

THE FAD

Written by
Michael E. Bierman

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2580 Loring Road NW
Kennesaw, Georgia 30152
470-774-0525
gremlinsfromthekremlin@yahoo.com

BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER:

"Men are grains of desert sand. The sea is humanity, awash in itself. Air alone is spared men, who are spared wings."
--Anonymous

FADE IN:

INT. PAIN SHOP - DAY

A filthy pain shop. Dimly lit, with moving pictures on the walls of people proudly exhibiting various injuries from myriad causes and harmful events.

ZIP, a thin teen boy in leather clothing, browses the pain shop. But for his chartreuse Mohawk, he wouldn't raise an eyebrow. A large Western-style metal scorpion buckle adorns his belt. Behind a counter, the surly SHOPKEEPER (50s).

ZIP
Whatchya got today?

SHOPKEEPER
Acids, new toxins and electrics.

ZIP
I hate fuckin' electrics. Don't really hurt, just make my teeth grind.

SHOPKEEPER
I sell 'em, I don't invent 'em.

ZIP
Got any Hymenoptera?

SHOPKEEPER
This ain't no joy shop, boy. I run a clean vend.

Zip looks around at the filthy shop.

ZIP
(sarcastic)
I can see that. No, old man. Bugs that sting, not chicks that swing. You know. Wasps, Bees, Yellow Jackets.

SHOPKEEPER

Pricey shit. The real ones is too hard to get. I can sort some Hornet synths. You gotta pay now.

Zip taps his vault chip on the counter.

ZIP

How much for how many?

The Shopkeeper thumbs his ear comm.

SHOPKEEPER

Lemme check...

SNAP TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK.

SUPER - (blood red letters drip onto the black) "The Fad"

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A heavily customized electric hums through the night with the headlights off.

INSIDE THE CAR

NULL, a pudgy teen, drives. He sports dark denim clothes and a velvet executioner's half-hood with eyeholes.

CIPHER, a beautiful teen female, slim with spiked hair and gothic makeup, makes the passenger seat happy. Her clothes are very skimpy. A number of safety pins and other piercings decorate her face and ears.

Zip rhythmically rocks in the back seat. He spends a lot of time trying to eyeball Cipher without her noticing.

NULL

I'm dulled, man.

CIPHER

Whaddya figure? You can't hurt while driving.

She takes out a glass vial and drips acid from an eyedropper onto her right forearm, which reddens and blisters.

She winces and squirms. Air hisses through her teeth as she draws in a long breath.

NULL
Why not? It'd be cool if I smash
up.

CIPHER
Think, dim. We can't croak yet.
We're not known.

ZIP
Where're we goin'?

While he rocks, he periodically slams his head into the window next to him.

CIPHER
I got a box of fishhooks and some
rusty razor wire. Gonna thread 'em
at the Strip.

INSERT - HER LEFT FOREARM

A serpent coils up her arm, inked in magic marker, with cross-stitch marks running its length.

BACK TO SCENE

ZIP
We were just there last night.

NULL
Where else we gonna go?

ZIP
Let's dwell in my basement, go slow
and hurt right.

NULL
No-one'll see it.

ZIP
I got digital. We can show it.

NULL
You got it figured.

CIPHER
Replay sucks. Too many tricks.
Gotta go live to get rep.

She picks at a scab until it bleeds, then stripes bloody war paint across her cheeks.

Zip leans forward in the seat and looks at Cipher's face.

The sight of her blood makes him upset. He tries to change the subject.

ZIP
Remember when we were just snots,
before the pain?

CIPHER
(playful)
Yeah, yer head was too big for yer
body!

NULL
His feet, too!

Zip stares at Cipher's breasts.

ZIP
We've all changed a lot since then.

Cipher tousles Zip's Mohawk.

CIPHER
(kidding)
Not all for the better!

ZIP
(hurt)
Thanks. I'm trying to build my
rep...

NULL
Try harder, man.

Laughs.

CIPHER
Zip's cooler than you, chub.

Null stops laughing and frowns.

Zip looks hopefully at Cipher.

ZIP
So I'm cool, huh?

CIPHER
Always.

ZIP
Ya think?

CIPHER
Yeppers. Cool's not what you do,
it's what you are. Cool's either
something ya got or not. You got.

ZIP
So you think I'm cool just dwelling
with you. Why do the rest then?

NULL
Whaddya mean, the rest?

ZIP
The pain.

NULL
What else we gonna do?

CIPHER
To get known. You know that.

ZIP
(defeated)
Yeah. Sometimes I forget what's
important.

NULL
Don't forget. You got a long way
to go!

Null laughs and Cipher says nothing.

Zip ignores the jab, and sinks back in the seat, lost in
thought.

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Zip, Null and Cipher arrive at a seemingly endless line of
parked cars with many teens hanging out.

SERIES OF SHOTS -- THEY ARE ALL ENGAGED IN HURTING
THEMSELVES:

--One has his foot repeatedly run over by a car.

--Another smashes a hammer into the top of his hand.

--Others shock themselves.

--Several strike each other with paddles, bats, and sticks.

--Some dip body parts in gas and ignite them.

--Others bang their heads into cars, walls, the street and each other's.

--Everywhere are blood and screams.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

BACK TO SCENE.

Null, Zip and Cipher get out of the car and sit down next to it.

Null works on himself with the car's cigarette lighter. He has rows of circular burn scars neatly patterned up his arm.

Zip unscrews the lid off a mason jar, then places the opening on his bare forearm. Hornets land on his arm and sting him repeatedly. Zip writhes and screams in pain.

Cipher threads her serpent pattern with a fish hook and wire, and winces and squirms at each tug.

A crowd of teens gathers and looks on in approval. They shout for the trio to hurt themselves more.

A CHUBBY TEEN GIRL watches with her friends. She takes a noticeable interest in Null.

CIPHER

Let's wander. Gotta pomp my
serpent.

She tenders her bleeding arm to Zip, who admires it.

Null stares instead at the interested girl. He is anything but smooth.

NULL

I'm gonna hang.

Zip caps his mason jar and hands it to Null.

As Zip and Cipher walk away and parade their injuries, the chubby teen girl sits next to Null.

EXT. THE STRIP - CONTINUOUS

Cipher and Zip kill time at the Strip.

ZIP
You can't get enough of this.

CIPHER
You got it.

ZIP
We goin' back for Null?

CIPHER
Nah, he's workin' that chick.

ZIP
Let's go back to my place.

CIPHER
Maybe later. I wanna eyeball
Grimaldi.

ZIP
Know the name. What's he to you?

CIPHER
Strip Legend. Heard speaks he'll
be here tonight. Ever eye 'em?

ZIP
(sarcastic)
Not had the pleasure.

CIPHER
He's beautiful.

ZIP
(sarcastic)
Something to look forward to. Why
am I here?

CIPHER
If you're not into it, go home.

ZIP
I don't wanna leave you.

CIPHER
I'm a big girl.

ZIP
That's what I'm afraid of.

CIPHER
I just wanna meet him.

ZIP
Then let's go.

EXT. THE STRIP - GRIMALDI HOLDS COURT - CONTINUOUS

A huge crowd has gathered in a large circle around an unseen attraction.

At center, a figure who can only be GRIMALDI sits atop a throne made of scrap wood and old carpet. Despite the threadbare trappings and decrepit locale, a certain aura of majesty surrounds him.

Grimaldi's harlequin outfit is topped with a jester cap. His face is a map of ancient wounds, and the scarred corners of his mouth curl upwards in a permanent and grotesque exaggeration of a smile. Despite the scars, he is handsome.

Grimaldi commands his lieutenants, CYCLOPS and INDIGO, to action with his striped and bell-topped jester cane. The Punch-like face on the cane mimics his own.

Cyclops and Indigo move amongst the crowd examining injuries and scars.

Indigo, a teen boy very similar to Zip, is topped with purple hair. He is haughty and bears a perpetual sneer.

Cyclops, a boy about six-years old, wears a shiny black leather overcoat. He is about half as tall as Indigo and Zip. Despite his diminutive stature, his single eye shines bright with confidence and authority. His other eye is an empty scarred red socket.

CHARIOT, Grimaldi's captain, (20s), sits near Grimaldi in an old electric wheelchair. Chariot has one arm and no legs.

Excitement fills the air, as the painers come to show their injuries to Grimaldi.

Cipher and Zip stand towards the back, and struggle to see what unfolds.

ZIP
Sure is hard to see from way back here.

CIPHER
Quiet, I wanna hear.

ZIP
Let's go up front.

CIPHER

No way. Grimaldi might eyeball us
with nothing to show.

Zip looks at his hornet stings, then carefully considers
Cipher's serpent.

ZIP

So what?

CIPHER

Hard to impress. Ya gotta go big.
There're no second chances.

Grimaldi waves his jester cane several times in the air. The
sound of the tiny bells rings out, drowned out by the hubbub
of the throng.

The crowd silences.

Grimaldi purposefully surveys the gathered masses.

GRIMALDI

Scores have come to implead my
favor. Strange visages promise
agony vainglorious, yet the
faithful return empty-handed.

Grimaldi speaks in a slow, deep tone, almost a growl. The
hypnotized masses watch their King.

Some of the painers look excited and ready to meet the
challenge. Others cower and try to blend into the bolder and
braver.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

What spoils shall my boon reap?

Grimaldi leans back on his throne and nods to Chariot.

CHARIOT

Bring forth the pain!

A few bold painers slowly approach the front of the crowd.

Grimaldi impatiently waves his cane.

GRIMALDI

My patience is short as the time we
shall spend. Make me laugh.

He scans the crowd for candidates.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)
Who dares demand a moniker?

Chariot gives a nod to Indigo and Cyclops, who circulate at the front of the crowd.

Most of the painers cannot meet Grimaldi's eye. Some examine their injuries with shame, and slip back into the crowd. A few stay at the front, and hesitantly stand their ground.

Indigo and Cyclops pause to examine injuries, shake their heads in disdain and disgust, then move on.

Indigo pauses at a teen who presents his arm.

They argue for a moment, then he and Indigo step forward.

Indigo holds up the fellow's mangled hand with contempt.

INDIGO
This guy has no fingers.

Grimaldi looks at the hand, then quickly loses interest and scans the crowd again.

GRIMALDI
They are but minnows in a stream; a passing flash without teeth to gnash. They do not bite the psyche.

Indigo smugly drops the teen's hand.

INDIGO
Fail.

The maimed and embarrassed teen disappears into the crowd.

Cyclops steps forward with a teen with facial burns.

CYCLOPS
This one has a burnt face.

GRIMALDI
(disinterested)
Fleet pain is a fellow well met,
but with features plain and
unenduring in the mind. A faceless
blur forgotten in time. We shall
not meet again.

The burnt teen drops his face into his hands, and is swallowed by the crowd as they push past him for a better view.

Chariot wheels forward with a bag in his lap.

He unzips it, then drops it to the ground with his only arm. It thumps and gray ash arises from it.

CHARIOT

I knew this one. This is all that's left of him. He suffered hard.

Grimaldi leans forward on his throne as he strains to see into the bag.

GRIMALDI

Said tale begs the question. How did he meet this end?

CHARIOT

Don't know. His friends brought him to me.

Grimaldi raises his voice slightly, and appeals to the crowd.

GRIMALDI

Who shall bear witness?

Everyone looks around, but no-one makes a move or sound.

After a moment, Grimaldi speaks.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

Epic pain unperceived is lost like smoke stolen from a dying fire by wind. It passeth into naught.

Grimaldi addresses the crowd again. He thrusts his cane at the bag.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

None shall testify?

Grimaldi pauses for a moment. Nothing happens.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

Thus, his name chokes on silence.

Zip lets out a huff of air.

ZIP

Grimaldi sure is tough.

Cipher looks down at her serpent, then hides it against her torso.

CIPHER
Told ya. Have to impress to get a
moniker.

ZIP
What's it gonna take?

Cipher wilts and sounds forlorn.

CIPHER
I don't know. Let's scupper before
he eyeballs us.

They fade into the crowd and are gone.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Late-day light filters through a small window. Zip, Cipher
and Null watch the vid-box.

NULL
Tired of me old wounds, man. I
hurt everywhere.

ZIP
(sullen)
Nice. Keep it up and someone'll
eyeball you.

He looks over at Cipher.

NULL
Yeah, but what's it gonna take to
get monikered?

CIPHER
Keep on the path and peeps'll view.
We get the rep, maybe one day
Grimaldi names us.

ZIP
Heard there's a cool pain spot on
the vid. We can get ideas.

CIPHER
'bout time.

Perks up, enthusiastic.

NULL
Ya can't get good stuff from the
vid. Peeps'll get the same ideas.

Cipher picks at her serpent's wire, apparently not paying attention.

Zip glares at Null, then turns up the vid-box.

ZIP

I been waiting for this. Shut yer hole and listen.

INT. BASEMENT - THE VID-BOX - CONTINUOUS

Zip, Cipher and Null focus on a breaking news story.

Two smiling news anchors appear; talking heads behind a futuristic desk:

NEWSWOMAN

Tonight we have something special for you. We've compiled a video montage of popular ways to suffer and demise! There are some great triumphs here. You should write them down for future reference.

NEWSMAN

That's right folks, get ready to take notes!

MONTAGE -- A SERIES OF MIXED COLOR AND BLACK AND WHITE CLIPS OF HORRORS WITH MATCHING SUPERIMPOSED TITLES, PARADE ON THE VID-BOX SCREEN. SIMULTANEOUSLY, WE HEAR THE SUCCEEDING NEWSCASTERS' VOICE OVERS:

SUPERS - "TRIUMPHS:"

"Animal"

--Clip of dog attack

"Gravitational"

--Clip of someone jumping off a height and plummeting

"Combat"

--Clip of riot

"Chemical"

--Clip of yellow-green gas drifting over corpses

"Blade"

--Clip of hara-kiri
"Vectors"
--Clip of plague victims
"Projectile"
--Clip of machine gun firing
"Mutilation"
--Clip of pliers causing injury
"Fire & Ice"
--Clip of someone frozen
"Asphyxiation"
--Clips of a drowned woman, hanged man
"Vehicular"
--Clip of cars crashing
"Blunt force"
--Clip of man getting hit with a frying pan
"Machinery"
--Clip of industrial machine injury
"Mayhem"
--Clip of body parts in a pile
"Novelty"
--Clip of a question mark vibrating small to large

END MONTAGE.

NEWSWOMAN (V.O.)
I'll say! There are so many things
to try, so many ways to die.

NEWSMAN (V.O.)
Sometimes the triumph is hard to
classify. Those are known as
Novelties.

NEWSWOMAN (V.O.)
They are often very unusual and exciting!

NEWSMAN (V.O.)
And every once in awhile, we're fortunate enough to glimpse the vision of a true artist who surprises us with something unique.

NEWSWOMAN (V.O.)
That wiggling hanging guy slowly lowered from the gallows into the shark tank after he cut off his feet was epic! Kind of touching and inspirational.

NEWSMAN (V.O.)
Yes, that one was a real treat! The basics just don't impress anymore. Most of the greats have moved on to combos.

Zip flicks off the vid-box.

ZIP
Did ya hear that? Little stuff don't make ya big.

NULL
Maybe won't hit the vid, but peeps'll still view.

CIPHER
Hard to know how to get eyeballed.

She looks down at her serpent thoughtfully.

Zip looks at Cipher with longing.

ZIP
Yeah, I know.

NULL
I'm out of ideas.

CIPHER
No kidding.

ZIP
I...We gotta think up something new.

He looks at Cipher.

The trio broods silently in the darkening room.

INT. NULL'S PLACE - DAY

Zip bursts into Null's place.

ZIP
Cipher here?

NULL
Thought she was with you.

ZIP
We gotta do something.

NULL
Like what?

ZIP
Gotta get noticed. Gotta get rep.

NULL
No shit. That's the point.

ZIP
This is different.

NULL
What? Every day's the same.

ZIP
That's the problem. Nothing
changes.

NULL
Do the hurt, score the pain.

ZIP
What's it gettin' us?

NULL
Don't know.

ZIP
Whaddya want?

NULL
I wanna make my name. Get
monikered.

ZIP
To get a moniker, you gotta mess
yourself up. Then what?

NULL
Never went beyond that. Figured
I'd be dead.

ZIP
That's what I mean. Why do you
wanna be dead?

NULL
So I have rep.

ZIP
Whaddya do with it when your dead?

NULL
I won't care. I'll be known.

ZIP
So you get known, then can't use
it.
(sarcastic)
Makes sense.

NULL
A moniker is its own reward.

ZIP
There has to be more.

NULL
What more?

ZIP
A name won't add credits to my
vault. Can't live off it.

NULL
You'll probably die from it.

ZIP
So gettin' known is gettin' dead.

NULL
That's it.

ZIP
A name'll get ya chicks.

NULL
An ugly chub with a rep can get hot
chicks.

He deflates.

NULL (CONT'D)
At least chubbies at the Strip.

Looks disappointed.

ZIP
Might get me Cipher.

NULL
Maybe a big rep gets her, but a
bigger one keeps her.

ZIP
So I croak gettin' monikered, then
she wants me, but I'm dead.

NULL
When you say it like that...

ZIP
I lose her without rep. I lose her
with rep. How do I win?

NULL
You don't. Can't get a name and a
chick. Not for long, anyway.

ZIP
My choice then. Rep or Cipher.
That's easy.

NULL
Yeah. I'd go for rep, too.

ZIP
No, dim. Cipher.

NULL
You gotta get your game straight,
man.

ZIP
I just did.

NULL
No name, no Cipher.

ZIP
There's gotta be a way.

NULL
You figure it, lemme know. I want
hot chicks too.

Looks jealously at Zip.

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Zip, Null and Cipher prowl the Strip. They approach a teen with a nail gun. He stands on a bench and chants, then nails his feet to it. He drops the nail gun and howls. Zip and Null clap in appreciation.

ZIP
Good idea. That's gonna hurt a long time.

NULL
Yeah. Then he's gotta pull the nails through to get loose.

ZIP
Pretty brutal.

He praises Nailer.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Cool, dude!

Nailer nods his head to Zip and grimaces a rictus of pain.

CIPHER
No biggie. Probably shot 'em 'tween the bones. Flesh wounds. Looks solid, but fails to impress.

ZIP
Pretty smart though. Nails are cheap, and it's gonna bleed a lot. Drip down so peeps'll see.

CIPHER
Antics. Small time. Who's gonna name him for that?

NULL
We could call him "Feet".

CIPHER
Lame. Won't stick.

ZIP
How 'bout "The Nailer"?

While Zip and Null stare in appreciation at the wounded feet, Cipher ambles off.

Cipher calls back over her shoulder.

CIPHER
Bor-ing.

EXT. THE STRIP - CONTINUOUS

Zip and Null hurry from the Nailer to catch up with Cipher. They stop next to a teen standing in front of a stack of boards. He draws back his fist, then smashes it through them. He yells as they break; blood drips from his knuckles.

ZIP
That was cool.

BREAKER
Call me "Breaker", man.

ZIP
Yeah, that sounds--

Cipher puts on the bitch.

CIPHER
(interjecting)
Pass. Grimaldi would ignore you.

She starts to walk away.

BREAKER
Wait. Check this.

Cipher impatiently pauses. Breaker steps before another stack of boards. He smiles at Cipher, then winks.

Cipher rolls her eyes.

Breaker rocks to and fro, then smashes his head through the stack of boards. He stands up, dizzy and off-balance. Blood crawls down his face from his forehead.

BREAKER (CONT'D)
That deserves a name.

CIPHER
Not. Nice try. Those boards are fixed.

BREAKER
If you weren't hot, I'd bust your chops.

Balls up his fists and tenses.

Zip steps between Breaker and Cipher.

ZIP
Easy man, she liked it. Just hard
to please. It was cool.

Breaker eases up and relaxes. Cipher moves on.

BREAKER
Good luck. You'll be dead before
she names you.

Zip glances warily at Cipher.

ZIP
I know it.

EXT. THE STRIP - CONTINUOUS

Zip and Null catch up to Cipher.

ZIP
You're tough.

CIPHER
Little tricks don't cut it.
Tomorrow, no-one will remember.

Null looks ahead to the next painer.

NULL
Check this dude.

A barefoot teen traverses broken glass scattered in the street. As he moves, he favors his weight side to side and yelps. He trails a wake of blood.

Cipher stops and shakes her head.

CIPHER
Been done.

GLASS WALKER
Call me "Shatter", babe.

CIPHER
Old trick.

GLASS WALKER
OK, how 'bout this?

The teen empties a gas can over the glass. He lights it and it smokes and flares bright into the night.

NULL
Cool. He's got fire!

Glass Walker travels the length of the flaming shards of glass. Smoke curls from his pants as they start to catch. He stands triumphant, scorched and smoking.

CIPHER
(sarcastic)
"Smoky"?

GLASS WALKER
Call me "Blaze".

CIPHER
Maybe if you actually caught fire.

GLASS WALKER
I deserve a name for that.

CIPHER
How 'bout "Flamer"?

GLASS WALKER
I'll keep workin' on it. Come watch me again.

CIPHER
Doubtful, thanks.

Glass Walker hangs his head.

EXT. THE STRIP - CONTINUOUS

Cipher walks on, followed by Zip and Null.

ZIP
What're you looking for?

CIPHER
Something that impresses.

ZIP
Like what?

CIPHER
You lookin' for ideas?

ZIP
Sure.

CIPHER
Can't help you.

ZIP
You don't know what you like?

CIPHER
I'll know it when I see it.

EXT. SPEED-RAIL TRESTLE - NIGHT

Zip, Cipher and Null swim in a pond beneath the trestle. The trestle spans from Low-Town to the Heights. The lights from the Heights above shimmer beautiful ripples on the water. Below is unlit and dark.

Other teens gather around a small fire nearby. They hold their hands over the flames til they screech and withdraw them, breaking the serenity of the scene.

ZIP
It's nice here.

Null attentively watches the hand-roasters.

NULL
Better if we had a fire to mess with.

CIPHER
Chill and swim.

ZIP
For once you're not into the pain.

CIPHER
I'm always into it. Just hangin' tonight.

Smiles.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
Besides, fire and water don't mix.

NULL
Maybe we can shame 'em into a game of Mumbly Peg later.

ZIP
You got your knives on you?

NULL
In the car.

CIPHER
Every time I get puncture wounds
and swim, they get infected.

ZIP
You finally comin' around?

CIPHER
Get real. Fever's a pain in the
ass and doesn't even show.

NULL
I poke myself a lot. Never even
reddens up.

CIPHER
(teasing)
The bugs don't like you either.

NULL
(hurt)
Thanks.

Heads for shore.

ZIP
Where ya goin'?

NULL
(to Cipher)
Not appreciated here. I'm gonna go
play Mumbly with them toasters.

ZIP
Don't leave us. Too far to walk
home.

NULL
I'll be over there.

Null quips Zip.

NULL (CONT'D)
You can work Cipher for me.

CIPHER
Walk on, chub.

Null mopes to the car to get his knives.

ZIP
You're nasty to him.

CIPHER
 Motivating him to pain harder, and
 stop tryin' to get me. Not
 interested.

ZIP
 Really, you got someone else in
 mind?

Zip smiles.

CIPHER
 What's it to you?

ZIP
 Curious.

CIPHER
 I'm keeping my eyes and options
 open.

Zip silently swims away from Cipher without looking back at her. Surprise and worry flicker across her features. She tries to nonchalantly swim after him, but follows a little too fast.

AT THE HAND-ROASTERS' FIRE - CONTINUOUS

Null plays Mumbly Peg with the hand-roasters:

DOTTIE, definitely cute, but not in Cipher's league; CLETIS, a tall, taciturn fellow missing an ear, and GORDY, a chubby teen. Tension flows between Null and Gordy, who is so much like himself.

The game progresses, and Null moves through the Mumbly Peg feats. He holds the knife in fifth feat position, with his arms crossed over his chest and the knife handle at his ear. He targets his own bare foot.

NULL
 Remember, see who can get closer
 without sticking himself.

He rolls the knife from his hand, and it sticks into the ground close to his foot. Gordy looks displeased and plucks it from the ground.

GORDY
 My turn.

Gordy has clearly played Mumbly Peg before, but lacks Null's skill.

He mimics Null's form, balances the knife, then loses control of it. The knife flips over and sticks into the top of his foot.

Gordy yelps and quickly pulls the knife from his foot. He hops and limps in a circle, shaking his arms in a chicken-dance of pain.

GORDY (CONT'D)
Dammit, not again. That really hurts.

He hands the knife to Null, who fancies it across his hand and moves through a

SERIES OF SHOTS - Null quickly works through the knife feats:

--The nose drop;

--The eye drops;

--The drop from atop his head.

--He completes each feat by coming close to his foot, without hitting it.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

Null hands the knife to Gordy. Gordy's feet now bleed badly from multiple sticks, and his ire is up. He hesitates before getting into the next position.

NULL
You're up.

GORDY
How many more feats to finish?

NULL
You're on eight of twenty-four.

GORDY
Shit.

IN THE WATER - CONTINUOUS

Zip and Cipher tread water near one another. The awkward silence and heavy weight of expectant words hang in the air.

ZIP
You're so mean, you push everyone away.

Cipher turns her back and swims a bit away from Zip.

CIPHER
That's just me.

ZIP
You weren't that way before.

CIPHER
(not believing her own
words)
You just didn't notice.

ZIP
Doubtful.

CIPHER
That's how it is.

ZIP
So you just hate yerself and all
peeps?

Cipher shoots Zip an angry glare over her shoulder.

CIPHER
I don't hate you.

ZIP
(sarcastic)
I can tell.

Zip moves closer to Cipher.

ZIP (CONT'D)
This is about yer parents, isn't
it?

CIPHER
Yer parents blew up. At least you
know why they never came back.

ZIP
That was an accident.

CIPHER
Pretty convenient. Yer dad heckles
the Administration, then blows up
with yer mom. Makes sense.

Zip eyes Cipher with a hurt look.

ZIP
Stop blaming yerself about yer own
parents.

CIPHER
I'm not.

ZIP
It's not yer fault they
disappeared.

CIPHER
Says you.

ZIP
Really?

CIPHER
Who else is to blame?

ZIP
Yer parents never would have
abandoned you.

CIPHER
Well, they did.

ZIP
Maybe they had an "accident" too.

Cipher looks shocked, then ponders a moment.

CIPHER
Maybe.

ZIP
You still got me and Null.

Cipher casts a guilty glance towards shore.

CIPHER
I chased Null away.

ZIP
I'm still here.

Cipher swims to Zip and kisses his cheek. Zip tries to conceal his thrill at her kiss. They look into each other's eyes.

ZIP (CONT'D)
We gotta stick together.

Cipher treads water and looks at Zip for a second, then silently swims into the darkness.

BACK AT THE HAND-ROASTER'S FIRE - CONTINUOUS

Gordy stands holding the knife, hesitating.

DOTTIE
Come on Gordy, get it done.

GORDY
Shut up, it hurts. And I burnt my hands before.

DOTTIE
You'd be cool if you'd stop yer bitchin'.

GORDY
You'd be cool if you'd try it, bitch.

Gordy shoves Dottie back.

DOTTIE
Get off me!

NULL
Knock it off, man.

GORDY
What's it to ya?

NULL
Leave her alone.

Gordy throws down the knife.

GORDY
Make me.

Null and Gordy engage in an ineffective mutual headlock and struggle with one another.

Zip and Cipher race from the pond to the fireside fight.

ZIP
What's going on here? Stop!

CLETIS
Stay out of it.

Zip moves forward and tries to break up the fight.

ZIP
I'm stopping it.

Cletis steps forward and pushes Zip.

CLETIS
Fuck off.

Null and Gordy stop wrestling and look at the others.

ZIP
I'm just breakin' it up. Look,
they stopped.

CLETIS
Your boy needs a beating. Cheated
Gordy.

Gordy looks unsure, and glances from Cletis to Zip.

ZIP
He doesn't cheat, he's the best at
Mumbly Peg.

CLETIS
I say he cheats.

NULL
Shut up, jerk. I don't cheat. I
won 'cause I'm better.

CLETIS
(to Zip and Null)
You both need a beating.

Cipher steps between them.

CIPHER
I'll settle this.

Everyone looks at Cipher.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
Zip challenges him--

She points at Cletis.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
to a duel.

ZIP
I do?

Cipher looks around, thinking. Her eyes search out the speed-rail trestle overhead.

CIPHER

Up there. You're gonna play chicken with the tram.

CLETIS

I'm not doin' that.

CIPHER

What're you, scared? Real cool, tough guy.

Zip and Cletis stare each other down.

ZIP

It's over now. Let's just go home.

CLETIS

No, asshole. Yer girl yaps bigger than yer play. You're doin' it.

Zip looks to Cipher for a response. She says nothing, but cocks an eyebrow at Zip.

ZIP

Let's go.

Zip jogs into the pond, and swims out to the base of the trestle. Many cross-pieces, struts and supporting elements start just above the water, and climb into the night towards the trestle.

Cletis pulls off his shirt and shoes and runs after Zip. He dives into the water and swims to the trestle base.

Zip and Cletis scale the trestle supports.

Their friends cheer them from below.

Cipher yells through cupped hands.

CIPHER

Wait for the tram. First one to jump loses. Go Zip!

As the boys near the top, the sound of the tram, which rapidly approaches, echoes through the gap.

ZIP

We don't have to do this.

CLETIS
Chicken shit.

ZIP
(resigned)
Good luck.

CLETIS
Fuck off, loser.

The tram lights appear in the distance ahead.

At the front of the tram, a MAN-CATCHER, bloodied, with several human hands and a head stuck in the grill. A calf and foot still wearing a sneaker make an ugly lance.

CUT TO:

The TRAM CONDUCTOR looks ahead and sees the boys on the distant trestle. He whoops and yells above the din:

TRAM CONDUCTOR
Wanna play? Two more points. The record's mine tonight!

He pushes the throttle full ahead, and the tram leaps forward at break-neck speed.

BACK TO SCENE:

Cletis hunkers down in jump-ready position.

Zip looks down at Cipher, who blows him a kiss. He bends down in jump-ready position, then suddenly does a handstand on one rail.

The tram approaches with incredible, deceptive speed. The sound of it thunders through the night toward Zip and Cletis.

A split-second before the tram arrives, Zip springs off with his arms and dives.

Cletis watches Zip dive and leaps towards Zip's side...too late.

Zip arcs toward the water in a perfect dive, enters with minimal splash, and disappears below the surface.

The tram cuts Cletis in half. The severed halves fall, one off each side of the track, spouting blood as they spin through the air. His form needs work, and Cletis's pieces make an unsightly splash in the pond.

Gordy and Dottie wail and scream at the appalling end of Speed-Rail Cletis.

Null and Cipher stand silently, respectively shaken and stirred.

Zip surfaces to screams. He looks around, and sees both ends of Cletis bobbing near him. Horrified, he swims to the bank, leaving Cletis to sleep with the fishes.

EXT. OUTSIDE NULL'S PLACE - RAINY NIGHT

The trio sit on a porch under a spotlight and watch the falling rain.

CIPHER

Everything smells so fresh and clean. The blood and crud's washed away. Maybe we should drink some rain.

ZIP

Don't do that.

CIPHER

Why not? I thirst.

ZIP

'Cause you can get prego drinking rainwater.

Cipher laughs.

CIPHER

Say it ain't so! I thought you knew how that stuff works.

Smiles devilishly.

CIPHER (CONT'D)

Maybe you need a lesson.

NULL

I'll take one.

CIPHER

No chance. You don't need help like Zip.

ZIP

I don't need help! I know 'bout that stuff.

Looks at Cipher.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Wait...maybe I do need some help.

CIPHER
Too late, you blew yer chance.

ZIP
(disappointed)
Mom told me she tried to have me
for years.

NULL
How does that figure with rain?

ZIP
One year the Administration ran out
of water. For a week there was
only rain to drink. Mom got prego
right away. She always thought
they put somethin' in the water to
stop kids.

NULL
What a moat of shit.

ZIP
Really? Kids are rare. You never
see 'em.

CIPHER
You might be on to something.

She winks at Zip.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
Wanna help me catch some rain?

NULL
Nah, he's scared.

Zip chides Null.

ZIP
She messing.

Turns to Cipher.

ZIP (CONT'D)
But I'm not scared.

Cipher grabs Zip's hand and gets up.

CIPHER
Then let's go, sexo.

ZIP
Stop mocking me.

Cipher pulls Zip along.

CIPHER
I'm not.

Zip lets Cipher pull him along.

NULL
What am I supposed to do?

Cipher giggles.

CIPHER
Drink some rain!

Cipher and Zip melt into the darkness.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Zip and Cipher stroll the street. They stop and turn to each other.

ZIP
So what'd you wanna talk about?

CIPHER
Who said I wanna talk?

ZIP
Are we gonna trade questions all night?

Cipher unzips Zip's pants and shoves her hand into the front. She grips Zip.

CIPHER
What have we here?

ZIP
That's pretty friendly.

CIPHER
Glad you think so.

ZIP
Touch me like you know me, baby.

Both Zip and Cipher burst out laughing.

ZIP (CONT'D)
I'm glad we laughed. What now?

CIPHER
Wow, you really do need help. The prong goes in the slot.

ZIP
Not that. Why me?

CIPHER
Because you're Zip!

ZIP
Really? You gonna go with that now?

CIPHER
If you have to ask, you haven't paid me half the attention I thought.

Zip and Cipher lock in a molten kiss. They pause, look around, then sneak out of the light into a deeply shadowed alcove.

Zip pulls Cipher's shirt over her head. He eyes and caresses her breasts, then sucks her nipples. Cipher drops Zip's pants. Zip returns the favor. They enjoy quick, vigorous sex.

EXT. STREET - LATER STILL

Afterwards, dressed again, Zip and Cipher sit in the shadows holding each other and kissing.

ZIP
We gotta do that a lot more.

Cipher laughs.

CIPHER
Keep turnin' me on. You'll like it.

ZIP
I already like it.

CIPHER
You're gonna like it more.

ZIP
How much more?

CIPHER
You're gonna love it.

ZIP
I already love it. I love you.

CIPHER
Slow down, speedy. We got time.

ZIP
Do we? We keep tryin' to get rep,
we won't last long.

CIPHER
You worry too much.

ZIP
There's much to worry about.

CIPHER
Don't get too serious. Let's just
dwell and do our thing.

ZIP
I don't wanna lose you.

CIPHER
(kidding)
You sure you got me?

Zip doesn't answer, and the two walk off in palpable silence.

INT. NULL'S ROOM - DAY

NULL
Let's go to the Heights.

ZIP
You wanna get ideas?

NULL
See how the rich peeps play.
C'mon. I'm driving.

ZIP
Good idea. I have no wheels.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Zip and Null cruise the Heights. The city is newer here, and cleaner. The people are well-dressed, and exhibit no visible injuries.

INSIDE THE CAR:

Zip watches people as they pass them on the street. The people who notice them make contemptuous faces and hurry away.

ZIP
Looks like you wasted our time.

NULL
Yeah, none of these are cool.

ZIP
No scars, no blood, no missing parts, nothing.

A couple stroll with a baby buggy and enjoy the day. The father removes the baby from the stroller, then holds him high in the air, talking to him.

NULL
Don't these peeps wanna be cool?

ZIP
Looks like they don't care.

Null points at baby.

NULL
Look at that little pink thing.
How'd that guy even get a chick?
He wouldn't know pain if it bit his ass.

ZIP
He must have a huge...vault chip.

They pass more people. None of them is hurting themselves.

NULL
The Heights suck. They've never even been to the Strip. No reps here.

ZIP
They seem happy. All the dudes have chicks.

NULL
Maybe we should hang here.

ZIP
We couldn't even afford to park here.

NULL
Besides, none of 'em are cool.

ZIP
Cipher might like it. Clean and happy.

NULL
Not her thing, man. No pain.

ZIP
She can change.

NULL
No way. She knows what she likes.

Zip motions Null to stop the car near some teens their age. Null pulls the car to the curb. Zip opens the window.

ZIP
Hey dude, how come no one's hurting here?

HEIGHTS GUY
(scoffs)
No one wants to hurt.

ZIP
Why not?

HEIGHTS GUY
We don't do low-class shit. That's for you idiots down below.

ZIP
Down where?

HEIGHTS GUY
Low-Town, The Strip, The Sewer.

Zip reflects on the words.

NULL
You got any good pain shops around here?

HEIGHTS GUY

Get lost. We don't want you here.

The Heights Guy walks away.

NULL

Damn ass-monkey doesn't know shit.

ZIP

Let's get outta here. This isn't gonna help me get a name or Cipher.

Null pulls away, and heads uphill.

ZIP (CONT'D)

Wrong way, dude. We gotta go down.

NULL

Lying feck. Gotta be a pain shop somewhere.

They pass a long, low, unmarked building. To their amazement, there is a fenced yard full of children at play. Null rolls to a stop.

NULL (CONT'D)

Where'd they get all those snots?

ZIP

I've never seen so many. Gotta be more right there than all of Low-Town.

NULL

What is this place?

ZIP

Must be a school. Never saw one for snots.

A cop stares from the school grounds at Zip and Null. He starts over to the car.

NULL

That cop is coming.

ZIP

Let's go.

Null quickly drives away. The cop stares after them and grumbles into his ear comm.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION CENTER - DAY

A long line of people winds down a sidewalk. They hold empty bags and other containers. Near the front of the line, a sign. Insert the sign:

INSERT: "NUTRITIOUS FOOD. COURTESY OF THE ADMINISTRATION."

BACK TO SCENE.

Near the line, a disheveled man (60s) wearing a double sign placard with anti-Administration slogans walks in the street. He barks out to the crowd:

ACTIVIST

Be brave and strong! Resist the
corrupted food of the
Administration. You will fill your
bellies today, but at what cost
tomorrow? Don't eat their poisoned
leavings! Rise up! Bring them
down and feast!

As the man nears people in the queue, they avert their eyes and shrink away from him.

A cop car arrives in a hurry and skids to a stop. Two cops burst out, and accost the man. Without a word, they draw pistols and shoot him down.

The cops stare ominously at the queue, then pan their pistols down the line.

They strip the placard off the dead activist, throw it into the street, and ignite it with gasoline.

They drive away, leaving the corpse behind.

EXT. THE SEWER - STREET - NIGHT

Null and Zip drive into the labyrinthine streets of the Sewer. Dark and dangerous, the Sewer offers little but crushing poverty, chaos, discord and death.

NULL

Hope we can find this guy.

ZIP

I thought you knew him.

NULL
Friend of a friend thing. Never
eyed him.

ZIP
Driving the Sewer at night is
foolish. We'll probably get
killed.

NULL
This guy has painful ideas. I
gotta talk to him.

ZIP
I'm over the hurt.

NULL
That's your mistake. I'm on it.

ZIP
(to himself)
No one listens...

NULL
I'm listening. Shut up and help
look.

Zip sits up and scans the darkened streets.

The car passes through decrepit areas of the city into its
infested underbelly. Null zigzags through gritty narrow
streets. As he drives, he leans left and right, searching
the shadows.

ZIP
This is pointless. We could drive
around all night and never eye him.

NULL
I'm lost already. This place is
spookin' me. Let's go back.

As Null tries to orient himself, he pulls to a stop and
fiddles with the map controls in the dash.

Zip sees movement in the dark and perks up.

ZIP
What's that over there?

Null stops fiddling with the dash and stares into the
darkness.

Several men, barely visible in dark clothes, unload a van near a city pumping station. Rows of large and small bottles, and stacks of boxes line the street next to the pumping station.

Pipes converge and crisscross down the sides of the street and overhead. Shutoffs, valves and convergences abound in the rusty spider-web pipe network.

NULL

What are those guys doing?

ZIP

Let's take a look.

Zip and Null get out of the car and stealthily approach the men, who are busy at work. As they get close, one of the men looks up at them. Instantly, a gun appears in his hand.

MAN

Freeze it, boys.

Zip and Null stop in their tracks.

ZIP

Put away the shooter. We're just walking here.

MAN

Keep your voice down, and go sit against that tank.

He gestures to one of the tanks.

NULL

We wanna go, man.

MAN

You're not going anywhere. Sit down and shut up.

The Man addresses another man.

MAN (CONT'D)

Henry--watch these two til I can deal with them.

HENRY

Got it, boss.

Henry pulls a pistol and points it at the pair.

Zip and Null sit by the tank in sullen silence.

Null whispers to Zip.

NULL
I'm scared, dude.

ZIP
It'll be cool. I'll sort it.

One of the men takes up watch while the others open a tank. They pour the contents of the bottles and boxes into it.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Hey, you can't do that. That's the water supply.

MAN
Thanks for the info. Stop talking.

They finish emptying their containers into the tank. The Man cranks it closed while the others throw the empty containers into the van.

MAN (CONT'D)
Get in the van.

The Man jumps down and holds his gun on the pair.

ZIP
Wait, man.

MAN
Now.

Zip and Null climb into the van, followed by the Man. The other men load into the van and it quickly pulls away.

INSIDE THE VAN - CONTINUOUS

MAN
Alright, who are you?

ZIP
Zip and Null.

MAN
Not your names. What do you do for the Administration?

ZIP
Nothing.

MAN
You're Administration spies.

ZIP
No, we're just a couple of dudes
looking for someone.

MAN
And who would that be?

NULL
Fade.

The Man and Henry look knowingly at each other.

MAN
What do you want with Fade?

NULL
I heard he has ideas.

The Man laughs.

MAN
He has ideas, alright. What do you
think about these two, Henry?

HENRY
I think they're clueless. Too
young for Admin moles.

MAN
I agree.

Points his gun away from Null and Zip.

Null lets out a huge breath.

NULL
Thanks.

MAN
I'm Clay. I'm in charge here.
Fade's ours. Recruiter.

ZIP
What were you guys doing back
there? Messing up the water?

CLAY
More like unmessing it.

ZIP
What's wrong with the water?

CLAY

I forgot. You've been drinking it. Loaded with drugs and toxins for attrition.

ZIP

Attrition? What are you talking about?

CLAY

The Administration is thinning the herd, so to speak. People aren't dying off fast enough on their own. The water is just one way to speed it up.

ZIP

What's wrong with the water?

CLAY

What isn't? Long-acting toxins. Heavy metals. Bacteria, viruses, prions. Anti-conception agents. Depressants, mood destabilizers, hallucinogens. You name it, it's in there.

ZIP

But I drink it every day, and I feel fine.

CLAY

That's the drugs. You feel fine, but you're not. And you don't have to tell me you drink the water. You don't look good.

ZIP

I hate to dis you, but how do you know all this?

CLAY

Those Administration guys working all this stuff? I used to be one of them.

ZIP

Why'd you quit?

CLAY

You can't quit.

Zip glances cautiously about.

ZIP
Then they're looking for you.

CLAY
Nope. I'm dead to them.

ZIP
How'd you pull that off?

CLAY
Ever heard of that shark tank thing?

ZIP
We saw it on the vid.

CLAY
Of course you did. We made it very public.

ZIP
So that was you.

CLAY
Yes and no. We faked it.

NULL
How'd ya do that?

CLAY
Misdirection. I switched with a fresh body. Admin mole. Taller than me, so we cut off his feet. Rope shake and some amps while he hanged wiggled him great. Sharks digested the body. No trace.

ZIP
Unbelievable. Why'd you do it?

CLAY
Got tired of killing everybody. Wanted to do some good.

ZIP
What did you just put in the water?

CLAY
Antibiotics, chelating agents, antivirals, enzymes, antivenins, mood stabilizers and hormones. Everything a healthy body needs.

ZIP

Where'd you get all that stuff?

CLAY

The Network makes it in underground labs. Or we steal it at the Heights.

NULL

The Network. I heard of you guys.

CLAY

(sarcastic)

You catch on fast. Now we have a problem.

NULL

What's the problem, man?

CLAY

You.

ZIP

We're not gonna say anything.

CLAY

You guys were looking for Fade. That could be good or bad.

NULL

I just wanted pain stuff.

CLAY

That's his cover. If he couldn't convert you, he'd kill you.

Null's jaw drops and he looks terrified.

ZIP

I wanna change all this. It's wrong. I hate it.

Clay points at Zip.

CLAY

You I can use. Not the other guy. We're going to have to eliminate him.

Henry trains his pistol on Null.

NULL

No, man!

ZIP
 He'll keep his mouth shut. It's
 honor for him. He's not sharp, but
 he's loyal as the day is long.

NULL
 I don't know nothin'. I'm
 sleepin'.

Clay sizes him up.

CLAY
 You pulled back the curtain and saw
 the wizard. You talk, I won't feed
 you to the rats. I'll juice you.

NULL
 I don't know what that means, but I
 don't want it.

CLAY
 Ever notice people that go into
 hospitals never come out?

ZIP
 Yeah.

CLAY
 They go out the back in HEADS
 trucks.

ZIP
 Head trucks?

CLAY
 Refrigerated rigs for hauling
 HEADS.

ZIP
 Still means nothing. You lost me.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIGHT - BEHIND A HOSPITAL

A long refrigerated tanker truck pulls away from a poorly lit
 building. Heavy hoses stretch from the building across the
 ground behind the truck. As it turns and catches the light,
 "H.E.A.D.S." is visible lettered across the side.

SIMULTANEOUSLY:

CLAY (V.O.)

They have a sense of humor. Not real subtle if you know what it means: Human EnzymAtic DigeSt. HEADS for short. People turned into sludge.

BACK TO SCENE.

ZIP

No shit?

CLAY

Yes, shit. Meat, bones, and hair, too. The whole thing goes into the vat.

ZIP

How do they--

CLAY

(interjecting)

Kill them up front. Electrocutation, gas, whatever. Throw them into enzyme vats. Add chemicals and blend a bit. A couple days later, pump pink slime into trucks. Goes right out the back.

NULL

No, man. Can't be happening...

CLAY

Every minute of every day. Makes great fertilizer. Makes even better mystery meat. What do you think they hand out at the food distribution centers?

Null heaves and hunches forward.

NULL

I'm gonna be sick.

CLAY

Not in here, you're not. Save it for the street.

ZIP

We gotta stop 'em!

CLAY
That's exactly what we're trying to do.

Slaps Zip on the back.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Welcome to the Network.

Gestures at Null.

CLAY (CONT'D)
He might be OK after all.

Null, pale and trying not to spew, smiles wanly.

ZIP
What's next?

CLAY
We'll get you oriented, and I'll brief you on some minor ops.

INT. SCHOOLROOM - DAY

A middle-aged man stands before his class. He looks as if he has been in a barroom brawl, and is bloodied and sore.

TEACH
Alright you jokers, get in your seats.

A cloud of complaints rises from the students as they slowly comply.

TEACH (CONT'D)
Hurry up. If you don't listen, you won't learn. And if you don't learn, you won't hurt. And if you don't hurt...

The students moan out the oft-repeated mantra as one:

ALL STUDENTS
You won't be cool.

TEACH
That's right! I'm glad I finally have your attention. Time for show and tell. Who has a nice open wound, or a pretty new scar?

Teach looks over the silent class, and his eyes find an empty seat. He points at it.

TEACH (CONT'D)

Where's Cletis?

INFORMED STUDENT

Speed-rail. Cut him in half. He snuffed it quick, but it was grismal.

JEALOUS STUDENT

I should've talked to him more. Might've gotten some ideas.

PRACTICAL STUDENT

I never liked that kid, but he's monikered now.

TEACH

He was a quiet one. Listened and learned, and look where it got him! We can all take a lesson from his fine example.

EXT. STREET - CENTER-CITY - DAY

The over-crowded business district. Unmarked Administration buses stretch in a line down the street, parked and ready to load. Speakers broadcast a message to the gathered throng:

ANNOUNCER (V.O)

All citizens over age 60 are required to report for ideological modification and enlightenment. You will achieve maximum potential. Free buses are loading now.

Lines of old folk are queued to load the buses. Administration drones in grey uniforms sit behind desks and check vault chips against lists and computer terminal screens.

An OLD LADY reaches the front of the queue, and hands her vault chip to an Admin drone.

OLD LADY

How long will this take? I need a nap and my episodics come on the vid soon.

ADMIN DRONE
 You must do your duty as a citizen.
 It will be over soon enough.

OLD LADY
 Can't I watch it on the vid,
 instead?

ADMIN DRONE
 No, you must attend in person.
 Move along.

OLD LADY
 But you haven't given me back my
 chip.

ADMIN DRONE
 We know who you are. You won't
 need it where you're going.

OLD LADY
 But I've never been without it.

ADMIN DRONE
 You will get it back when you
 return.

OLD LADY
 That seems odd, but if you say so.

ADMIN DRONE
 You're holding up the queue. Move
 along.

The Old Lady shuffles to the bus to board with innumerable other seniors.

The Admin Drone drops her chip into a processing box behind the desk. A flash of laser light emits from the slot, and a puff of smoke rises from the box.

The Admin Drone addresses the elder at the front of the line.

ADMIN DRONE (CONT'D)
 Next.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Zip and Cipher sit on a couch in the basement. Zip eases closer and puts his arm around Cipher.

ZIP
I'm glad I finally got you to
myself. Null's always around.

CIPHER
Don't get any ideas. He'll be back
soon.

ZIP
C'mon, let's put the parts
together.

Cipher slides away.

CIPHER
Let's not.

ZIP
We screwed in the street and now
you don't want me?

CIPHER
It's not that. It's complicated.

ZIP
What's complicated? I want you,
you want me.

CIPHER
I don't know what I want.

ZIP
What about us?

CIPHER
We're buds.

ZIP
Bud's who screw.

CIPHER
Screwed.

ZIP
What's wrong with you?

CIPHER
I want a guy who gets me hot.

ZIP
I did before.

CIPHER
You worked me up at the trestle.

ZIP
What does it take to get you worked
up?

She thinks for a moment.

CIPHER
Pain. Suffering. Blood.

ZIP
I thought you liked me.

CIPHER
I do. I just want a guy...like
Grimaldi. Someone who loves the
pain.

ZIP
So I gotta hurt myself to get you?

CIPHER
Pain gives you rep. Rep turns me
on. I thought you were into it.

ZIP
I thought so too. I'm not sure
anymore. There's gotta be more.

CIPHER
Oh, there is. Get a name.

ZIP
Not without a ton of pain.

CIPHER
Pain is cool. You know that.

ZIP
I thought I did.

CIPHER
You want me? Get monikered.

ZIP
You said I was cool.

CIPHER
You are cool. You're just not
known.

ZIP
So when everybody knows my name,
you'll want me?

Cipher's eyes shine and she gets excited.

CIPHER
Yeppers. Now you got it.

EXT. THE SEWER STREETS - NIGHT

Null and Zip walk the streets of the Sewer.

ZIP
Amazing how scary this place was
before.

NULL
Yep. Don't scare me now.

ZIP
The Network runs the show here. We
had nothing to worry about.

NULL
Now.

ZIP
Yeah, might've been dicey if we'd
met Fade first.

NULL
We got lucky.

The pair pause as they pass a man laying in the middle of the street.

NULL (CONT'D)
He looks out of it.

ZIP
Let's get him out of the street
before he gets run over.
(Zip gently shakes the
man's shoulder)
Wake up, man.

The Man's head rolls to the side. He is clearly dead.

NULL
That dude's dead!

ZIP
I think you're right.

The two roll him over, and there is blood beneath him.

ZIP (CONT'D)
He's been shot!

Zip crouches down and looks around. Null simply stands and looks at Zip.

NULL
What're you doin'?

ZIP
Get down, they might still be here!

NULL
Who?

ZIP
The shooters!

NULL
Clay probably shot him for sneaking around.

ZIP
This guy could be with Clay.

NULL
Shit, you're right.

ZIP
Let's move.

Zip and Null sneak quickly along the edge of the street, keeping to the shadows. As they move,

REVEAL:

A GROUP OF A DOZEN DEAD PEOPLE, scattered in the street and across the sidewalks.

NULL
What the fuck is goin' on?

ZIP
Quiet, keep moving.

Zip leads Null as they run through the streets. They occasionally pass more dead.

NULL
More of 'em.

ZIP
I know. Move!

As they reach an intersection, multiple gunshots ring out ahead. Zip and Null both hit the deck.

In the distance, two groups are engaged in combat. Both groups maneuver for position around cars and other cover while shooting at each other.

NULL
What do we do?

ZIP
Stay down.

NULL
Why don't we help?

ZIP
Help who? We don't know which is which.

As they watch, firebombs rain down from the windows of the building next to one of the groups.

The group catches fire, and screams shriek through the night. They drop their weapons, and try to beat the flames off themselves.

The other group advances, and mows them down without mercy.

ZIP (CONT'D)
There's Clay!

Zip points at one of the figures advancing and finishing off the flaming group.

The flaming group wiped out, the firing stops.

NULL
(yells)
Hey Clay, it's us!

Clay spins and points his weapon at Zip and Null. When he sees who they are, he waves them over.

Clay addresses the group.

CLAY
They're with us!

Directs Zip.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Look for wounded. We have to get off the street.

ZIP
What happened?

CLAY
They caught us in the open. No
time, gotta move!

The group finds several wounded and drags them to cover.

CLAY (CONT'D)
(into ear comm)
Get the vans out here now! We're
on the street North of hide two.

ZIP
What do we do?

CLAY
Gather the weapons, we can use
them.

Clay gives a signal to the GROUP LEADER. He and several others walk amongst the burning bodies, firing shots into their heads.

Zip, Null, and other group members scour the street for weapons. They gather them into a pile.

As they finish, two black vans pull up and screech to a halt. The doors fly open and several armed men emerge.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Load 'em up!

Everybody grabs wounded and weapons and loads into the vans. Clay climbs into the rear van.

The Group Leader yells from the lead van.

GROUP LEADER
All in!

Zip and Null stand at the door of Clay's van, and hand him the last of the weapons.

ZIP
(to Clay)
Us too?

CLAY
Hurry up, get in!

Zip and Null climb into the van and the door shuts behind them.

INSIDE THE VAN - CONTINUOUS

CLAY

Pick some weapons. You may need them.

Zip and Null re-arm themselves. Zip looks reasonably comfortable with a rifle. Null looks lost with a pistol.

Before they can even sit, the van peels off into the night. Zip and Null tumble around, then manage to sit down.

They are bandied about inside the van as it rapidly maneuvers through the streets, making seemingly random turns at high speed. The lead van takes the corners hard, and is tough to keep in sight as the group in the rear van is jostled about.

CLAY (CONT'D)

We have to get off the street before reinforcements come.

ZIP

What happened?

CLAY

Patrol got hit by an Admin death squad. We got lucky and they hit us below one of our hides. I tossed a pipe bomb into their center. That evened it up and stunned the rest. Our men in the hide fire-bombed them from above. It was easy after that.

ZIP

How many dead?

Clay talks to a FEMALE GROUP MEMBER.

CLAY

Get a count.

The female group member talks into an ear comm. After a moment, she signals something to Clay.

CLAY (CONT'D)

We killed about thirty of theirs. Lost a few of ours, plus about a dozen randoms they got before they hit our patrol.

ZIP

How did this happen?

CLAY

Every once in awhile, there's war
in the streets. The rest of the
time it's guerrilla tactics. Maybe
they got someone inside.

Looks at Null.

NULL

Wasn't me man!

ZIP

It wasn't him.

CLAY

If someone betrayed us, I doubt
they'd be here. You tell anybody
about us?

ZIP

Nobody.

Null turns to Zip.

NULL

What about Cipher?

CLAY

Who's Cipher?

ZIP

My girl. Kind of. She doesn't know
anything.

CLAY

You sure?

NULL

She hasn't been hanging around us
much lately.

ZIP

We've been fighting.

CLAY

(satisfied)

It happens.

He consoles Zip.

CLAY (CONT'D)

She'll be back.

ZIP
I'm not so sure.

EXT. CENTER-CITY - STREET - DAY

Administration vans slowly roll through the streets. They sport loud-speakers, and vid-panels play videos on the sides.

The vans blare loud messages as they wind their way slowly through the business district.

People gather on the sidewalks in front of buildings to hear the broadcast and watch the vid-panels:

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
Attention citizens! Tired of coming home after a hard day's work, only to find a load of housework waiting?

INSERT SHOT ON VAN VID-PANEL:

Worker comes home to sink full of dirty dishes, and shakes head in disgust.

BACK TO SCENE.

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
Do you have family members that sit at home and do nothing while you work hard all day?

INSERT SHOT ON VAN VID-PANEL:

Family members loaf on a couch and watch the vid-box.

BACK TO SCENE.

Some people nod in agreement, others show no reaction to the message.

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
We all know who doesn't pull their weight.

INSERT SHOT ON VAN VID-PANEL:

Successive shots of fat, old, and disabled people lying around.

BACK TO SCENE.

The vans stop as one, at equidistant positions on the street. The vid-panels all flash arrows at colored circles painted onto the sidewalks.

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
 Tomorrow is Administration Work Day. Bring any and all unwanted family members to the designated drop points. We will take them off your hands.

INSERT SHOT ON VAN VID-PANEL:

Undesirables load onto the vans at the designated drop-off points. Family members wave goodbye to those loading.

BACK TO SCENE.

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
 Imagine your life without the burden of unproductive, ungrateful, and worthless family members. Let us help lighten your load. We will put them to good use.

The vans slowly drive away, and the images on the vid-panels reset to the beginning.

VAN SPEAKERS (V.O.)
 Thank you for your attention. We look forward to serving you, and them, tomorrow!

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Zip hears knocking on his basement door. He cautiously opens it. Cipher stands before him.

CIPHER
 Hey, Zip.

ZIP
 Hey. Long time no see.

CIPHER
 You gonna let me in?

ZIP
 You wanna come in?

CIPHER
 I'm here, right?

ZIP
What about Grimaldi?

CIPHER
You see him with me?

Zip glances past her.

ZIP
Just making sure.

Cipher crosses to the couch and sits. There is a new awkwardness and distance between them. Zip thinks up something to break the silence.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Null's coming over. Wants to hang with that girl. Wanna come?

CIPHER
(tries to sound comfortable and normal, but can't pull it off)
Yeppers. We can cruise the Strip while he's working her.

She attempts a smile and tries to relax, but tension remains.

EXT. - THE STRIP - NIGHT

Zip, Cipher, and Null arrive at the Strip. Null stays with the chubby teen girl and her friends.

Zip and Cipher walk the Strip. They quickly arrive

AT GRIMALD'S COURT

A huge crowd surrounds Grimaldi, who sits atop his ragged throne.

Indigo stands at the left of Grimaldi's throne. He sneers and puffs his chest out as he imagines he protects Grimaldi, who needs no protection.

Cyclops stands short but proud to the right of Grimaldi.

Grimaldi leans down to speak to him.

Cipher and Zip head into the crowd, and make their way to the thickest part.

Cipher pushes her way front and center, trailed by a reluctant Zip.

Indigo sees the pair approach, and steps forward to block their path to Grimaldi.

INDIGO
Stay back.

Cyclops looks on in silence as he listens to Grimaldi.

CIPHER
I wanna chat up Grimaldi.

Indigo holds both hands out in a foreboding gesture.

INDIGO
No one speaks with the King of Pain.

Cipher proudly exhibits her arm.

CIPHER
He's gotta eye my serpent. I did it for him.

Zip is crestfallen.

Indigo looks to Cyclops, who does nothing, for support.

INDIGO
Not gonna happen.

Cipher makes a face at Indigo, then tries to push her way past. He pushes her back, with his hands on her chest.

She yells and pushes back.

CIPHER
Hands off, jackanapes!

Grimaldi looks up at the disturbance and notices Cipher and Zip. He points his jester cane at them.

GRIMALDI
How now, a vespertine brouhaha!
What kerfuffle hath the night wrought?

He sizes them up.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)
Beauty and the beast, p'raps.

His low grumble awes the gathered crowd.

Indigo retreats.

ZIP
(joking)
She's not a beast.

GRIMALDI
We agree.

Grimaldi turns his withering gaze full on Cipher.

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)
Hello, my pretty.

His voice radiates the certainty and iron conviction of power.

CIPHER
(smitten)
Hello back. What's your name?

GRIMALDI
So coy. Methinks you know who I am.

CIPHER
I might've heard of you.

GRIMALDI
Indeed.

Zip grabs Cipher's arm, tries to pull her away.

ZIP
Nice to meet you Grim. Time for us to go.

Cipher pulls her arm away and glares at Zip. She does not move. Her attention returns to Grimaldi.

GRIMALDI
The lady doth protest.

Cipher stands before Grimaldi, entranced.

CIPHER
Your scars are beautiful.

GRIMALDI
Alas, they are only skin deep.

Cipher reaches out half-way as if to touch Grimaldi's face.

CIPHER
So much pain...

ZIP
Pain's not everything.

Grimaldi chuckles, deep and low.

GRIMALDI
Again, we agree. There is death.

CIPHER
Exactly. Can't you see, Zip?

ZIP
Grimaldi's cool. But there's more.

GRIMALDI
We can but cloak ourselves in
humor's black velvet and embrace
the void.

ZIP
I'm gonna go home and embrace my
pillow. I'm beat.

Grimaldi looks intently at Cipher.

GRIMALDI
Yes, you are. Farewell.

ZIP
C'mon Cipher.

Cipher is held in rapt silence by Grimaldi's spell.

GRIMALDI
Fate, it seems, would have the lady
linger.

Grimaldi's voice breaks her trance.

CIPHER
See ya Zip, I'm stayin' awhile.

She is drawn to Grimaldi, who leans forward and whispers in her ear.

Cipher giggles and reddens at the unheard words.

She hesitantly displays her serpent to Grimaldi, suddenly unsure it is worthy in his presence.

Grimaldi traces the cross-hatched lines on the serpent with a finger and smiles.

Zip rushes off, angry and hurt. He is pursued by the crowd's laughter.

INT. NETWORK HIDE - THE SEWER

Zip and Clay meet at the planning table.

ZIP
What can I do to help?

CLAY
Not much, unless you have a bunch of reinforcements you haven't mentioned.

Laughs and shakes his head.

ZIP
None I can think of.

CLAY
We can start with your friends. Null should be here, and your girl. Where are they?

ZIP
Null's after a chick he met at the Strip. Can't blame him.

CLAY
And your girl?

ZIP
Cipher is...doing other stuff. I haven't seen her in awhile.

Zip bows his head, saddened and upset.

ZIP (CONT'D)
She's not really my girl. Everybody's after her. And she has her eye on someone.

CLAY
She'll come around. You have a lot to offer.

ZIP
Not against Grimaldi.

CLAY
She knows Grimaldi?

ZIP
Yeah. Real friendly.

CLAY
Grimaldi is impressive, but he's
fickle. And there are always a lot
of girls for him to chose from.
She'll be back.

ZIP
Not holding my breath. No way I
can compete.

CLAY
There are other things to life than
pain. She'll wake up.

ZIP
I've been saying and hoping the
same thing.

Zip becomes morose.

Clay notices, and changes the subject.

CLAY
We keep beating the Administration.
But we're still losing.

Zip perks up.

ZIP
What do you mean?

CLAY
Attrition. They keep throwing
everything at us, and even though
we win, we're losing too many men.

ZIP
Change strategy.

CLAY
Not much else we can do. They have
more guys. They can afford to waste
their men. We can't. Simple
numbers.

ZIP
There has to be a way.

CLAY
Not unless you know a small army
ready to fight.

Zip thinks for a second.

ZIP
What about the painers?

CLAY
They're too out of it from the water. Zombies. No way they'll listen.

ZIP
But we're fixing the water.

CLAY
Trying. Only so much we can do. Chems are tough to get. Every time we fix it, the Administration just pumps in more junk.

ZIP
We can try right after you clean it up.

CLAY
Fade recruits them. Just when we start to make headway, the Administration poisons the water again and we lose all progress.

ZIP
There must be a way to reach them.

CLAY
Let me know if you think of it. We need more men and a clean water supply, or it's just a matter of time.

Zip and Clay ponder in silence.

EXT. OUTSIDE NULL'S DOOR - DAY

Zip bangs on Null's door.

ZIP
Open up, it's me.

Null answers, groggy with sleep, his hair a mess.

NULL
Whatchya want?

ZIP
Figured we could hang later.

NULL
Come on now.

Zip looks past Null as though looking for someone.

ZIP
Nah, got stuff to do.

NULL
What stuff? I'll come.

Starts to pull the door shut behind him.

ZIP
Gotta go alone.

NULL
Leavin' me out?

ZIP
Just gotta do it alone.

NULL
We do everything together.

ZIP
It's a surprise.

NULL
Cool. For me?

ZIP
Maybe.

Tries to look past Null again.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Seen Cipher?

NULL
Nah, she hasn't been around.

A stirring inside catches Zip's attention.

CHUBBY TEEN GIRL (O.S.)
Everything cool?

Zip peers around Null, suddenly angry.

NULL
 (talks to the voice)
 Yeah, just my friend Zip.

ZIP
 Who is that?

NULL
 I got lucky. Chub from the Strip.

Winks and makes a wolfish face.

Zip gets very disappointed and starts to leave.

ZIP
 Find Cipher and bring her with.

Null is distracted by thoughts of a surprise.

When he looks up, Zip is gone.

EXT. THE STRIP - DUSK

Zip walks the Strip alone. He studies his feet as he goes.

Painers surround him in a hectic, colorful, slow-motion blur, doing their thing.

Oblivious, Zip walks on.

He arrives at Grimaldi's Court, and watches from the back.

Indigo and Cyclops circulate and work the crowd.

Grimaldi cannot be heard, but he motions, speaks, judges.

Rejected painers fade back into obscurity after having been judged, and failed.

A young man, wearing only a loin cloth approaches Zip. He is red and slick with blood from small cuts all over his body.

Zip reaches out and touches his arm. His hand comes away covered with blood.

ZIP
 Dude, what's going on?

BLEEDER
 Thought this was it. Lost a lot of blood. Damn Indigo said it's not good enough and mocked me to Grimaldi.

ZIP
That Indigo is an ass.

BLEEDER
I hate him.

ZIP
What happened?

BLEEDER
Grimaldi said something about
wasting his time. Failed again.

ZIP
Who is Indigo to judge? Doesn't
even look hurt. How'd he ever get
named?

BLEEDER
Grimaldi was holding court. Indigo
hung from a power line overhead and
screamed. Everybody looked up.
Shorted out the grid with his body.
Purple arcs and sparks went
everywhere. I gotta admit, it was
cool. Knocked out the lights on
the whole Strip. Grimaldi named
him on the spot.

ZIP
I wondered how he got monikered.

BLEEDER
That did it. Still an ass. Now I
got no reason to go on. Never
gonna get named.

ZIP
Try again.

BLEEDER
Out of chances.

Bleeder walks off, leaving Zip alone again.

EXT. STREET - LATER THAT NIGHT

Null, Cipher and Zip ride in Null's car.

Cipher looks tentatively at Zip.

CIPHER
Null said you have a surprise.

ZIP
Yeah.

CIPHER
What is it?

Zip doesn't answer.

NULL
Dude, tell me.

ZIP
(quietly)
Soon enough.

CIPHER
The suspense is killin' me.

NULL
Me too.

Zip smiles a sad smile.

ZIP
I wish everyone knew who I was.

NULL
You mean who you are?

ZIP
Yeah, that's what I meant.

CIPHER
You're Zip. Everyone knows that.

ZIP
Do they?

He looks into Cipher's eyes.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Do you?

NULL
Stop sexing her man. She don't dig
you.

CIPHER
Shut up, idiot!

Zip eyes Cipher intensely.

ZIP
Well, do you?

CIPHER

I don't know...We're buds. I want
a guy that everyone else wants.

NULL

That ain't Zip.

ZIP

Shut the fuck up! You got no shot.

CIPHER

Stop fighting over me!

Zip drops his head for a moment, steels himself. He looks at
Cipher.

ZIP

I can be him.

CIPHER

(softly)

I know.

ZIP

I am him.

Takes a couple deep breaths.

ZIP (CONT'D)

Wanna see something really painful?

He opens the rear car door and quickly eases out.

CIPHER

Careful Zip!

She is worried but can barely contain her excitement.

Zip clings behind the open door and looks ahead into the
darkness as the car speeds through the night. The wind
streams tears across his face. He howls like a madman.

ZIP

Hold steady, I'm going up!

Zip swings himself out and onto the roof of the car.

He lays on his belly and grabs the sides of the roof as he
slowly eases back.

Cipher nervously laughs.

CIPHER

Go, Zip, go!

She cuts her face with a razor blade in excitement.

Zip slides back onto the trunk.

Null and Cipher both look at him through the rear windshield.

Zip looks at the eager faces staring back at him.

Null lights his own hair on fire.

NULL

Do it!

Zip pauses, then looks at Cipher's excited face. They stare into each other's eyes.

CIPHER

(mouths the words)

I love you.

Zip resigns himself to what he must do. He takes a deep breath, then lowers himself to the bumper, grabs hold of it and kicks his legs off.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

A tricked-out low-rider with purple neon running lights shrieks past two parked cycle cops.

They watch as a teen boy with a green Mohawk clings to the car's rear bumper in a brutal body drag. Sparks scatter from his belt buckle as it grinds along the pavement. The boy screams in agony as the asphalt sands away his legs.

They watch the wild-eyed driver looking back as his flaming hair blazes light on the occupants' faces. They see the beautiful girl laughing and bleeding.

They watch as the car reaches an intersection. The driver hauls the wheel over hard and skids around the corner. The boy swings out in a wide arc. Garbage cans scatter like bowling pins as he mows them down.

The car picks up speed and is gone. As the screams fade, the cops look at one another.

SKINNY COP

Those kids were cool!

BIG COP
Sparky sure was. Real cool. I
could almost feel his pain.

SKINNY COP
You wish.

Yawns.

SKINNY COP (CONT'D)
I'm bored, let's roll.

The cops start their cycles and head off, watchful for
trouble.

INT. NULL'S ROOM - DAY

Zip lays in bed. His legs are swathed in bloody bandages.
He slowly regains consciousness, and tries to get up. Null
hurries to his side and holds him down.

NULL
Don't move, man. You're messed.

ZIP
What happened?

NULL
You don't remember your drag? It
was flawless.

ZIP
Except I can barely feel my legs.

NULL
Don't worry. You'll feel 'em soon
enough.

ZIP
What'd you give me?

He is groggy, shakes his head, and tries to clear his vision.

NULL
Some street shit called "Coma".
Guaranteed to kill pain.

ZIP
Must've been cheap. Everybody
wants pain. A Painkiller. What a
joke.

NULL

Not so cheap, and no joke. You kept screamin'. Even in your sleep. Admin hears you, it'll be the hospital.

ZIP

Maybe I should go.

NULL

You nuts? You go in, you won't come out. Leastwise not breathin'. Not cool. No triumph there.

ZIP

Where's Cipher?

NULL

Been hangin' with some dude. Workin' her hard. Can't remember his name, it's weird. But he's got super scars.

ZIP

(upset)

Great. She come to see me?

NULL

No, man. Not since your drag.

Zip tries to rise.

NULL (CONT'D)

Stop. You'll bleed out.

ZIP

I gotta find her. You'd think she'd want me after the drag.

NULL

If she wanted to be found, she'd be here. Leave it.

ZIP

I can't. I need her.

NULL

Ya got me. Forget her.

ZIP

Not the same. I gotta have her.

NULL

She's with that dude, Moldy.

ZIP
But she wants me.

NULL
She know that?

ZIP
C'mon man. I'm hurtin' enough. I
don't need yer shit.

NULL
Just keepin' up yer spirits.

ZIP
You're Killin' me.

NULL
OK, OK.

ZIP
You gotta find her.

Null examines Zip for a long moment.

NULL
OK, man. I'll look. Gimme awhile.
You inspired me. I wanna do a
show.

ZIP
Hurry, I don't wanna lose her.

Null hurries out of the room, and shuts the door behind him.
Zip lays back in the bed and stares at the ceiling.

INT. NULL'S ROOM - LATER

Null flings open the door. He is limping and banged up. He
walks to Zip and wakes him up.

NULL
Dude, they cheered me!

ZIP
What?

NULL
They asked my name, then shouted
it.

ZIP
Who did?

NULL
Crowd, man. I'm getting known!

ZIP
I sent you for Cipher.

NULL
I couldn't find her, so I put on a show.

Null does a little jig for a moment.

ZIP
You looked everywhere?

NULL
No trace. She's gone. Everyone was yelling for more!

ZIP
What'd you do?

NULL
Ran in and out of traffic. Got hit a couple times. Looked worse than it was. Crowd went nuts. Think they'll remember me?

Zip tries to get up.

ZIP
Who cares! We gotta find Cipher.

NULL
Dude, relax. I'll find her.

Pushes Zip back into bed.

NULL (CONT'D)
Wish you saw me man! You wouldn't believe it.

ZIP
I'm glad you're getting rep, but I don't care anymore.

NULL
Whaddya mean you don't care? I'm cool now.

ZIP
You're my friend. You helped me. You were already cool.

NULL
No one counts shit like that.

ZIP
I do. And so will a lot of others.

NULL
You changed, man.

ZIP
None of this makes sense anymore.
I only want to be with Cipher.

NULL
She mean that much to you?

ZIP
Nothing else matters. Please find
her for me.

NULL
I was just messing with you before.
She's really into you. She just
can't say it.

ZIP
I hope so.

NULL
Sorry I didn't find her.

Heads for the door.

NULL (CONT'D)
Count on me, dude. I'll find her
and bring her back.

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Null and Cipher speed along in Null's car. Cipher is in the
front passenger seat.

NULL
Glad I found you.

CIPHER
What's the big deal you told me
about?

NULL
Zip misses you.

CIPHER
Oh, yeah?

NULL
He doesn't want you with Moldy.

CIPHER
It's not his choice.

She crosses her arms and leans back into the seat.

Null puts his hand on Cipher's leg. She immediately throws it off.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
Hands off!

NULL
(morose)
I missed you too.

Null looks hurt and angry. He stomps on the gas and drives aggressively and recklessly.

CIPHER
Take it easy.

She grabs onto the door handle to steady herself.

NULL
I like driving fast. It's cool.

Null looks over at Cipher lustfully.

CIPHER
Do it when I'm not here.

NULL
But then you won't see.

CIPHER
See what?

NULL
How cool I am.

CIPHER
Doesn't matter what I think.

NULL
If I'm cool you'll like me. That other chick does.

Null looks at her again. He is pitiful, and clearly smitten.

CIPHER
Slow it down.

NULL
I'm not going fast now.

CIPHER
That's not what I mean. You know I
like Zip.

NULL
But you can like me too.

CIPHER
We're friends.

NULL
If I do something really cool,
you'll want me.

CIPHER
Not gonna change. We're just
friends.

NULL
I can be as cool as Zip!

Null works himself up, and gets even more agitated.

Cipher looks very worried.

CIPHER
Calm down. Let's go home.

Null reaches behind the seat and moves a blanket aside.
There are a number of gas cans on the back seat. He grabs a
small one.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

Null doesn't answer, and steers with his knee. He takes the
cap off the gas can.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
Stop it! You're scaring me.

NULL
I'm gonna get monikered! You'll
see!

Null slows the car as he pours the gas over himself.

Cipher screams and tries to open her door. It is locked.

NULL (CONT'D)
You have to watch me.

CIPHER
Unlock it! Let me out!

Null tosses the empty gas can. He pulls out a lighter and starts flicking it.

NULL
Fire is cool!

Cipher screams again and pulls at the door lock. Just as she pulls it up and opens the door a crack, Null's lighter lights.

Cipher throws herself out of the door onto the road.

The car continues on, and a bright flare of light flashes inside.

The car interior ignites and a massive burst of flames shoots out the windows.

Null emits horrid high-pitched screams as he burns.

NULL (CONT'D)
Help me!

Cipher tumbles to a stop, battered and hurt, and watches as Null's car rolls into a pole and stops.

Cipher sees Null kick out the windshield. The flames erupt from the passenger compartment and climb into the night. Null continues to SCREAM horribly. He bats at the flames that lick all over himself and tries to beat them out.

CIPHER
Null!

He tries to climb out of the car through the windshield hole. The SCREAMING intensifies. He beats at the flames, a human torch.

Suddenly, Null's car explodes with a massive BOOM.

Pieces of flaming wreckage spin away and fly everywhere.

Null, now blackened, stops screaming and collapses silently into the car.

Thick smoke and flames roil from Null's car-B-que as it burns with great intensity.

A bloodied Cipher sobs and crawls out of the roadway. She drags herself along the pavement.

INT. NULL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Zip still lays in bed in the dark room. The door creaks and eases open. Zip opens his eyes, looks over but cannot see anything. He hears a dragging sound.

ZIP
Null? You find her?

There is no response. The sound continues.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Lights!

The room lights turn on. Zip sits up in bed, and looks down.

Cipher: Bloodied, burnt, and battered, drags herself across the floor.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Cipher!

She collapses on the floor and does not move. Zip swings his legs over the side of the bed. He tries to stand, yells out and collapses to the floor. He crawls to Cipher. He gently tries to rouse her.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Wake up!

She moans and rolls toward him, reaching out.

CIPHER
(whisper)
Zip...

ZIP
Shit! Are you OK? What happened?

CIPHER
Crash.

ZIP
Where's Null?

CIPHER
Croaked. Went up in his car. I can't stop hearing him scream.

ZIP
Dead? Can't be. He was just here.

CIPHER
He was working on his rep. Flamed himself again. This time he used gas. Kicked out the windshield and the flames ate him.

ZIP
No!

CIPHER
I could hear him crackling. He burnt black, then crumbled.

Starts crying.

CIPHER (CONT'D)
He's bones now. Only bones.

Zip and Cipher break down sobbing in each other's arms.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

ZIP
Why didn't you come see me after the drag?

CIPHER
I did.

ZIP
Null said you never came. Busy hanging with Grimaldi.

CIPHER
I wanted to...

ZIP
But you didn't.

CIPHER
I met him outside. I couldn't go in.

ZIP
That hurt worse than the drag.

CIPHER
I couldn't see you like that.

ZIP
I thought you loved the drag.

CIPHER
I thought I did to.

ZIP
That was for you. Now you don't care?

CIPHER
It's not important anymore.

ZIP
I've never had more pain.

CIPHER
It was terrible.

ZIP
I thought it was cool?

CIPHER
It's not that. I realized what's important.

ZIP
Not me?

CIPHER
Only you. I thought you'd die.

ZIP
I almost did.

CIPHER
I never wanna see you in pain again.

ZIP
Then I can't compete with dudes doing it.

CIPHER
You don't have to.

ZIP
To keep you I do.

CIPHER
Not anymore. I already lost my parents. I'm not losing you.

ZIP
What about Grimaldi?

CIPHER
Pain is wrong. I just want you.

Zip and Cipher embrace and hold each other tight.

ZIP
It's not enough.

CIPHER
What?

ZIP
Just stopping.

Cipher nods agreement.

CIPHER
We gotta tell peeps the pain is wrong.

ZIP
There's more. The Administration is behind all this. They're trying to wipe us out.

CIPHER
What are you talking about?

ZIP
I need to catch you up on some stuff.

Zip recounts recent events to Cipher.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER

CIPHER
So the Administration is poisoning, brainwashing and killing everybody?

ZIP
Been doing it a long time. And we've been doing it to ourselves. We just couldn't see it.

CIPHER
And they probably killed our parents.

ZIP
It's starting to look that way.

Cipher rushes to the door.

CIPHER
I'm gonna make them pay.

ZIP
Slow down. We gotta do this right.

CIPHER
We can't just sit here.

ZIP
We're not. I'm gonna take you to
the Network.

CIPHER
As long as I get to kick some ass.

ZIP
Don't think they'll have a problem
with that.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Zip works at a table. He constructs a pipe bomb by carefully threading a fused end cap onto a white plastic tube. Cipher walks into the room.

CIPHER
What's that?

ZIP
Pipe bomb. Thin plastic shell with
powder. No metal to injure
anybody.

CIPHER
Then what's the point?

ZIP
Not sure yet. Distraction, maybe.
Might come in handy.

CIPHER
For what?

ZIP
I'm gonna get people to change.
Gotta get their attention.

CIPHER

Don't leave me out. I wanna help.

ZIP

Planned on it. I'm not goin'
anywhere without you.

Cipher smiles and gives Zip a kiss.

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Zip stands before the gathered crowd. His legs are still covered in bloody bandages. Everybody is hurting themselves. Zip holds his special pipe bomb. He yells at the crowd:

ZIP

Stop doing this!

There is no reaction from the crowd, and the chaos continues.

ZIP (CONT'D)

Listen to me!

Zip can barely be heard over the throng. He pulls out the pipe bomb and lights the fuse. He spins in a circle, pushes people, and screams:

ZIP (CONT'D)

Bomb! Bomb! There's a bomb!

Everyone around Zip looks at him, then starts to panic and scatters. Zip waits as long as he can, then jumps behind a car.

He flings the pipe bomb into the now-open space before him. The bomb explodes with thunderous force. Everything stops. The explosion echoes into silence.

Zip clammers atop the car.

ZIP (CONT'D)

Ears up, I have something to say.

Indigo steps from the crowd.

INDIGO

Shut the fuck up, ass nugget. Why
should anyone listen to you?
You're nobody.

The crowd starts to cheer Indigo and chant his name.

THE CROWD (O.S.)
In-di-go!

Zip tries to yell above the crowd.

ZIP
I am somebody! Listen to me!

Zip is barely audible above the chants of "Indigo". Cipher comes forward to stand near Zip.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Stop hurting! Live pain-free!

The crowd continues chanting and repeats.

THE CROWD (O.S.)
In-di-go!

Zip hangs his head and is about to jump down from the car.

Suddenly, a six-year old kid, clothed in black, steps forward and pushes Indigo back. Indigo does not resist.

The crowd immediately goes silent. Then a hushed whisper.

THE CROWD (CONT'D) (O.S.)
Cy-clops.

CYCLOPS
(softly)
I think we should listen to what he has to say.

There is a slight buzz through the crowd. Indigo eases forward, deferential to Cyclops, yet still defiant.

INDIGO
Respect, Cyclops. We'll listen to everything you say, but not him.

CYCLOPS
You're behind the times, man.
Don't you know who he is?

INDIGO
(loses confidence)
Yeah, he's nobody.

CYCLOPS
Try again. Everybody knows my old man is a cop. Ever hear the tale of Sparky?

There is a buzz through the crowd as they repeat the name.

THE CROWD (O.S.)

Spar-ky!

CYCLOPS

The old man said Sparky had a green 'hawk. Look at his bandages, man. Fresh from the drag.

Gestures towards Zip.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)

Indigo, meet Sparky. He's as bad ass cool as they come.

Cyclops bows in admiration to Zip. There is a hushed silence as Zip nods to Cyclops and addresses the crowd.

ZIP

He's right. I'm that dude. I'm Zip...Sparky.

The crowd erupts and chants.

THE CROWD (O.S.)

Spar-ky! Spar-ky! Spar-ky!

After a few seconds, Zip raises his hands. The crowd instantly quiets.

ZIP

Not long ago, my friend Null burnt himself to a crisp. You probably heard of him by now.

NULL'S FAN (O.S.)

(yells)

Torch was cool.

ZIP

Torch was cool. Now he's dead. I miss him.

INDIGO

At least we know he was for real.

Indigo glances at Cyclops defiantly. He confronts Zip.

INDIGO (CONT'D)

You're just a fairy tale.

Cyclops moves toward Indigo, angry.

CYCLOPS
Grimaldi named him.

Indigo stands silent, less sure now.

Chariot wheels forward and stops between Cyclops and Indigo.

All eyes immediately go to him.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)
Hail, Chariot!

Chariot stares down Indigo for a moment, until Indigo drops his eyes to the ground.

CHARIOT
(bitter)
You miss Torch? I get it. I miss
my arm and legs.

The crowd stirs.

Chariot glares at Indigo again.

CHARIOT (CONT'D)
Cops testified. Grimaldi named
him. I wanna hear what Sparky has
to say.

All eyes turn to Zip. He takes a deep breath and raises his voice.

ZIP
We've all lost someone. More than
that. We've all lost the joy of
life. We only embrace horror, pain
and death.

CHARIOT
My thoughts exactly. Just wasn't
man enough to say it. There's not
much left of me, but I'm still a
man. I'm sayin' it now: Sparky's
right.

CYCLOPS
It'd be nice to see in 3-D again.

ZIP
And it'd be nice to have Torch back
too. But he's wasted. And for
what? A stinking mess and a
moniker.

Indigo steps forward and slow-claps sarcastically.

INDIGO
Very moving. And very uncool.

ZIP
I don't care if I'm cool. I just
want this shit to stop.

Indigo shakes his head with a smug look.

ZIP (CONT'D)
OK, Indigo. Everybody but you. Go
hurt yourself all you want!

The crowd bursts into laughter and mocks Indigo, whose face reddens.

Zip raises a hand and the crowd quiets.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Jesting, man, your hair is cool!

The crowd applauds.

The anger drains from Indigo, who nods and lets out a deep breath.

ZIP (CONT'D)
I wanna be with Cipher.

Gestures at her.

ZIP (CONT'D)
Isn't that cool?

Indigo looks Cipher up and down.

INDIGO
She's hot. That is cool.

Cipher smiles. She has no more metal in her face.

ZIP
I want to get old with her, not die
young and lose her. Can't you see?
There's so much more than just
death.

Indigo thinks a second, then slowly nods and smiles.

The crowd starts chanting "Sparky" again.

Zip starts to speak and the crowd quiets instantly.

ZIP (CONT'D)
 When was not paining cool? Time to
 change. The Heights. Center-City.
 The Strip. Low-Town. The Sewer.
 This stops now. No more hurting!

Throws his arm to the sky.

ZIP (CONT'D)
 Live pain-free!

Cyclops and Chariot join Zip's chant: Live pain-free! Live
 pain-free! Indigo joins in the chant. The crowd erupts and
 joins the chant. Zip and Cipher embrace and kiss.

EXT. NETWORK HIDE - THE SEWER - NIGHT

Zip and Cipher stand outside a well-hidden security door in a
 dark alley in the Sewer.

Zip knocks a complex series of staccato raps on the door.
 Cipher watches the alley.

A covered peep-hole draws back and Zip steps back to be seen.
 The door cracks and a muzzle appears.

GUARD (O.S.)
 You followed?

ZIP
 All clear. We looped it twice.

GUARD (O.S.)
 Get in quick.

Zip and Cipher squeeze through the narrow opening.

INSIDE THE HIDE - CONTINUOUS

The guard scans them quickly as he bolts the door.

GUARD
 Clay know you're bringing her?

ZIP
 He wants to meet her.

The guard taps his ear comm and mutters something. He
 listens and nods.

GUARD
 Go on back.

Zip and Cipher enter another room to find Clay and a number of group members reviewing plans around a table.

Clay turns to Zip.

CLAY

Good to see you. This must be Cipher.

Greets Cipher.

CLAY (CONT'D)

I've heard a lot about you.

CIPHER

You too. Zip filled me in on what I've missed. Came to help.

CLAY

Bad timing. We're doing a raid tonight.

ZIP

Good timing. Let us come with you.

CLAY

I've just met her, and this is going to be dangerous.

ZIP

She's tough as a coffin nail.

CLAY

Convince me.

ZIP

Just stopping the pain isn't enough. We wanna stop the Administration.

CLAY

We all want that, but we have to be careful.

CIPHER

They killed our parents.

CLAY

There's a lot of that going around.

CIPHER

You don't take me, you better kill me. I'm gonna follow with whatever weapons I can find.

CLAY
You seem determined.

CIPHER
Now you know me.

Clay continues to size her up.

ZIP
Don't bother arguing with her. You
can't win.

Cipher smiles at Zip lovingly. She turns to Clay and stares
him down with a look of utter determination.

Clay stares back at Cipher, then finally relents with a sigh.

CLAY
(to Cipher)
You are tough.

Clay addresses a group member:

CLAY (CONT'D)
Get them some gear.

Clay barks at everyone:

CLAY (CONT'D)
Listen up, we don't have much time.

Clay details the plans, and points at diagrams.

While he gives instructions, the pair are outfitted with
ballistic vests, grenades, rifles and headgear.

Zip and Cipher attentively listen to the plan.

EXT. CENTER-CITY - THE FACTORY - NIGHT

The Network group infiltrates the areas surrounding a tall,
unexceptional building.

Zip and Cipher stand near Clay, blending into the shadows,
and with weapons ready.

Clay talks into his ear comm and gives instructions to the
group.

ZIP
What now?

CLAY

This is the Administration factory
that manufactures all the nasty
stuff they put in the water.

ZIP

Prime target.

CIPHER

Not for long.

CLAY

Without the junk they put in the
water, we can reach the people.
Wake them up.

ZIP

I gotta believe they'll see. Then
they can rise up too.

CIPHER

Stop hurting themselves, and give
it to the Administration.

CLAY

That's the plan.

ZIP

It's gotta work.

CLAY

Remember, quiet kills until we get
inside. We're going to need time
to set the charges.

ZIP

Sure do wish Null was here. He was
great with knives.

CLAY

We've lost a lot of good people.
Time for payback.

ZIP

That's a huge building. You sure
we brought enough explosives?

CLAY

I have an asset on the inside.
They just killed his parents
because they were too old.

CIPHER

I heard there's a lot of that goin' around.

Clay grins at Cipher's come-back.

CLAY

He's not real happy with them right now. I've seen blueprints. We know where to place the charges.

ZIP

What are we waiting for?

CLAY

Let's move.

Clay signals the group forward.

As the signal spreads, several dozen dark figures emerge from the shadows of nearby buildings and converge on the target.

The factory is surrounded by a razor wire fence.

As they approach the fence, two figures rush forward. They throw a piece of old carpet over the razor wire. One hefts the other up and over the fence with a foot-in-hand lift.

The inside figure races to the wall and flattens himself in the shadows. Just as he gets set, a guard rounds the corner and approaches, walking the fence-line.

As the guard comes forward, the inside man stands and whips a throwing knife at him. It catches him at the hollow of his throat. He goes down without a sound, except for the thud he makes when he hits the pavement.

CLAY (CONT'D)

(into ear comm)

Breach the fence.

Instantly, a crew runs forward with huge bolt cutters. In a few seconds, they have opened a hole in the fence.

CLAY (CONT'D)

(into ear comm)

Into the breach.

Clay, Zip, Cipher, and other members hurry forward.

One by one, they rush through the breach. Very quickly, they are all inside.

INSIDE THE FACTORY FENCE - CONTINUOUS

The group moves toward the factory entrance, hugging the walls and staying low. They stake out the sides of the door, as Clay approaches.

Zip stands next to Clay at the massive, fortified door.

ZIP

There's no way we're gettin'
through that anytime soon.

Clay smiles and starts punching numbers on a lit keypad.

CLAY

I've got the code. Changed every
day. This one's fresh.

Clay finishes entering the code and the door pops open with a loud clockwork click.

Two members immediately open and run through the door. By the time the others enter, there are four guards down.

Clay moves to the monitors and checks them quickly.

INSERT - THE BANK OF MONITORS

--A QUICK SCAN SHOWS NO MOVEMENT OR PERSONNEL.

As Clay turns, a guard furtively steps from a shadowed corner.

BACK TO SCENE.

CLAY (CONT'D)

All clear. Split up, and plant in
your positions.

The members break into respective groups. Each unit leader carries a map of the factory. They move off in different directions, followed by their groups.

Zip and Cipher follow Clay as he heads down a corridor. They run through the building, taking a number of turns, and finally stairs down to a sub-level.

CLAY (CONT'D)

This is it. Help me plant the
charges.

Zip, Clay, and Cipher plant the explosives at the bases of several massive structural columns.

Clay checks the explosives, then thumbs his ear comm.

CLAY (CONT'D)
(into ear comm)
Everybody ready?

Listens to response.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Start the timers, and exit.

Orders Zip and Cipher.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Start the timers.

Zip, Cipher and Clay all start their timers.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Move out!

Cipher, Clay and Zip run up the stairs towards the exit.

INT. FACTORY - OTHER TEAMS

The other teams rapidly exfiltrate the building.

BACK TO SCENE.

Cipher, Clay and Zip reach the top of the stairs.

As Cipher, in the lead, exits the stairwell, a guard steps forward and raises his weapon to shoot Clay.

Quick as lightning, Cipher strokes the guard across the face with her rifle butt. He falls to the ground and lays still.

CLAY
Dammit. Where did he come from?

Clay, Zip and Cipher run on. They exit the door. The other teams wait outside and stand watch in the shadows. Clay signals everyone forward. All the other teams exit the factory yard through the fence.

Clay pulls out a mini-torch and quickly welds the Factory entrance shut.

CLAY (CONT'D)

Not going to win any prizes, but it only needs to hold for 10 minutes.

ZIP

Let's move.

CLAY

We don't want to be anywhere near here when this comes down.

CIPHER

What the hell are you guys waiting for?

She runs ahead and waves for the others to follow. They take off running into the night.

EXT. STREET - CENTER-CITY - CONTINUOUS

Zip, Cipher, and Clay, winded, finally reach their van. Another group reaches a second one. They throw their gear in, and board. They are all panting from the hard run.

Just as they pull away, with Clay's van following the other, there is a massive explosion behind them which rocks the vans. A huge flaming mushroom cloud plumes into the night sky and billows over the tops of the other buildings.

INSIDE THE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Everybody cheers and they all look back at the explosion.

Zip and Cipher hug each other and sneak in a kiss.

Clay looks at them and smiles.

CLAY

Easy guys, get a room.

CIPHER

Don't worry, we will!

Everybody breaks into relieved, happy laughter.

They approach the Network Hide.

Out of nowhere, an Administration bus shrieks across the road and stops. It completely blocks their path.

Admin soldiers spill out from around the sides of the bus and nearby, and move towards the vans.

The lead van smashes into the side of the bus.

The following van with Clay, Zip, and Cipher, swerves as their driver slams on his brakes.

Everyone inside is jostled and bumped around.

They skid violently to a sideways stop, just short of striking the bus.

CLAY
Everybody out! Go, go, go!

In the panic, Zip stays composed.

ZIP
We're under attack!

As the van door is flung open,

REVEAL:

PANDEMONIUM: a motley mob of countless painers converges like bees from everywhere upon the Admin soldiers.

The painers assault the Admin soldiers with weapons of every kind.

At their center, Grimaldi unleashes on the Admin soldiers with a flame thrower. He fans the flames across their ranks and cuts them down like chaff.

The flames engulf and overwhelm them.

Screams of the dying rip through the night.

As Grimaldi works, he laughs loud, deep and clear.

It is over very quickly.

Admin soldiers lay burnt, dead and dying all around the ambush.

BACK TO SCENE.

Clay and his group stand amazed, armed to the teeth, and too late to help the ambushing painers in the slaughter.

Grimaldi glances about, catches view of Clay and gives a slight bow.

Grimaldi wolf-whistles.

The painers grab Admin weapons, then melt into the darkness.

Clay yells out to his group.

CLAY
Grab what you can and get off the
street!

The group gets everyone out of the crashed van, then hurries
away.

Clay and Zip pause a moment to survey the burning carnage,
then run off together to catch up with the others.

INT. INSIDE THE NETWORK HIDE

Clay addresses the group.

CLAY
Terrific work, everyone. What we
did tonight was a very important
first strike on the Administration.
And now we have help.

CIPHER
(good-natured joking)
I'm really happy I joined this
sorry crew.

Everybody laughs.

CLAY
We love you too.

ZIP
Told you she was tough.

CLAY
Saved my ass. I sure am glad you
convinced me to let her come along.

Zip and Cipher hug and kiss again.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Not more of that stuff!

TEAM MEMBER
They can't stay off each other.

ZIP
It's been a long time coming.

The Team Member quips Cipher.

TEAM MEMBER
Got a sister?

Cipher laughs.

CIPHER
Nope. You're outta luck.

TEAM MEMBER
Don't suppose you'd like to share?

CIPHER
You can't have him, he's mine!

Everybody laughs. The team member reddens and shakes his head, then bursts out laughing.

CLAY
Alright, enough goofing around.

Everybody listens to their leader.

CLAY (CONT'D)
Hide crew stays here. The rest disburse and lie low for awhile. We'll be in touch.

INT. NETWORK ROOM - LATER

CLAY
Good work, Zip. Your speech at the Strip spread like wildfire. Paining is dead. And now the painers have a new purpose.

ZIP
I just did what I could.

CLAY
It worked. Grimaldi messaged me. He wants to fight. He doesn't waste any time. We're joining forces. We just tripled in strength.

ZIP
Maybe more. Those painers are used to getting hurt. Most of 'em like it. They're not afraid of anything.

CLAY

There's more. Old folks started rioting against Admin busing today.

ZIP

Busing?

CLAY

They noticed that no one who got on a bus ever came back.

ZIP

I can help you.

CLAY

We're already arming them and teaching them how to fight.

ZIP

But they're old.

CLAY

A little spirit and a bunch of bullets go a long way.

ZIP

Set me up to train, or raid, or something.

CLAY

You're known now, and the Administration is looking for you.

ZIP

I tried so hard to get monikered. Now that I have it, I don't want it.

CLAY

Before you got named, your loudest cry was silent. Now your whisper is a scream.

ZIP

You do the talkin'. I'll keep my head down.

CLAY

And your name will echo for years.

ZIP

I can stay underground.

CLAY

It would only be a matter of time before they find you.

ZIP

Maybe we can fake my death too, so I can fight for the Network.

CLAY

I doubt we can pull that one off again.

ZIP

We can try.

CLAY

Too risky.

ZIP

I used to take risks for the wrong reasons. Now I wanna take them for the right ones.

CLAY

You're more valuable alive. I won't be around forever, and the Network may need a new leader someday.

ZIP

I'm not leadership material.

CLAY

I know a whole bunch of people who would disagree with that.

ZIP

I have a lot to learn.

CLAY

Get out of the city and lie low. Live your life. Someone may call on you soon enough.

Zip thinks for a moment.

ZIP

OK, if I can get Cipher to come along. She can't wait for the next raid. It'll keep her out of trouble.

Clay hands Zip a box of provisions.

CLAY

Take this stuff. It'll help you get started out there. Used to be the wilderness was dangerous. Now it's the city that'll kill you.

ZIP

Thanks. You're a friend.

CLAY

And you're a good man.

Zip smiles and shakes Clay's hand.

Zip glances past him to some weapons leaning against the wall.

ZIP

You wouldn't happen to have a couple spare rifles, would you?

Clay laughs and reaches for the weapons.

EXT. THE STRIP - DAY

Zip and Cipher walk the Strip, holding hands. Zip pulls something in a small buggy. People pass and wave at them in a friendly way. No one is paining.

ZIP

Where was it?

Cipher points out the spot.

CIPHER

Over there.

The pair approach a scorched and blackened spot on the street. Zip squats down and surveys the site.

ZIP

(to the spot)
Sorry I couldn't save you, man.

CIPHER

You tried. No one would listen.
It's not your fault.

ZIP

He was my best friend.

CIPHER

You've got me now.

ZIP

Null said something like that to me once.

CIPHER

I'm gonna miss him.

ZIP

Me too.

Zip wrestles a large item from the buggy. It is a memorial sculpture. He places it on the ground, and thumbs a switch.

The sculpture flashes neon orange and red flames. "TORCH" blinks above.

Cipher and Zip stand side by side admiring the memorial. Cipher's head rests on Zip's shoulder.

ZIP (CONT'D)

Goodbye, old friend.

Zip and Cipher turn away and walk on.

Even as they walk away, others come to pay their respects.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

A small desk in a bare, windowless office. The overhead fluorescent hums. Two men in dark suits pore over computer printouts.

YOUNG SUIT

30,000 a day. I never dreamed we'd be this successful.

BOSS SUIT

A drop in the bucket. We need more. We need to start a new one.

YOUNG SUIT

Can't we stretch it another six months?

BOSS SUIT

I doubt it. The numbers have peaked and it's slowing down fast. Time to try something else.

YOUNG SUIT

Everything's been done. Let's just do it the old-fashioned way, and start a war.

BOSS SUIT
Don't be ridiculous. This is not a
war issue. Besides, that's not our
department.

Young Suit shakes his head and stares at the wall.

BOSS SUIT (CONT'D)
Don't worry. We'll come up with
something.

He gets up and heads for the door.

BOSS SUIT (CONT'D)
We always do.

The men leave the room and flick off the overhead light. The
shutting door echoes through the barren space.

EXT. SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE THE CITY - DAY

Zip and Cipher hold hands and walk through open fields. In
the background, a simple sod house with a garden. There are
no other signs of civilization.

They are happy and healthy. Zip has a full head of hair.
Cipher is beautiful, and without piercings. She is
obviously pregnant.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

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