

## TWELVE

What did I get out of it? Not the drugs—  
I haven't used that stuff in—  
What is It? Nine—  
Almost ten years now. I didn't touch  
Any of Paulie's  
Funny money either—I'd seen him go broke—  
Oh, let's see—  
About one-third as many times  
As he bought himself  
A new car. I did  
Enjoy holding a slightly overpaid, decidedly  
Easy, almost  
Respectable,  
Almost professional, almost middle-class job—after more  
Than a decade  
Of bartending—which actually pays better—but I guess  
I'd grown tired of my  
Ever-younger  
Waitress-girlfriends  
Leaving me and my world behind when they went off  
To law school. But the main thing was,  
I could spend  
All my time with movies, and maybe  
Finish my book.

And there was one other thing. You see,  
I was proud—  
Silly with pride, really, about—well, about—  
The Porno Club.  
You see, there weren't any secretive  
Customers and there wasn't  
A single  
Hardcore video anywhere on the premises—that's what  
Was so beautiful—the Porno Club  
Existed only  
In my computer—it was a washing machine, you know, a way  
To clean up  
All the dirty cash  
That Paulie had too much of. Now, I'd written

The program myself, which is why  
I was so damn proud—you see, I never studied computers—  
    Just bought  
    A book and figured it out.  
All the program did was randomly search two files, assigning  
    Each cross match  
    A price value up to a variable  
Daily numeric limit which I— I'm sorry.  
    I get carried away.

Anyway, two or three days a week  
    Paulie would stop  
On the way to the bank with his cash, tell me  
    The numbers, and I'd  
    Generate the paperwork—a daily list  
    Of old movie actors  
Jerking off to the latest in porn. One of the sleazier  
    Distributors  
    Was more than happy  
    To send us phony invoices at ten cents  
On the dollar—you see, I really made it look  
    Like a regular business. In a way  
    I just loved  
The whole thing—you know, being a criminal  
    Mastermind, like  
    Meyer Lansky, or somebody...

Oh, I know it was hypocritical of me  
    To prosecute  
    Some crackhead for swiping  
A bag of microwave popcorn, when the stuff he was using  
    Might have...

    Actually, I didn't  
Think about that. As far as I was concerned,  
    Paulie supplied  
    An entertainment product to affluent  
Adults, who were responsible for their own lives,  
    And he and I  
Were playing an exciting, high-stakes game  
    Of cops  
    And accountants.

By the way, Richard Vulmer never rented  
In my store. I let  
The computer generate his file  
After I told a TV reporter what a regular customer  
He was. I just couldn't  
Resist.

And another thing. You know  
That twenty-two page  
Printout of Gunther Mandrake's  
Rentals—the one I cooked up for the D.A.? Well,  
What do you think  
Was the last  
Movie listed? You guessed it—*Hot Scrum*, featuring  
The most manly  
Australian rugby team ever to tug  
Each others' jockstraps.