



Nest of Vipers

Story and Screenplay
by Stan Thompson

Nest of Vipers

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CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Character	Age guide
Nick Ducane - movie actor	25
Jack Preston (no dialogue) - writer	47
Lieutenant Ralph Kenyon, LAPD	46
Detective Martin Weintraub, LAPD	31
Detective Liam O'Grady, LAPD	35
Detective Tony Valentine, LAPD	26
Dr Richard Bayliss - psychiatrist	44
Eddie Westerham - patient	33
TV Newsreader	25
Frank Zimmer - film producer	54
Isaac Marcus - associate film producer	40
Ray Haines - associate film producer	38
Brad Thorley - publisher	48
Sandra (Sandy) Howard - researcher	33
Arthur Josephson - pathologist	59
Paul Hagen - morgue technician	27
Lola Rochelle - movie actress	24
Johnny Farago - movie actor	28
Marion Bayliss - design consultant	41
Herb Flannigan - building superintendent	62
Sean Pegler - film editor	28
Lou Lombardo - casino owner	55
Karl Vance - Sean Pegler's boyfriend	26
Sarah Bates - housekeeper	78

Jenny Bishop - waitress	22
Kevin Winters - former army commanding officer	50
Oliver Martinez - aide	25

Non-speaking roles include: police patrol officers, assassins, crowd scene extras, hospital staff, restaurant and bar customers, roller coaster riders, and participants in the video featured briefly in this screenplay.

The characters, firms and events depicted in this screenplay are fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual firms and events is purely coincidental.

OVERVIEW

It is the summer of 1989: a number of violent deaths, which appear to be linked to the notorious, Hollywood movie brat pack, 'The Vipers', have the LAPD chasing their tails for leads. Lieutenant Ralph Kenyon is getting his ass kicked by the District Attorney to secure early arrests; but the only tenable clue is a bizarre tattoo found on the murder victims' bodies.

And feature writer, Jack Preston, threatening to expose the brat pack's sordid activities in an exclusive six-page article for a Hollywood scandal sheet, is gunned down in his apartment, and his research data removed by his killers.

Spurred on by a timely inducement of \$20,000 from the scandal sheet's publishers to take over the article to lay bare the truth about The Vipers' depraved behaviour, celebrated author and psychiatrist, Richard Bayliss, reluctantly accepts the daunting challenge to follow in Jack Preston's footsteps.

But Bayliss's life is at risk, too, when he narrowly dodges a sniper's bullet on a roller coaster, and his Mercedes sports car is forced off the road into the path of a freight train. And Bayliss's research assistant and new-found lover, Sandy Howard, faces an horrific ordeal, when it seems that she could be getting too close to the truth also.

A brutal and terrifying encounter in an abandoned movie theatre finally uncovers the sensational truth that could identify who's pulling the strings. But is anybody safe in this 'tinsel town' conspiracy thriller, and just who is the ruthless puppet master? What could his motive possibly be, and will the staggering truth be revealed or suppressed forever? In the end, that decision rests with one man only.

EXTERIOR: The freeway, south of Sacramento, California. Day.

DUCANE is powerless to avert the consequential pile-up; his Ferrari is pulverised on impact and, in a spectacular display of pyrotechnics, DUCANE is turned into a human torch. Engulfed in flames, and shrieking and yelping, DUCANE claws his way out of the fireball and crawls away from the inferno. Frantic attempts by eyewitness motorists, to douse the blazing movie actor with puny fire extinguishers, prove futile. DUCANE is cremated alive before the flames can be snuffed-out. His charred remains shudder in the wind on the freeway. The tanker driver is thrown clear; he disappears on foot and escapes from the catastrophe unnoticed.

EXTERIOR: JACK PRESTON'S apartment, Glendale, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this red-bricked apartment building in a leafy avenue. Three LAPD patrol cars are parked out front. Two uniformed officers flank the main entrance. A small group of inquisitive onlookers are kept at bay. LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON pulls up in an unmarked Chrysler. He gets out the vehicle, weaves his way through the curious gathering and nods to the uniformed offices as he enters the building.

INTERIOR: JACK PRESTON'S apartment, Glendale, Los Angeles, California. Day.

Feature writer, JACK PRESTON, has been found murdered in his apartment. LAPD detectives: MARTIN WEINTRAUB, LIAM O'GRADY and TONY VALENTINE are searching the ransacked apartment, when LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON arrives.

KENYON *(talking as he enters the room)* Just when I was winning with the paperwork, I get called out to another homicide. *(trying to attract attention)* Can someone please enlighten me...

WEINTRAUB *(gesturing to KENYON)* Over here, Lieutenant....

KENYON *(recognising the detectives)* 'The Three Stooges' – why is it always you fucking comedians? Are you guys joined at the hip or something?

WEINTRAUB Lieutenant?

KENYON Forget it – it wasn't that funny, anyway. So what have we got here?

O'GRADY *(pointing at JACK PRESTON'S body on the floor)* The victim's Jack Preston – a writer – we think?

VALENTINE Yeah – showbiz stuff – I've read some of his articles.

KENYON *(ignoring VALENTINE)* So how did he die?

O'GRADY *(pointing at the body)* Take a look. Plugged through the heart three times, Lieutenant.

VALENTINE With a thirty-eight, I reckon. At close range, too. Guess he could have known his killer?

KENYON *(dismissive)* It looks that way, but let's wait for the M E's report. *(a moment)* So who found the body?

WEINTRAUB His cleaning lady, Blanche Modine – she called 911 at 08:23. She has a key to the apartment. Arrived just after 08:15.

KENYON Did she see anybody acting suspiciously when she got here?

WEINTRAUB I asked her that, but she said there was nobody about. It's a quiet neighbourhood.

KENYON I don't suppose there's any sign of the murder weapon?

VALENTINE Nothing in the apartment. We've got officers combing the immediate vicinity, as we speak, but no trace so far.

WEINTRAUB Maybe whoever pumped him full of slugs was looking for something? The apartment's been trashed in a hurry, by the look of it.

KENYON *(noticing a space on PRESTON'S desk and pointing at it)* Do we know if Preston owned a computer? Those cables look like they might belong to one?

O'GRADY We've not found a computer, Lieutenant, but there's a couple of empty boxes of CDs, in the desk drawer. So I guess he probably had one.

KENYON Seems to me that maybe whoever murdered Preston, silenced him for what he was working on? Yeah? And ransacked his apartment looking for it.

VALENTINE It's a possibility - shut him up for good and remove all the evidence, you mean?

KENYON It figures, but keep searching. Jack Preston might have hidden something incriminating as an insurance policy – you never know? *(a moment)* I'll go visit his publisher - find out what Preston was working on. You guys go talk to the neighbours – maybe be they saw somebody leaving in a hurry.

EXTERIOR: RICHARD BAYLISS'S office building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this run-down, low-rise office building, where psychiatrist, RICHARD BAYLISS, has his practice and an adjoining apartment. A sign-board: 'DR RICHARD BAYLISS. CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST' is displayed on a side wall.

INTERIOR: RICHARD BAYLISS'S office building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

BAYLISS is concluding hypno-therapy treatment with ex-marine patient, EDDIE WESTERHAM.

BAYLISSand when I count to three you will wake up feeling relaxed and alert, without any recollection of this session. Do you understand?

WESTERHAM *(trance-like)* Yes sir. Relaxed and alert. No recollection.

BAYLISS One.....Two.....Three. *(WESTERHAM comes out of the trance)* How do you feel, soldier?

WESTERHAM Great, sir. As if a huge weight's been lifted. I feel as if I have some purpose, again – you know? But will the anxiety come back? Will I still suffer the panic attacks?

BAYLISS That's down to you. This therapy has to be supplemented with a positive and confident disposition, and only you can provide that. Dwelling on negative issues ain't gonna help and will only dissipate all the remedial benefits from these sessions.

WESTERHAM I do understand, sir – I need to keep focussed. I can do that. I know it.

BAYLISS Yeah, well try finding yourself a job – that way you'll be occupying your mind more productively, with the added benefit of a pay-check every month. I'd be more than happy to provide a reference – you were a damn fine soldier when you served under me in Nam.

WESTERHAM I know I've got the confidence and ability to hold down a job, sir. But the problem's finding one. When employers learn you're an ex-soldier invalidated out with a mental disability, they start reaching for clean underwear.

BAYLISS I know it's a tough world out there, soldier – I can't pretend otherwise. But you gotta keep trying. If you just give up, you will sink so low that no amount of therapy and medication will pull you up again. Once you go over that brink, there's nothing left but despair. Believe me. I'm treating other Nam vets who are dangerously close to that precipice.

WESTERHAM Were they marines too, sir?

BAYLISS Yeah, and army, with nightmares far worse than yours.

WESTERHAM What will happen to them, sir?

BAYLISS *(pensive)* Sometimes I'm too frightened to think....

EXTERIOR: The city morgue, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this characterless federal building; its identity only revealed by the succinct description carved into the building's façade: 'CITY MORGUE'.

INTERIOR: Autopsy suite, city morgue, Los Angeles, California. Day.

NICK DUCANE'S charred remains are deposited unceremoniously onto an autopsy slab for the attention of pathologist, ARTHUR JOSEPHSON and morgue technician, PAUL HAGEN.

JOSEPHSON *(watching as HAGEN unzips the body bag)* So this is all that's left of the infamous Nick Ducane...

HAGEN His loyal fans will be in mourning for months and the multiplexes will be re-running his old movies, I reckon...

JOSEPHSON *(contemplative)* This year's James Dean....

HAGEN Formal ID's gonna be tricky, Dr Josephson.....

JOSEPHSON Try and track down his dentist, Paul. But I doubt whether the dental records are gonna help much. *(examining the remains of DUCANE'S skull)* Not a lot left to go on here. *(a moment)* See if you can remove his leather pants without damaging his trunk and legs.

HAGEN That ain't gonna be easy – they're all that's holding him together. You having crispy duck take-out for dinner later?

JOSEPHSON I think I might pass and have pizza instead.

EXTERIOR: Claremont Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of the front office of this exquisitely-preserved Art Deco building.

INTERIOR: Office, Claremont Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Day.

The plush office of film producer, FRANK ZIMMER. He is watching a TV news broadcast (of Nick Ducane's death) with associate producers, ISAAC MARCUS and RAY HAINES.

NEWS READER (voice over).....'Nick Ducane was returning from vacation at his Sacramento mansion to complete the final scenes of his latest movie, 'Renegade Hoodlum', when the tragedy occurred. His co-star, Lola Rochelle, collapsed when informed of his death.....'

ZIMMER Shut it off! I've seen enough.

MARCUS *(turning off the TV)* Such talent. Such energy. So much to offer.....

HAINES Nine inches, I heard....

MARCUS Nearer ten!

ZIMMER 'Ladies', please! Can we just focus on completing the fucking picture. We need to get it out to the movie theatres while Ducane's death is still hot. Ray, what's the state of shooting?

HAINES Most of it's in the can. We can get away with Nick's stunt-double for what's left.

MARCUS We'll need to dub Ducane's voice, though.

ZIMMER No problem. We can get Johnny Farago. His drawl's about the same...

MARCUS His dick ain't the same – Lola won't be too pleased...

ZIMMER He's only gonna be dubbing Ducane's voice – not screwing her, for God's sake!

EXTERIOR: Office building of publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this impressive high-rise building. A sign at the ground floor entrance reads: 'THORLEY & WEBSTER - PUBLISHERS'. RICHARD BAYLISS arrives in his Mercedes sports and pulls up out front.

INTERIOR: Office of publisher, BRAD THORLEY, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is shown into BRAD THORLEY'S palatial office.

THORLEY *(getting up from his desk to greet RICHARD BAYLISS)* Richard. Good to see you again. Take a seat.

BAYLISS *(sitting down opposite BRAD THORLEY)* Likewise, Brad. It's been a long time.

THORLEY Three years by my reckoning. Can I fix you anything? Bourbon? A Martini?

BAYLISS No thanks. It's a bit early. I'm intrigued, Brad.

THORLEY You're wondering why I asked you to come over?

BAYLISS Well, yes.

THORLEY You've read about the death of Nick Ducane?

BAYLISS The movie actor? Killed in a road accident?

THORLEY That's one hypothesis....

BAYLISS I don't get you?

THORLEY There are some who would say Ducane was "silenced"....

BAYLISS You mean murdered? But it was a tragic accident? His car was hit by a kerosene truck.

THORLEY An impeccably choreographed accident, maybe....

BAYLISS But who'd want to kill him? I don't understand.

THORLEY I have my theories. And so did Jack Preston.

BAYLISS Preston? The writer? The guy who was gunned down in his apartment?

THORLEY The very same. He was researching an expose article for our 'Scrutiny' magazine at the time of his murder. I recommended him for the assignment. We wanted a sensational piece about Ducane. Something to lift the lid on his depraved life style.

BAYLISS Drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll, except he was no rock star.

THORLEY Yeah, that sort of thing. Preston called me here the night he was murdered. He said he'd stumbled on some hot and sleazy dirt that was pure dynamite.

BAYLISS Did he say what it was about?

THORLEY No. He said it was too hot to discuss over the phone. He was collecting the evidence – whatever it was – that night. And he was gonna bring it over here the next morning.

BAYLISS And you've no idea what Preston had dug up on Ducane?

THORLEY No. Preston just said to tell nobody. He said that it was so sensational that, if it got out, it could have unspeakable consequences. He sounded scared, Richard. Really scared.

BAYLISS He feared for his life, you reckon?

THORLEY Yeah, that's what I thought. But he never made it here. He was murdered that night and I guess his killers removed the incriminating evidence. I've had the LAPD here asking awkward questions. They wanted to know what Preston was working on. I just showed them some of his recent routine coverage of the Oscars. But I doubt that satisfied them.

BAYLISS This is all very intriguing, Brad. But why exactly did you invite me over?

THORLEY I want you to take over the article on Ducane, Richard. My people and I are happy to have you on board. There's an advance of \$10,000 upfront and another \$10,000 on completion. What do you say?

BAYLISS *(almost speechless)* It's very tempting, Brad. But why me? I'm a psychiatrist. I've got a busy practice. I don't have the time.

THORLEY And you're a damn fine writer, too. Your novel about the Brotherhood is still a best-seller. And you're still earning from the Pentagon thriller – I ought to know – we're sending you the royalty checks.

BAYLISS Those books took me years to write, remember. I'm a weekend writer, Brad. I'm sorry, but I can't do it. You'll have to look for somebody else. *(he stands up to leave)*

THORLEY By my reckoning, you could sure use \$20,000 right now?

BAYLISS *(sitting down again and irritated)* What are you saying?

THORLEY Word is you owe Lou Lombardo \$8,000. Overdue gambling debts. Can't keep away from his casino, eh? Old habits die hard.

BAYLISS I can take care of Lombardo.

THORLEY Who are you kidding, Richard? Only yourself. Your psychiatry practice isn't exactly thriving, is it? You're not getting any consultancy work from the LAPD these days – not since you screwed up over the Dimitri enquiry. And how many alimony payments have you missed lately? Take the assignment, Richard. Come up with the article. A couple of weeks' work at most. No sweat.

BAYLISS And get myself bumped-off like Preston? Thanks, but no thanks!

THORLEY No-one will know you've taken over writing the article, Richard. We're a very discreet bunch here. We'll give you all the support you need. One of my research assistants, Sandy Howard, has got a whole filing cabinet on Ducane. She's expecting you. Her office is down the corridor.

INTERIOR: SANDY HOWARD'S office at publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Day.

SANDY HOWARD is sitting at her desk sifting through some papers. The door to her office is open. She looks up when RICHARD BAYLISS taps gently on the door and walks in.

BAYLISS Hi. Sandy?

HOWARD Hi. You must be Richard Bayliss? I recognise you from your book jacket.

BAYLISS You've read one of my books? Which one?

HOWARD The Mafia thriller. I read it twice. Couldn't put it down. *(she stands up to shake hands)* Sandy Howard. Pleased to meet you.

BAYLISS Nice to know you, too, Sandy.

HOWARD Brad said to expect you. I'd been helping Jack Preston with his research. We were all so shocked to hear about Jack's murder. He was such a great guy. We still can't believe it.

BAYLISS Yeah, it's shocked me too and I didn't even know him. *(a moment)* So how can I be of assistance? Let's see if we can do Jack Preston proud.

HOWARD We're hoping to get computerised, but, in the meantime *(pointing)* there's a filing cabinet over there full of everything known about Nick Ducane. You'll need to plough through it to get up to speed. There's a desk next door you can use. Then you ought to check out Ducane's video clips we've collected from the TV news channels. They're on VHS, so you can run them at home if you have enough stamina left.

BAYLISS That sounds a gas. *(a moment)* Do you know anything about the 'sensational' evidence that Jack called Brad about on the night of his murder?

HOWARD No. Jack never disclosed it to me either.

BAYLISS OK, I'll see what I can find out from the LAPD. I used to be in their good books. I'll go cap in hand. Maybe I can get a lead.

HOWARD I won't ask why you pissed them off. So, let's get to work. Any questions?

BAYLISS Yeah. Will you have dinner with me one evening?

HOWARD We'll see.

EXTERIOR: LAPD headquarters building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of the building; its identity revealed by the succinct description carved into the building's façade: 'L A P D'.

INTERIOR: LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON'S office, LAPD headquarters building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is sitting across from LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON at his desk.

KENYON You know I really shouldn't be helping you, Richard. Some of us are still smarting over the Dimitri enquiry. You fucked up big time and lost us our conviction.

BAYLISS I know, Ralph. I admit I screwed up. And I'm really sorry. Boris Dimitri sure was one hell of a con-artist. Had me fooled big time.

KENYON Well, he'll be before the grand jury, sooner rather than later, if the DA has his way. *(a moment)* So you wanna know what we have on the Ducane death? Reckless driving on the part of the truck driver – that was our preliminary verdict. There was nothing wrong with the truck, mechanically. It was only six months old. Eyewitness reports confirm that the truck was speeding out of control and smashed into Ducane's Ferrari.

BAYLISS But what happened to the driver of the truck? Did he survive the crash? Was he taken to hospital?

KENYON Now that is a mystery – the truck belongs to Puma Petroleum and, according to their records, the scheduled driver that day was one Saul Jackson from Reno. Except that, when we visited his address, Mrs Jackson told us that her husband had been taken ill with violent convulsions the night before.

BAYLISS So Jackson never got to drive the truck?

KENYON Nope. Impossible. He died three hours before Nick Ducane left Sacramento – strychnine poisoning. The Reno police are treating Jackson's death as murder.

BAYLISS Then who was driving the truck?

KENYON I wish we knew. We're still investigating. But whoever it was didn't hang around – and it's unlikely he was injured – we've found no record of any likely suspect checking into a hospital or surgery for treatment. Seems he vanished into thin air.

BAYLISS Maybe somebody picked him up? Was following along behind? A planned murder made to look like an accident?

KENYON We're thinking that, too. We're still appealing for witnesses to come forward.

BAYLISS Do you reckon Ducane's death is linked to Jack Preston's murder in anyway? I hear he was researching Ducane for a magazine article. I've been commissioned to complete it. There could be a connection?

KENYON None we can identify, so far. We think Preston's murder was a professional hit – three slugs to the heart. No murder weapon found and no barrel markings on record to connect with any other shooting. Just another anonymous thirty-eight.

BAYLISS So, two definite and one suspected murder with Nick Ducane as the common denominator. But no real motive? (*a moment*) Was anything taken from Jack Preston's apartment, do you know?

KENYON We don't know for sure – but it's a possibility – his place had been turned over. But no papers. And no computer. I'd take extra care if I were you, Richard. You could be next on the list if you get too close. My advice would be to drop the Ducane article. It ain't healthy. Go back to being a full time shrink.

EXTERIOR: The city morgue, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this federal building

INTERIOR: Autopsy suite, city morgue, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS has arrived to talk to pathologist and friend, ARTHUR JOSEPHSON. Morgue technician, PAUL HAGEN, is also present.

BAYLISS Good of you to see me in your inner sanctum, Art. I appreciate it.

JOSEPHSON I was beginning to miss you, Richard – it's been a while since we sat around the roulette table. Lou Lombardo's been worried.

BAYLISS Heavy case load, Art. You know how it is. And now the magazine article. But keep that to yourself. So, not much time for recreation at the moment.

JOSEPHSON So, you want to know about Nick Ducane's death? *(a moment)* Thank you, Paul.

Morgue technician, PAUL HAGEN, removes the shroud covering the pitiful remains of NICK DUCANE on the slab.

As you can see, there wasn't very much left of the notorious Nick Ducane for me to dissect. Formal identification from dental records and from finger print records is proving a problem in the circumstances.

BAYLISS So how has he been formally identified?

JOSEPHSON Paul, here, has come up with one possible form of identification – I'll leave it to him to explain presently. As you will also see, only the lower trunk and legs survived total incineration – probably due to his penchant for leather pants.

BAYLISS *(grimacing)* Dreadful injuries – poor bastard.

JOSEPHSON Ironically, only his penis remains completely intact. Check out the tattoo...

BAYLISS *(taken aback)* A snake? He had a snake tattooed on his dick!?

JOSEPHSON A viper, actually. You've never heard of the Hollywood Viper Clan?

BAYLISS No. Should I have?

JOSEPHSON Richard, I'm surprised at you – it's a well known tinsel town initiation and badge of honour. I'll let Paul explain – he's very much 'in the know', so he tells me.

HAGEN Yeah, well, if you're one of the chosen few and lucky enough to be nominated and accepted, you get to have the viper tattoo on your dick. It's a tremendous honour to be marked with the viper. We had two other Vipers in last week – Otis Spinks and Leroy Sanchez – both bit players, overdosed on cocaine. And we've seen other Viper stiffs in here lately.

BAYLISS *(shaking his head)* I find this totally bizarre. Unbelievable.

HAGEN So, for the moment, we're relying on Ducane's viper tattoo to confirm his identity – it's all we've got to go on. Regular movie-goers would know that Ducane was a Viper – he's appeared full frontal in most of his pictures. You should catch some of them.

BAYLISS I've got that pleasure to come.

EXTERIOR: Claremont Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Night.

An establishing shot of the front office.

INTERIOR: Office, Claremont Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Night.

FRANK ZIMMER is working late. LOLA ROCHELLE arrives unexpectedly and barges into his office. She is distraught.

ZIMMER *(surprised)* Lola!

ROCHELLE *(rushing to hug ZIMMER)* Frank. We have to talk. I'm so scared....

ZIMMER You're in no danger, honey.....

ROCHELLE You're wrong, Frank. First Leroy and Otis and now Nick. I could be next!

They sit close together on a leather sofa. FRANK ZIMMER attempts to console her.

ZIMMER Take it easy. Calm down.

ROCHELLE How can I, Frank? They're now saying the truck driver was murdered, too...

ZIMMER But the driver disappeared. The police are trying to trace him....

ROCHELLE The guy who was meant to be driving was poisoned – his killer took his place and slammed the truck into Nick on the freeway – it's all over the radio.

ZIMMER So Nick's death wasn't an accident....

ROCHELLE And neither were Otis and Leroy's – I was with them that night. No way would they have overdosed – they didn't do drugs – they were clean, Frank!

EXTERIOR: The Church of the Holy Sacrament, Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this iconic building.

It is the day of NICK DUCANE's funeral.

RICHARD BAYLISS has joined the hysterical throng waiting to pay their last respects.

The multitude of mourners have engulfed the narrow access road to the chapel. The white hearse carrying Ducane's casket has collided with a TV camera van amidst all the confusion.

Official mourners have had to abandon their rented limousines; LAPD patrol officers escort the cream of young Hollywood through the heaving and groping mob.

LOLA ROCHELLE and JOHNNY FARAGO are forced to abandon their shared Rolls-Royce and risk life and limb, weaving through the baying rabble, to reach the sanctuary of the church.

TV arc lights bleach the immediate vicinity. A hundred zoom lenses, on whirring motor-drives, are trained on the celebrity congregation. Most of 'tinsel-town' have turned out for this frenzied farewell.

RICHARD BAYLISS is peeved to see his ex-wife, MARION BAYLISS, arrive with Claremont film producer, FRANK ZIMMER. They, too, are jostled by the swelling mass.

RICHARD BAYLISS has seen enough. He forces his way to the back of the crowd and walks away from the hysteria.

BAYLISS *(as he leaves)* I need a drink.

EXTERIOR: RICHARD BAYLISS'S office building, Los Angeles, California. Night.

An establishing shot of this building.

INTERIOR: RICHARD BAYLISS'S office building, Los Angeles, California. Night.

RICHARD BAYLISS interrupts his research for the magazine article to call his ex-wife, MARION BAYLISS.

INTER-CUT with MARION BAYLISS in her apartment.

BAYLISS Hi Marion, it's me. I'm not disturbing you?

MARION *(slightly cool)* No, not really. Just fixing dinner. How are you, Richard?

BAYLISS Fine. And you?

MARION Doing OK.

BAYLISS I saw you at Ducane's funeral today.

MARION Were you in church? I didn't see you.

BAYLISS No. Just observing the spectacle. *(a moment)* Are you dating Frank Zimmer?

MARION *(surprised)* That's my business, Richard.

BAYLISS Sorry. I just wondered – seeing you both together.

MARION I'm not, as it happens. I met Frank through work – we have a contract with Claremont to refurbish some of their offices. But I don't know why I'm telling you all this, Richard. *(a moment)* Is this a social call?

BAYLISS Well, yes and no. I've been asked to come up with an article on Ducane for Scrutiny magazine. So, good news, I can make the alimony payments – they've given me a generous advance.

MARION That's great news, Richard. My attorney's concerned that you've missed two months.

BAYLISS Yeah, I'm really sorry. But there's a check in the post. Honest.

MARION I believe you, Richard.

BAYLISS There is one other thing, though – your association with Frank Zimmer – any chance of arranging a discreet interview for me? Could you speak to him? He's the producer of Ducane's unfinished movie, I could sure use some background information right now...

MARION I don't think so, Richard. I hardly know him, really. It wouldn't be right.

BAYLISS I guess not. I shouldn't have asked. I'll try another angle. *(a moment)* Great talking to you again, Marion.

MARION I'm glad things are working out for you, Richard.

BAYLISS Yeah, me too. Take care.

MARION And you. *(she hangs up)*

BAYLISS I miss you.

He takes his time replacing the receiver.

INTERIOR: SANDY HOWARD'S office at publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Night.

RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD are reviewing data on NICK DUCANE.

BAYLISS *(drained)* This is heavy going. Nasty little creep, wasn't he?

HOWARD Not the kind of guy I'd want to take home to meet mom.

BAYLISS Just another foul-mouthed, under-talented punk with his brains in his pants. Where do they find these jerks?

HOWARD It's the casting agencies – they go for a certain 'look'. And Ducane fitted that image. Acting ability and personality come second and third. And being 'Mr Nice Guy' doesn't matter at all. You're the shrink – you, of all people, should understand!

BAYLISS I'm still learning! *(after a moment and with exasperation)* So, what was it that Preston dug up on Ducane that was so 'dynamite'?

HOWARD There's nothing here. I think Jack kept all his important research data at home on computer. He never discussed much with me. He was rarely in the office. But he used to call Brad a lot, though.

EXTERIOR: The Emperor's Dragon Chinese Restaurant, Los Angeles, California. Night.

An establishing shot of this famous LA restaurant with its iconic, illuminated Chinese architecture.

INTERIOR: The Emperor's Dragon Chinese Restaurant, Los Angeles, California. Night.

RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD are having dinner together in a private booth.

HOWARD *(enjoying the cuisine)* This is delicious....

BAYLISS I guessed you'd like it here.

HOWARD You eat here often?

BAYLISS Only when the company's special....

HOWARD And how often's that?

BAYLISS Not very.

HOWARD You're separated, aren't you?

BAYLISS Divorced. Three years, now.

HOWARD Do you still keep in touch?

BAYLISS Yeah. We're trying to stay good friends.

HOWARD That's nice. Any children?

BAYLISS We both wanted kids, but somehow they never came along. Maybe it was for the best.

HOWARD Didn't you serve in Vietnam?

BAYLISS You've been reading my book jacket....

HOWARD I'm sorry. I just enjoy asking questions.

BAYLISS That's OK. Yeah, I was over there putting my psychiatric training to good use in the jungle. A lot of those guys were sure messed-up. Some of them still come to me for therapy.

HOWARD Really? After all this time? But the war ended years ago?

BAYLISS Yeah, but their nightmares don't go away. *(a moment)* My turn – are you seeing anyone right now?

HOWARD Not especially.

BAYLISS Never been married?

HOWARD No. I wanted to, but I'm not very good when it comes to commitment. Perhaps I'm too selfish.

BAYLISS You will, one day.

HOWARD Maybe.

INTERIOR: SANDY HOWARD'S apartment bedroom, Los Angeles, California. Night.

SANDY HOWARD and RICHARD BAYLISS are in bed together, they have just made love. The bedroom is lit by dozens of candles. Frank Sinatra plays softly in the background.

BAYLISS I was hoping you'd invite me in for coffee, but never this...

HOWARD You don't go to bed on your first date?

BAYLISS I'm not that kind of guy. *(they both laugh)* The truth is I haven't had that many opportunities lately.

HOWARD I don't see why? You're one hell of a nice guy – kind eyes, firm body, own teeth and hair...

BAYLISS And you're one very special lady.

HOWARD Can we have dinner again, sometime? And Puligny Montrachet?

BAYLISS You can have anything.

EXTERIOR: The beach boardwalk, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California. Day.

It is a glorious sunny afternoon. RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD are strolling along the beach boardwalk, mingling with happy throngs of tourists, joggers, skateboarders, cyclists, etc. They stop to survey the area. They are eating ice cream cones.

HOWARD *(wide-eyed)* So this is the famous beach boardwalk?

BAYLISS You've not been to Santa Cruz before? Your parents never brought you here as a kid?

HOWARD No. My parents don't approve much of seaside resorts. I think they consider them too common.

BAYLISS Really? Well, if I promise not to tell your folks, how do you feel about joining the "common" people for a few hours?

HOWARD I'm loving it already, but I'm feeling rather guilty that we're out in the sunshine having a good time, when we should really be back at the office researching Ducane.

BAYLISS I feel no guilt whatsoever - we need a day away from uncovering Ducane's sordid lifestyle to clear our heads. So forget about that creep and have some well-deserved therapeutic fun.

HOWARD *(laughing)* So are you wearing your psychiatrist's hat now?

BAYLISS *(droll)* Yup. So consider this free advice.

RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD resume their walk along the beach boardwalk.

HOWARD So, did your parents bring you here when you were young?

BAYLISS Hell no. You're forgetting I'm from back east. Coney Island was the closest I ever got to this, but without the sunshine.

HOWARD You don't get much sun in Brooklyn?

BAYLISS *(laughing)* Only now and then. *(a moment)* So where did you say you were raised, again? You're not West Coast either.

HOWARD Now who's the forgetful one? Cheyenne, Wyoming, to be exact.

BAYLISS Oh yeah, 'The Frontier City'?

HOWARD *(surprised)* You know it?

BAYLISS No, not really – rookie twin brothers in my old platoon hailed from your part of the world. But they never made it back. I had to write to their parents....

HOWARD That couldn't have been easy.

BAYLISS It never was. *(a moment)* So what brought you to 'The Golden State'? You never said.

HOWARD It's a long story...

BAYLISS A man?

HOWARD A mistake.

BAYLISS *(trying to lighten the mood by pointing at the 'Giant Dipper' roller coaster)*
You game for a ride on that?

HOWARD Hey, it looks so scary and it's very high. I've no head for heights.

BAYLISS I reckon it's only seventy foot, which is puny compared to some of today's roller coasters. I'll hold your hand, if it helps?

HOWARD *(pointing)* Wasn't that the same roller coaster they used in a 'Dirty Harry' movie?

BAYLISS Yeah, Clint Eastwood climbs up it chasing a gang leader and shoots him at the top.

**EXTERIOR: The 'Giant Dipper' roller coaster, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California.
Day.**

We are in darkness experiencing the POV of RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD, who are occupying the front seats of the first car, as it trundles through the approach tunnel leading to the lift hill. The train emerges from the tunnel into daylight and we see the steep track ahead and the view of the beach/ocean in the distance. The train latches onto the lift chain, which emits a metallic clatter, and is slowly hauled up the incline.

**EXTERIOR: The 'Giant Dipper' roller coaster, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California.
Day.**

The reverse of the above camera set-up: we now see RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD head on as they occupy the front seats, with other riders sitting behind them in this six-car train.

HOWARD I can't bear to look. I think I wanna get off!

BAYLISS *(putting his arm around her)* You'll be OK – just don't look down.

**EXTERIOR: The 'Giant Dipper' roller coaster, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California.
Day.**

We are immediately behind RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD: the coaster train is a good half way up the incline; its summit is in sight as it continues slowly upwards. SANDY HOWARD huddles up close to RICHARD BAYLISS. Then, sudden gunfire – whoosh – a bullet slams into the wooden guard rail surrounding the track, splintering it in all directions! Another shot rings out, this time taking a large chunk out of the side of the coaster train close to where RICHARD BAYLISS is sitting.

HOWARD *(screaming)* **Richard! What's happening?!**

BAYLISS *(turning round to face the other riders who are beginning to scream and panic)* **A sniper! Get down everybody! Stay down!**

HOWARD **Richard, we gotta get off this thing! Can't they stop it?**

BAYLISS *(firmly)* It can't be stopped - we're going over the top – it's all down to gravity from now on. **Just hold on and keep your head down!**

**EXTERIOR: The 'Giant Dipper' roller coaster, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California.
Day.**

From low down, we see the rear of the coaster train as it reaches the summit of the lift hill. Panic has broken out from the riders. Then, another bullet tears into the back of the last car, but its rear seats are unoccupied fortunately. Then, the coaster train is released from the chain lift, disappears out of sight as it plunges down the first sixty-five-foot drop of the ride's circuit and continues round the undulating track under its own steam.

EXTERIOR: A beachside cafe, Santa Cruz, Monterey Bay, California. Day.

SANDY HOWARD sits alone at a table. She is drinking brandy. Two empty glasses sit atop the table. She is agitated. She keeps looking around and checking her watch. RICHARD BAYLISS joins her eventually.

HOWARD *(impatient and angry)* What took you so long? I've been waiting here ages!

BAYLISS The police kept going over my statement. *(he snatches the brandy glass from her hand and drains it in one gulp)* Thanks. I needed that. *(he tries to grab her hand, but she pulls it away)* How come you left so quickly? I've been looking for you everywhere.

HOWARD I just needed to get away from that damn place before the TV crews showed up. I didn't want my folks spotting me on the news channels. I made a brief statement to the police and told them I didn't need any medical treatment.

There is an angry silence.

What the hell happened up there, Richard? We were sitting ducks!

BAYLISS I don't know - a crazy sniper, I guess? That's what the police are thinking.

HOWARD It's to do with Nick Ducane's death isn't it? It was you the sniper was targeting, wasn't it?

BAYLISS Hey, if anybody was looking to take me out, how the hell would they have known I was gonna be riding the roller coaster at Santa Cruz today? You're the only other person who knew we were coming here.

HOWARD Maybe they followed us?

BAYLISS I don't buy that. I can spot a tail a mile off.

HOWARD Well, face facts, Richard – someone knew you'd be here. I don't see this as just some random shooting.

BAYLISS Well if that was their intention, then their sniper was pretty incompetent is all I'm saying. I was a sitting target on that roller coaster!

HOWARD *(exasperated)* The sniper wasn't "incompetent", Richard! Whoever it was deliberately aimed to miss you - it was meant to be a warning to tell you to back off!

BAYLISS No. I don't buy that either. You're grasping at conjecture.

HOWARD *(livid)* **“Conjecture”!** But didn’t you explain to the police about Nick Ducane and Jack Preston getting murdered and you taking over the Ducane article? *(almost hysterical)* It’s all fucking connected - can’t you see that, Richard!?

EXTERIOR: LAPD headquarters building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of the building.

INTERIOR: LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON’S office, LAPD headquarters building, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is sitting across from LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON at his desk.

BAYLISS You left a message for me to drop by, Ralph?

KENYON Yeah. Thanks for coming over, Richard. Enjoyed any roller coaster rides lately?

BAYLISS So you’ve heard?

KENYON Yeah, you’ve made headlines and I’ve had the Santa Cruz police department making enquiries about you.

BAYLISS Really? About me?

KENYON Yeah. They think you know more about the roller coaster sniper than you’re letting on.

BAYLISS How very astute of them. And what did you tell them?

KENYON Just routine stuff about you having helped us professionally in the past.

BAYLISS And that I fucked up over the Dimitri enquiry?

KENYON No. The less said about that debacle, the better.

BAYLISS You tell them I was working on the Ducane article?

KENYON No, I never mentioned Nick Ducane, but they asked me if I knew if you’d ever had any dealings with him.

BAYLISS Really? They mentioned Ducane’s name? And if I was ever involved with him? What did you tell them?

KENYON I just filled them in on the current situation regarding our investigation into Ducane's death. I left your name out of the equation.

BAYLISS Thanks for that, Ralph. I appreciate the gesture. The last thing I want is the Santa Cruz police on my back. *(a moment)* Did they say if they'd got any ballistic results from the bullets they dug out of the roller coaster?

KENYON Yeah, 5.56mm cartridges probably fired from an M16 rifle. But no comparable barrel markings on record to help identify the shooter.

BAYLISS High velocity M16 rifle, eh? Sounds military.

KENYON I would tread carefully if I were you, Richard. Maybe that sniper did have you in his sights after all?

BAYLISS That's just what Sandy Howard reckons...

INTERIOR: SANDY HOWARD'S office at publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS and SANDY HOWARD continue to review data on NICK DUCANE.

BAYLISS I'm really sorry about what happened at Santa Cruz, Sandy. I'm surprised you still wanna know me, let alone continue to help me with the article. *(he grips her arm)* I couldn't bear it if anything were to happen to you.

HOWARD I have to admit that I was scared and angry, Richard. But I've drawn a line under it. But you must tell the police everything you know. I'm still very worried. We both could have been killed!

BAYLISS Well, the Santa Cruz police have been on to Ralph Kenyon enquiring about me and the Nick Ducane murder. I think Ralph's satisfied them about any connection.

They are both silent for a few moments. RICHARD BAYLISS continues to sift through press cuttings and news reports.

BAYLISS *(exasperated)* Well, there's nothing new here to interest Scrutiny magazine readers. Just what was it Jack Preston discovered about Ducane that cost him his life?

HOWARD I wish I knew the answer to that, Richard.

BAYLISS Whoever killed Preston was convinced he was onto something – something pretty staggering and sensational, according to what Preston told Brad over

the phone. So why else kill him? Did Preston find any incriminating photos or letters? And had to be silenced?

HOWARD That would explain why Preston's apartment was ransacked. They were looking for something? But what?

BAYLISS If only we could access his computer – I bet it holds the answer.

HOWARD But the LAPD told you there was no computer at the murder scene.....

BAYLISS Yeah, but I need to take a look inside Preston's apartment myself – maybe the police missed something.

HOWARD That's one hell of a long shot....

BAYLISS You're forgetting – I'm a gambler. I'll drive over there now.

HOWARD How will you get in?

BAYLISS I'll think of a way, don't worry.

HOWARD Do be careful, Richard. You remember what I said at Santa Cruz? They could try again.

BAYLISS Yeah, I'll be watching my back. Don't worry. *(he gets up to leave and kisses her on the cheek)* I'll call you later. Maybe we can watch a Ducane video at my place later? I have Puligny Montrachet chilling in my ice box.

HOWARD I can hardly wait.

EXTERIOR: JACK PRESTON'S apartment, Glendale, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS pulls up in his Mercedes and parks out front.

INTERIOR: JACK PRESTON'S apartment, Glendale, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is trying to persuade the building superintendent, HERB FLANNIGAN, to give him access to JACK PRESTON'S apartment, which has been taped-up by the LAPD to prevent unauthorised entry.

BAYLISS *(flashing his business ID and a \$20 bill)* Hi. I'm Richard Bayliss. I'm working with the LAPD. I'm a forensic psychiatrist. The police want me to develop a profile of Jack Preston's killers. They haven't got a lot to go on. They think viewing the murder scene would help with my assessment.

FLANNIGAN *(perplexed, but grabbing the banknote)* That's a new one on me. OK, but don't forget to close the door on your way out.

BAYLISS I sure will. Thanks for your help - much appreciated.

FLANNIGAN You're welcome.

HERB FLANNIGAN unlocks the apartment door and shuffles off.

RICHARD BAYLISS gently disconnects the LAPD security tape, slips on latex gloves and enters the apartment. He sifts through the debris of the ransacked apartment. But there is no sign of a computer. Opening desk drawers he finds empty boxes of computer CDs. He rifles through document folders, but their contents relate to other unrelated matters. His attention is drawn to a row of music CD albums on a shelf next to the hi-fi. He opens each case and examines the silver discs. Nothing. But on pulling open the very last CD jewel case, he finds a computer CD hidden under the 'Dire Straits' disc. Bingo! The CD is labelled: 'DUCANE'.

BAYLISS Clever boy, Jack.

EXTERIOR: The Freeway, south of Glendale, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is driving back from JACK PRESTON'S apartment. He is elated. He feels confident that the computer CD will provide the sensational lowdown on NICK DUCANE.

A hulk of a black sedan is never out of his rear-view mirror; its menacing form grows larger as it locks onto the Mercedes. RICHARD BAYLISS pumps gas, but the sedan refuses to be shaken off. BAYLISS weaves through the traffic, exploiting the Merc's rapid acceleration and controlled manoeuvrability. The sedan follows suit, burning rubber on the freeway. His predator, kept anonymous by the sedan's tinted windows, closes in on BAYLISS. The sedan's substantial mass begins to pound and shove BAYLISS'S tail, jerking the Merc forward like some lurching missile. BAYLISS handles the onslaught with dexterity. He is successful in out-throttling each shunt from the sedan to diminish the impact. But the sedan changes tactics and draws along side the Merc. It lunges side on, forcing BAYLISS off the freeway. The sedan's sheer bulk wins points over the sporty Merc. BAYLISS tries to steer away from his stalker to correct his path, but the brute force from the side-on collision is too much for the Merc to recover from. The momentum is overwhelming; BAYLISS loses control and his Merc is catapulted over the freeway's embankment. It hurtles downwards towards adjacent railroad tracks and ploughs into the path of an approaching diesel freight train. Miraculously, BAYLISS is ejected from the spectacular pile up and comes to rest in a travelling sand wagon hauled by the locomotive. His Merc is reduced to scrap and shunted aside, as the train stays on the tracks; its damage is negligible. It trundles onwards. The black sedan is parked on the crest of the embankment watching. A few minutes later it pulls away.

EXTERIOR: Johnny Farago's beach house, Monterey, California. Night.

An establishing shot of this secluded low rise retreat overlooking the ocean

INTERIOR: Johnny Farago's beach house, Monterey, California. Night.

JOHNNY FARAGO and LOLA ROCHELLE are making frantic love. Led Zeppelin riffs pulsate from the hi-fi.

ROCHELLE *(trying to push him off her)* Slow down, Johnny.

FARAGO What's the matter, Lola baby? You don't love me no more?

ROCHELLE I'm scared, Johnny. I'm so scared.....

FARAGO I'm here, ain't I? I'm looking out for you. We're safe, baby. Trust me.

ROCHELLE You don't get it, do you? First Leroy and Otis and now Nick. We could be next! There's some crazy son of a bitch killer....

Without warning, two goons, dressed head to toe in heavy, industrial protective clothing smash their way through the patio doors from the beach. They look like invading spacemen.

ROCHELLE *(she screams hysterically)* **Johnny!**

FARAGO *(rushing to climb out of bed)* **What the fuck!**

Brandishing plastic chemical containers, the assailants begin to systematically douse the naked couple with acid; the effect of this deadly corrosive, sprinkled liberally over quivering flesh, quells all resistance immediately. Very soon their screams of excruciating agony subside and their whimpering is extinguished. The charred remains of JOHNNY FARAGO and LOLA ROCHELLE become shrouded by the acrid fumes from the human chemical reaction. The executioners ensure that every last toxic drop is poured over their victims, before disappearing into the night.

EXTERIOR: The Pines Memorial hospital, Los Angeles, California. Day.

An establishing shot of this modern and well-maintained building. Its name is prominently displayed by its main entrance.

INTERIOR: Private recovery room, The Pines Memorial hospital, Los Angeles, California. Day.

RICHARD BAYLISS is in bed recovering from his miraculous escape from the jaws of a freight train. He is visited by SANDY HOWARD and BRAD THORLEY.

THORLEY Lucky you escaped so lightly, if you ask me.

BAYLISS Luck! A miracle would be a more accurate explanation! Concussion, cuts and bruises, and a sprained ankle – not bad for a human cannonball touchdown in a travelling sand wagon. I should join a carnival!

THORLEY What the hell were you expecting to find in Jack Preston's apartment? You knew it had been ransacked before the police got there.

BAYLISS It was just a hunch. I was hoping there would be something – a letter or photos. Who knows?

THORLEY And who'd want to run you off the road? What did they think you'd found there?

BAYLISS I've really no idea.

HOWARD You were very lucky, you know. You could have been killed.

BAYLISS I know. It was touch and go. *(looking up at the ceiling)* Somebody up there must like me.

THORLEY I've got to go and make a few calls. Just get some rest. I'll call you later.

BAYLISS And don't forget my grapes next time.

HOWARD See you back at the ranch later, Brad.

BRAD THORLEY leaves the room.

Did you get a good look at the guy in the sedan?

BAYLISS No. It had tinted windows. *(a moment)* I've been wondering how anyone knew I'd be at Preston's apartment? Did you mention it to Brad?

HOWARD Yes, I did. I'm sorry. He asked me where you were going. I didn't think it was a secret.

BAYLISS That's OK. *(a moment)* I guess you were right all along – they put a tail on me. Or they were watching Preston's apartment?

HOWARD But why force you off the road into the path of a freight train? I don't understand.

BAYLISS Because I reckon they thought I'd found something incriminating in Preston's apartment.

HOWARD Like what?

BAYLISS *(pointing across the room)* Take a look in the locker – in my jacket pocket.

SANDY HOWARD pulls out the computer CD labelled: 'DUCANE'.

HOWARD Wow! So your hunch paid off. Where did you find it?

BAYLISS Hidden inside one of Preston's CD albums. I'm surprised nobody bothered to check inside them. *(a moment)* Can you take a look and print off anything interesting without Brad knowing?

HOWARD I sure can. What do you think's on it?

BAYLISS I don't know, but whatever's on it could be dynamite. Bring me the printout as soon as you can. Don't let anyone see you do it, OK?

HOWARD I'll take care of it tonight while Brad's out the office. Don't worry – I'll lock my door.

SANDY HOWARD slips the CD into her purse. LIEUTENANT RALPH KENYON charges in unexpectedly.

KENYON *(infuriated)* Just what the hell's going on, Richard? First Ducane, then Preston, then somebody takes pot shots at you on a roller coaster, and then you have an argument with a freight train! Can't you see a pattern developing? I can - somebody wants you out the way!

BAYLISS I'm fine, Ralph, thank you. Kind of you to ask. They reckon I'll be out of here in a day or two...

KENYON OK. So how are you feeling, then? I trust you're in a lot of pain? I'm sorry I didn't bring flowers. *(a moment)* And what the fuck were you doing in Jack Preston's apartment? You knew it was off limits. I ought to lock you up for your own protection!

INTERIOR: SANDY HOWARD'S office at publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Night.

The room is in semi-darkness. SANDY HOWARD feeds the CD into her computer and opens it. She accesses its data, which is flashed up on her monitor screen. She scans through each page of text until she finds a batch of low quality photo images. She finds them appalling: they depict NICK DUCANE, LOLA ROCHELLE, JOHNNY FARAGO, OTIS SPINKS, LEROY SANCHEZ and other recognisable movie people in acts of despicable sexual perversion. She searches through the file. The photos get worse: scene after scene of sickening sexual activity. Every degrading and degenerate act of debauchery under the sun seems to have been captured on grainy film. She is nauseated by this flagrant display of unbridled baseness. And then she lands upon images of a truly unexpected participant at a Hollywood Vipers' orgy.

HOWARD (aghast) Fuck!

Suddenly, the pornographic slide show is violently interrupted by the unexpected and nerve-shattering arrival of two blustering thugs, who literally smash their way through the locked office door. Ski masks protect their identity. SANDY HOWARD makes a dash for the connecting, archive filing room and manages to lock herself in. One of the goons snatches the CD from the computer's drive. The other drenches the room with kerosene.

EXTERIOR: Office building of publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Night.

A curtain of flames rises up behind the windows of the publishing floor. The heat intensifies and windows blow out. Dense clouds of smoke billow out into the night air. More glass shatters as the fire takes hold. Fingers of flame dart out from the exploding framework.

INTERIOR: Archive filing room at publishers: Thorley & Webster, Los Angeles, California. Night.

Dense smoke permeates the confined filing area. The window in the connecting door explodes showering SANDY HOWARD with deadly slivers. She coughs and splutters as the choking combustion overwhelms her. She keeps low and crawls over to the filing racks. She finds a yellow duster and holds it to her mouth. Blood from a cut to her cheek is soaked up by the makeshift mask. The connecting door ignites as the flames beckon closer. The acrid vapour is suffocating; SANDY HOWARD drags herself away from the advancing inferno. She knows that, in a matter of moments, the room will be engulfed by fire. Even now, the blaze has spread to the bookcases. SANDY HOWARD'S luck is running out; she collides with a filing cabinet in the thickening murk. The siren of a distant fire truck raises her hopes until more rows of bookcases burst into flames and collapse like toppling dominoes.