

"I think the problem with the plan," I say, "is if a prostitute turns up at a hotel room and sees three men in masks, she's not going to immediately think, *Superhero*. Plus, she may have to travel right across Seattle. It'll be an hour out of her night." They agree to abandon the idea.

Suddenly we notice a man across the street drop a small, clear bag onto the ground at the feet of another man.

"*Yahtsee!*" yells Phoenix. He rushes across the road. "What did you just drop?" he asks them.

"Pretzels," says the man, picking the bag up and showing it to us. There's a silence.

"Good!" says Phoenix.

We adjourn to a nearby café. "Aargh!" says Phoenix, in frustration.

Our very last hope, at 4:00 a.m., is Belltown. When we turn the corner into the district, everything changes. By day this place is nice—with bars and restaurants and art galleries. It's just down the road from the famous Pike Place market. But now, at 4:00 a.m., the dealers staring at us look nothing like the exhausted old crack heads from the bus stop, nor the two-bit pot dealers from Washington Square Park. These are large gangs of wiry young men. They stand on every block. The police are nowhere to be seen. I take in the scene and instinctively take a small step backward.

"There's a possibility we could get into a fight," whispers Pitch Black. "If that happens, back off, okay?"

"*What are you doing?*" a man calls from across the street. He's part of a nine-strong gang.

"Patrolling," Phoenix calls back. "What are you doing?"

He, Pitch Black, and Ghost walk toward him. I reluctantly follow.

"You've got to respect people's block, man," he's saying. "You don't come down here with your ski masks on. What are you doing, getting yourselves entwined in people's lives? You guys are going to get hurt. You understand? You want to see our burners?"

I'm sure I remember from *The Wire* that a burner is a stolen cell phone. But that doesn't sound contextually right.

"I don't care," says Phoenix.

"You don't care?"