

'A Pucking Good Love Story': Script and Reflection

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Master of Arts (by research)

University of York

Arts and Creative Technology

January 2024

Abstract

A Pucking Good Love Story is a feature-length screenplay about a budding journalist discovering corruption in the unique world of professional air hockey. The script is a rom-com with conventions from the sports genre. The script is accompanied by a reflection of my process of writing the screenplay. In the reflection, I detail my research into the professional air hockey world and the antecedents I studied for the screenplay. I also cover the changes I made following feedback from my supervisor and examiners.

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

A Pucking Good Love Story is a rom-com that follows a reporter entering the world of professional air hockey and finding her definition of what makes a sport challenged when she discovers a criminal conspiracy in the competition. As I developed the outline of my story, my research into the world of air hockey began to formulate plot beats, characterisation and an overall tone. I found balancing an accurate representation of air hockey the sport with writing an engaging and exciting story to be very challenging and often had to sacrifice one for the other.

After discovering the world of professional air hockey, I was determined to learn more and base a story around an air hockey player. When I began discussing the concept with friends and family I was met with a recurring statement: 'Air hockey is a game, not a sport'. This debate became a central theme of the script. I identified common requirements people needed to differentiate a 'game' and a 'sport':

- Competition: for a game to be considered a sport, the players must be trying to *achieve* a reward. Whether that reward is personal glory, money, fame or something else entirely. a game becomes a sport when something is at stake.
- Athleticism: sports are played by athletes, people who have trained to be the strongest, fastest or most agile at what they do.
- Supporters: team spirit, community pride, and passion added to the game by fans and supporters. People who can share in the passion and stakes of the game.

These became the three beliefs of the protagonist 'Holly', who begins the story believing air hockey is not a sport. Through her relationship with air hockey pro 'Harry', her bias about air hockey is broken down and she learns to accept air hockey and its sub-culture as a valid sport:

- Competition: Holly witnesses a range of characters striving to achieve something through professional air hockey.
- Athleticism: Harry shows Holly the technical skills required for air hockey.
- Supporters: Holly interviews supporters with great passion and generates support later.

When I first discovered professional air hockey, I did not believe it to be a sport, until I began to compare it to other sports that don't require much physicality. In the UK, darts is a popular sport played mostly in pubs but also possesses a lively and vivid professional scene; Pool and Snooker require large amounts of technical skill, but not physical athleticism. Even Ping Pong, or Table Tennis, has become an Olympic Sport. It was following these comparisons that I realised that air hockey's image as an arcade game is part of what holds it back. Thus I made sure to use comparisons to other less physical sports in the script to help convince audiences of air hockey's validity.

My initial story outlines were tonally surreal, imagining a world where air hockey was as popular as traditional sports like football. This allowed me to pursue satire through comparison to real-world controversies, such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup location controversy. It was discovered that Nepalese workers died at a rate of almost 'one a day in Qatar'¹, including evidence of forced labour on one of the World Cup construction projects. This was in addition to Qatar's laws against homosexuality, which discriminated against some of the players attending the tournament. In initial story ideas, the air hockey world was to be held in Qatar; many criticisms were ignored due to the popularity of football and the World Cup event, so I replaced the event with something I perceived as silly to demonstrate the ridiculousness of FIFA's decision to allow Qatar to host the games. As there was no established professional air hockey league in England, I invented one to base my story on my local area. Eventually, I reached a point where the outline bordered on the absurd which dampened the overall story. While developing the character arc for 'Holly', I realised I had to abandon the aggressive surreal tone and attempt to portray the world of air hockey as it is in reality, albeit heavily dramatised. Holly's attitude to air hockey changes when she's thrust into a dramatised criminal plot to clean illicit money.s. It became clear that Holly's role in the story was to act as an audience surrogate, as her introduction to air hockey is full of excitement and intrigue, matching the audience's introduction to air hockey.

The most important part of the representation was the gameplay and finding a balance between staying accurate and writing dramatic scenes. Unfortunately, I found any attempt at representing the rules or customs of air hockey had to be curtailed in some manner in service of the story or the viewer.

My first avenue of research was watching games of air hockey to garner a feel and understanding of the game. While I was unable to attend the worlds in person, as they take place at specific times and dates in America; I was able to explore the in-depth

¹ Pattison, Pete, '<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves>' [Accessed 20/12/23]

archive of previous Worlds tournaments through various YouTube videos. Through my research and comparison to the way I play air hockey, I was able to see the depth of skill and technique present in competitive play. One such technique is the grip; holding the mallet by the handle is restrictive, limiting the power and speed one can hit the puck. The correct grip at a professional level involved pinching the edge of the mallet allowing for more movement in the wrist. Using the edge grip creates a flicking motion during play and is a clear contrast to the 'beginner' handle grip. While writing the grip became an important storytelling device to establish the skill of the higher-level players while also showing the development of characters new to the air hockey world. Another stark difference to casual play is the concept of 'possession'; professional players will have 10 seconds to return the puck across the centre line, allowing for players to bounce the puck to generate momentum, or even demonstrate flare to distract their opponent. This level of skill is amazing to see in games, however, I held off on including this until the final match. Since 'possession' is so visually stunning and a clear demonstration of skill, I wanted to save it until the final to establish the distinct jump in skill for the finals. The aim was to make the climax more engaging and impressive for the viewer by heightening the stakes for the character; it became their toughest challenge yet.

Professional air hockey has at least two sets of rules that tournaments can follow; I chose to use the USAA Official Rules of Air Hockey² in my script. Not only did the rulebook help me ground matches in specified rules but it also helped inspire plot elements. Section V, part B describes how a puck that enters the goal but also rebounds away does not count as a goal; this inspired an exciting moment in the climax of the script where this exact scenario unfolds. Section II. Legal Objects Part B. Mallets details the requirements for player mallets, including weight, diameter, and colour. In an initial draft, this led to the inclusion of a cheating scandal in act one, involving a character named 'Grim Paxton' using ball bearings to increase the weight of his mallet. In the final draft, these rules were condensed and explained by Mick in act 1. Condensing rules is one of many examples where I've taken creative liberties to tell a more engaging story at the cost of misrepresenting parts of professional air hockey. Another example of this is my exclusion of multiple games in one match. Section I. Rules of Play, states a game consists of 7 points; in my script I established the first to seven points won overall, allowing me to have quick dramatic matches. In reality, the first to seven wins one game out of many in the match. Once again, for the sake of storytelling, I chose to misrepresent how the game is played. As I developed the script, I found the shorter representation was the best option, as it allowed a clear and dramatic stake. The one misrepresentation of the sport I needed to include was

² Gold Standard, <https://goldstandardairhockey.com/usaa-official-rules-of-air-hockey/> [Accessed 10/11/23]

the omission of Section VII: Player Conduct. This section goes into depth on the banning of vulgar language, talking during play, and verbal assault. While I adapted this with the majority of characters substituting the word 'fuck' with the word 'puck'; this is also being used to establish characters that belong to the world of air hockey and those that don't, and then demonstrate when a character assimilates to the world of air hockey; I ignored the rules against verbal assault and talking during play as without them the games became silent and uninteresting; until the final match where the stakes allowed for a silent but engaging game. In my research, air hockey is not culturally similar to sports like darts, but more akin to Tennis. So while I misrepresent air hockey here, I feel the inclusion of vulgar language is necessary for writing engaging and tense scenes.

As professional air hockey has existed since 1978, I had a rich archive of information to help my world-building. When creating the professional players, I analysed both the type of players currently involved in the sport and the types of places where someone might discover a talent for air hockey. The current USAA World Champion is American Colin Cummings, who first became world champion in 2015 at the age of 16³. The story of Cummings, a high school student turned air hockey pro, would become the basis of the character 'Mick Paxton', from age to alliteration. My research into the history of professional air hockey led me to a host of colourful characters from the sport and helped me develop a formula for creating my air hockey pros. Two 'legends' of the sport, Wil Upchurch and Tim Weissman both had nicknames they used in competition; Wil 'the Juggernaut' Upchurch and Tim 'the Maestro' Weissman⁴. To help align the scripted world with reality, these real players became icons for the script characters, with 'Harry' mentioning both Upchurch and Weissman and other characters quoting Upchurch. The idea of professional players possessing colourful nicknames became my main tool for designing new characters, having their identities revolve around these nicknames. I chose to use exaggerated, silly nicknames as a method of comedy, leading to characters like 'Max Salem'. Other fantastical elements of air hockey history also helped inform the way characters spoke to each other and established prestige. Another way I developed characters was by asking how they became air hockey players; interviews with professional players reveal they were introduced to the sport by other players who then became their heroes. I used this as a basis for 'Mick', a younger player who was introduced to the sport by the protagonist. For other characters, I used vicinity to air hockey as their introduction; 'Harry' spent much of his youth in an arcade, while 'Grim' owned a bowling alley with an air hockey

³ N/A, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100402072256/http://www.airhockeyworld.com/tourneelist.asp> [Accessed 20/12/23]

⁴ The Management, <https://wayofthepuck.com/my-most-memorable-air-hockey-moment-wil-upchurch-part-1/> [Accessed 20/12/23]

table. For a period in the early 2000s, professional air hockey was dominated by a group of Venezuelan players, before disappearing from the leaderboards after a few years. Recently these players have resurfaced, however, in the world of *A Pucking Good Love Story*, they are akin to mythology.

Professional air hockey is most often played in convention centers and on some occasions, malls. Another consequence of air hockey's lack of attention is the location where professional air hockey is played contributes to the belief that it is not a *real* sport. To emphasise this in my script, I chose to set the tournament in a mall; the disparity of the modern American mall being a place of relaxing consumerism rather than a place of passion, skill and hard work helps communicate the struggle of air hockey as a sport. Air hockey lacks legitimacy in the public eye. The first ever Air Hockey Worlds tournament was held in Las Vegas, Nevada and then more recently, in 2019 it was held in Colorado Springs. I decided to set my script in Colorado Springs to avoid the draw of a glamorous Las Vegas setting, in keeping with the aforementioned contrast between air hockey's skill and its prestige.

Initially one character, 'Harry', needed to overcome a fear of flying to attend the world championship. This storyline was the original goal of the character, with the secondary protagonist Holly aiding him as he overcame his fear. This storyline worked well as it allowed the characters to circumnavigate other sports located on the fringe of society. One noticeable sport was Redbull soapbox racing, and also cropduster plane racing. While I knew 'Harry' was a professional air hockey player, at the time did not consider the script an 'air hockey' story, rather it was a story about overcoming fear and establishing relationships. As I conducted deeper research into both professional air hockey and other films that have a similar tone, realised that the 'overcoming fear' arc was not needed and it corrupted the overall script. I'm glad I moved away from this storyline as I found the final script had a much more concise setting, revolving around one event over one weekend. This development continued until I realised Holly was the more appropriate protagonist. Since a goal of mine was to portray air hockey as a sport, it became clear that my protagonist should begin with the opposite belief and change that opinion as the story unfolds.

I took heavy inspiration from the 2004 film *Dodgeball*⁵ when outlining the tone of the film, as both my script and the film followed a niche sport. *Dodgeball* focused on being an 'underdog' story about an average group of people standing up against bullies. The film used the niche nature of dodgeball to constantly create comedic situations that

⁵ Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story, dir. by Rawson Marshall Thurber (20th Century Fox, 2004)

didn't apply to the real sport which left the representation of the sport as something childish, hilarious and not to be taken seriously. At the same time, the film used stakes to establish the sport as competitive, with the team needing to win to save their gym. I wanted to replicate this approach but employ a greater respect for the sport of air hockey. This presents itself in the grand prize for the air hockey tournament being \$100,000, a sizeable amount of money but not a prize you would encounter in a real tournament. To remedy this plot hole, I crafted the plot around the idea that \$100,000 was a ridiculous prize for air hockey. In the same way the prize in *Dodgeball* propels the team forward, gives them a clear goal and adds a layer of competitiveness to the sport; the prize money in *A Pucking Good Love Story*, acts as a tool to focus the criminal conspiracy plot, while adding that layer of competitiveness needed to label air hockey as a sport.

Another film I used as inspiration was *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*⁶. I incorporated the boastful character flaws of 'Ricky Bobby' into my supporting character 'Harry Bishop'. This helped me tackle the theme of my script; what makes something a sport. As the protagonist, 'Holly', held the opinion that air hockey was not a sport; my secondary character held the opinion that it was the most important sport. In having similar flaws to 'Ricky Bobby', 'Harry Bishop' instantly challenged 'Holly's' beliefs and escorted her on her arc. 'Harry's' attachment to his father found him trapped in wanting to be the best, similar to how 'Ricky Bobby's' attachment to his father trapped in wanting to go fast; in tandem with 'Holly's' acceptance of air hockey as a professional sport, 'Harry' follows an arc that sees him overcome his obsession and learn to fight for air hockey as a sport,

I believe I have successfully explored the debate of what makes a game a sport in a comedic manner while giving representation to an unknown sport filled with passionate players, referees and supporters. In my attempt to maintain a concise plot, I have taken the necessary liberties in my representation to deliver an exciting and interesting script following the world of air hockey. However, inserting comedy as much as possible has the risk of associating professional air hockey as a joke sport, similar to the effect I noticed in *Dodgeball*. In the following drafts, I will endeavour to craft a stronger, more accurate representation of the world, while also honing the comedy in a manner that isn't at the expense of the sport.

⁶ Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby, dir. by Adam McKay (Sony Pictures, 2006)

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A Pucking Good Love Story

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INT. RAMPART CASINO. NIGHT.

It is a busy night and a PLAYER has just won big at the roulette wheel. He collects his chips.

MIKE (40), well kept, neat suit, passes by carrying a METAL BRIEFCASE.

INT. RAMPART CASINO. CASH DEPOSIT. CONT.

Mike passes hordes of gamblers dumping cash in exchange for casino chips.

He opens a door marked 'AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY', he passes through the deposit to another door marked 'KEEP OUT'.

INT. RAMPART CASINO. ACCOUNT ROOM. CONT.

A team of employees scurry around the room counting all kinds of money: coins, bills, checks.

Mike sways through the organic machine gathering money to fill his steel briefcase.

INT. RAMPART CASINO. CONT.

Mike retraces his steps through the casino, acknowledging the guard as he leaves.

EXT. AIRPORT. PRIVATE JET. NIGHT.

Mike is exiting a parked town car as a private jet opens its door.

He boards the plane with the briefcase.

INT. PRIVATE PLANE. CONT.

ROY RAMPART (50) sits at a window seat staring out at the airport tarmac. He's sharply dressed, charming and exudes gravitas.

Mike takes the seat opposite Roy, presenting the briefcase.

ROY
Are we ready?

MIKE
Yes sir.

ROY
Good. Has the proxy been informed?

Mike signals the cockpit. The engine begins to WHIR.

MIKE
Yes sir, he has.

ROY
Which one is it again?

MIKE
Colorado Springs, sir.

ROY
And he knows I won't tolerate any
messy business, not again.

MIKE
He's been made aware, sir.

ROY
Good.

Roy waves him away.

EXT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. CAR PARK. DAY.

HOLLY WILLIAMS (27), a messy budding journalist stuck working stories she believes are beneath her, exits her beat-up car.

She stares at the office's logo, the 'CC' letters both hang out of place. She marches towards the office.

INT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. DAY.

Holly saunters through the withered news office.

ZAC WARDROPE (33) hangs over an INTERN's desk chastising his work when he spots Holly walking by.

ZAC
Holly! You've got that look on your
face, what crusade is it this time?

She flips him off and continues walking but he persists and follows her.

ZAC (CONT'D)
The offer is still on the table.

HOLLY
I'm not having a drink with you.

ZAC
Not that offer, the other offer.

HOLLY
I'm not joining your team either.

ZAC
Darts is a popular sport, lots of eyes on it.

HOLLY
Zac. I'm not reporting on darts.

ZAC
Why not?

HOLLY
Not here to write about games.

ZAC
Okay but the offer is still open.

HOLLY
No.

ZAC
I meant the drink.

She reaches an office labelled 'VIKKI' and swings the door open in Zac's face before disappearing in.

INT. SIMONE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Holly is sat in the middle of the baron office facing a large plastic desk.

VIKKI (55), an editor who loves journalism but has lost her backbone, smiles at Holly.

HOLLY
I heard this rumour-

VIKKI
Just. One moment.

HOLLY
It sounds like a good tip really-

VIKKI
We're just waiting on someone,
Holly.

HOLLY
That's weird because I thought you
were the editor, so you decided the
stories-

VIKKI
Holly. Please. Just, wait.

Simone, (50), barrels in. She's the owner, obnoxious and
displeasing to be around.

SIMONE
I want you to write a story about
an air hockey tournament.

Simone takes a seat next to Vikki.

HOLLY
Air hockey?

VIKKI
They're playing at the mall.

HOLLY
Is there not something more-

SIMONE
Write something good this time.

VIKKI
Keep it to the script.

SIMONE
None of your creativity.

VIKKI
Something brand inclusive.

SIMONE
Catchy headline.

VIKKI
Simple questions.

SIMONE
Or is that too hard for you?

HOLLY
No.

SIMONE

Good.

HOLLY

No, 'no'. I want something else. A real story.

Simone glares at Holly. Vikki looks at Simone.

SIMONE

Anyone can go out to some mall, ask a few questions and type it up in a neat article. Anyone. We want that someone to be you. Do you?

Holly grimaces.

INT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. DAY.

Holly storms through the office, Vikki is in pursuit.

VIKKI

Holly, stop-

HOLLY

I don't know why you put up with her!

VIKKI

She's the owner, she owns this whole building. What am I supposed to do?

HOLLY

Your job!

VIKKI

Holly we're a small town newspaper. There is no criminal conspiracy to report. What we have, is an annual air hockey competition.

HOLLY

Then I shouldn't be here.

VIKKI

I'm not firing you.

HOLLY

So I quit.

VIKKI

In that case you're here for two weeks.

Holly sighs.

VIKKI (CONT'D)

Just one interview.

HOLLY

One?

VIKKI

Find the best player, ask them a few questions and that's it.

HOLLY

Fine.

Holly storms off.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY.

HARRY BISHOP (20), a hermit with limited social skills, is cleaning the exterior of Bishop Arcade.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY.

Harry runs maintenance on various arcade machines. The arcade is well preserved.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. BACK OFFICE. DAY.

The office has been converted into a living space.

Harry packs a duffel bag. He circles the date on a hanging calendar. The box contains 'AIR HOCKEY: DAY 1'.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY.

Harry strolls through the arcade, duffel on his shoulder. He passes an air hockey table, which draws his focus.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. FLASHBACK.

A game of air hockey is underway between JIMMY BISHOP (40), a kind, burly man dressed in a polo shirt uniform and his eager son YOUNG HARRY (9).

The puck soars into young Harry's goal with a satisfying DING.

JIMMY

Game point. You ready to lose?

Harry positions the puck on the table and readies his mallet. He fancies a shot before launching a perfect hit. CLACK. The puck sails into Jimmy's goal.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You little-

HARRY

6-6.

Jimmy grabs the puck and smacks it into the side. PING. PING. The puck rebounds towards Harry, whose quick to launch it back. The volley continues until-

JIMMY

What's that?

Harry falls for the rouse, he turns his head. Jimmy seizes the opportunity and fires a shot. Without looking Harry moves his mallet to launch the puck straight into Jimmy's goal.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Holy shit. How did you do that?

Harry, containing his excitement, shrugs.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, act all humble now.

Jimmy tosses his mallet onto the table.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. LATER.

Harry and Jimmy lay under the air hockey table. Etched into the plastic are 'DAD' and 'HARRY', a tally of victories under each name. Jimmy has 11 victories, Harry has none.

Jimmy has a pocket knife in his hand and carves an etch under Harry's tally.

JIMMY

First of many, champ.

HARRY

You think?

JIMMY

Oh yeah. You're getting better every time.

HARRY

How good you think I can get?

JIMMY

Keep at it, I reckon you could be the best.

Harry runs his finger over the single tally under his name.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY. NOW.

Harry's intense concentration is broken by someone BANGING the front door.

He grabs his mallet off the table and heads to investigate.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY.

A young man named MICK (16), eager and idolizes Harry, is KNOCKING on the arcade's front entrance.

Harry walks out, locking the arcade behind him.

HARRY

How long have you been standing there.

MICK

Few hours.

HARRY

Yeah?

MICK

Tournament day.

Harry sets off towards his car, a red station wagon.

MICK (CONT'D)

Hey, I thought we'd warm up a little before we go.

HARRY

Why'd you think that?

MICK

You said we would.

HARRY
Did I? When?

MICK
Four years ago.

HARRY
Right. We don't have the time.

Harry gets in his car.

INT. HARRY'S CAR. CONT.

Harry starts the engine. Mick climbs into the passenger seat.

HARRY
What are you doing?

MICK
Oh.

HARRY
Your dad not taking you?

MICK
No.

HARRY
Um.

Mick gleams at Harry.

HARRY (CONT'D)
This'll be painless.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR. DAY

Harry drives to the mall where the air hockey tournament is taking place.

MICK
So I've really been working on my defensive game, trying to sure up my blocking cause I was letting too many pucks get in. Do you think it's gonna rain today?

Harry stares at the graying sky.

EXT. MALL. DAY.

It is raining. Harry's parked and is retrieving his duffel from the boot.

Mick's drenched but his spirits unaffected.

MICK

Oh boy, we're really here. Is it weird I'm not scared at all? Mostly just excited, what about you? Ooo, who do you think will be here, I hope what's his name is playing, ummm, Billy something, you know-

Mick notices Harry's begun walking to the mall without him.

MICK (CONT'D)

Man, you think it'll be busy inside? I'm not too great at waiting in queues.

Harry tries to pick up the pace but Mick catches up no problem.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION (AHA) BOOTH. DAY

Mick and Harry have joined a growing queue of players. The queue leads to a booth where officials are signing players in.

MICK

That's what I think should be done, cause if you think about it, everyone loves air hockey, so who wouldn't want to watch it professionally? I definitely would, but then again, maybe I'm biased, being a player and all. Woah, as of today I'm officially an air hockey player. Woah, we could be playing against each other!

Mick turns to see Harry has approached the booth to sign up.

AHA OFFICIAL

Sign the waver, proceed to my colleague to get your number.

Harry signs the documents and retrieves his number.

Mick approaches.

AHA OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

Sign the-

Mick has already signed the waver and grabbed his number. He pins the piece of paper with his number on his chest.

Mick spots Harry walking away. He watches Holly, notepad out, approach Harry.

HOLLY

Hi, can I ask a few questions-

HARRY

No. In sport mode.

Harry chargers past her.

HOLLY

Dick.

Holly spots Mick now and walks up to him.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Hi. I'm with NCC, can I ask you a question?

MICK

Oh wow. The NCC? Am I going to be on the news?

HOLLY

Sure. Would you say you're the best player here?

MICK

I don't know about best.

HOLLY

Well let's say you are. Do you think you're going to win today?

MICK

Boy, I hope I just make it to knockouts.

Holly scribbles in her notebook.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY

Various air hockey games are underway.

HOLLY (V.O.)

Knockouts?

AHA Officials are setting up a massive tournament outline.

MICK (V.O.)
That's day two, but you have to win
two games in group stages today.

The AHA official slides various numbers into different groups.

HOLLY (V.O.)
And how do you win a game?

Harry stands ready at one of the tables. His opponent is a SLENDER MAN (20) covered head-to-toe in tattoos.

Harry swirls his mallet around the table, he grips the edge of the mallet not the handle.

HARRY
(to Slender Man)
You ready?

The Slender Man tightens his grip on his mallet and nods.

Harry launches a perfect shot straight into his opponents goal. Harry winks at his opponent as the table spits out ELECTRONIC BELLS.

The table's score counter ticks to 0-1 to Harry.

MICK (V.O.)
Simple, first to seven wins. Well
it's a little more complex than
that, you see-

HOLLY (V.O.)
I get the idea.

The Slender man growls.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Mick's at an air hockey table awaiting his opponent. Holly is jotting notes in her book.

Mick warms up his arm before wrapping it in a special glove.

HOLLY
What are you doing?

MICK
Warming up.

HOLLY
For an air hockey game?

Mick nods. Holly makes a face.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. LATER.

Mick and his OPPONENT stand head to head. A REFEREE (40) in a stripped tee flicks a coin in the air.

MICK (V.O.)
Every game starts with a coin toss.

HOLLY (V.O.)
To decide who serves?

The referee catches the coin.

REFEREE
Call it.

MICK
Heads.

The referee reveals heads.

Mick and his opponent take their sides ready for the face-off.

MICK (V.O.)
No that's just deciding sides.
Games being with a face-off.

HOLLY (V.O.)
Face-off?

The referee places the puck in the middle of the table, using a pencil to ensure precision.

MICK (V.O.)
The referee positions the puck,
does a four-count.

REFEREE
4.3.2.1-

The referee pulls the pencil away. Both players fight for possession. Mick gains it and sinks a clear goal.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. BEFORE.

Mick is doing push-ups, to warm-up.

HOLLY
Like basketball?

MICK
Yeah, like basketball.

HOLLY
Do you really need to do that to
warm up?

Mick nods.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Harry's at a new table with a new opponent.

The next opponent is BIG BILL (30), a rotund man wearing a jersey plastered in capitalized BIG BILL insignia. He wears a single finger-less glove on his playing hand.

The volley is underway, both players trade the puck back and forth. Harry plucks the puck into the side-barrier, slipping it past Big Bill's mallet.

HARRY
That's what I'm talking about!

HOLLY (V.O.)
What about fouls?

MICK (V.O.)
There are a few. You can't touch
the puck with a body part.

Big Bill reaches his hand down to block a shot on goal. The referee WHISTLES.

MICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
No crossing the central line.

Mid volley, Harry overextends and crosses the line. Referee WHISTLES.

MICK (V.O.)
And no goal-tending.

Big Bill is goal tending, Referee WHISTLES.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. BEFORE.

Mick is mid-handstand. Holly shakes her head.

HOLLY

What about, when I used to play
with my brother, he'd get so angry-

Mick loses balance.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Harry and Big Bill are mid volley, it is tense.

HOLLY (V.O.)

He'd just start whacking the thing
full force. Harder and harder and
harder.

The volley is getting more furious.

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

Until eventually he'd whack it so
hard the thing would just-

Harry hits the puck so hard it flings straight off the table.

INT. MALL. INFIRMARY. DAY.

Mick has an ice pack on his head. Holly's in interview mode.

MICK

Yeah that's a classic foul, you've
played air hockey then?

HOLLY

Surprise, surprise, when I was a
kid I played kiddie games. Fouls
lose you points?

MICK

Sorta'. The opponent gets a free
shot.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Holly's watching Mick take a free shot. Mick sinks it, the
table score clicks to 4-7 to Mick.

The Referee swings Mick's hand in the air, winner.

HOLLY

That's your second win, so now
you're in the knockouts.

MICK
 Woah, I'm in the knockouts.

HOLLY
 You got a real chance of winning.

MICK
 You think?

HOLLY
 What do you get, if you win?

MICK
 The prize money.

HOLLY
 And how much is that?

Mick points.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. STAGE. DAY.

AHA Officials open the STEEL BRIEFCASE, revealing the packed money.

AHA OFFICIAL #2
 100,000 DOLLARS!

Holly and Mick are in the crowd by the stage.

HOLLY
 Holy shit. Where the fuck does an
 air hockey competition get 100k?

COMMOTION. The crowd turn to see Roy Rampart enter with his entourage.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
 Who is that?

AHA OFFICIAL #2
 Please welcome, owner of the
 luxurious Rampart Casino and proud
 sponsor of the Air Hockey
 Association's Annual National
 Tournament: Roy Rampart.

MICK
 He's sponsored these events for
 years. Funds the whole thing.

HOLLY
 Rampart. I recognise that name.

Roy is on stage shaking the hands of various officials.

AHA OFFICIAL #2

And to commemorate the end of day
one, please welcome to the stage
reigning champion: Grim Paxton.

The crowd applaud. GRIM PAXTON (40), a greasy man who prefers making people uncomfortable, strolls onto stage. He shakes Roy's hand.

HOLLY

You didn't tell me the reigning
champion was here.

MICK

Didn't I?

HOLLY

He's the one I need.

MICK

You really don't.

HOLLY

Do you know him?

MICK

No.

Grim spots Mick in the crowd, his expression sours. Grim marches off the stage.

AHA OFFICIAL #2

Grim Paxton... everyone.

Grim makes a bee-line towards Mick and Holly.

MICK

I gotta go.

HOLLY

He's coming right towards us.

Mick tries to sneak away but Grim grabs him by the collar.

GRIM

What are you doing here?

MICK

Watching.

Grim rips the paper number off Mick.

GRIM
Try again.

MICK
Playing.

Grim smacks Mick's head.

GRIM
What did I tell you? Go home.

MICK
But dad-

GRIM
Now.

MICK
I made it to knockouts.

GRIM
I don't care. Leave!

MICK
I just want to play.

GRIM
Well you can't. If I see you here again, it better be in the crowd.

Grim loosens his grip on Mick, turns and slips away.

HOLLY
Mr. Paxton, could I have a word-

Grim doesn't stop. Holly considers chasing but Mick is hurt.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Shit.

She gives up on Grim and comforts Mick.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
What's his deal?

MICK
I don't know.

HOLLY
Maybe he doesn't want the competition.

MICK
Whatever.

Mick shakes Holly off and slinks away.

INT. MALL FOOD COURT. BURGER KING. DAY

Holly strolls up to the counter. Harry turns around behind the counter, he's wearing a Burger King hat and apron.

HARRY
Still want that interview?

HOLLY
Huh?

HARRY
You asked earlier. I was in sport mode.

HOLLY
Can I have a burger please?

HARRY
I don't know I don't work here.
Heard you were looking for the best
air hockey player.

HOLLY
You know how to find Grim?

HARRY
Why would I need to? You're already
talking to the best.

HOLLY
Can I get a large-

Harry spots the manager coming from the back. He scribbles something onto a napkin.

HARRY
Shit, call me when you want the
interview.

He slides the napkin to Holly.

MANAGER
Who the hell are you?

HARRY
Harry.

MANAGER
Do you work here?

HARRY

Not anymore.

MANAGER

Where did you get that uniform? Who are you?

Harry tears his apron off and rushes away from the fast food place. Holly watches him leaves.

She turns back to the register.

HOLLY

Can I get a burger?

A fresh burger comes from the kitchen.

INT. MALL. LOCKER ROOM. DAY.

Holly meanders the locker rooms carrying a BK takeout bag. The area has been transformed into an impromptu AHA zone.

She spots an AHA Official strolling by.

HOLLY

'Scuse me, got Mr. Paxton's food. Any idea where he's gone?

AHA OFFICIAL #3

Oh shit, he just left for the employee car park.

HOLLY

Thanks.

Holly speeds away.

EXT. MALL. EMPLOYEE CAR PARK. NIGHT.

Holly's searching for Grim Paxton. She overhears a conversation and investigates.

Holly spots Grim Paxton from afar. He's talking to someone who she can't identify.

As she tries to get closer various armed ENTOURAGE appear. Holly takes cover.

Holly can't see the other figure but overhears their conversation

VOICE
Any trouble?

GRIM
A few surprises made it to
knockouts, but they'll be dealt
with.

VOICE
Avoid the theatrics this time.

GRIM
It won't happen again.

VOICE
Just make sure you win.

GRIM
Sir, half the challengers are with
us, same goes for the staff.

VOICE
I will be keeping an eye on things.
Don't fuck up.

One of the ENTOURAGE looks in Holly's direction, she takes cover.

HOLLY
Who the fuck rigs air hockey?

Holly tries to get a better look but its too dark. She sees a light switch in front of her.

The lights come on and Holly glimpses the figure, its Roy Rampart.

Roy ducks into his car as the entourage kick up a commotion. Holly sprints away.

Before Rampart's car speeds away, he rolls his window down.

ROY (TO GRIM)
Find out who that was.

Grim nods.

INT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. NIGHT.

The office is empty except for Holly and Vikki, both are locked in a screaming match.

HOLLY

There's something going on here.

VIKKI

When I said there's no conspiracies in this town I didn't expect you to go and make one up!

HOLLY

I'm not making this up.

VIKKI

Then where's your proof? Witnesses? Photos? Anything?

HOLLY

I tried, every employee I spoke to refused to comment.

VIKKI

Because nothing is going on. Its an air hockey competition.

HOLLY

With 100,000 dollars prize money, that doesn't set of any alarm bells?

VIKKI

Prize money at a sporting event, story of the century!

HOLLY

Air hockey is not a fucking sport! It is a game and Roy Rampart is using it as some kind of cover.

VIKKI

Cover for what?

HOLLY

Something! The guy is shady, he has past investigations-

VIKKI

That all came up empty.

HOLLY

Then why is he having backdoor conversations with competitors.

VIKKI

The previous champion. The two know each other.

(MORE)

VIKKI (CONT'D)

They can chat anytime they fucking want. You've got one interview with some kid, not even the person I wanted interviewed, and you claim the competition is being rigged because you overheard a conversation you have no proof actually took place. Holly, the sign on the front of this building is falling off. Simone wants to sell. So you've got your wish, you won't be working here much longer. Now, if you want to spend the next few months giving job interviews my glowing reference, cut this shit out.

Holly scoffs and turns to leave.

VIKKI (CONT'D)

He said there were players that need to be dealt with, means they're not on the cut.

HOLLY

Maybe they've heard something.

VIKKI

Maybe you can slip in a question or two while you're getting interviews about the tournament.

HOLLY

Interviews about the tournament.

VIKKI

Goodnight Holly.

Holly sprints out of the office.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. NIGHT.

Holly creeps into the abandoned arcade. She passes pictures of Jimmy and Young Harry.

All the machines are dead and the lights are off. The SOUND of air hockey emanates from within.

She follows the SOUND to the source. Light spills out of a room ahead of her.

She peers round the door and sees Harry's air hockey table seemingly abandoned.

HOLLY

Hello?

There's a BANG from under the table. Holly jumps. Harry slides out from underneath clutching his injured head.

HARRY

You pucking asshole.

HOLLY

I'm so sorry.

HARRY

What are you doing here?

HOLLY

Looking for you. I tried calling.

HARRY

Oh yeah. That wasn't my real number.

HOLLY

Why did you give it to me?

HARRY

Just seemed like the thing to do.

HOLLY

Mick mentioned you lived in an arcade.

HARRY

Where do you live? An apartment?

HOLLY

Yes.

HARRY

Good for you.

HOLLY

How long have you been playing air hockey?

HARRY

Does this mean you think I'm the best air hockey player?

HOLLY

No, it means I want to know how long you've been playing.

HARRY

All my life. You were looking to interview the best.

HOLLY

Past tense, now I'm taking anyone.

HARRY

I don't need to know that.

HOLLY

Have you ever seen any suspicious behavior?

HARRY

Caught two people practicing a secret handshake in the alley round back once, pretty weird.

HOLLY

In air hockey.

Harry shrugs.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Has the prize money for a game tournament always been so lucrative?

HARRY

Game?

HOLLY

Yes. Game.

HARRY

What was your name again?

HOLLY

Holly.

HARRY

Do you want to go somewhere more lively?

Holly sighs.

INT. SPORTS BAR. NIGHT.

There's a game of American Football on a big screen at the end of the bar. It's the Broncos v the Raiders.

A crowd of ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS watch the game, beer and nachos flying with every minuscule inch the hulking players crawl forward.

Holly's sat at a table, her pen and notepad ready and waiting.

Harry arrives with two drinks in his hand, a beer for Holly and a water for himself.

HOLLY

Water?

HARRY

Knockouts tomorrow.

HOLLY

Seriously?

HARRY

Seriously.

HOLLY

It's air hockey.

HARRY

Exactly, I can't lose my edge.

HOLLY

All you're doing is hitting a thingy with a different thingy.

HARRY

It's so much more than that. There's technique and strategy.

HOLLY

In air hockey.

HARRY

In air hockey.

HOLLY

It's a game.

HARRY

Most sports are.

HOLLY

There's a difference. Sports are athletic.

HARRY

I'm an athlete.

Holly scoffs. Harry raises his right hand and hovers it over the table.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Slap my hand.

HOLLY
What?

HARRY
Slap it. Go on.

She throws her hand at Harry's palm but he flicks it out of the way at the last moment.

He resets and she tries again but misses a second time, he brings his hand around and flicks hers as it misses.

HOLLY
Hey.

HARRY
Reaction time, speed, force. Air hockey requires athleticism, just as much as any other sport.

HOLLY
That's an exaggeration.

Harry points at some TVs at the end of the bar. They're all showing various sports, BASKETBALL, RACING, ARCHERY and BOWLING.

HARRY
Those are all considered sports. A basketballer might be more physically athletic than a bowling pro, but you'd never see a basketballer bowl a perfect 300.

The crowd of ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS all CHEER as a touchdown is scored.

HOLLY
It's still a game. It'll never be as competitive as football or soccer. You'd never see air hockey at the Olympics.

HARRY
You don't see football but you do see ping pong. You're literally at the world championships for air hockey.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

This tournament has been going on since the 70s. How is it not competitive. We've got tears-

He hold up his hand again, showing the cuts and scraped on his knuckles.

HARRY (CONT'D)

We've got blood. We have idiots willing to cheat just to win.

There's another triumphant cheer from the crowd.

HOLLY

But you don't have that. Supporters, hundreds of them tuning in every week just to watch.

HARRY

Does that matter?

HOLLY

Of course it matters. What does anything matter if nobody sees it?

HARRY

Like your articles then.

The crowd CRY in disappointment.

HARRY (CONT'D)

I've been all over this country. Chicago, Washington, Texas. I've always found some bar, some arcade to play in. There will always be an air hockey tournament underway that may not mean a lot to you, or anybody else, but means the world to that one person who wins. And I'm the guy who always wins.

HOLLY

Yeah, you don't seem like someone who can't handle a loss.

HARRY

You know, reporters aren't meant to show a bias.

Harry slams his water back.

HOLLY

Impressive.

HARRY
Try opening your mind a little.

HOLLY
Are you serious? Harry. Harry.

Harry leaves. The crowd exchange another disappointed CRY.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Dammit.

Holly shuts her notepad.

INT./EXT. HOLLY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Holly spots Mick carrying a baseball bat so she pulls up next to him and rolls her window down.

HOLLY
Mick?

MICK
Leave me alone.

HOLLY
What are you up to?

Mick stops.

MICK
You got your interview, now fuck off.

HOLLY
Do you want a lift, to wherever you're going? I owe you.

Mick considers.

INT. HOLLY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Mick's in the passenger seat resting the baseball bat on his lap.

Holly's eyes dart between the road and the bat.

MICK
Left up ahead.

HOLLY
So are you in a baseball team?

MICK
No.

HOLLY
Oh right.

MICK
Take the next exit.

Holly flicks on the signals.

EXT. PAXTON RINK. NIGHT.

Holly's car pulls into an empty car park belonging to a tacky bowling alley.

Mick and Holly jump out the car. Mick heads straight to the rink, on a mission. Holly follows.

HOLLY
This your dad's place?

Mick produces a key and unlocks the front door.

INT. PAXTON RINK. NIGHT.

Mick flicks a few switches and the building roars to life.

HOLLY
So what are we here for-

Mick takes the baseball bat and smashes it into a cash till. Holly SHRIEKS.

Mick continues to whack his bat into random objects around the rink.

Holly spots a door marked 'GRIM PAXTON: OFFICE'.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Where's the toilet?

Mick points with his baseball bat before bringing it down on a shelf of bowling balls. A few come crashing down denting the floor.

Holly sneaks away, slipping into the office instead.

INT. PAXTON RINK. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Holly begins snooping through various file cabinets to no avail.

There's a desktop computer, Holly taps away at the keyboard but is met by a password lock.

Holly searches through sticky notes, clutter and even under the curious potted plant for a password but comes up empty handed.

She looks in the desk drawers and finds a framed photo. It is a picture of Grim Paxton and Jimmy Bishop playing air hockey.

She twists the framed photo, there's a caption on the back: 'first competition'.

There's a folded note tucked into the frame. Holly opens it, 'password: airhockey11'

She taps it into the desktop and voila, she's in. She's looking through documents, emails, photos.

There's a CRASHING from outside. Holly speeds up.

Something catches her eye. Business correspondences from a company called Metric Inc. She takes a photo before locking the computer.

On her way out she deposits a tape recorder in one of the drawers.

INT. PAXTON RINK. NIGHT.

Holly exits the office to find the rink trashed. She spots Mick laying in the middle of one of the lanes so she joins him.

HOLLY

Get it all out of your system?

MICK

He's gonna kill me for this.

HOLLY

He's your dad.

MICK

He doesn't act like it.

HOLLY

Has he always been that way?

MICK

Every time that stupid competition is held here suddenly nothing matters except winning. And of course I'm not allowed anywhere nearby. God forbid there's a chance he loses.

HOLLY

I saw a picture of your dad with Harry's dad, were they close?

MICK

Yeah before my dad became so focused on winning it drove them apart.

HOLLY

What happened to him?

MICK

I can get you ice cream.

HOLLY

Excuse me?

MICK

Seems like all you want is a scoop.

Mick gets up and heads to the exit. Holly tries to catch up.

HOLLY

I was curious!

MICK

Well, he died. You're welcome, I'll see you tomorrow.

Mick storms out of the rink.

EXT. PAXTON RINK. NIGHT.

Mick's storming off while Holly's trying to play catch-up.

HOLLY

Your dad is cheating.

Mick stops.

MICK

No he's not.

HOLLY

I overheard him talking to Roy Rampart. They're rigging the competition.

MICK

Why would he do that?

HOLLY

100,000 dollars is a lot of money.

MICK

No. Have you seen this place? My dad doesn't need the money. Also, why would Rampart rig his own competition?

HOLLY

Have you seen anything strange or odd-

MICK

My dad is not a cheat. He's an asshole sure, but he's not a cheater.

Mick turns to leave.

MICK (CONT'D)

Leave us alone.

Holly heads to her car, defeated.

INT. MALL, AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

An air hockey table HONKS signalling a goal. MAX SALEM (50), a bald man with an impressive red beard and a stoic manner grabs a puck from his goal.

Grim laughs in victorious glee opposite Max. The score counter reads 4-5 to Grim.

The referee keeps his beady eyes on the puck as Max smacks it. Grim returns the puck, and the rally is underway.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Holly and Max are sat in a coffee shop, mid-interview.

MAX

What are you suggesting?

HOLLY

I'm not suggesting anything, just noticing a trend.

MAX

Sore losers looking for an excuse.

HOLLY

So you have no reason to suspect foul play?

Max thinks.

INT. MALL, AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Max shoots a puck towards Grim's goal. Grim uses his mallet to 'top' the puck just before it sinks into goal.

Max looks to the referee waiting a foul call that doesn't come.

Grim takes the chance to score a point for himself. 4-6 Grim.

GRIM

You're losing your edge, Max.

Max recovers the puck and starts another rally. When Max slips and returns a meek puck, Grim clips the puck with a spin.

Max reacts slowly, raising his mallet and placing it on top of the puck. The referee blows a whistle.

REFEREE

Foul.

The referee slides the puck over to Grim. Max shakes his head.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Holly and the referee are sat at a coffee shop, mid interview.

REFEREE

If you're going to waste my time with, well with whatever this is, I'd prefer you'd just come out with an accusation.

The referee crosses his arms.

INT. MALL, AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

The referee is holding Harry's puck demonstrating exactly how Harry placed his mallet on the puck. Harry has his hands on his hips, still in disagreement.

REFEREE

USAA Section 1 Rule 8: the puck cannot be 'topped'.

HARRY

I know the pucking rules.

REFEREE

Then follow them.

Harry gives in, throwing his hands up.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Holly's jotting notes in her book. The referee appears flustered.

REFEREE

And that was a correct call! I don't care what you're little notes say, if certain players are getting fouled frequently, it is because they are poor sportsmen. That Harry for example, last I checked he's still winning!

The referee sits back self-satisfied.

INT. MALL. LOCKER ROOM. DAY.

Roy Rampart, Grim Paxton, the referee and several AHA officials are in an intense meeting.

ROY

How is he still winning?

REFEREE

He's good.

ROY

I don't give a shit, I want him out.

GRIM

I'll take care of him next round

ROY

You better, for your sake, and your son's.

Roy takes off.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Holly's scribbling notes while Max continues their interview.

MAX

Jimmy Bishop, great player, shame what happened. I started playing air hockey in Bishop's. Everyone did, all the greats passed through that old place. Even the Venezuelans, before they disappeared. Just goes to show you, you have be careful what you eat.

HOLLY

Sorry?

MAX

Jimmy, he died from a toxic coriander plant. Must have thought it was regular coriander. Taken too soon.

Holly makes note of that.

INT. MALL, AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

TERRI (70), dressed in 80s aerobic gear, plays a feint which Mick falls for. When Terri actually slams the puck, it sinks straight into Mick's goal.

The score TICKS to 5-6.

BOBBY BARLEY (29), a nerdy guy whose had a few afternoon beers, CHEERS from the audience.

BOBBY

We got a game on our hands! LET'S GO TERRI.

Mick retrieves his puck from the goal, flicks it up in the air and brings his mallet down on top, slamming the puck into the table.

Mick sinks an ace. 6-6

Bobby is stunned.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
LET'S GO MICK!

INT. MALL. DAY.

Bobby's in the interview hot seat now. Holly has relaxed into her seat, engaged in Bobby's testimony.

HOLLY
You've come from Chicago?

BOBBY
I'd cross the globe to see this tournament. There are three principles in air hockey: deception, deception and deception. Wil Upchurch said that, and I love it every time I see it.

Holly jots the quote down.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
So yeah, there's probably something going on behind the scenes. My theory, doping.

Holly nods.

INT. MALL. DAY.

Max sits forward in his chair. Holly leans in as well.

MAX
I always thought Jimmy had the edge over Grim. If he hadn't passed, maybe Grim wouldn't be champion.

HOLLY
Do you think Grim will win again?

MAX
Harry's looking strong, anything could happen.

Max gets up, finished with the interview.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

DING. The puck sinks into Terri's goal. The table SINGS celebrating Mick's victory.

Mick launches into boastful celebration. Bobby joins suit. The two face off, screaming into each other's faces before embracing and jumping up and down.

Grim grabs Mick and drags him aside

GRIM

I told you to stay away.

Grim smacks Mick before realising people can see. He drags him to a more secluded spot.

GRIM (CONT'D)

You don't fucking listen, do you? One thing, you can't do this one thing I keep telling you. Here's what's gonna happen, I'm going to beat Harry, and then the two of us are in finals where you will lose. Understand?

MICK

Dad-

GRIM

You are going to lose, do you understand?

MICK

Yes. I lose the finals.

HARRY

HEY!

Harry has appeared. He pulls Grim off Mick.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Stop that.

GRIM

Bishop? Get out of here.

HARRY

Or what?

GRIM

Ask your father.

Harry punches Grim.

GRIM (CONT'D)
Perfect, that's disqualification.

Harry backs down.

MICK
But you hit him first.

GRIM
What?

MICK
Right Harry?

HARRY
Yeah. Self-defense.

GRIM
Bullshit.

MICK
That's what I saw.

GRIM
Mick, goddammit.

Mick storms off.

HARRY
See you at the table, dick.

Harry peruses Mick.

GRIM
Shit.

Grim kicks the wall.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

Mick and Harry are recuperating.

HARRY
You're in the finals.

MICK
Woah, I'm in the finals.

HARRY
If I don't make it through, you'll
beat him.

Holly approaches them.

HOLLY

Boys.

MICK

What questions do you have now?

HARRY

Or are you here to insult air hockey again?

HOLLY

I figured it out.

MICK

She figured it out.

HARRY

Congratulations, I'm about to play so, see ya.

HOLLY

You won't win. Rampart is rigging the game.

MICK

This again?

HARRY

What is she talking about.

MICK

Its bullshit.

HOLLY

Metric Inc.

HARRY

What?

HOLLY

They bought out the rink, right Mick?

Mick nods.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

The company is a subsidiary of Rampart Casinos. Roy Rampart owns the rink.

MICK

So?

HOLLY

So, if your dad wins, he can put the money back into Rampart's cash-flow. If the prize money was illicit in any way, this whole tournament would be an easy way to clean it.

COMMOTION. The next game is starting. Harry looks over.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Harry if I'm right Grim will do anything to make it to the finals. The ref is dirty, the officials will turn a blind eye. If you're going to win, you need to play the best game of air hockey you've ever played.

Harry braces himself.

INT. MALL. LATER.

The area has been rearranged so only one air hockey table is out. The audience section has filled out now, Mick and Holly among the crowd.

Roy is sat surrounded by his entourage in a VIP section.

The referee waits at the table.

MEG (60), an AHA official wondering if retiring early isn't such a bad idea, announces the match.

MEG

Semi-finals, Grim Paxton V Harry Bishop.

Harry steps forward to the table. Grim appears across the table. The ref preforms the coin toss.

HARRY

You ready to lose Grim? Just saying you should be ready to lose. Cause you're gonna lose. Basically no point in trying.

GRIM

So much like your father.

REFEREE

Heads. Grim?

GRIM

This side.

Grim and Harry move to their positions.

The referee places the puck in the middle of the table. He places a pen in the center of the puck, ensuring it's fairly placed.

HARRY

I've trained with the Juggernaut,
the Venezuelans, the Maestro. Give
up.

The referee takes the pen away but applies force so it favours Grim.

In a flash, Grim taps the puck and it SLAMS into Harry's goal. It happens so quick, Harry barely registers it.

GRIM

So much for training with the
Venezuelans.

Holly sighs.

Grim taps the puck. Harry returns with a bouncing belter that sinks into Grim's goal.

Harry throws down his mallet and slams the table.

HARRY

Yes. Yes. Goddammit yes.

Mick and Holly clap.

Grim serves and Harry nails a clean return goal. The score flicks to 1-2 to Harry.

Grim hits an ace. Then another one. 3-2 Grim.

GRIM

I never got to beat your dad.
You'll do though.

Harry recollects himself and Grim serves again, harder this time. Harry returns and scores a goal.

Harry takes the puck and pops it on the table, he feints a hit before slamming the puck for another goal. 4-5 Harry.

HARRY

That's what I'm talking about. Oh
yeah.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)
 (To Holly)
 Did you see that?

HOLLY
 Congratulations, you got the puck
 in. You want a prize?

HARRY
 Yeah that's why I'm here.

Holly smiles.

Grim slaps the puck back on the table. He tries to fool Harry
 with the feint but Harry knows better.

When Grim does serve, Harry is quick to smack the puck
 straight into goal.

GRIM
 Fuck.

REFEREE
 Game point, Bishop.

Grim is losing his composure, he looks over to Rampart who
 dispatches one of his entourage.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
 Time wasting.

Grim serves, Harry returns. Grim is playing defensive and
 Harry can't find a way in.

HARRY
 What's got you so scared Grim?
 Let's skip all this and get to the
 bit where you lose.

GRIM
 Shut up.

Grim gains possession but just as hit smacks the puck-
 DARKNESS. Someone cut the lights. SHRIEKS from the audience.
 PING. CLACK. PING.

The lights come on, the puck isn't on the table.

HOLLY
 What happened?

The referee inspects Harry's goal, then Grim's. There he
 finds the puck.

REFEREE
Winner, Harry Bishop!

Grim takes off full sprint. Holly, Mick and the crowd erupt into applause.

Harry runs to Holly and Mick.

HARRY
Am I not the best?

MICK
Man, how did you pull that off in the dark?

HARRY
You'll get it one day.

MICK
I'll look out for it tomorrow.

HARRY
So much for rigging the match.

HOLLY
You believe me now?

HARRY
That light shit wasn't a coincidence.

HOLLY
The look on his face was priceless-

Holly looks to the VIP section but Rampart has disappeared.

HARRY
He's gone.

HOLLY
Good. He's lost his money, all that's left is for you two to have a great finale tomorrow.

MICK
I should probably check on my dad.

HARRY
Give him my best.

MICK
See you tomorrow.

Mick leaves.

HARRY

Tell me air hockey isn't a sport.

HOLLY

That was fun but no, it is just a game.

HARRY

When was the last time you played?

She shrugs. Harry holds out his hand.

HARRY (CONT'D)

C'mon.

Holly takes his hand.

INT. BISHOP ARCADE. NIGHT.

Harry cracks the switches on an electrical box breathing life into the arcade. Machines come to life, emitting 8-bit BEEPS and BOPS.

Holly's waiting by the air hockey table, inspecting one of the mallets.

Harry strolls over, taking his mallet from the table.

HARRY

You ready?

HOLLY

Don't be so dramatic.

Harry pats his pockets.

HARRY

Do you have a quarter?

Harry points at the INSERT COIN symbol on the side of the table. She stares at him.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Joking.

He slams his fist into the side of the table. It awakens with a triumphant DING. Holly's goal spits out a puck.

She takes the puck and lays it on the WHIRRING table. The puck hovers and slides around.

Holly pushes her mallet into the puck, it skates across the table to Harry's waiting mallet.

He jerks his hand and the puck CLACKS into Holly's goal.

Holly scoffs. She retrieves the puck and dumps it back on the table, positioning her mallet for a strike.

HARRY (CONT'D)
You're holding the mallet wrong.

HOLLY
I'm holding the handle.

HARRY
That's the beginner grip.

Harry crosses the table and puts his mallet next to hers. He demonstrates how he holds the mallet, fingers on the edge.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Grip the side.

Holly's phone RINGS. Then VIBRATES. Harry drops his mallet. Holly scrambles to switch her phone off.

HOLLY
Sorry. Carry on.

He demonstrates the grip again. Holly adjusts her grip to match Harry's.

HARRY
Then flick with your wrist.

Harry demonstrates the motion with his mallet. Holly copies him a few times.

HARRY (CONT'D)
That's it.

Harry places the puck in front of her mallet. She flicks like Harry showed her and smacks the puck with a perfect THWACK. The puck sails straight into goal.

HOLLY
Look at that I'm a pro.

HARRY
Uh-huh. Show me your defense.

Holly brings her mallet flat against the goal and slides it left and right.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Wrong. Bring it forward.

Harry puts his hand over hers, guiding the mallet forward.

HARRY (CONT'D)
See, imagine there's a triangle-
here.

Harry moves behind Holly and puts his arm over hers. He traces a triangle in the table with the mallet.

HARRY (CONT'D)
You want to move the mallet in this
triangle to minimize the space an
incoming puck can get through.

They look at each other and realize how intimate they have become.

HOLLY
Got it.

HARRY
Good.

HOLLY
Seems easy enough.

Harry moves away and circles back round to his side of the table.

HARRY
First to seven?

HOLLY
Do I have any chance?

HARRY
Not at all.

HOLLY
Play left handed then.

HARRY
Only fair. I am a professional
athlete.

HOLLY
So there's some skill and
technique, it's still not a sport.

HARRY
Care to wager? I win, you admit
it's a sport.

HOLLY
And if i win?

HARRY
Up to you.

HOLLY
I'll decide when I win then.

HARRY
Thing is, I never lose.

Harry slides the mallet into his left hand. He's clumsy when handling it.

Harry takes the puck and readies it. He taps the puck, which slides over to Holly who flicks it off the side and into Harry's goal. The game is underway.

2-2 as Harry uses his signature feint, he winks at Holly's dour face.

3-4 to Holly as she blocks an oncoming puck and lands a nice return.

5-4 in a comeback from Harry made up of two clean strikes.

6-6 following a nice rally that ends with Holly sinking a screamer. They're both having heaps of fun.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Gamepoint. You ready to lose?

Harry places the puck down and serves. Holly returns. Harry rebounds it off the wall. Holly pulls her mallet back along the invisible triangle to block it.

She hits it back, he returns. Back and forth, back and forth, until-

HOLLY
What the hell?

Harry falls for the ruse, he twists his head. Holly seizes the opportunity and slams the puck to Harry's goal.

His paddle doesn't move and the puck slips into his goal. 6-7 to Holly.

She erupts into celebration. Leaning on the table and mocking Harry.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Did you just lose? To a beginner?
So much for world champion, you fat
loser.

HARRY

You got the language down.

HOLLY

And guess what? Air hockey still
isn't a sport.

HARRY

Laugh it up.

HOLLY

Oh believe me I will.

She begins laughing, hard. Harry produces his pocket knife,
silencing Holly's laughter. He disappears under the table.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Harry? Hey, you're not gonna stab
me just because I beat you right?
Harry?

HARRY

No.

HOLLY

Then what are you doing?

She circles the table and crouches down to investigate. She
sees Harry on his back using his knife to carve something in
the table.

Holly gets on her back and shimmies next to him.

HARRY

It's a tradition.

Holly sees the table. 'Dad' with an incomprehensible amount
of etches; 'Harry' with one etch; and now 'Holly'. Harry
carves one tally under her name.

HOLLY

You and your dad played a lot.

HARRY

Yeah. This was fun.

HOLLY

Maybe a little.

HARRY

I don't remember the last time I
enjoyed a game like that.

Holly turns her head towards Harry.

HOLLY

You don't?

Harry turns his head towards her, their eyes meet.

HARRY

What's the prize?

HOLLY

Oh. I don't know, I hadn't thought
about it.

They both lean in and kiss. Harry pulls away smiling ear to
ear. Holly's in a similar state.

Her phone RINGS causing her to jump and bang her head.

Holly answers her phone while they crawl out from underneath
the table.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Speak.

ZAC (O.C. FOR SCENE)

Evening beautiful.

HOLLY

Hanging up now.

ZAC

Where have you been?

HOLLY

Investigating.

ZAC

The whole office has been trying to
reach you.

Holly mouths 'Sorry' to Harry. He stands unfazed.

HOLLY

Why?

ZAC

Do you not know what's happening?

HOLLY
Care to clue me in?

ZAC
I understand taking a digital detox
Holly but this is next level.

HOLLY
Alright Zac, whatever the fuck
you're talking about I hope it goes
great. Goodbye.

ZAC
Wait. Boss wants you.

HOLLY
Which one?

ZAC
Simone.

HOLLY
Tell her I'm busy.

ZAC
Tell her your busy? But I'm sitting
with her right now.

HOLLY
Asshole.

ZAC
Do you want me to repeat that too?

HOLLY
What does she want, Zac?

ZAC
Come back to the office. She needs
to 'speak' to you.

HOLLY
Can it wait til tomorrow?

ZAC
She says no.

HOLLY
Bye Zac.

ZAC
Wait. One more thing. You alone
tonight?

She hangs up.

HARRY
Friend from work.

HOLLY
Friend, no. Work, yes.

HARRY
Miss. Reporter has to go back to
the daily planet?

HOLLY
Sorry?

HARRY
Lois Lane.

HOLLY
That makes you Superman.

HARRY
More like Clark Kent.

They embrace. . NIGHT.

Mick enters the rink, he hears a SCUFFLE coming from Grim's office.

INT. PAXTON RINK. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Mick bursts in the room. Roy Rampart and Mike have trashed the place.

Grim is beaten and bloody on his office chair.

Mick tries to scam but Big Bill comes from behind and grabs him.

ROY
Hold him.

MICK
Let go-

Roy punches Mick.

ROY
You know, we were just chatting
about you. You're a talented kid
but you lack discipline.

Roy hits him again.

ROY (CONT'D)

Your dad's been helpful over the years, now it's your time to join the family business.

MICK

Fuck you, Roy.

ROY

You're not getting it. You win tomorrow, or you see your father get the Jimmy Bishop treatment.

Roy lands a gun punch dropping Mick to the floor. He signals Big Bill who drags Grim out of the room.

Mick is left alone clutching his injuries.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. NIGHT.

Holly saunters out of the arcade, Harry following her.

HARRY

You really have to leave?

HOLLY

We can continue this tomorrow.

HARRY

I'm counting on it.

She goes to leave.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Wait. Did you mean what you said?

HOLLY

What?

HARRY

Do you think air hockey is a sport?

HOLLY

No. It's a game, Harry.

She sees how hurt he is.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I'll see you tomorrow.

She leaves.

EXT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. CAR PARK. NIGHT.

Holly jumps out of her car and struts to the office.

A group of men are taking the 'NCC' sign down from the office.

INT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. NIGHT.

The office is brimming with activity. Holly paces through the buzz.

INT. SIMONE'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

Simone types away at her laptop. Vikki is busy packing away her belongings.

Holly barges in.

HOLLY
What's going on-

She makes eye contact with Vikki.

SIMONE
How's the hockey story?

HOLLY
Air hockey.

Vikki grabs her belongings and leaves.

SIMONE
Oh yeah? We have an opportunity for you.

HOLLY
How dare you?

SIMONE
I beg your pardon?

HOLLY
You can't fire Vikki!

SIMONE
Well I didn't. The new owner did.

Simone signals the door. Standing in the doorway is Roy Rampart.

ROY
Evening ladies.

He strolls in and introduces himself to Holly.

ROY (CONT'D)
You're the reporter covering my
tournament, it's about time we met.

HOLLY
You bastard.

Roy scoffs.

ROY
I apologise, I'm not sure what I've
done to offend-

Holly tries to leave.

ROY (CONT'D)
Walk out that office and you won't
find a single job in journalism
again. I'll see to it personally.

Holly stops. She considers her options.

HOLLY
So be it.

ROY
Money buys things Holly,
businesses, arcades, you name it. I
believe Simone had an assignment

SIMONE
It's with Arsenal. We need you in
London for three months. Be at the
airport at seven. Keep in regular
contact, we expect updates every
Friday. Oh, don't worry, we've
given your story to someone else to
finish.

HOLLY
Who?

Zac opens the door and pops his head around.

ZAC
Hey boss..es. One awesome report
coming up!

SIMONE

Alright Zac, best of luck!

ZAC

Looking good, Holly.

He slinks out and shuts the door.

ROY

I am so glad we got the chance to work together. Obviously all your work comes through me, if I were to find out you'd been investigating something you weren't assigned to, well you know.

He takes Holly's hand and shakes it before showing her the door.

INT. SPORTS RANT OFFICES. DAY.

Holly paces through the office right into Zac, waiting with a pearly smile.

ZAC

Any advice, Holly?

HOLLY

Not now.

ZAC

Boss told me you'd taken an interest in one of the players... Harry? I'll be sure to pass on a message.

Holly blanks him and heads outside.

INT. HOLLY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Holly crashes inside. She doesn't see the figure in her backseat.

VIKKI

Holly-

Holly screams and flicks on the light, revealing Vikki.

HOLLY

Jesus Christ don't kill me!

VIKKI

Calm down, it's just me.

HOLLY

Vikki? What the hell is going on?

VIKKI

That dump was bound to be sold sooner or later.

HOLLY

I'm fucked.

VIKKI

Not necessarily. The finals are tomorrow, there'll be a lot of eyes. You get some evidence on stage, suddenly he's in hot water.

HOLLY

The tape recorder. I planted one in Grim's office, maybe it caught-

VIKKI

Go, get it. I'll wave the scent towards some old cop contacts.

Vikki opens the door.

VIKKI (CONT'D)

You'll have one chance, don't fuck this up.

Holly nods.

EXT. PAXTON RINK. NIGHT.

Holly parks her car and heads into the rink.

Roy's car speeds by headed in a different direction.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. NIGHT.

Roy arrives at the arcade and approaches the entrance with his entourage.

They knock on the door. Harry appears and they grab him, dragging him into the car park.

INT. PAXTON RINK. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Holly investigates the scuffle and finds Mick unconscious in the office, she shakes him and he gains consciousness.

HOLLY
Jesus, Mick, what happened?

MICK
They took him.

HOLLY
Who?

MICK
Rampart.

Mick is fading in and out of consciousness. Holly grabs her phone and dials 911. Mick grabs her hand.

MICK (CONT'D)
No...police. Have to save my...dad.

Holly and rifles through the desk drawer. The recorder is still there.

Mick sees her grab the tape recorder.

MICK (CONT'D)
No. No they'll kill him.

Holly looks at the recorder.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. NIGHT.

Harry scans his attackers. Big Bill and The Slender man, holding him down. Roy Rampart, reveling in it all.

HARRY
This is taking 'sore loser' to an extreme.

ROY
Nice place you've got here. I think I'll turn it into condos.

Harry struggles but his attackers hold him still.

ROY (CONT'D)
Of course, you could lose tomorrow. You wouldn't be able to call yourself the best, but you'll keep the arcade.

HARRY

Fat chance.

ROY

Right. Your girlfriend isn't going to save you. I bought her fucking paper. I own her. Besides, what was your plan. Did you really think about it? I fund air hockey. I go down, no tournament. No AHA, no nothing. You need me.

The Slender man pushes Harry to the ground. Big Bill wrestles Harry's right hand into his grip.

ROY (CONT'D)

Nevertheless, can't have you winning.

(to Big Bill)

Break it.

Big Bill applies pressure.

HARRY

WAIT! Jesus Christ! Wait.

Roy holds his hand up. Big Bill loosens his grip.

HARRY (CONT'D)

I'll lose. Okay, you're right, Ill do it.

ROY

I just can't take that chance.

He nods to Big Bill who SNAPS Harry's hand in one motion. Harry ERUPTS into PAINFUL CRIES.

ROY (CONT'D)

Be seeing you.

The trio leave Harry writhing in pain on the concrete floor under the neon lights.

INT. PAXTON RINK. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Mick's passed out again. Holly's looking at the recorder in her hand.

She sees the plant pot smashes on the floor. There's a label, it reads: 'TOXIC CORIANDER'

Holly gasps.

EXT. MALL. EMPLOYEE CAR PARK. DAY.

Roy's car arrives. He gets out and heads into the mall with his entourage.

Mike checks the boot where Grim is tied up. Mike shuts him in failing to notice Grim's hand restraints have loosened.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. DAY.

AHA officials transform the mall into a stage ready for the finals.

Mike alters the table.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

The stage is set for the finals. An air hockey table has literally be positioned on a stage.

EXT. MALL. EMPLOYEE CAR PARK. NIGHT.

Mike is briefing Big Bill, Slender Man, Terri, and various entourage.

MIKE

We're here to make sure everything goes smoothly.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

On stage, the referee inspects the table while Meg slides the two finalists into the table: 'HARRY BISHOP V MICK PAXTON'.

MIKE (V.O.)

The favorite to win is Mick. We are here to do everything to ensure that happens.

The referee flicks the table on. It WHIRS and GROANS. He runs his hand over, confirming the air is flowing.

EXT. MALL. EMPLOYEE CAR PARK. NIGHT.

Mike holds up a black & white photo of Holly.

MIKE

Be on the lookout for this woman.
If you spot her, escort her from
the premises quietly.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

Folding metal chairs once again create an audience, which is slowly filling in.

Familiar faces line the crowd: Max, Bobby, Grim, Big Bill, Slender man.

Meg produces a metal box, placing it on a podium. Meg clicks the box open revealing \$100,000.

Lost in the growing crowd is Zac, flocked by a team of ALERT PAs. He spots a BLONDE WOMAN sat alone in the audience.

ZAC

Alright someone keep track of the
score for me, I gotta go to work.

Zac heads towards the woman just as Holly passes by him, disguised as a Burger King employee.

INT. MALL. LOCKER ROOM. NIGHT.

Holly sneaks through the locker room. Mick is going through a series of intense warm ups.

MICK

I didn't order any food.

Holly hides her face.

HOLLY

Wrong room.

MICK

I'll take it anyway.

She drops the food without showing her face then tries to leave.

MICK (CONT'D)

They have my dad. I don't care what
you think or believe, or what Harry
wants. I am going to everything in
my power to win that game and save
his life.

Holly turns to face him.

HOLLY
You'll destroy air hockey.

MICK
I'll save my dad.

Holly leaves.

INT. MALL. LOCKER ROOM. NIGHT.

Harry's wrapping a sling around his arm. Holly creeps into the locker room.

HOLLY
Food for Mr. Bishop.

HARRY
Holly?

Holly sees Harry's arm.

HOLLY
Are you okay?

HARRY
You shouldn't be here.

HOLLY
He got to you?

HARRY
Rampart's won, you should go.

HOLLY
Harry you don't understand-

HARRY
I do. Only air hockey matters now
and without Roy air hockey is over.
I've got to lose.

HOLLY
If you allow him to do this, you'd
be killing air hockey yourself.

HARRY
Air hockey's just a game. It
doesn't need principles.

HOLLY
You don't believe that.

HARRY
It's the only choice!

HOLLY
Air hockey is a sport, and it's up
to us to save it.

HARRY
It's not.

HOLLY
Well it is to me. Fight for me.

Mike and his entourage enter.

MIKE
Get her.

They grab Holly.

HARRY
Get your hands off her.

MIKE
You're up. Move it.

Harry wavers to look at Holly. Mike grabs him and forces him
out.

HARRY
Don't hurt her!

MIKE
Search her.

The entourage pat Holly down and find nothing.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Young lady, what was your plan? Win
with the power of friendship? Throw
her out.

The entourage drag Holly away.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

Harry walks straight through the crowd and steps up on stage.
The referee spots him, then his broken arm.

REFEREE
Oh shit.

People in the crowd start to notice. Harry turns to face them, now all attention is on him. There's a collective GASP. Someone faints, it's Bobby.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

What happened?

Harry looks at Roy.

HARRY

I had an accident.

REFEREE

Are you resigning?

HARRY

No pucking way.

The crowd CHEERS.

Mick steps onto the stage to the welcome of an even larger crowd.

People are now stood shoulder-to-shoulder. Meg and her mall staff have given up with the chairs.

The referee pulls Mick and Harry into a pre-match conversation.

REFEREE

I don't know what the puck is going on tonight, but we have a lot more eyes than usual. I want a clean match boys. If I make a call, there's no talking back. Zero exceptions. Understood.

Harry nods. Mick follows suit.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Alright.

The players turn to each other, a stare down. The referee produces a coin.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Harry is heads. Mick is tails.

The referee flicks the coin. It twists in the air before landing on the floor, TAILS UP.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Mick?

MICK

Right.

The two players descend to their positions on the ends of the table.

Harry places his mallet on the table, assuming his grip with his left hand.

Meg steps up to the stage, microphone in hand.

MEG

Ladies and gentlemen!

The huge crowd stay silent.

MEG (CONT'D)

Welcome to air hockey.

Now they ERUPT. The CHEERS are deafening. People have phone flashlights on, white spots swaying across the whole horde.

MEG (CONT'D)

Are you ready?

BOOMING APPLAUSE.

EXT. MALL. NIGHT.

Holly is chucked out into the street. She picks herself up and dusts herself off.

She pulls out her phone and she's a message: 'It's done'. Holly remembers.

INT. VIKKI'S HOUSE. DAY. FLASHBACK.

Vikki and Holly are prepping for the night. Max, Bobby and other air hockey players are there too.

HOLLY

Everyone know the plan?

She's met with blank expressions.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Okay, from the top.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

Max and Bobby enter the mall.

HOLLY (V.O.)
First order of business is getting
me in.

They head separate ways.

INT. MALL. INFIRMARY. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

Max opens a backdoor in the closed infirmary.

HOLLY (V.O.)
Max you get the door open while-

INT. MALL FOOD COURT. BURGER KING. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

Bobby is lining up at Burger King.

HOLLY (V.O.)
Bobby you get a uniform from Burger
King.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT. FLASHBACK

Holly, dressed in her BK uniform, wades through the crowds.

HOLLY (V.O.)
Next, I'll head to the lockers to
speak to Harry.

As she passes Max and Bobby, they acknowledge each other.
Once shes passed Bobby and Max take off.

INT. MALL. TECH ROOM. NIGHT. FLASHBACK.

Max and Bobby conceal themselves at the end of a corridor.
There's a door guarded by Rampart's entourage.

HOLLY (V.O.)
They'll be expecting me, so once
I'm discovered, you should have a
clear shot at the tech room.

The entourage get a message and scurry off. Max and Bobby
sneak in, tape recorder in hand.

INT. VIKKI'S HOUSE. DAY. FLASHBACK.

Everyone is caught up.

HOLLY

Then right as everyone locks in for
the big match, Rampart's day is
ruined.

Holly smiles.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

The referee has positioned the puck on the center line,
holding it down with a pen.

Harry holds his mallet ready. Mick swings his from side-to-
side. It's a face-off.

The entire crowd has fallen SILENT.

REFEREE

Players ready-

The referee positions the puck.

1 second passes. Harry stares at Mick.

2 seconds have passed. Mick exhales, laser focused on the
puck.

3 seconds have passed, the crowd sit in anticipation.

On the fourth second, the referee releases the pen.

Mick pounces on the puck, making clean contact and sending it
straight into Harry's goal.

CHEERS from the crowd. The air hockey table CLICKS to 0-1.

Harry collects the puck as the machine spits it out. The
crowd dies down.

Harry places the puck on the artificial air. It hovers.

MICK

Not a leftie, huh?

Max leans over to Bobby.

MAX

Something's wrong.

EXT. MALL. NIGHT.

Holly's waiting.

HOLLY

It should have gone off by now.

She sprints back into the mall.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

Mick resumes play in a flash. The players start a good rally, the speed of the puck picking up with each rebound until Harry's grip slips, sending his mallet sliding away.

The referee blows a WHISTLE, grabbing the puck from the table.

REFEREE

Foul. Possession Mick.

The referee hands the puck to Mick, who lays it down and scores an ace on Harry. 0-2. The crowd CLAPS.

Harry is shaken, conceding two more goals taking the score to 0-4.

Harry retrieves the puck from the goal but hesitates to put it on the table.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

That's ten seconds, Harry.

Harry places the puck down but doesn't hit it. He looks out into the crowd and glimpses Holly making her way through the crowd.

MICK

Ref?

REFEREE

Any longer you'll foul on disruption.

Harry steadies his mallet. He bounces the puck off the side then smacks it, hard.

Mick pulls his mallet back, gaining possession.

Mick dances the puck around his half waiting for the moment.

Harry overextends his reach and Mick seizes the opportunity and fires the puck.

But Harry was ready, swiping his mallet at the puck. It bounces against the barrier, sneaking past Mick's mallet but just missing the goal.

The puck rebounds all the way around to Harry's side, he retakes possession.

Mick moves his mallet to a central position, so Harry flicks the puck down the middle. It skims the side of Mick's puck, reflecting straight into Mick's goal. 1-4 Mick

A generous CLAP from the audience.

Harry proceeds to display expert possession control of the puck, slinking it around his half of the table.

Mick tries his best to reposition his mallet but can't block Harry's shot.

More CHEERS from the audience, mostly Bobby. The table clicks 2-4.

Mick puts the puck back in play, pushing it all the way to center line before slamming it at Harry.

Harry manages to make the save, launching a quick return shot that lands square in Mick's goal. 3-4

Another CLAP. The audience has lost it's buzz and replaced it with focus.

Mick's back in possession, he bounces the puck a few times, circling his mallet around it in an attempt to disguise his move.

He pounces, a straight shot on Harry's goal. It's blocked.

Harry has control, he bounces it a few times then gears up for a shot and- he faints it.

The rouse is perfect, Mick flinches and Harry has sinks an open goal.

SERIOUS APPLAUSE for the display of skill.

The table flicks to 4-4.

MICK

What are you doing?

HARRY

Making it look good.

Mick slams the puck back down on the table. He whacks the puck at furious force.

Harry rebounds just in time. Mick returns with another full power shot, forcing Harry to stretch to block.

Once more the puck sails to Mick, who charges up his most powerful shot.

When he launches it, Harry reaches forward, colliding with the puck sending it flying upwards towards Harry's broken hand.

The puck smacks Harry full force engulfing him in ferocious pain. He collapses to the ground.

CRIES of disapproval EMANATE from the audience.

BOBBY

FOUL!

The referee checks in on Harry. He helps him up.

REFEREE

You good?

HARRY

Yeah.

The referee moves to confront Mick.

REFEREE

Keep it clean.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Harry. Your possession.

Harry resumes play but he's on the back foot, playing catch up to Mick's aggressive play style.

Harry and Mick concede leveling out the score. 5-5.

Harry serves and Mick returns, another rally.

In the crowd, Mike produces a device which he points at the table.

Just as Harry hits a clean shot the air shuts off halting the puck before Mick's goal.

The air comes back on and Mick sinks a goal.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

5-6. Gamepoint, Mick.

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE out of the crowd.

MICK

Time to end this.

INT. MALL. TECH ROOM. NIGHT.

Holly sneaks into the tech room and hits play on the tape recorder.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

The INTERCOM RINGS. It's playing a recording of Roy's assault on Grim.

Harry pauses his serve. The mall falls silent.

ROY (V.O.)
Hold him.

MICK (V.O.)
Let go-

Roy punches Mick (recording). The crowd GASP.

ROY (TO MIKE)
Get that recording.

Mike takes off.

Roy hits him again (recording).

CROWD MEMBER
SHAME!

ROY (V.O.)
Your dad's been helpful over the years, now it's your time to join the family business.

MICK (V.O.)
Fuck you.

ROY (V.O.)
You're not getting it. You win tomorrow, or your father gets a taste of his toxic coriander.

This hits Harry like a sack of bricks. The recording stops.

The crowd is silent.

HARRY
Your dad... killed my dad?

Mick is crying.

MICK
 You prick. Don't you get it. My
 dad's as good as dead now.

HARRY
 Good.

MICK
 What did you pucking say?

HARRY
 I hope he's rotting for what he
 did!

Mick grabs his mallet. Harry does the same.

MICK
 I'll destroy you!

HARRY
 Bring it!

Harry takes a deep breath before starting play. He begins with a few bounces before attempting a rebound shot, but Mick stops it.

Harry scans the crowd. In the distance, standing on a plant display, he sees Holly.

Holly's pointing out into the crowd.

HOLLY
 I see him, he's heading for the
 exit.

Rampart is being escorted out by his entourage, Vikki alone can't stop him.

ROY
 Get me to my car!

INT. MALL. TECH ROOM. NIGHT.

Mike storms into the tech room. He grabs the tap recorder and smashes it on the ground.

INT. MALL. AIR HOCKEY COMPETITION. NIGHT.

Mick returns quick and so does Harry. They start a rally with Mick getting more aggressive with each shot. But Mick slips up, overreaching his mallet and crossing the center line.

REFEREE

FOUL.

Possession returns to Harry. He yanks his mallet and with a crisp CLACK, the puck sails into Mick's goal.

The table clicks 6-6.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Gamepoint, Mick. Gamepoint Harry.

Just then a squadron of POLICE OFFICERS emerge from the crowd, blocking off Roy's entourage. He's cornered!

Onstage, Mick drops the puck down. The two players make eye contact.

Mick slams the puck. Harry blocks, the puck rebounds to Mick.

Mick smacks it once more and the puck flies into Harry's goal.

But it rebounds INSIDE the goal, flying right back out into play.

Mick reacts, claiming possession and launches another shot.

Holly's watching the officers close in on Roy when someone yanks her from her perch. It's Zac!

ZAC

You're meant to be on a plane to London.

HOLLY

Am I?

ZAC

Wait til Simone hears about this, you'll get what you deserve.

HOLLY

Oh go puck yourself, Zac.

She punches Zac square in the face sending him reeling back into the crowd.

The power goes out. DARKNESS.

OFFICER

Anyone have eyes on Roy?

REFEREE

Get those lights on!

BOBBY
Who the puck won?

The lights flick back on. The puck isn't on the table. Roy has disappeared.

The referee inspects Harry's goal, then Mick's. He grabs Harry's injured hand, then switches to his left and throws it up in the air.

REFEREE
WINNNER!

The crowd SURGES in UPROAR. Some CHEERING Harry, others CRYING in dispute. Mick collapses to his knees.

BOBBY
FOUL. DISRUPTION!

Holly climbs back onto her podium but she can't spot Roy. She heads for the stage.

Max leaps on stage and makes for the referee, the two huddle in a quick discussion.

Harry's still processing what happened. Mick is crying so Harry hugs him.

Meg's on the microphone.

MEG
Calm down. Everyone. Calm down.

The referee snatches Meg's microphone.

REFEREE
LISTEN! Since the disruption was not caused by any player, there's no grounds for a foul.

DISAGREEMENT from the crowd.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
Now hold on. As the winning party, I'm allowing Harry Bishop to decide if the point should be allowed.

All eyes snap to Harry cradling Mick.

HARRY
I wouldn't be a very good sportsman, if I didn't abide by what's fair. Disallow it.

Holly climbs on stage, Harry rises to meet her.

As Holly turns around the crowd ahead of her starts to clear and there in the opening is Harry.

The couple meet and embrace, another confetti canon exploding over them. They pull apart.

HARRY (CONT'D)
What did you do?

HOLLY
My job.

HARRY
I'm sorry.

HOLLY
We can still save the arcade.

HARRY
I think we should focus on saving
air hockey.

Holly runs her hand over Harry's sling.

HOLLY
You were playing with your left
hand. You let me win!

HARRY
I wanted you to love air hockey.

Holly smiles then kisses Harry. She pulls away.

HOLLY
Wait. What about Rampart.

Vikki joins them on stage.

VIKKI
He got away.

There's an engine sound. Roy's car EXPLODES through the mall. The crowd all dive for cover. It crashes into the stage.

Officers approach the vehicle and open the driver door. It's Grim!

The officers pull him out and place him under arrest.

MICK
D-dad?!

Mick sprints over to embrace his father.

GRIM
I'm so sorry, I was trying to
protect you.

An officer starts to haul him away.

HARRY
Wait.

Harry marches over to Grim.

GRIM
I had no choice. It was your dad or
my boy.

HARRY
Puck you.

Harry signals the officer to take Grim away.

GRIM
He's in the car! I brought him to
you! He's in the car!

Holly checks in the passenger seat and finds and injured Roy Rampart. As he regains consciousness, he's put in handcuffs.

Harry, Holly, Vikki, Max and Bobby along with officers crowd Roy.

ROY
You can't arrest me! I am this
tournament. Without me, there's no
prize money, there's no venue, no
staff. You idiots, you just
destroyed everything you love!

VIKKI
You're going away for a long time.

Just then, Mike appears. He nods to Roy.

ROY
Ha. You truly are all so stupid.
That little tape, your only
evidence. Is gone. You have no
case. No nothing!

VIKKI
We made copies.

HOLLY
Everyone heard it.

HARRY
You're done.

An officer takes Roy away.

ROY
NOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Meg has retrieved the prize money.

MEG
So what do we do with this?

MAX
Give it to the winner.

REFEREE
But there was no winner.

HARRY
We'll have to have to have a
rematch.

They all turn to Mick.

MICK
Forget it. Roy was right, without
his funding, air hockey is
finished.

Bobby stands forward.

BOBBY
I'll fund air hockey.

MAX
I'll fund air hockey.

REFEREE
I'll fund air hockey. And my name
is Rob.

CROWD MEMBERS
I'll fund air hockey.

It becomes a chant.

BOBBY (TO HOLLY)
The Spartacus thing is nice but I
am actually a billionaire I can
fund the whole thing.

But Holly's not listening. She's taken Harry but his uninjured hand and the two stroll off together.

The triumphant crowd all cheer: Air hockey, air hockey, air hockey.

EXT. NCC COLORADO SPRINGS OFFICE. CAR PARK. DAY.

Holly's carrying her belongings out of the NCC office, now stripped of it's logo.

She passes Zac and Simone, also out of a job.

Holly packs her things into her car before getting in.

INT. HOLLY'S CAR. DAY.

Holly gets in. Vikki springs up from the back seat.

HOLLY

Jesus Christ stop doing that.

VIKKI

You got your wish, you don't have to see this building anymore.

HOLLY

I am sorry, I know you liked this place.

VIKKI

Eh. Time for a change. What's next for you? Uncovering embezzlement in mini golf?

HOLLY

I'm not sure. I'll tell whatever story needs to be told. You?

VIKKI

I will get back to you on that.

HOLLY

You know, if you're interested in promoting a story, I do have one I'm working on.

VIKKI

Hit me.

HOLLY

Air hockey school.

Vikki's face crumples.

INT. COURTROOM. DAY.

Grim Paxton and Roy Rampart are sat, handcuffed, in the defendant box. Harry's sat in the audience.

The PROSECUTION is playing a video surveillance feed from Grim's rink showing Roy, the Slender man and Big Bill assaulting Harry.

The jury do not look pleased.

INT. BISHOP'S ARCADE. DAY.

Mick's standing at the hockey table playing against a CHILD (11).

MICK
You ready to play?

The child nods.

MICK (CONT'D)
You sure? Your grips all wrong.

The child adjusts his hand from holding the handle to holding the edge.

MICK (CONT'D)
Better. Everyone see that?

There's eight CHILDREN gathered around Mick's table watching him play. They all have mallets in their hand.

MICK (CONT'D)
Okay, go on try a serve.

The child serves, Mick intercepts. He stops play again to demonstrate a new technique.

All the arcade machines have disappeared and been replaced by more air hockey tables.

Harry strolls through waving to Mick.

EXT. BISHOP ARCADE. DAY.

Harry jumps in Holly's car.

HARRY
Ready, Miss. Reporter?

HOLLY
Always Clark.

They hold hands and drive away into the sunset.