

FADE IN:

INSERT BLACK

A bonfire crackles. Night desert sounds.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)
(Navajo accent)
So much hunger...

OLD MAN (V.O.)
(Russian accent)
... So few souls.

INSERT CLOSE-UP OF OLD WOMAN

The OLD WOMAN, ageless, dark skin, dark eyes and dark hair stares into the void. The shadows from a fire dance on her face.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)
Here is one.

INSERT CLOSE-UP OF OLD MAN

The OLD MAN, ageless, white skin, faded eyes and white hair stares into the void. The shadows from a fire dance on his face.

OLD MAN (V.O.)
Ripe for the taking.

The shriek of a wild animal pierces the darkness.

EXT. PHOENIX - PAPAGO MUNICIPAL PARK - DAY

(Note - This scene is shot behind a vantage camera lens)

The mid-afternoon sun is brutal. There isn't a bird or animal on the scorched desert trail. It is silent except for the constant humming of the jets from the Phoenix Sky Harbor.

From behind a boulder, appears ATHLETIC WOMAN, mid-30's. It isn't a mirage. Made of flesh and bones, earplugs in her ears, she runs to the rhythms of a female voice - her own -- shouting about the value of competition.

She sprints on the desert trail and attacks the steep man-made stairs that take her to the Hole-In-The-Rock at the top. From up here, there is a breathtaking view of the city.

But this woman isn't here for sightseeing. All that matters is to push the boundaries of her body. She pours a water bottle over her head and body, casts it aside and falls into military push-ups. Without a break, she flips over and crunches up and down.

INT. FITNESS STUDIO - NIGHT

(Note - This scene is shot behind a vantage camera lens)

The muffled sounds of the motivational tape continues.

Athletic Woman pumps thirty pounders at a universal machine. Alone in the semi-darkness of the studio, she moves hard and fast. She drops the weights and jumps to her feet.

She spins in place as she does her jumping jacks, her feet hardly touching the floor.

Hands forward, she falls on the floor and goes through a set of push-ups, one arm on the floor, the other one up. Next, she lets her two hands fly off the floor for a clap at the top of the push-up only to fall back down for more push-ups.

At last, it's time for the cool-off period. She slides into a sitting position and stretches her body flat on the floor. She remains in this position for a minute... smiles and removes her earplugs.

ATHLETIC WOMAN

Hey, handsome. Come join me... if you can...

There is no one in the gym.

She laughs and glances back behind her, her body still flat on the floor.

ATHLETIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

Couldn't keep up tonight, hey? Come on, babe.

The woman slides her body back up and stretches her arms above her head.

ATHLETIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, sure, you let me down, but then...

Her body responds sensually as if touched by someone's hands. She smiles with pleasure, closes her eyes.

ATHLETIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, you owe it to me, babe.

In the throes of pleasure, she leans back... her body floats for a second... a harsh swoosh slashes the emptiness... pleasure turns to a scream of pain. Her body sways back... and falls hard on the floor.

Athletic Woman lies still in a gymnast pose, eyes wide open, her mouth frozen in pain.

EXT. FITNESS STUDIO - DAY

A yelling MOB brandishes signs -- "The End Of The World Has Come", "The Devil Is Among Us", "Deadly Virus Out To Kill Us All", "A Ruthless Killer On The Loose", "Killing Ghosts."

POLICE OFFICERS, MEDICAL EXAMINER and FORENSIC CREW are center-stage, videotaped and photographed by fanatic REPORTERS.

NICK ANDREWS, early 40's, Aviator sunglasses on, slides out of a bright-red Mini-Cooper convertible. From the back seat, he grabs a metal case and a large-format camera. He turns around and scans the crowd in front of the fitness studio. His eyes stop on two non-uniformed PEOPLE.

One of them is DETECTIVE JACK CLARKSTONE, late-40's, dark skin, imposing posture, unlit pipe in his mouth. He signals Nick to come forward.

JACK

(English accent)

Bloody circus, today.

NICK

Not any worse than the last one.

SERGEANT JESSIE JOHNSTON, seasoned in age and fit in body, points her chin at the street.

JESSIE

Wrong... worse it is today.

All turn around.

A black van with "CHURCH OF TRUTH" painted in fire-red letters, pulls up in the middle of the street. On the roof of the van, sits TIMOTHY PURNELL, early 60's, dressed in black leather, dour and arrogant.

The man grabs a microphone and screams into it. Through the ghetto-like speakers on top of the van, his preppy Bostonian accent rather out of sync with his words.

TIMOTHY

Repent everyone. Or you too shall die. A death with no blood. For the devil is among us. Sucking up your soul. Drop by drop. Repent.

VOICES

(over the speakers)

REPENT. REPENT. OR DIE. DIE.

Several PEOPLE jump out of the van. All are dressed in black and carry SIGNS about the "Devil and his Servants," "Human Sins", the "Evil of Paganism." SIGNS of doomsday, hatred and fanaticism.

Some on-lookers cross themselves. Others echo the same words of doomsday, hatred and fanaticism. Yet others flip them the bird.

In ecstasy, reporters capture it all. Photographs, video clips, sound bites... nothing goes unrecorded.

JESSIE

Bunch of idiots. Morons.

Nick gets ready to take photographs of the action with his large-format camera. Jessie grabs his arm.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

You gotta be kidding me.

NICK

Never when I hold a camera.

Nick takes photographs of the crowd.

JACK

Give him a break.

(sighs)

It's making me sick. This. Them. All these murders.

JESSIE

We don't know they are murders.

JACK

Whatever it is, Sarge. The devil. A virus. A phantom -- One death every night is enough to make us all bloody sick.

INT. FITNESS STUDIO - LATER

Rapid succession of camera flashes.

Athletic Woman lies, dead, on the floor. There is no blood. No wound. No weapon.

JESSE

(to Jack)

Look at him, man. He's all over my crime scene.

Nick's large-format camera is everywhere.

JACK

Come on, Sarge. You know damn well Nick takes the best bloody forensic photos. Saved our asses more than once.

Close-ups. Low angles. High angles. Side angles. Frontals. The victim's face. Chest. Arms. Legs. Feet. Hands.

JESSIE

Yeah, yeah... but he's...

JACK

... pissing you off, yes, I reckon you've mentioned it more than once.

Jessie walks away and leans over Nick.

JESSIE

Done yet?

NICK

In due time.

JESSIE

Watch what you're stepping on. Destroying my evidence.

NICK

Soon, Jess, soon...

Nick gets closer to the victim and takes more photographs.

NICK (CONT'D)

... I'll be out of your hair.

JESSIE

Oh, yeah. In this life or the next?

NICK

Sooner than you think... and I mean out of your hair for good.

JESSIE

Well, then, who do I need to thank for that?

NICK

Me, my dear. Me. I've got Pulitzer-winning photographs waiting to be developed.

JESSIE

You don't say. Well, then. Why don't you rush on home now and let me work this crime scene?

NICK

A couple more and...

He moves to the head of the victim and takes a few close-ups.

NICK (CONT'D)

... it's all yours.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - LATER

Nick, his aviator sunglasses on, pulls up in front of a vintage General Store renovated for the 21st century. He reaches for his camera and gets out of his Mini-Cooper.

INT. GENERAL STORE - LATER

Western antiques, old photographs of Arizona and touristic widgets blend eclectically with basic foodstuff and every day amenities.

Nick storms into the store and aims straight to the ice-cream freezer. He opens the door wide and starts rummaging among the ice-creams.

AELLA PERONES, mid-20's, mocha skin, bored out of her wits, a store uniform on, stands to the side, in front of a newspaper and magazine rack. Popping a bubble gum, she organizes the latest editions of the newspapers, which advertise the same news story: something, someone called the Phantom Killer.

Next to her, Nick piles up several cartons of ice-cream outside the freezer and sorts them according to some unknown scheme.

From the corner of her eye, Aella notices Nick's strange behavior. She rolls her eyes and continues her work.

Nick takes two cartons of ice-cream and places them back inside the freezer. He takes two more and puts them away.

NICK
You got a favorite?

Not getting an answer from Aella, he leans over to her and touches her shoulder. She startles.

NICK (CONT'D)
You work here, right?

She takes the earplugs out of her ears.

AELLA
Excuse me?

NICK
Do you have a favorite?

AELLA
I'm allergic to milk.

NICK
Too bad. I love this stuff.

She nods and goes back to her work. He stares at her and then at the newspapers she arranges in the rack.

NICK (CONT'D)
I work on this case.

AELLA
Hum.

NICK
Eerie.

AELLA
I bet.

NICK
I photograph the dead victims.

She glances at him.

AELLA
I suppose you got yourself the perfect subjects. Still as can be would be my guess.

Nick bursts out laughing.

NICK
That's a good one. Real good. So,
really. You don't have a favorite?

AELLA
My brother used to love vanilla
with chocolate fudge bits in it.

NICK
Good choice. Then, I'll select all
three.

Once more, Aella turns to stare at him.

NICK (CONT'D)
Chocolate. Vanilla. Fudge.

AELLA
Clever.

Nick grabs all three cartons of ice-cream.

She watches Nick walk toward the register. He places the ice-cream on the counter, goes for his wallet, but can't find it. He gestures at the CLERK who places the ice-cream aside.

Nick walks back toward Aella and touches her shoulder.

NICK
Can't find my wallet. Saw it
anywhere around here?

AELLA
No, not really.

NICK
Maybe I left it inside the freezer.

AELLA
Possibly.

He opens the freezer and moves the ice-creams around.

Aella reaches out to Nick's camera and places her fingers on it.

INSERT AELLA'S MIND-LINK - GENERAL STORE PARKING LOT

The surroundings are distorted, as if seen through broken glass. The sounds come from far away.

Aella stands outside Nick's car in the parking lot. Nick grabs his camera and gets out of the car. She leans into the car.

The wallet has fallen out of his pants pocket in-between the center console and driver seat.

NICK (O.S.)
Damn. Not here.

BACK TO THE GENERAL STORE

Quickly, Aella removes her fingers from Nick's camera.

NICK
Was sure I left it here.

AELLA
It fell out of your pocket when you grabbed your camera off the passenger seat. It's stuck in-between your center console and driver seat.

NICK
Huh?

AELLA
Nice car. Love that bright red.

Nick looks at her suspicious of foul play. He shrugs and walks outside.

Pleased with herself, Aella puts her earplugs back on and continues re-arranging the newspapers and magazines.

A hand taps her on the shoulder. She turns around. Nick stands right behind her.

NICK
How did you do that?

She slides the earplugs off her ears.

NICK (CONT'D)
What's the trick?

AELLA
No trick. A special talent of mine.

NICK
You a mind-reader or something?

AELLA

I touched your camera. Showed me where your wallet was.

NICK

You're messing with me.

AELLA

Sir. I would never --

NICK

-- right. You had to see me outside... or you guessed. Right?

AELLA

Guessing's good.

NICK

I would've found it regardless.

AELLA

Yes, you would've. I always lose stuff under the driver seat.

Nick shrugs and walks to the cash register.

She hears a loud laugh and turns around. Standing a few feet behind her is LOKI, early thirties, dark and alert eyes projecting a can-do-it-all attitude, dressed in black from head to toe. A fancy cowboy hat covers his eyes.

LOKI

Loved that performance of yours.

AELLA

Excuse me?

LOKI

That trick of yours. Using your mind powers to see where he lost his wallet. Impressive.

AELLA

Listen. Sir...

LOKI

Sir? Oh, no, no. No need for such formality. My name -- My name is Loki.

AELLA

What is it you want?

LOKI
Me, nothing? But you... well,
you're quite a talented young lady.

AELLA
I don't understand.

LOKI
Oh, yes, you do. This touch of
yours. Very unique.

AELLA
It's nothing.

LOKI
You're underestimating yourself.

AELLA
My great aunt... she taught me,
when I was small to guess what's
inside people's minds... by
touching objects.

LOKI
As I said. You have an interesting
talent. It may come handy one day.
(leans close to her)
Besides, that jerk, he deserved it.

AELLA
A real ass. Taking all the ice-
creams out of the freezer.

LOKI
Maybe, one day, you can show me how
you do that... I know many jerks
who deserve it even more.
(whispers in her ear)
Something tells me you can do much
more with these powers of yours.

STORE CLERK (V.O.)
Aella. What are you doing?

Aella turns toward a STORE CLERK in a store uniform carrying
a stack of newspapers and magazines.

STORE CLERK
Something wrong?

AELLA
Uh... I...

STORE CLERK

The manager needs you to put these
away. Here.

He drops the newspapers and magazines into her arms.

Aella turns back toward Loki.

He has already left.

She runs past Nick, almost bumping into him, toward the exit
door and yanks it open.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Squinting through the harsh midday light, she searches for
Loki.

He is nowhere to be seen.