The Reductionist

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INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

A bare, brick-walled room. At the bottom of the screen, timecode and date stamp - 1:38 PM, January 23, 1998.

AMY (20s), red-haired hippie-pagan, sits at a steel table, blindfolded. Mumbling voices off camera. Amy writes on a slip of paper.

AMY
Fischer. Here's the date you die.

Her voice is deep, guttural; a man's voice, or a monster's. Off camera, a short frightened squeak.

AMY (CONT'D)
"A small bullet, a piece of glass, and your heart just grows around it."

Amy's head drops and smacks the table.

BLACK.

INT. FISCHER'S BEDROOM - PRESENT - NIGHT

An alarm clock reads 2:37. FISCHER (30s), a pale, gaunt recluse, lies in bed. His eyes flicker and dart: REM sleep.

A pencil on the night stand trembles. It spins. It snaps. A horrible WAIL. Then POUNDING.

Fischer sits upright, willing himself not to panic. Murmuring shadows swim across the walls like amoebae. The alarm clock flickers; its digits spin backwards. A houseplant begins to grow long, blackened tendrils.

Fischer lurches out of bed.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fischer opens the vanity mirror. Shelves of pill bottles. He fills a plastic cup. Dumps pills on the porcelain. A fat black spider crawls from the pill bottle.

Fischer pops two pills and raises the cup of water. It's not water anymore. Instead, a bloody stew of entrails.

The shadows GIGGLE and ROAR. The POUNDING grows louder. Fischer screws his face up with resolve.

He swallows the bloody mess. He drinks as if proving he can keep it down.

The noises stop. The shadows settle. The room is normal. The cup: just water. Fischer looks at himself in the mirror. Utter contempt.

Fischer spits on his own reflection.

EXT. FISCHER'S STREET - MORNING

Posted signs on houses: FORECLOSED. Front lawns overgrown with weeds. An abandoned car dealership on the corner.

A police cruiser pulls up in front of the only kept-up house. A luxury sedan sits in the driveway.

INT. FISCHER'S FRONT DOOR - MORNING

Fischer answers the door, rumpled, unshaven. He blinks at the sunlight, barely able to see SHERIFF MONICA "MO" BIERCE (30s), leather jacket and jeans, athletic.

BIERCE
Mister Fischer? I'm Sheriff Bierce. Can we have a talk?

Fischer smiles weakly and gives her a thumbs-up.

INT. FRONT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

MISTER VALJEAN (50s) - balding, suit-and-tie, concerned expression - sits near a computer desk. Fischer leads Bierce inside. The room is a mess of wires, pizza boxes, shotglasses, and pill bottles.

BIERCE
Rough night?

FISCHER
You could say that. This is my client, Mister Valjean.

BIERCE
I know who he is.

She sees Fischer's computer and its impressive peripherals. The screen shows an animated network on a U.S. map.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
You use a lot of hardware for a psychic.

FISCHER
I'm, uh, not a psychic. I was a parapsychologist. Were you talking to the FBI?

BIERCE
The FBI contacted my office. They filled me in on your history. They told me you were a consultant.

FISCHER
That's right.

BIERCE
They also told me they had reopened this case, and hired you to find Miss Valjean's body. And then your contract was terminated last week.

VALJEAN
(to Fischer)
What? You didn't tell me that.

Fischer holds out a hand to Valjean: *give me a minute.* He takes Bierce aside.

BIERCE
You need to turn the physical files over to me, and destroy any electronic material you have.

FISCHER
Look, we're almost there. I've got police stations uploading video leads for me. Give me a half hour.

BIERCE
Why? So you can come up with some vague clue about how they'll find her near water? Or in a hotel that starts with the letter "B"? You're taking advantage of a man's grief. Don't make me arrest you.

FISCHER
I'm not a fraud. I use sophisticated algorithms to solve missing persons cases-

BIERCE
This is not a missing person.

Valjean flinches. He stands.

VALJEAN
I had better leave.

FISCHER
Please, sir. One more video. I need you to make an ID.

Fischer turns to his keyboard and types.

BIERCE
All right. Mister Fischer, you have the right to remain silent-

A video box pops up on Fischer's monitor. A girl of seventeen, tie-dyed hair, in a police holding cell. Valjean gasps. His lip trembles.

VALJEAN
That's her!

Bierce stares at Fischer, stunned, then at the video.

BIERCE
What? Mister Valjean, are you sure-

FISCHER
They picked her up for me last night in Austin. The description fit, and they got a ninety percent match on the fingerprints. It's her.

VALJEAN
She's alive. Oh my God.

FISCHER
It's not all good news. She's got a rap sheet, an abusive boyfriend, a heroin addiction-

VALJEAN
I have to go I have to get to her-

FISCHER
You've got time. I'll book you a flight for this afternoon.

VALJEAN
Thank you. You found her.

Valjean's eyes well up. He sits, lost in thought. Fischer turns to Bierce, a touch of a smile on his lips.

FISCHER
So, where were we? I have the right to remain silent?

BIERCE
I'm a little speechless myself.

FISCHER
You can take the FBI files back, if you want. It'll save me postage.

BIERCE
They told me this was a serial killer case. They caught him. He confessed.

FISCHER
He didn't lose much by claiming one more victim. I didn't buy his story. You don't have to read minds to know someone's lying.

Bierce nods, impressed. She moves over to watch the video. Valjean taps Fischer on the shoulder. He speaks quietly.

VALJEAN
Mr. Fischer? My wife died...not knowing. I know you're not...I wonder if you know any...anyone who might...help me speak to my wife. Let her know about Amanda.

He is begging, a small boy asking for a miracle. Fischer shoots a look at Bierce. She does not appear to have heard, still immersed in the computer.

FISCHER
(to Valjean, hushed)
Can we talk privately?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer motions Valjean into a chair. He opens a small bar and pours Valjean a glass of Johnny Walker Blue.

FISCHER
I know it's early. But this goes down smooth. You like card tricks?

VALJEAN
Yes, actually, I enjoy magic in general.

Bierce appears at the doorway. She listens, unnoticed.

FISCHER
Would you grab that deck of cards? I won't even touch it.

Valjean picks a card deck off the bar.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Pick a card. Concentrate on it.

Valjean chooses. He holds up the card and stares at it.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Seven of clubs.

Valjean laughs and turns it around: seven of clubs.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Wanna know how I did it?

VALJEAN
Certainly.

Fischer points behind him. Valjean turns to look: the bar has a mirrored back, and the card's reflection is visible. Valjean laughs again and shakes his head at himself. Fischer's smile fades a little.

FISCHER
How do you feel when you see how the trick works? Does it seem obvious, silly? Do you feel like you've been duped, just a little?

Valjean's smile disappears. He nods.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Don't go to a psychic, Mister Valjean. Go get your daughter.

Bierce studies Fischer for a moment, then slips away.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Bierce shakes Fischer's hand, then ushers Valjean to his luxury car. They leave Fischer in his empty driveway.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer opens the mirrored medicine cabinet and takes out more pills. Closes the cabinet door.

A demon in the mirror behind him. Shadowy. Indistinct. Seven feet tall.

DEMON
Traitor.

Fischer squints at it, unfazed. He swallows his pills.

FISCHER
You're some LSD that got knocked loose from my spinal column. Get lost.

He cracks his neck. The demon vanishes. He puts the pills away.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer swigs scotch from the bottle. The TV flickers in the darkened room. His head weaves a little. On the program is GEORGE BRELLANT, a suave psychic in a suit and tie.

BRELLANT
I sense a lot of energies in the room tonight, does somebody have a watch, a gold watch?

Fischer picks up a phone and dials.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
George Brellant live. Do you have a loved one you'd like George to contact?

FISCHER
I have an object for George.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
He doesn't read objects by phone.

Fischer brandishes a pistol. He aims it at the television.

FISCHER
It's a Glock 9 millimeter. I'll be in the audience one night. Tell him he's gotta stop preying on old women and desperate people. Or he's gonna eat a bullet.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Who is this?

FISCHER
George is psychic. Tell him to figure it out.

He hangs up. Unplugs a machine hooked to the phone: ANTI-TRACE.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer snoozes. Bathed in the glow of the television. Movement in the room. Creeping twitching things.

Fischer startles awake. Turns on a light. Monsters disappear into the shadows. Fischer stares. Wide-awake.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Fischer staggers out and weaves his way to the mailbox. He collects his mail. One unmarked envelope, nearly square, no stamp.

He pulls a white card from the envelope. On it, one penned word, in a bold, swooping script:

DUCK

Fischer drops to his knees. Shields his head with his hands. Draws his pistol. He looks up and down the street. Nobody. Nothing happens. He bursts into laughter. Shakes his head.

FISCHER
You stupid son of a bitch.

He inspects the card again. Wary.

Something falls from the sky and SMACKS against the street. Fischer points the gun. He moves cautiously towards the street, towards the fallen object.

A brown duck, guts and feathers spattered over the pavement. Fischer looks up. A flock flies in a V, missing a member.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer swallows two more pills. He inspects the duck on the ground. Pokes it with a stick. He takes a dozen pictures of the dead duck and the card.

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - DAY

The office is littered with papers, cabinets, and folders. Fischer digs through a box marked AMY. He finds a framed photograph of himself with an arm around Amy, the redheaded hippie. She flashes a peace sign.

He retrieves a stack of square white cards. The first reads MICHAEL. He compares it to the DUCK card. Same handwriting, same pen, same card stock. He flips through other cards.

One reads ALLEGHENY COUNTY. Another, HEMSTITCH. Another, only numbers: 1-18-01.

His eyes are drawn to a shelf. A library of dated digital video tapes. The last one reads 1-18-01. He looks at the photo of Amy. Her image peers back at him.

FISCHER
You're dead, so you don't matter.

The glass frame cracks. The DUCK card bursts into flames. Fischer yelps in surprise and drops the card.

BLACK.

INT. WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

Timecode and date stamp - 2:43 AM, DECEMBER 25, 2000.

Amy twists her blindfold in her hands and grins at the camera. In a melodious, laughing voice:

AMY
You hear reindeer?

Fischer laughs, off camera, but clearly, as if through a microphone. Two other voices, CARYL, older female, and NICK, young male, chime in from time to time. They are quieter, off mic.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Should we ask him?

AMY
About Santa? Yeah! The American people deserve the truth.

NICK (O.S.)
Come on, let's get serious, guys.

AMY
Oh, bah, humbug.

The tape jumps ahead: 2:47 AM.

CARYL (O.S.)
We're all set, here.

AMY
Bring it on.

2:49. Amy swallows a pill with a glass of water.

2:52. Amy stares at the ceiling.

AMY (CONT'D)
Be my bartender anytime, Fisch.

2:55. Amy blindfolds herself. Grows still.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Seraph session three hundred sixty two. Seraph? Do you hear me? Seraph? Are you with us?

Silence. Then, Amy's voice drops two octaves:

AMY/SERAPH
"Daddy, daddy
It's just like you said
Now that the living
Outnumber the dead."

NICK (O.S.)
Welcome, blessed Seraph.

FISCHER (O.S.)
How are you tonight, Seraph?

AMY/SERAPH
Tired. You haven't looked at your card, Fischer.

FISCHER (O.S.)
No, Seraph, I'm not getting into this every single session, I'm not looking at the card.

Amy rubs the glass of water with her finger.

AMY/SERAPH
Why have you summoned me by chemical methods again?

FISCHER (O.S.)
Well, Seraph, you've been resistant the last few sessions.

AMY/SERAPH
I've resisted because your questions have become pedantic.

FISCHER (O.S.)
I wouldn't say-

AMY/SERAPH
Why the sudden obsession with classification, with testing, with measurement?

FISCHER (O.S.)
I think you must already know.

AMY/SERAPH
Of course. Money. Your grants depend on the correct answers.

Cries of protest and general consternation from off-camera.

FISCHER (O.S.)
That's not it, Seraph.

CARYL (O.S.)
We've always just accepted you. You could be a manifestation of Amy's psi ability-

FISCHER (O.S.)
You could be a malevolent entity.

NICK (O.S.)
Wait. We don't think-

AMY/SERAPH
You don't trust me?

NICK (O.S.)
We do! We trust you.

FISCHER (O.S.)
It's not a matter of trust.

AMY/SERAPH
Everything is a matter of trust. The entire support system of what you call life runs on trust.

FISCHER (O.S.)
That seems melodramatic, even for you, Seraph. We all believe you're a real phenomenon. We just need some scientific verification.

Silence. Amy's expression is as blank as ever.

Without warning, THE GLASS EXPLODES. Shouts of alarm from everyone. Then, stillness.

AMY/SERAPH (O.S.)
Will that demonstration be adequate?

BLACK.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY - PRESENT

Fischer accepts three boxes from UPS.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

He opens the boxes. Dried milk, cold cereal, pasta, soda. One box full of bottles. He puts his groceries away in the pantry. He spills white powder from a bottle onto his counter top. He uses a steel spatula to fill empty pill capsules.

INT. FRONT ROOM - DAY

Fischer talks on his laptop via Skype to DAVE HARROW, a balding, athletic FBI agent in a suit. The Skype window says Dave's location is QUANTICO.

HARROW
(defensively)
Look, Fisch, I didn't sic the Sheriff's department on you. These guys in legal...what are you doing? Is that blow?

Fischer is still scraping powder into capsules. He grimaces at the computer.

FISCHER
Yes, Dave, I called up the FBI so I could snort cocaine right in front of you guys. It's my meds, OK? Is that allowed?

HARROW
You know what you need? Fresh air. I've never seen you leave your house.

FISCHER
Well I've never seen you leave the office. That's the beauty of an internet relationship. I never have to see you in person.

Fischer sets the capsules aside.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
You still owe me one for the Valjean job, even if you didn't personally try to get me arrested.

HARROW
Fine. I'll mark it on your ledger.

FISCHER
Don't bother. I'm calling this one in right now.

HARROW
OK. What do you want?

FISCHER
I need you to send Sheriff Bierce back over here.

HARROW
Why?

Beat.

FISCHER
Doesn't matter. Just do it.

HARROW
That's...odd. Even for you. And what makes you think I even have the jurisdiction to order her around?

FISCHER
You don't have to order. Make something up. Have her bring me a receipt for the files. Just do it. Make it official.

HARROW
All right, I'll see what I can do.
(beat)
Fisch, is something going on? That I should know about?

FISCHER
Nope. Everything's fine.

He shuts down the Skype window on Dave's quizzical look.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer sits on the stoop. Bierce strolls up the driveway.

BIERCE
Now, don't think I'm crawling back just to apologize. The FBI says you need a hand with something, and I'm always around to help a citizen in need.

FISCHER
Wow. I didn't even vote for you.

INT. FISCHER'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer grabs two beers from the fridge and hands Bierce one. Two covered pots on the stove pop their lids and rattle. Black liquid seeps out of them. Bierce doesn't notice.

FISCHER
What did the FBI tell you about me? Not what I do for them. About...my psychological state.

BIERCE
Oh. You mean, you see ghosts.

FISCHER
I hallucinate. Regularly.

BIERCE
Yeah, they gave me a little run-down. They said it doesn't stop you from doing your work. I'm guessing they look the other way.

FISCHER
Pretty much.

BIERCE
How is it, when you see these things? Are you seeing them now?

Fischer looks around the room, hemming and hawing.

FISCHER
You don't want to know what the ceiling fan thinks about you.

BIERCE
Am I gonna have to shoot it?

FISCHER
I've come close.

BIERCE
So it's a demon?

FISCHER
Worse. It's a Republican.

Bierce smiles and sips her beer.

BIERCE
I'll say this, you're the sanest crazy guy I've ever met.

FISCHER
Pills help. Inside the house it's easier to shrug things off. I don't go out at night. Ever.

BIERCE
How long have you dealt with this?

FISCHER
About ten years. I did the wrong drugs one night, and it stuck.

BIERCE
So. What do you need me for?

FISCHER
Something's happened, and I need a second set of eyes that I can trust. I've got cameras, but there's nothing like firsthand observation. Which isn't possible for me.

Bierce considers the situation.

BIERCE
All right. Whatcha want me to see?

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bierce stands at a work desk. Spread before her lay the half-burnt card, the cracked picture frame, and the dead bird.

BIERCE
This looks like the worst Iron Chef episode ever.

Bierce looks around the room. Books on shelves, like The Demonologist's Handbook, catch her eye.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
What do you think happened?

FISCHER
First, I thought I did it myself.

Bierce looks at Fischer askance.

BIERCE
You think you mailed a letter to yourself, broke a picture frame, and lit the letter on fire? And didn't know it?

FISCHER
It seemed logical, if unsettling. It would mean I'm deteriorating. I'd have to check into a hospital.

BIERCE
OK. But?

FISCHER
The ink is fresh. I got a near perfect match on the handwriting, but the person in question is dead.

BIERCE
All right.

FISCHER
I couldn't forge this myself. I wouldn't know how. So I'd like you to double check my results for me.

BIERCE
And the FBI wouldn't do this for you?

FISCHER
I'd like this done independently. By people who don't know me.

Pause.

BIERCE
Done. I'll have the lab look it over.

FISCHER
Thank you.

BIERCE
What if you're right? And it wasn't you? Got any theories?

FISCHER
I have one, but it's pretty...out there.

Bierce shrugs.

BIERCE
Try me.

Fischer walks to the window. He holds the card out and indicates the burned-away portion of the card.

FISCHER
If someone weaved flash paper into the card. And then stood out there with a microwave gun-

BIERCE
A microwave gun?

FISCHER
The army builds them.

BIERCE
Like a heat ray?

FISCHER
Someone could have set the card on fire from across the street. And if the beam went wide, it could have hit the wooden frame, warped it, and cracked the glass.

Beat.

BIERCE
Well. Let's just keep that theory between you and me for now. People might think you're a little nuts.

Fischer smiles, in spite of himself. He opens up an old suitcase and slides the dead duck inside.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bierce carries the suitcase to her car, escorted by Fischer. She looks down the deserted street.

BIERCE
Consulting for the FBI pays pretty good, right? You can probably afford to move someplace more decent than this.

FISCHER
Where? Out of Detroit?

BIERCE
Well, a better neighborhood, at least.

FISCHER
The whole city's bankrupt. You can't run away from it. I've just been here for a long time. You get used to things.

BIERCE
Yeah, but this is just about the bottom of the barrel. There's probably eight houses still occupied in this whole neighborhood.

FISCHER
It was a nice development when I came here. Growing. But people got mortgages at rates too low to be believed. And they shouldn't have believed it. Now some family gets evicted every other week.

BIERCE
I know. I'm the one who evicts them.

Fischer says nothing. Bierce gazes at the horizon. She speaks matter-of-factly, but there's shame underneath:

BIERCE (CONT'D)
I work nights now. We have to catch the homeless colonies.
(MORE)

BIERCE (CONT'D)
They squat in the houses at night and beg downtown during the day.

Now she stares at the houses, defiantly.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
I could have been like that guy in Cook County. Refused to evict. Stood up to the banks. But I'm the law, I have to do my job. It's like the whole thing is broken, rotten, but you can't stop yourself from running along with it.

FISCHER
You shouldn't beat yourself up. The world is what it is. We just do the best we can.

Bierce tries to find something to say, then gets into her car.

BIERCE
I'll call you when I get the lab results.

FISCHER
Adios, Sheriff.

BIERCE
You can call me Mo.

FISCHER
Moe?

BIERCE
Short for Monica. But Mo, like the Three Stooges.

FISCHER
You can call me Fisch. Like a fish.

BIERCE
See you around, Fisch.

She drives off. Fischer shakes his head.

FISCHER
"Fisch like a fish." What a moron.

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer reads The Demonologist's Handbook. A picture of souls in Hell. Something like a rat, but too long and thin, skulks out of the darkness and stares back at him with green eyes.

FISCHER
Boo.

It vanishes. He shuts the book.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer looks up and down the street. Nothing out of place. He grabs his mail. He finds another blank white envelope.

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - DAY

Fischer turns out the lights and runs a blacklight over the envelope. No fingerprints. Using two pairs of tweezers, he opens the envelope and slides out another white card. It reads:

SHERIFF JOINS THE DEAD
DOWN AT THE ZUG
9:32 PM
GREEN WIRE

The same pen, the same handwriting.

INT. FISCHER'S FRONT ROOM - EVENING

Fischer stares out the window, drumming his fingers. On his desk, the card. Programs run on the computer: INK ANALYSIS, HANDWRITING ANALYSIS, CHEMICAL TRACE ANALYSIS.

The clock on the desk turns to 8:45.

Two VOICES strike up a conversation in the back room. One is grating and high pitched, like NAILS ON A CHALKBOARD. The other is deep and slurred, like a creature from a TAR PIT.

TAR PIT
Zug zug zug.

CHALKBOARD
He wants to fuck that pig that trundled in here yesterday. She'll get fucked tonight, all right! You're fucked at Zug!

Fischer rubs his eyes.

FISCHER
Shut up.

CHALKBOARD
Oh, now he's talking to us! We're delighted! Poor shadows!

Fischer picks the white card off the desk. Stares at it.

TAR PIT
Nine thirty two. Tick tock tick.

FISCHER
Nothing's gonna happen.

CHALKBOARD
That's right! Sit down and have a drink! Read about it in tomorrow's paper!

He picks up the phone and dials.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Wayne County Sheriff's Department.

FISCHER
Hi, could you please connect me to Sheriff Bierce?

CHALKBOARD
Ask if she wants a good time with Fisch the fish!

FISCHER
Knock it off.

Fischer swallows his pills. The voices stop.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Excuse me?

FISCHER
Sorry, I...can you connect me-

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Sheriff Bierce is out at the moment.

Fischer minimizes the programs on his computer and brings up an internet map program.

FISCHER
She’s not out by the Zug Steel Mill, on the island, is she?

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Who is this?

A tar-black human torso crawls out of the darkness from the dining room, pulling itself along on stumpy forearms.

FISCHER
I’m a...I’m a consultant for the FBI, I just need to get in touch with her -

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Did you call in the disturbance?

FISCHER
The disturbance? No, look, can you reach her?

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Is there a reason, sir?

FISCHER
I think she’s in danger.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Can you tell me why you think she’s in danger?

Fischer opens his mouth, shuts it. He hangs up. The crawling thing is gone. He looks at the clock. Ten to nine.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer stuffs a bottle of pills in his jacket pocket. He sticks his pistol into the back of his jeans.

EXT. FISCHER’S STREET - NIGHT

Fischer marches out his front door and down his deserted street. Shapes move in the abandoned houses.

EXT. ALONG THE RIVER - NIGHT

Across the river rises a tree-lined suburb. On Fischer’s side, it is a nightmare of abandoned buildings. Tires burn in the streets.

Fischer sees a fifteen-foot-tall skeletal beast in the alleys. It bounds along like a giant gazelle, eyes on fire, matching his pace.

EXT. ZUG ISLAND BRIDGE - NIGHT

Fischer approaches a bridge, years out of repair. It spans about five hundred feet to an island of burnt-out factories. He steps onto the steel mesh walkway. CREAK. He fumbles out his pill bottle and twists off the cap.

A BARK snaps the silence.

Fischer spins around. A small and drooling black mutt snarls at him. He loses the pill bottle. It falls through the mesh and into the river.

FISCHER
Aw, fuck no!

The dog BARKS again. Fischer BARKS back at the dog, enraged. The dog retreats, startled. Fischer looks desperately at the river.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Ah Jesus.

He fishes his hand into the water. A slimy black hand slinks up and slithers over his arm. He jumps back off the bridge. He starts walking home, hands stuffed in pockets. He stops. Hits himself in the forehead.

Resolutely, he turns and storms onto the bridge. LAUGHTER bubbles up from the river. Hands grab the steel mesh beneath Fischer's feet.

EXT. ZUG STEEL MILL - NIGHT

Fischer makes it across the bridge to an old steel mill. The front doors hang open. He draws his gun.

INT. ZUG STEEL MILL - NIGHT

A vast, deserted factory floor, with a second level of questionable catwalks. No signs of life. Fischer notices a door, eaten by years of rust. It is locked with a shiny new combination lock.

He tries a combination, haphazardly. The lock pops open. He almost drops the lock in surprise. He opens the door. A flight of stairs, down into darkness.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - NIGHT

Fischer descends into a long, narrow room with a filthy cement floor. He holds his cell phone out like a flashlight. He shivers; his breath mists in the air. A large, dark lump lies on the floor. Fischer approaches it slowly, cautiously.

It is a dead PIG. Its throat has been sliced open, spilling its juices to the cement. Fischer's cell phone illuminates the walls. Animal corpses hang in neat rows. In a cage, a litter of SCREECHING white rats.

DEPUTY (O.S.)
Who's down there? Identify yourself!

Fischer holds up his hands. A DEPUTY, young and nervous, stands at the top of the stairs, gun trained.

FISCHER
I'm looking for Sheriff Bierce!

BIERCE (O.S.)
Fischer?

Bierce appears in the stairwell.

FISCHER
Hey!

BIERCE
The hell you doing here?

FISCHER
You wouldn't believe me.

BIERCE
Wouldn't be the first time.

She starts down the stairs, followed by the deputy. Fischer examines the pig carcass. He rolls it to check the incision in its throat. He sees a glint of metal beneath the pig. He looks at the floor. He can just barely see a silver web of wires.

FISCHER
Don't touch anything! Don't move!

Everyone freezes.

DEPUTY
What? What is it?

FISCHER
Ah. Sheriff? Mo? Do you see wires running across the ground? Are those there?

Bierce checks the ground. She squints.

BIERCE
Oh shit. Yeah, they're there.

FISCHER
OK, can you come over here? Without touching those wires?

Bierce makes her way across to Fischer.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Is this what I think it is?

Fischer very gently lifts the pig. He reveals a metal disc beneath, with a serial number.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Is that there?

BIERCE
Yes. That's a very old land mine. The wires are trips.

FISCHER
Get that kid out of here.

Bierce calls out to her deputy.

BIERCE
Listen up! Get outside and move everyone away from the building.

FISCHER
And watch your step!

The deputy obeys. Bierce turns back to Fischer.

BIERCE
Now what?

FISCHER
You gonna go, too?

Bierce shakes her head, matter of fact, no negotiation.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
All right. I heard it click.

BIERCE
It’s armed.

FISCHER
Great.

BIERCE
Don’t move that pig.

FISCHER
It’s getting heavy. I’m gonna lose my grip soon. We’re a little fucked, here.

BIERCE
I’ll call in the bomb squad. Hang on.

She dials on her cell phone. Fischer’s eyes grow wide.

FISCHER
Is that wire on the floor green?

Bierce checks.

BIERCE
Not really. It’s silver.

Fischer peeks under the pig’s belly. Three tiny wires stick out of the mine: red, blue, green.

FISCHER
Got a knife?

Bierce looks. Unfolds a pocketknife.

BIERCE
You know which wire to cut? I don’t.

Fischer considers it.

BIERCE (CONT’D)
Fisch?

Fischer slips a little. The pig leans heavily on the mine.

BIERCE (CONT’D)
Fisch?

FISCHER
Green wire! Green!

She reaches underneath the pig and snips the green wire. Fischer drops the pig carcass. He grabs Bierce and dives away from the mine. Nothing happens.

BIERCE
All right. I forgive you for not voting for me.

But Fischer just stares. At the far end of the room rises a stone platform, cubic, about four feet high. Atop it rests a small stone statue.

The figure is rudimentary - human-shaped, but with large horns atop its head. In its lap, a pile of animal bones.

A fire wells up in the statue's eyes. Something big as a cow, but with eight spidery legs, slinks around behind the statue.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
It's just a pile of rocks and bones, Fisch. What's wrong?

FISCHER
I have to go home. I have to go home right now.

BIERCE
It's OK. Come with me.

FISCHER
I need my pills. Oh shit is that happening?

He points to the walls. The dead and eviscerated animals lift their heads and HISS at Fischer. The white rats SCREAM.

EXT. ZUG STEEL MILL - NIGHT

Bierce leads Fischer away from the mill, to a parked police cruiser. She sits him in the back seat.

BIERCE
Just stay here for a bit, OK? I'll get an officer to take you home.

Fischer nods. Bierce closes the door. AMY WARREN, blindfolded, sits in the seat next to him. Fischer CRIES OUT in fear. He yanks the door handle, but the door won't open.

FISCHER
Hey! Hey! Let me out!

Amy's head turns slowly, eerily. She faces Fischer. She reaches behind her head to untie the blindfold. Fischer breaks into a frenzy.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Get me out of here! Please! Help!

BIERCE
Fisch? What's wrong?

Bierce pulls on the door handle. Locked. Fischer lapses into incoherent screams.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Hey I didn't lock this. Who's got the keys? Hey somebody get me the keys to this car!

Fischer shrinks back against the car door. Amy lets the blindfold fall from her eyes.

BLACK.

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

Timecode and date stamp - AUGUST 3, 2000, 3:28 PM.

Amy, blindfolded, sits perfectly still.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Hello, Seraph. We were looking for-

AMY/SERAPH
Are you stoned, Fischer?

Pause.

FISCHER (O.S.)
I'm actually feeling very focused. How do you feel? No poetry today?

AMY/SERAPH
What is your purpose in this experiment? Drugging each of us?

FISCHER (O.S.)
I'm still tinkering with the exact formula. But you've always said the whole group contributes to your psychic presence.

AMY/SERAPH
This is not what I meant. I'm not going to answer your questions.

FISCHER (O.S.)
You will, actually. Watch: what are the next three numbers in the randomizer?

Pause. Then, reluctantly:

AMY/SERAPH
Sixty four oh-eight. Eight ninety one. Thirty three eighteen.

Tap, tap, tap. Impressed sighs.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Out of twelve digits, you missed two. That's better than any psychic has ever-

AMY/SERAPH
Stop talking, Fischer.

Silent obedience.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
If you have ever heeded one of my warnings, listen now: this will end badly.

BLACK.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Fischer wakes up on the couch. Bierce sleeps in a chair. In her hand, the white card:

SHERIFF JOINS THE DEAD.

She awakens.

FISCHER
You want breakfast?

INT. FISCHER'S DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer serves Bierce a pile of pancakes.

BIERCE
You defuse land mines *and* make pancakes. It's a wonder you're single.

She looks the white card over and chews her pancakes.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Your dead duck tested clean. It just died. The card was just paper. So, who's your pen-pal?

FISCHER
I don't know.

BIERCE
Let me ask it this way: who's Amy Warren?

Fischer looks at her sharply.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
You were screaming her name last night. You remember that?

Silence.

FISCHER
Finish your breakfast.

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer delves into his trunk of files and pulls out a stack of the handwritten white cards.

FISCHER
Pick a card. Any card.

Bierce picks up a white card: MONIQUE 284 BROADWAY.

He pulls a video tape from the middle of the library, and inserts it into a playback deck.

BIERCE
What was this like? Chasing ghosts? What did you do?

FISCHER
I had studied psychology and physics. And the FBI paid for my pharmacology degree. So I was the scientist. And tech support. And eventually, the interrogator.

He pushes PLAY.

ON THE TAPE

Amy sits in a chair at a table, blindfolded. She holds a pen and a blank white card in front of her.

NICK (O.S.)
Fisch, you ready?

YOUNG FISCHER (O.S.)
Yup. Seraph, are you there?

Amy breathes heavily, then in her deep, monstrous voice:

AMY/SERAPH
“This is the time. And this is the record of the time.”

BIERCE jumps in her seat.

FISCHER
Seraph loved Laurie Anderson.

BIERCE
What’s...who’s Seraph?

FISCHER
A discarnate entity. A teacher from a nonlinear temporality.

BIERCE
What’s that mean?

FISCHER
Who the hell knows.

BIERCE
What’s with the blindfold?

FISCHER
My idea, actually. It focused Amy. She could do longer sessions.

ON THE SCREEN, Amy begins to write. She seals the card in an envelope.

YOUNG FISCHER
Thank you, Seraph, this could save someone’s life. Can you-

Amy’s head falls and smacks against the desk. Then she sits up, smiling and rubbing her head.

YOUNG FISCHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ouch. Session's over, I guess?

AMY
You got an Advil?

INT. FISCHER'S FILE ROOM - DAY

Fischer turns off the tape. Bierce flaps the MONIQUE 284 card.

FISCHER
Monique was thirteen years old. She had been kidnapped. The FBI found her in a crack house at 284 Broadway in Paterson, New Jersey.

BIERCE
Impressive.

FISCHER
Do you know how many Broadways, or Moniques, there are in the country?

BIERCE
On the tape, you sound pretty convinced.

FISCHER
Seraph was pretty convincing. But then Ritalin hit the market. I studied the connection between focus-enhancing drugs and psychic manifestations.

BIERCE
Studied?

Fischer grins.

FISCHER
It was an independent study.

BIERCE
So you gave Amy psychic speed. What happened?

He picks up a new card: DOOLIN'S PUB 7:14.

FISCHER
Lightning struck it.

BIERCE
You’re kidding me.

FISCHER
Seven fourteen. Burned it down. Want to see the tape? Or the newspaper articles?

BIERCE
So how do you explain that? This whole Seraph thing?

Fischer hands the AMY file to Bierce. She flips through it.

FISCHER
Amy had been hospitalized for dissociative identity disorder. Seraph was a second personality. Even his handwriting was unique.

BIERCE
The FBI must have known she had multiple personality.

FISCHER
They ignored it. We ignored it. She had an abnormally high success rate, especially after the drugs.

Bierce puts down the file and shakes her head.

BIERCE
She predicted a bolt of lightning.

FISCHER
Seraph may have hypnotized us. Showed us a blank card, then went back later and filled it in.

BIERCE
You got her on tape!

FISCHER
She could have edited it.

BIERCE
Altered the evidence and hypnotized you? The other personality could do that? Is that likely?

FISCHER
She, or Seraph, may have been the greatest charlatan who ever lived.

Bierce considers this.

BIERCE
Then either somebody's trying to convince you that Amy's still alive, or she's not dead.

FISCHER
Oh, she's dead.

BIERCE
She couldn't have faked it?

This silences Fischer. He seems truly distressed.

FISCHER
No. I was there when she died.

BIERCE
Did you see her die?

FISCHER
It's...it's not possible.

BIERCE
It's not possible? Even for "the greatest charlatan who ever lived"?

Silence.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
All right. Whoever it is, they told you about Zug Island. They might have saved my life. Let's go find out why.

INT. BIERCE'S CAR - DAY

Bierce drives Fischer over the bridge to Zug Island.

BIERCE
Just to be clear, this is the last time the police act as your personal shuttle service.

FISCHER
I could hop in the back like last night. You could be my chauffeur.

BIERCE
Get a car.

FISCHER
Oh yeah. “Sorry, officer. I didn’t see you, my windshield filled up with blood.” Right. Good idea.

EXT. ZUG STEEL MILL - DAY

A police tape perimeter surrounds the building. Members of the bomb squad are packing up their van. OFFICER DREYFUSS (30s) hustles up to meet Bierce and Fischer.

DREYFUSS
Sheriff.

BIERCE
Hi, Jay. This is Mister - what’s your first name, Fisch?

FISCHER
Aaron.

BIERCE
Aaron?

FISCHER
Whatever.

BIERCE
This is Fisch. He works with the FBI. He’s OK.

DREYFUSS
Sure. What can I help you with, Mister Fisch?

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - DAY

Fischer and Bierce descend to the sublevel room. Fischer realizes that Dreyfuss is still standing in the doorway at the top of the steps.

FISCHER
You coming?

DREYFUSS
Not unless I’m ordered to.

The bomb and wires have been removed, but nothing else appears to have been touched. Even the cage is there, and the rats sleep in a huddled pile.

Fischer studies the carcasses on the walls.

FISCHER
Could they tell where he might've gotten the land mine?

DREYFUSS
In this neighborhood? Wal-mart.

Fischer inspects a slaughtered rabbit. Its throat is cut from ear to ear, and a straight incision opens up its chest.

FISCHER
He's a survivalist. And... occultist.

BIERCE
That's clear.

DREYFUSS
Part of a cult, you think?

FISCHER
No. He's a loner, a wannabe. He's looking for something to believe in. Something anarchical.

Fischer approaches the protohuman statue with Bierce behind.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
He carved the altar right out of the rock. It's not anything he found in a book. It's an experiment. He was expressing himself, reaching out to something he couldn't define.

Bierce shudders and blows out a cloud of cold mist.

BIERCE
Jesus, it's cold down here.

FISCHER
No windows, no sunlight. That might account for it.

DREYFUSS
You're kidding me, right? It's eighty degrees outside, you can see your breath down there.

Fischer looks sharply at Dreyfuss.

FISCHER
Go jump in the river.

DREYFUSS
Excuse me?

FISCHER
It’s pretty cold, even in August. It’s leaching heat right through the wall.

DREYFUSS
The river’s not below freezing!

FISCHER
Visible breath is a result of the dew point of the air, not just the temperature. The air’s full of moisture.

DREYFUSS
I don’t like your tone, buddy. Don’t talk to me like I’m some kid.

FISCHER
I’m explaining a scientific phenomenon to a man who refuses to walk down into a basement-

BIERCE
Easy, now.

FISCHER
-because of a scary-looking statue and some cold air.

DREYFUSS
This place is fucked! There’s no cracks in the walls! Where’s the moisture coming from?

FISCHER
Let’s find out.

Fischer opens the cage of rats and dumps them onto the floor. The rats scurry along the walls, searching for an exit. One by one, they approach and surround Fischer. They stare up at him, heads cocked, whiskers twitching.

BIERCE
Holy shit.

One by one, they each fall over on their sides, eyes glassy. They are all dead. Dreyfuss crosses himself.

DREYFUSS
Holy Mother of God.

Bierce looks to Fischer for guidance. Fischer's eyes dart back and forth over the circle of dead rats. Trying to control his emotions.

He takes a pair of tweezers and a small plastic bag out of his pocket. He chooses a rat and seals it up in the bag. He looks anxiously at the statue.

EXT. STEEL MILL - DAY

Dreyfuss leads Bierce and Fischer out into the sunlight, and without a word, walks away from them.

BIERCE
What do you think happened in there?

FISCHER
I'm working on it. If I were you, I'd box up every one of those animals and test them for poisons, chemicals, rabies, anything. What else can your department do?

BIERCE
My department? This is local law enforcement's jurisdiction. They were doing me a favor just letting me bring you in here.

FISCHER
All right, what are they gonna do? They should stake the place out. He'll try to come back here. This place has meaning for him.

Bierce takes him aside.

BIERCE
Listen, Fisch. They'll take this seriously, but it's one incident. They got gang wars, domestic violence, homicides-

FISCHER
He planted a land mine-

BIERCE
They can't afford to keep a watch on an abandoned steel mill with all the other shit they have to do. Not on a hunch that this guy would be dumb enough to come back here.

FISCHER
They're spooked.

BIERCE
Yes. But challenging that is not going to get them to set up surveillance.

Fischer nods, frustrated.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Maybe...the Sheriff's department could farm out an investigation to you. Unofficially.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - EVENING

Fischer is on another Skype call with a visibly tired Dave Harrow. Bierce stands behind him, arms folded, visible in the Skype video box.

FISCHER
I'm just trying to figure out who leases the building.

HARROW
Did you maybe try Google before calling the Bureau?

FISCHER
I can't get public records, or a list of previous employees. The mortgage was toxic, nobody wants to claim it. I can't even get schematics. Can you help me or not?

HARROW
Not.

Fischer throws up his hands in despair.

HARROW (CONT'D)
This may surprise you, Fisch, but I actually do like to go home sometimes. It's way too late for this shit.

Bierce steps closer to the webcam.

BIERCE
Agent Harrow, this is a serious investigation. I'm surprised you're refusing be more helpful.

HARROW
Sheriff, Mister Fischer is not an FBI agent. He's a contractor. Neither one of you has the right to make demands of this office. And I don't know what he's doing running around interfering with the local police.

BIERCE
If he hadn't "interfered" last night, Agent, my ass and probably a couple of officers would've been blown up. So I'd cut him some slack.

Harrow says nothing to that, but he looks a bit more contrite.

FISCHER
I don't need a lot, Dave. I just want the building's history.

HARROW
I'll see what I can come up with. Tomorrow.

FISCHER
Thank you.

HARROW
And Fisch? Does she know everything about you? And your, whole...

Harrow mimics insanity.

FISCHER
She knows, Dave.

HARROW
Even the-

FISCHER
Dave. She knows. Good night.

He disconnects the call and shuts down the Skype program.

BIERCE
Man, I certainly get my money's worth from you.

Fischer looks up from the computer.

FISCHER
Are you paying me?

BIERCE
Did I say that? I think you must have hallucinated it. You know.

She copies Dave Harrow's attempt at "insanity". Fischer laughs, bleakly. He shoves away from the computer desk in frustration.

FISCHER
I shouldn't need him, anyway. But I'm out of practice.

BIERCE
You do this for a living.

FISCHER
You know what I mean. The occult stuff. The rats. That bothers me.

BIERCE
I'm sure there's a logical explanation. But Harrow was right about one thing, it's late. Time to call it a night. Have a beer.

FISCHER
It doesn't go well with the pills.

BIERCE
Yeah, from what I gather, that's not a rule you stick to.

Fischer relents.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer pours himself a scotch.

FISCHER
Maybe I could find the owners of the surrounding buildings-

BIERCE
Fisch. Relax. You don't have to impress me. I'm taking the rest of the night off. Why are you still acting like you're on the clock?

Heavy silence.

FISCHER
I have the feeling like something worse is coming. But I don't trust feelings. I don't know why this puts me on edge. You're right, I just need a break.

Beat.

BIERCE
What kinda movies you like?

AN HOUR LATER

Fischer and Bierce sit on the couch, drunk, cracking up. On TV, Kermit the Frog and Fozzie Bear get thrown out of an airplane.

BIERCE
This is so much funnier than when I was eight.

FISCHER
We used to play drinking games with this one in college. You had to sing all the songs or drink.

They laugh, long and hard. It dies down. They both notice at the same time that Fischer has his hand on Bierce's knee. Bierce looks at Fischer's hand, smiling wistfully.

BIERCE
I don't have time for romance, Fisch. Or grown men acting like teenage boys head over heels. I'm just a little lonely.

FISCHER
Sounds like a perfect match.

He touches her cheek lightly and draws her face close to his. They kiss roughly and drunkenly, finding their way as best they can, not caring about niceties.

HOURS LATER

Fischer holds a sleeping Bierce in his arms. Their clothes lay strewn about the floor. The TV casts a blue sheen. Bierce's hand rests on Fischer's chest. A small scar there, right over his heart.

The monsters in the corners of the room stir and slither. Fischer rises.

BIERCE
Umm what?

FISCHER
It’s OK. Sleep.

She does.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Fischer pulls on his boxers. He pops pills.

INT. FISCHER’S FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer types into his browser: RITUAL ANIMAL KILLING.

He reads. Unsatisfied.

He tries DEMON KILLS ANIMALS NO MARKS.

He clicks through several web pages. Pictures of Dante and Milton. A Bible link - Mark 5: 1-20.

VARIOUS PASSAGES HIGHLIGHTED ON THE WEB PAGE

“Send us into the swine, so that we may enter them.”
...Jesus gave them permission...
...the herd rushed down the steep bank...
...and they were drowned in the sea.

FISCHER

shakes his head and sinks back in his chair. Out the window, he sees Amy Warren, standing at the mailbox.

EXT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer walks out in only his boxers, gun in hand. Amy is gone. Nothing moves but the wind in the trees. Fischer runs to the mailbox and opens it. A white envelope. He tears it open. It reads:

ARE YOU LISTENING, FISCHER?

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer bursts in the front door. Amy stands over Bierce, reaching for her face. Fischer CRIES OUT IN ALARM. He runs to Bierce's side; by the time he gets there, Amy has disappeared. Bierce wakes with a YELP.

BIERCE
What? What's wrong? What's wrong Fischer?

Fischer holds her tightly. He steadies his own breath.

BLACK.

INT. WHITE ROOM - JANUARY 3, 2001, 1:16 AM

Timecode. Amy, seated and blindfolded.

AMY/SERAPH
Alone tonight, Fischer?

Silence.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
I am ageless. I have fathomed young suns and seen the flourishing of human life from its infancy. I cannot understand your behavior.

FISCHER (O.S.)
You can't?

AMY/SERAPH
You are taking psychotropics, speed, and a dream-suppressant. Why the drugs? Why did you buy a gun? What is wrong with you?

FISCHER (O.S.)
Why do you give us information? Why did you tell us about that kid getting raped?

AMY/SERAPH
Was the information not useful?

A photograph is thrown into Amy's face. She does not flinch.

FISCHER (O.S)
Considering we were too late to stop it?

(MORE)

FISCHER (O.S) (CONT'D)
You gave us a blow-by-blow description. It was pornographic. You're a sociopath.

AMY/SERAPH
I could not prevent the crime.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Oh, but you can blow up fucking glasses just fine, right? You'll pop my head like a grape if I dare try to optimize your predictions, but a kid getting raped, well that's just tough shit.

AMY/SERAPH
This is surface scum. You are fundamentally broken, Fischer. You have become perfectly possessed.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Oh, please. By what?

Amy tilts her head slightly, ruminating.

AMY/SERAPH
Let us call this demon "The Reductionist". Borne of an aspiring vacuum within you.

FISCHER (O.S.)
Why are you changing the subject?

AMY/SERAPH
Is this about your card?

FISCHER (O.S.)
Fuck that card!

AMY/SERAPH
Why did you buy a gun?

FISCHER (O.S.)
To put a bullet in that rapist! I tried to do what you wouldn't do, but the cops got to him first!

Silence.

AMY/SERAPH
You have a demon housed within you, Aaron Fischer. While it remains, we can no longer be allies.

Silence.

FISCHER (O.S.)
It’s war, then.

BLACK.

EXT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - MORNING

Fischer walks Bierce to her car.

BIERCE
Not gonna hold hands or anything, are you, Fischer?

Fischer shakes his head and smiles.

FISCHER
Sorry about the middle-of-the-night freak out.

BIERCE
Don’t lose sleep over it.

FISCHER
Sure. I got plenty of other things that I can lose sleep over.

BIERCE
Well. If you’re not sleeping anyway. You can call me.

Fischer grins. Bierce gets in the car and drives away. Fischer stares at the empty buildings along his street. A glint in a window. He squints: was that there? After a moment, he goes inside.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Fischer swallows three pills. Nothing in the mirror. He grins broadly.

EXT. STEEL MILL - DAY

Fischer crosses the bridge, carrying two video cameras on tripods. At the door, hungry vines reach for him. He ignores them.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - DAY

Fischer sets up the cameras: one recording the doorway, one recording the altar. He attaches wireless transmitters to each. He slaps a prominent sticker on each camera:

POLICE SURVEILLANCE.

The demonic statue GROWLS at him. He winks and gives it a thumbs-up.

INT. STEEL MILL MAIN LEVEL - DAY

Fischer closes the sublevel door and slaps on his own combination lock. Forked tongues slip under the door crack. Fischer whistles.

He turns to go. Standing at the entrance, two hundred feet away, is GREMLIN, a shadowy figure, average height and build, features too distant and darkened to be seen. Fischer ignores the figure and walks towards the entrance.

Then he stops short. Gremlin seems too...ordinary. Not so much imposing as caught-off-guard. Fischer squints at him. Stomps his foot once. Gremlin runs.

FISCHER
Oh, shit.

Fischer runs after him.

EXT. STEEL MILL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer sees Gremlin tearing across the bridge; he sprints for it.

Slimy hands burst from the water to grab Fischer. Fischer yells in alarm and topples backwards onto the ground. Hundreds of locusts swarm over his body. He brushes them off frantically, then rolls over. The bugs begin to vanish.

FISCHER
Dammit dammit dammit!

He leaps to his feet. Gremlin is already running along the bank at the other side of the river. Fischer digs out his cell phone and runs, keeping pace on his side of the water. He dials.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Yes! I need the DPD! The Detroit Police Department! Yes!
(MORE)

FISCHER (CONT'D)
I'm chasing a wanted man at Zug Island, he's running-

Gremlin disappears down a side street across the river.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Shit! He's headed down Jefferson. I can't see him anymore. Never mind. He's gone.

Fischer throws his cell phone on the ground.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Fuck.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer trundles in, frustrated and tired. He turns on his computer. He brings up two windows: the video feeds from the steel mill. All's quiet.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - EVENING

Fischer dissects his dead rat. A knock at the door; he answers it. Bierce walks in with a Domino's Pizza.

FISCHER
Moonlighting?

BIERCE
I caught the delivery guy at the curb. He was looking at your house like Dracula lived here, so I paid him and saved him the trip.

FISCHER
Well, just take the difference out of my paycheck.

BIERCE
Paycheck? This is your paycheck.

Bierce notices the video boxes on the computer.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Conducting your own stakeout, I see?

She sees the dissected mouse. Beat.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
I'm hungry. Let's eat.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer puts on a Laurie Anderson record. He joins Bierce on the couch for some pizza.

BIERCE
Record player? See, there's something I didn't believe existed.

FISCHER
Funny.

BIERCE
What's the strangest thing you still believe in?

Fischer gives it some honest thought while he pours himself a glass of scotch. He shakes his head.

FISCHER
I can't think of anything.

BIERCE
Seriously, Fischer. You used to study this stuff for a living.

FISCHER
You name it. I don't believe in it. Go ahead.

BIERCE
The Tooth Fairy.

FISCHER
Starting small?

BIERCE
UFOs.

FISCHER
Not enough hard evidence.

BIERCE
JFK. Oswald didn't act alone.

FISCHER
Conspiracy theory.

BIERCE
Loch Ness Monster.

FISCHER
Come on.

BIERCE
Love. Romantic love.

FISCHER
A by-product of biological urges.

BIERCE
A by-product...
(in disbelief)
Jesus Christ.

FISCHER
Jesus Christ? Nope, don't believe in him, either.

BIERCE
Not at all? Like, the man, Jesus?

FISCHER
He might not even be a historical figure. He could be a composite.

BIERCE
So, no God, then, either?

FISCHER
No.

BIERCE
Justice.

Beat.

FISCHER
I believe we create justice.

BIERCE
How?

FISCHER
Mutually agreed-upon norms. Empathy.

BIERCE
Man. You're tough.

Fischer swigs his scotch.

FISCHER
You know, you were the one who ran in here calling me a phony psychic.

BIERCE
Well, I don't buy all that crystal ball nonsense, but I don't discount everything strange in the world.

FISCHER
Well, what's the strangest thing you believe in, Sheriff?

Bierce shrugs.

BIERCE
When I was fifteen my sister and me got out an old Ouija board. It was creepy, but. Then that night I got up for some water, and my sister was in the hall in her white gown. And I asked her what she was doing, and she looked at me. And her eyes were dead and black. And she said in this real high voice, a bird's voice, I'll never forget it, she said, "partridge tree".

She swallows her scotch before she can continue.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Now behind her there was an open door to my father's office, and I saw something white, it looked ten feet tall, moving towards the door, like to come out into the hallway. I grabbed my sister and we ran to my room and locked ourselves in. Cause if that thing had come out in the hallway, I'd have died of fright right there. And we never talked about it again.

Fischer nods.

FISCHER
You know what that was?

Bierce looks at him, hopeful.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
It's called hypnogogic regression. You sister was sleepwalking, and recited a snatch from "The Twelve Days of Christmas". And your not-fully-matured cerebellum caused you to have a minor hallucination.

Silence. Bierce smiles and shrugs it off.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
But. Ouija boards work. You've discovered my weirdest belief.

BIERCE
Really?

FISCHER
It's not spirits. It's the ideomotor effect. Still, I think it's a fascinating phenomenon.

BIERCE
Let's do one.

Fischer looks at her as if she's gone crazy.

FISCHER
No.

BIERCE
Scared?

FISCHER
No. It's just not worth it.

BIERCE
Why not?

FISCHER
It breeds mistrust. It'll move, and then you'll say, stop moving it Fisch, and I'll say, I'm not moving it, you stop moving it Mo, and we'll get pissed off at each other.

BIERCE
Fischer. Something is giving you information. It might be you, your subconscious. It might be a ghost. This would seem to cover all bases.

Fischer shakes his head, annoyed, and grabs a magic marker off an end table. He draws a cross on the wooden coffee table, like a compass. At the four points he writes: YES, NO, MAYBE, DON'T KNOW. He turns a glass coaster upside down and puts it on the table. He touches it with two fingers.

FISCHER
Put your fingers on the coaster.

BIERCE
You ruined your coffee table.

FISCHER
Are you in, or out?

BIERCE
Do you trust me?

FISCHER
Maybe. Do you trust me?

BIERCE
With my life.

She puts two fingers on the coaster.

FISCHER
Is someone or something here trying to talk to me?

Almost immediately, at a good speed, the coaster zips to YES. Bierce sucks in a breath.

BIERCE
Is this Amy Warren?

The coaster slides to NO.

FISCHER
No dice. Is this Seraph?

The coaster slides back to the center of the table, then, NO.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Is it me, talking to myself?

No movement. Then the coaster moves in a lazy clockwise circle. Around and around.

BIERCE
What's it doing?

FISCHER
Stalling.

Then it slides to YES.

BIERCE
We're talking to Fischer?

To the center and back: YES.

FISCHER
See? Even my subconscious doesn't believe in this crap.

BIERCE
We're talking to Fischer's subconscious?

It slides across the table: NO.

They look at each other, confused.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
We're not talking to Fischer's subconscious?

NO.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
But we are talking to Fischer?

YES.

FISCHER
I'm not moving it consciously.

NO.

BIERCE
Are you a spirit?

Hesitation. Then: DON'T KNOW.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Are you a ghost?

DON'T KNOW.

FISCHER
This doesn't make-

BIERCE
Are you a dead person?

YES.

Bierce looks at Fischer. His eyes are wide and horrified.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
We're speaking to the ghost of Aaron Fischer?

YES.

Fischer rips his fingers away. The coaster flies off the table and crashes in the corner of the room. Bierce watches the path of the coaster, and then almost falls backwards in fear. At the window stands Amy Warren, blindfolded.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Fischer!

But Fischer sits staring at the makeshift Ouija board, frozen.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bierce bursts out the back door. The yard is deserted. She pulls her gun and circles the house. Nothing. She checks the grass by the window where Amy stood. No footprints. She looks out at the neighborhood in frustration.

BIERCE
Amy Warren! Step out and identify yourself! This is the police!

Nothing. A catcall from three blocks over: a bawdy neighbor. Bierce trembles with rage and fear.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bierce returns. Fischer is draining his glass of scotch. He pours himself another one.

BIERCE
Amy Warren is alive, Fischer. She's fucking with your mind.

Silence. Fischer goes on drinking, staring at the wall.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
I don't know what this was. Magnets. She did something. She was a genius, you said it yourself.

FISCHER
She's dead.

BIERCE
If she's dead, then we were just talking to a ghost. I saw a ghost. And for some reason, the ghost thinks it's you. You're being haunted by yourself.

Silence.

FISCHER
You told me your ghost story. Wanna hear my ghost story?

Pause.

BIERCE
OK.

FISCHER
Come with me.

Fischer walks to the basement door and unlocks it. He walks down the stairs. After a moment, Bierce follows him.

INT. THE BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The basement is a huge cement-floored room, sectioned off by wooden beams. Fischer weaves through the beams.

FISCHER
Step into my office. Make yourself comfortable.

Bierce walks around the beams, into a section of the basement cut off from the others. It is

THE WHITE ROOM

Amy's dusty desk and chair stand against one white-washed wall. Video equipment rests on shelves, years out of date. Fischer sits down in Amy's chair. Bierce hesitates, then takes one of the chairs by a camera and tripod.

Fischer picks a video tape off the desk: 1-18-01. He puts it into a tape deck and hooks up a monitor.

BIERCE
All these experiments took place in this house?

FISCHER
You know what I loved? More than ghosts, and demons, and Bigfoot, and seances? Alchemy.

He pops the top off a pill bottle and dumps a few out.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
It was all metaphoric. The alchemist was supposed to use substance and magic to spin his soul into gold. And I mixed concoctions that would knock your head off. I was a sorcerer with pills.

He pops the pills. He runs his finger along a long-emptied cabinet.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
So when I decided that it was time for Seraph to go, I tried to perform a chemical exorcism.

BIERCE
How did that work?

FISCHER
I got everybody high. I didn't tell anybody beforehand. Certainly not Amy. It was the most powerful psi-stimulant I'd ever mixed. It was, let's say, mind-altering.

Fischer pushes PLAY.

ON THE SCREEN - THE WHITE ROOM

Amy is tied to her chair. Only her writing arm is free. She thrashes wildly. She WAILS, an infernal shee-cry. Her free hand writes on the desk, calmly but forcefully, and apparently independent of Amy's control. Loud BANGS. A DAT machine smashes against the desk.

BIERCE

startles in her chair. Fischer fast-forwards.

FISCHER
This is the boring part. Seraph made a lot of noise when he figured out I was killing him.

BIERCE
What are all those noises? That flying stuff?

FISCHER
Nick - he was a young guy, he revered Seraph - he had a really bad reaction. He started trashing the place. Bookshelves, everything.

ON THE SCREEN

Amy slumps in her chair, still blindfolded. MOANS from off-screen, fearful, pained. One voice stands out louder than the others:

YOUNG FISCHER
Help! Shut it down! They're eating us alive! THEY'RE EATING US ALIVE!

NICK (O.S.)
Save me, please, Seraph!

More CRASHES. A bookshelf topples onto the screen, spilling its contents. Fischer's gun lands at Amy's feet. Through the blindfold, she looks right at it. Reaches for it. Picks it up.

BIERCE can't look away.

FISCHER
Watch carefully. Don't take your eyes off the screen. Don't miss a frame. You are not being tricked.

ON THE SCREEN

Amy rests the gun on the desk. She addresses the camera.

AMY/SERAPH
This is a malfunction of the flesh, Fischer. You have reaped this.

Amy lets out one more ROAR, and then her head hits the desk.

She bolts upright, and tears off the blindfold. She looks around the room, uncomprehending, suddenly weeping.

AMY
Seraph? Seraph where are you?

YOUNG FISCHER
He's dead! Ding, dong, the witch is dead!

AMY
What? What?

Amy lapses into incoherent pleas and sobs. Young Fischer laughs.

YOUNG FISCHER
Wait! Wait! It's amazing! I can taste myself being eaten! I can feel myself going down its throat!

Amy points the gun offscreen and FIRES. Young Fischer's laughter stops. Amy FIRES again and again. The other moans cease.

She puts the gun to her head and FIRES. An eruption of blood from her temple, and she slumps to the desk. Her eyes are open, staring into the camera, dead. The tape continues to play.

IN THE BASEMENT

Bierce stares at the screen in silent horror.

FISCHER
She shot me in the rib cage, right between my heart and my lungs. I was dead for nine minutes before they resuscitated me. They say it was a miracle I wasn't brain dead, but it's not a unique story.

Bierce shakes her head reflexively. Fischer studies her.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Want to see it again?

He rewinds and advances the horrible footage frame by frame. Suicide in super slow motion.

BIERCE
It's real.

FISCHER
You can never be sure. That's the beauty of science. Maybe it's just a better fake than we can tell.

BIERCE
It's real.

FISCHER
I thought Seraph was an evil spirit. But Amy didn't need an exorcism. She needed a doctor.

Bierce stands, shaking.

BIERCE
Was she your friend? Weren't they all?

FISCHER
Yeah.

BIERCE
How can you live in a haunted house where all your friends died?

FISCHER
Because it's an act of defiance.

BIERCE
Against who?

FISCHER
Against the phantoms of my own mind. There aren't any ghosts here. Why should I run away? From my own memories? From bad dreams? I will not be driven by a fantasy.

BIERCE
Or an emotion?

FISCHER
Same thing.

Bierce shakes her head.

BIERCE
It's an act. You're not that cold, Fisch.

FISCHER
No?

BIERCE
No. You couldn't have done what you did for that man and his daughter. I saw your eyes. You cared.

Fischer walks to the desk and strokes it.

FISCHER
See that slight discoloration? That's her blood. That's real. That's never gonna come off.

Bierce stands, furious and disgusted, trying to bottle an outburst. She walks out.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bierce walks to her car and gets in. She grabs the wheel. Her hands tremble. She drives away.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Fischer sits with his scotch and his pills. He watches the suicide video over and over.

BLACK.

LATER

Fischer stirs from drugged slumber. Amy Warren sits at the desk. Fischer smiles sardonically.

FISCHER
Hey, look. It's the Ghost of Fischer Past. Are you me? Are you the me that died?

AMY/SERAPH
Yes.

She speaks with Seraph's deep, monstrous voice. It is frighteningly more *present* than in the old videotapes; as if it comes from the air itself, with dark undertones like the buzzing of a thousand locusts.

FISCHER
You look like Amy. And talk like Seraph. But you're me. Explain that.

AMY/SERAPH
Your eyes are closed. Your ears are stoppered. This is as close as I can get.

FISCHER
Oh, as close as you get, huh?

He reaches out slowly towards Amy. She recedes, while somehow staying seated at the desk; it's as if Fischer's sense of perspective has become skewed. He withdraws the hand and smiles smugly.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
All right. "Fischer". If you're my ghost, then who am I?

AMY/SERAPH
You're all that's left in this body. A residue. A demon.

FISCHER
The Reductionist.

AMY/SERAPH
If you like. I've been trying to contact you.

Fischer hunts around on the floor. He comes up with a pill bottle.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
You don't seem frightened of me anymore.

FISCHER
Nope.

AMY/SERAPH
Why not?

FISCHER
Because before I was in bad shape, really tripping. And Mo had me actually believing Amy might be alive. But now I know exactly what you are.

He reaches towards Amy's face again; she once more seems to recede into the background.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
See that? That's dysmetropsia. Very common visual hallucination.

AMY/SERAPH
It's also commonly reported by the demonically possessed.

FISCHER
I'm not a demon. I'm just nuts.

AMY/SERAPH
Either way, you're arguing with yourself.

Fischer rolls his eyes, but he's clearly losing patience.

FISCHER
Jesus Christ. Give it up. You are not real.

AMY/SERAPH
Prove it.

FISCHER
I can do that.

Fischer opens his pill bottle. Empty.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Where are my pills?

AMY/SERAPH
Your crutches are gone, Fischer.

Fischer jerks fully awake, enraged.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer flings open the medicine cabinet. Hundreds of tarantulas.

FISCHER
Shit!

Fischer hesitates, then tentatively reaches out to touch the cabinet. He grabs a spider. It bites him. He curses in pain. He retreats.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer opens the cardboard boxes of delivered medicines. Full of snakes.

INT. BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer runs down into the basement. He picks a hatchet off a shelf and advances on Amy.

FISCHER
Give me my pills. Now!

AMY/SERAPH
No.

Fischer slams the hatchet into the desk, between two of Amy's fingers.

FISCHER
Now!

AMY/SERAPH
Stop acting like a child. You can't hurt me. You're only going to hurt yourself.

Fischer looks at his shelves, full of long-forgotten arcana. He picks a canister of salt and begins to sprinkle it in a circle around Amy.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

FISCHER
You tell me.

AMY/SERAPH
It looks like you're performing an exorcism.

Fischer touches his nose.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
You don't believe in magic.

FISCHER
I don't believe in ghosts, either. I do, however, believe in placebos.

Even blindfolded and stoic as ever, Amy's face seems to fall a bit.

AMY/SERAPH
You don't have the power.

Fischer grabs a match and lights a white candle. He thrusts it at Amy, waving a hand over it.

FISCHER
Spirits, enchant this holy circle. Cast out this interloper-

AMY/SERAPH
One million dead.

Fischer stops the exorcism.

FISCHER
What are you talking about?

AMY/SERAPH
The man at the mill. The man who puts the letters in your mailbox. He is about to unleash an ancient evil and usher in an era of darkness.

FISCHER
How would you know that?

AMY/SERAPH
Because I’m interfering with him.

Fischer advances on Amy.

FISCHER
How?

AMY/SERAPH
He called out for guidance. He invoked spirits, and some of them listened. So I snuck in, too.

FISCHER
Then just tell me what he’s up to.

AMY/SERAPH
That’s not the way it works.

Fischer grabs the desk and throws it into the corner of the room. Amy remains seated, unfazed. She looks up at him, as if through the blindfold.

FISCHER
You’re as useless as Seraph was!

AMY/SERAPH
These are the laws of the universe. The dead can’t speak directly. So I can’t stop him. But I can put him in your power. Because you’re the same. You both embrace chaos.

Fischer shuffles, offended, maybe a little frightened.

FISCHER
I don't embrace it.

AMY/SERAPH
Everywhere you go, you drag me with you, your own ghost. The rats died from their proximity to your aura.

Fischer suddenly grabs his chest in pain. He can't breathe. He sinks to his knees.

AMY/SERAPH (CONT'D)
Our entire civilization is a sand castle by the sea. The tide laps at its foundations.

FISCHER
You don't scare me.

AMY/SERAPH
Will you defend your fragile home against the onslaught of the ocean? Or are you an agent of chaos?

Fischer catches his breath. He stands.

FISCHER
Prove it. Tell me how to find him.

AMY/SERAPH
I'll send him to you.

Fischer trembles. He reaches towards Amy. For once, she doesn't recede from him. He grabs Amy's blindfold and tears it away.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fischer wakes up on the couch.

FISCHER
Aw, fuck this.

INT. THE BASEMENT - DAY

He stumbles downstairs. Everything is in its place.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

He opens the medicine cabinet. No pills. He checks the toilet. Nothing. He unscrews the base and slides the toilet aside. He looks down into the sewage pipe. He slides a hand down as far as he can. Nothing.

INT. FISCHER'S FRONT ROOM - DAY

Fischer grips the phone tightly.

FISCHER
I need a shipment today. No I'm not a pharmacy! Two days isn't good enough!

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fischer's eyes dart about the room. He takes deep breaths.

INT. FISCHER'S KITCHEN - DAY

He grabs a six pack of Coke from the refrigerator. He checks the caffeine content. He guzzles down every single can.

He stares at the pots on the stove, focusing. He makes "scary monster" claws and roars at them. Nothing. He nods, satisfied for now.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer heads to his mailbox with an armload of electronics. He opens the mailbox and finds a white envelope. He studies it. He bites it. He sets it aside.

He sets a small timer inside the mailbox. He installs a tiny camera underneath. He opens the envelope.

385 JEFFER STREET
1:30 PM

He takes a picture of the notes with his cell phone. He checks the time. Quarter to one.

EXT. FISCHER'S STREET - DAY

Fischer strolls down his street. He looks at each window carefully. Sometimes he sees dead people, black holes for eyes, watching him.

EXT. 385 JEFFER STREET - DAY

Another FORECLOSED sign. The lawn grows wild, the roof shingles hang loose, the front gate has been bashed in. Some smart aleck has painted a dirty word across a window.

Fischer makes a cursory inspection, and then heads around to the back door.

INT. 385 JEFFER STREET - DAY

The room is thick with dust and shadows. A white curtain hangs on a bar over a door frame. Fischer moves to the curtain. He touches it, caresses it. He pulls the curtain across the door frame. He stands a moment in silence.

Somewhere in the house, the CREAKS of footsteps. They come closer. A shadow falls across the curtain. Someone is standing on the other side.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Is someone there?

The voice is whispery, masculine. Fischer whispers back:

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Are you real?

Beat.

GREMLIN (O.S.)(CONT'D)
Are you really there?

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Are you the Reductionist?

Beat.

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Did the ghost send you?

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
He sent me, too. Are you a friend?

Beat.

FISCHER
Maybe.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Are you here to help me?

FISCHER
No.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Do you know why the ghost makes me write the letters?

FISCHER
No.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
He won't let me see what I write. He makes me wear a blindfold. I try to figure out what my hand is writing but I can't seem to do it. And I take the letters somewhere, but it's like a dream I can't remember.

Beat.

GREMLIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you the one who reads the letters?

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN
Are those your cameras at the steel mill? Your lock?

FISCHER
Yes.

GREMLIN (O.S.)
Are you going to stop me?

Beat.

FISCHER
Yes.

Beat.

GREMLIN
You'd better stay out of my way.

Long pause.

Gremlin springs at the curtain. The curtain tears off the door frame. Fischer becomes entangled in it, head to toe. He can't see. Gremlin punches him in the gut several times, then flees. Fischer stands and unwraps himself.

EXT. JEFFER STREET- CONTINUOUS

Fischer bursts from the house, gun in hand. He runs through the streets. Looks in every direction. No luck.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer types away at his computer. Coughing, hacking. The doorbell rings. Fischer moves to the door and checks the peephole. He opens the door. Bierce.

BIERCE
Hey.

FISCHER
Come on in.

INT. FISCHER'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bierce and Fischer sit on the couch. Beers. Fischer coughs again, horribly. He's in bad shape.

FISCHER
I feel awful. I didn't think withdrawal would be this bad.

BIERCE
What do you think happened? Did you unconsciously flush everything down the toilet?

FISCHER
I took the toilet apart. I would have popped anything I found.

Silence.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
I saw our Satanist today.

BIERCE
Where?

FISCHER
In a house in the neighborhood. I didn't see what he looked like. He's writing the notes. He thinks...a ghost is talking to him.

Bierce grimaces.

BIERCE
You sure he was there?

FISCHER
No. Honestly, it was very strange. I felt...hypnotized.

Beat.

BIERCE
I saw something here last night that I can't explain. But it's pretty clear this house is poison, Fisch. You see that, right?

FISCHER
I guess so.

BIERCE
You said you'd check yourself into a hospital if you had to. If you do, I'll be there for you. Every day.

Gratitude bursts into Fischer's eyes like sunlight through clouds. Then doubt settles in.

FISCHER
I don't know that I can.

BIERCE
It's easy. I'll help you.

FISCHER
We've known each other for a week. You're gonna be there every day?

BIERCE
I owe you that much. I gotta do something worth some good in this world, and why not start with you?

FISCHER
I can't trust that.

BIERCE
You don’t trust me?

FISCHER
I don’t trust anything. I haven’t trusted anybody in a long time. I can’t even trust myself. How can I trust you?

Bierce touches her forehead to Fischer’s.

BIERCE
I wish I could help you.

FISCHER
In the end, we’re alone. We can only help ourselves.

She kisses him, small pecks that turn into passion. He leads her up to his bedroom.

INT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fischer holds Bierce in his arms in bed. She sleeps. He stares, wide-awake. He coughs quietly. Monsters creep and laugh in the shadows. Outside, in the street, stands Amy Warren, watching.

Fischer gets out of bed. He stands over the sleeping Bierce. The monsters advance from the shadows, slithering towards him. He takes her hand and closes his eyes. Breathes. Calms himself.

The monsters stay still. They watch him with sharp white eyes, a silent jury. He takes one deep breath, and blows it out. He opens his eyes; the monsters are gone.

He smiles. He squeezes Bierce’s hand, then lays down next to her and goes to sleep.

EXT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer takes Bierce to her car. She takes his hand.

FISCHER
I guess we’re turning into hand-holders, huh?

BIERCE
Sh.

She kisses his forehead.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
You're gonna be all right, you know that?

FISCHER
I'll take your word for it.

She gets in the car. He walks back across the street. He opens the mailbox. Another white envelope.

He checks the timer - 7:42:04 and counting. He grins. He opens the envelope. This handwriting is different, scrawling. It reads:

BOOM

He turns and yells at Bierce's car, halfway down the block:

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Mo!

An EXPLOSION rocks the car. The windows burst outwards. Thick smoke pours from every crevasse of the vehicle. It rolls to a stop.

Fischer runs towards the smoking wreck. He tears the door open, burning his hand. He pulls Bierce's body from the car. Too late. He dials on his cell phone.

911 OPERATOR
9-1-1 state the nature-

FISCHER
(screaming, shaky)
Officer down! 115 Henderson Street in Delray! Officer down her car was bombed!

He pulls out his gun. He aims it at everything. All around him, the world seems to WHISPER, a soft, menacing voice. Giant eyes open up in the sky. He shoots randomly into the trees.

EXT. FISCHER'S STREET - DAY - LATER

Fischer sits slumped on his front porch, cradling his gun. Ambulances and police cars crowd the street. A tow truck hauls up Bierce's car. The cops eye Fischer. He scowls back: a sick, crazy man.

EXT. FISCHER'S STREET - DAY - LATER

The street is overrun with TV vans. Reporters bustle about, trying to get their best shot. A tow truck hauls away the remains of Bierce's car. Fischer watches it go from his window.

INT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer plugs a card into the computer. The video feed of the mailbox camera pops up: bright green, nightshot.

He gets a good glimpse of Gremlin's legs. Then Gremlin moves back to Bierce's car and goes to work. Never a face shot, nothing particularly useful. Fischer shuts the computer down.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer stumbles out of his door, wielding his hatchet. The reporters first turn their microphones and cameras on him, and then when they see the hatchet and the rage on his face, they back up. Police officers train their weapons on him.

With a furious kick, he knocks his mailbox from its stand. He smashes it with his foot. The hidden camera clatters to the pavement. He demolishes it with the hatchet. He turns on the mailbox and chops it into scrap.

A spasm of coughs wracks his body. He collapses. The reporters and cameras surround him. Looking up, all Fischer sees are weird, demonic faces. The lights on the cameras are burning eyes.

Finally, amidst the horror, he sees a human being: Officer Dreyfuss, looking down at him with disgust. He yanks Fischer to his feet.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

Fischer rides in the back again. Dreyfuss drives. Reporters stick microphones at the windows as the cruiser pulls away.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

A new white room - a sterile police interrogation room. Fischer sits at a table, across from Dreyfuss. Fischer takes note of the room's large window - there's nothing so fancy as a two-way mirror here, just an adjacent observation room, where three STOIC COPS watch Fischer closely.

When Dreyfuss speaks, rage seethes just below the surface of everything he says, but he maintains control.

DREYFUSS
How's your surveillance, Mister Fischer? Did you ever get a glimpse of this guy?

Fischer shakes his head wearily.

DREYFUSS (CONT'D)
Any leads? Anything at all? 'Cause you know, the Sheriff put a lot of faith in you. You really had her convinced you knew what you were doing.

Fischer looks away. Through the window, the three watching cops are fading into the shadows. Their eyes are black holes, melting black wax slowly down their faces. Fischer steels himself and tries to hold it together. Dreyfuss leans in, leering, mocking.

DREYFUSS (CONT'D)
Do you see dead people, Mister Fischer? Are you seeing ghosts?

Fischer looks back, defiant.

DREYFUSS (CONT'D)
Because there's only one person dead tonight I care about. And that's Monica Bierce.

FISCHER
You and me, we're on the same side.

DREYFUSS
Really? 'Cause I have a theory. Maybe it's crazy, you tell me. Every time the Sheriff ran into one of these bombs, you were there. I hear you had some kind of run in with her a few weeks back. And you have quite a history, don't you?

He slides a file onto the desk and opens it. It shows a picture of Amy Warren, brains splattered on the desk in Fischer's basement. Fischer stares at it, trembling.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK. Dreyfuss looks to the window. DAVE HARROW, in the flesh, cocks a thumb at him angrily: *get out here.*

DREYFUSS (CONT'D)
Oh, lucky you. Big Bad Uncle Sam here to bail you out. Sit tight, Doctor Venkman.

Dreyfuss walks out of the room. Fischer watches as an inaudible argument develops between Harrow, Dreyfuss, and the other cops. He looks down at the folder and shuts it.

Suddenly, across from him, there is BIERCE. She has Amy's blindfold over her eyes. Fischer's breath grows rapid, ragged with fear. He peeks up at the corner of the ceiling: a video camera. He tries to face down the apparition.

When she speaks, it is not in her own voice. It is in the deep, modulated voice of Seraph.

BIERCE/SERAPH (O.S.)
You're running out of time.

Fischer sneaks a look at Harrow and the cops; they are wrapped up in their argument. He mutters under his breath at the apparition.

FISCHER
What is this?

BIERCE/SERAPH
I thought you'd be happy to see your girlfriend again.

FISCHER
Stop it. You're not Mo. Don't you throw that shit back at me. Don't defile her image.

BIERCE/SERAPH
She's dead, so she doesn't matter.

She reaches out and touches his hand. The flesh of her hands are blackened and charred, with worms crawling out of the palms. Fischer leaps up from the chair and screams at her.

FISCHER
Leave me alone!

BIERCE/SERAPH
Mo's dead. Amy's dead. We're all dead. There's nothing we can do. You're pissing away the life we should have had.

Harrow and the cops now see Fischer screaming, presumably at nothing. They try to fumble out the keys to the interrogation room.

FISCHER
Who, me? According to you, I'm a demon. I never had a life.

BIERCE/SERAPH
You've got one now.

Black bugs swarm around the room, over the walls. Fischer's hands shake. The cops can't seem to get the door open.

FISCHER
If you're really me, you got no one to blame but yourself! You were suckered by delusions of grandeur.

BIERCE/SERAPH
You're an ungrateful, soulless bag of dust.

FISCHER
You're a psychological cancer! You're not real!

BIERCE/SERAPH
You've been sedated for twelve years. What possible judge of reality could you be?

Dave Harrow bursts into the room. The bugs and Bierce are gone, vanished as if they were never there.

HARROW
Fischer! Get a grip, man. Come on. We're leaving.

INT. HARROW'S CAR - DAY

Fischer stares sullenly out of the passenger side window, like a burned-out soldier. Dreyfuss steals nervous glances at him as he drives.

HARROW
Don't talk to the cops without a lawyer anymore, OK? I don't know if they're gonna try to make a case against you, or what, but just don't be stupid, OK?

FISCHER
Thanks, Dave.

HARROW
You're a real idiot, you know that? Are you at least gonna tell me what you know?

FISCHER
What I know?

HARROW
About this guy!

FISCHER
I'm not lying. I don't know anything.

HARROW
Why's he planting bombs? Is he a terrorist? Anarchist? Bored?

FISCHER
I don't know. Maybe there is no reason.

Harrow and Fischer sit in sullen silence. Fischer is seized by another coughing spasm.

HARROW
You don't look good.

FISCHER
I need my meds. You might as well let me out here. You're never gonna get past the press.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

Harrow drops Fischer at a street corner. Before Fischer can leave, he rolls down his window.

HARROW
Seriously, Fischer, if that computer can give you any leads, now's the time. If not, you're never gonna find him.

Fischer nods and walks away. Harrow watches him go, then drives off.

EXT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - DAY

Fischer leaps a fence into his backyard. The reporters on his front lawn don’t notice him. He tries to open his back door, and realizes he doesn’t have his keys. He grabs a lawn chair and forces his way in through a back window.

INT. FISCHER’S FRONT ROOM - DAY

Fischer stares at his computer. He has all kinds of analysis programs open. He hands rest on the keyboard, unmoving. His eyes are wandering, unsure. He pulls the surge protector from the wall. Everything shuts down with a worrying THUNK.

INT. FISCHER’S FRONT ROOM - EVENING

He stares idly out the window. The TV vans are starting to disperse. He wipes the pistol with a cloth. He does not seem to know that he is doing it.

INT. FISCHER’S DINING ROOM - EVENING

Fischer shuffles through his own house, lost. Plants wither in their pots. A mirror turns to liquid and runs down the wall. His television turns on by itself, and blood seeps from its edges.

Fischer sits at the kitchen table, motionless at the middle of a storm: walls talking, carpet fibers growing, silverware rattling, food rotting.

INT. FISCHER’S FILE ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer spreads the handwritten cards across the work table. The ink starts to bleed and run. He strikes a lighter and sets the one marked 1-81-01 on fire. It SQUEALS in protest.

He tosses it into the waste basket. The flames rise. He tosses more cards in. They scream as they burn, like tortured insects.

EXT. FISCHER’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer shuffles out the back door, away from the remaining press corps. Over his back fence, he can see the dead walking the streets. He looks wildly in every direction, lost. He yells at the sky.

FISCHER
Now what?

Nothing. Fischer closes his eyes. Grows quiet. Calm. He opens his eyes.

The sky is full of stars. Mars and Venus are visible. A brilliant shooting star - some chunk of meteorite - blazes across the sky.

In the streets, the monsters shuffle and crawl, writhe and groan. Fischer doesn't bother with any of them. He looks to the earth. A small dandelion pokes through his lawn.

Fischer falls to his knees in front of the tiny thing. Its yellow petals are as bright as the sun. He drinks in its beauty. Tears fall from his eyes.

All across the lawn, he sees the dandelions, bright as suns. Bierce is suddenly there, standing behind him. She rests a hand on his shoulder.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
This is withdrawal.

BIERCE/SERAPH
No. This is *approach.*

Fischer touches the flower. It bends gently under his hand.

FISCHER
Is this real?

BIERCE/SERAPH
You're obsessed with reality. This is your world. You are its occupant and defender. What are you going to do about it? Are you listening, finally?

Fischer stands. He looks at Bierce, thoughtful, finally calming down.

INT. FISCHER'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Fischer digs through the wreckage of his workshop. He comes up with candles, arcane books, and vials of colored sand and salt.

INT. FISCHER'S FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

He digs in a storage closet, and removes a GPS and some expensive-looking gadgets. He slips his gun into a concealed holster.

Last, but not least, he grabs the hatchet on his way out.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer slings a backpack over his shoulder. He leaps over his back fence and starts down the street. The dead faces stare out of every window, but now Fischer seems to take the vision in stride. Almost every house bears the same damning sign: FORECLOSED, FORECLOSED, FORECLOSED.

EXT. JEFFER STREET - NIGHT

Fischer makes it to the abandoned house where he saw Gremlin the day before. Two HOMELESS MEN watch him, wary.

FISCHER
Hey!

Fischer walks towards them. They flee towards the house.

HOMELESS MAN
Cop! Cop!

Fischer sprints into the house after them, drawing his gun.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is overrun with the homeless, grabbing their possessions and running for the exits.

HOMELESS MAN
Cop! Go go!

FISCHER
I'm not a cop! I'm looking for somebody! He's dangerous! Help me, please!

No one listens. They bolt for the doors.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
He's been in this house! And over at the factories on Zug Island! Come on, somebody knows him!

Fischer finds one OLD WOMAN (60s), cowering in a corner.

WOMAN
No me mato. No me mato. Madre de Dios, no me mato.

FISCHER
I'm not gonna hurt anybody. Look.

He puts the gun away. He holds his hands out to her.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
There's a dangerous man. *Hombre malo.* I need to find him. Please. Help me out, here.

She stares at him, unresponsive.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Hombre malo. He talks to ghosts. Bad spirits. *Habla con diablos.*

She nods.

WOMAN
Ah. No. No diablos. Un hombre que habla con angeles.

FISCHER
He talks to angels?

WOMAN
Angeles. Seraphin.

At that word, Fischer's eyes light up. The woman is now fully at ease, almost suspiciously so. She traces a cross on Fischer's chest with one finger.

FISCHER
What he's talking to isn't an angel. It's nothing holy.

WOMAN
No, no.

She traces again - up, down, left, right. With each motion:

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Si. No. Quizas. No se.

FISCHER
Yes. No. Maybe. Don't know.

The woman nods. Her face is changing slightly, teeth elongating, hair growing, eyes darkening.

Fischer stands and looks around the room, searching for some answer that eludes him.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Does he come here often?

WOMAN
No.

FISCHER
Does he move around the neighborhood? With the rest of the homeless?

WOMAN
Si.

FISCHER
Is he alone?

WOMAN
Si.

Fischer comes across the white curtain on the floor, the one Gremlin tangled him up in. He picks it up and drapes it across the floor. Although there is nothing underneath it, a shape forms: the drapes appear to cover a body.

FISCHER
Is this him?

Fischer pulls out a vial of sand and creates a circle around the curtain. He pushes down on the form's face, forming eyes, nose, and lips.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Caucasian, maybe Hispanic male, five foot ten, mid-twenties...

Fischer feels the shape's pockets.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
...he's unarmed.

The shape under the sheet begins to speak in a whisper.

GREMLIN
Who's there?

Fischer doesn't flinch; he accepts the vision at face-value, interrogating the Gremlin-ghost like a prisoner.

FISCHER
What's your name?

GREMLIN
I won't say. That's a secret.

FISCHER
Why did you come here?

GREMLIN
There were stories about a haunted house around here where people died. I couldn't resist.

Fischer's eyes flit back and forth, piecing it together.

FISCHER
You lived in the neighborhood. You were one of the foreclosures.

GREMLIN
My wife died. But the hospital bills kept coming. I was drinking. They took my son. They dragged me out kicking and screaming.

FISCHER
So you squatted. Stuck around in the abandoned homes. And then...you found something.

GREMLIN
The *seraphin* led me to it. They said it would bring me justice.

FISCHER
What was it?

GREMLIN
It was in the river. By the factory.

FISCHER
"An ancient evil."

GREMLIN
Maybe.

FISCHER
Well, that could mean anything really bad and really old.

Gremlin has nothing to say to that.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Is this you? Are we really talking, here? Or is this more crap from my own head? And how can I possibly tell the difference?

GREMLIN
I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill them all.

FISCHER
How? How are you gonna kill anyone? More bombs?

GREMLIN
That's a secret, too.

Fischer thinks about that.

FISCHER
No. Not anymore.

Fischer whips the curtain away. There's nothing underneath. The old woman is gone, too.

EXT. JEFFER STREET - DAY

Homeless people watch Fischer as he strides out of the house. Some are brazen enough to stand out in the open. Some carry knives. He backs down the street away from them, watching the windows of the houses along the street.

FISCHER
"An ancient evil that will kill a million people."

Bierce is again following behind him.

BIERCE/SERAPH
And in its wake, kill the rest. I've been trying to warn you. Are you starting to listen?

Fischer nods to himself, lights dawning in his eyes.

EXT. ALONG THE RIVER - NIGHT

Fischer crosses the bridge to Zug Island. Scaly hands reach up from the river.

EXT. STEEL MILL - NIGHT

The mill has become a house of horrors. The windows of the mill move and GROAN, like yawning mouths. Giant slugs creep around its perimeter.

Fischer walks to the front entrance. The mill ROARS at him. He tries to push his way in. The door doesn't budge. A foul wind whistles out around the edges.

He takes his hatchet from his pack and chops into the door. The mill SCREAMS to the heavens, mortally wounded.

INT. STEEL MILL - NIGHT

Fischer kicks the remainder of the door down. Animal bones and dust bunnies slither along the cement floor, babbling in horrible languages. Fischer's boots crunch down on the otherworldly pests.

He withdraws a small digital device from his backpack and turns it on. It reads: 83°F. He snaps the lock off the door to the sublevel.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - NIGHT

The sublevel is empty of phantoms, but VOICES BABBLE in every corner of the room. The stone statue seems larger. Red eyes glow in its head.

Fischer holds out the thermometer and approaches the statue. The numbers are dropping: 75°, 72°, 69°. The voices grow to a CACKLING mob.

Fischer sets the monitor on the statue: 59°. He knocks the statue and bones to the floor. He grabs the altar and shoves with all his might. Slowly, the stone slides away.

Underneath the slab, set into the floor, is a metal grate. Fischer sets the thermometer on the grate: 49°. He twists the grate and pulls it away. A shaft leading downwards, with metal rungs set into the wall. Fischer climbs down the shaft.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN WELL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer lights a flashlight as he scales the rungs. Twelve feet down, the shaft bottoms out. A small alcove recesses into the wall. In the alcove sits an industrial refrigerator unit. Fischer reaches out and pulls its door open.

The shelves are packed full of vials. They have been haphazardly selected: some look like serious high-tech stuff, some like hospital issue, some like pieces from a kid's chemistry lab.

Fischer lifts his shirt over his nose. He puts on heavy gloves. He gingerly removes one of the high-tech canisters. It has a label. Under a skull-and-crossbones, he can read:

B-AN-205023894638XXX
HANDLE WITH EXTREME CAUTION
BACTERIUM BACILLUS ANTHRACUS

FISCHER
Fuck!

He slams the refrigerator door shut. Inside the vial, dust-yellow powder, like colored sand. He gets his cell phone and dials.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Come on. Come on.

HARROW (V.O.)
This is Dave Harrow, you've reached my voicemail-

FISCHER
Shit shit shit.

He hangs up and dials another number.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Federal Bureau of Investigation.

FISCHER
This is Aaron Fischer. I'm a contractor. I work with Dave Harrow's office.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Agent Harrow is not in the office-

FISCHER
Listen to me! I'm calling from Detroit, Michigan. I have in my hand what I believe to be a canister of weaponized anthrax.

OPERATOR
Who is this again?

FISCHER
It doesn't matter who I am! He's got enough of this stuff to wipe out the whole city! I'm already infected. We're gonna need a shitload of antibiotics or we're all gonna die.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Are you there sir?

FISCHER
Hello? Can you hear me? Did you hear any of that?

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Hello? Hello?

BEEP. Fischer's cell phone says NO SIGNAL.

FISCHER
Christ!

He considers the canister. Then he starts to climb up the ladder with it.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - CONTINUOUS

He reaches the top of the hole and places the vial on the floor. A gloved hand snatches it up. Fischer looks up, surprised. Gremlin slams a wooden board down on his head.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN WELL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer falls down the narrow shaft onto hard concrete. He cries out in pain. Blood pours from his scalp. SCRAPE. Above him, the sounds of stone on stone. Fischer looks up to see Gremlin shoving the heavy stone slab back over the hole.

FISCHER
Hey! Hey!

One more SCRAPE, and the stone covers the hole. Pitch black.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

VOICE
Ain't no Christ down here.

Then, SHRILL LAUGHTER.

Fischer turns on his flashlight. Right by his hand is something like a bat, but with a round mouth full of jaws, like a lamprey. It opens it mouth and laughs at him.

Fischer cries out and nearly drops the flashlight. He is surrounded by tiny, laughing, ratlike creatures. They swarm, clawing at his arms and face.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Gremlin sets a small metal device on the floor of the room: another land mine. He pulls out a small pin. The mine makes a quiet tick-tick-tick sound.

INT. STEEL MILL - CONTINUOUS

Gremlin closes the door to the sublevel and snaps the lock.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN WELL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer scales the ladder as the rat creatures pull at him. He yells out in fear, over and over, like breathing. He pounds on the stone sealing him in.

Hands pull him down a rung; he fights back. He pulls himself up to the top rung, and gets himself into a crouching position - feet on the top rung, back against the stone. He pushes with all his strength. The stone slab moves.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer claws his way out of the hole. Arms and teeth grab at him. He spills out onto the floor, losing his flashlight. The toppled statue casts a strange SHADOW on the wall.

The shadow melts and slides down the wall, puddling and trembling on the floor like living ink. It sloshes towards Fischer, still struggling to his feet.

Fischer sees the ticking land mine in front of him. He tears for the door. He runs up the stairs, the shadow licking at his heels. He throws himself against the door. Locked. The statue swallows Fischer’s ankle. Fischer grabs his hatchet and hacks through the door.

INT. STEEL MILL - CONTINUOUS

Fischer reaches a hand through the small hole. He grabs the lock. Fumbles it.

INT. STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - CONTINUOUS

The shadow swallows Fischer up to his waist. The bat creatures swarm from the hole. One jumps on his face and bites him. He swings his hatchet at them.

He spots the explosive at the center of the room. He leaps down the stairs, wading through the enveloping shadow as if through molasses. He grabs the device and runs, creatures hanging off his arms and shoulders.

He stuffs the explosive through the hole in the door. He leaps down into the shadow.

BLAM!

The door explodes inwards. The bat creatures are wiped away, the shadow vanishes as the intense light pours in. Fischer stands and runs up the stairs.

EXT. STEEL MILL - NIGHT

Fischer hurls himself out of the front entrance. The doors and windows chomp like hungry jaws. The monsters shrink back into the mill.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Fischer, blood leaking from his scalp, stalks through the streets, pistol in hand, pissed off beyond belief. He checks each house as he passes. All have slouching corpses at the windows.

And then, he stops.

EXT. BOARDED UP HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

This house has no monsters, no demons, no corpses at the windows: these windows are all boarded up.

It has a mailbox, but no house number. Its door is bolted with a steel bar. But the most distinguishing feature catches Fischer’s eye: the sign posted outside the house is not FORECLOSED, like all the other houses.

It says CONDEMNED.

Fischer walks to the barred door. He tries to pull it open. No luck.

EXT. BOARDED UP HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Fischer finds a rusty storm cellar door. He pulls on it. It gives a little, but a bolt holds it on the inside.

He checks a boarded window. Beneath the boards, it is covered with a stretched-taut tarp.

Fischer takes a hammer from his backpack. He quickly pries off two of the boards. He slips in through the window.

INT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

The interior of the house is nearly pitch black. Every window is covered with a tarp. Fischer covers up the hole he came in. He draws his gun and creeps through the room.

There is something in here with him, a strong rustling. He finds a metal cage. A large creature beats against the bars. It SQUAWKS.

It is a large duck, stuffed into a small bird cage. It honks angrily at Fischer. Fischer slips into another room.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is full of bird cages, all occupied. Some are straight from the pet shop - canaries, finches, toucans. Others are ducks and geese, dirty wild birds.

On the table lies a series of square, white cards. Fischer turns them over, one at a time. He reads:

AMY WARREN

Then:

THE REDUCTIONIST

He flips through a few more. Nonsense like CLOUDBURST. MIND IN MOTION.

A noise? Fischer looks around, pointing the gun. Nothing. He turns to the last card. No words. Instead, a diagram.

A child’s drawing of a house, with dozens of cartoon birds flying from it. Each drawn bird figure is meticulously filled with tiny skulls and crossbones.

Fischer looks around wildly. He sees the discarded anthrax vial, open, on the floor.

Gremlin steps out of the darkness with a fireplace poker. He knocks the gun from Fischer's grip. The birds SCREECH and flap.

Gremlin wrestles Fischer to the floor. He pushes down on the back of his neck with the poker.

Fischer grabs blindly with one free hand. His struggles slow, watching a half-interested bird staring back at him.

He digs into his pocket. Comes out with a lighter. He sets the carpet on fire.

The rug is thick with dry mold and rot, and in five seconds half the floor is aflame.

Gremlin springs up and tries to bring the crowbar down on Fischer. Fischer rolls away and runs into the next room.

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

More birds in cages, crying for release. Fischer spills the cages to the floor.

Gremlin bursts in with the gun. He trips over the cages.

Fischer dives for cover as Gremlin unloads the gun wildly into the stove and counter tops.

INT. SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer makes it back to the boarded window and lunges halfway through it.

Gremlin grabs him and tries to pull him back. The blaze reaches the room. The caged duck SQUEALS in terror.

Fischer kicks Gremlin back against the cage. He hurls himself out of the window.

EXT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Fischer grabs his hammer and nails a board back across the window.

Gremlin tries to reach out with his hands, but Fischer hits him with the hammer.

INT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Gremlin runs through the house, opening all of the bird cages.

EXT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer tacks the tarp back in place. He hears the GROAN of the rusty latch on the storm cellar.

Gremlin pushes open the cellar doors. Flapping creatures flood from the darkness behind him towards the open door.

Fischer leaps against the storm door, shutting Gremlin and the deadly birds inside.

INT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Gremlin SCREECHES and throws himself against the doors. The birds flap and whip themselves into a frenzy. Smoke fills up the basement.

EXT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer grabs a new lock from his backpack. He slaps it on the storm cellar doors.

INT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Gremlin pushes his way back through the flock of birds. Blood pours from a hundred wounds. He runs through the house and whips the tarps away from all of the windows.

EXT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer walks to the sidewalk. The roof of the house catches fire. He dials on his cell phone.

INT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Gremlin falls to the floor, dying, pecked repeatedly by the swarming birds.

EXT. CONDEMNED HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer looks up. Birds pour out of every window and fill the night sky. Fischer collapses to the street.

BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Fischer stirs in a hospital bed. IVs stuck in his arm. Dave Harrow reads a paper nearby.

HARROW
Welcome back from the dead.

Fischer almost leaps out of the bed. Harrow restrains him.

FISCHER
The birds. They're carriers.

HARROW
We know. FEMA's got a task force working on identifying and retrieving the animals.

FISCHER
Did it spread?

HARROW
Detroit's quarantined. It's martial law, but they're inoculating everybody. You're gonna pull through.

Fischer sinks back into bed, exhausted.

HARROW (CONT'D)
How did you find him?

FISCHER
You'd never believe me.

Pause.

FISCHER (CONT'D)
He was nobody. Disgruntled, out of work. Lost. Just looking for answers in the wrong places.

HARROW
So. No terror plot.

FISCHER
No. He fished it out of the river. Probably bought the refrigeration unit wholesale.

HARROW
Where'd you get this information?

FISCHER
It doesn't matter. Investigate it, the facts will check out. You'll find a kid in foster care, his son. That's a start.

HARROW
That's a pretty difficult story to swallow.

FISCHER
Why? The canister has a label, check it with the DOD. Their inventory will come up short.

HARROW
The DOD's not gonna admit to having, much less losing, a biological weapon.

FISCHER
They can spin it however they want.

Harrow frowns sourly. He stands and heads for the door.

HARROW
Well. I'll pass it on.

FISCHER
You don't seem happy.

HARROW
It's just too little, too late.

FISCHER
What's that supposed to mean?

HARROW
They're talking nuclear war, Fisch.

FISCHER
Why? There's no enemy. It's just one guy. We don't have to go to war.

HARROW
You think these guys in Congress want facts? They've got enemies, they've got villains, they've got their stories. You think facts are going to change anyone's mind?

Harrow walks out. Fischer sinks back onto his pillow, astonished and frustrated.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Fischer watches TV. Angry TALKING HEADS.

TALKING HEAD 1
We can't do nothing. We're under attack-

TALKING HEAD 2
Exactly! It's obvious this man was part of a greater plot-

Click. He changes channels.

NEWSCASTER
- questions unanswered, but with Detroit still in a state of emergency, Congress is moving towards a resolution to strike -

Click.

TELEVANGELIST
America is paying now for its rejection of moral law-

Click.

George Brellant, the TV psychic, is on stage, playing another crowd.

BRELLANT
I want you to open your minds.

This gets Fischer's attention.

BRELLANT (CONT'D)
It's too easy to bogged down in the little details of this life, to not see beyond, to miss the forest for the trees. There is more to this world than many people want to admit.

He watches Brellant in silence, fascinated.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Fischer wakes from sleep. His IVs have been removed.

INT. HOSPITAL HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Fischer walks down the hallway. Doctors, nurses, and the occasional soldier in fatigues do not notice him. He observes a YOUNG NURSE exiting a room marked STORAGE. She notices an emergency and runs to take care of it. Fischer catches the door to the room before it closes.

INT. HOSPITAL STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fischer walks past well stocked shelves. At the back of the room, he finds hundreds of pill bottles. He selects a few and pockets them.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Fischer opens capsules and dumps out powder. He cuts a mixture with a plastic knife.

FISCHER
I need help. If you're listening.

Bierce stands by the bed. Fischer looks her over.

BIERCE/SERAPH
You've accepted the truth, then?

FISCHER
What truth?

BIERCE/SERAPH
That this is real.

FISCHER
That I'm a demon? And you're my ghost?

BIERCE/SERAPH
Yes.

Fischer goes back to his powder.

FISCHER
Mo saw Amy at the window that one night, and then I showed her the video of Amy's death. She said she couldn't explain it.

BIERCE/SERAPH
Can you?

FISCHER
Sure.

FLASHBACK - FISHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fischer and Bierce watch their makeshift Ouija board.

BIERCE
We're speaking to the ghost of Aaron Fischer?

The coaster spins to YES.

Fischer rips his fingers away -

- but from a lower angle, it can be seen that his fingers catch on the edge of it, hurling it across the room.

Bierce watches the path of the coaster, and catches a figure at the window.

BIERCE (CONT'D)
Fischer!

But as she turns to look at Fischer, the face at the window becomes clear: it is her own face.

FISCHER (V.O.)
She saw her own reflection. She had been thinking about Amy, and ghosts, and her mind fooled her.

BIERCE/SERAPH (V.O.)
What about the rats?

FLASHBACK - STEEL MILL SUBLEVEL - DAY

Fischer spills the cage of rats to the floor.

FISCHER (V.O.)
Yeah, it's great having all these experts from FEMA around.
(MORE)

FISCHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I found out rats infected with anthrax can suffer sudden shock and cardiac arrest.

The rats scurry as fast as they can, looking for an exit. As Fischer holds the cage, a small amount of food pours out onto the floor next to him. They run to Fischer's side, and then they slow and stand still as they weaken.

FISCHER (V.O.)
Considering they'd probably been locked up for weeks, letting them run free probably killed them.

The rats drop dead.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Bierce/Seraph, even through the blindfold, seems to scowl at Fischer.

BIERCE/SERAPH
That's all conjecture.

FISCHER
What if it is? It's a good theory, and it fits.

BIERCE/SERAPH
And what does that make me?

FISCHER
You're the part of me that died. I'm the part of me that was left behind. You want to call it ghost and demon, whatever. I call it a fractured mind.

BIERCE/SERAPH
So it's all an illusion to you?

Fischer grins and winks at Bierce/Seraph.

FISCHER
Now who's obsessed with reality?

He fills a capsule, producing a small blue pill.

BIERCE/SERAPH
What do you want from me?

FISCHER
You're powerful. It doesn't matter if you're real, or imaginary. It doesn't matter what I think. Together, we caught that guy. We did something extraordinary.

BIERCE/SERAPH
That's something you can't explain.

FISCHER
That's something I can't explain *yet*. Maybe it's psychokinesis, maybe it's the power of positive thinking. All that matters is, for once, I'm working with my mind, instead of against it.

BIERCE/SERAPH
Why would I work with someone who doesn't believe I exist?

FISCHER
What do you care? You get someone to talk to, who'll pretend you're real. You get to be useful. How's that?

Beat.

BIERCE/SERAPH
All right. Let's get to work.

BLACK.

EXT. FISCHER'S HOUSE - DAY

The sirens of emergency vehicles howl away in the distance. The street is deserted except for one remaining press van: anonymously white, not even sporting a logo, just a bumper sticker with a red circle and slash through THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA. Sitting on the curb is a YOUNG REPORTER (20s), playing on his iPhone.

Fischer emerges from his house. The reporter jumps up and runs over to him. Fischer smiles disarmingly.

FISCHER
I need someone with a camera. You like magic?

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

Timecode and date stamp.

Two light bulbs are set in the desktop: right and left.

Fischer sits down at the desk. He pops a blue pill. The reporter and an ASSISTANT, young male, speak into a microphone.

REPORTER (O.S.)
We're recording, and streaming. Go.

FISCHER
This is video podcast one.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
OK. We've rigged a beta-decay test. One bulb will light every ten seconds, based on particle readings. These are quantum effects, no way to predict them.

FISCHER
This is our first live experiment.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Fischer will predict which bulb will light, right or left. How many are going to try to guess, Fisch?

FISCHER
One hundred in a row.

Fischer picks up a blindfold and puts it on. As he speaks, his voice deepens.

FISCHER/SERAPH
We're on the edge of destroying ourselves. You may feel helpless. But you have great power. You can do what I do. Watch carefully. You are not being tricked. Begin.

Long silence.

FISCHER/SERAPH (CONT'D)
Left.

A short silence. Then, just as the light goes on:

BLACKOUT.