

.EXECUTOR

Written by

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OPEN ON:

INT. BLACKHAWK NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A fade from black reveals an enormous crowd of people on the central floor, hands in the smoke-laden air. A laser light show pierces through the smoke, multicolored beams shooting through the fog. Music pulses through the crowd, its beat marking time for the crowd. The television screens, the music amps, and the mixing gear all have the same logo: a neon blue arch within a hexagon. Text at the side of the gear puts a name to it: Arc Technologies.

We weave through the dancing crowd, whose phones all have neon blue Arc Tech logos. The couches adjacent to the walls are just as packed as the floor, with the only gaps being doors marked as "STAFF ONLY" every few yards. The people here engage in sex, drugs, and all manner of sin. A man in a black suit and sunglasses carries in a box to one group, who immediately open it and take the needles inside, jamming them into their arms. After a moment, they lay back, indulging in a high, staring up at the skylight, where neon blue Arc Tech drones illuminate the night sky, spelling out brands as imitation constellations. The crate-touting guard returns to the staff door, and leans into his earpiece.

CRATE GUARD

Cache delivered. Get another one,  
we can make them buy more.

We look back to the entrance of the club, where two bouncers in black suits and sunglasses bar the way to an enormous line outside. Just to the right of the entrance is an empty patch of the wall. Two people walk in front of our view, and after they pass, a woman occupies that space, neon blue energy dancing around her.

The woman, EXE, wears a black cloak draping down to her elbows, trimmed with glowing neon blue energy. A form-fitting dress runs the rest of the way down her body to her ankles, the dress trimmed with glowing blue energy.

The crate-touting man in black approaches her, setting down the crate and drawing a baton. The baton crackles with electricity.

CRATE GUARD (CONT'D)

You're not on the list, lady.

The music dampens to a near quiet as Exe sheds the cloak and dress, revealing a skin-tight black bodysuit. As the hood falls, striking blue eyes pierce the smoke, and her short white hair falls into place.

A flash of blue light, and she pulls out a large shotgun from seemingly nowhere. She places her hand on the forestock and chambers a shell.

The sound of the chambered round silences the club. People on the walls stare up at the armed woman, while the floor dwellers turn in abject horror.

Beat.

WOMAN ON FLOOR  
SHE'S GOT A GUN!

BLAM! The man in black's head is reduced to a fine red mist and his body collapses to the floor. The club is alive once again, but in a cacophonous panic. Men in black file out of the "STAFF ONLY" doors, bearing handguns and similar electric batons. One of the guards calls into his earpiece.

ONE OF THE GUARDS  
Door posts, take her down!

The doormen turn and rush in, attempting to tackle Exe. She disappears for a moment and rematerializes behind them, crackling with blue energy. They stagger, and with a crackle of energy, shrink down into nothing, as if they were a minimized computer program. Exe wheels and fires a shell at an approaching guard, whose chest collapses in on itself as the 12-gauge shell hits, center mass.

WOMAN ON FLOOR  
Oh, God! Run!

With the doormen dead, the people on the floor rush towards the entrance trying to escape. Exe runs to the right, meeting the guards filing out of the doors. The guard at the front swings his right-handed baton at her; she lunges to the left under his swing and sweeps his legs with her right. As he collapses to his knees, she lifts him by the collar and places the shotgun to his back. A gout of sinew and gore paints the formerly vacant wall as the shell tears him nearly in two.

ONE OF THE GUARDS  
OPEN FIRE!

The next three guards already have their handguns drawn and trained on Exe, whose head turns to see them just as the barrels flash. She dematerializes again, reappearing just short of the center guard with her shotgun barrel already to his chin. As another shell vaporizes his head, the other two guards train their pistols on hers. She leans forward as the handguns fire, the bullets zipping off into the balcony overlooking the floor.

Exe turns in an instant and fires a shell into the right guard's back, pumps, and as the left guard turns to face her, he receives a shell in his chest.

Exe approaches one of the staff doors and sees a dozen guards inside it, armed to the teeth with automatic rifles about to fire out at her. As the muzzles flash, she dematerializes once again, and appears at the other end of the room, where the guards all minimize just like the doormen. Sparks dance through the room, seemingly celebrating the massacre.

She scales the stairs at the back of the room, emerging in the balcony above the club. She walks over to a man seated on a couch hurriedly packing a suitcase on a table full of bundles of money.

EXE

Pharma, was it?

The man pauses, and stands up. What desperation was in his actions is not present in his voice. He surveys her as he responds:

PHARMA

Yeah, some guys call me that, why's a pretty little thing like yourself wanna know?

Exe's face clenches in disgust, but she regains composure, steadily lifting the shotgun to eye level.

EXE

My eyes are up here. Look at them and tell me where the shipments are, and you can keep yours.

PHARMA

Okay, okay. Who's askin', though?

He meets her steely gaze as he gestures down at the club, guard bodies littering the sides of the floor, where some pedestrians writhe in pain, caught in the crossfire.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

And what the hell did they pay you to do all this shit to my club?

EXE

The name is Exe, and I'm asking.

His eyes widen at first, but then he adopts a sly expression.

PHARMA

Oh, professionalism! I like it!  
You'll have to gimme your business  
card, I could use your... services.

Exe twitches at the double entendre.

EXE

Take me to the stash before you  
make my finger slip.

Pharma throws his hands up.

PHARMA

Okay, okay, fine. Geez.

He pushes the couch to the side and presses a button on the  
underside of the table. The floor where the couch was sinks  
down and slides away, revealing a staircase. Pharma gestures.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

Ladies first.

Exe prods him with the muzzle of the shotgun. It burns him.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

Gah! Fine, fine.

Pharma slowly walks down the staircase, hands trembling on  
the handrail. Exe follows close behind, gun trained on him.  
They arrive at the bottom, and he flips a light switch. The  
walls are piled high with metal boxes. Some are on the floor,  
opened, tie-down cables strewn around them. Tables in the  
room contain racks of needles. He gestures to his left and  
describes the operation:

PHARMA (CONT'D)

Okay, here's the opiates, there's  
some more downers in the back.  
Uppers are over here. I don't know  
how you plan on getting all these  
out of here before the cops show  
up, but-

Exe walks over to a table to the left. Sparks of blue energy  
fly off her body.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

Woah, the hell's happening with  
you?

She snaps up at him, a feral look in her eyes.

EXE

Morphine.

He looks at her in confusion, then points to the needle rack to her left.

PHARMA

Y-yeah, needles are there, crates are behind-

Exe grabs a tie-down cable and wraps it around her upper bicep. She takes a needle and jams it into the lower bicep, injecting 10 MG into her arm. She then takes another, and another. Pharma's voice heightens.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing?! You just wanted some of the product? Why'd you kill all my guys, you crazy goddamn junkie?!

She slumps down on the table, the sparks subsiding.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

You are fucking crazy! That's three fucking doses!

Exe stirs, then stands up. Her hand brushes the container holding the morphine cache, which dematerializes into sparks.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

Wha... Okay, when that shit kicks in, you are fucked.

He continues as he walks back into the doorway, grabbing at a handgun stashed in a box. His hands shake uncontrollably.

PHARMA (CONT'D)

The police are my bitches, they're not gonna touch me. You're gonna rot for stealing my product, you piece of shit. I own this part of town, and you're not gonna show me up in my own turf!

He fires a bullet at Exe, and it lands in her head. Instead of boring into her skull, it freezes at the skin, and then snaps out of existence with a blue flash. The drug lord's last words are warbly, but just as loud as before:

PHARMA (CONT'D)

What the fuck even are you-

BLAM! Pharma's head, neck, and upper torso are liquified, and his corpse slumps against the wall, sliding down to the floor. Exe lowers her shotgun, walks to the back of the room, then looks back at the corpse.

Beat.

As the sounds of police sirens grow, Exe looks up at to where the ceiling and wall meet. She disappears, blue energy scattering around the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKSTREET - NIGHT

Exe materializes in an alleyway behind the nightclub, tie-down cable still around her arm. Seeing the police lights on the main street, she slips deeper into the alley, weaving between piles of trash bags and overflowing dumpsters. The red and blue lights of the police cars shift to neon blue, and she pauses. Sidling up against the wall of a building, she puts her ear to the alley, listening in on a discussion between a police officer and someone else, whose military-esque fatigues are demarcated with Arc Tech icons.

OFFICER

And what exactly gives you the jurisdiction to take over the response?

CAMBER

I assure you, Arc Technologies' Camber Corps is more than capable of taking over this operation. The order should be coming down to you momentarily.

OFFICER

Yeah, well, SWAT is a few blocks that way, so if you want to tell them to lay off you can go right ahead.

CAMBER

Actually, I'm sure you'll find your SWAT team's reaction time wanting.

The officer leans into the radio on his shoulder.

OFFICER

Copy...(beat) Did I hear you right?  
There's a roadblock? Over. (beat)  
Tell them to move. Over. (beat)

He looks up at the Camber, who now totes a nefarious grin.

OFFICER (CONT'D)  
... Fine, keep me posted. Out.

CAMBER  
It seems your response will be  
delayed. As usual.

The Camber raises a hand and gestures down the street towards the Nightclub, and the sounds of dozens of boots thunder out.

CAMBER (CONT'D)  
You can maintain the perimeter.

OFFICER  
Do you even know the situation? The  
shooter's not identified, let alone  
located.

CAMBER  
When you talk to the press, you  
will give them the name Nikola.

With that, he turns and walks towards the Nightclub. The officer follows, his voice fading out as Exe continues running up the alley.

OFFICER (O.S.)  
Hey, wait just a goddamn minute!

As she continues running, Exe is nearly blinded by the amount of lights in an intersection. It's crowded with Arc Tech vehicles and Cambers, who we now see in detail: men armored head to toe in silver and black riot gear trimmed with energy. Each man carries a belt with two knives and four grenades, a pistol, and either a shotgun or a submachine gun.

Just beyond the roadblock, there are large vehicles with police sirens blaring, but their lights cannot penetrate the neon blue of the Cambers'. Several SWAT personnel have exited their vehicles and approached the Cambers, but the only response they give is over a megaphone:

CAMBER  
(over a megaphone) Please remain  
calm. Arc Technologies personnel  
have taken over operations and the  
situation is under control.

Exe takes a left away from the roadblock and slips into another alleyway. However, just as she rounds a corner, she sees a young woman, DIYANA, confronting a Camber.



Her young sister, CRESS, is a few paces behind her. Exe ducks behind a dumpster at their backs and eavesdrops.

DIYANA

I don't give a shit what's  
happening back there, I was going  
home with my sister!

The Camber does not respond. His submachine gun rests at his side on a sling, and his right hand is near his pistol holster.

DIYANA (CONT'D)

Look, please let us past! I'm  
sixteen, she's five. We don't have  
anything on us, not money, not  
guns, nothing! We couldn't hurt  
anyone if we tried!

CLACK! The pistol drops to the ground. Instinctively, Diyana looks down at it.

CAMBER

She's going for the gun. Engaging.

DIYANA

Wha-

Exe, recognizing what's about to happen, lunges forward and grabs Cress, shielding her with her body. The Camber opens fire.

CRESS

DIYANA! NO!

As Diyana falls to the ground, Exe looks Cress in the eyes.

EXE

Run. Get out of here. I'll take  
care of your sister.

As Exe stands up to face the Camber, Cress turns and runs, but stops as she turns the corner, seeing the Arc Tech lights. She peeks back around the corner at Exe.

CAMBER

Wait, you're-!

Exe extends her hand to produce her shotgun, but the Camber pulls a canister from his belt. Pressing a button on the side of the canister causes a red flash, and Exe's shotgun disappears into energy. Exe runs forward, flickering with energy, fruitlessly attempting to dematerialize. The Camber opens fire, but Exe tackles him.

The Camber kicks her to the right into a wall, and puts his right hand to his helmet, pressing a headset button.

CAMBER (CONT'D)

This is Camber Unit 58709, I need  
backup-

Exe grabs his wrist, pulling his arm away from his head. He fires three rounds into Exe's stomach, but the bullets crackle away into energy. Exe pulls his arm downward, but with his left arm, the Camber punches Exe. Exe staggers one pace back, almost falling. Low to the ground, she grabs the pistol and puts a bullet in the Camber's helmet, visor, and chestplate. Seeing that none of the armor was pierced and the visor is only slightly cracked, Exe rushes forward to the thrown Camber, and puts the pistol under his chin. He knees her in the stomach, and the fourth bullet zips up into the air.

Both staggered, the Camber raises his SMG again, but Exe puts a fifth bullet into the magazine, causing the rounds to cook off. He throws the gun to the ground, not wanting the exploding mag to be near him. In the same action, he closes the distance with Exe, pulling his combat knife with his left hand. Exe fires the sixth bullet into his forearm, causing him to drop the knife as the bullet bores through his arm and nests in his chestplate. Exe kicks him in the abdomen to the left, and he turns to the side. Exe jumps on his back, and he falls face-down on the ground. She removes the tie-down cable and wraps it around his neck, and places her right boot on the back of his neck, and pulls the cable tight. With his left hand and last choked breath, the Camber activates his communicator.

CAMBER (CONT'D)

Unit... down... Nikola... EMP  
ineffective...!

Exe kicks his helmet off with her boot, and puts her seventh and final bullet in his head. The blood of the Camber's head mingles with that of his last victim's. Exe falls back, exhausted.

Cress, seeing the action has ceased, walks around the corner and looks at her sister. Exe stands up and looks at her.

CRESS

Diyana...

EXE

I... I'm sorry.

Beat.

The sound of boots make the two of them snap up to look at each other. Cress runs to Exe, and she grabs her hand and runs further up the alleyway, fleeing the Cambers.

Exe and Cress slip out into a crowd surrounding the perimeter set up by the Cambers, weaving through the massing people and onto the sidewalk behind them. As they head down the street, Exe ducks behind a door, pulling Cress with her. She peers out looking at the two Cambers speaking ahead of them.

CAMBER 1

Are we absolutely sure it's Nikola?

CAMBER 2

If he tried the electromagnet, we need to treat it like it's Nikola. We can't take chances.

CAMBER 1

Who the hell even is Nikola? Did command even give us a visual?

CAMBER 2

Apparently it's top-secret, but they say we'll know it when we see it.

CAMBER 1

(scoffs) Yeah, like that's helpful.

Cress taps Exe on the shoulder.

CRESS

Who's Nikola? What are they talking about?

Exe pulls Cress into the building.

EXE

I'm Nikola. That's their codename for me.

Cress cocks her head to the side.

CRESS

So that's your name?

EXE

No.

Cress narrows her eyes.

CRESS

So what's your name?

EXE

Exe.

Cress's eyes shoot open.

CRESS

Ex... ah? Exe! Huh. That's a weird name! I'm Cress! I'm named after a plant!

Exe stands up.

EXE

Okay, Cress. Let's get out of here-

Exe suddenly puts her back to the wall, and after a moment, Cress does the same.

CAMBER 1 (O.S.)

Well, better lock the warehouse before it becomes a problem.

CAMBER 2 (O.S.)

You didn't already? You left it open?!

CAMBER 1 (O.S.)

Calm down, I had my eye on it the whole time!

The door slams shut. A key rattles, and the door's lock clicks on.

EXE

(after a beat) Shit.

CRESS

(gasp) That's a bad word!

EXE

Bad word for a bad situation.

Exe crosses the metal balcony and walks down the stairs, Cress following closely behind. Exe stealthily ducks from crate to crate, with Cress lagging behind, nullifying the point of stealth.

EXE (CONT'D)

(silently) Cress! Be quiet!

CRESS

Huh? Oh-! (sudden whisper) Okay! Super inside voice!

As the crowd on the exterior becomes louder, Exe sighs. Her eyes widen as she hears someone, and pulls Cress close. She opens the crate she has her back to and looks inside. Seeing it is empty, she picks Cress up and puts her in the crate.

EXE

Stay here. I'll be back in a bit.

CAMBER (O.S.)

H- Hey! Who's there?!

CRESS

Oh- Okay! I'll be here.

Exe closes the crate. A flash of blue produces her shotgun, and in a single motion, she peeks over the crate and puts the shotgun shell in the Camber's side, ending the battle before it begins. She lunges forward as a second Camber emerges.

CAMBER

This better not be some kind of  
joke, dude-

BLAM! The Camber's visor shatters, but his helmet remains intact, albeit filled with red sinew.

Exe looks around, quickly stashes the bodies into adjacent crates, then returns to Cress's crate.

CRESS

Hi, Exe!

EXE

Hope that wasn't too loud.

Exe lifts Cress out of the crate, and sets her back on the floor. The two venture into the warehouse, and Exe pauses, seeing a bright computer screen. She walks over towards it.

CRESS

Oooh! Computer!

Exe sets her hand on the computer tower, and the monitor's display flickers, several windows opening and closing every second.

CRESS (CONT'D)

Woah...

Exe stops on an open folder. A document opens, and Exe reads it aloud to herself.

EXE  
Codename: Nikola. Full name:  
redacted. Personal details page  
redacted. Camber Threat Index  
Level, Tier 1, detain. Use lethal  
force if necessary..?

CRESS  
Huh?

EXE  
Doesn't make any sense to me  
either. No wonder they didn't know  
what to do.

Exe returns to reading.

EXE (CONT'D)  
On capture, deliver to Genesis  
Compound... wait...

She pauses, deep in thought.

CRESS  
Do you know that place?

EXE  
(muttering) That would have to be  
there... no where else it could be.

CRESS  
What are you talking about?

EXE  
That compound was where I was born.

Cress's eyes light up.

CRESS  
Oh! When were you born? Is it your  
birthday?

EXE  
No, not yet.

CRESS  
Aww...

Exe turns to look at Cress.

EXE  
Where's your home?

CRESS  
I'm from the Undercity!

Exe turns back to the computer, placing her hand on the tower. There's a loud crack, and the computer falls silent.

EXE  
Perfect. That's on the way.

CRESS  
What are you gonna do?

Exe turns and walks past Cress, and after a beat:

EXE  
I'm going to find what Arc wants  
with me.

Cress gasps. She runs to Exe and grabs her wrist.

CRESS  
No! You can't! They're bad people!

Exe pauses. She takes a deep breath.

EXE  
I know.

The two walk to the back of the warehouse, and Exe opens a shuttered door.

EXE (CONT'D)  
I'm going to take you back to the  
Undercity. Can you find your way  
home from there?

Cress nods.

CRESS  
Yeah! It's all my home!

Exe smiles, and the two depart. Exe closes the shutter.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GENESIS COMPOUND - MORNING

A shutter door opens as a Camber signals a large semi truck inside. The semi backs onto a loading ramp. Two Cambers open the trailer, revealing Exe sitting on top of a tied-down box, legs crossed and shotgun in lap.

EXE  
Morning, gentlemen.

The Cambers barely have time to place their hands on their weapons before Exe puts two buckshot shells into their necks.

Exe steps out of the back of the trailer, taking a pistol off of the rightmost Camber, peeks around the right of the trailer, and puts a bullet in the driver's head as he comes to investigate. She turns to the left, and as the Camber rushes inside, she puts a bullet in his nose. He stumbles forward and collapses, revealing the exit wound on the nape of his neck.

Exe grabs the keycard off of the Camber she stands atop. She walks to the right, taking a pouch of shotgun ammunition from the right Camber. She opens the pouch, seeing 12-gauge slugs. She sets the pouch on her belt and uses the card access to enter the compound.

As she walks through the fluorescent-lit halls, she hears a security guard with two Cambers approaching.

GUARD (O.S.)  
I swear, I heard something from the driver's radio.

CAMBER 1  
Sure, sure.

CAMBER 2  
Watch it be Nikola.

CAMBER 1  
Ha! As if. If he's got the balls to come to us, I'm gonna kill the punkass. Fuck what command wants.

Exe loads one buckshot and two slugs. The three stop.

CAMBER 2  
Wait. Did you hear that?

GUARD  
I told you! We got someone to kill!

CAMBER 1  
Damn straight.

EXE  
By all means...

Exe walks out from behind the corner, cocking her shotgun.



EXE (CONT'D)  
I'd love to see you try.

BLAM! The buckshot tears the guard's chest open, and he collapses. The Cambers draw their primary weapons, and Exe chambers another shell.

CAMBER 1  
Contact!

At that vocal cue, the compound's pale lights flick out, relighting with red alarm lights. Sirens blare. Exe fires her shotgun, and the slug punches into the first Camber's chestplate, cracking it and loosing a fount of blood.

CAMBER 2  
Holy shit-!

Exe chambers another slug and shoots it into the Camber's forehead, piercing the helmet. A hole bores through the man's head and out the other side of the helmet, and he collapses. She runs past the bodies, taking a right, then a left. She ducks into a corner next to a door, just as it swings open and a dozen Cambers rush through. She slips into the door just after they round the corner, loading more slugs into her shotgun.

As she continues down the halls, she ducks into the wall to her left, hearing footsteps coming from the left. A pair of Cambers rush down the hall.

CAMBER  
This is Unit 15370, we are en route  
to the VIP! What's the status on  
the intruder, over!

The two run past Exe, not noticing her.

CAMBER (CONT'D)  
Copy, we're ready to take out  
Nikola! Out!

Exe follows the two from a distance, eventually coming to a large balcony overlooking a testing chamber. The CEO of Arc Technologies, ABRAM NEBULOUS, is observing a procedure within the chamber. The Camber salutes in his presence.

CAMBER (CONT'D)  
Sir! We are searching the base to  
locate Nikola.

Abram sits still.

ABRAM  
Find her. Now.

Exe's eyes widen.

CAMBER  
Sir, yes sir!

He turns and rushes back towards the door. Exe, thinking quickly, dematerializes and reappears on a lower level of the compound. She looks out at the testing chamber. A loud click reverberates through the chamber as the CEO speaks over the intercom.

ABRAM  
You may resume the operation,  
Doctor Ruedol.

DOCTOR RUEDOL stands on a podium above an operating table with a man tied down to it. He looks up from a laptop with several cables connected to machines surrounding the operating table, emblazoned with USB icons with the branches culminating in X's. He clears his throat and speaks.

RUEDOL  
Yes, well, Project DataMIND has  
yielded bountiful fruit, as I'm  
sure you're aware.

He looks down to the tied down man with a sad look, before returning to a neutral expression.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)  
And we've made breakthroughs with  
ways to accelerate the process of  
digitization.

Exe stares into the chamber.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)  
We have also made several  
advancements in soul accessibility.  
Before me is a man from the  
terrorist group known as Descent,  
who are well-known opponents to Arc  
Technologies and the march of  
progress.

The man on the table struggles.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)  
He will be reborn in the Arc Hive.

Ruedol presses the Enter key on the laptop. The machines around the table whirr to life with neon blue energy. Beams of energy scan up and down the man, who writhes in agony.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

The Arc Hive, our magnum opus. A perfect digital replication of the world, carrying data from past and present. All souls within it are ours, and with their aid not even death will stop our progress.

Exe watches in terror as the man is dematerialized.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

As you can see, we've gone from this procedure taking minutes to seconds. In perhaps just a year's time, we can make this an instantaneous process.

ABRAM

(over the intercom) What of digitizing multiple people at once?

Ruedol pauses for a moment, shifting his position on the podium.

RUEDOL

That remains beyond us for the moment, sir.

ABRAM

Not so for Nikola.

RUEDOL

No, sir.

Beat.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

Well, if you'd look to my right at the screen-

Projected onto the wall is a computer background, its file explorer opened, revealing a single file.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

-you'll see our subject. Named here "subject001.soul," he has been digitized and compressed into a file that only takes up three terabytes.

(MORE)

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

Compared to the human brain's natural memory capacity of around 2.6 million gigabytes, we have reduced the size of these files to a little over one one-thousandth of the size we started with.

ABRAM

And you mentioned accessibility.

RUEDOL

Yes sir, I did.

He opens the file into a text editor. With a file search, he arrives at one line of code.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

We have summarized this soul's views of Arc Technologies and willingness to cooperate in a single value. And by editing this-

He removes the negative sign in front of the value.

RUEDOL (CONT'D)

-we can completely reverse this man's disdain for our business.

Ruedol saves the file and launches it with another program, "Arc Soul Reader." The face of the digitized man opens in a window, and he greets the gallery.

SUBJECT001

Greetings, Doctor Ruedol. And a fine day to you, Mr. Nebulous. How may I assist Arc Technologies today?

Rudol turns to the balcony and bows.

ABRAM

Good work, Doctor. You never disappoint.

Exe, quivering with rage, throws herself through the glass of the gallery.

EXE

YOU MONSTERS!

She chambers a shotgun slug, but three Cambers in the operating room open fire on her, knocking her to the back of the room.

Doctor Rudol turns and runs out of the operating room, and Abram suddenly stands. Exe gets to her feet and turns her shotgun to the Cambers.

ABRAM

Exe.

EXE

You're the CEO of this place? You signed off on all this?! WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?!

ABRAM

Please, just put the gun down, we'd love to find that out just as much as you-

EXE

NO! I will not be used! I will not let you do what you did to him!

SUBJECT001

I am content with this development, Exe. You have nothing to fear-

EXE

Shut up!

The Cambers raise their guns at Exe. Abram turns and walks with his Camber escort.

ABRAM

Get me out of here. Now.

Exe runs up to the podium, jumps to the table, and vaults up to the gallery as Abram runs off through the door.

EXE

You're not going ANYWHERE!

As she lands in the gallery, Exe looks to her left and right. At her right, she sees a woman with frizzy black hair in a white labcoat, lapels adorned with buttons. Exe's rage completely evaporates for a moment.

EXE (CONT'D)

Wait-

As Abram rounds the corner, Cambers open fire on Exe. The woman is rushed out the other direction. Exe's anger returns, and she digitizes the men shooting at her.

Abram hears his detail engage Exe, but he keeps running.

By the time Exe catches up with Abram, his helicopter has taken off from the compound. She rushes out to the launchpad, seeing it fly far away from her reach.

She screams in anguish, falling to her knees.

Six Cambers exit the door behind her, and train their weapons on her. Just as they open fire, she dematerializes.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. UNDERCITY - LATER

A city underneath a city. Day and night are indistinguishable, and the Undercity does not care. Skyscrapers rise up into the earthen ceiling, continuing up through the earth. Between the skyscrapers are run-down buildings, only two or three stories high with narrow alleys between them. The streets are grimy and packed with trash, both bagged and littered.

Exe limps through the streets, sparking with energy, bearing a sullen expression. She looks ahead and behind her, and seeing no one, ducks into an alley. We continue forward, seeing a flash of energy from within the alley, and she emerges on the other side of the building walking upright, but with an even more dour expression. The expression is explained when she throws a needle on the ground before stepping out into the street.

Exe walks through the streets of the Undercity, passing people every now and again, never making eye contact. Eventually, she hears a familiar voice behind her, small, but pronounced:

CRESS

Exe!

Exe turns around, dire face softening a bit at the sight of her little friend.

EXE

Oh. There you are, Cress.

Cress's joyful demeanor fades to confusion upon seeing Exe's sullen look.

CRESS

Are you okay?

Exe pauses for a moment. Her eyes widen in realization, and she adopts a smile for Cress's sake.

EXE  
I'm fine, now that you're here.

Cress nearly explodes with joy hearing this.

CRESS  
Where were you? Were you exploring?

EXE  
Something like that.

CRESS  
There's a lot of old places around here! We like to explore them sometimes!

Exe gives Cress a quizzical look.

EXE  
Places belonging to who?

CRESS  
Arc... Technogy? That's a hard word.

Exe's eyes widen. She fires off several questions in rapid succession.

EXE  
Arc?! Who were you exploring with?  
Can I talk to them?

CRESS  
You wanna meet my friends at home?

EXE  
Yes! Yes I do!

CRESS  
Okay... They don't like strangers, though...

EXE  
If they hate Arc too, we'll have plenty in common...

Cress takes Exe by the hand and runs ahead, nearly causing her to fall over.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. DESCENT HEADQUARTERS - LATER

A slot in a door slides open, breaking the dark. The doorman, DYLLYON, speaks in a hushed tone.

DYLLYON  
Password.

Cress jumps a few times, struggling to reach the slot. Exe picks her up and puts her to the slot, and Cress continues.

CRESS  
Exe dust!

Dyllyon sighs.

DYLLYON  
Exodus, Cress. It's Exodus.

CRESS  
Same diff!

DYLLYON  
It really isn't.

Exe peeks into the door hole, and Dyllyon heightens his tone.

DYLLYON (CONT'D)  
Cress, who'd you bring?

CRESS  
Oh, this is Exe! She's nice!

DYLLYON  
It's going to take more than some kid's vouch for me to trust you-

EXE  
I'm sorry about Diyana. If it's any consolation, I avenged her death.

Dyllyon is completely silent for a beat, and then unlocks the door, ushering the two in. Cress runs in cheering, Exe follows slowly. Dyllyon places his hand on her shoulder.

EXE (CONT'D)  
Hm?

DYLLYON  
(after a beat) ... Thank you.

EXE  
Were you two close?



(Beat. A long, contemplative beat.)

DYLLYON

... Very.

EXE

I'm sorry for your loss.

He remains at the door while Exe follows after Cress. Cress turns back to Exe, presenting a large room filled with metal tables. The room's main light fixtures are off, but the various lights present make it anything but dark. There are two levels, walls and handrails on the second floor illuminated with multicolored string lights. A light fixture in the center of the room casts rotating hues down on the floor. A bar catches these lights in glasses and bottles, but the people in this room hardly need more light. Their clothes are adorned with glowing neon fixtures, and the majority of them are sitting in poses they believe to be considered cool. Computers and phones light up the tables. Not one of the people present appears to be over the age of 25.

CRESS

Welcome to Descent HQ! The downfall  
of Arc Technogy!

Exe is anything but impressed.

CRESS (CONT'D)

... What? It's a hard word!

The bartender, ARI, clears her throat.

ARI

Sorry about the brat-

Exe winces at the reference to Cress as Ari surveys Exe up and down, adopting a coy grin.

ARI (CONT'D)

-but she's definitely dragged in  
worse looking things...

Exe scowls, but before she can snap a retort, SYLAS, the eldest, at 24 and a half, reprimands Ari instead;

SYLAS

Ari! Quit harassing the new  
recruits!

Ari pouts.

ARI

Aww, okay.

Exe turns her scowl to Sylas.

EXE  
And who said I was joining you? I  
don't even know what you people do.

She gestures towards Ari.

EXE (CONT'D)  
And what kind of resistance has a  
bar right when you walk in?

Sylas looks confused, but continues.

SYLAS  
Like the kid said, we call  
ourselves Descent. We're a group  
that hates Arc Tech, and we wanna  
bring 'em down!

Exe's scowl lessens, but she appears miffed.

SYLAS (CONT'D)  
Ayna, roll the slides!

A 19-year-old girl, AYNA, clicks a TV remote. A large flatscreen TV on the wall opposite the bar lights up, with a stylish logo, reading "DESCENT." When Exe sees the Arc Tech symbol on the TV, she becomes even more irritated.

AYNA  
Take it away, boss.

Sylas produces a clicker remote from his backpack and gives a presentation he has clearly rehearsed. As he starts, Dyllyon locks the door and takes a seat at a table.

SYLAS  
We are Descent! I'm the leader,  
Sylas!

Enthusiastically, he gestures to Ari at the bar. The slideshow advances, revealing an exhaustive description of Ari.

SYLAS (CONT'D)  
That's Ari, our frontwoman!

EXE  
And by "frontwoman," I take it you  
mean bartender and resident flirt.

SYLAS  
Frontwoman!

EXE  
(stifling anger) Right.

He advances the slide, which presents the next member as he introduces him.

SYLAS  
That's Austen, one of our esteemed runners!

Exe becomes noticeably exasperated.

AUSTEN  
I know three coding languages!

After an awkward pause, Sylas silently advances the slideshow, which introduces MELIA, 22. She's a runner.

MELIA  
Hey, I know four!

Exe glares at Melia with growing rage.

MELIA (CONT'D)  
(after a beat) ... And I back up all my data...

Beat.

Sylas clears his throat.

SYLAS  
ANYWAY, this is Zavv, he's our enforcer!

ZAVR  
Anyone who shittalks Descent will have to hear from me!

Exe's glare shifts to Zavv. He becomes noticeably uncomfortable.

ZAVR (CONT'D)  
Uh... yeah...

Sylas continues, starting a rapid-fire to get this over with.

SYLAS  
Okay, Ayna, 19, informant, Deklan, 19, crowddriver, Nayli, 17, influencer, Kali, 20, keyboard warrior, Dyllion, 17, bouncer, Mikl, 14, an apprentice runner, and Cress, 5, our moral support.

Everyone stands up and lifts their right fist into the air.

ALL BUT EXE  
We are Descent! Arc shall descend!

Exe's rage turns quiet. She looks around the room at all the tech, and after a beat;

EXE  
Thirteen thousand, seven hundred  
and forty eight dollars.

All appear confused.

SYLAS  
Wh... what?

EXE  
That is the current going rate for  
every piece of Arc technology in  
this room. Your computers, your  
phones, you flatscreen TV. Hell,  
even the lights in your clothing  
probably has some Arc system  
running in it.

NAYLI  
Uh... and your point is...?

EXE  
And most of these Arc products have  
some degree of microphone. Or  
camera.

KALI  
And?

EXE  
Which means everything you people  
have ever said in the presence of  
these devices has been monitored.  
Likely recorded.

DEKLAN  
Oh...

EXE  
And that's to say nothing for the  
price that you people have no doubt  
put down for these things.  
(Beat.)  
Unless of course, you stole them?

There are murmurs in the room, but nobody gives a solid answer.

EXE (CONT'D)  
Of course not. In fact, as far as I  
can tell, the only person really  
off the grid here is her.

Exe points to Cress.

CRESS  
My sis and I could never afford  
anything techy.

Exe's eyes widen in realization.

EXE  
Wait... you said this was your  
home?

CRESS  
... Yeah.

EXE  
Do you not have anywhere else to  
live?

CRESS  
... No.

Exe looks back to the group.

EXE  
So as far as I can tell, this is a  
group of hypocrites playing at  
resistance.

Ayna turns the TV onto national news.

EXE (CONT'D)  
I don't know what you people think  
you're doing to bring down Arc, but  
I can assure you it's not working.

Exe stops once the news anchor reads the headline.

ANCHOR  
We begin tonight with shocking  
news, a mass shooting occurred at  
the Blackhawk Nightclub-

Exe continues, her voice overwhelming the news anchor's.

EXE

In fact, I'm pretty sure that despite all your trappings you've probably helped Arc more than you've hurt them, considering how much money you've given them.

ANCHOR

-at least five dead, fourteen missing. Forty patrons are reported wounded, with seventeen currently in intensive care.

The quiet burn of her anger flares up at this.

EXE

Oh, come ON! No mention of Pharma or the drugs?

The members of Descent turn to look at each other, looks of horror growing on their faces.

ANCHOR

-there was a similar shooting at the Arc Technologies Genesis Compound this morning. The death toll is unknown, but it has been confirmed to be at least thirty.

Exe looks at the group.

EXE

That is action. That is doing something, ANYTHING, to take them down. Just sitting around doesn't change anything, doesn't get things done!

ANCHOR

-Arc Technologies has uncharacteristically given a name to these crimes, albeit a pseudonym-

EXE

That is vengeance. That is resistance.

ANCHOR

The perpetrator of these two shootings has been confirmed to be the same culprit, a killer known as Nikola.

Exe points to the television.

EXE  
That- That is me.

The group is silent. The television continues on.

SYLAS  
Oh... oh my fucking god.

Exe takes a seat at the bar. She crosses her arms and her legs.

EXE  
And I'm not here to play pretend.

Most of the members of Descent stagger to their feet.

DYLLYON  
Neither was Diyana.

Exe looks at Dyllyon, her rage abating for a moment.

NAYLI  
You... You can't stay here.

CRESS  
Wha- why not?

AUSTEN  
Did you not hear the news? She's a mass shooter! We're lucky she hasn't shot us yet!

He turns to look at Exe, her steely gaze trained on him. He recoils.

AUSTEN (CONT'D)  
I mean, look at her! She could snap any second and we'd all be shooting statistics!

Dyllyon plants his foot in Austen's direction.

DYLLYON  
You shut your mouth! Cress is alive because of her!

KALI  
And how do you know she's not lying about that? Are you really going to take a five year old's word at face-value?

DYLLYON  
Why, you-!

He lunges at Kali, but Ayna grabs Dylllyon's shoulder, stopping him.

AYNA  
(quickly) Cool it, cool it, cool it!

She looks up at Kali.

AYNA (CONT'D)  
He's got a point though. If Exe's really as bloodthirsty as you say, Cress wouldn't be here right now. Same with those civvies in the club.

EXE  
They're only in the ICU because of the Cambers.

Sylas remains standing at the front of the room, his hand firmly on his chin in thought. Ari pours herself a drink as she speaks.

ARI  
So, Sylas, Mr. Leader Man. What are your thoughts on the lady of the hour?

Sylas pauses for a beat, then:

SYLAS  
I'm not sure.

Nayli steps towards Sylas and raises her voice.

NAYLI  
What?! How can you not be sure?!

SYLAS  
She's given us a fair chance.

NAYLI  
Look, Sylas. You're our leader, and I trust you. But I'm not about to trust Miss Statistics over here because you do.

SYLAS  
I didn't say-

He looks around the room. Everyone is tense.



SYLAS (CONT'D)  
Okay, you know what? Sort it out  
yourselves. We'll take a vote when  
we're done.

Sylas drags a chair to the back of the room, and sits at the  
center of the wall.

KALI  
Look, I don't like Arc. I don't  
think any of us do. But some of us  
make a living using their stuff-

Exe throws her right hand in a presenting gesture in Kali's  
direction.

EXE  
And there it is.

Kali snaps back.

KALI  
Speak when spoken to! You're the  
one in the hotseat!

Exe stands up. She speaks with cold ferocity.

EXE  
Excuse me?

Kali balks. Exe slowly walks towards her.

EXE (CONT'D)  
I don't need some prissy little  
shill to tell me when I can and  
can't speak. You're talking about  
me, so you'll listen to me when I  
have something to say.

She stops only a few inches from her face.

EXE (CONT'D)  
Are we clear?

Kali nods.

EXE (CONT'D)  
Good.

She walks back to her seat.

AUSTEN  
See what I mean?

Mikl walks over to Austen and hides behind him.

ZAVR

Yeah, I do. I was with Syllas, but now I get your point.

NAYLI

Look, Arc's got some shitty business practices. I'll say that every day of the week. But we kind of need them. They keep the lights on, they keep us comforted, they make sure we're safe better than the police ever did-

Melia's fist clenches the moment Nayli says they need Arc. Nayli's speech becomes more and more dampened until Melia explodes:

MELIA

No! No we don't! You talk like they have our interests at heart, like they're your family! They're not! They're a cabal of money-grubbing monsters that have you wrapped around their little finger!

Nayli flinches when Melia begins yelling, and then matches her volume. The two's speech overlap.

NAYLI

How do you know that? They help a lot of people!

MELIA

Nayli. Nayli! You know who you're talking to? What your crowd here is?!

NAYLI

And I think you people are too harsh!

MELIA

Oh gee, I never thought about it that way before- wait, who signs your paychecks again? WHAT EXACTLY IS YOUR GODDAMN JOB?!

Nayli stops speaking for a moment.

MELIA (CONT'D)

You make your LIVING telling  
EVERYBODY WHO CAN LISTEN how  
absolutely AWESOME Arc is! It's to  
the point where you've gotten some  
of US wrapped up in this shit! Why  
are you even here? Who invited you?

Nayli speaks at her normal tone, but it's noticeably weak in comparison.

NAYLI

Well our deal doesn't really work  
like that-

MELIA

There! That! That is the problem  
here! Descent was founded because  
we believe that Arc is getting too  
powerful, and you are making deals  
with them!

NAYLI

Hey, I promote us too! Just as much  
as Arc, if not more!

MELIA

And how do you think that makes us  
look?

Kali steps in.

KALI

Okay, okay, okay, calm down, you  
two. I understand that Nayli has  
some suspicious qualities to her-

EXE

(scoffs) I'll say.

KALI

-BUT, we can't let that distract us  
from the topic at hand.

MELIA

Exe took action. More than we did.  
And she has a point- we give them  
way too much. And the only person  
that doesn't is homeless.

As she says that, everyone turns to look at Cress. Her eyes wander around the room.

MELIA (CONT'D)

If Arc is so generous, then why doesn't she have anywhere else to go? Diyana had an old Arc phone from her parents, but they still shot her.

KALI

Arc can't be expected to help everybody in the world!

Ayna stands up and walks to Melia's side.

AYNA

There's a big difference between not helping someone and shooting them.

AUSTEN

Look, Arc may be bad, but she's killed dozens of people in the last day alone. I don't think they're that bad-

Ari speaks up from the bar, suddenly clear of thought.

ARI

The Blackout.

He turns to look at her.

AUSTEN

Huh?

ARI

If Arc isn't actively malicious, explain the Blackout.

Most of the younger Descent members appear confused. Ari sighs.

ARI (CONT'D)

Back in 2033, Arc completed a merger with the two biggest American-based tech companies. The US Government filed an anti-trust lawsuit against them to try to break up their stranglehold on the market.

Melia's intensity falters.

ARI (CONT'D)

The thing is, Arc had control over every device in the entire country. If it was updated after 2030, Arc had some fingerprints in the operating system. That was all they needed.

MIKL

What... what did they do?

ARI

They turned them off.

Nayli double takes.

NAYLI

They did what?

ARI

They turned off everything in the country. Computers, phones, off. Everything run by computers, gone. For one day, the entirety of the mainland United States went dark- (she snaps her fingers)- just like that. Power grid was gone, auxiliary power systems failed, crucial infrastructure was out until the next day. Wall Street crashed, the global economy froze for a day, and supply chains weren't fixed for months. Response systems were down too, nobody could call for help. We have no way of knowing how much damage was dealt that day.

DEKLAN

All because of a lawsuit?

ARI

Well, the Supreme Court dropped it the next day, so... mission accomplished?

KALI

How do you know? I've never heard about this.

ARI

It was my earliest memory. My mom was in the hospital for heart surgery just as the Blackout happened. No beeps, no blips, the whole hall just went black. The doctors did what they could, but... there wasn't much. She was dead in minutes.

NAYLI

Why haven't we heard about this?

ARI

Well, that's because of Arc employing affable young people like yourself to blot out all the bad press. And do you really think they'd keep their hands off that info?

DYLLYON

Diyana's dad was a journalist that wanted to find out the death toll. Every video he made got copyright-struck and blocked. Every article he wrote got taken down. When he started handing out fliers, he disappeared. Diyana tried picking up where he left off.

(beat)

That's probably why they...

Beat. Exe audibly clenches her fist.

ARI

I'm sorry, sweetheart.

AYNA

Sounds to me like promoting both Arc and Descent is pretty bad for your health, Nayli.

Nayli is frozen in stunned silence.

EXE

At least I didn't kill people in for heart surgery. I only shot at drug lords and Arc Tech's paramilitary goons.

KALI

And how do we know that?

Exe sighs, but looks up at the television. It shows footage of first responders loading victims from the Blackhawk shooting onto ambulances. A paramedic is tending to a bullet wound in the shoulder.

ANCHOR

Autopsy reports reveal that Nikola killed armed personnel with a shotgun, and switched to a rifle or handgun for pedestrians.

EXE

I only have a shotgun, Kali.

Kali looks at the TV, seeing a nightclub guard in the background of the anchor. He carries an assault rifle and a pistol on his hip.

AUSTEN

They were in the crossfire...

EXE

You got it.

Sylas stands up.

SYLAS

Okay then, vote time. If you'd like to stay with us, that is?

Exe sits back.

EXE

You guys aren't as bad as I thought. I'll join if you'll have me.

Sylas claps his hands.

SYLAS

Okay, all in favor of Exe staying?

Ari, Austen, Ayna, Deklan, Dyllyon, Cress, and Kali, raise their hands.

SYLAS (CONT'D)

All opposed?

No one raises their hands.

SYLAS (CONT'D)

Abstentions?

Zavr, Nayli, and Mikl raise their hands.

SYLAS (CONT'D)  
Right then, 7 in favor, 3  
abstained. Welcome to Descent.

Exe smiles.

EXE  
I hope we do great things together.

ARI  
Getting a bit late, wouldn't you  
say?

Sylas looks at his wristwatch.

SYLAS  
Huh, yeah I would. I'm turning in  
for the night.

Exe stands up.

EXE  
I don't exactly have a place to  
sleep.

SYLAS  
No problem, we have rooms upstairs.  
You'll probably need to room with  
someone, though...

He looks around the room, then stops at Cress. He gestures in  
her direction, then says:

SYLAS (CONT'D)  
...I hope you don't mind...?

EXE  
(sigh) If it helps her feel safe,  
sure.

They watch as Cress goes up the stairs.

EXE (CONT'D)  
Though I'm probably not the best  
role model.

SYLAS  
The fact that you're aware of that  
makes me feel a lot better.

Exe smiles faintly before heading up the stairs.

CUT TO:



## BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cress is sound asleep. The door to the bathroom is shut, but the light is on. Inside the bathroom, Exe stands hunched over at the sink, a belt strapped around her arm. She's not in her bodysuit, instead wearing an oversized t-shirt with a gray alien printed on the front. She takes slow, heavy breaths as blue energy crackles, and a very large needle appears in her hand.

She looks at the clear liquid in the needle. She turns it slightly, and she sees her reflection in the glass. She scowls at it more intensely than ever before. She takes a deep breath, raises it to her other arm, and injects it into her elbow. She nearly collapses.

Beat.

She staggers to her feet, gasping for breath. The injection point in her arm bleeds, and with a flash of blue energy, it seals. She stares at herself in the mirror- bedraggled, with sullen eyes and a miserable grimace. She clutches the empty needle in her hand. A voice pops into her mind.

RUEDOL (O.S.)

A Hiveborn like that, coming into the physical world? I suppose it's possible, what with the new advancements in Project DataMIND.

She looks up at the mirror, and sees through it the other side of a computer monitor. Sitting at the desk is Doctor Ruedol. He's talking to a woman with frizzy black hair and a white labcoat with lapels adorned with buttons. He's not looking at the screen, but he's not exactly looking at the woman either.

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

Albeit unlikely, if it somehow reversed the digitization process, she could create a human body. It'd be very unstable. If it acts at all like a .soul file, its body will attempt to routinely optimize itself more and more until the very body itself decompiles and returns to the Hive.

Her grip on the needle tightens.

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

And, well, the .exe application was recognized as malware at the start of all this.

(MORE)

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

If it tries to cross back into the Hive decompiled, the firewall would catch it and delete it.

Exe's grip tightens further, the glass begins creaking.

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

Well, we could probably stabilize the body by introducing flawed code into it, prolonging the optimization. Digitizing others could do that, and if the body works like code, we could break the process for a time by clouding neural sensors or prompting a dopamine release. Morphine might do it.

The needle breaks, glass digs into her hand. Blood drops into the sink. A flash of blue energy, and all that's left is the blood in the sink. She looks down at the pool of red. Clear drops fall from her eyes, dispersing the blood puddle.

Cress is still sound asleep. The bathroom door opens, casting light on her, but her face remains in the shade as Exe's shadow keeps the light out of her eyes. Exe walks over to Cress, hand still bleeding. She sets her hand on Cress's cheek. After a moment she pulls away, leaving a smear of blood on her face. Seeing that, she quickly uses her other hand to wipe the cheek clean.

Exe stands up straight, and looks down at Cress. Her morose look softens to a gentle smile. After a moment, Exe turns and walks to the vacant bed across the room, climbs in, and lays on her side, facing the wall. At the nape of her neck, there is a birthmark in the shape of a USB symbol, but the tips of the branches are X's. It is the same as the Project DataMIND symbol. It glows with a slight blue outline, which persists as the scene fades to black.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. PHARMACIST H.Q. - A MONTH LATER

We look up at a man walking into a room full of flickering screens. The man wears a suit and tie, all articles black except for a white dress shirt. His fists are clenched in their black gloves. Sunglasses obscure his eyes. Another man, ALCH, sits in an office chair with several remote interfaces built into the armrests.

As the man in black walks in he flicks several switches, and most of the flickering screens turn off.

ALCH  
So you're Abram Nebulous?

We look over Alch's shoulder, and see the man in black in an elevated position compared to him.

ABRAM  
Yes. And you're Pharma's replacement?

Alch adopts a toothy grin.

ALCH  
HA! Pharma ain't got shit on me. He was fuckin' around, gettin' shot in a nightclub while I was out here, running the place. I made his millions.

Nebulous is unflinching.

ABRAM  
I see.

ALCH  
Whatever deals he had with you, I'm sure you're gonna like my offers better. That said-

He pulls a lever on the underside of his chair and a keyboard flips up from what used to be the legrest. It snaps into his lap as a large plasma monitor descends from the ceiling and lights up. He types in: "ABE NEBBY'S LIST OF SHIT TO DO:" and enters two new lines.

ALCH (CONT'D)  
-what can I do for you?

ABRAM  
I need someone captured.

Alch reclines in his chair, knitting his fingers together.

ALCH  
We don't usually deal in live cargo. It'll cost you extra.

ABRAM  
Done.

Alch sits forward.

ALCH  
Damn, that quick? Who's the target?

ABRAM  
Nikola.

Alch laughs, lurching back into his chair.

ALCH  
No kiddin'?! Same fucker who iced  
Pharma? Sure! I've been meaning to  
thank him for the promotion!

Abram steps forward.

ABRAM  
You don't know what Nikola can do.

ALCH  
Really? I don't know what another  
dumb fuck can do? Don't matter what  
shit he's on, I can bring 'im in  
all the same!

ABRAM  
She is not human!

Alch double-takes, then nearly falls out of his chair  
laughing.

ALCH  
You're telling me the fucking  
professional bougie-ass Camber  
Corps couldn't bring in one bitch?  
You're callin' ME in for it?!  
(more laughing)  
Oh, you're funny!

ABRAM  
Did you not see Blackhawk?!

ALCH  
So what? She got lucky and bagged a  
few of Pharma's goons. Big whoop.  
We've taken down dudes who've  
killed three times as many people  
as that. Bullets don't give a shit  
who they're killin'.

ABRAM  
And the fourteen others?

ALCH  
Oh, those fuckers that ran off?  
Whatever.

ABRAM  
They didn't run off.

He produces a flash drive.

ABRAM (CONT'D)  
They're right here.

Alch, adopting a deathly glare, presses a button prompting a mechanical arm to descend from the ceiling, snatching the flash drive out of Abram's hand. It plugs the flash drive into a USB port in the ceiling. A folder opens on Alch's desktop, revealing fourteen .soul files.

ABRAM (CONT'D)  
We found these in the temporary  
files of the Hive servers.

ALCH  
You don't fuck with the  
Pharmacists. I don't give a shit  
who you are.

ABRAM  
I didn't. It was Nikola.

ALCH  
Don't fuckin' lie to me. I know it  
takes those huge machines to do  
this shit.

ABRAM  
It didn't. She did all this by  
herself.

ALCH  
What the- okay, let's say I even  
kind of believe you. How would she  
have done this?

ABRAM  
I don't know. None of us know. We  
thought she could have some remote  
access to the Hive, but nothing  
like this. This shouldn't be  
possible.

As he says this, an alarm goes off. One of the screens turned off by Alch snaps on, displaying CCTV footage of Austen, Dylllyon, and Deklan running towards a door.

The date and time is current. Exe can be seen in the background, standing over a squirming Camber. There's a flash, she flinches with the recoil, and the Camber twitches before falling still. She looks up. The screen becomes overrun with static, and a instant later she's gone.

ALCH  
... Oh shit, them again.

He flicks a switch, and red lights flash through the halls. Abram looks at him, shocked.

ABRAM  
Again?!

ALCH  
Yeah, these fuckers have been  
harassing us for a few weeks.  
'Specially that white-haired chick.

He looks at Abram; once stoic, he is now in stunned silence.

ALCH (CONT'D)  
... Oh fuck.

He flicks on more switches. More screens light up, showing dated footage of Descent raiding compounds and torching drug supplies. It also contains footage of Exe killing countless members of the Pharmacist cartel.

ABRAM  
That's her. That's Nikola. She's  
here.

Alch stands up as two Cambers rush in.

CAMBER  
Sir, we need to move!

ALCH  
I-I can't take this shit. Find  
someone else for it.

The Cambers begin running out, Abram in between them. Alch presses a button and a microphone rises up out of one of the interfaces. He speaks into it, and it echoes through an intercom in the facility.

ALCH (CONT'D)  
Shut everything down! Close the  
doors and rig the bombs!

He stands up to follow Abram, but the room goes dark. He freezes. The intercom system crackles to life.

EXE (O.S.)  
Tell me, Alch. Have you ever heard  
of the Blackout?

Alch stumbles backward towards his chair. Beat.

Exe materializes behind Alch in a flash of energy and puts him in a chokehold. She glows with energy. He struggles in her grasp, but she doesn't budge. He chokes out a battered plea:

ALCH  
L-lemme go....! Please-!

She throws him into his chair. He collapses into it, choking, and stares up at a shotgun barrel.

EXE  
Tell me where Nebulous is.

ALCH  
You just missed him, actually, he  
was headed that way-

He points out to the hall with his middle finger. She clubs him in the head with the stock of her shotgun, and then grabs his wrist and knees his elbow, breaking his arm.

ALCH (CONT'D)  
AUGH! FUCK!

She prods the broken arm with her gun.

EXE  
Tell me where he's headed if you  
want to keep this.

ALCH  
He's going to the Sanctum!

A figure drops from the ceiling. Melia walks up behind Alch.

MELIA  
Impressive setup you got here!  
We'll be taking it.

Alch turns his head. Exe lifts the shotgun, but relents.

ALCH  
You can't get in without me!

MELIA  
Heh. They don't call us "runners"  
for nothin'.

Melia pulls the keyboard over to her and begins working.

EXE

Sanctum?

ALCH

The Silicon Sanctum! Where all those old tech HQ's used to be back before the acquisitions! Arc's little microstate in the San Francisco bay!

Exe lowers her gun.

EXE

See? Was that so hard?

ALCH

You didn't have to break my goddamn arm!

EXE

You didn't have to be difficult.

Melia opens the computer and adopts a sly grin.

MELIA

Heh... I'm in.

Austen peers down from the ceiling.

AUSTEN

Are you really going to say that every single time you guess a password?

MELIA

Yeah, so?

Austen sighs.

ALCH

Are... are you people real?

MELIA

Damn right we are!

Alch leans back in his chair, utterly devastated.

CUT TO:



INT. DESCENT HEADQUARTERS - THAT EVENING

Melia enters first, closely followed by Exe and Austen.

EXE

So, how are we getting to the Sanctum?

MELIA

Well, says here that there's a convoy going out tomorrow morning that'll get about halfway across the country, and then load up onto high-speed rail for the rest of the trip to the Sanctum.

EXE

Right, I'm getting on that convoy then.

SYLAS (O.S.)

You're not doing it alone.

Sylas walks in with the rest of Descent.

EXE

It'll be dangerous. Our first direct attack on Arc.

ARI

Sweetie, we've been doing a lot of dangerous stuff with you. This is just the next step.

EXE

You guys have been doing great so far, but this is different. We've been small-time, this is the biggest target Arc has.

NAYLI

What's so different now? You've been fine throwing us at dangerous stuff before-

EXE

Because I didn't care before!

Beat.

EXE (CONT'D)

You're good people. You want to change things, and you're not afraid to take action.

(MORE)

EXE (CONT'D)

This wouldn't be just breaking in and breaking things, we'd have to kill people. And while I've been trying to shoulder that burden, it'd be unavoidable there. I don't want you to have to do that. And that's to say nothing for what they'd do to you.

Beat.

SYLAS

We'll take you there. We'll wait outside in case something goes wrong.

He places his hand on her shoulder.

SYLAS (CONT'D)

You're not alone. We're not gonna let that happen.

Exe slowly smiles.

CUT TO BLACK.

SYLAS (V.O.)

So let's go over the plan.

INT. CONVOY GARAGE - MORNING

Fade in from black to a garage full of trucks. Descent members rush in, running low to the ground.

SYLAS (V.O.)

At the first light of dawn, we stow away in the trucks. Nayli's got contacts with the drivers, so as long as we get in the right trucks, this part will be easy.

As their leader describes their actions, the members of Descent follow through. The trucks launch without incident. We cut from interior of truck to interior of truck, seeing our heroes travelling without incident.

EXE (V.O.)

These convoys are carrying crucial hardware for Arc operations, if something goes wrong with them they'll know. We need to be extremely careful.

Melia and Austen have broken into the computers.

EXE (V.O.)  
... aside from you two, go nuts.

We come to a compound with a high-speed rail running out of it. The convoy comes to a stop.

SYLAS (V.O.)  
When we land at the transfer point,  
we have to hurry. We need to load  
our gear into Car 21 without  
arousing suspicion.

Descent is very fast in loading into Car 21. The train  
departs without incident.

EXE (V.O.)  
Before the final stop, we need to  
unload. The train slows at the  
Sanctum border, so we can hop out  
before the border checks.

Descent leaps out of the train car just as it slows. Exe runs  
towards a large fence, behind which is an enormous collection  
of buildings.

EXE (V.O.)  
From there, I go in alone. You guys  
set up to support me from the  
outside.

From within a disconnected freight boxcar, Austen opens a  
program that taps into the building's cameras and follows Exe  
in.

AUSTEN  
We have eyes, Exe. Look alive.

Exe shows a thumbs-up towards the camera. Sylas looks over  
Austen's shoulder.

SYLAS  
Everyone ready?

Exe nods towards the camera. Melia chimes in from across the  
boxcar.

MELIA  
Raring to go!

Exe's voice crackles through the computer's speakers.

EXE

Hit it.

Austen hits the Enter key on his computer.

CUT TO:

INT. SILICON SANCTUM - NIGHT

The fire alarm echoes through the halls as Exe drops down to the floor through a skylight.

PA SYSTEM

Attention, attention. An emergency has been reported within the complex. Please cease operations and leave all buildings. Security personnel are to remain in place until otherwise ordered.

Exe walks through the halls, shotgun in hand. Two Cambers can be heard from around a corner Exe is advancing toward.

CAMBER 1

Think someone left the microwave on too long?

CAMBER 2

And cause the whole complex to evacuate? Heh, yeah right. Nobody's that shit at cooking.

CAMBER 1

I just wanna find whoever's got me out on my '45 and slit their fuckin' throat. I wanted to enjoy my dinner, dammit!

Exe chambers a round. The Cambers stop dead in their tracks.

CAMBER 1 (CONT'D)

I- I take that back.

Exe continues walking forward.

EXE

I'm feeling nice today. Consider this your order to leave. Tell 'em Nebulous excused you.

They look, dumbfounded.

CAMBER 2  
Y-you got it, lady.

They stumble forward, taking off at a run. Exe looks in their direction, revealing an earpiece.

EXE  
Smart.

A voice comes through the earpiece.

MELIA (O.S.)  
Exe, you there?

She puts her hand to the earpiece.

EXE  
Yeah, I copy. What's up?

MELIA (O.S.)  
Three rooms down, you're gonna want  
to take a left, then a right.  
You're looking for Room Number  
7701.

EXE  
Got it.

Exe turns a corner as she says that, running towards our view. She stops, and gently places her hand on a panel underneath the marker reading "7701." It flashes green, and the door slides open. As she enters, the room glows blue as Exe enters the Arc Hive.

INT. ROOM 7701 - TWENTY-FOUR YEARS AGO

Exe walks into the room, and a scene from long ago plays out before her eyes. A woman with frizzy black hair sits slumped over at a desk, her white labcoat draped over the shoulders of the chair, a few colorful buttons clipped to the lapels. A voice echoes from her, but her mouth does not move.

MARCIA (V.O.)  
Doctor Marcia's log, October 5th,  
2031. Overseeing Project Dustgarden  
has been a trial. I'm sure DataMIND  
was bad, but I'm not sure Abram  
understands the weight of this,  
much less that of pawning it off on  
me.

Doctor Marcia's head lifts from her arms, glasses crooked on her face. Her arms drop to the sides of her office chair.

Exe sees her reflection in the computer screen and stumbles a step forward.

MARCIA (V.O.)

I doubt he would want me recording this, but it's been haunting me for too long. The Hive is a new frontier for humanity, but this requires responsibility that Abram's just not taking. Digitization alone borders on torture, but he seems almost excited to delve into human experimentation even after that. First the AI assistants, then putting them in those thugs' helmets, those two were understandable, but this?

Exe reaches her right hand out to Marcia's left, but the doctor moves it up to the keyboard.

MARCIA (V.O.)

I don't see what good could ever come from conceiving a child within the Hive. I was glad that we couldn't copy .soul files, but Abram seems dead set on commodifying human life.

Exe stands up straight and looks forward at the computer, a bewildered look growing on her face.

MARCIA (V.O.)

There's something deeply wrong with digitizing his... reproductive sample. Forcing it onto some poor soul is even worse.

Exe falls to her knees.

MARCIA (V.O.)

And then he made me nurse the baby.

The screen shows an open file explorer. There is one thing in this folder, a lone, unnamed executable file. It simply reads ".exe". When Marcia double-clicks on it, initially nothing happens. After a moment, an infant appears on the monitor, almost perfectly three-dimensional. She is swathed in blue energy obscuring most of her body, but she has a full head of white hair and striking blue eyes. Marcia straightens her glasses, and manages a small smile. She puts her hand up to the monitor. The baby, after a moment, places her small hand up to meet the doctor's. The doctor speaks.

MARCIA

Exe. I'm going to name you Exe.

The Hive falls away around the 24-year-old Exe. She remains on her knees, an empty look on her face.

Beat.

The door opens, but the sound is distant. A woman in a white labcoat stands in the doorway. Several colorful buttons adorn her lapels.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

Exe?

Exe turns around, staring at the doctor.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

Oh my God, it's really you... I had a feeling it was when I heard the reports of the digitizations, and when the alarms went off-

Exe staggers to her feet.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

Do... do you remember me...?

Exe throws herself towards Marcia. The doctor flinches, clenching her eyes shut. After a moment, she opens them. Exe holds her tight in a hug. She's weeping.

EXE

M... Mom...

Marcia hugs Exe back.

Beat, as mother and daughter stand in their first real embrace.

Marcia places her hands on Exe's shoulders. Exe lets go, her hands drop to her sides.

EXE (CONT'D)

Nebulous is... my father. Isn't he?

Marcia gives Exe a sorrowful look. Tears well up.

MARCIA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for... everything...

Exe's hands clench as tears fall from her face.

EXE  
He's the monster.

Marcia lifts her hands to Exe's cheeks, and wipes the tears from her face.

MARCIA  
I... I understand why you did what you did. I get it. But-

EXE  
I know.  
(Beat)  
I know, and I've come to regret it myself.

MARCIA  
Oh, Exe...

EXE  
But it's too late to turn back now. I know Arc wants me captured and back in that Hive forever. And frankly, I'd rather they just kill me.

She looks up at Marcia.

EXE (CONT'D)  
But I'm not going to let them do either of those things. They're not getting me, and I don't want them to get you either.

Marcia smiles.

EXE (CONT'D)  
You're the only person that ever genuinely talked to me while I was in there. So please, just get yourself somewhere safe.

MARCIA  
I can't-  
(Beat)  
Okay. I'll do what I can.

Exe hugs her again, and Marcia is much quicker to reciprocate.

EXE  
I love you, mom.

Exe pulls herself away and materializes her shotgun.



EXE (CONT'D)  
We'll catch up another time. I have  
a loose end to tie.

Marcia waves after Exe.

MARCIA  
Wait! One more thing!

Exe stops. Marcia throws Exe a flash drive. She looks at it; there's a piece of masking tape on it. Marker written on the tape says ".exe".

MARCIA (CONT'D)  
That should stabilize you. Just...  
get off the morphine. Please.

EXE  
Thanks, Mom. I'll... I'll do my  
best.

Exe dematerializes, and Marcia takes off at a run to the stairwell.

INT. SILICON PENTHOUSE - MIDNIGHT

Exe appears at the front of the office. Abram Nebulous sits at his desk, hands tightly gripping the armrests. He's sitting up perfectly straight. After a moment, he looks up at her.

ABRAM  
Ah. Nikola.

Exe responds, motionless.

EXE  
That's not my name.

ABRAM  
Exe.

She stares at him.

ABRAM (CONT'D)  
I...  
(beat)  
I just want you to-

EXE  
What? You want me to get back in  
your computer? You want me to stay  
in my petri dish?

ABRAM  
No, I want you to...

He stands up. His hands are shaking uncontrollably.

ABRAM (CONT'D)  
I want you to know that I'm sorry.

Hearing this, Exe begins marching towards Abram. The shotgun dematerializes.

ABRAM (CONT'D)  
I didn't mean for you to grow up  
like that. If I had known you were  
sentient, I would have gotten you  
out sooner, I would have-

Exe punches Abram in the face. He falls to the floor, sunglasses cracking. She grabs him by the tie, and begins screaming. She punches him in between breaths.

EXE  
SENTIENT?! You didn't know that I  
was SENTIENT?! You thought I was  
just some other artificial  
intelligence? Well, NOBODY in that  
Hive is artificial! They're all  
people, denied their deaths! They  
can't rest because YOU puppet them  
around for your sick, twisted  
desires! How can you POSSIBLY not  
know that, and how DARE YOU tell me  
you're SORRY?!

Abram, face battered to the point of barely seeming human, hits a button under his desk with his foot.

ABRAM  
(speaking through swelling) I'll  
let them die. I'll let us all die.

Exe turns around, seeing the button. There is a nuclear symbol on it. She gasps, and stands up, taking off at a run. Almost as quickly as she started, she stops. She grabs a golf club off the wall and walks back to the desk.

EXE  
And I'm not going to let you die  
easy.

She clubs him in the face three times. After the third, he stops twitching. Just for good measure, she breaks the club over her knee and stabs him through the head with the handle.

INT. SILICON SANCTUM - ZERO HOUR

Alarms and sirens blare louder than ever. Exe flashes from hallway to hallway, looking frantically. Eventually, she finds Marcia.

EXE  
MOM! WE NEED TO GO!

She grabs Marcia by the hand and leads her out at a run. After a few seconds of running, glass breaks. Cambers point guns at the two.

CAMBER  
Open fire!

Exe screams in fury as blue energy rushes around the room. The Cambers disintegrate, and their bullets puff into sparks. Exe grabs Marcia and continues running. Three U.S. Apache Helicopters on the outside of the building pursue the two.

HELICOPTER  
Give yourself up, Nikola! It's over!

Exe shoves Marcia out of the way as bullets rip through the window. Exe throws herself out of the building, radiating with energy.

EXE  
YOU'RE GODDAMN RIGHT IT'S OVER!

She lands on the windshield of the helicopter, and rears back. A single punch sends a cascade of explosive energy through it, digitizing its pilots and blowing out the Apache's engines in a azure gout. She leaps to the second one, landing at the center of the blades. An enormous blue blast tears it in half. She throws herself at the last one, shredding the engines and rushing through it. As she emerges from the wreck, she turns on a dime and snaps back into the building as the final copter crashes into the building.

Exe arrives at her mother's side just as the PA crackles on.

PA SYSTEM  
Reactor detonation in T-Minus 10 seconds.

Marcia looks at Exe, terrified. Exe's face is one of steely determination.

EXE  
Hold on.

Marcia drapes her arms around Exe's shoulders and holds on for dear life. Exe leaps out of the window a final time, and the lower half of her body digitizes. It crackles with blue energy, and she launches forward faster than a bullet. The blue energy branches out like lightning, striking the complex below dozens of times, digitizing any Camber training guns upward.

The two land outside the borders of the microstate, right in front of a boxcar. Exe throws the door open, throws herself in with her mother, and slams it shut. The rest of Descent turns to look at her and the scientist.

SYLAS

Welcome back-

There's a deafening explosion. The boxcar is sealed off to prevent the light from blinding anybody, but the magnetic wave causes all of Descent's computers to shut off.

MARCIA

Hold on to something!

All of the resistance members brace for an impact of some kind, but the car is lifted off the tracks. They tumble as the car rolls onto its side, its roof, then its other side.

After a beat of settling dust, a voice calls out.

ARI

We all still here?

CRESS

Owww...

SYLAS

Augh, dammit... You said it, kid.

Marcia is holding onto the door. She's on her feet.

MARCIA

I should have specified to hold onto something nailed down.

DYLLYON

Verrrry funny. Who is this, anyway?

Exe sits up and blows her hair out of her face.

EXE

My mother.

Everyone looks at her, confused.

MARCIA

Long story. One for another time.

She opens the car door. Descent slowly emerges, and looks north to where the Silicon Sanctum once was. A mushroom cloud billows up over the San Francisco harbor.

MARCIA (CONT'D)

We should be far enough away to not have to worry about radiation.

Nayli falls to her knees.

NAYLI

Oh my God... Arc did that?!

MARCIA

To themselves, no less.

Exe crosses her arms.

EXE

This was all their own doing. They were their own downfall.

Marcia looks at her daughter.

MARCIA

They're not down yet. They have other offices, they'll get another CEO.

SYLAS

But they're not immortal. There's going to be consequences to this, and not just from us. I doubt the US is going to appreciate the radiation.

MARCIA

That said, we should get out before it hits us.

Descent turns and walks away, away from the smoldering Sanctum and towards the future.

CUT TO BLACK.