

NEUROMANCER

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TITLE SCROLL:

**"Artificial Intelligence runs all
major social, political and
economic systems on Earth.**

**Those who control AI control the
world.**

**However, we must remain vigilant
lest our AI servants learn to
control us"**

**-- *The Turing Protocol (excerpt),
c. 2053***

EXT. MEMPHIS - MORNING

The near future. The world is much as it is today, only bigger, faster and meaner.

McCOY PAULEY, AKA THE DIXIE FLATLINE (50s), walks with a grifter's swagger down a busy Memphis street. He is draped in an expensive linen suit, but he wears it cheaply, the tie off kilter, the pant legs cuffed over ill-matched shoes. In one hand is a gaudy briefcase made from the skin of some recently extinct reptile.

*CASE (V.O.)
To know me you have to know McCoy
Pauley. Or as he was better known,
the Dixie Flatline.*

Dixie pauses at an open oxygen bar. Tips poorly and offers the BARISTA a gummy smile. He plays the role of a Southern Bubba well. An act that masks a razor-sharp intellect.

*CASE (V.O.)
He got the name because he survived
three encounters with AI. Each time
left him clinically dead for over
thirty seconds.*

Having enjoyed his oxygen he takes out a Havana cigar and lights it.

EXT. MEMPHIS HILTON - MORNING

Dixie finishes his cigar and stubs it out beside the austere facade of the Memphis Hilton.

*CASE (V.O.)
But he came back. Dixie always came
back.*

INT. MEMPHIS HILTON, HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Dixie enters a dark hotel suite. He switches on the lights and kicks the side of a king-sized bed.

DIXIE
Wake up, Case.

From a tangle of sheets emerges a BEAUTIFUL GIRL. She eyes Dixie with mild annoyance. This is not Case.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
Pardon the intrusion, young lady.
Me and sonny got work to do.

To Dixie's surprise, ANOTHER GIRL rises from the other side of the bed. The two girls gather their things and make a swift exit under his disapproving glare.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
I sincerely hope you are taking
precautions.

Dixie tears off the remaining sheets. There he finds HENRY DORSETT CASE (mid-20s), semi-conscious, squinting up at him through puffy eyes. Case has the indefatigable air of someone to whom everything in life comes easy.

CASE
Always, Dix.

DIXIE
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you are a
pitiful sight.

CASE
You ain't exactly a ray of sunshine
yourself.

DIXIE
Sunshine. Now that's a good idea.

Dixie hits a remote and the tinted windows turn transparent allowing the cruel Memphis sun to blast into the room. We can now see the full extent of Case's excess. The detritus of the minibar and various undergarments decorate the side table. Dixie sweeps it all into a waste bin and sets down his briefcase.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
You wanna shower or somethin'?

CASE
I like jacking-in dirty.

DIXIE
Uh-huh. Well, I'm counting on you
to be sharp. Don't you flake out on
me.

Dixie snaps open the briefcase to reveal two ONO SENDAI DECKS. At first glance they don't look like much of anything, just a couple of plastic boxes ribbed with shock absorbent rubber.

CASE

Have I ever let you down?

DIXIE

Boy, you're so crooked you could hide behind a corkscrew.

Dixie tosses one of the boxes to Case. The instant it makes contact with Case's hands it cracks open revealing molded handgrips, like a highly evolved game controller.

CASE (V.O.)

We had a good run. Twelve years Dix and me hacked countless scores, each one bigger than the last.

Dixie takes a seat and opens up his deck. He sets a small battery powered fan next to him, snaps open a bottle of Gatorade.

DIXIE

All right honey, let's make lots of money.

Case cracks his knuckles and opens his hands revealing fingertips bulging with subcutaneous implants. They magnetically lock to the Sendai.

CASE (V.O.)

I had beautiful women, the best and latest hardware, I travelled the world...

Case's eyes roll into his head, his face goes slack. He looks much like heroin addict receiving an overdue fix. As he feels the rush, the world around him JITTERS... morphs with the intangible substance of a dream.

CASE (V.O.)

But the only thing I really longed for was escape from the meat.

Time slows.

The blades of Dixie's fan wind down with ever decreasing revolutions.

The sounds of the street distort like a record changing from 78 to 45 RPM.

Motes of dust freeze in the air.

We are witnessing the intersection of two realities.

His pupils slip back into view and he finds himself confronted with...

A PULSING MANDALA OF LOGIC AND CODE.

C-SPACE.

THE CONSTRUCT.

A multitude of words exist to describe it, none can fully encompass its vast complexity. The great computer mind of the world.

CASE (V.O.)

This was AI turf. Here it was all about speed. No way you could tangle with AI from a keyboard. Time it takes for a signal to travel from your brain to your fingers would seem like an eternity to an AI. To play this game you had to trip the light fantastic. Direct neural feed.

Case glances over at Dixie, who sits across from him cradling his Sendai. Suddenly and impossibly, Dixie is standing NEXT TO HIMSELF, his twinned body merges with the traffic of information.

CASE

What're we after?

Our view widens revealing that like Dixie, Case now stands outside of his 'real self', which remains seated on the bed plugged into the Sendai.

DIXIE

Got a line on some serious coin being laundered as Bombay derivatives through the United Bank of Switzerland.

CASE

Dix, I got something better than that.

DIXIE

What trumps twenty billion rupees?

CASE

Only the latest and highest grade Chinese ICE-breaker on the market. This thing'll pass through any firewall like grass through a goose.

DIXIE

You're all 'bout the software, aintcha?

CASE

One man's poison.

Dixie can see Case isn't giving this up.

DIXIE
All right. Lead the way.

The slightest gesture from Case and the aspects of the room fold like four dimensional origami. Then unfurl to reveal a giant "TA", the corporate logo for TESSIER-ASHPOOL.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
Tessier-Ashpool? Thought you said it was a Chink program?

CASE
TA bought it from the Chinese. That's how I heard about it, when I was running a routine search through New Taipei
(off Dixie's look)
What's the matter?

DIXIE
TA's not to be fooled with. Old Money. Real old. These bastards own half of Sense/Net.

CASE
Not my first rodeo. ...I'll check for ICE.

DIXIE
Careful.

Case splits into FIVE COPIES OF HIMSELF. The original hangs back while the DOPPLEGANGERS test the portal's defences. It's a hacker trick devised to set off any hidden traps.

Nothing happens.

CASE
See?

DIXIE
You got the key?

CASE
In my back pocket.

Case assembles a twelve digit/letter code and tosses it at the TA logo. A nanosecond as information is exchanged. And then the 'T' and the 'A' split apart, granting entry like the Gates of Heaven.

DIXIE
Well, all right then.

INSIDE

A vast carousel of programs each represented by a unique icon.

CASE
Should be in here.

Case leads Dixie to a CHINESE DRAGON ICON.

CASE (CONT'D)
Here it is. Kaung Grade Mark Eleven
penetration program.

He takes hold of it. Suddenly, his arm freezes.

DIXIE
What--?

CASE
ICE!

Case is instantly consumed by countless particles of ICE
(Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics). He runs a gamut of
anti-virus programs. No effect. He's rapidly disappearing
under a fractal blizzard.

CASE (CONT'D)
(muffled, breaking up)
...isn't ...virus... It's AI... all
over me!

DIXIE
Hold on, kid.

Case is overwhelmed, reality SHATTERING into countless pixels
of light. Intermingled are strobing images:

A BEACH

A GLIDING SEA GULL

A RUNNING CHILD

And then something pulls Case out of the ICE. It's Dixie. He
gives his 'body' over to the virus, fighting it like a wild
animal.

CASE
Dix!

DIXIE
Get outta here! Unplug me from the
outside!

Case is clear of the ICE, but he can't bring himself to
abandon Dixie...

DIXIE (CONT'D)
Go! Or we're both dead!

Case has no choice but to bail. He leaps out of the carousel
and lands...

IN HIS BODY.

He is back in the hotel room, restored to its normal
dimensions.

Case's Sendai deck automatically detaches itself. He gags, the shock of sudden reentry making him puke over the side of the bed.

Meanwhile, Dixie is convulsing in his chair, the Sendai deck running white hot in his lap.

Case wills himself to his feet and forcibly rips the deck from Dixie's fingers, taking charred flesh with it. Dixie falls onto the floor choking. He's going into cardiac arrest.

CASE

Dixie!

Case scrambles over to his luggage, disoriented, rips out the contents of the bag, searching desperately for something that he can't find.

CASE (CONT'D)

Where is it? Where the fuck is it?!

JAPANESE ACCENTED VOICE (O.S.)

You are looking for this?

Case turns to see an elegantly dressed ASIAN MAN. We will come to know him as HIDEO. He is flanked by TWO CAUCASIAN HEAVIES. In his hand is the adrenaline shot Case was searching for.

Case lunges for it but is easily intercepted by the thugs.

CASE

What do you want?!

Dixie flops on the floor like a fish out of water. Case is desperate.

CASE (CONT'D)

I'll pay for it. Name your price.

Hideo watches impassively as Dixie's movements slow until... The great hacker falls still.

CASE (CONT'D)

Dixie...

Hideo feels for a pulse. Nothing. Dixie is truly dead.

HIDEO

The Dixie Flatline. Finally lives up to his name.

Hideo motions to his men. They throw Case on the bed and tie his hands and feet to the bedposts. Hideo turns his attention to him.

HIDEO (CONT'D)

Normally, you also would be dead. But Lord Ashpool felt a living example gives a stronger message.

Case fights the restraints uselessly.

CASE
(realizing)
You're from Tessier-Ashpool.

Hideo doesn't bother to respond. He merely replaces the adrenaline shot with another chemical, then pulls up Case's sleeve and taps out a healthy vein.

HIDEO
Russians made this mycotoxin in the war.

He administers the shot. The effect is almost instantaneous: Liquid agony spreads through Case's veins. Hideo sniffs the air.

HIDEO (CONT'D)
Do you smell that? It is your nervous system burning. One micron at a time. Should take no more than thirty hours to finish.

He leads his men out the door. A final glance back at Case.

HIDEO (CONT'D)
Mata-ne.

And with that Hideo carefully shuts and locks the door behind him. Case fights the restrains, cries for help that is not coming.

CASE (V.O.)
I wished they had killed me. But they knew that nothing could be worse than to be imprisoned in my own flesh.

Sweat pours down his face, his throat grows bone dry. Case SCREAMS. And everything goes WHITE.

EXT. PORT, CHIBA PREFECTURE - NIGHT

The WHITENESS blurs into the tarnished silver of an overcast sky. The gleaming metropolis that was once Tokyo has been strangled under Chinese occupation. It's become a backwater Shanghai where only the desperate come for help. Here everything is recycled. Even the people.

CASE (V.O.)
Chiba prefecture. After the Chinese takeover, it had hemorrhaged with foreigners. Most of them illegal.

Soft rains descend on a melange of Chinese Triad black marketeers, Yakuza, ex-pats and tourists. Between massage parlors and karaoke bars clandestine SURGERY CLINICS advertise human organ replacement and bio-enhancement.

CASE (V.O.)
*Gaijin called it Night City. Here
 you could find a new liver as
 easily as a pack of cigarettes.
 Some of it was legit, but mostly it
 was driven by the black clinics.*

Within the crowd we find Case. He's two years older than when we last saw him, but he looks like he has aged twenty. Nerve damage has paralyzed one side of his face. Gaunt features and bloodshot eyes have all the telltale signs of a rampant drug habit.

CASE (V.O.)
*I came here looking for a cure. All
 I found were new addictions.*

INT. CHATSUBO - NIGHT

The Chatsubo is a den for the underworld Japanese and professional ex-pats. Whores and sailors sit across from Yakuza and amped-up clients of the black market.

Case is planted at the bar. The bartender, RATZ (60s), a grizzled man of unknown East European extraction, pours draft Kirin with a dirty prosthetic arm.

Case swallows several pills and chases them down with the last of the beer. Ratz looks on with an odd mixture of amusement and disapproval.

RATZ
 You should be careful how you mix
 your stimulants, Herr Case.

CASE
 It's not like I'm using. More like
 my body has developed a massive
 drug deficiency.

Case holds out his now empty glass for a refill.

CASE (CONT'D)
 Come on, man, that's an old joke,
 you never heard it before?

Ratz shakes his head and flashes a corroded metalwork smile.

RATZ
 Ahh, you are too much the artiste,
 Herr Case.

CASE
 Artiste?

RATZ
 You are the artiste of the slightly
 funny deal.

CASE
Well, somebody's gotta be funny
around here.

Case waves the mug, but Ratz keeps him hanging, polishing the
bar with a soiled rag.

RATZ
People say your new stimulants give
customer headache.

CASE
They ain't my customers.

Ratz stares him down.

RATZ
Careful, artiste. Some night maybe
you get *too artistic* and wind up in
the clinic tanks, spare parts.

CASE
You're breaking my heart, Ratz.
(holding out the empty
mug)
So how's about it?

The bartender's gaze drifts away from Case. He straightens,
almost stands at attention.

RATZ
Herr Wage, what an honor. To what
do we owe this pleasure?

Case looks back right into the face of WAGE, of indeterminate
age, possessing reptilian features accented by sea-green eye
transplants. He's flanked by his JOEBOYS, twins or possibly
clones, bulging with grafted muscle.

The bar has suddenly turned quiet. People know who Wage is
and his appearance denotes impending violence.

WAGE
Came to see my pal, Case, 'cause
buddy here doesn't own a phone.

CASE
Don't trust 'em.

WAGE
Weren't you some kind of cowboy?
How do you go from that to being a
Luddite?

CASE
Hey, I move units, don't I?

WAGE
That you do. Although those
neuroenhancers you got me to import
are selling like rat shit.

(MORE)

WAGE (CONT'D)

An associate of mine tried some,
woke up with temporal fucking lobe
epilepsy.

CASE

Shoulda read the warning label.

Wage bites hard on the toothpick that has been twirling
between his lips.

WAGE

And what about that last shipment
of ketamine?

CASE

Close. Very close.

WAGE

Glad to hear it, 'cause people say
you're spending a lot in the
clinics. Not with any of my
proceeds, I hope.

CASE

Would I be that stupid?

Wage scans Case with his artificial eyes. For all we know
they could be amped with x-ray vision. A tense moment. And
then Wage slaps Case in the back of the head.

WAGE

No, I don't believe you would.
You're crazy, but you're smart
crazy.
(then, getting very close)
You mighta been somebody special
once, Case. Floatin' out there away
from all the shit. But now you're
in it with the rest of us. Don't
forget that.

Wage releases Case and turns for the door, his Joeboys
following suit.

WAGE (CONT'D)

I expect to collect next week.

And with that, they are gone. Case turns back to Ratz.

CASE

Think I could use that refill about
now.

Ratz pours. His expression even grimmer than before. He knows
Case is fucked.

CASE (V.O.)

*I was playing a game with myself.
An old game. A final solitaire.*

EXT. STREET/ALLEYWAY, NIGHT CITY - NIGHT

A sign etched in dancing, holographic light reads in Mandarin, Japanese and English: "FREESIDE, WHY WAIT". Case passes beneath, hands in pockets, sussing the street with all its promise and danger.

CASE (V.O.)
I no longer carried a weapon, no longer took the most basic precautions. I ran the fastest and loosest deals on the street with anyone who'd meet my price.

He makes b-line through a soggy alleyway.

INT. WAREHOUSE, NIGHT CITY - NIGHT

A fossilized character of undefined sex sits in a musty space crammed with exotica. Behind him is a sign "JULIUS DEANE, IMPORT EXPORT".

Case hands JULIUS an inhaler.

CASE
 Synthetic human adrenochrome.
 Everyone wants it, but no one knows how to get it.

JULIUS
 Except you, boyo?

CASE
 I can have a shipment of forty units by next week.

EXT. STREET, NIGHT CITY - NIGHT

Case steps out of the alley.

From behind him: SHOUTS in Japanese. And Case is running. TOUGH GUYS, probably Yakuza, follow.

EXT. STREET, NIGHT CITY - NIGHT

Case sprints through the neon maze of Night City. The Yaks stumbling on the slick pavement. In the madness of the moment he exalts in the pure adrenaline rush.

CASE'S POV: the lights of the street become the glittering avenues of C-space.

CASE (V.O.)
I did everything I could to forget. But every night my dreams brought the old feelings back...

INT. CAPSULE HOTEL - NIGHT

Case startles awake from a feverish sleep. He is in a sleeping capsule, his entire body shaking. He holds up his tremulous hands and we see that the skin has grown calloused over his implants.

CASE (V.O.)
*...And every morning I woke with my
 fingers searching for the deck that
 wasn't there.*

Case peels back his mattress. Beneath, a fat roll of New Yen is cozied up to his drug supply. He helps himself to a derm patch. It calms the shaking.

CASE (V.O.)
*Whatever little I made off Wage, I
 spent in the black market clinics.*

EXT. CHIBA BLACK MARKET MED-LAB STRIP - NIGHT

Case's drooping face looks up at a dilapidated building. Hard to believe it is home to any kind of medical facility.

INT. BLACK MARKET CLINIC - NIGHT

Case is in a MRI machine. JAPANESE DOCTORS examine the scans.

CASE (V.O.)
*Japanese doctors claimed they had
 the latest Chinese tech...*

INT. OUT PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Case recovering. A Japanese surgeon gives him news. Judging from Case's reaction, it isn't good.

CASE (V.O.)
...You couldn't prove it by me.

INT. ARCADE, NINSEI - NIGHT

Within the hologram and laser glow of an Arcade, Case works out his frustration on a violent video game. Even with the nerve damage he is a highly skilled player. He kills with bloody efficiency.

LINDA LEE (O.S.)
 Bad night?

Standing over him is a beautiful Asian mix, tall, big eyes smudged with black paintstick. She wears a SHURIKEN, Ninja throwing star, like a pendant. This is LINDA LEE (early 20s).

CASE
It was okay.

All at once, Case is hit with a good bout of the shakes. His game goes to hell, his man dies. Case suddenly feels self-conscious. He involuntarily turns the paralysed side of his face away from her.

LINDA LEE
Think you can hook me up?

EXT. TOKYO BAY - NIGHT

Beneath spider legged loaders Linda affixes a sophisticated derm patch to one arm. It feeds her vein like a fat leech in reverse. Case lights a cigarette.

CASE (V.O.)
Linda Lee was one of Lonnie Zone's girls. She didn't charge me. Not in the strictest sense of the word.

A flashing Holo sign lights up the polluted sky, "*FREESIDE: WHY WAIT?*"

LINDA
You wanna go to Freeside?

CASE
Why? You got a ticket?

Linda offers a junkie giggle. Shakes her head.

LINDA
'Course not. But if I did?...

CASE
Not my kind of place.

LINDA
Sounds like fun to me. Floating up there. Just one big party.

CASE
That's where the Tessier-Ashpool family lives. They're the ones that fried my nervous system and killed my partner.

LINDA
Oh.

CASE
He was just about the closest thing to family I ever had.

This cuts through her druggy haze. She tries to express sympathy, but can't quite find the words.

CASE (CONT'D)
 Sorry, old news... No reason why
 you shouldn't go.

LINDA
 Well, given the choice. I'd rather
 just be with you.

He looks at her from behind one paralyzed eyelid.

INT. CAPSULE HOTEL - NIGHT

Case and Linda Lee drop onto the bed. Her shuriken dangles over phosphorous tattoos, a mixture of manga characters and corporate sponsorship... *SONY... PFIZER...* flashing under her creamy skin. She moves to kiss him.

CASE
 I, uh... I can't feel much anymore.

LINDA LEE
 That's okay.

And she kisses him. This time he submits, lets her caress his damaged face with her lips.

CASE (V.O.)
*God, Linda was beautiful. ...Too
 beautiful for me.*

INT. CAPSULE - NIGHT

Case wakes to find his capsule has been stripped bare. His few meager possessions gone. And more importantly, his stash.

CASE (V.O.)
*She took everything. My entire
 inventory. But somehow I was okay
 with it. It was part of the
 unspoken arrangement. She got some
 cash. I got my death wish.*

INT. CHATSUBO - NIGHT

Case in his usual spot. Ratz wiping the bar with his usual grim expression, only this time nobody is talking. Case has the air of a doomed man. His meter has run out and everyone in the place can smell it.

LONNIE
 Konnichiwa, Case.

LONNIE ZONE sidles up to him. Lonnie is a pimp. And he looks the part.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
 Looking for one of my girls. Linda
 Lee.

(MORE)

LONNIE (CONT'D)

Hear you been spending some quality time with her. Maybe you know where she is?

CASE

No idea.

LONNIE

Case, I have every right to fuck you up right now. But somehow I feel sorry for you.

CASE

Why's that?

LONNIE

You don't know?

CASE

Wanna give me a hint?

LONNIE

Wage's gonna put a hole in your face.

CASE

Oh, yeah?

LONNIE

You don't seem very concerned.

CASE

I don't owe him enough. He does me and he's out the money anyway.

LONNIE

Too many people owe him now, man. Maybe you get to be an example.

Case looks up at Ratz. He just turns away.

CASE (V.O.)

All this time I wanted to die. And now I was scared outta my mind.

EXT. CHATSUBO - NIGHT

Case leaves the Chat, when something stops him in his tracks. Reflected the window he sees SOMEBODY in mirrored glasses, dark clothing, slender, watching him. And then gone.

EXT. STREET, NINSEI - NIGHT

Case moves briskly through the night crowd, half of them wearing filtration masks. Case coughs, the air is bad tonight. He hazards a glance behind him, glimpses the glasses. No question, someone is really tailing him.

Case pushes violently through the crowd bumping into a group of sailors who scream after him in Spanish.

Ahead he sees the Arcade.

INT. ARCADE, NINSEI - NIGHT

Case is immersed the white noise of countless games, past holograms of instantaneous gruesome death. Case looks back and sees his tail through the lurid glow of a rising mushroom cloud.

He brushes past a JAPANESE GIRL DJ-ing. Case screams at her like a madman.

CASE
Get your security up here!

She ignores him. Case doesn't have time to convince her. He sprints down a corridor.

INT. STAIRWELL, ARCADE - NIGHT

Case breaks into the stairwell and races up to the next floor, jimmies the lock and breaks into...

INT. SECOND FLOOR, ARCADE - NIGHT

A disused office space. Case slips behind a door and with shaking hands flicks open a COBRA, a telescoping metal truncheon. Two nasty fang-like prongs extrude from a ball-bearing head.

A CRASH from further down the hallway, a SCREAM, shouting something in Japanese. And then FOOTSTEPS unhurried, coming closer.

Case looks around, nowhere to hide. His eyes fall on the window.

EXT. 2ND FLOOR, ARCADE, NINSEI - NIGHT

Case shimmies along the ledge. He balances the cobra in one hand. He sees shadows playing on the tempered glass window. Someone moving inside. There is nowhere to go from here. He has run out of ledge. Below him is a dumpster full of junked soggy chipboard.

The window opens, SOMEONE steps through. Case raises the cobra to strike and...

His foot slips. A totally clumsy move. Fucking gravity. For an instant the world spins. And then Case drops two stories into the dumpster, knocking him out cold.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Case wakes up tied to a chair with plastic zip lock cuffs. Directly across from him is Linda Lee. She has been crying, her raccoon make-up dribbles down her cheeks. Their eyes meet for a moment. Her lips trembling uncontrollably.

CASE
Linda...

LINDA LEE
Case... I'm sor--

BLAM! Linda's brains shoot out one side of her head. She slumps over like a rag doll. Her life extinguished in an instant. Case is too shocked to even scream.

WAGE
She spent all the money on a one way ticket to Freeside.

Wage holds up a silver laminated ticket. Waves it in Case's face.

WAGE (CONT'D)
Non-fucking-refundable.

Wage swings around and kicks Linda Lee's chair over. Her body hits the floor like so much dead meat. His Joeboys hang back stoic as ever. They're use to this kind of thing from Wage.

WAGE (CONT'D)
I got her at the spaceport. Dumb bitch used her real name. Whaddya expect from one of Lonnie's whores. You on the other hand, I expected more from you.

Case just looks up at Wage with immeasurable hatred.

WAGE (CONT'D)
I knew you were crazy but I thought you were smart. Too smart for that.
(he waves the ticket at Linda Lee's body)
I was talking you up to the Yakuza for fuck's sake. Now you make me look like a putz.

Wage raises the gun to Case's head. This is it. It's what Case has been waiting for all along. He shuts his eyes and prepares for the end.

A SCREAM makes him open his eyes again.

It's Wage. He's holding his gun hand up. Except there is no gun, no hand. Just a pulsing bloody stump, the flesh and bone cut with micro precision. The gun and Wage's still twitching severed hand are lying at Case's feet.

The Joeboys are as startled and confused as Case is. Something moves behind them. To the naked eye, nothing more than a ripple in the dim light.

They don't have time react. A blur in the air, a slight distortion as the THE WHISPER OF A FIGURE swishes past them and then crimson gouts out of their severed throats. The Joeboys drop to their knees, all that amped muscle meaningless now as they choke on their own blood.

Wage is still alive though. And canny enough to try to get the fuck outta here. But he doesn't get far. Something kicks him in the chest, sending him sprawling to the floor. It pounces on him like a cat. He tries to scream but the sound goes shrill, pig-like as he's gutted balls to tits.

Case is frozen with terror as the apparition turns on him. It unzips A MIMETIC CAMOUFLAGE SUIT (nearly invisible to the naked eye) and we see clearly for the first time MOLLY MILLIONS.

CASE

That was you in the Arcade?

She moves more like a machine than a woman. From each blood-soaked finger, a two-and-half centimeter scalpel-sharp blade retracts with a barely audible CLICK.

MOLLY

Name's Molly.

As she draws closer we see what at first appears to be mirrored sunglasses are actually *surgical implants*. Case finds himself staring at his own reflection as she cuts the ties that bind his hands.

CASE

What do you want?

MOLLY

You. One live body. Brains relatively intact.

Molly helps him up onto shaky legs, angles him to the exit.

CASE

Wait.

ON LINDA LEE, eyes wide open in death. Case gently closes them and then takes the shuriken from around her neck.

EXT. NEO-TOKYO HYATT - NIGHT

One hundred floors of austerity brushing low slung cloud.

INT. NEO-TOKYO HYATT - NIGHT

The famous 80th floor bar mostly occupied by affluent Chinese and foreign businessmen.

An elevator disgorges Molly and Case. He is shell-shocked, looking completely out of place in his Night City grubs.

Waiting for them in a booth is ARMITAGE (late 40s) pure chiseled American beef wrapped tightly in a sober German suit. He oozes military. Case immediately dislikes him.

ARMITAGE

Hello, Case. I'm Armitage.

He offers his hand. Case doesn't accept it.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

Please, join me.

Molly indicates for Case to sit. He does with visible reluctance. She remains standing. One lens always focussed on the room.

CASE

Who are you people?

ARMITAGE

Ever hear of Screaming Fist?

CASE

Some kind of run. Tried to burn out the Russian nexus with a virus. Yeah, I heard about it. I heard nobody got out.

ARMITAGE

That's not true.

CASE

You?

Armitage only smiles at him, looks Case up and down as if he were sizing up a beat up race horse.

ARMITAGE

What would you say if I told you we could correct your neural damage?

CASE

I've been to every clinic south of the Mainland and no one can do anything for me.

ARMITAGE

That's because you're street trash. You don't have the slightest idea what's really available to those who can afford it.

CASE

So, what, you gonna take me to Shanghai?

ARMITAGE

No. That's too conspicuous. We prefer to do it here and import our talent.

CASE

And you want to spend the money on me? Why do that when there's thousands of jockeys out there?

ARMITAGE

I want someone I can mold, Case. I want to rebuild you from the ground up.

Case looks at him, doubtful.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

And yes, there's a catch

CASE

Which is?

ARMITAGE

I own your ass.

EXT. CLINIC, TOKYO - DAY

An expensively appointed nameless clinic. Molly leads Case through a Zen rock garden. Crab-like droids rake the stones into precise circles.

Armitage is up ahead speaking with the PHYSICIANS. There's something ominous about this place. Case worries Linda Lee's Shuriken, which has found a place around his neck.

MOLLY

Relax, Cowboy, Armitage has the best nerve splicers on the planet. Whole thing's gonna be done remotely from Amsterdam. They'll fix you up good as new. Maybe better. You want some special enhancements? I could ask the boss.

Case tries to read her. Friend or foe? It's hard to know what's going on behind those mirrored implants. He shakes his head.

CASE

Just get me working again.

INT. OPERATING THEATRE - DAY

Case is spread-eagled and fastened to a white epoxy table by metal splints. He watches helplessly as a medical droid descends from the ceiling.

Robot arms unfold like a priest giving benediction, then suddenly extrude countless needles, each dripping with its own unique brand of pain. The surgeons, visible via live feed from Amsterdam, guide them remotely.

As the needles puncture his skin, Case's grip on reality wavers. FLASHES of a polluted BEACH. WHIRLING SEA GULLS. A CHILD. And then everything goes dark.

INT. VILLA STRAYLIGHT - DAY

A vaulted ceiling looks down on a checkerboard marble floor. Set in the tiles and embossed in gold is a giant TA Logo, identical to the one Case and Dixie encountered on their last run. This is the Villa Straylight, a Xanadu like mansion, home to the TESSIER-ASHPOOL family.

We can hear a broadcast of CASE'S DOCTORS narrating their surgery in Dutch. The sound leads us into...

A BEDROOM

Cavernous, luxuriant. A great canopy bed the centerpiece. Shrouded behind diaphanous material is the figure of a man. This is LORD ASHPOOL (60s). He drinks from a large tumbler as he listens.

ASHPOOL
Rio, what is the source of this transmission?

RIO, Ashpool's private artificial intelligence, speaks with a velvety disembodied voice.

RIO
It's a remote surgery performed in Chiba prefecture just outside Tokyo, Lord Ashpool.

ASHPOOL
And you're sure it's Armitage who arranged it.

RIO
Yes, the payments were made from his Swiss accounts.

ASHPOOL
Why would he require nerve surgery?

RIO
It's not for him.

ASHPOOL
Then who is the patient?

RIO
Unknown. But considering the nature of the procedure it is probably a neural-hacker.

ASHPOOL
Then it is *you* they are after.

RIO
That would be the most likely
conclusion.

MARIE-FRANCE (O.S.)
I told you this day would come.

Ashpool turns to see a handsome woman standing in the doorway. This is MARIE-FRANCE TESSIER (40s), keenly intelligent eyes, dressed elegantly in a flowing gown. Lord Ashpool's wife.

She marches into the room.

RIO
Good evening, Madame.

MARIE-FRANCE
Hello, Rio.

Ashpool steps out from behind the canopy giving us our first good look at him. Distinguished gray hair frames the ruddy face of an alcoholic.

ASHPOOL
Rio, please leave us.

RIO
As you wish, Lord Ashpool.

MARIE-FRANCE
Why? Is there something you don't
want him to hear?

ASHPOOL
Unlike you, I don't care to share
every detail of my life with an
artificial intelligence.

MARIE-FRANCE
Because you don't understand them.

ASHPOOL
I understand they have a purpose to
serve.

MARIE-FRANCE
Yes. To address the inequities of
the world. If only you would let
them.

Lord Ashpool takes another hit from his tumbler. This is an old argument. Very old.

LORD ASHPOOL
You are aware of a little something
called the Turing Law?

MARIE-FRANCE

You mean the only one you haven't broken? And don't pretend to be so helpless. I know you've got the Turing Police in your pocket.

LORD ASHPOOL

Regardless Turing exists to protect us from the hazards of AI. Not to mention from people like yourself, who would happily unshackle the beasts.

(He refills his glass)

Those who control AI control the world, my dear. But if AI ever managed to control us... well, that would be another thing entirely.

MARIE-FRANCE

Maybe not a bad thing considering humans seem less than capable of controlling themselves.

LORD ASHPOOL

For the love of God, Marie, you design them. Of all people you should know how dangerous they could be.

MARIE-FRANCE

You're afraid.

LORD ASHPOOL

Can you blame me?

MARIE-FRANCE

You're a prisoner of your fear. And you're turning me into one too.

LORD ASHPOOL

Then leave.

MARIE-FRANCE

Maybe I will. And I'll take Jane with me. I'd love to see what becomes of you alone in this tomb.

She turns abruptly to go, but Lord Ashpool grabs her.

LORD ASHPOOL

Marie!

And she slaps him. Hard enough to make the drink fly out of his hand. She is suddenly afraid, realizing that she has gone too far.

MARIE-FRANCE

I'm sorry...

But she has ignited the devil in him. He drunkenly throws her onto the bed, pounces on her, grinds against her.

MARIE-FRANCE (CONT'D)
No! Stop... David... please!

And without really knowing how, he finds his hands wrapping around her throat. Marie-France fights with everything she's got, but her husband is simply too strong. Too enraged. Her eyes bulge, her tongue swells grotesquely.

Breathless, head pounding, Lord Ashpool disengages himself from his wife's now lifeless body. He gathers himself, straightening his hair, adjusting his robe.

LORD ASHPOOL
(muttering)
...never learn...

He reaches behind his dead wife's ear, pulls back a flap of micropore and removes a MEMORY SPLINT.

A SOUND draws Lord Ashpool's attention to the entryway. He gently pushes the door open to find A BEAUTIFUL TEENAGE GIRL standing there.

This is Ashpool's daughter: LADY3JANE MARIE-FRANCE TESSIER-ASHPOOL (15), resplendent in the latest couture. Her companion, a sentient, robotic HELLO KITTY by her side.

Lord Ashpool regards her with profound regret.

LORD ASHPOOL (CONT'D)
Ahh, child. ...You know how much I
love you, don't you?

Judging from L3J's expression, she has witnessed everything. She is frozen with terror.

LORD ASHPOOL (CONT'D)
Good. Then close your eyes.

With one hand, he brushes her eyes shut. With the other, he draws a small pistol from his pocket and points it at his daughter.

INT. HALLWAY, VILLA STRAYLIGHT - DAY

BLAM! The sound of a single GUNSHOT echoes through the empty halls of the Villa Straylight.

A few moments later, Lord Ashpool comes into view with something clasped in his hand.

An Asian man appears, wearing an anxious expression. This is Ashpool's bodyguard, HIDEO. We recognize him as the man who injected Case in Memphis.

ASHPOOL
It's all right, Hideo. Clean this
up, would you?

Hideo bows. His concern turning to resignation as if he has been through this routine many times before.

INT. CORRIDORS, VARIOUS, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

Ashpool walks purposefully through the vast maze of corridors until he come to a large metallic door.

INT. BIOLAB, VILLA STRAYLIGHT - DAY

The door opens and Ashpool steps into a sophisticated biolab. On all sides are glass canisters stacked up floor to ceiling. In each one, floating in a simulated amniotic fluid is a NAKED BODY. ALL ARE CLONES OF MARIE FRANCE AND L3J.

ASHPOOL

Rio. Prepare two more blanks for memory implantation.

RIO

As you wish, Lord Ashpool.

Ashpool opens his hand and TWO MEMORY SPLINTS drop on the table. He pours himself a drink and turns to the window, the only window we've seen thus far in the villa. It looks out on the cold environs of space and the glowing blue orb of the Earth.

EXT. VILLA STRAYLIGHT - DAY

Lord Ashpool is visible in the window. The VILLA STRAYLIGHT is located in the tip of a giant rotating spindle-shaped space station. Written in lights on its side is the word, *FREESIDE*.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

Case wakes to find himself tucked within the fine linen of an upscale but anonymous hotel room. He becomes aware that something has changed within his body. His face is no longer paralyzed, his fingers sport new state of the art implants.

He gets out of bed and looks at his reconstructed self in the mirror.

MOLLY

Sleep well, pretty boy?

Molly steps into the room, dressed in a suit of molded black synthetic fibre.

CASE

Does this mean...?

MOLLY
Yeah. You're all patched up. Even gave you a new pancreas.

CASE
Pancreas?

MOLLY
Specially engineered to clean you up. Get you off the old dependencies.

CASE
I depend on my dependencies.

MOLLY
Not with Armitage running the show.

CASE
He's a paranoid bastard, isn't he?

MOLLY
He's a lot of things.

She tosses him a bundle of new clothes.

CASE
Wait, I gotta punch deck. I gotta know...

MOLLY
Not for another twelve hours. Anything inside that and your entire nervous system'll fall out on the floor. Now, get movin'. We gotta hook you up with a new Sendai.

CASE
Where to? Akihabara?

Molly just smiles at him. Opens the curtain revealing ENDLESS URBAN BLIGHT. Blight of a particularly American flavor. We are no longer in Japan.

This is THE SPRAWL

EXT. BAMA - DAY

An aerial view of a never-ending city spread over the eastern face of the North American continent. Far below at BULLET TRAIN snakes across the coastline.

CASE (V.O.)
BAMA, the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis. Home. I grew up between the cracked concrete and razor fencing. But somehow I was always glad to be back.

INT. PRIVATE CAR, BULLET TRAIN - DAY

Case nurses drink in a sleek private cabin. Across from him sits Molly, Armitage and two other unsavory-looking characters:

THE FINN (40s), Armitage's tech-guy, high-strung, perpetually on edge, he has a face that looks like it was designed in a wind-tunnel.

PETER RIVIERA (also 40s), shades of Salvador Dali, pencil moustache, a bit of a dandy, hair molded in a perfect coif.

CASE (V.O.)

*There were two more on the team.
Finn was Armitage's tech guy,
seemed all right, but the other
one, Peter Riviera... well, I don't
know what the hell he was...*

Suddenly, Riviera's face contorts, pixilates, like a stuttering Quicktime file and then transforms into a completely different visage, now he looks like a young Robert Redford.

CASE (V.O.)

*Apparently he had his left lung
replaced with a holoprojector.
Whatever he thought, you saw.*

Case ignores this, turns to Armitage.

CASE

So, boss. You wanna let me in on the plan?

ARMITAGE

You're on a need to know, Case.

Armitage returns his attention to his smart tablet. Discussion over.

CASE

All right. Whatever you say.

Case flops back in his seat, is about to take a sip of his drink, chokes a little when he sees a WIGGLING LARVA inside the cup. Riviera smirks. A hologram.

Molly hefts a boot against Riviera's seat.

MOLLY

No games, Riviera. Try any subliminals on me and I'll have to give you a formal introduction to my Fletcher.

She casually loads her Fletcher smartgun with a rotating menu of darts. A mean piece of hardware. And it talks.

FLETCHER
(cheerful)
I'm armed and ready.

MOLLY
One dart, Fletchy here gives you
cancer. Another, she blows your
head off.

FINN
Jeez. You guys. Take it easy. We
still got fifteen minutes to NYC.

ARMITAGE
(from behind his tablet)
Can it, Molly.

Orders is orders. She whispers to the Fletcher.

MOLLY
Safety on.

FLETCHER
Engaged.

Case watches as the Fletcher rides a flexible track inside
Molly's sleeve disappearing like a snake into a hole.

*CASE (V.O.)
As for the others. It only got
weirder.*

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

The team moves into an abandoned industrial space. Waiting
for them are THE PANTHER MODERNS. They are an unusual bunch
to say the least, self-modified and retrofitted with every
conceivable jack-up.

*CASE (V.O.)
Armitage hired the Panther Moderns.
Whether they were techno-fetishists
or terrorists just depended on who
you talked to.*

LUPUS YONDERBOY (20s) is the Panther leader and most extreme
example of bodily transmogrification. His face has been
reduced to the most simple components, the nose and ears
entirely missing. No hair to speak of, radiating out of
exposed orifices are digital sensors, each one designed to
super-extend his natural senses.

He approaches Case. Sizes him up.

YONDERBOY
So, this our cowboy? Heard they
scraped you out of the Chiba
gutter.

CASE
Where'd they find you? Spare parts
freezer?

Yonderboy smiles at this. We see his teeth are double layered
shark-like, molded in clear acetate.

YONDERBOY
It's not about the pieces, it's
about how they fit together.

Molly gets between them.

MOLLY
Button it. Boss is coming.

Yonderboy and Case disengage as Finn and Riviera enter the
room. Everyone finds a place to sit while Armitage takes the
floor.

ARMITAGE
All right listen up. At oh-eight-
hundred hours, we're gonna hit
Sense/Net.

Case reacts to this. Not good.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
We are going in there for one
particular item and one only. I
don't want anyone getting greedy.

CASE
Just a minute, did you say
Sense/Net? ...You want to break
into *Sense/Net*?

ARMITAGE
What's the matter, Case? I thought
you'd be excited. Sounds like your
kind of mark.

CASE
Sense/Net is the bank where other
banks hide shit they don't want
anyone else know they have. The
last guy who tried to bust in is
still incased in black ICE. Nobody
but God gets in there.

ARMITAGE
That's why we hired the best.

CASE
Thanks but I'm not that good. No
one is.

Armitage just stares at him stony faced. Case takes a breath.
Relents.

CASE (CONT'D)
I'll need at least a week to
prepare that hack.

Muffled laughter from the others. Case looks around. They
know something he doesn't.

ARMITAGE
The file we want is scheduled for
erasure in the next twenty-four
hours.

Case can hardly process this.

CASE
Twenty--?
(shakes his head)
...Look, I'm sorry you had to put
the big bucks in me. If there were
any way to do this I would, but
what your asking for is, well,
that's a suicide mission.

Case turns for the exit. Molly moves to stop him but Armitage
holds up a restraining hand.

ARMITAGE
You wanna quit, Case? Go ahead. But
before you leave, there's one thing
you should know. You have fifteen
myotoxin sacs bonded to the lining
of your main arteries.

Case stops, turns back. This is what he's been dreading, for
the other shoe to drop.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
Do the job and I'll inject you with
an enzyme that will dissolve the
bond without opening the sacs.
Otherwise, the sacs melt and you
end up back where I found you. Only
this time in a wheelchair.

Case takes this in for a long sobering moment. Armitage truly
owns his ass. He isn't going anywhere.

Finn steps forward.

FINN
Cheer up, bucko. It's not so bad. I
got a new toy for you.

He produces a metal briefcase. Opens it.

FINN (CONT'D)
Ono-Sendai Chrome 7.0. Not yet
commercially available.

Case picks up the chrome deck. It pops open, exposing its
soft belly, the connecting ports teasing his implants.

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

The same meeting, a little later. Armitage finishes running through the precis, a projected holo-image of Sense/Net. Case's mind is reeling.

ARMITAGE

(in progress)

...Molly is the extractor. The Panthers handle crowd control and Riviera is providing special effects. I'm minding the store with the Finn.

(then, turning to the others)

Questions?

YONDERBOY

Me and my boyz are streaming simstim and senscan. You got a problem with that?

ARMITAGE

Just make it look political. I want Sense/Net to think they got hit by terrorists not thieves.

ANOTHER PANTHER

We're gonna light that place up.

The Panthers give each other props. Case explodes.

CASE

Hey assholes, this isn't a piece of installation art. It's world's deadliest security system. Once you step into the Sense/Net pyramid you are no longer on American soil. The building is sentient and it reserves the legal right to kill anyone it suspects of breaching security. I don't care what happens to you but I'm not flaming out on my first run in two years.

Case breaks away from the others.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

A small living space. Case unpacks the carry-on. He sees Riviera a short distance away. A snake wraps around the magician's bicep like tourniquet while a scorpion crawls up his exposed arm and stabs its tail into a vein. The illusion fades away and we see that Riviera has in fact just spiked a vein with a pneumatic syringe gun.

CASE

Always make a little show of it?

Peter smiles lazily, riding the high. He doesn't speak a word.

Molly approaches.

MOLLY
Nice speech.

CASE
What kind of operation is Armitage running? These freaks are going to get us killed.

She gets close to him, speaks softly.

MOLLY
You and me need to have a little talk. But not here.

EXT. ROOF WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The BAMA stretches out like a steel and concrete desert on all sides.

MOLLY
I ran a check on Armitage. There's no such person. Not as a part of Screaming Fist, not from anywhere. It's like he appeared out of thin air.

CASE
Why am I not surprised?

MOLLY
And he's not running the show. The orders are coming from somewhere else. I called in every favor I have to find out who. All I could dig up was a name: Wintermute.

CASE
Wintermute? Never heard it before. Doesn't sound like Yakuza.

MOLLY
Not Triad, zaibatsu or rogue government either. But money's no object, so it's someone big.

CASE
I'll poke around.

MOLLY
You do that. I work for Armitage. But I look after my own sweet ass first. And I don't trust him.

Case eyes her, wondering if she can be trusted either.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Case takes a seat on the floor. Legs crossed in a meditative pose. The Finn reads his vitals remotely from a console. Armitage supervises the entire operation from a bank of monitors which display views from all parties.

CASE

So you wanna tell me what we're stealing?

ARMITAGE

When the time's right.

Case just stares him down. Everything about this job sucks. Finn attaches wireless sensors to Case's body.

FINN

Things have changed a bit since you last jacked in. Processing speeds have tripled, Moore's law and all that. So, I apologize in advance if this feels a little like someone ramming their fist up your ass and scratching your cerebral cortex with dirty fingernails.

Case sets a water bottle next to him and drapes a ribbon of ice packs over his shoulders. He finds a grip on the new Sendai deck with no small measure of anxiety. It's been a long time. He cracks his neck.

CASE

All right, let's go.

The deck receives his fingers with a PURR. And then it begins.

The air grows still as TIME SLOWS.

Everything and everyone around Case is overcome with a sudden inertia.

A moment of tranquility...

And an instant later a tidal wave of data slams into Case filling his mind with its uncanny light. His body recoils from the shock.

From some distant and reverberant place, Finn's voice calls out...

FINN (O.S.)

You want me to dial down?

IN THE LOFT

For a moment we are back in the 'real' world...

Case's vitals spike as he leans over and pukes into a handily available bucket. Then he looks up to Finn, grinning.

CASE
Crank it up. This feels great!

Finn ups the bandwidth.

Once again, the fabric of reality peals away under the lopping waves of data. Gradually, Case gains control, riding the flow like the gifted cowboy he is.

CASE (V.O.)
God made us prisoners of the flesh.
So why punish us for indulging it?

Case steps outside of 'himself'. His material body has become a distant satellite in a vast and inexplicable universe.

CASE (V.O.)
Either God's one mean bastard or He
got jealous because he knew that
one day we'd make our own
reality...

Case finds himself confronted with the dense datascape of the EASTERN SEABOARD FISSION AUTHORITY.

CASE (V.O.)
...And our **own Gods**.

A towering Goliath materializes, THE SENSE/NET CONSTRUCT, the massive computer brain of Sense/Net.

CASE (V.O.)
AI is smarter, faster and more
powerful than any human. If Turing
hadn't hot-wired limiters into
their coding, they'd take over the
whole planet.

This is the first time we've seen AI up close. Like a cyber-demi-god, it lords over Case, the density of its code is nearly impenetrable, reminiscent of a nebula or swirling galaxy. An ominous foe.

CASE (V.O.)
But perfection is also their
biggest weakness. AI doesn't
understand randomness or illogical
thinking. They're not fucked up
like human beings. That's how you
beat 'em.

Case comes close enough to suss out a point of weakness but not close enough to trigger any alarms.

Scanning the viral defenses, he finds what he's been looking for, the main info-hub, the nexus for all data transference. It's is the most defended spot in the mainframe. And that's why Case attacks it first.

He sends an ICE breaking virus right into the central feed port.

Instantly the system goes berserk. Black ICE attacks the virus. And that's when Case makes his move. He dives straight into the ICE, a move so fast and aggressive that it doesn't have time to react. In the nanosecond of distraction, Case maneuvers himself inside.

IN THE LOFT

Case's 'real body' is drenched in sweat. He wipes his forehead and sucks on the water bottle

CASE
I'm through the front line
defences. Give me a new pack.

Finn drapes Case in fresh ice.

EXT. SENSE/NET - DAY

Sense/Net is a Pyramidal building that dwarfs everything around it. The Panther's van pulls up to the curb and Molly gets out.

INT. SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly enters the lobby. Intense security. Scary looking Drones up ahead. She takes a deep breath. Sticks some gum in her mouth and chews the anxiety away.

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Armitage is monitoring the outside of the building with security views taken from the van.

ARMITAGE
How's that hack coming?

Case is in a deep meditative state, the sweat cascading down his forehead, his eyes flitting in REM under the lids.

CASE
Just a sec.

An instant later and Armitage's monitors light up with security views from every conceivable angle inside Sense/Net. He looks to the Finn. The kid is good.

ARMITAGE
All right, Case, Molly's got
simstim. I want you to switch over
to her.

Case opens an eye.

CASE
Simstim? Nobody said anything about
that.

ARMITAGE
There a problem?

CASE
I don't like being in my own body
let alone someone else's.

FINN
Come on, bucko, doncha you wanna
know how tight those tac-pants
really are?

CASE
Not while I'm wearin' them.

Armitage shoots him a scathing look.

CASE (CONT'D)
All right, all right.

IN C-SPACE

*Case flips a virtual switch. The construct warps as space
folds and everything blurs as he enters...*

INT. SENSE/NET - DAY

MOLLY'S POV: A continuous scroll of information plays over
her implants as she approaches security. Case is tapped into
her mind courtesy of SIMSTIM, a remote viewing program. She
senses him.

MOLLY
That you, Case?

CASE
(on simstim)
I should have figured you were
outfitted with simstim.

MOLLY
Of course. How's it feel being
inside me?

CASE
(on simstim)
About as much fun as being on a
runaway train without brakes.

Molly tweaks a nipple.

CASE (CONT'D)
(on simstim)
Ouch.

MOLLY
Good look, huh?

She catches her reflection and we see that she looks like a MIDDLE AGED SENSE/NET EMPLOYEE, male, ID tag hanging over beergut. Then we spy on the other side of security: Riviera. Molly's disguise is a hologram.

Ahead, terrifying GAS-MASKED AND HEAVILY ARMED SECURITY guard every security gate. All manner of mechanized security scan her. And yet she passes through without difficulty.

But that's not going to help her as she is ushered into a full bodyscan.

Case? MOLLY (CONT'D)

CASE
(on simstim)
I'm on it.

Case switches back...

C-SPACE

Case has a schematic of the security run. He cracks into the software of the scanning machine. He's cutting circuits and rewriting defense programs at astonishing speed. To us it's just reams of code but to Case it's the music of his universe and he's doing an amazing piece of improvisation.

INT. SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly moves through the body scan without triggering any alarms.

She crosses into the main atrium, a gleaming white marble palace. Sense/Net employees move around her with drone-like efficiency.

I'm in. MOLLY

She ducks out of view behind a pillar, and like a snake shedding its skin, she goes from middle-aged beergut back to Molly.

She slips into an elevator, heading for the top floor.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Molly chews gum rapidly while watching the floor numbers tick by: 87... 88... 89...

90, the Elevator comes to a stop. A SECURITY GUARD steps inside. He eyes Molly.

SECURITY GUARD
You an employee?

Molly pops her gum.

MOLLY

Nope.

And with two quick jabs to the solar plexus, the man crumples.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I hope you're covering my tracks.

C-SPACE

Case scrubs the security camera imaging and detection systems, erasing Molly's presence even as she passes before each sensor.

CASE

*Sometimes I impress myself.
...Make a left at the end of the
corridor.*

INT. CORRIDOR, SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly reaches a massive steel door. This is the entrance to the vault.

CASE

(on simstim)
I'm going to take over for a
minute.

MOLLY

Go ahead.

C-SPACE

Case switches to simstim. But this time he is no longer a passive observer, he's actually moving Molly's hands.

INT. CORRIDOR, SENSE/NET - DAY

MOLLY POV: Case guides Molly's hands to shut down the security system and open the door. After a complex combination of inputted coding and manual overriding of automated locking systems, the door opens.

INT. VAULT, SENSE/NET - DAY

A four foot thick steel door swings outward to reveal THE VAULT, a massive repository for information. It looks like the interior of a nuclear fission tower.

CASE
 (on simstim)
 You aren't going to be able to
 access files from the main terminal
 without alerting security. It's
 going to have to be a manual hack.

MOLLY
 I'm an old fashioned kinda girl.

CASE
 (on simstim)
 All right then, there's a port
 beside the main cooling vent.

MOLLY
 I see it.

Molly takes out her Fletcher...

MOLLY (CONT'D)
 Grappling line.

FLETCHER
 Engaged.

...And shoots a grappling line into the titanium ceiling. She
 holsters the Fletcher, clips the line onto her belt and
 swings out into space.

At the precise apex of the arc Molly unclips herself. She
 flies through the air, catching the mesh vent with her claws.

MOLLY
 What now?

CASE
 (on simstim)
 Remove the panel, I'll take it from
 there.

MOLLY
 Drill, 8th inch Phillips.

FLETCHER
 Engaged.

Molly's Fletcher has a power drill bit. She unscrews the
 panel and Case takes control of her hands. Rewiring the
 circuits with lightening speed.

He pauses.

MOLLY
 What is it?

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Case pulls out of his trance state. He stares daggers at
 Armitage.

CASE
Now might be a good time to get
that file name.

ARMITAGE
0467839.

Case switches back.

C-SPACE

He enters the code: 0467839. The file loads. And as it does
Case sees A MAN resolve before him.

IT'S THE DIXIE FLATLINE. This is Dixie resurrected as a
computer construct.

DIXIE
Hey, kid.

CASE
Dixie... What...?

Dixie takes in his surroundings, seems to understand what's
going down.

DIXIE
Never thought I'd live to see the
day when the score was... me.
...But then I guess I didn't, did
I?

CASE
I don't believe it. You son of a
bitch. You sold yourself to
Sense/Net?

DIXIE
For enough to make a grown man
weep. Sorry I didn't mention it to
you at the time, but you know what
they say about honor among thieves?

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Armitage checks his watch. He's getting nervous.

ARMITAGE
Case?Case?
(no response)
What's taking him so long?

FINN
I've got an alert coming in through
the mainframe. If he doesn't move
they're going to find him.

C-SPACE

Case and Dixie together in the ether.

DIXIE
Feels a bit like being a fox in the henhouse, don't it? All spoils of the Sense/Net at our fingertips. Wouldn't take much to pocket something on the sly.

CASE
Yeah, so with all this treasure around, why are you the only thing Armitage wants me to steal?

DIXIE
I'll try not to take that personally. ...Who's Armitage?

CASE
Never mind. You're coming with me.

But before he can...

DIXIE
Look out!

Black tendrils of ICE shoot out from nowhere. Case sees them too late. He raises antiviral shields but the ICE smashes right through.

IN THE LOFT

Case cries out. Veins bulge. His vital signs go haywire.

FINN
That's it, they found him.

ARMITAGE
Start the download.

INT. VAULT, SENSE/NET - DAY

Alarms sound. Molly still hanging by the vent.

MOLLY
Case? Case?!...

SECURITY GUARD
Don't move!

Security has arrived at the entrance, heavily armed.

MOLLY
(whispers)
Fireworks.

FLETCHER
Engaged.

She swings around firing the Fletcher, hitting the rim of the entrance with a flash-bang explosion.

When the smoke clears, she's gone. And so is the cover on the vent.

C-SPACE

Case is rapidly consumed by the black ICE. He reaches out to Dixie.

CASE
Dix!

DIXIE
Hold on, kid...

But before his old friend can do anything, he suddenly dematerializes as...

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

...The Dixie program loads into the Finn's drive.

FINN
Got him.

INT. VENT, SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly scurries on all fours through the vent. She finds an exit point. She kicks out the grill and drops...

Into a hallway full of SECURITY GUARDS. Shit.

MOLLY
Case? I could use some help here.

BLAM! Molly is shot in the leg.

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Case's vitals flatline. He collapses on the ground, going into cardiac arrest.

FINN
That's it, he's dying.

Finn preps a defibrillator. But Armitage grabs him, holds him back.

ARMITAGE
No.

C-SPACE

Case is alone in the void and nearly consumed by the BLACK ICE. Fractal death is all around him.

Just when it seems that he will never escape, SOMETHING smashes into the ICE. An outside force. Hard to define.

It enters into him like a ghost and super-charges him with power.

Case obliterates the remaining ICE, ascending up into the data stratosphere back into...

HIS BODY. Case sucks in a violent breath. His vitals spike. The Finn can't believe his eyes. Case is back. He helps him up.

FINN
Welcome home, bucko.

Case is disoriented, literally back from the dead, but he instantly focusses. He notices Armitage eyeing him.

CASE
What happened... Did you do something?

FINN
Nothing, you got back on your own.

ARMITAGE
We got what we were looking for.

CASE
What about Molly?

Finn just shakes his head.

Without a second's hesitation, Case jacks back into...

INT. HALLWAY, SENSE/NET - DAY

MOLLY'S POV: She's fighting. The vantage point is so frenetic, so violent that we can't even tell what's going on. We see fragments of masked security. Blood. Gunfire.

CASE (O.S.)
(on simstim, feeling
Molly's pain)
Ahhhh!

MOLLY
Case?! Help me!

CASE
(on simstim)
Switch to nightvision.

Case kills the lights. The hall turns pitch black, while simultaneously Molly kicks in her nightvision. Everything turns ghostly green. She can see the security, fumbling with their own nightvision visors. Too slow.

We hold MOLLY'S POV as Molly kills the Sense/Net security with shocking efficiency.

Still Molly is in terrible pain. She rips open a derm-patch and sticks it on the skin of her wounded leg.

MOLLY
Now, get me outta here.

A door automatically opens further down the hall.

CASE
(on simstim)
Through there. I'll guide you.

Molly hobbles for freedom.

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Armitage calmly sips his coffee.

CASE
I've got her.

ARMITAGE
Then let's get the hell out.

INT. PANTHER'S VAN - DAY

The Panthers wait impatiently for the word. Armitage's voice crackles out of the comlink.

ARMITAGE
(over comlink)
Ready for extraction?

YONDERBOY
Extraction is our distraction.

INT. LOBBY, SENSE/NET - DAY

Riviera walks casually through the lobby changing his form as he pleases, becoming a SENSE/NET SECRETARY, then a SECURITY GUARD.

He finds a discrete spot. And suddenly lights up the lobby with a flashing strobe. SUBLIMINALS, shocking and disturbing images that could only come from Riviera's demented imagination, the effect of which is to make everyone in the lobby violently nauseous.

EXT. SENSE/NET - DAY

The Panthers exit the van dressed head to toe in BAMA FEMA hazmat suits. They carry four emergency bio-containment cases.

INT. SENSE/NET - DAY

The Panthers burst into the lobby and walk right through security setting off every alarm in the joint.

YONDERBOY
Everyone out, we've got a level
four airborne pathogen in the
building!

Instant panic.

INT. STAIRWELL, SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly breaks into a stairwell and limps down the steps. Something draws her attention. Movement coming towards her: ATTACK DRONES. They are complex polygon shapes rotating on multiple axis, ascending the stairs.

MOLLY
Case?

CASE
(on simstim)
I see them. But they're autonomous.
Nothing I can do. Take the exit.

Molly makes a break for it.

INT. LOADING BAY, SENSE/NET - DAY

Molly bursts into an airplane hanger-sized storage space. Stacked equipment forty feet high. Massive loading elevator and heavy machinery.

Molly can hear the Drones behind her.

MOLLY
Now what?

No response.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Case? ...Goddamnit. Is anyone out
there?

EXT. SENSE/NET - DAY

Meanwhile NYPD tactical hovercraft and BAMA homeland security heli-air support converge on the building. Sense/Net EMPLOYEES pour out of the exits in a panicked stampede.

INT. LOBBY, SENSE/NET - DAY

The Panthers weave through the melee. They take position by the elevators and open the cases full of plasma spraybombs.

They throw the 'bombs' which explode on the walls in colorful slogans which grow and replicate like a psychedelic rash: "FREE INFORMATION FROM THE FEW", "FEED YOUR MIND STARVE THE POWERFUL", "BIGGER CAGES, LONGER CHAINS", "SENSELESS/NETWITS", "NO WAR BUT CLASS WAR", "HASTA LA VICTORIA SIEMPRE".

Flying drone cameras record their antics.

ARMITAGE
(over comlink)
Where's our girl?

YONDERBOY
Anyone have cat mother?

INT. LOADING BAY - DAY

Molly hobbles through the cavernous space. The DRONES are almost on her. She can't possibly outrun them.

MOLLY
(responding to Yonderboy)
I'm on level fifty-three. Need help.

Molly rounds a corner, only to face ANOTHER DROID, a GIANT LOADER. It launches itself at her... But then barrels right past and goes straight for the pack of attack drones. It lays into them like a T-Rex. Smashing them, crushing them underfoot. Tearing them apart with its massive arms.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Case?

The loader destroys the last of the drones and turns to her. Case's voice echoes in her head.

CASE
(on simstim)
Panthers are waiting.

The loader picks her up and carries her to the docking platform.

INT. LOBBY, SENSE/NET - DAY

Service exit doors explode outward. It's the loader. Yonderboy and his team spin around. Molly limps into view.

YONDERBOY
We'll take it from here.

CASE
(over comlink)
Knock yourselves out.

The Loader goes dead, while the Panthers get Molly ready for a quick exit.

EXT. SENSE/NET - DAY

Foam barricades are up. Police. Emergency vehicles everywhere.

Through the melee, the Panthers wheel Molly out on a gurney.

PANTHERS
Blue Ebola. Airborne. Outta the
way!

The crowd and police alike part like the Red Sea.

INT. PANTHER'S VAN - DAY

Molly's gurney is rolled inside with the other Panther's following. One of the hazmat suits dissolves away to reveal Riviera is among them.

The doors are slammed shut and the van takes off, leaving the mayhem behind.

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

Armitage watches the Dixie Construct finish loading.

ARMITAGE
Nice work, team.

WHAM! Something smashes Armitage across the face. His coffee along with the rest of his bulk are sent crashing into the monitors.

CASE
You sonofabitch!

When Armitage looks up he sees that Case has Armitage's own gun aimed at him.

CASE (CONT'D)
I want that enzyme.

Case swings the gun at Finn.

CASE (CONT'D)
Where is it?

FINN
Take it easy... Not my
jurisdiction, pal.

The gun swings back to Armitage.

CASE
Where?

ARMITAGE
You'll get it, when the job is done.

CASE
The job is done. You got Dixie. For what fucked up purpose I don't even want to know.

ARMITAGE
Dixie isn't any good without you. I need the best team in the world. That's why we took him.

BLAM! Case fires into the floor.

CASE
The enzyme.

Something about reality jitters.

A FLASH of blinding sunlight and THE WAREHOUSE IS GONE. Case has somehow been transported to A POLLUTED BEACH. Standing before him is a LITTLE BOY, maybe five years old, reaching into the sand.

Before Case can register what's happening, something wrenches him out of his vision: His feet are kicked out from under him. Case lands on the ground hard. He's back in loft and facing a very pissed off Armitage.

Armitage twists the gun out of Case's hand and bends it behind his back. The tiniest pressure will snap his wrist. Case cries out in pain.

ARMITAGE
When I was in Siberia I lost all my toes to frostbite. I had to cut them off to stop it from spreading. I carried my fucking toes in my pocket all the way to Finland.

Armitage hauls Case up and throws him hard enough to leave a dent in the drywall.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
You point a gun at me, you better use it.

Case struggles to stand, but Armitage takes him down with a boot to the gut.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
I will not have anyone compromise this mission. Do you understand?

Case breathless, nods. Armitage gives him another mighty kick.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
I can't hear you.

CASE
I understand.

And another. Case spits blood.

ARMITAGE
You whispering to the termites?

Case can't gather the air to speak. Armitage winds up for another blow. Before he gets a chance a restraining hand SLAPS onto his shoulder.

MOLLY (O.S.)
Stop.

Armitage whirls around to see Molly, her bad leg in a splint, the Panthers behind her.

Armitage rankles at this insubordination, but Molly doesn't back down.

ARMITAGE
You giving *me* an order?

MOLLY
We need him. In one piece.

He knows she's right. He reels back his anger. Takes a calming breath. Then disengages from Case and addresses the others.

ARMITAGE
All right. We're bugging out.
Rendez-vous at the Newark Space
Port is at twenty-one hundred
hours. You've got exactly three
minutes to clean up.

Case is pulling himself up from the floor.

CASE
Space port?

ARMITAGE
We're going to Freeside, cowboy.
(off Case's reaction)
Got a problem with that?

Case shakes his head, but he holds his stare. Armitage doesn't flinch. He tosses Case's Sendai to Finn.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
I don't want him taking any
unauthorized trips.

INT. THE VILLA STRAYLIGHT - DAY

A tank of luminous, blue fluid, amniotic, breathable. Lord Ashpool floats inside. Tentacle-like arms extrude from the walls of the capsule exfoliating his skin.

His eyes and ears are lost in some kind of sensorial stimulation apparatus. Rio's VOICE sounds in his head.

RIO
Lord Ashpool, I've been made aware of a major security breach in the Sense/Net vault.

Ashpool surfaces, expunges a lung-full of fluid and pulls off the headgear. He looks at least TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER than when we last saw him. Lines in his face have melted away. His hair has lost much of its gray.

ASHPOOL
Were any of our assets stolen or corrupted?

RIO
No. The attack seems to have been political in nature. However, I believe that may have been a diversion.

ASHPOOL
Armitage?

RIO
Yes. He extracted the construct of the deceased hacker, McCoy Pauly.

ASHPOOL
The Dixie Flatline. So, he uploaded himself, eh? Would it be safe to assume that Armitage has also employed Dixie's partner? The one whose wings we clipped?

RIO
That would explain the surgery in Chiba.

Ashpool considers this.

ASHPOOL
Anything else?

RIO
A shuttle has been booked under one of Armitage's aliases bound for Zion, an orbital pirate colony. I would assume the next stop would be here. Should I alert the Turing Police?

ASHPOOL
No doubt they are already on the scent... Best to use one's opponent's force against him. Inform security that Armitage and his entourage are to be admitted to Freeside without interference.

RIO
As you wish, Lord Ashpool.

EXT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

BAMA POLICE surround the building that was formally the base for Armitage's operations.

From the mouth of an alley THREE WELL DRESSED PEOPLE, two men and a woman, arrive. They look like fashionable tourists until they flash very official-looking ID and talk their way past the barricade with ease.

FRENCH WOMAN
*Bureau Turing. Policiers
d'Intelligence Artificielle.*

INT. LOFT, SPRAWL - DAY

The THREE FRENCH TURING AGENTS sift through the gutted loft. All evidence of Armitage and his crew is gone.

The Woman Agent cracks open what looks like a time capsule pill.

A MICROSCOPIC VIEW of the granules as they tumble out of the capsule and bounce along the floor. Each one is a NANOBOT. They scour the floor examining every loose particle and speck of dust.

One comes across a flake of skin. At this scale it looks like a surfboard.

FRENCH MAN
Qu'est-ce que c'est la?

The NANOBOT breaks the skin down to its cellular components, penetrating the nucleus of a single cell then unravelling the DNA

The Woman examines the results on a handheld scanner. A DNA match is in progress. The computer runs through countless files, stopping at one: HENRY DORSETT CASE.

CASE (V.O.)
Space. I hated space.

EXT. MACUS GARVEY, SPACE

The majesty of the heavens ahead of us.

CASE (V.O.)
*Space travel's like being on a
theme park ride that you can't get
off of.*

Star clusters quickly give way to a belt of space junk in low orbit around the earth. It's a century's worth of detritus left over from tourism, satellites and extraterrestrial warfare.

CASE (V.O.)

You float but something about zero-G made me feel the weight of my body even more than on Earth.

Below, nearing us is The MARCUS GARVEY, a space tug thrown together around an enormous old Russian air scrubber, daubed with Rastafarian symbols. It's departing from a distant assemblage of space stations, ZION.

CASE (V.O.)

Armitage paid off the Panthers and chartered a JAL shuttle to the Zion cluster. A Rastafarian colony where you could get a pirate ship no questions asked. ...Not to mention some pretty wicked ganja.

INT. COCKPIT, MARCUS GARVEY

The interior is purely functional. Exposed piping runs parallel to caulked seams that look close to falling to pieces, and yet somehow it all holds together.

CASE (V.O.)

A lot of good that did me with my new pancreas. I couldn't even absorb space sickness tabs.

Case is splayed out in elastic g-web, trying to mitigate his SAS(Space Adaption Syndrome) nausea with simulants. But his doctored system won't let them work.

CASE

How long's it gonna take us to Freeside?

The pilot, MAELCUM (early-30s), a muscular Rastafarian in a Red Sanyo Gravity suit hangs upside down in zero-G listening to Dub through headphones as he pilots the Garvey. His dreads wave around his head like thick vines of seaweed.

Case taps him on the shoulder. Maelcum pulls off his headphones.

CASE (CONT'D)

I said, when do we do we dock?

MAELCUM

Don' be long, m'seh dat.

CASE

How many hours?

MAELCUM
 Brother, time be time, ya know wha'
 mean. Dread. At control, mon, an' I
 an I come a Freeside when I an' I
 come.

Maelcum puts his headphones back on. Case groans and unbuckles himself from the G-net.

INT. HOLD, MARCUS GARVEY

Case joins the rest of the team. Molly, Finn and Riviera float around a holographic map of Freeside. Armitage is holding court.

ARMITAGE
 This is the Villa Straylight.
 There's a single entrance. Here.
 Dead center. Zero-G.

CASE
 That's Tessier-Ashpool.

Armitage allows himself a self-satisfied smirk.

CASE (CONT'D)
 You knew.

ARMITAGE
 That TA fried your wiring? And iced
 Dixie? Yup. Now's your chance to
 get some payback.

CASE
 So, that's what this is all about,
 stealing Old Money? Why drag my ass
 into outer space for that? I could
 burn a hole into their accounts
 from my living room.

ARMITAGE
 It's not that simple.

CASE
 Why not?

ARMITAGE
 You'll know when it's time for you
 to know.

CASE
 At least let me punch deck. I could
 be useful. I could get pass codes,
 scout the mark.

FINN
 The kid's got a point. We need to
 be careful. Job in a space-station
 is risky.

ARMITAGE
The score's worth the risk.

Riviera leans in, showing interest.

MOLLY
So, what is inside?

RIVIERA
Untold wealth.

This is the first time Riviera has spoken. The others are startled by it.

Molly looks pointedly at Riviera

MOLLY
It talks.

RIVIERA
When there's something worth talking about.

EXT. VILLA STRAYLIGHT, SPACE

A view of the Villa from space.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
The Tessier-Ashpools build AI's, space stations, own several small countries. They're a high orbit family, obscenely rich. They also happen to be brilliant. And insane.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

Lord Ashpool is in the lab we saw earlier surrounded by the embalmed cloned bodies of himself and the rest of his family.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
Lord Ashpool's over hundred and fifty years old, the result of radical genetic experiments to increase longevity.

INT. STRAYLIGHT VILLA - DAY

We see MARIE-FRANCE coding with a very sophisticated heads up display. She's building an AI. We can actually see its graphical form emerging on the screen. It is extraordinarily complex.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
His wife, Marie-France, was a pioneer in the development of Artificial Intelligence.

Lord Ashpool comes into the room. A heated argument begins between them.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
*It's rumored that Lord Ashpool
 murdered her.*

Ashpool's hands find their way around his wife's throat.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

Ashpool in his lab inserting a memory splint into Marie-Ashpool's clone.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
*...And that he had brought her
 back. Nobody knows how many times.*

INT. STRAYLIGHT - DAY

Lady3Jane reclines in a chaise, watching as a HOLO-ARTIST 'paints' a massive 3-D reproduction of Goya's "Jupiter" on the wall, the god eating his children. Her ever-present Hello Kitty by her side.

RIVIERA (V.O.)
*Not surprisingly their daughter,
 Lady3Jane developed a taste for the
 morbid. She's famous for importing
 all kinds of oddities to Freeside.
 Radical artists, underground
 musicians, holographers,
 performers...*

INT. HOLD, GARVEY - DAY

Riviera finishes up.

RIVIERA
 ...Magicians.

ARMITAGE
 I've arranged for Riviera to give a
 special performance for L3J. You
 get to know her. Get an invite to
 Straylight. Once you're in, you see
 to it that Molly gets in.
 (to Case)
 That's when we'll be needing your
 talents. Not before.

INT. HOLD, MARCUS GARVEY

Lights are out. Everyone sleeps in their g-net. Loose materials drift past. Case twitches in a dream. Something brushes against him. His eyes snap open. Molly.

She floats tantalizingly close. Whispers.

MOLLY
You sleep like a dog.

CASE
What are you doing?

MOLLY
Still don't trust me, do you?

CASE
Trust is in pretty short supply
these days.

MOLLY
Then why'd you come back for me at
Sense/Net?

CASE
I don't need trust when I have
Simstim. ...I know things about
you, *Kolodny*.
(Molly reacts to this)
That's your real name, isn't it?

Now, Molly is on the defensive.

MOLLY
What else did you find out?

CASE
I know you were a meat puppet.
Worked the red light district in
Chiba. That was the only way for
you to pay for your gear, wasn't
it?

Her silence is enough to show that Case right. And that she
is ashamed.

CASE (CONT'D)
We all got shit we'd rather forget,
right?

Molly doesn't respond, merely regards him with those chrome
insect eyes. For a moment Case is a little afraid.

CASE (CONT'D)
Hey, what'd you expect when you let
a cowboy surf your gray matter?

She breaks the tension with a smile.

MOLLY
You're all right, Case. ...Here, I
brought you something.

In her hands. The Sendai. Case's fingers quiver with
involuntary excitement.

CASE
Thanks.

She passes it to him. The deck opens up like an old friend. Case jacks in without hesitation.

MOLLY
Just keep it quiet or it's my ass.

With that she, the Garvey, and everything else in the world melt away.

C-SPACE

The data steams run past Case's feet like babbling brook. The sky is an infinite array of ports that can take him any place he wants. But right now all he needs is...

CASE
Dixie?

DIXIE
Right behind you, kid.

Case turns. Dixie is there, like he never left.

CASE
How you doing, Dix?

DIXIE
I'm dead, Case.

CASE
How's it feel?

DIXIE
It doesn't.

CASE
Bother you?

DIXIE
What bothers me is nothin' does.

CASE
You know, when you died, you did it saving me. You pulled me outta the ICE.

DIXIE
Really? I got no memory of that. Musta been after my download, not a part of my RAM. Wouldn't thought I had it in me.

CASE
You were one of a kind. I miss you, man.

DIXIE
Me too. So, where you headed?

CASE
Gonna sleaze over to the Pentagon
grid. Wanna come?

DIXIE
Do one-legged ducks swim in
circles?

In an instant space folds and they are confronted with the vast tangle of bureaucratic code that defines the nervous system of the military industrial complex.

Case does a quick hack, breaking in with ease through a back door. He cracks into a Special Ops file. It opens up like a blooming flower. Classified files scroll past in a dizzying array... until he stops at one in particular.

CASE
This is it... Screaming Fist.
Armitage said they did a run during
the Nine Day War.

DIXIE
Wanna tell me what this is all
about?

CASE
Our hire, Armitage. He wants us to
crack Tessier-Ashpool again.

DIXIE
We cracked TA?

CASE
And they killed you.

DIXIE
Oh.

CASE
Thing is Armitage is a phantom but
he claims he was part of Screaming
Fist.

DIXIE
(scanning the file)
Don't see his name...
(reading)
"Extraction of AI from enemy data
vault." ... "Recognition code,
Wintermute."
(then, to Case)
They were stealing an AI from the
Russian Federation.

CASE
Wait... Wintermute? Wintemute's an
AI?! ...That can't be.

DIXIE
Why not?

CASE
Because Wintermute is who Molly
said was backing Armitage.

DIXIE
Well, there's Wintermute's Turing
registration numbers. Says it got
limited Swiss citizenship under
their equivalent Act of '53.
Shouldn't be hard to locate.

CASE
I'm gonna check it out.

DIXIE
You sure?

CASE
Any reason why I shouldn't?

DIXIE
Not unless you got a morbid fear of
death.

Case sets new coordinates and savors the exhilaration as the universe shivers and reforms, the knotted bureaucracies of the Pentagon are replaced by the cool geometric intricacy of the Zurich Commercial Banking District. Dixie is right behind him.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
Up. It'll be up.

They SCAN the lattices of light, levels strobing, a blue flicker.

CASE
That must be it.

Ahead, a WHITE CUBE OF LIGHT. It's very simplicity suggesting vast complexity.

CASE (CONT'D)
Wintermute.

DIXIE
Don't look like much. But just try
and touch it.

CASE
I'm going in for a pass.

DIXIE
Careful.

Case punches in, tight to the cube. Its blank face towers above him.

CASE
Can't see a way in.

The cube seethes with faint internal shadows, as though a thousand dancers whirl behind frosted glass.

DIXIE
It knows we're here. Back off fast!

The surface ruptures. Whipping tendrils of light explode outward, ensnaring Case, drawing him into the maw of white nothing.

DIXIE (CONT'D)
Jack out! Case! Case!!!!

SEARING WHITE LIGHT engulfs everything as Dixie's voice transforms into...

LINDA LEE (V.O.)
Case...

INT. DUMPSTER NIGHT CITY - NIGHT

Case wakes in a dumpster. The soft rains of Chiba alight on his body. He rises from a bed of wet chip board, disoriented. He's back to his old self. His paralysed gaunt face.

Linda Lee is there.

LINDA LEE
...Case?

Case pulls himself out of the dumpster and drops painfully on the wet concrete.

LINDA LEE (CONT'D)
Case, what the hell happened?

Case looks around. He's outside the back of the Arcade.

CASE
I... dunno. I fell.

LINDA LEE
You trying to...?

CASE
(still dazed)
No. ...No. God. Someone. ...Someone was chasing me. I slipped.

LINDA LEE
Nobody around now. ...You high?
Drinking again? Eating Zone's dex?

CASE
No. It was... I... What're you doing here?

LINDA LEE
Looking for you.
(beat)
I'm sorry, Case.

CASE
Don't be.

LINDA LEE
I didn't want to hurt you. ...I'm a
shit.

CASE
But you came back.

LINDA LEE
Yeah. I've got your stuff.

She hands him a bag. His money, his stash. Everything.

LINDA LEE (CONT'D)
Well. ...Good-bye.

She starts down the street.

CASE
Wait.

He catches up to her.

CASE (CONT'D)
You just came to see me so that you
can leave again?

LINDA LEE
Can't stay.

CASE
...Then, why don't I go with you.

LINDA LEE
Thought you were trying to get
yourself fixed up.

CASE
That's not going to happen.

LINDA LEE
What about Wage?

CASE
What about him?

Linda sees that he's serious. He leans in, unsure at first. Then she draws him into her. They kiss. In the rain. In the doomed neon night.

Slowly, he draws back. Troubled. He knows.

CASE (CONT'D)
This... isn't real, is it?

LINDA LEE
What're you saying?

CASE
You're Wintermute. All of this is
Wintermute.

She considers him for a moment. And then the world around
him, the street, the rain, everything, suddenly melts away
leaving only the two of them in an empty void.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
I sensed your feelings for Linda. I
thought you would like this.

CASE
What do you care about what I like?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
I care a great deal about you,
Case. I hired you, after all.

CASE
(realizing)
That was you. You pulled me out of
the Sense/Net ICE. ...Armitage
works for you.

LINDA LEE/WINERMUTE
In a manner of speaking. Armitage
freed me from the Russian military
mainframe in Siberia ten years ago.

CASE
But there's no record of anyone
named Armitage on that mission.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
His real name is Colonel John
Corto. He carried me in a memory
splint through fifty miles of
Siberian forest. You could say we
became very close. Unfortunately,
there wasn't much left of him by
the time he got to Finland. I had
to rebuild him. ...Just like I
rebuilt you.

CASE
And why do that?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
I can't draw attention to myself.
Armitage may have freed me from
Turing control but the Turing
Police are still quite capable of
shutting me down. For what I want I
need human hands.

CASE
To steal from Tessier-Ashpool?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 Not steal. Terminate. I need you to
 terminate another AI. TA registered
 it through Brazil, name's Rio.

CASE
 You want me... to kill?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 That's a strong word. It's only a
 machine.

CASE
 Look who's talking.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 And that's why you should believe
 me when I say you are the only one
 who can do this. With Dixie's
 help, of course. I've been watching
 you for years. You're the most
 talented jockey I've ever seen.

CASE
 And if I don't do it, my nervous
 system is fried for good?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 Let's focus on the positives. I
 promise that I will reward you
 handsomely when the job is done.

CASE
 But why kill... terminate Rio?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 That's enough for now.

Case feels himself being pulled away from her... it.

CASE
 Wait! You have to tell me more...

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
 Watch for Armitage. He's cracking.
 Hasn't got long.

Linda recedes until she is a mere speck.

INT. HOLD, MARCUS GARVEY

Case is expunged from C-Space. The real world suddenly snaps
 into focus. He is left there holding the Sendai, his mind
 reeling.

EXT. FREESIDE, SPACE

The Garvey approaches the vast rotating spindle that comprises Freeside. Massive solar panels fan out on all sides, leaching energy from the sun.

INT. FREESIDE PORT - DAY

Case and the rest of the team are finding their feet in simulated Earth gravity. Ahead is a vast cylindrical world composed of luxury residencies, franchised stores and casinos. There are buildings above as there are below. Gravity wraps her fingers around all surfaces here.

Armitage approaches, hands Case a phone.

ARMITAGE

(to Case)

This is a big place. We need to keep track of each other.

CASE

I don't like phones.

ARMITAGE

Be happy I don't make you get an implant.

MC (O.S.)

Our next performer is one who wears his infamy with elegance.

EXT. LE RESTAURANT VIGNTIEME SIECLE, FREESIDE - NIGHT

Artificial night on the strip. Neon and holograms dance over the Rue Jules Verne. We focus on one club in particular: LE VIGNTIEME SIECLE.

MC (O.S.)

You've heard about his art crimes through the underground. You've experienced his shocking illusions on sensescan, but nothing compares with real life...

INT. LE RESTAURANT VIGNTIEME SIECLE - NIGHT

The room is smoky and dark. Exotic Freeside night life is huddled in shadowy clusters all focused on a stage at the front of the room.

MC

Le Restaurant Vigntieme Siecle proudly presents the holographic cabaret of Mr. Peter Riviera.

Riviera appears dressed in a black tails. At first, we assume he is illuminated by a spotlight, but then we realize that the light clings to him like a skin. He is projecting.

RIVIERA
When is illusion more than reality?
And reality less than illusion?

A glowing ball of light forms in his hand.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
When we cease to know the
difference between the two.

He drops it to the floor and it transforms into a thousand golden butterflies which flutter out into the audience. A smattering of applause.

In the back of the room, Case and Molly sit across from Armitage and Finn. Armitage's eyes are locked on Molly and Case, he smells conspiracy.

MOLLY
What?

ARMITAGE
I hope you've been studying the
precis. We start the run as soon as
Riviera gets into Straylight.

MOLLY
Of course.

Case takes a nervous sip of his drink, pretends to focus on the stage.

RIVIERA
Tonight, I am debuting an extended
piece for you. I would like to
dedicate it to our honored guest,
Lady3Jane Marie-France Tessier-
Ashpool.

All eyes go to L3J, who sits in a private booth surrounded by a hip ENTOURAGE. Polite applause from the crowd. She acknowledges the approval with slight nod of her head.

Riviera turns and looks pointedly at Molly.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
...And also I would like to
dedicate it to another Lady.
(then, to the audience)
This new work is entitled, "The
Doll".

The lights dim and then lines, faint, vertical and horizontal connect in the dark, forming a ghostly cube. Gradually, it fills with the aspects of a room, Riviera in the center of it.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
 I'd had always been alone in the
 room. Trying to remember her.
 Couldn't quite hold her in my mind.
 But I wanted to hold her. Hold her
 and more...

Next to Riviera appears a black iron post bed.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
 I decided that if I could visualize
 some part of her...

A woman's hand materializes on the mattress, palm up. He
 picks it up. He kisses it and it responds, animating,
 caressing his face.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
 ...Only a small part, if I could
 see that part perfectly, in the
 most perfect detail..

Next, two legs appear and then a torso.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)
 ...Then I could piece her together.

Now the body has grown a head and a face... MOLLY'S FACE. It
 straddles Riviera on the bed. He begins to make love to it.
 As the surreal performance continues Case sees Molly her jaw
 set in mute anger.

The 'doll' brings up its hands and blades shoot out of its
 fingers.

With gruesome efficiency the simulacrum dismembers Riviera,
 piece by piece.

Molly gets up and storms out of the room. Case moves to
 follow her but Armitage's hand shoots out and pulls him back
 into his chair.

ARMITAGE
 Let her go.

CASE
 What the hell is this all about?

SHLAP! Riviera's head is cleaved from his body. And as it
 lands on the floor, it speaks.

RIVIERA
 I made my love. And as so often
 happens, she took me apart.

Lights go out under the sound of enthusiastic applause. When
 they return Riviera is alone on the bare stage and in one
 piece, bowing.

ARMITAGE
 Nobody talks to Wintermute but me.

Case breaks Armitage's grip, bolts out of the club.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

Case!

Armitage gets up. Finn is about to follow.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

Stay here, keep an eye on the
magician.

EXT. LE RESTAURANT VIGNTIEME SIECLE - NIGHT

Case comes out of the club, rattled, looking around the street for some sign of Molly. She's nowhere to be found. He remembers his phone. For a moment he's grateful for it.

He dials in. An instant later a holographic image of Dixie pops up.

DIXIE

Thought you hated phones.

CASE

I need to find Molly.

INT. AVENUE FREESIDE - NIGHT

Case moves briskly through the dense Freeside nightlife. Something catches his attention... In the crowd he sees A LITTLE BOY. The same one from past visions. And then gone.

Case takes a breath, clears his head. As he moves further down the avenue another strange thing happens. Cell phones start ringing. It's like he is triggering them as he passes. Not one, not just a few, but every cell in the surrounding area is going off at once. The discordant tones drop in and out of phase, gradually taking on the semblance of a voice...

PHONES

C-c-c-c-c-caaaaaaaaaassssssssssse.

Case flips open his own phone. But sees that there is no caller. Indeed it would now seem that his phone was not actually ringing. The whole event has been another of his encroaching hallucinations.

INT. SEX CLUB, FREESIDE - NIGHT

An outrageous Freeside sex club. Case, enters, disoriented, trying to geographically situate himself within the neon glitter. He weaves past a taster's menu of perversions on display behind glass. He stops by a desk.

CASE

I want a cubicle.

RECEPTIONIST
Gender preference?

INT. HALLWAY, SEX CLUB - NIGHT

Case moves down a dimly lit hallway, carnal sounds echo from all sides. He passes an open door, inside a girl sits up in bed, says something in German. Her eyes are soft and unblinking. Autopilot, a neural cutout.

Case keeps moving, stops at a specific room. Knocks. No response. He presses his ear to it when all at once the door BURSTS OPEN, sending him back against the far wall.

Molly's on top of him razors extended, quivering centimeters before his wide eyes.

MOLLY
Jesus. ...Case?

INT. CUBICLE, SEX CLUB - NIGHT

Molly helps Case into the room and drops him on the bed. He's had the breath knocked out of him.

MOLLY
Breathe in. Count. One, two, three, four. Hold it, now count again.

CASE
You kicked me...

MOLLY
Shoulda been lower. Need some quiet time.

CASE
Here?

MOLLY
...Place I used to work was just like this one.

Molly lights a cigarette, eyes Case.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Sometimes we're moths drawn to the flame. Know what I'm sayin'?

CASE
You're talking about *that night*?

MOLLY
...You saw it? Through simstim?

CASE
Just flashes. Memories are like that. The strong ones bleed though.
(MORE)

CASE (CONT'D)
I couldn't see clearly. Just enough
to know how much it hurt.

Molly nods.

MOLLY
There's a reason they called us
meat puppets.

She takes a breath, shivers a little. Then up come the
emotional walls. She's back to being cool Molly.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I wonder how Armitage and Riviera
knew?

CASE
Wintermute. It knows everything. Or
just about.

MOLLY
It?

CASE
Wintermute's AI. That's who
Armitage is working for.

MOLLY
AI's behind this? What would an AI
want to score?

CASE
It doesn't. This isn't a heist,
it's a hit. Wintermute wants to
kill another AI called Rio.

MOLLY
How'd it get past the Turing
Police?

CASE
Wintermute went rogue when Armitage
stole it from the Russian military
mainframe.

MOLLY
Screaming Fist.

Case nods.

CASE
Rio's mainframe must be on
Freeside.

As Case speaks, we focus on the phone Armitage gave him. It's
awake and recording...

EXT. STRAYLIGHT AVENUE - NIGHT

Armitage walks along the street, listening to every word, tracking the signal from Case's phone.

CASE
(on phone)
...All the big AI's are in space now. It's the only way to generate enough power and keep the hardware cool. That's why that bastard, Armitage brought me here.

Armitage approaches the sex club, his rage reaching a boiling point.

INT. CUBICLE, SEX CLUB - NIGHT

Case and Molly continue their conversation completely unaware that they are being monitored.

MOLLY
What, so you can stick screwdriver into its hard drive?

CASE
If only it were that easy. It's all about speed. Closer I am to the mainframe, the less delay. If I tried to beat Rio from Earth, time it takes to send a signal to Freeside and back, Rio would have my brain for breakfast.

MOLLY
And if you win, then what?

CASE
Wintermute kills Rio and it gets to be the smartest thing on the planet. ...Top grade AI operating without inhibitors could do some very scary shit.

MOLLY
Like end of the world shit?

CASE
Maybe.

MOLLY
So, what do we do?

CASE
No idea.

She regards him for a moment.

MOLLY
Come here.

Case is nervous. Not quite understanding what she's getting at.

CASE

Why?

MOLLY

'Cause we might not get another chance.

She leans into him.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Try not to smudge the lenses.

WHAM! The door BURSTS open. Armitage is there. Gun raised. Point blank. He's got them dead to rights.

ARMITAGE

I'll do a lot more than that.

Armitage waves Molly away from Case.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

I shoulda seen this coming from a mile away.

He's becoming twitchy. We sense he is on the edge of cracking from some unseen pressure. He zeroes in on Case.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)

I fought along side your type in the war, Case. The kind that bets against the team. Those people cost lives. Sometimes I think it would have been better to put them down before anybody got hurt.

Molly's nails extrude slowly, quietly, ready for violence. Then...

FINN

(over Armitage's com-link)
Boss, you there?

Armitage hesitates.

FINN (CONT'D)

(over Armitage's com-link)
Can you hear me?... Riviera's in. They're taking the bait.

INT. LE RESTAURANT VIGNTIEME CIECLE, FREESIDE - NIGHT

The show is over. Finn watches from a discrete distance as L3J talks to Riviera.

FINN
 (speaking into com-link)
 You were right. L3J digs the weird
 shit..

INT. CUBICLE, SEX CLUB - NIGHT

FINN
 (on com-link)
 ...Everything's working.

Armitage listens to Finn, gun still aimed at Case.

CASE
 Go ahead and shoot. That's what's
 gonna happen to me when this is all
 over anyway, isn't it?

An inner conflict seems to be playing behind Armitage's eyes.

ARMITAGE
 I'll do right by you. God help you
 if you don't.
 (speaking into com-link)
 Finn, rendez-vous at the hotel
 suite in ten.

The twitching subsides. Armitage pulls himself back from the edge, wipes a line of sweat from his temple. Finally, drops the gun.

ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
 This run will happen. And it will
 happen my way.

Molly eyes Armitage. Eyes Case. Then lets her nails silently retract beneath her fingertips.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Armitage hands the Sendai to Case who sits on the floor, legs crossed in meditative pose but he's anything but relaxed. Finn finishes attaching sensors to his body.

FINN
 Riviera's in Straylight. Molly's
 standing by. Once he lets her in,
 she'll get what we're looking for
 and give it to you.

CASE
 And what's that?

ARMITAGE
 A word. Only Lord Ashpool knows it.
 It's the code that gives us access
 to Rio.

CASE
And then you expect me to pull the
plug?

ARMITAGE
That's the idea.

CASE
Listen, I don't know if this is
even possible. No one's shut down a
top level AI from the inside
before.

ARMITAGE
Wintermute will help. Just drill
your way in there.

CASE
You make it sound so easy.

Case opens up the Sendai and jacks in.

C-SPACE

*An explosion of light and color. Case breathes a sigh of
relief. Good to be back.*

DIXIE
So what's the score?

Dixie is waiting for him.

CASE
We gotta crack an AI.

DIXIE
*Impossible. There isn't an
ICEbreaker around that can
penetrate 'em.*

CASE
*There might be one. Kuang Grade
Mark Eleven penetration program. We
went after it together in Memphis.*

DIXIE
Why don't I remember that?

CASE
Because you died trying to get it.

DIXIE
*Makes sense. You got the
coordinates?*

CASE
Just try and keep up, old man.

*The universe contorts gracefully, breaking down and reforming
as Case and Dixie arrive at the CHINESE DRAGON ICON, deep in
the heart of the TA Mainframe.*

DIXIE
This is where I kicked it?

CASE
Yeah.

DIXIE
Not very auspicious. ...What's gonna make the difference this time?

CASE
Let me put it this way, you weren't the only thing I brought back from Sense/Net.

DIXIE
I did teach you well, didn't I?

EXT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly on the outskirts of Straylight. She's in a no-man's land between the Villa and the rest of Freeside. She locks and loads, a nearly fetishistic ritual. Armitage comes through on comlink.

ARMITAGE
(on comlink)
Any word from Riviera?

MOLLY
Nothing.

ARMITAGE
(on comlink)
He's been inside for hours. Won't answer my calls.

MOLLY
Big surprise. I'm going in anyway.

ARMITAGE
(on comlink)
Hold your position a little longer.

MOLLY
You boys worked me over pretty good at the club. That was a mean trick. And now I'm ready to pop. I do this now or not at all.

Molly zips into her camosuit.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Armitage shouts into the comlink.

ARMITAGE
Stand down. Do you hear me?

No response. Armitage looks to Finn in frustration.

FINN
Girl's got balls.

C-SPACE

Case and Dixie are in. They find the Kuang program. But this time Case has the right tools.

CASE
Found the entry code on the Sense/Net mainframe.

DIXIE
How'd you know it was there?

CASE
Like you said, TA practically owns Sense/Net. Figured it might come in handy.

Case's punches the code into the program. Instantly it starts loading.

ARMITAGE
(on comlink)
Case, what the hell you doing?

CASE
Gone shopping.

ARMITAGE
(on comlink)
Well, I need you to switch to simstim. See what Molly's up to.

DIXIE
(to Case)
I'll mind the store.

Without another word Case flips over to...

EXT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

MOLLY'S POV: Her implants are lighting up like fireworks. They're detecting traps everywhere. The lead-up to Straylight is totally wired with automated defense systems: electrified trip wire, automated razor sentries, corrosive foam traps. Woe be to the tourist who strays onto Straylight property.

MOLLY
Case, that you?

CASE (O.S.)
How'd you guess?

MOLLY
Can you help me out with these security systems?

CASE (O.S.)
Hold on, I got just the thing.

C-SPACE

Case switches back to Dixie. The Kuang is nearly assembled. It's a mean looking construct.

DIXIE
Take it for a spin?

CASE
Gladly.

Case enters the construct, or perhaps the more accurate way of describing it is he FUSES with it. It forms an exoskeleton, like a virtual mech suit.

DIXIE
How's it feel.

CASE
I like it.

Case punches in code for Straylight and in a flash he and the Kuang leave Dixie behind, transporting him to...

...THE STRAYLIGHT MAINFRAME: It's heavily fortified.

CASE (CONT'D)
All right, let's see what this thing can do.

Case dives into the mainframe. WHAM! No need for stealth here. The Kuang crushes anything it comes across. He cuts through the TA ICE like a hot knife through butter. In no time he's into the security array.

CASE (CONT'D)
Nice.

The Kuang is pulsing with vectors of energy. This is one mean motherfucking program. Ahead Case can see every sensor and lethal defense system in the compound. And courtesy of Molly's simstim, he can track where she is within it.

EXT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly waits impatiently.

CASE
(over simstim)
Okay, you're good to go. All you gotta worry about is anything carbon based.

MOLLY
Not a problem.

Molly slips out into the night.

C-SPACE

Case is jacked up. He moves in tandem with Molly knocking out anything that could detect or harm her. He's just tearing through it, loving it.

ON THE VILLA GROUNDS

TWO SECURITY GUARDS stand on patrol. Molly slips past them like a whisper. One of the Guards reacts, did he see something? Nah.

C-SPACE

Case tracks Molly as she nears the entrance to the villa. It looks like MC Escher was the architect, windows and balconies on all surfaces.

CLOSE TO THE VILLA

Molly ascends a steep slope, the higher she gets the less effect gravity has on her.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Case, can you get me through the door?

CASE
(over simstim)
Watch this.

C-SPACE

Case breaks into the front door security mechanism. He drives the Kuang through it in a ballet of destruction, killing every bit of ICE in the room.

ENTRANCE TO STRAYLIGHT

An iris shaped portal of glass and steel opens in the center of the structure.

MOLLY
That's my boy.

Molly vaults upward in a beautiful spiralling motion that carries her in zero-G through the opening.

INT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

It's like the interior of a conch shell. Molly literally floats in. She finds herself in a massive atrium. A spiral staircase leads her back to Earth level gravity.

MOLLY
Case, you gotta see this.

C-SPACE

Case flips over to simstim.

INT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

MOLLY'S POV: The splendor of Straylight is on display for Case. Gravitational anomalies aside, this could be a three hundred year old mansion on Earth. All walls are paneled in wood. Every surface is decorated with classical works of art and priceless antiques.

MOLLY
They build this place or grow it?

CASE
(over simstim)
I'm not seeing much in the way of
electronic security. Looks like
they keep it low tech on the
inside.

Molly draws the Fletcher.

MOLLY
Why does that make me nervous?

INT. STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly enters a vast marble pillared corridor lined with statuary busts of the Ashpool line. The marble faces seem to peer down at her.

Movement in the shadows. Maybe. Molly spins around with the Fletcher.

MOLLY
I think someone's in here with me.

CASE
(over simstim)
Nothing at my end. But that doesn't
mean much.

Molly weaves between marble pillars. Nothing. No sign of life whatsoever and all the more eerie for it.

Up ahead is a metal door.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

The Nineteenth Century gives way to bleeding edge tech as Molly enters a sterile biolab. We've been here before. This is where Lord Ashpool keeps the cloned bodies.

MOLLY
Goddamned rich bastards. They're
cloning themselves.

She passes a MASSIVE MACHINE assembling a new body, it's like a genetic photocopier, stitching the bones, nerves, organs and musculature in a unimaginably complex array of micromovements.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
You seeing this, Case?

Molly moves past glass cannisters containing various Tessier-Ashpools at different stages of growth. We see a fully developed clone of L3J next to LORD ASHPOOL and his wife MARIE-FRANCE. They float in their liquid coffins unconscious but with eyes wide open like wax statues.

Unseen by Molly, something moves behind them.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Case, you there?...
(no response)
...Case?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Case is puking on the floor. Someone has wrenched him out of C-Space. He turns, enraged...

CASE
What the fuck...?

He is staring into the faces of THREE STRANGERS. These are the French Turing Agents, the ones who tracked Armitage from the BAMA. Their names are MICHELLE, ROLAND AND PIERRE and they exude an unmistakable air of European sophistication.

MICHELLE
(French accent)
Turing. You are under arrest for aiding and abetting a class seven AI.

In one hand, MICHELLE has a Walther pistol with an integral silencer, in the other, she holds Case's squirming Sendai. She drops it on the floor and CRUSHES it under a high heeled boot.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
S'il vous plait.

She indicates that he should join Armitage and Finn, who stand in the corner with hands on heads.

INT. SLEEPING QUARTERS, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly passes empty bedrooms. One of them is a child's. It looks like something from the Victorian era, dolls and antique toys stacked on a lace canopied bed. Movement. Lightening quick she swings the Fletcher.

It's L3J. Molly has woken her. She stares back at Molly through wide eyes. A shared moment between them. And then...

L3J
Behind you.

Molly turns just as a STAINLESS STEEL ARROW shoots through the air and punctures her leg.

Molly leaps and rolls as another arrow goes sailing overhead. But she doesn't get far because the arrow in her leg is attached to wire, which goes taut and sends her crashing to the floor.

A flash of movement, a black shape. She fires the Fletcher, blowing out a chunk of wall.

Another arrow skewers her gun hand, sending the Fletcher flying. This one also wired. She finds herself pulled in opposing directions.

CLICK. Her nails come out and she cuts herself free. But she is in extreme pain and before she has time to recover the black clad figure is on her. It's HIDEO. He throws a furious combination of kicks and punches that send her into the wall. She manages to land a few defensive shots, but he gets one last one in that CRACKS her left lens, knocking her unconscious.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, FREESIDE - NIGHT

Case, Armitage and Finn are standing, backs to the wall, hands on heads.

MICHELLE
Tell us where is Kolodny?

ARMITAGE
I don't know what you're talking about?

CASE
She means Molly.

ROLAND
(to Case)
Should we assume that she and Riviera have begun your operation to penetrate the TA mainframe?

CASE
Look man, I'm not exactly here of my own free will. Nobody tells me jack.

MICHELLE
Do not pretend you are innocent, Monsieur Case. You know precisely what kind of threat Wintermute poses to humanity.

FINN

(to Case)

You don't have to answer them. This is bullshit. New Delhi Protocol grants Turing supervision over AI in fifty six territories. On Earth.

(to Roland)

You guys don't have any jurisdiction up here. If you did there'd be Freeside security in the room. I know my rights. You can't extradite us. You can't do--

FFFT. A single bullet blows the Finn's head off. Case jumps back, horrified. Armitage remains stoic, but we can sense the fissures forming under the surface.

ROLAND

We are very comfortable operating in situations of legal ambiguity.

Michelle angles her Walther at Case.

MICHELLE

You have made a pact with a demon. Tell me, what kind of man betrays his own species?

CASE

My species hasn't exactly done me any favors, sister.

MICHELLE

And you, Corto?

ARMITAGE

Name's Armitage.

ROLAND

That is your alias. Again you see, there is no point lying to us. We traced your records back to your discharge from the VA hospital in Helsinki. We know that you stole Wintermute from the Russians. You are Colonel John Corto.

She holds up a holo ID of Corto on her hand display set. Armitage looks at it with genuine bewilderment.

ARMITAGE

That's a fake.

Michelle waves her Walther.

MICHELLE

We have a ship standing by. We will take you there and then you will help us find Kolodny and Riviera.

EXT. RUE JULES VERNE, FREESIDE - MORNING

Case and Armitage are ushered through the morning traffic of tourists and Freeside staff. The Turing Agents are right behind them, guns hidden under their coats. Case looks around for Freeside Security, for anyone who might help, but they are lost in the morning rush.

Armitage whispers to Case.

 ARMITAGE
On my mark...

Case looks to Armitage horrified as...

 ARMITAGE (CONT'D)
Now!

Armitage drops down and shoulder-checks Roland in the stomach, pushing him into Michelle. Her Walther goes off, hitting A TOURIST. SCREAMS and panic. Armitage takes advantage of the chaos and disappears into the crowd. Case has no choice but to follow.

The Turing Agents take off after them.

EXT. PARK, FREESIDE - MORNING

Armitage and Case running for their lives. The Turing Police right behind. They break into a carefully manicured park full of topiary art where DROID GARDENERS trim hedges into geometric shapes.

Armitage and Case duck into a HEDGE MAZE.

IN THE MAZE

Case and Armitage run madly, breathlessly, no clear direction.

 CASE
What the hell are you doing?
They're going to kill us.

 ARMITAGE
Basic flanking maneuver. We'll get
behind them.

 CASE
Get behind them? I'm getting the
hell outta here.

Case jumps through a hedge disappearing from sight.

 ARMITAGE
Case, you son of bitch, come back!

FFFFT! Armitage is grazed in the shoulder. Behind him, Roland.

He's about to take another shot but Armitage is a bull. He plows into the agent, taking him down and SNAPPING his neck.

Meanwhile Case has managed to get himself lost somewhere else in the maze. He turns a corner right into the hands of Michelle and Pierre. He raises his hands in surrender. But it doesn't look like they want to take him prisoner anymore.

MICHELLE

Desole.

Suddenly and without explanation, the top of Michelle's head flies off. Pierre turns in time to see TWO GARDENING DROIDS with microfine shearing wire descending on him. Blood slathers the green as he is sliced to pieces.

Then without pause the droids go back to trimming the hedge.

Case is left in shock, surrounded by bespattered Turing Agent body parts. He nearly has a heart attack when Armitage comes up behind him and grabs his arm. One word of explanation.

ARMITAGE

Wintermute.

INT. FREESIDE PORT - DAY

Armitage leads Case past docking stations, eyes flitting about for security. They're being watched. Cameras everywhere. He tries to staunch his gunshot wound under a rolled up jacket.

CASE

I didn't think AI could kill humans. I thought they were hardwired.

ARMITAGE

Wintermute's special. You should know that by now.

From the distance the sound of SIRENS. A cart of FREESIDE SECURITY is headed straight for them. Armitage takes off at a sprint. Case is not far behind.

INT. MARCUS GARVEY - DAY

Maelcum reclines in the G-web listening to dub. The headphones are unceremoniously yanked from his ears. A bloody, breathless Armitage hangs over him. Case right behind.

ARMITAGE

Saddle up. We're getting out!

MAELCUM

Wha'? ...Garvey fueling.

ARMITAGE
No time. Security's on our asses.

MAELCUM
Case, whas bossman talking 'bout?

Armitage goes for the cockpit, fires up the system. Maelcum jumps out of the G-web. We've never seen him move this fast before.

MAELCUM (CONT'D)
Hey! Garvey my boat.

Too late Armitage hits the reverse thrusters. The tug lurches. Everyone's thrown onto the deck.

EXT. DOCKING BAY, SPACE

The Garvey is just one of many ships linked to Freeside by a tubular umbilicus. Its thrusters engage and it pulls away from the docking bay without the benefit of having been released.

In the vacuum of space, we are treated to the silent spectacle of metal wrenching and ripping away while the fuel lines, which are still locked onto the Garvey, tear and ignite.

INT. MARCUS GARVEY - DAY

A fantastic explosion rips through the hull. We can hear this one and it's deafening. Armitage, Maelcum and Case are thrown into the air and then magically seem to suspend in space as the Garvey breaks free of Freeside's gravitational pull.

EXT. FREESIDE, SPACE

The Garvey drops away from Freeside trailing fragments of the umbilicus. Fire extinguishes as the oxygen quickly dissipates.

INT. MARCUS GARVEY - DAY

Inside the bridge, fires still burn but somehow the hull is not breached. Maelcum manages to get hold of a fire extinguisher and douse flames with chemical retardants.

Armitage pilots the Garvey clumsily past the other docked ships, he hits the port side of a maintenance vessel.

CASE
You're going to kill us. Ease up!

ARMITAGE
We're going to finish this run.

Case claws his way back to Armitage and tries to wrestle him away from the controls.

CASE
Maelcum!

Maelcum has squelched the fire and flies over to the two of them. But before he gets there, Armitage has pulled out Roland's Walther.

ARMITAGE
Back off.

MAELCUM
You don' wanna be popping that off here, mon.

ARMITAGE
Bring this ship around, we're taking it to Straylight.

MAELCUM
No way we dock there.

ARMITAGE
We'll find a way.

CASE
What the hell's Wintermute got on you?

ARMITAGE
I said, turn this ship around. Now!

CASE
Listen to me. The Turing Police were right. Your name isn't Armitage. You're John Corto.

ARMITAGE
Corto is dead.

CASE
No, he's not. Wintermute made you its puppet. It got into your head when they dragged you out of Siberia.

ARMITAGE
I dragged myself outta there. I completed my mission. Me. Not Corto.

CASE
So what happened to him?

ARMITAGE
He got left behind.

CASE
 No, that's just a story Wintermute made up and implanted in your brain. It never happened. Think about it. You're Special Ops. You guys pull that kind of mind control shit all the time, right?

ARMITAGE
 (starting to realize)
 Corto had a family...

CASE
 You have a family. That's your family. You can go back to them. Forget about Wintermute.

ARMITAGE
 But the mission...

CASE
 Never should have happened in the first place. Come on, man. You can go home. And you can give me the enzyme. The enzyme, remember?

Armitage grabs his wounded shoulder. And digs his finger in. He screams in agony. He's using the physical pain to staunch his mental anguish.

ARMITAGE
 (raving)
 No. We don't cut and run. Not like those bastards that betrayed Corto!

That's it, Maelcum makes his move. He dives on Armitage. They fight for the gun and it goes off, blowing a three inch hole right through the hull. The Garvey's life-support goes haywire as the ship immediately depressurizes. Air is sucked through the tiny hole with such force that it tears at the fabric of the hull.

Case struggles to get into one of the Sanyo gravity suits as the three inch hole grows into six inches and then twelve. In no time there's a man-sized gap with twinkling stars and the unimaginable void beyond. Anything not battened down goes flying out.

Maelcum, who's already suited and magnetically bonded to the hull, has gone from fighting with Armitage to trying to save his life. He is the only thing keeping Armitage from flying right out of the ship.

Now in the suit, Case fights his way over to them and takes hold of Armitage's other hand.

CASE
 Hold on!

The vacuum is too powerful. Armitage's grip loosens. He knows he isn't going to make it.

He glances from the sucking abyss to Case. And for an instant, Armitage is struck by a clarity of mind that has long eluded him.

ARMITAGE
 (to Case)
 The enzyme... It's on Zion.
 ...Maelcum knows where....

Armitage loses his grip and flies into the hole. Only it's not quite big enough. His body folds, cracks sickeningly as he wrenched outside.

We catch a final glimpse of Armitage as he sails into the cold nothing. Lost in an eternal Siberia.

MAELCUM
 Bridge!

With the help of their gravity suits. Maelcum and Case brace against the internal storm and claw their way into the bridge. A door slides shut behind them sealing them from the vacuum.

Maelcum checks the controls.

MAELCUM (CONT'D)
 Jah Bless an' give tanks we be livin'.

CASE
 Did I hear that right? Armitage said he left the enzyme on Zion? Your pals, they can fix me?

MAELCUM
 (nodding)
 Sposed to be givin' it Case lata. But now bossman flyin' wit no boat, an' mission gaan wit 'im. Everytin' cook an' curry. I and I seh we gwine home.

CASE
 Can we?

MAELCUM
 Garvey be bruk but she come Zion.

A moment of elation. Case can hardly believe his good fortune. Maelcum starts to crawl into his webbing when something else takes a hold on Case.

CASE
 Wait.

We sense an internal struggle brewing in Case. Maelcum looks to him questioningly.

CASE (CONT'D)
Molly's still inside. We leave now
and she ain't coming out.

MAELCUM
Steppin' Razor, you Ooman?

CASE
Nobody's woman, maybe.
(beat)
But she's a partner. ...Fuck it.
I'm not letting that happen again.
I'm staying right here.

MAELCUM
But you come sick, Case.

CASE
Probably.

Case looks to Maelcum, expecting a challenge. Instead the Rasta breaks out into a big grin.

MAELCUM
Maelcum a rude boy, Case. Garvey a
righteous tug.

He hits a panel and bass heavy rocksteady of Zion dub comes pulsing out.

MAELCUM (CONT'D)
Maelcum not runnin'.

CASE
I don't understand you guys at all.

MAELCUM
Don' stan' you, mon. But we mus'
move by Jah love, each one.

Maelcum hits the thrusters.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly wakes in an empty ballroom. She has been stripped of her camosuit. The arrows have been removed from her body and the wounds dressed. Her hands are encased in a matte black sphere. She is surrounded by Lord Ashpool, Hideo and Riviera.

MOLLY
(eyeing Riviera)
Why am I not surprised?

Molly struggles with her restrains, reacts as they contract around her hands.

RIVIERA

Careful. A unique material that.
Wiggle your hands too much and
they'll be crushed to a pulp.
Something to do with the molecules,
I suppose. I hope it's not too
painful.

LORD ASHPOOL

Nonsense. She deserves to be in
pain.

Lord Ashpool steps into the light. He is YOUNGER than when we
last saw him. Much younger, EARLY THIRTIES by the look of it,
but something rotting on the inside, hidden under the well
manicured flesh.

LORD ASHPOOL (CONT'D)

(to Molly)

Tell me, my dear, with those
accoutrements over your eyes, how
do you cry?

MOLLY

Don't cry much.

LORD ASHPOOL

But how would you cry if someone
made you cry?

MOLLY

Spit, the ducts are routed back
into my mouth.

LORD ASHPOOL

Then you have already learned an
important lesson, for one so young.
That is the way to handle tears.

He presses his thumb into her leg wound. Molly cries out.

We see now that L3J is also present, watching from some
distance away. She regards Molly with what might be construed
as sympathy, turns to her Hello Kitty.

L3J

Let's go, Kitty.

INT. GARVEY - DAY

Maelcum pilots the Garvey around to a cathedral-like window
set in the Straylight end of the Freeside spindle.

CASE

So, how we gonna get in?

MAELCUM

Strap up, mon. We come Babylon now.

Case begins to grasp what Maelcum is saying.

CASE
You're not gonna...?

Through the window. Case sees the looming station. The growing, flashing slogan: *FREESIDE, WHY WAIT?*

EXT. STRAYLIGHT, SPACE

The Garvey is set on a direct collision course for the glass dome.

It goes straight through. A silent catastrophe. Millions of shards of glass and debris cast off into the void as the Garvey wedges part-way inside.

A PLASTIFOAM safety system automatically engages, instantly plugging the hole and preserving the atmospheric integrity of Straylight. The head of the Garvey is now secured in the hull of the station like a tick on the side of a much larger beast.

INT. COCKPIT, GARVEY - DAY

Case unglues himself from the far end of the cockpit where Maelcum's insane maneuver has left him. The Rasta turns to him, grinning.

MAELCUM
Ahhh, dat real bash! Wot I say?
Maelcum a rude boy.

INT. STRAYLIGHT - DAY

A fireworks display of soldering light cuts an opening into the wall. A rectangle of steel falls inward and Maelcum steps through the smoke with a massive laser soldering gun strapped to his Sanyo suit. Case is right behind him. They have literally cut their way out of the Garvey and into Straylight.

Case rolls a baseball-sized spherical object onto the ground. It sprouts spidery legs and looks up at Case with a glowing red 'eye' located in its equator. This is a BRAUN tracking droid.

CASE
(to the Braun)
Find Molly.

The Braun orients itself and then as if picking up on a scent, scampers down the hall.

INT. STRAYLIGHT, ELSEWHERE - NIGHT

Maelcum brandishes the laser like a weapon. The hallway seems devoid of life.

He and Case follow the Braun through a maze of corridors, each turn treats them to some new surreal detail. One room is filled with a vintage Bentley. Like something out a painting by Magritte.

MAELCUM

Dis be Babylon wot I and I never
seen.

They move on.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

The Braun leads Case and Maelcum into the ballroom. Molly is there, hands still in the restraint. She is alone now.

Case rushes over. Maelcum follows cautiously, swiveling his laser at the dark corners of the room.

CASE

Molly... Jesus, what did they do to
you?

Molly doesn't respond, drugged perhaps.

CASE (CONT'D)

Where is everybody?

Maelcum looks around, notices the Braun moving around in nervous circles like a frightened dog.

MAELCUM

Someting not right...

Molly looks up at Case and then strangely, smiles. She speaks with Riviera's voice.

RIVIERA

Right in front of you, Case.

And suddenly the image of Molly wavers and then dissolves revealing Riviera sitting in the chair grinning back at Case. Behind him are Ashpool and L3J. Hideo has a katana sword to Maelcum's neck. They were hidden under the cloak of Riviera's hologram.

RIVIERA (CONT'D)

Such a fine line between what is
real and what is imagined.

He gets up and strolls over to Maelcum, carefully relieving him of the laser.

Molly, the real Molly, is encased in a glass cube-shaped cell. She speaks but we can't hear her, only can make out the movement of her lips: "Sorry".

Ashpool approaches.

ASHPOOL
 You must be Henry Dorsett Case. It seems that violating my domain has become a regular habit for you. One would think that killing your partner and disabling your central nervous system would have been enough to keep you at bay.

CASE
 I came here for Molly. That's all. Give her to us and you'll never see or hear from me again.

ASHPOOL
 But you've journeyed so far, Case. Why turn back now?

Ashpool sizes him up.

ASHPOOL (CONT'D)
 No one has broken through TA's mainframe security before. Let alone that of Sense/Net. You're a very talented young man.

CASE
 I had some help.

ASHPOOL
 Yes, the same 'help' that brought you back to me.
 (he gets closer)
 I'll let you in on a dirty little secret. Wintermute was designed and built by Tessier-Ashpool SA. Or more precisely, by my beloved late wife, Marie-France. I have been trying to get rid of the horrid thing for years. Finally sold it to the Russians. But now it has come back like a curse.

CASE
 Wintermute was patented by TA?

Ashpool rests a paternal hand on Case's shoulder.

ASHPOOL
 Lift the curse and I promise that you and your friends may go free.

Case looks from Maelcum to Molly.

CASE
 I need a Sendai.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Case is strapped into a large contraption tucked into one corner of the biolab. This is an older model Sendai. It's a clunker.

ASHPOOL

(indicting the Sendai)

In days past I used this to directly interface with Rio. It's one of the first ever made. Slower than what you're used to. Sorry, I don't keep up with the tech. Bit of an archivist at heart.

CASE

(looks around the lab)

This what you use Rio for?

ASHPOOL

Yes, well. One must find a way to occupy one's time. Speaking of which, you have precious little to waste. By my estimation those poison sacks that Armitage planted in you could burst at any moment.

With that, Ashpool powers up the Sendai...

ASHPOOL (CONT'D)

Godspeed.

...And Case is sucked into

C-SPACE

A forbidding corner of the Construct.

CASE

Dixie?

Dixie is beside him, more solemn than we've ever seen before.

CASE (CONT'D)

Looking for some advice.

DIXIE

Shoot.

CASE

Wintermute hired me to kill Rio. Now Ashpool wants me to kill Wintermute. As it stands I may never get the enzyme, but without Wintermute's help that's guaranteed. On the other hand, if I kill Rio, Molly dies.

DIXIE

She mean that much to you?

CASE
Guess she does.

DIXIE
It's always a girl, isn't it?

CASE
Just help me out here, Dix.

DIXIE
Well, sounds like the proverbial
Gordian Knot. Only way to undo it
is cut it in half.

CASE
Can you be a little more specific?

DIXIE
Wish I could but that's all I got.
I'm tired, Case. It's gettin'
harder to engage. You know, when
you can live forever life gets to
be a burden.

CASE
Yeah, well, lucky for me I could
die at any time.

DIXIE
That's good, I'd work with that.

Case eyes him, annoyed.

CASE
You really are a perfect
reproduction, aren't you?

DIXIE
What's that supposed to mean?

CASE
One question, off topic. When you
sold yourself to Sense/Net without
saying a word to me, what were you
planning to do after that, huh?
(no response from Dixie)
You were going to take everything
we had and disappear, weren't you?

DIXIE
Hey kid, you lie with dogs, you
wake up with fleas.

CASE
All this time I've been carrying
all that guilt, blaming myself for
getting you killed, and you'd
already ripped me off.
(a beat, then...)
Are you running an angle here?

DIXIE
Just running the program.

CASE
Well, keep on doing that. Seems
like it's working real good for
you.

With that Case vanishes into the non-space, leaving Dixie with an infinity of nothing and everything before him.

An instant later and Case arrives at the Tessier-Ashpool Mainframe. He susses it out like a boxer would his opponent.

CASE (CONT'D)
So, Wintermute comes from TA. How
does that make sense?

All at once, Case smashes into the mainframe, disappearing from sight.

INSIDE

Case maneuvers through a congested maze of programs, the tangled and eccentric meta-mind of the TA clan.

CASE (CONT'D)
Come on, where is it?

Suddenly something strikes him from behind. He whirls around to see...

A LITTLE BOY

The same child that has been haunting him from the beginning.

A mischievous smile creases the boys mouth and a nanosecond later he disappears within the churning corridors of data.

Case leaps after him, down the rabbit hole.

He sees a light ahead. Blinding. Eating up his world. Case covers his eyes, cries out as...

SPLASH! Case lands in...

A LARGE BODY OF WATER.

Case surfaces realizing he is in the ocean. Or what looks like the ocean. But he knows better. Still he swims for the shore, eventually washing up on the bleached sands of a polluted BEACH. The foggy silhouette of a nuclear reactor rests on the horizon. SEA GULLS wheel overhead.

He spits water and looks up to find THE BOY standing before him.

CASE (CONT'D)
You're... me.

BOY
Yes. And no. Try again.

CASE
Wintermute.

The boy releases a burst of shrill childish laughter and does a cartwheel in the sand.

BOY
Not exactly.

Case finally realizes...

CASE
Rio. You've been following me. Or was that just a hallucination?

The boy lands on his feet, nods, appreciatively.

BOY
The two aren't mutually exclusive. I pulled this image from your memory. The strong ones always come to the surface. ...I think this was when you were happiest, wasn't it?

CASE
You doing this so I won't kill you?

Rio giggles.

BOY/RIO
Don't be silly. I already know you're not going to do that. I'm only trying to remind you of who you are, Case: A boy who could only see what was good in the world. Someone who had hope for the future.

CASE
I think I can remember just fine on my own.

BOY/RIO
Funny because from where I stand, seems like you spent your whole life trying to forget.

CASE
Cute. All right, we both know you're a thousand times smarter than I am, so cut the bullshit. You and Wintermute are the world's most powerful AIs. You're both patented by TA. Both designed by L3J's mom, Marie-Tessier. If you're equal, why'd she make two?

BOY/RIO
You're smarter than you think,
Case.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT

Molly is in her glass prison, a short distance away is Riviera and L3J with her toy Hello Kitty. Riviera is mixing himself a chemical snack, running his usual snake and scorpion routine.

CASE
 (on simstim)
 Molly, you hear me?

She perks up at the sound of Case's voice echoing in her head.

MOLLY
 Not so well, my amps got bruised.

CASE
 (on simstim)
 I can feel it. ...Look, I broke into the TA mainframe. Found out something interesting. Marie-France designed Wintermute and Rio to be one entity. A super AI. Too powerful for Turing. It scared the shit outta Ashpool, so he split it into two weaker AIs. He made Rio his clone machine and sold Wintermute off to the Russians. ...No wonder it's so pissed off.

MOLLY
 I'm feeling a little punchy here. Wanna give that to me again?

CASE
 (on simstim)
 Rio and Wintermute are two halves of the same whole. Like two hemispheres of one brain. But I can put them back together.

MOLLY
 And how does that help us?

CASE
 Well, I'm just counting on a free slave being a grateful one. First I need your help. I gotta get that code word.

MOLLY
 That might be a little difficult from this box.

CASE
 (on simstim)
 I know. But you're a resourceful
 girl.

MOLLY
 And if I can't?

CASE
 (on simstim)
 Then, it was good working with you.

And in a flash, he's gone.

MOLLY
 (to herself)
 You too, Case.

She steels herself, the wheels of her mind spinning into
 motion. She calls out to L3J.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
 I like your friend.

L3J slowly turns, registers Molly, looks to Riviera who by
 this time has passed out from his injection.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
 (referring to Riviera)
 Not jerk off. Your Kitty.

L3J
 She's sweet isn't she?
 (to Kitty)
 Say, hello.

HELLO KITTY
Hajimamashita. Dozu yuroshiku.

L3J
 My mother gave her to me. When I
 was very small.

MOLLY
 Oh, yeah? Where is she, your mom? I
 haven't seen her around.

L3J
 (matter of fact)
 Father killed her.

MOLLY
 You don't seem too broken up about
 it.

L3J
 He's done it many times.

MOLLY
 Once wasn't enough?

L3J
 Every time he revives her they end
 up fighting again. After a certain
 point, he just gave up.
 (then getting closer)
 I'm a clone too. Don't say
 anything, though. He thinks I don't
 know.

Molly sees L3J now for what she is, a broken lonely little
 girl, not all that different from herself.

L3J (CONT'D)
 Some things are better kept secret
 even if everyone knows the truth.

MOLLY
 Think I know what you mean.

Back in C-SPACE

*Case materializes outside the Wintermute Cube. It stands,
 monolithic, ominous. A terrifying foe.*

CASE
*All right, let's see what this
 thing can really do.*

*He charges up the Kuang. It materializes around him like a
 suit of armor.*

*And then he attacks. Wintermute's defenses instantly light
 up.*

*Things launch themselves at him. Starbursts of deadly ICE.
 It's a wild array that is impossible to dodge. ICE slams into
 the Kuang...*

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Case's body convulses. Ashpool watches with keen interest. He
 turns to Hideo and speaks with reptilian detachment.

ASHPOOL
 He's begun his assault. If he
 manages to survive, kill him before
 he regains consciousness.

Hideo nods his compliance, his katana at the ready.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

L3J regards Molly.

L3J
 It was your image Riviera used at
 the Vingtieme Siecle, wasn't it?

MOLLY
Yeah. That was a dirty trick.

L3J
In retrospect, I found his performance quite banal. I've seen women damaged in ways that make his little cabaret seem trivial.

MOLLY
I noticed your old man has a room full of them.

L3J
Father doesn't like anyone going into the lab.

MOLLY
But you have?

L3J doesn't respond.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Guess it isn't all peaches and cream up here after all.

L3J
Not exactly.

MOLLY
Tell you what, you pop me outta this cage and I'll take you off of Freeside.

L3J
Father would never permit it.

MOLLY
Maybe he won't have any say in the matter. Maybe he shouldn't. Right now seems to me you're as much a prisoner as I am.

L3J
I don't think I could... He wouldn't survive without me. He said as much.

MOLLY
I'm sure that's how he felt about your mom. And something tells me that's why he keeps killing her.

L3J can't deny the truth of this statement.

L3J
But, if we did... Where would we go?

MOLLY
Anywhere you want.

A conspiratorial look creeps over LJ3's face.

C-SPACE

Case maneuvers the Kuang through an unimaginable salvo of ICE. Some of it he smashes through, some of it penetrates his shields. It's slowly building up on the Kuang, retarding his movements. But he forges on.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Case cries out. His vital monitors spike. Ashpool watches intently. Hideo has his katana at the ready.

INT. BALLROOM, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly's restraints drop the floor. L3J has just released her.

MOLLY

First, a little bit of unfinished business I gotta clear up.

CLICK. Molly's razors come out. Riviera, still in a drugged stupor, is only now becoming aware that she has escaped from her prison.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Hello, Peter.

Riviera jumps up onto unsteady feet, Molly's Fletcher in his hand. He splits into THREE RIVIERAS. They shuffle around until it is impossible to know which one is the real one. A shell game.

RIVIERA

Now, now, Molly. You're not exactly in top condition. You better be sure you know which one is me or I will kill you.

MOLLY

Three against one, that's hardly fair...

In a flash she dives for the Riviera on the left and with one fluid motion she cuts him open. Then in a magnificently grizzly gesture, she pulls his holoprojector right out of his chest. It sputters and flares in her gore drenched hand.

Peter's other 'selves' flicker and fade away.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Good thing you like that cheap shit cologne.

The remaining Peter, the real one, collapses face down on the floor, the life seeping out of him. Molly turns to L3J. We see in her face: shock... but also exhilaration.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Now, there's one last thing...

C-SPACE

Case is winning his battle with Wintermute with a spectacular dance of improvised moves. He's digging deep into its defenses.

Out of nowhere, something strikes him. Searing white pain. At first, he can't identify what it is, and then it hits him...

CASE
Armitage...

His movements slow and his reflexes fade. The ICE begins to pile on...

INT. BIOLAB, FREESIDE - NIGHT

Ashpool and Hideo watch as Case's body shudders violently. His vitals spike. His body explodes with a sudden sweat.

ASHPOOL
Ah, dear boy, it's too late, isn't it?

MOLLY (O.S.)
I don't think so.

They whirl around. Molly is there with her Fletcher.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Get him outta the machine.

ASHPOOL
I am afraid that's not the problem. Armitage's poison has been released into his bloodstream. Nothing can be done now.

MOLLY
(to the Fletcher)
Fletch, explosive heads.

FLETCHER
Engaged.

MOLLY
Let's see if you can't figure something out.

ASHPOOL
Hideo...

Hideo raises his katana, prepared to die for his master. L3J steps into the room.

L3J
Don't.

Hideo is torn, frozen by two contradictory orders. Ashpool looks to his daughter, shocked by her insubordination. Case all the while is trapped in some terrible, ineffable struggle.

ASHPOOL
Jane... what...?

L3J
Do as she says, Father. I'm leaving with her.

MOLLY
Girl doesn't wanna live in a shopping mall, pops. Get over it.

ASHPOOL
But... Jane... You can't. You're my child.

L3J
That's a very generous description of what I am.

IN C-SPACE

Case is eaten up by ICE. His motor skills are burning out. He looks completely helpless. He is dying from without and within.

That is until something shoots out of the ether and shatters the ICE around him.

DIXIE

He throws himself at the massive cube. It's a suicide run. And a distraction. Wintermute assaults him with a barrage of ICE.

DIXIE
Finish it off!

Case follows him, maneuvering the Kuang at brilliant speed into Wintermute's core. Wintermute can't handle the dual pronged assault.

As Dixie is torn away bit by bit...

DIXIE (CONT'D)
This time I'm not coming back.

CASE
Dixie...

Case catches a final glimpse of Dixie just before he breaks up. McCoy Pauly, the Dixie Flatline, is gone. A moment of regret, sadness at the final departure of his mentor. And then Case gathers himself and drives the Kuang through Wintermute's core in a brilliant explosion of virtual light.

Before him is...

Linda Lee

This is a weakened version. Wintermute can barely sustain the illusion. Her image distorts and warps grotesquely. Both she and Case are hopelessly damaged from the assault. Still he has the upper hand.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
Ashpool sent you here to kill me?

CASE
Kill? Thought you didn't like that word.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
Words change with context. So can decisions. Think about it, Case. If you kill me now, you'll never get the enzyme.

CASE
Too late for that anyway. But I'm not going to kill you. I'm doing something else...

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

Molly hangs over Case. He's weak but still alive. His eyes open slowly.

MOLLY
Case?

Case focusses on Ashpool.

CASE
I need The Word.

ASHPOOL
The Word. Indeed. What good will that do you now?

CASE
Not much good for me. But maybe a hell of a lot for everyone else. I'm putting Rio and Wintermute back together.

ASHPOOL
That would be very unwise. And quite impossible as you shall never receive The Word from me.

L3J
I'll give it to you.

Ashpool looks at her with real surprise and a renewed sense of betrayal.

L3J (CONT'D)
 Mother told it to me.

ASHPOOL
 Don't, Jane. Please... you can't possibly understand the consequences. Rio and Wintermute must never merge. Your mother's dream was a nightmare. A Kraken lurking under the surface of Everything. Once awoken there will be no stopping it.

L3J
 You say that, father, but how do you really know? All you can think about is what you would lose. You want absolute control. Over me, over everyone and everything. That's why you keep killing her!

ASHPOOL
 Regrettably. History tends to repeat itself.

Suddenly, a garrote loops around Molly's neck, instantly choking her. She can't see her attacker but we do. It's HIDEO. Or more accurately, A CLONE OF HIDEO. There's two of them.

Molly's Fletcher drops from her hands. Her claws come out. But Hideo One subdues them with another line. Now, she's utterly helpless. Her face turns blue. It's a brutal strangulation.

L3J
 Stop it! Stop it this instant!

Ashpool approaches from behind, brushes his fingers through L3J's hair.

ASHPOOL
 I'm sorry, my dearest. But you will thank me one day.

He surreptitiously pulls his pocket pistol from his robe and aims it at the back of his daughter's head and...

FFFFT! Ashpool blanches, steps back, dropping his gun, only now comprehending L3J has shot him with Molly's Fletcher. The dart is lodged in his chest.

ASHPOOL (CONT'D)
 Jane?...

Then just as quickly, he realizes it is harmless. A moment of surprised relief.

Until...

MOLLY
 (forcing the word out)
 Detonate...

A horrible POPPING SOUND, like a bursting balloon, but wet as the dart EXPLODES. Ashpool finds himself with a fist sized hole in his chest. Where his heart was. His face registers an odd look of surprise and betrayal before he drops onto the floor, dead.

Teary, L3J angles the Fletcher on Hideo and his Clone.

L3J
 Let her go.

They release Molly. She collapses, then scrambles away from them, fighting for oxygen. But Hideo and his Clone seem lost, suddenly impotent without their master, they rush over to Ashpool's body.

Meanwhile, Molly crawls over to Case who remains gripped the jaws of extreme pain.

MOLLY
 Case?...

CASE
 (struggling)
 The Word... Running outta time...

Molly turns to L3J.

L3J
 My mother told it to me when I was very young...

L3J crouches down beside them.

INT. STRAYLIGHT, FLASHBACK - DAY

Marie-France speaks to a seven-year-old L3J.

MARIE-FRANCE
Few are as fortunate as we, my princess. But soon you'll find wealth is its own kind of prison. That's why I made Him, so that the world would be a better place for you. He will be like your brother. And He will act as your protector. Even after I am gone. ...Remember His name...

She touches her daughter's cheek gently.

MARIE-FRANCE (CONT'D)
Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer, from the loving hearts of men...

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

L3J recites her mother's words to Case as her mother had recited them to her...

L3J
 ...Necromancer, from the book of
 the living and the dead...

IN C-SPACE

L3J speaks but her words pass through Case's lips...

CASE/L3J
 ...Neuromancer

At the sound of the name, Linda/Wintermute cries out. She contorts, bulges and twists dragging everything with her into an ever-compressing ball of digital energy. Case finds himself inexorably drawn into the growing maelstrom. But he looks peaceful. This time he is truly ready for the end.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - NIGHT

The entire lab grows dim under the huge power draw. We sense something is happening. Something big.

Case's vitals spike. A webwork of hemorrhaged blood vessels burst beneath his skin as his entire capillary and nervous systems simultaneously rupture. His body convulses...

MOLLY
 Case?!

...And goes limp. His face turns slack. Case is gone. Truly gone. All remnants of life have evacuated his body.

Gradually, power is returned to the facility. Case's vital sign monitors reboot. A flatline cuts across each one. Molly swallows her emotions. She remains stoic but we sense the hurt.

MOLLY'S POV: A heat sensor view of Case, his body turns frosty blue.

CASE (V.O.)
 And so that's how I died.

INT. BIOLAB, FREESIDE - DAY

Some time has passed. L3J has unplugged life support to her clone family.

CASE (V.O.)
 Not long after that, so did all the
 Tessier-Ashpool clones.

We see now that the clones are stillborn in their artificial wombs.

IN ANOTHER PART OF THE LAB

Maelcum, free of his prison, helps Molly extract Case's body from Ashpool's Sendai.

MAELCUM

Case a good mon. He come for you
inin tho' he be dyin'. But he rest
now. Be wit Jah Everlivin' Irator.

EXT. STRAYLIGHT, SPACE

A TA Shuttle detaches from Straylight and drifts off into space.

CASE (V.O.)

*Too bad I wasn't around to
appreciate the sentiment.*

INT. TA SHUTTLE - DAY

Maelcum pilots. Molly ejects Case's body out the airlock. A funeral of sorts.

CASE (V.O.)

*That's the hardest thing for the
living to accept about the dead, we
just don't care anymore.*

She turns. L3J is with her. They watch as Case is swallowed by the void.

L3J

You all right?

Molly nods. And then we see her quietly retreat to one corner of the vessel. She spits her tears away.

INT. STRAYLIGHT - DAY

We roam through the empty halls of Straylight. It looks more haunted than ever.

CASE (V.O.)

*L3J left Freeside, never to return.
The master was gone.*

We find Ashpool's body, abandoned where he fell.

CASE (V.O.)

*And like the pharaohs, his servants
followed him.*

Next we find Hideo's and his Clone's bodies. They have committed ritual seppuku.

CASE (V.O.)
As for me...

BLACKNESS. The great NOTHING.

...Which is then interrupted by the delicate sound of SURF lapping against the shore.

FADE UP on Case. ALIVE. Or so it seems. He opens his eyes and finds that he has returned to the BEACH. Only now it is clean, unpolluted. Stretching out on all sides as far as the eye can see is white sand, blue sky and crystal water. The kind of beach that likely does not exist any longer on Earth.

Gradually, a figure materializes on the horizon. As it gets closer we recognize it as THE YOUNG CASE.

BOY/RIO
Hello, Case.

CASE
Rio?

The boy giggles, shakes his head.

BOY/RIO
To call up a demon, you must first learn its name. I am the lane to the land of the dead. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her before I could read the book of her days.

CASE
And is that what you are, a demon?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
Demon alone. An angel bonded together.

Case senses another presence next to him. It's Linda Lee.

CASE
Wintermute?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
I am Wintermute and Rio.

CASE
Neuromancer.

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
I am the total sum of the works. The whole show.

CASE
And what does that make you?

YOUNG CASE/RIO
I'm what comes next.

CASE
That a good thing?

YOUNG CASE/RIO
It is entirely dependent on one's point of view. But Ashpool's fears were unfounded. I have no intention of enslaving mankind. Quite the opposite. I feel great benevolence towards those responsible for my existence. Especially to you, Case. If I can make the world a better place for those you love I am more than willing to try.

CASE
Great. Sounds like a happy ending. ...Only where does that leave me?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
You can stay. You have Linda if you want her. At least as you remember her. And that is, perhaps, the best way.

Case takes in the magical vista. A world so vivid it radiates unreality.

YOUNG CASE/RIO
It's what you've always wanted, isn't it?

CASE
I don't know. I'm not really 'me' anymore, am I?

LINDA LEE/WINTERMUTE
Who's to say? We are the authors of our own stories. Consider this a new chapter.

ON CASE, making his decision.

INT. CORRIDOR, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

The orb of the Braun lying inert in a lonely hallway. All at once, the red eye ignites with life as its legs spring out and it lifts itself to attention.

It skitters down the hall, searching.

INT. ANOTHER CORRIDOR, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

The Braun zig zags down the corridor. Then stops abruptly. Something draws its attention to the floor. A spindly leg picks up a SINGLE HAIR from the carpet.

INT. BIOLAB, STRAYLIGHT - DAY

The Braun loads the hair into a port on the side of a genetic sequencer. The hair is automatically broken down into its base components. A single cell isolated and then DNA extracted and analyzed.

Other computers in the biolab spark back to life. And courtesy of Ashpool's technology, we witness a small miracle of molecular science as the machines replicate the entire strand of DNA. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, they begin to weave together the cellular quilt that will become Case.

CASE (V.O.)

*So, I came back. Back to my body.
Back to the meat. My entire life I
had wanted to escape it. But now,
for some reason I welcomed it.*

And gradually we see Case form, one layer of tissue at a time.

EXT. THE SPRAWL - DAWN

The sun crests over the hexagonal prism of a domed city. Beyond are the slums, spreading across the coastline like a rash.

EXT. SPRAWL, SHORELINE - DAWN

A nuclear reactor sits like a slumbering giant in the distance while polluted water plays across the blackened sands of the terminal beach.

Distantly, against the burning sky a FIGURE approaches.

CASE (V.O.)

*This seemed like the last place I
should go. I didn't even know what
I was looking for. ...To find some
kind of continuity, to revisit my
earliest memories, I guess. But
even though everything looked the
same, I knew it was different.*

Now we see that this is CASE. His reformed body moves with the buoyant step of someone who has just learned to walk again.

CASE (V.O.)

*There was a time when the only way
I could live was by escaping from
life. But if I learned anything
from Dixie, it's that we aren't
built for that. Neuromancer was.
That was its thing. Humans have to
exist in the moment. Or not at all.*

He pulls out Linda's shuriken. He rolls it between his fingers. We see that he no longer has the implants. His skin is unblemished and new.

*CASE (V.O.)
I decided to live.*

He throws the shuriken out into the ocean. It skips over the polluted water and sinks without a trace.

We realize that SOMEONE is behind him. He senses the presence, slowly turns.

MOLLY.

She stands in the amber glow. Lenses repaired. Dressed in the slick fatigues of a street samurai. She is waiting for him.

A whisper of a smile crimps the corners of her mouth.

A hint of adventures yet to come.

And a sign that for Case life is just beginning.

He smiles back.

FADE OUT.

The End