

MOST DANGEROUS
PILOT

Episode One
"Birds of a Cage"

Written by

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ACT ONE

INT. PENTHOUSE SUITE - BEDROOM - MORNING

BENEDICT HAVEN (34) opens his eyes. He lies in silk sheets. He looks to his side, a woman sleeps peacefully.

Benedict gets out of bed. He's shirtless, in boxers. A tall, muscular man, his body is pockmarked with scars, injuries.

He looks at the sleeping woman, tries to *remember*. Benedict walks to the night table, picks her purse up, removes what looks like a credit card but it's a HOLOGRAPHIC I.D.

He taps the identification with his finger, an image of the woman materializes along with a name... NATALIA JONES.

Benedict returns the I.D. to the purse, speaks to her.

BENEDICT

Natalia.

She doesn't stir. Benedict leans over, gently rocks her.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Natalia. Wake up. Time to leave.

NATALIA (20's) awakens. She's raven-haired, dark-skinned. Quite beautiful. She looks at Benedict, smiles demurely.

She gets out of bed, naked. The rest of her is stunning too.

NATALIA

Can I take a shower? The water here is so clean. Pure enough to drink.

BENEDICT

Do you live in a cluster? I grew up in the Ten Fingers.

Natalia nods yes, seductively walks to the shower, turns.

NATALIA

Join me.

Benedict smiles at her, but shakes his head no. Disappointed, Natalia enters the shower, turns the water on, and sings an unknown melody. Her voice is beautiful and soothing.

Benedict walks to the toilet. He pisses a blood red stream of urine into the bowl. Benedict does not react. When he's done at the toilet he pops a few pain pills at the sink counter and then listens to Natalia sing for a moment.

Benedict goes to the glass wall of his bedroom and looks out. At least a thousand feet up. A dense SMOG fills the air.

He can only see two things; towering glass skyscrapers and--
-hundreds of LIGHTED DRONES that fill the sky like fireflies.

One of these lighted drones hovers just outside his window. It projects a RED BEAM that scans his eyes. The drone hovers to a docking station on the outside of the bedroom window and attaches itself, then deposits a PACKAGE.

The drone detaches and flies away. Benedict reaches into the receptacle and removes a SHOE BOX. Looks at it curiously.

He opens the shoe box and removes a single SNEAKER. It looks too small for his feet. He removes a NOTE from the shoe box.

Handwritten on the note: "Remember this?". Benedict doesn't smile but the item clearly stirs a memory.

A memory that's interrupted when Natalia enters the bedroom wearing a towel having finished her shower.

Natalia quickly dries herself off with the towel and then retrieves her clothes from the floor.

Benedict watches her dress. It never gets old.

He picks up her purse from the night table, hands it to her.

BENEDICT
Where's your breather?

NATALIA
Lost it in the club last night. Or
it was stolen. Had a lot to drink.
I'll... manage.

Benedict motions to the window and the smog outside.

BENEDICT
No, no. I have extras.

Benedict opens his dresser, removes what looks like a high-tech dust mask that covers the mouth and nose.

He hands her the breather. She smiles in gratitude.

NATALIA
Top of the line.

Benedict leads her out of the bedroom.

PENTHOUSE SUITE - LIVING AREA

Everything is plush. A large fruit basket sits on a table.

NATALIA
Good luck tonight.

Benedict smiles curtly. Natalia eyes the fruit basket.

NATALIA (CONT'D)
Can I have some grapes?

BENEDICT
Go ahead.

Natalia grabs a handful, pops several in her mouth at once. She closes her eyes as she eats them, savors the flavor.

NATALIA
I'd forgotten.

BENEDICT
Take the whole basket.

Natalia was leaving, turns around, incredulous.

NATALIA
Really?

Benedict picks up the fruit basket, hands it to her.

NATALIA (CONT'D)
Thank you. So much.

BENEDICT
Cover it up. You don't want any clusterfucks to see what you have there. They'd kill for a taste.

She acknowledges. He opens the suite door. She leaves.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Business district. Morning rush. The streets and sidewalk are clean and safe. On every corner, a well-armored policeman.

Natalia carries her fruit basket under a frayed pink blanket, wearing the breather Benedict gave her. Her steps are quick and purposeful, the faster away from prying eyes the better.

Natalia walks past a policeman whose head turns to follow her, accompanied by a WHIRRING mechanical sound. The cop's RED EYES blink rapidly, appears to be scanning Natalia.

The cop is an ANDROID. It turns to scan another pedestrian.

Natalia passes men and women in business suits, some wear goggles with their breather and appear to be engrossed in some unknown virtual world.

At the entrance to a subway station, Natalia maneuvers around a BODY lying at the top of the steps.

It's an older man, without a breather, DEAD. No one cares.

Natalia walks down the steps. At the base, an AIRLOCK.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Natalia and many others pass through the airlock. They all walk to where the tracks would be but in their place--

A MOVING SIDEWALK. Natalia hops on. The sidewalk carries her through a tunnel that eventually opens up into--

THE DEN

An underground flea market reclaimed from no longer in use subway tunnels. A boutique sells hacked technology. Street vendors lure you into games of chance. VR brothels. Thrift shops selling vintage clothes. And no one wears a breather.

A neon-lit diner called RAT BURGER advertises lab grown meat, a roach coach sells fresh PIGEON PIES.

Natalia debarks the moving sidewalk, walks along the shops. A CREEPY MAN(45) sides up to her, looks at her covered basket.

CREEPY MAN

We'll pay good money for the child,
triple if the father is Caucasian.

NATALIA

She's not for sale, stranger.

CREEPY MAN

A girl. Can I see her? Does she
have all her fingers and toes?

NATALIA

Go away.

CREEPY MAN

I'm not a slaver, I promise you.
She'll go to the upper crust.

Creepy Man tries to remove the blanket.

NATALIA

No!

Natalia shoves him and runs away. Unbeknownst to her, an ORANGE has fallen from the basket. The creepy man spots it and picks it up, hiding it under his jacket.

Creepy Man seems quite pleased with his find but--

HORACE NINE (O.S.)

You there!

A sturdy man of African descent in a long RED leather coat walks toward him. This is HORACE NINE(28). A luminescent BILLY CLUB at his hip, shades cover his eyes.

CREEPY MAN

I was just leaving--

HORACE NINE

I saw the color orange.

Creepy Man stutters out an incoherent consonant--

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

I know a lie is your first recourse
so don't insult me, pimp.

CREEPY MAN

The girl dropped it.

HORACE NINE

Were you hustling her? Mister Main
doesn't abide your kind looking for
side action in his den.

CREEPY MAN

I would never infringe on Mister
Main. No sir.

Horace holds his hand out. Creepy Man reluctantly, removes the orange from his jacket, gives it to Horace. Creepy Man turns tail and walks away, not daring to look back.

EXT. CITY - MONORAIL STATION - NIGHT

Benedict waits near an empty monorail track. About thirty men and women stand in a group with him, all wearing breathers and matching track suits with a SPONSOR LOGO on the back. Mixed in with the team are coaches, trainers and physicians.

Behind metal barriers on the far side of the monorail platform are a throng of excited supporters.

Since they all wear breathers and can't cheer, they STOMP their feet in unison. Some supporters bang drums, others wave large flags of the team's sponsor logo.

It's a cacophony of sound, STOMPING FEET, DRUMS, COWBELLS.

Benedict gestures at *something on the platform*, his teammates all look where he's pointing. They appear AWESTRUCK.

GYORGI

(muffled)

It must be a sign. A good one.

Benedict nods at GYORGI(26), a massively thick man whose father might have been a prize-winning bull.

Benedict holds his FIST UP at the supporters and motions toward the *thing* on the platform, he then brings his index finger to his breather and makes the SHUSH SIGN.

The supporters obey him and bring all NOISE to a HALT. Everyone on the platform has their eyes glued on...

A SPARROW fluttering around the platform looking for crumbs. Needless to say it's a rare sight.

They watch the sparrow in TOTAL SILENCE for a fleeting few moments... then it flies away.

The supporters resume their DRUM BANGING and FEET STOMPING.

A large monorail car pulls into the station. The team members file into it. The supporters knock the barricades down and surge forward, arriving at the car as the doors close.

They bang their fists on the monorail windows, not as an act of violence but of encouragement. Several players inside the car bang the windows in return as the monorail pulls away.

INT. MONORAIL CAR - MOVING

A VIDEO DRONE outside the window keeps pace with their car, records them. Gyorgi flips his middle finger at the drone.

Benedict pays rapt attention to the passing city, a mix of majestic glass and steel skyscrapers offset by burned out hovels, tent cities, and drum fires.

On the street below, driverless taxis, buses and uni-riders move about-- along with a few armored limousines.

Benedict nudges the older black man standing next to him, points out the window to the biggest cluster in the city, ten eighty-story towers lined up one by one next to each other.

This is the TEN-FINGERS where Benedict grew up. Surrounding the ten towers are hundreds of smaller buildings that make up a city within a city.

The most prominent feature of this massive complex is that the entire area is WALLED OFF as if it were a prison.

BENEDICT

Been almost twenty years now.
Someone made me think of it today.

The older black man nods. Larger than Benedict, graying at the temples with a salt and pepper beard. This is CARTHAGE.

CARTHAGE

How could you forget it? I still have one last brother in there.

BENEDICT

I hadn't forgotten. It's just--

CARTHAGE

Easier to block it out. Yeah.

BENEDICT

Nothing I can do.

CARTHAGE

We all say that. Millions of us.

Benedict looks around the monorail car, back at Carthage.

BENEDICT

Would you rather be back in there?

CARTHAGE

Hell no.

BENEDICT

Then let's not ponder things we can't change.

The monorail car approaches a glass-roofed sports arena.

A HOLO-SIGN flashes, "Welcome to Madison Square Garden."

A second holo-sign projects as big as a four story building: "Tonight! New City Mongrels vs. Shanghai Sparrows".

The monorail dips downward, enters the arena from below.

INT. ARENA - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Benedict and his teammates change from their sponsor track suits into their BULLSEYE uniforms.

On their heads-- an anti-concussive helmet. The jersey and pants are gel-padded. Printed on each jersey-- a moniker of the player's choosing. Benedict's says HAVEN. Other players choose a nickname like 'MAD DOG' 'REAPER' or 'GUSTO'.

On the feet-- GLIDE BOOTS. The sole is an advanced magnetic composite that adheres to a receptive playing surface.

Players build speed and maintain balance with minimal effort, allowing them to play the game without easily tiring.

The game BULLSEYE is built to create high impact collisions.

A team MEDIC examines player DARYL 'DYNAMO' DRAGOVIC(34), platinum blonde hair with a flame tattoo on his neck.

The medic checks Dynamo's cognitive and physical response time using a cerebral monitor. Dynamo's adamant that he's READY to play, the medic looks skeptical.

Benedict BANGS fists with Dynamo, a quick bro hug follows.

BENEDICT

Fucking Dynamo, ready to blow!

Benedict moves to BILLY SUNDAY (24), long rock star hair, as a player he's small, quick and acrobat-like in the air.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Your glide boots better work tonight, Billy, I don't want any more excuses.

BILLY SUNDAY

Whoa, Ben, shit happens with glide boots all the time. I had one fuck up and you won't let it go.

BENEDICT

It's weird man, you're the cockiest little shit I know. The ball only seems to slip out of your hands against our main rivals when the point spreads are small and the betting's big. Games like tonight. Well you better be at your best tonight, Billy. You hearing me?

Benedict stares Sunday in the eyes long and hard, walks away.

With the team dressed, the MANAGER(50s) addresses the squad. Bald pate, limping gait, ill-tempered. He's BUTCH CRAVEN.

BUTCH CRAVEN

I don't need to go over strategy but I need to say one thing. The suits want higher ratings. They've deemed this a kill game. No points for the kill, just bonus money.

The players amp up their intensity upon hearing this news.

An OLDER MAN in a tailored suit enters the locker room. He watches from behind the manager in full view of the players.

His name is ALEC WORTH(70s), TEAM OWNER. He has neatly-parted gray hair, was handsome in his day. Now he's quite frail.

Craven places a holo-projector on a table in front of them. It produces holograms of three Shanghai players, pointing out vulnerable areas on each player.

BUTCH CRAVEN (CONT'D)

Scouting tells us these are the three most vulnerable of Shanghai's players. One of their launchers has a spinal injury that's been held together by duct-tape the last few matches. A solid elbow to the back could result in paralyzation. Now let's not get caught up looking for that early kill, keep an eye on the game score. I ain't losing to these dog-eaters again just because you want that kill bonus. We take the kill when it naturally comes. Keep your lines tight. No soloing or settling old scores.

Craven turns off the projector, turns dead serious.

BUTCH CRAVEN (CONT'D)

We haven't lost a player in almost a year now and I don't want to break that streak tonight.

Craven walks toward the tunnel that leads out toward the playing surface. He stops, turns back.

BUTCH CRAVEN (CONT'D)

Come on you Mongrels!

He waves for his players to follow. As they head down the tunnel, in unison the players YELL LIKE BANSHEES.

Benedict hangs back, stops right next to team owner Worth.

BENEDICT
You're feeling better.

Worth chuckles, then quickly breaths from an inhaler.

ALEC WORTH
Better than death, I suppose.

He hands Benedict a shoebox. Benedict takes it, looks inside. A matching sneaker to the one delivered by drone earlier.

ALEC WORTH (CONT'D)
Don't even ask me how difficult
that was to find. Old model.

Worth coughs hard. Benedict hears the CHEERS from the arena. He motions to Worth that he needs to get going. Worth nods. Benedict walks but Worth grabs his arm.

ALEC WORTH (CONT'D)
Twenty years ago, Benny, you stole
the first one. But this one...
(motions to the sneaker)
This one you earned. And old
trespasses are forgotten. We'll
talk about retirement after the
game. Just do me one favor.

BENEDICT
Anything, Mister Worth.

Worth coughs violently again, uses the inhaler a second time.

ALEC WORTH
This old man hasn't got long to
live, allow me the pleasure of one
final victory.

BENEDICT
Consider it done, sir.

Benedict turns to walk down the tunnel. Worth calls to him.

ALEC WORTH
And don't get yourself killed.

Benedict nods his head grimly, continues to the arena.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. CRUSHED VELVET - OFFICE**

A MAN in a crisp, colorful suit looks out a one-way window. His view below: a large Roman-themed strip club and brothel.

Well-heeled men watch sexy strippers pole dance or share drinks together. One of these entertainers leads a man by the hand up a grand staircase to the second floor where private bedrooms are available if the price is right.

CHARLES MAIN(Asian, 45) turns from the one-way window and sits at an oak desk. Slick hair, handsome face, dapper, in a movie about his life, Ken Watanabe plays him.

The BULLSEYE game featuring Benedict's New City Mongrels team projects on his 3D wall, the volume turned down low.

Horace, the black man in the long leather coat from earlier, enters the office. He sits across from Main, glances at the 3D wall, watches Benedict CLOBBER an opponent.

HORACE NINE

There was some heavy late action on Shanghai. Four or five bettors.

Main fusses with a virtual spreadsheet built into his desk.

CHARLES MAIN

Kill games are always hard to handicap... How heavy?

HORACE NINE

Council of Twelve heavy.

Main looks up, a hint of concern perhaps.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

We'll do well on the side bets.

Main nods his head, returns his attention to his desktop.

CHARLES MAIN

You said you had something for me.

Horace removes the ORANGE from his jacket pocket, places it on the oak desk within Main's peripheral vision.

CHARLES MAIN (CONT'D)

Is that genuine?

Main picks up the orange, sniffs the rind, feels the texture.

HORACE NINE

I wouldn't know.

Main places the orange inside a breadbox-sized cube located on the corner of his desk. The cube analyzes the orange.

CHARLES MAIN

As a boy, I had oranges with my breakfast every morning. We could grow them in Wakayama and some of the other southern prefectures.

Main removes the orange from the analyzer, then peels it. He smiles as he does this, a warm memory.

HORACE NINE

A young woman dropped it. I ran face cogs on our security archive. She passes through almost daily. A Jones from the Ten-Fingers.

CHARLES MAIN

Probably high classing her tail for the Uppers. How long has she had in and out privileges?

HORACE NINE

A year or two. Has a jewelry license but she isn't selling diamond rings, I assure you.

Main breaks the peeled orange into wedges, shares one.

CHARLES MAIN

Thinking she might be a resource?

HORACE NINE

She could work in here for sure, make us and herself a mint.

Horace puts the orange wedge in his mouth. Chews it. A broad and RARE SMILE crosses his face, he's impressed.

CHARLES MAIN

I don't need another whore. But a girl who has entry to people who have access to inaccessible things-- that I could do something with.

Horace nods. Main offers him another orange wedge, he eagerly takes it. Both of them then draw their attention to a violent play in the game of Bullseye playing out on the 3D wall.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

**The following can work both as a game action MONTAGE and as an explanation of the rules of the BULLSEYE game.

Benedict stands over a fallen foe who bleeds from the mouth. He grabs the SHINY METALLIC BALL from his opponent's hands.

It's volleyball-sized and resembles a pinball. Despite its metallic look, the ball's elasticity allows it to be easily compressed with the fingers so it can be thrown.

Benedict waits for a group of blockers to GLIDE toward him.

The playing surface looks like metallic ice and is comparable in size to a HOCKEY RINK. The player's glide boots adhere to the surface and produce a powerful THRUST.

Gyorgi, Carthage and Dynamo glide to Benedict, he gets in behind them as they motor toward the Bullseye board.

At both ends of the arena are elevated, forty foot tall BULLSEYE boards (picture an upstanding rectangle), one for each team to defend and one for each team to score on.

The goal is to score points by throwing the ball through the RED bullseye (highest part, smallest hole) for TEN POINTS. Below the red bullseye is a larger GREEN worth five points, below that an even larger YELLOW worth three points.

Shanghai use their defenders to disrupt Benedict's charge. Benedict's blockers carve a path, knock opponents down.

Dynamo gets taken out by a shoulder hit to the head from one of Shanghai's players. He WOBBLES as he tries to stand up.

Benedict, with two blockers left, approaches a LAUNCH POINT.

There are two LAUNCH POINTS on the surface about thirty feet in front of the Bullseye boards. Players that glide onto the launch points are PROJECTED IN THE AIR to the bullseye--

--but each team has a player swinging from a bungee rope pendulum-style in front of the Bullseye whose job is to BLOCK shots and intercept players hurtling to the board.

This player is called THE KEEP.

Benedict glides onto a launch point with great speed, higher speed equals more elevation, better chance to score big.

Benedict launches himself toward the bullseye board, as he gets close THE KEEP knocks him off his trajectory--

Benedict releases the ball, hitting the GREEN bullseye for five points. When the ball hits a bullseye it passes through and is no longer an active ball.

A NEW BALL is dropped into play from the arena ceiling at 'center ice'. A mad scramble between the two teams to gain possession of the ball ensues.

Dynamo has the ball in his hands momentarily but a Shanghai player BLIND-SIDES him with a hit to the head. Dynamo loses possession and CRUMPLES down to the ground.

Losing and gaining control of the ball occurs several times between the teams until Carthage wrangles the ball away and breaks clear of the scrum.

Each team has a SLINGER, a player that operates a SLINGSHOT device that is strapped to the shoulder.

Carthage tosses the ball to New City's slinger, he launches the ball back toward the bullseye board where Benedict has re-launched himself in order to catch the ball mid-air.

The timing needs to be perfect and it is, Benedict catches the ball with one hand and fends off the KEEP with the other arm for a close up SLAM of the bullseye.

The home crowd ERUPTS in a frenzy at the ten point score, this gives Benedict's team the lead over Shanghai, 42-33.

A BULLHORN sounds indicating the end of the first half of play. Benedict high-fives Gyorgi as the New City Mongrels exit the playing surface and walk down the tunnel.

LOCKER ROOM

Benedict and his teammates hoop and holler. Coaches offer them pouches of liquid 'fuel' for them to drink.

Equipment managers tinker with malfunctioning glide boots. Bleeding wounds are CAUTERIZED by a physician followed by a HYPO injecting a fast-acting pain relief.

Dynamo arrives in the locker room late. He bleeds from the eye and the nose, seems lost, unaware. He's helped to a cot by a trainer. Thirty-four years old but looks older.

Benedict walks to him. Dynamo's hands shake uncontrollably.

BENEDICT

(to trainer)

What are waiting for? Use the neuralizer on him.

TRAINER

It's no longer effective. Might make him worse at this point.

Dynamo drools, Benedict gently tries to rouse him.

BENEDICT

He just needs to recover. You'll be good for the next match, right?

Dynamo desperately looks up at Benedict, his mouth stutters as if he wants to speak but can't. Dynamo looks away and curls up into a ball on the cot.

Benedict eyes his teammates, they ignore what they see.

BUTCH CRAVEN

Hustle up Mongrels, second half is two balls in play. Raphael from the junior squad will be rotated in for Dynamo.

RAPHAEL, long hair, Latino, lots of tats, much YOUNGER.

BENEDICT

Coach, he hasn't practiced with us, we can play a man short if needed.

Craven raises an eyebrow at Benedict.

BUTCH CRAVEN

Raffy knows our playbook and the sooner we integrate him--

BENEDICT

Dynamo will be okay--

BUTCH CRAVEN

Dynamo is done! Now we've got a game to finish off and a Shanghai scalp to claim. I want both!

Craven leads the team back up the tunnel. Benedict eyes Dynamo, who stares lifelessly up at the ceiling, ALONE.

INT. TEN FINGERS CLUSTER - NATALIA'S APARTMENT

Small room. A folding bed in the wall. An electric stove in the corner that passes for a kitchen. Charcoal drawings on the walls add a semblance of life.

Natalia sits at a work station crafting jewelry, she peers into an eyepiece to do delicate detail work.

She half pays attention to the Bullseye game on her monitor.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Benedict Haven's been a madman
 tonight. Easy to see why he's been
 voted Most Dangerous Player four
 out of the last five years.

She steps away from her workstation, goes to the counter in her 'kitchen' area and takes an APPLE from her basket.

NATALIA watches the game on her monitor.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Somehow the Mongrels have retaken
 the lead after being penalized ten
 points for failing to return all
 their players for the second half.

Benedict throws the ball to Billy Sunday, the player Benedict accused of drugs/gambling. Sunday has Carthage and Gyorgi blocking for him as he runs for the launch point.

COLOR ANALYST (V.O.)
 Dynamo surely would have been a
 kill target after those brutal
 blows to the head-- And here we
 have Billy Sunday making his move!

Sunday launches himself in the air, twisting and contorting his body to make it difficult for the KEEP to block him.

Just as Sunday is about to make an easy bullseye, he loses his grip on the ball and it drops to the surface below.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Oh that was fucking tragic! A
 horrible drop by Sunday!

Shanghai's defenders pounce on this opportunity and quickly transition to offense. As the 2nd half has TWO BALLS in play, Shanghai has the opportunity to make a DOUBLE SCORE.

Attacking from both sides of the playing surface, New City are back on their heels and scramble to mount a defense.

But Shanghai are deadly on the break and are able to mount consecutive launches toward their bullseye, scoring back to back scores worth twenty points!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 A stunning reversal gives Shanghai
 a sixteen point lead!

INT. ARENA - NIGHT - LATER

Benedict looks at the scoreboard. New City trails Shanghai by a score of 82-76. A final countdown begins with five minutes remaining that's heard ECHOING throughout the arena.

Shanghai controls one ball, New City the other. Shanghai has their entire team in defense-mode, they crowd and block the launch point to New City's bullseye. Their own ball carrier is protected behind a wall of blockers.

The countdown indicates there's less than two minutes left.

Benedict and his teammates huddle-glide in a circle.

BENEDICT

Time's almost gone. They'll expect me to be the carrier. First wave of blockers takes out their barricade. The second wave makes a clear path. When their carrier makes a break--

Benedict looks at Billy Sunday with gritty determination.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

I hand off to you Billy. And then I chase their carrier. If we do this right he might only have one or two blockers left. Which I'll handle.

Billy nods. Everyone else acknowledges the plan.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

You owe us one, Billy.

The teammates form two lines and glide away to the far end of the playing surface before whipping around and turning back towards their launch point.

Building speed, New City careens toward Shanghai's defensive huddle. Benedict and Billy are the last two in line.

The first New City grouping smashes headlong into Shanghai, bodies go flying, arms are fractured, teeth removed.

The second assault follows fast and furious, the best two blockers, Carthage and Gyorgi, lead the way with Benedict right behind them and Billy Sunday striding aside.

As Benedict predicted, the Shanghai carrier peels away from their defense with just a single blocker to aid HER.

Benedict hands the ball to Billy Sunday and does a 180 degree turn that has him on the heels of Shanghai's carrier.

Billy, with ball in hand, approaches the launch point and instead of building speed seems to drag his boot on the ice.

Billy launches, but because of the boot drag his speed is reduced and he does not get good height.

Shanghai's KEEP swings to block him and knowing that New City needs a bullseye, positions himself where he will allow a green or yellow score but not a red.

Billy's weak launch only scores three points. Score, 82-79. With the countdown now at ten seconds, the game is lost.

At the other end, Benedict catches the lone Shanghai blocker and, balancing himself on one leg and kicking with the other, sends the Shanghai blocker flying off to the side.

Shanghai's carrier breaks off her approach to the launch point and makes a quick turn back to her defense.

But Benedict pursues the carrier and with five seconds left catches her by surprise, gets her head in an arm lock--

AND SNAPS HER NECK just before the final bullhorn sounds.

Benedict's teammates seem surprised by this act, the Shanghai team abandons their victory celebration to attack Benedict.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

That was a questionable kill as the clock was winding down!

COLOR ANALYST (V.O.)

Is she dead? We don't know yet.

The medical trainers for Shanghai rush out onto the surface. Benedict fends off several attackers, his teammates aid him.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Kills must be in the natural flow of the game, that crossed a line!

Several COP BOTS glide onto the playing surface, ZAPPING players from both sides with electric current.

The medics attending to the Shanghai player shake their heads and give a thumbs down sign, cover the body with a blanket.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Looks like New City got their kill but not without controversy.

Benedict's led away from the brawl by Carthage as the CopBots diffuse the situation. Shanghai coaches yell insults at them.

COLOR ANANYST (V.O.)
 Shanghai launcher Chunhua Sing
 pronounced dead. She made the all-
 star team three years ago, a hell
 of a player, a sad way to go.

ARENA - TUNNEL

Carthage leads Benedict down the tunnel, others lag behind.

CARTHAGE
 What the hell was that?

BENEDICT
 That's the game we play. The one
 everyone wants to see.

CARTHAGE
 We give them the game we want to,
 on our terms, not theirs.

LOCKER ROOM

Benedict walks to his locker, removes his uniform.

BENEDICT
 Fuck it man. I'm done with this
 shit anyway.

CARTHAGE
 You ain't done with nothing. That's
 crazy. We're done when *they say so*.

BENEDICT
 Maybe for you. Not for me, Carthy.
 I won't be playing this game much
 longer, Mister Worth and I have it
 all worked out. He's releasing me
 from my contract.

The rest of the team spills into the locker room, subdued.

Carthage leans in close to Benedict, speaks low.

CARTHAGE
 You won't be the first player to
 think he's bigger than the game.
 And we've seen what happens to
 those who thought they were.

BENEDICT
 The hell are you saying?

Carthage glances around the locker room. Players are changing out of their uniforms, some have headed to the shower.

CARTHAGE

Ever wonder what happened to Vinny Shanks? Thom Dunbar? Bradley Seven?

BENEDICT

Vinny OD'd. Dunbar knifed outside a bar. Brad Seven... that was a... bus accident.

CARTHAGE

Yeah man, a fucking bus accident. What are the goddamn odds?

(beat)

Those players all spoke out against the game. Either changing it or leaving it. All in their prime too. If you think Worth is going to let you limp off into the sunset then you're more naive than I figured.

Benedict measures his words carefully. It's clear Carthage might be the only man able to talk to Benedict this way.

BENEDICT

I appreciate what you have to say, friend. But Mister Worth and I... He's one of the few good ones left.

Benedict's covered with dried splotches of blood. He removes a large towel from his locker.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

I need a shower. And I'm going to have a talk with Billy.

Benedict heads toward the shower. On his way there, Benedict bumps into the trainer who was treating Dynamo at half time.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Hey man, how's Daryl doing?

The trainer looks perplexed, not sure who he's referring to.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Daryl. Fucking Dynamo man. Where is he? Still getting treatment?

TRAINER

He was... dismissed.

BENEDICT
What the fuck does dismissed mean?

The trainer hesitates to answer, Benedict grabs him.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)
Fucking answer me, prick. Who the fuck dismissed him?

BUTCH CRAVEN (O.S.)
I did.

Benedict lets go of the trainer, who skulks away. Coach Craven stands across from Benedict, defiant.

BENEDICT
Is Dynamo off the team?

BUTCH CRAVEN
Yeah, he's off the team.

BENEDICT
Why?

BUTCH CRAVEN
Too many broken synapses. Brain was fried, Benny. Costing us points. He was sold to another-- *organization*.

BENEDICT
You just said his brain's fried.

BUTCH CRAVEN
It is.

BENEDICT
Then who purchased his contract?

BUTCH CRAVEN
An underground Streetbull team took him on. Look, Dynamo doesn't have long anyway. I know he was your friend but forget about him.

BENEDICT
Was? He's still my friend.

Craven nods at Benedict admirably but...

BUTCH CRAVEN
That's great but you have other concerns. The bonus money for your kill is being withheld pending a hearing...

(MORE)

BUTCH CRAVEN (CONT'D)
 But I'm sure the commission will
 give the *biggest star in the game* a
 soft slap on the wrist and say,
 'don't do that again'. And then
 you'll get your money.

Craven turns away... but then turns back to face him.

BUTCH CRAVEN (CONT'D)
 And don't question my strategy or
 decision making anymore. You're *not*
 bigger than the game. No one is.

Craven walks away. Benedict loses himself in thought. He sees
 the blood-soaked cot Dynamo was lying on at halftime.

Benedict closes his eyes and tries to block it out.

But he hears a VOICE. A laughing, jovial voice. A voice not
 too upset by the big loss. He sees Billy Sunday.

Sunday sits on a gurney, a DOCTOR examines Billy's knee,
 applies a pain-reducing mist.

Benedict approaches them, Sunday eyes Benedict warily.

BENEDICT
 Maybe you should have a tech
 examine your glide boots, Billy.

BILLY SUNDAY
 It wasn't the boot, Ben. My knee
 gave way on my launch approach.

BENEDICT
 Was your knee bothering you when
 you dropped that sure bullseye? Or
 is your wrist hurting too?

BILLY SUNDAY
 Actually, Ben, it's my whole body.
 But I figured *I wouldn't need to*
tell you that.

Benedict smiles slyly. Then he stares hard into Billy's eyes.

BENEDICT
 Leave us alone a minute, Doc.

The doctor sighs, does as he's told.

BILLY SUNDAY
 Look, Ben, I know what you're
 thinking--

BENEDICT

You don't know what I'm thinking
brother because if you did you'd be
long gone from this locker room.

Billy nods his head, he knows Benedict could end him.

BILLY SUNDAY

I'll do better.

Benedict grabs him by the neck, squeezes so he can't speak.

BENEDICT

If I find out you've been betraying
the Mongrels, Billy, selling us out
so one of your gangster friends can
make a buck... well... I'll make
sure the men who have been losing
money know your name... Got it?

Billy Sunday nods his head frantically, desperate for breath.
Benedict releases his grip, Billy GASPS for air.

Benedict brushes past his teammates, who all just witnessed
him choking a fellow player.

Benedict enters the showers.

As the water hits his skin, Benedict grabs a bar of soap and
rinses off the dried, caked blood from his body.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. ABANDONED SUBWAY TUNNEL - NIGHT**

Total darkness. Footsteps on gravel gradually draw closer.

INFRARED POV

Subway walls riddled with graffiti. Damaged rail lines. A pair of RED EYES belonging to a rat scampers away.

On A DOORWAY an old sign says <<Authorized Personnel Only>>
A hand twists the knob, the door pushes open.

Trash litters a hallway that has water-damaged walls.

The hallway leads to a STAIRWELL. Boots clank loudly on metal as someone makes their way up several flights of stairs.

Another door is pushed open. Walking down a long hallway where at the end LIGHT creeps out under yet another door.

INDUSTRIAL ROOM

Horace enters a large room full of pipes and water-pumping equipment. A droning, mechanical HUM fills the room.

Horace walks to the far corner and comes upon a GUARD sitting in a booth behind security glass, like a movie ticket-taker.

Horace slides a GATE-PASS into a thin slot in the booth wall. The guard reads his screen, eyes Horace distrustfully.

HORACE NINE

Is there a problem?

GUARD

The pass is good. Twelve hours. It doesn't say what your business is.

HORACE NINE

Because it's not your concern.

They look at each other contemptuously.

GUARD

Your club is contraband. Put it in the security box when it opens up.

A WHOOSH sound, a compartment at waist level opens up. Horace hesitates, he does not wish to place his billy club inside.

GUARD (CONT'D)
Don't fret now, you'll get it back.

Horace grits his teeth, reluctantly places his club inside. The compartment closes up with a WHOOSH.

GUARD (CONT'D)
Besides... my scan say that you're enhanced. *Sure you'll be just fine.*

A door near the booth clicks open. Horace passes through.

SEWER ROOM

Horace enters a small brick-faced room. The only exit is a series of metal rungs that go UPWARDS.

Horace is about to climb the rungs when the SAME guard, behind a security window, speaks.

GUARD
Nice jacket. Real leather?

Horace turns around to face the guard.

HORACE NINE
The word that has escaped you is 'coat'. And yes it's real leather. Real hard to find too. Even harder to take from me.

GUARD
I'm not trying to take anything from you. It's just if someone inside *does* take a liking to your nice red leather *coat*...

Horace removes his shades. One of his eyes is a MECHANICAL IMPLANT. He talks of his coat with a certain pride.

HORACE NINE
I color-matched it to dried blood. Makes clean up easier. So tell your clusterboys you've got a better tip for them. Tell them when I walk around that corner to steer clear and save themselves the trouble.

Horace puts his shades back on, climbs up the rungs.

INT. THE DEN - RAT BURGER - NIGHT

In a neon-lit 50's-style diner, Benedict sits alone in a corner booth, a cap pulled down over his eyes. Seven burgers on a plate in front of him with an assortment of side orders.

He eats joylessly, weighed down by unknown thoughts.

HEATHER STRIDE (O.S.)
 Didn't think this was your scene.

Benedict looks up, sees HEATHER STRIDE, aka 'HEATHEN'(22). An Amazon brought to life, part African, Asian, Puerto Rican.

Benedict manages a smile, finishes chewing his burger.

BENEDICT
 I used to come here all the time,
 when I was starting out.

HEATHER STRIDE
 When your pay grade was lower?

BENEDICT
 A lot lower... Join me if you like.

Heather sits across from him. Benedict motions to his food.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)
 Help yourself. I wasn't nearly as
 hungry as I thought.

HEATHER STRIDE
 Thanks. I'm *still* making low wage.
 Until I get my shot with the bigs.

Heather smiles, takes a burger and a potato wedge. Benedict glances at Heather as if he's noticing her the first time.

BENEDICT
 Uh, I know you go by Heathen...

HEATHER STRIDE
 Heather. Heather Stride.

BENEDICT
 You don't look like a Heather.

She doesn't. Tall, dark skin, full head of kinky, wavy hair.

HEATHER STRIDE
 Tell me about it.
 (referring to the burger)
 This is good.

A YOUNG MOTHER and her SON cautiously walk up to the table.

YOUNG WOMAN
Would it be okay if you signed my
son's cap?

The BOY(8) wears a NEW CITY MONGRELS cap.

BENEDICT
Of course.

The mother gives Benedict a marker. The boy removes his cap and hands it to Benedict to sign. He does, hands it back.

BOY
Thank you!

The boy smiles. He's holding COLLECTIBLE CARDS in his hands.

BENEDICT
I see you collect the holo-cards.

BOY
Yeah, I have almost a hundred.

The boy pridefully lays a few cards out on the table. Most of them are New City Mongrels; Haven, Gyorgi, Carthage, Sunday.

Benedict picks up his own holo-card, it shows a live-action looping montage of some of his best plays. He grins.

BOY (CONT'D)
I have other teams too.

The boy lays out cards of players from competing teams. The last card is of CHUNHUA SING, the dead Shanghai player.

BOY (CONT'D)
I didn't like it when you hurt the
lady the way you did.

Benedict's smile disappears, Heather looks away, awkward.

BENEDICT
You'll understand when you're
older. It's... part of the game.

Benedict looks to the boy's mother, she's embarrassed.

YOUNG WOMAN
Okay, well time to go. Gather up
your cards.

The boy carefully stacks his cards, is led away by his mom.

Benedict seems genuinely bothered by the boy's comment.

HEATHER STRIDE

You're right, he's just a kid, he doesn't understand the world yet.

BENEDICT

Would you have taken the kill?

Heather's surprised by the question, doesn't want to answer.

HEATHER STRIDE

Doesn't matter. I wasn't there. You did what you did.

Benedict searches her eyes for the truth, she doesn't blink.

BENEDICT

Okay... look, I've lost my appetite and there's something I need to do.

HEATHER STRIDE

You want company?

BENEDICT

No. I can't involve you with this.

HEATHER STRIDE

Now I'm intrigued.

Benedict thinks hard for a second, reluctant to spill detail.

BENEDICT

Looking for Dynamo. He was sold to a streetbull team. They're playing tonight... somewhere in The Den. No one will admit there's a game.

HEATHER STRIDE

The Soho Stranglers.

BENEDICT

You know where they play?

HEATHER STRIDE

I do, but it's way off the beaten path, seeing how streetbull isn't sanctioned by the Council. It would be difficult to describe all the twists and turns to get there.

BENEDICT

Then show me.

EXT. TEN FINGERS CLUSTER - ALLEY - NIGHT

A manhole cover pops up, is pushed aside. Horace climbs out. He's now wearing a breather.

As he replaces the manhole cover, a tiny dog darts out of nowhere and nips at his hands. Startled, Horace jumps up.

The tiny dog looks like a Chihuahua on steroids. It bares its teeth and growls at him, angrily darts at Horace's feet. A large DEAD RAT lies nearby. Protecting its kill perhaps?

Horace is unnerved by the growling dog, it continues nipping at him. He slowly backs away from it, exits the alleyway.

EXT. TEN FINGER CLUSTER - STREET - NIGHT

A light drizzle falls as Horace walks down a crowded street. Piles of trash on the sidewalk, bin fires on every corner. Stray dogs run about. Most people wear cheap dust masks.

Despite the bleakness, a good energy exists. Sidewalk vendors sell food and sundries. The storefronts are all open and well lit, street musicians sing songs trying to lure customers.

People huddle under an awning as they watch a 3D TV inside a store window. Others eat fresh hot pretzels or mystery meat.

People notice Horace walking, his red leather coat a sight.

X-RAY POV

Horace's mech-eye (under his shades) analyzes every human that he passes, noting anyone carrying a possible weapon under their jackets or stuffed in their trousers.

He passes FIVE MEN on a street corner huddled around a drum fire as they smoke and drink. His mech-eye identifies them as each carrying one weapon, some carry two.

We see red outlines of knives, dartguns, and shocker batons.

BACK TO SCENE

Horace walks past them without the slightest acknowledgment. He approaches the base of a large skyscraper. Etched into the exterior above the main entrance; TOWER SEVEN.

Before entering the tower, he looks back toward the corner where the five men stand. Two of them had been watching him but they both look away. Horace nods to himself.

INT. TOWER SEVEN - ELEVATOR

Horace shares an elevator with an ELDERLY WOMAN. She looks like a bag lady, but that is more or less the standard look.

The elevator makes its way past the twenty-second floor, but then suddenly stops at floor twenty-three.

The door doesn't open but a loud grinding noise reverberates from the other side along with the barking VOICES of angry, desperate men. Horace looks at the old woman, curious.

ELDERLY WOMAN

They'll pry the doors open. I have nothing. Just give them what they want, it's easier that way.

Horace nods at her and waits for the inevitable. The door creaks and groans, like force is being applied.

ELDERLY WOMAN (CONT'D)

You shouldn't come here looking like that. Brought it on yourself.

Horace stands as CLOSE to the door as possible. Suddenly, the doors are violently pried open by a hydraulic device.

The FIRST GOON moves toward Horace armed with a BATON, but Horace KICKS it loose and in one swift motion LIFTS the man up with his arms and DRIVES HIS SKULL into the metal frame.

He lets the man drop down, his neck bent at a grisly angle.

ELEVATOR FOYER

The other TWO MEN, caught off guard, fire their handheld weapons at Horace, a dartgun and a blade slinger.

Horace wraps himself hedgehog-like in his leather coat. The darts and sharp metal blades bounce off or half-embed.

After delivering their full payload, they wait for cries of agony. But Horace unfurls himself from his coat unharmed.

He plucks one of the RAZOR SHARP blades from his coat as both men bull rush him. Horace slices the SECOND GOON's throat, blood spurts from a gaping neck wound, the goon drops down.

The third goon looks aghast at this turn of events. He turns tail and runs, Horace throws the blade at the goon, misses.

The third goon turns down a hallway, Horace pursues him.

HALLWAY

Horace removes a dart embedded in his coat and slings it at the fleeing man, hitting him square in the back.

The man CRIES OUT in pain but keeps running. Horace stops.

Filth litters the hallway. People sleep in cardboard boxes. Clothes and other items are hung on makeshift shelves.

He eyes a WOMAN with two small children sitting in a tent. They stare at Horace, frightened, one of the children cries.

An apartment door opens, someone peers out, looks about, sees Horace and then quickly shuts the door.

The third goon is long gone. Horace returns to the foyer.

ELEVATOR FOYER

The elderly woman attempts to remove the hydraulic arm device that still holds the elevator doors open. Horace gently moves the woman out of his way and shoves it aside with ease.

Horace enters the elevator, pushes a floor button. The woman stands in the lobby staring at him, unsure.

Horace waves her into the elevator. She enters. Without a word, she stands warily next to Horace as the doors close.

SIXTY-SEVENTH FLOOR - FOYER

Horace exits. The elderly woman gone. Horace dumps from his hand a bunch of darts and metal blades onto the floor, most of them bent and twisted from the impact with his coat.

SIXTY-SEVENTH FLOOR - HALLWAY

Horace walks, keeps an eye on apartment numbers. Unlike floor twenty-three, this hallway is quiet and clean.

Halfway down the long hallway, Horace sees a MAN talking to some unseen person inside an apartment door.

Horace arrives, checks the apartment number. The man eyes Horace's coat, notices splotches of WET BLOOD on it.

Young(20s), tall, skinny, pasty-looking. His name, AUGIE.

AUGIE

Can I uh... help you, sir?

Horace ignores him. Instead he steps closer to the doorway to see who Augie's talking to on the inside.

NATALIA stands there dressed in sleepwear. She sees Horace, skips a breath and takes a step back but tries to look cool.

HORACE NINE

Natalia... *Jones*.

Natalia nods her head yes. Horace looks hard at Augie.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

Excuse us, I have a private matter to discuss with this tenant.

AUGIE

Umm, okay. Look, I manage the top twenty floors here and--

HORACE NINE

Do you now? What a splendid job you are doing keeping things shipshape.

Augie speaks to Natalia, she looks cautious and unsure.

AUGIE

Do you know this person?

HORACE NINE

She doesn't know me, but I'll be sure to make a *proper* introduction.

Natalia nods her head at Augie... 'it's okay.'. Augie leaves. Horace stands there just outside the doorway.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

May I come in?

NATALIA'S APARTMENT

Horace scans the room... which doesn't take long. He spots what he was looking for -- The fruit basket on the counter.

He walks to it, looks inside. EMPTY, save for a kiwi. He removes the kiwi from the basket, looks at it curiously.

NATALIA

It was a gift.

HORACE NINE

I know what an orange is, but what is this called?

NATALIA
I don't know. There was only one of
them in the basket.

Horace places the kiwi on the counter, across from Natalia.

HORACE NINE
Was that your boyfriend?

NATALIA
No.

HORACE NINE
Was he bothering you?

Natalia blinks her eyes, looks down, then back at Horace.

NATALIA
What do you want?

HORACE NINE
You *know* what I want.

For a moment, Natalia thinks the worst, Horace notices this.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)
No... you misunderstand.

Natalia exhales. Horace probes on.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)
That floor manager boy at your
door, he *expects* things from you?

NATALIA
I can't get you fruit. I'm sorry.
It was a gift. A one time thing.

Horace pulls out a switch blade. Natalia GASPS. She backs up
a step or two, her voice nervous.

NATALIA (CONT'D)
It was Benedict Haven. I met him in
a club. The basket was given to him
and he gave it to me. He doesn't
even remember my name.

Horace uses the switchblade to cut the kiwi in two halves.

HORACE NINE
I hope you don't mind, I'm really
curious about this thing.

He offers her half of the kiwi. She doesn't take it.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

Please.

Natalia takes the kiwi halve. They eat it at the same time.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

I liked the orange better.

Horace removes a CARD from his coat - hands it to Natalia.
Credit card-sized, it's a tiny billboard with moving images.

HORACE NINE (CONT'D)

We supply girls in private shows
for the upper crusters.

NATALIA

I don't do that kind of work.

HORACE NINE

You dance in a cage. Be sexy. They
tip you. No kissing, no groping...
no sexual gratification.

(Natalia's negative look)

You'll make more money in one night
than in weeks selling jewelry. And
you won't have to degrade yourself
with... what was his name again?

NATALIA

Augie.

HORACE NINE

No more Augie doggie.
(and then)
What do you say, Natalia?

NATALIA

And... what else?

HORACE NINE

And... we value information. When I
say the uppers, I mean the elite.
You listen. They get half lit. You
ask a question. They answer. You
say, 'Ooh, *tell me more*'.

NATALIA

I can handle Augie.

Natalia returns to her jewelry work station.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

And I'll give your offer all the
consideration it deserves.

HORACE NINE

I can access you a 3D printer for your work. Make life easier.

NATALIA

Will you serve my prison term if I'm caught with it?

Horace immediately heads for the door. Natalia follows. He opens the door, steps halfway out...

HORACE NINE

Trust me when I say this. Benedict Haven remembers your name.

Horace exits, Natalia shuts the door.

TUNNEL

Benedict and Heather walk a narrow, brick-faced tunnel. Lit enough to see where you're going, dark enough to be creepy.

BENEDICT

I had no idea you started out in streetball. I never played.

HEATHER STRIDE

It paid more than I get now playing for the junior squad.

BENEDICT

You'll make your money soon. I've heard big things about you. But...
I may not be around to see it.

Heather makes a curious face regarding the comment.

They come upon a CAST IRON DOOR with a small, barred window. A MAN on the other side peers at them, cautious.

CANKER

You two look lost.

HEATHER STRIDE

That you, Canker?

CANKER

(after a long look)
The prodigal bitch has returned!

The HEAVY door CREAKS open. CANKER(50s), teeth missing, strands of hair on his head, but jovial in spirit.

CANKER (CONT'D)
 You come for a visit, luv? Or you
 want the game?

HEATHER STRIDE
 Both. Room for two more?

CANKER
 That all depends, who this?

Canker seems to recognize Benedict but cant quite place him.

HEATHER STRIDE
 I can vouch for him.

CANKER
 All right then, on your word.

Canker lets them pass, pushes the cast iron door shut.

STREET BULL COURT

Benedict and Heather sit on bleachers packed with fans. They watch the Soho Stranglers verses Queens Borough Rangers.

The court is similar to a high school gymnasium. Six on six. The scoring for Streetbull is the same as Bullseye but the launch points are trampolines and glide boots are not used.

There's more running, more sweat, more blood. On a good night, a thousand people watch a game.

Fans cheer every violent hit. A Soho team member gets carried off the playing surface. This is when DYNAMO enters the game.

BENEDICT
 There he is. Looks alright.

Dynamo runs with the ball, knocks over two tacklers before lobbing an ALLEY-OOP pass to a teammate who uses a trampoline to elevate himself toward the bullseye for a TEN POINT SLAM!

A new ball's dropped from the ceiling. Soho has most of their players forward, leaving them vulnerable to a quick counter.

Queens Borough wins possession with only Dynamo defending a three-on-one break. Dynamo backpedals, tosses one blocker aside while the second blocker lunges at Dynamo's feet and tries to wrap up his legs-- but Dynamo avoids this move.

Dynamo jumps on the launch point at the same time as the ball carrier and in MID-AIR, elbows the carrier's face and knocks the ball loose.

Dynamo lands back on the trampoline and picks the ball up, launches in the air, tosses the ball long toward a teammate.

His teammate catches it and makes a quick score for Soho.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

His movement and reactions are back. He can still play for us.

HEATHEN

Maybe.

Benedict gives Heather a dismissive glance... he's convinced.

LOCKER ROOM

Drab cinder block walls. Doubles as a boiler room. Benedict and Heather Stride enter. The Soho Stranglers are celebrating a big victory over their local rivals.

One of the Stranglers recognizes former teammate Heather.

VINICIUS

Well look who it is! Miss Stride coming back to slum it up with us!

VINICIUS(28) greets Heather affectionately. Other teammates see her and join in, continue the celebration.

Benedict spots Dynamo across the room and walks toward him.

Dynamo sits on a chair as a TECHNICIAN fiddles with the back of his head. Benedict's not sure what's going on.

BENEDICT

Daryl, that was some performance!

Dynamo turns his head slowly, looks at Benedict, confused.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

Daryl? What's going on man?
(to technician)
What are you doing to him?

The technician slides some sort of BRAIN IMPLANT out of the back of Dynamo's head. The technician appears annoyed.

TECHNICIAN

Hey pal, this is delicate work, if you distract me or my patient he's going to have a synaptic failure.

The technician gently re-inserts the implant, re-boots it.

TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)
See, he's fine. Right buddy?

He slaps Dynamo's face. Dynamo looks at Benedict, smiles.

DYNAMO
Benedict. Benedict Haven. Greetings
my friend. Are you well?

BENEDICT
Daryl?

DYNAMO
I... I was not able to access my
cortex drive initially. But now I
can, and I recognize my friend. My
good friend, Benedict Haven.

TECHNICIAN
I'm getting all teary-eyed here--

Benedict violently lifts the technician up by his shirt.

BENEDICT
Undo what you did, motherfucker!

TECHNICIAN
I can't! What's done is done!

BENEDICT
You lobotomized him!

Benedict slams the technician onto a gurney and CHOKES him.

CHARLES MAIN (O.S.)
Mister Haven. Release him!

Benedict turns to see Soho Strangler OWNER Charles Main
standing in the room -- flanked by two HUGE bodyguards.

CHARLES MAIN (CONT'D)
The man whose throat you have your
fingers wrapped around cost me more
than the entire Strangler team.

Benedict releases him.

CHARLES MAIN (CONT'D)
You yourself may need a man with
his talents one day so you'd do
well to... view the situation with
an open mind... No pun intended.

BENEDICT

Undo it. Now.

CHARLES MAIN

That's not going to happen.

The technician returns his attention back to Dynamo.

CHARLES MAIN (CONT'D)

He came to me drooling and without control of his bowels. He has a life this way. Without the brain boost, he's an empty shell.

Benedict looks at Dynamo, in his gut he knows the truth.

BENEDICT

If Mister Worth knew this was going to happen he wouldn't have sold him off to you.

CHARLES MAIN

Your Mister Worth was well aware of what would happen to Dynamo, or Daryl, if you prefer. He was placed in my hands out of compassion. He'll play the game and he'll live.

A STRONG HAND grabs Benedict by the shoulder from behind.

DYNAMO

Benedict! It's me, Dynamo. How are you my old friend?

Benedict looks Dynamo in the eye, there's nothing there but a shadow of the man Daryl once was. Benedict fakes a smile for Dynamo and pats him on the shoulder.

Benedict spies Heather listening in from across the room. He walks toward her and motions that it's time to leave.

TUNNEL

Benedict and Heather head back, SILENT-- until Heather stops.

HEATHER STRIDE

You asked me a question earlier. I wouldn't have taken the kill. Not the way you did in that moment.

Benedict, a man who appreciates honesty... but STUBBORN.

BENEDICT

That's why you're still on the junior squad. Thanks for the tour.

Benedict keeps walking, Heather stands there, upset.

TOWER SEVEN - HALLWAY

A pretty, young WOMAN takes a deep breath and then knocks on an apartment door. Waits there nervously until someone peers through the PEEPHOLE - then she SMILES.

The door opens. Augie stands there, looking cocky.

AUGIE

You're late. Can't wait all night.

The woman says nothing, but her eyes look off to the side...

Where HORACE stands - he plants his foot in the doorway.

AUGIE (CONT'D)

Shit! What the hell?

The woman smirks a little, walks away.

AUGIE (CONT'D)

What do you want man, I've done nothing to you!

Horace stares at an unnerved Augie.

HORACE NINE

Listen to me, Augie doggie. You've got a nice little racket here but my hustle is far bigger. Natalia's rent is going to suddenly escalate.

Augie can tell Horace means business.

AUGIE

She's not going to be very happy.

HORACE NINE

Maybe so. But no one in this god-forsaken place ever is for long.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY**

Benedict Haven and his New City Mongrel teammates run through strategy drills as Butch Craven barks instructions at them.

BUTCH CRAVEN
Alright Mongrels, hit the showers!

LOCKER ROOM

Benedict changes out of his practice jersey. At the locker next to his, Carthage does the same.

BENEDICT
He was a blank slate, Carthy, empty eyes staring at some unseen thing off in the distance.

Carthage nods his head, he has seen that look before.

BENEDICT (CONT'D)
That ain't gonna fucking be me, telling you that right now.

CARTHAGE
Retirement? That isn't even a word any more. Don't delude yourself.

Carthage stares at Benedict hard, a hint of anger.

CARTHAGE (CONT'D)
And if your mind is elsewhere when we're on the field of play you put everyone on our team in danger.

Benedict DOES NOT LIKE the comment from Carthage, SLAMS his locker shut. Carthage isn't happy with Benedict's reaction. I'm not sure who'd win the fight but I'd pay to see it.

Just then, a package DELIVERY DRONE rolls up to Benedict. The drone scans Benedict's eyes, then releases a small PACKAGE.

CARTHAGE (CONT'D)
Another fucking sneaker, perhaps?

Carthage cracks a smile, Benedict laughs, defusing the anger.

Benedict takes the package, opens it up. It's a BLOOD QUILL, a way to sign documents in both the sender's and recipient's blood in order to genetically verify both parties.

The blood quill contains TWO VIALS, one already blood-filled.

BENEDICT

A blood quill-- from Mr. Worth.

CARTHAGE

You gotta be kidding me...

BENEDICT

He's following through on his promise, Carthy. I'm out.

CARTHAGE

You son of a bitch.

Carthage stares in disbelief-- then he BRO HUGS Benedict.

CARTHAGE (CONT'D)

You got the fuck out!

In the package along with the quill, a flashy PARTY INVITE.

BENEDICT

Looks like Mr. Worth has invited me to a party tonight to celebrate.
The Imperial Plaza.

CARTHAGE

Going out in style.

Both men stand somewhat in awe of the moment.

INT. CRUSHED VELVET - GRAND STAIRCASE

Early afternoon, quite a few patrons inside the club. Horace Nine talks to Natalia on the viewscreen in his SHADES.

HORACE NINE

You'll be fine, Natalia. We protect our girls. Your do's and do nots are in the package. Look for it.

The conversation ends. Charles Main sides up next to him.

CHARLES MAIN

She's rattled. Maybe not a good choice for her first gig.

HORACE NINE

She'll do well for us. Natalia's adaptable, thinks on her feet. Not a whore at all. She's... *real.*

Main nods his head, confident in Horace's assessment. They watch their male customers chat up the beautiful women.

CHARLES MAIN

No matter how well-crafted the duplicity... People always prefer the tangible. Even if it brings them physical and emotional pain. They want it. We give it to them.

They watch a gorgeous stripper lead a customer toward a private booth... but not before he pays a fat sum.

CHARLES MAIN (CONT'D)

Life's a *cruel* game, Horace.

HORACE NINE

Only if you're the one being played, Mr. Main.

Horace walks down the staircase leaving Main alone.

NATALIA'S APARTMENT

Natalia opens her door. A delivery droid drops a package. She brings it inside and quickly opens it.

A COSTUME. She holds it up. Mostly made of BLUE FEATHERS. She looks in the box, instructions included. A CAGE KEY as well.

She takes a deep breath, thinking.

EXT. IMPERIAL PLAZA - NIGHT

A shining tower reaching two thousand feet into the night.

INT. THE PENTHOUSE OF TITUS

Five floors of decadence. A future day bacchanalia.

Women performing sex acts on whoever asks. Girl-girl shows with large phalluses, nude nymphs swimming in a pool with an underground viewing area for the curious.

Women dressed in neon apparel offer cigars or narcotics.

Costumed waitresses offer drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Shrimp cocktails from Little Bo Peep, rack of lamb from a Cavewoman.

Live music plays, reminiscent of the synth-heavy 1980's...

FOURTH FLOOR OF TITUS PENTHOUSE

...And girls like Natalia who dance as exotic CAGED BIRDS.

Natalia dances in a cage wearing a sexy Blue Jay costume. Mostly OLDER MEN chat her up, tip her electronically.

Occasionally a man will reach through the bars to touch her leg or playfully grab her wrist-- but they can do no worse.

One man who can't get enough of her beautiful face and sexy figure is HAROLD(50s). He's besotted and drinking heavily.

HAROLD

It's a place like no where else.
Pristine. The bluest water, the
greenest greens. And the birds in
the trees... just like you.

Natalia smiles her warm and inviting smile. Harold tips her for the first time. Natalie looks at her WRIST METER. She GASPS at the amount of money she was just given.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I'll take you there. Away from all
this. You deserve a better world.
You can take the deepest breaths,
fill your lungs with pureness...

NATALIA

I wish it were true.

HAROLD

It's true. All of it. I've been
there. Have a small bungalow. I'd
share it with you. But they won't---

TITUS ANDREYEV (O.S.)

Harold, are you drunk again? Pawing
this young girl?

Natalia startles when she sees TITUS ANDREYEV(33), top advisor to the Council of Twelve and trillionaire tycoon.

He looks Russian, sounds British, has a Caesar cut. He's not physically imposing per se-- but looking him in the eye gives an impression of an uneasy darkness that's best avoided.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

What's your name, girl?

NATALIA

Natalia.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Pay him no mind, he pulls this
behavior with every new bird.
Making obscene promises bound to go
unkept. Now you go right on dancing
and chat up some other gents.

Titus leads Harold away by the arm. Natalia watches long
enough to see Titus wave a disapproving finger at Harold.

MAIN ENTRANCE

Benedict stands in a large double-door entrance, shows two
security guards his invitation. They recognize him and shake
hands as they let him into the party.

Benedict is NOT SHOCKED at the debauchery around him but...
He does a double-take when he see an ALLIGATOR swimming in a
pond built underneath a cascading five-story waterfall.

Party-goers toss scrap meat over a six-foot plexi-glass wall
that surrounds the pond. The alligator eats voraciously.

Benedict grabs a glass of champagne from a passing wine wench
and a stogie from a CIGAR GIRL.

The cigar girl runs her hand up and down Benedict's thigh.

CIGAR GIRL

I was told by a very good friend of
yours to keep a bullseye out for
you.

BENEDICT

Mister Worth. He told you to *keep*
an eye out for me. Where is he?

CIGAR GIRL

He'll be coming soon. But he wants
you to come now.

BENEDICT

Where? Wait, what?

CIGAR GIRL

He meant what he said. For me to
keep a *bullseye* out for you.

The cigar girl, already wearing an impossibly short skirt,
turns around and lifts her skirt up to reveal:

A BULLSEYE painted on her NAKED backside.

Benedict smiles, laughs a little bit.

CIGAR GIRL (CONT'D)
Well, Benedict, are you going to
fuck me?

BENEDICT
Right here? Up against the wall?

CIGAR GIRL
Bend me over that couch.

She points to a lovely, unoccupied velvet couch.

BENEDICT
Much more classy. Let's go.

Benedict downs his champagne, takes her away by the hand.

FOURTH FLOOR OF TITUS PENTHOUSE

Natalia enralls her admirers. Her tip meter is overflowing and because of this she is smiling and relaxed.

She gently removes an octogenarian's hand from her thigh. He smiles lasciviously like the old pervert that he is.

TITUS ANDREYEV
The more unavailable you are the
more desirable you become.

Titus has returned, is he an admirer too? Something more? Natalia is wary of him because-- most people are.

Titus looks at the Octogenarian with supreme distaste.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Run along you limp old codger.
Can't you see she's disgusted?

The Octogenarian stares at Titus unhappily.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Before I brain you.

He does as he's told. Natalia's unhappy, he was tipping well. Titus puts his face right up to the bars of the cage.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
What would it cost me to unlock
you, dear?

Natalia tries to maintain a calm smile.

NATALIA

As I've told the others, I'm not available for activities outside my birdcage.

TITUS ANDREYEV

But horny Harold wanted to whisk you away to... where was it again?

NATALIA

He was making up stories.

TITUS ANDREYEV

I find that there's a kernel of truth in almost every great lie.

NATALIA

Like you said, he was drunk and making promises-- not the first man this evening to make a proposal.

Titus looks for weakness, an eye blink, a stutter. He shows Natalia his money transfer device. He tips her. She watches her wrist meter advance, but not so generously.

She smiles at the tip but is clearly not blown away.

TITUS ANDREYEV

What if there were a bluest blue and a greenest green, Natalia?

He tips her again. She notices. A little better.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

That would be worth something to me. Harold, boring fart that he is, travels the world looking for raw materials. He's been everywhere there is to be. It's made him rich.

He tips her again. Natalie raises an eyebrow at the amount.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

But I am far richer. And I wish to know of this place he spoke of.

He tips her again, his LARGEST TIP by far. But still.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

And keeping a secret like this serves no one. I must know.

Natalia stares at Titus, and he at her. Her breath, shallow. He tips her again, almost as if the transfer causes him pain.

Natalie eyes her tip meter. She has to look at it twice. Her eyes widen, her hand shakes a little bit.

NATALIA

Clean white sand that one can roll
around in. Birds that sing to you.
Fish that swim in the sea. And
something called *Coconuts*.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Where. And how?

NATALIA

Somewhere in the Atlantic. A series
of islands. Some large and small.
He spoke of a way to keep the bad
air out and the ocean water fresh.
It's a place where the sun...

Titus hangs on Natalia's every word. He's enraptured.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

The sun shines every day.

(beat)

That's all I know.

Titus appears as if he just climaxed, he's sweaty, limp.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Thank you, sweet girl. You've been
an enormous help.

He stares deep into her eyes, it's quite unnerving to her.
Titus then walks away. Natalia checks her tip meter again,
she can't believe her windfall.

FOURTH FLOOR - ELSEWHERE

Benedict exits a bathroom, zips his fly up, soon followed by
a woman dressed as a medieval maiden. The maiden pinches his
ass as she walks away. Benedict walks in the other direction.

Benedict walks to a dance floor with a spinning GLITTER BALL.
On a nearby couch, Billy Sunday drinks and snorts and flirts
and laughs with several GANGSTER GOONS and their dates.

Benedict sees him, but Sunday doesn't see Benedict. He thinks
of confronting Billy for a moment-- but then just leaves.

He comes upon Natalia's birdcage, watches her with other men.

Natalia notices Benedict standing there. It's only now that
Benedict realizes who she is. He nods at her.

At first she's not sure what to say-- but waves him closer.

NATALIA
What are you doing here?

BENEDICT
Isn't it obvious? This is my
retirement party.

NATALIA
So you're horse meat?

Benedict gives her a quizzical look, then looks her over.

BENEDICT
And what would that make you?
You're in a cage and I'm free.

Natalia turns her back on him and dances for someone else.
Benedict, somewhat perturbed, moves on toward a staircase.

FIFTH FLOOR OF TITUS PENTHOUSE

Benedict arrives at the top of the staircase. There's less activity up here, as if it would be an invasion of privacy.

And it is. Titus sits at a bar area with a balcony that overlooks the entire five floor penthouse. A select few friends sit with him. He spots Benedict heading his way.

TITUS ANDREYEV
Who let that goon up here? Where's Jeffrey, on a piss break again? And where the fuck is Philip? I've been calling for him the last hour!

One of Titus' associates stands up with a purpose.

FRIEND
I'll ask him to leave.

TITUS ANDREYEV
You don't ask, you tell.

The friend meets Benedict halfway there.

FRIEND
I'm sorry, this area is private.

Benedict brushes past him until he arrives where Titus sits. Titus takes this as an affront to him but smiles anyway.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Benedict Haven. Most dangerous man!
Are you enjoying my little soirée?

BENEDICT

Yes, thank you. I've been to my
share of parties but this one--

TITUS ANDREYEV

Takes the proverbial cake!
(to his friends, excited)
Did you see the Shanghai game? What
a delightful killer we have in our
presence! Neck-snapper supreme!

His friends all laugh with and glad-hand Titus.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

What can I do for you, killer of
men, women and children? Well, only
women lately.

Benedict, of course, must endure this teasing with a smile.

BENEDICT

I've been looking for Mr. Worth all
evening and someone informed me he
might be up here with you.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Ah. Good old Uncle Alec. Was quite
a man. I was going to say goodbye
tonight but why spoil a party?

A look of concern shows in Benedict's face.

BENEDICT

What do you mean, 'was'?

TITUS ANDREYEV

Okay, is. But he'll be dead by
morning. Heart attack. His fourth.
That and lung disease a bad combo,
eh? Nothing more can be done.

BENEDICT

(annoyed)
Where is he?

TITUS ANDREYEV

I don't like your tone. And he's in
a fucking hospital. Greenwich.

Benedict abruptly leaves Titus without a word.

FRIEND
He doesn't know, does he?

TITUS ANDREYEV
Not. A bloody. Clue.

PHILIP(30's) enters the bar area. He's an assistant to Titus.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Fucking Philip, finally.

PHILIP
Sorry.

TITUS ANDREYEV
The girl in the cage.

PHILIP
Which one?

TITUS ANDREYEV
The cunt Blue Jay. She knows about
the blue and the green.

PHILIP
What shall I do?

TITUS ANDREYEV
Find the key to unlock her and
bring her here.

Philip nods his head, leaves the room.

FOURTH FLOOR OF TITUS PENTHOUSE

Benedict rapidly descends the staircase from the fifth floor, he blows past Natalia's birdcage, but then turns back to her.

BENEDICT
Hey, what did you mean by that
'horse meat' crack?

NATALIA
It was a joke.

BENEDICT
I get that it was joke but it went
over my head.

Natalia squats down on her knees to get closer to Benedict. He looks impatient, like he really needs to leave but also wants to end things on an up-note with Natalia.

NATALIA

When I was little my mother used to watch the horse races on TV. These animals were so exotic and it was a rare glimpse into the world of the Uppers. It was her way of making life in the cluster just a little less drab, for us to pick a horse and root for it to win.

Benedict nods like a man who understands the notion.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

Well, there was this horse named Hadrian. It didn't come from strong bloodlines. My mother and I rooted for Hadrian every time out. And he won every race he ran for two years straight. Until he started losing. And losing. Until it was said that Hadrian had been retired. A word I was unfamiliar with. I asked my mom. She never protected me from the harsh truth of this world. So she showed me a video of the owner sitting at a dining table with a bunch of Uppers. He looks into the camera and says 'There's always one more purpose waiting to be served', just as a waiter brings him a plate with a well-done steak from the flank of a slaughtered Hadrian.

Benedict looks at Natalia, eyes wide open.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

Since then, any time I hear the word 'retire' I think of horsemeat. I didn't mean to upset you.

Natalia resumes dancing. Benedict stares at her, then leaves. Just as he does, Philip approaches Natalia with a KEY.

FIRST FLOOR OF TITUS PENTHOUSE

Benedict makes his way toward the main entrance, but he keeps getting stopped by partiers who want a picture or handshake.

Finally, as he approaches the main entrance where the glistening waterfall cascades into the alligator pond...

He hears a high-pitched FEMALE SCREAM--

Benedict looks up to see a BLUE-FEATHERED BIRD desperately flapping its wings as it PLUNGES down the waterfall.

It SPLASHES HARD into the alligator pond.

The blue-feathered bird is stunned from the fall, tries to stay afloat but... SHE can't swim.

The alligator moves toward the 'bird' to investigate.

Party revelers watch, some in horror, but some CHEER the alligator as if they want to see it feast on her.

Benedict runs up to the plexi-glass edge of the pond, it's only then that he realizes it's Natalia in the water.

And she's about to be ATTACKED.

Benedict JUMPS up and grabs the top part of the glass wall with his fingers and lifts himself up, throws a leg over.

Benedict flops into the pond and swims for Natalia. The alligator swims near her as she frantically splashes about.

Benedict picks up a rock from a small ledge and BASHES the alligator's nose, the gator bobs away defensively.

Benedict throws Natalia over his shoulder and then climbs onto a small ledge, the gator returns, its jaws gaping wide.

The wall on the backside of the pond is shorter, Benedict's able to scale over while balancing Natalia on his shoulder.

Benedict and Natalia land in a soft bed of flowers. Some of the party-goers CHEER Benedict's heroism, some BOO him.

Lying in the flower bed, Benedict looks straight up the waterfall. DOZENS of party guests look down at him from the balconies of each floor.

On the top floor, Benedict sees Titus and his circle of friends staring down. If it's possible to make eye contact five floors away-- they do.

BENEDICT

We should leave.

Benedict lifts up a still shaken and half-naked Natalia (missing many of her feathers) and leads her away.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. DRIVERLESS TAXI - PARKED - NIGHT**

Benedict and Natalia sit in the backseat. Outside the taxi, Greenwich Hospital. Natalia wears Benedict's sport coat.

BENEDICT

You'll make it home okay?

NATALIA

Yes. I can tell Mister Worth means a lot to you. Better say goodbye before it's too late. So go.

Benedict nods his head.

BENEDICT

You don't remember anything?

NATALIA

I smelled a strange odor, and then I guess I passed out. Then I woke up with that... beast.

BENEDICT

It's called an alligator. I heard they breathe fire.

NATALIA

I don't think that's true.

BENEDICT

Lucky for you.

NATALIA

Yeah. Lucky. Thanks for saving my life, Benedict.

BENEDICT

You're welcome...

Benedict looks at her, so vulnerable, still wet, pretty as ever. And he thinks to himself... what the hell is her name?

Natalia snickers. She knows he doesn't remember. But then--

BENEDICT (CONT'D)

...Natalia.

Benedict exits the taxi, watches her as it drives away.

INT. GREENWICH HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM

Alec Worth lies in bed, pale, weak voice, shallow breath.

ALEC WORTH
My third set of lungs. Second heart
and liver. My body just said 'no
more'. But it was fun. Sorry I
missed the party, Ben.

Benedict sits next to him, solemn.

ALEC WORTH (CONT'D)
Did you bring the quill?

BENEDICT
Yes.

ALEC WORTH
The papers are on the desk. We sign
in blood and we sign digitally. No
one can question it.

Benedict scoots to the table. He pricks his thumb with the quill, the vial fills up. Then he signs the set of papers in his own blood signature, papers already signed by Worth.

ALEC WORTH (CONT'D)
You are a free man, Benny. And the
game will miss you.

BENEDICT
I don't know what to say.

Alec Worth motions for Benedict to lean his ear closer.

ALEC WORTH
Did you fuck that young lady with
the bullseye on her ass?

BENEDICT
Yes.

ALEC WORTH
Then say thank you, you ungrateful
prick.

Benedict smiles big and broad, Alec laughs, then lapses into a COUGHING FIT. Benedict tries to comfort him.

ALEC WORTH (CONT'D)
There'll never be another Benedict
Haven. Those bastards will have to
get over it. You be a good boy...

HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Benedict exits Worth's hospital room. He's emotionally spent. Imagine his surprise to see Titus Andreyev standing there.

TITUS ANDREYEV

I came to say my final goodbye to Uncle Alec.

BENEDICT

What the hell happened to Natalia?

TITUS ANDREYEV

Was that her name? I hope she's okay. Terrible incident.

BENEDICT

Tell me more.

TITUS ANDREYEV

We arrested a man who had bothered her all evening. Tried to stick his fingers in her gash. Somehow he got ahold of her cage key from my staff. We'll tighten security to make sure it doesn't happen again.

BENEDICT

She's lucky she wasn't killed.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Indeed... look, Benedict, I feel we got off on the wrong foot. I was a tad pugnacious with you, acting brash in front of my friends. I respect you quite a bit. And well, I feel I have a lot to offer you in your post-retirement world.

Benedict's eyebrows arch up, surprised that Titus knows.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

Oh yes, Uncle Alec told me all about it. Quite bold of him. And I'm fully on board with the idea. You'd be wonderful in the community outreach area, the clusterfucks all look up to you -- or should I say, the people, the downtrodden among us, they admire you, they would listen to what you have to say. And I want to give you that voice.

Benedict looks at Titus, wonders if he should trust him.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
 Come on, your people need you. The Council needs someone of your stature to deliver their message. It would be mutually beneficial.

BENEDICT
 Mr. Andreyev, *I would* like the chance to discuss this with you. Living conditions in the Cluster need improving, the food, the wages, more in and out priviledg--

TITUS ANDREYEV
 I love it! You already sound like a politician! You are the man for the job. And there is no time like the present. I know it's late, but can you meet me back at the Imperial in about two hours? I need alone time with my dearest uncle.

BENEDICT
 Of course. I'll meet you there.

TITUS ANDREYEV
 Brilliant! Oh... and Benedict, please... call me Titus.

Benedict nods and then leaves. Titus enters the room.

PRIVATE ROOM

Titus sits in the same chair Benedict did earlier.

ALEC WORTH
 Your father and I, we did have some adventures. I never cared for the hunts all that much. Never could shoot the animals.

TITUS ANDREYEV
 Father would poke such fun at you. Sentimental Alec he called you.

ALEC WORTH
 I suppose I was. Your father shot anything that moved. The elephant babies too. Its mother's cries so disturbed me. We had no idea it would all be gone so soon.

Whatever smile Titus had is now gone.

TITUS ANDREYEV
 And you're still a sentimental old
 fool. Not made for this world.

Worth views Titus with a jaundiced eye.

ALEC WORTH
 What happened to you, Andrew? You
 were such a good boy, once.

TITUS ANDREYEV
 My name is Titus. Not Andrew.

ALEC WORTH
 No. You are Andrew. I know he's in
 there somewhere.

Worth coughs violently again, worse than ever. Titus stands
 up, doesn't know what to do. Worth feebly reaches for a glass
 of water on the night stand but he can't reach it.

Titus watches him, Worth looks pathetic. Titus puts his hand
 on Worth's pale cheek, caresses him -- then in an instant---

CHOKES HIM with one hand. Titus' grip is incredibly powerful,
 almost as if it were artificially enhanced.

Worth turns PURPLE, gasps for a breath that doesn't come.
 Titus releases him, Worth slumps over, DEAD.

TITUS ANDREYEV
 No, he's not here at all.

Titus picks up the contract papers that Benedict signed as
 well as the blood quill. Then he closes Worth's eyes shut.

CRUSHED VELVET - MAIN'S OFFICE

Charles Main sits. Horace Nine stands. Natalia FUMES.

NATALIA
 You're goddamn right it won't
 happen again! I'm done with this!

HORACE NINE
 I will investigate this matter, no
 one should have had access to your
 cage key. I promise you I will find
 out how this happened.

CHARLES MAIN
 Natalia, please accept my apology--

NATALIA

And do you think I don't know that it was you who made Augie raise my rent by a thousand credits? Huh??

CHARLES MAIN

And your wrist meter tells me you made TWENTY times that amount to--

NATALIA

What good does that do me, dead?

HORACE NINE

I will punish the offender--

NATALIA

What if it was Titus himself?

CHARLES MAIN

That would be... complicated. But there's a thing I must know. Did you follow your directives?

NATALIA

Yes.

CHARLES MAIN

And did you obtain the type of information that interests us?

NATALIA

I don't know. Most of the men just wanted to fuck me.

HORACE NINE

Did you hear any political dirt, chatter about stock prices, any hushed or loose talk that--

NATALIA

I might have... heard something...

Both Main and Horace wait in anticipation.

NATALIA (CONT'D)

This one man, Harold was his name. Filthy rich. He spoke of an island-- one that couldn't possibly exist.

Main and Horace look at each other, then back at Natalia.

CHARLES MAIN

Tell us more.

INT. TITUS PENTHOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

A hesitant Benedict's about to ring the door bell when...
The double doors open suddenly, a WOMAN exits the apartment.

This is GEMMA(25). For now, she's a woman in over her head.

She's beautiful, dressed sexy... but bleeding from her nose.
A fresh welt on her cheekbone swells purple.

A VOICE from inside the penthouse screams maniacally.

TITUS ANDREYEV (O.S.)
You shallow grave of vacuity!

The woman looks at Benedict but bears him no mind.

BENEDICT
Miss, are you okay?

Her nose is bent, broken, gushing blood.

GEMMA
It's fine. I'll get it fixed.

She walks to the elevator. Titus pokes his head out the door.

TITUS ANDREYEV
Benedict, there you are ol' chap.
Come in, come in, much to discuss.

Benedict shakes off that bad scene and steps inside.

TITUS PENTHOUSE - LIBRARY

A warm fire roars. High ceiling. Walls full of books. A
golden retriever puppy sleeps on an Oriental rug. The room
has a rustic and old-fashioned charm. And shadows.

Titus enters, followed by Benedict, drinks in hand. Titus
sits on a leather couch, motions for Benedict to sit on a
slick-looking recliner with a built-in footrest.

TITUS ANDREYEV
My favorite room. You comfy?

Benedict leans back in the recliner, uses the footrest.

BENEDICT
Now, yes.

TITUS ANDREYEV

This was the very room in which Uncle Alec read to me as a boy. I bought the place from him few years back when he down-sized. My father was not inclined to do that sort of thing... you know, take an interest in his son. But Uncle Alec, he did.

BENEDICT

He helped me-- more than I can say.

TITUS ANDREYEV

I'm sorry to have to tell you this but he passed soon after you left.

Benedict's fond expression changes to sadness. Titus seems to have a contemplative moment. Benedict joins him.

In a dark corner of the room, something large MOVES. At first Benedict does not notice, but the floor CREEKS and his eyes are drawn toward a BEHEMOTH of a MAN lumbering toward them.

BENEDICT

What the fuck is that?

Benedict rises from his recliner, alarmed by his movement.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Calm down now, don't excite him. This is my man-servant, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY is a broad-shouldered, seven-foot tall hulk. Think the Bond villain JAWS without the scintillating personality.

BENEDICT

Jeffrey?

TITUS ANDREYEV

Yes. A gentle giant. And other times, *not so much*. I once had the thrill of watching him fuck a man to death. An old business partner of mine refused to sell me his shares at an inequitable rate. Poor bloke bled to death internally. *But in the end...* I got my price.

Benedict appears a bit unnerved by Jeffrey's presence.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

Have you ever had a Chateau Lafite? I'd like you to try it. Follow me.

Titus leads Benedict past the fireplace --Benedict glances at the Golden Retriever puppy lying on the rug. The puppy has been preserved by a taxidermist.

An uneasiness hits Benedict but he follows Titus regardless.

Titus walks up to a bookshelf built into the wall. He passes through the bookshelf like a ghost -- Benedict startles.

Then a hand passes back through the bookshelf beckoning him forward. It becomes apparent the bookshelf is a HOLOGRAM.

Benedict passes through the bookshelf, followed by Jeffrey.

WHITE ROOM

Shiny white floor, walls and ceiling. A single bottle of Chateau Lafite and two glasses sit on white table.

Benedict watches Titus use a corkscrew to open the bottle of wine, pours two glasses.

Titus swills it, sniffs it, then drinks.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Please, drink up. Enjoy. Cost me a bloody fortune.

Benedict drinks the wine, appears to savor it.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

We have much to discuss about your future. I was thinking of loosening the rules of bullseye to allow for more killing. What do you think of that prospect?

BENEDICT

I don't think that's a good idea.

TITUS ANDREYEV

But I do and I'd like your honest opinion. It certainly affects you.

BENEDICT

Actually, it doesn't. As of now, I'm officially retired.

Titus laughs obnoxiously. And then laughs a second time.

TITUS ANDREYEV

Retired? What makes you think that?

BENEDICT

I signed the papers this evening with a blood quill. Do you not remember our earlier conversation?

TITUS ANDREYEV

Tell me, Benedict, did you even read the papers you signed?

Benedict looks at him, swallows, he knows he didn't.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

You did not sign retirement papers because such a document does not exist. What you did do... is newly indenture yourself to me for the rest of your life. It was my blood in that quill, not my dear uncle's. He was rather easily misled in his final days. You see, I am the new owner of the New City Mongrels...

Benedict eyebrows arch, his nostrils flare.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

And I'll be damned if I let the best fucking bullseye player on the planet walk away.

BENEDICT

I told Mister Worth I was done. You can't make me play the game!

TITUS ANDREYEV

I was hoping you'd say that.

Titus motions to Jeffrey. Jeffrey grabs Benedict where the arms meets the shoulders, lifting him in the air with ease.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

I call this room the 'mind fucker'.

Benedict tries to shake himself loose from Jeffrey's grip but he can't, Jeffrey's strength is monstrous.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

It uses technology developed by one of my companies. One of a kind.

Jeffrey tosses Benedict to the middle of the room. Benedict crashes to the floor, he quickly rises in defensive posture.

At this moment, A BUBBLE forms around Benedict's body. It looks very similar to a soap bubble, but it can't be popped.

Benedict tries to paw at the surface of the bubble but it has no effect, the bubble is both there and not there.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Let's see what frightens you.

Benedict's arms and legs suddenly flail about as if he were free-falling, Benedict SCREAMS in terror. Inside the bubble, it appears as if Benedict has fallen off a tall building.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Impressive, no? I can have you hit pavement if you like?

Then the images stop and it's just Benedict in the bubble.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
Or how about burning to death?

Benedict SCREAMS horrifically as his body is consumed by flames. He's in ANGUISH.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
And this is just the starter menu.

Benedict stops screaming as the flames disperse.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
This isn't some VR trick passed through your optic nerves, no, in the bubble we tap into your brain using the same pain and sensory receptors your mind uses every day. It's fucking real. Or so you think.

Benedict's wide-eyed, hyperventilating, sweating profusely.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)
So when you said that I can't make you play, I assure that I can. Fire and falling are nothing. I'll have you experience thoughts so vile, acts so debased, the guilt and shame of it will never leave you.

BENEDICT
Fuck... you.

TITUS ANDREYEV
As you wish. Time to meet Vlad.

In the bubble, Benedict stands in a grassy meadow. He hears cries of pain coming from VOICES all around him.

He looks to one side, sees a woman IMPALED on a stake. She's still alive but barely, looks as if she'd prefer death.

Two ARMORED SOLDIERS hold Benedict in place. Another man behind Benedict holds a long GREASED wooden stake.

Benedict wants to speak or fight back but can't. The man behind Benedict SHOVES the stake up his ass.

Benedict wails in absolute inhuman AGONY.

The soldiers hoist his body up, the stake slowly slithers up Benedict's backside, avoiding all the major organs.

Benedict experiences something beyond mere pain, almost as if his soul is being split apart along with his body.

Benedict cries out one final time as the stake pokes through his skin just under his right collar bone.

He's been impaled in a field along with dozens of others in a scene right out of the life of Vlad the Impaler.

Outside the bubble - Titus wears a horseshoe-shaped RECEPTOR on his head, allowing him to participate in the experience.

Inside the bubble - Titus approaches Benedict. He's dressed exactly the way Vlad the Impaler would be dressed.

A red silk robe lined with fur, black boots, ceremonial cap.

Titus stands right underneath where Benedict is impaled. Blood oozes from Benedict's mouth. Titus looks up at him.

TITUS ANDREYEV (CONT'D)

No dear Benedict, you will play the game for me til every sinew in your body snaps... and the very marrow in your bones runs dry. And if you refuse me, there is no limit to the fresh hell I'll have you imagine.

Titus stares at Benedict with madness in his eyes.

Benedict cries out in fear and unimaginable torment as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE