

ten weeks in the head bin
by
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EXT. WIRRIMBIRRA SANCTUARY (REAL WORLD) - DAY

The burning wreckage of heavy logging equipment has transformed dense bushland into hell. Someone has been playing with explosives. 'Love Life, Hate State' has been spray-painted along a chain-saw contraption. BLAKE, a teenage riot grrrl, sprints through the trees.

BLAKE (V.O.)

I guess you could say that I was obsessed. Obsessed with the idea that I could make a difference. Nothing too unhealthy. Just your average teenage aggression. It wasn't until that day in the sanctuary that things got a little out of control.

A NANO-BAT, a tiny surveillance robot hangs from a branch, starts recording as Blake runs by. A GUNSHOT rings out. The nano-bat drops into the air. An unkempt activist, JON, runs through the trees. He gestures, summoning another nano-bat. It films him.

JON

(to camera)

They're going to kill us. Run!

He collides with Blake, grabs hold of her and yells in her face.

JON (CONT'D)

What are you doing?! Go home Blake.

The nano-bat is shot out of the sky. Blake pulls free. The activist turns to see a DOG, with a wrap-around visor for eyes. It leaps at Jon.

EXT. WIRRIMBIRRA VISITOR'S CENTRE (REAL WORLD) - DAY

An armoured car blocks the entrance to the sanctuary. TROOPERS, wearing riot gear, herd a small group of unkempt ACTIVISTS out of the forest at gunpoint. A trooper holds a visor-enhanced dog on a leash. It sniffs the air.

STATE TROOPER (O.S.)

(through loudspeaker)

Come out in the open and put your hands in the air.

EXT. WIRRIMBIRRA SANCTUARY (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blake runs away from the dog. The dog sees the world in infra-red. It leaps at Blake. The dog rips into her jacket arm, Blake squirts its face with a spray can. The dog gags on the paint.

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Blake runs towards nearby burning wreckage. The dog wipes its visor clean with a paw and bounds after her. The dog sees the surroundings as glowing with heat. Blake hurdles the wreckage and disappears from its view.

STATE TROOPER (O.S.)
(through a loudspeaker)
Nobody move.

Blake looks around desperately, shielding her face from the intense heat. The flames crackle merrily. Gunshots and screams as the troopers open fire on Jon and the activists.

INT. WRECKED VEHICLE (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blake crawls into the burning wreckage of a logging vehicle. She looks up anxiously as the wreckage creaks. The dog's feet come into view. The dog's infra-red view of the world is disrupted by a wall of heat from the flames.

The dog sniffs around, moves close to Blake's hiding place. Blake extinguishes flames licking at her clothing. She gasps. The dog looks up and scans the wreckage, its nose sniffing the air. A high pitched whistle. Blake watches the dog's feet disappear.

EXT. WIRRIMBIRRA SANCTUARY AERIAL VIEW (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Jon and several activist lie dead in the forest.

From the air, urban sprawl threatens the bushland from all sides. The Department of the Environment and Network Resources (DENR) logo - a tree whose roots blend into integrated circuitry - is marked on the side of a bug-like transport vehicle rising up out of the smouldering forest.

The transport speeds away towards the skyline of Sydney in the distance.

MAIN TITLES

We move down along the edge of the bush into suburbia.

EXT. BARGO MAIN STREET (REAL WORLD) - DAY

The front of a traditional convenience store is being demolished by a giant vehicle. On a nearby billboard, an artist's impression of the re-development - a multi-storied cube. Blake is fuming. She rips down a re-election poster for the CHIEF, a darkly handsome youthful politician.

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STATE TROOPER (O.S.)

Hey! You!

Blake's boots convert to roller-blades as the TROOPER strides towards her. She flees down the street, past noisy construction sites. She is filthy, at odds with her sterile surroundings. A posse of preppy SCHOOLGIRLS snigger as she passes. Blade determinedly pumps her way up Main Street, ignoring the honking of vehicles as they swerve around her.

EXT. FRONT DOOR (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blake's boots switch back to normal as she runs up to the front door. It opens as she reaches for it. MUM hugs Blade fiercely. DAD, a gruff bearded professor, looks shaken. He steers them inside.

INT. KITCHEN (REAL WORLD) - DAY

MUM and DAD watch current affairs over dinner. Mum looks domestic. Dad is a gruff bearded professor. Life-sized holographic images of the Chief, sharply dressed in a suit, and LANA, a news anchorwoman, hang in the air in front of the table.

LANA

Why would I bother with this? A city on the internet? Chief, I live in the city. I work in the city. If I want to get around, I don't need your whiz bang technology. I take the tube.

A holographic scale model of a city appears like a coffee table between them.

CHIEF

Sure Lana. I acknowledge that it's early days. But you need to see Cityscape for yourself. You haven't and it's different.

LANA

How is it different?

CHIEF

When was the last time a virtual world that wasn't a game made money? Tourists love it because kids love it. Businessmen love it because tourists love it. Gamers love it. We've legitimised their space. In twelve months we've turned a playful online tourist space into reality.

(MORE)

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CHIEF (CONT'D)

The State's had massive economic growth economy. We've become a global cultural phenomenon. And it's all been done without any impact to the environment.

Dad snorts with derision.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

My department was charged with opening up business opportunities that don't waste the State's most precious resources. We've done it.

LANA

Is it also true that your department is developing a mental containment facility?

Dad chokes on his dinner. Blake, all cleaned up, walks through the holographic projection and sits down. The Chief stares at Lana.

BLAKE

Sorry I'm late--

MUM

Shush!

CHIEF

I am sorry. What you mean?

DAD

(his mouth full)

Watch him worm his way out of this one.

MUM

Shush... Daniel!

Lana hesitates and fumbles through her papers. She is losing her nerve. The Chief gives her a patronising smile.

LANA

I'm referring to Dixon's theory of mental containment. Published in 2012. He describes a method of exporting thought out of a human brain. And storing it digitally.

CHIEF

Very sci-fi.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Blake scowls at the Chief.

LANA
So not something you're working on?

CHIEF
No. No comment.

DAD
What's he hiding?

MUM
You're paranoid. Too much media.

Mum gestures, the holograms dissolve. The room brightens.
Blake's face has been scratched.

MUM (CONT'D)
Blake, what happened?

BLAKE
Nothing. I fell over. Mmm... what's
for dinner?

DAD
I asked you not to go.

BLAKE
Go where Dad?

DAD
Don't play games with me. You know
what I mean.

Blake locks eyes with Dad then she starts eating.

DAD (CONT'D)
You're too young.

BLAKE
I'm sixteen.

MUM
Listen to your father Blake. You
shouldn't hang around those men.
They're too old for you.

DAD
(to Mum)
I bet she wasn't welcome. You know
Jon. He'd never let his kids anywhere
near the protests.

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BLAKE
Leave me alone...

MUM
What about the boys at school?

BLAKE
It's not about boys, Mum! If the Chief gets his way, soon there won't be any forest left.

DAD
It didn't make the news.

Blake gets up from the table.

BLAKE
He's killing people.

An awkward pause.

MUM
Who wants dessert?

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL) - NIGHT

Blake's room is a mess of teenage paraphernalia and photos. A dog-eared photo is being blue-tacked to the wall. It shows the activists, Jon and Dad are clowning around with baby Blake in the photo. Blake sobs quietly.

EXT. CITYSCAPE SKYLINE - NIGHT

A hyper-real virtual city, a simulation of the area encompassing the old cities of Sydney and Canberra, now known as the State. A massive sports stadium looms ahead, lights dazzle. The crowd roars.

COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
Welcome back to the action. It's half-time here in Cityscape and we got a record crowd. Oh what's that?...

The city landscape distorts. Buildings warp, to reveal wire-frame construction. Stadium lights flicker.

COMMENTATOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's standing room only folks. I've never seen anything like it. This is shaping up to be one hell of a game!

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The stadium is packed with cheering fans and State personnel. Many fans have an identi-kit look, 'Kens' and 'Barbies', the same male and female bodies but with different faces. The beautiful people are rendered better. A Ken tries to sneak in his pet rat, a software agent. A trooper's heavy hand falls on his shoulder.

TROOPER

No bots. Take it outside.

The Ken dissolves. A sign behind says "No bots"

INT. STATE REGISTRY - NIGHT

An endless chamber filled with rows of filing cabinets and official storage containers. Two small figures are hunched over bookcases toppled from a row. FAINT CROWD NOISES. Blade, a woman in her late twenties, short hair, athletic build, leans on the shoulders of a crudely-drawn stick figure guy, CD. Blade stares intently at CD's flexi-stomach, currently in the form of a screen, displaying text. Blade and her 'customised dude' software agent are hacking. Blade works fast. She pulls records from the bookcase and speed reads. CD bends over in a yoga position, twists around to study scrolling data on his belly.

CD

Hey Blade, check out this dodgy server will ya? I'm getting indigestion just thinking about it. Ooooh!

CD's stomach bulges and undulates. Blade ignores him. She examines a State file which features a photo of Blake.

BLADE

It's all dodgy.

CD elongates his neck like a giraffe to peer over Blade's shoulder.

CD

Mmmmm. Who's the little girl?

CD does his best Beavis and Butthead impersonation, snorts and wheezes with glee.

BLADE

Can you keep a secret?

CD nods vigorously. Blade screws the photo up into a ball and chucks it towards CD who gobbles it up. The photo momentarily appears on CD's stomach screen. The screen folds back into his body.

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BLADE (CONT'D)

Nice one!

CD burps.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Pig.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

A chunky player runs down the field with the ball. His logo'ed flanks wink advertisements. A player tackles him. As they hit the ground, players break apart into limb-sized chunks that bounce awkwardly. Players surge in to regain the ball. The crowd roars. The Chief smiles in the VIP area. KARMA, a cold and statuesque woman, his aide, surveys the crowd. A giant scoreboard puts the Cityscape Raiders ahead by two points. On the field, body parts re-assemble. The 'injured' players rejoin the play. The game is otherwise similar to Rugby League.

The stadium lights fluctuate. The game statistics literally fall off the scoreboard. Blade appears on the scoreboard. She acknowledges the crowd with a grin.

BLADE

Hey Chief. Chief! How come everyone here loses but you? What's the score?

The crowd noise drops to a MURMUR.

CHIEF

Karma?

Karma's eyes roll back.

BLADE

How many people did your troops kill today?

KARMA

She's in the Registry.

BLADE

Don't be shy Chief. We're the fans. How many?

The Chief stares at Blade, intrigued. Karma 'dissolves', as if wiped by an eraser.

BLADE (CONT'D)

(to crowd)

Sorry to interrupt you guys.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE (CONT'D)

I hope you're enjoying the game. It's called "manipulation".

On the scoreboard, Blade's image is replaced with that of a sheep.

SHEEP

Baaah!

The sheep transforms into an sheep-faced Barbie.

SHEEP BARBIE

I'm no sheep. I'm unique.

Identical BARBIES in the grandstand look at each other in confusion. Their KENS are irate. As one yells out, the system censors him in real-time with bleeps and a black mouth patch.

KEN

Get ****ed you ****ing douchebag! Play the ball!

The sheep pokes its head out of the scoreboard and nibbles around the edges of the screen.

INT. STATE REGISTRY - NIGHT

Blade sits with a chessboard-sized model of the stadium in her lap. The players resemble chess-pieces. CD quivers in front of Blade. He's a bundle of hyperactive energy waiting to explode. CD's stomach screen shows the Chief in the grandstand.

BLADE

Chief. You're going down.

On-screen, the Chief raises an eyebrow. CD bounces around Blade, gesticulating like some manic boxing referee doing the count.

CD

(quickly)

Alrighty! You got the ole player override happenin' here. You've got write and run OPS on both sides. You've got them sockets diverted nicely, if I may say so myself. Now whatchya gonna do with all that?!

Blade rolls a player figurine around in her hand, thoughtful. CD jumps up and down with excitement.

CD (CONT'D)

C'mon. It's your move.

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CONTINUED:

Blade slams the player figurine back onto the field board. An alarm wails.

BLADE

Shit.

CD beeps and waggles his finger in disapproval. CD's stomach screen noisily rewinds a recording of his memory, back a few seconds, and replays. On CD's screen, Blade triggers the alarm. The screen is censored with parental advisory labels.

BLADE (CONT'D)

(on-screen)

Oh poo.

CD sniggers. A large DOG-THING (a horrid cross between a Tasmanian devil and a boar) materialises nearby. Ferocious growls.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Play the ball.

Blade tips the player pieces off the board and into CD's stomach screen. She darts off with CD. The dog-thing snaps at their heels. Blade and CD head to the right of two exits. The dog-thing cuts them off and forces them through the left exit.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

The player with the ball jerks as if electrocuted. It leaps into the grandstand and barges through the crowd. The other players follow suit, tossing troopers out of the way. The grandstand crowd swarms with floating text. Every avatar now has personal details that scroll in the air beside it. Names, occupations, sexual preferences... It's a privacy nightmare as people scramble about to avoid glances.

A Ken backs away from an enraged Barbie.

BARBIE

What does it mean you're gay? You're my husband!

The Chief soothes the male VIPs.

CHIEF

Gentlemen please. It's under control.

INT. STADIUM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The dog-thing charges after Blade and CD. Through a maze of corridors lined with pipes.

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BLADE
They're herding us back to the stadium.

CD
Who's the sheep now?

Blade runs her hand along the wall, feels for a way out.

BLADE
Very funny. What's on the menu?

CD's stomach screen displays blueprints of the stadium.

CD
We have exits on special today. For Mademoiselle, I recommend zis one.

INT. STADIUM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Blade moves to where CD points. She runs her hand along the wall, like a dowser. A panel opens.

BLADE
Looks good. I'll take it.

She dives into the new opening.

INT. STATE STORAGE - NIGHT

Blade, and then CD, fly out of a hole into a large storage chamber piled high with sports equipment and other junk.

CD
No sweat. What did I tell ya?

The dog-thing fly out of the hole into Blade. Blade and the dog-thing roll around. Blade gets on top of the dog-thing, pounds its head out of shape. Three dog-things appear around CD.

CD (CONT'D)
Eerr! Now that's ugly code!

CD sees inside the dog-things. The bodies are dense wire-frame apart from bloody eyes and mouth.

BLADE
Find another route. Fast.

CD's stomach screen comes alive with scrolling data.

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CD

Alright alright! I'm workin' on it..
Geez!

Blade does a backwards somersault as a dog-thing snaps at her.

BLADE

Slacker.

CD

Hey dog-breath, over here!

CD's hands grow out into a chair in one hand, and a whip in the other. He plays lioness-tamer with a dog-thing. Blade does floor gymnastics around the junk, as dog-things snap at her.

BLADE

CD. Talk to me.

On CD's stomach screen there are stadium blueprints overlaid with error messages.

CD (O.S.)

Ai carumba! They're trying to cut our
access.

CD smashes his hand/chair over another dog-thing. It freezes for a moment and then snarls back into life.

CD (CONT'D)

Tough little buggers.

On CD's stomach screen a model of the stadium re-orientates itself. A route is plotted from one chamber to the outside of the stadium.

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

I got it!

CD breaks into a run and transforms into a sleek ski-like vehicle. Blade kick-boxes a dog-thing and dives into the ski. CD and Blade mesh together like a glove.

BLADE

Let's go.

CD-ski shoots sky-wards, carrying Blade. A ceiling panel starts opening but not wide enough. Blade and CD-ski pull up sharp beneath the panel. Blade tries to hold it open as the panel starts closing.

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BLADE (CONT'D)

Next time, I'll take the bus.

CD

Don't be so nasty.

BLADE

You blew it.

CD

Hey, no fair! You wrote me remember?

BLADE

Yeah. What was I thinking?

Blade pounds on the panel with a sharp cry. The panel opens again and the pair shoot up through it.

CD

Alrighty! Once again, the Customised
Dude delivers... free!

EXT. STADIUM - DAY

Blade and CD (the jet-ski) come flying out of the grandstand roof past the LIONESSE, a cross between a panther and a marsupial lion. The lioness leaps up, hooks its claws into CD-ski, and is carried up with it. The lioness sees the world through a complex interface akin to a military tactical display. Snapshots of Blade's face are highlighted and dragged into a separate panel for comparative analysis against a facial database.

Blade leaps onto the lioness's back, dislodging it. Blade and the lioness plunge towards the field. CD-ski circles back underneath Blade. Blade drops back into her ski position. The lioness roars and dissolves as it hits the ground.

INT. STATE REGISTRY - DAY

The pages of Blade's file are being accessed. BAH4216 - Blade Alice Harkensen. The pages update, Blade is re-classified as a wanted fugitive; illegal avatar, unregistered bot owner, terrorist, data vandal, virus... The book is being thrown at her but her real world details are all unknown. The mug-shots on file are crude facial sketches. They wink at us.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blake is asleep. Her bedroom walls are plastered with anti-authoritarian posters and teen pin-ups. An artificial NANO-MOTH clings to the face of a twenty-something guy with a gravity-defying coif, near a slogan "Love life, Hate State".

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The moth flutters away, tracked by a webcam in a ceiling corner. The nano-moth lands on a CD lying on Blake's messy desk. The CD's printed label reads 'FRANC - Federal Reactive Agent (Non-Classified)' and has a crude stick figure sketch on it.

Crammed under the desk is a mess of computer hardware. A monitor screen is on, laid on its side. It displays a fly-by over rugged mountains. The nano-moth flutters over the screen. Blake's eyelids flutters.

EXT. WILDERNESS SKYLINE - DAY

Blade flies with CD (back in stick figure mode) over the rugged red mountain range. This is her private world. CD yawns and mocks the ambient music. He looks across at Blade with a gleam in his eye. CD grows a banjo out of his stomach and starts a toe-tapping tune.

CD

(singing)

Oh well I'm glad to live in this State
of mine. But I wish that I was free.
And I wish that I wuz just a dawg and
the Chief was just a tree. I--

Blade gives the banjo 'the flick' with a gesture. It dissolves. The ambient soundscape resumes. CD looks frustrated. He clears his throat noisily.

CD (CONT'D)

Hey Hack-maam, how many State troopers
does it take to break an egg?

Blade doesn't react. CD plays hand-puppets. His left transforms into Blade, his right into the Chief.

CD (CONT'D)

(as Blade)

Gee I dunno CD. But I'm just dying for
you to tell me.

(as the Chief)

I have no beef with eggs. They must
have fallen down the stairs.

CD cackles hysterically, holding his sides in laughter.

BLADE

CD, your jokes suck.

CD stops laughing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD

Lighten up Wonder Wench! I'm just followin' yer profile which means that right about now I should--

CD grabs hold of Blade's leg and spins her upside down.

BLADE

(grinning)

Hey--

They tumble towards the ground and wrestle like perfectly matched sparring partners.

EXT. OUTBACK LOOKOUT - DAY

Blade and CD dangle their feet over a red rock cliff. They look out over the outback.

BLADE

CD. What's a douchebag?

CD

Uh... Narrow minded? Conservative? Self-centered? Egocentric? Discredited member of online society? Take your pick.

BLADE

Ouch.

CD

Don't worry about it. You're never going to please everybody.

BLADE

We have to go back.

CD

You crazy? What for?

BLADE

The Chief is up to something. I want to know what it is.

CD

Haven't you done enough for one day? Don't you get tired of all this?

BLADE

I'm tired of the Chief. That's all.

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CONTINUED:

CD

Great motivation kid. You sure that's all that's bothering you?

CD sighs theatrically. His stomach screen crackles into life.

CD (CONT'D)

One moment Captain. Incoming message for you.

CD's stomach screen displays Dad knocking on a door.

BLADE

Shit. I better go.

INT. BLADE'S SPACE - DAY

Blade's personal virtual space is a void holding a untidy arrangement of personal icons and computer windows. Axel, the heroic activist, features prominently. Blade and CD fly out of a window displaying the outback.

CD

Welcome home sailor. Urgh, what a mess!

Blade looks around. She's fully alert.

BLADE

Are we clear?

Data scrolls across CD's stomach screen.

CD

Yep. Look's quiet.

Blade gesticulates and the contents of Blake's bedroom begin to materialise around them. Blake lies on her bed. In a floating window, Dad has his ear to the door. He knocks again.

BLADE

I better run. See ya.

CD looks sad and neglected.

CD

Whatever...

CD transforms into a compact-disk icon with a sad smiley face. Blake and her bed begin to materialise. Blade jumps onto it.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - DAY

The monitor screen shows a composite view of the bedroom and Blade's space. Online material fades out as the real world objects fade in. On-screen, on the bed, Blade rolls into Blake, merging with her. Blade is Blake. Blade is her avatar. An LED on the ceiling camera, labelled "RIG - Reactive Interface Grid", goes from red to green. In the real world, Blake's eyes open. The sound of drilling intensifies. As does the knocking at the door.

DAD (O.S.)
Blake, you in there?

Blake darts across to her desk. She grabs the 'FRANC' CD from the desk and dives back onto her bed. She hides it under her pillow. She gestures. The door unlocks with a click.

BLAKE
Come in.

Mum and Dad enter.

BLAKE (CONT'D)
Sorry. I didn't hear you.

DAD
(peering around)
I don't like locked doors.

Blake shifts uncomfortably.

BLAKE
I know Dad. I'm sorry.

DAD
How is that RIG?

BLAKE
Great. Heaps faster.

DAD
Good. Let me know if you need a hand.

BLAKE
OK. But I think I got the hang of it.

Dad fidgets awkwardly. Mum nudges him. They're not good at this.

DAD
Look Blake. We're so sorry. Jon and the others...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAKE
They didn't hurt anyone.

MUM
The Chief is calling them terrorists.

BLAKE
He's a liar. And a murderer.

Dad looks up nervously at the RIG cam.

DAD
Be careful what you say Blake.

BLAKE
I'm sorry.

MUM
The Chief is the law right now

DAD
And we're stuck with him.

BLAKE
(under her breath)
We don't have to be.

Mum storms out in frustration. Dad puts his arm around Blake and cuddles her. There is a barcode numbered tattoo on his forearm.

DAD
You're a lot smarter than me. So don't
make the same mistakes I did.

BLAKE
Why won't anyone take me seriously?

DAD
Blake. You're not listening--

BLAKE
I can stop him--

DAD
Stop living in a dream! Who do you
think you are? What happens if you get
caught stealing OPS again? Another
suspension?

Blake pulls away with embarrassment.

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BLAKE

It was only once.

DAD

They are not called Operator Privileges for nothing. Don't play God in someone else's system.

BLAKE

Play God? That's what the Chief's doing.

DAD

It's his world Blake. Don't muck around with it. Do I make myself clear?

BLAKE

Yes Dad.

DAD

Love you.

Dad kisses her on the forehead and leaves the room. Blake leans back on the door. She trembles and breathes in deeply. She closes her eyes.

EXT. CITYSCAPE HARBOUR - DAY

A sleek cruiser, "Rejuvenation", glides the Opera House on the virtual harbour foreshore. The Chief proudly surveys Cityscape from the front deck.

DAD (V.O.)

It's his world Blake. Don't muck around with it.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Dad sleeps with his head on the keyboard of his out-dated PC. The room is littered with books on Virtual Combat, Information Warfare and Computer Security. His face is on several jacket covers. A screensaver has CD moon-walking across the monitor.

MUM (O.S.)

Daniel? When are you coming to bed?

DAD

Whaa? Oh geez... what time is it?

Dad looks up, the impression of keys still visible on his forehead. He flails about for the mouse. CD vanishes.

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The screen comes alive with complex graphs and readouts showing the status of every device in the house. Kitchen appliances, lights, RIG...

DAD (CONT'D)
Just a minute.

Dad yawns profusely. Something catches his attention mid yawn. On-screen, a graph marked "BLAKE" is fluctuating wildly. Dad starts typing.

DAD (CONT'D)
What are you up to?

On-screen, FRANC, a dour-faced Federal Reactive Agent (a better drawn version of CD) appears wearing a trench-coat in the style of a detective.

DAD (CONT'D)
Hey FRANC. I need you to baby-sit.

EXT. CITYSCAPE SKYLINE - NIGHT

Blade and CD fly towards Cityscape. The skyline is constantly adjusting. Like plants filmed by time-lapse photography, skyscrapers and other landmarks transform. A new tower snakes its way up and around an existing one. Structures merge into one another.

BLADE
Keep an eye out for probes.

CD
Roger that.

CD picks up pace only to bounce off an invisible force-field surrounding the city. The force-field crackles, momentarily revealing a geodesic dome structure. CD yelps as sparks lick at him.

CD (CONT'D)
There goes our anonymous entry. Bummer dude.

BLADE
Come here.

Blade grabs CD by the scruff of his neck. CD squirms.

CD
Oooh. That tickles.

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CONTINUED:

Blade rolls CD out flat like a blanket across the shield. CD's smiling face is imprinted on its centre. Blade punches smiley and the shield shatters.

CD (CONT'D)

Ooorf!!

Blade shimmies through the hole, enveloped in CD's protective layer. CD reforms on the other side and nurses his jaw.

CD (CONT'D)

Nothing like a bit o' brute force, hey
Blade?

CD looks over his shoulder and sniffs the air.

BLADE

Let's make this a quick one.

CD and Blade zoom down into Cityscape.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

On-screen, the FRANC software is recording "Net Nanny" mode. In a panel, FRANC is seen slowly clambering through the hole into Cityscape.

FRANC

She found a hole. I'm going in. Err...
one second.

EXT. CITYSCAPE SKYLINE - NIGHT

The hole is now a wire-frame cylinder which is contracting into a 2D disc. FRANC is squashed.

FRANC

(muffled)
I'm having difficulty. It's some kind
of tra--.

The disc contracts to a point and vanishes. The hole is gone.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Onscreen, we see Cityscape from FRANC's perspective and a transcript of his last words.

FRANC

(very muffled)
It's some kind of tra--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD's face appears on-screen. Mock-amazement then sniggering as the image dissolves into static.

INT. CHIEF'S CABIN - NIGHT

The luxurious cabin is filled with fine art, lots of sculptured figures. The Chief rests in his private quarters. He scratches behind the lioness's ears.

CHIEF

You should have stuck to the script.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The top of the tower is a large multi-levelled chamber divided into clumps of floating consoles and windows. Technicians in DENR uniform are everywhere. A LITTLE GIRL, dressed cutesy, monitors a bank of windows and consoles with TECH #1. Behind her paces the lioness.

CHIEF (V.O.)

There is no point in scaring people.

One window shows Lana's avatar, terrified, in a stark cell. The other window shows her real body slumped in an office chair. The lioness picks up its pace.

INT. INTERLINK PIPE - NIGHT

The lioness rushes down a narrow pipe towards a pulsating light.

CHIEF (O.S.)

It's hard to imagine what it's like to see the world through someone else's eyes?

INT. LANA'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Lana's real body jolts and her eyes open as if coming out of a trance. Her heartbeat gets louder.

CHIEF (O.S.)

It takes some getting used to.

INT. CHIEF'S CABIN - NIGHT

The Chief breathes in deeply.

INT. LANA'S CELL

Lana screams.

EXT. HARBOUR - NIGHT

Blade and CD come to a stop. They hover above the harbour. CD transforms into ski mode. Blade hops on.

BLAKE
Party time people.

CD
Make some noise!

BLAKE
Crank it.

Hard techno vibrates out of CD-ski's surface as they dive down towards the ship 'Rejuvenation'.

CD
Bombs away!

A cluster of projectiles drop out of CD-ski. Each hit on the boat sends a surge of voltage running through it.

BLAKE
Yoo hoo Chief. Wake up.

The ski dashboard shows a radar screen with five blips approaching.

CD
We got company.

Five stingray-like shapes surge up out of the harbour in attack formation.

BLADE
Raytracers. Where did they come from?

The rays arch their tails forward and fire bursts of energy from them.

CD
Watch yer head Blade. Those rays will fry ya.

The ski twists and turns smoothly to avoid each of the energy bursts.

BLADE
I think we got their attention.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The CD-ski barrel-rolls away from the rays and dives down towards the water. The rays follow in pursuit as the jet-ski skims above the harbour, heading towards the Cityscape on its shores.

EXT. GEORGE STREET - NIGHT

Blade and CD fly along the rooftops.

BLADE
(looking backwards)
Not too quick. They'll lose us.

CD
Too slow. Now too fast. Too bloody fussy. That's what you are!

An energy burst just misses them. It hits a giant Planet Hollywood globe. It topples off a building. The five rays zoom into view and chase the jet-ski down the street. The giant globe bounces down the street and flattens avatars.

EXT. CITYSCAPE SQUARE - NIGHT

Blade steers CD-ski down into the square alongside the DENR building, an imposing skyscraper. Blade looks back over her shoulder.

BLADE
Now you've gone and lost them. Silly.

A hand forms itself out of CD (jet-ski) and pokes Blade in the ribs.

CD
You talking to me? Hey! You talking to me?

BLADE
Hey. Cut it out! Stop.

The hand disappears. The ski flies around the square, weaving through a crowd of avatar SUITS. A GRANNIE Barbie, with blue-rinse hairdo, has tipped over and is trying to right herself unaided, like a beetle. Blade reaches down and pulls Grannie back up onto her feet.

GRANNIE
Thanks dear. I can't get the hang of this thing. Oh my...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The rays come shooting out of a subway entrance. CD-ski loops up and out of their way. Avatars run in panic in all directions. Some dissolve.

BLADE

CD. Are you ready to copy?

CD

Copy that.

We move with the jet-ski as it goes up into a steep climb, races up the side of the DENR building, and ducks over the rooftop. The ski flies low across the rooftop.

BLADE

And paste it.

CD

Done.

BLADE

Gracias Señor D.

They divide into two identical pairs. One pair, Blade and CD (jet-ski), dives down into the roof while the other, a decoy, flies straight ahead across the city. The rays race ahead, shooting like mad.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Dad searches through junk on his desk. On-screen static clears. FRANC re-appears. On-screen the message: "Re-spawning processes..."

DAD

Maggie? Have you been in here? Tidying my desk?

MUM (O.S.)

Not likely. Why?

DAD

I'm missing something. A CD.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - NIGHT

Blade and CD hover in a vertical ventilation shaft. CD's stomach screen unfolds. The screen is split in two. One side scrolls code, while the other displays a blueprint view of the building shafts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE
 (consulting CD's screen)
 There's time for one more run.

CD
 Which way Chief?

BLADE
 Don't call me that.
 (pointing)
 Check this out--

On-screen a large chamber is highlighted on the blueprint.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - NIGHT

Blade and CD step into a vast chamber filled with thousands of humanoid figures suspended in a grid pattern.

BLADE
 What is it?

CD
 Avatars on ice. Groovy.

Blade and CD move along a row of bodies. Each is encased within a translucent shell. Each shell has a bar gauge and a barcode (like Dad's). CD leans over a casing.

CD (CONT'D)
 This is weird. They're all alive. But they're not connected.

Blade leans over to examine a casing which is faintly glowing. Inside is a tough looking guy with a gauge at 5%.

BLADE
 What do you mean "Not connected"? Who is this?

CD's stomach screen shows the State file on the tough guy.

CD (O.S.)
 Say hello to Contestant 2403 Mr. Julio Barnes. Julio is doing time for double homicide in the State Pen. His avatar must be around here someplace. This is some kind of tracker.

BLADE
 For prisoners.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD

Julio likes strawberry ice-cream, brunettes, hey! And bowling. Good thing there's no link to this guy. Wait a sec. That's weird. No link. That means there's no meat to this guy.

The State file lists 'Online' status alongside flickering brain wave readouts.

BLADE

(pointing at readouts)

There must be a link. Someone's thinking.

CD

I dunno. This is some kinda weird neural setup. If you ask me, these babies are self-contained.

CD bounces down the aisle ahead of Blade.

BLADE

You're not making sense CD. An avatar is just a shell. There has to be someone in the flesh controlling it.

CD peers into several more avatar casings.

CD

Then why does this look like life support?

CD leans over a casing that holds AXEL, the pin-up from Blake's bedroom. His gauge is at 55%.

CD (CONT'D)

(to Axel)

Hey, we know you---

Blade doesn't hear. She's further down the row.

BLADE

I think you're right CD. This is some kind of freaky ass prison.

CD

Then I seriously suggest we split.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLADE

If the Chief is keeping people online
then we could be--.

CD's stomach screen starts flashing and pinging with alarm messages.

CD

In deep shit.

BLADE

Go!

Blade and CD dart back to the wall they entered through. There is no hole anymore. CD moves through the wall but Blade collides with it.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Shit.

CD's head reappears back through the wall, worried.

CD

What's up doc?

The far wall of the chamber is replaced with a gross distorted image of the Chief's face. It leers at them. The wall moves towards Blade.

BLADE

I'm losing OPS.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - DAY

CD is halfway through the wall straining to pull Blade back into the shaft. Blade's fist comes through the wall, punches CD's stomach, and sends him flying back out into the shaft.

CD

Attagirl Blade! You can do it!

CD grabs hold of Blade's arm and pulls. He braces his feet against the wall.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

The Chief and the little girl watch multiple views into the Avatar Gallery. On-screen Blade tries to escape. Her upper arms have already disappeared through the wall. In a window, a selection rectangle tries to focus on Blade. Blade keeps shrugging it off her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LITTLE GIRL
Stop her from grabbing OPS.

The Interlink pipe materialises.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - DAY

A wave of energy shoots out from the wall with the Chief's mouth and knocks Blade down to the ground. CD comes back through the wall and stands over Blade as she groggily regains his feet.

CD
Blade? Blade! C'mon mate, we gotta go.

A silvery cage forms around them. Blade tries to break out but the cage is impregnable.

BLADE
CD I can't. Go get help.

CD
Huh?

Blade bangs on the cage in desperation.

BLADE
Don't let them trace you.

CD hesitates and looks around in confusion.

CD
Hey, I can't just leave--

BLADE
Beat it CD.

CD
You didn't design me to function alone.

BLADE
Get outta here!

CD looks shocked.

CD
Well... if you say so I guess. I guess
I'll... err... bye.

CD transforms into an elaborate series of mathematical equations that resolve at zero. Blade sees the lioness leap at her.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

The monitor screen is all static. The nano-moth flutters against it. Blake lies motionless on her bed, her mind captured. Her brown eyes bulge open.

KARMA (O.S.)

The subject is immobilised.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - NIGHT

Blade's green eyes stare forward. Reflected in them is the gallery space. With gestures, the little girl makes the avatars float out of rows into a molecular structure. Streams of light shoot from body to body. The structure continues to update on its own. A dog-thing materialises and sniffs the air. The Chief and Karma accompany a giant (mouse-style) pointer as it plucks the frozen Blade from her cage. Blade is dragged through the solid roof of the cage, like a ghost, and dragged across the gallery. FRANC peers out of an avatar casing at her. Blade is placed into a nearby empty casing, identical to the rest.

LITTLE GIRL

Sir, we have a problem.

CHIEF

What is it?

LITTLE GIRL

We can't find her source.

The Chief looks at Karma. The little girl hands Karma a small card which expands into Blade's State file. A photo of Blade in the stadium scoreboard. Crude stick faces as seen earlier.

KARMA

The ID is fake. All the links are corrupted.

CHIEF

Any suspects?

KARMA

No. This is new.

CHIEF

I want you to find her and bring her in. Start with the hospitals.

The Chief scrunches the card in a ball and lobs it onto the faceplate of Blade's avatar casing. The gauge is green and shows 0%.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KARMA

She won't last long.

CHIEF

Then we had better get started.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Dad forces open the bedroom door and rushes over to the bed, Mum is right behind. Blake's body lies motionless on the bed. Her eyes are wide open. Dad checks her pulse and glances at the RIG.

MUM

Oh no... Blake.

DAD

She's breathing.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - DAY

On-screen, a static-filled recording of the Avatar Gallery. Mum peers anxiously over Dad's shoulder at the screen, clenching him.

FRANC (O.S.)

My last contact with her.

A dead line tone.

SYSTEM (O.S.)

Connection lost.

DAD

Damn!

Dad slumps back in his chair, exhausted.

MUM

God I hate computers. I don't understand any of this.

On-screen, cueing back through FRANC's memory, Blade crosses the Avatar Gallery. The image of Blade freezes and enlarges.

DAD

(peering at screen)

Is that you Blake?

Dad hits a key and brings up Blade's State file on-screen.

DAD (CONT'D)

It has to be.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUM

Why would she want to look older?
There's nothing wrong with her.

The crude stick figure faces appear on-screen.

DAD

Oh no. Perfectly normal behavior for a
kid. It must be in the genes.

The Chief and the little girl's conversation REPLAYS.

LITTLE GIRL (V.O.)

We have a problem?

CHIEF (V.O.)

What is it?

LITTLE GIRL (V.O.)

We can't find her source.

DAD

Good girl.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - NIGHT

CD paces the shaft in a fury. He noisily rewinds back through memories of Blade. CD lip-syncs to Blade as scenes play on his stomach screen.

BLADE (V.O.)

CD I can't get out. Go get help.

On-screen, the DENR blueprint zooms into view. Lines trace out exit routes through Cityscape. Blade's breathing as the playback is amplified.

BLADE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Don't let 'em trace you.

CD hiccups and goes through violent contortions. He's malfunctioning.

CD

(quicker and quicker)

I try so hard improvising my subs off
for that bloody Blade and now look at
me! I'm gonna lose it! Do you believe
that? Fourier's fouled me up, the
little fu--

He looks up suddenly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE (V.O.)
Get outta here. Beat it CD!

CD flattens out like a mat. A sniffing dog-thing walks over him.

INT. TEMPORARY STORAGE TUNNEL MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

It's pitch black then bursts of static reveal Blade's eyes. They flit about. The tunnel is filled with a seething mass of half-rendered/half wire-frame human figures, misshapen with agonized expressions, the PRISONERS. They groan and claw at each other as they are pushed down the tunnel. The prisoners dissolve on contact with a grate at the far end. Blade's body is stretched and deformed. She struggles against the tide of bodies, avoids vicious swipes from mad prisoners.

At the mouth of the tunnel, fresh prisoners pour into the tunnel. Axel and the OLD-TIMERS sit on a ledge above the seething mass. Blade forces her way back towards the mouth of the tunnel. Axel points her out to his mates. He whistles.

AXEL
Keep going lady! There's holes all
over this joint.

Blade looks up. She is stunned to recognise Axel.

AXEL (CONT'D)
Look out! Behind you.

A PROBE, a grotesque spherical creature, with giant eye and fanged mouth, materialises through the tunnel grate and flies towards Blade. Numerous smaller eyes protrude on waving stalks from all around its body. The old-timers boo and hiss enthusiastically. It hovers above Blade. The probe shoots out tendrils of light from its eyes. The beams pluck Blade out of the crowd. The probe carries her back down the tunnel.

AXEL (CONT'D)
Don't let 'em break you.

Blade mouths "Axel" as she dissolves into the far wall of the tunnel.

EXT. WILDERNESS SKYLINE - DAY

Moving over the rugged mountains of Blade's wilderness world, as before. The peaks are now covered in snow.

TECH #1 (O.S.)
Warden?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The little girl turns to him.

TECH #1 (CONT'D)

I may have something. This came out of
a proxy cache in the Bahamas.

Blurry images of CD and the activists flicker in the foreground.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

Try the trace again.

A barely distinguishable Blake looks out at us, her eyes
widening.

TECH #1 (O.S.)

Hold on.

Blake's image folds into a paper airplane and glides off.

TECH #1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Damn! I've never seen a system act
like this. Who the hell is she?

The sun begins to set over the mountains. A formation of lights
, like a will-o-the-wisp, rises up from the mountains and shoots
into the foreground. Our image jitters with the impact.
Lightning dances across the inside of our screen. The horizon
glows with the sun's departing rays.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

It's an attack!

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

Blade struggles in mid-air surrounded by windows that show
biometric graphs and brain-wave readouts. The probe hangs above.
Its light tendrils manipulate her body, poke, prod, and spin her
around. Blade sees a nearby window with blueprints. She
struggles. The little girl and DENR technicians are distracted.
Their instruments go haywire. A large window displays the
wilderness and is enveloped by crackling electricity. Lightning
shoots out, hits other windows. The wilderness window replicates
itself again and again. Blade's body jerks rigid. Her eyes bulge
as a hundred points of light move in a cluster across her skull.

BLADE (V.O.)

Don't let them trace you. Don't let
them trace you.

Keyboard characters float through the aqueous humour of Blade's
eyeballs. Her eyeballs roll back in their sockets.

EXT. WILDERNESS SKYLINE - NIGHT

The mountains are now completely overlaid with integrated circuits. Lightning surges down wires in the landscape. The mountains distort with violent movements. In the distance, a vortex swallows the landscape as it approaches.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)
Widen the array!

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER

Blade breaks free of the probe and runs to the blueprint window. She places her hand on the window. Blueprint data is sucked up through her fingers. "Downloading System Operator Privileges" on-screen. The little girl turns.

LITTLE GIRL
Stop her!

The probe's tendrils seize Blade. One hits her in the head and knocks her unconscious.

INT. BLADE'S CELL - DAY

Blade regains consciousness. She is lying on a metallic floor in a void. She tries to look over the edge of the floor but is repelled by an invisible force-field. She gesticulates. A static-filled window appears. Blade bangs on the window frame. The screen switches between static-filled channels. "ACCESS DENIED" on-screen. Blade looks around nervous and places her hand on the screen. Blueprint data floods out into the screen. "READ ACCESS ENABLED". Blade gesticulates to dismiss the window. It vanishes just as the little girl steps out of the void onto the floor.

LITTLE GIRL
Blade Alice Harkensen, you have been found guilty of crimes against the State.

BLADE
Uh huh.

Blade casually circles the little girl, prodding the air with a foot. She feels resistance, another force-field.

LITTLE GIRL
You have been mentally detained by the Department of the Environment and Network Resources.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE
(rubbing her eyes)
Cool. And you are?

LITTLE GIRL
The Warden. Whoever and whatever you
don't want me to be.

Blake lunges at the girl, bouncing off the force-field. The little girl is startled but recovers quickly. She screams in rage.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

The monitor is now on the desk. On-screen, images of Blake's head surrounded by medical readouts and displays. Mum and Dad watch Blake's brain on an EEG.

MUM
She should be in hospital.

Blake lies immobile on her bed.

DAD
No. She's safer here.

EXT. PARK CLEARING - DAY

Blade materialises in a tree-filled park next to Axel and two younger PRISONERS. All four are dressed in black and hold automatic weapons. Axel holds an Uzi at the ready as he turns around. Blade tries to pry loose an automatic that is attached to her hand.

BLADE
Ugh! It's stuck!

PRISONER #1
Hey Axel. We got a newbie.

The younger prisoners laugh.

AXEL
(to Blade)
This is a sim. They're going to play
games with us.

BLADE
(looking around)
Not with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A bullet flies into a tree trunk besides Blade. First person shooter view of the four prisoners. Someone is running through the trees, shooting a pistol.

AXEL

Get used to it. This is a cop trainer.

A blonde POLICE OFFICER in sunglasses runs into the clearing, firing wildly. Prisoner #1 takes a direct hit in the chest and goes flying backwards. Blade stares in shock at Prisoner #1 who is still alive despite a massive chest wound. He winks and blows her a kiss.

AXEL (CONT'D)

And we're the bad guys. So move it!

Axel and Prisoner #2 fire back at the police officer.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD)) - NIGHT

Dad types. His eyes are deep rimmed with fatigue. Mum leans over his shoulder. On-screen, FRANC looks around, nervous, in a fedora hat.

MUM

I hope you know what you're doing
Daniel.

EXT. CITYSCAPE STADIUM - NIGHT

FRANC and Dad's unfashionably low-resolution avatar get up from seats in the grandstand. FRANC's attire barely disguises that he's a bot. Dad pats him on the back, steering him past a nearby trooper.

DAD (V.O.)

So do I.

Dad watches FRANC disappear into the crowd.

EXT. PARK TREES - DAY

Blade, Axel, and Prisoner #2 run through the trees. The police officer chases them. Prisoner #2 is shot in the back. Axel is hit in the shoulder and cries out in pain. He stumbles. Blade drags Axel behind a tree. Axel grits his teeth in agony.

AXEL

The first question I always ask is. Do
they know we're real?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The police officer fires off the last of his ammo. His gun transforms into a baton.

POLICE OFFICER

Damn!

The officer ducks behind a tree and recovers his breath. He tucks the baton into his belt holster and after a moment draws it out again. It is a gun once more. He takes a deep breath and runs off. Blade leans against a tree, tracing patterns in the air. Axel acts as look out.

AXEL

Second question. Do they know that they hurt us?

A small window opens up in front of Blade, displaying a map of the park.

BLADE

Right. Get your bearings here and make a run for it. There's an exit up ahead.

AXEL

What? Where did you get that?

BLADE

Operator privileges. You coming?

AXEL

Hell yeah.
(as he tries to move)
Aaargh!

Blade leads Axel through the trees. Her map window keeps pace with Blade as she runs. Axel limps.

BLADE

The back door is around here somewhere.

AXEL

I don't see shit.

Blade stops at the base of a tree.

BLADE

Up here.

Axel looks up. The branches form a thick canopy high above them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AXEL

You've got to be kidding--

BLADE

Hurry.

The window vanishes. Blade climbs up the tree. Axel follows, with difficulty.

AXEL

Wait for me.

There is a big gap before the next branches. Blade leaps up into the air and grabs hold of the lowest branch. She swings up around and onto it. She hangs off the branch by her feet and reaches down for Axel. Axel jumps up and grabs hold of Blade's hands. Axel is in agony and unable to pull himself up.

BLADE

Come on Axel.

AXEL

Do I know you?

BLADE

No. You don't.

Axel loses one hand grip and swings. Blade flails around and grabs it again. Axel cries out in pain. His shoulder wound bleeds.

AXEL

I can't. It hurts.

Blade strains to pull Axel up with all her strength.

BLADE

Come on. We're nearly there. We'll get you out, fix you up and then we'll go after the Chief. OK?

Axel looks perplexed, momentarily distracted.

AXEL

Yeah. Whatever.

He grits his teeth and pulls himself up. Blade pulls him up onto the branch. They are almost at the canopy.

BLADE

You alright?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AXEL

I think so. Thanks.

Blade helps Axel up into the canopy.

BLADE

The exit's right above us---

Blade stops. She listens for a moment then disappears into the canopy.

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

Stay here.

AXEL

Hey wait. Who are you?

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

Freeze ass-hole!

Down on the ground, the police officer has his gun aimed at Axel. Blade dives out of a different part of the canopy and knocks the officer to the ground.

BLADE

Are you feeling this, officer? Do you know that I'm real?

Blade pins the officer's weapon arm and clubs him. The officer flails around like a cockroach on its back. He is not designed for unarmed conflict. The officer's body warps and dissolves.

AXEL

Way to go! You nailed him.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - DAY

CD paces back and forth in the shaft, still furious. His head is bent, peering at his stomach screen. On-screen, CD's last interaction with Blade is being cued noisily back and forth. CD giggles as though drunk. He looks up at us.

CD

What?! Haven't you seen a bug before?

One of his eyes falls out.

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - NIGHT

A bank of monitors tracking prisoners and Cityscape avatars. The lioness stretches out and notices a window onto CD going crazy in the ventilation shaft.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SYSTEM (V.O.)
We have a foreign agent. Standby.

The lioness growls and gets to its feet.

EXT. CANOPY - DAY

Blade and Axel plough upwards through the dense branches. Axel slumps down to the ground in pain.

BLADE
Don't stop.

AXEL
I'll catch up.

BLADE
But we're nearly there.

AXEL
I know my limits. How about you?

BLADE
I know how to take care of myself.

AXEL
Then why are you here?

Blade glares at him. Axel guffaws. A stupid and infectious sound.

AXEL (CONT'D)
Ouch!

Blade crouches down to look at Axel's shoulder. The wound is visibly healing.

BLADE
How is it healing so fast?

AXEL
This is the head bin. It's all in the mind. Lucky for us, these minds take a hell of a beating.

BLADE
How much of a beating?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

That depends on you. They're still testing the system, trying to work out how to keep us alive. But this place is not healthy.

BLADE

How long have you been here?

AXEL

No idea. A week? Ten? Who's counting? No one lasts that long. No matter how good your source is, soon or later, you'll do one sim too many and you'll fry.

BLADE

I'm not a prisoner. Not in real life.

AXEL

Soon you will be. And you'll be grateful. Your mind won't last a day without the physical links to your flesh in place.

BLADE

Then we better hurry.

INT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

Blade and Axel emerge out of the canopy to find themselves just under the rim of a large hexagonal cell. Overhead, the sky is made up of more cells. They clamber out into the midst of a vast spherical chamber. The Avatar Gallery hangs in the space in the center of the chamber. Its walls are transparent like spiderwebs. The curved surface of the chamber is covered with an uneven honeycomb of cells.

BLADE

What is this place?

AXEL

'Sim Central' we call it. Each cell, a different sim. The Chief's making a fortune. It's amazing how many slave labour deals you can cut with a system like this.

BLADE

He's found the killer app.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

Yeah. That's us. Bastard.

An ellipsoid-shaped tower floats in the distance above the honeycomb. Light shoots out from the tower. It connects a cluster of avatars to one of the cells.

BLADE

There might be OPS in that control tower. I'll check it out.

Blade runs off along cell walls towards the tower. Axel admires her for a moment then sticks his fingers in his mouth, blows a two-note whistle. Across the vast chamber, a cell glows once. A beam of light streaks towards Axel. Axel jumps up as the light reaches him. A shiny red convertible materialises around him. Axel revs the engine and takes off after Blade. The car pulls alongside Blade. A door swings open for her.

AXEL

Newbies. They always do things the hard way.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - NIGHT

CD has literally tied himself up in knots and rocks back and forward in the shaft. He wears an inane grin. The lioness is stalking him in the darkness nearby.

CD

Good morning boys and girls. Today we're gonna try a little self-help recipe. As you can see, I really need it.

The lioness creeps down the shaft behind CD.

CD (CONT'D)

First, cut off the circulation. Like so. Then you can attempt the simple cleansing procedure.

CD groans and gasps as he pulls his knots tighter and tighter.

CD (CONT'D)

(strained)

Don't try this at home kids.

FRANC reaches up from an opening in the shaft and pulls CD out of harm's way just as the lioness pounces. It growls in displeasure.

INT. DATA STREAM - NIGHT

FRANC and CD tumble end-over-end down a cylindrical shaft made up of hexi-decimal characters and widgets.

CD
Faster! Faster! More! More!

FRANC controls their descent with gestures. They stop tumbling.

FRANC
I need to patch your core. It's not going to hurt.

CD
Pain!! I need pain!!

FRANC clamps a hand over CD's mouth. CD screams through FRANC's fingers.

FRANC
Keep quiet. We don't want to risk data corruption.

FRANC releases his hand.

CD
(to the viewer)
We don't want to risk data corruption.
What a nerd.

FRANC slaps a circular patch onto CD's forehead.

CD (CONT'D)
Aeow! You bitch.

The patch begins working. CD's eyes glaze over.

CD (CONT'D)
Crazy.

FRANC stares into CD's eyes.

CD (CONT'D)
(dreamily)
Aaaaah....I see stars.

The shaft ends abruptly. FRANC and CD hit the bottom hard but remain on their feet. They eye each other off, wary.

CD (CONT'D)
Let me guess. We're related.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANC

Federal Reactive Agent. Non-classified. Same as you.

CD

I'm happy for you FRANC. Now what about Blade?

INT. CAR - DAY

Axel shifts gears like a pro.

BLADE

Where did you get this?

AXEL

The car? It's from a sim.

BLADE

You stole it.

INT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

The car swerves along the hexagonal maze of cell walls. Axel puts the car through its paces. He navigates the treacherous route across each cell with skill.

AXEL (V.O.)

No. I copied it. It's a not-so limited edition.

Axel guffaws loudly. Blade cringes.

INT. CAR - DAY

Blade studies Axel.

BLADE

(quietly)

You're not what I expected.

AXEL

Say what?

BLADE

This place. It's not what I expected.

Blade peers down into cells as they hurtle past. Each cell contains a very different environment. In one, a tube-shaped racetrack running through an alien city.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

The Chief has a pretty mean head for business. You would not believe how popular us prisoners are. Sorry, us mental resources.

Axel sizes up Blade.

AXEL (CONT'D)

You know. I used to be famous.

BLADE

(without looking up)

Really?

AXEL

Yeah. I was what they called a "cyber-athlete". Just a fancy word for hard-core gamer but that's why I'm in here. I was good.

Another cell contains World War One troops in their trenches.

BLADE

What happened?

AXEL

I got mixed up with the wrong crowd. The worst mistake I ever made. Not gamers, in case you're wondering. It was those fucking activists.

BLADE

Excuse me?

AXEL

These guys had me doing lousy PR for them. Signing autographs. A photo shoot. You know. All that minor celebrity shit they lay on for teenyboppers. Hey. I was good at it.

Blade has gone red. She catches a glimpse of a red dragon breathing fire upon several knights in a cell.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Anyway, it all ended in tears. The Chief needed some more guinea pigs in here and there I was. A wire-head orphan with my face plastered all over these stupid "Hate State" posters.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AXEL(CONT'D)

It wasn't a technically a crime but
who needs the law when you've got a
place like this?

BLADE

You're not an activist.

AXEL

No way. It was a gig. I can't even
remember what they called themselves.

Another cell contains a slo-mo shoot-out between people in
designer leather outfits and sunglasses and policemen.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Look at those posers.

BLADE

Stop the car.

EXT. SIM CENTRAL - NIGHT

FRANC and CD materialise and fall to the ground in the midst of
the sim cell openings.

CD

Thanks for the patch dude. I'll see
you round.

CD starts walking away. FRANC blocks him.

FRANC

You're not going anywhere. You'll get
caught again. We have to hide.

FRANC tries to hustle CD into a vine-encrusted cell.

CD

Hands off buddy! I make my own
choices.

CD is distracted by a flying object in the distance.

CD (CONT'D)

Hey. Check out the birdy. What's that
about?

FRANC grabs CD in a choke-hold and the momentum carries them
into the tomb cell.

INT. CAR - DAY

The car has stopped. The control tower looms ahead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL
What's wrong?

BLADE
(thinking aloud)
You were never a member of Eco-
Alliance.

AXEL
That's the one! That's the name.
(frowning)
Did I tell you that?

BLADE
You never protested against the Chief.

AXEL
Err no. I mean yes. Well, not exactly.
What do you want me to say?

BLADE
Shit.

Blade gets out, slams the door and starts walking away. Axel gets out and runs after her.

AXEL
Hang on. What's this got to do with
you?

BLADE
It means I can't trust you.

Axel snorts derisively.

AXEL
Trust. A beautiful thing. Especially
in the head bin. You won't even tell
me your name.

Blade stops and turns around.

BLADE
Blade.

AXEL
(smiling)
Sure babe. Sure it is.

Blade avoids his gaze.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AXEL (CONT'D)
But that's OK. I trust you.

Axel guffaws. Blade looks at him suspiciously.

AXEL (CONT'D)
See? It's easy.

BLADE
(under her breath)
It's simple.

Blade walks away.

AXEL
Wait! Blade. This is for you. Thanks
for showing me the door.

Axel hands Blade a SCRIPT THING - a device the size of a large fat credit card with crude buttons marked on one side, and gold prongs on the other.

AXEL (CONT'D)
For good luck.

Blade gives it a squeeze. The box reshapes into a ball.

AXEL (CONT'D)
Shit! It works...

He tries to snatch it back off Blade. No chance, she's too quick.

BLADE
(frowning)
What's the big deal. Here take it.

Blade throws the script-thing up in the air and walks away. Axel catches the script thing as though it was priceless.

AXEL
"Just a script thing", she says. "Just
a script-thing"! Do you know how long
I've been trying to make it do that?

INT. TOMB - NIGHT

FRANC and CD are hidden in the thick foliage of the tomb,
looking upwards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL (O.S.)

Come on. Don't look at me like that.
We're in this together.

CD glares at FRANC, breathing over his shoulder.

CD

You're getting on my nerves FRANC.

A giant scaly foot squashes CD and foliage into the ground. The Allosaurus walks over them, oblivious to their presence. CD regains his shape. He looks up at the dinosaur's rear-end with disdain.

CD (CONT'D)

What the hell is your problem? Ya big oaf!

(to FRANC)

I don't think it can see us.

FRANC

That's good. Then we're not a target.

The dinosaur sniffs around in front of them. CD leaps onto the dinosaur's leg.

CD

But I need attention!

FRANC grabs CD by the scruff of the neck, and pulls him behind a pile of rubble.

FRANC

(whispering)

Quiet you idiot! What's wrong with you?

CD

I need Blade.

The lioness pads down into the tomb through the archway and sniffs the air.

EXT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

Axel walks along the edge of the cell with the tomb, vines cover its sides. He nurses the script thing. Blade follows behind.

BLADE

Where did you steal that from?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

It was made by a friend of mine. He said he could get us out. Before he got fried.

BLADE

Let me see.

AXEL

No. Let me show you.

Axel peers down into the cell. There is a crunching noise below. Axel squeezes the ball between his hands and holds out his palm. The script thing transforms to match the colour of his hand.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Pretty cool huh?

Axel reshapes the script-thing into a ball and winds up to pitch it into the tomb.

BLADE

Axel, don't--

The ball arcs down into the tomb.

AXEL

Don't worry. I've got some more.

Blade and Axel peer over the edge of the cell. Vines block their view of a large creature below.

BLADE

That's not what I meant.

There is an snarl from the tomb.

INT. TOMB - NIGHT

The lioness looks upwards at the foliage. The dinosaur looks up and hisses. CD cranes his neck upwards. From his perspective, the foliage dissolves to wire frame, to reveal Blade and Axel.

CD

(whispering)

Blade, look out--

FRANC gags CD. Too late. The lioness spins around and heads towards them, straight past the dinosaur. Axel's ball flies into the tomb and goes splat against the dinosaur's head as it flattens out. Time accelerates. Everything happens too quickly. The dinosaur has technical difficulties.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It bellows, swings its tail, and smashes the lioness into the side wall. FRANC grabs CD by the wrist. CD struggles to break free. FRANC pulls him across the tomb and out through the archway.

CD (CONT'D)

What ya doing ya moron? I don't want to be with you.

The lioness materialises in front of them and snarls. It swipes, and hooks FRANC's coat with a claw.

EXT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

Axel peers down into the tomb through the foilage, trying to make sense of the ruckus.

BLADE

Let's get out of here.

AXEL

Hang on. I want to see what happens.

A bat-thing (a dog-thing with wings) lifts Axel up from behind in its talons and swoops away towards the control tower.

AXEL (CONT'D)

The car!

Another bat-thing swoops down to get Blade. Blade somersaults out of the way and sprints back to the car. She leaps into the driver's seat.

INT. CAR - DAY

Blade reaches down for the ignition. The bat-thing slams into her door and swipes at her. Blade leaps out the other door.

INT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

Blade runs along the top of the cell walls. She somersaults out of reach of the bat-thing snapping at her heels. A third bat thing flies up out of a cell at her. Blade ducks, loses her balance, and falls into the adjoining cell.

EXT. ATMOSPHERE - DAY

Blade plummets down through clear blue sky. The ground below is endless sand dunes. A missile shrieks past Blade. A MIG-29 Foxbat streaks by overhead. Behind Blade, an F-16 does crazy maneuvers to shake the missile off its tail.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blade looks up to see the bat-thing streaks downwards at her. Blade gesticulates, a data window expands above her. It acts as a parachute. The bat-thing smashes through the window, dazed. The F-16 explodes in a ball of fire nearby.

Blade grabs hold of the bat-thing and they plummet down together, clawing at each other. Blade rips open the bat thing's side, to reveal a wire-frame torso with various data panels.

BLADE

Thanks for the OPS, bat-thing!

Blade rams her fingers into a data panel. They suck up hexadecimal characters.

CHIEF (O.S.)

That's enough.

Everything freezes. The desert, plane, and blue sky scroll out of view. Blade and the bat-thing are left frozen in a void.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The screens show prisoners in their cells. Axel in one. Blade materialises into another, before vanishing and materialises in Axel's cell.

INT. AXEL'S CELL - NIGHT

Blade falls to the floor.

AXEL

How the hell did you do that? I thought you got away.

Blade gets up, opening her window next to Axel.

BLADE

I'm working on it.

Using her window, Blade calls up network diagrams and systems data.

AXEL

But you let 'em take my car. What a waste.

BLADE

Maybe not.

"READ ACCESS: You have full read privileges." on-screen. The information on-screen scrolls past at a rapid pace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

No idea. What's it saying?

BLADE

It says we're in luck.

AXEL

How?

BLADE

There's too much going on. Way too much.

On-screen, a complex network diagram showing Cityscape, Interlink, the State Registry, and other public service systems grouped around a central hub.

BLADE (CONT'D)

(pointing)

Look how many systems use this hub.

AXEL

(uncomprehending)

That would be about right. The bastards!

Blade tries not to smile. She strokes a central node of the diagram. The image zooms in on a network hub and switches to a diagrammatic view of a submarine. The image shudders. Static disrupts the picture.

BLADE (O.S.)

That's it. That's how we do it.

AXEL

Do what?

BLADE

Get out. The containment grid, Registry, Cityscape, all these sims. They're all on the same network.

Axel looks blank.

AXEL

(frowning)

And that's good...

BLADE

(pointing)

It's dodgy. Way dodgy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLADE(CONT'D)

Any problem with one of these and you could spike the whole network. If we can bring down the containment grid somehow, we get out. Everything's connected.

AXEL

Everything's connected. Gotcha...

Blade flicks between different data screens.

BLADE

I've got read OPS but I need write OPS for control.

AXEL

Fair enough.

On-screen the view turns to static. The window explodes into fragments.

BLADE

Damn. No more read OPS.

Axel guffaws. Blade glares at him.

AXEL

I didn't say anything.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

A window plays a recording of Blade and Axel in their cell.

BLADE (O.S.)

(recorded)

I've got read OPS but I need write OPS for control.

The Chief and Karma peer down at the window.

KARMA

Dangerous. She's walking through level one security protocols like they don't exist. Get rid of her.

The Chief strokes Karma's head.

CHIEF

Don't be jealous. She's a pussycat. I can handle her.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Blade materialises inside a small gothic chapel. A likeness of the Chief in a stained glass window looks down at her.

CHIEF (O.S.)
It's time we met.

Blade spins around to see the Chief. She drops to the ground, trying to kick his feet out from under him. The Chief is too quick. He grabs her wrist and pulls her close.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
You see, I'd really like to meet you in the flesh. But you don't seem to want that.

Blade can't help but admire his looks for a second but then pulls free. The Chief grows a foot taller and steps forward.

BLADE
You don't scare me.

CHIEF
Good. I'm not trying to scare you. Especially now we know who you are.

Blade remains poker-faced.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
You're a real pain in the ass. But I like your style. Maybe we can cut a deal.

BLADE
What kind of deal?

CHIEF
Stop fooling around and I'll let you work for me. You can go free.

BLADE
Really.

CHIEF
You're a talented woman. You like collecting OPS? I'll give OPS you've never dreamed of. All you have to do is play by the rules. Let's do something constructive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE

I'm going to bring you down. That will be constructive.

The Chief bends over backwards and his body zooms back, merges into his likeness in the stained glass. The likeness speaks.

CHIEF

And your family. Don't you care about them?

BLADE

You don't know anything about my family.

CHIEF

Is that right?

(smiling)

I see your father didn't teach you anything. Didn't he teach you not to play with matches.

Blade grabs a nearby candlestick holder and hurls it like a spear. The Chief laughs as his image shatters.

CHIEF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You're pretty quick for a girl, aren't you?

BLADE

If you touched my parents...

CHIEF

What happens to them is entirely up to you Blade. Think about it.

The Chief's image vanishes from the glass shards. A large bald Franciscan MONK in fighting stance appears before Blade. The monk is armed with a quarterstaff.

BLADE

Christ! What do you want?

MONK

Don't you dare blaspheme in here!

Blade kicks the staff out of his hands and snaps it in one swift movement.

BLADE

Get a life, geek.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blade gets a fist in the face. The monk attacks Blade with a swift progression of bare-handed moves, smashes her back through the pews. Blade retaliates but is no match for the monk who pummels her relentlessly.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - NIGHT

The gauge on Blade's avatar casing goes up, from 17%, with the sound of each blow.

MONK (O.S.)
Pray for salvation. My child.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Blade looks up, groggy, as the monk executes a killer combo of moves. Blade leaps up and grabs hold of a low rafter. She pulls herself up onto one of several rafters that run the length of the chapel. The monk does the same. They fight. Blade gets in a good blow and knocks the monk off the rafter.

BLADE (V.O.)
Where's the holes? There's gotta be
holes. Think about it.

Blade sprints along the rafters and somersaults down behind the altar.

MONK
You feeling hot little lady?

The monk has a hard-on in his cassock.

BLADE (V.O.)
Fucking role-players.

Blade feels around the altar for a secret catch or lever. The monk approaches as he smashes through the pews.

MONK
Stop running around. I have to get
back to work.

BLADE (V.O.)
Get lost creep.

Blade kicks the back of the altar, her foot disappears into it. The back of the altar is not solid. A back door. Blade dives straight into the altar and disappears, just as the monk flies over the top.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MONK

Aeiiii!

The monk lands badly. He rips his cassock open.

INT. JUNK CHAMBER - NIGHT

Blade falls to the ground inside a rock-carved tunnel on top of a disintegrated skeleton. Old computer junk and Sydney 2000 Olympic memorabilia litter the ground.

MONK (O.S.)

Hey! Come back here. What kind of rip-off is this?

Blade glances up, uneasy.

BLADE (V.O.)

How did he trace me? What did I do wrong?

The Chief and Karma stride towards her.

CHIEF

Don't be too hard on yourself. You don't have much time. Talk to me.

Blade charges at them.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

I'm a good boss. I just need some love.

Blade somersaults over them and disappears down the tunnel.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

(to Karma)

Be gentle.

Karma morphs into the lioness and bounds after her.

INT. CATACOMBS - DAY

Blade dashes through a maze of roughly hewn tunnels. The demented babble of other prisoners.

BLADE

CD? CD! Can you hear me?

Blade runs through a junction, pauses to glance into an adjacent chamber. Inside, an untidy heap of prisoners with glass-eyed expressions (the WATCHERS).

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Animated characters swarm over the pile and pitch advertisements, infotainment and other media to a captive audience. Blade turns the corner.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - NIGHT

Blade is back in the maze of DENR ventilation shafts. She turns. The lioness runs towards her. It slows down and morphs back into Karma who strides towards her with menace. Her voice blends with the Chief's.

CHIEF/KARMA

I don't want to hurt you. But what choice do I have?

Blade turns around to run and but the shaft is now blocked off by a grid. Through the grid prisoners are 'processed'. One by one they are lowered, feet first, onto a whirring device that resembles a hard drive. They are absorbed into it, expressions of pain on their faces. Blade raises her hands in defeat.

BLADE

Alright. You've got me.

Karma swipes and scratches Blade's cheek. It bleeds.

CHIEF/KARMA

I've had you from the start.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

A window displays a fly-by over Sim Central. The view dives into a cell. The Chief stand by the window. Blade and Karma appear.

CHIEF

(to Blade)

It's good to see you.

BLADE

What do I do?

On-screen, inside the cell, an translucent tube contains a racing track. It winds its way through a very 60's alien landscape.

CHIEF (O.S.)

You and Karma are going to win a little race for me. Think of it as a fund-raiser.

On-screen, library footage of races in the tube. Logo'ed racers fly just above the track and jostle each other for position.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

It looks civilised but digital can be
deceiving.

On-screen, a DENR logo'ed racer shoots its way through the pack.

BLADE

What's in it for me?

CHIEF

(putting his arm around her)
That's the spirit. Beat the sim and
show me I can trust you. It will be
worth your while. Karma will drive.

BLADE

No.

CHIEF

No?

BLADE

I get to choose my partner.

CHIEF

(amused)
Is that so?

BLADE

Yes.

The Chief narrows his eyes.

CHIEF

And who would that be?

BLADE

Axel. Not some psycho hit-chick.

CHIEF

Don't push your luck.

BLADE

Do you want to win? Axel's the best.

CHIEF

Maybe once. But not now. He's one of
our old timers.

BLADE

He just lacks motivation. You haven't
seen him trying to impress me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHIEF

You're so transparent. I can see what you're doing.

BLADE

If it was my money, I'd bet on Axel. How many races has he won on this track?

CHIEF

(to Karma)

Karma?

(to Blade)

If you're wasting time--

BLADE

Check the files if you don't believe me. I'm being constructive.

The Chief stares at Blade.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Moving fast down into the enclosed racing track. Nine racers fly into formation behind a pace vehicle.

CHIEF (O.S.)

Cut every corner but leave no trace.

BLADE (O.S.)

No sweat.

CHIEF (O.S.)

I'm betting on you. Don't make me regret it.

INT. RACER - NIGHT

Blade is in the co-pilot seat of a tight-fitting cockpit.

BLADE (O.S.)

Trust me.

She adjusts her console and moves instrument panels around with a finger. Axel is beside her, control device in hand.

AXEL

Do you know what you're doing?

BLADE

Just drive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RACE CONTROL (O.S.)
Lap one commencing in 5.4...3...2...1... And
we're off! On the final round of the
tournament.

The racer shoots forward.

AXEL
Yah!

BLADE
(muting race control)
Go get 'em Axel.

Immediately the cockpit is rocked with a loud explosion.

BLADE (CONT'D)
Whaa? Oh yeah. Shields.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Blade's racer flies up off the track and bounces off the tunnel
wall. The racers behind them open fire.

BLADE/AXEL (O.S.)
Arrrrgghh!

Three other racers shoot past Blade's.

INT. RACER - NIGHT

Blade and Axel rebound like a rag dolls off the windscreen. The
three racers weave amongst each other up ahead.

AXEL
Thanks. I needed that.

BLADE
You alright?

AXEL
I think my ten weeks are up.

Blade rips an instrument panel out of the console.

BLADE
(looking upwards)
Hey Control! This sim is buggy as
hell.

Blade winks at Axel.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The Chief, Karma and the little girl watch views of the race on their screens.

BLADE (O.S.)
(distorted intercom)
This sim is buggy as hell.

CHIEF
(to little girl)
Keep her in sight.

LITTLE GIRL
(gesturing)
Yes Chief.

On-screen, the cockpit chaos Blade has created.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)
What's she doing?

INT. RACER - NIGHT

Blade rips bar graphs and readouts, like entrails, out of the console.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

On-screen, views of Blade and Axel are obscured by static. The lioness snarls.

TECH #1
Something's wrong. There's too much interference.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Axel and Blade have got the hang of their racer. It glides up behind another racer and tail-gates it.

BLADE
Rack 'em up Axel.

Blade's racer fires a missile up the arse of a racer. The missile sends the other racer spinning off into the walls.

AXEL (O.S.)
Toasted.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

LITTLE GIRL

(to Chief)

We're losing the signal. Do I pull them out?

CHIEF

What is she doing?

KARMA

She's leaving no trace. Like you told her to.

RACE CONTROL

...and remember, tonight's winning team takes home a jackpot of nine millioness dollars...

LITTLE GIRL

What do we do?

The Chief looks at Karma. Their eyes lock. Karma shakes her head.

CHIEF

Wait.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Another racer smashes the spinning racer out of the way. The tube lighting fluctuates madly.

AXEL (O.S.)

Shit. You see that bug?

BLADE (O.S.)

That's no bug. That's a feature.

INT. RACER - NIGHT

Blade's console is an electrician's nightmare. Screens and panels are all out of alignment. Software spaghetti. On a rear-view screen, a racer weaves back and forth. It shoots at them. Blade taps on a display and brings up a blueprint of the racer.

BLADE

OK. Unlimited shields.

AXEL

Don't get caught cheating.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE
Hell no. These are glitches.

Axel speeds the racer around some tight bends. He shoots several racers out of the way.

AXEL
Hang on.

Their racer jerks sideways and moves up around the tube.

BLADE
Fourth place. Coming up on third.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Their racer swivels around the side of the tube to overtake another racer upside down.

INT. RACER - NIGHT

BLADE
(staring at console)
Way to go. Two more.

A map of the racetube is spread over Blade's console screens.

BLADE (CONT'D)
Bingo.

AXEL
What? What did you find?

Another explosion jolts their racer. Another racer speeds past.

BLADE
Just drive!

AXEL
Shit. Don't do this to me.

Blade punches instructions into her console. The console beeps again and again. Blade slaps it hard. The noise stops.

BLADE
C'mon Axel. I got you more speed. Now use it.

AXEL
Roger that Chief.

The racer lurches forward again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE
Don't call me that.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

Blade's racer slides past the last two racers.

BLADE/AXEL (O.S.)
Yee-harr!

INT. RACER - NIGHT

They are in the lead and can see the finish-line ahead.

AXEL
(eyes glued straight ahead)
You still there?

Blade is working feverishly. Her fingers dance over console screens, manipulate data.

BLADE
Hang on.

Axel looks down at his console.

BLADE (CONT'D)
A bit more.

A cross-section of the racetube map is highlighted.

AXEL
Tell me you got something.

BLADE
OK Axe. Fly by the numbers.

Axel's map is surrounded with numerical data. Navigation coordinates, trajectory info, speed indicators.

AXEL
What's it gonna do?

BLADE
Trust me.

On the rear view screen, eight racers. All firing. Axel sweats.

AXEL
This better be good. Hold onto your head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Axel twists his control stick. The racer swivels around 90 degrees.

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

The racer flies on its side across the finish line.

AXEL (O.S.)
Alright!

BLADE (O.S.)
Steady...

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The Chief has a big punter's smile. He punches the air.

CHIEF
Yes!!

INT. RACER - NIGHT

BLADE (O.S.)
Now!!

INT. RACETUBE - NIGHT

The racer lurches sharply and crashes into the tube's roof. It rebounds off the floor. And bounces back up. The next racer crashes into Blade's racer and is deflected sideways into the wall. The timing is perfect. More racers smash into them from behind. They ricochet off the walls faster and faster. Several racers collide in a massive explosion.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The Chief's smile drops away.

LITTLE GIRL
It's all locked up. Nothing's responding.

On a screen, the tunnel wreckage burns bright. We move down into the fiery remains. Racer wreckage and debris is sucked out of the tube through cracks into a void.

CHIEF
Where are they now?

On the screen, racer debris is being sucked into a crack.

EXT. VOID - NIGHT

Beyond the crack, debris spirals off into a void.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)
There's too much noise.

TECH #2 (O.S.)
The signal's gone.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Dad sits up in bed with a jolt. Mum is asleep beside him.

INT. DAD'S OFFICE (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Dad, wearing a dressing gown, sits down in front of the computer. On-screen, only static. Dad types.

DAD
Wake up FRANC.

On-screen, "AGENT UNAVAILABLE. Trying to reconnect....."

INT. CRAWL SPACE - NIGHT

A battered Blade pulls even more battered Axel up a narrow crawl space. Flames from the wreckage burn at its mouth. An explosion lights up the crawl space.

AXEL
(weakly)
You could have warned me.

BLADE
I'm sorry. I'm making this up as I go.

Another explosion. A fireball hurtles up towards them.

AXEL
Make it up a little easier.

Blade rips open a hole in the crawl space and ducks into it. Blade pulls Axel into the hole. The fireball shoots past.

EXT. GEORGE STREET MAINTENANCE VIEW - DAY

Blade and Axel crawl out from a storm-water drain in the midst of the city. Nothing apart from them is coloured. Scattered about are frozen avatars, poised in mid-movement. The city is grey and deserted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE

Did we break something?

AXEL

No. It's always like this.

BLADE

This place used to look like
Disneyland.

They wander along the footpath. Festival banners line the street.

AXEL

This is the maintenance view.

BLADE

I get it. Same city. Different world.

AXEL

They don't want us scaring the
tourists.

BLADE

(whispering)

Quick. Someone's coming.

Blade and Axel duck down behind a low wall. A probe floats down the street past the wall, its eyestalks waver. Axel moves as if to jump it. Blade restrains him, points out another probe that is herding prisoners down the street. There are probes everywhere.

BLADE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

We have to get to that hub.

AXEL

This way.

Axel leads Blade down a narrow alley off the main street.

EXT. HARBOUR FORESHORE MAINTENANCE VIEW - DAY

Blade and Axel move through the undergrowth of a lush ornamental garden on the harbour foreshore. The water is a few meters away. Axel starts to collapse. Blade lowers him to the ground gently.

BLADE

You stay here. I can do this alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

I was wondering when you'd ditch me.

BLADE

I'll be back.

AXEL

Sure you will. Just what you need right now is a cripple to weigh you down. Forces you to think laterally. No hard feelings babe.

Blade leans down and kisses him.

AXEL (CONT'D)

You better get going kid.

BLADE

Who says I'm a kid?

AXEL

Here. Catch.

Axel tosses Blade the script thing. She moves to the water's edge.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Watch your head.

Blade nods in acknowledgement and swan dives into the harbour.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - DAY

Blade swims down through the dark water. She stops, listens intently. Faint sonar pings. Blade changes direction. The pings get louder. The hub, a submarine, looms out of the darkness and glides by beneath her. Blade kicks forward to match speed with the submarine. She moulds the script thing flat in her hands and presses it against the hull. The script-thing changes colour to match the hull. Blade swims upwards. A pair of eyes light up on the side of the hull. A ray detaches itself and follows after her.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

Tech #1 and the little girl watch a window showing Blade swim away. The Chief and Karma stand behind them.

LITTLE GIRL

We found her. Near the hub.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHIEF

Any damage?

LITTLE GIRL

No. She didn't get inside.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - DAY

Blade swims upwards. The ray approaches from behind. It envelops her and descends slowly back to the submarine. Blade is smothered between two flaps of ray. The inside surface of each flap is a complex mesh of integrated circuitry. Blade tries to wriggle out from the ray sandwich. She frees her torso and grabs hold of the ray's spiny tail, bends it back towards her. She uses the tail to tear at the ray's circuitry. Sparks fly. The ray short-circuits. It releases its grip and Blade swims back up.

EXT. HARBOUR FORESHORE MAINTENANCE VIEW - DAY

Blade pulls herself up onto the foreshore. She lies down next to Axel who is fast asleep. Blade stares out at the harbour. "Rejuvenation" sails by in the distance. A team of prisoners work on the bow.

BLADE

(softly)

Who am I kidding Axel? Only myself perhaps.

Axel stirs.

AXEL

(stretching)

You came back.

BLADE

How are you feeling?

AXEL

Better.

He leans towards her. Blade pulls back.

BLADE

There's something you should know about me--

A probe bursts through the vegetation, tendrils bristle. The probe lifts Axel up. Blade tries to pull him back but is sent flying back into the bush by a bolt of light.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Blake has been hooked up to a compact life-support system. A ventilator and drips are in place. A male DOCTOR examines Blake as Mum and Dad stand nearby.

DOCTOR
You say it's been twelve hours. No movement whatsoever?

MUM
Nothing.

DOCTOR
What was she using the RIG for?

Dad and the doctor lock eyes.

DAD
No idea.

The RIG's camera adjust focus.

DAD (CONT'D)
What do we do now?

MUM
(looking at the RIG)
We turn that thing off. And we get her to hospital.

DAD
(frowning)
Maggie.

DOCTOR
I wouldn't advise it, at least not until we know what caused that surge. If we disconnect and she's still hallucinating we could do irreparable damage.

The RIG's red light pulses slightly.

DAD
Can she recover from this?

DOCTOR
It's unlikely. Clinically speaking, her mind is gone. I'm sorry.

Mum and Dad react in dismay and reach for each other.

INT. AXEL'S CELL - DAY

Axel looks dejected, watches his static-filled picture frame.

AXEL
We nearly made it. Damn!

He lashes out in anger. A buzzing mosquito noise begins. Axel looks up. A giant MOSQUITO-LIKE THING hovers above the cell. AXEL shakes his head and looks back up. Nothing. The little girl GIGGLES.

AXEL (CONT'D)
So this is how it begins.

INT. BLADE'S CELL - NIGHT

Blade peers into a static-filled window where Axel's image fades. The mosquito sound is louder.

BLADE
Axel. Can you hear me?

Several giant mosquito things circle high above the cell like vultures. The little girl skips out of the void and plays yo-yo.

LITTLE GIRL
No more peeking Ms. Blade.

The window explodes into fragments around Blade. Blade clutches her arm in pain.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)
Don't worry. You know it's not real.

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - NIGHT

Karma moves between several windows that display analysis data on CD and FRANC. One window shows CD morph between various forms. The two agents are chained to separate windows by metal collars on opposite ends of the space. Karma steps in front of FRANC.

KARMA
Federal agent, you have one minute left to comply.

FRANC grits his teeth. CD seems to have lost it again, mumbles to himself, picks at his feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KARMA (CONT'D)

Under section 4, article 12 of the Data Protection Act, I order you to cooperate. Who sent you?

FRANC has gone schizophrenic, too many conflicting loyalties.

FRANC

No. ERR... Stop! ERR. My owner has nothing to do. UNDERSTOOD. nothing to do with any violations. I AM REGISTERED TO PRO--

CD's leg shoots out across the space and crushes FRANC against a window.

CD

(wincing)

Oops. Sorry 'bout that.

FRANC's crushed head wears an expression of relief. CD shrugs at Karma.

KARMA

Come here.

Karma lunges at CD. He slips out of his collar and darts around the space, looks to escape. As though in a fish tank, CD bounces off invisible walls and the windows. Karma's analysis system reads back to her its findings at high speed.

SYSTEM (V.O.)

(quickly)

System analysis complete. The subject is undocumented. Safeguards within the agent's header are preventing disassembly of its core.

CD

Hey lady. If you're gonna pick me to pieces, be gentle.

CD throws himself hard against the windows, pushes them towards Karma. She nimbly avoids them. In a window, CD dances like crazy to the macarena. Karma stops to watch.

CD cracks his knuckles. His stomach screen unfurls.

CD (CONT'D)

Analyse this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

On CD's screen, schematics of Karma's body. Every image is crawls with hexi-decimals. A mug shot of the Chief appears.

CD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Harlon Bryant. The Chief of the
 Department of the Environment and
 Network Resources. Born March 21,
 1928.

CD ponders his screen, hand on chin.

CD (CONT'D)
 Mmmm. You're incredibly well
 preserved.

He ducks sideways to avoid Karma.

SYSTEM (O.S.)
 The subject is an unregistered
 personal interface to virtual
 environments. Simulating personality
 on demand.

CD
 (frowning)
 Kar-ma honey. Why aren't you in the
 files? Are you for real?

A lightbulb goes off above CD's head. He smiles and looks sly.

CD (CONT'D)
 No. You're not. Are you?

Karma swipes at CD, he leaps back, bounces off a window.

CD (CONT'D)
 Me and my big mouth.

CD literally zips his mouth shut. On CD's screen, a list of Karma's attributes, her operator privileges. A mouse pointer tries to drag items out of the list. Each time, "ACCESS DENIED" appears and the item floats back.

SYSTEM (O.S.)
 (too quickly)
 The subject's capabilities pose an
 immediate threat to State security.
 (slower)
 System recommends that all agent
 processes be killed immediately
 pending further analysis, analysis,
 lysis, lysis

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The system seems caught in a loop. CD unzips his mouth.

CD
We could do with a break here, sister.
How about we err...

Karma's windows all shudder. Several turn to static.

CD (CONT'D)
See what lines we have in common.

CD winks at Karma. She lunges at him. CD leaps away, transforms into a comfy couch.

CD (CONT'D)
Tell me Karma. As one agent to
another. What's wrong with these
people?

Karma strides towards CD with a murderous look.

INT. BLADE'S CELL - NIGHT

Five mosquito-things dive bomb the cell. Blade kick-boxes four of them as they approach.

LITTLE GIRL
You're a tough cookie. But you can't
keep this up.

Blade does a backwards somersault out of the way as the last mosquito dives down into the floor, leaves its proboscis bent.

BLADE
You're right. I should give up.

Blade does a running kick and kicks the mosquito, like a football, at the little girl. The mosquito barely misses her as she ducks.

LITTLE GIRL
If you're so clever.

The little girl flings her yo-yo at Blade. It hits Blade in the head with a loud crack. Blade crashes to the floor.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)
Why don't you hack your way out of
here?

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - NIGHT

Blade's gauge, on her avatar casing, jumps to 76%.

EXT. WIRRIMBIRRA SANCTUARY (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blade's perspective as she runs in terror. A wallaby pricks up its ears. A nano-bat peers down at her.

INT. KITCHEN (REAL WORLD) - DAY

DENR troopers burst in. Mum and Dad are at the table.

TROOPER

Where is she?

Dad tries to block them. He is clubbed to the floor.

INT. BLADE'S CELL - DAY

Blade comes to with a start as a GUNSHOT rings out.

BLADE

Dad?!

She looks around terrified and picks herself off the floor. She repeatedly opens and closes a window that displays nothing but static. The mosquito noise returns.

BLADE (CONT'D)

CD. If you can hear me. There isn't much time.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

On-screen, stills of Mum and Dad are placed along-side stills of the wildlife sanctuary, CD and the activists.

TECH #1

We think we got her! Tell the Chief.

EXT. SHIP DECK - NIGHT

The Chief plays host to a cocktail party for leaders and dignitaries from around the globe. He listens to a Japanese LORD in traditional robes.

LORD

Rumours have been circulating. They say that your system is not secure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHIEF

Ashita-san. Let your colleagues know that there is no cause for alarm. We have taken full precautions.

LORD

We heard about the stadium incident.

CHIEF

That woman had a long history of psychiatric disorder. She used her husband's security clearance to access the Control Space. They have been in custody ever since. Will you excuse me one moment?

Karma, dressed in an revealing gown, is being chatted up by a burly US general.

GENERAL

Of course we're interested. But why all this focus on civilian applications?

The Chief slips next to Karma.

CHIEF

General?

The Chief pulls Karma aside. No more smiles.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Alright. I'm taking your advice. Keep an eye on our guests while I clean up.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

The submarine glides past. The script thing appears on its hull. Intermittent sparks fly off it, like a cold engine trying to start. Live voltage surges from the script thing to the hull.

EXT. STADIUM MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

Blade falls onto a stage in the middle of the stadium. The crowd is made up of identical Chiefs. They surge towards the stage. Mum clambers up out of the pit onto the stage.

MUM

Blade.

She smiles as she approaches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUM (CONT'D)

My darling. I've missed you so much.

Mum's face suddenly distorts with rage.

MUM (CONT'D)

You little wretch!

She swipes at Blade.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - NIGHT

Blade's avatar gauge jumps to 84%.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

Sparks run along the submarine hull as it ascends, blows ballast. The pinging noise speeds up. Raytracers fly off the hull in all directions.

INT. STADIUM MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

Mum slaps Blade in the face.

MUM

I've run out of patience. Where are you?

Mum transforms into Dad.

DAD

You're a thief. Nothing more. Who taught you to steal OPS?

Dad punches Blade in the face.

DAD (CONT'D)

Answer me!

Dad transforms into an unkempt activist.

ACTIVIST

You're a disgrace. Look at yourself. Why would we want you around?

The activist yanks Blade by the hair and transforms into Axel. He shoves her away in disgust.

AXEL

You freak. Why don't you leave me alone!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE
 (reaching out)
 Axel?

AXEL
 You nearly kill me just so you can
 escape. You used me. Like you used
 everybody else.

BLADE
 No. It's not true.

AXEL
 "Get the Chief. Stop the Chief". Can't
 you hear you're obsessed? You don't
 know when to quit. Do you?

BLADE
 No.

Blade drops to her knees, clutches her head. Axel shrinks and
 transforms into Blake.

BLAKE
 You're so pathetic. Haven't you got
 any self-respect?

Blade looks up in surprise. She chuckles weakly.

BLADE
 You're so transparent. I can see what
 you're doing.

Blake turns into the Chief. He grabs Blade by the neck.

CHIEF
 That was you! Wasn't it? That was you.

The stadium lights fluctuate.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

The submarine, floats in the middle of the harbour, fires
 pellets of crimson light from its two topside missile tubes. The
 pellets shoot towards the city. Lightning strikes the sub.

INT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

Blade floats in the midst of the chamber. Her arms are pulled
 back by an unseen force. Her head is forced back as though
 someone has grabbed her hair. The Chief appears, holds her
 scalp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHIEF

What a waste. You could have been
someone really special.

EXT. HARBOUR MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

Glowing pellets fly across Cityscape. They ricochet off
everything. The pinging noise continues.

INT. SIM CENTRAL - DAY

The Avatar Gallery is now a hundred times its original size. It
fills steadily with new avatars without casings. The cocktail
party guests appear to fill up a row.

CHIEF (O.S.)

And will you look at that? Now,
everybody's coming. The fools. They
think this is the new Vegas. They've
got no idea.

The Chief grips Blade like a vice.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

But I bet you do. You still in there
Blade? C'mon. Why don't you impress
me? One last time. Tell me what this
place is all about?

Blade tries to turn away from the Chief. He grabs her chin.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

What is Cityscape? Little Miss Blade.

BLADE

(quietly)

A Trojan.

CHIEF

Speak up kid. What was that?

BLADE

This a Trojan Horse.

CHIEF

(twisting Blade painfully)

Which is?

BLADE

A weapon...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHIEF

Yes?

BLADE

That looks harmless.

CHIEF

Good girl.

LITTLE GIRL (V.O.)

The VIPS are ready sir.

The Chief strokes Blade's head. She squirms weakly.

CHIEF

All thanks to you. Just think. If your source hadn't been so well hidden, we might never have made the breakthrough.

The general in his avatar casing. The lord in his casing. Avatars from around the globe.

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

How do you replace the mind of a world leader? Someone who everyone knows. Well, you have to disguise the fact that something is missing. You have to learn to not make it obvious. You have to learn to leave no trace.

Blade looks horrified. The Chief gestures.

INT. STADIUM MAINTENANCE VIEW - NIGHT

The Chief holds Blade in his vice-like grip on the stage. The stadium is filling with people in DENR uniform.

CHIEF

Once the agents are deployed, into our distinguished guests, I'm going to influence every major foreign power. It's a painless invasion.

Parts of the stadium warp. The Chief looks around concerned. He lessens his grip on Blade. Pellets bounce into the stadium. CD appears on the stage behind the Chief.

CD

Oh there you are. Yoo-hoo Chief!

The Chief whirls around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD (CONT'D)

I've been looking for you everywhere.

Blade is suddenly alert again.

BLADE

That's my lift.

Blade picks the Chief up in a crotch-hold and tosses him off the stage into the mosh-pit. The stage floor buckles. The Chief leaps back onto the stage along with Karma. Their voices mix.

CHIEF/KARMA

You little shit.

The Chief and Karma charge towards Blade. Blade runs towards CD. CD stretches out his stomach screen with his hands. Blade dives into it.

CD

Welcome aboard Captain.

CD dissolves. The stadium collapses onto the stage.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

Technicians move around their consoles and windows in confusion. Different alarms ring out. The floor weaves and buckles. The windows move around amidst blinking error messages. The little girl runs frantic between technicians.

TECH #1

The hub's out of control.

LITTLE GIRL

Re-start it quickly.

TECH #1

We will lose the containment grid.

LITTLE GIRL

Only for a moment. Do it.

A glass-covered set of switches materialises on Tech #1's console. Tech #1 knocks back the cover and flicks switches. The sound of a motorbike intensifies.

TECH #1

What the hell is that noise?

Blade flies in from a nearby window on CD, now a motorbike.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD

Yee-hah!

LITTLE GIRL

Security!

Blade hops off CD-bike and storms towards the little girl. Blade fights off a number of technicians that swarm in to intercept. Blade lifts the little girl up and shoves her up against a window.

BLADE

Is this the hack you had in mind?

CD transforms back to normal and produces a stethoscope. CD places it against the little girl's chest. His stomach screen unfolds. On-screen, the little girl's file features an unflattering photo of an unshaven and balding man.

BLADE (CONT'D)

No. This look definitely doesn't suit you.

Blade hurls the little girl across the space. Several bat things bank hard to avoid her as they fly towards Blade. CD is busy adjusting settings on a nearby console. Tech #1 tries to pull CD off the console. The Chief and Karma appear next to Tech #1. CD palms them off with a hand the size of a cupboard.

CD

Back off punk!

The Interlink pipe materialises.

CD (CONT'D)

Hurry!

Blade kick-boxes a tech out of the way and sprints towards the pipe. She leaps up into the pipe, which expands to hold her. Three bat-things swoop into the pipe after her.

INT. INTERLINK PIPE - DAY

Blade runs down the pipe towards a bright light at the end. The bat-things catch up. The lioness enters the mouth of the pipe and roars. CD-bike swerves past the lioness and catches up with Blade.

CD

Big jump now.

Blade leaps across onto CD-bike and screeches off.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - DAY

Blade's avatar dissolves out of its casing.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - DAY

Blake's hand moves. Her face relaxes. Her eyelids flutter. Mum has fallen asleep beside her.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

Technicians busily re-arrange fixtures. Windows and consoles are strewn everywhere.

TECH #1

This just came in from a high school
in Bargo.

Blade's photo in a window.

CHIEF

That's her.

The Chief's window switches to a view of a cell.

INT. CELL - DAY

The little girl is attacked by the mosquitoes.

CHIEF (V.O.)

You let a sixteen year old girl just
walk out of here. Your services are no
longer required.

INT. BLADE'S SPACE - DAY

A window opens displaying a aerial view of Cityscape. Blade and CD-bike fly out of it. CD transforms back to normal. Blade peers back into the window.

CD

You can't wipe the link. It's too
late.

BLADE

I'll lead them straight home.

Blade turns to look back into the window. On-screen, three bat-things are approaching.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Gridlock!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A grid draws itself on the screen. Blade backs away from the window. The three bat-things fly out of the window. The grid bulges away from the screen like a rope net. The bat-things get tangled in the net. Blade and CD beat the shit out of them.

CD

There's more on the way.

BLADE

Shut this place down.

Icons and windows close and dissolve. A window displays Sim Central. Blade and CD dive into it.

EXT. BARGO MAIN STREET (REAL WORLD) - DAY

A storm brews. A DENR transport roars down the street.

PILOT (O.S.)

We'll be there in ten.

SYSTEM

(O.S. through intercom)

Roger that T4. You have three targets.
An adult male, an adult female, and a
teenage girl.

INT. DENR VENTILATION SHAFT - DAY

Blade and CD float in a five-way junction. CD swivels his head 360 degrees to monitor each direction.

BLADE

Where's the Chief?

CD

The stadium. He's due to give a speech
in five minutes.

BLADE

Where's Axel?

CD

He's been moved. It could be a trap.

BLADE

This whole place is a trap.

EXT. SPACE - DAY

From space, the Earth slowly revolves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Well folks. It's pretty busy down here. Looks like the whole world has decided to pay us a visit. It's like the Olympics all over again.

As Australia comes into view, the Sydney Canberra region glows with immense volumes of winking network traffic data.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't know if we've ever seen a crowd like this. Happy birthday Cityscape!

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - DAY

Axel is curled up in a foetal position. Giant mosquitoes swarm above Axel.

KARMA (V.O.)

Tell us about Blade, Axel.

A mosquito lands on Axel's head. He doesn't respond.

INT. AVATAR GALLERY - DAY

Axel's gauge, on his avatar casing, is at 99%.

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - DAY

A long needle pierces the skin of Axel's arm. It draws blood.

AXEL

(weakly)

She hates needles.

The needle is a mosquito proboscis. More mosquitoes land and stab him. Axel writhes and moans. From the waist down, his body has been melted into a flat lump. Karma stands nearby. Axel is reflected in her flitting eyes.

AXEL (CONT'D)

And she could whip your ass.

Karma slaps him hard across the face.

BLADE (O.S.)

Are you looking for me?

Karma whirls around. Blade connects a flying kick into Karma's forehead. Karma hits the deck. Blade throws herself at Karma.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They roll around the floor and wrestle. CD shoos the mosquitoes away from Axel. CD runs towards Karma.

KARMA

(to CD)

No you don't. Música!

The macerena tune pumps out of a nearby window. Blade knocks Karma out of the way.

BLADE

Oh shit. She scanned him.

CD stops. He stretches his hands out and vibrates.

CD

No. Not the macerena...

AXEL

What?

CD starts doing the macerena dance. He can't help himself. It's in his programming. Axel looks on in despair.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Oh Christ.

CD wears a look of pained embarrassment. He can't stop dancing. Karma is on top of Blade, tries to overpower her. A window switches to a view of the Chief.

CHIEF

You started the party without me.

Karma spins Blade around in a policeman's grip and lifts her up to face the Chief.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

(indicating CD)

Did you think it was cute?

CD dances. Karma twists Blade around to the Chief.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

And to think you had us all a bit worried. Good bye Blade. The fun and games are over.

The Chief's window goes blank. Blade gets beaten up by Karma.

EXT. CITYSCAPE STADIUM NORMAL VIEW - NIGHT

From the air the stadium is more dazzling than ever. Fireworks light up the town. In the midst of the ground, a stage and screen has been erected. Loud rhythms are being pumped to the dancing crowd. The stadium lights fluctuate.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Once again there seem to be some technical difficulties. Bear with us.

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - DAY

Karma inflicts cruel damage on Blade. Axel looks up at CD.

AXEL

Tell me what to do.

CD does the macarena as though possessed. His stomach screen switches to audio controls. He tries to point at the STOP symbol. Blade pins Karma to the floor.

BLADE

Turn it off!

Karma throws Blade off and goes in for another attack.

AXEL

(looking around)

Where?

Axel squints at the multitude of windows. They blur into each other. He finally sees the music window. He gestures. The window slides over to him. He stretches up to press STOP on the interface.

CD stops dancing. His body unravels into a long continuous thread like an Escher drawing. He jumps into the fray, wraps himself around Blade like an exo-skeleton. Blade, now padded up like the Michelin man, throws Karma off. Karma turns into the lioness and leaps back at her. Blade/CD catches the lioness head-on and all three of them fall backwards into a window and disappear.

AXEL (CONT'D)

Hey. What about me?

INT. DATA STREAM - DAY

Blade, CD and the lioness tear at each other as they plunge down a shaft made up of endless hexi-decimal numbers and widgets. They hit the bottom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CD and the lioness merge into a glob of churning and swirling widgets. Their respective shapes merge and twist as each momentarily gets the upper hand. Blade extracts herself from the glob. The glob stops moving.

BLADE

CD?

Karma slowly emerges from the glob. She brushes off a widget or two and smiles. Blade adopts a martial arts position.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Let's get this over with.

KARMA

(Sesame Street Mafia)

Psst. You wanna buy some OPS?

Blade raises an eyebrow.

BLADE

Some OPS?

KARMA

Sssh! Right...

Karma grins in unfamiliar fashion. Blade grins back.

BLADE

Why not? I could use some good karma.

INT. KARMA'S SPACE - DAY

Axel, half a lump, mopes in the midst of the space. Blade flies out of the data window. Blade and Axel embrace.

AXEL

Are you going to leave me like this?

BLADE

Sorry.

Blade gesticulates. Axel's body transforms back to normal.

BLADE (CONT'D)

No time to explain. The Chief is about to do something really bad. I've got to try and stop him.

AXEL

Blade. Listen to me. Log off. Go home while you can.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLADE

I can't. He knows who I am.

AXEL

You're not in prison. You can run.

BLADE

He'll know where we live. My family.

AXEL

How do you know for sure? How do you know that any of this is real? Have you thought about that? Maybe there's nothing bad except

(tapping his head)

what's going on up here. Get out. You've been in too long.

BLADE

If you're right. I'm the only one who is going to get hurt. If you're wrong...

He kisses her.

BLADE (CONT'D)

At least I tried to make a difference.

Blade dives back into the data window.

AXEL

No. Wait! You live with your parents. Shit...

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Above the stadium, aircraft pass in formation. The crowd roars. The Chief stands at a podium on a stage in the middle of the ground. His image fills the scoreboard. A screen, built into the podium, displays a view of Karma's space.

CHIEF (V.O.)

Karma? Where are you?

Karma materialises behind him and stands at attention. The Chief looks relieved. He clears his throat.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, many distinguished guests. Welcome to Cityscape. The future online.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From behind her, CD is clearly merged into Karma. CD dissolves, leaves Karma standing rigid, like a mannequin.

INT. DATA STREAM - NIGHT

Karma's disembodied head shrieks with rage. It rolls around inside a swirling cloud of hexi-decimal numbers and widgets.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

The Earth has stopped revolving. The east coast of Australia glows.

CHIEF (V.O.)

Tonight I share with you a vision of society. A world not susceptible to decay. A world not subject to human frailty. A world of limitless potential formed from what we dream together. Tonight, we enter a new phase of human history. Cityscape welcomes you.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - DAY

Above the technicians, large windows show the Chief, the Simulation Control Space and the Avatar Gallery. The Avatar Gallery is a solid mass of bodies.

TECH #3

That's 2.8 millioness avatars and counting. We're running out of space.

Tech #1 stands in front of the Avatar Gallery console and window.

TECH #1

Do what you have to.
(under his breath)
Hold together baby.

Two bat-things hang from a perch nearby. The lioness makes its way across the space towards Tech #1.

TECH #1 (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

The lioness snarls and knocks him out of the way with a paw. The lioness turns into CD. Blade dives out of CD's stomach screen. Blade begins fiddling with the console.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH #1 (CONT'D)

No! Don't touch that!

Everyone rushes at Blade. The bat-things unfurl their wings hissing. Blade jumps up and seizes the rim of the Avatar Gallery window and pulls it down. CD dissolves.

TECH #1 (CONT'D)

Don't!

Blade adjusts the window. She and the window dissolve.

INT. BLADE'S SPACE - NIGHT

Blade materialises into her space, holds the Gallery window, positions it carefully in mid-air. New fixtures materialise into the room. A swivel chair, and an unattached mouse and mouse pad before it at desktop height. Blade sits down and wiggles the mouse. A pointer moves through the air. Blade double-clicks. A miniature bas relief model of Cityscape materialises before her. Two bat things fly out of the Gallery window at her. The pointer changes to a skull and crossbones.

BLADE (O.S.)

Too easy.

Blade double-clicks on each bat-thing and it is wiped from view. Blade drags a dotted outline over the stadium within the cityscape model. As the window touches it, the stadium is highlighted.

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

Chief. You're dropped.

Blade takes her finger off the mouse. The Gallery window zooms towards the stadium.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

The monitor screen on Blake's desk displays another view of what's happening. A folder labelled Avatar Gallery is dragged across the screen into a blueprint diagram of the stadium. A pop-up dialogue (like in Windows) shows avatars being hurled towards a stadium icon. A counter spins, adds new digits to the tally.

INT. INTERLINK CONTROL TOWER - NIGHT

The Control Space floor has disappeared. The entire space is now suspended in the air above the stadium. The technicians look down terrified. The city throbs with an orange glow beneath them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECH #1
Everybody log out! Now!

The technicians dissolve. A window shows Sim Central with dog-things and bat-things spiral past.

EXT. SIM CENTRAL - NIGHT

A vortex, where the avatar gallery used to be, sucks out the contents of each cell. The Interlink Control tower is uprooted like a tree.

INT. BLADE'S SPACE - NIGHT

The Cityscape stadium model glows. Blade types something fast and hits ENTER.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

The Chief looks up from his podium with a worried expression. An orange glow radiates beyond the walls of the stadium. Earlier footage of the Chief replays over and over again on the scoreboard. The recording is mixed and scratched as though by a VJ.

CHIEF
(recorded)
Once the agents are deployed, into our distinguished guests, I will influence every major foreign power. It's a painless invasion.

The VIPS look at each other in shock. People in the grandstand look around in confusion. A Ken and Barbie spot their own likenesses in the gallery images above. A REPORTER watches the crowd. He whispers into a PDA. Ticker-tape text scrolls past in the sky above the stadium. "Broadcast message from Blade: Log off now. This is a trap." The Chief's mouth twists into a snarl. The sky above the stadium fills with bodies from the Avatar Gallery until the sky is completely tiled with avatars. A wall of light moves through the avatars, shatters all the avatar shells in sequence. The crowd panics.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
(to Karma)
No witnesses. Give them plan nine.

Karma's mannequin stares ahead glass eyed. The Chief has a closer look.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
Alright! I'll do it myself.

EXT. DENR BUILDING - NIGHT

One of the top floors of the skyscraper implodes, pulls the structure out of shape.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

The monitor screen is wallpapered with pop-up error messages from Interlink. The counter continues to climb. The screen image shrinks to a dot.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

A group of Kens stare up at the sky in confusion. They can see their own avatars above the stadium. The reporter yells into his PDA.

REPORTER

No. Definitely. We can't log out!

The Chief gesticulates. A heartbeat throbs. An image of the Chief's own head materialises above the stadium. The eye sockets are black and empty.

CHIEF'S HEAD

Remember. Without me, you're nothing.

The Chief's head develops a horrible leprosy-like infection that causes his skin to peel and fall off, reveals wire-frame.

EXT. CITYSCAPE SQUARE - NIGHT

The head bin old-timers run down the steps of the DENR building, they whoop madly. At the base of the building, Axel waits in his convertible.

PRISONER #1

We made it bro. It's over.

Prisoner #1's skin vanishes, reveals wire-frame and bloodshot eyes. Axel looks at his own hands. They are transparent.

AXEL

Not yet.

Axel burns rubber across the square.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

The heartbeat is louder now. In the grandstand a Barbie shudders in terror. She looks around. Everyone in the crowd has wire-frame bodies and bloodshot eyes. A hand falls on her shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She spins around to see her companion Ken. His eyes have turned to sludge. They are dripping out of their sockets. She screams.

KEN

Honey? What's wrong? You're freaking me out!

The reporter yells into his PDA.

REPORTER

It's some kind of mass hallucination.

Fine cables spew out of the phone, dig into the reporter's skull. He screams and falls to his knees as his head is wrapped in copper cable.

CHIEF'S HEAD

If I'm not happy, why should you be?

Mosquito-things attack people in the grandstand. A Ken is dive bombed.

On the stage, CD sneaks up behind Karma and merges into her. Karma sneaks up behind the Chief and gives him a bear hug.

KARMA

You're so mean. I just love it.

The Chief struggles but can't break the embrace.

CHIEF

Get off me! Break off!

Karma transforms into CD.

CD

Hold on Chief. She's coming.

Blade flies down onto the stage and strides towards the Chief.

BLADE

Turn it off. It's over.

The Chief grins and dissolves.

BLADE (CONT'D)

The ship.

EXT. SHIP DECK - NIGHT

The heartbeat continues. Axel pulls himself up onto the ship's railing and swings over it. Two extra large dog-things sit on the deck waiting for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AXEL

Here boys. Come and get it.

Axel holds two script things, prongs outwards, in his palms.

INT. SHIP CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The heartbeat is louder but muffled. Blade kicks open a panel and climbs out into the corridor with CD. They start running down it.

INT. CHIEF'S CABIN - NIGHT

Blade and CD burst into the room. The Interlink icon rotates overhead. Axel is stuck near the door, his lower half is melted as before.

CHIEF

(to Blade)

Great timing. I didn't fancy hiding out in prison.

BLADE

Give it up Chief.

CHIEF

Not so fast.

The Chief gestures and CD is ripped in two and flung across the room at giant magnet-like devices. The Chief leaps at Blade who is momentarily distracted. Blade and the Chief kick box one another. They wrestle up against the console. The files are knocked everywhere. Blade and the Chief are perfectly matched. The Chief's State file is on the floor. The Chief painfully twists Blade's arm up behind her back.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Always good to see you.

The Chief throws Blade face first against the wall. Her body inverts to face him. She lunges at the Chief. Two extra large dog things appear in the doorway.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Get her, boys.

The dog things leap onto Blade, knock her to the floor. They maul her. Blade knocks their heads together. They don't seem to mind. There is a script thing stuck to each of their torsos. The Chief runs to the console and fiddles with settings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHIEF (CONT'D)

How well do your parents know you? Do you think they'll ever notice the difference between you and me?

The Chief leaps up into the Interlink pipe which swells to accommodate him.

CD body bits stutter to life. The Chief's file is on the floor. CD's stomach screen unfolds to display the same information. Blade is pinned to the floor by a dog-thing. Axel looks at the script box.

AXEL

Hurry up. Do something!

INT. INTERLINK PIPE - NIGHT

The Chief runs down the pipe towards the light. He looks over his shoulder and laughs.

INT. CHIEF'S CABIN - NIGHT

The script boxes spark into life and sink into dog thing flesh. The dog-things go nuts and literally tear each other apart.

Blade pulls free. Blade runs to the console and twiddles knobs. The window shows Blake's body.

AXEL

Is that you? Is that where he's going?

Blade looks across at CD. CD's screen is flashing between red and the Chief's file. Blade lunges forward.

INT. CHIEF'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

The real Chief, an ancient man with the same features, sits up and opens his eyes with a big smile. He is in bed and covered in drips and other life-support equipment. He coughes and splutters. RIG cameras zoom in on his face. Several DENR aides wait at attention nearby. The décor resembles the Chief's virtual cabin. The wall opposite the Chief is tiled with screens. Most have angry faces yelling. The Chief looks around in confusion as the realisation hits him. He's back in his own decrepit body.

CHIEF

You bitch!

His NURSE resembles Karma. She stands over him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NURSE

Behave yourself. We have visitors.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

The DENR transport hovers outside the window. Dad looks out at the pilot.

INT. TRANSPORT VEHICLE COCKPIT - NIGHT

The pilot stares at Dad in the upstairs window.

PILOT

(looking over his shoulders)
Hold it fellas... New orders coming
in.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - NIGHT

Mum joins Dad at the window to watch the transport vehicle. It rises and flies off into the distance.

INT. CHIEF'S CABIN - NIGHT

The Chief's aged head is ranting on the console screen.

CHIEF

I'm going to rip you apart you little--

A mute symbol appears on-screen.

BLADE

Keep it real.

EXT. CENTREPOINT TOWER - SUNRISE

Blade and Axel stand on the roof of Centrepoint Tower. Cityscape is deserted.

AXEL

Well. That's it then. You got him.
Anyone else you feel that passionate
about?

BLADE

Don't. I'm an idiot.

AXEL

I didn't say that.

BLADE

I'll be grounded for life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Axel takes her hand.

AXEL

Let me put in a good word. If you tell
me your real name.

Blade whispers in his ear. Axel smiles.

EXT. HARBOUR - SUNRISE

An explosion rocks Rejuvenation. Its textures slide sideways
into the harbour.

EXT. OUTBACK LOOKOUT - SUNRISE

Blade and Axel look out over the outback, standing on the edge
of the cliff. Axel puts his arms around Blade.

AXEL

Now that I'm free. How do I find you?

BLADE

I don't know.

She hesitates.

BLADE (CONT'D)

Talk to my agent.

She pulls Axel over the cliff. They fall out of sight.

INT. STATE REGISTRY - DAY

CD throws folders and files into a garbage bin. He hums as he
works. The material is marked with DENR security classifications
and references to mental containment know-how.

CD clambers into the bin and stomps up and down a few times. He
sticks his tongue out at us and pulls the lid down over him. The
bin disappears with a flash and a pop.

INT. BLAKE'S BEDROOM (REAL WORLD) - SUNRISE

Blake's eyes open slowly. Dad is asleep besides the bed. Blake
reaches out and grabs his hand. She smiles for the first time.

END TITLES