

THE RAT KING

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. UNDER BRIDGE - NIGHT

A rat crawls through a patch of brush beneath a dingy overpass. Two more rats follow on each side as they scuttle through cigarette butts and broken glass in the dim light of street lamps.

They scamper to a concrete corner underneath the bridge.

A homeless man sleeps in the corner, covered by a crusty blanket and wearing a wool cap. Sporting a long, gray beard, DALE (60's) snores.

The rats crawl up his blanket, sniffing as they go. One of them climbs all the way up and sniffs his face.

Dale snaps awake.

DALE

Jesus!

He panics and bats the rat away, flinging it into the brush. The other rats scatter. He takes a moment to collect himself.

He turns around to see a limousine parked on a small street right next to the overpass, flanked by rows of dilapidated buildings. He can hear the engine running but the windows are tinted dark and the headlights off. He shrugs and ignores it.

He rustles among the few belongings he has stored under the bridge and pulls out a big, black trash bag.

He struggles to stand up and waddles away into the night.

The limousine headlights turn on and the car drives forward.

EXT. CITY STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Dale walks down an empty city sidewalk, bag over his shoulder. He wears a long winter coat.

SUPER: NEW YORK CITY, 1974

He passes a closed porno theater and aging pawn shops while scouring the ground beneath him. He stops at an empty soda can in the gutter. Bingo. He tosses it in his bag.

Lights illuminate him from behind. He turns to see the limo slowly moving toward him.

Dale picks up his pace down the sidewalk. The limo speeds up. He turns to look again but the lights blind him from seeing inside the limo. He jogs. The limo matches his pace.

He struggles to run quicker, hobbling as the limo creeps closer. He turns into a vacant alley.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Dale runs into the alley only to be blocked by a chain-link fence. The limo pulls up on the sidewalk where he turned into the alley, blocking him from exiting. One of the windows in the back rolls down.

Dale hobbles to the fence and tries to climb it.

STRANGER

Wait! You don't gotta do that, man!

Dale stops and peers at the open window of the limousine.

STRANGER

We didn't mean to scare you. Come over here a second...

Dale nervously looks side to side, unsure of what to do.

STRANGER

Seriously, come over here. We don't bite.

Dale walks toward the car. He looks into the window but its dimly lit inside. He can barely make out the man beckoning him. The STRANGER (40s) is wearing a crisp, black suit and big sunglasses.

STRANGER

You hungry, pal?

Dale nods. The stranger opens the limo door, revealing a lush interior and a BEAUTIFUL WOMAN (30s) in a tight dress next to him. Gentle soul music plays on the radio.

The man holds out a long sandwich wrapped in white paper. He sports a Rolex watch on his wrist.

STRANGER

You like Fiorelli's?

DALE

I've never had it.

STRANGER

It's the best sub in New York.

Dale reaches out for the sandwich but the stranger pulls it away.

STRANGER

Hop inside, we've got more food and wine than we know what to do with. We saw you down the street and thought you could use a helping hand.

DALE

I'm not so sure.

The woman leans forward, still obscured in the dim light of the limo.

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Don't worry, what's your name?

DALE

Dale...

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Well, Dale, we're feeling generous tonight. Why don't you join us?

DALE

Ok, yeah... sure.

He starts to climb inside.

STRANGER

Leave the bag.

Dale drops his bag of cans and climbs inside the car. The door slams shut.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - LATER

The limo cruises down the mostly empty bridge. The back window rolls down.

The stranger's hand, still sporting a Rolex, extends out of the window. He holds a bundle of clothes, Dale's hat and coat included. He drops them.

The clothes drift into the night air and float over the edge of the bridge.

They fall into the dark waters of the East River below.

EXT. RESTUARANT PATIO - DAY

A pair of aging hands open a leather bill holder. Inside is a bill reading '\$48.98'. The hand slides three twenty dollar bills into the other side and closes it.

Two ELEGANT WOMEN in their early 60s sit across from each other on the busy patio of a chic restaurant as the city street buzzes behind them. They look displeased.

A short, thin WAITER (20's) walks up to the women. He's got a messy crop of black, curly hair and an apron around his waist. He leans forward with his hands behind his back, servile with a forced smile.

WAITER

How was your dinner, ladies?

ELEGANT WOMAN 1

It was fine, thank you.

ELEGANT WOMAN 2

What happened to our waitress?
We've been waiting to settle our
bill for far too long.

WAITER

I'm sorry, ma'am, she was held up.

ELEGANT WOMAN 2

(scoffs)
I should hope so.

WAITER

Is there anything else I can do for
you?

The second elegant woman thrusts the bill holder toward him.

ELEGANT WOMAN 2

Just give me the change so we can
leave. Exact change, please.

The waiter grabs the bill holder and nods.

WAITER

Sorry for your wait, I'll be back
in a jiff.

The waiter walks toward the restaurant door, but makes a sudden turn through patio gate into the sidewalk. He struts down the street.

The two women look at each other, aghast.

ELEGANT WOMAN 1
Where is he going?

A young WAITRESS (20's) bursts through the front door of the restaurant, frantically looking around. A large COOK (40's) with a grease-stained shirt follows behind her.

The waitress sees the waiter walking away.

WAITRESS
That man's not a waiter!

ELEGANT WOMAN 2
What is happening?

WAITRESS
He locked me in the bathroom and made me slide my apron underneath the door!

ELEGANT WOMAN 1
He's got our money!

ELEGANT WOMAN 2
Somebody stop that man!

The cook bounds over the patio fence and sprints towards the thief.

The fake waiter turns to see the commotion at the restaurant and the cook running toward him. A shit-eating grin spreads across his face as he sprints away.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

The thief hauls ass down the sidewalk, breaking through groups of pedestrians who shout at him as he sprints wildly. He rips off his apron and lets it float away.

This is RONNIE PETROSKY (20's), smiling ear to ear in his great escape. He checks behind him and sees the cook closing-in. Ronnie's smile fades.

COOK
I'm gonna fuck you up, kid!

Ronnie rounds a corner and pivots into a small alley. He quickly climbs into a dumpster.

The cook rounds the corner and stops to look inside the alley. Ronnie peeks out of the dumpster and sees the sweaty cook desperately looking for him. The cook gives up and walks back the direction he came.

Ronnie hops out of the dumpster and reaches back inside. He pulls out a backpack, zips it open, and yanks out a jacket and sunglasses. He dawns them with a satisfied smile.

He turns the corner and smacks into the broad chest of the cook waiting for him. The cook grabs him by the collar.

COOK

You think you're slick, huh?

RONNIE

On my good days.

The cook punches him in the face, knocking his glasses to the pavement. His nose bleeds.

COOK

Well this is one of your bad days.

He punches Ronnie in the stomach, crumpling him to the ground. He tries to hold onto the cook's waist for balance.

COOK

Get the fuck off me!

The cook kicks him in the chest.

COOK

Give me the money or I'll cave your little head in.

Ronnie reaches into his pocket and pulls out the bills he stole. The cook snatches them and spits on Ronnie, now sprawled out on the sidewalk and bleeding.

COOK

Rat bastard.

The cook walks around the corner.

Ronnie crawls to the side of the building, exhausted and bleeding. He leans against the brick façade.

He raises his hand to reveal the cook's wallet in his grasp. He opens it up and sees the cook's driver's license.

He chuckles to himself as he pulls out the cash in the billfold. He tosses the wallet in the gutter.

RONNIE

Good day, indeed.

Ronnie stands up and stumbles onto the sidewalk. He pulls out a t-shirt from his bag and uses it to wipe the blood from his face. He picks up his sunglasses from the ground and dawns them.

EXT. VARIOUS STREETS MONTAGE - DUSK

As the sun sets, Ronnie slinks through the littered streets of a crumbling New York. A broken man in a broken city.

Head down and gripping the straps of his back pack, he walks past prostitutes, decaying buildings and addicts nodding out in the dark recesses of a failed state.

He descends into the subway station.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Ronnie leans back in the seat of the subway car. He notices the strange looks of the people around him, grimacing at this strange little man.

He feels beneath his nose, the blood starting to pool on his upper lip. He mops it up with the wadded up t-shirt and applies pressure to his nose.

A small child holding her mother's hand stares at him. They make eye contact.

RONNIE

You should see the other guy.

EXT. STOOP - NIGHT

From across the street, we spy a man sitting alone on a stoop. His button-up shirt is wide open as he leans back on the stairs. Ronnie walks up and they share quick pleasantries, but we're too far away to hear.

The man checks if the coast is clear as Ronnie slips him some money. The man slips something into Ronnie's hand. Ronnie walks away into the night.

EXT. DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

A condemned, dilapidated tenement building looms above us. It's surrounded by foreclosed shops and a few wary homeless people camped along the sidewalk.

Ronnie slides open a busted window, tosses his backpack inside and goes in head first. He closes the window behind him.

INT. DERELICT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie climbs up a dusty stairwell to the second floor. He walks down a long hallway with stained wallpaper and dirty carpet.

INT. RONNIE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie swings open the door to his shabby squatter's apartment. It's a cramped, decaying spot but fairly well kept, all things considered.

A young woman with fraying hair and baggy clothes sleeps on a tattered couch in the living room. TRIXIE (20's) wakes up when Ronnie drops his backpack on the kitchenette counter.

She leans up groggily, rubbing the sleep from her eyes and yawning.

TRIXIE

What'd you get?

Ronnie pulls a wadded up baggy of cocaine from his pocket and tosses it on the counter.

RONNIE

Coke.

TRIXIE

No H?

RONNIE

I'm not looking to nod off tonight, I need to be sharp. I'm spelunking later.

TRIXIE

You're the only junkie I know who plans tying off around going into the sewers.

RONNIE

Because I'm not a junkie.

Trixie groans as she rises from the couch.

TRIXIE

And I'm the Queen of fucking
England.

Ronnie lights a candle on the kitchen table. Trixie sees the
bruises on his face.

TRIXIE

What the hell happened to you?

RONNIE

Some meat-head caught me after a
score.

TRIXIE

Did you do that stupid waiter thing
again?

RONNIE

It's not stupid if it works.

He pulls out the remaining cash and lays it on the table.

RONNIE

I got the sucker's wallet.

TRIXIE

And he busted your head in. You
could just pickpocket wallets and
not suffer through the Three
Stooges routine, ya know.

Ronnie cuts a line of coke on the table with a bus pass.

RONNIE

What's the fun in that?

He leans down and snorts the line of coke. He hands the bus
pass to Trixie, who cuts her own line.

TRIXIE

You're really going down there
again? Two nights in a row you've
met up with that creep.

She snorts a line.

RONNIE

His name's Squeak. And I like it
down there. No one busting my head,
no one giving me shit. Just me and
miles of darkness.

TRIXIE

You act like the sewers are the pyramids of Egypt.

RONNIE

They are. All the city's secrets are down there. You just gotta have the balls to find them.

Ronnie walks into the bedroom on the other side of the apartment.

TRIXIE

What fucking secrets? It's just rats and shit down there.

Ronnie walks out of the bedroom with a headlamp strapped to his head. He flicks the headlamp on, blinding Trixie who covers her eyes. She tosses an empty soda can at him. He dodges it and laughs. He flicks the light off and starts stuffing drinks and food into his backpack.

RONNIE

All the crap the straight edge losers of this city don't want you to find. They walk around flashing their wads, but they've all got something to hide. And all those secrets wash down into the sewer.

TRIXIE

Just... be careful, a lot of people have been going missing lately.

He dawns his backpack and heads to the door.

RONNIE

Don't fret, I'm at my best when I'm backed into a corner.

TRIXIE

Whatever, just bring H next time you score. I don't want coke all the time, makes me hyper and I've got nothing to do.

He grabs a crow bar from the corner and props it on his shoulder.

RONNIE

Then get a hobby, like me.

Ronnie flashes her a mischievous grin as he goes through the door. She rolls her eyes.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

A pale, slender man with a shaved head leans against a fence surrounding a basketball court. He keeps his hands warm by stuffing them under his arms. He shakes in the cold as he nervously looks around. This is SQUEAK (20's).

Someone climbs up the fence and drops in front of him. Squeak panics and whips out a switchblade, ready to fight. He quickly realizes it's Ronnie who's got his hands up.

RONNIE

Relax, it's just me.

SQUEAK

Don't scare me like that, man. I'm on fucking edge.

Squeak puts his knife away.

RONNIE

C'mon, let's get down there.

SQUEAK

It's off, dude. Not tonight.

RONNIE

What the hell, why?

SQUEAK

Just fuck off, I'm not going down there.

RONNIE

What happened?

Squeak shiftily looks around and leans toward Ronnie.

SQUEAK

(quietly)

I found something.

RONNIE

What'd you find?

SQUEAK

Never mind.

RONNIE

Jesus, Squeak. We've been going down there for weeks and all we've found are old shoes. Did you really find something?

SQUEAK
It's a real trip, dude.

RONNIE
Then show me! I told you there's
gotta be some wild shit down there.
I've felt it. You've felt it. Don't
puss out on me now.

Squeak takes a deep breath.

SQUEAK
Fine. But this is the last time.

EXT. EMPTY CITY STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Squeak sneaks up to a manhole in the middle of the dark street. Ronnie sidles up behind him.

RONNIE
This is the one?

SQUEAK
It's the closest I've found.

Ronnie wrenches the crowbar under the manhole cover and lifts it up. Squeak grabs it and drags it away with all his might.

Both of them look into the deep darkness below them, only the top rungs of a ladder visible.

SQUEAK
You first.

RONNIE
I've got the crow bar, I need to
close it.

SQUEAK
Fine.

Squeak climbs down the ladder into the pitch black. Ronnie follows him.

He grabs the manhole cover with the end of his crowbar and drags it over the hole, sealing them in the dark.

INT. SEWER TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Pure black. Ronnie flicks his headlamp on, illuminating the long, cramped tunnel before them.

They're hunched over in the concrete tube with water up to their ankles. Squeak pulls a flashlight out of his jacket and flicks it on.

RONNIE

Which way?

Squeak points to the endless tunnel ahead.

SQUEAK

That way. Two lefts, a right,
another left, then a right.

They walk through the wet muck of the sewer, only seeing as far as the headlamp allows, sloshing the stagnant water as they go.

We follow them through twists and turns as they traverse deeper and deeper.

The sounds of splashing water echo farther down the sewer. They stop and stare ahead into the inky black.

Several rats bound down the tunnel toward them and scurry around their feet, quickly moving past and scuttling the other direction.

Squeak panics, losing his breath and grabbing his chest. Ronnie lays a hand on his back.

RONNIE

Just breathe, bud. It's alright. In
and out, in and out...

Ronnie breathes in and out heavily, trying to get Squeak to copy him. Squeak follows suit and catches his breath.

RONNIE

It's alright, it's just us down
here. Two brave explorers, right?

Squeak nods in agreement.

RONNIE

We've got this, let's keep moving.

Ronnie leads Squeak further into the darkness.

INT. NARROW TUNNEL - LATER

Squeak and Ronnie stop at the entrance to a narrow tunnel. A red spiral is painted above it. Squeak shines his light on it.

SQUEAK

In here.

RONNIE

What the hell is that?

SQUEAK

Just... follow me.

They crouch as they sneak through the cramped tunnel. Ronnie looks around with the flashlight, ducking his head so it doesn't scrape the foul sewer tunnel.

RONNIE

Jesus, how far is it?

SQUEAK

We're close, I swear.

Squeak shines his light along the wall, looking for something in particular.

RONNIE

What're you looking for?

Squeak stops and smiles.

SQUEAK

This.

He shines his light on a crack in the wall, just large enough for someone to slide through.

SQUEAK

You first this time.

RONNIE

Are you joking? Can I even fit through there?

SQUEAK

I did.

RONNIE

No way, man. I don't do well with tight spaces.

SQUEAK

You dragged me down here, pal. You said we were explorers right?

Ronnie shoots him an annoyed glance.

RONNIE

Fine.

Ronnie squeezes into the crack sideways and shimmyes through it. Squeak follows.

They both slide their way along the rough brick, inching closer to their destination.

INT. SEWER CAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie squeezes out of the crack into darkness. Squeak bumps into him as he stumbles out of the opening. Ronnie catches him and steadies his friend.

Squeak looks around in awe.

SQUEAK

We're here...

RONNIE

We're where?

Squeak shines his light ahead. Concrete pillars illuminate before them. He pivots around the room, lighting up a giant man-made cavern.

RONNIE

This place is huge... too huge. Why is it down here? Who built this?

SQUEAK

Follow me.

Squeak leads him down the huge corridor past rows of concrete columns. Water drips from above and splashes in pools below.

Squeak stops and shines the light on the wall.

There's writing all over the concrete in red paint. Huge, intricate symbols and strange pictographs of animals.

He feels the symbols with his fingers.

RONNIE

What the hell is all this?

SQUEAK

I don't know, man. Check it out.

He swivels his light around the room, revealing the writing is everywhere. All over the columns, on the walls. He points the light up.

A massive sprawl of symbols and ornate designs cover the ceiling like an underground Sistine chapel.

Ronnie peers up in fascination.

RONNIE

I knew something was down here. I
fucking knew it.

Ronnie stares down the encroaching darkness ahead, a limitless black.

RONNIE

What's further down?

SQUEAK

I don't know. This is as far as I
came. I freaked out and got the
hell out of here.

Ronnie paces further into the darkness, illuminating bits of the wall as he looks around at the grand designs.

He stops in his tracks.

RONNIE

What is that?

His dim light shines on something furry on the ground ahead.

They inch closer, crouching as if not to disturb it. Ronnie leans down to examine it.

On the ground is a mass of a dozen dead rats. Their tails and fur are matted together at the center, forming a ring of decaying vermin.

RONNIE

What the fuck?

With one finger, Ronnie tilts the mass of rats up. They're stuck together like a dry disc of fur and teeth.

Squeak shines his flashlight around the rats.

SQUEAK

Whoa...

Ronnie backs away to get a better view.

A red spiral, like a fractal of symbols, wraps along the ground with the mass of dead rats at the very center. Squeak traces the spiral with his flashlight as it extends all the way to the walls.

Lumps of material are piled together along the edge of the walls extending into the darkness.

Ronnie kneels down and peels away at the crusty material. He holds it in the light.

It's a t-shirt, dusty and stiff. He peels away at the pile again, revealing a pair jeans. Then again, pulling away socks and underwear and shoes.

RONNIE

It's all fucking clothes...

SQUEAK

I don't like this, man. I wanna get out of here.

Ronnie shines his headlamp further into the darkness, revealing more piles of clothes along the walls.

RONNIE

That's a lot of clothes, why are there so many clothes?

SQUEAK

I'm serious, Ronnie. This is too weird, I wanna go.

Ronnie ignores Squeak and snatches the flashlight from his hand. He shines it upward.

He follows the designs on the ceiling till the light hits something shiny and metallic.

A hatch.

A small metal hatch high above them, directly over the spiral.

RONNIE

How the hell do you get up there... or down from there?

SQUEAK

I don't fucking care, man, let's get the hell out of here.

Ronnie pulls out his crowbar. He aims it at the hatch above and throws upward with all his might.

It dings the metal hatch, raising it an inch before it slams shut again. Squeak dodges the crowbar as it crashes to the ground.

Ronnie smiles.

 RONNIE
It's not locked.

 SQUEAK
You wanna go up there? Are you
insane?

 RONNIE
Clearly. Where do you think we're
under? Fifth avenue?

 SQUEAK
I don't know.

Ronnie picks up the crowbar and heads for the crack in the wall where they squeezed in.

 RONNIE
One, two, three--

 SQUEAK
What're you doing?

 RONNIE
Counting my steps.

Ronnie keeps walking.

 RONNIE
Four, five, six, seven...

INT. SEWER TUNNELS - LATER

The two men pace through the encroaching darkness of the tunnel, retracing their steps.

 RONNIE
Hundred twelve, hundred thirteen,
hundred fourteen...

EXT. EMPTY CITY STREET - LATER

The manhole cover slides open. Ronnie pops his head up and looks around for moving cars, but the street is empty.

 RONNIE
It's clear.

Ronnie climbs up into the street.

RONNIE
Three hundred and four.

He reaches down and pulls Squeak up.

Ronnie starts to retrace his steps above ground.

RONNIE
Three hundred three, three hundred
two--

SQUEAK
Are you actually going back there?

RONNIE
Of course, we need to see what's
above all that shit.

SQUEAK
I'm done, dude. You're on your own.

RONNIE
We've made this far man, aren't you
curious?

SQUEAK
Not anymore. It's too much, I don't
know what the hell I saw down
there, and I don't want to know.

RONNIE
Suit yourself.

Ronnie retraces his steps as Squeak disappears into an alley.

RONNIE
Three hundred one, three hundred,
two ninety nine...

EXT. CITY BLOCKS - LATER

Ronnie carefully counts his steps as he makes his way through
trash-strewn city sidewalks.

RONNIE
Two hundred twenty, two hundred
nineteen, turn right...

He turns right down a street. He keeps walking as he moves
into better looking neighborhoods, post-apocalyptic 70's New
York becoming cleaner and more opulent as he traces his path.

RONNIE
One hundred ten, one hundred nine,
turn left...

EXT. 5TH AVENUE - DAWN

Ronnie reaches a street corner.

RONNIE
Twenty nine, turn left...

He looks at the street sign above him. It reads '5TH AVE.'

RONNIE
Fucking called it.

He continues down the street.

RONNIE
Five, four, three, two...one.

He stops in place and peers up.

A huge mansion looms above him. With a wrought iron gate and art deco façade.

RONNIE
Holy shit.

He stands on his tippy toes, trying to peer over the fence or look into windows, but there's no sign of life. Ronnie shuffles onto the street.

INT. RONNIE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie opens the door and walks in.

RONNIE
Trixie, you're not going to believe
it...

He drops his backpack on the counter and looks around. The apartment is empty.

RONNIE
Trixie?

He looks into the bedroom and sees nothing. He shrugs.

Ronnie climbs on the kitchen counter and reaches on top of the cabinets. He pulls down a rectangular tin reading 'BARNUM'S ANIMAL CRACKERS.'

He plops onto the couch in the living room and opens the tin. Inside is assorted heroin paraphernalia. A baggy of brown powdered dope, lighters, tubing, syringes and a well-worn spoon.

He puts some powder on the spoon, heats it up until it's liquid and sucks it up with the syringe. He wraps the tubing around his arm, tightens it and finds a vein.

He pokes the needle in and injects.

His eyes go vacant. He drops the needle in the tin and rips off the tubing and places the kit next to him. He sinks into the couch and leans his head back.

RONNIE
(softly)
Fuck.

His eyes start to flutter. They close as he nods off.

DARKNESS.

SNAP. SNAP.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Wake the hell up, scumbag.

Ronnie's eyes flutter open. Two men stand before him, leaning in close.

DEREK (40's) snaps his fingers in Ronnie's face to get his attention. He's a rough looking dude with streaks of gray hair and an army green jacket. Next to him is a much larger man, SAMMY (30's). He's sporting a blonde handlebar mustache and a scar along his cheek.

Ronnie looks to the nearby window, sunlight pouring into the room and illuminating the dust in the air.

RONNIE
(groggy)
How long have I been out?

DEREK
How the fuck should I know?

RONNIE
How can I help you gentlemen?

Ronnie doesn't budge an inch from his catatonic pose, which infuriates the men.

SAMMY

Where's our fucking money, Ronnie?
You were supposed to have it
yesterday.

RONNIE

How'd you find me?

DEREK

That bitch Trixie sold you out for
a bit of smack. Guess you should've
shared.

Derek picks up the tin of heroin supplies off the couch and
examines it.

DEREK

Quite the stash you got going. Must
be nice getting high on my dime.

Ronnie shrugs.

RONNIE

It's a living.

Derek tosses the kit against the wall, sending the supplies
crashing to the ground. Ronnie watches with hazy
indifference.

DEREK

You owe me two hundred. Well, you
did owe me two hundred. Now it's
three. Where the fuck is it?

RONNIE

Do you take checks?

DEREK

Cocksucker!

Derek grabs Ronnie by his ankles and yanks him off the couch.
He lands on his back as his head bangs against the floor.

Sammy punches Ronnie's already bruised face, causing blood to
pour from his nose.

DEREK

You think this is a fucking joke?

Derek kicks him in the ribs. Ronnie yelps and curls up in
agony on the floor. Sammy grabs him by his hair.

SAMMY

Where's the money, dipshit?

RONNIE

I don't have it, Derek! I swear!

DEREK

Break his fucking ankle, Sammy.

Sammy leans his hefty boot on Ronnie's ankle. He screams.

RONNIE

Wait! Wait! I can get you the money. I can get you more than three hundred!

Derek shoots a look to Sammy. He eases up on Ronnie's ankle.

DEREK

How? How's a ratfucker like you gonna get me my money?

RONNIE

I've got a beat on some rich asshole's house. I'm sure he's got tons of valuable shit in there.

DEREK

And how the fuck are you gonna steal this shit?

RONNIE

I know an easy way inside, a secret way. I can go at night, it'll be easy.

Derek chuckles.

DEREK

Well it seems this petty thief thinks he's a cat burglar.

RONNIE

Just give me a few days.

DEREK

Two. You got two days. And then Sammy's gonna do a lot more than break your ankle.

Sammy kicks him in the ribs. Ronnie gasps.

Derek walks over to the wall and grabs the baggy of heroin from among the other paraphernalia on the floor.

DEREK

And I'm holding onto your skag
until then. Maybe then your junkie
ass will get me my money.

Derek wiggles the bag of heroin.

DEREK

Carrot...

He points to Sammy.

DEREK

Stick.

The dealers walk out of the apartment. The door slams shut.

Ronnie lays in the fetal position on the dirty floor,
clutching his ribs. He struggles to regain his breath.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

A bearded man reads an auto magazine on a glass countertop.
Behind him, power-tools are hung along the wall. He is a
HARDWARE STORE CLERK (60's).

Ding. The front door swings open. The clerk looks up from his
magazine to see Ronnie, now wearing sunglasses and a bandage
over his nose. He hobbles to the counter.

RONNIE

Up high, uhhh... I need to get up
high.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK

...what?

RONNIE

I need something, like a stick or
something, you know... to poke...
up high.

Ronnie mimics holding a long stick and poking it upward.

The clerk shows him to the back of the store. He pulls an
extendable rod out of a bundle of them in a box.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK

These are extendable rods, people
put all sorts of things on the end
here. Hoses, brooms, they clean
their gutters with 'em. Just twist
it like this...

The clerk twists the center of the pole, allowing it to extend all the way out. Ronnie examines the length.

RONNIE
Not long enough.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
It's the longest thing we got.

RONNIE
I'll take two then. And duct tape.
Got any hooks?

The clerk rings up Ronnie at the cash register.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
Two extendable poles, duct tape,
rope, and a hook...

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
That'll be fifty two ninety nine.

Ronnie peers over the man's shoulder at the power-tools along the wall behind him.

RONNIE
That's a nice a power drill you
got.

The clerk turns around to look at the wall.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
Yeah, that's a new model from
Samson, just got it last week.

Ronnie reaches over the counter and deftly pulls the man's wallet from the back pocket of his jeans.

The clerk turns around just as Ronnie hides the wallet behind his back.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
Are you interested?

RONNIE
I'll pass.

HARDWARE STORE CLERK
Alright then, cash or check?

Ronnie smiles.

RONNIE
Cash.

INT. NARROW TUNNEL - NIGHT

Ronnie treks through the dirty water of the sewer. He's got on his backpack full of gear and the poles in hand. His headlamp lights the way.

He reaches the tunnel entrance with the red spiral above it. He stops and touches it like it's a magical seal.

RONNIE
No going back, now.

He crouches and heads into the tunnel.

INT. SEWER CAVERN - LATER

Ronnie squeezes through the crack in the wall, holding the poles at his side. He finally pops through and stumbles into the cavern.

He peers around, illuminating everywhere he looks with the headlamp.

He creeps to the center of the cavern where the spiral spreads across the floor. He kneels down where the mass of rats once rested, but it's empty. Only a trace of dust remains.

Ronnie aims his headlamp above to see the hatch.

He empties his backpack onto the floor: the hook, rope, crowbar and duct tape spill out.

He extends both poles to their maximum length and lines up the two ends of the poles side by side. He uses half a roll of duct tape to fuse them together into one giant pole.

He pulls out the coiled rope and the hook. He ties the end of the rope around the O-ring at the bottom of the hook.

Carefully, he raises the extra long pole up. It bends slightly, but the tape holds.

Ronnie lifts the pole to touch the hatch. He slowly raises the pole, pushing up the hatch quietly. He gets it halfway open, then juts the pole up, causing the hatch door to swing open with a clang.

He peers up into the open hatch above but he can't see anything. He grabs the homemade grappling hook on the ground. He aims the hook at the edge of the hatch and throws it upward.

It misses by several feet. He dodges the hook as it falls to the ground.

RONNIE

Fucker.

He grabs the hook and aims it again. He throws with more force. It scrapes the edge of the hatch but falls again.

RONNIE

Goddammit!

He aims one more time and takes a deep breath. He tosses the hook up. It clips onto the edge of the hatch and holds.

Ronnie chuckles. He pulls on the rope to make sure it's secure. It doesn't budge. He stuffs the crowbar in his backpack and dawns it.

He starts to climb the rope, but winces in pain. He grabs his aching ribs. He takes another deep breath.

Ronnie slowly shimmies upward with his hands and legs gripping the rope for dear life.

INT. WINE CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

The open hatch lies before us, the hook scraping back and forth along the edge.

A hand grabs on the edge of the hatch. Then another. Ronnie hoists himself up through the opening.

He climbs through onto the floor, panting and writhing in exhaustion. He catches his breath.

He stumbles to his feet and looks around, a sense of awe overcoming him. His headlamp lights up the dark room around him.

He's in a luxurious wine cellar. Rows and rows of expensive wine everywhere he looks.

RONNIE

Jesus Christ.

He runs his hand along the bottles and stops at one. He pulls it from the rack and dusts it off. He reads the aging, ornate label under the light of his headlamp.

'Lenox Madeira 1796.'

RONNIE

Goddamn.

He grabs the crowbar from his bag and stuffs the bottle inside. He makes his way through the rows of wine until he sees a stairwell at the end of the room. He looks up the stairs to a solitary door at the top with light creeping through the cracks.

He tiptoes up the creaky stairs, his crowbar in hand and ready to strike.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie slowly cracks open the door to reveal a huge dining room. He creeps through the room in amazement. He's never been in such a lavish place before.

He runs his hand across the lengthy table, set with fine china and shining silverware as if a meal is about to be served.

He turns around to see a giant painting on the wall behind the table: 'Christ In Limbo' by Hieronymus Bosch. He's captivated by the gigantic painting of apocalyptic fervor and chaos. He focuses on the gaping hell-mouth at the top of the painting which spews out the damned.

RONNIE

Where the hell am I?

He grabs some of the silverware and stuffs it into his backpack.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie sneaks into the massive main living area filled with leather furniture, landscape paintings and abstract statues.

He grabs a gilded candle holder from a table and stuffs it in his backpack.

He walks through the empty center of the room and stops. He looks beneath him.

A red spiral, similar to the one in the sewer, spreads out underneath him along the floor. He looks upward.

A huge hole in the ceiling reveals the floor above. It's surrounded by circular railing and an ornate chandelier hangs above it. He admires the architectural feature with wonder, like its a portal to Heaven.

SQUEEEAK. He hears a door open upstairs. Panic rises up inside him.

He hears footsteps creak on the ceiling above him. Then more.

A cacophony of footsteps above him. He follows the sounds above, watching the ceiling like a frightened animal.

He follows the sounds until he reaches an elaborate spiral staircase on the other side of the room. The footsteps descend down the stairs.

He quickly hides behind a strange, abstract statue that looks like a melting man in the corner next to the stairs.

Ronnie peers through a hole in the statue to get a good look.

At first, one man steps off the stairs. He's wearing a crisp tuxedo, but his face is obscured by the statue.

Then another man walks down, then a woman. One by one, over a dozen people descend down the stairs. They whisper to each other in quiet, reverent tones. They're all wearing tuxes or sequined dresses and fine jewelry. But he can't see any of their faces through the statue blocking most of his view.

Ronnie tries to breathe quietly as he trembles.

The fancy strangers gather in the center of the room and circle around the spiral. Someone wheels out a cart with a punch bowl and a dozen champagne glasses. They ladle a red liquid into the glasses and pass them around.

They converse louder as they imbibe their drinks. The atmosphere of the room grows looser.

Ronnie slides out from behind the statue while they're all distracted. Without daring to turn around, he quietly ascends the staircase.

INT. MANSION STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie reaches the top of the stairs and slinks through an open doorway into a lavish study filled with bookcases on all sides. He's still sporting the backpack and the crowbar in hand. In the center of the study is the hole looking down into the room below.

He sneaks up to the bannister around the hole and leans over to get a look at the strange gathering in the living room.

The guests finish their drinks and place the champagne glasses on the cart. They form a circle around the spiral in the center of the room.

The circle parts as a lone man in a white tux walks into the center. He holds a silver platter with a rounded glass top.

Underneath the glass top is a the mass of fused rats from the sewer. The man pulls off the glass top, kneels down and slides the clump of dead rats onto the center of the spiral.

Ronnie watches with morbid curiosity, leaning over the bannister even further.

The circle of people all join hands around the mass of rats. They begin to chant in unison.

EVERYONE

Ninkilim auck Belial, grutu vermina
aus gnosticos. Pleroma deus auck
Ninkilim. Hastura aun whispero...

The rat clump twitches. The grotesque mass stirs as they chant louder.

EVERYONE

NINKILIM AUCK BELIAL. VERMINA
DYNASTICA AUS DEA. CHAOS POPULOS
YUD MONAD. DEMIURGIS AUS
GNOSTICOS...

The rats squeak and shutter as they twitch back to life. Their eyes grow black as the mass of vermin writhes in the center of the spiral.

Ronnie watches in astonishment from the hole above.

RONNIE

Jesus fucking Christ.

The man in the white tux approaches the rats, extending his hand slowly toward the thrashing rodents.

A hand grabs Ronnie on his shoulder and spins him around.

A large man in a butler's uniform grips him by the neck.

BUTLER

What the hell do you think you're
doing?!

Ronnie yelps at the surprise. He weakly swings the crowbar, smacking the man in the face. The butler lets go of him and grabs his wounded face.

BUTLER

Fuck!

Ronnie panics and loses his balance. He falls backward over the railing.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie plummets to the floor below and lands directly on the writhing mass of rats. They squeal in agony as he crushes them with his back as he lands. The bottle breaks in his backpack, spilling wine all over the floor. The crowbar flings out of his hand and slides away.

The crowd around him gasps and shrieks in terror.

Ronnie groans, the breath knocked out of him. He twists in pain on the floor.

The man in the white tux grabs Ronnie by his collar and yanks him to his feet.

MAN IN WHITE TUX

What have you done, you heathen!

The crowd gathers around Ronnie as he regains awareness. He can finally see the cultists unobscured and terror overtakes him.

Every single one is wearing a crude animal mask. He looks from person to person, each one with a handmade mask of real fur and feathers. A rabbit, a crow, an owl, a wolf, a leopard. The masks cover only the top half of their face but he can see the anger in their eyes behind the mask.

He scans the room and their shocked, furious faces until he reaches the man in the white tux gripping him, nearly pulling him off the floor. He wears a mask resembling a fox.

MAN IN WHITE TUX

Who the hell are you? What are you doing here?

The man looks past Ronnie to the now dead clump of rats on the floor.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

Do you have any idea what you've done?

Ronnie pushes away the man in the white tux and runs for a door.

Another man in a bird mask tries to grab Ronnie, but Ronnie elbows him in the face, knocking off his mask. We can see clearly it is the strange man from the limousine.

The man scrambles to put his mask on as Ronnie runs away. The crowd of masked people chase after him.

INT. MANSION KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie slams through the door. The large kitchen is covered in stainless steel counters and sleek appliances. Ronnie frantically runs around the big island counter in the middle of the room.

The crowd bursts in the room led by the man in the white tux. They flank each side of the counter, trapping Ronnie in the corner.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX
Grab that son of a bitch!

Several of the men grab him by his arms as he struggles to break free, but he's overpowered.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX
Put him on the counter!

They lift Ronnie up by his arms and legs and lay him across the island counter. He knocks off all the utensils and metal bowls from the counter which crash to the ground.

RONNIE
Let me fucking go!

They hold him in place. The man in the white tux grabs a long chef's knife from a knife block and holds it to Ronnie's throat. He stops struggling as he feels the cold blade against his skin.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX
Who are you? Who sent you?

RONNIE
Richard fucking Nixon.

The man in the white tux sighs. He looks to the man in the bird mask.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX
Grab a goddamn cheese grater.

The man in the bird mask nods and head to cabinet. He rummages through it until he finds a large box cheese grater.

Ronnie's eyes dart around in fear as he's still held in place.

They turn around his arm, revealing its underside. The man in the bird mask holds the grater to his forearm.

RONNIE

Wait, wait!

The man in the white tux gives the bird man a quick nod. He scrapes the grater down Ronnie's arm, peeling back bits of skin. He howls in pain.

RONNIE

Jesus Christ! Fuck you!

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

Who are you, street trash?

RONNIE

I'm nobody! I just wanted to take some of your shit, that's all.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

I don't believe you.

The bird man runs the grater down his arm again. Ronnie screams in agony.

A man in a rabbit mask bursts into the kitchen, Ronnie's backpack in hand.

RABBIT-MASK MAN

I've got his stuff.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

Dump it.

The rabbit man zips open wine soaked backpack and dumps it on the tile floor. Broken glass and all the pilfered goods crash to the floor.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

So you're just a petty thief.

RONNIE

I fucking told you!

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

Well you've got extraordinarily bad timing.

He hands the knife to the man in the bird mask.

MAN THE WHITE TUX
Cut his throat.

RONNIE
Stop! Please!

The bird man holds the knife to Ronnie throat.

Ronnie's eyes roll to the back of his head and then turn black. A cacophony of voices shriek from his open mouth, forming a single scream like a collective gasp for air.

His head wrenches backward and his chest rises. The man in the white tux grabs the knife and pulls it away from Ronnie's throat.

The crowd around Ronnie reels backward in shock as he clenches and seizes, thrashing on the steel counter.

He floats a couple inches from the table as the onlookers gasp.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX
No... It can't be...

Ronnie's body relaxes and his limbs hang limp as he rises up a foot above the counter, the shrieks emitting from his mouth turning into a ghastly roar.

The roar turns into a death rattle, the last of the scream whimpering out of him. His eyes turn white and roll forward.

He drops from mid-air and slams on the counter.

INT. MANSION GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ronnie's eyes slowly flutter open. They adjust to the dimly lit room.

He lays in a bed with flowing silk sheets and an engraved headrest. He feels the luxurious sheets and scans the room, unsure of where he is. It all comes back to him.

He snaps fully awake and leans up, panic setting in.

RONNIE
What the fuck?

Across from his bed on the opposite wall is a portrait of a German noble duke, stately dressed and standing proud in front of a lush landscape.

He looks down to see he's wearing silken, powder blue pajamas with a monogram reading 'F.K.' He feels his body as if he's unsure he's real.

He pulls up his sleeve where he was sliced with the cheese grater. A bandage covers the underside of his arm.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The bedroom door slowly cracks open. Ronnie leans his head out to spot if the coast is clear. The hallway is empty.

He crouches and moves silently down the hall, nervously looking around.

Ronnie sneaks further and passes the study from before. He doesn't notice a dark figure sitting in a chair.

MAN IN THE WHITE TUX

Guten abend, dear Ronnie.

Ronnie turns to see the man in the white tux sitting alone in the study. He's leaned back in a chair with an ancient book open in his lap and a drink in hand.

He's no longer wearing a mask. We see he's a handsome man in his early 40's with slicked back hair and a thin mustache. He greets Ronnie with a smile.

This is FELIX KOENIG.

Ronnie sprints toward the stairwell but runs into the barrel chest of the butler and falls to the floor. The butler points a pistol at Ronnie.

Felix slams his book shut and Ronnie flinches at the sound.

FELIX

No need to be frightened. You're a welcomed guest here.

Felix rises from his chair and lays the book on a table.

FELIX

If I meant you any harm, I would've cut your throat already, instead of giving you a pillow to lay your head.

Ronnie, still splayed out on the floor, considers the situation. Felix, hands behind his back, ambles toward him.

FELIX

I'm not angry. In fact, I quite
admire your ambition. You look
hungry... are you hungry?

Ronnie nervously nods. Felix grabs Ronnie's hand and hoists
him to his feet. He wraps his arm around Ronnie's shoulder.

FELIX

Let's get some grub.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - LATER

Ronnie sits at the head of the table, the Bosch painting
looming behind him. His eyes dart around the room.

The door to the kitchen bursts open as Felix struts to the
table. He holds a silver plater with a plate of spaghetti and
red sauce. He sets it down in front of Ronnie.

FELIX

You like spaghetti?

RONNIE

...yeah.

FELIX

Of course you do, a hearty food for
hearty people.

Felix sits in the chair adjacent to Ronnie and puts one leg
over the other. He leans forward expectantly.

Ronnie carefully takes a bite. It tastes good. He shovels it
into his mouth.

RONNIE

Famished, aren't we? Gregor, bring
the cheese!

The butler, GREGOR (50's), walks in from the kitchen with a
chunk of parmesan and cheese grater in hand.

Ronnie looks up from his meal to see the dark bruise on
Gregor's face where he smacked him with the crowbar. He stops
chewing. Gregor glares at him with barely contained anger.

GREGOR

Parmesan, sir?

Ronnie looks at the cheese grater as fear and disgust rise
within him.

RONNIE

No thanks.

FELIX

That's enough Gregor, leave us be.

Gregor walks back into the kitchen.

RONNIE

(chewing)

You're not wearing a mask.

FELIX

I don't wear it all the time. That would be entirely impractical.

RONNIE

I can see your face, though.

FELIX

You know where I live, anonymity has already been lost.

RONNIE

Then you wouldn't mind telling me who you are.

Felix extends his hand.

FELIX

My name is Felix.

RONNIE

That sounds fake.

FELIX

It's not.

Ronnie shakes his hand.

RONNIE

I'm Ronnie, but you already knew that. How'd you know that?

Felix reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bus pass. It reads 'RONALD PETROSKY.'

FELIX

I found a wallet in your backpack along with all your ill-gotten gains, it contained your bus pass. No other identification, however. And no money, either.

RONNIE

That would explain the ill-gotten gains.

FELIX

Touché. You don't strike me as an individual with many prospects or attachments.

RONNIE

Whatcha mean?

FELIX

Do you have a job?

RONNIE

No.

FELIX

A car?

RONNIE

Nope.

FELIX

A family?

RONNIE

Not anymore. Dad died when I was a baby. Mom drank herself to death a few years ago.

FELIX

How'd your dad die?

RONNIE

Factory fire. They didn't have fire escapes, so he just had to stand there and burn.

FELIX

That's awful.

RONNIE

Yeah.

FELIX

Where do you live?

RONNIE

Here, there, everywhere.

FELIX

Very bohemian of you.

RONNIE

I don't know what that means. What the fuck is this painting behind me?

FELIX

Hieronymus Bosch. Do you know him?

RONNIE

Yeah, we shoot skag together under a bridge.

Felix chuckles.

FELIX

Is that how you deal with life on the street, jabs and jokes?

RONNIE

I deal with it however I can. I take what I need and leave the rest.

Ronnie looks around the massive dining room with all its pomp and grandiosity.

RONNIE

It seems you don't know when to stop taking.

Felix straightens his tie and stands up.

FELIX

Well put.

He ambles over to the giant painting behind Ronnie and examines the details. A cacophony of sin and violence, a frenetic view of hell itself.

Ronnie turns around to watch Felix scour the painting. He traces the details with his fingertips.

FELIX

I hung this painting because it reminds me of what the world truly is. The story of all life has been one of violence and domination. Everything is eating everything else, always. From the largest black hole to the smallest rat, the story is always the same.

Felix focuses on the grotesque hell-mouth in the painting which eats people alive.

FELIX

You're either a gaping mouth,
swallowing everything around you...
or you're the one being swallowed.

He turns around and looks Ronnie directly in the eyes.

FELIX

Now let me ask you Ronnie, are you
tired of not being the mouth?

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - LATER

The clump of dead rats sits on a pedestal covered by the
glass dome.

Felix and Ronnie lean down to look at it, their faces warped
by the glass.

RONNIE

What the hell is it?

FELIX

They call it a 'Rat King.' It's a
phenomenon that's only occurred
naturally a dozen or so times over
hundreds of years. When a swarm of
rats forms a nest, sometimes their
tails wrap together, then their
matted fur fuses them into one
creature. A beast with many heads.
Do you see that in the center?

Ronnie leans in to see a larger rat fused in the middle.

FELIX

Sometimes there's one fat rat in
the center, who gets to eat all the
same food but does nothing except
hold the entire fusion together.
The King of the Rat King. Without
him, they would just be individual
vermin. But with him, they're truly
something marvelous.

FELIX

Why are you showing me all of this?

Felix walks toward a glass door and beckons Ronnie to follow.

EXT. MANSION BALCONY - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie and Felix stand looking over the balcony at the city lights sprawling before them. Massive skyscrapers, lines of cars and wandering pedestrians.

FELIX

This city, Ronnie, is a Rat King. We're all clumped together here, our fur and tails matted to each other. One big beast with millions of heads. Separately, we're vermin of little note. But together, we build empires. We span the globe. We inherit the Earth. But our world is off its axis. Everyone wants to be at the center. Because of our ambitions to claw over each other to sit on our own little thrones, the whole beast will die. But there's a better way... an older way.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Felix walks into the center of the room toward the spiral, now clean of wine. Ronnie follows him.

FELIX

What you witnessed earlier tonight was a simple veneration of this concept. Me and my... friends... gathered together for a bit of camaraderie and ritual. A celebration of being the fat rat in the middle of the pile. But we also seek a solution to that pile killing itself. We want only to amend the natural order. To preserve what makes humanity special, so it can continue to flourish.

RONNIE

I saw your spiral down below, too.

FELIX

As above... so below.

RONNIE

Does that mean there's one up there?

Ronnie points up through the hole in the ceiling surrounded by the now broken railing. The chandelier twinkles above.

FELIX

No, this is as far up as the spiral goes. The nexus of what we wish to accomplish.

Ronnie spies the fox mask neatly hanging on the wall.

RONNIE

What about the masks?

Felix wanders over to the mask and touches it gently, admiring the real fur.

FELIX

We dawn them in order to debase and humble ourselves, to show us what we really are underneath all our delusions of grandeur. Simple animals. And without a system to hold us into place, that's what we all revert back to. In the end, we all--

Felix turns around to see that Ronnie has vanished. He straightens his tie and scoffs.

INT. WINE CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie throws open the hatch in the center of the wine cellar. He looks down into the darkness. He grabs the rope, still attached by the hook, and descends into the sewer.

INT. SEWER CAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie climbs down the rope into the dark depths of the sewer. He reaches the half point when--

A whistle. He peers up to see Felix looking down through the hatch from the cellar above.

FELIX

Going so soon? The festivities were just starting.

RONNIE

I've seen enough.

Felix reaches into his breast pocket and pulls out a baggy of cocaine.

FELIX

But there's still so much more fun
to have. Let me show you how the
other half lives, I doubt you'll
get another chance.

Ronnie looks down at the floor beneath him, then back up to
Felix. He sighs.

RONNIE

Fine, but it gets too weird I'm
bailing.

FELIX

It's your choice.

Ronnie climbs up the rope.

EXT. MANSION STREET ENTRANCE - LATER

The wrought iron gate in front of the mansions creaks open
automatically. Felix struts onto the sidewalk, now wearing a
more modern suit. Ronnie sulks behind him, wearing his
freshly cleaned clothes and jacket.

A familiar looking limousine pulls up.

RONNIE

Where we going?

Felix opens the door and beckons Ronnie to hop inside.

FELIX

The kind of place guys like you
never get to see.

Ronnie slides into the waiting limo.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie eases himself into the backseat of the limo as Felix
hops in and closes the door.

FELIX

Driver, The Red Door.

The obscured driver of the limo nods and slides the divider
between them shut. Felix grabs a bottle of champagne on ice
and pops it open.

FELIX

Have you ever been in a limousine before?

RONNIE

Uh, yeah. A few actually. I like to steal their radios.

Felix chuckles as he pours two glasses of champagne. He hands one to Ronnie who eyes it before drinking it in one gulp.

RONNIE

This is nice and all, but I was expecting something a little more...

FELIX

Of course!

Felix pulls the baggie of coke from his pocket and tosses it to Ronnie. He catches the baggie and pours a little bit between his thumb and forefinger. He snorts the bump.

EXT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - LATER

The limo pulls up to a vacant sidewalk. The door swings open and Felix and Ronnie step outside. Ronnie looks around at the decrepit buildings on the empty street.

RONNIE

It's a ghost town. Why'd you bring me here?

FELIX

You should know this city isn't what it seems.

Felix walks over to an unassuming red door. He knocks on it. A slot in the middle of the door slides open.

BOUNCER (O.S.)

Who are you?

FELIX

I am Legion.

The slot slides shut and the door opens. A large bouncer in a black suit ushers them inside.

INT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie and Felix walk down a long, dingy hallway. Ronnie anxiously looks around the narrow concrete passage.

The quiet thumping of music grows louder as they walk. It's at full blast when they reach another red door at the end of the hallway. Felix grabs the door handle.

FELIX

There's more secrets buried in this city than just the sewers, Ronald.

He swings the door open.

INT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie walks into the ballroom of the club, his eyes wide as Felix follows behind him with a smirk.

Dozens of people in tailored suits and short dresses participate in a bacchanal of earthly delights. Shimmering lights and hanging glass fixtures give the club an otherworldly feeling. A live band plays disco music on a stage surrounded by a dance floor of drunken, grinding dancers. Men eagerly lead women into backrooms, people are openly snorting lines of coke on tables, champagne and whiskey are pouring freely. Everyone is uproariously laughing or groping or dancing.

The kaleidoscopic atmosphere overwhelms Ronnie as he paces through the place, drawing the odd glance from the wealthy clientele. Felix strides next to him, hands behind his back.

A CLUB WAITER (40's) carrying a silver platter with two tumblers catches up to them.

WAITER

Sir, we're so happy to have you back. We saw you walk in and we've already prepared your usual, as well as one for your... guest.

Felix grabs a tumbler from the tray and motions Ronnie to do the same.

FELIX

Much obliged.

The waiter bows and skitters away. Felix clinks his glass against Ronnie's.

FELIX

Bottoms up.

Ronnie and Felix down their drink. A beautiful woman, MARA (30's) in a sequined dress slides up behind Felix and puts her hand on his shoulder.

MARA

Who's your friend, Felix?

FELIX

Mara, you always have a way of honing in on the most interesting man in the room, don't you? This is Ronald.

Mara extends her hand gracefully and Ronnie shakes it.

MARA

I'll have to see how interesting he is for myself.

RONNIE

I can guarantee I'm not like anyone else in here.

MARA

Don't be so sure. We all have the same needs, don't we?

Mara saunters toward the dance floor, beckoning Ronnie to join her. Felix nudges him forward

FELIX

You're a mouth now. So go eat.

He pushes him forward. Ronnie grabs Mara's extended hand as she leads him deeper into the crowd of dancers.

The four-on-the-floor disco beat picks up as Ronnie and Mara are swallowed by the crowd. She rests her arms on his shoulders as they groove and grind, Ronnie slowly warming up to the ecstasy of the dancers surrounding him. The compact crowd, shimmering lights and heavy bass lure Ronnie into a trance. He starts to smile and enjoy himself.

Mara runs her fingers through his hair and pulls him in close. She kisses him passionately.

She pulls away and disappears into the crowd, leaving Ronnie dumbfounded. He cuts through the other dancers to look for Mara, but she's gone.

Ronnie slides out of the dance floor and the throbbing crowd, sweaty and confused. He sees Felix leaning against the bar smoking a cigarette and staggers over to him.

FELIX
Enjoying ourselves?

RONNIE
Sure, but I could use something a little... stronger.

FELIX
Was Mara not strong enough for you?

RONNIE
She vanished.

FELIX
Like much of life's pleasures, she is fleeting. What did you have in mind?

Ronnie leans in to whisper.

RONNIE
Got any H?

FELIX
No need to be so secretive, there's no judgement here.

Felix turns to the bartender and motions him over.

FELIX
Two empty glasses.

The bartender nods and hands him two empty tumblers.

Felix heads for a black door in the back of the room with Ronnie in tow.

INT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - BACKROOM - CONTINUOUS

Felix swings open the black door and walks inside, Ronnie behind him.

The backroom is a more intimate space. A few tables surrounded by the wealthiest clientele sitting in plush booths. The duo walks past table after table of clubgoers snorting cocaine or vigorously making out. At one of the tables, a wealthy young man shoots heroin with a glazed over look on his face. Ronnie stares at the heroin like a dog staring at a cut of meat.

They arrive at an empty table at the back. Felix straightens his suit and sits down. He sets the two empty tumblers on the table.

FELIX
Sit, please.

Ronnie slides into the booth and leans in.

RONNIE
I didn't think people would be shooting up in a fancy place like this.

Ronnie eyes the young man shooting up a few tables away.

FELIX
Rich or poor, we share the same vices. The only difference between you and him is circumstance. You had a dead father and an alcoholic mother, he had the reigns of a biochemical conglomerate and a trust fund so immense it would make a Carnegie blush.

RONNIE
Could I get some H here?

Felix pulls a flask from his breast pocket and unscrews it.

RONNIE
I've got something more ceremonious for the occasion.

He pours a red liquid from the flask into both glasses.

RONNIE
That's what you were drinking with your 'friends' earlier.

FELIX
Sharp eye.

RONNIE
It looks like wine.

Felix holds up the glass and admires the liquid.

FELIX
There's definitely wine in this little cocktail, in vino veritas as they say.

The ancients understood the alchemical properties of wine well. How it could soften the senses and warm the mind to new possibilities. But they didn't have the benefit of modern science to truly open the waking life to realms unseen.

Felix slides a glass over to Ronnie who catches it. He eyes the liquid as well.

RONNIE

What else is in here?

FELIX

A few things you've probably had before, a few things you haven't. Designer drugs, you could say. Tailored specifically for my friends and me.

RONNIE

Tailored to what?

Felix slides over and leans toward Ronnie.

FELIX

How exactly did you find my secret little room down below?

RONNIE

I was... exploring, I guess. Exploring the sewers.

FELIX

Exploring for what?

RONNIE

I don't know, really... something. Anything.

FELIX

Alone?

RONNIE

Just me.

FELIX

And what led you to the sewers of all places in this colossal city?

RONNIE

I just had... this feeling. Like... there's millions of people roaming around up here. Living their lives, making their money, fucking and dying. But what's underneath all that? What's right under our feet that no one seems to think about. I was... curious.

Felix smiles a satisfied grin.

FELIX

And that, my friend, is what this concoction is tailored to. What my little club of cohorts concerns themselves with. Curiosity. Most people spend their lives not wanting to know what's underneath. Blind to secrets right under their feet. But men like you and me, we must search for the things no one else wants to see. Because we know, deep down, what is hidden... is the most real.

Felix raises his glass. Ronnie raises his, reluctant at first. They clink their tumblers together and cheers.

FELIX

Welcome to what's underneath.

They down their drinks in one gulp and set their glasses on the table.

Ronnie scratches his back.

RONNIE

Is it getting kind of hot in here?

FELIX

Not really.

Ronnie scratches the center of his back harder.

RONNIE

Hang on, I gotta go to the bathroom. Where is it?

FELIX

Out the black door, to the left.

Ronnie lurches forward toward the black door. He digs vigorously into his back.

INT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie bursts through the bathroom door, still scratching his back.

He stumbles over to a mirror and holds onto one of the sinks for support. He claws at the back of his shirt and pulls it up. He turns around to get a look at his back in the mirror.

In the center of his back is a patch of twitching gray fur and dark skin. He pokes it and winces.

He turns his head slightly and catches a view of the stall behind him in the mirror, completely shrouded in shadow. A single, dark figure looms in the stall.

Ronnie whips around, but the stall is empty.

RONNIE

What the fuck is going on?

He turns around to look at his back again. The patch of fur is gone.

INT. THE RED DOOR CLUB - BALLROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie stumbles through the door into the ballroom. Everything seems different. It's darker overall, but the strobing lights of the dance floor flash bright red. The house band plays thumping, droning music.

He staggers through the ballroom. The other patrons seem sinister now. They laugh too hard, their mouths opening too wide. In a leather booth, a couple gropes each other too ferociously as their tipped champagne bottle pours over the edge of the table. The man rips into the woman's flesh.

Everyone clamors around in manic joy, guzzling booze and dancing hysterically, all bathed in flashes of red light.

In a trance, Ronnie wanders toward the dance floor where everyone jerks around and grinds with animal abandon.

Across the sea of fervent dancers, Ronnie spies a dark figure cloaked in shadow in the corner.

Felix sidles up next to him and whispers in his ear.

FELIX

You see him, don't you?

Ronnie panics and stumbles away from the dance floor. He flounders toward the front red door.

He busts through a crowd of rowdy men downing tumblers of whisky. He catches a glimpse of a giant rat tail swinging from under the bottom of one of their suit jackets.

He clings onto the handle of the red door and wrenches it open. He falls forward.

INT. MANSION FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie falls flat on the floor. He looks at the pristine, tiled floor beneath him and then looks upward. He realizes this isn't the hallway leading to the club.

It's the foyer of Felix's mansion.

He stands up and balances himself, bewildered by his surroundings.

He sees more ecstatic guests in the living room ahead, huddled in cackling circles or laying across couches downing champagne. An after-party.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie wanders over the spiral in the center of the room which seems to pulsate. His back itches so he digs into it.

SLAM. THUD. Noises ring out from floors above.

Everyone stops and looks up at the ceiling as something heavy moves around upstairs.

The noises stop. Everyone resumes conversation like nothing happened. Ronnie rubs his temples, trying to get ahold of himself.

Someone catches his hand and turns him around.

It's Mara. She hits with a soft smile and eager eyes.

 RONNIE
You vanished.

 MARA
I'm back.

She pulls him by the hand and leads him through the crowd of hollering drunks in the living room.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mara leads Ronnie past the dining room. In his haze, he looks inside to see several guests huddled around the giant table.

They manically sketch rows of unknown symbols on the table with red paint which coats their hands and the arms of their suit jackets.

One of the men makes fleeting eye contact with Ronnie. He sports a grey upturned mustache and a hollow look in his eyes. The imprint of a red painted hand marks his face.

Mara pulls Ronnie out of view.

INT. MANSION STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mara leads Ronnie up the spiral stairway.

A man and a woman, nearly undressed, gleefully shuffle down the stairs. Their booze sloshes out of their glasses as they pass Ronnie and Mara.

RONNIE

Where are you taking me?

MARA

Somewhere private.

Mara stops and looks down at him.

MARA

That's what you want, right?

RONNIE

Uh... yeah. I do.

MARA

Then let it happen.

She smiles and pulls him further up the stairs.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mara leads him down the empty hallway. They pass a set of double doors leading into a master bedroom. One of the doors is slightly cracked.

It catches Ronnie's eye. He stops and peers in for a brief second. He sees the writhing hands and feet of multiple people lying together in a huge bed.

Mara yanks him away.

Ronnie stumbles as she pulls him further. The hallway seems to twist and bend in front of him. He looks behind to see a shadowy figure looming at the far end of the hall.

MARA

We're here.

Mara stops at a door and twists its antique knob. It opens to reveal the bedroom Ronnie had slept in earlier.

Mara grabs Ronnie by his jacket collar and pulls him into a kiss. He grabs her back and the two of them slip into the bedroom. He closes the door behind them with a click.

CUT TO BLACK.

DEEP VOICED MAN (O.S.)

Hey...wake up. I said wake up,
buddy! Hello? Anyone home? I said
wake up!

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Ronnie's eyes flutter open to the harsh light of day. His head rests against a concrete sidewalk.

A nightstick jabs at his chest. He looks up to see a POLICE OFFICER (40's) standing over him.

POLICE OFFICER

Are you deaf? Wake the fuck up,
pal. You can't sleep here.

Ronnie lifts his head from the pavement and takes in his surroundings with groggy eyes.

He's laying on a dirty sidewalk next to a brick building in broad daylight. His hair is matted to his head and his jacket covers him like a blanket.

RONNIE

Where am I?

POLICE OFFICER

You're on Myrtle Ave, numb-nuts.
Which isn't a fucking hotel, so
wake up and be on your way.

Ronnie struggles to lean up. A rat jumps from underneath his jacket. The cop flinches at the sight.

POLICE OFFICER

Whoa!

They both watch the rat scurry down the street.

POLICE

This city's a fucking sewer.

The cop grabs Ronnie's arm and yanks him to his feet. He's woozy and dazed but manages to find his balance and scoop up his jacket.

RONNIE

I don't know how I got here.

POLICE OFFICER

A lifetime of bad decisions. Now beat it.

The cop nudges him forward. Ronnie lumbers along the sidewalk ahead as he slips on his jacket. A subway train roars above him.

EXT. WOMEN'S SHELTER - DAY

With his hands in his jacket pockets, Ronnie walks down a derelict street. He passes a shanty-town where homeless people cook cans of food over trash can fires.

Across the street hangs a sign that reads 'HELPING HANDS WOMEN'S SHELTER.' Ronnie spots Trixie leaning against the wall of the shelter, smoking a cigarette.

They make eye-contact and she quickly averts her gaze. She flicks the cigarette into the curb and strolls away, hunching over to seem inconspicuous.

RONNIE

Wait!

Ronnie runs across the street, narrowly avoiding a car driving by. Trixie picks up her pace but Ronnie catches up to her down the sidewalk.

He grabs her by the shoulder.

RONNIE

Wait a damn minute!

She whips around. She looks rough with dark bags under her eyes and frizzy hair.

TRIXIE
What is it?

RONNIE
What the hell, Trixie?

TRIXIE
If you want me to apologize I'm not gonna.

RONNIE
That's not what... why did you sell me out to Derek and his fucking goon?

TRIXIE
For H, why else?

RONNIE
I would've gave you some.

TRIXIE
No, you wouldn't and you didn't.

RONNIE
Yeah, you're right.

TRIXIE
I know.

Trixie walks away but Ronnie slides in front of her.

RONNIE
So you're staying here now?

TRIXIE
Yeah, I been here a few days.

RONNIE
But you just left my place yesterday...

TRIXIE
I left three days ago, Ronnie.

He grows puzzled and runs his hand through his hair.

TRIXIE
Is something going on with you? You look... off.

RONNIE

You wouldn't believe me if I told you. I'm starting to not believe it myself.

TRIXIE

Whatever, just... take care of yourself. Bye, Ronnie.

She trudges forward down the sidewalk, arms crossed and head low. Ronnie watches her walk away.

RONNIE

Three fucking days...

EXT. DERELICT BUILDING - DAY

Squeak sits on the stoop of Ronnie's squatter building. He's got his hands stuffed in his jacket pockets and rocks back and forth nervously.

He sees Ronnie walking toward him. He hops off the stoop and scampers over to Ronnie, but Ronnie walks past him.

SQUEAK

Jesus, Ronnie, where have you been?

RONNIE

You don't wanna know.

SQUEAK

Of course I do. I thought you were fucking dead, man! Did you go back down there?

RONNIE

I did.

SQUEAK

Have you been down there this whole time? You look weird, are you okay?

RONNIE

I'm fine, Squeak.

SQUEAK

Shit's been getting weird out here, man. A bunch of people on the street have been going missing. Rhonda, Dale, Marlon. No one knows what's going on.

RONNIE
I don't either.

SQUEAK
Did you find anything else down there? Tell me about it.

RONNIE
There's nothing down there. Forget the whole thing.

Ronnie cracks open the window of the building.

SQUEAK
Don't bullshit me, man. I know something happened down there.

Ronnie whips around and snaps at him.

RONNIE
Nothing happened, asshole. Stop going down there. It's just a sewer. We're not explorers, we're just a couple of fucking junkies.

SQUEAK
Fine... I just thought... nevermind. I guess I'll fuck off.

Squeak storms off down the street. Ronnie watches him go with a sense of regret. He climbs through the window.

INT. RONNIE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie creaks open the door of his apartment. He pokes his head inside and looks around. The coast is clear.

He walks over to his heroin kit where it was smashed against the wall. The box, spoon and other paraphernalia lay on the ground.

He kneels down and picks up the burnt spoon, examining it wistfully. He drops it and walks away.

Ronnie plops onto the couch and let's out a deep exhale. He buries his face in his hands and contemplates everything that's happened.

A floorboard creaks. Footsteps clunk from the other side of the apartment.

Ronnie looks up to see Derek walking out of his bedroom.

DEREK

You think you're one slick cat,
don't you?

Ronnie leaps over the couch and runs toward the exit, but slams into the barrel chest of Sammy waiting in the doorway.

Sammy grabs him by his wrists.

RONNIE

Let me fucking go!

Ronnie rips his wrists free and dashes toward the other side of the apartment. Derek tries to block him, but Ronnie jukes him.

Ronnie flings open the window and crawls through it onto the fire escape. Sammy grabs his ankles right as they're about to slip through the window and pulls him back inside.

He crashes to the dirty floor of his apartment. Derek and Sammy each grab an ankle and pull him across the carpet toward the kitchen.

DEREK

You slippery little shit!

RONNIE

Fuck your mother! Fuck your
mother's mother!

Ronnie thrashes and tries to break free, but can't. He grabs onto anything he can find. The leg of the couch, the corner of the wall, the fraying carpet itself. But they keep dragging him further to the kitchen.

He squeaks against the linoleum as they drag him to the table and chairs. Derek pulls a roll of duct tape from his army jacket pocket, peels off a length of it and rips it.

Sammy kicks Ronnie in the hip. He winces in pain.

RONNIE

You son of a bitch!

Sammy pulls Ronnie up to his feet and plops him in one of the chairs around the table. He's too dazed and in pain to fight as he holds back tears and clutches onto his hip.

Sammy holds one of Ronnie's forearms to the arm of the chair. Derek quickly wraps duct tape around it, holding him in place.

RONNIE

What the hell are you doing?

DEREK

I told you, Ronnie. You had two days.

Derek rips another length of tape. Sammy holds the other forearm to the chair and Derek wraps it in place again.

Ronnie tries to rock back and forth to tip over the chair, but Sammy grabs the back of it and holds the chair in place.

Derek sighs in relief now that Ronnie is subdued. He slicks back his long hair and smiles.

DEREK

It's been three days, Ronnie. Three. And since you scratched and clawed to get away, I'm assuming that you don't have the money.

RONNIE

I'll get you the money, man. I got into that rich assholes house!

DEREK

And yet here you are, with nothing to show for it. I think that rich asshole's house was just some junkie psycho bullshit.

RONNIE

I swear, I can get back in there. You have to give me a chance.

Derek pulls a cigar box out his jacket pocket and opens it.

DEREK

That's where you're wrong.

Ronnie eyes the box nervously.

RONNIE

What is that?

Derek rummages through the box.

DEREK

I don't have to give you another chance. Because I learned my lesson. Ronnie, you're vermin.

Derek pulls out a bag of heroin. He lays it on the table.

DEREK

And you don't feed vermin, or give it a place to stay, and you sure as hell don't let it borrow from you. Because a rat will never give it back. It only takes.

He pulls out a lighter and syringe and lays it on the table next to the heroin.

DEREK

And it will come back again, and again, and again, no matter how many times you throw it outside. So you don't give it another chance. Because the only thing you can do with a rat... is put it down.

Derek pulls an ice cream scoop out of the box. Ronnie stares at it in fear as Derek sets it on the table.

RONNIE

What the fuck?

Derek pulls out a rubber tube from the box and tosses it to Sammy. Sammy pulls up Ronnie's sleeve and wraps the tubing around his right arm and cinches it.

Derek pours a big pile of heroin into the ice cream scoop, more than enough for an overdose.

RONNIE

No... no, you can't do this to me.

DEREK

Why not? You love this shit, don't you? A big wad of heroin is a fucking dream come true, right?

Derek lifts up the scoop and holds the lighter under it. He lights the flame and slowly melts the heroin.

RONNIE

Come on, Derek, I'll do anything, I'll get you the money.

DEREK

Why? So you can keep shooting skag and running around the sewers like a freak? Well I've got all the dope you need right here.

Derek sticks the syringe in the huge pool of heroin and sucks it up.

It fills the syringe completely and leaks out of the top and drips out of the needle. Ronnie stares at the bursting syringe in horror.

Sammy taps Ronnie's right arm and finds a vein. He pinches it to make it protrude. Ronnie squirms but it's futile.

Derek holds up the syringe and flicks it as he walks over to Ronnie. He kneels in front of Ronnie and presses the needle to his vein.

RONNIE

Please, I'm begging you...

Derek looks him right in the eyes with a twisted sense of calm reassurance.

DEREK

When they find you, they'll say...
'He was just another junkie who
didn't know when enough was
enough.'

Derek presses the needle into Ronnie's vein.

FELIX (O.S.)

And what will they say when they
find you?

Ronnie, Derek and Sammy turn to see Felix leaning in the front doorway. He's wearing a long coat over a suit with wide lapels. He smiles at them.

Derek springs to his feet. Sammy lets go of Ronnie's chair and turns to Felix, puzzled by the unexpected guest.

DEREK

Who the fuck are you?

FELIX

A guardian angel.

SAMMY

For this little piece of shit?

Ronnie struggles to angle his head to see the doorway.

FELIX

Even the lowest of god's creatures
needs one. Where's yours?

DEREK

My guardian angel?

FELIX

Yes.

DEREK

I don't fucking have one.

FELIX

Well that's too bad.

Felix slides behind the doorway into the hall, revealing Gregor standing behind him with a double barrel shotgun pointed into the apartment.

DEREK

Jesus fuck--

BLAM. Gregor fires a shot with expert precision, nailing Derek in the head with buckshot. It explodes out of the back of his skull as blood and brain splatter against the wall. Ronnie yelps as Derek's corpse collapses to the floor.

Sammy reels in shock and makes eye contact with Gregor who turns the shotgun toward him. Complete terror overcomes him as he holds up his hands.

SAMMY

Wait! I--

BLAM. Gregor fires a second shot into Sammy's chest. It tears through him, tattering his shirt and spraying viscera all over Ronnie and the kitchen.

Sammy's huge corpse slams to the ground right next to Ronnie. With blood splatter on his astonished face, Ronnie sees the light leave Sammy's eyes as he lays motionless on the floor.

Gregor pops open the shotgun and the empty shells fall to the ground. He loads two more into the gun and snaps it shut.

Felix slides through the doorway and strolls around the bloody kitchen, hands behind his back.

Ronnie hyperventilates, his eyes wide in a thousand yard stare. He fidgets back and forth in shock, still restrained to the chair.

FELIX

Is there anyone else here? Anyone
hiding in the back?

Ronnie doesn't respond, he only stares down at Sammy's corpse, completely dumbfounded.

Felix leans down and snaps in front of his face.

FELIX

Hey! Get a grip. Is there anyone else here?

Ronnie snaps out of it and finally looks up to Felix.

RONNIE

There's no one else. Just me.

Felix walks over to the kitchen counter, visibly uncomfortable with the dirty apartment. He pulls out drawers one by one until he finds a knife. He picks it up and glides back to Ronnie.

Ronnie watches the knife, unsure of what to expect.

Felix cuts the duct tape restraints on Ronnie. He yanks himself free from the chair and rubs his aching forearms while breathing rhythmically to calm down.

Gregor walks into the hallway. Felix follows and stops at the door.

FELIX

Are you coming?

Ronnie looks at Felix, then back to the bloody crime scene.

FELIX

You're more than welcome to stay and... sort all of this out.

Ronnie snaps back to his senses.

RONNIE

Fuck it, let's go.

EXT. DERELICT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Gregor slides through the open window onto the sidewalk. He reaches back inside and helps Felix climb through, carefully avoiding mucking up his coat.

Felix straightens his coat and suit while checking if the coast is clear.

Ronnie falls out of the window onto the pavement, still weak from the beating and splattered with blood. Gregor helps him to his feet and Felix guides him to a big, grey Cadillac parked along the street.

From behind some trash cans, Squeak watches Gregor get in the driver's seat while Ronnie and Felix get in the back seat.

They drive away, leaving Squeak confused and worried on the side of the street.

INT. GREY CADILLAC - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie stares out the window, shell shocked with blood on his face. He watches block after block of wandering street gangs and trash can fires as they drive through the worst parts failing 70's New York City.

Felix reaches into the breast pocket of his long jacket and pulls out a handkerchief, monogrammed 'F.K.' He holds it out to Ronnie.

Ronnie feels the blood drying on his face. He snatches the handkerchief and rubs his face clean.

FELIX

From where I'm sitting, it looks like Hell on Earth out there. A dying city, swallowing up everyone with it. It almost swallowed you, just now.

Ronnie stops wiping his face and starts to cry. He can't hold it in any longer. Felix puts his hand on his shoulder to comfort him.

FELIX

Life doesn't have to be this way, Ronnie. There's a way out, but only if you follow me all the way.

RONNIE

All the way?

FELIX

All the way to the edge. And we'll step right past the brink of this stupid, cruel world. There's a strange new horizon waiting for men like us. We can watch its sun rise.

RONNIE

You'll take me there?

Felix gently grabs him by the back of the neck.

FELIX

I'll take you farther than anyone has ever gone.

RONNIE

Where do we start?

FELIX

With a fairy tale.

INT. CENTRAL PARK - DUSK

Felix and Ronnie stroll through Central Park, dimly lit by the sunset. Gregor walks several feet behind them and sizes up pedestrians that walk by.

FELIX

Once upon a time, there was a little prince. This little prince came from a noble house that prospered in the countryside of Germany. But his noble family was collapsing under the weight of the new world. Industrialization drew his workers to the growing urban sprawl, and soon his family was noble in name only. This little prince knew that there was no more wealth or power to be had in the dying feudal life of yore. So he took what little his family had left and crossed the great Atlantic to America. There he became a titan of industry and built great factories in this new Babylon. But all that wealth couldn't save him from the feeling that he'd been robbed. That his noble bloodline had been sullied by taking part in this cutthroat new world. He had won immense wealth, but his blood-right had vanished. This little prince grew old and died in the land of opportunity, but not without bearing a son. And along with his fortune, he passed down his yearning for a lost world.

EXT. 1950'S CITY STREET - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Felix, in his early 20's, trudges down the sidewalk. His hair is longer and he's cleanly shaven. He wanders sullenly down the street.

FELIX (V.O.)
Eventually that son had a son, and
that son bore another little
prince. And that little prince
carried that chip on his shoulder,
knowing that his divine right had
been stolen from him.

Felix brushes past people with his head down.

EXT. OVERLOOK OF CITY - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Felix stands along a railing overlooking the Brooklyn Bridge
and the city skyline. He peers out over the dark waters and
bright city with morose longing.

FELIX (V.O.)
So this young man wandered the old
streets of New York, listless and
idle. He could only yearn.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Felix wanders through rows of dusty furniture and tables
stacked with books.

FELIX (V.O.)
That is until one day, his
wandering led him to the back of an
antique shop tucked away like a
catacomb in this vast city. And in
that dusty hovel, he found
something remarkable.

Felix picks through a stack of books and examines their
covers. Sunlight pours in through cracks in the curtains and
illuminates floating columns of dust. He stops at a fading
yellow tome with a spiral of rats illustrated on the cover.
He cracks it open.

FELIX (V.O.)
It was a book unlike any other he
had seen before. It was written in
the high German language of the
middle ages, nonsense to most, but
this little prince could read every
word thanks to the traditions of
his noble family. And what he read
in this fraying tome set him on a
new path back to the old world.

Enraptured, young Felix flips through page after page.

INT. MANSION STUDY - END FLASHBACK - DAY

Ronnie sits in a lush chair in the mansion study as Felix paces around, running his hands along the spines of his books in the grand library. Ronnie sips a tumbler of scotch while wearing a robe, his hair wet from a shower.

FELIX

You see, this book was written by men of great faith. Gnostic monks from the 14th century whose practices were deemed blasphemous by the church. They were banished and forced to live on the fringes of German society, long before they even called it 'Germany'.

INT. MEDIEVAL MONASTERY INFIRMARY - FLASHBACK - DAY

A German monk (60's) walks down a row of sick villagers laying on cots. He sports a long robe and the iconic tonsure haircut of medieval monks along with a gray beard.

FELIX (V.O.)

This was a time when death held greater dominion than life, when the black plague swept through Europe like a scythe cutting wheat. To most people it seemed like the world was ending.

The monk carries a bowl of water and rag. He kneels at a sick young boy, stick thin with hopeless eyes. He dabs the wet rag across the boy's brow, but the boy only stares off into the distance.

FELIX (V.O.)

Their villages became graveyards and parents ate their young to survive. These heretical priests sought to quell this raging plague by any means necessary.

The monk rises to his feet and we see several other monks behind him, uselessly caring to the dying villagers.

INT. MONASTERY BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The monk spins an armillary sphere, an astrological globe, upon a wooden table in his plain bedroom. He examines it closely as if looking for a sign from God. He peers out his window to the stars above with despair.

FELIX (V.O.)

But their star charts, tinctures
and communions with the Almighty
were fruitless. They felt like God
had abandoned them.

The monk fills with anger and swipes the globe off the table.
It crashes to the ground. He buries his head in his hands.

INT. MONASTERY LIBRARY - FLASHBACK - DAY

A group of monks gather in a library beset with rows of
scrolls and volumes of hand-bound books. One of them slides
forward an upright mirror made of pure black glass. They form
around it, examining it with curiosity.

FELIX (V.O.)

Desperate and living on the edge of
civilization, they resorted to less
savory forms of divination. They
crafted spirit mirrors, dark panes
of obsidian glass. And they would
stare into these mirrors for hours
on end.

A monk sits in a chair, face to face with the black mirror
which subtly reflects his own image back. He stares deep into
it and his eyes glaze over in meditation.

FELIX (V.O.)

They relaxed themselves with
medicinal herbs so they could open
their minds to see what was on the
other side of that black glass.

We pull back to see all of the monks have their own mirror.
Some gather around a table, drinking wine and smoking out of
long pipes. The others sit in front of their respective black
mirrors, peering into it with deep fascination.

FELIX (V.O.)

After months of pleading with the
darkness for help, months of
staring into the abyss, something
stared back...

One of the monks clutches his chair and gasps while staring
into the mirror. He struggles to stand and shakily points
toward the mirror as the other monks gather around him.

They all stare into the mirror as if seeing an absolute
miracle, their tired old faces gleaming with joy.

FELIX (V.O.)
 ...and it was eager to meet them.

EXT. MONASTERY COURTYARD - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The twenty or so monks march forward, single file, into the overgrown courtyard in the middle of the monastery. They each carry a candle.

FELIX (V.O.)
 These holy men communed with the being that stared back at them from the void, and it told them he was a King. They needed him to right the wrongs of their dying world, so they conducted elaborate rituals to deliver him into our plane.

They form a circle, set each candle down in front of themselves and hold hands.

FELIX (V.O.)
 They would smoke exotic herbs and binge themselves on wine laced with wormwood, then they would form a ritualistic circle. They were trying to free their imaginations so they meld their thoughts together to form one single consciousness.

The monks all close their eyes and lean their heads back, chanting loudly.

MONKS IN UNISION
 Ninkilim auck Belial, grutu vermina
 aus gnosticos. Pleroma deus auck
 Ninkilim. Hastura aun whispero...

Wind gusts through the courtyard and extinguishes all the candles. Their chant grows louder. The wind picks up as the trees rustle and leaves swirl around.

FELIX (V.O.)
 This King, he had no body. He had no mind. He could only live in this world as collective thought, a figment of their imagination. But try as they might, they could barely pry this king from his formless world into our own.

The wind dies down. The leaves fall the ground. The candles relight on their own. The monks relinquish each other's hands and grow despondent in their failure.

INT. MONASTERY DINING ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

The monks sit around plain tables on simple chairs as they eat stew out of bowls with wooden spoons.

FELIX (V.O.)

Their hopes were dashed. All seemed bleak. Until one of the monks purchased an oddity from a traveling merchant.

A monk rushes into the room carrying a wooden box wrapped in butcher's paper. The other monks gather around as he unwraps it and unhooks the latch on the front of the box. The monk pulls a thick leather glove over his hand.

FELIX (V.O.)

A mass of rats fused together by their tails. A common folktale many had assumed was a fanciful superstition. A rat king, as you know. Except this one was alive.

The monk pulls out a rat king, but all the rats are squirming and gnawing at each other. A wretched, writhing, slithering disc of vermin chewing at the monk's glove. They hiss and squeak and squeal.

EXT. MONASTERY COURTYARD - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The monks gather hands in another ritual circle, candles at their feet. But now, the living rat king lies in the middle of their ritual. They begin to chant.

FELIX (V.O.)

This creature was a collective mind all on its own, and a perfect vessel for the shapeless king. So with the squirming ball of vermin, the monks made a last ditch effort to bring forth their savior and return the world to what it once was.

As they chant, the rat king writhes. The white eyes of the rats turn black. Their shrieking fervor rises to an unbearably high pitch--

CUT TO:

INT. MANSION STUDY - END FLASHBACK - DAY

Felix stands looking out his window at the city beyond. He sips a tumbler of scotch with a far-away look.

Ronnie leans forward in his seat, eagerly expecting the end of the story.

RONNIE

Did they do it? Did it work?

Felix snaps back to reality and ambles to the corner of the library.

FELIX

I don't know. That's where the book ends.

He picks the yellow tome from a book shelf and flips through it. Ronnie walks behind him and tries to catch a glimpse of its pages. Felix slams the tome shut and slides it back into place on the bookshelf.

FELIX

I've spent the last decade of my life trying to write the ending of that story.

Felix walks away and opens a closet in the corner of the room.

FELIX

I want to finish what those great men started. To right the wrongs of this world and return it to what it once was.

He pulls out a spirit mirror of his own from the closet. A long stretch of black obsidian glass on two wheels. He wheels it over to Ronnie who stares at it in fascination.

FELIX

A kingdom that finally has its King.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - DAY

Felix drags a chair along the floor which squeaks as it rubs against the hardwood. He pulls it into the center of the spiral on the floor.

He pushes the black mirror in front of the chair.

Ronnie stands in a doorway, arms crossed. Felix beckons Ronnie to sit.

RONNIE

I'm not so sure about this.

FELIX

You said you wanted to go all the way. And this is just the first step.

Ronnie reluctantly plops down in the chair.

Felix straightens the mirror. Ronnie leans forward to look deep into the black glass, his dark reflection the only thing visible.

RONNIE

I don't see anything.

FELIX

Of course not, it's been two seconds. Patience, Ronnie.

RONNIE

I wouldn't count patience as one of my virtues.

FELIX

No better time to learn. Just sit back, relax and look deep into the glass. Don't force anything, just let go and simply look.

Ronnie sits back in the chair, relaxes his shoulders and exhales. He stares deep into the glass, his dim reflection the only thing looking back.

Felix lays on a chaise lounge nearby.

Time fades forward several minutes at a time: Felix sitting up, laying down and falling asleep on the lounge while Ronnie sits in the chair staring deep into the mirror.

He sits still at first, but each time we fade forward he grows more agitated and restless, leaning back and forth and growing impatient. An hour passes as daylight turns to the amber light of sunset.

Ronnie finally snaps.

RONNIE

Fuck this!

He jumps up and tips the chair over. Felix snaps awake on the lounge.

RONNIE

I can't do it, I can't just sit here and stare into this fucking mirror! I need something to relax me. Didn't you say the monks used some drugs? I think that's what I need, something to calm me down. Open up my mind or whatever.

Felix rubs his eyes.

FELIX

Considering your history, Ronnie, I don't think a depressant is beneficial to this process. We can't have you nodding off.

Ronnie paces back and forth. He reaches under his shirt and itches the center of his back.

RONNIE

I can't just sit here sober like some asshole, it's driving me crazy. I'm sick of looking in this goddamn thing. I can't look at it any more, I can't...

Ronnie stops pacing. A strange notion arises in his mind and he feels compelled.

He grabs the chair and sets it in front of the mirror, then swivels it around to face the opposite direction.

Felix watches with renewed curiosity.

Ronnie sits in the chair facing away from the mirror. He leans back, relaxes and closes his eyes.

Felix quietly leans forward on the lounge, curious about Ronnie's method.

Silence.

We move closer to Ronnie, his eyes closed and face relaxed. His eyelids flutter slightly as if dreaming.

More silence.

Ronnie inhales slowly.

RONNIE

I see something.

Felix rises from the lounge and walks up to Ronnie in meditation.

RONNIE

It's dark... but I definitely see something.

FELIX

What do you see?

RONNIE

Waves. Like ocean waves. But they're black, like ink. And they're endless. They stretch on forever.

FELIX

Can you look closer?

RONNIE

I'm flying over them. Crashing black waves... but they're not water. They're breathing.... they're writhing.

FELIX

Is there anyone else there?

RONNIE

Yes, I can feel someone. But not someone. It's bigger than that. I can feel it all around me. It wants to talk to me.

FELIX

What does it want to say?

A quiet howling rings in Ronnie's ears. It grows louder as more screams join the howl. Felix walks up to Ronnie and puts his hand on the chair, watching him like a hawk.

RONNIE

It's just... screaming.

FELIX

What does it want from you? What does it want from me?

The wails and howls grow louder, forming a choir of banshees rising in his ears. Ronnie grabs his ears to stop the noise, but it's futile. He grimaces in pain.

RONNIE

It's not saying anything! I don't understand. Stop, just stop. Jesus fucking Christ just STOP!

Ronnie eyes snap open, but they're pure black. His arms go limp and fall at his side. His body floats a foot above the chair, his mouth wide open. The choir of wails project from his gaping mouth.

Felix watches in rapturous delight.

The spirit mirror shatters. The black glass crashes to the floor.

Ronnie snaps out of it. His eyes roll back to white and he falls down into the chair with a slam.

Trembling, he grabs around his body like he's finally back in control of it.

RONNIE

What the fuck just happened? What the hell was that?

Felix grins ear to ear and shakes Ronnie in the chair.

FELIX

You did it my boy! You fucking did it!

RONNIE

I did?

FELIX

Yes!

RONNIE

He spoke to me?

FELIX

No, Ronnie, he spoke through you! Do you know what this means?

Ronnie struggles to catch his breath.

RONNIE
No fucking clue.

FELIX
It means we're ready, dear boy. The
time has come. I've got calls to
make!

Felix rushes out of the room. Ronnie turns around to see all
the broken obsidian glass shattered on the floor.

He feels his chest and arms to make sure he's still in
control. He peers around the big empty room as if there's
someone there watching him.

RONNIE
I need some fucking heroin.

INT. WINE CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie sneaks through the rows of wine bottles. He reaches
the end of the cellar where a large cabinet rests in a dingy
corner. Ronnie grabs the padlock on the cabinet doors.

RONNIE
Fuck.

FELIX (O.S.)
Looking for something?

Ronnie whips around to see Felix striding toward him,
surrounded by the rows of his expensive wine.

RONNIE
Yeah, I was looking for--

FELIX
No you weren't. You were looking
for drugs. How'd you know they were
down here?

RONNIE
You keep mentioning wine and exotic
herbs. I figured you kept them all
in one place.

FELIX
Solid deduction.

Felix slips past Ronnie and pulls a key out of his breast pocket. Ronnie glances at the pocket and makes a mental note. Felix unlocks the padlock and swings the doors open.

Ronnie looks inside with glee. A dozen or so wooden boxes, neatly arranged, sit in the cabinet. Each one is labeled with a specific drug.

'COCAINE.' 'MARIJUANA.' 'LSD.' 'PSYLOCYBIN.' 'HEROIN.'
'BARBITURATES.' 'AMPHETAMINES.'

Ronnie leans in to read each box.

FELIX

These aren't all for ritual purposes, you know. We like to have a bit of fun ourselves.

Ronnie scans each box until he reaches a small black box on the bottom shelf with no label. He picks it up.

RONNIE

What's this one?

Felix snatches it from his hand.

FELIX

This is nothing to be trifled with. You had a minuscule dose of it yourself at the club.

Felix holds up the box to admire it.

FELIX

I was the patron toward the creation of this little wonder. A designer drug designed just for my purposes. And now your purposes, too. I've found no better method to crack open one's imagination like an egg. I call it 'Verinvina'.

RONNIE

Let's do some.

Felix laughs.

FELIX

Not until the big night.

He sets the box in the cabinet, closes the doors and locks it to Ronnie visible disappointment.

FELIX
We've got work to do. So until
then...

Felix grabs a nearby bottle of wine.

FELIX
...we'll have to stick with wine.

Felix eyes Ronnie, sizing him up.

FELIX
You don't own a tux, I'm assuming.

RONNIE
I don't own underwear.

INT. HABERDASHERY - DAY

Ronnie stands in front of a full length mirror as a tailor measures his wingspan. He flinches whenever the tailor gets too close to him.

Felix watches from the back of the luxurious boutique.

FELIX
Do you have something in his size?

The tailor measures his legs. Ronnie flinches again.

TAILOR
He's a bit short... and gangling..
but we should have something.

FELIX
You're a good man, Wilson.

The tailor walks away as he jots down the last measurements. Felix slinks up to Ronnie who stares in the mirror.

FELIX
Still thinking about what happened
earlier?

RONNIE
Yeah... it just shattered. What
does it mean?

FELIX
It means you've got a connection
like no other. You're the key,
Ronnie.

When you smashed into our little ceremony that night, I was ready to toss you from the roof. But I'm glad I just knocked you out instead.

RONNIE

That's what happened? I just remember my vision going black and my body going numb. Then nothing. I felt the same way in front of the mirror today.

Felix puts his hand on Ronnie's shoulder.

FELIX

I thought I was taking you to the edge, dear boy. But it's you who's been taking me. You've got so much potential, now I just need to convince the others.

RONNIE

The other... mask people?

FELIX

Yes, the mask people. They haven't seen what I've seen, they don't know what you're capable of. But they'll learn soon. The whole world will learn what they've squandered by leaving a boy like you in the gutter.

Ronnie smiles at the thought. Felix looks at his dirty clothes.

FELIX

I think you're going to need more than a tux. Tell me Ronnie, what kind of tie do you like?

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - LATER

Ronnie struts through a fancy restaurant in a hip new suit with wide lapels and a bolo tie. Felix walks in front of him as they follow a waiter to their table.

The wealthy patrons look at Ronnie in mild confusion and disgust as he walks by. His smile fades.

The waiter motions them to their table.

WAITER
Right here, gentleman.

Felix slips the man a tip with a subtle handshake.

FELIX
Many thanks.

The waiter bows and slips away as Ronnie and Felix slide into the cushioned booth around the table.

RONNIE
Everyone's looking at me funny.

FELIX
Well, a suit isn't going to erase a lifetime of delinquency and street living. You still carry yourself like an urchin, and you're in desperate need of a shave and haircut. I'll have my barber swing by later.

Ronnie picks up the menu but barely pays attention to it. He looks around the room as all the prim and proper people eat small plates of food and shoot him the side eye.

EXT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - LATER

The gray Cadillac pulls up to the curb as Ronnie and Felix step outside.

FELIX
How'd you enjoy your first meal as one of New York's elite?

RONNIE
I liked it, I don't really know what it was, but I liked it.

Felix chuckles as Gregor opens the car door for him. He slips inside the Cadillac.

SQUEAK (O.S.)
Psssst. Ronnie!

Ronnie looks down the street to see Squeak hiding behind a news stand. Ronnie tries to subtly shoo him away.

SQUEAK
Come the fuck over here!

Ronnie bends down to look at Felix inside the Cadillac.

RONNIE

Gimme a moment, will ya?

FELIX

Sure, but we've got a tight schedule here.

Ronnie gently closes the door and walks over to Squeak behind the news stand.

RONNIE

What do you want, Squeak?

SQUEAK

What do I want?! What the hell are you doing? Why are you dressed like that, who the hell is that guy?

RONNIE

It's a long story.

SQUEAK

Does that story start with the fucking sewers? You said you didn't find shit down there, now you're walking around like a fucking Rockefeller. What're you mixed up in?

RONNIE

Someone finally sees my true worth. He knows I'm more than some street trash. I've got potential.

SQUEAK

You've got a head full of loose screws, Ronnie. I don't know what the hell he wants with you, but it's not anything good. Don't you see how weird this shit is? One minute you're shooting skag in a flophouse, the next minute you're hopping in Cadillac's on fifth avenue in brand new suit and that stupid tie.

RONNIE

Whatever, man. They want to help me and you can't stand it. You're jealous.

SQUEAK

They don't help people, asshole. They just take.

That's all they've ever done to guys like you and me. So ask yourself, what the hell are they gonna take from a guy who's got nothing to take? I saw what was down in that sewer, Ronnie. This is a deal with the goddamn devil.

RONNIE

Well it's my deal to make, so piss off.

Ronnie turns away and walks off in a huff.

SQUEAK

Everyone watch out, big man walking! The king of fucking New York!

Ronnie opens the Cadillac door and catches a last glimpse of Squeak.

Squeak shakes his head, stuffs his hands in his pockets and sulks down the street. Ronnie climbs into the car.

INT. GREY CADILLAC - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie close the door behind him.

FELIX

Who was that?

RONNIE

A nobody.

Felix pours Ronnie a glass of wine and hands it to him.

FELIX

To the somebodies.

They clink glasses and drink.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ronnie leans back in a portable barber chair as the barber rubs shaving cream on his face and neck. His hair's shorter and slicked back. Ronnie watches nervously as the barber shaves his neck with a straight razor.

Felix flips through a magazine while laying back on a couch.

RONNIE

I've got a question.

FELIX

And I've got ears to listen.

RONNIE

When this is all over, what's it gonna be like?

FELIX

What's 'what' gonna be like?

RONNIE

The world, I guess. Me... you.
Everyone. What's it all gonna be like?

Felix lays down the magazine and rises from the couch. He walks behind the barber and whispers in his ear. The barber shoots him a confused glance.

FELIX

You heard what I said.

The barber shrugs and hands Felix the straight razor. He swiftly walks out of the room.

Felix holds the razor to Ronnie's neck and continues shaving him. Ronnie grows fearful.

FELIX

It'll be a simpler place to live.
No mess and confusion about who controls who and what this damned world exists for. Instead of humanity unleashing it's collective id through violence, our shared human mind will behold something greater. We will form a true body politic. A bright new future where he is in charge, like a caring father guiding his children to greatness.

RONNIE

And what about people like me?

FELIX

You'll be exalted, Ronnie. One of the chosen few at the heart of this revolution.

RONNIE

No, I mean people... like me.
Street people, junkies.

Felix stops shaving and ponders the questions.

FELIX

It's a great rain that's coming to
wash us all clean, and not everyone
is going to survive the flood.

Felix holds the razor against Ronnie's neck.

FELIX

Why're you so curious? Are we
getting cold feet, dearie?

Ronnie winces slightly at the blade against his skin.

RONNIE

No, I just wanted a preview of
what's to come.

FELIX

Well, you won't have to wait long.
Tomorrow's the big day.

Felix finishes the last bit of shaving on Ronnie's neck. He
grabs Ronnie by the shoulders.

FELIX

Then it'll be your time to shine.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ronnie sneaks through the second floor hallway.

FELIX (O.S.)

Hello Bunny, it's tomorrow night.
Yes, I'm serious.

Ronnie peeks around the corner to see Felix standing in the
study, a corded telephone in hand.

FELIX

No, we can't reschedule. The board
meeting will have to wait... yes, 6
PM. See you then.

Felix hangs up the phone and dials another number on the
rotary dial. It rings for a second.

FELIX

Crow, it's time. Tomorrow night...
yes, that's still the plan.
Nothing's changed.

Ronnie sneaks past the study as Felix continues on the phone.

Ronnie walks past the bedroom he had slept in, the door wide open. He looks inside and sees the eerie portrait of the noble duke on the wall.

An image of him and Mara having sex flashes into his mind for a brief second, that blurred night coming back to him.

He shakes off the flashback and closes the bedroom door.

He sneaks down the hallway to a door at the end. He presses his ear to it. Silence.

INT. MANSION STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie cracks open the door and peers inside. It's a storage room.

Furniture, paintings and racks of old clothes gather dust in the dim light. Much of it is covered in protective white sheets and canvas.

Ronnie rummages through the junk. He pulls off a sheet to reveal an empty wardrobe. He finds a music box on a desk and turns its crank. It plays back an out-of-tune lullaby. He picks through a rack of clothing that's just ornate robes bearing a family crest.

He spies a huge object on the back wall covered by a tarp. He squeezes through old furniture to reach it. He pulls off the tarp.

It's a giant sign that reads 'KOENIG TEXTILES INTERNATIONAL.'

One side of the sign is singed black from a fire.

Ronnie feels the sign in disbelief.

INT. SMALL KITCHEN - FLASHBACK - DAY

Ronnie, a small child of nine years old, sits at the kitchen table. He flips through a family photo album, examining each photo of his father as a young man.

He stops at a photo of his father standing in front of a brick building with a sign reading 'KOENIG TEXTILES INTERNATIONAL.'

Ronnie's mother, a haggard woman with a cigarette in her mouth and a glass of vodka in hand, walks up and looks over his shoulder.

RONNIE'S MOTHER

No use in looking at photos of your daddy, it won't bring him back. You didn't even fucking know him.

She puts out her cigarette on the photo.

INT. MANSION STORAGE ROOM - END FLASHBACK

Ronnie comes back to the present, still holding the tarp.

He steadies himself on the burnt sign as his eyes well up. He tries to hold back the tears, but Ronnie fails.

He falls to his knees and cries.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

One by one, limousines, Cadillacs and Rolls-Royces pull up in front of the mansion and drop off guests.

The men in tuxedos escort women in lavish dresses to the front door, all of them in animal masks and giddy with excitement. They all step out into the waiting night and stroll up to the looming mansion.

INT. MANSION BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Ronnie stares into the large mirror in the grand bathroom and straightens his bow tie. He's clean cut with slick hair in his immaculate tuxedo... but his eyes betray his anger.

Knock knock.

FELIX (O.S.)

Are you decent?

Ronnie inhales deeply.

RONNIE

Yeah.

Felix cracks open the bathroom door and grins ear to ear. His fox mask rests atop his head and he sports his white tux. He hides something behind his back.

FELIX

You clean clean up well, I must say. Quite dashing.

Felix walks around him, examining the new Ronnie, but Ronnie avoids eye-contact.

FELIX

As stellar as you look, it's missing something...

Felix pulls a mask from behind his back.

A RAT MASK. Crudely fashioned like the others, it's made of gray fur and bone. It has beady holes for eyes with buck teeth and ragged ears to match.

Felix extends it to him.

Ronnie examines it queasily.

FELIX

Go ahead, put it on.

RONNIE

I'm not so sure.

FELIX

You simply must wear it for the occasion. This is the most important night of our lives! If not for yourself, then for me.

Ronnie stares at its hollow eyes.

RONNIE

I don't think so.

Felix grits his teeth and leans in close to Ronnie.

FELIX

(whispering)

We've got a house full of New York City's most valuable people down there, and most of them want me to slit your throat. So it's your choice, I bring down you in the mask, or I bring down your head.

Felix thrusts the mask into Ronnie's chest. He reluctantly slides it over his face.

Felix pulls his own mask down. They both look into the mirror, only their mouths and eyes visible beneath the fur. Felix wraps his arm around Ronnie's shoulder like a proud father sending his son off to prom.

FELIX

Look at us, beasts of the night.
Shall we hunt?

RONNIE

I'm ready.

Felix claps him on the back and walks out. Ronnie clinches his fist so hard it turns white.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The couple dozen mask-wearing guests sit and stand around the dining room table. The giant Bosch painting looms behind them as they mutter in harsh tones to one another.

Felix struts to the head of the table and they all go quiet.

FELIX

Ladies and gentleman, we've spent
years of our lives trying to unlock
a door. Now let me present to
you... the key.

Ronnie walks around the corner, sheepish in his rat mask.

Everyone around the table stares daggers at him. Ronnie stands next to Felix, almost hiding behind him. Felix grabs him by the shoulders and pushes him ahead, presenting him to the guests like a favorite child.

Felix pulls out a chair at the head of the table and guides Ronnie to sit in it. Ronnie takes the seat at the center as the others look at him with disgust.

FELIX

I'm sure you all remember this
little scamp from a week ago when
he interrupted our fun. And I'm
sure many of you wish he was at the
bottom of the East River.

The man in the rabbit mask stands up.

RABBIT-MASK MAN

He should be rotting in the sewers!

CAT-MASK WOMAN

He's seen what we do, he's a danger to us all!

BIRD-MASK MAN

Why does this scum deserve to live after destroying our vessel and seeing my face?

The table grows rowdier and angrier. Felix steps forward and settles the guests with a silent gesture.

FELIX

Yes, this young man broke into my house, crushed our vessel in the midst of our procedure and proceeded to gnash and claw to get away. But we all witnessed something that night. Something beyond our explanation. Graciously, you have allowed me time to probe that mystery. And the answer to that riddle is why we've all gathered here tonight.

The guests murmur and look to each other. Felix puts his hands on Ronnie's shoulders.

FELIX

You see, when young Ronnie fell onto our vessel in the middle of our proclamation, he did more than crush the rats. He became a vessel himself. And while we were trying to summon forth... him... a bit of our desired guest seeped into our undesired guest.

Ronnie is shocked and confused by Felix's speech. He tries to turn around to look at Felix, but Felix holds him in place by the shoulders.

WOLF-MASK MAN

You're saying some of... him... is in this vagrant?

FELIX

More than some. This very boy may be the key to crowning our king.

The ultimate conduit to his power
and the only chance we have to
bring him into our world.

RABBIT-MASK MAN

Surely you must have some proof,
because otherwise I find this to be
pure speculation.

Felix leans down and whispers into Ronnie's ear.

FELIX

(whispering)
Lay forward on the table.

RONNIE

What?

FELIX

I said lay forward on the fucking
table.

Ronnie leans forward onto the table, arms stretched forward.

Felix grabs the back of his jacket and pulls it forward
revealing...

A patch of twitching gray fur and dark skin. It spreads out
in a spiral on his back, larger than before.

The crowd gasps at the symbol splayed across Ronnie.

RONNIE

What the hell are you looking at?

Ronnie tries to twist around to look at his back but Felix
holds down his head. The crowd gathers around his end of the
table and inspects Ronnie like an ancient relic.

RONNIE

What the fuck is going on?

RABBIT-MASK MAN

Good lord, it's a revelation!

CAT-MASK WOMAN

It's positively incredible, what
does it mean?

FELIX

Whatever aspect of him we summoned
that night is now growing inside
young Ronnie.

We've finally acquired the final piece of the Rat King.

BIRD-MASK MAN
How do you know he can be successfully grafted?

RONNIE
Grafted? What are you talking about?!

Felix pushes Ronnie harder into the table.

FELIX
That night, after he passed out and everyone left, I tested a hypothesis...

Felix tickles the spiral rat patch on Ronnie's back. Ronnie squirms at the uncomfortable feeling.

THUD. SWISH. CLUNK. Something big rustles around two floors above. Everyone stares up at the ceiling as something thrashes upstairs.

WOLF-MASK MAN
Dear god, they're connected.

RONNIE
Connected to fucking what!?

FELIX
Tonight's the night, ladies and gentleman! The godhead now has a head!

A few of them shake hands in congratulations, others hug and laugh. Several of them pat Felix on the back as a satisfied smile spreads across his face.

FELIX
Now now now... SILENCE!

Felix waves his arms and everyone stops their chatter. Ronnie woozily stands up from the table.

FELIX
This is a momentous occasion, so before the climax of our achievement, there's only one thing to do...

The guests stare at Felix in anticipation.

FELIX

Let's get good and drunk!

Everyone cheers. The polite aristocrats turn feral.

FELIX

Show our messiah a good time,
people!

Felix pushes Ronnie into the crowd. They hug him, kiss him on the cheek and rub his shoulders. Some of the women grab his thigh and whisper into his ear. He can't help but smile.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A champagne bottle pops its cork.

The foaming booze pours out into waiting glasses held by guests as Felix fills them to the brim.

We move through the party as the guests descend into bacchanalia. Drinking, groping, grinning, dancing. They lay on couches, stand on chairs and grapple onto each other laughing like hyenas after a kill.

Several of them form a crowd around Ronnie, pouring champagne into his glass and drunkenly petting him like a dog. His mask rests atop his head.

Ronnie smiles, but nervousness grows underneath it. Two men cling to him.

WOLF-MASK MAN

The great deliverer, our little rat
boy!

BEAR-MASK WOMAN

How's it feel to be the most
important man in the room?

RONNIE

Like I'm being eaten alive.

The crowd around him wails in laughter. They spill their drinks and cheerfully shake Ronnie.

A woman in a tiger mask saunters up to him.

MARA

It's been awhile, Ronnie.

RONNIE

Mara?

She grabs his hand and pulls him away from the groupies.

RONNIE

I didn't think I'd ever see you
again.

MARA

I knew I'd see you again because I
knew you were special.

She pulls Ronnie in close and they embrace each other. They slow dance to the old-fashioned waltz playing from the record player in the corner of the room.

Mara leans in to whisper in his ear, her expression and voice turning deadly serious.

MARA

You have to get the hell out of
here.

RONNIE

I don't even know what's going on
anymore.

MARA

You don't want to know, you just
need to fucking leave. Get out of
New York, never come back.

RONNIE

Why are you telling me this?

MARA

I thought all this shit was kooky
and fun, but it's gone way too far.
You're just a dumb kid, you
shouldn't be a part of this.

RONNIE

I'm not dumb, I'm just--

Mara kisses Ronnie on the lips. His eyes close in bliss.

She pulls away, her hand lingering on his jacket.

MARA

(mouthing words)
Get the hell out of here...

She turns around and fades into the crowd, leaving Ronnie with the cackling drunkards who surround him.

Felix slips through the guests and slides behind Ronnie. He pulls Ronnie's mask over his face.

FELIX

The fun has only begun, dear boy.

RONNIE

I need to talk to you... in private.

FELIX

What's the matter?

RONNIE

Can we just talk somewhere?

Felix grabs Ronnie by the arm and leads him away.

INT. MANSION KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The door swings open and Felix marches Ronnie inside the stainless steel kitchen. Ronnie sees the cheese grater on the counter and a shiver runs up his spine.

FELIX

Why are you dragging me away from your big moment?

Ronnie pulls off his mask and lets it hang from his neck.

RONNIE

Why is it my big moment? You called me the fucking messiah. Everyone out there's ready to jerk me off.

Felix pulls up his mask.

FELIX

Isn't that what you wanted? You were living on the street a week ago, now you're a prince.

RONNIE

A prince of what? I don't know what I've got myself into, I don't know what the hell is on my back, and I sure as hell don't know what your gang of freaks is going to do to me.

FELIX

We're the freaks? You came up from the sewers and crawled into my home like a fucking cockroach.

RONNIE

That's it, I'm done with this whole thing. I'm out of here.

Felix grabs Ronnie by the arm. Ronnie shrugs it away.

RONNIE

You said I could leave if it got too weird, well this is way too goddamn weird.

Ronnie tries to walk away again but Felix grabs him by his shirt and pulls him close.

FELIX

What changed? You were excited to start this brand new world with me, now you've got cold feet?

RONNIE

What's your last name?

FELIX

What?

RONNIE

What's your last fucking name?

FELIX

Koenig. So?

RONNIE

As in Koenig Textiles right? My father burned to death in your family's factory. The one that didn't have fucking fire escapes. I saw the sign in your back room, burnt to shit like my dad was.

Felix laughs in disbelief.

FELIX

That's it? That's why you're destroying the most important revolution this world has ever seen? Because my great grandfather didn't put up fire escapes?

RONNIE

You've been fucking me for generations.

FELIX

You're giving up all this for your daddy? A man you didn't know?

RONNIE

And who's fault is that?

FELIX

He was a worker bee, Ronnie. A peasant. You're about to be a king, what does it matter?

RONNIE

A peasant? Just a peasant to someone like you.

FELIX

This is how you repay me for saving your life? Your pointless, stupid little life?

Ronnie pushes Felix away.

RONNIE

Fuck you, and fuck your freak show.

Felix punches Ronnie in the face and he falls backward onto the floor. Felix kicks him in the side.

FELIX

You ungrateful little shit, I was going to give you the world!

RONNIE

I don't fucking want it!

Ronnie sweeps Felix's leg and he falls to the floor.

Ronnie stumbles to the other side of the kitchen. He pulls a long knife from a knife block.

He turns around to see Felix stand up and pull down his mask, fury in his eyes with a wicked smile.

Ronnie holds out his knife as Felix circles him like a beast on the prowl.

RONNIE

Stay the fuck away from me!

FELIX

Poor little rat boy had no daddy.
Tut tut tut. What a shame.

Ronnie walks backwards until he reaches the door, knife outstretched.

RONNIE

Don't you dare follow me.

FELIX

I won't need to, dearie, you're
about to enter the lion's den.

Ronnie backs through the door. It swings back and forth in front of him, giving glimpses of Felix cackling in his mask.

INT. MANSION DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Knife still pointed forward, Ronnie backs into the dining room. He bumps into the table behind him.

He turns around to see several guests pull the Bosch painting off the wall. They lay it on the table and pour their drinks all over it. One of them smashes a bottle and slashes at the painting with the sharp glass.

A man in a pig-mask takes his lit cigar and puts it out in the hell-mouth in the painting, burning a big hole.

They look up to see Ronnie standing there with a knife and mask hanging down.

PIG-MASK MAN

Open wide!

Two of the guests grab onto Ronnie but he swipes them off and runs away.

INT. MANSION FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie runs into the foyer toward the huge front doors exiting the mansion, but stops dead in his tracks.

A man in a monkey mask hangs from the chandelier, completely nude. He swings around making ape noises while several other guests stand below, throwing bottles at him.

RONNIE

Jesus Christ.

They turn to see Ronnie's mask-less face.

DOG-MASK WOMAN
He's not wearing his mask!

MONKEY-MASK MAN
(still hanging)
Put your fucking mask on!

Ronnie runs toward the door but the guests block his path. The monkey-mask man jumps down from the chandelier and chases him.

INT. MANSION STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie runs up the spiral staircase, the naked monkey-mask man and several others in pursuit behind him.

He stumbles and falls down, but quickly turns around and kicks the monkey-mask man in the chest. This knocks the man back into the others who all fall like bowling pins down the stairs.

Ronnie clamors to his feet and sprints upward.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Panting and wide-eyed, Ronnie runs into the hallway. He looks down the length of it but it seems much longer than before.

Shouting rings out from the stairs behind him. This snaps Ronnie out of his befuddlement. He sprints to the nearest door and opens it.

INT. MANSION BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie swings open the door to see an eagle-masked woman kneeling next to a bathtub. Dozens of empty champagne bottles lay on the floor.

Inside the tub she holds down the head of a fully clothed man wearing a fish-mask. She's drowning him in a bath of champagne.

Bubbles pour out of his mouth while she holds his head under the fizzy amber liquid. Then she pulls him up to breathe.

FISH-MASK MAN
More! MORE!

She dunks him again with a wicked grin. Ronnie slowly closes the door.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie looks down the hallway, which now seems even longer than before.

He jogs down it, passing a few guests painting red spirals on the walls and floors with their bare hands. They don't notice him jogging by, they only mutter German to themselves as they compulsively draw the fractal patterns.

Ronnie turns to look back from where he came. A crowd of guests form at the other end of the hall, including the monkey-mask naked man and the pig-mask man. They see Ronnie from afar and run towards him.

Behind them all, Felix stands with his arms crossed.

Ronnie panics and bursts through the nearest door.

INT. MANSION BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie runs through a bedroom but slows down when he sees Gregor laying on the bed. He's stripped down to his underwear, tied up like a hog with an apple in his mouth and terror in his eyes.

Two of the guests in hyena-masks laugh as one of them lights a blowtorch.

Gregor makes eye-contact with Ronnie, pleading for help, but Ronnie sprints to the door on the other side of the bedroom.

INT. NEW HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie jolts out into a new hallway he's never seen before. It's completely empty and quiet. He stops for a second.

RONNIE

Where the hell am I?

He sneaks down the hallway. Along the walls hang several portraits of the Koenig noble family. Ronnie examines them as he walks toward a stairway at the end of the hall

They start off normal, including a portrait of the same nobleman from his bedroom.

But as he walks further down the hall, they grow more grotesque. Distorted faces, screaming children, noble women crying blood.

Ronnie stops to inspect the final portrait.

It's a painting of Felix, standing proud in his white tuxedo and holding his fox mask at his chest. Over his shoulder is a shadowy figure with a long rat tail.

SHOUTING. Ronnie hears yelling and commotion from down the hall where he started. He quickly sneaks up the stairway ahead of him.

The stairway grows darker the further he walks up it. At the end is a single door with light shining through the cracks.

INT. BIG OPEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie slowly opens the door and looks inside.

It's a huge, empty room. Intricate wallpaper and sconces with lit candles hang upon the walls. The floor is alternating black and white tile.

In the middle of the floor rests another large red spiral.

On the far end sit huge double doors.

Ronnie creeps through the silent, vacuous room. He stands upon the spiral and looks down at it's intricate fractal pattern.

He walks to the double doors at the end. Ronnie presses his ear to the door.

He hears the faint sounds of shuffling and movement on the other side. He grabs one of the doorknobs and wriggles it.

Locked.

Ronnie reaches into his breast pocket and pulls out a key. He looks at it with a clever smile.

Ronnie unlocks the doors and pushes them open. They CREEEAK as they swing.

Darkness awaits on the other side. Ronnie stares into the pitch black but sees nothing. He slides the key into his pocket.

He walks to the threshold of the doorway leading to the darkness, candle in hand and knife in the other.

RONNIE

All the way to the edge.

He walks into the abyss.

INT. DARK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie treads through the dark room. The flickering candle lights his uneasy face.

He wanders further and further.

CLANG. He runs into a table. A candelabra tips back and forth, ready to fall, but Ronnie catches it. He lights the candles.

Before him on the table is a spread of rotten food. Teacakes, roast chicken, vegetables and bread spoiling in shades of moldy blue and green. Flies swarm around it all.

RONNIE

What the hell?

Ronnie holds his nose. He turns around to see the doors he entered are now just a dim light from far away.

He walks around the table and further into the darkness, only the black and white tile visible ahead.

We hear something in the abyss. Slight movement against tile, light breathing.

RONNIE

Hello? Is anyone there?

The movement in the dark stops. Silence. Ronnie peers out into the encroaching black.

TRIXIE (O.S.)

(weakly)

Who... who's out there?

Ronnie perks up. He recognizes the voice.

RONNIE

Trixie, is that you?

TRIXIE (O.S.)

Ronnie? Is Ronnie here?

We hear the slight sound of sobbing. Ronnie walks toward it.

RONNIE

Trixie, where the hell are you?
How'd you get here?

SQUEUAK (O.S.)

Ronnie's here? Ronnie, is that you?

Ronnie stops dead in his tracks.

RONNIE
Squeak? You're here, too?

Ronnie sneaks forward. He looks down at the tile ahead, dimly lit by the candles. The tip of a dirty foot sticks out from the darkness.

RONNIE
Hello?

The foot pulls back into the black. Ronnie reels back himself, frightened.

RONNIE
Why are you guys... who, who else
is in here?

SQUEAK (O.S.)
Help us, Ronnie...

TRIXIE (O.S.)
Help us...

RONNIE
Stay where you are, I'm coming!

Several more voices ring out, male and female, all of them weak and pitiful, all of them saying 'HELP US.'

Ronnie creeps further into the darkness ahead, the voices growing louder as Ronnie looks for the source.

TRIXIE
Right here, Ronnie...

Ronnie stops and turns to his left. He holds his lit candle forward to see into the dark. He inches forward, revealing everything ahead with dim light.

We see a pair of dirty feet. Then a pair of hands. Then more feet, and more hands. Then a head. Then more heads. Trixie's head. Squeak's head. Dale's head. All of their bodies, heads, feet, hands and genitals fused into one giant mass. Over a dozen people molded together into a horrific, squirming blob of flesh and faces. A HUMAN RAT KING.

All of the heads turn to look at Ronnie. Their hair is messy, their faces are dirty and all have terror in their eyes as their heads protrude from their collective body.

Ronnie stares at the abomination in shock as tears fill his eyes and his hands tremble.

Squeak's head turns to look at Ronnie as fingers and flesh wriggle around him. His eyes are blank and unfocused.

SQUEAK

Where are we? What am I?

Trixie's head also turns to look at Ronnie.

TRIXIE

*Help us, Ronnie, we don't know
what's going on...*

DALE

Help us... help us...

RONNIE

I don't... I... I...

A hand lurches forward on the tile, then a foot. Then more hands. They claw at the floor and pull the huge flesh clump of people toward Ronnie.

VARIOUS VOICES

*Help us... please help us,
Ronnie... help us...*

Ronnie backs away as the monstrosity crawls toward him. Their skin squeaks against the tile as their heads bobble and limbs clumsily reach forward.

Tears roll down Trixie's cheeks.

TRIXIE

*Please, Ronnie... I'm so sorry...
please help me...*

Ronnie panics and turns around to run but he slams into the table instead. Rotten food falls to the floor as Ronnie collapses to the ground. His knife falls from his hand and slides across the tile into the darkness.

He turns around to see the clump of heads, flesh and limbs crawling closer and closer. The loose limbs not clawing onto the tile fidget and seize erratically. The heads struggle to hold themselves up.

They moan and sob and wail like a choir of the damned as the abomination crawls closer. A few of the hands grab his shoes.

Ronnie kicks himself free from their grasp and scoots backward along the tile toward the door.

SQUEAK

Damn you, help us!

Pain overtakes Ronnie. He grits his teeth as he clutches onto his back.

The monstrosity stops moving and its the limbs go limp. All of the heads tip back in unison and their eyes turn black.

Ronnie gets a grip on the pain and turns to see all the heads moaning a single note in unison as their black eyes stare upward.

RONNIE

What the fuck....

All the heads turn down to look at Ronnie. They all speak in unison, forming together into one voice.

THE RAT KING HIMSELF.

THE RAT KING

You are the one, Ronnie. The one I need to become whole.

RONNIE

Who the fuck are you!?

THE RAT KING

You know who we are. You met us in the mirror. I am us, and we are you. You've been alone for so long. Now you will never be alone. You've never had power. Now you will have it all.

RONNIE

Whatever you've got to give me, I don't fucking want it.

THE RAT KING

We need a true head, one to hold the crown. Your head. Join us. Join me. Be me.

Trixie's head turns independently from the rest. Her voice is soft and inviting but her eyes are still black.

TRIXIE

Join us, Ronnie. It's perfect here. Just perfect.

Squeak's head turns toward Ronnie as well.

SQUEAK

*We wanted our lives to mean
something. Now they do. Now they
matter more than ever.*

The voices join in unison again as the abomination crawls toward Ronnie.

THE RAT KING

*Join us, Ronnie. Join us. Join us.
Join us...*

Ronnie scrambles to his feet and sprints toward the doors. He looks over his shoulder to see the human rat king jerkily pulling itself forward. Their black eyes turn furious as they screech in frustration as Ronnie escapes.

INT. BIG OPEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie stumbles through open doors, whips around and slams them shut.

He leans onto the doors to catch his breath.

FELIX (O.S.)

So you've met your destiny.

Ronnie turns around to see Felix and the entire cult standing on the opposite side of the room.

Most of them sway around drunkenly. They all stare at Ronnie in either anger or wicked anticipation.

Ronnie runs and tries to evade the crowd, but they quickly block his path and overwhelm him. The bird-mask man and a sheep-mask man grab him by the arms.

He kicks and squirms to get away but they drag him into the middle of the spiral.

RONNIE

You're all vile! You're monsters
for what you've done!

FELIX

We are liberators of the flesh,
dear boy. Bring the chair!

The man in the pig-mask drags a chair across the tile toward the spiral. It squeaks until he turns it around and plops it in the center of the design. The two men holding Ronnie force him down into the chair.

The key falls from Ronnie's pocket onto the floor.

RONNIE

You're sick, you're insane! Those
are my fucking friends in there!

Ronnie turns red in anger and holds back tears.

FELIX

And you led us right to them. I
knew you weren't the only one in
the sewers that night. I knew
others were aware of my special
little room below. That dank sewer
is where our magnificent creation
was born out of the bums and human
garbage of this city. On their own,
they were meaningless, wasted
lives. But together, they're
something beautiful. And my my my,
how it has grown with each rat
we've added to it.

Ronnie cries and yanks at his captors who tie his hands
behind his back with rope.

The crowd of masked guests circle around him and laugh at his
futile attempts to escape.

RONNIE

I'll kill you! I'll fucking kill
you all!

They chuckle louder and Felix cracks a smile. He walks a
around Ronnie.

FELIX

Once you join your friends in
there, our king will take root in
this world. What those stupid
monks couldn't understand was that
he could never be contained in mere
rats. He required a true collective
mind, and there's no mind of
greater depth than man's. And those
minds come with heaps of flesh,
ready to be molded.

Felix holds up Ronnie's head by his hair so he can look him
in the eyes.

FELIX

And your mind will be the crown
jewel he needs. Thank you, Ronnie.

Soon you and them and him will be one. Then all this world can be one. Perfect harmony.

Felix lets go of his hair and Ronnie hangs his head in shame.

FELIX

And now... a drink to get us started.

One of the guests wheels forward a cart complete with champagne glasses and a punch bowl full of red liquid.

Ronnie looks over to see the man in the bird-mask ladling out the liquid into glasses and passing them around. Everyone grabs a glass and forms a circle around Ronnie.

Felix raises his glass into the air.

FELIX

Tonight, we free our minds so that he may fill them. To the new world!

The guests raise their glasses and cheer.

CULT IN UNISON

To the new world!

They clink their glasses together and all of them gulp down the red liquid. Felix finishes his drink with relish.

He throws the glass on the ground and it shatters. The others toss their glasses into the wall and into corners, shattering glass around the room.

Ronnie, head down and messy hair covering his face, sobs softly. Felix puts his hand on his shoulder.

FELIX

No need to fret, dearie. You'll be with him soon.

Felix looks to the double doors caging the abomination.

FELIX

Wait... how did you get in there?

A glint on the floor catches Felix's eye.

The key. He kneels down and picks it up.

FELIX

This... this is my key. My master key.

He looks to Ronnie, who he can now see is not actually sobbing... but laughing softly.

Guests around the room start to act strangely. They rub their temples and grind their teeth. They pace around uneasily.

Felix rushes over to Ronnie and pulls his head up by his hair.

FELIX

How'd you get this? Why do you have this?

RONNIE

You learn a lot of things on the street. Like pick-pocketing. You let me see your drug stash and where you kept your key. Not a smart thing to do around a junkie.

Felix looks around at his guests as they act erratically. They moan slightly, blink too much and seem lost.

FELIX

What the hell have you done!?

RONNIE

Well... I waited till you made your little drug cocktail and then I decided to spruce it up.

FELIX

With what? What did you add!?

RONNIE

Enough acid to make a whale trip, and some of your fancy designer drug... what was it?

FELIX

Verinvina?

RONNIE

Yeah, that.

FELIX

How much did you add?

Ronnie chuckles.

RONNIE

All of it.

Felix's eyes go wide in terror. He backs away from Ronnie and looks around at the guests as the room descends into chaos.

FELIX
Jesus fucking Christ...

RONNIE
He's not gonna help you.

Some of the guests throw up, others hyperventilate and gasp for air. One of them laughs hysterically and another dances a nervy jig.

Felix watches as his guests lose their minds one by one.

He starts to lose his own faculties and wobbles around the room, trying to get a hold of himself. Sweat pools on his brow.

FELIX
No no no no no....

He clutches onto others to hold himself up, but they're barely standing themselves. He slips and falls to his knees and stares at his hands.

FELIX
Is he here? Where is he? Is he within us?

RONNIE (O.S.)
He is us. And I am him...

Felix looks up to see Ronnie still tied to the chair.

RONNIE
You've sought me in the darkest corners, you've prayed to me in your desperate hours.

Ronnie holds his head up confidently as the tripping guests turn their attention to him. Felix struggles to stand up.

RONNIE
You wanted power. You had more than you could handle, yet you wanted more. You wanted supreme control of other's lives, too.

The cult gathers around him like moths to a light. Ronnie grows louder.

RONNIE

Well I can gift that to you, my
believers. For the dark one you've
sought is me! You've brought me
into this world, and I will deliver
unto you all. Free me, my flock!
Cut me loose!

In a haze, the bird-mask man grabs a broken champagne stem
from the floor and uses its sharp edge to cut the rope
binding Ronnie.

Ronnie jumps up from the chair and holds his hands to the
sky. The crowd gasps.

He pulls his rat mask over his face.

RONNIE

Hark! The herald demon sings.
Kneel, I command you, kneel!

The cultists clamor to kneel before Ronnie, clumsily falling
to their knees and groveling before him.

Felix remains standing, confused and tripping as he watches
his cult slip from his grasp.

RONNIE

Scream! Scream for me!

They all shriek like banshees at his command. A wicked smile
grows on Ronnie's face.

RONNIE

Dance for your master! Dance for
the dark christening!

They hop to their feet and dance like they're possessed. They
jerk and twirl around.

Felix wades through the crowd, desperate to stop them, but
too fucked up to express himself.

FELIX

Stop! It's not him! He's... he's
just a rat! A rat man!

Ronnie points to Felix.

RONNIE

Seize him!

Two guests grab Felix by his arms and hold him in place.

Ronnie stands on the chair in the middle of the spiral as the crowd gives him their rapt attention.

His eyes turn black as he belts at the top of his lungs.

RONNIE

Bow down before the king of rats,
the emperor of the abyss! I cloak
myself in night and soar through
secret worlds. I extinguish the
suns and collect its meager
creatures in my razor maw. All will
become me and I will devour all, a
rat feeding on its own tail until
time falls down and space stops
cold. Behold my black splendor and
rejoice!

The crowd devolves into a frenzy. The cultists yelp and hoot during his speech. They scream and cry and laugh wildly.

RONNIE

Silence!

The crowd goes dead silent, enraptured by their god.

RONNIE

If you love your king, tear each
other apart.

The guests look to one another, befuddled by the command. They murmur loopily.

RONNIE

I SAID TEAR EACH OTHER APART!

The bird-mask man screams and lunges at the pig-mask man. He grabs him by the sides of his head and drives his thumbs into his eyes. The pig-mask man screams in pain mixed with maniacal laughing.

This brutality drives those on the fence into action. The room erupts into an uncontrollable frenzy as everyone scratches, bites, rips and stomps one another like feral beasts.

Their tuxedos and dresses get splattered in blood as they rip the corners of each other's mouths and pull out their hair.

Felix watches his cult descend into a blood bath in total agony. Ronnie watches with delight.

Felix sees Ronnie smile and barges through the crowd.

FELIX

You upstart little pissant!

A guest punches Felix in the gut and he doubles over. Another kicks him in the ribs and he falls into the fetal position, clutching his side.

He looks up to see Ronnie, eyes black and face obscured by the rat mask, standing above him with a smile.

FELIX

You've taken everything from me! I have nothing!

RONNIE

Welcome to the club.

Ronnie grabs him by his ankle and drags him through the ongoing riot to the double doors.

He flings Felix toward the doors and he slams into them .

RONNIE

I can sense your little science experiment in there, we have a connection.

FELIX

It's precious, leave it be!

BAM. Something slams on the double doors from the other side. Felix panics at the sound and crawls away from the door.

RONNIE

Your precious abomination is hungry, Felix. I can feel it in my gut.

BAM. It slams the door again.

RONNIE

Like a stupid little rich boy who's in over his head, you forgot to feed it. It's only had rotten garbage for weeks.

BAM. Felix struggles to stand up, scrambling to get away from the banging door.

RONNIE

Like you said, you're either the mouth, or you're the one being swallowed.

BAM! The doors fling open. Felix runs from the doors, but Ronnie kicks him in the chest, pushing him straight into the dark room.

From the black, hands and feet and teeth latch onto Felix and drag him screaming into the darkness.

The last we see of Felix is Dale's teeth sinking into his neck and ripping off a chunk of flesh. He disappears into the abyss while he wails in fear.

We hear the sounds of bones crunching and viscera splattering in the darkness.

Ronnie's eyes turn back to normal as he shakes off his fury. He pulls the rat mask off his face and turns around to see the aftermath.

Most of the guests are dead or writhing in pain on the floor. Two of them continue to fight weakly in total exhaustion. A hyena-mask man dances and cackles through the sea of bodies.

INT. MANSION KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie flicks on a gas burner on the stainless steel stove-top, starting a hissing flame.

He holds the ancient rat king tome to the stove. It smolders, sings black and catches fire.

INT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie holds the burning book up to a set of curtains and sets them ablaze.

He walks around the living room and sets the couch, a book-case and more curtains on fire.

He spies the original rat king under glass. He tosses the glass dome onto the floor, shattering it. He grabs the mass of rats and throws it onto the burning couch.

The clump of fur, eyes and tails burns black.

INT. WINE CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ronnie swings open the latch leading to the sewer below. He grabs the hook and rope nearby and attaches it to the edge of the latch.

He looks around at all the wine about to be destroyed. He grabs a bottle.

INT. SEWER TUNNELS - LATER

Ronnie trudges through the long tunnel he originally came through with Squeak. His tuxedo is disheveled and the rat mask hangs under his neck.

He lights the way with a flashlight as he drinks from the open bottle of wine in his other hand.

SLOSH, SLOSH, SLOSH. He hears footsteps ahead. He stops.

From the darkness, a figure steps into the light.

It's Ronnie, or at least it looks like Ronnie. It's eyes are pure black and it's completely naked.

Ronnie stares in morbid fascination as it walks past him without even looking in his direction.

He watches the doppelgänger walk into the dark from where he came. As it disappears, Ronnie catches a glimpse of a big rat tail swinging behind it.

EXT. EMPTY CITY STREET - LATER

A manhole cover lifts up and slides forward, the same one Ronnie and Squeak pried open.

Ronnie climbs through the sewer hole and into the street, wine bottle still in hand. He stands up and dusts himself off.

He looks to the skyline ahead as smoke billows and sirens wail in the distance.

He smiles and tosses the empty wine bottle.

EXT. STOOP - NIGHT

Ronnie walks down the street with his hands in his pockets. His tuxedo jacket hangs over his shoulder and his mask still hangs below his neck.

He passes a drug dealer sitting on a stoop, the same one from the beginning. He doesn't even recognize Ronnie as he passes.

Ronnie walks past him, his brow furrowing and eyes growing contemplative as the urge rises within him.

He shakes it off and keeps walking.

Ronnie stops. He thinks for a moment. He grows antsy, the itch to shoot up taking over his thoughts.

RONNIE

Fuck it.

Ronnie turns around and walks back to the drug dealer.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAWN

A rat scurries through a gutter and jumps up the curb.

Two sets of black shoes stop in front of the rat which runs away into the alley.

We pull up to see two cops stopped dead in their tracks. One of them is the cop from earlier.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Jesus Christ, it's never-ending with those things.

POLICE OFFICER 2

As long as there's people, there's gonna be rats.

They walk down the sidewalk past a news-stand. We see a newspaper headline in big, bold letters:

"MONEY TO BURN: MANSION FIRE KILLS DOZENS."

They stroll past an alley as the rat scurries down it. Their eyes are drawn to a pair of shoes sticking out from behind a dumpster. The first cop nudges the second.

POLICE OFFICER 1

You see that?

The second cop nods and they walk cautiously into the alley.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The two cops walk around the dumpster and see the source of the two black shoes.

Ronnie. Dead.

He's sitting against the wall next to the dumpster, a belt around his arm and a needle stuck in his vein. He's still wearing his tuxedo, except for his jacket laying next to him.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Good lord.

The first cop kneels down to look into Ronnie's lifeless eyes. His skin is pale blue and he has a slight smile.

The cop reaches out and feels for a pulse on Ronnie's neck.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Dead as a doornail.

He stands up and sighs. The second cop averts his eyes.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Goddamn, that's the third junkie this week. Probably hadn't shot up in awhile, didn't know when enough was enough.

POLICE OFFICER 2

He's wearing a tuxedo.

POLICE OFFICER 1

You wouldn't believe what the rich assholes in this city get up to.

POLICE OFFICER 2

I'll call it in.

The second cop jogs down the alley while the first takes another look at Ronnie, irked by his slight smile. He sees something grey and furry under Ronnie's arm.

He kneels again and moves the corpse's arm to reveal the rat mask sitting on the pavement.

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

Two paramedics hoist Ronnie into a body bag atop a stretcher. They cross his arms over his chest.

We get one final look at his lifeless face. One of the paramedics lays the rat mask over his chest like he's a pharaoh with his most prized possession. He zips up the bag.

They wheel the stretcher to an ambulance parked in the street. The two cops stand on the sidewalk and watch.

The bag starts to twitch and wriggle and shake. The first cop spies the bizarre movement.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Wait!

They all turn to notice the twitching bag, shock on their faces. They rush to the stretcher.

The first cop reaches it first and unzips the bag. ZIIIIIIIP.

RATS. Hundreds of rats pour out of the body bag. They crawl down the stretcher and scurry up the arms of the cops and paramedics. Everyone shrieks, swatting the rats off themselves.

The army of rats pour onto the sidewalk and gather together like a hive of bees. They scuttle down the street to a manhole cover and slide it open. They climb down into the sewer below.

The paramedics and cops watch in horror as the rats descend out of view into the dark depths of the city.

The cop pulls open the body bag, revealing nothing left inside... except an empty tuxedo and a rat mask.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.