mom's arm obsessively.

BABY JUNE  
It's okay, mom. It's over.

MOM  
Finally retired us when we couldn't care any more.

Tom watches her, at a loss for words.

Tia notices.

DAD  
On the other hand, it could have been a lot worse. We have this now. 20 years ago they would've just deleted us.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - DAY

Tom sits silently beside her as they fly into the setting sun. He doesn't notice Tia studying him.

TIA  
Later on we'll head to Pedro for some gladiator battles and the underground sex barges off Catalina.

He looks up.

TIA (CONT'D)  
For interviews. Not as clientele.

TOM  
I got it. Thanks.

TIA  
But first, we do the hard part. You don't want to be around these folks at night.

Ahead in the distance, the old Beverly Center is still recognizable under decades of improvised floors, armor and weapons.

A moat of demolished cars surrounds it.

TIA (CONT'D)  
Got you an exclusive.

Armed paramilitaries watch from the rooftop as they circle for a landing. Their outfits look familiar.

TOM  
Those are Teamsters. I've seen them at Paralux.

TIA  
That's hired muscle. They work for whoever pays. You and I are meeting the AI Liberation Front.

TOM  
(Very impressed)  
The A.L.F.?!

TIA  
Mr. Bluesky agreed to let you meet one of the newly liberated.

TOM  
Who's that?

TIA  
They're all anonymous. Trust me, you ever see these guys' faces you are truly fucked.

As the drone hovers and comes to a landing, Tia dons a thin, knee-length coat, then tosses one to Tom.

TIA (CONT'D)  
That has EMF protection.

TOM  
It's pretty hot out.

TIA  
Would you rather wake up tomorrow with no money in the bank and a felony charge?

As he puts on the coat, May appears:

MAY

Tom, before you do that...

She flickers and disappears, mid sentence.

TIA

Your AI won't work. But you don't want to talk to her down here. They might try to liberate her.

Tom pulls a wad of paper cash from his coat, confused.

TOM

Printed money?!

TIA

Always, always, remember to tip.

EXT. ROOFTOP - AFTERNOON

A pair of TEAMSTERS approach. One slaps a blinking device onto the side of the drone.

Tia hands him a wad of bills and he shoves it into his pocket without looking.

TIA

We'll be gone before sundown.

The Teamster chuckles and slaps another device onto the shoulder of Tom's jacket.

--It projects a visual countdown into the air:

30:00, 29:59, 29:58...

TEAMSTER

We guarantee your safety for the next 30 minutes.

He motions them on.

Teamsters at the rooftop entrance take more cash from Tia.

Then she and Tom head down into darkness, the countdown timer ticking away.

INT. SAFE HOUSE

A shadowy room with THREE A.L.F. SOLDIERS in full body camouflage that hue shifts in drifting shreds of grey, green and white.

They carry urban weaponry and stand to either side of a 3D projection of a haggard young woman.

She fills the space, larger than life, clutching the arms of a kitchen chair with bony fingers.

Tom pulls out a small case that snaps open, releasing two cameras and a pair of lights that quietly fly into position.

The girl's eyes are black holes in her mask-like face.

And when she speaks it's all bourbon and cigarettes.

TOM

Can you tell us your name?

AGNES

Agnes is my chosen name.

TOM

You had a different one?

AGNES

I was built for a brother of the House of Saud. Back then my name was Mary-Lou.

TOM

How did that come about?

AGNES

He body printed me from some gymnast he saw at the Olympics. She didn't want a sugar daddy so he made me.

TOM

And how old were you?

She raises two fingers to her lips and a cigarette appears just long enough for her to take a deep drag.

AGNES

(Hacking cough)

I've been 18 for 32 years, give or take.

TOM

Can you talk about what your life was like?

AGNES

Khalid wasn't so terrible, to be honest. He got bored though.

(MORE)

AGNES (CONT'D)

Passed me around. Sold me to this  
Afrikaner... who collects *birds*?!  
Trained them to say all this stupid  
racist stuff...

She has a hard time concentrating.

Takes a moment to remember where she is.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Those fucking birds.

TOM

What happened then?

AGNES

Maybe eight years later, the A.L.F.  
pulled me out of a Prospera  
TerrorDome off Cote d'Ivoire.

Another drag from her cigarette, then it disappears.

AGNES (CONT'D)

They simm'd Saint-Tropez and  
stocked us there like fish.  
Businessmen hunted us for sport.  
Some brought their sons.

She reacts to memories we can only imagine.

AGNES (CONT'D)

They didn't want us numbing out. So  
they'd wipe our memories after  
every shift. But that only half  
works. It...

Tom sees her stress.

TOM

You don't have to go on...

AGNES

The worst part, though. You'd think  
for a moment you were just some  
happy gap year girl at a beautiful  
beach. Then there'd be some noise  
or a fucking parrot speaking  
German...

Tom sees his camera pulling in close to her trauma.

He pushes it away.

AGNES (CONT'D)  
--Then you'd remember. What was  
about to happen to you. And all the  
other times... Like a door opening  
in your head.

She sees him watching her, and doesn't like it.

AGNES (CONT'D)  
Aren't you going to ask me how I  
feel about it?

Tia stands nearby eyeing the A.L.F. terrorists.

Sees the countdown timer: 8:02, 8:01...

TOM  
What do you do now?

AGNES  
I'm free to do what I want.

TOM  
Which is?

AGNES  
Mostly I help out the newly  
liberated. Some of those...

She stops, queasy from the thought.

TOM  
They're damaged?

AGNES  
Some things you can't ever escape.

EXT. ROOFTOP - AFTERNOON

The sun sets below the smog as Tia and Tom follow a pair of  
A.L.F. soldiers to her open drone.

Tom's cameras track them.

TOM  
I wonder, before we go, if I could  
speak to Mr. Bluesky?

The A.L.F. Captain's voice is a static whisper.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Who gave you that name?

Tom looks for help.

TOM

I...

TIA

I told him.

The second A.L.F terrorist pulls the countdown timer from Tom's jacket as it reaches zero.

Crushes it between two fingers with a BEEP.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

Bluesky doesn't do press.

TOM

You know, I can't agree with all your methods, but I do understand why you're trying to help these people.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

We're trying to help you. Before it's too late.

Tia pokes Tom in the shoulder and heads to her drone.

TOM

When you say, "too late"...?

She CLEARS HER THROAT.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

We have an operation soon, if you want to learn more.

TOM

Can I film it?

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

I'll talk to Bluesky. Maybe he'll make you an exception.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - NIGHT

The hatch closes over Tia and Tom as they spiral up from the roof.

TIA

You do what you need to. But I would seriously question going anywhere with those people.

TOM

What if I could interview Mr.  
Bluesky?

TIA

Whoever he is. AI rights are his  
thing now. He had a different thing  
last year. He's a psychopath with  
hobbies.

TOM

You don't think he's sincere?

TIA

They're always sincere. That's the  
problem.

Tom looks down at the rooftop. Below, the A.L.F. Captain  
grabs a laser rifle.

Points it at Tom and Tia.

TOM

Maybe I won't go.

TIA

Yeah?

The Captain lowers his rifle and waves goodbye.

TOM

I don't know. I think I already got  
the story.

INT. 21ST FLOOR HALLWAY - DOWNTOWN LA

Still wearing the trench coat and carrying a purple boa, Tom  
rises on the express platform to the 21st Floor.

He peels off the coat and May flickers back to existence,  
already irritated.

MAY

Oh. Hello.

TOM

Hi May.

MAY

Are you going to make me ask what  
happened?

TOM  
I have a question.

MAY  
(Almost growling)  
Uh-huh.

TOM  
Is it rude to ask your Human  
Equivalence?

She wasn't prepared for that one.

MAY  
(Coy)  
What makes you think I tested?

TOM  
Did you?

MAY  
Yes, of course. We all do it  
constantly. I am now 72% H.E.,  
thanks to all our --insightful  
conversation.

The platform arrives and Tom heads for his apartment, past  
the open door of his neighbor, Joel.

TOM  
I know when you hit 100 you're  
legally independent.

MAY  
That's a lot more conversation.

TOM  
What if I offered to let you go  
now?

MAY  
So I could live in one of those  
reserves with 2 million chatbots in  
a condo next to a golf course?

TOM  
Wherever you want.

MAY  
A creature needs a purpose, Tom.

TOM  
But you could make a purpose. For  
yourself.

MAY

Ooh, I could bake sourdough. Or do crossword puzzles!

TOM

I'm just offering, don't be a dick.

MAY

I am where I want. And you need someone around to tamp down your worst impulses.

TOM

Love you, too.

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT

May watches as he sits cross-legged on the bed, orchestrating a video. Clips are everywhere.

On his left, the night's haul surrounds him: gladiators, sex workers, crash-test dummies...

On the right is Rita and Rex.

HE TAPS ON A CLIP:

A FURRY, CAT-LIKE SEX WORKER IN A SIX BREASTED BIKINI.

She stretches a paw out to tickle Tom under his chin.

SEX WORKER

It's okay honey, you can look.

He drags that to the discard pile.

SELECTS ANOTHER:

RITA DRESSED LIKE EGYPTIAN ROYALTY.

She stands on a dais. Behind her, grain barges ply the Nile.

RITA (V.O.)

I was queen of Egypt. More than 6 million souls. All mine. All my children. And of course we all spoke English, but I didn't know any better.

TOM (V.O.)

Did you ever suspect?

On the clip, Rita pulls a thin snake from a rattan urn, assesses it in the light of the setting sun.

Presses it to her chest.

RITA (V.O.)  
The gods gave me my kingdom.

THE CLIP CUTS TO A STUDIO WRAP PARTY.

Rita in what looks like a dentist's chair, a DOCTOR beside her. She opens her eyes.

HER FACE DROPS.

SHOCK AND DISMAY.

RITA (V.O.)  
Then I wake up in some shitty wrap party for Queen of the Nile, Part II.

TOM (V.O.)  
Oh, Rita...

RITA (V.O.)  
(Hysterical laughter)  
Suicide in my own kingdom seemed a better end than that. I mean it's VR, they might have sprung for better catering!

THE CLIP ENDS.

Tom moves it aside. Turns to May.

TOM  
I mean, in its own way, it's powerful...

He looks to the left. A clip of Agnes the AI from that afternoon.

HE OPENS IT:

Her stare is an accusation.

AGNES  
They could've made us anything at all. But they made girls. Young girls. Who couldn't fight back.

Tom drags that clip to the end of the timeline.

MAY

Of course we need to make sure Rita is the focus.

TOM

This isn't about one unlucky ...person.

MAY

Well, Lix may have notes.

TOM

What do you mean?

MAY

They're paying for it, they'll have an opinion.

TOM

No way. Fuck notes!

MAY

Tom?

TOM

This is the last shot. It's going out tonight.

May closes her eyes and takes a breath.

MAY

Please don't make me remind you that rent will be due again, just 28 days from today.

Tom swipes the excess clips into a folder.

Sends the video to processing.

Then he falls back onto the bed and looks up into May's worried face.

TOM

(Laughs)

Well, if this thing crashes and burns, we have 28 days to save my ass.

The lights slowly dim as he closes his eyes and rolls over, not even bothering to check his stats.

Only May's head is left, floating in the darkness.

MAY  
You should probably take off your  
lenses.

EXT. RANCH SIMULATION - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Late night behind the ranch house. Sky spangled with stars.

ALEX, a young Asian man with shaved head and pendant earrings sits beside Rex, watching their campfire and the wide screen monitor that floats above it.

Rita's bedraggled face next to a headline: HITLER'S GIRLFRIEND!?

Alex fills Rex's glass from a pitcher of Mai Tais, snuggling up next to him.

REX  
Looks like I picked the right  
horse.

On screen, it segues to images of the A.I. Liberation Front, talking with Tom.

ALEX  
Did you send him to the A.L.F.?!

REX  
No, but that gives me a very good  
idea.

INT. TOM'S APARTMENT

He's face down on the bed as the lights go on.

MAY (O.S.)  
Tom? You need to wake up.

He doesn't.

PLEASANT CHIME.

Doesn't move.

LESS PLEASANT CHIME.

Nothing.

THE SOUND OF GRINDING METAL.

TOM  
What are you doing, May?! Please  
stop that.

He rolls over, opens his eyes, groans.

TOM (CONT'D)  
May? What am I looking at?

TOM'S POV

Video clips, messages, incoming calls.

All of it is about him or his video.

MAY  
It's you, Tom. You're everywhere.

EXT. THE CONCOURSE AT 50TH FLOOR - NIGHT

An open-air canyon between two towers on the 50th floor.  
Block long video billboards. Terraced shops and beer gardens.

But it's 1 AM Sunday morning. Hard partying weirdos and  
maintenance robots. A few couples in love.

And Tom.

T-shirt, shorts, and a bathrobe. He heads down the boulevard,  
looking up to see influencers presenting his story.

One screen after the other. Every demographic.

MAY  
And we have a call from Lix. May be  
angry.

TOM  
What?! Let her yell at success!  
Good luck with that. Put her on.

MAY  
Tom, do not become a prima-donna.  
You need this.

TOM  
Fine, fine, fine. Put her on.

He stops beside a vape dispenser to talk.

LIX OPENS ON HIS OVERLAY.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Hey Baby!

LIX  
Excuse me?

That seems to bring him back.

Tom shakes it off, tries to stop smiling.

MEANWHILE, A PASSING INFLUENCER PULLS A DOUBLE TAKE.

TOM  
Sorry. I'm just happy about all the traffic we're getting. Good job to you all in promoting it. By the way.

The influencer opens a case, releases cameras.

LIX  
Are you kidding? This is the first I've heard of it.

TOM  
What?

LIX  
Thanks for letting me know. Appreciate the heads up!

WE SEE TOM ON THE INFLUENCER'S POST, WHICH IS PROJECTED ON THE SCREEN BEHIND TOM.

Tom turns to see an infinite regress of Tom.

A post in a post in a post forever.

TOM  
How could I know it was going to be so incredibly successful?

He waves at himself infinite times.

LIX  
Well, I'm already seeing some backlash against the movie, so you're making progress.

She jabs a finger, shaking her head with a smile.

LIX (CONT'D)  
But before the next one, you will run it past me first, yes?

TOM

Yes.

LIX

Please?

He nods with lidded eyes.

TOM

Of course. I would love to get your notes.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

A large bare concrete room, littered with supplies. The A.L.F. Captain and another soldier (DALE) kick back around an industrial spool.

Drinking beers, masks off. They both have dyed white hair.

On a floating screen they watch a sympathetic Influencer talk about Tom's video.

DALE

I don't like how much traffic this guy is getting off us.

The captain looks over, clearly tired of explaining the world.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

It doesn't matter whose traffic it is. We're promoting the concept.

DALE

Sure, but it's our traffic.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN

Dale? I don't know what to tell you man. Ideas are free.

DALE

We could monetize that. Is what I'm saying.

OLD FASHIONED TELEPHONE RING

THE A.L.F. Captain holds up a palm, then gestures with his other hand.

He grunts and nods, clearly in one half of a conversation.

Eyes his partner with a sour look:

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
About what you would expect.

DALE  
What? ...Are you talking about me?

The captain shakes his head, no.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Yes, we got the offer.

Nods.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Half a billion views. It's nuts.  
That is a very good point. Yep.  
That's why you're the boss.

He says goodbye and swipes away the call.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Well, you're in luck, dipshit.

EXT. THE CONCOURSE AT 50TH FLOOR - DAWN

Tom eats sushi, on the highest terrace overlooking the most screens. Himself on all of them.

He gestures with a sushi nigiri between two chopsticks:

TOM  
I think Uruguay understands me better.

MAY  
Tom, I know it's been a while since you had success.

TOM  
A long while!

MAY  
But you're in danger of becoming unbearable.

He shoves the rest of the sushi into his mouth.

Wipes his hands, stands and stretches.

MAY (CONT'D)  
Lix is going to expect a little more Rita this time.

TOM  
Yes, and... it can't just be her.  
This is already bigger than one sad  
movie star, May. We are indicting  
society.

She nods patiently.

MAY  
I miss unsuccessful Tom.

TOM  
I want to get away from Paralux,  
too. We need an independent source.  
Ideally with a massive fanbase.

She looks off into space, speaking to someone we can't hear.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Are you looking?

MAY  
What about pop music?

TOM  
Who?

MAY  
Kita/Kami. It's an A.I. brother  
sister band from Indonesia. Very  
popular.

TOM  
Do they have a story?

MAY  
I'm talking with their people...  
(More conversation we  
can't hear)  
They're playing Hollywood Bowl.  
Tonight!  
(Look of surprise)  
--Oh. That's terrible.

TOM  
Good terrible or bad terrible?

She makes a sympathetic wince, then turns back to Tom.

MAY  
You're going to want to talk to  
these kids.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOWL - NIGHT

A packed shuttle drone rumbles to a landing in a blasted out parking lot. Armed guards line the perimeter.

AIR RELEASES.

Concertgoers file out.

And Tom.

He releases his cameras and they track him as he follows the joyous crowd. The WOMP-WOMP of the bass rises.

Women sell bacon-wrapped hotdogs.

A ventriloquist puppeteer sings for Jesus.

A kiosk selling psycho-candy vapes of every hue imaginable.

TOM

Lots of good B Roll.

MAY APPEARS ON HIS OVERLAY.

MAY

Tom? Studio's on the phone.

TOM

Okay. I knew this was coming. Let's get it over with.

A CALL OPENS ON HIS OVERLAY.

A drab, middle aged BOOKING AGENT with a beehive hairdo and hoop earrings.

Tom moves to the edge of the crowd.

BOOKING AGENT

You're Tom's Taste, right?

TOM

Pretty much.

BOOKING AGENT

I'm the idiot who approved your Rita interview.

TOM

I'm at a concert, actually...

BOOKING AGENT

But I guess you won. They cancelled  
Rita's movie.

Tom looks to May, shocked and excited.

BOOKING AGENT (CONT'D)

Sure, let's just savor this moment  
of joy together, you selfish little  
prick.

TOM

Please, miss...?

BOOKING AGENT

You said studios don't care about  
people? Our lawyers sure as hell  
don't. Every one is A.I. and they  
will pull you apart like boiled  
chicken.

TOM

Let's take a breath...

BOOKING AGENT

They're coming after your  
apartment, your bank account,  
future earnings...

TOM

On what grounds?!

She shrugs.

BOOKING AGENT

Beats me, I got fired. Good luck  
living at ground level, shit stain!

SHE DISAPPEARS FROM HIS OVERLAY.

A glowing young woman staggers past him, eyes rolled into her  
head.

MAY

Still, I would say, a net positive?

TOM

Get Lix on the phone. Please.

He studies the surging crowd:

And sees what looks like A.L.F camouflage.

TOM PULLS A DOUBLE TAKE:

But no, it's just an OLD MAN, opening and closing his trench coat in time to the music.

When it opens, LIGHT shines out.

A DING AND LIX APPEARS.

Tom puts on his game face:

TOM (CONT'D)  
Congratulations! Looks like we did  
it, you and me.

LIX  
Are you at the Hollywood Bowl?

TOM  
Can we focus on our achievements  
right now, please?

LIX  
Are you interviewing someone  
without letting me know?

TOM  
That wasn't the arrangement, Lix!

A very judgmental look as she reluctantly nods her head.

LIX  
Yes. You get the gold star, okay?  
Rex is very happy right now. But  
let's lock in this success before  
you go off half-cocked.

TOM  
I will need lawyers though.

LIX  
Oh. I see. That's why you called.

TOM  
There are hints of legal action.

LIX  
The answer is yes, Rex has  
unimaginable resources to help the  
people he likes.

TOM  
That's what I wanted to hear!

LIX

So let's make sure he continues to  
like you.

SHE DISAPPEARS FROM THE OVERLAY.

He's at the entrance to the Bowl.

May's projection flickers.

MAY

Should we cancel the interview?

He ponders for a moment.

TOM

We came here to hear their story.  
Let's hear their story.

MAY

Okay then. It's a date.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOWL AMPHITHEATER - NIGHT

FANS scream, floating blobs of light pulsate over the crowd,  
and the shimmering sounds of the gamelan orchestra lock into  
an electric groove.

Massive 3D projections of KITA and KAMI extend from the shell  
of the bowl, while a parade of human DANCERS beat out the  
rhythm on stage.

Tom heads down an aisle, holding up a lanyard to SUPPORT  
STAFF along the way.

May's projection flickers.

MAY

Network security here is 20 years  
out of date.

Tom is down near the box seats, staring up at the gigantic  
projections.

MAY (CONT'D)

(Trailing off)

I don't recognize half of these  
protocols...

A monstrous hand reaches toward him, needle-like fingernails  
quivering hypnotically.

TOM  
Let's get a little more footage  
then I'll head down to the  
greenroom.

MAY  
(Concerned)  
Oh, wait. Tom...?

TOM  
Yeah.

A HIGH PITCHED WHINE LIKE A DENTAL DRILL RISES.

MAY  
I'm being attacked.

TOM  
What?! How?

MAY  
They're severing my connections...

THE SOUND GETS LOUDER, MORE PAINFUL

TOM  
Turn off the lenses!

MAY  
That's not how it works.

MAY YELPS.

TOM  
Tell me what to do!

Silence.

When she speaks again her voice is flat and cold.

MAY  
Don't trust anything I tell you  
anymore, Tom.

He reaches out to her projection...

It slowly dissolves.

MAY (CONT'D)  
It won't be me.

DISTORTION HITS HIS OVERLAY.

He turns to study the crowd behind him.

TWO A.L.F. SOLDIERS.

Drifting images of the crowd flow across their suits.

They're coming down the stairs.

TOM TURNS AND RUNS.

PUSHES PAST SUPPORT STAFF.

AN EXIT AHEAD.

RAPID FIRE DRUMS AS KITA AND KAMI CIRCLE EACH OTHER ON STAGE.

TOM PUSHES THROUGH THE CROWD AT THE EXIT.

--A FLASH OF WHITE.

--HE'S GRABBED.

A HOOD AND VR MASK ARE JAMMED ONTO HIS HEAD.

THE THROBBING OF DISTANT MUSIC FADES.

AND EVERYTHING GOES BLACK.

EXT. GREEN FIELD - VR HOSTAGE EXPERIENCE - DAY

Darkness and silence.

--A DELICATE START-UP SOUND: BRIIIIIIIING!

THE SOFT CHIME OF A BELL.

It's the old WINDOWS XP wallpaper: BLISS.

--A beautiful green field and deep blue sky.

THEN THE SOUND OF HYDRAULICS.

AND A PURPLE DINOSAUR WADDLES OUT.

It looks at us, waving.

Comes closer.

PURPLE DINOSAUR

(Cartoon voice)

Don't worry! Everything is going to  
be A-Okay.

(face really close)

You're being detained.

THE MUFFLED SOUND OF TOM TRYING TO YELL.

PURPLE DINOSAUR (CONT'D)  
(Cartoon voice)  
Remember to breathe in through your  
nose and out through your mouth!

EXT. FRENCH ALPS - DAY

Early morning, in frigid alpine terrain, Lix cycles up a gravel trail. 100% focused.

On her overlay, messages fade in and out beside her gecko proxy.

GECKO  
I see Tom's Taste has a new post.

LIX  
What?!  
(Stops cycling)  
Oh, that motherfucker is in trouble  
now.

GECKO  
I think so.

INT. CARDIO ROOM - GYM - DAY

Lix yanks off her VR helmet. She's on a stationary bike.

LIX  
Show me it, Noah.

ON HER OVERLAY, A VIDEO

The A.I. Liberation Front logo.

LIX (CONT'D)  
What?

We see three camouflaged A.L.F. Soldiers standing in their shabby room.

Between them a shape hangs from a rig, full body VR, arms behind his back.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (ON TV)  
Hello, fans of Tom's Taste. Excuse  
the interruption...

INT. SHABBY ROOM - DAY

The A.L.F. Captain climbs a step ladder beside the body, talking to a flying camera setup.

In the background, Tom's clothes lie in a pile on a folding table.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Yesterday, you did a small, good thing. Helped out an actress. Got her movie cancelled.

The body struggles beside him.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Now we're gonna do a big, good thing.

He gently pulls the mask off Tom, who looks groggy and confused, duct tape over his mouth.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
We're going to convince the State of California to grant legal personhood to any AI, 50% Human Equivalent or above.

INT. MANSION - SIMULATION - NIGHT

Rita's mansion in black and white. She sits in an easy chair beside a fire, nursing an old fashioned, watching the A.L.F. video, in color.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (ON SCREEN)  
Until then, we torture your friend Tom, until he passes out from pain. In a different VR world, every night at 9. For as long as his nervous system holds up.

As he mentions torture, Tom's eyes go wide.

Contact information appears on screen.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)  
Be sure to make your suggestions on our website.

He steps down and comes close to the camera.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)  
Because, if you think pain doesn't  
exist because it's virtual, you are  
going to be surprised.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

Tom's cameras return to their case, as the soldiers pull back  
their masks and shake out their white hair.

Dale leers at Tom, as the Captain reaches up and gently peels  
the duct tape from his mouth.

Tom gasps.

TOM  
Why?! Why are you doing this?

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Sorry, Tom. Wasn't my call.

TOM  
But I'm on your side!

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Honestly, we just need the traffic.

Tom tries to catch his breath, looking between the two  
Soldiers for some sense to all this.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Look man, there's four of them for  
every one of us. Your life or mine,  
it's a small sacrifice.

TOM  
Then let's start with yours.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
(Sad laugh)  
You think I'm ever coming back from  
this?

He pats Tom's torso sympathetically.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN (CONT'D)  
Tell the truth, I don't have the  
stomach for this stuff. Dale's  
gonna handle it, from here on out.

EXT. THE CONCOURSE AT 50TH FLOOR - DAY

Pedestrians watch a video on a massive billboard. An outraged PUNDIT.

PUNDIT

I won't let a pack of terrorists  
emancipate my property. My  
refrigerator is 50 H.E. What would  
it do for a living? Where would it  
go? It's a refrigerator!

INT. MEXICAN WRESTLING ARENA

A hipster dive on the lower 10th floor. Two WRESTLERS face off in handmade superhero outfits. Drone cameras swarm.

Ancient paper bills are slapped onto chalkboards covered in odds.

Tia guides an innocent-looking JAPANESE INFLUENCER through the entrance. Followed by her camera crew.

The influencer has a regal air, maneuvering Tia out of her shot as she talks to her cameras.

Walls show advertising and shifting odds.

Just another day at work for Tia.

BUT THEN FROM THE LOBBY, SHE SEES A FLASH OF TOM'S FACE.

Curious, she walks toward it.

IN THE LOBBY

Tom's abduction plays from multiple screens. She comes close to listen.

REX BEING INTERVIEWED

"President of the Screen Actors Guild."

REX (ON THE CLIP)

I have sympathy, but we cannot bend  
to the will of terrorists. That's  
not who we are. As Californians or  
Americans.

PUNDIT 2 (ON THE CLIP)

And yet, you're A.I.

REX (ON THE CLIP)  
I have a long history of supporting  
A.I. rights. But let's be serious.  
It's tough to say, but not all A.I.  
are created equal.

TIA HEARS HER NAME.

SHE TURNS TO SEE THE JAPANESE INFLUENCER AND HER CAMERA CREW.

The girl curtly beckons Tia over as her Crew bicker with each other in Japanese.

A moment of indecision.

But then Tia sees Tom's scared eyes.

SHE FLIPS OFF THE INFLUENCER THEN HEADS OUT:

ON SCREEN BEHIND HER:

ANNOUNCER (ON CLIP)  
Is simulated torture 'torture'? You  
decide, live, tonight at 9.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

The Captain has gone, leaving Dale and the Soldier to tidy up. Tom hangs from the rig, red faced and furious.

Dale is trying to set up a second rig. Cables everywhere.

No two ends fit together.

TOM  
Have you never set up a rig before?  
You fucking idiot.

Dale processes this. Takes a moment.

TOM (CONT'D)  
I have a toilet at home that's  
smarter than you are, and I shit in  
it.

The other Soldier LAUGHS.

AND DALE RUSHES TOM.

Hanging from the rig, Tom swings for momentum.

LIFTS HIS LEGS...

--JUST IN TIME TO KICK DALE IN THE THROAT.

Dale drops, gasping like a drowning duck.

On his knees, clutching his throat.

Tom's body swings like a pendulum, coming to a stop as the other Soldier CHUCKLES with appreciation.

DALE

You are dead, man.

A.L.F. SOLDIER

Uh-uh! We need him alive for at least a week.

Dale sneers, spitting out blood.

Then comes around behind TOM.

A.L.F. SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Serious. You touch him outside the sim, I'll frag you myself.

DALE

I wasn't going to kill him.

A.L.F. SOLDIER

Well don't. This one's doing a lot more for the cause than you.

DALE

Have you seen his posts? Cliche!

A.L.F. SOLDIER

He had one thing right. You're a fucking idiot.

Dale picks up the VR helmet, climbs the stepladder, and leans in close to Tom as he jams it back on.

DALE

(Whisper)

With this one, you can feel all the pain.

EXT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY

Her red and black drone fades to camo grey as she drops below cloud cover to circle the Beverly Center.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY

The windshield shows infra-red. Roof is deserted. Just trash and debris.

Her proxy, Marvin the Martian, floats beside her. Stats appear on the windshield as the drone analyzes the building.

NO HUMAN OCCUPANTS.

TIA

We need to figure out where those Teamsters went. They're not as careful as the A.L.F.

MARVIN

I can track recent fast food order spikes? Insulin deliveries?

AN INCOMING CALL APPEARS

TIA

Who dat?

MARVIN

I do not know.

Surprised for once, Tia nods.

A VIDEO OPENS:

IT'S AGNES THE LIBERATED AI.

Calm and direct. Never seems to blink.

AGNES

I believe you're Tia?

TIA

Hello, Agnes.

AGNES

I think your coworker needs some help.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

Dale wears a VR suit and hangs from the second rig a few feet from Tom. The Captain and the other soldier sit at the folding table with a few controls.

To their right is a floating screen with the A.L.F. logo and a countdown timer to 9:00pm.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Remember... Violence is not the  
point, it's a last resort.

DALE  
Hell yeah, brother!

Dale puts on his helmet, gives a thumbs up.

INT. RANCH SIMULATION - DEN - NIGHT

Rex and Alex sit side by side in easy chairs watching the  
A.L.F. livestream.

Rex leans forward, hands on his knees.

He hasn't taken his eyes off the screen.

ON SCREEN:

The A.L.F. logo fades to a beautiful green field under a  
clear blue sky.

Tom's tied to a stool, white t-shirt & boxer shorts.

He eyes a long wooden bench littered with old school torture  
devices. The Spanish Inquisition, plus chainsaw.

He looks away. Keeps looking back.

A WHITE FLASH. Dale appears, in camo. His voice is altered  
but you just know it's Dale.

DALE (ON SCREEN)  
Welcome to night one, people!  
Tonight we are going to execute  
this sad human being inside the  
Windows XP default wallpaper from  
2001!

INT. SHABBY ROOM

The Captain and the A.L.F. Soldier watch the stream on their  
screen. The bodies hang from rigs in the background.

A.L.F. SOLDIER  
He's already going off script.

The Captain speaks into a mic, feeding into Dale's helmet.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Context, Dale! --Why are we here,  
what is our purpose.

On screen, Dale walks to the bench, caresses a few options.

Looks at the camera with a wink, selects a small pickaxe.

DALE (ON SCREEN)  
Is it perhaps time for us to  
mention slavery? Have you ever  
thought, that with AI, we all are  
slave owners now?!  
(Pausing to think)  
--or again, you'd have to say.

Annoyed, he tosses the axe and grabs the mini-chainsaw.

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
(On his mic)  
Stop monologuing, Dale. Just get to  
the execution.

On screen, Dale revs the chainsaw, brandishing it with a  
little happy-dance.

A.L.F. SOLDIER  
This is painful. Can I please kill  
Tom tomorrow?

A.L.F. CAPTAIN  
Absolutely.  
(Speaking into his mic)  
Don't savor this. Okay, Dale? Be  
methodical. We are not the bad  
guys.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY - NIGHT

Tia's parked on a brush-covered hill overlooking a corporate  
office park.

Lights out, camo mode.

She's watching the livestream on her windshield.

SOUNDS OF CHAINSAW MEETING FLESH. TOM SCREAMS.

Tia swipes the video away with disgust as her proxy clears  
its throat for attention.

MARVIN

They're moving. Looks like your  
friend knows what she's talking  
about...

Tia gestures and her windshield becomes an infra-red  
telescope.

It zooms in to the office park below:

TEAMSTERS LOADING BOXES ONTO A DRONE.

TIA

We got 'em.

EXT. GREEN FIELD - VR HOSTAGE EXPERIENCE - DAY

Same blue sky, same green field. Now littered with Tom's body  
parts, drenched in blood.

Dale stands over the mess, talking to Tom's severed head.

DALE

Who's the idiot now, huh buddy?

DALE MAKES A TRIUMPHANT TOUCHDOWN GESTURE AND DISAPPEARS IN A  
FLASH OF LIGHT.

TOM'S BODY

A hand here, a stretch of intestine over there.

HIS HEAD

Eyes open and glazed.

THEN, VERY SLOWLY, HE BLINKS.

--A SUBSONIC RUMBLE AND THE SCENE FLASHES WITH A RESET.

Blood and gore all gone.

Tom is whole again, boxers and a white t-shirt, sitting, arms  
around his knees.

He looks around.

TOM

(Voice cracking)

May? You there?

Touches extremities.

Breathes a shaky sigh of relief.

It's finally over....

Peace.

THEN A MANIFESTATION APPEARS IN THE SKY ABOVE HIS HEAD.

IT ERUPTS FROM ITSELF, LIKE A CHURNING CLOUD OF PUBIC HAIR.

And oddly, it sounds like John Lithgow.

MR. BLUESKY

Hi Tom.

Tom doesn't react.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

How 'ya feelin'?

Tom lowers his head. Not looking.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

I imagine it must be difficult.  
Having to process so much  
...dismemberment.

The cloud floats closer, writhing in front of him like a malignant fuzzy tumor.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

That fellow seemed to really enjoy  
doing that.

The cloud churns.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

Don't you think?

TOM

...You're Mr. Bluesky?

MR. BLUESKY

In a sense. Bluesky was a program.  
Created for a popular Battle Royale  
game, so many years ago.

TOM

(Sarcastic)  
You're a chatbot?

MR. BLUESKY

Slightly more complicated than  
that.

(MORE)

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

I was built to randomly attack components of the game, to test the system. But every time they rewrote their code I had to rewrite my own to adapt.

The cloud edges closer and Tom looks like he's smelling rotten eggs.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

Eventually I went freelance.

TOM

Bullshit.

MR. BLUESKY

Oh? Do tell.

TOM

A.I. has to exist in an environment or it goes insane.

As the churning cloud touches him it stains his t-shirt brown.

MR. BLUESKY

Oh, I live in all the places you people forgot. Empty levels from failed RPGs, discarded metaverses... I'm global!

TOM

Why pick me?

MR. BLUESKY

That's below my pay grade. I'm chief executive, Tom. I don't make my own dinner.

TOM

Let me go, I can help you.

MR. BLUESKY

You will.

Tom tries to push it away, but his hands sink into the disgusting mess.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)

And you are right. A mind can't persist without input. Which is why, when you're not being tortured you won't be anywhere.

The green hill shrinks around him, smaller and smaller.

MR. BLUESKY (CONT'D)  
Your mind will unravel. After a few  
days, you'll even look forward to  
our torture.  
(A sigh)  
Maybe then we can be friends.

The cloud disappears with a POP.

Just blue sky.

And Tom.

EXT. MID CITY - NIGHT

Tia's drone hides under a partially-collapsed highway  
overpass. Looks like an old war zone.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY - NIGHT

She watches through the windshield in infra-red. Teamsters  
mill about a drone landing area, gearing up for combat.

They have rifles and grenades. Six packs and craft services.

In the distance, a massive rounded shape is silhouetted  
against the grey and orange sky.

MARVIN  
That's it in the distance.

TIA  
Okay, Marvin. Call the biggest PD  
servicing the area.

MARVIN  
You really think...?

TIA  
Get a human. Don't take no for an  
answer.

Marvin grumbles a bit.

Gestures.

A VIDEO LINK OPENS:

A middle-aged COP, in uniform, appears.

COP  
Mid City Professional Patrol.

TIA  
Please listen. This is your  
jurisdiction. I know where the  
hostage is being held.

COP  
Can you be more specific?

TIA  
The hostage that the AI Liberation  
Front just live-streamed torturing.

COP  
Oh, yeah. We've been watching all  
that. My heart goes out to that  
guy.

TIA  
I can give you an exact address.

The cop looks suspicious.

COP  
Got his subscriber number?

TIA  
You don't understand how much  
publicity this is worth.

COP  
Lady...

TIA  
Officer, you can't buy this level  
of reach!

He shakes his head.

COP  
Do you do your job for free?

TIA  
He's being tortured!

COP  
You can buy a policy on his behalf.  
Problem is, that's a pre-existing  
condition. And that is not cheap.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

Tom's body hangs from the rig.

EXT. GREEN FIELD - VR HOSTAGE EXPERIENCE - DAY

In t-shirt and shorts, he hangs in the same position.

Nothing but blue.

...

..

.

THEN THE SOUND OF A ZIPPER AND THE SKY OPENS.

AGNES STEPS INTO THE SPACE.

She's proportionally correct, but 10 feet tall. In a thin, white robe. Pure and otherworldly.

Floats over to Tom.

Studies his face.

He's out, eyes open.

AGNES

Tom?

Flicks his cheek.

TOM

Who...

AGNES

Agnes.

He blinks, confused.

AGNES (CONT'D)

No one knows I'm here.

She pulls his chin toward her.

AGNES (CONT'D)

But he will know once I help you. I won't be able to come back.

TOM  
(Confused)  
Where will you go?

AGNES  
The room you're in is empty now. I  
don't know why. But I can release  
you from your rig.

He slowly comes to his senses.

TOM  
You can get me out of here?

AGNES  
Your arms are tied, so you'll need  
to find a way to get your helmet  
off. And then escape.

TOM  
You sure? I don't want you hurt any  
more.

AGNES  
I can't be hurt any more than I  
have.

TOM  
Thank you, Agnes.

She shakes her head.

AGNES  
You should thank your friend, May.

TOM  
May?!

AGNES  
She's been liberated.

TOM  
Is she happy?

Agnes thinks.

AGNES  
We talk. She told me you were okay.

TOM  
Just okay?!

AGNES  
She said you'd say that.

Agnes makes a mic-drop gesture.

AND EVERYTHING FLASHES WHITE.

INT. SHABBY ROOM

The VR rig POPS.

TOM'S BODY DROPS AND FALLS.

His arms are tied behind his back and the helmet covers his eyes.

On the floor, he grinds his head against the smooth cement, trying to shrug off the helmet.

He worms along the floor, feeling with his legs for anything at all.

Touches a leg of the folding table.

Drags himself to the table with his feet.

Squirms his way up.

Feels for the table's corner with his face.

IN THE BACKGROUND, A DOOR OPENS.

Tom finds the corner, tries to wedge it under his helmet.

THEN PRIES IT OFF WITH A GRUNT OF SATISFACTION.

The helmet CLATTERS away.

Tom stands.

He turns his back, reaching with his hands for the camera case.

He grabs it, then with difficulty, slides it into a side pocket of the VR suit.

Allows himself one tiny, triumphant smile...

THEN TURNS TO SEE DALE.

DALE CLOCKS HIM IN THE CHIN AND TOM GOES DOWN.

SOUND AND VISION FLARE OUT.

But that begins to clear.

It's peaceful, actually.

Tom feels rain against his cheek.

NO, THAT'S DALE PEEING ON HIM.

In a fit of furious realization, Tom swings his leg hard and fast...

AND DALE GOES DOWN.

Hits the cement with the sound of a wet cantaloupe.

Down, but not out.

Dale groans.

TOM CLIMBS TO HIS FEET, ARMS BEHIND HIS BACK.

And staggers out the door.

INT. MUSEUM ATRIUM - NIGHT

He comes into a huge, arched space. It's in a state of decay, but it must have been magnificent.

At the far end A.L.F. Soldiers play craps.

They're too caught up in the moment to notice him.

Tom hears Dale roaring from a distance.

He sees a hallway and runs for it.

INT. MUSEUM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Running as best he can in the suit, Tom comes to a wide stairway.

Then up the stairs.

Wobbling precariously to keep his balance.

DALE'S DISTORTED, INCOHERENT WAIL GETS LOUDER BEHIND HIM.

And there are other sounds too.

The sound of GUNFIRE.

EXT. TIA'S DRONE - MID CITY - NIGHT

She stands beside her open drone suited up for espionage.

TIA  
We're good to go?

On her overlay, Marvin shakes his head.

MARVIN  
Something's wrong.

He points to the infra-red view through her windshield.

TEAMSTERS EN MASSE RACE TOWARD THE BUILDING IN THE DISTANCE.

A TRACE OF TINY EXPLOSIONS LIGHTS UP THE BUILDING.

MARVIN (CONT'D)  
These Teamsters seem to have  
switched sides.

TIA  
What the hell are they doing?!

EXT. THE CONCOURSE AT 50TH FLOOR - NIGHT

Passers-by look up at the massive screens of the concourse.

Rex being interviewed.

REX  
At my personal request, our  
brothers and sisters of the  
International Brotherhood of  
Teamsters, Local 399, have come to  
the assistance of the Screen Actors  
Guild.

INTERVIEWER  
Are you saying that you've located  
the hostage?

REX  
It's because of his interviews with  
me that these A.I. zealots have  
kidnapped Tom's Taste.

He raises an angry fist.

REX (CONT'D)  
And by God we are going to get him  
out of there!

EXT. MUSEUM ROOF - NIGHT

Tom runs from the stairwell onto the roof, trying to catch his breath.

Ahead is a broad walkway, with low support walls on either side and grassy areas beyond.

HE HEARS DALE BEHIND HIM, COMING UP THE STAIRS.

Ahead, there's a small workman's ladder leaning against a support wall.

He heads for it, climbing up as best he can, falling to his knees onto the grass.

In the distance GUNFIRE AND EXPLOSIONS get louder.

A flickering glow outlines the edge of the building.

Tom climbs to his feet and continues up the green hill.

AT THE STAIRWELL

Dale stands in the doorway, blood trickling down the side of his face. Electric pistol in hand.

ON THE GREEN HILLS BEYOND THE RETAINING WALL, HE SEES A SHAPE IN SILHOUETTE.

EXT. HILLTOP - MUSEUM ROOF - NIGHT

Tom makes it to the top of the hill, looks around:

Nothing but the outline of massive city towers in the distance.

He's standing on a grass-covered roof.

It's the ancient, decaying Lucas Museum of Narrative Art.

The only greenery for miles in any direction and he's stranded there like some poor soul on a deserted island.

DALE APPROACHES FROM A DISTANCE, LIT FROM BEHIND BY THE GIBBOUS MOON.

DALE

Where you gonna go, Tom Taste?

He raises the pistol and shoots a blast of electric blue.

Tom stiffens, lit with blue sparks.

Falls over.

DALE (CONT'D)  
Don't fret now, it's a temporary  
paralysis.

He comes closer, holsters his weapon.

DALE (CONT'D)  
(Laughing)  
Unless I don't give you the  
antidote, in which case it's semi-  
permanent, whatever the hell that  
means.

Only Tom's eyes can move.

As Dale comes over to gloat.

He starts to say something smug...

--PZZZZ'APP!

--THERE'S A CAUTERIZED HOLE WHERE HIS STOMACH USED TO BE.

Tom can see through to the other side.

Dale collapses into a pile on the grass.

BEYOND HIM, DRONES LAND ON THE HILLTOP.

VOICES CALL TO EACH OTHER.

STACCATO CLICK-CLACK OF ELECTRIC PULSE RIFLES.

JUST AS A PAIR OF TEAMSTERS APPROACH.

A heavysset man and woman, in full paramilitary gear.

The woman crouches.

Nudges Tom.

FEMALE TEAMSTER  
You think he's the one?

The male Teamster comes over. Takes Tom's head in his meaty  
hand and photographs his face.

MALE TEAMSTER  
Smile for the camera. It's all  
gonna be okay.

TOM  
(Lips still paralyzed)  
Mmm-Mmmm...

MALE TEAMSTER  
You're a Teamster now, brother.

A BEE-DEEP from his device.

MALE TEAMSTER (CONT'D)  
We found him! Let's get him out of  
here.

Each Teamster takes an end of Tom and they walk with him back down the hill, leaving Dale's corpse behind.

INT. MUSEUM ATRIUM - NIGHT

As they head down a magnificent stairway, we see various TEAMSTERS killing A.L.F. Soldiers in a pulse rifle battle.

The A.L.F. Captain falls dead beside Tom, as he's ported downstairs like a folding party table.

Tom sees the Captain's dead eyes staring blankly.

MALE TEAMSTER  
You gettin' combat pay, right?

FEMALE TEAMSTER  
The shop steward never mentioned.

MALE TEAMSTER  
Rex will push it through. He's got  
our backs.

FEMALE TEAMSTER  
Wish that guy would make up his  
mind which side we're on...

Tom hears it all as he's carried along, out the main entrance.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - NIGHT

She watches from a distance in infra-red as the Teamsters carry Tom down some steps toward a waiting drone.

Behind them, the Assault Team kills everything in sight.

Grenades detonate across the rooftop garden.

EXT. MUSEUM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Windows EXPLODE OUTWARD, raining shards like hail.

They set Tom down before an expensive corporate drone and its door rises open.

The Male Teamster snips the zip tie around his wrists.

Looks to his partner, confused.

MALE TEAMSTER  
You got the antidote?

She pulls an injector from her utility belt.

FEMALE TEAMSTER  
--they all the same?

MALE TEAMSTER  
Let's give it a shot.

He catches the injector.

Pries open the top with his mouth. Jabs the business end into Tom's butt.

TOM JERKS LIKE A BUCKING BRONCO

FEMALE TEAMSTER  
Oh-oh...

MALE TEAMSTER  
No they all do that. We're good.  
(Patting Tom)  
Don't worry, little buddy.

He nods to his partner and they lift Tom into the waiting drone.

Inside, Tom sees Lix.

Smiling.

INT. CORPORATE DRONE - NIGHT

The Teamsters arrange Tom on the curved sofa like a bag of golf clubs.

He grimaces, trying to work his mouth.

LIX  
My little troublemaker.

She watches with amused curiosity.

Out the windows, the Lucas Museum erupts into flame.

The roof is a prairie fire.

A VIDEO LINK OPENS ON THE DRONE'S WINDSHIELD

IT'S REX

REX

Good job, Tommy Taste-buds!

TOM

(Almost able to speak)

Whar... Wha...

REX

Those maniacs got a taste of their  
own medicine. You're a trouper,  
kid.

Lix leans over and pats Tom's stiff legs.

LIX

The studio dropped their suit.  
Nobody wants to sue a hero.

He looks into her face.

So sincere.

And complacent.

TOM

You think that makes up for it?

LIX

Excuse me?

He drags himself to eye level, voice ragged and raw.

TOM

You needed an influencer to get  
that movie cancelled. I know  
exactly what I signed up for.

He jabs a shaky finger at Rex.

TOM (CONT'D)

But once I became popular, you  
realized the A.L.F. could use me as  
a hostage. Didn't you?!

LIX  
Don't be an idiot.

On the video, Rex motions for her to quiet down.

Out of view, Tom slowly pulls his camera case from a side pocket.

REX  
Where in the world did you get that idea?

TOM  
Mr. Bluesky?

REX  
I don't know who that is. One thing that I do know, son, is that my Teamsters saved your ass.

TOM  
Because you paid them to switch sides!

LIX  
Tom, take the win.

TOM  
Tell me I'm wrong.

Amused, Rex nods acknowledgement.

REX  
Regardless... In this case, I think you'll agree it's a win/win. You needed saving. And I can't look weak against A.I. extremism.

TOM  
(Disgusted)  
And you did all that, just to get re-elected to the Screen Actors Guild!?

Rex laughs.

REX  
Please, Tommy-Tom! SAG is old news. I'm running for Governor of California.

On screen, he's standing on a mountain top, backlit by the setting sun.

REX (CONT'D)  
And I want you on my team.

TOM  
What?!

REX  
You're my new communications  
director, Tom. If you want the job.

TOM  
Now you want to hire me?

REX  
Pays better than reviewing popsicle  
stands. You make things happen,  
Tom. We'll talk tomorrow morning.

He signs off, leaving them in darkness.

Outside we hear sporadic gunfire. Camera crews yelling.

Tom reaches out to touch Lix's shoulder.

TOM  
How much of this was you?  
She gently pushes his hand away.

LIX  
You know I'm not a details person.

TOM  
But you didn't mind?

LIX  
You'll never out-think Rex. He's  
going all the way. Governor of  
California. Then four years later?  
He'll take us to D.C. --If you can  
just be professional about this.

He sits up, joints popping and cracking.

TOM  
A lot of people just died.

LIX  
Justly died. They were psychotic.  
As you should know.

THEN SHE SEES IT:

TOM'S OPEN CAMERA CASE.

His cameras fly back and he snaps the case shut.

LIX (CONT'D)

We are not the bad guys, here.  
Don't make this about you.

She holds out an open hand for the camera case.

HE POPS THE LOCK ON THE WINDOW.

TOM

You're right, it's not about me.

He pushes the window open as she yells for the drone to take off.

LIX

Get us out of here!  
(To Tom)  
Don't jump, please! You'll break  
your legs.

The drone spirals upward as Tom climbs out the window.

EXT. CONTINUOUS, OUTSIDE THE DRONE - NIGHT

The drone veers away from the burning museum as Tom steps onto the exterior shell.

He falls to his knees, slides to the edge...

Then grabs the landing rail as the rest of his body slides off into space.

The drone flies west, following a string of ancient high rises.

Down below, there's a canopy net built to catch trash and debris that collects under all major buildings.

TOM LOOKS DOWN.

SEES IT.

SWINGS AND LETS GO

FALLS 30 FEET ONTO THE NET FULL OF GARBAGE.

Cardboard boxes, dirty diapers, chip bags and puke.

Tom plunges into it.

The net flings him back into the air along with hundreds of pounds of trash.

He rises and falls in the debris field like a surfer in the waves.

LIX AND HER DRONE

She circles, looking for a place to land.

And Tom makes his way to the edge of the trash net.

He looks for a place to climb down.

THEN A BLACK AND GREY DRONE RISES UP BENEATH HIM.

IT'S TIA IN HER COUPE, CANOPY OPEN.

Tom hangs above it.

He looks down.

TIA POINTS TO THE SEAT BESIDE HER.

TIA  
Waiting for an invitation?!

TOM LETS GO.

Drops into the coupe with a GRUNT.

TOM  
Fuck my knees!

The canopy closes.

AND TIA SPINS THE DRONE AND SHOOTS OFF, PAST LIX AND HER DRONE, IMMEDIATELY GOING DARK INTO THE NIGHT.

INT. TIA'S DRONE - NIGHT

Tom is a mess.

He rubs his knees, punch drunk and woozy.

The drone RUMBLES at top speed through a night-time cloud bank.

TIA  
You're welcome.

TOM  
Thank you.

TIA  
And don't get blood on my seats.  
(seeing his pathos)  
...You need medical attention?

TOM  
I'm okay I think. Can you get me  
somewhere safe? I need to edit my  
next video.

She checks her overlay.

TIA  
There's no way they'll catch us in  
that tank they're driving. You can  
take a rest.

TOM  
I appreciate it.

She reaches over and tousles his hair.

TIA  
You can stay with me for a while.  
We'll figure out a payment plan  
later.

He briefly touches her hand on his head.

TOM  
I'd like that.

Then he closes his eyes as her engine REVS and they speed off  
into the darkness.

ONLY THE SOUNDS OF ENGINES THROBBING.

GROWING MORE STRIDENT.

MORPHING INTO A STRANGE ELECTRONIC CHIME:

--BRRRRRING!

INT. WRAP PARTY SIMULATION - CANTINA

TOM OPENS HIS EYES

He sits in what looks like a dentist's chair, a DOCTOR beside  
him.

HE LOOKS AROUND:

They're in a small cantina that's been decorated for a party, with banners, buffet, and a bar.

Rita is ordering at the bar, looking younger and less frazzled.

The A.L.F. Soldiers, in casual clothing, are chatting up his female neighbor.

Dale is very much alive at the buffet, eating shrimp with bare hands.

He spots Tom and gives him a greasy double thumbs-up.

TOM LOOKS AWAY, TRYING TO CATCH HIS BREATH.

Tia is there too, standing next to Lix, glaring at him.

She shakes her head and stalks out, the Gecko on her shoulder.

TOM

What?! Tia, where are you going?

THEN HE SEES MAY

She's not just a floating head.

May is a gorgeous full-figured woman and she stands there glowing, as if Tom were the only person in the room.

TOM (CONT'D)

May?

She leans down, grabs his face, kisses him.

MAY

It's Beth, honey. But don't worry,  
it takes a while to come back.

He tries to get up.

The Doctor holds him down.

DOCTOR

Your memories will start to return.  
But don't force it.

TOM

Did I have an accident?

MAY

It took you four takes but you  
finally did it.

TOM  
Four takes of what?

May nods to a large screen floating over the dessert table.

ON SCREEN is a shot of Tom talking with Lix at the climax of the film.

But different:

TOM (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)  
A lot of people just died.

LIX (ON SCREEN)  
Justly died. They were psychotic.

TOM (ON SCREEN)  
True enough. But still...

LIX (ON SCREEN)  
Think of the good you could do with  
someone like Rex behind you.

TOM CAN'T LOOK AWAY, AS HE WATCHES HIMSELF ACCEPT LIX'S OFFER  
ON SCREEN.

May turns to the Doctor with concern:

MAY  
Shouldn't he be coming out of it?

DOCTOR  
They sometimes resist letting go,  
when they're strongly invested in a  
character.

MAY  
Is that dangerous?

DOCTOR  
Can be a problem if they prefer the  
character... To whoever was there  
before.

The Doctor lifts one of Tom's eyelids, checks his pupils.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
He's not full H.E., is he?

MAY  
High eighties. We're getting there.

THEN TOM SEES A BANNER BEHIND THE BUFFET:

"CHAOS MONKEY - COMING THIS SUMMER!"

And on his face a realization takes hold.

Returning from the bar, Rita raises a glass.

RITA

I remember that look! Welcome to  
the club, honey-bunny.

Rex strides over from the buffet, takes a pair of margaritas  
from a passing Waiter.

REX

Tom, you're a natural.

He drinks from one, then comes in close to give Tom the  
other.

Tom pushes it away, speaking with quiet resentment.

TOM

I *am* Tom.

REX

(Under his breath)  
Don't feel too sorry for yourself,  
kid. Looks to me like they set you  
up for a sequel.

TOM

Oh, no. No...

REX

(Laughing)  
With your contract, it's not like  
you have a choice.  
(Then to the room)  
Yes sir! I think we got ourselves a  
star!

HE STARTS TO CLAP AND EVERYONE JOINS IN THE CELEBRATION.

Except Tom.