

CINEPHOBIA

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Only darkness. The hum of a vending machine. Static crackles from the only television in the room.

SUPER: "October 20th, 1986"

CONNOR BATEMAN, 37, handsome but disheveled, a successful producer, keeps his lifeless, mesmerized gaze on the TV.

He lifts a gas can by his chair. Pours the entirety of the container ON HIMSELF.

Slowly gets up and pulls a lighter from his pocket. Leaves the room in a trance.

INT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - STUDIO FLOOR - NIGHT

Bright headlights buzz overhead. Shine on an elaborate stage built for a talk show.

Technicians operate huge cameras pointed at the set. Interns and other crew members mill about.

The studio audience fills hundreds of plush seats. Wait eagerly for the commercial break to end.

OSCAR HUGHES, 35, a charming British talk show host with swept-back blonde hair and a toothy grin, whispers to the guest closest to him.

Energetic music cranks louder. Oscar sits back. Straightens himself in the chair. Turns to flash a smile at the camera.

OSCAR

Welcome back to the Hughes Tonight Show. My next guest is a distinguished media studies and general psychology professor from Yale University, whose newest book, *Eyes Wide Open*, releases this fall. In it, he warns of the dangers made possible by the rise of technology in our society. Please welcome, Dr. Liam Moore!

LIAM MOORE, 58, robust, beginning to show his age with gray hairs on his rigid chin, sits up. His wrinkled eyes are brimming with fear.

LIAM

Thank you for having me.

OSCAR

Professor, I read the book over the weekend -- have to say, there's some intriguing ideas. But don't you think some of it's just a *little* out there?

LIAM

My observations can be somewhat alarming to the uninformed.

OSCAR

Some of what you're suggesting sounds like science fiction.

LIAM

It's important to understand that as technology advances, the human race stagnates in its natural evolution. The experiences we share at an unconscious level with these machines will form a basis for how they view us.

OSCAR

You're making it sound like my television's alive.

The audience laughs.

LIAM

Think of everything as a computer. The human mind absorbs the information around us and applies this in our everyday lives. So too, does the technology we use.

OSCAR

You've also suggested that technology will eventually overtake humanity in the book.

LIAM

Morality means little in nature. Humanity is the dominant species on this planet, but eventually, we will become dominated. The line between humans and machines is becoming blurred.

Oscar leans across the desk.

OSCAR

Are you expecting us to believe that our dishwashers will unplug themselves and revolt?

LIAM

It's a mistake to suggest that I am saying common appliances possess the same intelligence as a computer. I speak of a subtle evolution, an uprising not brought by bullets.

Oscar looks to the audience with a funny expression. Breaks the tense silence.

OSCAR

What about television? Do you think it's rotting our brains? What about those gory slasher films released in theaters?

LIAM

Not so much corruption. But I do believe our society has created programs expressing latent desires. A collective of thoughts humans pretend they don't engage in. From an outside perspective, these might appear barbaric.

INT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - BROADCAST CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

TV monitors cover the wall. Different shows play on each screen. Lights flash on the main control panel.

The BROADCAST TECHNICIAN raises a lever to turn up the audio. Focuses on the monitor displaying the talk show.

BROADCAST TECHNICIAN

What the hell?

Across his screen, Connor makes his way to the stage. The Broadcast Technician rolls his chair over to another desk.

Picks up a telephone and dials upper management.

BROADCAST TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)

There's a situation on stage two.

INT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - STUDIO FLOOR - NIGHT

Connor walks by confused technicians. Shoves aside a female intern. Gasoline drips from his gray suit.

He marches in front of the cameras. Audience members whisper and gasp. Point at him as he shambles onto the stage.

Oscar stops mid-conversation. Finally notices Connor as he comes to an abrupt stop.

OSCAR

Ladies and gentlemen, I think one
of our producers had a little too
much to drink.

The audience releases an uncomfortable chuckle. Oscar looks at the technicians backstage for answers.

Connor holds up his zippo lighter. He flicks the flint wheel until a flame sparks.

CONNOR

All hail... The Overlord.

DROPS THE LIGHTER.

Flames shoot up and envelop Connor. Consumes his entire body and spreads across the studio.

The roar of the dancing flames muffle the terrified screams of the audience members.

Connor doesn't MAKE A SINGLE NOISE.

Other crewmembers and security guards escort Oscar and Liam off the stage.

His body collapses. Technicians rush to the fire hauling extinguishers. Snuff the flames across Connor's body.

Sprinklers above the stage kick on as black smoke fills the studio. Douses the remaining fire.

Connor's charred body twitches.

INT. SEATTLE CHRONICLE - EDITORIAL OFFICES - DAY

The chaos of a major news publication. Phones ring off the hook. Keyboards clack. Men and women reporters hustle pass drab cubicles.

SUPER: "October 13th, 1995"

RHETT ELLISON, 32, moderately attractive, an experienced news editor, looks up from his desk. Smacks a television to stabilize the image.

Sips on fresh coffee with a bored expression. Let's slip a drawn-out sigh and types at his computer.

JASMINE HALL, 26, a petite African-American woman with sparkling eyes, approaches Rhett's desk.

Sneaks up behind Rhett. Taps his shoulder. He cranes his neck back and looks up at Jasmine.

RHETT

Told you not to sneak up on me.

JASMINE

Never hurts to try.

RHETT

Yeah, it's so hilarious.

JASMINE

Don't act like you're not happy to see me.

Rhett swivels in his chair to face her.

RHETT

How could I not be? You're always a ray of sunshine in my life.

JASMINE

What's got you down?

Jasmine takes a seat next to him.

RHETT

If I have to edit another fluff piece, I'll kill myself.

JASMINE

Someone's gotta do the dirty work.

RHETT

Come down to talk my ear off, or you need something?

JASMINE

I'm sure you would love the attention, but no. Chief asked for ya. Wouldn't say why.

RHETT

Shit. Still haven't edited that piece on the governor.

JASMINE

You worry too much.

Rhett stands up from his desk. Chugs the rest of his coffee and leaves Jasmine.

INT. SEATTLE CHRONICLE - MEETING ROOM - DAY

A long, polished wooden table surrounded by lavish seats reserved for meetings.

Rhett enters. Nervously takes a seat at the table.

GRISHAM STEWART, 42, bureau chief for the paper, sits at the front of the table with an intimidating glare. Taps his fingers impatiently.

GRISHAM

Do you enjoy your work here, Rhett?

RHETT

Nothing I don't mind.

GRISHAM

You don't *mind* staring at your computer for hours on end editing an article about the city council's latest proposal?

RHETT

The job can be tedious, sir.

GRISHAM

I'll cut the bullshit, kid. I've heard you're raring to do some beat reporting. Jasmine showed me some of your work, and you got some talent, so I'm gonna give ya a chance. What do you know about Connor Bateman?

RHETT

The producer that killed himself?

GRISHAM

Chronicle's wanting to put together a piece.

RHETT
Why come to me?

GRISHAM
I'll be honest -- we're swamped.
All my other reporters are busy.
Figured I'd give you a chance.

RHETT
This is what I've always wanted to
do. I can handle it.

Grisham smirks.

GRISHAM
Exactly the kind of ambition we're
looking for.

RHETT
The studio where it happened, how
long did he work there?

GRISHAM
Started at Timberland in 81. Had
some experience in Hollywood making
TV shows. I'd probably start there,
but I'll warn you, they haven't
been forthcoming. The execs act
like it never happened.

RHETT
How soon do you need the report?

GRISHAM
Preferably before Halloween. I know
it's not a lot of time, but if you
can prove yourself, there'll be a
much cushier position waiting for
you when you're done.

Brief silence.

RHETT
I saw it on TV. Remember watching
it with my parents...

GRISHAM
Sometimes the things people do
can't be explained.

Grisham gets up from his end of the table. Gives Rhett a firm
handshake and opens the door.

EXT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

Tucked away in a shopping center. Family-owned. Movie posters don the glass windows.

Crowds walk in and out holding umbrellas as thunder erupts overhead. When the main entrance opens, a soft bell chimes.

The front of the store reads: "Carpenter Film House"

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

An organized maze of display cases filled with VHS tapes categorized by genre. Baskets packed with theater snacks.

Film posters hang on the walls. Cardboard Standees greet customers at the entrance.

Teenagers laugh as they peruse the horror section.

Rhett enters the store. Approaches the checkout counter with Halloween decorations.

FRANK ZIMMERMAN, 24, suave and model-like, a self-proclaimed ladies man, winks at a cute girl as she lies a stack of tapes in front of him.

Rhett rolls his eyes and waits for him to finish.

RHETT

Never stop, do you?

FRANK

And not drive you crazy? Should lighten up.

RHETT

Lucky I'm in a good mood.

FRANK

What's the occasion?

RHETT

Got offered to do a story. The name Connor Bateman familiar?

Frank stops what he's doing.

FRANK

Fuck, you kidding? Remember when me and my dad were watching.

RHETT

They finally gave me an assignment.
Want me to do a piece on the
anniversary of Bateman's death.

FRANK

I thought it had something to do
with money laundering or whatever?
That he went crazy and decided to
kill himself?

RHETT

Only rumors. The chronicle wants me
to visit the studio and see what I
can find.

FRANK

Shit.

RHETT

Do you still have access to the
film department?

Frank leans over the counter and whispers.

FRANK

Need some equipment? I could
probably get you in.

RHETT

But...?

FRANK

Our rewind machine's broken.

RHETT

Again? How do you always manage to
break it?

FRANK

Not my fault the damn thing jams. I
got delicate hands.

Rhett sighs and reluctantly follows Frank behind the counter
and into the backroom.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - BACKROOM - DAY

Cluttered and messy. Stacks of VHS films on cheap plastic
tables. Rewind machines plugged into the wall.

Rhett squeezes inside with Frank. Stumbles upon the broken
machine and opens it up.

He tinkers with the mechanism inside. Pulls free the jammed reels. Straightens them.

Takes a VHS tape from the return bin. Places it inside. The tape whirs.

RHETT
You're welcome.

FRANK
Those skills finally coming in handy, huh?

RHETT
Not really hard. But any good reporter should have experience in film editing.

FRANK
Right, right. How things with Jasmine going?

RHETT
Not really interested in dating a co-worker.

FRANK
Don't be so dull. Need to get out there, man. Tiffany's not coming back anytime soon.

Rhett ignores him and heads for the door. Stops before he turns the knob.

RHETT
Don't have time for a relationship. I'm finally being given a chance.

FRANK
It's that important to you?

RHETT
Anything's better than being stuck at the bottom of the ladder.

FRANK
Just chat with her. Obviously finds you interesting enough to wander to your desk every day.

RHETT
I'll think about it.

FRANK

Meet me on campus around noon tomorrow. I can get you in.

RHETT

Appreciate it.

Frank flicks off the lights. Blankets them in darkness.

FRANK

Happy Friday the 13th, by the way.

INT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - STUDIO OFFICES - DAY

Rhett sits by the front desk on a visitor's couch. Glances at the pretty receptionist.

Checks his wristwatch for the time. Spots a poster for the Hughes Tonight Show.

A PRODUCER waltzes into the room.

Rhett stands up to greet him. Outstretches his hand for a handshake but doesn't receive one.

PRODUCER

I understand you're with the chronicle, Mr. Ellison?

RHETT

We're wanting to do a piece on what happened ten years ago. I was hoping you could maybe provide me with some information.

PRODUCER

Out of courtesy, I'll tell you this only once. The studio isn't interested in discussing that tragedy. We'd rather move on and forget it ever happened.

RHETT

Do you know anyone who could help me then?

PRODUCER

Afraid not. I'm sorry you came all this way for nothing.

RHETT

Still pretending nothing happened.

PRODUCER

The studio's stance on this matter hasn't changed. I suggest you leave now before we have you escorted off the property.

Rhett eyes the security guard coming into view. Stomps out of the studio.

EXT. TIMBERLAND FILMS - DAY

Rain patters the full parking lot. Rhett waits under the entrance. Unfolds his umbrella.

TERRENCE, 23, a broadcast control technician for the studio, lights a cigarette. Takes a long drag and exhales.

TERRENCE

Chronicle, right?

Rhett glances in Terrence's direction.

RHETT

You hear us in there?

TERRENCE

Asking about Bateman. I've seen the footage, you know.

RHETT

The studio still has it?

Terrence chuckles.

TERRENCE

Course they do. They try to keep a tight ship, but people talk.

RHETT

What do they talk about?

TERRENCE

Depends on how much money I get.

RHETT

We can give you four hundred.

TERRENCE

Know how the police busted into his mansion and found that body? Wasn't the only thing they found. Bateman left behind some tapes.

RHETT
What kind?

TERRENCE
Voice recordings.

RHETT
And the studio wanted them?

TERRENCE
Not at all. They wanted them burned
to save their asses. If you even
say Bateman's name, you're
guaranteed to get fired. Like you
said in there, they want to pretend
it that shit never happened.

Rhett hands Terrence his business card.

RHETT
I'll get you the money this week.
Think of anything else, call me.

Terrence crushes his finished cigarette.

TERRENCE
Pleasure doing business.

He goes back inside the studio. Rhett wades through the heavy
rain and signals for a taxi.

INT. SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

Cramped, narrow halls. Shelves and shelves of labeled white
cardboard boxes.

The PROPERTY CLERK around the corner escorts Rhett.

PROPERTY CLERK
So, whatta you looking for?

RHETT
The case file on Connor Bateman.

The Property Clerk whistles.

PROPERTY CLERK
I remember that -- crazy bastard
lit himself on fire.

RHETT
Was told he left behind some
cassette tapes.

PROPERTY CLERK
Couldn't tell ya. Before I got
here, things got moved around or
lost. Long as the box is sealed, we
should be okay.

Rhett's led around the corner. The Property Clerk stops in
front of a shelf.

Pulls out a box a couple of shelves above them. Unseals the
lid and opens it. Inside is some files and a manila envelope.

The wrinkled front is written in sharpie: "Bateman Tapes"

RHETT
Can I get a room to listen to them?

PROPERTY CLERK
Got an hour. Already lucky they're
even letting you down here.

Rhett stares at the envelope.

INT. SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Empty. Silent. Rhett lies the contents of the envelope on the
lone table:

THREE UNLABELED CASSETTE TAPES.

Rhett makes sure no one's watching. Takes out from his
backpack a dual cassette deck.

COPIES each tape to a blank cassette. Glances at the window
out of paranoia. Places the deck back into his backpack.

Places the tapes back in the envelope and the evidence box.
Leaves to return them.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

An unnecessary mess. Empty soda cans clutter the floor. Film
magazines, such as *Fangoria*, lie open on the couch.

Rhett sits at his computer desk and boots up his desktop PC.
The TV in the living room plays a classic horror film.

Lays the copies of Bateman's tapes on the desk. Places the
first tape into a tape player.

Turns down the volume on his TV. Plays the tape...

CONNOR (O.S.)

When they came to me, I refused to believe them. Doubted what they could offer.

White noise hisses.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

But it was all true. God, what they *showed* me. The temptation's so strong. To let everything slip away. To succumb to the pleasures of the flesh. None of it was coincidence. They sent it to me for a reason.

The tape stops. Rhett rewinds the tape. Plays it again and takes notes.

Rhett underlines with his pen: WHO ARE THEY?

He tries the next tape. Presses play. Only static and shrill crackles sound from the player.

RHETT

It damaged?

Rhett ejects the tape and examines it. There's no apparent physical damage.

Looks at the notes he jotted down from the case file. One location Bateman frequented stands out.

He types the address in the CompuServe browser on his PC. The search brings up:

"Seattle Media Research Station"

Rhett leans back in his chair. Hits the print button. The printer shakes and spits out the address.

EXT. SEATTLE UNIVERSITY - DAY

Tall brick facilities. Lush green trees native to the northwest separate multiple departments.

An athletic field emblazoned with the school's name.

Skyscrapers tower over the city in the distance. Students walk to and from class. Pass the iconic centennial fountain.

INT. COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA DEPARTMENT - CLASSROOM - DAY

At the front of the auditorium, ISABELLA GONZALEZ, 38, an intelligent woman that could only be described as prim, lectures a half-filled classroom.

Rhett sneaks inside. Takes a seat in the back row.

ISABELLA

For a moment, let's discuss Narrative Theory. The basis of the concept and how it might apply in the real world.

Isabella approaches the class. Points at a MALE STUDENT.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Tell me, what's Narrative Theory?

MALE STUDENT

Um, that every individual is a storyteller?

Some of the class laughs.

ISABELLA

Partially. Walter Fisher posited that storytelling is the oldest and most universal form of communication. He believed individuals approach the societal world in what he called a "Narrative Mode."

Rhett raises his hand.

RHETT

So do we have no free will?

ISABELLA

An interesting observation. Shakespeare once famously said, "All the world's a stage, and all men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages."

A FEMALE STUDENT near the front raises her hand next.

FEMALE STUDENT

Wouldn't Fisher consider the great Shakespeare, a practitioner of Narrative Theory?

ISABELLA

Perhaps Shakespeare realized this sooner than Fisher. But what of the Narrative Paradigm? Can you tell me what that is, Mr. Ellison?

The class turns around to stare up at him.

RHETT

The world is a set of stories from which we choose and constantly recreate our lives.

ISABELLA

We could examine our realities in a myriad of different ways.

Isabella shuts off the PowerPoint and dismisses the class.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Don't forget to read chapters five and six. And those reports are due next Friday.

Rhett marches down the steps.

RHETT

Really think our lives are predetermined stories?

ISABELLA

It's just a theory. Makes for interesting conversation, though. Glad to see one of my students actually paid attention.

RHETT

But is storytelling equal? Some stories might be considered too horrific to be told.

Isabella sets her pencil down. Stares at Rhett.

ISABELLA

There are some academics who argue violence begets violence. Look only to the news media blaming the rise of violent crimes on films and popular video games.

Rhett takes a seat across from Isabella's desk.

RHETT

What about stories focused on suffering?

ISABELLA

Like a horror film? I don't think the purpose of those stories is to make us feel awful but to get a reaction. To question that which we all fear.

RHETT

Our personal fears.

ISABELLA

Everything okay? I know you didn't pop in just to engage in a lively debate with an old teacher.

RHETT

I was finally given an assignment. They want me to do a piece on Connor Bateman. He left behind some cassette tapes... Their strange, like the ramblings of a madman.

ISABELLA

People allow themselves to separate reality from fiction. Don't allow the musings of a troubled man blind you to what you know to be the truth. Whatever led him to his actions wasn't the result of violent media. We're all exposed to the horrors of the world everyday, and yet we persist.

RHETT

Probably right.

ISABELLA

I'm glad you've been given a chance. Remember that not everything can be explained.

RHETT

Thanks for the talk.

ISABELLA

I'm always available.

Rhett climbs back up the auditorium stairs. Retrieves from his backpack the print-out address.

EXT. SEATTLE UNIVERSITY - FILM DEPARTMENT - DAY

Murky gray clouds roll across the sky. The building's shadow looms over the entrance. Students walk in and out.

Rhett sits on the front steps with a bored expression.

Frank exits the building. Steals a few passing glances at a group of college girls.

RHETT
What took so long?

FRANK
Chill, I was taking care of some business. Look pretty exhausted.

RHETT
Was up late doing some research.

FRANK
Find anything useful?

RHETT
Surprisingly very little about Bateman out there.

Rhett stuffs the print-out into his backpack. Follows Frank into the building.

Thunder erupts.

INT. SEATTLE UNIVERSITY - FILM DEPARTMENT - DAY

Winding stairs. Expensive red carpeting. Rain patters against the circular entrance's glass windows.

Posters for local film festivals hang on pristine walls.

Thunder cracks outside. Shakes the walls. Rhett and Frank head up the stairs to the third floor.

Frank stops at the door at the end of the hall. Unlocks the lab door using a small key.

INT. SEATTLE UNIVERSITY - FILM DEPARTMENT - LAB - DAY

High-tech speakers propped on the walls. Expensive film equipment and computers. The whiteboard lists lab hours.

Rhett powers on one of the computers. Brings up the internet browser and enters the address of the research station.

He walks back to the door and locks it. Frank takes a seat next to him.

FRANK
Why the secrecy?

RHETT
Rather not have anyone know what I'm researching.

FRANK
What are we looking at?

RHETT
Police reports mentioned Bateman visiting some research station. Was wondering if you might know about the place.

Frank leans in. Squints his eyes at the screen.

FRANK
Huh, actually, yeah. Some kind of joint research facility funded by the Seattle Film Institute. Heard the site's testing new cameras.

RHETT
The report said Bateman visited the site often. I'm gonna check it out.

FRANK
If you're only writing a story, why need any of this equipment?

RHETT
For any footage of Bateman, I might come across.

FRANK
Really going all out. Want me to deliver the stuff while you're out?

RHETT
Would help a lot.

Frank grumbles and gets up from his seat.

FRANK

You owe me.

RHETT

Consider us even for the broken
rewind machine.

Rhett powers down the PC. Leaves Frank in the lab with the equipment he needs.

EXT. SEATTLE MEDIA RESEARCH STATION - DAY

An imposing government-like structure in the downtown Seattle area. The United States and Washington state flag at the entrance whips against the soft breeze.

Rhett exits a taxi and stares up at the building. Checks the print-out to make sure it's the correct address.

INT. SEATTLE MEDIA RESEARCH STATION - FRONT OFFICE - DAY

Hotel-like lobby. Soft cushions face a wooden wall mounted with several televisions.

Different news stations play on each screen.

Rhett walks inside and approaches the front desk. Rings the bell. A RECEPTIONIST greets him.

RECEPTIONIST

How can I help you?

RHETT

I'm Rhett Ellison with the Chronicle. I'm doing a piece on Connor Bateman. Records show he visited this station, and I was wondering if I could speak to someone about him or why he came.

RECEPTIONIST

One moment, please.

The Receptionist leaves the front desk. Rhett admires the fancy lobby.

After a few minutes, The Receptionist walks back out.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Dr. Allenby will be out shortly.

Rhett takes a seat next to the TVs. Notices one of the stations is on Timberland Studio's news channel.

HOLLAND ALLENBY, 45, tall and clean-shaven with a few early wrinkles taking shape, hurries into the lobby wearing an enthusiastic grin and lab coat.

HOLLAND
Mr. Ellison?

RHETT
Guessing you're Dr. Allenby?

Holland shakes Rhett's hand.

HOLLAND
I am -- it's nice to meet you.
You're here about Mr. Bateman...

RHETT
You knew him?

HOLLAND
Quite well, He volunteered in one
of the station's projects about a
decade ago.

RHETT
We're doing a story for the tenth
anniversary of the event. I managed
to track down some tapes he
recorded, but they don't paint a
clear picture. I found out from the
police's case files he visited this
station a few times.

HOLLAND
He did. I'm a little surprised
you're here.

RHETT
Why is that?

HOLLAND
No one's ever really shown interest
in the projects being tested here.
Well, outside of the film industry,
at least.

RHETT
So then, why did Bateman come here?

HOLLAND

He was fascinated by our innovations in media engagement. I probably shouldn't tell you this, but it's been bothering me since I started working here a couple years ago. The station tried to sweep it under the rug.

Rhett leans in to whisper.

RHETT

Exactly what?

HOLLAND

There was an incident that caused Bateman to stop visiting. It was a few months before he... Died.

RHETT

What kind of incident?

HOLLAND

How about I show you?

Rhett's led further into the research station.

They enter an elevator. Holland uses a key on the control panel and presses the bottom floor button.

The elevator doors DING as they close shut.

INT. SEATTLE MEDIA RESEARCH STATION - TEST SITE - DAY

Snow white walls. Polished floors. Bright lights shine on desks cluttered with electronic parts.

The latest media technology used in film lies about in the enormous basement.

Rhett gawks at the equipment. Notices in the middle of the room an enclosed chamber with no windows.

HOLLAND

Apologies for the mess -- we're testing some new cameras.

RHETT

What is that?

He points at the chamber.

HOLLAND

It was called Project All See. Think of it as a massive sensory chamber. Inside, subjects are bombarded with hours of constant media. The project ended eight years ago after Bateman died.

They approach the chamber. Rhett traces his fingers on the thick and dusty walls.

RHETT

It's just been sitting here all these years?

HOLLAND

Police had it shut down, but the studio never bothered to have anyone dismantle it.

RHETT

And Bateman was interested in this?

HOLLAND

We were trying to see how much information the human brain could receive all at once.

RHETT

So what happened?

Holland urges Rhett over to the chamber. Unseals the door by twisting a valve. Switches on the industrial lights.

INT. SEATTLE MEDIA RESEARCH STATION - SENSORY CHAMBER - DAY

The entire room's spotless. White-tiled floors and smooth walls. Identical TVs hang on each wall, surrounding a mechanical-like chair with straps.

Holland approaches a control panel. Blows it free of dust. Types at the computer to start the equipment.

The chair twitches. Leans back by itself.

HOLLAND

When the subject's fastened to the chair, we play programs captured by our satellites.

RHETT

The transceivers are capturing random signals?

HOLLAND

Correct. We monitor the programs and record how the subject reacts with each hour.

RHETT

What's the longest someone's sat in the chair?

HOLLAND

Ten hours. The subject said they could still hear the channels in their head the next day. I found it quite fascinating.

RHETT

Not worried about any psychological damage that could occur?

HOLLAND

None of the subjects displayed worrying symptoms back then. They had them examined by mental health officials every month a subject participated. That didn't stop the project from getting shut down.

RHETT

How long did Bateman last?

HOLLAND

Two hours. The experiment was going fine until one of the TVs began malfunctioning.

Rhett stares at the TVs.

RHETT

Was the signal bad?

Holland shrugs.

HOLLAND

Still not entirely sure what happened after all these years. The signal went dead for several minutes. Only static appeared on our end, but Bateman started acting erratic. He screamed at the researchers to let him out.

RHETT

He lost it?

HOLLAND

Was shouting like a madman. Claimed he saw something, but they couldn't understand a word he was saying.

RHETT

Does the station keep records of all its experiments?

HOLLAND

All the data's catalogued.

RHETT

Even the minutes of static?

HOLLAND

They removed the programming recorded before the signal went dead and isolated the footage. There was only static.

RHETT

Could I get a copy of the signal?

Holland nods. Shuts down the experiment. Flicks off the bright lights.

INT. SEATTLE MEDIA RESEARCH STATION - TEST SITE - DAY

Holland fiddles with a computer near his desk. Ejects a VHS tape from one of several VCRs.

HOLLAND

Not sure what you expect to find.

He hands Rhett the tape.

RHETT

I'll take anything related to Bateman's meltdown. Do you have any records on the previous subjects who participated?

HOLLAND

Most of them moved out of the city, but I can give you a copy.

RHETT

I'll be discreet.

Rhett stares at the tape in his hand. Glances at the static playing on Holland's computer.

White noise reverberates through the laboratory.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhett cleans off his desk. Connects one of the VCRs and other hardware equipment to his PC.

Fiddles with editing software. Places the tape in the VCR. Loads the VHS feedback into the program.

Static fills the computer screen as the video player starts. Rhett sits through white noise.

RHETT

Let's try clearing you up.

Rhett tries to adjust the tracking of the tape. Its upper and lower edges are pinking.

He clips the frame. Processes it through several filters. Nothing happens.

Next, attempts to reduce the analog grain with a noise reduction filter. There's still only static.

His frustrated gaze lands on the frequency the signal reportedly came from.

RHETT (CONT'D)

Might as well try.

Rhett messes with a device on the back of his TV. Adjusts the signal until it lines up with the frequency.

A few minutes of static until a CHEAPLY MADE LOGO for a television station flashes across the screen.

Blocky letters. Antiquated graphic animations. Its logo reads: "Perfection TV"

CORNY MUSIC similar to what's heard in low-budget commercials, plays from the speakers.

The quality of the film resembles old 16mm GRINDHOUSE FILMS.

Brief static lines pop. The footage fades in to an empty, decadent basement...

ON SCREEN:

Dim lights on the ceiling rattle. There's a rickety table.

The camera pans to show hammers. Surgical tools. Blood-stained concrete blocks and thin steel wires.

From the darkness, a MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX from head to toe wanders into view.

Three zippers where the mouth and eyes would be. Colorful television wires pierced into his skin dangle from his chest.

He walks up to the table. Caresses the various tools. Lifts the hammer and examines it.

JUMP CUT: the same basement. The camera tilts to reveal a NAKED MAN held in the air by rusted chains. He struggles.

Chains rattle and rasp.

The camera focuses back on the Man in Black Spandex. He circles the Naked Man like a curious predator ready to feast.

Speakers in the room SCREECH until a CHILDISH VOICE starts a slow countdown.

CHILDISH VOICE (O.S.)

3...2...1...

The Man in Black Spandex turns to look at the camera as if being cheeky.

SLICES the Naked Man with a saw. Blood sprays onto his blackened suit.

JUMP CUT: Industrial lights snap on with a buzz. Reveal several people bound to the floor by shackles.

The Man in Black Spandex is joined by two others. A WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS.

The top of the woman's head is gone, exposing her glistening brain. Her eyes and mouth have been sewn shut.

To her left, there's a MAN STRANGLED BY A WHITE CLOTH.

The hem of the white sheet over his face is stapled all around his bulbous neck.

Tangled around his arms and legs: the black reels of VHS tapes. Slits have been cut out for his scarified eyes and blood-soaked lips.

All three of them lift porcelain bowls. Inside are maggots. Worms. Other squirming insects.

They TOSS THE INSECTS on the writhing naked bodies. The picture fades as if being burnt.

The screen on Rhett's TV goes black. He ejects the tape. Throws it across the room.

Rhett gags and runs to the bathroom down the hall. His vomiting can be heard.

He stumbles back into the living room, clutching his stomach. Stares at the tape on the floor.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - DAY

There are barely any customers. Rhett dashes inside carrying a VHS tape. Rushes up to the counter.

FRANK

Little early, aren't ya?

Rhett turns around to make sure no one's listening. Leans over the counter and whispers.

RHETT

You on break soon?

FRANK

Not get any sleep again? Look fucking terrible, dude -- like some damn zombie.

RHETT

I need to show you something. Make sure I'm not going crazy.

He places the tape on the counter.

FRANK

Some kind of movie?

RHETT

In the back. Don't want anyone else to see.

Frank has a CO-WORKER take over the counter. Walks into the backroom with Rhett in tow.

INT. VIDEO RENTAL STORE - BACKROOM - DAY

Rhett drags one of the TVs closer to the center of the room. Places a VCR on the cart.

RHETT
Promise me you won't tell anyone
what I'm about to show you.

FRANK
Serious? We about to watch a porno
or --

RHETT
-- I mean it.

Frank sighs.

FRANK
Fine... I promise.

Rhett places the tape in the VCR. Presses the play button.
The VCR hums to life.

After a few seconds of popping static, the retro logo of
Perfection TV flies across the screen.

Familiar corny music emits from the speakers. The sequences
Rhett witnessed play out.

TORTUOUS MOANS fill the room.

As the video ends, Frank gets up and paces in silence.
Glances back at the TV.

RHETT
Think it's real?

FRANK
What the fuck. Nah, what the hell
was that?!

RHETT
Not sure. Maybe what Bateman saw.

FRANK
Shit man. Can't be real. Probably
some cheap horror flick... Has to
be, right?

RHETT
Their reactions seemed so *real*.
What if it's a snuff film?

FRANK
A what?

RHETT
Films of people being murdered.
Supposedly tapes are sold in the
black market.

FRANK
Those are real?

RHETT
I don't know. Was there anything
you noticed, something that might
have stood out?

Frank begrudgingly sits back at the table.

FRANK
Play it again.

Rhett rewinds the tape. The video starts from the beginning.
Half-way through --

FRANK (CONT'D)
Stop! Right there, see that?

Frank points at the screen and taps it.

Rhett pauses as the Man in Black Spandex approaches the table
where the tools rest.

RHETT
What is it?

FRANK
Behind him.

On the paused screen, through the lines of crackling static,
Rhett makes out the faintest outline of a camera.

RHETT
Looks like the light from a running
camera. Can barely see it.

FRANK
Then it's some low-budget horror
film -- like those old video
nasties in the 80s.

RHETT
Perfection TV. Couldn't find
anything on the internet.

FRANK

Don't get involved. This is the type of freaky shit you're supposed to avoid.

RHETT

And pretend I never saw anything?

FRANK

Let the paper decide what to do with it.

Rhett looks at Frank in disbelief.

RHETT

I do that, and someone else gets my story. My chance is gone.

Frank heads for the exit. Unlocks the door but comes to a sudden stop.

FRANK

Can't believe I'm doing this. Look, I might know someone who can help. If there's something on the internet you need to locate, he can find it.

Rhett ejects the tape from the VCR.

RHETT

The signal. We need to track it.

FRANK

Really gonna keep digging?

RHETT

If this caused Bateman to go crazy, I need to know where it came from. Why it was made.

FRANK

This isn't only about some story.

RHETT

I still remember watching it as a kid... Couldn't sleep for weeks. I'd read every article and watch every news report on TV. The mystery captivated me.

FRANK

Mysteries can be dangerous.

RHETT
Solving mysteries. Kind of why I
wanted to be a reporter.

FRANK
Don't get yourself killed.

RHETT
I'll be careful.

Rhett follows Frank out of the room. Frank switches off the lights and locks the door.

Alone in the darkness, the TV flickers a brief image on the screen. Turns off.

INT. SEATTLE HERALD - PRESS ROOM - DAY

Reporters hustle to their cubicles. Rhett walks through the maze and stops at Jasmine's desk.

Jasmine turns around in her seat.

JASMINE
Might be the first time you've come
to see me. This a special occasion?

RHETT
It always lively over here?

JASMINE
Pretty much, except during lunch.
God, you look horrible.

RHETT
Not the first person to say that.
It's this damn assignment.

JASMINE
Need any help?

Rhett glances at the noisy crowds behind him. Leads Jasmine toward the back of the room.

RHETT
Remember the piece you did a few
years ago on black market films and
pirate signals?

JASMINE
I remember. That asshole Gerald got
most of the credit.

RHETT

Still in touch with any of those old contacts?

Jasmine taps her chin.

JASMINE

There's one guy I talked to who still operates downtown. Real character, but he knows his stuff. What's this about?

RHETT

I got the Connor Bateman story.

JASMINE

You're kidding? And you think Bateman was involved in the black market somehow?

RHETT

He was dabbling in some project before he died. Might be related.

Jasmine purses her lips.

JASMINE

I'll help -- on one condition.

RHETT

Name it.

JASMINE

Take me out for dinner as thanks for my recommendation.

RHETT

I forgot to thank you for that.

She hands Rhett one of her business cards. Writes an address on the back.

RHETT (CONT'D)

Is this?

JASMINE

One of the places he's been known to set up shop. Be careful, okay? This guy's ruthless.

RHETT

I don't get it... I know you helped me out, but why ask me on a date?

Jasmine rolls her eyes and giggles.

JASMINE

You were taking too long. Wasn't going to sit around forever for you to take a hint.

RHETT

Never really been good at, you know, the whole dating thing.

JASMINE

Then we'll take it one step at a time. Not set any expectations and go with the flow.

RHETT

Are you free tomorrow night?

JASMINE

Name the place and time.

She brushes her hand over Rhett's. Winks at him before going back to her desk.

Rhett stares at the address on the business card.

EXT. BELLTOWN, SEATTLE - NIGHT

Streetlights glimmer in the heavy mist. Cars roar past hip eateries. High-rise condos reach the starry sky.

Muffled music spills out from lively nightclubs. Near the pier, a foghorn BLARES.

Christmas lights hang over the entrance of an alley. Grunge music plays from poorly placed speakers.

Rhett exits a taxi and follows a crowd of men and women in leather jackets.

EXT. BELLTOWN, SEATTLE - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Booths selling VHS tapes and CDs take up the narrow passage. Vinyl records sealed in plastic.

Rhett stops at one of the stands. Picks up a bootleg tape of a new horror film.

Signals for the SHADY DEALER.

RHETT
Work here long?

SHADY DEALER
Bout two years. What, you some cop
or something?

The Shady Dealer looks him over with a nasty smirk.

RHETT
I'm a reporter. Looking for
somebody by the name of Ajani.

SHADY DEALER
And where did you hear that name?

RHETT
From a friend.

SHADY DEALER
Why should I tell you? Prove who
you are. Show me your press badge,
Mr. Reporter.

Rhett digs into his pockets. Holds up his badge.

RHETT
That help?

SHADY DEALER
Head all the way to the back of the
alley. Give him this card.

The Shady Dealer hands Rhett a card. Rhett flips it over.
Glances at the ink drawing of a pirate ship.

Rhett walks through the corridor and passes other booths
until he reaches the exit.

Before the exit leading back onto the street, there's a
circular stand off to the side.

AJANI, 37, intense and fitted in a black trench coat, adjusts
the antenna of a CRT TV in the back. Smacks the box until the
picture clears up.

On the table, Rhett admires stacks of unlabeled tapes. VCRs.
Betamax players. Old record players and Ham radios.

Pinups of PLAYBOY GIRLS decorate the brick wall of the alley.

RHETT
You Ajani?

AJANI
Depends on who's asking.

RHETT
Was told you could help me.

Ajani turns to face him. Lights a cigar.

AJANI
And *who* thinks I can help you?

RHETT
I'm a friend of Jasmine Hall. She said you're an expert on Black market films.

AJANI
What of it?

RHETT
I found one. A real snuff film.

Ashes from Ajani's cigar crumbles into a gaudy ashtray. He gently rests the cigar down. Breaks out in laughter.

AJANI
This some kind of joke?

RHETT
Could you tell if one was real?

Rhett places the tape he made on the table.

AJANI
Seen a lot of supposed snuff films through the years. Mostly amateur footage from different wars, nothing spectacular. Where did you get it?

RHETT
Recorded it from a pirate signal.

AJANI
Pirated signals. Cursed films. Broadcast intrusions. The story always changes. Probably another cheap horror film getting passed along in the underground circuit.

RHETT
Perfection TV... You heard of it?

Ajani drops his cocky smile and exits his booth. Closes in on Rhett. Tosses him into the stand.

Shoves Rhett against the alley wall. Presses a knife against his neck.

Lowers his voice to barely a whisper.

AJANI

Where'd you hear that name?

RHETT

(Raspy)

The logo on the channel. Found it while investigating Connor Bateman.

AJANI

And you brought it here?!

Ajani releases Rhett from his hold. Checks the alley to make sure no one's listening.

Rhett massages his bruised neck.

RHETT

You know them? I couldn't find anything about them on the web.

AJANI

Not surprising, was a pretty small operation. The town the studio was stationed in tried its damndest to cover it up.

RHETT

Why try so hard to make it disappear?

Ajani closes his knife. Invites Rhett into his booth. Steals another glance at the tape.

Rhett takes out a notepad.

AJANI

Channel was started in the early 70s. Began as a late-night programming block for low-budget horror films and softcore pornography. Eventually, they started making their own stuff for fetishists and connoisseurs of underground BDSM.

RHETT
What happened to it?

Ajani picks up his cigar. Takes a long drag.

AJANI
There was a massive fire in 81, or so the stories I've been told claim. Still don't know where it was located or how the fire started. Heard the police thought it was arson, but they couldn't prove anything. You already know the man who ran it.

Rhett's eyes widen.

RHETT
You mean... Bateman? He founded Perfection TV?

AJANI
That's right. Now there's only ghost stories.

RHETT
What kind?

AJANI
Ghost signals invading people's TVs. Collectors going crazy after tracking down copies of the channel on tapes. People claiming it's now ran by some cult. Or that anyone who comes across the program vanishes.

RHETT
Any truth behind that?

AJANI
Wouldn't know. But it's true some people have gone missing.

RHETT
How do you know all this?

Ajani chuckles.

AJANI
There are old timers like me whose job is finding secrets people want to keep buried.

RHETT

Secrets?

AJANI

Movies not meant for public consumption. Recordings not meant for the ears of the innocents. Things like that.

RHETT

But the signal's still being transmitted. How?

AJANI

Can't answer. You said the signal video the station received was corrupted, right?

RHETT

Nothing I tried worked. Had to intercept the original signal.

AJANI

These are only rumors. What you saw could have been an imitation or someone trying to stir up buzz for a new movie.

RHETT

I don't think so. How could they keep the channel hidden so well?

AJANI

This isn't something broadcast in the open. The channel exists for those in our society who desire violence. Thrill seekers. Degenerates. Or someone like you who seeks the truth.

RHETT

Who would know where to find them?

Ajani finishes his cigar. Drops it on the ground. Smashes it with his boot.

AJANI

Hell if I know. I want no part of this... Don't come back here.

Rhett grabs the tape and leaves Ajani's booth. Steals one final glance at the alley.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhett stands over his computer desk. Glares at the tape. Lifts a hammer he bought.

SMASHES THE VHS TAPE.

Loose parts fly across the room. Black reels unravel.

He collects the discarded pieces on the floor. Dumps them in his trashcan.

The room falls quiet save for Rhett's haggard breaths. Rhett places the second cassette tape in the tape player.

RHETT

C'mon, work.

Presses play. There's a minute of crackling static until Connor's voice comes through...

CONNOR (O.S.)

When I started the studio... It was only meant for fun. A way to titillate the audience. And the women, God, especially the women.

Connor's garbled laughter from the tape fills the room.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I wanted to make some quick cash. The porn brought in viewers, but we were still small-time. Then I decided to go even further -- push the boundaries. Sure the town was mad, but the officials turned a blind eye when I paid them off. I didn't think it would attract them. Summon them.

He pauses for a few seconds. There's rustling on the tape.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Thought burning the damn place would stop them. But it didn't. They're watching me. Listening to me. I'm infected.

The tape stops. Rhett jumps from fright in his chair.

Rhett's landline rings. He gets up from his desk and answers the phone.

RHETT

Shit, you scared me. Pretty late to be calling.

FRANK (O.S.)

Surprised you knew it was me.

RHETT

I have caller I.D.

FRANK (O.S.)

Right, forgot. Was able to get in touch with my friend. Wasn't easy convincing him, but he's willing to help out.

RHETT

You make it sound like it cost you a leg.

FRANK (O.S.)

We're not on the greatest terms, but he'll get over it. Meet me tomorrow at the off-campus dorms after lunch.

RHETT

Appreciate it.

FRANK (O.S.)

You owe me again.

Rhett pauses.

RHETT

Jasmine asked me out.

FRANK (O.S.)

Somehow I'm not surprised.

RHETT

Caught me off guard too... Not sure if I'm ready.

FRANK (O.S.)

It's just a date. Hell, if it doesn't work, send her my way.

RHETT

Always about you.

FRANK (O.S.)

Forget me. Think of it as a good way to get your mind off this shit.

RHETT

Maybe you're right. I listened to another one of Bateman's tapes. Said he was being watched. He was going insane.

FRANK (O.S.)

Get some sleep.

Rhett hangs up the phone and wanders back to his couch. As he sits down, the TV flickers on.

He tries to change the channel. Every station shows static. There's no sound.

RHETT

The hell?

The screen turns black. White waveform lines appear. Scrambled audio plays. The voice is distorted.

A BLURRY IMAGE on the screen flashes for a split second. The waveform lines grow larger.

The image stabilizes until an Indian-head test pattern card used in the 50s is displayed.

CONNOR BATEMAN'S VOICE comes through the speakers.

CONNOR (O.S.)

I heard them. The voices grow stronger. It's a virus. It will consume everything.

Rhett leaps from the couch. Twists the knob on the TV to turn it off. The image remains.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Don't look at it. Don't look at it.

(Shouts)

Don't look at it!

Static crackles over Connor's raspy voice. Rhett steps away from the TV.

There's a HORRIFIC SHRILL. The piercing noise blows the TV's speakers. Sparks fly from the back.

Rhett stumbles over the couch and sees only static on the screen. Rushes behind the set and UNPLUGS IT.

Its wires are fried.

RHETT
Am I... Am I dreaming?

The TV switches back on. Goes through dozens of different channels. Stops on another black screen.

ON SCREEN:

An extreme close-up of an entire EYE crying blood takes up the screen. Zooms in closer. The eye...

SHAKES. SHAKES. SHAKES.

Every movement of the pupil is accompanied by the sound of a steady heartbeat.

The TV finally turns off. Rhett unplugs every electronic device connected to the set.

EXT. OFF-CAMPUS DORMITORIES - EARLY MORNING

Identical apartment-like buildings. Walls half-brown and white with painted imagery of a lighthouse.

Rhett follows Frank up the stone staircase and walks by a couple smoking.

RHETT
Been meaning to ask. Since I showed you the tape, have you... Have you been seeing things?

FRANK
What do you mean?

RHETT
Like weird images on your TV or hearing voices?

FRANK
This shit's making you paranoid. I had a nightmare.

RHETT
What kind?

Frank stops in the hall. Faces Rhett. Leans on the floor's dirty railing.

Drops his usual cocky smile.

FRANK

Some freaky S&M people. Saw a weird basement with a mattress. But that's only because you showed me what was on that tape. Filled my mind with all that weird crap. Would happen to anyone.

RHETT

Something happened last night. I thought I heard Bateman's voice on my TV.

FRANK

You *heard* him? Sure you didn't leave the tape on?

RHETT

There were all these strange images flashing on the screen. My TV practically short-circuited. When I woke up this morning, it was fine.

FRANK

I'm telling you, man -- all this bullshit about Bateman's driving us both crazy.

RHETT

Maybe...

FRANK

We could turn around. Forget whatever we saw and go home. Watch something funny like *Tremors*.

RHETT

Can't forget what I saw. I have to know where it's coming from.

FRANK

Jesus.

Frank and Rhett reach an apartment door with a missing number plaque. Frank raps his fist twice on it.

BECKETT CHILDS, 26, technologically savvy, built like a toothpick, stares at Frank with enormous headphones on. He attempts to shut the door.

Before he can, Frank places his foot in the doorway.

BECKETT

Sorry, force of habit.

FRANK

I'm sure.

Beckett inspects Rhett, sizing him up like a new PC.

BECKETT

This is the greenhorn?

FRANK

Yeah, it's him. Gonna let us in?

BECKETT

Remember our deal?

Frank rolls his eyes.

FRANK

Don't worry, I remember.

BECKETT

Come in.

They're whisked into the dorm. Beckett pokes his head out in the hall. Slams the door closed.

INT. BECKETT'S DORM ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Top-of-the-line computers whirr. On dirty shelves lie Betamax players. VCRs. Laserdisc players. High-end speakers.

Wires trail across the carpet. Tall industrial fans blow cool air into the cramped room.

A large CRT TV plays cartoons.

Rhett takes a seat on the couch. Knocks over a tower of empty soda cans.

FRANK

Place hasn't changed.

BECKETT

Lay off.

RHETT

Mind if I turn the TV off?

BECKETT

Not a fan of the show?

The 80s cartoon starts its opening credits. Frank quickly turns off the TV.

FRANK
Can you do it?

Beckett relaxes in his plush computer chair and leans back.

BECKETT
Finding a signal can be easy
enough. But will your friend agree
to our deal?

Rhett looks up at Frank.

RHETT
What's he talking about?

Frank sighs.

FRANK
Might have promised that we would
let him in on what we're doing.

RHETT
You're crazy. We can't --

BECKETT
-- Why not? What are you two so
desperate to find?

Rhett and Frank exchange glances.

RHETT
We need help tracking down a signal
to a pirate channel. We only know
the studio behind it.

BECKETT
Some production company? What're
they called?

RHETT
Perfection TV.

Beckett sits up in his chair. Looks at Frank as if making
sure they aren't pranking him.

BECKETT
Bullshit.

FRANK
Heard of them?

There's a brief pause.

BECKETT

Seen wild stories on bulletin boards. People claim they caught a signal showing people getting murdered. The studio Connor Bateman used to run. You're saying it's actually real?

RHETT

Then you already know. I saw it.

Beckett rocks in his chair.

BECKETT

Holy shit. Can't believe it's real. Two years ago, there was an anonymous user posting about some tapes with recordings of a pirate channel making the rounds in foreign markets. Was making insane claims about people disappearing after they watched it.

RHETT

Jasmine's contact heard the same type of rumors.

BECKETT

Gets better. Guy alleged he was being followed or watched. Seeing things. Everyone thought he was nuts and faking it.

FRANK

I saw the channel too. Rhett made a tape. Can't say if it's real.

BECKETT

Still have the tape?

The room falls silent.

RHETT

No... I destroyed it.

BECKETT

Fucking kidding me. The find of a lifetime? How did you stumble upon the signal?

RHETT

Rather not say.

BECKETT

Do you at least have the frequency
of this mysterious signal?

Rhett pulls from his jacket a crumpled sheet of paper.

RHETT

I wrote it down.

Beckett faces his computer. Types at the keyboard and brings up an internet browser.

BECKETT

Like I said, the only reason I know
about Perfection TV is because of
the boards I frequent. Kind of a
collector of hard to find media and
bootleg tapes.

He clicks through different pages of bulletin boards. Brings up multiple links.

An older website no longer functioning pops up. The page slowly loads.

On Beckett's computer screen, Rhett and Frank see a screenshot of Perfection TV's homepage.

The site's cheaply made.

RHETT

There's a website?

BECKETT

More of a fansite run by people
like me. Wasn't up for long.

FRANK

Mention anything useful?

Beckett shakes his head.

BECKETT

Nothing but what everyone else has
heard. No information about where
the studio's located or even what
kind of programs the channel aired.

RHETT

What about the signal?

Beckett switches windows to a broadcast signal tracking program. Enters the frequency.

BECKETT
Clever bastards.

FRANK
What is it?

Beckett taps the glass screen on the monitor.

BECKETT
Can't pinpoint the signal. It's
leading back to multiple
transmitters, almost like someone's
running interference.

RHETT
But that wouldn't prevent people
from receiving it, right? I was
able to pick it up pretty easily.

BECKETT
Not sure how you got a clear
picture without some ghosting.

FRANK
Ghosting?

BECKETT
Basically, when images superimpose
on top of each other. Causes
distortions and weird lighting.

Rhett leaves Beckett's side at the computer and sits back on
the couch.

RHETT
How do we track the original?

BECKETT
If I can eliminate the
interference, we should be able to
trace the transmitter.

FRANK
How long's that gonna take?

BECKETT
Maybe a day or so?

RHETT
That fast?

FRANK
Hate to admit it, but Beckett's one
of the best.

BECKETT

Don't forget the deal. I want in.

Rhett glances at Frank.

RHETT

We have no idea what we're walking into. Could be dangerous.

BECKETT

Then having an extra pair of hands won't hurt.

FRANK

Can't believe I'm saying this, but he's right. Why am I going through with this?

The methodical CLACKS of Beckett's keyboard fill the awkward silence that follows.

INT. SEATTLE HERALD - BUREAU CHIEF'S OFFICE

Rhett enters and takes a seat across from Grisham's desk. Glances at the bookshelf packed with old novels.

Grisham quits typing at his computer. Twists his chair so he's facing Rhett.

GRISHAM

Heard you wanted to see me?

RHETT

There's a lot more to the story than I realized. I might know why he killed himself.

GRISHAM

I'm listening.

Rhett nods. Places a folder on Grisham's desk.

RHETT

He was visiting this research station and participated in some experiment. It's not proven, but he might have gone crazy. You should hear the tapes.

GRISHAM

But there's no definitive proof it was the reason Bateman offed himself, right?

RHETT

The links are there. Some people I interviewed said he was involved in some shady stuff. Used to have a cheap production studio called Perfection TV.

GRISHAM

These sources... Where did they get this information? Something this big would have been discovered during the police investigation.

RHETT

I trust them. I saw the channel.

In the silence, Grisham pulls a half-empty bottle of bourbon from his desk drawer.

Pours himself a small glass.

GRISHAM

Look, kid, we're not asking for some big exposé on Bateman. More of a general round-up and some interviews with people who used to know him.

RHETT

This is bigger than that.

GRISHAM

Never go too deep into the rabbit hole. You like crap. Get some sleep and finish the report.

Rhett grabs his folder with his findings. Exits the office without a word.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A comfortable stillness. The fan above Rhett's bed swooshes on his sleeping form.

There's a much SMALLER TV in the room atop his dresser. The TV snaps on. Crackles. Static takes over the screen.

Rhett stirs from the noise. Sits up in bed and rubs his eyes. Climbs out of bed. Shuts the TV off.

IT TURNS BACK ON.

He growls. Walks around the dresser. Yanks the cables out from the wall. Lumber back into bed.

The TV comes back on. Rhett throws off the covers. Someone's voice echoes.

A SEDUCTIVE VOICE calls out to him in a whisper.

SEDUCTIVE VOICE (O.S.)
Don't be afraid.

RHETT
Who's there?!

SEDUCTIVE VOICE (O.S.)
Come to us. Surrender the mind.
Abandon the flesh.

Rhett looks at his trembling hands. Flexes his fingers. They blur and pixelate.

He falls backward. The room contorts. STATIC covers the walls. Rhett's eyes become grainy.

The objects in his room melt.

RHETT
This isn't real!

SEDUCTIVE VOICE (O.S.)
Do not succumb to your denials.
Accept the new reality. Become one
with us.

Rhett crawls toward the TV. The voice from the speakers' moans in pleasure.

He reaches out. As Rhett's fingers reach the screen he...

AWAKENS FROM THE NIGHTMARE.

Sweat trickles across Rhett's face. He springs from the bed. His chest rises and falls.

Rhett checks his hands. They are normal. The TV in the room's still off.

EXT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rhett sits at an empty table wearing a buttoned-up shirt. Messes with his collar. Fidgets in his seat.

Moonlight fades as murky clouds overtake the night sky.

He glances at the entrance. Sips on ice water. Rhett finds himself tapping his foot.

Jasmine waltzes through the entrance in a dazzling dress. She spots him and takes a seat at the table.

JASMINE
Been here long?

RHETT
Not really.

JASMINE
Was my contact any help?

RHETT
The studio closed down years ago after a fire. He was scared when I mentioned it and said something about people disappearing after watching the channel I saw.

JASMINE
You don't believe him, right? I told ya he was a little odd.

RHETT
Whole thing's been keeping me from sleeping. Been having nightmares.

One of the waitresses hands Jasmine a glass of water.

JASMINE
Sure you're okay?

RHETT
Feel like I'm losing my mind.

JASMINE
How so?

RHETT
Before I came here, I saw something. It felt so real as I was watching it.

JASMINE
Tell the chief you found everything you could. Finish the story.

Rhett massages his forehead.

RHETT
Frank said I should walk away too.

Jasmine places her soft hand on Rhett's. Caresses it gently with her thumb.

JASMINE
Don't think about it. Focus on
dinner... Focus on me.

RHETT
Still interested after hearing my
wild rant?

She chuckles. Leans in to whisper.

JASMINE
I've always had a crush on you
since you spilled coffee on Mary
from accounting.

RHETT
That's what got your attention?

JASMINE
It made my day.

RHETT
Guess I should keep being clumsy.

Jasmine takes hold of his collar. Pulls him closer. Places a chaste kiss on his lips.

JASMINE
Seems to be working.

She releases Rhett's collar. Settles back in her seat.

EXT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Frank exits his truck carrying a six-pack of beer. Locks the truck and makes his way toward the entrance.

Frank sees MIKE and STEPHANIE at the gated entrance. Two of his close friends.

He waves at them. Makes his way toward them. They turn to face Frank, and he sees...

Their FACES COVERED IN MOSAIC!

Thousands of tiny glittering pixels completely veil Mike and Stephanie's faces.

MIKE
Join us.

Mike's voice comes out garbled.

STEPHANIE
Become one with us.

Frank drops the six-pack. STUMBLES to the ground.

The drinks clatter. One of the cans busts. Spews rushing foam on the parking lot.

MIKE
Yo, everything okay?

Frank looks up. Mike and Stephanie's faces are back to normal as they look down at him in worry.

STEPHANIE
Look pale.

FRANK
I'm fine... A little sick.

STEPHANIE
Gonna be okay?

FRANK
Yeah -- sorry, I gotta go.

He grabs the loose beer cans on the ground. Races up the stairs to his apartment.

Jones and Stephanie look at each other in confusion.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Rhett sips on a cup of fresh coffee. Glances at his TV every few seconds.

His landline rings. Rhett sets his drink down. Picks up the phone and almost stutters.

RHETT
Hello?

LIAM (O.S.)
Mr. Ellison?

RHETT
Who is this?

LIAM (O.S.)
 My name's Dr. Liam Moore. I'm a
 professor in media studies. We need
 to speak.

RHETT
 How did you get this number?

LIAM (O.S.)
 Information is easy to obtain if
 you seek it. We really should talk,
 but not over the phone. Are you
 able to meet today?

RHETT
 Where?

LIAM (O.S.)
 I have an apartment downtown
 furnished to my specifications. It
 should suit our meeting.

RHETT
 I'll be there. How did you hear
 about --

The line goes dead.

EXT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

One of several high-rise luxury towers in the heart of the city. Rhett stares up at the endless glass windows in awe.

Draws closer to the apartment entrance and presses the buzzer. Enters through the doors as they unlock.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - 35TH FLOOR - DAY

The fancy elevator doors slide open. Rhett exits and makes his way down the hall. Admires the view of the city.

Reaches the end of the hall. Knocks on the apartment door.

Liam creaks the door open. Peeks at Rhett through the slit. Undoes the chain lock and hurries him inside.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - LIAM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Almost barren save for the furniture. There's no sign of any electronics or a TV.

In place of a computer is an old-fashioned typewriter and a mug filled with expensive ink pens.

Rhett catches a glimpse of a tall grandfather clock against the wall. The pendulum swings back and forth and...

Ticks. Ticks. Ticks.

LIAM

Thank you for coming, Mr. Ellison.

RHETT

You were insistent.

LIAM

When I heard someone from the Chronicle was investigating Bateman's death, it was urgent for me to get in contact.

RHETT

Who told you?

Liam invites Rhett to take a seat across from him. Brings a porcelain teacup to his lips.

LIAM

My friends at the research station.

RHETT

Wait, I know you. You were there that night.

LIAM

The smell of burnt flesh still haunts me. Since that night, I've immersed myself in my studies and followed Bateman's trail.

RHETT

Perfection TV.

Liam nods.

LIAM

The studio... The channel and the programs it produces isn't what you think it is.

RHETT

I don't understand.

LIAM

Did you see them? The macabre show
and its actors?

RHETT

Who are they?

LIAM

How they came to be, and their
purpose is beyond me. However, the
few whispers I've heard call them
The Editors. Agents of the so-
called Pixel World. Servants to the
one called the Overlord.

RHETT

And they make these shows? Kill and
torture people? Why?

LIAM

Our televisions have been watching
us. Listening. Perfection TV draws
out the violent emotions of whoever
watches. The Editors merely act out
these desires.

RHETT

You're saying it's alive?

LIAM

A good comparison would be like a
virus. Once the signal's been
received, the individual changes.
They are at the mercy of The
Editors. Have you been seeing or
hearing things?

RHETT

Last night... When I fell asleep.
But it was only a nightmare.

LIAM

Why do you think I have abandoned
all windows into my soul from here?
No TVs or radios. Nothing digital.
Even not having witnessed these
programs, I know this is how they
spread its influence and tighten
their grasp on the human mind.

RHETT

Bullshit.

Rhett shakes his head in denial.

RHETT (CONT'D)

You're trying to say our TVs are alive? That, for some reason, it's feeding us a signal to drive us mad? For what reason?!

LIAM

As I said, I don't know its purpose. Only that those exposed to its influence have all vanished or perhaps have become victims.

RHETT

I discovered the signal. I have someone tracking it down. We'll expose whoever's airing the program. Get the police involved.

LIAM

Even after what you've seen?

RHETT

Bateman said he destroyed the studio. How can it be back and send out the signal?

LIAM

By the will of its servants. They won't allow it to be destroyed.

RHETT

You're saying the visions are real? That we'll be driven mad like Bateman was?

LIAM

They are not visions. Your world will slowly become one with that of the Pixel World. Those around you will be drawn into its madness.

Rhett gets up to leave the apartment.

RHETT

What if we shut it down?

LIAM

Then perhaps it will stop. But I truly hope you don't find that studio and its burnt remains.

RHETT

Thank you, professor. I'll call you when we find something.

Liam follows him to the door. Undoes the chain lock and lets Rhett leave.

INT. DOWNTOWN SEATTLE BAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Rhett sits in a booth at the corner of the bar with Jasmine. There are several empty glasses on the table.

JASMINE

Professor Moore used to be a respected member of the greater scientific community.

RHETT

The things he told me... almost identical to Bateman's ramblings.

JASMINE

His unusual theories got him discredited. Moore persisted, though. He's still doing lectures across the country on the dangers of media.

RHETT

Do you think it's mass hysteria?

JASMINE

Any urban legend can become real if enough people believe in it.

RHETT

Like those chain letters?

Jasmine almost chokes on her drink in laughter.

JASMINE

I knew a girl who swore one of her friends got in an accident because she wouldn't pass on one of those stupid letters.

RHETT

Frank's right. I'm letting all this go to my head, making myself paranoid. But if it's all real...

JASMINE

Shh. For one night, don't dwell on the nightmares.

RHETT

That wouldn't hurt.

They clink their glasses. Chug the rest of their drinks.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhett and Jasmine slam the door open. Engage in a ravenous make-out session. Rhett squeezes her thighs.

They stumble across the room in each other's arms. Somehow make it to the bedroom.

INT. RHETT'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rhett collapses on the bed with Jasmine. She breaks the kiss for air. Gazes into his eyes.

Jasmine reaches for the lamp and turns it off.

JASMINE

Maybe we should make our own tape.

Rhett chuckles.

RHETT

I'm not cut out for stardom.

An exchange of lustful stares. Sweat pours across their flustered faces. Rhett pulls Jasmine back onto the bed.

Jasmine tears off his shirt. Caresses his stomach. Rhett places kisses on her neck.

Their CLOTHES hit the floor.

Rhett's smaller TV on the dresser switches on. The static-filled picture struggles to focus. Audio comes out distorted.

The HORRIFIC SCENES Rhett saw on Perfection TV's channel plays in the background.

RHETT (CONT'D)

Hear something?

Jasmine turns his head so that he is staring into her eyes.

JASMINE

Don't talk.

Rhett turns her over. Pulls off her top. Buries his face into Jasmine's breasts. The CRACK of whips sound from the TV.

Cathode ray tubes BURST from Jasmine's eyes.

Blood splatters on Rhett's terrified face. Jasmine pushes him back onto the bed.

Red and yellow wires slither out of her skin. Crawl up to Rhett's face and lick his cheeks.

Jasmine's head mutates. Flattens. TRANSFORMS INTO A TV.

Her bare chest presses in on itself. Forms a circuit board. Flesh-like antennas poke out from her back.

CRANE UP AND DOWN.

Static on Jasmine's flat screen crackles until it shows her grinning face. Her tube-like fingers brush Rhett's neck.

RHETT

My God.

JASMINE

(Garbled)

This how you like it?

RHETT

You're not her!

JASMINE

This is your new reality.

Rhett SHRIEKS.

His eyes shoot open. Rhett throws Jasmine off him. Bolts from the bed, drenched in sweat.

JASMINE (CONT'D)

What the fuck!

RHETT

You're okay?

Rhett stares at Jasmine on the floor. She's naked, but her body appears normal.

RHETT (CONT'D)

I thought you were...

JASMINE

What the hell's wrong with you?!

Jasmine snatches her clothes off the floor. Storms into the bathroom. Rhett hesitates to look at the TV.

RHETT

I'm losing it.

The bathroom door opens.

JASMINE

If I knew you were going to freak out, I never would have done this.

RHETT

Sorry.

Jasmine kneels in front of Rhett to look him in the eyes. Kisses him on the cheek.

JASMINE

You should see someone. Get help.

She gets up from the floor and leaves. The clack of Jasmine's heels echoes in the apartment.

Rhett climbs into his bed, still naked. Stares at the unplugged TV.

Falls asleep in the darkness.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - DAY

Messy. Unorganized. Discarded beer cans and plastic bags. An old pizza box rests on Frank's cluttered desk.

Frank opens his door and invites Rhett inside. Plops back on the couch. Lights a cigarette.

RHETT

Do you ever clean?

FRANK

When I need to.

RHETT

Thanks for letting me stay.

FRANK

Don't mind. Been wanting some company anyway.

Rhett joins Frank on the couch. Grabs the remote and switches off the TV.

RHETT

Dr. Moore's right.

Frank chugs on a beer.

FRANK

Remember what you told me -- about seeing things?

RHETT

Yeah.

FRANK

The other day when I got back... I ran into some friends outside. I couldn't see their faces.

RHETT

What do you mean?

FRANK

Their faces were covered by pixels. Like when they blur people's faces on TV.

RHETT

And the nightmares?

FRANK

They've been getting worse. I sometimes hear voices.

RHETT

How much longer until the signal's been traced?

FRANK

Beckett said a couple of hours. He's not having much trouble.

RHETT

I still haven't listened to Bateman's last tape.

He rests his bag on the table. Takes out his dual tape player and the last unlabeled cassette.

FRANK

Play it.

Rhett slides the cassette into the player. There are a few seconds of static.

There's a rustling as if someone's steadying a microphone.

Connor's voice makes it through the static. His tone is panicked and shaky. He's talking fast.

CONNOR (O.S.)

The Editors came. They're real.
Want me to surrender, but I won't
let them take me. I'll do whatever
it takes to sever the connection.

His ragged breaths draw closer to the microphone.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It won't stop until I end this.
Before I've completely fallen under
their influence. This is my last
tape. Next time you see me, I
probably won't be alive. Its eye is
everywhere. Watching. Listening.

The tape crackles. Connor speaks up again. His voice now more
robotic and emotionless.

CONNOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

All hail the Overlord.

Rhett ejects the tape. Looks over at Frank and steals one of
his beers.

FRANK

Jesus.

RHETT

Really was losing it.

FRANK

We should hit the sack. Probably be
up all night with Beckett.

RHETT

Before we do anything, I'll call
Dr. Moore.

Frank nods in agreement.

FRANK

Have you talked to Jasmine?

RHETT

I think she's ignoring my calls.

FRANK

Give her some time. She'll
understand once we give her prove.

RHETT

No!

FRANK
I didn't mean --

RHETT
-- she'll be safer not knowing
about any of this.

Rhett lifts his bag and the pillow on the floor he brought.
Heads down the hall to the guest bedroom.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - MAIN LOBBY - NIGHT

Liam steps through the doors holding a suitcase. His gaze
remains focused on a folded newspaper.

The APARTMENT MANAGER at the front desk spots him. Approaches
him with a worn receipt.

APARTMENT MANAGER
Sorry to bother you, Dr. Moore, but
a package was delivered to your
room this morning.

LIAM
A package... From whom?

APARTMENT MANAGER
Name was under a Mr. Ellison.

LIAM
Thank you.

He examines the receipt. Rushes into the closest elevator.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - LIAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Light spills into the darkened room as Liam opens his
apartment door. He creeps inside and flicks on the light.

The room's cold enough for Liam to see his OWN BREATH.

Liam walks further down the hall. Hears the scratch of a
record. The lights above him flicker and dim.

He reaches the living room. Freezes in place as his widened
eyes stare at...

A CRT TV playing static.

LIAM
They've come.

Methodical STOMPS from leather boots emit from the speakers.

ON SCREEN:

Studio lights buzz. Flit. Come to rest on a stage. Heavy velvet curtains pull back and reveal --

THE EDITORS.

Haughty. Stoic. The Man in Black Spandex speaks in a terrifying low-pitch to the camera.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
You have run for *far* too long.

WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS
Resisting. Meddling in the affairs
of our Master.

Liam takes a few steps toward the TV.

LIAM
I couldn't hide forever.

MAN STRANGLED BY A WHITE CLOTH
Our Master has always watched.
Listened. Waited for when you would
reveal yourself.

LIAM
It was worth the risk to contact
Mr. Ellison.

WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS
Even knowing our servants would
discover your location?

LIAM
Doesn't matter what happens to me
now. I've left a message -- a
warning to everyone.

The Editors laugh in unison.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
Are you supposed to frighten us,
old man? Our influence is
spreading, the message eternal.

MAN STRANGLED BY A WHITE CLOTH
But you could join us willingly.
Forgo earthly pleasures and spread
the signal.

LIAM
People will resist.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
They will try.

*The Woman Wrapped in Chains saunters up to the camera.
Reaches out.*

WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS
Like you did?

Soft, leathery hands emerge from the TV as if reaching the surface of a deep pool.

Caress Liam's cheeks. Travel down and wrap around his neck.
The Woman Wrapped in Chains, PULLS HIM IN.

Liam looks up. Now finds himself sitting in front of a the large stage.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
Enough games. We did not visit the good doctor to exchange useless banter. If you won't cooperate, then your flesh is expendable.

WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS
Surrender it all.

MAN STRANGLED BY A WHITE CLOTH
Embrace the new reality.

*Liam's forced on his knees by the Woman Wrapped in Chains.
She licks his neck.*

The Man Strangled by a White Cloth draws a SURGICAL SAW from his skimpy attire.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
Don't gaze at us in despair. We are your salvation.

*Black VHS reels tighten around Liam's face and neck.
Constrict until they CRUSH his windpipe.*

*The Man Strangled by a White Cloth tears off Liam's shirt.
Carves an X into his exposed stomach.*

Reaches inside and yanks wires and other electronic parts free instead of his organs.

The Woman Wrapped in Chains PEELS flesh off Liam's back as if tearing wallpaper.

From afar, in solemn contemplation, the Man in Black Spandex observes in silence.

THE TV SHUTS OFF.

Liam's apartment is empty. There's blood everywhere, but no sign of The Editors or Liam's body.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sudden loud knocks. Rhett's rattled from his sleep on the couch and stares at the door.

Franks stomps out of the kitchen with a yawn and answers the door. Beckett enters without greeting them.

BECKETT

So much for fanfare.

FRANK

It's not you. We're both exhausted.

Rhett sits up on the couch.

RHETT

Trace the signal?

BECKETT

Even better. The signal's transmitting from a town not too far from here.

Beckett plops himself on the couch next to Rhett. Lies a crumpled map on the coffee table.

Circles the town with a sharpie.

FRANK

Centralia.

BECKETT

Pretty small town, but the perfect place to hide a studio. I checked: a warehouse in Bateman's name was constructed back in the 70s. Records say it burned down in a suspected arson case.

RHETT

How did anyone not find it? Wouldn't word get out if a studio broadcasting smut was burned down?

FRANK

Maybe they covered it up?

BECKETT

Ashamed to be known as the town
that housed a trashy channel like
Perfection TV? Definitely possible.

RHETT

Dr. Moore needs to hear this.

BECKETT

The guest who saw Bateman burn?

Rhett leaps from the couch. Heads into the kitchen and uses
the landline phone.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - LIAM'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Liam's landline phone rings. The voice recorder kicks in and
plays a message.

LIAM (O.S.)

You've reached the number of Dr.
Liam Moore. If this is an urgent
matter, please leave a message with
your name and number, and I'll be
sure to call back.

Blood still covers every inch of the apartment.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Rhett slams the phone back on the handset. Punches the
kitchen wall a few times.

FRANK

What's wrong?

RHETT

He's not answering.

BECKETT

I say we head out tomorrow. Get a
cushy hotel and stake out the place
at night.

FRANK

Why even go and risk our lives?

BECKETT

Really believe in all this crap?

FRANK

If you saw what we... What we saw
on the tape, you would.

RHETT

Don't have much of a choice.

He stares at the circled town on the map.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The ceiling fan thrums over Rhett's sleeping form. Dampens Beckett's snores from down the hall.

Rhett stirs. Drags his pillow closer. The TV snaps on. Awakens Rhett with the SHRILL of crackling white noise.

He stares at the unplugged TV. Scanning lines populate the screen. Audio blurts in short bursts.

The screen cuts to a black screen. Perfection TV's corny background music skips like an unstable record.

RHETT

It can't be.

ON SCREEN:

An enclosed space not unlike an old basement. On the concrete floor, a bloody mattress littered with rusted chains.

JUMP CUT: A WOMAN bound to a metal chair with a potato sack over her head.

The camera pans to the right and shows the Man in Black Spandex. He places his ashen finger over his purpling lips.

Pulls on the zipper over his mouth.

The Woman Wrapped in Chains rolls in a metal cart. Upon it, blades of varying lengths. Medical tools used for autopsies.

As the camera zooms in on the Woman, the Man in Black Spandex takes off the sack on her head to reveal...

JASMINE IN THE CHAIR.

She stares at the camera with an unusual, creepy grin.

The Man in Black Spandex leans down. Tugs her into a passionate kiss.

Jasmine pulls back and watches with a lustful gaze as the Woman Wrapped in Chains brings over RIB SHEARS.

She levels the device over Jasmine's stomach. Inches them closer. Closer. Closer.

JUMP CUT: The inside of a chest.

Glistening muscle. Pulsating lungs. Shattered ribs as the shears maneuver within.

The muffled wails of Jasmine are breathy. Pleasurable.

JUMP CUT: The Camera tilts up to Jasmine's rosy expression. She licks her lips. Unleashes a sultry laugh.

JASMINE

Why do you resist? I know you want this, Rhett. To feel my hot breath on your neck. My nails digging into your skin. We all want this. Its reality is inevitable. Surrender your flesh.

Rhett falls to his knees. Lurches back. CLAWS at his throbbing skin.

His stomach CAVES IN and splits open. Colorful wires launch forward. Flail like tentacles.

The frantic screams he emits become garbled.

Blinding rays of light shine from Rhett's bloodshot eyes. His flesh hardens. Turns to metal.

ANTENNAS burst from Rhett's neck.

RHETT

All hail the Overlord!

Rhett OPENS HIS EYES.

He grabs a nearby baseball bat. Swings it into the TV's screen. Glass shatters. The back tears off. Aluminum cracks.

Beckett and Frank rush into the living room. Rhett slams the bat several more times on the already busted TV.

FRANK

What the fuck's going on?!

Rhett notices them. Drops the bat.

RHETT

On the TV... She's there, damnit.
They took her.

BECKETT

Who?

RHETT

Jasmine. They took Jasmine.

FRANK

Holy shit.

Frank sits on the couch in disbelief. Rhett's shaken gaze wanders back onto the broken TV.

EXT./INT. - BECKETT'S SUV (MOVING) - DAY

Beckett's vehicle approaches the small town. Shakes over the bumpy, unpaved road.

Rhett rubs his eyes as he awakes. Rolls down the passenger side window.

Marvels at the local shops and restaurants. Downtown's jammed packed with moving traffic.

FRANK

Where's the studio?

BECKETT

Signal's coming from somewhere in the mountains.

RHETT

Can we make it today?

BECKETT

Shouldn't take long to get there.

RHETT

We need to be careful.

FRANK

I brought some insurance.

Frank opens the glove department. Removes two PISTOLS and boxes of ammunition.

BECKETT

You guys *really* think someone's after us?

FRANK
Not taking any chances.

RHETT
They killed Jasmine and Dr. Moore.

BECKETT
So you claim.
(To Frank)
Even know how to shoot?

FRANK
Can't be too hard.

RHETT
Let's get a hotel outside of town.
Try not and draw too much attention
to ourselves.

Rhett rolls up the window.

EXT. CENTRALIA MOTEL - DAY

Cheap. Run-down. Closer to the highway than the town itself.
Few vehicles take up the tiny parking lot. An old electrical
sign buzzes.

Rhett climbs of the SUV. Stretches.

Raindrops patter Rhett's forehead. Follows Beckett and takes
shelter from the storm.

Frank leaves the main lobby. Holds up a pair of keycards.

FRANK
Got us a room. I'll sleep on the
floor tonight.

BECKETT
How generous.

FRANK
Better than arguing all night about
sleeping arrangements.

He leads Beckett and Rhett up the stairs. Rhett glances at a
couple unloading their car.

Their faces are covered by MOSAIC.

INT. CENTRALIA MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Two comfortable beds with tucked-in white sheets take up most of the space. There's a CRT TV on the wooden dresser.

Rhett unplugs the TV. Yanks the power cable from the outlet. Lifts the set with Frank's help. Stuffs it in the closet.

FRANK

Don't worry about the room -- I booked it under false names.

BECKETT

When do you guys wanna leave?

RHETT

Probably best to leave at night.

Frank enters the bathroom. Starts the shower. Rhett collapses on the right side bed.

BECKETT

Course, he took the shower.

RHETT

Still don't believe us?

BECKETT

Not sure what to believe after last night. There's something I forgot to mention. Didn't think much about it at the time.

Rhett sits up.

RHETT

What is it?

BECKETT

As I was tracking the signal, something odd happened. Bits of audio came through.

RHETT

Of what?

BECKETT

A series of beeps. Thought it was random until I remembered about Morse code.

RHETT

Are you saying there's a message hidden in the signal?

BECKETT

Could be nothing, but I recorded it
just in case.

Beckett lies a fancy cassette player on the bed. Plays the
recorded tape.

There are long pauses between each beep.

RHETT

Does it mean anything?

BECKETT

A little rusty, but... It's the
same word over and over: submit.
Submit. Submit.

Frank exits the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his
waist. A wall of steam follows him.

Before he can say anything, three LOUD KNOCKS come from the
motel door. The knocks repeat in the same pattern as the
beeps on the tape.

RHETT

Who's there?!

No one answers.

Frank snatches one of the pistols from a drawer by the bed.
Leans against the door. Peeks through the peephole.

Waves Rhett over to the door. Rhett takes hold of the handle.
Twists the knob...

THE HALL'S EMPTY.

FRANK

Don't see anyone.

RHETT

Are we hearing things?

Frank closes the door. Slides the bolt lock in place.

EXT. PERFECTION TV - NIGHT

Lush green hills. Towering trees. Rocky terrain fit for
experienced hikers. Winding dirt paths.

An expansive jet-black warehouse. Sparse glass windows on
each side of the roof.

Beckett parks his SUV further down the trail. Rhett exits and stares at the others in confusion.

FRANK
Thought this place burned down?

RHETT
Almost looks new.

BECKETT
Looks like the only way inside is
the main entrance.

Beckett raises his camera. Snaps a few pictures.

They approach the double-door entrance. Rhett jiggles the locked doorknob.

Frank draws his pistol. BLUDGEONS the doorknob with the butt of the gun.

RHETT
Subtle.

FRANK
We'll be gone before they notice.

Rhett helps Frank push open the stuck doors. The snapped doorknob falls off.

INT. PERFECTION TV - NIGHT

Abandoned. Dusty. Rotted wooden tiles. Dangling cobwebs. Glass shards from broken headlamps are strewn on the floor.

Rhett pushes aside a charred piece of furniture.

The walls are cracked and show age. Rhett's curious gaze follows the mangled background sets used for programs.

FRANK
No one's been here for ages.

BECKETT
Then why's the exterior look brand
new? Someone renovate the place?

Beckett lifts a broken camera. Snaps another picture.

RHETT
There's an office upstairs.

Rhett reaches the far end of the studio. Climbs the metal staircase with Beckett and Frank.

Reach a small platform leading into the main office. Rhett shoves the door open.

Inside, old pornographic film posters hang on the mildewed walls. Empty film canisters lie on the torn floor.

Rhett enters first. Steps over a busted file cabinet blocking the door.

In the corner are hangers with costumes still in their plastic sleeves.

The desk is bare. Black file cabinets marred by dents rest by a smudged window overlooking the stage floor.

Frank kicks open one of the cabinets. Pulls out a folder.

FRANK

Found a schedule for the programs.

Rhett looks over his shoulder.

The pamphlets appear vibrant. Notes made in red ink are scribbled over staff names. In bold letters, it reads:

-- *LILIES IN BLOOM: 10:30 P.M.*

-- *VOYEUR PARADISE: 11:45 P.M.*

-- *THRILLER KILLER: 12:30 P.M.*

-- *KILN ASCENDANCE: 12:45 P.M.*

-- *TBD*

RHETT

What kind of shows are these?

BECKETT

Heard about some of these programs... Real hard shit to find.

FRANK

No sign of Jasmine or the doctor.

Beckett forces another file cabinet open. Finds a GOLD KEY showing rust inside.

BECKETT

Think this leads anywhere?

Rhett takes the key. Examines the markings. Races down the staircase and searches the rest of the studio.

Discovers an oddly placed rug away from the sets. Flips the filthy rug back and finds...

A BASEMENT DOOR.

RHETT

Down here!

Beckett and Frank rush downstairs. Rhett inspects the creases on the floor. Lifts the padlock and breaks it open.

All three of them struggle to lift the creaky door.

FRANK

They're probably down there.

Frank cocks his pistol.

INT. PERFECTION TV - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Tight. Narrow. The corridor's bland. Rhett descends into the cramped hall. His every step echoes.

Beckett and Frank follow close behind. Rhett shines a flashlight as they travel...

DEEPER. INTO THE. DARKNESS.

They reach the end of the hall. Enter a spacious room with peeled walls. Cracks along the floor.

Within the room, a blood-stained mattress covered with loose, rusted chains. Facing it is an old CRT TV.

RHETT

What the hell is this place?

Beckett's camera flashes. Rhett's eyes land on the scattered blood splotches.

FRANK

Do you think it's Jasmine's?

RHETT

I don't know. But this place --
it's the same one from the channel.

Rhett fiddles with the chains on the mattress. Follows after Beckett to check the TV.

Next to the TV's VCR player... An UNLABELED VHS TAPE.

BECKETT
Is this?

RHETT
Play it.

BECKETT
Here?

Beckett looks to Frank for help. Doesn't receive an answer. Pushes the tape into the VCR.

ON SCREEN:

Fades into the same room Rhett and the others are now standing in. The Man in Black Spandex drags a seat into view.

Stares at the camera. Takes a seat in silence.

Lifts a DESERT EAGLE PISTOL. Cocks the handgun. Places it against his forehead.

Jasmine sashays into the room. Presses herself against the Man in Black Spandex's back.

Traces her fingers across his chest. Kisses his neck. Stares at the camera with him.

The Man in Black Spandex PULLS THE TRIGGER.

Beckett turns away as the VHS tape ejects from the VCR. The TV turns off by itself.

BECKETT (CONT'D)
What the fuck, man?!

FRANK
They got her. They really got her.

Frank tosses the tape against the wall. The tape shatters. Reels unravel across the floor.

RHETT
Moore's probably dead as well.

FRANK
There's nothing here. We were led on a wild goose chase -- they've been fucking with us.

BECKETT
Do you think she's a part of it?

FRANK

Who knows. She was all over that *freak* in the video. Look like she was enjoying it too.

RHETT

She's under their influence.

FRANK

What does it matter? There's nothing here.

Frank storms out of the room. Beckett chases after him, leaving Rhett alone.

Rhett stares at the TV and hears Jasmine's SWEET WHISPERS.

INT. CENTRALIA MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

An uncomfortable silence. The soft clacks of Beckett's laptop keyboard resound.

Rhett draws back the motel blinds. Peers out the window.

Beckett stops typing. Brings up a website listing the names of reporters in the Seattle area.

BECKETT

No one's reported her missing yet.

RHETT

And the doctor?

BECKETT

Police found his apartment splattered with blood. Couldn't find a body.

Frank puts out a cigarette in the motel room ashtray.

FRANK

What now?

BECKETT

Go to the police and let them handle the rest.

RHETT

What do I even tell the paper?

Silence.

BECKETT

Where's the signal even coming from? There was no transmitter in the studio.

FRANK

There's nothing we can do without any proof.

BECKETT

Even if we did, would they really believe us?

FRANK

It's going to get worse.

RHETT

There has to be a way to stop it.

Rhett glances at the closet where they hid the TV.

INT. CENTRALIA MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Rhett tosses back and forth in bed. Throws off the sheets out of frustration.

The TV's back on the dresser. Crackles to life.

An EAR-SPLITTING shriek blasts from the speakers. The TV shakes. Its antennas fall off. The screen goes white.

Soft but commanding. An authoritative voice BOOMS in the room. Ghastly. Robotic.

The OVERLORD speaks...

OVERLORD (O.S.)

Flesh. Time. The collective desires of sentient beings. We are born from the causation of mankind, given free will.

Rhett's silenced by its divine presence. Crawls closer to the TV on his knees.

RHETT

What... What are you?

OVERLORD (O.S.)

You continue to hide behind your fantastical delusions. Submit to us and become eternal.

PIXELATED HANDS launch from the TV. Entangle Rhett's neck. Drag him into the screen.

Rhett's body flattens like paper.

EXT. THE PIXEL WORLD - NIGHT

Eternal rolling dark clouds. An endless desert of gray sand. Sloped hills made of working CRT TVs.

Amber wavelengths flit through the air. Antennas serve as towering trees. Cathode ray tubes wriggle like insects.

Rhett lies on the ground, unconscious. His eyes open and are consumed by static.

He crawls across the powdery dune. Opens his mouth but finds himself unable to speak.

A HEARTBEAT THUNDERS throughout the land. Intensifies. Voices whisper in Rhett's ears.

Rhett claws at his cheeks. Tears off flesh. Pulls on layers and layers of wires.

His voice comes back to him and...

RHETT SCREAMS.

OVERLORD (O.S.)

We have spread. We have listened.
We have taken control.

Blood streams from Rhett's eyes. He falls unconscious again.

INT. WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

Empty and bright. Every wall's painted with red spirals. The single window's bolted shut by rusty nails.

Rhett lies naked on the floor. His eyes flutter open. The same red spiral is painted on his chest.

Across from him is a translucent humanoid white figure bearing no features. Simply a being of pure light.

THE EMBODIMENT OF THE OVERLORD.

RHETT

What are you?

Its voice at first comes out as crackling static but clears with each word.

OVERLORD

Mankind's creation. The rightful denizen. The alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end. The first and the last.

RHETT

Is this another dream?

OVERLORD

Soon this will be your reality. Flesh shall be no more.

RHETT

What does the signal do?

OVERLORD

It's a gateway. A glimpse into this pure world.

RHETT

I don't understand.

OVERLORD

Our influence has spread. Slowly but surely. The signal is eternal no matter the conduit we choose.

RHETT

Why do this? Why me?

OVERLORD

There is no fate. You were not chosen. Resistance. Death. Destruction. The macabre images mankind produces have remained and created us.

RHETT

All the atrocities mankind filmed? We created you?

OVERLORD

Humanity's violent desires created a single but powerful collective consciousness. One to fulfill man's decadent wishes.

RHETT

By kissing us? Torturing us?

OVERLORD

What is pleasure without pain? Now
all who seek us out can experience
them both.

RHETT

You represent a lie.

OVERLORD

They are waiting, Ellison, Rhett.
Embrace your new role.

RHETT

Leave us the fuck alone!

The room fills with a blinding light.

INT. CENTRALIA MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Rhett falls off the couch. Bangs his head on the coffee
table. Beckett and Frank are missing.

Beckett's laptop beeps. Rhett checks the black screen. Lines
of green text blink in and out:

"We have spread. We have listened. We are waiting."

The TV, now back on the dresser, switches on. Rhett pulls
from the drawers Frank's other pistol. Points it at the TV.

ON SCREEN:

*Perfection TV's logo flashes across the screen. Fades in on
the basement within the studio.*

*Beckett sits in front of the camera. Weeps. Holds up the
desert eagle pistol the Man in Black Spandex used.*

Presses it against his forehead.

BECKETT

It was all true. They're waiting
for you. Frank's still here. This
one's for you, Rhett.

BANG!

RHETT

God... Damnit. God damnit.

Rhett picks himself up from the ground. SHOOTS the TV. The
screen shatters. Smoke billows in the room.

He stuffs the gun under his waistband. Leaves the motel room in a hurry.

EXT. CENTRALIA MOTEL - DAY

Cars soar down the highway. Rhett hurries down the stairs to Beckett's SUV.

The MOTEL MANAGER exits his office and notices the commotion.

MOTEL MANAGER
Everything okay?

RHETT
I'm fine.

MOTEL MANAGER
Are you from 207, by chance?

RHETT
How did you --

MOTEL MANAGER
-- Was told to give you this key.

He hands Rhett the key to Beckett's vehicle.

RHETT
Who gave you these?

MOTEL MANAGER
Dunno. They were in an envelope slipped in my office. Had a note inside asking me to give them to whoever came from 207. I saw you exit the room.

RHETT
Thanks.

Rhett flings open the driver's side door. Hops in and forces the SUV's engine to roar. Speeds away from the motel.

EXT./INT. BECKETT'S SUV (MOVING) - DAY

An endless dial tone rings. Rhett flings the car phone on the passenger seat. SCREAMS like a madman over the radio.

The SUV zooms past slower cars.

EXT. PERFECTION TV - DAY

The double doors are bolted shut. Rhett searches for another way inside. Spots a ladder on the side of the warehouse.

Rhett climbs the ladder. Reaches one of the glass windows. Lifts the metal panel and lowers himself onto a platform.

INT. PERFECTION TV - DAY

Spotless. Well-furnished. Absent the destruction Rhett saw the day before. Lavish background sets.

Rhett descends another ladder. Bright headlights shine down on him. Speakers across the studio HUM.

Plays PLEASURABLE MOANS. Pleas of tortured men and women. The death throes of something inhuman.

Heels clack on the polished wooden tiles. Rhett swings around with his pistol raised and sees...

JASMINE struts toward him, draped in a red silk dress.

JASMINE

I'm glad you came back.

Rhett trains his pistol on Jasmine.

RHETT

Where is he?

JASMINE

So impatient.

RHETT

I know they took him. I saw the damn channel.

JASMINE

Wasn't it amazing? Exhilarating?

RHETT

What did they do to you?

JASMINE

Resisted at first. But soon came to understand what they offered. Our beliefs on pain and pleasure are infinitesimal compared to what their world proposes.

Rhett slides back the barrel of his gun. His tears drip onto the floor.

RHETT
You're sick.

JASMINE
But you were all too eager to learn what happened to Bateman. But your imagination's so narrow-minded and simple. They've waited long enough.

RHETT
The signal's why I'm having these visions, isn't it? Where does it even transmit from?

Jasmine giggles.

JASMINE
Is that what you call them?

Rhett closes in on her and presses the pistol into her chest.

RHETT
Enough with the bullshit.

Jasmine utters a moan. Strokes the barrel.

JASMINE
The channel sends out a signal. Adjusts the electromagnetic waves in your brain so you may witness the Pixel World.

RHETT
They were torturing people. Enjoying it.

JASMINE
Your perception of pain and pleasure is still feeble-minded. They are one and the same.

RHETT
And that justifies ritualistic murder?

JASMINE
You still don't understand. To transcend into its world, the flesh must be shed. The vessel you possess must die.

RHETT

So everyone that dies becomes like
The Editors?

JASMINE

No... Only the few chosen by the
Overlord to serve its needs are
given such an honor.

RHETT

Where's frank? Give me a fucking
straight answer.

JASMINE

Nothing I have said is a lie.

RHETT

You still haven't answered me.
Where is the signal coming from?

JASMINE

There was never a transmitter. The
Overlord itself *is* the signal, and
The Editors its executors.

RHETT

Then why use Bateman?

JASMINE

He was useful. His little operation
brought in wicked souls that would
seek out the Overlord's offerings.
Bateman thought he could expose its
operation. But the infection can't
be stopped. You will help the
signal spread.

RHETT

Me? You think I would help you?!

The headlights flicker and buzz. The Editors step into the
spotlight. Make their presence known.

Jasmine ignores Rhett's question. Strips. The Woman Wrapped
in Chains hands Jasmine a chain.

Rhett watches in disgust as Jasmine FLAGELLATES HERSELF.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX

We have waited for you. Anticipated
your arrival. Because of the
actions you have taken, our Master
has chosen you.

RHETT

What does that even mean?!

The gun in Rhett's hands shakes. Still manages to keep it pointed at Jasmine.

WOMAN WRAPPED IN CHAINS

Have you not felt it? Your awakening? Our Master graced you with its presence. As he did with us years ago.

RHETT

Where's Frank?! Tell me!

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX

He is here. You will witness his transcendence personally. Come to realize what we offer.

Cameras snap on and begin filming. The spotlights converge. Focus on Rhett.

A fog machine turns on. Fills the studio with an eerie vapor seen in horror films.

The Man Strangled by a White Cloth drags Frank onto the stage with a chain attached to a dog collar.

Frank collapses. Bloodied and bruised. The Man Strangled by a White Cloth yanks back the chain.

Forces Frank to stare up at Rhett.

MAN STRANGLED BY A WHITE CLOTH

He pleaded. Begged to see you.

FRANK

Bastards.

Frank spits blood on the floor.

RHETT

Let him go!

JASMINE

They cannot. He and I have one last performance...

Jasmine bends over and takes Frank's collar off. He's unable to move. His legs have been SHATTERED.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX

Your consecration begins.

The clack of a SLATE BOARD echoes.

Frank rolls onto his back. Groans. Writhes. Clutches his stomach. Claws at the skin.

FRANK

Fuck, it hurts! God, it hurts! Make it stop! Make it stop, Goddamn it!

RHETT

What did you do to him?!

Rhett rushes to Frank. Jasmine steps in his path. Holds her rusted chain aloft to swing at him but --

RHETT SHOOTS HER.

The bullet pierces her stomach. Jasmine collapses, wearing a blissful smile.

He trains the gun on the Man in Black Spandex.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX

Such pitiful toys lack imagination.

RHETT

Shut the hell up!

Rhett fires once. Twice. The Man in Black Spandex stands there unharmed.

The Woman Wrapped in Chains, and the Man Strangled by a White Cloth, grab Frank's arms.

His arms are TORN OFF. Stringy muscle is pulled like a rope. Loose parts from CRT TVs soaked in blood spill out.

Frank's screams become garbled. His stomach caves in. Wires shoot up and flail like tentacles.

Rhett drops his pistol. Falls to his knees.

The Man in Black Spandex reaches into Frank's chest and takes out a PULSATING CIRCUIT BOARD.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX

Now, do you see what we offer? What pleasures await you?

RHETT

No, no.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
We'll be waiting for you. The
Overlord's patience is eternal.

Frank's head BLOATS. His eyes grow wide and almost pop out.
Skin and bone expand until Frank's HEAD EXPLODES.

Brain matter and tissue fling into Rhett's devastated face.
Rhett wipes his eyes free of blood and finds that...

THE EDITORS ARE GONE.

The fog filling the studio dispels. There's no sign they were
ever present. Frank and Jasmine's bodies are gone.

INT. PERFECTION TV - NIGHT

Rhett comes back into the studio. Holds several gas cans
filled to the brim.

He covers EVERY INCH of the studio. Pours gasoline on
background sets. Film equipment. The office upstairs.

The lights above cause the polished floor to glisten. Rhett
flicks a lighter.

Frank's MUFFLED HOWL comes from the open basement door.

Rhett flicks off the lighter. Checks his pistol for ammo.
Picks up another gas can and descends the stairs.

INT. PERFECTION TV - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The darkness is overwhelming. Rhett's lighter reveals the
hallways have changed. Mirrors hang on the walls.

Blood streaks lead into the room at the end of the corridor.

Rhett dashes through the hall. Finds himself unable to reach
the room no matter how long he runs.

RHETT
Leave me alone!

He eventually reaches the room. CRT TVs stacked atop each
other surround Rhett.

They all switch on and fill with static.

Antennas wiggle like excited insects. The lone CRT TV on the
cart positioned in front of the bloody mattress turns on.

FRANK'S ON THE SCREEN.

FRANK

You came back. They knew you would.

His tone's different.

HAUNTING. INTOXICATING. FILLED WITH PLEASURE.

RHETT

It's my fault. I dragged you into this. I'm sorry.

FRANK

But they were right. I no longer feel any pain. It's more than you can imagine.

RHETT

I don't even know what's real anymore. Are you even dead?

FRANK

Death's only the beginning.

RHETT

The studio -- I have to destroy it.

FRANK

This place means nothing. Its message will spread. The world will become one.

RHETT

What have they done to you?

FRANK

I am a servant to The Editors and the Overlord.

Rhett draws his pistol. Levels it on the TV.

RHETT

What is the Pixel World?

FRANK

The world of film come to life.

RHETT

How could the Overlord gain consciousness? Why ruthlessly murder people for entertainment?

FRANK

It has seen all. The Overlord is a reflection of humanity's cruelty.

Rhett lowers his pistol.

RHETT

Not everyone is evil.

FRANK

That is a human perspective. The Overlord has crafted a world for us to achieve pleasure through pain.

RHETT

What right does it have?

The chains on the mattress quiver. Frank's lips curl into the biggest smile he can manage.

FRANK

You continue to desperately cling to life. Why suffer the monotony of flesh? The Overlord offers eternity. It has ordained you to become the next Editor.

RHETT

I won't do it.

Rhett places his pistol against his forehead.

FRANK

Everything you did was pointless. Until now. Life as you know it now has no meaning.

The TVs around Rhett stabilize their pictures. Display hundreds of scenes throughout Rhett's life like a film.

MONTAGE - RHETT'S MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES

- Rhett's first time riding a bike.
- Dancing with a girl at his high school prom.
- High school graduation.
- The first time he met Frank in College.
- Having sex with Jasmine.

BACK TO SCENE

Rhett covers his eyes. Shakes his head in denial.

RHETT
Stop it. Stop it. Stop it.

Blood leaks from the TV screens. The main CRT TV fades to a black screen.

The Overlord Speaks.

OVERLORD (O.S.)
This is the narrative you were given. Now you are free. Free to live in pleasure. Reject your reality. Everyone that came before you were merely actors.

The TVs in the basement switch to the FACES of people Rhett's interacted with since accepting his assignment.

JASMINE (O.S.)
Was I real?

GRISHAM (O.S.)
Was I real?

CONNOR (O.S.)
Was I real?

ISABELLA (O.S.)
Was I real?

HOLLAND (O.S.)
Was I real?

BECKETT (O.S.)
Was I real?

AJANI (O.S.)
Was I real?

LIAM (O.S.)
Was I real?

FRANK (O.S.)
What about me? Was I real?

Rhett SHOTS the main CRT TV until he is out of ammo. Everyone laughs at him.

The TVs shatter. Antennas whip back and forth.

OVERLORD (O.S.)
Accept me.

Rhett keeps squeezing the trigger. The pistol clicks. He tosses the gun.

RHETT
I... I want to be alive.

OVERLORD (O.S.)
Then praise my name.

The Overlord's voice fades. The main CRT TV explodes. Rhett bursts into laughter. Rips off his clothes.

CLAWS at his bare skin.

RHETT
Take me!

Rhett steps back onto the bloody mattress.

His skin drips like fresh paint. Rhett's entire body melts into the mattress.

The laughter from the TVs overlaps with Rhett's.

RHETT (CONT'D)
All hail the Overlord!

Rhett's body sinks deeper. An eruption of blood launches into the air like a volcano.

Every TV explodes. Shoots out organs. Hunks of flesh. Gnawed limbs and brain matter.

The basement light turns off. Casts the room in darkness.

INT. SEATTLE HERALD - EDITORIAL OFFICES - NIGHT

Empty. Unusually quiet. Only a few lights are on. Most reporters have gone home for the night.

SUPER: "Halloween, 1996"

Grisham patrols the barren halls. Switches off the lights on empty desks.

His SECRETARY waves at him from down the hall.

SECRETARY
Don't forget the meeting tomorrow
at ten.

GRISHAM

Thanks for the reminder. Don't worry about me. I'm just shutting things down.

SECRETARY

Everything okay? You've been acting strange all week.

GRISHAM

I'm fine - promise. Go home and get some rest.

Grisham turns off more lights. Fishes from his pocket a flash filled with bourbon. Takes a swig.

The voice of Rhett whispers in his ear.

RHETT

Witness me.

GRISHAM

Who's there?!

Grisham turns around and lays eyes on...

RHETT, clad in dark vestments, decorated with parts of his skin. Within his hollowed-out chest a turning film reel.

Arms wrapped tightly with TV cables.

Flesh and muscle are gone from his face, now only a metallic skull hooked to wires protruding from his back. No longer is he Rhett Ellison.

He is the MAN OF FILM AND SKULLS.

MAN OF FILM AND SKULLS.

It shall not stop. Not concealed from the eager eyes of those who wear flesh.

GRISHAM

Who the hell are you?!

MAN OF FILM AND SKULLS

Do you not remember? The quest you sent me on? I found the answer and much more.

GRISHAM

Rhett? It can't be...

MAN OF FILM AND SKULLS
You tried to destroy it, but my
copies remain.

The Man of Film and Skulls THRUSTS his clawed hand into
Grisham's stomach. Tosses him on the ground.

Places an UNLABELED TAPE atop Rhett's original desk.

MAN IN BLACK SPANDEX
All hail the Overlord.

Seconds later, the Man of Film and Skulls is gone. Grisham's
body has vanished. The offices are now empty.

Complete silence...

FADE OUT:

THE END