

HIGH-RISE

by
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Based on the novel by
JG Ballard

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Darkness first.

Darkness and the cry of a distant gull, shrill as the scream of a newborn child.

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- DAWN

A gull soars upwards past the facade of a vast Babelian structure, the ghostly outline of the sun reflected in its flawless curtain wall of chrome and plexiglass.

There are more of the birds massing about the top of the building, perching on the ventilation ducts and lift heads like carrion animals anticipating a massacre.

A figure stands at the penthouse railing, gazing silently out over the sea of cloud, the empty heavens and the distant earth below. Then swinging himself over the rail he pushes himself off into space.

The gulls rise cawing as the faceless man falls.

And falls...

Mix through:

Images of strife from across the globe. A doomwatch montage of scenes culled from the rolling news. War in the Middle East. Starvation in Africa. Melting ice caps in the North Pole. New plagues. Western civilization poised on the brink of calamity, beset by recession and rampant crime.

A mellifluous baritone VOICE narrates.

VOICE

A world in turmoil. Resources are scarce. The climate is in flux. The future is uncertain.

Now a view of blue sky. Sudden quiet. Peace.

VOICE (CONT'D)

But there is a place where hope resides...

Inspirational music plays as the CAMERA GLIDES earthward to find the glowing spire of a building.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Welcome to Elysium. A sanctuary for challenging times.

Nearly one mile high, the structure rises from a nest of tropical vegetation in the midst of vast ocean.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Protected by the expanse of the Pacific. Powered by the sun and the earth herself. Designed by the greatest architectural visionary of the new millennium.

Now the CAMERA ZOOMS inside the building. Within its crystal skin a glass and marble world awaits. A stunning array of stores and restaurants. A glistening, vertical city.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Go to the world's finest restaurants... By elevator. Discover the quietest corner of downtown... Inside your own living room.

The CAMERA DRIFTS inside an apartment. It is an airy, stylishly-decorated model unit.

VOICE (CONT'D)

At your feet, the world of commerce, cuisine and entertainment. Above your head, the sky, serenity.

The CAMERA SOARS through the window, taking in the awe-inspiring ocean view.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Home.

INT. HYDROFOIL CABIN, EXECUTIVE LOUNGE -- DAY

We pull back to reveal that the promotional video is playing inside the sleek cabin of a hydrofoil.

VOICE

The goal of Elysium is not simply to be the world's highest building, it is to embody the world's highest aspirations.

A monotonous blue seascape whips by the cabin windows while uniformed stewards attend to the passengers, who watch disinterestedly as a schematic of the building appears on the plasma screen before them.

It is viewed in cross-section. Thermal and solar generators are highlighted, as are internal greenhouses and waste treatment stations.

VOICE (CONT'D)

We are a self-sustaining community. Our food is grown locally. Our energy and waste are recyclable. Our footprint on the planet is invisible...

The CAMERA ZOOMS BACK to display a computer-generated image of the Earth from space, its nations highlighted in a glowing grid of rainbow colors.

VOICE (CONT'D)

We invite people from all walks of life. From all parts of the globe. Together, they form a rich, cultural mosaic. An unprecedented example of international cooperation, a symbol, a beacon of progress for the entire world...

Among the passengers is DOCTOR ROBERT LAING. Although still in his early-thirties, Laing's boyish features frame world-weary eyes. The contradiction suits him - a young man who has seen much but who is still searching for some yet undefined Grail.

At this particular moment, he is suffering from acute seasickness.

STEWARD

Are you all right, sir?

Laing looks up at the concerned face of a friendly steward.

LAING

Just motion sickness.

STEWARD

Would you like a medical attendant to meet you in the lobby?

LAING

That's all right. I'm a doctor.

The man sitting next to him, a rotund businessman in his mid-fifties named ADRIAN TALBOT, looks on as Laing opens a window, breathing in fresh, salty air.

TALBOT

This is your first visit. Am I right?

LAING

Yeah. I.. Uhh.. Got a job interview.

TALBOT

Best of luck to you, buddy. Me and the wife waited over a year to get into Elysium. Things had gotten pretty rough on the coast.

LAING

Seems to be the same story everywhere nowadays

TALBOT
Everywhere except here.

Talbot gestures towards the window. Laing turns and sees something looming on the horizon. Something man-made.

EXT. ISLAND -- DAY

The hydrofoil slows as it approaches a tiny island enclosed by a gigantic seawall. Looming over this watery berth is a massive building: the HIGH-RISE, even more impressive in life. A finger pointing to God.

INT. SECURITY/RECEPTION -- DAY

Laing and the other passengers enter an elegantly designed reception area. Soothing, ethereal music envelopes them as the walls, intelligent and motion sensitive, greet them with a swaying, golden sheaf of wheat, the Elysium logo.

Security is handled remotely. Laing is scanned by unseen devices. An itinerary flashes before him:

DR. ROBERT LAING: GUEST OF ALICE FROBISHER, RELATION:
SIBLING, DURATION OF STAY: ONE DAY, PURPOSE: TENANT
APPLICATION.

ENJOY YOUR STAY.

Laing's nausea from the voyage melts away as a pair of sliding doors whisper open, granting him entry.

INT. LOBBY -- DAY

A holographic pantheon of Grecian gods gazes down at Laing as he crosses the cool marble tiles.

ALICE:
Bob-ee!

A woman waves excitedly to him. ALICE FROBISHER, forties, efficient, professionally dressed, his sister.

ALICE
Welcome to my place.

INT. ATRIUM -- DAY

The relative calm of the reception area gives way to the busy commercial hub of the building. Alice leads Laing past a luxurious array of stores, restaurants, theatres and recreational facilities. Glass elevators provide access to the residences above.

Every cornice, every buttress and every fixture seems to project to infinity. The effect is dizzying.

LAING
A little ostentatious, isn't it?

ALICE
The bigger the better, I always
say. Oh, stop gawking!

Alice playfully tugs on his sleeve.

ALICE (CONT'D)
C'mon, they're waiting.

INT. CONCOURSE -- DAY

Centerpiece to the commercial district, a giant video screen runs a fusion of ads and experimental media collages.

Alice leads Laing past a stunning array of high-end stores, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana and the like.

Laing spies a beautiful woman, an actress or possibly a supermodel, lingering by a shop window. A perfectly groomed Afghan hound accompanies her on a diamond-encrusted lead.

LAING
Is that...?

ALICE
Yes. It is.

LAING
Jane Sheridan lives here?

ALICE
All the best people do. Soon you
will too.

Laing watches as the actress boards a voice-activated express elevator that communicates directly with the penthouse.

LAING
Well, I have to admit, the
architect... What's his name?
Royal...

ALICE
Anthony Royal.

LAING
He's a genius.

ALICE
(proudly)
And a resident.

INT. ELEVATOR-- DAY

Laing follows Alice into one of the elevators.

ALICE
Conference room.

The doors shut and the elevator rises.

ALICE (CONT'D)
I wish I could weigh in, but with Charles on the board it's kind of a conflict of interest. Still, you don't need my help. They're going to love you.

LAING
Well, first let's see how I feel about them.

Alice busies herself straightening Laing's tie and dusting his jacket.

ALICE
Bobby, please, it's a coveted position. There are countless other applicants.

LAING
This isn't my only option, you know.

Alice casts him a doubtful look as a soothing, androgynous voice calls out.

ELEVATOR
Forty-sixth floor. Conference Room and Tenant Services.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

DR. ELEANOR PANG, fifties, Chinese-American, formidable and acutely intelligent, reviews Laing's file on her patented Elysium data pad.

PANG
You come highly recommended. PhD in medicine from Harvard. Winner of the Lasker Foundation Award. Internship at the Marshfield Clinic. Three years on the Weizmann Neurological Project. There's only one thing that concerns me...

Laing tenses slightly. He notices a CCTV camera angling its lens at him.

PANG (CONT'D)
Six months ago you were asked to leave your last position because of "unethical conduct"?

LAING

What was 'unethical' was the way the administration of my clinic was playing politics with people's lives.

PANG

Please, tell me more.

LAING

I was developing a drug treatment for multiple sclerosis. We had finally perfected an antineoplastic agent that had all but eliminated any cardiotoxic side effects. I had FDA approval.

PANG

Sounds like a dream.

LAING

It was. Until clearance to use the drug was rescinded by new Federal laws. I had patients who were already deep into their treatment and had made significant progress. To pull them out of the program at that stage would have been devastating. I made the decision to continue the treatments. Against the wishes of my superiors...

PANG

And your research partner, your wife, she disagreed?

LAING

My ex-wife.

PANG

Sorry to bring it up, but the ethical conduct of the medical staff is obviously a serious consideration.

LAING

Look, I'm not angling for some cushy position in an exclusive community. I'm here because Elysium functions outside the jurisdiction of Federal Law. It's the only place I can continue my research. I'll let you decide whether that's ethical or not.

Laing takes a breath, suddenly aware that he may have overreacted. Pang snaps her data pad shut.

PANG

Thank you Dr. Laing. We'll be in touch.

He nods firmly, eyes returning to the watchful CCTV camera.

LAING
Of course.

INT. ATRIUM -- DAY

Alice and Laing wait on the patio of a small cafe. She watches as her brother nervously stabs a spoon into the foam of his cappuccino.

ALICE
It can't be as bad as you think.

LAING
Yeah. It was pretty much an unqualified disaster.

Laing looks past her, focusing on a meticulously outfitted angular beauty, a little older than himself, who is walking purposefully towards their table.

CHARLOTTE
Doctor Laing?

LAING
Yes?

CHARLOTTE
Charlotte Melville. Chief Resident Manager. Would you mind saying a few words for me?

Charlotte produces a tiny digital recording device, thrusting it towards his face.

LAING
About what?

CHARLOTTE
Thank you. That's perfect.

She thumbs the record button off.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
I just needed your vocal patterns for the voice activation on your new apartment.

LAING
My new apartment?

CHARLOTTE
Congratulations. You've got the job.

It takes a second to sink in.

LAING

What?

CHARLOTTE

Your application was approved by Royal himself. Seems you made quite an impression on him.

LAING

The architect? What's he got to do with this?

CHARLOTTE

CCTV. From time to time he likes to drop in on interviews with prospective employees.

Laing shoots Alice a look. She sends him a triumphant, toothy smile.

ALICE

I'm so excited. See, I told you these things have a way of working out...

INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY

A glass elevator rises into the stratosphere of the building.

CHARLOTTE

The apartment's telemetry is voice responsive. Fully interactive and fully remote...

LAING

You're quite the salesperson.

CHARLOTTE

I only sell what I believe in.

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

Charlotte leads Laing down a hallway of apartments. They stop by an apartment door.

CHARLOTTE

Go ahead. Just say your name.

LAING

Laing. Doctor. Robert...

There is a soft click and the apartment door gives before him.

CHARLOTTE

Open Sesame.

She offers her hand. Laing takes it... feels a charge of attraction.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
 You'll get the hang of it soon enough. Just let me know if there is anything else that we can do to help you get settled in...

LAING
 Thanks. I will.

She lingers for a moment, smiles and departs. Laing watches her go.

INT. LAING'S NEW APARTMENT

The apartment's studio living room and single bedroom, kitchen and bathroom dovetail into each other to minimize space and eliminate internal corridors.

A Mozart violin concerto serenades Laing as he customizes the electronic wallpaper from the touch screen info-hub.

He calls out.

LAING
 Walls. Sky.

As if by magic, the walls transform from their original beige to sky blue.

Laing considers the color chits displayed on the screen. Then he calls out again.

LAING (CONT'D)
 Forest...

The walls begin to fade to green...

LAING (CONT'D)
 Ocean...

The room transforms into the aquamarine blue of a tropic reef replete with passing schools of exotic fish. This is like living inside a giant iPhone.

As he crosses to the bedroom area, the bay windows grow opaque to shade him from the setting sun. Slipping off his shoes, he lies back on the form-fitting mattress.

LAING (CONT'D)
 Universe.

A pause. And the walls become a cosmic display of bursting nebulae and dappled star clusters.

LAING (CONT'D)
 I guess you *can* have everything.

EXT. HIGH-RISE - MORNING

Elysium rises from the ethereal morning mists, its shining solar panels warming themselves in the gathering light, steel ramparts thrusting aimlessly skyward into the empty, upper air.

INT. HALLWAY -- MORNING

Laing steps out of his apartment smartly dressed for work.

INT. ELEVATOR -- MORNING

Laing steps into the lift to find himself standing next to an impressively full-figured girl in her early twenties, who sports a carefully coiffed shock of bright blue hair and multiple piercings.

Laing shifts from foot to foot as the carriage descends, trying not to look at her tattooed cleavage.

HOLLY
You're new here?

LAING
How did you guess?

HOLLY
This place is smaller than it looks. Besides, just about everyone comes to see me. Eventually...
(off Laing's confusion)
I'm a masseuse.

A soft tone rings out and an androgynous voice whispers...

ELEVATOR
Fifth floor clinic.

HOLLY
I work at the spa. You should check it out sometime. I can tell from one look at you it might be just what you need...

LAING
Thanks. Maybe I'll do that.

The doors open and Laing steps out.

HOLLY
Don't forget to ask for Holly.

She waves as the doors close, leaving Laing to find his way to...

INT. CLINIC/ CONCOURSE -- MORNING

Laing approaches sliding glass doors. They part for him and he enters...

INT. RECEPTION/ CLINIC -- MORNING

A beautiful reception area. An attractive receptionist sits behind a flower-adorned desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Ready for your first day, Dr.
Laing?

LAING
Absolutely.

INT. LAING'S OFFICE/CLINIC - MORNING

Pang stands at the bay windows, staring out at the cawing gulls. She turns as the receptionist shows Laing into the spacious office.

RECEPTIONIST
I've uploaded all your case files
into our network...

Pang steps towards him, extending her hand.

PANG
I trust you like our facility?

LAING
You should see where I used to
work.

He looks around himself at the cavernous workspace. As usual, the dimensions of the high-rise make his head reel.

Laing walks over to his new desk area and switches on his computer, booting up the display.

PANG
We've tried to anticipate your
needs but if there's anything else
just put it on the list. Sometimes
it takes longer than we would like
to get materials from the mainland.

LAING
Thanks. I'll let you know.

PANG
Well, I'll leave you to it then.

Pang heads out the door. Laing drops in a chair with a mixture of elation and relief, his gaze going to the three-dimensional image of a twisted nerve ganglia turning on the digital display before him.

INT. LAING'S OFFICE/CLINIC -- LATE AFTERNOON

The office has barely been outfitted but Laing is already hard at work.

On screen Laing manipulates simulations of various molecular combinations. It's heady and intricate stuff, but we can also see that he is contentedly lost in the puzzle.

A muffled cry lifts him from his reverie. Was it imagined? He holds his breath, straining to hear but whatever it was that disturbed him has already fallen silent. Narrowing his eyes a little he returns his attention to his work.

INT. HALLWAY -- EARLY EVENING

The internal time of the high-rise runs to its own clock, like an artificial psychological climate. As the light fades from the day so the halls and passageways become increasingly clogged with activity, a seemingly endless stream of beaming, elegantly-dressed citizens wafting past Laing as he waits beside the elevators. Then the doors chime open.

INT. ELEVATOR -- EARLY EVENING

Laing closes his eyes, alone with his thoughts for a moment.

ELEVATOR

Level four. Athletic facility and
spa.

The doors open as several bathrobed residents step inside. On impulse, Laing squeezes out.

LAING

Excuse me.

And finds himself in the reception of...

INT. SPA -- EARLY EVENING

A Zen stone garden and bamboo-themed space. Laing walks past steam rooms, unseen pools and curtained massage tables. A woman's voice calls out.

HOLLY

Hey, you.

INT. SPA -- EVENING

Laing receives a massage from Holly.

HOLLY

I had a feeling that you would be here sooner rather than later.

LAING

The last few days have been pretty hectic. Almost surreal.

HOLLY

That's what I love about this place. I remember when I first came here. The endless corridors, the windows reaching to the sky... It still fascinates me.

LAING

I really haven't had the chance to think about that.

Holly laughs knowingly.

HOLLY

You will. Now, close your eyes and relax.

And she goes to work in earnest. In spite of himself, Laing submits to the pleasure.

INT. POOL -- DAY

Drinks and light food fare are distributed by uniformed spa staff to the tanned residents who lounge on deck chairs and in tented cabanas. Prominent among them is Jane Sheridan and one of her friends, a heavy set man in his early forties to whom Laing has not yet been introduced. The actress' ever-present Afghan hound reclines lazily at her feet. Several children play in the shallow end, their gaudy inflatable toys littering the water.

Laing dives in. Underwater, the world is serene and silent. Laing relishes the calm. He reaches the far end of the pool and surfaces in front of a six-year-old boy. His serious face is framed by a scuba mask and in his hands is a toy shark. This is ELIOT.

LAING

That's a hammerhead?

ELIOT

Actually it's a Sphyrna Mokarran.

LAING

That's pretty smart.

ELIOT
I'm going to be a marine biologist
when I grow up.

Eliot abruptly disappears underwater. Then a few seconds later pops up some distance away in the deep end of the pool. Laing waves to him, impressed.

WAITER (O.S.)
Power smoothie?

Laing glances up to find a waiter crouched at the poolside.

LAING
Uh, sure.

WAITER
I'll set it next to your chair, Dr.
Laing.

Laing hoists himself out of the water.

LAING
Thank you.

Towelling himself down, Laing pads over to a reclining beach chair. He is about to enjoy his smoothie when, all at once, the lights in the pool enclosure abruptly shut off

A moment of surprised silence is followed by splashing and cries of confusion. Laing fumbles in the gloom realizing that the power supply to the entire floor has been knocked out.

A few long, tense moments as panic rises... And then, the lights rekindle. The occupants of the pool are left in a state of confusion. Laing blinks, catching sight of Charlotte Melville's anxious face amidst the onlookers.

CHARLOTTE
Eliot?

Laing scans the pool area trying to figure out just who she is looking for in all the chaos.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Have you seen my son? He was
wearing a scuba mask...

LAING
I'll find him.

A crowd has gathered around the pool's edge, pointing at something in the water. Laing pushes through them, expecting the worst.

LAING (CONT'D)
Please, I'm a doctor.

One of the attendants reaches for a long-handled pool skimmer. The crowd parts for him as a shape is revealed, floating on the surface of the water.

It's the Afghan hound, waterlogged and lifeless. Jane Sheridan cries out at the sight of it.

ELIOT
Is he dead?

Laing nods, relieved to see Eliot standing beside him, the rubber shark cradled protectively in his hands.

ELIOT (CONT'D)
I thought dogs could swim.

EXT/INT. BALCONY/LAING'S APARTMENT -- SUNSET

Laing settles himself into the nook of an ergonomically designed deck chair, hearing the sound of laughter and distant music tinkling down from a gathering far above as he watches the sun set over the watery horizon.

Clambering to his feet, he ducks back into the lounge to take an incoming call.

LAING
Laing here.

Charlotte's face appears on the plasma screen before him.

CHARLOTTE
I wanted to thank you for taking care of my Eliot during the black out yesterday.

LAING
Oh. But I didn't do anything. I was just glad that he was all right.

Eliot whispers something to his mother from off-camera.

CHARLOTTE
Well, you certainly made a strong impression. He wants to show you his new aquarium. If you're free for dinner?

Eliot ducks briefly into view.

ELIOT
I have an African fighting fish. He has three rows of teeth!

It's an invitation. Laing can't help but be touched and amused.

LAING
Guess, that settles it then.

CHARLOTTE

Good. Come by around eight. We're
in 8701.

The image winks out as the call ends and Laing turns, startled by the sound of a LOUD EXPLOSION from the balcony door immediately behind him.

A bottle of sparkling wine has fallen from a floor above, ricocheting off the awning before colliding with the balcony, spraying the spot where Laing was sitting only moments before with foam and broken glass.

Laing blinks. Stepping tentatively back into the line of fire, he cranes his neck to see where the bottle came from.

EXT. LAING'S APARTMENT/ BALCONY -- SUNSET

Laughter and distant music filter down from one of the upper floors where a party continues unabated. Swearing quietly to himself Laing notices that two of the decorative tiles have been cracked. Mildly irritated, he picks up the bottle neck, still with its wired cork and foil in place, and tosses it over the balcony rail. A few seconds later he hears it shatter in the forecourt far below.

Pulling himself together, Laing peers cautiously over the ledge, wondering what further damage he might have caused. He turns to fetch a dustpan and brush, only to freeze as he notices a figure watching silently from the adjacent balcony.

LAING

Oh... hullo there...

His neighbor, a sober-looking individual in his mid-forties peers owlshly at him as if appraising his bone structure.

LAING (CONT'D)

Uh... it came from up there!

He gestures wildly at the balcony above.

LAING (CONT'D)

You think it's a party that started too early, or one that's being going on all day and is just getting its second wind?

Laing glances at his watch.

STEELE

That party's always going on.
Building's got its own rhythm.

Steele offers his hand over the railing.

STEELE (CONT'D)

Nathan Steele... You're Robert Laing, right? The new doctor.

Laing awkwardly reaches around the barrier separating their balconies and gives Steele's hand a firm shake.

LAING

Yes. How is it that everyone seems to know?

STEELE

I work out of the clinic too. I'm an orthodontist.

He flashes a perfect set of teeth.

LAING

Well, it's good to meet you, uh, Nathan. We should grab a drink sometime.

STEELE

Love to.

LAING

Well, anyway, I'd better clean up this mess...

STEELE

Mess?

LAING

Yeah, right over...

Laing looks back, stunned. The fragments of bottle and spilled liquid have vanished. Then he catches a glimpse of the robotic cleaning 'droids (Elysium Robotics TM) as they retreat with a purr of contented telemetry to their posts within the walls of the apartment, sweeping away the last few shards of glass as they go.

INT. EIGHTY-SEVENTH FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

The elevator doors swish open and Laing steps out, a bottle of wine in one hand. He sees a woman moving down the hall just up ahead. It looks like Holly, the masseuse.

LAING

Holly?

Curiosity gets the better of him. He follows her. But when he rounds the corner he finds himself alone. It's as if she has vanished into thin air. Confused, Laing heads back the way he came. He reaches an apartment door, catches his breath and knocks.

A short pause, and the door swings open to reveal Charlotte, beautiful as ever.

CHARLOTTE:

Ah, there you are! Right on time...

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Laing steps inside, noticing at once that the living space is far more sumptuous than his own domicile on the fifty-fourth floor. Charlotte shuts and locks the door behind him.

CHARLOTTE
Can I get you a glass?

LAING
If you'll join me. ...Where's Eliot?

CHARLOTTE
He's feeding the fish. Make yourself at home while I open this up.

Laing steps into a tastefully furnished open-plan living room. One entire wall is given over to a huge aquarium that sheds its aqueous glow across the dining area as if the entire apartment is deep under water. A burly, unshaven man in his late thirties, whom Laing realizes he saw at the swimming pool a little earlier, is helping Eliot feed the fish. This is RICHARD WILDER. He brushes off the fish flakes and extends a big hand.

WILDER
Hi, doc. I'm Richard.

Laing shakes it while trying to disguise his disappointment. Eliot looks on as his favorite African Cichlids fight over their evening meal.

LAING
Robert. A pleasure.

INT. DINING ROOM, CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Eliot is asleep on the couch. Laing, Wilder and Charlotte are finishing a gourmet dinner. It's hard to discern whether Charlotte and Richard are more than just friends.

CHARLOTTE
Richard's a filmmaker. Quite famous, actually. He did that documentary on Darfur a few years back, you might have heard of it.

LAING
Really? What are you doing here?

WILDER
Making a doc on Elysium, of course.

LAING
It's a little far from the front line, isn't it?

WILDER

Actually, you'd be surprised by what kinds of pressures exist in a vertically integrated environment like this one. Do you realize that Elysium is designed as a series of thirty story buildings stacked on top of each other? Pressure from top to bottom is literally what holds the whole shebang together. I'm calling it my 'prison film.'

Laing laughs, but it's hard to know if Wilder joking.

WILDER (CONT'D)

But I want to know about you. What are your thoughts? Always good to have an outsider's opinion.

LAING

(uncomfortable)

Uh... sure, what is it that you want to know?

WILDER

Anything.

LAING

I only got here about a week ago, but it seems like a wonderful community.

WILDER

Nothing about it bothers you?

LAING

Not really, why?

WILDER

Well, for instance there are some serious problems with the world. And coming here seems like the perfect way to hide from them.

LAING

I'm not here to hide from anything, I'm here to make a difference.

WILDER

Ah, yes. I heard. You're the one working on the cure for multiple sclerosis.

LAING

My father died of it when I was about Eliot's age.

This bit of information seems to strike a chord in Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
That's terrible. I didn't know.

LAING
No one should ever have to suffer like that. The brain quite literally stops talking to the body...

CHARLOTTE
Is it always fatal?

LAING
Invariably. I've made it my life's work to try and find a solution.

WILDER
That's mighty noble of you, doc. So I guess Royal's handed you the perfect opportunity?

LAING
I'm not sure how much Royal has to do with it.

WILDER
Then, I take it you haven't met the great architect?

LAING
I haven't had the chance.

Wilder looks to Charlotte, a sly smile forming.

WILDER
It seems only our Charlotte here has access to him. He's almost a complete shut-in.
(to Charlotte)
I'm still waiting for my interview, you know...

CHARLOTTE
(pointed, to Wilder)
I think it's best we talk about this later.

WILDER
Yeah. I get the hint.

Wilder glances at his watch, reaching for his jacket.

WILDER (CONT'D)
Better be on your guard, doc. Not everyone's intentions around here are as noble as your own.

Charlotte silently pulls a face, meeting Laing's eyes as Wilder lets himself out. Then she begins to giggle. Her laughter proves infectious.

INT. KITCHEN, CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Laing helps Charlotte as she tidies away the plates.

LAING

What is it with that guy?

CHARLOTTE

That's just Richard. He's a true provocateur... I hope he didn't ruin our evening.

LAING

Not at all. It was an excellent meal. It's such a pleasure to eat steak again.

CHARLOTTE

Again?

LAING

My ex was a macrobiotic vegetarian. Nothing but raw veggies and tofu.

CHARLOTTE

Poor you. That's no way to live...

She places a trailing hand against his arm in mock sympathy and Laing turns, leaning in to her as he tries to set the dishes on the sideboard. He's not quite as dexterous as he might have wished and the plates clatter loudly as he puts them down.

ELIOT

Mommy?

Charlotte steps away and Laing glances around to see Eliot rising sleepily from the couch.

CHARLOTTE

It's time for bed.

Eliot walks towards his bedroom, stopping at the doorway, his gaze focusing on Laing.

ELIOT

Is he staying the night?

CHARLOTTE

(humorously shocked)
Eliot!

Eliot retreats into his room.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I apologize. He, uh...

LAING

Yeah. He's a kid.
(beat)
(MORE)

LAING (CONT'D)

Well, I guess it's getting late...
I hope you don't mind but I have
some paperwork I should get done...

Charlotte looks a little crestfallen as Laing pushes back his chair.

CHARLOTTE

Of course.

INT. LAING'S OFFICE/CLINIC -- DAY

Laing sits alone in his office, staring a little distractedly at his computer screen. A takeout sushi lunch rests half-eaten beside him. He isn't able to focus on his work.

An odd sound reverberates from somewhere outside. He glances up, this time quite certain that he heard something.

A soft whimper.

INT. CORRIDOR/ CLINIC -- DAY

Laing steps into the corridor. A weird, semi-human cry ripples through the reception area. He pauses on the threshold, still clutching his congealing sashimi burrito.

Another scream follows a moment later. It seems to be coming from Pang's office.

INT. PANG'S OFFICE -- DAY

Shrill cries fill the room. Pang, stationed calmly at her desk, greets him warmly.

PANG

Hello, Robert. I hope I didn't
disturb you.

Pang keys a command into her computer and the volume of the cries diminish.

PANG (CONT'D)

I've been studying and synthesizing
the cries of hundreds of infants at
the moment of birth. It's all part
of my research into pre and pari-
natal trauma.

(off Laing's puzzled
look)

I know it's unsettling, but given
time, one discovers a musicality
that is quite captivating.

LAING

Yes. 'Unsettling' would definitely
be the word for it.

Losing his appetite, Laing tosses his burrito in the bin before deciding to make himself scarce.

INT. STUDY, LAING'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Laing tosses and turns in bed, trying to get comfortable. A thumping echoes from a distant apartment, the sounds of a party fueled by alcohol and insomnia. Annoyed, he gets to his feet.

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- NIGHT

Laing steps onto the balcony. Something is troubling him. Something about this place. He looks out at the massive structure.

Above and below, nearly every apartment is lit up. Each one a separate tableau -- residents watching TV, arguing, fucking, laughing, partying. It's a kaleidoscope of humanity.

The sounds from the disparate apartments meld, growing into a deafening cry.

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Laing steps out into the corridor. He straightens his hair as he restlessly makes for the lift, not quite sure where he's going or what he's really looking for.

INT. CONCOURSE -- NIGHT

The shopping precinct is all but deserted. Laing wanders aimlessly in an insomnia ridden haze, neither quite asleep nor awake. Then, as if in a dream, he spies a lone figure in the distance. On closer inspection he realizes it is Holly. She walks down a row of closed shops.

He impulsively follows her as she weaves through a labyrinth of corridors and inlets. The journey terminates at a service entrance.

Laing ducks behind a pillar, watching as...

Holly takes out some tools from her jacket and begins to pick the lock.

CLICK. She unlocks the door, opens it and disappears inside.

Laing creeps out from his hiding place, hesitates at the threshold. Curiosity gets the better of him, he steps through the door into...

INT. SERVICE CORRIDOR -- NIGHT

This is a side of the high-rise that Laing has never seen before. It is unfinished, functional and dimly illuminated. Ahead, he finds Holly by a set of service elevators. She hits the call button.

Laing accidentally kicks a piece of discarded pipe. Holly turns, startled.

HOLLY
Who's there?

Laing steps from the shadows.

LAING
It's me.

HOLLY
(stunned)
Dr. Laing? What are you doing here?

LAING
I was going to ask you the same thing.

She eyeballs him, gauging his trustworthiness.

HOLLY
You're not going to tell anyone, are you?

INT. SERVICE ELEVATOR -- NIGHT

Laing rides with Holly, watching the floor numbers change. After a long silence...

HOLLY
Have you ever been in love?

Laing doesn't quite know how to respond.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Well, have you?

LAING
Yeah. Sure.

HOLLY
Do you know how when you love someone, you discover hidden parts of them? And how each discovery is like a gift...? That's how I feel about this building.

LAING
What do you mean?

HOLLY

There are places that no one knows about. Unmarked rooms. Stairways that go to nowhere. Windows that look at concrete walls.

BING! The elevator comes to a stop. The doors open on a dimly-lit, cathedral-like space, empty and unfinished.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Here we are.

LAING

Where's this?

HOLLY

I don't know. That's what's so exciting. This floor isn't supposed to exist.

She steps out of the elevator. Laing pauses for a moment then just before the doors shut, decides to follow.

INT. MYSTERY FLOOR, ELSEWHERE -- NIGHT

The dim figure of Holly leads Laing deeper into the space. Odd sounds, some mechanical, some human, echo from behind the drywall.

Laing follows Holly as she rounds a corner and disappears through a door cordoned by velvet rope.

A long line of TENANTS are waiting to be admitted to the secret room, the source of the sounds.

Among them is...

LAING

Wilder?

WILDER

So, the good doctor has some vices after all.

LAING

What is this?

WILDER

You don't have an invitation?

LAING

Do I need one?

The doors to the hidden room open. For an instant Laing stands poised on the threshold, blinking at a writhing mass of naked bodies and sweaty, intertwining limbs. Lit only from a couple of bulbs from above, their movements are grotesque, rhythmic and mechanical.

A ring of voyeurs watches opportunistically, flanking the heaving, moaning mass. Some of them are openly masturbating, some just stare and some look contemptuously bored.

All at once, the doors slam shut as a bouncer violently ejects a man from the room.

WILDER
What do you think? Go back to your apartment.

LAING
I want to know what's going on.

WILDER
(shushing)
Keep it down.

LAING
Not until you tell me what you're doing here.

Laing notices that Wilder has a small camera tucked in his jacket.

LAING (CONT'D)
Is that a camera?

WILDER
I said shut...

But it's too late. Patrons next to Wilder spy the camera, they immediately turn away so their faces can't be seen.

PATRON
He's got a camera!

A ruckus in the line. The bouncer's attention is drawn to Laing and Wilder.

WILDER
(pissed)
Now you've done it.

Wilder jumps over the rope.

BOUNCER
You, come back here!

Laing is suddenly aware that he may be in real danger. He goes after Wilder. Several more bouncers take chase as Laing follows the fleeing filmmaker through the emergency exit.

INT. STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

Laing and Wilder clamor down winding stairs.

Wilder drags him into an alcove beneath the steps. They huddle, breathless, as the clatter of feet pass overhead.

After several long moments, the sound recedes and they crawl out.

LAING
(whispering, freaked
out)

What was the hell was that about?

Wilder looks at him, annoyed, and starts down the stairs.

INT. ANOTHER STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

Wilder and Laing trudge down another stairwell. Laing casts frequent, paranoid glances behind him.

LAING
Come on, you must know what was
going on in that room?

WILDER
Your guess is as good as mine. But
I'm pretty sure it's not something
I would take the kids to see.

LAING
Who organizes it?

WILDER
Why the upper floors, of course.
They're behind most of the problems
here.

INT. CORRIDOR -- NIGHT

Laing follows Wilder through a mid-level corridor. Wilder casts about himself, eyes searching for the subtle, all but invisible signs of recent conflict.

WILDER
There was a fight here. Two nights
ago. I snooped around. Everyone
denies it happened.

Wilder takes out his camera and aims it at the carpet.

WILDER (CONT'D)
There. Blood.

Laing takes a closer look at the dark stains. They could be blood. It's hard to know for certain.

WILDER (CONT'D)
It seems that the floor below
believed that the floor above was
pissing into their ventilation
network.

LAING

Why would they do that?

WILDER

They're trying to get them to move.

INT. STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

Wilder and Laing wind down a corkscrew staircase. The walls of the shaft are covered by an increasingly complex tangle of graffiti that reflects the education and intelligence of the building's tenants. Some of the phrases appear to be palindromes, such as 'Borrow or Rob?' or 'Dammit, I'm mad!' whilst others are twisted, half familiar slogans such as 'He who dies with the most toys wins!', 'Eat the Rich!' and 'Will the last person to leave the building please turn off the lights!' Despite their wit and imagination however the complex acrostics, and civilized obscenities aerosolled across the raw concrete rapidly merge into a single colorful but indecipherable mess.

Wilder films as they go.

WILDER

The powerful don't like to cohabit with the weak. They're moving to the top while the rest of us are relegated to the lower floors.

LAING

But why doesn't someone speak out or register an official complaint?

WILDER

To do that would mean expulsion from paradise.

They reach the bottom. Wilder opens another door, marked by a spiraling day-glo tag.

INT. SUB-FLOORS -- NIGHT

Wilder, still filming, leads Laing down the skeleton of an unfinished escalator.

WILDER

The high-rise is dividing into three groups. At the bottom are the unwanted but necessary commoners, your basic proles: the service employees, maintenance, retail and cleaning staff. The central two thirds of the building is made up of people like you: self-centered, docile members of the professions.

(MORE)

WILDER (CONT'D)

On the top twenty-five floors are the elite, headed by the great architect himself. Royal lives in the penthouse, you know.

Laing rubs his eyes, realizing they are not alone in this postmodern wasteland. Blurred faces stare back at them from the shadows. He hears laughter and the sound of a baby crying.

WILDER (CONT'D)

It's their complaints that are acted on first. They set the menus of the restaurants. They program the live music, sport events and art exhibits. But above all, it is their patronage that keeps the middle ranks in line, by constantly dangling a carrot of friendship and approval.

LAING

I'm not looking for anyone's approval.

WILDER

Not even Charlotte's?

Laing takes this in. He can't deny there is an element of truth to Wilder's statement.

WILDER (CONT'D)

See, when you build a fortress and no one tries to tear it down, the structure starts to rot from the inside... Over here.

Ahead is a hall divided into long rows of six-foot partitions.

Half-naked men and women representing a variety of races and nationalities, sit in front of their stalls, smoking, drinking and listening to a melange of music.

LAING

(quietly)

What the hell is this?

WILDER

A temporary holding area for cheap labor. Many of these people have been here a year waiting for apartments. There's no way they'll ever get them.

(turning)

Come on. Let's get some fresh air.

Wilder departs, leaving Laing to ponder the scene a moment longer.

EXT. WATERFRONT -- NIGHT

Wilder and Laing skirt the waterfront. Laing is clearly upset.

LAING

I can hardly believe it... I mean... It flies in the face of everything this place stands for.

WILDER

It certainly does. But think about it, Laing. We're in international waters. That means no taxes. No legal entanglements. Fertile ground for corruption.

Wilder takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights up. He offers one to Laing. He accepts. He needs it

LAING

First one in fifteen years.

WILDER

Funny how old habits come rushing back when you're having too much fun.

Laing tries to process this, disturbed.

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- MORNING

The building juts like a steel reef from the ominous swell of morning fog.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S OFFICE -- DAY

Laing enters Charlotte's office. She gets up from her desk.

CHARLOTTE

Robert, what are you doing here?

LAING

I have to talk to you right now.

CHARLOTTE

I have a meeting in a few minutes. Can it wait?

LAING

No, it can't.

Charlotte, concerned, shuts the door to her office.

CHARLOTTE

What's wrong?

LAING

Are you aware that there is an entire community living like refugees in the basement?

Charlotte eyes him, sees that there is no point in hiding from the truth.

CHARLOTTE

How did you find out?

LAING

Wilder.

She sighs. Then shakes her head.

CHARLOTTE

It's complicated.

LAING

I'm listening.

CHARLOTTE

Those people are construction laborers. They can't move into their apartments until they finish building them. It's a chicken and egg situation. But Royal insists we'll have proper living arrangements for them within two weeks.

LAING

That's not all. I saw some kind of illicit sex club or cult or coven or something. I don't know what the hell it was I really saw. Wilder showed me evidence of fights, intimidation...

CHARLOTTE

Listen to me, you can't trust Wilder. He's got some kind of weird grudge against Royal. He's determined to take this project down. And he's prepared to fabricate all kinds of evidence to do it.

LAING

How can you be so sure?

Charlotte seems to be weighing her options.

CHARLOTTE

All right. I'm going to show you something. But it is strictly confidential.

Charlotte taps her computer keyboard. A video file pops up on screen.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

This was taken at the pool during the blackout.

Charlotte lets the video play. From a SECURITY CAMERA POV, we see the chaos around the pool. Figures are painted in the ghostly green hue of infrared night vision.

A man facing away from us jumps into the pool and forces Jane Sheridan's Afghan hound under the water. The other figures circulate, oblivious to the murder.

Once the dog has drowned, the man climbs out of the pool. He turns, his face exposed to the camera. Charlotte freezes the image: it's Wilder.

Laing is stunned.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

We don't want this to get out.

LAING

Why would he do that?

CHARLOTTE

When you build something beautiful, there is always someone who wants to destroy it. I've been trying to keep him close to keep an eye on him, but this time he was way out of line...

(beat)

So we're exploring ways to quietly evict Wilder. But he's proving to be a difficult man to get rid of.

Laing takes this in, his picture of events adjusting.

LAING

So, you're really going to find proper housing for those people?

CHARLOTTE

Of course.

He eyes Charlotte, a tinge of betrayal...

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Please believe me, Robert. We've got it all figured out.

...And heads for the door.

INT. LAING'S OFFICE/ CLINIC -- DAY

Laing sits groggily in front of his plasma screen, trying in vain to focus on his work. After a while he pushes back his chair and crosses to the window, silently gazing out at the limitless blue horizons beyond.

Returning to his desk he powers down his computer, deciding to take the rest of the day off.

INT. RECEPTION/ CLINIC -- DAY

Laing spies Talbot loitering in the reception area. He is looking a little worse than when Laing first encountered him on the hydrofoil. He sports a black eye and one arm hangs in a sling.

LAING

Mr. Talbot... what happened to you?

TALBOT

Got into a li'l argument on the tennis court. With my racket...

Laing notes the bruising on Talbot's knuckles.

LAING

And those?

TALBOT

Had to break my fall somehow.

LAING

That eye looks bad. Has anyone taken a look at it yet?

INT. LAING'S OFFICE/CLINIC -- DAY

Laing flashes a Mag-Lite at Talbot's injured eye.

LAING

This is going to be bright.

TALBOT

How's it look?

LAING

It's okay but you're going to have to take it easy for a while and stay off the courts.

TALBOT

That's a relief. I need my peepers. Part of my profession. I'm a jeweller, you know. Finally opened shop in the upper concourse.

He presses a neatly printed business card into Laing's hand.

TALBOT (CONT'D)

You should drop by sometime. You never know when you'll be in the market. Either for yourself or someone new...

LAING

Thanks. I'll keep that in mind.

Laing eyes him. His suspicions growing.

INT. FIFTY-FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY

Laing is just starting down the corridor towards his apartment when he hears a burst of raucous, childlike laughter and the clatter of footfalls in the stairwell. Just then, Steele pops his head out of the neighboring apartment as if he has been silently waiting just inside the door for Laing to return.

STEELE

Did you hear that? Damn kids are messing with the garbage disposal units again. They're running wild in this place.

Laing glances back hearing distant catcalls.

LAING

They're just children. They sound harmless enough...

STEELE

Harmless? Believe me, I'm an orthodontist. I get to see their teeth.

Laing looks a little taken aback.

STEELE (CONT'D)

Hey, are we ever going to get that drink?

LAING

I'll call you.

He finally manages to get the door open, retreating into the safety of his apartment.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT/BALCONY -- DAY

Laing moves about his apartment restlessly. He pulls a recently purchased pack of cigarettes from a bag of groceries.

Feeling increasingly claustrophobic he crosses to the balcony door.

He lights one of the cigarettes, taking a deep punishing drag as he stares out at the listless, blue horizon. Then, deciding he doesn't like the taste, he stubs it out.

INT. THIRD FLOOR CORRIDOR -- DAY

Wrinkling his nose against the heavy, stagnant air Laing makes his way through the sulphurous lower reaches of the building. Although it is only mid-afternoon there is already a party in progress in the apartment at the end of the hall.

Checking the number on the battered card he fishes from his pocket, Laing starts towards the source of the apparent revelry, hearing the sound of raised voices coming from within.

WILDER (O.S.)

A psychotic would have a ball here.
Vandalism has plagued this building
since it's inception.

Laing knocks. Finding the door already partly open, he peeks inside.

INT. WILDER'S APARTMENT -- DAY

The room is cluttered with various degenerate looking individuals and boxes of camera and lighting equipment. Wilder is holding court, swinging the camcorder clenched in his hand as he speaks.

WILDER

It's an unconscious rebellion. A
last gasp of humanity before it's
drowned in a sea of good taste.

His wife Helen broods in the corner, clearly resentful of these intruders, while her children run around the room, overwrought with the excitement of the party.

Wilder spies Laing hanging in the doorway.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Hey, Laing! Good timing.

Wilder waves him in. Laing steps inside with more than a little trepidation.

LAING

What the hell is this, Wilder?

WILDER

It's a social disaster movie.

Laing nods, slowly taking in his surroundings. Every spare inch of the flickering, dysfunctional wallpaper is covered in a wild array of fluorescent multi-colored post-it notes and mimeographed script pages densely annotated with expressive doodles and huge, swirling arrows.

WILDER (CONT'D)
It's real life, man. In fact it's
better than real life...

He crosses to the off-line editing suite set up in one corner of the apartment, the only area of the room which has been kept in meticulous order.

WILDER (CONT'D)
It's reality TV!

LAING
(quietly)
I know what you did at the pool.

Wilder takes this in. Makes no attempt to deny it.

WILDER
Somebody has to wake people up.

LAING
You killed that dog.

WILDER
Means to an end, old man! Means to
an end.

LAING
Then you won't mind if I end this
conversation. And any further
contact with you.

WILDER
You're making a mistake, bro'.

LAING
What the hell do you care?

WILDER
Because you're here for all the
right reasons. But this place
exists for all the wrong ones.

Wilder turns, fumbling haphazardly through a stack of discs.

WILDER (CONT'D)
Royal's done it before. A tower
block he designed back in the 70's
went seriously offline. You
probably read about it...

He shoves a disc at Laing with the words "UP!" written in bold letters.

LAING

UP!?

WILDER

It's a working title.

Laing stares Wilder down. Grinning insanely, Wilder gets right in Laing's face and then thrusts the disc into his coat pocket.

LAING

You stay away from me. And stay away from Charlotte.

Wilder shrugs. Laing turns and storms off.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Later, Laing reclines motionless as a lizard in his armchair, watching as handheld interview footage of Anthony Royal circa 1975 flickers across his electronic wallpaper.

ROYAL

The system cannot be fixed from the inside out. We have to fix it from the outside in...

Laing blinks. For a beat it is almost as if the architect's recorded image is addressing him directly. Feeling a little uncomfortable, he retrieves another cigarette from the discarded pack.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

After all, each one of us is little more than the meager residue of the infinite unrealized possibilities of our lives. Like the Situationists' earlier experiments in Utopian psychogeography, the Docklands development failed because it was founded on what was best in humanity. Remember, the building itself is merely a state of mind, an ontological sanctuary from a quantal world...

Just as Laing is about to hit the fast-forward button, the doorbell rings.

A box appears on the screen, displaying a security camera view of Charlotte hovering like a moth on his doorstep. Laing butts out the cigarette and waves away the smoke before opening the door.

LAING

Charlotte... is everything alright?

CHARLOTTE
 Couldn't sleep. Hope I'm not waking
 you?

LAING
 No. I've had insomnia ever since I
 moved in... Where's Eliot?

CHARLOTTE
 Babysitter.

Charlotte steps inside. Laing feels the charge of her presence inside his private bubble. She sniffs the air.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
 I didn't know you smoked.

LAING
 I didn't. Until recently.

Charlotte eyes the apartment with some fascination, as if it might reveal some hidden truth about him. She focuses on the blurred, outsized images surging across the electronic wallpaper.

LAING (CONT'D)
 Have you seen this?

She nods, watching archival footage of rescue workers and uniformed British police officers removing body bags from the parking structure of a sterile, steel and glass development in the London Docklands.

CHARLOTTE
 Yes.

LAING
 Wilder gave this to me this
 afternoon. The man's obsessed...

CHARLOTTE
 I did warn you.

Reaching for the remote control, she switches off the digital display.

LAING
 How well do you know him?

CHARLOTTE
 Well enough.

Laing frowns, noticing a mark on her neck. He brushes her hair aside to reveal a series of dark smudges like livid finger marks. Laing looks confused for a moment as Charlotte's hair falls back down quickly covering the telltale evidence

She turns towards him but does not pull away, her face filling his world.

Laing's questions are all but forgotten as she raises her lips to his. They kiss with controlled passion. She holds his face, running her tongue around the inside of his lips, hungry for flesh.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Charlotte sits astride Laing, riding him violently. She has turned carnal... animalistic. Laing gives himself over to her passion.

We see their bodies move in abstract. Their motions are rhythmic, almost mechanical.

PULL BACK and we realize we are watching them on...

INT. PENTHOUSE -- NIGHT

A BANK OF CCTV SCREENS. Charlotte and Laing are being observed by hidden lenses and microphones in Laing's apartment. Their recorded voices sound increasingly mechanical, blending into a single, synthesized, semi-human cry, echoing through...

INT. HIGH RISE, VARIOUS -- NIGHT

Images of the building's nocturnal functions:

Pumps driving water.

Fluctuating current from the generators.

Empty elevators rising and falling in pre-programmed patterns.

Cleaning droids vacuuming the halls, cleaning the glass exterior.

It's as if the building has an eerie, inanimate life of its own.

EXT. HIGH-RISE - DAWN

The sea and the sky wake together, light rising in a steady flood, flowing over the horizon from one end to another while Elysium itself still floats in the ashes of the night.

A single, lonely satellite mast atop the penthouse bursts abruptly into fiery life, catching the first rays of the gathering light as the gulls rise, cawing, to greet the day. First one facet and then another of the building's east facing curtain wall begin to glow but its other windows, otherwise inclined, remain dead, blind and extinguished, the disorder growing steadily greater until the sun appears at last, an infernal crescent of salmon coloured fire heaving into view above the uttermost rim of the earth.

INT. SUB-BASEMENT -- DAY

The partitioned living quarters that once clogged the lower levels are gone. The entire space has been cleaned and whitewashed. Laing is amazed by the transformation. Charlotte is supervising it. She catches sight of him.

CHARLOTTE

The temporary living quarters are now officially closed.

LAING

Where are the people?

CHARLOTTE

They've moved into their apartments.

Laing looks on as the uniformed maintenance workers hose down the walls with disinfectant.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I know how this must have looked to you.

He smiles back at her.

LAING

Everything looks different in the daylight...

INT. CONCOURSE -- DAY

Laing, Charlotte and Eliot stroll down the aisle between the stores. They stop by the pet shop for a moment, admiring the beautiful phosphorescent fish swimming in the window.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The fish now swim in Eliot's aquarium. Laing watches them turning endlessly

LAING

I hope they get along with the others.

ELIOT

Oh, they will. These species are totally compatible.

Laing feels a presence behind him and turning sees Charlotte, silently admiring the two of them.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- BEDROOM

Charlotte and Laing are dressing to go out. She stands before the mirror, fastening her hair while Laing sits on the end of the bed, pulling on his socks.

CHARLOTTE
You know you're really good with him. Eliot, I mean.

LAING
He's easy to get along with.

CHARLOTTE
I haven't seen him this happy in months. Not since his father died...

Laing's eyes go to the photographs on the nightstand. A bearded man, approximately his own age, standing beside Eliot in the back of a motor launch, grins back at him.

LAING
Lymphoma must be a pretty terrifying word to a kid.

He hunkers down beside the bed, searching for his other shoe.

LAING (CONT'D)
Do you think he's responding to Pang's therapy?

CHARLOTTE
Yeah, but I'm not really sure that's what he needs. I think he just misses his father... I suppose you know all about that.

Laing nods slowly, feeling empathy, but not quite knowing how to respond.

INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

A luxurious party is underway in the eighty-third floor apartment. Alice is the consummate hostess, carefully directing the flow of guests, making introductions, nourishing alliances between strata of high-rise society.

There is a murmur among the guests when Charlotte and Laing arrive. Noticing the stir, Alice cranes her neck to see what the others are whispering about. She cries out when she sees it's her brother and his date.

ALICE
Bob-ee! You're here at last. And Charlotte...

LAING

So this is what the ninety-third floor looks like. This is quite a place you've got here...

Alice steps back, looking them up and down as if admiring her handiwork.

ALICE

And you two make quite a couple.

Laing begins to feel a little uncomfortable, sensing the eyes of the assembly upon them. It's as if he is being silently judged and found vaguely wanting by the affluent upper floor guests.

Taking her brother's arm she guides him through the crowd, whispering in his ear while Charlotte is distracted for a second by one of her colleagues.

ALICE (CONT'D)

It's good to see you looking so happy. You were always the one who wanted a family.

LAING

I see some things never change. Like your meddling...

ALICE

Moi? Meddle?

Charlotte catches up with them as they near the bar.

Alice's husband, CHARLES, wealthy but socially obtuse, adorned with gold-rimmed Armani glasses, pushes his way towards them, nursing a big scotch.

CHARLES

(drunk)

I haven't had the pleasure.

Charles's eyes linger on Charlotte a little too long.

ALICE

You're running dry. Perhaps you should get another.

Alice gives her husband a gentle push in the direction of the bar.

ALICE (CONT'D)

I used to resent the alcohol. Now I rely on it.

Pang, dressed in a sari worn with an air of a New Age priestess, joins them.

PANG

Vice can be our greatest weapon.

She is accompanied by Jane Sheridan, her famed beauty somehow eroded in the short time since Laing last saw her.

JANE

(to Charlotte and Laing)
Eleanor is the most inspiring of therapists. I've suffered a great deal since the... incident at the pool. I'm not sure how I would have handled the trauma on my own.

PANG

The truth is that we are all traumatized from the instant we enter this world. We just don't know it.

Pang zeroes in on Charlotte.

PANG (CONT'D)

From what I've gathered in my time with Eliot, I suspect you might benefit from our technique.

ALICE

Oh, yes. It's such a transformative experience.

Charles returns, refilled glass in hand.

CHARLES

Just like the liposuction that you had done last year or that week with the ashram in India...

ALICE

Charles! Hush!

PANG

You really should think about sitting in on one of our groups.

CHARLOTTE

Thanks, but what's life without a little trauma after all.

Just then, lights flicker. Party music falls mute. Some of the guests assume this is part of the celebration. Applause and cheering ring out.

LAING

Neat party trick?

ALICE

Not mine.

EXT. ALICE'S BALCONY -- NIGHT

Guests on the balcony, point skyward. Lights shut off, beginning at the top floors then descending through the building in another rolling black out.

EXT. ISLAND -- NIGHT

Seen from the water. Within seconds, the entire high-rise is immersed in darkness. It looks like a giant tombstone against the night sky.

INT. ALICE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Laing keeps Charlotte close. The guests are actually enjoying the excitement of the blackout.

Then the sound of screams begin to come from somewhere outside followed by smashing glass and a deafening alarm.

INT. EIGHTY-THIRD FLOOR, HALLWAY/TRIUM -- NIGHT

Laing and Charlotte step out of Alice's apartment and peer over the railing. The vast atrium is cast in darkness.

Flashlights dance in the void. Some belong to security guards racing out of the park area. Laing follows them with his eyes, glimpsing tenants trapped in frozen elevators and people stumbling blindly in the darkness. Others huddle helplessly in corners.

All at once, the power surges and the lights turn on. Soothing music returns. The elevators resume their journeys, but the concourse is in chaos:

Residents are huddled among shopping bags in tiny, frightened clusters. Shattered glass from the smashed display window of the jewelry store litters the ground.

Talbot, the jeweler, stares out of his vandalized store in stunned silence.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Charlotte is immersed in a 'virtual town hall meeting' playing on Laing's heads-up display. Tenants, reps from each floor, participate in something akin to a sophisticated iChat module. Pictured in the center is the building manager, a pleasant, unassuming man in his early forties. There is an artificial friendliness to his Teflon demeanor. He listens patiently as the pixilated image of the ninth floor rep unloads on him from a window in the corner of the screen.

NINTH FLOOR REP

We still don't have power on the ninth floor.

MODERATOR

There are certain parts of the electrical grid that had to be shut down in order to complete repairs. But we will be fully operational very soon.

Another window containing another head pops on.

TWELFTH FLOOR REP

Residency level twelve has bad cell reception.

MODERATOR

I'm quite certain that's not related to the power draw.

And another.

THIRTY-SECOND FLOOR REP

What about the wi-fi? We can't connect to the Elysium server unless we're in the concourse. Do any other floors have that problem?

And another.

TWENTY-THIRD FLOOR REP

We can connect but it's too slow. It takes a whole day just to download one movie.

MODERATOR

Please, if we could stay focused on the issue at hand.

And now the screen is invaded with countless boxes, each one containing an angry face.

FIFTY-SIXTH FLOOR REP

Why don't we just pull more power from the mainland?

NINETY-SECOND FLOOR REP

Do you know how much money I have invested in this building? This level of service is completely unacceptable. I demand to speak to Royal!

MODERATOR

Unfortunately that is not a possibility. Royal is unavailable right now.

SIXTEENTH FLOOR REP

And when will he be available?

MODERATOR

Building maintenance isn't exactly Royal's department. I'm the one you need to address your complaints to.

SIXTEENTH FLOOR REP

Why? He designed the damn building and this is plainly a design error!

The heads have melded into a massive jumble of voices. Under the furor, Laing finds Charlotte's hands reaching around to his belt buckle. Something about the growing hostility seems to be stoking her desire.

He turns around to face her, lifting her onto the kitchen island. He kisses her, unbuttoning her blouse to discover a purple bruise just over her left breast.

LAING

Did I do that?

Charlotte's response is to push herself deeper into him. Their lovemaking turns violent under the growing cacophony. And then she does something very odd: As they make love, Charlotte reaches out and grips tightly onto a wine opener. Unseen by Laing, her fist tenses until a single rivulet of blood drops onto the counter.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Laing and Charlotte, post-coital, lie entangled on the couch.

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes I think this building will never be finished.

LAING

Can't be easy working for a genius.

He quietly strokes her shoulder as she snuggles against him.

CHARLOTTE

It's mostly public relations, but there's always those little details... What do they say? That's where God is? ...Or is it the devil? I can never get it straight.

LAING

You've interviewed everyone who lives here, right?

CHARLOTTE

Yep. That's my job.

LAING

It's just... there seems to be so many angry people here, so many conflicting personalities.

Charlotte bristles at Laing's quiet criticism. She sits up, covering herself with the sheet.

CHARLOTTE

Royal feels that it is healthy to have a certain quota of dissent in the building.

LAING

It doesn't feel particularly healthy to me.

CHARLOTTE

Paradise comes at a price.

LAING

So Milton says. I wonder if he was a shut-in like Royal.

CHARLOTTE

Anthony's got his reasons.

LAING

Such as?

CHARLOTTE

That shouldn't concern you.

LAING

He's sitting up there in that high security penthouse of his, brooding over all of us like some kind of fallen angel and that shouldn't concern me?

Laing feels a surge of frustration. All the unanswered questions are starting to work on his mind and for a moment, he finds himself unconsciously reaching for a cigarette.

CHARLOTTE

No. Trust me. Anthony's been like a father to me. He was there when Eliot and I needed him most. Ultimately, I think he wants what's best for all of us. He just has privacy issues.

LAING

I'm having trouble believing that. I mean, I'm glad he's been so good to you... but something about this place just doesn't add up.

Charlotte turns away, glancing at the clock.

LAING (CONT'D)

What?

CHARLOTTE

I have to go and pick Eliot up from
the sitter.

Retrieving her bra from the floor, she presents her back to
Laing who automatically helps her hook the lacy garment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

It's the devil, isn't it?
That's always in the details...

INT. ATRIUM -- DAY

Laing approaches the jewelry store, the debris now cleared
away and the front window repaired.

INT. JEWELRY STORE -- DAY

Laing enters. Talbot is behind the counter.

TALBOT

Hey, doc. What can I do for you?

LAING

Just looking.

TALBOT

Anything in particular?

LAING

(ignoring the question)
Mr. Talbot, that time you came in
to the clinic, you didn't hurt
yourself playing tennis, did you?

Talbot's silence tells Laing all he needs to know.

LAING (CONT'D)

What really happened to you?

TALBOT

What floor do you live on?

LAING

Fifty-four.

Talbot looks around at the other shoppers, then motions
conspiratorially for Laing to come closer.

TALBOT

It's old money on my floor. They're
trying to get rid of me.

LAING

They did this?

TALBOT

That line about a power overload is a crock. They shut it down on purpose. To show they mean business.

LAING

What about the management... security, can't they do something?

Talbot scoffs at the idea.

TALBOT

Don't worry about me. I know their dirty secret. I know what happened to all those people they had crammed into the basement.

LAING

They got their apartments, didn't they?

TALBOT

They got a one-way ticket out of the building. No compensation. Nada.

This hits Laing hard.

LAING

Are you sure about that?

TALBOT

Absolutely. It's my best defence. If they don't let me keep my apartment, I'm organizing a class action suit. I'll sue Elysium for all it's worth.

Talbot's eyes narrow.

TALBOT (CONT'D)

And if that doesn't work, I'm prepared to take more extreme measures.

LAING

Extreme?

TALBOT

(avoiding the question)
Let's just hope it doesn't come to that. But if it does, can I count on your... support?

LAING

I don't think so.

Laing edges away from him.

INT. LAING'S OFFICE -- DAY

The nerve ganglia Laing has been studying, swims in lazy circles on his computer screen. He stares at it, glassy-eyed, his mind is clearly elsewhere. Distantly, he can hear Pang's birth trauma recordings bleeding through the walls of her office.

Suddenly, he picks up his phone, dials, waits...

LAING
 (into the phone)
 Charlotte, it's me again. Please call.

He hangs up, stands, paces the length of the room, then abruptly leaves.

INT. LOBBY -- DAY

Charlotte is supervising a group of uniformed workmen who are trying to position a heavy piece of classical statuary, a marble goddess salvaged from some nameless pagan temple. Charlotte turns, her expression clouding as she notices Laing silently watching her.

CHARLOTTE
 Robert, what are you doing here?

LAING
 I've been calling all day, but you weren't answering your cell.

CHARLOTTE
 It's been buggy lately.

She returns her attention to the work at hand.

LAING
 Is something wrong?

CHARLOTTE
 I can't decide whether she should be facing east with the rising sun, or west. East of course is better for the natural light, but west feels somehow more appropriate.

LAING
 No, I mean with us?

CHARLOTTE
 I don't understand.

LAING
 We need to talk.

CHARLOTTE

In case you hadn't noticed, I'm kind of busy right now. They delivered this piece a day early.

LAING

Perfect. Should I make an appointment?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. You know, this really isn't a good time.

The workers set down the statue per Charlotte's instructions. For a brief second the icon tilts as it settles into its new space. Everyone holds their breath for a moment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

That's an incredibly ancient image of Cybele with her lover and son Attis. Of course she had him castrated first...

LAING

Nice. Where's Eliot?

CHARLOTTE

He's up in the penthouse with Royal.

LAING

What's he doing there?

CHARLOTTE

Royal's been tutoring him.

LAING

Royal? ...I think it's time that I had a chat with the great architect myself. I've got a couple of issues.

CHARLOTTE

You know I can't help you with that.

Laing turns away starting back towards the atrium. Charlotte calls after his retreating figure.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Robert?

But he is already lost from sight, swallowed up by the afternoon traffic.

INT. ATRIUM -- DAY

Pausing beside the express elevator Laing removes an iPhone from his pocket, playing back a recording of the conversation he just had with Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
 (Recorded on iPhone)
 ...an incredibly ancient image of
 Cybele with her lover and son...
 (Laing fast-forwards, stops, plays)
 ...in the penthouse with Royal...

INT. PRIVATE ELEVATOR - DAY

Laing enters the empty carriage. Thumbing the iPhone, he plays back the recording into the voice activated console.

CHARLOTTE
 (on iPhone)
 ...penthouse...

He glances nervously up at the cyclopean eye of a CCTV camera as the doors swish shut. Doing his best to compose himself, Laing hums along with the elevator music, watching the blinking numbers rush by as the private elevator carries him to the dizzying upper reaches of the building.

INT. PENTHOUSE, ATRIUM -- DAY

The doors whisper silently open.

ELEVATOR
 Roof Garden and penthouse.

Laing steps out giddily into a spacious marble atrium decorated with more archeological plunder. The torsos and cracked faces of nameless Greek and Babylonian deities.

From somewhere not far off comes the sound of a party in progress - the murmur of soft laughter and the clink of glasses. Laing starts towards the voices only to find his path blocked by a huge white dog that comes silently padding towards him across the gleaming chessboard floor. It's probably an Alsatian but could just as easily be a wolf.

LAING
 Nice dog...

The dog bares its teeth, hackles rising as a ferocious snarl ripples through the air.

LAING (CONT'D)
 Uhm... okay. Bad dog.

Two cadaverous looking giants in white tuxedos approach, drawn by the dog's snarls.

GIANT 1
Sitzen zu.

The Alsatian politely responds. Wagging its tail it sits on command.

GIANT 2
Can we help you?

LAING
I'm here to see Royal.

GIANT 2
Do you have an invitation?

LAING
No, but --

GIANT 1
This is a private function.

GIANT 2
This way, please.

Laing finds himself gently yet firmly escorted back into the waiting elevator.

Craning his neck, he catches a fleeting glimpse of a man leaning on a gleaming, stainless steel walking stick, framed by the entrance to the penthouse.

LAING
Royal?

But the doors to the elevator whisper shut, blocking the figure from sight, and Laing is once again cast into the building's lower depths.

INT. CONCOURSE -- LATE AFTERNOON

The elevator spits Laing out on the concourse. He wanders the mall, trying in vain to get an outside line on his iPhone but the reception bars remain stubbornly at zero. In the end, clambering onto the edge of an ornamental fountain, he manages to get a weak signal.

LAING
Yeah, hello. Is that the leasing manager?

MANAGER (O.S.)
How may I help you?

LAING
I was wondering if there was any way possible to break my lease? Buy my way out perhaps?

MANAGER (O.S.)
I'll need to see your original
tenancy agreement.

LAING
I don't have it in front of me.

He rubs his sleepless eyes, slowly becoming aware of the deteriorating state of the concourse. Seemingly overnight the condition of the building has started to slip. Dog feces and uncollected garbage clogs the aisles between the stores. Graffiti tags mark the kiosks and lamp posts, and immediately behind Laing a damaged elevator door spasms aimlessly open and closed.

MANAGER (O.S.)
Just so you know - breaking the
lease at this stage is liable to
incur a heavy penalty. And of
course you aren't allowed to sublet
without certification from the
tenant's association who must
approve any newcomers...

LAING
(with a tinge of sarcasm)
Thanks. You've been really
helpful...

He terminates the call and dials again.

OPERATOR
For an Elysium extension say "one",
for an outside line say "two"...

LAING
Two. Outside line. Two! Jesus, I
hate talking to a machine!

OPERATOR (O.S.)
I'm sorry but the outside lines are
currently unavailable. Please try
again later...

LAING
Figures.

He pockets the handset, pushing his way frustratedly through the evening traffic of workers, shoppers and cleaning staff.

INT. FIFTY FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY -- EARLY EVENING

Music blares from the doorways of countless apartments. The malfunctioning ventilation system has turned the air into a miasmatic, swamp-like fug.

Laing heads back to his apartment desperately attempting to catch a signal on his iPhone, when he comes across Steele standing in the hallway, trying in vain to unclog a dysfunctional garbage disposal chute.

STEELE

There no way in hell that you're going to get a signal on that thing. The whole floor's been offline all morning...

LAING

Dammit...

STEELE

So...What's this about you and Charlotte Melville?

LAING

What do you mean?

STEELE

Come on, Laing. People talk. People watch. Social climbing's a favorite past time around here

LAING

But there's nothing to...

STEELE

You are one lucky man. What kind of strings do you have to pull to get that? I'd just hate to be around when she cuts them loose.

Laing blinks, a little taken aback by this.

LAING

Excuse me?

Steel grunts, retrieving what looks like the mangled remains of a dead cat from the garbage disposal chute.

STEELE

(sarcastic)

Maybe we can chat about it over that drink?

A sudden surge of uncontrolled choleric rage rises through Laing. Rounding on Steele, Laing almost strikes him in the teeth with his iPhone, only stopping himself at the very last second.

LAING

Not unless I can piss in it first.

Hastily retracing his steps Laing starts back towards the stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

The sound of shouts and breaking glass come from the direction of the elevator shafts, the blare of music filling the dark air.

Sections of the staircase have been turned into a garbage-well by the residents above and broken glass litters the steps, cutting Laing's shoes. A growing mound of uncleared refuse sacks forces him to exit the stairwell at the landing communicating with the pool deck.

INT. SPA/POOL -- NIGHT

The pool deck is crammed with upper story tenants. It's hard to know if this is several parties bleeding into each other or one massive gathering.

LAING

What's the occasion?

PARTY GUEST

Haven't you heard? We've reached critical mass.

LAING

What?

PARTY GUEST

We're fully occupied.
(slapping Laing on the back)
No one else gets in! We're on our own! The rest of the world can kiss our ass!

The man scampers away leaving Laing to mill through the crowd. He glimpses all kinds of outrageous behavior:

The attendant has disappeared, abandoning his booth, and already the pool has begun to look neglected, discarded towels clogging the gutters.

Unattended children drink alcohol and throw hors d'oeuvres at each other while a younger couple fuck openly in one of the poolside cabanas.

It's all too much for Laing. He pushes his way through the bodies, heading for the stairs.

INT. STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

Laing tries to work his way back towards the concourse, only to find the stairwell blocked by an impromptu barricade. He tries his iPhone again, finally getting a couple of bars.

A trilling sound echoes from below. Laing pockets his phone and peers over the railing to discover a mob of lower floor tenants marching up the stairs, their cell phones baying eerily.

Judging this group to be less than friendly, Laing tries to make himself scarce, heading for the nearest landing only to step into the path of a second, rival faction. They emerge from the shadows, clutching their blinking iPads. From their mouths come a series of peculiar whoops and cries, a mocking echo to their counterparts' phones, which has the effect of sounding more like some Neanderthal mating call than any recognizable pattern of civilized human speech.

LAING

God..

He takes a half step backwards only to find himself violently seized from behind.

WILDER

He can't hear you, compadre.

LAING

Wilder!

Wilder clutches his camera to his cheek, shirt open to the waist, exposing a barrel chest that he shows off with some pride. Keeping a firm grip on Laing's shoulder, he steers the young doctor into the relative safety of the nearest janitor closet.

WILDER

Sssh!!!

INT. BROOM CLOSET -- NIGHT

Laing listens wide-eyed to the cacophony of shrieks, grunts and jangling ring tones as battle is joined on the landing beyond.

LAING

What the hell's going on out there?

WILDER

Wi-fi hot spot! Haves against the have-nots! Shirts against the skins! Nature in the raw...

Wilder peers through a crack in the cupboard door. Wielding his camera like a Kalashnikov, he tries to cover the chaotic melee unfolding outside.

WILDER (CONT'D)

What was it that you're researching again?

LAING

What?

WILDER
The disease. Which one?

LAING
MS.

WILDER
Right. The breakdown between mind
and body. I think we're seeing a
perfect example of that right here.

Laing shuts the door on the melee, forcing Wilder to focus on
him.

LAING
I tried to get to the top.

WILDER
Any luck?

Laing shakes his head.

WILDER (CONT'D)
I've been chasing Royal for years.
I'm beginning to believe that he's
a figment of Charlotte's
imagination. Either that or he's
cryogenically frozen at the top of
the pyramid like good ol' Uncle
Walt.

LAING
No. He's alive. I saw him...

Their eyes meet.

WILDER
I've gotta get to Royal. One way or
another, even if I have to climb
this building with a goddamn
grappling iron. You with me?

LAING
And what are you going to do when
you find him?

Wilder grins wolfishly.

WILDER
I don't know. Interview him. Fuck
him. Kill him... Maybe all three.

Pushing open the closet door the burly filmmaker propels
himself out into the waiting stairwell. The brawl, or
whatever it was, has migrated elsewhere.

WILDER (CONT'D)
Come on!

INT. CONCOURSE -- NIGHT

Laing chases Wilder onto a crowded mezzanine gallery overlooking the concourse.

LAING

Wilder! Hey, wait up...

Laing sees an angry mob gathering nearby and hears a familiar voice raised above the hubbub. Momentarily separated from Wilder by the swirling throng, he goes to investigate.

Talbot stands at the epicenter of the increasingly hostile crowd. He tries to break out of the circle surrounding him, only to be pushed from one person to another like a pinball until he finally falls to his knees.

TALBOT

(hysterical)

You can't intimidate me!

Laing's eyes roam across the faces of Talbot's persecutors, recognizing his sister's husband, Charles, his features coarsened by rage.

CHARLES

You know what happens when people like you come in here.

TALBOT

I live here.

MAN'S VOICE

That's what you say.

ANOTHER VOICE

Send him back where he belongs.

CHARLES

What are we playing tonight?

A medley of suggestions are shouted out.

VOICE 1

Gang plank!

VOICE 2

Flying School!

VOICE 3

Moon Walk!

CHARLES

I rather like Flying School... Did you know we've been running a flying school here? No?

VOICE 1

We've decided to offer you some free lessons.

CHARLES
 One free flight lesson. But that's
 all you need...

The mob takes up the chant.

CROWD
 Flying lessons!

Talbot tries to break free only to be half-lifted from one pocket of tenants to the next.

CROWD (CONT'D)
 Flying lessons! Flying lessons!
 Flying lessons!

Talbot is carried hand-over-hand to the balustrade overlooking the ornamental fountain that forms the centerpiece of the multi-tiered shopping concourse. The base of the fountain is visible eighty floors below.

The onlookers begin grunting and hooting in expectation as a pair of tattered papier-mâché wings, part of a child's angel costume, are fastened to Talbot's back.

Laing catches flashes of Talbot's jacket, his legs and a glimpse of his terrified face, and then... nothing at all as the flailing jeweler is tossed over the edge.

ON FALLING TALBOT:

His body cartwheels through space. There is something almost beautiful about his movement, like a weightless dancer. Time seems suspended until...

WHAM! The ground meets Talbot, shattering him and our POINT OF VIEW.

ABOVE:

The chanting abruptly stops. Laing pushes his way to the balustrade. He looks down into the chasm. Talbot's shattered body, barely visible from this distance, lies on the ground at the base of the fountain, framed in a pool of blood.

INT. ATRIUM -- NIGHT

Laing holds onto the railing, shocked and excited at the same time. Almost every balcony is now occupied, the residents gazing down as if from boxes in an enormous opera house.

INT. CONCOURSE -- NIGHT

Tape cordons off the area where Talbot fell. Laing watches as the body is carried away by orderlies from the clinic.

A crowd of onlookers is gathered around the high-rise security chief. Laing pushes through the crunch of people.

An upper floor tenant is giving his account of what happened.

UPPER FLOOR TENANT 1
He just jumped. It was awful. He climbed over the balustrade and jumped.

SECURITY CHIEF
Was he drinking?

UPPER FLOOR TENANT 2
Yes. He was going on about his business, how he was destitute and didn't want to live any more. Then he strapped on those wings...

VOICE FROM THE CROWD
Like fuckin' Tinkerbell.

There's a murmur of nervous laughter from the onlookers.

LAING
That's a lie.

All eyes turn to Laing.

LAING (CONT'D)
He was thrown off the balcony. I saw it happen.

Alice's husband Charles disengages himself from the crowd.

CHARLES
Robert, it was a suicide, the guy jumped. There's no way that you could have heard the crazy things that he was saying from where you were standing.

SECURITY CHIEF
You can make a report if you like, Dr. Laing.

LAING
Where are the police? Shouldn't there be a real cop taking statements?

SECURITY CHIEF
We are the legal authority here.

Wilder steps from the crowd, flanked by a gang of unruly-looking lower floor men.

WILDER
Don't waste your breath, Laing. These gorillas aren't interested in justice. They're here to protect the folk upstairs.

Wilder signals to one of his accomplices, a man dressed in the uniform of a maintenance engineer who has somehow hot-wired a laptop to the circuitry in the wall.

The giant video screen lights up with handheld footage of Talbot's beating and subsequent execution. Wilder has managed to capture the whole event in horrifying detail.

The upper floor residents quietly break ranks, slipping away while the security team nervously eyes the crowd.

WILDER (CONT'D)

When are we going to wake up and tell these assholes upstairs that we won't take it any more. I'll tell you when. RIGHT NOW! IT ENDS RIGHT NOW!!! Down with the upper floors!

The crowd goes completely berserk. Laing appeals for calm. It's pointless. There is no suppressing the sudden surge of anger that courses through the mob. The security team is instantly overwhelmed. Fleeing upper story residents are captured and pummeled. Windows are smashed. Stores looted. COMPLETE AND UTTER SOCIAL BREAKDOWN.

In the center of the maelstrom, Laing finds Wilder, who is using his camera like a weapon. He grabs Wilder, getting right in his face.

LAING

What the hell do you think you're doing?

WILDER

I'm going straight to the top! And I'm going to ask one last time, think you're man enough to join me?

LAING

You're insane...

Shaking his head Laing pushes his way through the mob, searching in vain for a way out.

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Laing pounds on Charlotte's apartment door.

LAING

Charlotte, it's me. Open up.

No reply. Finally, Charlotte, hastily wrapped in a dressing gown, cautiously opens the door a crack. Laing gently forces his way past her.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Inside, the windows are curtained. The apartment is suffused in gloom. Several of Eliot's fish float belly-up in their tank.

LAING

Go and get Eliot. We have to get out of here, now.

CHARLOTTE

I can't. He's up in the penthouse with Royal. Besides, there's nowhere left to go.

LAING

What do you mean?

Charlotte retreats from him like a wounded animal, her robe slipping to reveal a puffy bruise on her throat. Laing shakes his head in confusion.

CHARLOTTE

Nothing works. The cell, the internet, all down. It's like the outside world isn't there any more.

Laing tries to turn on the nearest wall screen. Nothing happens except electronic snow.

WILDER

What did I tell you? It was only a matter of time before the great architect capped the killing jar.

Laing whirls around as Wilder appears in the doorway of the apartment, still flushed from his apparent success.

LAING

What are you doing here?!

WILDER

Our Charlotte has a secret.

Wilder steps behind Charlotte and runs her fingers through her hair. Charlotte freezes under his touch.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Don't you, my dear?

Wilder yanks her hair and she yelps, hanging her head in shame.

LAING

You son of a bitch. Don't touch her.

WILDER
 But it's what she likes.
 I didn't do anything she didn't
 want.

Still stroking her hair, Wilder smiles like the cat who has
 swallowed the canary.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 If it's any consolation, it started
 before you moved into the building.

Laing shakes his head in denial.

LAING
 Charlotte, is this true?

CHARLOTTE
 I... I wanted to explain...

WILDER
 Let me tell you a li'l something
 about our Charlotte...

Wilder quietly takes the sash from her robe as it slides from
 her naked body, tying her hands behind her back.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 She's sold herself to Royal. She
 does his dirty work. Tells his
 lies. Covers up his mess. But now
 the walls of Jericho are finally
 crashing down...

Charlotte's excitement is readily apparent as she drops to
 her knees.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 You can do anything you want to
 her.

Laing is caught between an emotional crossfire of anger and
 pity, and something else that he does not yet recognize.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 Go ahead. Look at her. She's
 practically begging for it.

Distant shouting filters into the quiet room. The shouts are
 becoming more urgent, violent. Somewhere outside, glass
 shatters. Laing circles Charlotte and for a moment it looks
 as if he might follow a more bestial impulse. Then, sobering,
 he crouches down and unties her hands.

LAING
 That's enough! Let's find Eliot and
 get out of this place.

She lashes out at him, kicking and scratching, full of anger
 and self-loathing.

CHARLOTTE

Get away from me! Just get away!!!

Laing recoils, her nails scoring his cheek with deep, red lines like tribal markings.

LAING

Stop it, Charlotte. STOP IT!

He slaps her, harder than he might have wished.

Charlotte falls back in tormented ecstasy. Laing pauses a moment, flush with the violence.

Then, realizing that this is what she wanted all along, he slaps her again. He falls on Charlotte, desire overtaking him as he runs his mouth over her exposed breasts.

Wilder finds a seat on a chair. He lights a cigarette. Drinking in the sound of screams and jangling alarms rising from elsewhere in the building he watches as Charlotte and Laing make love on the floor.

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- DAWN

The sun rises angry and red. The high-rise catches its hellish glow.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT -- DAWN

Laing awakens feeling sick and confused. He opens his eyes to find himself sprawled on Charlotte's bed, the details of the night before slowly coming back to him. He sits up, sensing movement in the next room.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT. DINING AREA

Charlotte stands at the balcony door, staring dazedly out at the crimson skies. Wilder is seated at the dining room table, changing the battery pack on his camera. He glances up as Laing enters the room.

WILDER

You look hungry, man...

Lost in his own inner turmoil Laing barely registers him.

WILDER (CONT'D)

There's a baloney sandwich in the fridge.

Laing turns towards Charlotte, not knowing quite what to say. Avoiding his eyes she begins to gather a few personal effects into her bag.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Are you staying here? Or coming with.

LAING

I'm going, but who said I was going with you?

WILDER

You need me! The express elevators are out of commission and I can read the graffiti tags. At least then you'll have a running chance of knowing which stairwell is safe...

CHARLOTTE

He's got a point. We can't take any unnecessary risks. Not with Eliot up there. And right now Royal's the only one with any access to the outside world. I think he's got some kind of satphone.

Hefting the camera Wilder starts towards the door.

WILDER

Well, let's go make a call.

Steeling herself, Charlotte glances at Laing, who purses his lips, noting the look of deepening trauma in her eyes. After a moment he follows Wilder.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Buck up, doc! This is gonna be one helluva climb...

INT. CHARLOTTE'S FLOOR - HALLWAY -- DAWN

The walls of the lobby are scrawled with slogans and obscenities, lists of apartments to be vandalized like an insane directory.

WILDER

Wow! I'm glad I don't live on the thirteenth floor! That's number one on every hit list.

He snorts sarcastically.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Obvious choice, I guess...

Laing and Charlotte look on as Wilder scans the tangled, day-glo markings. Then the filmmaker lets out an excited grunt, noticing that someone has tagged the slogan 'UP!' In big, bold block capitals beside one of the battered elevator doors.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 It's a sign, man! A fuckin' sign!
 Straight from above. It's gonna
 make the perfect opening shot...

Wilder raises his camera, staring at the painted slogan through his viewfinder.

Laing draws back the elevator doors, peering cautiously into the empty shaft. Sections of metal railing and water pipes crisscross the shaft, inserted like stop indicators to prevent the cars from moving up or down.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 This is where it begins alright.
 Cue opening titles. Cue music...

INT. STAIRWELL -- DAY

Laing, Charlotte and Wilder trudge up the stairs. A long line of residents runs in each direction. Many look like refugees, carrying bags of food and bottles of water.

Wilder videotapes them as they pass. He's exhilarated by the sight... happy to be back in the war zone.

Charlotte stumbles. Laing catches her. She seems fragile, on the verge of collapse.

LAING
 Rest for a moment and catch your
 breath.

CHARLOTTE
 I'm good. I can make a couple of
 more flights.

Gathering herself, she rejoins the procession.

INT. STAIRWELL, FURTHER ALONG -- DAY

They are making slow progress. The line continues to shuffle onward.

In the descending line is Wilder's wife, Helen.

HELEN
 Richard!

She embraces him shallowly.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 Thank god. I was upstairs getting a
 manicure when the riots started.

CHARLOTTE
 What about your children?

HELEN
They're safe in the apartment.

CHARLOTTE
No one is safe. We're cut off... We could be stuck here indefinitely.

HELEN
(anxiously to Wilder)
We have to get back to them.

WILDER
Not just yet.

HELEN
What?

LAING
(to Wilder)
What's the matter with you? Go home to your family.

WILDER
I can't give up now. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. They'll live.

HELEN
(calling after him)
We'll live? Is that all you have to say?

Wilder merely shrugs and resumes the upward journey.

HELEN (CONT'D)
All right. That's the way you want it? Good riddance. We'll be fine. I hope Royal eats you for breakfast.

Helen continues the descent stone-faced as Laing regards Wilder with growing distaste.

INT. STAIRWELL -- DAY

The line has come to a halt. Wilder cuts through the crowd, hearing someone shouting up ahead. Laing and Charlotte follow. They manage to push their way to the front to find a barrier of cast-off furniture blocking the passage.

A phalanx of upper floor residents stand guard. They're checking ID. An imposing muscular man calls out:

MUSCLED RESIDENT
You can't break the line like that.

LAING
What's going on?

MUSCLED RESIDENT
Only residents of floors sixty and
over can pass.

Wilder switches on his camera.

MUSCLED RESIDENT (CONT'D)
Now get back in line.

CHARLOTTE
My son is in the penthouse.

MUSCLED RESIDENT
Really? Do you live there?

CHARLOTTE
No.

WILDER
Don't you know who you're talking
to? This is Charlotte Melville.

MUSCLED RESIDENT
Turn around, please.
(to Wilder)
And turn that off.

He moves to block the lens. Wilder hefts the camera between
the man's legs. The muscled resident instantly crumples.

Wilder pumps his camera in the air with a victory WHOOP.

WILDER
(to the crowd)
Death to the upper floors!
Freedom to Elysium!

An echoing cry rises from the line. The guards shuffle
nervously. One attempts to grab Wilder. He clocks the guard
with the lens of his camera, then yanks him off balance,
sending him tumbling.

The crowd goes berserk, swallowing the fallen guard and then
storming the barrier.

WILDER (CONT'D)
(to Laing and Charlotte)
Come on!

Other guards ready themselves for a fight, but they're
quickly overwhelmed by the horde. Taking advantage of the
confusion Laing, Wilder and Charlotte slip through the
blockade.

INT. UPPER STORY HALLWAY -- DAY

Wilder bursts out of the stairwell, followed closely by
Charlotte and Laing. He's manic, running off the adrenaline
high.

WILDER
 You see. You see! It's all been
 carefully orchestrated. Those
 fuckers.

Wilder calls out to no one in particular.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 I'm on to you people!

As if in answer, a gunshot rings out from the end of the
 hall.

LAING
 Come on!

INT. ANOTHER UPPER STORY HALLWAY - DAY

Laing, Charlotte and Wilder go pelting blindly down the
 corridor, taking another corner, increasingly disoriented in
 the uniform maze of dimly lit passageways.

WILDER
 Hello! Hey! Somebody...

Wilder starts desperately pounding doors at random, listening
 for sounds of life inside before moving to the next.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 Open up! We're the police

There's no response from behind the door. Charlotte and Laing
 exchange an anxious glance. The situation is getting
 increasingly out of hand and neither of them can be sure who
 Wilder will turn on next.

WILDER (CONT'D)
 Did you hear me? I said we're here
 to rescue you!

Still no response. Then a faint voice comes from the other
 side of the locked portal.

MRS HILLMAN: (O.S.)
 Go away!

Just then another shot ricochets from around the corner. In
 desperation Wilder reaches into his backpack and pulls out a
 box of dog biscuits. He holds them up to the peephole,
 shaking the box slightly.

WILDER
 I brought treats...

There is a low murmur of voices within followed by a metallic
 scraping sound as someone pulls a heavy object across the
 floor.

Then the door gives, swinging open to reveal the face of a desiccated older woman in a blood-spattered evening dress.

MRS HILLMAN
What else have you got?

INT. THE HILLMAN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Wilder brushes the old woman aside as they force their way into the apartment, hastily closing the door behind them.

A huge barricade of furniture all but blocks the hallway. The woman's husband lies on a mattress in an adjoining room filled with expensive antiques and artwork. His head is bandaged with a torn evening dress shirt, through which blood has seeped on to the pillow. He raises his head as Laing and Wilder enter, his hand searching for a section of balcony railing on the floor beside him.

MR. HILLMAN
Who are you? How did you get in here?

His wife tugs at Wilder's sleeve, peering excitedly at the box of dog biscuits.

MRS HILLMAN
You've got a present for me?

She pokes at the carton, gazing hungrily at the overweight basset hound on the label. Both she and her husband are as thin as scarecrows.

WILDER
Don't be so grabby.

Mr. Hillman stares passively up at the newcomers, his face drained of all color. Wilder pretends to accost his wife, running his hands over her buttocks to see how he reacts, but Mr. Hillman gives no flicker of recognition. Wilder stops stroking Mrs Hillman when he sees that she is openly responding to him. He tries to move away from her, but her small body is surprisingly agile.

MRS HILLMAN
I know why you came to rescue me...

Reaching into the barricade, Mrs Hillman pulls at a black metal pipe. As it emerges Laing realizes that it is the barrel of a shotgun. Surprised, Wilder takes the weapon from her hands. She smiles encouragingly, as if expecting him to go out into the corridor and exchange fire with whoever's out there.

He breaks the breach. Two live shells are in place under the hammers. Then he pushes her in the chest.

WILDER
Rescue yourself.

Laing looks on uneasily as Wilder takes in the sumptuous and very expensive antique furnishings with growing animosity.

WILDER (CONT'D)

Who the hell are these people?

Charlotte is so nervous that her voice is barely a whimper.

CHARLOTTE

Mr and Mrs Hillman are on the board...

WILDER

You mean they invested in this hellhole? They're part of this place!

MR. HILLMAN

Please. Please, take whatever you want. Just don't hurt me...

Wilder makes as if to crush the old man's head with the butt of the shotgun. Changing his mind at the last moment, he smashes an expensive looking vase instead.

CHARLOTTE

That was uncalled for.

Half playful, half in earnest, Wilder begins to throw dog biscuits at Mrs Hillman, scattering them around the floor.

WILDER

Try soaking these in gin. I know you've got a bottle hidden somewhere.

LAING

Wilder... hey...

A scrawny-looking cat breaks cover, and Wilder levels the shotgun at the startled animal as it streaks towards the balcony.

CHARLOTTE

Is this part of your movie?

Wilder coolly draws a bead on the terrified cat as it tries to take refuge in the curtains.

WILDER

Docudrama. I'm making a statement.

Plucking a heavy porcelain vase from the barricade, Laing swings it hard at Wilder's head. Wilder stumbles back, his scalp bleeding. Mrs Hillman rushes to his aid. She throws Laing an accusing look.

MRS HILLMAN

Now who's going to rescue us?

Judging her to be completely insane, Laing takes Charlotte by the arm, guiding her towards the door.

LAING

Let's go.

INT. UPPER FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY

Laing and Charlotte squeeze through the barricade and out into the hall.

CHARLOTTE

Look out!

Laing catches a flash of movement as an unknown assailant swings an antique calvary sword at his head. He manages to duck in time, only to receive a golf club connects in the back of his knees.

Laing goes down, eyes watering with pain. When he looks up once more, it is to find himself ringed by a posse of affluent looking men and women bearing makeshift weapons. With a dawning sense of horror he realizes that he recognizes some of them from his sister's cocktail party.

Their leader, a middle-aged gynecologist, clutching a croquet mallet, fixes Laing with his beady glare.

GYNECOLOGIST

Who are you?

CHARLOTTE

He's with me.

WOMAN

He looks like he's from the lower floors.

An elderly banker in a Brooks Brothers suit casts a disapproving eye over Laing's disheveled hair and clothing.

BANKER

I saw him. With the first raiding party. He's one of them all right.

LAING

I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a doctor. I live on the fifty-fourth floor. I'm Alice Frobisher's brother.

WOMAN

We don't like downsidiers wandering our halls and riding our elevators.

LAING
Downsiders? I'm one of you!

BANKER
Hardly.

He glances at Charlotte.

BANKER (CONT'D)
She's okay. But you...

GYNECOLOGIST
There's boundaries. And you're on
the wrong side of the line, boy.

LAING
Please, listen to me. Royal is the
only one who can help us. He's got
the only outside line. If we can
just get to him we might be able
to--

Laing starts to get up, but the man grasps him by the scruff
of the neck and throws him against the wall.

CHARLOTTE
Please! Let him go! You don't know
what you're doing...

Laing tries to fight but is swiftly overwhelmed, Charlotte's
helpless, pleading voice lost beneath the jeers and taunts of
the crowd.

After Laing has been suitably beaten and humiliated, they
hoist him above their heads and carry him kicking and
screaming down the hall.

WOMAN
Garbage disposal.

MAN
Broom closet.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM -- NIGHT

Laing, bloody and bruised, is tossed into a closet filled
with cleaning supplies. The door is slammed shut and locked
from the outside. Laing throws himself against it, hammering
at the steel cladding with his fists.

LAING
Let me out! Goddamn it! You have
to let me go!

Muffled laughter and jeering come from the other side of the
door. And then the sound of departing footsteps.

LAING (CONT'D)
Charlotte! Help! Somebody!

Laing kicks and pounds on the door one last time before crumpling to the ground.

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- NIGHT

The high-rise sits dark and malevolent against the bruised-looking sky. Lights flicker on and off as power hiccups through the building.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM -- NIGHT

Laing comes awake curled in a nest of towels and mops. Feeling groggy and not a little disoriented, he looks at his watch. He taps it with his finger. The battery is dead. It's impossible to know how long he has been imprisoned.

The light bulb above his head flickers and then flares out. Laing is left in complete darkness.

LAING

No, no, no...

Laing stumbles in the blackness, rifling through shelves of detergents and paper towels, searching for a spare bulb.

A voice interrupts.

VOICE

(whispering)

What are you looking for?

Startled, Laing looks blindly around the room.

LAING

Who said that?

VOICE

It's only me. A little mouse.

Laing's eyes find a barely discernible ventilation grill. Someone is hidden within.

VOICE (CONT'D)

A little mouse lost in the house.

The voice giggles girlishly.

Laing presses his face to the grill. He can only make out the glint from two wet eyes recessed in the darkness.

LAING

Please, help me. I'm stuck in here.

VOICE

I know. I've been watching you, Laing.

LAING
Who are you?

More giggles. And then the eyes disappear deeper into the vent.

LAING (CONT'D)
Hey! Come back! Please.

CLICK. The door unlocks and swings open. Standing silhouetted on the threshold is the outline of a girl.

Laing steps out of his prison and sees that it is Holly. She has become feral, rodent-like. Her eyes are set deep in her skull, orbited by black rings.

HOLLY
Come quickly. It isn't safe.

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Holly leads Laing to an open vent and with surprising agility, crawls inside. She turns back to him.

HOLLY
Hurry. It's much better in here.

Laing lifts himself inside.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
No one knows about the vents.

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT -- NIGHT

A grilled hatchway is kicked open. Laing follows Holly to the base of a vast concrete shaft.

HOLLY
You have to be careful of the dogs.

LAING
The dogs?

HOLLY
They're getting hungry.

Laing follows her eyeline. Naked fluorescents form a glowing path above and below.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
The maintenance elevators still work. Mostly. Look out.

She pulls him back aside as an elevator fills the shaft. It stops just beneath them.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Come on.

She crawls onto the roof of the elevator carriage.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Hurry.

Laing joins her just as the elevator begins its ascent. They are carried upward.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Remember the first time we met?
That was in an elevator.

The elevator pauses. Then it begins to drop. Laing looks at her -- now what?

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Switch.

Holly takes Laing's hand and jumps. He has no choice but to follow. They land on the roof of another car traveling upward. Laing gasps. Holly giggles.

The lights flicker.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Uh-oh.

And the elevator jolts to a halt.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Black out.

The shaft turns pitch black.

A beat later, the amber emergency lights flick on. Four feet above them is the entrance to the next floor.

INT. HALLWAY, 120TH FLOOR -- NIGHT

The elevator doors creak open as Laing emerges from the shaft.

LAING
Come on.

HOLLY
I'd rather stay here, thank you.

The elevator powers up and drops. Holly waves to him as she sinks into the concrete abyss.

The power surges again, the malfunctioning wallpaper flickering continuously like a fibrillating heart, its dancing, intermittent illumination revealing rows of ransacked apartments. Garbage and shattered furniture lies strewn across the floor.

Laing turns to find he is no longer alone.

A pack of dogs have appeared, foraging through the refuse in the corridor. Some are small, innocuous toy dogs, but others are formidable beasts, Rottweilers and Dobermans among them. They stiffen, hackles rising as they become aware of his presence.

He backs away.

The dogs advance slowly, drawn by Laing's body odor and the promise of fresh human meat.

Laing bolts.

The dogs chase hungrily after him.

INT. STAIRWELL -- NIGHT

Laing races up the steps, taking them three at a time. Behind him he hears the echoing clatter of padded feet.

He bursts out of the stairwell and into...

INT. UPPER FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Laing slams the stairwell door shut and throws all his weight against it. The hounds scratch and growl on the other side.

Another growl draws his attention to the opposite end of the hall, where a second pack of dogs are already bounding towards him.

Laing scans the corridor for escape. He spots the half-open door of a nearby apartment and makes a break for it.

Behind him the stairwell door explodes open as the dogs give chase.

Time seems to slow as Laing sprints for sanctuary. The two converging packs race him there.

INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Laing flies in and shuts and locks the door an instant before the dogs reach him, barking and scratching.

Laing stands there, bug-eyed, panting. As he gradually recovers, he turns to see that someone is sitting in a chair, facing away from him.

LAING

Hello?

Laing approaches with trepidation. He finds a man and a woman curled together on the chair. They are both dead. A double suicide.

Laing's legs buckle. He slides to the floor.

INT. KITCHEN, ABANDONED APARTMENT -- DAWN

Warm morning light reaches Laing in the corner of the kitchen where he has made his bed.

He rises, groggy and parched.

INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT -- DAWN

Laing crosses to the foyer, pressing his ear to the door. Not a sound. He unlocks the door and gingerly swings it open.

RAWWWR! The dogs have been lying in wait. They burst into the apartment. Laing has no choice but to sprint to...

EXT. BALCONY, ABANDONED APARTMENT -- DAWN

A windswept balcony. A flock of startled seagulls rise into the brightening firmament as Laing climbs onto the railing, wavering for a moment over the yawning abyss. The dogs leap, fueled by hunger and rage. One skitters over the edge into oblivion.

Laing clamps his hands onto the balcony above and using every last ounce of strength hoists himself upward. Another dog manages to latch onto his pant leg. He is jerked down, dangling for a beat, only four fingers preventing him from dropping.

Then his pant leg rips. Freeing him. Still, the wind tears at him, sucking him toward the void.

Laing emits a pained cry, and straining every muscle and tendon, manages to stabilize himself. Bracing his bare, blood-slicked feet against the steel and concrete facade of the building's curtain wall, he works his way higher, clambering from one spandrel panel to the next, leaving the dogs howling with frustration below.

Another two floors and he manages to heave himself over the lip of a concrete parapet, panting for breath and holding on hard until the pain of exertion begins to ebb, until he can breathe again.

LAING

Up...

Taking a deep breath, he begins to climb once more. No longer knowing why. Knowing only that he has to.

EXT. HIGH-RISE -- DAWN

The rising sun warms Laing as he ascends, hand over hand, ledge to ledge, trying not to look down.

His gaunt, unshaven face is a mask of agony, his skin slick with sweat. Vertigo courses through his body but there is something else, something within him that is stronger than his fear, an irrefutable desire to reach the top that only seems to deepen with each passing floor.

In his ruined condition, progress is minimal but to simply keep going, incrementally gaining altitude, is all his body and mind can encompass, his limbs going through the motions of some in-built ritual that keeps them moving long after the pilot has taken his hands from the joystick.

EXT. PENTHOUSE BALCONY -- MORNING

At last, Laing drags himself over the railing and collapses onto the ground, completely drained. He lies there, immobilized by exhaustion.

Laing blinks, not knowing whether it is hours or minutes later. Looking up through a shimmering, milky haze he tries to focus on the gulls, wheeling and cawing above him, wondering whether or not he is good to eat.

After a while he sits up. Levering himself slowly to his feet Laing gazes at his surroundings, taking in the infinite blue curve of the horizon as he catches his breath. It is as if he is literally standing on top of the world. Then turning away he starts giddily towards the reflective glass doors leading towards the penthouse.

INT. PENTHOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Laing finds himself in a spacious apartment, larger and more luxurious than any other in the building. The modernist interior is accented by tasteful antiques, its immaculate decor seemingly untouched by the madness that has consumed the rest of Elysium.

Laing's mouth is as dry as sandpaper and realizing he can't swallow, he casts unsteadily around himself in search of a tap.

INT. MONITOR ROOM, PENTHOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Laing wanders dazedly into a room that he realizes is devoted to the surveillance of Elysium. It represents a God's eye view of the building. Various atrocities play out from the dispassionate perspective of countless CCTV cameras. Royal has not left a single nook or cranny hidden from his gaze. Only, now there is no watcher other than Laing.

Driven by his thirst, he continues on.

INT. ROYAL'S STUDY -- AFTERNOON

Laing passes from Royal's eye to his mind. Here in Royal's study lies a compendium of the great architect's life's work, as well as Utopian visions of the past: The Tower of Babel painted by Bruegel, Newton's Cenotaph by Etienne-Louis Boullée, Italian Renaissance visions of an Ideal City, Russian Constructionist Urban Plans.

And in the center of it all, a beautifully constructed scale model of Elysium. The crown jewel of Royal's collection.

A low snarl ripples through the air, and Laing turns to see the white Alsatian watching him from the doorway.

LAING

Sitzen zu...

The dog obediently does as it is told, settling itself on its haunches for a moment. Then, wagging its tail, it leads Laing towards the kitchen dining area.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING AREA - AFTERNOON

Laing reaches for the tap, dismayed to find that there is no water coming from it. He tries a second time with the same results. Looking around for another source of liquid, his stomach begins to knot up again.

The dog watches placidly as Laing dry heaves. Then the nausea passes and the dog turns on its heels, disappearing through a sunlit doorway.

Steadying himself, Laing follows, stepping out into the warm afternoon light.

EXT. ROOF GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Laing narrows his eyes, staring at his surroundings in amazement. He feels like the first man gazing upon Eden. A paradisiacal roof garden stretches away before him like a jungle in the sky. There are subsistence crops neatly planted in rows between the trees and beyond them he glimpses catchment areas for rainwater, gleaming solar panels and spinning wind turbines.

There is a tinkle of childish laughter and the white Alsatian goes trotting away down the aisle of trees. Laing follows, hearing the voice of an old man recounting a familiar fable.

ROYAL

Once upon a time, in a golden age,
everyone in this world spoke the
same language and lived in
harmony...

Laing catches sight of Eliot at the far end of the aisle of trees.

The boy is standing beside an infinity pool, a silver serving platter in his hands. Behind him an old man is seated on an aluminium beach chair, shaded from the direct heat of the afternoon sun.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

Then one day an architect dreamed of building a tower reaching into the heavens, so that man could be on par with the creator whom they worshipped...

Anthony Royal, resplendent in a spotless white safari jacket with his long hair worn at shoulder length like the ancient mariner, is holding court to an attentive audience of women.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

The mind that had conceived the tower could not build it alone. The task was too great...

As Laing approaches he realizes that the women are the surviving members of Pang's therapy group. Among them he recognizes his sister, Alice, looking positively monkish in a hooded bathrobe, bearing the familiar logo of the Elysium spa.

ALICE

Bobbee...

She meets his gaze and smiles. Laing takes a half step closer, noticing with growing unease, that several of the women, his sister included, have had their heads shaven like adherents of some strange quasi-medieval sect.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Come. Join us.

The white Alsatian settles itself contentedly at the foot of Royal's reclining beach chair, guarding his master's stainless steel walking stick. The architect doesn't seem to register Laing's presence.

ROYAL

But the hands that built the tower knew nothing of the dream of the brain that had designed it...

Eliot smiles at Laing as he clambers onto the sun deck, settling himself beside his sister on one of the loungers. To his dismay he notices that the boy is feeding the wheeling gulls with scraps of raw meat.

Royal's frail body is suddenly stricken with a violent tremor. Several of the women move to help him but he waves them away, gaining control of his body once more.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

The creator took one look at what they were doing and knew that nothing would stop them from being like him if they realized their goal so he confused their languages and there was so much discord among them that the tower fell to ruins...

Through the haze Laing recognizes in Royal the telltale signs of a condition he knows all too well.

But exhaustion overwhelms him as the great architect speaks, he finds himself drifting into oblivion.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

The name of the tower was Babel and from thence did the creator scatter his children abroad upon the face of all the earth...

INT/EXT. ROOF GARDEN -- LATER

Laing stirs, trying to rouse himself from a confused, feverish dream of soaring vertical surfaces and endless vistas of chrome and concrete. A huge, unblinking eye seems to stare back at him from a hexagonal window in the apex of a hallucinatory tower and he awakens with a shudder.

Laing sits up to find himself lying beneath a makeshift shelter that has been erected at one end of the infinity pool. He is surprised to find Charlotte bending over him, wrapped in a hooded dressing gown like the others.

LAING

Charlotte! What are you--?

She smiles, raising a finger to her lips.

CHARLOTTE

Sshh. You need to rest. You almost didn't make it.

Charlotte raises a cup of water to Laing's lips and he groggily sips it, overwhelmed by a mounting sense of unreality.

LAING

Am I dreaming?

CHARLOTTE

Not anymore. We were so worried about you...

Alice wordlessly crouches beside Charlotte, helping her dress her brother's wounds.

LAING
How did you get here?

CHARLOTTE
Royal. He always finds a way.

LAING
Royal...?

ALICE
He needs you Bobby.

Charlotte nods in agreement.

CHARLOTTE
We all need you.

LAING
What are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE
Royal is dying. He has multiple
sclerosis just like your father...

Laing tries to struggle to his feet, the realization dawning on him as to why he was brought to the building in the first place.

LAING
You don't need me. You need my
research!

ALICE
You've been given a second chance,
Bobby. Don't throw it away!

His sister gently restrains him. She raises the cup to his lips once more as if to silence him but Laing forces her hand away.

LAING
Let go of me...

EXT. ROOF GARDEN/SUN DECK - LATE AFTERNOON

Laing emerges from the makeshift shelter, one hand raised to shield his eyes from the slanting, late afternoon light.

ROYAL
Contemporary culture exalts money
and desacralizes life. It creates
artificial wants and needs...

He turns towards the sound of the great architect's voice, catching sight of Royal still seated on the sun deck surrounded by Eliot and his sycophantic, robed followers.

ROYAL (CONT'D)
(continuing)

...Of course, we knew from the start that the tenants would turn on each other, that the greed of society's cream would inevitably lead to violence and devolution...

LAING

An experiment? This whole thing is just an experiment? Sitting here safe at the top of the building while people are dying down there...

Royal finally takes notice of Laing.

LAING (CONT'D)

You've got to do something! You've got a sat phone, right? We've got to call for help!

ROYAL

It's not that simple, Dr. Laing. I wish it were. I doubt that anyone cares much for what becomes of us. We bid good riddance to the outside world and in all likelihood they have done the same to us.

The architect shakes his head sadly, his gaze wandering towards the balcony railing and the sea of cloud beyond.

LAING

But we have to do *something*.

ROYAL:

There's nothing to be done. Everything is going perfectly according to plan.

Laing regards him incredulously.

LAING

Are you for real? Just look at yourselves! Who the fuck are you to play God with people's lives?

ROYAL

You still don't understand, do you, doctor? I'm not in charge here. No one's in charge. All this is occurring quite... naturally...

Laing glances back at Charlotte who has emerged from the lean to and is now standing a few paces behind him.

LAING

Did you know about this?

She lowers her eyes.

LAING (CONT'D)
You were part of it right from the beginning, weren't you?

Charlotte starts to say something, a muttered denial perhaps but then Pang comes to her defense, cutting her off.

PANG
What's wrong with a parent wanting a better world for their children?

Eliot takes a step closer to his mother and she reaches out, silently ruffling his hair, a gesture Laing suspects is intended to calm her own nerves rather than the child's.

LAING
You call this a better world?

ROYAL
Elysium is merely amplifying our natural tendencies, Dr. Laing. It's hardening us, shaping us into a society that is equipped to survive the harsh realities which lie ahead.

Royal's hand trembles uncontrollably as he reaches for his aluminum walking stick.

LAING
You're still talking like this is for some greater good. But it's all about you. It always has been. Your Docklands community imploded and the only way you could deal with it was to rebuild a disaster into a success.

Laing has struck a nerve. Royal searches for a response, but for once even he is at a loss for words.

ALICE
You're a part of this, Bobby, whether you like it or not. You belong here with us...

LAING
And what if I don't go along with it? What if I refuse?

ALICE
You mean like Charles did?

Laing glances nervously about himself, realizing that the group has begun to grow in numbers, more of the women rising from the waters of the swimming pool like hungry, amphibious creatures.

His sister's voice is flat and emotionless, as if she is speaking lines learned by rote.

ALICE (CONT'D)

We have planted a seed from which a mighty tree will spring...

There is something of the mindless acceptance of hippy beatitude to Alice's smile as she watches the women close in on her cornered brother. Then the expression freezes on Alice's face and she pitches forward, a damp stain spreading between her shoulder blades. The sound of the concussion catches up an instant later and Laing spins to see Wilder perched on the balcony railing like the devil incarnate, outlined by the setting sun, the smoking shot gun cradled in his arms.

LAING

No! No! NO!!!

Wilder seems incapable of comprehending him, as if the upward climb has robbed the filmmaker of the power of speech. His naked torso is marked by a hatchwork of scarlet lines drawn with a tube of lipstick. The improvised war paint resembles the cuts of meat in a butcher's diagram. As he brings up the shotgun he curls back his lips in an inarticulate cry of animal rage.

Before he has time to pull the trigger, Laing launches himself across the sun deck towards him, hitting Wilder in a flying tackle and definitively spoiling his aim. They roll in the flower bed at the very edge of the balcony, thrashing, chopping and punching. Laing has been pushed beyond his limits, his body hardened by the journey up the building, but Wilder has the tricks, the animal cunning and the inhuman pain threshold. Twice, Laing manages to get his knee into Wilder's testicles, but the big man keeps on coming.

Wilder strikes at Laing with the butt of the shotgun, emitting a weird series of snarls, whoops and grunts. Crying out in grief and pain Laing manages to catch hold of the gun barrel, trying in vain to twist it from his adversary's vice-like grip.

Simultaneously, Royal rises unsteadily from the beach chair, attempting to remove himself from the line of fire. The women start forward, sensing that the great architect might be in danger.

Then the gun goes off, the blast taking Royal in the midriff, almost cutting him in half.

There is a stunned silence. The old man somehow manages to stay on his feet for an instant longer, his torso a red ruin, one hand still clutching the balustrade.

ROYAL

This generation shall not pass...

Realizing what is about to happen, Charlotte tries to close the gap between them.

CHARLOTTE

Anthony...

ROYAL

See these mighty buildings. All shall be thrown down...

Royal manages to take one last faltering step towards the edge of the balcony, using his cane to find balance. Then, surrendering to his fate, the great architect pitches forward into space.

He stretches his arms outward, dropping the cane.

ROYAL (CONT'D)

Heaven and earth shall pass away...

EXT. HIGH-RISE. SUNSET

Viewed from a great distance. The tiny form of Royal plummets over the side of his building. A fallen Icarus.

He tumbles, down and down, until he is lost in the sea of clouds.

EXT. PENTHOUSE BALCONY -- SUNSET

For a moment a horrified silence reigns.

Then the women move as one, a piercing, inhuman wail erupting from their collective throats, the guttural cries of birth trauma. Wilder grunts, relaxing his hold on Laing as he rolls aside, trying to regain his footing but the women are already closing in on him, producing short, pointed knives from within their robes. The bewildered filmmaker emits a bestial whimper of fear and panic, casting helplessly about himself in search of an exit. He turns, the cry dying in his throat as he finds himself confronted by his wife.

HELEN

I told you we'd be fine.

The women descend on Wilder, shrieking in impotent rage, their blades flashing. He manages to cast a final pleading look to Laing before he is lost within a flurry of stabbing arms.

LAING

Wilder...

Gripping the discarded walking stick, Laing slowly pulls himself to his feet.

He steadies himself, dry heaving as he watches the women carry Wilder's now lifeless body to another part of the garden where a controlled cooking fire has been started. The terrible logic of this new society is now abundantly clear.

A low moan escapes Laing's swollen, blood spattered lips and the women turn towards him as if seeking his approval. For a moment he stands swaying in the failing light a victorious apex predator surveying his kingdom. Then, shaking his head, he drops the walking stick and slowly backs away. The Alsatian goes after him, tail wagging.

INT. PENTHOUSE -- SUNSET

Laing haltingly retraces his steps into the penthouse. As he makes his way towards the lift, he hears a soft sound behind him. He turns to find Charlotte watching him with tear-filled eyes.

CHARLOTTE

Please...

Laing wishes he could reach out to her, to reassure her somehow but at first the words refuse to come and the only sound he can muster is a single, barely coherent syllable.

LAING

I...

CHARLOTTE

Don't leave us.

LAING

I... can't stay here...

CHARLOTTE

But there's nothing left out there.
Nothing to go back to.

LAING

I'll take my chances.

They stare at each other for an endless moment. Their gazes carry more weight than words. Then her eyes turn to Eliot.

Laing walks away.

INT. FOYER/ATRIUM -- NIGHT

One hundred and fifty floors below, Laing staggers out into the garbage-strewn atrium. For the first time since his arrival in the building, he feels utterly lost and directionless.

The marble gods stare down at him dispassionately as he starts towards the shattered foyer doors.

EXT. HARBOUR -- NIGHT

Laing stands on the desolate harbor wall, gazing out to sea, the predatorial white gulls wheeling and cawing about him.

There is no sign of the hydrofoil and a greasy, oily film floats on the surface of the water, glinting in the sullen firelight. Behind him a seemingly endless stream of traumatized tenants are still trying to exit the building. Some of the survivors have lashed together improvised rafts and Laing watches as they paddle away from him into the darkness, still senselessly clutching their suitcases and pathetic bundles of loot and stolen consumer durables. He doesn't rate their chances on the open ocean and in any event feels no great desire to join their exodus.

Noticing that he's finally getting a few bars on his iPhone, he starts to key in a number. Then, changing his mind and realizing that he has nothing to say, he pitches the handset into the ocean, returning his attention to the stricken high rise, the white Alsatian still following obediently at his heels.

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Small fires cast their hellish glow on arcane graffiti-marked walls. Human and animal waste intermingle with mottled garbage.

With the Alsatian at his side, Laing walks past the detritus, oblivious.

He stops before a door: his old apartment.

INT. LAING'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The door swings open on one hinge. Laing pushes past it.

Everything he owns has been either destroyed or looted. The housekeeping droids are scattered on the floor like poisoned cockroaches.

Then he hears a low sound like a sigh or a sudden intake of breath and he pauses, realizing he is not alone.

Charlotte and Eliot are waiting for him, their expectant faces all but lost in the gloom. For a long moment all three are silent as if none of them are willing to make the first move and risk breaking the unspoken truce.

Then the dog starts forward, wagging its tail. Eliot reaches out, gently petting the Alsatian, his tiny hand scratching the beast fondly behind the ears.

EXT. LAING'S APARTMENT/ BALCONY -- NIGHT

Laing roasts the Alsatian's skinned body over an open fire. Crouching beside the embers he methodically feeds the remaining pages of his research into the flames.

His face is painted with intricate patterns. A matted beard is forming. The gentle doctor is no more. He glances back at Charlotte and Eliot who sit on a mattress behind him, feeling a warm glow of affection for them and a sense of pride at the family unit they have finally become.

He stokes the pyre of textbooks, sending a column of sparks soaring into the gloom. The silhouette of the dead dog on the spit resembles the flying figure of a mutilated man, soaring with immense energy across the night sky.

A cry rings out.

Laing pauses, picks up his spear and crosses to the balcony railing.

EXT. BALCONY, LAING'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Outside, on their balconies, residents compete in a guttural shouting match. Language is no longer needed. The loudest and most ferocious voice is the winner.

Charlotte and Eliot watch approvingly as Laing waves his spear and screams into the darkness. He easily bellows with more force and energy than his unseen neighbors -- a testament to the dominance of his strength in body and spirit.

The other cries fade away until it is only Laing's voice that is heard. He barks one last time and all is silent.

Laing lowers his weapon, energized by this small victory. Beyond is the void of inky night. He breathes in the sea air, somehow satisfied with his station in the new hierarchy.

EXT. ISLAND -- NIGHT

Seen from a great distance the tiny fires which illuminate the surface of the high-rise extinguish one by one, until it is lost in darkness.

FADE OUT.

The End.