

RAY GUNN

Screenplay by

BRAD BIRD
and
MATTHEW ROBBINS

Story by

BRAD BIRD

5th Draft

June 28, 1996

BEFORE YOU READ...

The only important character not adequately represented in the script of RAY GUNN is the sprawling, magnificent city of METROPIA, where almost all of the film takes place.

I wanted to do a detective story set in the future, but I wanted that future to be seen from the same time period during which the detective story was at its peak --the thirties, generally speaking-- before World War II and the atomic bomb made the world a smaller place, and the future less than rosy.

This is an ART DECO future where everything is streamlined within an inch of its life, where cities are gargantuan jewels that stretch into the heavens, where flying cars stream through the sky, where creatures from other planets have joined the melting pot, and holograms are only in black and white.

At the same time I wanted to combine two disparate worlds from the same period: the squeaky clean look of BUCK ROGERS and the contemporary, gritty, been-around characters from pulp novels.

Picture that look, that world, with all it's marvels and visual splendor, when you read this script.

Thanks.

Brad Bird

RAY GUNN

BLACK. THEN -

- LIPS

...luscious, wet, pouting lips. In glorious BLACK AND WHITE. The lips part seductively...

LIPS

Welcome.

WIDEN to reveal the shimmering, holographic face of VENUS ENVY, entertainer, pop star extraordinaire, actress, media sensation.

ROOFTOP - DAY

This is a huge, 3-D commercial. Venus' sultry black and white image gazes out over the Technicolor splendor of greater METROPIA, a sprawling, OZ-like city of tomorrow. Morning sunlight plays on streamlined bridges and multi-level streets. A soaring art deco TOWER, five hundred stories tall, dominates the skyline.

VENUS

Welcome... to the future.

STREET CORNER

It's a stuffy, airless morning. FLYING YELLOW TAXIS zip to and fro. Pedestrians, many distinctly NON-HUMAN, ride moving walkways.

At a magazine stand, the news vendor mops his brow and stares dully at another big hologram of Venus, this one floating over a busy intersection.

VENUS

Welcome...Welcome to th -

PROPELLORAIL

A sleek, propeller-driven commuter train pulls into the station. The doors SWISH open, belching out thousands of sweating passengers on their way to work. CAMERA moves with them, isolating on the bleary, pre-caffeinated face of -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EYERA (Ira) KADOK, a slightly burnt out half-alien, half-machine. Eyera is a living camera with one eye in the center of his head, and three extendable tripod legs. He totters past another Venus hologram which stares down from an overhead walkway.

VENUS

-come. Welcome... to the future.

INT. BINFORD BUILDING - ENTRANCE TO LOBBY

More crowds. Eyera is stopped abruptly by a burly young GUARD.

GUARD

(with animosity)

Can I help you?

EYERA

Geez, I hope not.

GUARD

Alright Skank, where's your I.D.?

With fire in her eyes, PHOEBE TASK arrives. Very much a human and very pretty, too.

PHOEBE

(to Guard)

You new to the building, sonny?

GUARD

Yes, ma'am.

PHOEBE

(re: Eyera)

Well he's not, okay? His name is Eyera Kadok, he's with Gunn investigations, 227th floor. Don't forget it.

She pushes Eyera onto a crowded jet elevator, where a COUNTDOWN is underway.

EYERA

Thanks, Phoebe.

PHOEBE

Yeah, well... I apologize for my species.

As they strap into the last remaining spaces against the wall, a dozen matching Venus holo-ads float in the lobby like huge balloons. Venus is singing now, and dancing, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

"Welcome To The Future." One night only.
The concert of the century. Venus Envy
live at the Metrodeon!

Phoebe grimaces. Mercifully, the doors close.

CAMERA stays outside: there is a muffled EXPLOSION and a cloud of steam billows forth. CAMERA SHAKES violently.

UPPER FLOOR CORRIDOR

The overhead indicator lights up: **227**. DING! The doors open, revealing the same passengers - now disheveled by the jarring journey - straightening themselves blandly. Phoebe and Eyera exit and head down the corridor.

OFFICE DOOR

The lettering on the glass panel reads: **RAYMOND GUNN: Private Investigator**. Phoebe notices an odd-looking potted plant with a ribbon around it at the foot of the door. She picks it up.

PHOEBE

Look, he got another one. Sure is ugly.

EYERA

Not where I come from.

As Phoebe slips her key into the lock... Clunk. The door jams up against something. Phoebe and Eyera exchange a look and push with all their might. The door opens.

INT. RAYMOND GUNN'S OFFICES - PHOEBE'S ROOM

Phoebe steps inside, trips over a footlocker and falls onto a rollaway bed. There's wardrobe bags, hastily filled boxes, cheap luggage everywhere. Plus various hats, a trenchcoat, and a blender.

Phoebe sits up in a tangle of sheets. No one's in sight. Eyera squares himself to take her photo, his eye the lens. CLICK!

EYERA

"The Morning after the Night Before."
Like it.

Furious, Phoebe hops off the bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHOEBE
(yelling)

Ray? Where are you?

She yanks open a door. The bathroom. Full of hanging shirts and shaving stuff.

RAY
(off)

In here!

INNER OFFICE

Tall windows, battered desk, file cabinets. In the middle of the room, the Venus holo-ad, still doing its thing.

RAYMOND GUNN is flat on his back, working on a large, extremely powerful air conditioner. He wipes the sweat off his face and points his screwdriver at the Venus commercial.

RAY
Can you believe this?? Three times this morning. It's an invasion of privacy!

PHOEBE
(indicating boxes, etc.)
What is all this, Ray?

RAY
It's my apartment, Phoebe.

PHOEBE
What's it doing in our office?

RAY
The situation is temporary.
(reluctantly)
I bounced another rent check.

PHOEBE
(sudden realization)
You--? What about my salary?

RAY
No problem. Just wait until Friday, okay?
(Eyerla hands Ray the plant)
Oh for- another plant? Who in God's name-

Eyerla grins, picks up the note tag pinned to it's side--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EYERA

(reads note)

"To Ray - with kissy."

Ray drops the plant, pot and all, into the wastebasket.

PHOEBE

You expect us to conduct business like this? You've got Arnold Dom in ten minutes. What's he supposed to think?

RAY

The situation... is temporary.

VENUS

(hologram)

Welcome to the future...

The Venus holo-ad goes into its dance routine. Ray pounds the air conditioner.

RAY

Would you PLEASE shut her up?? Call someone!

PHOEBE

Who am I supposed to call?

RAY

I don't know. Her!

(gestures at hologram)

Venus Envy!

PHOEBE

(yeah, right)

You want me to call Venus Envy.

RAY

Or her people. Ca'mon, Pheeb. Show some initiative!

Phoebe EXITS, shaking her head. Eyera follows and shuts the door.

RAY

You gotta nip these things in the bud -

With a sudden WHIRR, the air conditioner comes back to life. Startled, Ray sits up, enjoying the breeze.

Thirty-seven years old, with boyish features that have been unsweetened by an unruly life, Gunn's under pressure - professional and personal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The cooler CLUNKS to a stop. Ray can't believe it. He WHOPS it on the side.

A BLAST of sub-zero air suddenly snaps Ray's head back, encasing it in ICE. He staggers around the room, unsure of what to do, trying not to panic.

RECEPTION OFFICE

Ray enters, grabs the phone from Phoebe and hangs it up. Phoebe sees Ray... and starts to LAUGH.

PHOEBE

What happened to y--

Ray grabs a pen from her desk and scribbles out a note:

"Can't breathe. Help."

Phoebe picks up her letter opener and starts to jab Ray's head, only managing to chip off a few flakes of ice. Ray's legs get rubbery.

PHOEBE

Hold still, hold still.

Holding some 8x10s, Eyera emerges from the bathroom and starts to laugh. He moves in for a few close-ups of Ray's distorted face.

PHOEBE

This is not the time, Eyera!

EYERA

(still snapping)

You'll thank me later.

PHOEBE

EYERA!!

Eyera snatches the letter opener from Phoebe, approaches to start chipping, then hesitates -

EYERA

(to Ray)

Now, about that raise -

Phoebe and Eyera share a LAUGH. Ray SMACKS the ground with his palm, stopping them. Eyera pokes at the ice with the opener with little effect. Phoebe picks up something heavier: her photophone.

Ray's eyes GO WIDE with fear as Phoebe rears back... and WHACKS him, knocking him flat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But the ice stays intact. Ray, now turning blue, frantically gestures for them to try again. Eyera grabs a chair. WHAM!! The ICE finally shatters. Ray GASPS, sucking air into his starving lungs... and looks up into the startled face of his client:

ARNOLD DOM, 31, handsome in a thick sort of way, his capped teeth set on "auto-grin".

DOM

Did I come at a bad time, Mr. Gunn?

Ray looks up, his face still wet and bluish from the ice, and smiles sheepishly.

RAY

Not at all, Mr. Dom. My associates and I are just about done with this. Thanks, Eyera, Phoebe.

PHOEBE

Any time. And we mean that, Boss.

Eyera represses a snicker. Ray shoots them a look and ushers Dom past the bed and household bric-a-brac.

DOM

What's with all the furniture?

RAY

Uh. Murder re-enactment. Death by refridgeration... uh, right in some guy's bedroom. Complicated, complicated case.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE

Ray closes his door behind him. The HOLO-AD is gone.

DOM

Nice and cool in here.

RAY

Isn't it? Take a seat, Mr. Dom.

DOM

Call me Arnold. So: not too many private dicks anymore.

RAY

(smiles)

Last of the breed, still standing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOM

These days everything's electro-this and hydro-that. If I want to find something out, I don't want to go to a machine. I want a *human*.

HOLO-AD ANNOUNCER

(interrupting)

When it's hot, there's nothing cooler than the COOLAIRE 98!!

Ray scowls. The holo-ad CONTINUES under the following:

RAY

Sorry. I don't know where these things are coming from.

DOM

These? They're from Megamedia studios. Brand new. They're called Holo-ads.

RAY

You in the entertainment business?

DOM

Almost. My wife is Venus Envy.

The commercial ends. In the ensuing silence...

RAY

The Venus Envy?

DOM

How many are there?

(pause, becoming emotional)

One. Only one. And I'm losing her-

Dom begins to WEEP. Ray pours a shot of bourbon in a glass, gently pushes it toward him. Dom DRINKS, regaining composure.

DOM

Tell me, Mr. Gunn. How do you feel about ... aliens?

EYERA

(voice over)

Venus Envy is an alien???

INT. RAY'S HOVERCAR - NIGHT

With Eyera at his side, Ray pilots his GYRON through the glowing, concrete canyons of Metropia.

RAY

No, no. She's involved with one.

EYERA

I don't believe it. But I like her better already.

They stop at a high altitude red light. The city sparkles below.

RAY

Dom found this in her dressing room.

Ray hands a note to Eyera. In a neat, feminine hand:

"Xavier Hotel. 11:30 PM. Room 201."

EYERA

The Xavier? Slugsy's hotel? In the alien maze?!

(realizing)

Boy, oh boy. The press would eat this up with a spoon.

Suddenly, the engine dies. The car drops like a stone. Ray quickly BANGS on the dash. He's done it a thousand times. The hovercar COUGHS and catches, rising obediently to take its place back at the light.

EYERA

Uh, Ray...?

RAY

Oh, for God's sake, Eyera. What happened to the film I just gave you??

EYERA

(defensive)

I don't plan it! The light's good, the angle's right... something in me just... snaps. I gotta be me, Ray.

Ray grumpily flips him a roll of film.

RAY

Be someone else until we get there.

EXT. METROPIA - THE ALIEN MAZE

Ray's hovercar slows down as the air lanes become narrow and twisted. The buildings in the maze are old, asymmetrical, oddly organic, the streets layered and criss crossed at odd angles. A city within a city... and a whole separate world.

EXT. XAVIER HOTEL - NIGHT

The best hotel in the heart of the alien quarter. Weird creatures come and go in all kinds of suits and vehicles.

Ray and Eyera pull up across the street. Over the front door, a banner reads: WELCOME XENISH DENTAL ASSOCIATION in three languages. Eyera watches the conventioners unload from hovercabs.

EYERA

Ray, look...! Vanzine Kaluta.

RAY

She's working for Slugsy now??

Greeting hotel guests at the top of the stairs, is the massive form of VANZINE KALUTA, a reptilian Leona Helmsley on steroids. Somewhere in the galaxy, Vanzine - dressed as she is in an expensive gown - might be considered attractive. Somewhere else.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

Among bizarre, bright pink potted palms, more exotic aliens in a symphony of unintelligible chatter. Atonal, multi-rythmic music floats from a combo in the cocktail lounge.

A sign on the registration desk reads: **ALIENS ONLY.**

Eyera - looking TALLER - crosses the lobby. He's wearing a trenchcoat that comes down to his ankles. CAMERA LOOKS DOWN: Instead of Eyera's normal tripod legs, RAY'S SHOES.

Eyera pulls a party hat off a passed-out alien conventioner and walks/waddles to the stairs, stubbing his toes on them.

EYERA

(mutters into coat)

Stairs... stairs -

Ray's feet awkwardly adjust. Eyera ascends the stairs, nodding at two hotel dicks - TINY and FAZELI. They grudgingly nod back.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY

Affecting the pose of an inebriated alien hotel guest, Eyera/Ray stagger unsteadily in front of a door fumbling for the key. A rowdy group of carousing aliens in party hats wave to Eyera as they pass by.

As soon as they disappear around the corner, Eyera/Ray drop the drunk act and quickly move to room 201. Eyera seems to suddenly ELONGATE as Ray lifts him up to the transom.

EYERA'S P.O.V. (THROUGH TRANSOM)

A corner of the bed is visible, as is an arm chair, in which something resembling a large CATERPILLAR is seated. He wears sunglasses and a smoking jacket. No sign of Venus.

RESUME RAY AND EYERA

Eyera shakes his head.

EYERA

Wrong room.

RAY

That's imposs - !

The sound of FOOTSTEPS. Eyera quickly drops to his seated position astride Ray's shoulders as they resume the fumbling drunk pose in front of the other door. Eyera glances out of the corner of his eye. Coming right at them, in semi-silhouette, undulating sexily and trailing a mink... VENUS ENVY, in the flesh! Closer and closer.

She stops in front of Room 201. Puts in the key and enters.

IN ROOM 201

A small, round MIRROR quietly pushes in near the ceiling. Slowly turning his hand, Eyera scans the room below, coming to rest on a second arm chair, in which Venus is sitting, wrapped in a complex embrace with the caterpillar! They kiss!

Click! Eyera's eye/lens snaps the shot. He's just visible on the other side of the transom.

EYERA

Held aloft, swaying slightly, he fires off a few more shots. Then he abruptly JOSTLES.

EYERA

(annoyed whisper)

Hold still-!! ...Ray?

He looks down. The hotel dicks, Tiny and Fazeli, glare up at him.

INSIDE THE COAT - WITH RAY

Still holding Eyera, but through the coat he's nearly face to face with FAZELI and TINY!

EYERA

(feigning drunkenness)

We, uh, I... seem to have... lost my key.

FAZELI

And gotten taller.

EYERA

(defensive)

S'a free country...!

FAZELI

You'd better come with us.

Tiny takes Eyera by the coat-- and feels Ray's arm inside.

Suddenly Ray's fist punches through an opening in the coat, catching Tiny on the jaw. He falls against Fazeli's feet--

RAY

Run!

They head for the stairs--

MAIN STAIRWELL

The lobby. Much laughter and cheering from the partying aliens and Ray and Eyera tumble down the stairs and fight their way toward the front door.

At that moment, Vanzine appears, on her way back inside. She sees them through the crowd and stops, puzzled.

Ray and Eyera reverse direction and duck inside an OFFICE. The name on the door: **Vanzine Kaluta, Manager.**

INNER OFFICE

Boom! Tiny and Fazeli burst in. They spy the opened window -

FAZELI

(in subtitled Xenish)

Side door. We'll trap them in the alley.

Tiny runs out. Fazeli briefly scans the room - which is dominated by a flat-panel cash register/bookkeeping machine. Satisfied there's no one there, he steps out of the window.

Eyera's EYE LENS cautiously pokes out from behind the curtain. Ray emerges from the opposite side. Eyera reacts at the sight of the bookkeeping station. Something fishy. Shoots a picture: CLICK!

RAY

(checking the corridor)

Take off your coat...

LOBBY

Eyera/Ray emerge from the office - but now Ray's on top, wearing sunglasses and Eyera's hat, while Eyera's TRIPOD LEGS sidle them across the lobby... and out the entrance.

EXT. RAY'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Dark, except for a couple of faint lights glowing on floor 227.

RAY'S OFFICE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ray's bathroom, which doubles as a darkroom, is bathed in red light. Wearing a red-tinted monocle, Eyera rotates his eye in it's socket, functioning as an enlarger now. He cranes his neck and looks down at a sheet of photographic paper. Ray sits on the edge of the tub.

EYERA

You know, photos are like this business,
Ray. It's all about the light... the dark
...and all the lovely shades of grey
inbetween.

(hunkering down, focusing his eye)

The light... and the dark...

He exposes a NEGATIVE IMAGE: Venus and her centipede-like lover.

RAY'S OUTER OFFICE

Ray comes out of the darkroom, inspecting the photos.

RAY

Nice work, Eyera. Go get some sleep.

EYERA (O.S.)

Not yet. I'm gonna print one of Vanzine's office. Something funny there.

RAY

Will you please *stick to the case* for--

But Eyera shuts the door to the darkroom.

RAY'S INNER OFFICE

Holding the 8x10s, Ray enters and turns on the light. Seated at his desk is Vanzine Kaluta. Uh oh.

KALUTA

You up late, Raymond.

RAY

Yeah, well office hours are nine to five, Vanzine. How'd you get in here, anyway?

KALUTA

(*little smile*)

Door is broken.

Remaining cool, Ray goes to his wet bar, hiding the photograph. He pours two drinks.

RAY

Honey of a dress...

KALUTA

You like? Was tailored first for all my arms. But was wrong look for me. I redo for only top set, see? Like human.

She wiggles her other limbs beneath the fabric. An unsettling sight.

RAY

(*hiding distaste*)

Classy...

He gives her a drink and sits at his desk, warily studying her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KALUTA

Feel like goddam pressure suit. But,
gotta fit in, right? Big happy.

(down to business)

So, Raymond, you come to hotel tonight?

RAY

Just popped in.

KALUTA

And pop right out. I thought we friends.

RAY

We are friends, Vanzine.

KALUTA

I see you at hotel, I wonder myself: why
Raymond come here? To see me, or to
snoop?

(pointed)

Which?

RAY

Oh. The first one.

KALUTA

(pleased)

What I thought! Oh, Raymond... we know
each other so long--

She suddenly spies the PLANTS in the trash, and looks STRICKEN.

KALUTA

You not like my flowers...??

Ray's eyes go wide. A look of DREAD comes over his face.

RAY

That was you...??

KALUTA

(hurt)

You always say nicey to me.

RAY

Just trying to be friendly, trying to
keep things... light.

KALUTA

You don't mean nicey?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY

Vanzine... it's just... we're different.

Vanzine's face falls... slowly, quietly turning hard.

KALUTA

How we different, Raymond...?

The tension is getting thicker by the second. Sensing trouble, Ray slowly, silently slides opens a desk drawer.

RAY

How are we...? Well... for one thing...
(uncomfortable, clears throat)
you've got a bit of a temper, Vanzine.

KALUTA

(soft, dangerous)

I don't get angry without I have reason.
What you tell Slugsy, hmmmnn?

RAY

Slugsy? What are you talking about?

KALUTA

Slugsy hire you, hmnn? To snoop on me?
Waste of time. I run his hotel honest.

RAY

He's lucky to have someone with your
integrity, Vanzine. We both know it!

EYERA (OFF)

Hey Ray! Vanzine's embezzling the Slug!

Eyera bursts into the room, waving a photo of Vanzine's office.

EYERA

I got a shot of her books right he-

He suddenly sees Vanzine, who rises to her full considerable height. She backhands Eyera. He lands in the corner, out cold. She turns toward Ray--her eyes blazing with betrayal and rage!!

IN AN INSTANT: Kaluta has SEIZED Ray by his collar and hoisted him into the air. INSTANTANEOUSLY Ray has a laser pistol in Vanzine's face. She is startled for a frozen moment... then a grin splits her bulky head, displaying an uncomfortably large number of razor-sharp teeth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KALUTA

You no shoot me.

Ray thinks it over, then swings the pistol to Kaluta's shoulder and pulls the trigger. The pistol sparks pathetically but DOESN'T FIRE. Vanzine is OUTRAGED.

KALUTA

You would SHOOT ME???

RAY

(defensive)

I would've WINGED YOU!

Vanzine ROARS, her other arms ERUPTING through her dress! She HURLS Ray across the room.

Ray SLAMS into the far wall and flops to the floor, next to Eyera. Kaluta LUNGES for Ray's throat, choking him with all six arms. As his life flashes before his bulging eyes, Ray glances above him and SEES THE AEROLUXE.

With every ounce of remaining strength Ray smacks it with his free hand and -

FOOOOOOOOOOMMM!!!!

A FRIGID BLAST erupts in Kaluta's face, instantly encasing her head in ICE. She reels back, stumbling, and CRASHES THROUGH THE WINDOW.

WITH KALUTA

- her scream rendered SILENT under the ice, as she PLUMMETS 227 stories to the street below.

AT RAY'S WINDOW

Ray, gulping air in ragged breaths, peers down toward the street.

EXT. THE STREET BELOW - LATER

A chalk outline of Vanzine's body (with all six arms delineated) graces the dented pavement. Metropia's finest have cordoned off the area.

The crowd is thick with news people waving cameras and mike booms. Ray stands next to POLICE LIEUTENANT LOU BLEVINS, who watches impassively as several sweating cops try to move Vanzine's huge, bagged corpse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLEVINS

Long fall.

(Ray nods in agreement)

I'm talking about you, Gunn: taking alien clients.

RAY

Vanzine wasn't a client.

BLEVINS

Then why get involved? She was scum.

RAY

Honest scum, Lou. Scum with a heart.

BLEVINS

The heart's an overrated organ, Gunn.
Look where yours got you.

With a loud, collective GROAN the cops heave Vanzine's body into a transport, which sags under the weight. Flashbulbs pop.

BLEVINS

You alright? You need some money?

RAY

I'm fine. Thanks for the thought.

Ray turns to go. Blevins stops him.

BLEVINS

Watch your back. Vanzine had a lot of enemies, but she had a few friends too.

Walking away from the crime scene, Ray pulls his laser pistol from his coat pocket.

RAY

Piece of junk.

He chuck's it into the river.

CITYSCAPE - DAY

Ray's car is one of thousands cruising Metropia's crowded skies.

EXT. METROPIA - STREET LEVEL - DAY

Ray steers down to street level. At the sidewalk, the aerocars are stacked five high, maximizing the available space. Ray maneuvers into a spot just above another car and climbs out.

INT. MERKERSON'S GUN SHOP - DAY

Ray ENTERS. It's a gray market kind of place, junky and disreputable, full of hot merchandise and no questions asked. On the wall behind the counter is a worn sign: **NO ALIENS**.

A loud SQUAWK! makes him jump. A domesticated STIRPE (a hairy bird-like creature) marches around the counter near the door.

Another customer, a striking YOUNG WOMAN with dark red hair and big sunglasses is dickering with the owner of the shop, a scary-looking spud of a man named MERKERSON.

RED

But I don't want to hurt anyone.

MERKERSON

(annoyed)

Lady. This is a gun shop. Guns hurt people.

RED

I just want protection.

Merkerson glances sardonically at Ray.

MERKERSON

(to Red)

You want protection that doesn't hurt anyone. Why stop there? How about a gun that rehabilitates people?

RED

(interested)

Will it fit in my purse?

MERKERSON

Get the hell out of my shop.

RED

Don't be difficult. You must have something.

Red reaches into her purse and pulls out a huge wad of bills. Both Ray and Merkerson react. She points at the display case.

RED

That one.

MERKERSON

The Electravolt? It's not accurate...
Photon's obsolete, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RED

But it looks so sassy.

Merkerson winces, pulls the laser pistol from the display case and sets it on the counter. She picks it up, waves it around. Ray and Merkerson both duck. The woman is delighted.

RED

Dangerously sassy. I'll take it.

She peels off a few large bills, smiles and turns to exit.

MERKERSON

Don't you want your change?

RED

(pleasantly dismissive)

I'm sure you work hard. Here, Tischka!

The stirpe flies over, lands on Red's shoulder as she exits.

RAY

Miss!!

Startled, the woman spins, training her weapon on Ray. He keeps his arms in the air and slowly approaches. He reaches out, flicks a button on the pistol grip.

RAY

The safety.

(she looks at him blankly)

When you don't want to shoot, you put the safety on.

She smiles and shrugs.

RED

I've never been big on safety.

She exits. Merkerson eyes Ray, who moves back into the shop and hefts a strange, bulky rifle with tubes circling the barrel.

MERKERSON

What're you looking for?

RAY

Well, I had a Revis 7.7. But the one time I needed it -

MERKERSON

- fizzed out on you. It's a knockoff, a FAKE! What were you thinking? Look at this...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MERKERSON (cont'd)

(pulls weapon from display)

Lecton Fryboy. Two hundred thousand volts of pure aggression. Kind of heavy, leaves a bit of collateral damage, but what a punch!!

RAY

I don't think so.

MERKERSON

No? How about this?

(pulls out another)

Atomaster G coil. Fires a laser grid. Dices anything within fifty meters. Boom! Little cubes.

RAY

Do you have anything less... violent?

MERKERSON

What is this, pacifist day? I'll show you something.

Merkerson pulls down the shades and locks the front door. Gets a metal box from behind the counter and opens it dramatically. He lifts out an offbeat, but cool looking PISTOL and hands it over. Ray inspects it, aims it, gauging it's balance.

RAY

What's so special about it?

MERKERSON

What's special?

(calls out)

Nathan!

A thin, pasty-faced BOY emerges from the back reading a book. He looks up, sees Merkerson aiming at him and breaks into a run.

Merkerson FIRES. The red particle beam lashes out and retreats back into the muzzle of the gun - all before the boy's book hits the floor. The boy is GONE.

RAY

Holy shit!!!!

MERKERSON

Relax. He's my nephew. Where do you want him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RAY

Wh - what...?

MERKERSON

Where do you want him?

(pointing)

There? There?

Ray is too stunned to answer. Merkersen aims at the center of the room and fires. A GREEN BEAM RE-INTEGRATES the BOY, spewing him into the room - still running. The boy plows straight into a display with a loud CRASH.

MERKERSON

This is the KAHL A113 particle blaster, limited production prototype. Only forty-eight were ever produced.

NATHAN

(picks himself up)

That's it! You can't treat me like dirt just because I go to college and you nev-

Merkerson BLASTS Nathan again. BLAM. Gone.

MERKERSON

Fires a beam that shatters whatever it hits into atoms and stores them in sequence inside the gun -

(taps the gun handle)

- here. Designed for law enforcement. They're illegal now.

RAY

Why?

MERKERSON

(leans close)

Replicator coil.

He hands the gun to an impressed Ray, who examines it.

RAY

Really? Isn't that an alien technology? Banned technology?

MERKERSON

Do I look like a lawyer to you?

RAY

How much?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MERKERSON

One hundred and thirty five.

RAY

I'll give you forty.

MERKERSON

And I'll consider it a deposit.

RAY

Forget it.

(tosses gun back to him)

What do you have for forty?

Merkerson stares at Ray and pulls out a toy pistol, squeezing the trigger. It whines and makes little sparks.

MERKERSON

'Course it's not much of a deterrent.

It's just... annoying.

EXT. STREET - OUTSIDE GUN SHOP

Ray angrily exits the shop. As he passes an alley, the sidewalk gets brighter as if lit from above. A moment later two ALIENS in JETPACKS drop out of the sky, cutting him off. FAZELI and TINY.

Fazeli jabs a blaster into his side. Tiny frisks him; he's clean.

TINY

No gun, Gunn?

FAZELI

We just went to a funeral, Gunn. Vanzine Kaluta's. Now we got no boss. Know what that means?

RAY

Uh... you're bossless?

They shove him into the alley. Ray crashes into a pile of trash cylinders.

FAZELI

SHUT UP! She went to your office and DIED shortly thereafter. Who paid for the set up?!!

RAY

You guys got the wrong -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tiny cracks Gunn on the side of the head with his pistol. Ray sprawls on the ground.

FAZELI

You're gonna die anyway, Gunn. Tell us who paid you and we'll kill you quick!

A loud SQUAWK interrupts them. A stirpe! RED is at the end of the alley, holding her new, sassy-looking Electravolt.

RED

(jittery)

Don't... don't move anything...or, or I'll shoot this!!!

FAZELI

You'll shoot that? At me? If I -
(moves suddenly)

- MOVE???

Startled, Red pulls the trigger. CLICK. Nothing happens.

Ray quickly PUNCHES the ignition button on Fazeli's JETPACK. Fazeli rockets out of frame, straight into a ledge two stories above -

- which draws Tiny's attention away from Red, who's still trying to fire her pistol.

Fazeli, whose head is being mashed into the ledge by the roaring jetpack, flips the ignition switch OFF, and drops two stories, falling in a heap on top of Ray!

Tiny whirls back to face Red. She simply heaves her gun at him, bouncing it off his forehead. He staggers around, clutching his head, cursing. Wild-eyed, he suddenly straightens up -

- and UNFOLDS, doubling in height! Red freezes.

Wrestling with Fazeli, Ray punches the ignition on the JETPACK again. This time Fazeli rockets straight down the alley, SLAMMING into Tiny and carrying them both across the street and into the side of a building. BOOM!!!

Ray slowly gets to his feet. He reaches toward her gun - and flicks the safety off.

RAY

When you want to shoot, you take the safety off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RED
(smiles, embarrassed)
Thank you.

RAY
No, no. Thank you. After all...

- He looks her over, clearly attracted.

RAY
...your timing was perfect.

She looks him over, equally attracted.

VENUS
Just lucky.

RAY
My name's Ray. And you are...?

RED
Late, actually.

She stuffs her pistol in her bag and leaves.

RAY
Wait a minute, wait a minute...

Red stops and turns. Regards him silently.

RAY
Why'd you do it? Why take the risk?

RED
(shrugs and smiles)
Who knows? You might be worth it.

And with that she smoothly crosses the street through dense traffic. Ray gawks like a schoolboy.

INT. GUN SHOP - A MINUTE LATER

Ray enters, scowling. Merkersen smiles at him benignly.

RAY
How much?

MERKERSEN
Still a hundred and thirty five.

Ray tosses his cash to the counter. Merkersen hands him the gun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERKERSON

Come again.

Ray pockets the gun and EXITS the shop. Merkerson cackles with delight until Ray reappears in the doorway.

MERKERSON

(caught)

Can you blame me for trying?

Ray fires the gun. Merkerson's nephew Nathan MATERIALIZES and starts yelling. Ray leaves.

EXT. SKYLINE - DAY

Ray steers his Gyron toward the massive tower that dominates the Metropia city center. The Megamedia Building. It's hulking architecture is at once impressive and intimidating.

EXT. MEGAMEDIA STUDIOS - FRONT GATE

In the shadow of the big building, Ray's parks his hovercar. He approaches a guard kiosk.

RAY

Ray Gunn to see Arnold Dom.

GUARD

(checks list)

You're not on the list.

RAY

He'll see me, pal.

GUARD

Not while I'm here. Buddy.

A limocruiser descends into view. The back window rolls down, and SAM STELFREEZE, breakfasting in transit, sticks his head out.

STELFREEZE

(mouthful)

Raymond?

RAY

Stelfreeze???

STELFREEZE

You coming or going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Coming.

STELFREEZE

Hop in. I'll give you a ride.

(to guard)

It's okay, he's with me.

Ray shoots the guard a grin and climbs in the limocruiser. The guard sullenly waves them through.

INT. LIMOCRUISER

They glide through the Megamedia back lot. The limo is almost obscene in its opulence. Ray can't hide his awe.

RAY

Sam. What happened to you?

STELFREEZE

Success, Raymond. How about you? I heard you went... private.

RAY

You make it sound like a disease.

STELFREEZE

Come on, this is me talking. I was good and I nearly starved to death. No one needs a private dick nowadays. What do you have that a prybot doesn't have?

RAY

Instinct.

Stelfreeze presses a BUTTON in the arm rest. METAL ARMS flip out from behind the front seat and dump colored powder into a steaming cup of water. And a nozzle squeezes out a hot foam that hisses itself into a credible-looking croissant. Sam offers it to Ray, who grimaces and declines.

STELFREEZE

Come on, they taste real. No...?

(shrugs, eats it himself)

How'd you like to work with me here? In the holo-marketing division.

RAY

Oh, no. Don't tell me. Not you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STELFREEZE

Okay, they're annoying. But they're revolutionary. And very high resolution.

RAY

You're saying you stopped surveillance work to go into advertising??

The ARMS thrust food at Ray, who this time, reluctantly accepts.

STELFREEZE

Marketing pays, Ray. And holo-ads are only the beginning. We got things coming up that'll change everything. What are you doing here, anyway?

RAY

A client named Arnold Dom.

STELFREEZE

(laughs)

Dom?? He's your client? He was Rance Hepner back when I nailed him for bunco and fraud. Guy keeps reinventing himself. He still hang around with gangsters?

RAY

He's married to Venus Envy.

STELFREEZE

That's not what I hear.

RAY

What do you hear?

STELFREEZE

I shouldn't say. I don't say. Just ask him about Levity Love.

EXT. METRODEON AMPHITHEATER - DAY

Ray hops out of the limo, still carrying his coffee and roll. As the limo pulls away, Stelfreeze leans out.

STELFREEZE

My door's always open, Raymond!

Ray dumps the food into the nearest trash can. He pulls a brown envelope from his pocket and follows a sign pointing to the Metrodeon amphitheater.

INT. BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR

Ray enters through a side door and finds himself in a dark, narrow corridor, surrounded by stage hands and costumed performers. He taps a STAGE MANAGER on the shoulder.

RAY

Excuse me. Where's Arnold Dom's office?

STAGE MANAGER

End of the hall. Through the double door.

Ray picks his way over cables and sandbags to the door at the end. As he reaches for the handle - WHAM! The door flies open and two dozen muscle bound CHORUS BOYS pour forth. Ray is swept away by a river of high-spirited beefcake.

Grabbing futilely at the walls, Ray finds himself carried downstream, around a couple corners and into the OPEN AIR.

EXT. METRODEON STAGE - DAY

The chorus boys fan out, dumping Ray onto the stage floor. He looks around, confused. Bright sunlight. A rehearsal piano banging away. Dancers warming up. And ten thousand empty seats under the open sky.

VOICE

Oh, my God... hello! You found me!

Ray spins around. There, perched in an odd-looking reclining chair connected to an assortment of wires, is VENUS ENVY...

RAY

Miss... Envy?

A few craven assistants hover around her as a technician clamps her arms to the sides of the chair.

VENUS

(to the technician)

Not so tight!

(to Ray)

Aren't you the sharp one. Disguise didn't fool you, you got past the guards..

RAY

I think you've got the wrong guy...

Venus flinches as the nervous technician positions her head on a metal brace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VENUS

Ow!! What are you doing???

TECHNICIAN

Sorry, Miss Envy, but you have to stay really, really, still. Okay, Sid, hit it.

A guy in a white coat hits a button and hot beams of light start to work their way down Venus face and body. She smiles at Ray.

VENUS

(indicates Ray's envelope)

...you want me to autograph something?

TECHNICIAN

Hold it!

(to Venus)

You moved, Miss Envy. I'm really really sorry but we'll need to start over.

VENUS

(to Ray)

I have a better idea.

(to a flunky)

Go get my wig. The red one.

(to the technician)

Let me out of this stupid thing.

TECHNICIAN

But Mr. Vogel said...

VENUS

(exploding)

LET ME OUTTA THIS STUPID THING!!

Terrified, the technician unclamps Venus from the chair. As she stands up, a STIRPE flies across the stage and lands on her shoulder. Ray's eyes widen...

VENUS

(soft again, to stirpe)

Tischka, my sweetie...

The flunky returns with the wig. Venus playfully tugs it on, dons her sunglasses and becomes RED, the woman from the gun shop and the alley. Ray is speechless.

VENUS

You're the first one to recognize me in this get-up, you know...

(yells)

Robert!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A photographer runs in and snaps photos. Ray's mind is spinning. Out on the set, an assistant yells.

ASSISTANT

Rehearsing!! Places!!

Venus thrusts her cup of coffee into Ray's hands.

VENUS

Don't go away.

He watches her move to center stage, trailing a wrecking crew of hair and makeup people. Ray feels bad, the envelope full of incriminating photos now seeming awfully large and heavy.

ANGLE ON STAGE - MUSICAL NUMBER: "INNOCENT"

This number is both a legitimate showstopper and a parody of the pop world's hyped-up videos. The chorus boys prance mindlessly and Venus appears in a dramatic puff of PINK SMOKE. As sexy/silly as it is, one thing is certain:

Venus is a STAR, as charismatic as they come.

ON THE SIDELINES

Ray watches, fascinated. ARNOLD DOM appears. Making a friendly show, Dom steers Ray off stage. He's angry.

DOM

What the hell are you doing out here??
You were supposed to come to the office.

RAY

I tried, okay? Here's your pictures.

Dom eagerly opens the envelope.

RAY

I'm sorry.

DOM

Hmm...?

(Ray indicates photos)

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Terrible thing.

Ray shoots a steely look at Dom. Behind them, Venus is at the climax of her number. Big finish. Ray takes a last, guilty look at the photos.

CLOSE ON PHOTOS

Camera MOVES IN on Venus, in the arms of the centipede. Picture after picture. Closer and closer. Her hand, featuring a TATTOO, is draped over the alien's back.

RESUME: DOM AND RAY

Dom pulls a roll from his pocket, peels off a pile of bills.

DOM

Pleasure doing business with you.

He slaps the money into Ray's hand. Ray considers all this cash with a mixture of relief and guilt. He slowly pockets it and heads out of the stage.

ASSISTANT

(calling out)

Stand in, please! Levity! Levity Love!

A GIRL jumps up from her chair and hustles onto the set. She resembles Venus and is dressed in a matching costume.

Ray takes a careful look as she goes by.

CLOSE ON GIRL'S HAND

A TATTOO marks her right hand...

RAY

...quickly looks over at Venus. WHIP PAN to...

CLOSE ON VENUS' HAND

No tattoo! Ray's been had.

WITH DOM

Ray returns, SNATCHES away the photos, and stuffs the precious wad of cash into Dom's breast pocket.

RAY

You oily son of a- you staged the whole thing. You must think I'm an idiot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dom stares at him a beat, narrows his eyes. Then LAUGHS suddenly, awkwardly making light of it.

DOM

Come on, Gunn. A prybot would've figured this out in a second. Why'd you think I didn't want one?

Very gently, Dom puts the money back in Ray's hand.

DOM

But, I *did* underestimate you. So here's a little something extra...

He adds a few extra bills, and retakes the envelope.

DOM

I'll even give you a little cut of the settlement when it comes in, okay? For your continued cooperation...

Ray stares at the money in hand, and his face shows a struggle between pride and need. He's wavering and Dom knows it...

DOM

Come on. Life's tough. Nobody's pure. We all need money. Besides, it's not like you haven't been played before...

Ray stops. Dom's hit a nerve.

RAY

(low, tight)

What do you mean...?

DOM

(sympathetic)

I heard how you lost your badge. At least I'm paying you for it...

Ray spins, DECKING Dom, who rolls to a stop under the craft service table, out cold. Ray tosses the money at Dom's feet.

INT. METRODEON - TRAILER

Ray KNOCKS on the door of Venus Envy's trailer.

VENUS

(from within)

It's about time!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ray takes a big breath. This won't be easy.

IN VENUS' DRESSING ROOM

She's in her walk-in closet, half-dressed. Her back to him.

VENUS

Who in hell got me this wretched trailer?
Barry, it's a goddamn insult!! I-

She turns around. Spots Ray. Her mood abruptly changes.

VENUS

Hi! Where'd you go? And what IS your name?

RAY

Raymond Gunn. I'm a private investigator.
Your husband hired me.

He gives her the photos. She looks at them, then, with deep disappointment, at Ray.

VENUS

This... is what you do for a living?

RAY

(chagrined)

Look, Ms. Envy. I'm trying to take the high road here...

VENUS

(tosses photos aside)

These are fake. I've never cheated on Arnold.

RAY

He used your stand-in to make it look like you did.

VENUS

Why would Arnold do that??

VOGEL

(off screen)

To improve on his divorce settlement.

VENUS

...what???

BARRY VOGEL enters. Well dressed, perpetually distraught. Mechanically shakes Ray's hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOGEL

Barry Vogel. Venus' manager. I saw it coming. I insisted on a prenuptial agreement, and boy, am I glad I did.

(to Venus, who is fuming)

I want you to stay cool, okay? Do not confront him, you hear me? This is no time to let your temper make news. Okay??

Venus coldly rises, marches out the door. Vogel turns to Ray-

VOGEL

This will be husband number four. I was husband number one. And lord help me...

(mournful laugh)

...I still love her. Can you believe it?

He sighs and looks around the dressing room.

VOGEL

Look at the dump they stuck her in. Album sales are flat. Her tour's in trouble. We can't even fill those seats out there. What next?

There is a SCREAM from somewhere on the sound stage.

EXT. CENTER STAGE - METRODEON

In the middle of the arena, a growing CROWD of onlookers and assembled media watch with giddy fascination, as if witnessing a playground fight: Venus is throttling Dom!

It's almost funny until Dom starts turning BLUE. The witnesses fall SILENT.

Vogel pulls Venus off as handlers try to turn aside the MEDIA. Dom GASPS, COUGHING raggedly. He says something unintelligible to VENUS. Venus's REACTS with CUTRAGE. She lunges at him, clawing at the air, barely restrained by Vogel, eyes afire -

VENUS

I'll KILL you, you worthless leech!!
You're DEAD!!! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - DUSK

Ray sits sullenly at his desk, playing with his new gun. Phoebe watches him with distaste.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHOEBE

This means I don't get paid, right?

Ray ZAPS his lamp, REINTEGRATES IT on the other side of his desk.

RAY

You don't understand. He wanted me to be fooled. He hired me... to be a chump.

PHOEBE

Welcome to the club.

She marches out. Ray follows her into the reception area.

RAY

Phoebe... wait. I didn't know the guy was going to turn out to be -

PHOEBE

(emptying her desk)

What?? A sleaze? You work for sleazy guys all the time. Who cares if he's pinching his rich wife for a few extra bucks on his way out?? I can't do this anymore. I'm done. I quit.

(she exits, pausing at door)

I don't mind you having your pride, Ray. I'm just tired of it coming out of my paycheck.

She leaves, slamming the door behind her. Ray slumps. The perfect end to a perfect day. The door OPENS a beat later.

EYERA

Did I miss something...?

EXT. METROPIA - NIGHT

Night in the big city. Hovercars hum past, wending listlessly through the canyon of lights. No one walks in Metropia.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ray stares listlessly out his window at the traffic floating by. He finishes off a glass of bourbon. Eyera is parked in a chair, his tripod legs up on Ray's desk. He's drinking, too.

RAY

I don't blame her for walking. I won't blame you either, if you want to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EYERA

Me? Leave the only fool loyal enough to
keep giving me film?

Ray holds up his glass for a refill. Eyera pours from the half-
empty bottle on the desk.

RAY

There are other fools, Eyera.

EYERA

Maybe. But you're my favorite.

They CLINK glasses. The phone RINGS. Ray picks it up.

RAY

Raymond Gunn.

VOGEL

(through phone)

Mr. Gunn? Barry Vogel. I appreciate what
you did today. It was above and beyond.

RAY

(eyeing bourbon bottle)

Look, Mr. Vogel... I'm right in the
middle of something here, and -

VOGEL

We'd like to hire you.

EXT. THE MOON ROOM - NIGHT

A ritzy address in Metropia's neon-filled entertainment district.
Outside the fancy Moon Room night club, Ray and Eyera inspect a
life-size color cut-out of Venus' photo double, LEVITY LOVE,
appearing nightly.

VOGEL

(continues, voice over)

We think Dom is having an affair. With
Levity Love - who we fired, by the way.
She sings at Dom's club, the Moon Room.

Not many customers. A bored alien DOORMAN, a pseudopod, holds
open the door for Ray and Eyera.

DOORMAN

All species are welcome, gents. Drinks
half price after midnight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EYERA

I love this business.

(beat, impatiently)

Uh, Ray... do you suppose I could --

RAY

No film until we sit down. I don't want a lot of shots of everything but the reason we're here. Stay focused.

EYERA

(sulkily)

I'm always focused.

A jet of exhaust announces the arrival of an enormous limousine hovercar. The doorman suddenly comes to life, gasping:

DOORMAN

...Slugsy...!

He brusquely elbows Ray and Eyera aside and hurries to open the passenger door. After a dramatic pause, the occupant slides out of the back seat.

SLUGSY

Meet FRANCIS XAVIER, otherwise known as SLUGSY, an enormous, tuxedoed SLUG. He slithers heavily to the entrance, leaving a trail of slime. A diminutive CLEAN-UP creature follows, cleaning up the pavement with a foaming brush.

Off to the side, Ray mutters softly to Eyera.

RAY

Look who's here...

ARNOLD DOM rushes out from inside the club, practically groveling, masking his anxiety at the unexpected visit.

DOM

Francis, what a surprise! You should have called!

Slugsy takes a draw on his cigar and deliberately blows a cloud of smoke straight into Dom's face. Dom's rictus grin never moves.

Eyera clicks off a couple of quickies.

INT. MOON ROOM

One big room, whose full bar and elegant details (recessed lighting, plush carpets) speak of major money. Dressed in a slinky costume, Levity Love is in the spotlight, singing to a very sparse crowd.

At the best table, SLUGSY and DOM are surrounded by waiters and flunkies. Dom is drowning in flop sweat.

EYERA AND RAY

At a table in the back, Eyera screws on a telephoto monocle and trains it on Levity. CLICK CLICK CLICK. It STEAMS UP. He rubs it dry and resumes snapping.

RAY

Slow down. You're wasting film.

EYERA

Come on, Ray, I'm only human.

RAY

No, you're not. Shoot *them*, not her.

Ray glances at Slugsy's table, but now... it's *empty*.

BACKSTAGE

Ray dodges waiters and busboys as he makes his way past the kitchen. He pulls on a waiter's jacket and picks up a tray full of champagne glasses.

OUTSIDE AN OFFICE

Ray nears a partially-open door and sees Slugsy and Dom going over accounts. He leans close, catching a few words.

DOM

You knew the club was going to lose money at first! We were very clear on that!

SLUGSY

(deepest voice in the world)

Your incompetence is almost artistic. You promise me Venus Envy. You stick me with a Venus impersonator. And now you don't even let the impersonator IMPERSONATE!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOM

If people are tired of the real Venus Envy, how the hell am I going to sell an impersonator?!! Listen to me...

(selling it)

Venus Envy is yesterday. Levity Love... is tomorrow.

SLUGSY

You're an idiot. What about this divorce of yours?

DOM

Not my fault, F.X. Things happen.

A smattering of APPLAUSE from out front as Levity's song ends.

SLUGSY

(ominous)

They do indeed, Mr. Dom...

Ray turns, surprised to see that Levity has come off stage and is headed straight at him.

LEVITY

What are doing?? Get back to work!!

Ray tries to move off, but is STOPPED by Levity, who latches onto his sleeve--

--then grabs a glass of champagne from his tray and downs it. Replaces the empty glass on his tray and storms off to the office. Ray breathes a sigh of relief and pops back to listen.

IN THE OFFICE

Levity removes a high heel and bounces it off Dom's head.

DOM

Baby, what's wrong! You were great!!

LEVITY

How dare you get up in the middle of my act! And how DARE you discuss this club without including me!

Slugsy's eyes FLASH! He rises, making a sticky sound as he moves his massive bulk toward Levity, backing her into a corner. She tries to mask her fear... and is losing the battle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLUGSY

My dear. I never hesitate to solve my problems. Ask anyone. The trick... is not to become one of them.

LEVITY

This club is part mine. Arnold and I had a deal--

SLUGSY

(sharply)

Yet another mistake for which Mr. Dom will pay me back in full.

Slugsy slowly turns his crushing gaze to Dom, who swallows hard.

INSIDE RAY'S CAR - OUTSIDE BACK ALLEY - LATER

It's raining now. Ray and Eyera wait wearily. Arnold Dom exits the back door of the club and climbs into his gleaming hovercar.

RAY

About time.

Ray tries to start his Gyron. But the motor's not turning over.

RAY

Come on, baby... now's not the time...

EYERA

We're gonna lose him, Ray...

But the motor is still not turning over, and Dom's starting his take-off cycle. Ray CURSES, HITS the dash. He glares at Eyera-- who knows what the look means.

Eyera GROANS and jumps out of the car, and with surprising speed, skitters toward Dom's car on tripod legs, springing up like an african jumping spider --

-- and latching on to the rear. He FLATTENS himself against the metal just as the hovercar jets off in a whoosh of exhaust.

INT. RIVO ALTA APARTMENTS - LEVITY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A study in domestic decadence; lots of money, no taste. Dom, dressed in silk pajamas, is hunkered down in Levity's large, too ornate bed. He's on the the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOM

Hey, whose lawyer are you, anyway! I'm telling you, she'll settle. Settle big. She settled for me, didn't she?

Dom lets out a laugh. CAMERA MOVES up from the bed to a vent in the ceiling. A large EYE is barely visible behind the grate.

INT. VENT

Eyera shifts uncomfortably in the confined space as he watches Dom in the bed below.

DOM

Because I know her. Better than anyone.

There is a subtle offscreen SOUND. Dom REACTS.

RESUME DOM

He turns to the door and yells toward the living room.

DOM

Levity? I'm in here, honey!!

No response.

DOM

I'll call you back.

He HANGS UP. Looks toward the bedroom door. Dom gets up, refastening his robe, and shuffles into the darkened living room.

DOM

I thought you had another show tonight.

(pause)

Levity...? Honey...? You still mad?

Dom moves toward the front door, finding it AJAR. Spooked, he pushes the door shut and looks around. His senses heightened, he goes to the fireplace and picks up a POKER, carrying it with him.

A SUDDEN VOICE startles Dom. He spins, brandishing the poker.

It's only a HOLO-AD in the center of the room, advertising an exotic, highly realistic pseudo-vacation, courtesy of 3-D Sensorama. Dom grunts, annoyed at the ad as...

a shadow RISES UP from behind him -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dom turns. His eyes POP WIDE in HORROR.

INT. VENT - ABOVE LEVITY'S BEDROOM

Eyera JUMPS as he hears DOM SHRIEK from the living room, followed SOUNDS of struggle. Then... a deathly SILENCE, only the distant sound of the HOLO-AD echoing through the hall.

INT. BEDROOM

After a beat, Eyera pushes open the grate and carefully drops, spider-like, onto the bed. He moves stealthily to the door, and pushes it OPEN to REVEAL a surreal sight:

INT. LIVING ROOM

A HOLOGRAM, the GIANT SMILING FACE of a commercial spokesman hangs mid air, jabbering away. Beneath it lies the dead, crumpled body of Arnold Dom.

Eyera ENTERS, now edgy as hell and fighting panic. He takes a deep breath and moves expertly around the body, recording the murder scene. FLASH. FLASH. FLASH.

Eyera finishes and quickly fires off a few shots of the room. FLASH FLASH FLASH and he's out the door -

as the smiling HOLOGRAPHIC HEAD babbles on and on...

EXT. VOGEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rain lashes the side of Vogel's luxurious, darkened home. Over the howl of the storm: the sound of a PHONE RINGING.

INT. VOGEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vogel's alien butler STICKLEY, hands him the phone.

STICKLEY

It's a Mr. Gunn. He says it's urgent.

VOGEL

(into phone)

This better be good.

INTERCUT: RAY'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Ray speaks into the phone as Eyera paces behind him.

RAY
Dom's been murdered.

VOGEL
Oh, God.

RAY
Where's Venus?

VOGEL
I don't know. At home. Maybe.

RAY
Find out. The police don't know yet.

Vogel HANGS UP, and DIALS. Pause.

VOGEL
This is Barry, this is important. Put me
through to her bedroom phone. Now.
(to Stickley)
She's not answering.

PUSH IN on Vogel as the implications SINK IN.

VOGEL
This is not good.

EXT. MEGAMEDIA HEADQUARTERS - MORNING

The main entrance to the mammoth tower. Vogel stands before a group of REPORTERS gathered on the steps.

VOGEL
Ms. Envy is deeply saddened by Mr. Dom's
untimely death and hopes that his
murderer is swiftly brought to justice.
We have no further comment at this time.

REPORTERS
(ad lib chatter)
Is that ALL??? Where is Ms. Envy??? Where
was she last night?? WHERE IS SHE NOW???

Vogel disappears inside the building. Guards block the mass of reporters from following. They GRUMBLE and seethe.

INT. RIVO ALTA APARTMENTS - CRIME SCENE - MORNING

Ray threads his way past hordes of cops to the front door, and is stopped by a rookie.

RAY

(to rookie)

It's okay, sonny. I know your boss.

(calls out)

Hey, Lou...!

In the hall, Lieutenant Blevins grimaces.

BLEVINS

Ray. You don't wanna come in, okay?

RAY

Sure I do.

BLEVINS

(lowers his voice)

The Captain's here, Ray.

Just then, a VOICE from the living room.

VOICE

Hello, Ray...

INT. LEVITY LOVE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Members of Metropia's finest are scattered throughout the crime scene, collecting evidence. And in charge, a tough, yet attractive woman, CAPT. LIZ DEXLER, MPD.

DEXLER

Let me guess. Dom was a client. Hope you got paid up front.

RAY

I'll get by, Liz. What am I interrupting?
Are we covering up evidence? Or
manufacturing it?

DEXLER

Don't have to. Take a look.

BLEVINS

Murder weapon. Electravolt.

Blevins holds up a laser pistol... Venus's pistol. Ray gulps back his surprise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Uh... any prints?

BLEVINS

Corrileum grip. Can't leave prints on it.

From an adjoining room, the sound of WEEPING: Levity Love.

RAY

You've questioned her?

DEXLER

Says she was at her club. Got witnesses.
She looks like Venus Envy, doesn't she?

RAY

If you say so.

Blevins solicitously puts a hand on Levity's shoulder.

BLEVINS

I know you're upset, Ms. Love. Would some
coffee help?

LEVITY

(dabbing her tears)

You're so sweet...

Blevins exits. Ray keeps an eye on Levity, whose demeanor instantly HARDENS.

DEXLER

(to Ray)

You see the news? I'm up for promotion.

RAY

Congratulations. Over whose dead body?

DEXLER

You're something. Most guys, they flame
out, they'd leave the city. But not you.

RAY

I like it here, Liz. After you,
everything seems... so clean.

Levity SEES Ray watching her, and freezes. Just then, Blevins returns with the coffee. Levity resumes her "distraught" behavior.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY
(struggling to sit up)
I'm in the book, you know.

VENUS
Sorry. I'm out of sight now. Have to
avoid the press.

RAY
Sounds like a first.

Venus smiles and rolls balletically to her feet.

VENUS
Barry thought it was best. Until they
find the murderer.

RAY
What makes you think they haven't?

VENUS
They have the killer??

RAY
No...but they have the murder weapon.
(pointed)
Your pistol.

VENUS
My pistol? That's impossible. My pistol's
(searches bag)
...gone.
(beat, defeated)
How do they know it's mine?

RAY
They don't. I do.

VENUS
Did you tel' them it's my gun?

RAY
(hates himself)
Not yet.

VENUS
Why not?

Ray doesn't answer. Venus softens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VENUS

I didn't kill my husband, Ray.

RAY

(whispers)

Did you hear that?

VENUS

What?

RAY

(whisper)

Keep talking.

(louder)

So why'd you buy the gun?

Ray moves stealthily across the room. Venus watches him, fascinated. He motions for her to keep talking.

VENUS

Uh, I bought it for... protection.

RAY

From what?

VENUS

Someone. From my past. Who wants to be part of my future.

Ray has climbed onto a table. He grabs a large book.

RAY

A gun's a dangerous thing. You could get hurt--

He suddenly SLAMS the book into some drapes. A dented PRYBOT (which looks something like a metal JUNE BUG) drops out with a CLUNK. It BUZZES and SPUTTERS, struggling to get airborne. Ray SMASHES it again, finishing it off.

VENUS

The hell is that? A bug?

RAY

Prybot. Who's interested in you?

VENUS

Who isn't? The tabloids are always snooping around...

She finds an open window. Slams it shut. All business now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

VENUS

Anyway... You're going to work for me. I want you to find out who killed Arnold.

Ray scrutinizes her for a moment. He doesn't like her tone.

RAY

What if I find out it's you?

VENUS

Then I'll be the first to know. I like it that way.

RAY

Don't be so cocky. I'm not one of your fans.

VENUS

How do you know? You don't know anything about me.

RAY

Enlighten me. Where were you last night?

VENUS

Nowhere.

RAY

That's not an answer.

VENUS

Then ask me something else.

Ray turns on his heel and heads out the room.

VENUS

Where are you going??

Ray keeps walking. He has no idea where the front door is, but he's determined to find it fast.

VENUS

What is your problem??

Ray STOPS, whirls on her -

RAY

If you want another spaniel for your entourage, Ms. Envy, you got the wrong guy. And if you think I owe you one, remember your gun. I kept my mouth shut. I'd say we're even.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

VENUS

(beat)

Look, I'm sorry. I'm not used to...

(this is hard for her)

I want... I need... your help.

INT. LIBRARY - MINUTES LATER

Ray and Venus sit before a roaring fire. Venus sighs.

VENUS

Last night... I was singing. At a club called Al's Bar. No Talent Night. It's an open mike kind of thing.

RAY

Anyone see you there?

VENUS

No one would've recognized me. I wasn't her.

RAY

Wasn't who?

VENUS

Wasn't Venus. Sometimes I don't want to be her, you know? Sometimes I just want to sing. Venus Envy has limits, Mr. Gunn. I don't like limits.

A blinding light suddenly SHINES through the window, fixing on Venus and Ray. AEROSHOIPS HOVER outside.

YANOVER runs into the room. He hits a BUTTON on the wall. The drapes on the big window CLOSE instantly.

YANOVER

Reporters! Come on, Ms. Envy! The service entrance!

He throws a CLOAK around Venus and hustles her from the room.

VENUS

Find the killer, Mr. Gunn. Find the killer and we'll both be happy.

PUSH IN on RAY, suddenly alone as AEROVEHICLES swarm at every window like moths to a flame, FLOODING the room with LIGHT.

CUT TO:

BLACK & WHITE. AEROVEHICLES POV SHOT:

A wobbly, telephoto IMAGE of Ray standing alone inside the Envy mansion. Over this, the smarmy voice of host ROCK LaROD:

ROCK (VO)

...and what of the strange "man at the window?" The latest in a long line of lovers? Husband number five?? Venus is keeping her fly trap shut!

This is **INSIDE DOPE**, a cross between an old NEWSREEL and a modern TABLOID. PULL BACK to the kinetoscope in...

RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Eyera watches from a swivel chair.

EYERA

"Mystery Man?" Ha! I like that.

Ray flips through EYERA'S PHOTOS of the MURDER SCENE.

ANGLE ON THE PHOTOS:

Featuring Dom's body, twisted and sprawled beneath the grinning, ghost-like HOLO-AD. Ray examines the photos dispassionately.

ROCK (OS, cont'd.)

And she's fought with them all...

Ray finally looks up.

RAY

Record this.

Eyera hits the "record" button on the kinetoscope.

RESUME NEWSREEL (HAND-HELD CAMERA)

Venus pours a drink over the head of a TUXEDOED MAN, then looking toward CAMERA, goes after the CAMERAMAN -

VENUS

Get out of my face!!!

QUICK CUTS of Venus verbally, physically, publicly abusing a series of men, throwing food at them, nudging them with her aerocar, hurling insults, lobbing breakables, etc.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROCK (VO)
...up to, and including her fourth
husband just last week!

CUT TO: NEWSREEL - REPEAT EARLIER SCENE

of VENUS choking DOM, only this time from HAND-HELD CAMERA'S POV.
Vogel pulls Venus off as handlers try to turn aside the MEDIA.
Dom GASPS, COUGHING raggedly, genuinely afraid. Venus claws at
the air, barely restrained by Vogel, eyes afire -

VENUS
I'll KILL you, you worthless leech!!
You're DEAD!!! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

ON RAY & EYERA

Ray hits the "STOP" button, ending the recording. Rewinds the
cylinder, presses "PLAY":

ON THE SCREEN: Dom coughs raggedly. He SAYS SOMETHING
UNINTELLIGIBLE to VENUS. Venus's REACTS with OUTRAGE.

Ray hits "PAUSE", then "REWIND" and "PLAY". He turns up the
VOLUME and strains to listen -

ON THE SCREEN: Dom SAYS SOMETHING UNINTELLIGIBLE to VENUS.

Ray FREEZES the IMAGE. Turns to his PHOTOPHONE and dials a
number. SAM STELFREEZE appears on the photophone screen.

RAY
Hey, Sam. Could you do me a favor? I'm
sending over a telepicture. Can you
enhance the audio?

STELFREEZE
I'll do what I can.

RAY
You're a pal. Sending it now.

Ray rewinds and presses the "SEND" button.

VENUS (OS)
I'll KILL you, you worthless leech!!
You're DEAD!!! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

Eyera studies Ray's troubled face. His eye NARROWS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EYERA

What are you not telling me?

Ray looks at Eyera. Sighs heavily, looks out the window.

RAY

The murder weapon belongs to her.

EYERA

Geezus. And the cops don't know? Here we go again!

RAY

(bristling)

What's that supposed to mean?

EYERA

It means you're protecting some dame who doesn't deserve it! Is this a habit with you? You like getting clobbered?

(ominous beat)

What're you doing, Ray?

EXT. THE MOON ROOM - NIGHT

Ray's gyron is parked in back.

INT. THE MOON ROOM - NIGHT

Ray peers out at the club from behind some curtains near the stage. Plenty of customers now.

MUSIC starts. The lights dim... and a single spot illuminates...

LEVITY LOVE

- dressed in drab clothes. She starts performing a shy version of Venus Envy's "Welcome To The Future". Bit by bit, with each addition-- new wardrobe, accessories and wig-- she assumes a full-bore impression of Venus herself. The crowd loves it.

INT. LEVITY'S DRESSING ROOM

The room is small and dim, cluttered with costumes and yellowed clippings.

Ray is searching the drawers of Levity's vanity. Suddenly: FOOTSTEPS! Ray dives for cover... and the door swings open. It's LEVITY, (in Venus wardrobe) with THREE ALIENS:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUNSEL, a small, twitchy trigger man in a trenchcoat several sizes too big; LUG, a hulking stooge; and ELBON, the centipede who posed with Levity.

LEVITY

Sorry, boys. This is as far as you go. I gotta change.

GUNSEL

Mr. Xavier is most anxious to discuss Arnold Dom's untimely demise. He wishes to meet at your earliest convenience.

(veiled threat)

And he does not wait well.

He hands a BUSINESS CARD to Levity, who tucks it in her cleavage.

LEVITY

You tell Mr. Xavier that Arnold's death doesn't change a thing. I am still a co-owner of this club, his partner, and I have no intention of selling him my share. Especially now. So, beat it.

She slams the door. Then she sits wearily at the vanity. and NOTICES a drawer has been opened. She glances up at her mirror -

IN THE MIRROR: a reflection of her costume racks, and RAY'S SHOES sticking out in the row of women's heels.

RAY'S POV

LEVITY, pulling on a drawer as if it's stuck.

WITH LEVITY

With a WHIRL she yanks out the drawer, and SLAMS it into the clothing, catching Ray in the jaw. He crashes to the floor.

Levity plants her high heel on his chest and winds a dress around his neck like a noose.

LEVITY

You?? What are you doing in my closet?!!

RAY

I... I...

She YANKS the noose tighter. Ray grabs it and pulls her down - HARD. She hits the floor. Ray gets to his feet, straightening his clothes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

I was looking for something light and summery. I need to ask some questions -

LEVITY

I've already told the police. I was here when Dom was murdered. I have-

RAY

-witnesses. So I've heard.

(he helps her up)

You do a mean Venus Envy. Lucky she's hot again...

LEVITY

A little scandal goes a long way.

RAY

Yeah. All the way to the bank.

Levity gives him a sudden, appraising look, then turns her back to him.

LEVITY

I need some help.

(Ray hesitates)

Unzip me. Pretty please.

Ray tugs down the zipper.

LEVITY

What do you think?

RAY

Nice back...

LEVITY

I need someone to watch it for me.

Ray suddenly ZIPS BACK UP. She SPINS to face him-- the CARL sticking out of her cleavage.

RAY

Look. I just need--

LEVITY

Some information. I know. Well I've got plenty. I know how to make it pay, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY

I'll bet.

She presses up against him and gives him a big KISS.

LEVITY

You interested? Give me a call.

She smiles and playfully PUSHES Ray out into the hall.

HALLWAY - OUTSIDE LEVITY'S DRESSING ROOM

She closes her door. Ray opens his palm. There is the business card. It reads: **"F. XAVIER'S EXOTIC FOODS - Where Alien Means Home."**

EXT. F. XAVIER'S FINE EXOTIC FOODS - DAY

Back in the alien maze. A parade of well-to-do ALIENS flows in and out of an upscale specialty store featuring foodstuffs imported from other planets.

Across the street, Ray watches, stymied. Then he spies a SIGN in the window of a cosmetic shop nearby: **BLUE MUD FACIALS!**

INT. COSMETIC SHOP

Ray is seated in a reclining chair while a young beautician leans over him.

COSMETIC GIRL

Close your eyes.

She aims an odd looking NOZZLE at his face and BOOM --

Ray's head is coated in BRIGHT BLUE MUD, his hair blown back into a blue fan behind his head. Ray opens his eyes and looks into a mirror. Perfect. He jumps out of the chair.

COSMETIC GIRL

But sir... we're not finished with --

RAY

(exiting)

It's perfect. Thanks.

INT. F. XAVIER'S FINE EXOTIC FOODS - CONTINUOUS

Blue-faced, fan-haired Ray ENTERS and looks around: vegetables with fur, fruit with suction cups, crème de la cooties, etc.

Ray goes up the CLERK at the deli counter. **The following dialog is in subtitled Xenish--**

RAY

Speaking I'd like to be please, to Mr. Xavier.

DELI CLERK

Mr. Xavier isn't available at the moment.
Would you like to sample something?

He hands Ray a hunk of green meat, which Ray absently stuffs into his mouth. Ray points to a cart full of strange BLUE FRUIT, each as large as a beachball.

RAY

Those look good.

DELI CLERK

Hajlas melons.

(apologetic)

Only for our best customers.

Ray nods, still chewing the meat. Then the taste hits. Ray GAGS, forcing it down.

DELI CLERK

Good?

Ray nods lamely, his eyes watering, then turns and drifts toward the back, pretending to be interested in what's on the shelves.

A BACK DOOR

ELBON, the centipede-like alien, stands guard at a door near the rear. He is nodding fitfully. Ray looks carefully: behind his dark glasses, the centipede is asleep. Ray quietly sneaks past.

LONG CORRIDOR

Lined with shelves overflowing with bottles, jars and cans of alien foods. Ray moves through the dark toward some VOICES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Are you insane? I don't want to be in business with you.

DEEP VOICE

But you already are. As Dom's widow, you inherit all his assets. Congratulations. And condolences.

Ray moves to a DOOR, through which he sees VENUS and SLUGSY.

INT. SMALL OFFICE

Slugsy and Venus are seated at a table in a nicely furnished room. Slugsy's goons, GUNSEL and LUG hover near the door.

SLUGSY

Meanwhile, precious girl, your day in the sun is waning. I can help.

VENUS

Your concern is touching. I've never been more famous in my life.

SLUGSY

Yes, for being a spoiled, petulant, hot-headed murder suspect. How long will that last? You used to be known for... genuine achievements.

VENUS

I came down here as a favor, Slugsy.

SLUGSY

What did you call me??

VENUS

You heard me. You think calling yourself Francis Xavier takes the stink off you, but to me you'll always be Slugsy.

Both Gunsel and Lug RISE threateningly.

SLUGSY

I should kill you right now.

VENUS

I rest my case.

Slugsy recomposes himself, signals his goons to step back and leans his massive bulk over Venus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLUGSY

I can make you cooperate. I don't have to ask...

Venus jumps to her feet, fearless.

VENUS

Don't you dare threaten me, you fat tub of grease! If you expose me, I'll expose your whole stinking operation!

She grabs her coat and heads for the door. Gunsel steps in her way. She SLAPS him across the face. Furious, he goes for his gun.

SLUGSY

Gunsel!

Gunsel restrains himself. Glaring, he reluctantly STEPS ASIDE.

INT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE OFFICE

Ray ducks behind the door just as Venus blows past.

SLUGSY (OFF)

Let her go.

Venus leaves through another door, revealing a warehouse filled with more hajlas melons, which hang from long, ropey stems. There are hundreds of them.

Intrigued, Ray quietly takes out a pen knife and cuts into one. Just then, he looks up to see LUG'S FIST coming straight at him - BOOM!!!

- the screen is BLACK.

INT. BACK ROOM - LATER

Ray AWAKENS. A ring of alien FACES - and a pistol - stare down at him. SLUGSY watches as GUNSEL pulls a card from Ray's wallet.

SLUGSY

(reading, in English)

"Raymond Gunn. Investigations." You're a private detective? In this day and age?

RAY

(in Xenish, subtitled)

I just some melons want to buy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Slugsy studies Ray's blue face and wild hair.

SLUGSY

You understand human, and yet you insist on speaking Xenish... sloppy Xenish. What species are you, Mr. Gunn? And why are you really here?

RAY

(in Xenish, subtitled)

I like exotic food.

SLUGSY

We'll see. Elbon?

Elbon pulls a small, puffed out, spidery creature from a glass jar swimming with them. Places it on Ray's chest. Its movements are deliberate, creepy... like a tarantula's. It inches toward Ray's face.

SLUGSY

This is a lecroNid. Its blood is highly unstable, even explosive. That's why it moves so slowly. A delicacy to most alien species, but to humans - fatal.

With his gun barrel, Elbon pokes the lecroNid toward Ray's mouth.

SLUGSY

Which is it to you, Mr. Gunn?

The lecroNid inches over Ray's chin, resting on Ray's trembling, tightly clamped lips.

SLUGSY

Open up, Mr. Gunn. Open up or Elbon will shoot you right now.

Ray slowly parts his quivering lips. Elbon nudges it into Ray's open mouth. Chest heaving, Ray closes his lips around it.

SLUGSY

Good. Now bite.... and swallow.

Ray HESITATES. Glances around the room. SEES IN QUICK CUTS:

The GUN BARREL... inches away from his face.

SLUGSY watching intently.

ELBON, holding the gun, popping a cigarette between his lips with one of his free hands, and igniting...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

...a LIGHTER.

Ray BITES DOWN. The lecronid POPS inside his mouth like a cherry tomato. Ray snaps his head toward Elbon and SPITS the JUICE into the open FLAME! FOOM!!

Elbon SHRIEKS, his upper body and multiple legs ENGULFED in FLAME. His PISTOL slides across the floor.

Ray LEAPS from the chair, knocking Gungel aside. The door is locked. Ray THROWS his weight against it.

Elbon is a TORCH. He SCREAMS and charges blindly through the room, colliding with furniture and igniting the drapes.

Ray can't get through the door. Scrambling, Gungel seizes Elbon's GUN, swings it toward Ray. Ray looks back just as -

FLAMING ELBON crashes blindly into him. They EXPLODE through the door and -

INT. STORE - FRONT ROOM

- tumble into the store filled with startled CUSTOMERS! Melons and goods go flying. Ray stumbles to his feet, his jacket on fire. A startled GOON instinctively BLOCKS the front door. Ray nabs a hajlas melon and DIVES through the display window...

EXT. F. XAVIER'S FINE EXOTIC FOODS - DAY

...hitting the elevated sidewalk, rolling to snuff the flames. He tumbles off the sidewalk's edge and PLUMMETS straight down, bouncing off a canopy and landing on the HOOD of an AEROCAR!

Ray - dazed, blue-faced and smoldering - realizes he's on a CAB. He weakly lifts a hand...

RAY

Taxi...?

INT. VOGEL'S MEGAMEDIA OFFICE

Assistants scurry, kinetoscopes blare videos, phones ring. Vogel slides a glass panel shut, muting the noise. He sits at his desk, where Ray is on the PHOTOPHONE.

VOGEL

I suppose I should be happy. The whole planet wants her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Sure they want her. In bite-size chunks.

VOGEL

They're suddenly buying concert tickets!
We're selling out, Gunn! AND WE CAN'T
EVEN FIND HER!!

INTERCUT: RAY'S OFFICE

Ray is in his washroom, towelling off the blue make-up.

RAY

And you were worried about damage
control...

VOGEL

It's the press. They're animals. Worse
now than when we were starting out. This
is the kind of success I hate, the kind I
can't protect her from. Nothing worth-
while can survive it. Our marriage
couldn't.

Ray emerges from the bathroom. His jacket is in charred tatters.
He moves closer to his photophone.

RAY

What was that like, being Mr. Venus Envy?

VOGEL

(smiles)

By the looks of your jacket you already
know.

At Vogel's, a harried ASSISTANT slides open the door. The DIN
outside is huge.

ASSISTANT

It's "**Inside Dope**" on two. They claim
Venus had a breakdown and is en route to
a lunar sanitarium.

VOGEL

(almost shouting)

No further comment at this time!

(to Ray)

Find her, Gunn. Please. Before they do.

He hangs up; Ray's screen goes dark. He opens the door to his
inner office, where EYERA is crouched over something, holding
Ray's pen-knife.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EYERA
(looking up)

I don't get it. Look.

He steps aside, revealing the LARGE HAJLAS MELON. He's made a circular cut at the top.

EYERA
It's hollow!

EXT. - METROPIA / CLUB DISTRICT - NIGHT

A marquee reads; "No Talent Night." Ray walks up and goes inside.

INT. AL'S BAR - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Ray approaches the CLUB MANAGER.

RAY
Any female solo acts scheduled?

CLUB MANAGER
(checking list)
No solo females tonight.

Ray exits the club and into...

A MONTAGE

The marquees pan by: "UNSCHEDULED ACTS" "OPEN MIKE NIGHT." etc.

Ray wanders from bar to bar, suffering a CACOPHONY of sound and terrible acts, both human and alien. From time to time, he hears bits and pieces of a weird, haunting MELODY, as if on the wind... but it's constantly interrupted by the cheap, raucous sound of amateur acts at various clubs.

Finally, Ray slumps against a lamp post, on a crowded HOVERDOML platform. He's ready to give up and board a metal egg-shaped transport vehicle when he hears the strange MELODY again. It's good. He lets the subway car go.

A STREET

Ray walks against the flow of pedestrians. Now he can hear lyrics.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOICE

*I'm so tired of playing...
playing with this bow and arrow...*

The VOICE has an otherworldly quality, with two distinct, breathy harmonies beneath the main vocal. Puzzled, Ray follows the sound.

VOICE

*Gonna give my heart away
Leave it to the other girls to play
Cause I've been a temptress
Too long...*

INT. RAT'S NEST - NIGHT

A smoky, low-key blues joint. Ray enters, looks at the woman onstage.

It's VENUS, wearing her RED WIG. Her lush voice is full of feeling... totally unlike her glitzy pop persona.

Ray moves forward past a man (call him GLASSES) who seems to RECOGNIZE him. The man looks at his newspaper.

INSERT: NEWSPAPER

The huge front page photo shows Ray in Venus' picture window. Headline: "WHO IS VENUS' NEW MYSTERY MAN??"

NEAR THE STAGE

VENUS and Ray LOCK EYES. Venus likes the way he's looking at her, and starts to direct the song to him.

VENUS

*Give me a reason to love you
Give me a reason to be
a woman
I just want to be... a woman.*

Ray is ENTRANCED.

Venus finishes the number. The crowd APPLAUDS. Ray joins in. Venus sees something new in his eyes: respect.

RESUME GLASSES

- still pondering Ray and the newspaper. Finally:

GLASSES

(stares at stage)

My God. It's... Venus Envy!

Someone at the next table passes the news. Word spreads: "It's her", "She's wearing a wig", "It's Venus Envy", etc. A WOMAN goes to the PAY PHONE and dials.

WOMAN

(into phone)

Bob? Judy. Guess who's singing at the Rat's Nest right now...

EXT. RAT'S NEST - NIGHT

Customers excitedly crowd in. "Venus Envy's inside!" etc...

INT. RAT'S NEST

The bar is FILLING UP and the murmurs have grown into a dull roar, drowning out Venus's song. She begins to falter as she realizes: they've STOPPED LISTENING. Then, at the back of the club, she SEES...

CAMERAS. The MEDIA! The CROWD surges up against the stage.

VENUS

Ray...?

A man grabs her foot, starts to pull her shoe off. As Venus bends down to push him away, someone yanks off her RED WIG! The crowd ERUPTS! It IS Venus Envy!!!! They RUSH the stage!!

VENUS

Ray!!

Ray jumps onstage. A FAT MAN charges at Ray, who PUNCHES his lights out. Venus swings the mike stand to hold back the crowd. Ray yanks her offstage.

EXT. ALLEY / BEHIND RAT'S NEST - NIGHT

Venus and Ray head for her flashy convertible. They hop in and TAKE OFF one jump ahead of the crowd.

INT. XENO JOE'S - NIGHT

This is a dark, bohemian coffee house, populated entirely by hipster aliens, some dancing to the sensuous beat of a weird quintet.

RAY and VENUS sit at a table, sipping coffee.

RAY

Why the hell would you pull a stunt like that at a time like this?

VENUS

I just want to *sing*. And have people listen without thinking of me as a pop star or a murderer or a-a-

(beat)

I don't know who I am anymore.

The tempo of the music picks up.

RAY

Maybe you should ask Levity Love. She does a pretty good impression.

VENUS

Little bloodsucker. First she feeds off my marriage, then my career. I'm not going to take it much longer -

RAY

We need to talk.

VENUS

No, we don't. We need to dance.

She pulls him out of his chair and onto the dance floor.

Their DANCE is part lindy hop, part martial arts. A study in mutual attraction and defense, both sensuous and downright hostile. At first, Venus clearly leads.

RAY

I don't wanna dance.

VENUS

Don't be embarrassed. I don't expect much

Ray frowns, suddenly spins her in a fancy move. Now Ray leads.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

I didn't say I couldn't dance. I said I don't want to.

VENUS

Have it your way.

- She flips him over her back. Venus turns away to dance with an alien. Ray forcibly cuts in, and again takes the lead.

RAY

Are you gonna talk to me? Or do I have to get rough?

Venus' eyes FLASH. She twirls, sweeping Ray's legs out from under him. He anticipates it and rolls, grabbing her arm and bending her back, close to the floor. Venus is surprised. *Impressed.*

RAY

I saw you with Slugsy today.

VENUS

You were following me?

RAY

I got lucky.

Again she flips him. Ray lands gracefully, and throws her into a hard spin. Other alien dancers watch, giving them a wider berth.

VENUS

Slugsy helped me when I was starting out. We had things in common.

RAY

Like what?

VENUS

We were both outsiders.

The dance brings them close together, closer than ever before.

RAY

He said he could "make you cooperate."
What's he got on you?

She breaks free, gives him a suspicious look. She tries to leave, but Ray grabs her. Resumes the dance. She looks into his eyes -

VENUS

This isn't going to work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY

Why not?

VENUS

We can't *both* lead.

EXT. FRONT ENTRANCE - BINFORD BUILDING - NIGHT

More RAIN as Ray and Venus pull up at the front entrance of his office building.

INT. VENUS'S AEROCAR

RAY

Well... thanks for the song and dance.

He opens the door.

VENUS

Don't go yet...

Ray closes the door. They sit in silence, listening to the patter of the rain on the roof. Finally:

RAY

Well... I -

VENUS

(suddenly)

Did you really like it? The song?

Ray looks at her, surprised to see her so vulnerable.

RAY

Very much.

VENUS

I wrote it. All my other songs have been written for me.

RAY

Probably why I like it.

Venus averts her eyes, smiles quietly to herself. Ray is completely intrigued with this new facet to her personality.

VENUS

Barry says it'll destroy my career.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

He's gotta save you from something. It's his job.

VENUS

He means well. This is a hard time for him.

RAY

Hard for him? What about you? You could lose everything.

VENUS

I could, couldn't I?

She LAUGHS, delighted with the idea.

RAY

You could always run away...

VENUS

(wan smile)

For tonight at least.

She looks at Ray warmly.

RAY

Well... good night.

VENUS

Good night.

Ray opens the door and climbs out.

INT. BINFORD BUILDING - LOBBY/ELEVATORS - NIGHT

Ray straps himself into the elevator, lost in thought. The doors start to close. Suddenly an ARM REACHES through, forcing the doors to RE-OPEN. Startled, Ray looks up as -

VENUS leans in, KISSES Ray full on the lips...

POV RAY

As Venus walks briskly away, she looks back and waves. The DOORS CLOSE, blocking her from view.

INT. ELEVATOR

RAY is frozen in his blank stare as the elevator BLASTS OFF. Even though he vibrates during the ascent, a smile tugs at the corners of his mouth.

EXT. BINFORD BUILDING - NIGHT

Venus gets into her AEROCAR. It ascends into the rain.

INSIDE VENUS'S AEROCAR - NIGHT

She, too is smiling. Outside, the office windows of Ray's building move by... all dark, except ONE.

Inside, TWO FIGURES go through files, scattering papers. She SLOWS her car, dims her LIGHTS. Then something else catches her eye: the name stenciled on one of the office windows:

"Raymond Gunn - Private Investigations"

The FIGURES suddenly freeze, then shut out the lights...

INT. BINFORD BUILDING - OUTER OFFICE - SAME TIME

Ray ENTERS. He notices a blinking MESSAGE light on the Phoebe's PHOTOPHONE. He presses a button. Sam Stelfreeze appears on the SMALL SCREEN.

STELFREEZE

Hey. Ray. I'm sending that audio enhance you wanted. Call me.

The picture cuts to VIDEO FOOTAGE: Venus choking Dom. Vogel pulls Venus off as Dom GASPS, COUGHING raggedly. He turns to Venus and this time Ray can CLEARLY HEAR:

DOM

(raspy)

The public won't love you, forever, sugar. Especially when I tell them your little secret.

Venus reacts with OUTRAGE, clawing at the air, barely restrained by Vogel, eyes afire -

VENUS

I'll KILL you, you worthless leech!!
You're DEAD!!! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The TRANSMISSION ENDS. Ray stares for a moment, then presses the "SAVE" button. He sees red light coming from the darkroom -

RAY

Eyera?

He glances inside. No one there. Ray turns to his office, pushes open the door and snaps on the LIGHTS, REVEALING -

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Papers everywhere. And the HAJLAS MELON, sitting on his desktop.

RAY

Eye - ?

Slugsy's surviving goons, GUNSEL and the large, brainless LUG train their weapons on Ray.

GUNSEL

We meet again, Mr. Gunn, but you look much better in blue. You like hajlas melons?

RAY

A little too ripe for me.

Lug picks up the melon and stuffs it in his huge coat. Gungel holds up a stack of PHOTOS: SLUGSY and DOM outside the Moon Room.

GUNSEL

If you have an interest in Mr. Xavier, why not come with us?

They close in. Resigned, Ray raises his arms for the inevitable frisk. He's clean. They propel him toward the door.

TIGHT ON RAY'S COATSLEEVE

As he lowers his arms, the KAHL silently drops into his palm.

HALLWAY - JET ELEVATORS

As Gungel summons the elevator: Zzzapp!! A flash of red light and Lug VANISHES, his weapon clattering to the floor. Ray levels his blaster at the astonished Gungel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY
 (smiles)
 Gosh, where'd he go???!!!
 (gestures)
 Back to my office, scooter. Let's talk.

Ray motions him back toward his office...

...and steps on Lug's pistol! He FALLS BACK, his Kahl DISCHARGING - which REINTEGRATES LUG up against the ceiling!

For a moment Lug hangs there, dumbfounded. Ray ROLLS clear - into the elevator, just as Lug CRASHES to the floor!!

Ray comes up, trains his pistol on Lug, who SWATS it away. The blaster bounces off the back wall of the elevator.

Ray hits the button for the BOTTOM FLOOR. Gungel and Lug jump inside just ahead of the CLOSING DOORS.

A moment of HORROR as they realize *THEY AREN'T STRAPPED IN...*

THOOOOOOOOMMM!!!

Bodies SMASH against the ceiling as the elevator ROCKETS 227 floors STRAIGHT DOWN!

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

The CAR bullets past, disappearing down the shaft!

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR

Their faces contorted by the G forces, Gungel and Lug struggle with their weapons, which suddenly weigh a ton. They're trying to aim at Ray, whose Kahl is pinned to the ceiling. He can't reach it.

Lug is slowly lifting his gun ever closer toward Ray. So, Ray hits the STOP button.

A deafening SCREECH as the elevator STOPS - SLAMMING everyone to the floor!

The three wobble to their feet. Gungel remembers his gun, points it unsteadily at Ray, who slumps against the wall, defeated.

GUNGEL
 Now. You will stop trying to be Mr. clever smartman... and come wi -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Just then, the doors OPEN, REVEALING a matronly WOMAN with a shopping bag. She sees them and SHRIEKS - spilling her groceries.

Ray JABS the button for the 339th floor! WHAM - the doors close and FOOOOOomm! All are THROWN to the floor!

ELEVATOR SHAFT

as the car ROARS heavenward.

RESUME RAY & CO.

...as the unhappy trio is crushed flat against the floor next to flattening fruits and vegetables.

Ray inches toward his blaster, but Lug drags his pistol up. BLAM! Cans of food EXPLODE, spraying SAUCE everywhere. Ray is unharmed, his gun is almost in hand when -

- WHAM!! The car suddenly STOPS at the top floor, pitching everything to the ceiling and then to the floor. The groceries rain down.

Silence. Then GROANING. Gonsel, bleeding from his nose, woozily roots through the clutter for his pistol.

Covered in sauce, Lug grabs Ray by the throat. Ray thrashes futilely. He has no choice. He reaches back to the control panel-

GUNSEL

Please God, no - !

Yes. Ray jabs a button. Everyone and everything SLAM painfully to the ceiling again.

Ray spies his blaster, caught in the strap directly above him. He slides his hands into position, waiting for the inevitable -

- SUDDEN STOP. Ray deftly nabs the pistol as everything is hurled back to the floor. CRASH!!!

THE 249TH FLOOR - HALLWAY

Elevator doors OPEN. Ray executes a perfect shoulder roll and gets the drop on the GOONS. They FREEZE. Ray swings his pistol back and forth between them...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUNSEL

He can't beat both of us...

They MOVE for their weapons - Ray FIRES and - FLASH!

- his gun MALFUNCTIONS!! Ray suddenly finds *his body has been REARRANGED!!!* His arms and legs have changed places on his torso, which has been turned on its side like a crab. His head is at the bottom of it all, wearing a face of utter confusion.

Unharmd, GUNSEL and LUG gawk...

FLASH! Ray fires and his parts REARRANGE AGAIN! Gungel and Lug stand in awe, unsure of how to proceed.

Ray awkwardly lurches away. Amused, Gungel and Lug follow, like kids trailing a tortoise. Gungel CHUCKLES, shaking his head.

GUNSEL

Mr. Gunn. Now you're just being silly...

Ray fires the gun, REINTEGRATING into a something resembling a human pogo ball. He HOPS. Gungel and Lug CACKLE.

Ray FIRES; reforms into a humanized table. Venus's AEROCAR appears outside the window at the far end of the hall.

VENUS

The WINDOW Ray!! JUMP!!

Ray breaks into a clumsy gallop, heading toward the window. The goons race after him, BLASTING. Ray FLINGS HIS BODY THROUGH the window -

EXT. OUTSIDE RAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

- and out into space! Venus watches with horror as Ray arcs out OVER her convertible and plunges into the darkness.

VENUS

Oh, my GOD!!

Venus throws her aerocar into a POWER DIVE, racing to catch up.

WIDE

CAMERA PLUMMETS with them, SILHOUETTES in a race straight down.

RESUME VENUS

Her engine's ROARING. She's squints into the rushing WIND as her eyes dart between Ray and the inescapable ground RUSHING up.

Suddenly, she YANKS BACK ON THE STEERING WHEEL and the car is SCREAMING out of the dive but the ground is RIGHT THERE and -

RAY IS CAUGHT, landing safely in the passenger seat!

SPARKS FLY as the underbelly shaves the street, the car straining for altitude.

VENUS is JAMMED deep into her seat as the car goes VERTICAL...

METROPIA SKYLINE - NIGHT

and up... slowing... until the convertible levels off, floating over moonlit clouds, where only the tops of tall buildings poke through.

INSIDE THE CONVERTIBLE

Venus SLUMPS, starts breathing again. She's white as a sheet.

VENUS

(gasping)

Ohhh. My God. Omigodomigodomigod. I can't believe I got you. Oh, I'm going to die now. I'll just have my attack and it'll all be over.

(swallows)

My life flashed before my eyes. Don't ever make my li -

She turns, getting her first good look at RAY... and SCREAMS!

RAY

I'M OKAY!! I'M OKAY!! STOP SCREAMING!

Venus does... staring at him in wide-eyed HORROR.

RAY

My gun malfunctioned. I'm scrambled, but none of me is missing.

VENUS

Are you sure...?

But the GOONS' CAR comes screaming out of the clouds and BOOM!!!

METROPIA STREETS

-- they COLLIDE! Both GO DOWN in a skidding crash-landing.

Venus has hit her head on the dash. She's bleeding.

RAY

Run... you can't carry me and I can't keep up. Run!

Venus looks back. The GOONS stumble from their car, woozily training their guns on Ray.

VENUS

BACK OFF!!!

They stop, surprised by her ferocity.

VENUS

Let him go. Or I'll go to Slugsy myself. I'll make sure you hate every day of your drastically shortened lives.

TIGHT ON RAY'S HAND

which (in his rearranged state) is near the floor. His fingers TIGHTEN around his malfunctioning PARTICLE BLASTER.

BACK TO SCENE

GUNSEL

Stay out of this, Envy. It's business.

VENUS

That's right, maggot. And I'm involved now. Go ahead. Test my clout with your boss.

Gunsel hesitates, frustrated by her threat. Then SMILES.

GUNSEL

He doesn't need to know.

He grins sadistically as both goons point their guns at Venus.

RAY SPRINGS UP

in front of Venus, grabbing hold of the goons and YANKING them together in a big BEAR HUG. Ray's one free limb produces his BLASTER. He jams it into the center of the GROUP and pulls the trigger! **THWAAAMM!!!**

ON VENUS

- as she's LIT UP by the tremendous FLASH of red light. The goons' PISTOLS tumble INTO FRAME at her feet. Venus stares AGHAST as she hears Ray's pained voice -

RAY (OS)

...run....

Venus stumbles back, horrified at what she sees, but unable to look away. Then she turns and runs off into the night...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

ON SOMETHING

It has three heads, six eyes, six feet, six hands... and it's MASSIVE. CAMERA PULLS BACK.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

It's RAY, GUNSEL and LUG, randomly thrown together into a lumpy, hulking, multi-headed creature.

IT sits, looking irritated and unhappy, directly in front of:

SLUGSY

- also massive, irritated and unhappy. He massages his throbbing temples. In the background, dozens of hajlas melons move along a conveyor belt.

SLUGSY

I asked you guys to do a simple job...

GUNSEL HEAD

(muttering)

Yes, but you didn't -

SLUGSY

Shut up!

(beat)

I told you to look through Mr. Gunn's files. I didn't say "look through Mr. Gunn's files and merge your bodies together into a grotesque botch", did I??

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUNSEL & LUG HEADS

(ad-lib negative muttering)

No, you didn't... it was his gun... etc.

Slugsy shakes his head in disgust. Just then, a bright purple 3-D CREATURE materializes before them. It's a *holographic* alien, in full color, juggling Indian clubs and cracking jokes in Xenish.

SLUGSY

Selick!? Where are you?

An ALIEN WORKER in a lab coat rushes up. In one hand he holds an ELECTRONIC PART (looks like a vacuum tube). In the other, he has a remote control. (This dialog in subtitled Xenish.)

ALIEN WORKER

Sorry, Mr. Xavier! New shipment, wired for color..!

SLUGSY

Not now... where's Selick?

Using a joystick, the worker walks the 3-D hologram into a back room. Even in his melded state, Ray is impressed.

RAY

You're smuggling replicators?

SLUGSY

Of course. In these.

He grabs the large hajlas melon from the table.

SLUGSY

Quite lucrative. Alien technology doesn't come cheap, especially if its illegal.

RAY

Who's buying?

SLUGSY

I can't say, I don't say. I merely supply the human population with what it wants. Pity, really. The melons are delicious.

He cuts open the melon and...

EYERA SPRINGS OUT snapping open like a portable umbrella. He madly swings a gun around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EYERA

FREEZE YOU UGLY MOTHERS! Nobody moves!
Ray comes with me! Ray?... R—ay...??

He gawks at the Ray/Lug/Gunsel beast. Slugsy cuffs Eyera to the ground. His gun is snatched by a GOON.

SLUGSY
(yells)

What about the gun?? SELICK...!?

SELICK, a small man with a large head and long, graceful fingers comes running with Ray's partially disassembled gun on a tray.

SELICK

It's a KAHL A113 Particle Blaster. Uses one of our coils. They don't make them anymore.

SLUGSY

Hmn? Why not?

SELICK

Well... they, uh... uhm...

He gestures at Ray and company.

SLUGSY

Oh, yes... yes, of course.

SELICK

They're amazing weapons, really. But quite fragile. Any big bump will throw them out of alignment.

(to Ray & Co.)

Did you bump this?

RAY & CO.

(ad-lib muttering)

Yeah, sure... it was bumped, etc.

Selick tinkers with the gun, as Slugsy seethes.

SLUGSY

(to Ray's head)

I hold you responsible for this. I'd have you surgically removed and tortured if it were possible.

A BEAM suddenly RIPS through the air, DISINTEGRATING Ray and Co.! Selick holds Ray's BLASTER, its barrel still smoking. He calmly adjusts a dial on the gun's side, FIRES three times -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

- reintegrating GUNSEL, LUG and RAY into their normal, separate selves.

SELICK

It's possible.

Slugsy GRINS nastily. Ray winces. Out of the frying pan and onto...

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - NIGHT

Now Ray and Eyera are flat on their backs, SECURED to a sooty pad of concrete. Eyera BLINKS, snapping a few pictures.

RAY

What's the point? We're going to die.

EYERA

Just want to finish the roll. You gotta admit. It's a helluva shot.

PULL BACK to reveal that they're directly under the exhaust port of an immense ROCKET FREIGHTER.

In the background, a forest of rockets stand like a towering bed of nails pointed toward the starry sky. Every few seconds and in sequence, one of them blasts off in a ROARING BALL OF FIRE!

Overhead, a COUNTDOWN begins. Slugsy leans over them.

SLUGSY

Normally I'm not nostalgic, but this was my port of entry to this world. I was young like you, Mr. Gunn, full of foolish ideas.

SELICK

(reacts, to himself)

Gunn? Raymond Gunn?

(to Slugsy)

Excuse me, Mr. Xavier...

SLUGSY

Foolish human ideas. They sounded good.

(grandly)

"Separate but equal".

(bitter chuckle)

That was half right.

The ground QUAKES as another rocket BLASTS into the heavens.

(CONTINUED)

SLUGSY

Rejection of the unfamiliar is human nature. Yet, most of nature is not human.

A CLOSER ROCKET takes off. Ray's getting NERVOUS...

SELICK

Uh, Mr. Xavier...

SLUGSY

(oblivious)

You think I enjoy life on the outside -- always looking in? There are only a few avenues to success if you aren't human... and they all happen to be illegal!

SELICK

...about Mr. Gunn -

SLUGSY

(snaps at Slick)

I DON'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS ABOUT MR. GUNN!!

(cordial again, to Ray)

Goodbye.

The countdown reaches nine... eight... Clouds of vaporizing rocket fuel swirl around them. Slugsy and his goons start to clear the area. All except Slick. And he's getting panicky -

The ground starts to VIBRATE... pre-ignition! CAMERA MOVES IN. Ray shuts his eyes, grimacing, preparing -

SELICK

EXCUSE ME!!!!

CUT TO:

A JET OF FLAME

Blazing down, THROUGH FRAME... CAMERA PULLS BACK, revealing a cigar, stuck in RAY'S mouth. He puffs, drawing flame from Slugsy's lighter, then blows a SMOKE RING, savoring the taste.

PULL BACK reveal Ray and Slugsy, side by side at Slugsy's lair, in huge leather arm chairs. A pair of tootsies in skimpy outfits are serving them drinks.

SLUGSY

So, you are the man who rid the world of Vanzine Kaluta! She almost cost me my hotel!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He ROARS with laughter. The room is FESTIVE, filled with Slugsy's toadies, all enjoying music and drink as instructed. Slugsy leans over and gives Ray a pat on the cheek. Gunsel watches jealously.

SLUGSY

And here I was about to kill you. Do forgive me, Mr. Gunn, I had no idea.

RAY

That's okay. Neither did I.

Everyone LAUGHS as if it's the greatest joke in the universe. Some good-time girls sit on Eysa's lap, posing as he happily clicks away, burning through a silver tray piled high with film.

Glasses CLINK, backs are SLAPPED. Good will to burn. Selick hands Ray his particle blaster.

SELICK

Now, don't bump it...

RAY

(mock drops it)

Whoops...!

This gets the biggest laugh yet.

RAY

(still chuckling)

There's just one thing I'd like to know, Slugsy...

The room goes suddenly SILENT... even the MUSIC stops.

SLUGSY

(softly, cold & dangerous)

NO ONE calls me that. My name is Francis Xavier.

The room is fat with TENSION. No one even breathes.

RAY

Sorry...

SLUGSY

(beat, shrugging it off)

How could you know?

The music and chatter RESUMES with relief.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SLUGSY

What's your question?

RAY

Did you murder Arnold Dom?

SLUGSY

Mr. Gunn. If I wanted Dom killed he would have simply disappeared. And if you continue to poke your nose into my business...

Slugsy tousles Ray's hair. Ray gets the message loud and clear.

EXT. BINFORD BUILDING - NIGHT

A long, black HOVERCAR descends. A door opens in the back and Ray painfully exits.

RAY

See ya around, boys. It's been surreal.

A woozy wave from Gunsel, Lug and Eyera, who lounge drunkenly within. Champagne bottles litter the floor. Ray shuts the door and the car jets away into the night sky.

INT. RAY'S APARTMENT/OFFICE - NIGHT

Pained and weary, Ray puts his key in the door and PUSHES IT OPEN TO REVEAL:

VENUS, looking anxious. She stands.

VENUS

Ray...?? Ray...!

She approaches him, stunned that his body is normal again.

VENUS

How did -- what happened? Are you okay??

(gestures at his body)

Are you...is everything... I mean...

RAY

I'm all right. I'm just... sore.

VENUS

I didn't know what to do, who to call. I just came here, hoping... hoping that you wouldn't be --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She wraps her arms around him, embracing him. He emits a WHIMPER.

VENUS

(releasing him)

Oh God, I'm so sorry...

RAY

It's all right. It just... hurts to be touched.

Venus looks into his eyes, as if she understands all too well, and very slowly... very tenderly moves closer...

VENUS

We don't have to touch...

Ray doesn't move. He searches her eyes... as she slowly brings her lips to his... hesitating... not quite touching -

VENUS

...and we don't have to feel...

They kiss, lighter than air at first, then gently deeper... as CAMERA DRIFTS BACK...

...and Ray's door closes them from view.

INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wrapped in a tangle of sheets, Venus and Ray speak softly, not breaking the warm spell.

VENUS

It's funny.

RAY

What?

VENUS

This has been the scariest night of my life, but... I've never felt so safe.

Ray smiles sleepily. He touches the metal necklace draped around her neck.

VENUS

My father gave it to me. For luck. I never take it off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Never?

VENUS

I might someday. When I'm lucky enough.

RAY

It's strange. Beautiful.

Venus smiles slowly. She rolls over on her stomach, changing the subject.

VENUS

Barry said you were a cop. I can't picture it.

RAY

Why not?

VENUS

Because I can't picture me with a cop. Why did you quit?

RAY

I didn't. I lost my badge. My captain did something wrong, I covered it up and took the rap.

VENUS

Why?

RAY

I guess I was trying to protect her.

VENUS

Her...?

Ray is silent.

VENUS

Did you love her?

RAY

Once.

She sits in silence for a moment.

VENUS

Did she ever thank you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY

In a way. She took my badge.

VENUS

That's cold.

(pause, smiles)

Naturally, you swore off women.

RAY

That was the plan.

They kiss.

CAMERA DRIFTS BACK, as the muffled sound of the city only amplifies the room's peaceful silence.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE : TIGHT ON RAY'S FACE

- as it is caressed by FEMALE HANDS. As the hands pull away, they REVEAL A YOUNGER RAY, from his cop days. One of the hands OPENS, palm up. Ray removes his badge and surrenders it.

RAY (V.O.)

I guess I was trying to protect her.

The CAMERA lifts to reveal that the hands belong to VENUS.

Flashback: VENUS & RAY KISSING.

EYERA (VO)

What're you doing, Ray?

FLASH! to:

VENUS'S FACE...

BLEVINS (VO)

The heart's an overrated organ, Gunn.
Look where yours has gotten you.

Venus strangles Dom, who transforms into Ray. VENUS CHOKES RAY.

VENUS

You're DEAD! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

XENO JOE'S - NIGHT

Flashback: Ray and Venus dancing.

VENUS

Slugsy helped me when I was starting out.
We had things in common.

RAY

Like what?

RAY JOLTS AWAKE

- disoriented, heart pounding. He finds himself tenderly entwined with Venus, and that she's sleeping like a baby.

RAY

(whispering)

...like what?

Ray slowly pulls away the sheet... revealing...

GILLS at the base of her neck, partially visible behind her necklace. Venus Envy is an ALIEN.

Ray drops the sheet, recoiling.

INT. PHOEBE'S OFFICE

Ray watches his PHOTOPHONE, REPLAYING Stelfreeze's enhanced transmission of Venus's attack on Dom.

DOM

The public won't love you, forever,
sugar. Especially when I tell them your
little secret.

Venus reacts with OUTRAGE, clawing at the air, barely restrained by Vogel, eyes afire -

VENUS

I'll KILL you, you worthless leech!!
You're DEAD!!! Understand me?? DEAD!!!

The TRANSMISSION ENDS, turning to STATIC. PUSH IN on Ray as he stares at the blank screen.

Arms start to wrap around his neck and RAY nearly jumps out of his skin. It's VENUS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY
JESUS!!... you scare me, scared me.

VENUS
What's wrong...?

RAY
I couldn't sleep.

Venus looks at the screen full of static, puzzled.

VENUS
Come back to bed.

RAY
I told you. I can't sleep.

VENUS
(snuggling up to him)
We don't have to sleep...
(recognizes Ray is cold)
What's wrong? What're you not telling me?

RAY
I should ask you the same question.

The phone RINGS. Venus studies Ray, hurt and puzzled. Finally, Ray picks up.

INTERCUT: VOGEL AT HOME/RAY'S OFFICE

Vogel stands in front of an enormous kinetoscope, on which LEVITY LOVE is in the middle of an interview. She is wearing a VENUS ENVY wig and costume.

VOGEL
Is she there? Put her on.

Ray hands the phone to Venus.

VOGEL
(grim)
Turn on Channel 101.

Venus turns up the volume on Ray's kinetoscope. Venus is APALLED.

VENUS
Oh, my God. She's doing interviews,
dressed like me...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEVITY

(to interviewer)

If Venus really loved her fans, she'd tell them the truth about who she really is. What she really is. And since she won't tell you, I will.

VOGEL

Now, keep calm, okay?

Kinetoscope CUTS TO: A REPORTER sitting at a news desk.

REPORTER

Levity Love will be holding a live press conference later this morning with new revelations about Venus Envy.

VOGEL

Don't do anything. I want you to stay out of sight, understand? Venus?

Venus drops the phone. Hypnotically, she flips from channel to channel -

CLICK. Gossip about Venus. CLICK. News about Venus. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK: Soundies by Venus, Venus merchandise for sale, Venus at large, Venus the star, the murderer, the product.

A LOUD CRASH. Instinctively, Ray ducks. When he looks up, his kinetoscope is gone. Venus has tossed it through the window. He checks the room: she's gone.

VOGEL (THROUGH PHONE)

What was that? Venus!?

RAY

(picking up)

It's me, Barry.

VOGEL

What now!? Put her on the line...

RAY

I'm afraid I can't do that.

Ray moves to the window and LOOKS DOWN.

VOGEL

How long's she been there? All night?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY
That's none of your business.

VOGEL
It is my business, Gunn!
(pause)
Sorry. I - I can't help it. I'm an idiot,
I just -

RAY
Hold it. I see her.

POV RAY

Ray's GYRON swings around the corner far below, zooming up with VENUS at the wheel.

RAY
She just stole my car.

VOGEL
This is great! This is JUST GREAT!! Her
concert's a joke! The studio's already
furious! What am I going to tell them??

Vogel HANGS UP.

I/E. EYERA'S AEROCYCLE (MOVING) - DAY

The aerocycle maneuvers violently through the ribbons of rush hour traffic. Eyera drives. Ray holds on like a man possessed.

EYERA
You want to tell me what's the hurry...?

RAY
Just drive, dammit!

EXT. OUTSIDE RIVA ALTA APARTMENTS - DAY

They pull up to the RIVA ALTA APARTMENTS. Ray jumps from the aerocycle and runs inside.

INT. RIVA ALTA APARTMENTS

Ray races up to Levity's room, pushes open the door to REVEAL:

LEVITY IS DEAD. Ray is devastated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From the corner of his eye, Ray sees a shape, hiding behind the door. He steps into the room and SLAMS the door! Revealing -

- VENUS. She looks at Ray with imploring eyes...

VENUS

She was dead when I got here.

RAY

As good as dead anyway.

VENUS

I didn't kill her... I know it looks bad,
I-

RAY

When were you going to tell me?

VENUS

What...?

RAY

STOP IT!!

Ray tears off her necklace, exposing her GILLS. Instinctively she covers them with a hand.

RAY

Were you EVER going to tell me???

VENUS

I... I was afraid. I didn't know how
you'd feel...

RAY

Do you know how I feel now?? Would you
like to guess???

VENUS

It was too soon! I kept thinking things
would change, that people would change,
that they'd accept us...! Then, I could
tell you. I could tell everybody...

Ray picks up a phone, dials a number.

RAY

But Levity almost beat you to it. Can't
have that. It might hurt sales.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VENUS

Yes! No, that's not it... It was *my* life,
not hers! Oh, God, that sounds like a
confession. Ray, please...

RAY

(into phone)

Ray Gunn for Lieutenant Blevins.

VENUS

You don't believe me...?

RAY

Lou? How soon can you get to the Riva
Alta?

(beat)

Fine. Hurry.

He hangs up.

VENUS

(crushed)

You think I - ?

RAY

From the beginning.

VENUS

Then wh - why did you...?

RAY

You think I only work for innocent
people? You hired me to find out if
someone else killed your husband. The
answer is no. I've done my job.

VENUS

Is that all I mean to you...?

This tears Ray up inside. He grabs her forcefully.

RAY

Why should you mean more?? Why should you
matter more to me than anything else??
Because of last night?

She SLAPS his face. Instantly he SLAPS her back.

RAY

You think I don't want to lie for you?!
I do. I do and I won't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

VENUS

I didn't kill her! I didn't kill either of them!

RAY

I'm not a fool!!!

VENUS

You hate me. You hate me because I'm not human!

RAY

I don't care what you are!! I won't scrap my life for you!!

Defeated, he sits down. She comes up behind him, clutching a vodka bottle.

RAY

Blevins has orders to bring you in. We have just enough time for you to write me a check. You wanted a new life, sugar... here it is.

(he turns to her)

It's safe to say the old one is over -

WHAM! She clocks him with the bottle.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

LEVITY'S LIVING ROOM

Eyera, Blevins and Phoebe stare down at RAY as a DOCTOR bandages his head. They've stretched him out on the sofa.

DOCTOR

Mild concussion. Looks like he was struck.

PHOEBE

I disagree. I know how this man reacts to women. I think he fell.

RAY

(groggy)

Phoebe...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHOEBE

(sympathetic)

Look at you. I'm gone for a few measley days...

RAY

Levity... she's-

EYERA

The cops are already here, Ray. There's a warrant out for Envy's arrest.

Ray abruptly SITS UP, causing his head to THROB. Several COPS comb the crime scene, gathering evidence. Ray leans toward Eyera.

RAY

Where is she...?

EYERA

Nobody knows.

EXT. METRODEON DISTRICT - DAY

City streets for blocks around are jammed with people and vehicles. Everyone is headed for the amphitheater. A CHANT can be heard: "Ve-nus! Ve-nus!"

GUARD KIOSK

The studio GUARD tries to wave the people away, but he's forced back into his little booth.

GUARD

Get back...! Go home!!

With a loud CRACK, his kiosk breaks free and he's swept aside by the mob. "Ve-nus! Ve-nus!"

MAIN GATE

A MULTITUDE of restless fans presses up against the main gate, ignoring desperate exhortations from the loudspeakers.

LOUDSPEAKERS

PLEASE MOVE AWAY FROM THE GATE. The Venus Envy concert has been CANCELLED. Return your ticket to the box office for a FULL REFUND.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGRY CONCERT-GOER
WE DON'T WANT A REFUND!! WE'RE HERE FOR
VENUS ENVY!!

An rebellious ROAR of support issues forth. The crowd begins to CRUSH against the FRONT GATE causing it to ROCK back and forth.

LOUDSPEAKERS
(new voice)
THIS IS THE POLICE. A WARRENT HAS BEEN
ISSUED FOR THE ARREST OF VENUS ENVY. MOVE
AWAY FROM THE GATE AND DISPERSE OR WE
WILL ARREST YOU, TOO...

The crowd roars with mocking LAUGHTER. All that's necessary now is for one crazed Venus fan to shout -

CRAZED VENUS FAN
THEY CAN'T STOP VENUS - OR US!!!

CHAOS!! With a defiant ROAR the sea of people surges forward - CRASHING against the gate. A WAVE of humanity floods the grounds like water from a burst dam.

After a moment of futile resistance, a few COPS retreat from the stampede, as the capacity crowd rushes into the arena...

Flowing with the mob, CAMERA CLOSES IN on one face, half hidden under the hood of a baggy sweatshirt: VENUS ENVY.

Unrecognized, she keeps her gaze fixed on the ground, walking right past the cops!

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Ray returns to his office, feeling rocky. He sits down and hauls out his bottle of bourbon.

He slowly and carefully pours a full jigger of whiskey. He holds the drink for a moment... then hurls his glass - shattering it on the wall. At that moment -

A HOLO-AD APPEARS... advertising a NEW KINETOSCOPE.

This makes Ray even MADDER. He heaves anything within reach at the hologram: the BOURBON BOTTLE, a LAMP... as he picks up a small STATUE -

- he STOPS and stares at the HOLO- AD: A KINETOSCOPE?

He looks back at the VACANT SPOT his kinetoscope occupied only hours before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His mind racing, Ray yanks open his file cabinet and pulls out Eyera's PHOTOS of the ARNOLD DOM MURDER SCENE.

TIGHT ON THE PHOTOS: a HOLO-AD plays in the center of the room behind Dom's body.

Ray grabs his coat, pausing long enough to see a SECOND HOLO-AD starting - advertising UNBREAKABLE LAMPS.

RAY

Sonuvabitch...

EXT. MEGAMEDIA STUDIOS - MEGAMEDIA TOWER - DUSK

An immense, orange SUNSET spreads out in the Western sky, silhouetting the spiky antennae high atop the Megamedia tower.

On the ROOFTOP, an access door opens and Ray walks out, his hair and coat flying in the breeze. He sees SAM STELFREEZE calibrating a large dish antennae.

RAY

They KNOW, Sam.

STELFREEZE

Hi, Ray! What's this, a yes? Or you're still considering my offer...

RAY

The holo-ads KNOW. How do the holo-ads know what I need??

STELFREEZE

(stiffens)

I can't tell you, Ray. It's restricted. I'd lose my job.

RAY

Your job?? We're talking about lives here, Stelfreeze. Educate me before I do something rash.

INT. HOLO-MARKETING DIVISION/MEGAMEDIA

Stelfreeze and Ray walk through a massive cumulation of metal, glass, wires, and tubes. Miniaturization doesn't exist here. Advanced machinery like this only comes in one size - ENORMOUS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STELFREEZE

A technological breakthrough made it possible. Certain electronics.

He flips open a panel, revealing an array of glowing tubes: *replicators!!* Ray plucks one out of its mount.

STELFREEZE

Whoa! Put that back! You don't play with unfamiliar compon -

RAY

Unfamiliar? Did you say... *unfamiliar?*
Who's your supplier, Sam?

STELFREEZE

I have no idea. Really, it's corporate. Corporate purchasing.

(beat)

Okay, I know they're illegal, but that'll change. We're using them wisely and responsibly. Hey, holo-ads are just the beginning. We can store *anything* in 3-D. In fact, we're gathering scans of every major star under contract to Megamedia.

Ray STOPS.

FLASHBACK TO: Venus holding still as the technician scans her with an ELABORATE MACHINE. End FLASHBACK.

RAY

Every star?? Including Venus Envy?

STELFREEZE

(cheerful)

Especially Venus Envy!!

INT. METRODEON - SKYBOX

Vogel stands with some nervous MEGAMEDIA OFFICIALS, surveying the restless sell-out crowd below. The Venus chant is louder now, more insistent.

VOGEL

Don't worry about it. They'll stay until they get bored. Then they'll go home.

Then, cutting through... a VOICE, unearthly, beautiful... Venus Envy's true voice. The crowd falls silent, looks around expectantly, puzzled, but captivated anyway.

INT. HOLO-MARKETING DIVISION / MEGAMEDIA - SAME TIME

Ray and Stelfreeze enter the circular ENCOMPASSCREEN ROOM and climb a few steps to a raised platform in the center, which is surrounded by a curved screen.

STELFREEZE

See, we have enough band width to send and receive information. The hologram doesn't just play, it records. Shoots 360 degree images of its surroundings and transmits those images back to us. Your place, for instance.

Sam punches a series of buttons.

ON THE ENCOMPASSCREEN a 360 IMAGE of RAY'S OFFICE appears.

STELFREEZE

It says you need... a carpet, two chairs, picture frames..... two windows...

(becoming astonished)

...a desk, a gun, a security system, two lamps, a secretary, Jesus, Ray...

RAY

I need you to call up a Holo-ad that appeared three nights ago at 92456 Mifroler Court, apartment 63.

Sam punches a few more buttons. Waits a beat -

STELFREEZE

It says we ran two ads there that night. Which one do you want?

Ray holds up the PHOTO from Dom's murder scene. Points to the HOLO-AD hovering over Dom's body.

RAY

This one!

STELFREEZE

The vacation ad?

Stelfreeze pokes a button. Ray's eyes suddenly widen.

ON THE ENCOMPASSCREEN

SOMEONE stands over Dom's body. The face is dark, indistinct.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Can you enlarge that??

Sam obliges.

STELFREEZE

Okay, enhancing...

PUSH IN ON RAY'S FACE as he reacts to what he's seeing.

RAY

I'll be damned.

EXT. METRODEON - TWILIGHT

A HOODED FIGURE emerges from a shadows onto the stage, radio-mike in hand, holding the last note of the song as it trails off into SILENCE. There is a stunned PAUSE. Then the figure throws back the hood: VENUS ENVY.

THE CROWD GOES INSANE!!

IN THE SKYBOX

Vogel's jaw drops.

VOGEL

This is great....! This is... history.

RESUME STAGE

Venus stands as the wave of cheers blows over her. But there is no joy on her face, no release. She is simply waiting for her chance to speak.

VENUS FAN

We love you, Venus!!

VENUS

You love me...?

(bitter chuckle)

Why ...?

VENUS FAN

Because of who you are!!

VENUS

And who is that...? A singing murderer?
Is that what's selling this week?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The crowd falls SILENT.

VENUS

You don't even know me.

VENUS FAN #2

We love you anyway....!!

VENUS

We'll see...

Venus pulls off necklace... and exposes her GILLS. Diamond vision type cameras zoom in for a close up, broadcasting the image over the giant screens placed throughout the arena. The crowd GASPS.

SKY BOX

VOGEL collapses into his chair, mortified. The crowd starts buzzing, chattering, arguing. Vogel cautiously looks out at the arena, where--

--the crowd begins to chant again: "Ve-nus! Ve-nus!"

ON STAGE

From the wings, the POLICE rush out to seize Venus. She grabs a remote --

-- and disappears in a cloud of pink stage smoke. The cops are baffled. A moment later, a cry goes up.

VENUS FAN #1

There she is!!!

Venus's gyron blasts low over the stands, the ROAR of the engine blending with the crowds ROAR, then up into the evening sky.

INT. MEGAMEDIA - FOLLOWING RAY & STELFREEZE

Sam jogs after Ray to the OUTER OFFICES.

RAY

Can you patch into their broadcast system?

STELFREEZE

(worried)

Yes...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They emerge into an outer office, only to find the office workers clustered around a KINETOSCOPE, watching live images of a high-speed CHASE: VENUS ENVY hotly pursued by an army of POLICE craft and MEDIA VEHICLES.

Ray bolts out of the room, Sam hustling after him.

EXT. HOLO-MARKETING BUILDING - NIGHT

Ray jumps on the aerocycle and fires it up.

STELFREEZE

What're you gonna do?

RAY

I'm gonna stop the show.

Ray hits the accelerator and ZOOMS off.

I/E. GYRON / METROPIA AIRWAYS - SAME TIME

Venus Envy is living her worst nightmare. The whole world is after her, pulling alongside, honking, waving, shooting photos.

Captain DEXLER personally pilots a four-passenger squad car. Her frightened police passengers hold on for dear life.

DEXLER

(on police loudspeaker)

Pull over and place your hands on the wheel! This is your last warning!

Tears stream down Venus' face as she pulls a radical loop. Some pursuing media vehicles COLLIDE with a cop aerocycle.

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARD ROOM - NIGHT

Men in sober suits. Long faces. The door flies open and VOGEL rushes in. He turns on a wall of kinetoscope monitors tuned to Megamedia's news channel.

VOGEL

Sorry I'm late, gentlemen, but there's something you'd better see.

Their live coverage of the Envy chase appears on the monitors.

I/E. GYRON/METROPIA AIRWAYS - SAME TIME

Every CAMERA VEHICLE within ten miles is watching as COP AEROCARS close in around Venus, FLANKING HER on all sides. Directly ahead is a massive office building. She's trapped.

But Venus doesn't stop. Incredibly, she STEPS ON IT!

I/E. COP AEROCAR

Captain DEXLER's eyes BUG OUT as the building LOOMS CLOSER.

DEXLER
WHAT THE HELL IS SHE DOING???

THE CRASH

The pursuing police craft BREAK OFF at the last minute as the gyron SMASHES into the side of the building, SHATTERING the plate glass window!

INT. BUILDING

WORKERS DIVE out of the way as the gyron SKIDS across the entire floor, PLOWING through desks and chairs as it BEELINES toward the far window - CRASH!!!

Out the other side and off into the sky!!!

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARDROOM

The jaws of the BOARD MEMBERS collectively DROP. Whatever else this is, it is killer entertainment.

BOARD MEMBER #3
Turn on the ratings meter!

Vogel flicks a switch on the media wall. A DIAL jumps to life and moves to the 55% mark. The board members are IMPRESSED.

EXT. METROPIA - AIRWAYS - SAME TIME

VENUS is unhinged, trapped, desperate. Suddenly, RAY appears alongside, piloting his aerocycle! He yells into the wind...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

I know you're innocent!! I can prove it!!

Venus can't make out what he's saying. She looks wounded and desperate. Behind them, the COPS CLOSE IN.

DEXLER

(loudspeaker)

Get out of there, Gunn! We're gonna start shooting - !

Ray SEES Dexler, turns to Venus, yells at the top of his lungs:

RAY

I - KNOW - YOU'RE - INNOCENT!!

Venus HEARS THIS. Her desperation melts into a hopeful smile.

There is a loud KACHUNK! The engine DIES. Venus looks down at the FUEL meter: EMPTY. The vehicle sputters and veers crazily.

Ray swings close and LEAPS from the aerocycle to the hood of the car! He clings tightly, bracing himself against the rushing wind.

RAY

OPEN THE BUBBLE TOP!

She jabs a button. The bubble top, cracked and dented, only OPENS a few inches. It STICKS with a GRATING WHINE.

VENUS

IT'S STUCK! OMIGOD, IT'S STUCK!!

Ray can't budge it. He frantically POUNDS with his fists.

The craft is going down over a lake.

Ray tries one last time to get the top open - and FAILS.

They lock eyes, sharing a profound wordless sorrow. Blinking back a tear, Venus reaches through the small opening to clasp Ray's hand, and soundlessly mouths "I love you."

CLOSE

on Ray's anguished face. He mouths "I love you, too."

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARDROOM

Vogel and the board members watch the TINY FIGURES in this airborne drama, picking at a tray of snacks as they do. The RATINGS METER stands at 74%.

EXT. OVER THE WATER

At the last moment Ray BAILS OUT, splashing into the lake.

The gyron arcs across the water to the far shore, smoke pouring from its tail, and -

- flies into a hill, EXPLODING on impact.

RAY bobs to the surface as the fireball roils into the sky. PULL BACK to take in the whole sad scene - with media vehicles circling the burning wreckage.

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARDROOM

Vogel and the board are SILENT, stunned at the turn of events. Vogel glances over at the RATINGS METER: 93%. Vogel gulps and quietly picks up a phone.

VOGEL
(softly)

This is Barry. Press two million additional copies of the Envy cylinder.

EXT. CRASH SITE - MINUTES LATER

Police vehicles, fire engines, ambulances. Ray is wet and wrapped in a blanket. His eyes are glassy; he's in shock. Captain Dexler arrives, gives him a cold stare.

DeXLER

This time you better take my advice.
Disappear, Gunn, for good.

Several REPORTERS SEE Ray and converge on them.

REPORTER #1

Mr. Gunn, what are you feeling after this tragic turn of events?

REPORTER #2

Were you close to Miss Envy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REPORTER #3

What drove her to murder?

Ray grabs a FIRE AXE off the nearest truck. Then he stoically climbs into one of the POLICE VEHICLES.

REPORTER #2

Any statement at all?

RAY

Stay tuned.

He hits the gas and ZOOMS OFF. The reporters stand there blankly watching him for a moment. Then -

REPORTER #4

Captain Dexler... isn't that your car?

REPORTER #1

STAY ON HIM!!

The REPORTERS SCRAMBLE their mobile units to follow Ray. Dexler seethes.

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARDROOM

The board is still stunned, unsure of how to react, muttering; "She's never been bigger", "Yes, but she's dead", "How are we going to follow this up?", etc. Vogel clears his throat -

VOGEL

A moment of silence, please. In memory of Venus Envy, a great, great star.

Everyone quickly shuts up. Instant piety. Vogel walks over to a curtained wall at the back of the room. Takes his place at a speaker's podium.

VOGEL

Venus Envy is dead... long live Venus!

The curtains fly back, revealing VENUS ENVY in her sexiest show-biz costume and glitz make-up. A mindless smile on her face.

VOGEL

(into a microphone)

"Hello, you greedy bastards! Did you miss me? Did you think I'd leave just when I was starting to make you rich?? Not the new, improved, "Phoenix Envy!"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Vogel speaks, the Venus figure before him SYNCs every word, in perfect Venus voice. This, of course, is an elaborate, perfect hologram.

THE BOARD

is SPEECHLESS. But it's clear what they're thinking - MONEY.

FLYING

Pursued by media vehicles, Ray roars between Metropia's glittering skyscrapers, and as he rounds a corner -

- the MEGAMEDIA BUILDING comes into view, dead ahead of him.

ROOFTOP

Ray brings his vehicle to a rough, bumping stop at the base of one of the antennas. As the media vehicles catch up, they train their cameras on him.

KINETOSCOPE PICTURE

Handheld news coverage now... of RAY GUNN, carrying his axe, marching across the roof to a fat BUNDLE OF CABLES.

BOARD ROOM

The Holo-Venus lifts her necklace, shows off her neck. No gills.

VOGEL/VENUS HOLOGRAM

See? Not an alien! That was just a hoax.
And I'm feeling so much more cooperative
now! Just tell me what to do and I'll do
it!!! Megamedia knows best!!

BOARD MEMBER #1

So, that's what you've been up to! Barry,
you're a genius!!

VOGEL'S eyes suddenly GO WIDE. He looks at the kinetoscope near the door, where Ray is shown, up on the roof, swinging his axe. Sparks leap up! He is cutting the cables!

VOGEL

No! What is he doing??!!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Bit by bit, the Holo-Venus slowly scatters apart... her lissome arms and legs flickering and floating about the room.

EXT. METROPIA STREET - NIGHT

Near the propellorail station. Taxis stop. Pedestrians stop. Everyone stares at an enormous public news-screen, where Ray can be seen, chopping like a crazy person.

A citizen turns and points at the nearest HOLO-AD, which is, like the Holo-Venus, turning into incoherent pixels. As more and more people notice, a CHEER goes up.

BOARDROOM

The big double doors fly back and Ray charges into the room!!!

VOGEL

Call security!!

Ray GRABS VOGEL and hauls him over to the window. He flings it open and holds him out over the abyss.

SECURITY bursts into the room and advances toward Ray.

RAY

I'll DROP him!!!

Security freezes. NEWS VEHICLES HOVER outside the window. Reporters start yelling.

RAY

Shut up and pay attention!

(turns to Vogel)

You were promoted to the Megamedia board because of Venus Envy, but Venus stopped selling. You were stuck. You needed a gimmick, something dramatic. Then Venus attacked Dom in front of the press and you saw your opening; murder as a career move! Murder could make Venus Envy hot again! So you murdered Arnold Dom.

VOGEL

That's absurd!

Ray gets on his wrist phone to Sam -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY

Play it, Sam.

ON THE KINETOSCOPE, the live broadcast suddenly goes STATIC, followed at once by the RECORDING of Vogel murdering Arnold Dom.

- WITH THE REPORTERS

They gasp, and train their CAMERAS on Vogel.

RAY

You framed Venus Envy! Suddenly every piece of Envy merchandise became valuable! Especially after your second victim, Levity Love! Didn't matter whether Venus died or went to jail, you'd make money off her either way.

Ray pulls Vogel back into the room and throws him at the feet of his fellow board members. They GLOWER at him.

VOGEL

(to board members)

Her last three movies bombed! Her book didn't sell, none of her merchandise was moving. And you gentleman were committed to bleed red ink for three more years! I did it for you!! I transformed Megamedia's greatest liability into its greatest asset!

The board members turn away from Vogel, unmoved.

VOGEL

And now, she can go on and on, a techno marvel, who we control, day and night!

BOARD MEMBER #4

(one eye on the news cameras)

You've gone beyond the pale, Barry. We don't do business that way.

VOGEL

Sure we do...! We've done business that way on a regular ba -

BOARD MEMBER #1

(cuts him off, to guards)

Take this man away.

Two GUARDS flank Vogel and lead him toward the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAY

Hey Vogel.

(Vogel stops, turns)

I'll send you a bill.

Vogel fixes Ray with a killer look and snarls.

VOGEL

You never loved her, Gunn. I loved her. I made sure no one will ever forget her. Now she's a legend! And legends...

Vogel pauses, smiling ruefully...

VOGEL

...legends go out in a blaze of glory...

Vogel suddenly spins, breaking free of the guards. He leaps out the window!!

EXT. MEGAMEDIA BUILDING

Outside, VOGEL SLAMS into a CAMCYCLE, landing on the ACCELERATOR. The vehicle BLASTS FORWARD into the thicket of MEDIA VEHICLES. REPORTERS and CREW dive clear as the vehicles EXPLODE into a shower of cartwheeling scrap, and Vogel and the STILL INTACT CAMERAS tumble toward the streets far below.

INT. MEGAMEDIA BOARDROOM

Ray and the board watch the monitors spellbound, simultaneously repelled and fascinated as they watch -

VOGEL'S FALL

- brought to them live, courtesy of the CAMERAS plummeting with Vogel allllll the way down. VOGEL SCREAMS. The GROUND rushes up -

RAY and the BOARD avert their eyes. Offscreen, a sickening THUD. After a beat, everyone slowly, timidly looks toward -

THE MONITORS

Just STATIC. After an long BEAT...

BOARD MEMBER #2

(softly to #1)

Beautiful coverage...

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

The office is immaculate; cleared of boxes, etc. from Ray's apartment. PHOEBE TASK is back at her post. Ray stands near the door, carrying a cage with Venus's pet stirpe inside. It SHRIEKS.

RAY

Seeing you there is a heartwarming sight,
Pheeb.

Phoebe smiles, then looks at Ray with concern.

PHOEBE

Are you okay?

Ray nods. The phone RINGS, Phoebe answers.

PHOEBE

Gunn Investigations. No, Mr. Gunn is off
for two weeks.

(covers mouthpiece, to Ray)

Metropia Enquirer. About Venus.

RAY

You know what to say.

PHOEBE

(into phone)

Mr. Gunn has no comment.

Ray gives her the high sign, waves good-bye and EXITS. Phoebe and Eyera trade concerned looks.

EXT. MISSION MOUNTAINS - LATE AFTERNOON

Ray drives away from the city, away from the sleaze, away from the lousy media circus still feeding on the short, sad life of Venus Envy. He glances at Venus's stirpe, whose cage rests on the passenger seat. It regards Ray silently.

EXT. VENUS'S HIDEAWAY/MISSION MOUNTAINS - SUNSET

He stands outside a lonely cabin in the mission mountains. Her favorite spot. He gently hangs the caged stirpe above the front door. Facing the beautiful view, he breathes deep the fragrant air... then reaches into his jacket and pulls out his pistol.

He bows his head, closes his eyes and silently mutters... what? A prayer...? He thrusts out his arm and pulls the trigger -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RE-INTEGRATING VENUS, who was stored in the chamber.

She STARTLES, looking first at Ray, then at her surroundings with a haunted, wide-eyed expression.

VENUS

Am I dead?

RAY

That's what they say. But you know how the press exaggerates.

(smiles)

Welcome to the future.

They kiss. The kind of kiss that movies used to end with. Ray leads her, laughing, into the cabin.

Hold a beat. Venus's stirpe SHRIEKS. Several times.

Ray leans out the front door, aims his pistol at the stirpe. ZAP! The stirpe DISAPPEARS. Beat. ZAP! Ray reintegrates the stirpe OUTSIDE of the cage. It shrieks a last time...

...and flies off into the evening sky.

FADE OUT.

THE END