

THE VIRTUAL WRAITH

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY SKYLINE - MIDDAY

Gleaming glass skyscrapers bask in the electromagnetic radiation of the sun. A clear blue sky looks down upon a thriving, multi-cultured metropolis. Underneath the core is an integrated network of lavish tunnels acting as a subterranean people router, connecting skyscrapers, subways, condos and hotel lobbies, and covered wall to wall with underground shops, stores, cafes and salons. This is the PATH system.

On the ground and underneath, the city is a healthy, thriving, safe and comfortable metropolis. However, thirty-five thousand feet above, at this very moment, a harbinger of dramatic change is stuck in an irreversible nosedive and on a collision course with the downtown core!

CUT TO:

INT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER - SAME

It's pandemonium inside the fuselage as the massive jetliner plummets towards the city. Luggage-artillery and fragment-grenades of personal effects hurl hellfire in all directions and unbuckled passengers bounce off the ceiling as they are flung towards the back of the nose-diving plane. The temperature in the cabin is dropping drastically, resulting in water vapor in the air turning into a thick mist.

CUT TO:

INT. COCKPIT - SAME

A cacophony of buzzing alarms resonates throughout the air and overhead, warning lights bathe the pilot, copilot and first officer in flashes of red and orange as they struggle to pull back on the control yokes and lift the massive airship out of it's nosedive.

PILOT

(screaming frantically) Pull-Up!
Pull-Up!

CO-PILOT

(horrified, stymied) We're losing
pressure!

FIRST-OFFICER
 (screaming into his headset)
 Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! YYZ, this
 is MNA: Multi-National Air, 7-8-7.
 We are in a state of uncontrolled
 decompression, locked in a
 nosedive. Full capacity onboard.
 Altitude dropping fast: Thirty
 thousand, twenty-nine nine, twenty-
 nine eight, Mayday!

Something has gone horribly wrong with flight 333!

CUT TO:

EXT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER (PLUMMETING) - SAME

Astonishingly, the front hatch of the jet is wide open;
 something ill-advised while in-flight. Standing eerily calm
 and sturdy inside the frame is ETHAN; a physically fit, young
 man in his mid-twenties with shaggy brown hair and a square
 jaw. While one hand grips the aluminum door-stile, the other
 holds an FN Five-seven pistol to his temple. He stares
 blankly out into the atmosphere; seemingly unaffected by the
 stress that the natural laws of physics should be applying to
 his body.

CUT TO:

INT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER - SAME

Inside the kitchenette at the front of the plane, a flight
 attendant clutches onto the cylindrical, steel handle of an
 oven door. Directly in front of her, Ethan stands in the
 open hatchway with his back turned to her.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 (crying, screaming, frantic)
 Please! What are you doing? You're
 going to kill us all!

Ethan flinches before steadily turning around to face the now
 somewhat horizontally airborne attendant as she clings to the
 over door. He gazes at her pensively.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
 Please, I don't want to die!
 Please!

CUT TO:

EXT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER (PLUMMETING)

The jet continues to dive, approaching its terminal velocity as the shrill wail of the twin PW2043 engines taunt the unsuspecting population below.

CUT TO:

INT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER - SAME

Passengers and pilots begin to red-out as their fields of vision blur crimson from their burst capillaries and quickly lose consciousness due to their heightened blood pressure. The flight attendant clinging to the stove is now a limp body stretched out flaccid against the wall of stacked food trays opposite the oven.

Ethan, however, seems to be tolerating the intolerable gravitational pull with ease as he stands gazing apathetically at the limp attendant. Suddenly, he snaps out of his befuddlement and turns once again to face the open sky, lifting the muzzle of the Five-seven back up snugly against his temple.

Wrapping his finger around the trigger, he closes his eyes and whispers to himself.

ETHAN

It's all just electromagnetic radiation. Everything flows. I need to disappear, I need to escape.

Suddenly, everything goes quiet. The wailing jet engines, the rattling dishes, the cacophony of ringing and buzzing alarms, they all lose their auditory worth. The silence is deafening.

And then, BANG! The sound of a single gunshot ripples throughout the air!

With his arms outstretched and his back to the approaching Earth below, Ethan offers his soul to the universe. His eyes closed, he doesn't flinch as a trickle of blood flows fluidly from the gunshot wound to his head. The red droplets form a floating, vertical line midair as they're left behind in succession.

His body pierces the sound barrier with a loud POP followed by a thunderous BOOM, compressing multiple pressure waves together and instantly merging them into a single shockwave at the speed of sound!

Only a few thousand metres from impact, Ethan's eyes suddenly dart open. The bullet lodged in his brain hasn't affected him in the slightest.

He soon begins to shoot past the roofs of the monolithic bank towers and the glittering glass condos and hotels. Suddenly, he whispers to himself.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Hopscotch...

Instantly, the increasingly loud, piercing whine of a send-and-receive fax tone begins to resonate through the air! *Handshaking* as it is called, is always accompanied by a queer and uneasy cacophony of digital hisses and moans. Just before it reaches a dynamic that would shatter the glass of the skyscrapers, and just before Ethan explodes in a puddle of bodily fluids on the concrete below, the entire landscape is ensconced in a brilliant white light; Ethan's face being the last aspect of his body to remain visible before everything turns to white.

Whiteout.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Whiteout continues.

CROWD (O.S.)

(shouting in unison) Surprise!

The whiteout subsides as overhead lights flash onto Ethan's face. He's horrified! Panic paints a thick veil of anxiety across his face as he stares blankly ahead of himself. His hair is brushed neatly to the side and is at least three inches shorter than it had been on the 787.

Behind him in the front foyer of his family home, ETHAN'S MOTHER, an older, attractive brunette woman with shoulder length hair and square jaw, stands smiling.

Anterior to them, in the estuary of the six-thousand square-foot mansion, stands a crowd of fifty or sixty people, all awaiting Ethan's return and his subsequent surprise college graduation party.

For a split-second, nobody notices that something is horribly wrong, and nobody notices as Ethan's retinas quickly flood with mercury. Suddenly, he blacks-out and collapses face-first on the hardwood floor.

He begins to violently convulse and gyrate back and forth; the result of a severe tonic-clonic, epileptic seizure.

Stupefied, the surprise-partiers look on in horror before an older, attractive man with more grey on his head than black comes bursting out of the crowd. This is ETHAN'S FATHER.

ETHAN'S FATHER
(panicked) Ethan!

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER THAT EVENING

Blackout remains.

A woman's gentle, yet professional voice breaks the silence:
THE NEUROLOGIST.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)
Have you suffered any recent head
trauma?

ETHAN (V.O.)
Not that I know of.

Illumination.

Ethan is horizontal, strapped into an fMRI machine and slowly being reversed into the massive, magnetic neurological scanner. Remnants of dried blood stains his upper lip and chin while a look of terrified bewilderment annexes his face.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)
You mentioned earlier this evening
that you have been feeling detached
lately. What do you mean by that
exactly?

ETHAN (V.O.)
I don't feel real.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)
Okay, what else?

ETHAN (V.O.)
I don't know how to explain it.
Everything up until this moment; I
can't tell if it actually happened
or not.

(MORE)

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

I realize I'm twenty-six, but I can't concretely say whether I've experienced any of it or not. I can feel that I remember *something*, but what that something is, I have no idea.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

Try and put your finger on it Ethan. I can only help you if you give me the information I can't gather from the machines. Sometimes when a brain begins to develop epilepsy, there can be periods where the person will experience time lapses; moments in time where they transcend into an aura-like state. They're very common in tonic-clonic epileptics. Essentially, they're mild seizures where the mind doesn't fully collapse into a state of convulsion. Have you noticed this feeling? Daydreaming more than usual? Even Hallucinating?

Inside the fMRI machine, a light flickers on and the plastic hunk of technology springs to life. Ethan's eyes stop dead centre as he tries to regain his composure.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Other than perpetual *deja vu*, nothing.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

And, other than the past little while, you've never been an epileptic, or suffered an epileptic fit?

ETHAN (V.O.)

Not that I know of.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

Tell me about the *deja vu*. How long has this been happening?

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPHY ROOM - SAME

Ethan sits stoically in a white gown in a small, bright laboratory room.

A netting of white, electronic wires connected and intertwined through a layer of thin, round electrodes sits snugly on his scalp.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Everything that I *know* should feel familiar, feels completely alien to me. It's like everything outside of my brain is completely unjustified by my mind.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

And how long have you felt this way?

ETHAN (V.O.)

I don't know, maybe a few months? It comes and goes and it's difficult to even put a finger on what I'm feeling.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

What about dreams? Are you having recurring dreams or nightmares?

ETHAN (V.O.)

I don't remember my dreams anymore.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

What about anxiety or depression? You've been taking Zoloft for over a year now, has that helped? Was it law school that was making you anxious?

ETHAN (V.O.)

I honestly can't remember much about school. If you asked me about *Miranda vs. Arizona*, I could write you an essay from memory, but if you asked me where or when or even how I learned it, I wouldn't be able to answer. I know things, but I have no idea how I know them.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

And as far as you can remember, you haven't suffered any recent head trauma or concussions lately?

ETHAN (V.O.)

That I know of? Never.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY ROOM - SAME

Ethan is once again on his back. A white, plastic table reverses him into a giant, snow-white, PET scanner.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

What about religious experiences?
Have you felt anything that may be
spiritually awakening?

ETHAN (V.O.)

No, I'm agnostic.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

What about electronics? Have you
recently bought a new bedside clock-
or even a smart-phone? Sometimes
the naturally occurring
electromagnetic fields might
produce hallucinations or even a
sense of depersonalization. And
they can simply be the result of
household electronics
malfunctioning. It's rare, but it
happens.

ETHAN (V.O.)

(party to himself - stoic, but
still audible) Everything's
electricity. Everything's
electromagnetic radiation.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

What about a girlfriend or
roommates, have they noticed
anything unusual? Both in yourself
and your environment?

ETHAN (V.O.)

I'm single and I live alone, so no.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, SMALL LAB ROOM - SAME

Topless, Ethan sits expressionless in a cold, steel chair. A nurse is administering a lengthy sortie of blood tests, drawing numerous vials of blood from a vein on the inside of his left forearm.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

Have you noticed a difference in your mood since you started taking the Zoloft?

ETHAN (V.O.)

Yeah, I don't really panic like I used to, but it's made me more apathetic than anything, and I'm okay with that.

THE NEUROLOGIST (V.O.)

And the anxiety was brought on by school?

ETHAN (V.O.)

(he sighs) Again, I can't look back in retrospect. I remember that before I started taking the medication, there was a period of a few months where my heart would wake me up every morning as it pounded against my mattress at five a.m. But that doesn't happen anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, NEUROLOGIST'S OFFICE - SAME

An attractive, healthy and professional woman in her late thirties; THE NEUROLOGIST, sits cross-legged with a pad of loose-leaf, lined paper, taking notes.

Across from her, Ethan sits postictal, slouched on a large, leather couch. His right eye is swollen from where his face hit the hardwood floor. Beside him his mother sits attentively and alertly. To their left, Ethan's father sits in a small, leather armchair.

THE NEUROLOGIST

As far as any of the three of you know, Ethan was never epileptic as a child, and never experienced any form of seizure?

ETHAN'S MOTHER

No, never.

THE NEUROLOGIST

Ethan, looking back, can you remember a time when you felt perfectly normal, before any of this started happening?

Ethan's lips begin to tremble and a single tear squeezes itself out of his left duct.

ETHAN

Nothing makes any sense anymore.

THE NEUROLOGIST

Honestly Ethan, how long have you been feeling this way?

Ethan sighs and scans his parents faces before replying.

ETHAN

I don't know. At this point, almost two years maybe?

Suddenly Ethan's Father burst's out.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Two years! Jesus Christ Ethan, why didn't you say something earlier? You could be dead by now. What if you had a seizure and split your head open when no one was around?

ETHAN

(sighing) It's never been as bad as it was tonight. The panic has never been so overwhelming that I just black out.

THE NEUROLOGIST

So the Zoloft doesn't always hold back the panic?

ETHAN

Ninety-nine percent of the time it does and I'm thankful for it. But there is one percent of my life that I feel I have no control over, and that's when I start to really panic.

The Neurologist turns her head to address Ethan's Mother.

THE NEUROLOGIST

Sometimes epilepsy can lie dormant for the first quarter of someone's life and then it all of a sudden kicks in without warning. There's usually signs when they're younger. Was Ethan abnormally aloof as a child?

Ethan smirks mildly.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Well, not to any extent that we would have thought there was a problem. He's always been a relatively good student, especially in the last few years at law school.

The Neurologist turns back to face Ethan.

THE NEUROLOGIST

So you're home for good now?
You've finished school?

ETHAN'S FATHER

He's articling at my firm this summer and into the fall. So for the next while he'll be back at home with us.

THE NEUROLOGIST

That's good. Obviously, I'd like you back here regularly for blood tests and possibly to run some more scans, but as far as I can tell, and as far as the results from the tests show us, you're perfectly healthy. We didn't detect any abnormalities in the tests. You don't appear to be epileptic, but that's not to say this attack couldn't be beginning of the syndrome. You did suffer a generalized seizure tonight, which is quite common amongst epileptics, although now, your diagnosis is idiopathic.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

What does that mean?

THE NEUROLOGIST

It means we can't identify a cause for the attack. Sometimes the order of the brain can regress into chaos, only to right itself once again after an attack.

Suddenly, Ethan winces and slowly moves his right arm up and with the tips of his finger, feels around the back of his skull; something feels odd...

THE NEUROLOGIST (CONT'D)

Do me a favour Ethan, try and keep a daily journal of what you do and how you feel. Book an appointment with my receptionist Nadine on Monday morning for sometime late next week. We open at eight a.m.

The Neurologist stands and Ethan and his parents follow suit. The four of them slowly move towards her office door.

THE NEUROLOGIST (CONT'D)

I know it's scary. Trust me, but I can assure you that it's perfectly normal, even if you do turn out to be epileptic. It's virtually painless and medication easily controls more than 75% of cases. But for now, let's just keep an eye on you and hope for the best.

Ethan nods pensively.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Thanks Doctor, we really appreciate you coming in this late.

THE NEUROLOGIST

"Plan for the worst, hope for the best", a proverb that suits both the home and the work life of a doctor. I'll see you in a week Ethan. Have a good night.

As the family of three leave the office, The Neurologist gently closes the door behind them with a quiet yawn.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

A black BMW 750i drives tranquilly through opening gates that guard the driveway of a massive, Victorian mansion.

INT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

Ethan stares in the mirror of his en suite bathroom at the reflection of the bruise forming around his right eye. Shutting off the light, he walks into his room and lies down on his bed, fully clothed except for his shoes. He stares wistfully at the ceiling, lost in a world of nothingness.

A gently knock on his bedroom door break the silence.

ETHAN

Come in!

The door creaks open and Ethan's Mother walks in.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

How are you feeling? Do you need anything?

ETHAN

I don't think so, thanks.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

How's your eye?

ETHAN

It's fine.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Alright. Let me know if you need anything. Roberta will be here tomorrow at nine and I'll be gone for the morning, so if you need anything just ask her, okay?

ETHAN

Okay, thanks. Night.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Good night.

His mother exits and closes the door behind her. On his bed, Ethan is still. It's dark. And then in an instant, a blinding light seems to explode from his bed, its luminescence ricocheting everywhere!

A horrified and bewildered look expropriates Ethan's face. Squinting, Ethan raises his hands to look for the source of the light but instantly realizes that it's radiating directly from the palms of both his hands, manifesting in the shape of two, perfectly spherical orbs!

Suddenly, Ethan becomes catatonic and his retinas glare over in a mercurial silver hue before instantly rolling back into his skull. His body begins to gyrate and convulse as another epileptic fit takes a hold of him.

After about five seconds, the light from his palms extinguishes itself, his body comes to a sudden halt and he blacks-out immediately.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. KOWLOON CITY, HONG KONG - DAWN

A dilapidated, monolithic apartment tower is stacked amongst six other run-down behemoths. This apartment block is just one of many that constitute the antiquated slums of the city's unfortunate poverty-stricken. Smog permeates perpetually throughout the air and unleaded fuel exhaust blackens the exterior concrete facades of the slums.

CUT TO:

INT. SLUM APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

A small, crowded, filthy apartment flat.

A kitchenette near the front door is littered with dirty dishes, old food scraps, and a small colony of lies. In an adjacent living room, a middle-aged man is passed out on the couch in the dark, bathed in the light of a fuzzy television.

Strange artifacts decorate the apartment. Mirrors of all sizes hang from illogical places, like the backs of doors, the fridge door, and even up against the closed curtains. Two sets of wind chimes, wooden and metal, hang from the ceiling directly inside the front entrance. Dangling from strings nailed to the wall are a variety of different looking forks in a strange but systematic style.

CUT TO:

INT. RONG'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT FLAT - SAME

Inside this room - a room so small that the single mattress strewn on the floor can barely contain itself within the four walls - a young scrawny, crooked-looking, fifteen-year old boy, RONG, is sound asleep.

A window, murky with grime, is sequestered into four, quarter squares. The top-right pane has been shattered at one point of another, and hanging directly inside of this open frame are a small, but unique set of green, wooden, wind-chimes.

A sudden gust of wind, aggrandized from a light breeze, blows through the open window and stirs the chimes to life, waking Rong. As he lifts his torso up against the wall, it's evident that he has some form of physical disability.

Suddenly, from across the room, where the bottom of the mattress is separated by an inch from the doorway, a rickety door violently swings open outwards into the hall and the man from the couch; RONG'S FATHER, abruptly and precariously steps into the room and stops at the foot of the raggedy, old mattress on the floor. Rong begins to shake in fear.

A crazed look is etched into his father's face. A half-empty bottle of cheap grain alcohol is secured snugly in his left hand. In his right hand, he holds a round, metallic disk, a luopan, a compass designed for Feng Shui to determine the precise direction of a structure in relation to its energetic harmony.

In a drunken haze, Rong's Father lifts the luopan up close to his face and inspects it, blinking and smacking his lips in a drunken stupor as he tries to decipher the complicated diagrams inscribed on the rotating disk. But then suddenly, he lowers the luopan and fixates his eyes on Rong.

RONG'S FATHER

(slurred) There is no harmony in this room.

Rong says nothing, pulling his raggedy bedsheets up to his chin.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Did you hear me? I said, this room is disharmonious!

Rong stares silently, making no attempt to respond in any way.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

(slurred, angry) Of course you can't hear me, you're useless.

(MORE)

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

You don't do anything. You distort the Feng Shui. You're a demon sent to corrupt my energy. You are chaos thrown into a life of order.

Rong stays silent.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

You're a useless cripple. Disabled in every way possible. You can't walk, you can't speak, you can't hear. Only your eyes work properly, but what's the use? You never leave the house. What could you possibly need to see? What light-waves does your brain need to register in order to do absolutely nothing at all?

Ominously, another gust of wind bursts through the open pane, slamming the wind chimes against one another violently in a tumultuous cacophony of hollow TONGS, TLOONGS and CLONGS.

Rong's father cocks his head to the side and is stupidified as he observes the rowdy chimes banging together and then suddenly become motionless, as if they had moved not once in their entire existence. Motionless as if the wires they were dangling from were actually solid rods of steel.

Rong's Father stares at the comatose chimes in confusion before turning his head back to face his son on the mattress on the floor. For a moment, they stare at each other in silence, before the luopan in Rong's Father's hand begins to spin around indiscriminately, the magnetized metal plate being pushed and pulled from seemingly every direction!

Quickly, he drops the luopan in horror, staring at it spinning around wildly on the floor. Rong too, has transfixed his stare on this phenomenon.

But then, once again, instant and utter silence. The spinning metal plate suddenly comes to an immediate halt, as if it had never moved once in its entire existence.

Rong's Father lifts his gaze from the instrument on the floor and returns it to his son, before shifting it once more to a pair of crooked and rusty crutches next to the mattress.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Even when you're lying on the floor, your disease distorts the Feng Shui in my home. No worthy human energy source has legs made out of rusted metal.

(MORE)

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

No pure being is so stained with
evil that he affects the Feng Shui
even as he lies flat on the floor.

In a flash, his father jumps onto the dishevelled mattress and digs his palm into his son's thick, shaggy hair, clamping down on a tuft and nearly separating it from his scalp. He lifts Rong up and off of his mattress and as he pulls his son out of the room, he bends down, picks up the luopan and secures it snugly under his arm.

Screaming in pain, Rong tries to assuage his suffering by wrapping his hands around his father's fist and pushing himself forward, reducing the drag from his father's grip.

INT. HALLWAY, APARTMENT - SAME

Rong's father drags his son along the grime-infested carpet towards the dimly lit living room.

RONG'S FATHER

Six-thousand years of development!
After six-thousand years of
development, our people have
accumulated an understanding of
what is good and what is bad. We
have strived from health and
wealth. But if you do not have
one, then you will never have the
other. If you are full of disease,
if you're house is so full of filth
and disease that luck is too
frightened to enter your life, then
you must sever your ties to the
filth and disease. Energy has no
interest in helping those who are
not interested in helping
themselves.

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - SAME

Rong's father throws his son down on the floor next to the coffee table. Frenzied, his father throws open the heavy curtains and floods the small living room with sunlight. He presses his forehead against the window and stares down to the ground, inspecting the luopan as he does.

RONG'S FATHER

(mumbling) Crooked streets,
buildings placed chaotically.
(MORE)

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Everywhere I look, there is no order, no harmony. Even my own seed comes out crooked.

Unbeknownst to his father, Rong, as of late, can in fact hear supernaturally well, hearing things that no human should hear, like the electric current flowing through the walls or the voice's from cell phone ear pieces thirty stories below.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

What is your destiny Rong? What are you capable of? Where is your personal luck? What chaos were you plucked from and what determines your future? What is your potential energy Rong? You have the fate of a beggar. Even if you choose to be something, if you want to achieve success, you won't. You cannot even leave the house, how are you supposed to bring luck to this household? My worthless seed spawned into nothing but a chaotic bag of bones and mismatched muscle.

Suddenly, a small, thin figure steps out of the dark, adjoining hallway and into the living room. This is RONG'S MOTHER, a petite Chinese woman in an old stained apron. She approaches and kneels down next to her son.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Don't cater to his disease.

RONG'S MOTHER

What did you do to him?

RONG'S FATHER

The same thing I'll do to you if you keep asking me questions. Now, get away from that filth. He needs to be taught a lesson on how to earn his keep and how to lessen the amount of upkeep he doesn't earn.

RONG'S MOTHER

You think he wants to live like this? Don't you think he would help if he was able to?

RONG'S FATHER

He's a burden on this family.

RONG'S MOTHER

He's your own son! He may not be able to hear, but he can understand quite well what you're saying.

Rong's Mother picks her son up and holds his upper body in her lap, his lame legs lying motionless on the floor.

RONG'S FATHER

I told you not to help him.

RONG'S MOTHER

You're drunk! You're always drunk. Do me a favour, since you've given up on being a contributing member of this family, just leave us alone when you're drinking. You're nothing but a wild animal. An unemployed drunk, that's who I married, an unemployed drunk!

Suddenly, Rong's Father drops the luopan to the floor. Like an enraged bull, he snarls at his wife and son as they sit on the floor. Then, in a flash, he leaps across the room and backhands his wife clean across the right side of her face, sending her flying. Reaching down, he grabs a hold of Rong's hair once more, lifts up his skull, and then slams his occipital bone against the edge of the table. Rong is knocked nearly unconscious on contact, and as his eyes slowly stagger shut, the last thing he sees is the intermittent flashes from the fuzzy television.

Blackout.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

The large, Victorian home poses placidly behind black, wrought-iron gates. At the end of the driveway, outside the gates, a large, blue recycling bin sits next to a small, green, organics bin. Suddenly, emerging from the bushes, a family of four raccoons surreptitiously scuttle towards the organics bin. The largest of the four reaches up and yanks the bin sideways, knocking it over and spilling its contents all over the ground.

INT. ETHAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

On the large television hanging on the wall, an old episode of *Gunsmoke* beams down from the plasma display.

Marshall Matt Dillon has dual revolvers drawn and is proceeding to fill a small group of baddies with hot lead. Once the annihilation ends, he ends it with a final display of showmanship, spinning his revolvers around before holstering them snugly on either side of his hips, in a flash of metal.

Ethan lies sideways on his bed. Suddenly, the intercom on the walls sparks to life.

ETHAN'S MOTHER (O.S.)

Ethan! Dinner!

In a panic, Ethan springs up to a sitting position at the sound. Immediately, a deep, alien pain in the back of his skull cause his to reach back and grab his head. He winces and exhales through gritted teeth, attempting to stave off the apparent migraine, or worse, and epileptic attack. Yet, as quickly as the pain climaxes, it dissipates, leaving only a minor, but perpetual ache in the back of his skull.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Sitting at a large, wooden table, Ethan's father inspects a steaming bowl of chili in front of him. From the hallway behind him, Ethan rounds a corner, enters the kitchen and sits down at the table, his mother following close behind him with her own bowl of chili.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Look who's finally up.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Ethan, don't forget you have that follow-up appointment with Dr. Somerville.

Somewhat aloof, Ethan nods.

ETHAN

Right.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

I can drive you in the afternoon once I'm home from the gym.

ETHAN

(distant) Okay, thanks.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Don't forget to mention how much you've been sleeping since the seizure.

ETHAN

Yeah.

ETHAN'S FATHER

They've been asking about you at the firm. Larry's got a whole summer's worth of work for you to get started on.

ETHAN

(aloof) Huh?

ETHAN'S FATHER

I said, they've been asking about you down at the firm. When do you think you'll come in and get to it?

ETHAN

(distant) Oh yeah, right, soon.

As his parents begin to eat, Ethan stares blankly at his steaming bowl of chili.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Seriously Ethan, eat something, please. That's another thing to bring up tomorrow, your loss of appetite.

Ethan smacks his tongue lazily, cringing at a perpetual, acidic taste that has appended itself to his mouth.

ETHAN

All I can taste is battery acid. Like when you stick your tongue to a battery.

Ethan's parents shoot one another a look.

ETHAN'S FATHER

That doesn't sound healthy.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Make sure you tell that to Dr. Somerville tomorrow too, and the cold sweats at night.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Well, hopefully she'll have good news for you tomorrow and you'll be able to snap back to reality.

ETHAN

(distant) yeah, right.

ETHAN'S FATHER

All that energy being wasted asleep
in your bedroom could be put to
better use, especially down at the
firm.

Suddenly, something triggers something deep in Ethan's
subconscious. Eerily and robotic, he whispers his reply.

ETHAN

There's always a loss of energy.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

What?

Almost in a trance, Ethan once more whispers his reply.

ETHAN

Entropy. It's the second law of
thermodynamics. There's always a
loss of energy.

ETHAN'S FATHER

What the hell are you talking
about? I didn't realize they teach
you *thermodynamical* laws at law
school.

Suddenly, Ethan nearly falls completely unconscious. His
eyes begin to shut and his head become weightless as it bobs
towards the table.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

(panicked) Ethan!

At her scream, Ethan snaps out of it, his eyes scanning the
room as if he has no idea where he is.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Jesus Ethan, are you okay?

ETHAN

(distant) Uh, I don't know anymore.
Nothing is making sense. I know
this sounds odd, but I can't tell
which way time is flowing anymore.
Yesterday feels like tomorrow and
last week feels like today.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Make sure you tell that to Dr.
Somerville too.

The pain in the back of Ethan's skull suddenly spikes and he immediately reaches back to attempt to ameliorate the pain.

ETHAN

And I've got this splitting headache in the back of my skull that won't go away. What is wrong with me?

ETHAN'S MOTHER

I don't know Ethan, but it's certainly concerning. Oh Ethan, you used to be so happy when you'd come back from school. I've never seen you like this before.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

A black, Crown Victoria eerily pulls up to the curb at the foot of the driveway. Its brakes screech lightly as it does.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

ETHAN

(distantly wistful) I want a door to open in my perception so I can disappear through the wall. Without light I can disappear.

Ethan's Father is perplexed.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Look, everyone is worried when they first finish school. It's a shock to any professional student's system. But reality was always coming Ethan, it was always right around the corner and you knew it. Sooner or later it was your fate. You can't shy away from the real world Ethan. It's a sign of weakness.

ETHAN

So I never had a choice then?

ETHAN'S FATHER

None of us really do.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

That's ridiculous. We all have choice. We have choice up until the moment we die.

ETHAN'S FATHER

You make those choices based on the materials available to you.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

I still make the choice.

ETHAN'S FATHER

You *think* you make that choice. But really, the choice you make is simply a result of years and years of conditioning. Everyone has such a small degree of choice that essentially, they haven't chosen anything. Rather, they've picked from the few alternatives left to them. It's consequentialism at its finest.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

The driver's side door opens and from behind, a man in an expensive, black suit emerges and approaches the gates. Pressing his left hand to his ear and pressing in on something, the massive gates begin to immediately convulse, quickly snapping clean off their hinges.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Try and eat something Ethan. Especially with the doctor tomorrow. It would be good to have some strength.

ETHAN

(calmly) I think I have a migraine. Do we have anything strong I could take? It feels like something is ripping the back of my head open from the inside.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

If you think it's safe, there's probably something up in our bathroom, under the cabinet, from when I had that knee surgery a few months ago. Just try not to overdo it.

Ethan sighs and stands up, steps away from the table and walks towards the front of the house and up a flight of stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

Ethan flicks on the lights and walks towards the large wall mirror above the double-sink vanity. Staring at his reflection, he's unimpressed with the person staring back at him. Wincing from the pain, Ethan looks through the cabinets before finding a bottle of Percocet. As he pops the lid and drops a pill into his left hand, he's horrified to discover that his palm is glowing white-hot! He drops the pills and stumbles back against the wall in shock. As he stares at his hands - both of them now glowing white-hot - he watches as the heat energy slowly manifests itself into two, perfectly spherical orbs, hovering about an inch or so from the deepest dip of his palms. The orbs of radiant energy cast a warm, white light on his face as he goggles back at them in terrified awe.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

The mysterious man approaches the front door but stops for a moment to once again lift his left hand up to his ear. This time, a small, white, two-way, radio receiver earpiece is visible sitting snugly inside his ear. Suddenly, the large, wooden door begins to rattle in front of him...

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

Ethan is horrifically mesmerized by this hypnotizing blast of radiant, light energy that now sits in two, perfect spheres. Experimenting, Ethan brings his palms closer together and watches as bolts of electricity begin to surge back and forth between the orbs. Then, suddenly, the glow dies down and the radiant balls of manna dissipate into nothing.

Instantly, a wave of nausea overtakes Ethan and he lunges for the toilet, hugging the porcelain as he violently dry-heaves into the open bowl. Exhausting himself and seeing no evidence in the still waters of the toilet, Ethan sits on the tiled floor and once again notices the sour taste of battery acid in his mouth. It quickly becomes overpowering and Ethan is forced to lean over and spit into the toilet. And when he does, his eyes shoot open in consternation as he watches a thick glob of liquid mercury land in the still water!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

ETHAN'S MOTHER

I guess it all makes sense. We've all lived good lives so far, something was bound to go wrong eventually.

ETHAN'S FATHER

We create our own luck, but sometimes, regardless of what we do, fate has surprises waiting in the wings for us that we would never expect.

Suddenly, firm footsteps are heard as they click along the hardwood floor and round the corner and enter the kitchen.

ETHAN'S MOTHER

Here he comes. Ethan, I wanted to ask...

She stops mid-sentence when her eyes fall upon a stranger in a black suit and slicked back hair standing fifteen feet away from her. His eyes are hidden behind dark sunglasses and in his right hand he holds a prodigious, Desert Eagle pistol.

Ethan's Father stands up in a mixture of courage and consternation.

ETHAN'S FATHER

Who the hell are you?

The mysterious man makes no reply, instead raising the pistol and aiming it directly at Ethan's Father.

ETHAN'S FATHER (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Put that down!

Ethan's Mother stands up from her chair.

ETHAN'S MOTHER
(panicked) Listen, take whatever
you want, we won't...

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM, ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

Ethan is listless on the tile floor, staring at the swirling glob of liquid mercury now firmly at the bottom of the bowl. Suddenly, a loud, muffled BANG erupts from somewhere in the house. Ethan perks his head, but in his current state, doesn't give the sound another thought. And then again, another BANG ripples throughout the sound-waves and once again, dazed, Ethan raises his head, this time keeping it aloft and level.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

The Desert Eagle is lowered back to the mysterious man's hip. Smoke billows from the barrel. Lifting his left hand up to his ear, he once more presses in on the white ear-bud before spinning eighty degrees and finally revealing his full, chiseled, yet refined-businessman features. He is AGENT SMITH.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - SAME

His stupor subsiding a little, Ethan lifts himself back up to the mirror and rests his hands on the vanity. He stares at his pathetic reflection in the mirror and sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - SAME

Agent Smith walks rigidly towards the front of the house and the stairwell that leads up to Ethan's Parent's room.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - SAME

Ethan hunches over one of the two sinks but doesn't manage to turn on either faucet.

A look of sheer helplessness annexes his already bewildered and weary expression. He disengages from his reflection in the mirror and drops his gaze downward towards the counter-top and sink.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRS - SAME

Smith reaches the top of the staircase and doesn't stop, continuing forward towards the Master Bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - SAME

Stooped over the sink, Ethan suddenly cocks his head back up to lock eyes with his reflection, and as he does, something quite remarkable happens. The pupils and irises of each of his eyeballs begin to morph into silver, mercurial orbs!

He looks different. Much different now than he did less than a minute ago. He looks secure, confident, ravenous even. A look of resolve etches itself into his face and the faint curl of a trickster snarl tilts the corners of his mouth up and out. It's as if he's become a completely different person.

Immediately, he twirls around and begins scanning the bathroom for something. Reaching into a wicker basket, he pulls out a large hair dryer before stepping swiftly back to the vanity and turning on the taps in both sinks. He closes the drains and stuffs the emergency vents up top with face-cloths to ensure the overflow.

With the water now cascading down to the tile floor, Ethan methodically plugs the hair-dryer into the wall and stands with his feet shoulder-length apart. He faces the open bathroom door awaiting a fate that he all of a sudden, somehow knows is imminent. In his left hand, he clenches the hair dryer like a pistol.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

Smith enters the bedroom and notices the light emanating from the en suite bathroom. The sound of water running is prevalent as he approaches the doorway.

As he crosses the threshold, he immediately notices Ethan, standing eerily calm in the centre of the bathroom, almost as if he was expecting Smith. The entire tile floor is covered in the water overflowing from the sinks.

Like a Wild West showdown, the two of them stand eyeing each other closely. The Desert Eagle in Smith's right hand, the large hair-dryer in Ethan's. Suddenly, Ethan flicks the switch and the hair-dryer sparks to life; the sound of air being sucked in the back vent and shot out of the front, plastic barrel dominates the situation.

It's Smith who moves first, but he can't get his hand up quickly enough as Ethan drops the electrified dryer to the floor, splashing in half an inch of water and exploding into a bouquet of sparks. Suddenly, with the electricity pulsing through him, Ethan's hands begin to once more glow white-hot as the wall socket behind him bursts with energy, spewing and spraying sparks. Light bulbs overhead burst in a shower of glass and as Smith manages to bring his pistol to shoulder-height, two, chunky bolts of electricity shoot out from Ethan's palms. As they connect with Smith's chest, they propel him backwards twenty feet, crashing against a swivel, floor-mirror. And in that moment, the piercing wail of a CNG send-and-receive, *handshaking* fax-tone blasts through the airwaves.

Instantly, the mercurial hue dissipates from Ethan's eyes, and twenty-feet away, Smith's body begins to morph into someone completely different. In a matter of seconds, Smith's body is gone and in its place lies the freshly-dead body of a sloppy-looking, scruffy, overweight man in a suit and trench coat.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S FAMILY HOME - SAME

A blue recycling and a green organics bin stand upright at the end of the driveway. Suddenly, emerging from the bushes, a family of four raccoons scuttles towards the organics bin, and the largest, presumably the mother, reaches up and knocks over the bin, spilling it's rancid contents everywhere and providing a sumptuous feast for the raccoons. It's Deja Vu...

TIME LAPSE: FAST-FORWARD TWO MONTHS

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN HOTEL - EARLY MORNING

A prodigious, Indiana limestone, art-deco hotel looms over a busy, boulevard.

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Ethan wakes up in bed. He shoots upwards in a panic. He's soaking wet with sweat and a drip of blood streams slowly from his left nostril. With all the blinds drawn, Ethan's suite is a dark and quiet cave.

Suddenly, the phone on the bedside table begins to ring. After a few deep breaths, he reaches over and lifts the receiver to his ear.

ETHAN
(groggy, hesitant) Hello?

RICHARD (O.S.)
It's me.

ETHAN
Richard?

RICHARD (O.S.)
Yeah. I'm downstairs.

ETHAN
What, right now?

The clock beside the phone reads "7:33".

RICHARD (O.S.)
I was in the neighbourhood and I thought I'd check-in to see if you required my services.

Beside the clock and phone, sits a crusty spoon with a curled handle. It's accompanied by a candle, water bottle, rubber tubing and an open box containing a handful of syringes. Ethan glances over and rubs his eyes before replying.

ETHAN
Uh yeah. You always seem to call me at the perfect moment. It's like you're psychic or something.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Something like that. Can you be outside in five minutes?

ETHAN

Yeah, sure. Actually make it six minutes.

RICHARD (O.S.)

Six minutes it is. Look for a black Infinity.

ETHAN

Wait, another new car? How many of these do you have?

RICHARD (O.S.)

As many as I want. Now hurry up, you've already wasted thirty seconds.

The line clicks dead. Ethan hangs up the phone and gets up.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN HOTEL - SAME

A sleek Infinity G35 idles next to a boulevard separating the westbound traffic from the eastbound. A thin trail of white smoke liberates itself from a crack in the driver's side window.

INT. INFINITY G35 - SAME

RICHARD is a dapper looking man in his early fifties. He keeps his eyes locked on his side-view mirror. Nearly ten minutes after their phone conversation, Ethan finally emerges from the front entrance of the hotel. He watches as Ethan walks to the passenger side door, opens it and sits down.

RICHARD

Good morning.

ETHAN

(awkwardly) Morning.

Richard smirks.

RICHARD

How are things?

Ethan sighs.

ETHAN

Things?

RICHARD
Yeah, things. How are they?

ETHAN
Define "things".

RICHARD
Anything, everything, something.
You pick.

ETHAN
They're all the same to me.

Richard inhales deeply on his cigarillo and blows the smoke out the thinly cracked window.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
You know, between the exhaust fumes leaking-in and the smoke from your cigarillo, you're creating quite the gas chamber in here. That can't be healthy.

RICHARD
I'm willing to take that risk.

Richard kisses his cigarillo and draws the smoke into his lungs.

ETHAN
So, another new car? What is this, the sixth one in the two months I've known you?

RICHARD
It's easier to stay incognito this way.

ETHAN
From who, the cops?

RICHARD
Not the police necessarily, but I'm always looking over my shoulder, I've always got an exit.

Suddenly, Richard shifts the clutch into first gear and pulls away from the curb, integrating the car into the flow of traffic.

ETHAN
So how is it that you always seem to know when I'm running low?

RICHARD
Intuition maybe?

ETHAN
I suppose your subconscious has gotten used to my timetable, but I didn't think it was possible to always know the exact moment.

RICHARD
Sometimes our brains just know things that we can't explain.

Ethan turns and looks out his window.

ETHAN
I guess.

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME

The G35 weaves its way through street traffic and pulls onto the on-ramp leading to the elevated highway which runs along the bottom of the city.

EXT. STRIPMALL - SAME

Richard shifts down to fourth gear after a smooth ride on the highway and merges onto an off ramp. Once back on city streets, Richard pulls into a parking lot and into a vacant spot. Ahead of them, a busy coffee shop and its accompanying drive-thru serve the morning rush of cars.

RICHARD
The rat-race is an endless marathon.

ETHAN
It ends when you die. Life's a checklist, then you die. When you're dead it doesn't matter if you had one or a hundred check marks, but while you're alive, you convince yourself that they matter and obsess over them.

Suddenly, the car cigarette lighter pops up and Richard brings it up to a fresh cigarillo, lighting it and expunging smoke from his lungs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I've been meaning to ask you; I can't seem to get rid of this taste of battery. You know, like when you stick your tongue against one? I don't think it's the heroin because I've had it longer than I've known you, but I can't be sure.

Ethan thinks to himself a moment before reassuring himself.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, at least two months now.

RICHARD

Are you getting any vitamins?

ETHAN

Probably not.

RICHARD

It could be a deficiency. You should take a multi-vitamin. Do you?

ETHAN

No.

RICHARD

Well then maybe it's something to consider.

ETHAN

Maybe.

For a minute or so, Richard and Ethan both watch the line of cars as it slowly inches forward towards the drive-thru window.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Do you ever feel like there's a pattern to the world? Like a rhythm?

RICHARD

What makes you say that?

ETHAN

What doesn't?

RICHARD

Is there a societal, circadian rhythm? Perhaps.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Night and Day is a continues cycle,
so are the seasons. Somehow it
makes sense. Electromagnetic
pulses follow different rhythms,
different frequencies.

ETHAN

No, I mean more of a fabricated,
constructed web of nothingness that
seems to pulsate with ignorance.
It's like an algorithm stuck in a
rut. The more I'm amongst society,
the further I feel from humanity.

RICHARD

Maybe you're not supposed to fit-
in. Maybe your alienation is a
result of a logical thought-
process.

ETHAN

What is thought? If I think of
something and type that thought
into my computer, it stores that
thought as a bunch of on/off
switches on a magnetic disc or
microchip smaller than my
thumbnail. The clicking that my
computer makes when I save
something, that's a thousand
miniature, on/off switches copying
my memory into its. In my brain I
construct thoughts and memories and
emotions out of atoms. Inside a
hard drive, a computer constructs
the same thing out of bits, bites,
electrons and whatever else they
can manipulate to fit their needs.

RICHARD

Our brains are constantly recording
and recording means memory. The
whole of our being is simply
memory. Without it, you're
nothing. When it comes down to it,
those bits and bytes and electrons
that make up the images and sounds
and words are also just atoms.
Visible to us only because light
photons bounce off of their
electrons. So regardless of how a
thought is stored in memory, it's
always comprised of atoms, and in-
turn their electrons and nuclei.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

The main difference between organic thought and digital algorithms is that computers handle instructions step by step, and each one of those instructions is very simple. It's the fact that a computer can handle trillions of those instructions per second that makes it able to do what it does. But organic thought happens simultaneously. Our brains are parallel processors, trillions, if not quadrillions of electrical currents moving through our synapses at the speed of light. Comparatively, computers simply work one by, step by step. They're high-speed, linear idiots, albeit idiots that calculate simplicity at the speed of light.

ETHAN

There's got to be more out there. This can't be it, can it? I mean, who am I? Where am I? When am I? What am I? What do I bother living my life? Regardless of whether or not I'm addicted to drugs and rotting-away in a hotel room or working at a law firm and decaying at a desk, ultimately, I'm going to be decomposing in the ground somewhere when all is said and done and all of the information I've stored in my brain will slowly compost into dirt. Three-hundred and thirty-three years from now, no one will have ever heard of me and no one will even remotely care. So why should I care now?

RICHARD

Time is created at the quantum level. No one is certain of their future, but without uncertainty, our futures would already be defined. Life is an irreversible process which contains randomness at every level. It can't simply be reversed in the same order. If you were to rewind reality using the same laws of physics, life as we know it would break down. How do you un-crack an egg? How do you un-burn a piece of paper?

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

The real world isn't simply a dead, passive nature which behaves as automation, which once programmed, continues to follow the rules in the program. Not the real world at least.

Ethan shoots Richard a confused look and then sighs. Richard takes the moment to enjoy another pull from his cigarillo.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I don't think enough people ask themselves those questions.

Slowly, without responding, Ethan lifts his hand up to the back of his skull, gently rubbing the spot where the pain always comes from.

ETHAN

There couldn't have been thousands of years of human history and trillions of people come and gone for it all to lead to this. This boring, dull life that we all pretend is better than it actually is. Why do I feel like I'm walking amongst a herd of naive cattle every time I go outside? What happened to my consciousness? What happened to my self-awareness? Everyone generates their own reality. Everything they know and hold dear is entirely manufactured by their mind. All each of us can prove is that we, ourselves, exist. Nobody can prove that anything or anyone else they interact with is real. And not only are people unaware, they're unaware that they're unaware. I can't do what everyone else before me has done and pretend like I'm an individual, like I'm unique. I don't want to be just another neutrally electrified chunk of meat wandering aimlessly around this floating, ball of rock.

RICHARD

A unique hero is forever unchangeable. Mentally, I think what you're feeling is quite healthy.

ETHAN

And physically?

RICHARD

Well, the truth can take its toll on some people. And usually they'll turn to me and my services if things just get too unbearable.

ETHAN

Street drugs to treat depression?

Richard smiles.

RICHARD

Well, certain chemicals can significantly alter how the mind operates and even how your personality is articulated. Consciousness can be drastically manipulated and fine-tuned with psychoactive drugs.

ETHAN

Were you a doctor before you became a drug-dealer?

RICHARD

Something like that.

ETHAN

I guess my real question is why do I see things like this and no one else? Why do I wake-up in a panic every time I fall asleep?

RICHARD

If there's something inside of you that's telling you that none of this real, then maybe you should start listening to it. The truth is always hidden in plain sight. To miss it is the anxiety of modern man.

ETHAN

So you're telling me to give in to these thoughts of lunacy?

RICHARD

That depends on who's branding you a lunatic.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

If there were others like you, perhaps you might begin to look at everyone *else* as the lunatics for not seeing the world as you do.

ETHAN

At this point, I think that's just a dream.

RICHARD

What if it's not? What if you're right? What if you are one-in-a-billion? What if everyone else, with the exception of a few people like you, were living a lie? Most of us are exposed to thousands of images and codes and instructions everyday, most of them we don't pay attention to, but they're still out there, they shape our reality whether we like it or not. Some people are just more adept than others at deciphering the chaos.

ETHAN

I don't know what any of that is supposed to mean. What am I supposed to do?

RICHARD

Perception is subjective. When you open a door and enter a room, what you consciously have to do in order to comprehend your surroundings is give-in to your subconscious. Without being aware of it, your brain comes to a logical conclusion as to the size, the height, the depth, and the specific characteristics of that room, allowing your consciousness to focus on the task at hand. Ninety-nine percent of the information you perceive doesn't come through your eyes, but from inferences that you're constantly making in the back of your mind.

ETHAN

What does that mean?

RICHARD

Have you ever wanted an experience with a substance that allowed you to see the world in an entirely new way?

ETHAN

What way?

RICHARD

The real way.

ETHAN

Isn't the point of drugs to *augment* reality?

RICHARD

That depends on what you perceive to be real and what you perceive to be augmented.

Richard motions with his head towards the up-scale, coffee shop and it's accompanying drive-thru.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Is any of that, *real*?

ETHAN

No.

RICHARD

To them it is. But a reduced awareness doesn't have to stay so forever. Sometimes it takes a trigger, but once you start, it's difficult to stop seeing things differently. Just because our brains are capable of storing a hundred trillion bits of information, it doesn't mean that most people choose to fill that space up with anything worthwhile, if anything at all.

ETHAN

So what are you saying?

RICHARD

I'm *asking* you if you want to free your mind.

ETHAN

How much does it cost?

RICHARD

The first time is free.

ETHAN

Sure. At this point, I'll try anything to stop making me feel like this. My concept of how I view the world is crumbling and it's unsettling. The moulds that have shaped my life for so long have been broken. What I knew before, what I *thought* I knew before, has completely vanished. I need to emancipate myself from this chaos but I have no footing. And if I give up now and revert back to my old, false securities, I'll be living a lie. I'll be nothing more than everyone else; eyes closed, mouth open and pissing into a headwind.

RICHARD

I'll give you some time to think about it. Besides, I don't have it with me right now. How about you make up your mind and let me know by tonight?

Ethan doesn't respond right away. Instead, he glances out the front windshield at the queue of cars and their respective drivers, waiting for their morning coffee.

ETHAN

Why doesn't anyone else see it?

RICHARD

Once in a while we stumble upon the truth, but most of us manage to pick ourselves up and hurry along as if nothing happened. You've managed to free your rate of vision from the realm of visible light, so to speak.

ETHAN

The answer is perpetually screaming, but no one's listening. It's a dog whistle in a crowded elevator. Piercingly inaudible.

RICHARD

It's there. It's around us every second of everyday.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We are surrounded, entombed by the truth, but the majority of people are happy to ignore it and instead, make up their own stories to satisfy themselves. It's easier to accept a facade as the truth if it makes you feel comfortable, if it's hiding the gutted and burned reality inside.

ETHAN

Why would I want to try a drug that showed me a gutted and burned reality?

RICHARD

Because ignorance is bliss, but you don't seem happy. How much worse could it get?

ETHAN

What happens when it wears off?

RICHARD

I'm afraid it doesn't. Once you step through the mirror, you can't go back. Just because you can't explain a feeling, doesn't mean you should ignore it. Our subconscious brain is as equally aware as our conscious brain. The stronger our cognition, the stronger our intuition.

ETHAN

Can a sane person ever understand what it's like to be insane?

RICHARD

Define sanity. Free minds need a lineage too.

Ethan turns his head and looks out the window at a massive, industrial garbage truck scooping up a large bin and emptying it into the large receptacle in the back. Richard looks down at the clock, it reads "8:01".

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I should get going. It's in the glove compartment. Don't worry about paying me now. If you decide to come tonight, you can pay me then.

Ethan reaches forward, opens the glove box and removes a bag.

ETHAN

How do you always drive such nice
cars is you don't seem to care much
about money?

RICHARD

What is money?

He presses the red start button next to the steering wheel
and the G35 roars to life.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE REAL WORLD - PRESENT DAY - MIDDAY

The real world is a bleak, dystopic reality inhabited now by only a handful of human beings. All other remaining sentient life on the planet is robotic. Whimsical sandstorms flail miscellaneous pieces of matter throughout the air, and in a short break of wind, a pile of rusty, old cars can just be made out, stacked against a brick wall. Underneath the layer of grime, the word "Subway" is painted in faint, white, stencilled lettering. Hidden very well amongst this pile is a complex system of small satellite dishes, a few skinny antennas and a single transmitter.

INT. ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

IAN, a skinny, frail man in his mid-thirties sits at an old wooden desk, staring at his reflection in a mirror propped up by a few dusty books. A distant and sorrowful face stares back at him. What happened to who he used to be?

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. CITY - DUSK - THE PAST

Air raid sirens wail over a large downtown core. It's pandemonium in the streets. Skyscrapers are on fire, cars are overturned, and mass looting and riots are abound. In the streets, people run screaming from a squadron of hovering, halo-like robots. Without hesitation, they spit fire from their hollow centres at anything that moves.

The city is surrounded by machines and they are blitzing its defenses from every angle. Massive mobile machines continuously pound the infrastructure with cannon fire and shells.

Suddenly, the last three remaining skyscrapers in the downtown core come crumbling down to earth after absorbing one to many explosive shells.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - SAME

A massive, Neo-gothic cathedral sits quietly, protected by surrounding mid-rise buildings, as of yet destroyed.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - SAME

Four dozen civilians sit huddle together in the pews. Men at the front entrance guard the large, locked doors with assault rifles, while others stand guarding the congregation in the pews. A priest walks up and down shaking hands.

Up front at the altar, a compact and impromptu command centre is occupied by men and women, all of whom look overwhelmed with adrenaline and consternation. Amidst them stands a much healthier, vibrant and muscular looking Ian. Beside him, Richard stands with his twenty-year old daughter, ZOE, an attractive, fit, Mulatto girl. She looks distraught.

RICHARD

We need to move. From what we've heard, the robots have a striking distance of over two-thousand feet and their city-destroyers are moving at a pace of three kilometres an hour. Which means we're lucky to still be alive right now.

An older but refined-looking WOMAN speaks up from the back.

WOMAN

From what I've heard, people are being melted alive in the streets. Where do you expect us to go?

RICHARD

All I know is that if we stay here, we're as good as dead. So if that's what you choose to do, you're better be prepared for what's coming because they'll be here sooner or later.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

But you're right though, the streets are no safer, especially with a group this large. The robots have managed to raze the city in less than twenty-four hours.

IAN

Why are they bothering with a ground assault if they're destroying everything in their path? Why not just bomb us and get it over with?

RICHARD

We all watched them nuke the United Nations; the entire world watched. They have the capability but they're not utilizing it, which of course raises some questions as to what they have planned for us.

A MAN interrupts from the back.

MAN

They're rounding us up like cattle aren't they? I don't mean to panic, but why are they rounding us up? I mean, we've all heard the rumors.

RICHARD

And they're just that for now; rumors.

WOMAN

Don't patronize us. Just because you're a doctor doesn't mean you can treat us like your patients.

RICHARD

Look, I'm just saying that we need to move. The longer we stay here, the closer they get.

MAN

You said we're surrounded. Where the hell are we supposed to go?

The priest excuses himself from the frightened families in the pews and approaches the command centre.

PRIEST

(eerily calm) Excuse me, excuse me. Everyone back there is tired and scared. At this point, I suggest we all move downstairs, below ground to the Sunday school classrooms and hold vigil. It's up to The Lord now.

IAN

(irritated) They're blackening the skies, father, and the robots are sucking-up all the electricity along the way. God can't see us or help us now.

PRIEST

It doesn't take clear skies to ask for the lord's assistance, it takes faith. Even now, he's all around us. He's omnipresent.

IAN

(with disdain) If prayer makes you feel better, then go ahead, I won't stop you. But you're not dragging everyone downstairs. Right now, we're surrounded by machines, not merciful gods. If you want to live to see tomorrow, hiding underneath a layer of wooden beams won't help you. The robots will sniff us out before we even know they've breached the building. If we don't move now, we die. It's that simple.

The priest grinds his molars and stares at Ian before childishly capitulating. He turns and walks back to the pews as Ian and Richard watch on. Another man in the crowd now takes his turn to add his opinion.

MAN # 2

(panicked) I don't want to end up some machine medical experiment.

RICHARD

I was in the reserves when I was younger and I know you don't stay cooped up, defenseless and waiting for the enemy. Ian's a Marine. We should all be thankful that we have him and his small, but formidable platoon with us.

Ian picks a transparent, plastic map up off of the table.

IAN

(calm, firm) I have no desire being burned alive, nor becoming an *alleged* medical experiment. So, I think it's only logical that we move quickly and quietly. We don't know much about them, but what we do know is that most of the robots have infra-red and night-vision, but we also know that they're clumsy in urban environments because of all the electrical interference. What's left of it.

MAN

What do you mean "clumsy"? They've been destroying everything in their path; I wouldn't call that clumsy.

WOMAN

They're slower in the city than they have been in the suburbs.

Ian interrupts and points to a spot on the map.

IAN

We're here. The nearest subway station is three blocks away at College Street. If we can make it to the tunnels, I'm almost certain we'll be able to follow the tracks north to the end of the line.

MAN

That's twenty miles at least. We're walking?

IAN

You got a bus?

RICHARD

It's the best of all evils, I'm afraid, but it's our only...

At that moment, a massive tractor-like machine with gigantic, mechanical eyes where the headlights should be, rams its way through one of the enormous side-walls. As the rubble collapses and the dust springs up to life, a small squadron of black halos hover in through the opening and immediately disperse. It's mayhem. Richard, Ian and Zoe grab their rifles and quickly turn around and move behind the altar.

Peeking out from behind, they watch as each the halos begins circling the crowd like boarder collies with a herd of sheep.

IAN

Jesus Christ, what are they doing?

RICHARD

Should we stick around to watch?
See if the rumors are true?

Suddenly, they watch as the halos being to systematically suck people up by their heads, suspending them inside their metallic rings with some invisible force. The priest is one of the first to be snatched. Without hesitation, a mechanical arm pops out and jabs a hypodermic needle into his neck, causing him to instantly pass out. Shifting its gadgets, a drill exposes itself and instantly begins cutting in to his occipital bone. Then, a pair of forceps appear and begin to dig into the raw brain tissue. One by one, every single person out in the pews experiences the same process.

Ian grabs Richard by the arm.

IAN

This is insane. We need to move.
Now!

Ian, Richard and Zoe move towards an emergency exit at the rear of the church, behind the altar, and escape outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND THE CHURCH - SAME

Explosions rock the landscape and horrific screams can be heard from inside the church. Richard, Zoe and Ian sprint across a side road and into an alley on the other side, just barely missing being seen by a squadron of passing halos.

RICHARD

That was close. Christ, if we had been a few seconds slower...

IAN

...We'd be having our brains ripped-out right now. All three of us.

RICHARD

What now then? You're the soldier, I'm the surgeon. This is when I start listening to you entirely.

IAN

We're three blocks from the subway,
maybe two and a half now. We can't
go by foot, not with those things
flying around. We need a car.

Glancing down the alley, he spots a back exit from a cafe
with five adjoining parking spaces and accompanying cars.

IAN (CONT'D)

Come on.

Approaching the cars, Ian makes haste to move from window to
window, looking for keys, but with no luck.

IAN (CONT'D)

Nothing.

RICHARD

Can you hot-wire one?

IAN

I can yes, but I'm not that great
at it.

Shattering the glass with his elbow, Ian unlocks the door and
gets in. He pops the hood and moves around to the front and
reaches his arm deep inside.

RICHARD

So are you really a marine, or were
you just saying that to make us all
feel better?

Manipulating a few wires under the hood, Ian tries to
remember what he learned in the Marines about cars.

IAN

No, that's true. I'm a Marine. I
served two tours on the Peninsula.
I'm a corporal. First thing I did
last night when I heard about the
invasion was to make my way down to
the Military Institute. That's
where I ran into the other guys...
Jesus, they're all dead now. Who
would have thought, that in the
end, it would be a giant toilet
seat that got 'em. We can't dwell
on that now.

Suddenly, surprising himself, Ian easily stirs the car to
life.

IAN (CONT'D)
We're electrified. Let's move.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Behind the wheel, Ian pulls the car up to the edge of the alley where it meets the road and stops short of the opening.

INT. CAR (IDLING) - SAME

The three of them are strapped into their seat-belts in preparation for a tumultuous ride. Zoe is in the back.

IAN
The station is three blocks northwest. We have two options; gun it as fast as possible, drawing lots of attention, or creep along slowly and quietly but risk being found, which by that point will be already too late.

RICHARD
Gun it!

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME

Peeling out of the alley, Ian pilots the speeding car along roads, around corners and through alleyways. He swerves violently as he just barely misses a row of newspaper boxes on a corner and stops the car. Inside the car, all three of them are tossed around, Richard getting the worst of it as his seat belt tightens around his neck, squeezing his Adam's apple. Gasping for air, he unbuckles it.

IAN
(frantic) That was close! You guys alright?

RICHARD
Yeah, the seat belt tightened around my windpipe.

IAN
Look, down at the end of the block, there's the station.

Suddenly, the car is t-boned by a massive, tractor-trailer like, front-end loader and slammed through a storefront. The three passengers are thrown around like rag-dolls, Ian and Zoe less severely thanks to their still-buckled seat belts.

INT. JOE'S HARDWARE - SAME

Landing on the roof on the linoleum tiled floor, Zoe and Ian are suspended upside down by their seat belts. Detritus and debris from the collapsed wall ensconce them.

INT. CAR (UPSIDE DOWN) - SAME

Dumbfounded and dizzy and with a gash across his forehead, Ian manages to mumble something through a broken jaw.

IAN
Risherd? Rishersd? Can you hear
me?

ZOE
Ian. Ian.

IAN
Iz okay Zoe, iz okay. Risherd,
Risherd. Hey...

A grumbling comes from somewhere beside him in the darkness.

IAN (CONT'D)
Risherd, that you?

RICHARD
(incoherent) Mmmmm, mmpf, Ian.
Ian?

IAN
Yeah, rye-here. You okay?

RICHARD
Mmmmmmpf. I don't know. I can't
feel my legs.

IAN
(mumbling) We nee ta move. We nee
to get out of here.

RICHARD
Where are we? What happened?

ZOE
 (frightened, overwhelmed) Dad,
 wake up! We're in a car, upside
 down. Wake up!

Ian unbuckles himself and falls to the overturned ceiling of the car. He's a bloody mess and he turns himself right-side up.

RICHARD
 (panicked, mumbling) Zoe? Is she
 okay?

Suddenly, spotlights illuminate the car, followed by a faint, ominous hum of approaching halos. Zoe and Ian have freed themselves from their belts, but Richard is still stuck.

With the light focused on the car, Ian can now see that Richard is stuck in a very unnatural position. He lies almost in the shape of an "L", his head, neck and upper back flat against the overturned ceiling of the car.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (mumbling) I can't feel my legs. I
 can't feel anything from the waste
 down.

Suddenly, Ian watches as a hovering halo lowers itself beside Richard's passenger side window. Ian barely has time to yell before the halo rotates backwards on its axis and sucks Richard's contorted body out of the car by his head.

IAN
 Risherd!

Before Ian and Zoe can decipher what just happened, they too are violently sucked out of the car through where the shattered windows used to be. Within seconds, all three are injected with syringes and sedated. The halos make quick work of their occipital bones and lobes, ravenously inserting and removing various sharp, metallic tools. Soon, the three of them are hanging limp and unconscious, their heads supported by an invisible force inside the metallic halo. They are unaware of it yet, but the three of them have just evolved into cyborgs as there is now a massive, electrical socket-like device implanted firmly into the back of all three of their heads. Suddenly, without any indication, the halos buzz out of Joe's Hardware and into the streets, a pair of legs dangling in the air behind each of them.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - A SHORT WHILE LATER.

Richard wakes up to utter confusion and chaos. He hears voices around him and he quickly catches a glimpse of three halos, but they now lie defunct, smashed and in pieces on the pavement. There are blurred people crowding around him.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Oh God, what is that thing in the back of his head?

MAN'S VOICE

All three of them have it.

WOMAN'S VOICE

It looks like an electrical socket. It doesn't matter now. We're sitting ducks out here. Get them in the van, quickly.

Richard passes out.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - SOME TIME LATER

Richard wakes up groggy but otherwise pain-free. He lies in a hospital gurney. Emergency generator lights shine down from flood bulbs above and a half dozen tubes come and go from Richard's right forearm.

RICHARD

(drowsy, discombobulated) Zoe? Zoe?

A woman's hand presses reassuringly on his chest from above.

WOMAN #2

She's fine. They're both fine. Calm down, okay? You're safe, but you've been seriously injured. Just relax. The girl and the young man you were with are both alive, but you need to keep your heart rate down. If you don't you'll kill yourself, got it?

RICHARD

(calming) Yeah, yeah, I get it.

The woman reaches over and fiddles with an IV bag.

WOMAN #2

Here's a little more morphine for you. I'm sure this is a little much to wake up to.

Richard nods pensively and feels a queer feeling in the back of his head. Reaching back he feels the metal socket and the memories of earlier events manifest in his memory.

RICHARD

(shouting, panicked) What is that? What is that? They put one of these in the back of my head too?

The woman opens a valve and floods the tubing with morphine.

WOMAN #2

There's no need to panic. It's okay. Now, as for the thing in the back of your head, we're trying to figure out what it is. We took some scans while you were unconscious, but it doesn't seem to be affecting you in any observable negative way.

As the morphine leaks into Richard's system, he calms down.

RICHARD

(dazed) Where are we?

WOMAN #2

Mt. Sinai. Two levels underground.

RICHARD

I can't feel my legs.

WOMAN #2

You've injured your spine. You were in surgery for eight hours.

RICHARD

What? How long have I been out for?

WOMAN #2

The three of you came in nearly two days ago I believe.

RICHARD

Two days?

WOMAN #2

Yes, but we're moving on soon.

RICHARD

Who says?

WOMAN #2

Oh there's bit of a mob that's joined together. They were the ones who rescued you.

RICHARD

Where's Zoe, my daughter?

WOMAN #2

She's fine, she's with your other friend, but I'm afraid he's broken his jaw and has had to have it wired shut.

RICHARD

What about the machines?

WOMAN #2

They haven't found us yet. They say it's because we're underground, below reinforced concrete. The hospital's electromagnetic equipment and led walls are interfering and also helping us stay hidden. I don't know, I'm a doctor not an engineer.

RICHARD

I'm a doctor too. My spine. I can't feel my legs at all, is it bad?

WOMAN #2

It's been severed. We still don't know how bad it is. I'm not a surgeon but they said that a piece of bone had cut a major nerve in your lower back. Although, ironically, that thing in your head might have actually kept you alive.

As the morphine begins to really kick in, Richard passes out.

Blackout.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - SAME

Richard awakes to complete chaos! To his right, the female doctor he was talking to is having her skull pried open and her cranium reconfigured by a meticulous halo. Richard watches in horror before suddenly, out of the darkness of the dimly-lit corridor, the downward swipe of a fire axe chops down! The blade tears into the machine and it instantly short-circuits, flails upwards and rockets down the hall, smashing against the end wall and erupting in a massive explosion. The doctor's limp body unfortunately along for the ride.

Emerging from the shadows is Ian, holding the fire axe pendulous in his right arm and wearing a wired-shut jaw.

RICHARD

Where's Zoe?

Ian gives him the thumbs up sign. He can't speak but instead begins to hastily unplug all the medical equipment from the walls, tossing the cords on Richard's gurney. Suddenly, the ominous sound of humming halos begins to pulse through the air and Ian wastes no time in moving. He grabs Richard's gurney and begins to push him down the hall towards an awaiting elevator when about fifty meters behind them, a trio of halos turn a corner into the hallway. It's a race to the finish as Ian pushes with all his strength to get to the open elevator. They make it with less than a second to spare as the halos slam into the freshly closed elevator doors behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR CAR (MOVING) - SAME

Ian stands beside Richard and the gurney he's lying on. As his grogginess subsides, he spots a socket in Ian's head.

RICHARD

They got you too?

IAN

They got all three of us Richard.

The doors ding open and Ian wheels the gurney and Richard on top of it out into the dark, dank bowels of the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL BASEMENT - SAME

A small crowd of people stand in the dim emergency light. Standing amongst them is LANCE, a thin, scrawny man in his mid-thirties. Beside him, Zoe holds an FN Five-seven pistol.

RICHARD

Zoe!

Out of the small crowd steps a woman in scrubs; the SURGEON.

SURGEON

There's no one else. The machines caught everyone. We're lucky to be here.

She turns to address Richard.

SURGEON (CONT'D)

How are you feeling? We need to get you plugged back in.

Ian pushes Richard toward an array of sockets along the wall where the surgeon proceeds to plug in the most vital devices.

A man speaks up from the crowd.

MAN #3

The robots can't find us this deep, at least not yet.

RICHARD

That means we're trapped down here.

MAN #3

We don't really have an option.

RICHARD

What do you suggest?

MAN #3

We wait until they've moved on and take our chances.

RICHARD

How long will we wait?

MAN #3

As long as we can.

The surgeon turns around from the gurney against the wall.

SURGEON

He can stay here for two days before we run out of supplies. We were able to wheel down a few carts, but it's not much.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - REAL WORLD - PRESENT DAY

A land line phone next to Ian begins to ring.

IAN
(edgy) Yeah?

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

LANCE, who was first introduced to Richard, Ian and Zoe that day in the hospital almost two years ago now, sits perched on a swivel chair in front of a console of computers. He's older, dirtier, and worn-out from living underground. Behind him, Zoe and Richard watch the screens he's manipulating with a series of keyboards. Zoe sits on a stool while Richard is permanently seated in an elaborate electric wheelchair. Suddenly, Lance taps a few last taps on a keyboard.

LANCE
Got it.

RICHARD
So what exactly is it?

LANCE
Well, that's a good question. As far as I can tell, it looks like most if not all of the earth's geostationary satellites have somehow, once again become fully operational. And if that's not enough to get you excited, it looks as if flight dynamics and maneuvering are being manually controlled from somewhere on Earth. As if someone is trying to get the communications network back online.

RICHARD
Someone or something. Nobody ever said the robots weren't interested in finding out the answers of the universe. If they're as aware as we are, they'll have the same questions as we do.

LANCE
Robots have taken over space exploration?

RICHARD

Why not? Evolution doesn't become complacent, it just doesn't always have to move linearly. The robots are at the top of the pecking order now. They can do whatever they want. Humans are an endangered species.

ZOE

How do they send and receive through the black? I thought the whole point of us scorching the skies was to block communications.

LANCE

And the sun.

RICHARD

Where there's a will, there's a way. Even if it's not necessarily *human* will.

ZOE

So what happens if the robots contact aliens? What if aliens land on this planet and think that it belongs to the robots and not us?

RICHARD

What if the aliens are machines themselves? And who says the planet doesn't belong to the robots? What if the same thing happened on some distant planet? An organic life-form creates and is then subordinated by a mechanical menace of some sort. Skin or steel, the fittest survive. With them, there's no denial, no ignorance, no faith, just calculated logic. There's no bureaucracy, no religions, no emotion, just pure survival logic and algorithmic thought. This is true communism, space program and all. Who knows, there could even be robot philosophers. Some secrets of the universe will forever be beyond the grasp of humanity, but may not be beyond the grasp of the next cadre of intelligent life.

Behind them, Ian saunters in unnoticed and approaches the control console. He's aloof, distant and detached.

IAN

And what about the secrets that are beyond them? Who's going to answer those?

RICHARD

We'll be long gone by the time whoever they are, figure it out.

IAN

So, what's up?

RICHARD

Lance discovered that the robots have begun using Earth's satellite systems.

IAN

(nervous, anxious) They're launching rockets?

LANCE

No, not yet at least.

ZOE

They're using old television and military satellites, but we don't know why.

Ian changes the subject.

LANCE

(anxious) So, we're still hacking in tonight then?

RICHARD

That's the plan, are you still okay?

IAN

Yeah, a little tense maybe, but yeah, I'm good to go.

ZOE

You sure?

IAN

Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Trust me, I'm fine.

Ian has struggled with this new reality more than the rest.

RICHARD

(steadfast, compassionate) Well, it's tonight or it doesn't look like we'll have another window for months. Hacking-in is crude at best, and to find conditions where the wind is this calm is rare. Don't forget, it's our consciousness that will be travelling through the waves of information out there. Ethan's got his supply of heroin for the time-being, so he'll be a wraith for another week or two, depending on how heavily he's using. None of us know how much longer the cloaking program will be able to keep him incognito inside. It's only a matter of time before The Agency cracks the code.

ZOE

Or before Ethan overdoses and kills himself. If The Agency doesn't get him first, the heroin will.

RICHARD

It's a gamble, no doubt.

Suddenly, Ian jumps in with resolve.

IAN

We go in tonight.

RICHARD

I think it's the right choice. But this *is* a choice Ian, you have the freedom to say 'no'.

IAN

What's the point of free will if I use it to stay trapped in this world of nothingness, too afraid to try to change things?

ZOE

If it's any consolation, you shouldn't expect to encounter resistance, but don't forget that you'll be alone and there won't be anyone around to pull you back together if you fall apart.

IAN

I realize that.

LANCE

I'll be with you in spirit. You can always connect with me on your mobile.

IAN

Right, yeah.

RICHARD

The good news is that The Agency doesn't seem to have any awareness of the abilities of our second target, so for you Ian, it should be a rather uneventful excursion. From what we've observed over the last few months, he's severely autistic, physically disabled and rarely, if ever, leaves his apartment. He hasn't been making any waves inside the program. The only way we even initially heard about him was through Danny.

IAN

And you trust him?

RICHARD

In this barren world you trust whoever you can find. If they're human, that's usually a good start.

IAN

I'm not sure if I'm comfortable going inside on a tip from someone we hardly know.

RICHARD

Danny has been with us for nearly three months, you've just never taken the time to get to know him.

ZOE

Danny is legitimately a drifter. Not everyone wants to hide underground forever. Some people need to keep moving.

RICHARD

Ian, we all know the stress you feel on a daily basis, and if there was any way that I could help you out medicinally, I would.

Unfortunately, sometimes there's nothing that therapy can do. If the brain has reorganized its chemical structure, it's nearly impossible to rehabilitate it without medication. But think of those still inside the program who feel like you do, but don't know why.

ZOE

Change is a significant source of stress and we think that when the machines were first transplanting humans from the real world into The Program, not all connections were connected correctly, and not all memory was erased.

RICHARD

When the mind has difficulty recognizing and acknowledging the world around it and can't translate the sense into brain code, it becomes overwhelmed from too much unfamiliar information, and that's when things start to get a little wacky. When our brains begin to malfunction, we're thrown completely out of sync with the entire world around us. And when you can't consciously grasp time, depth, color, contrast, shape or movement, the loss of these motor skills can really drive someone bonkers.

Ian drops his head and begins to rub the back of his skull.

ZOE

It's going to be fine, Ian.

IAN

Yeah...

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE - LATE MORNING

Ethan sits upright in bed, comatose against the headboard. His mouth hangs eerily agape, his retinas are glazed over in a mercurial hue and on the table next to him is an ejected needle of heroin. On the television on the wall facing the bed, an old episode of *Gunsmoke* bathe's Ethan's limp frame in flashes of black and white. Marshall Matt Dillon twirls his dual revolvers around in an impressive display of gunplay.

Suddenly, the sound of a buzzer echoes throughout the suite. His mercury retinas dissipate and he jumps out of bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM, HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Ethan stumbles groggily towards the front door. Visible track-marks line the inside of both arms and he covers them with a black hoodie he tosses on as the buzzer continues to humm all around him. As Ethan gets closer to the door, a man's voice suddenly barks from the other side.

CROFFORD (O.S.)

Ethan? It's me, John. Come on, I know you're in there.

Ethan puts his eye up to the eyehole and watches as Crofford reaches down and inspects the "Do Not Disturb" tab.

ETHAN

(through the door) That's there for a reason.

CROFFORD

Ethan?

ETHAN

(annoyed, groggy) Yeah?

CROFFORD

(calmly) Let me in.

ETHAN

(quietly) Christ, John, just leave me the hell alone.

CROFFORD

I'm your only human contact and I'm not here to bother you this time. Look, I brought coffee.

ETHAN

There's a coffee maker in here. Actually, now that I think about it, I get a free breakfast with this room every morning if I want, coffee included, so your offer isn't very enticing.

CROFFORD

Come on Ethan, human interaction every few months is a necessity. You know, people go crazy cooped-up by themselves. It's a form of interrogation torture. They lock people up alone for months and then one day unexpectedly yank them out of their dark prison cells and throw them under a bright light. You can get anybody to say anything with that kind of shock.

ETHAN

Yeah, well luckily for me you don't have that luxury anymore.

CROFFORD

That's all in the past Ethan, that's almost two months ago now. You've got to understand that I was taking the case personally, and I probably got a little gung-ho at times, but you know I'm good for my word. I'm not here to interrogate you.

ETHAN

It's almost as if you forget that I was cleared as a suspect. And plus, I have human contact with the housekeeping lady every once and a while.

CROFFORD

This is still an on-going investigation you know. Just because you've been cleared as a suspect doesn't mean you're not still a valuable witness.

ETHAN

There's no law that says you can keep harassing me until I tell you what you want to hear.

CROFFORD

I'm not here to put words in your mouth and I'm not here to accuse you of anything. After all Ethan, this is personal for you too. We're talking about your parents. I would have thought...

Suddenly the front door swings open and into the hotel suite.

ETHAN

...You would have thought what?

CROFFORD stands there with the tray of coffee in his hands. He's a detective, that's obvious from his brown, trench-coat and his bland, business-casual shirt and pant combination underneath.

CROFFORD

I would have thought you'd be more open to sharing any information you might have.

ETHAN

(passively annoyed) I told you everything I know. No matter how many times you keep coming back to me, I'm still going to know the same amount of information. I can't create something from nothing. And it's not as if I'm going to have some epiphany while you stand outside my door.

CROFFORD

Well then, may I come in?

Ethan looks back into his dark living room. He sighs.

ETHAN

Fine. It's not like you'd leave me alone if I said 'no'.

Crofford walks in and Ethan locks the door behind him.

CROFFORD

It's like a cave in here. Let's let some light in, shall we?

Crofford sets the tray down and opens the blinds.

ETHAN

(wincing) I could have turned a light on.

CROFFORD

Vitamin D is something you don't want to deprive yourself of, and judging from the lifestyle you've been living for the past two months, it's the only vitamin you're going to get. Exposure to sunlight is essential for life.

Ethan plops himself down on a couch.

ETHAN

(uninterested) So what do you want?

Crofford takes a seat on an armchair.

CROFFORD

(sarcastic) Hospitable as always.

ETHAN

If you accuse someone of murdering their own parents enough, you'll find that it doesn't take long for them to lose their sense of hospitality. Plus, I'd still be asleep if you hadn't stopped by.

CROFFORD

Look, I know you've been through hell the past few months, and trust me, I'm well aware that the last thing you want to talk about is your parents' murder. But the fact of the matter is that I do have questions, and frankly they need to be asked. I'm only doing my job Ethan. No matter how well you can store this away and not think about it, you're still living in denial. This is reality, you have to face facts.

ETHAN

I'm tired of facing facts that never seem to add up.

CROFFORD

And that's why this case isn't going away. A dead cop at the scene of the crime isn't conducive to a cold-case file. Nothing galvanizes the upper-brass like a dead cop. They don't like to see these kind of things go unsolved.

ETHAN

Yeah, well.

CROFFORD

I need your help. You need your help. Don't you think that if we solved this, that you may finally feel the desire to get on with your life and stop hiding-out in this hotel room?

ETHAN

The more familiar I am with this room, the more unfamiliar I am with it. And that's basically how everything feels to me. I feel like a ghost lost in a virtual fog.

CROFFORD

I think you should talk to someone professional about this. The world isn't so bleak. We all deserve to be happy. It's in the Declaration of Independence.

ETHAN

It's the *pursuit* of happiness. There's no answer for what happened that night.

CROFFORD

There has to be an answer. Nothing is unanswerable.

ETHAN

No, you're wrong.

CROFFORD

Why do you say that?

ETHAN

I don't know.

CROFFORD

You've got to give me more than that, Ethan.

ETHAN

Really, I don't know.

CROFFORD

Come on Ethan, I know you're hiding something.

(MORE)

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

Why was he there that night? How is he connected with your family?

ETHAN

I don't know why your partner was there. I had never seen the guy before. Don't tell me I'm hiding something from you. I don't even know what's hiding from me.

CROFFORD

What?

ETHAN

I don't know if what I'm feeling means that *I'm* not real, or that *you're* not real, or that this *hotel room* isn't real, or that *none* of this is real. I can't tell you which of my memories have actually happened. It's like my hindsight has cataracts.

CROFFORD

Static or not, you must remember something. I don't know why or how, but I think that Landry was there that night because he was connected to your family.

ETHAN

And you think that *I* do?

CROFFORD

You're the only link, Ethan. Sometimes people forget the details of a traumatic event. Maybe there's something inside of you that needs to be triggered.

ETHAN

I'm too far gone now to have the wool re-pulled over my eyes.

CROFFORD

Listen, I came by to take you out for breakfast. I promise I won't ask another question. What do you say?

ETHAN

Not today, I feel sick.

Ethan begins to hyperventilate.

CROFFORD

Alright, alright, I'll leave you to yourself today. What about breakfast tomorrow?

ETHAN

What?

CROFFORD

Are you even listening to me?

ETHAN

What? Yeah, sure fine, tomorrow. Just make sure you call first. I'm not a fan of doorbells.

CROFFORD

Alright, how's nine?

ETHAN

Fine.

Crofford stands and walks toward the front door.

CROFFORD

If you have anything to tell me...

ETHAN

Nothing.

CROFFORD

Alright, I'll see you tomorrow. Don't ignore my calls or I'll be ringing the doorbell.

ETHAN

Yeah.

CROFFORD

You know, you should really think about buying some multi-vitamins or something. You look terrible. There's a drug store in the lobby.

Crofford leaves the suite. The instant the door closes behind him, Ethan bolts every lock and runs stumbling to his room.

On the writing desk, he picks up an envelope and from it, carefully taps a brown powder out into a curved-handled spoon. Sparking a lighter, and mixing a few drops of water with the powder, Ethan sets the flame beneath the metal and cooks it until it's a sticky liquid. Picking up a fresh syringe, he draws the liquid back, ties a rubber band around his left bi-cep and injects the heroin into his bloodstream.

For a moment, it's pure bliss, but within a few more, Ethan's retinas suddenly flood with mercury and he breathes in the unnerving wail of a CNG send-and-receive fax signal.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, RONG'S APARTMENT FLAT - MORNING

Rong awakes with a searing pain in the back of his head. He's surprised to find himself with his head in his mother's lap.

RONG'S MOTHER

Shhh.

She is cleaning his wound with a damp face-cloth.

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

It's okay. He's gone. He left about thirty minutes ago. You've been unconscious. How do you feel?

Rong calmly bobs his head from side to side.

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

I don't think it's too bad. He's done worse to both of us before.

As she cleans his wound, Rong reaches back to feel the wound

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Don't touch, not with those hands. Let me clean you up, you don't have to worry about that.

With a last few dabs, his mother finishes cleaning the wound.

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

There, all clean. Now, how does your head feel. Have a headache?

Rong nods.

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Thought so. Now, what I can do?

She reaches into a basket on the coffee table and pulls out an acupuncture needle and cauterizes it with a match.

RONG'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Okay, hold still.

She tilts Rong's head forward and slowly inserts the needle beside the gash in his skull. Suddenly, Rong's head shoots back and from out of his mouth shoots a bolt of lightning! In a cloud of smoke, the television is hit full on by the lightning and explodes into a million fragments. Horrified, his mother pulls him closer to her chest as he begins to convulse, spitting white foam. It lasts only a moment before he once more, passes out.

Suddenly, the front door of the apartment opens up. Rong's Father steps inside. He holds a bottle of grain alcohol.

His eyes transfix on the exploded television.

RONG'S FATHER
(eerily calm) What happened here?

Rong's Mother says nothing, she's paralysed with fear.

RONG'S MOTHER
(sternly) I asked you, what happened here?

He approaches his wife and son sitting on the floor.

RONG'S FATHER
What is this, you're trying to help him?

RONG'S MOTHER
What kind of mother would I be if I wasn't?

RONG'S FATHER
A worthwhile one, that's what. Look at this useless hunk of meat. Over a billion people in this country and I end up with the single, most useless son out of everyone. Every year it's something different. He forgets how to talk, how to hear, how to speak. He forgets how to do everything except breathe! The only thing I would be happy for him to forget is how to breathe!

RONG'S MOTHER
You're a monster!

RONG'S FATHER
I'm the scientist. I've created the monster! We've created it!

RONG'S MOTHER

He couldn't be further from that.
You choose to poison your brain
with alcohol while your son
struggles to use the one he was
born with.

RONG'S FATHER

He wasn't born *completely* useless.
It's a new handicap every year!
He's distorting the energy in our
lives, can't you see it? We are
supposed to live a life of
illumination and all we've done is
live in the shadow of his darkness.

He walks to the front door and grabs a hanging frying pan.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

There's only so much I can do on
our budget, but could you imagine
the horror we'd experience daily if
our son's overwhelmingly negative
energy wasn't at least, partially
deflected?

RONG'S MOTHER

You're horrible.

RONG'S FATHER

Yes, but at least I am symmetrical!
I am not a crooked, twisted,
entwined lump of skin and bones,
like the son you hold so dearly in
your arms now. You of all people
should know that Feng Shui is an
intangible web of interconnections,
and up until this moment, I've done
everything to clear this space of
negative energy except for one.

RONG'S MOTHER

Never! You will never again touch
my son! You will never again hurt
him in order to fulfill and satisfy
some sick obsession with Feng Shui.
Look around you, we live in filth.
This space isn't clear, this
apartment isn't clean! You don't
work, you don't cook, you don't
clean. What do you need all this
energy for if all you do is sit
around drunk watching television?

Rong's Father glances back over at his destroyed television.

RONG'S FATHER
(meticulously slow and maddened)
What happened to my television?

He peers down at his wife and son on the floor, no answer.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)
I asked you, what happened to my
television? I know you know.

Paralysed with fear, all she can do is shake her head 'no'.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)
What? Don't tell me you've gone
dumb now too. Don't tell me I'm
living with two mutes instead of
one!

He steps towards his wife on the floor and looms over her.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)
Perhaps your silence suggests that
it was pre-determined for my
television to explode? That when I
purchased it, it was already
doomed? Is that what you're
telling me?

Rong's mother wearily shakes her head 'no'.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)
(screaming) Well, I don't think the
television *chose* to explode, so
what happened?! What happened?! I
thought I understood the laws of
nature, but apparently, according
to my family, televisions can
simply explode without reason, and
this is something that requires no
rational explanation! Perhaps
we're living in a dream, or a
virtual reality, forever barred
from understanding the true nature
of things, the true laws of the
universe.

RONG'S MOTHER
Reality is whatever our individual
brains need it to be. If we all
lived in yours, we'd be delusional,
pathetic drunks.

Enraged at this comment, Rong's Father suddenly moves away from his family and walks towards the kitchenette. Opening a drawer, he begins to sifts through an assortment of cutlery.

Rong's mother watches from the living room when suddenly, Rong's eyes open and for the first time in years, he speaks.

RONG

I want to bend light. I want to
twirl time. I want to disappear.

His mother's head whips down to face him in her lap.

RONG'S MOTHER

(flabberghasted) What did you say?

Blackout.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S HOTEL - EARLY AFTERNOON

A Crown Victoria is parked amongst cabs beside the boulevard.

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (PARKED) - SAME

Detective Crofford sits in the driver's seat. Next to him, DETECTIVE TONY POPOLOUS, a naive, young, enthusiastic rookie detective, sits peering at the hotel through binoculars. Crofford smokes a cigarette and blows it out his open window.

TONY

I'm not getting paid to sit in this
cancer-box with you all day.

CROFFORD

(sarcastically) Yeah you are.

TONY

Well maybe in this car, but I'm not
getting paid to breathe in your
second-hand smoke.

Crofford takes a last drag and tosses the butt onto the road.

CROFFORD

Happy?

TONY

Not really. The stink is marinated
into the interior. What happens
when you have to chase a suspect?

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

How do your blackened lungs give you enough oxygen to make it one city block?

CROFFORD

You're too green to understand the complexities of smoking. We all start out with ideals, but in a relatively short amount of time, they dissipate and apathy takes over.

TONY

(sarcastically) How inspiring.

CROFFORD

I'm a realist, you've been a detective now, what, two months?

TONY

Almost, yeah.

CROFFORD

And you were highway patrol before that and before that you were still in high school, right?

TONY

I was highway patrol for five years and I was at the academy before that. What's your point?

CROFFORD

My point is that sobriety only lasts so long, It's like a marriage, well, it's like anything really. It's fun at first, but then that ecstasy wears off and all you're left doing is sitting in a car, and the only way to make that reasonably bearable is to smoke. For every suspect I have to physically chase down, I have five-hundred hours of sitting right here, in this car.

TONY

I don't smoke or drink.

CROFFORD

Good for you.

TONY

You're just an old curmudgeon.

CROFFORD

I'm a realist. You're in the real world now Tony, you'll learn quickly that it's tough to be an idealist *and* a realist. And this is a real job. You have to make the choice as to which world you want to live in, the real or the ideal? And my advice to you is to choose the real world. Expectation only leads to resentment.

TONY

So you're saying that if I want to live in the real world, I have to forget all of my ideals?

CROFFORD

Ignorance is bliss. You have to decide if you want to live in a pretend world that you *think* you have the power to change, or in the real world, where you quickly realize you have little, if any effect on anything.

TONY

Why do I have to choose?

Crofford starts to answer, but realizes he doesn't have one.

CROFFORD

Another piece of advice; try to be a little more discreet with the binoculars. You stick-out with that vest too. You look like you're about to pull a raid.

TONY

What am I supposed to do, get shot and killed?

CROFFORD

Who do you expect to shoot at you?

TONY

Anyone, anytime, anywhere.

CROFFORD

Remember Tony, real versus ideal. Living in one world means you get killed in the other.

(MORE)

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

If we're ever in a fire-fight and you start twirling your guns around like you're in some old Western, I think I just might put you out of your misery myself.

TONY

That's reassuring.

A beat.

TONY (CONT'D)

So what about your old partner then? You said he wasn't a violent guy either.

CROFFORD

He wasn't and that's why this entire thing stinks to me. And even if Landry did have some secret vendetta against Ethan or his family, he wouldn't have been so sloppy about how we went about it. He was a pacifist, but if he was burning to kill someone, he wouldn't just walk in the front door without gloves or a mask. He wouldn't have let himself get killed while wearing his badge. Why would he even take his badge? Unless he was forced to do it. Blackmailed into doing it for someone else.

Suddenly, a woman's voice comes crackling over the radio.

DIANE (O.S.)

John?

Crofford grabs the handheld and lifts it to his mouth.

CROFFORD

Yeah Diane, go ahead.

DIANE (O.S.)

John, that Agent was asking for you again. He says it's urgent. What am I supposed to keep telling him? It's difficult to lie to his face.

Crofford sighs, turns to Tony then speaks into the receiver.

CROFFORD

No matter how symmetrical they manage to slick their hair, we're still living in a democracy.

DIANE (O.S.)

So what should I tell him the next time he shows up?

CROFFORD

(unsettled) Shows up?! He was down at the station?!

DIANE (O.S.)

He just left my desk.

CROFFORD

(sighing) Don't worry, just tell him to call me directly.

DIANE (O.S.)

Be careful John.

John holsters the walkie-talkie receiver.

TONY

What's that all about?

CROFFORD

This prick, Smith, from the Agency.

TONY

(excited) No shit, an Agent? Those guys are like super spooks.

CROFFORD

They're spooky alright, but don't get so excited. If an Agent is this aggressive, it's not a good sign. It's easy to accept that they're there, but once you encounter one for real something changes. It's hard to explain.

TONY

You're scared of The Agency?

CROFFORD

It's much deeper than that. You can't see them, but you sure as hell can sense them. It's almost as if they want you to know they're there, without actually showing you that they are.

TONY

Cigarettes and superstition. I was seriously misinformed about you.

CROFFORD

Yeah, well, whatever The Agency is, they're more involved than any of us realize. They get more and more involved in the case everyday. This is the third time Smith's tried to get in touch with me, but the first time he's actually showed up at the precinct. He's got another thing coming if he thinks he can take over this case from me.

Tony takes a casual glance to his right and notices Agent Smith standing eerily still, staring at the Crown Victoria.

TONY

Oh shit!

CROFFORD

What?

Tony points to his right, about thirty feet ahead of the car.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

(shocked) Where the hell did he come from? How did he find us?

TONY

You're right, he *is* terrifying.

CROFFORD

The guy's relentless. He's like an algorithm.

TONY

Wasn't he just at the station?

CROFFORD

That's twenty blocks away, in rush hour traffic. He'd have to be travelling at the speed of light. Shit, if he knows we're here, then he must know Ethan's inside.

Suddenly, Smith begins to walk to the driver's side window.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

Afternoon Smith.

SMITH

Good afternoon gentlemen.

CROFFORD

I just got a call that you were at the station. You move around fast.

SMITH

(emotionless) Shortcuts detective.

CROFFORD

Even in gridlock?

SMITH

Especially in gridlock. Tell me detective, is it true that you are aware of Ethan Ellis's whereabouts?

CROFFORD

The kid from the triple homicide?

SMITH

Yes, the same case involving the murder of your former partner.

CROFFORD

Not since we cleared him as a suspect, why?

SMITH

It's an internal investigation.

CROFFORD

I wish I could help you, but I have nothing. He sold his parents' house and disappeared.

SMITH

I would presume that since he was the only witness to your partner's murder, you may have kept an ongoing relationship.

CROFFORD

We got everything out of him we could. He claims he blacked out for hours and doesn't remember anything until being woken up by the housekeeper the next morning.

Smith bends down and peers at Tony.

SMITH

And you?

TONY

No, nothing. I was only assigned to this car a few weeks ago.

CROFFORD

I'm not in any trouble, am I?

SMITH

No. We just wish to speak with Mr. Ellis. He's a very tough individual to locate.

CROFFORD

You guys don't usually seem to have any problems finding people.

SMITH

I suppose it's possible to hide within the system. The Agency isn't perfect, yet. Until we fix the bugs, we need to rely on a more local source of intelligence.

Suddenly, a black Jaguar XJ6 pulls up behind Smith.

TONY

If you do happen to hear anything, don't hesitate to call.

Smith hands Crofford a business card. It reads: "Agent Smith. The Agency. (416) 222-3333.

SMITH

By the way detective, what are you doing here?

CROFFORD

Showing the kid the ropes. Introducing him to my contacts.

The passenger door of the Jag pops open behind Smith.

SMITH

(dryly) Don't hesitate to call.

Smith turns and gets in the Jaguar and it pulls away.

CROFFORD

Something's not right with that guy. Any of them. You have to be a certain breed to be an Agent.

TONY

What's with the classic Jaguar?

CROFFORD

Where the do they recruit these
guys from? I've been a detective
for twenty years and I've never
heard of a recruiting program.

Crofford pulls out a cigarette and lights it.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

Don't even say it. This is my last
one.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, RONG'S APARTMENT FLAT - MORNING

Rong's Mother stares at her newly vocal son in shock.

RONG

The arrow of time is directionless.
Entropy has failed. There's never
been a beginning and there will
never be an end. Only a wheel
inside a wheel inside a wheel...

Suddenly, Rong's Father stumbles out of the kitchenette and
begins advancing towards his family, wielding a rusted,
carbon steel chef's knife in his right hand.

RONG (CONT'D)

(whispering) None of the history of
the system matters.

Rong's Mother watches her approaching husband with fear.

RONG'S MOTHER

You're insane. Get away from us.

RONG'S FATHER

It's not you I'm after, but if I
have to cut through you to get to
him, then so be it.

RONG'S MOTHER

You would murder your own son
because he isn't symmetrical?

RONG

I can rewind The Matrix.

RONG'S FATHER

For all the order in the universe,
there is an equal amount of chaos.
Perfect symmetry begets perfect
harmony. But a crooked skeleton
and a fruitless mind attracts an
abundance of bad chi and a shortage
good.

RONG'S MOTHER

No, it's you that brings the
negative energy. You're a curse.

Without warning, her husband backhands her across her face.

RONG'S FATHER

From your crooked womb came this
crooked spawn. Everything flows.
Without a current, you have chaos.
And there's always friction between
moving parts! As always, you fail
to grasp the importance of
equilibrium. There is always a
loss of energy. It's not up to us
to create chi, but rather, simply
to conserve and promote it. We are
subservient to the universal flow
of energy, but that doesn't mean we
have to be ignorant of it. Voltage
is present or absent. Current is
flowing or not flowing. A magnetic
field is in either one direction or
the other. Civilizations depend on
currents. Water, wind,
electricity; they all follow a
code. Symmetry is a universal law.
If disproportion and asymmetry
won't voluntarily be rectified,
then they will have to be forcibly
removed.

He bends down, picks Rong out of his mother's lap and slams
him to the floor, rendering him unconscious once more.
Rong's Mother is semi-conscious from being smacked across her
face. Helpless, she watches as her husband gently teases the
rusty blade against Rong's jugular.

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

To think that I bothered waiting
fifteen years, each one worse than
the last.

(MORE)

RONG'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Each one marking the onset of another ailment, another impediment, another obstacle to this household obtaining perfect chi.

Suddenly, the two chimes hanging near the front door begin to BONG and BLOONG. Rong's Father snaps his head to the left to inspect the chimes, but within seconds, the chimes stop dead, as if they've never moved once in their life. Then, he feels a tug from the knife and turning back to look, immediately realizes that his knife has somehow fastened itself to Rong's neck, as if held in place by a magnetic attraction. He tries to yank it away with no luck. Suddenly, the wind chimes CLONG to life. Then, every metallic object in the apartment begins to feel attracted to Rong, flying from drawers and shelves to attach themselves to him. Above, light bulbs burst and the smoke detector activates in a whining BEEP.

RONG'S MOTHER

Was this predetermined? Was this chaos pre-determined?

Rong's father is speechless. Dishes start to explode out of cabinets and more and more metallic objects are inching their way steadily towards Rong.

RONG'S FATHER

(stupefied) A magnetic field can only be generated by an electrical current.

Suddenly, the whole world is put on pause, and everything freezes. Dishes float in mid-air, Rong's parents are mannequins and the clock on the wall has stopped ticking.

Someone pushes play again and everything collapses to the floor. The shatter causes Rong's eyes to shoot open. The brown and black of his irises and pupils have been supplanted by two, mercurial orbs.

RONG

Everything's electricity...

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Ethan is on his bed in a state of nothingness. His eyes are mercurial silver. On the television, "Little Joe" Cartwright twirls his revolvers around in an old episode of *Bonanza*.

All of a sudden, a send-and-receive CNG fax tone blasts throughout the air. Ethan awakes, stands up and walks towards the mini-fridge, where he finds only a few packages of liquorice. He inspects a package and notices that the vitamin content is nil. He inspects his sallow face in the mirror and decides to buy some vitamins.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - SAME

A sprawling lobby offering a variety of services is a beehive of activity. One of the six elevator doors opens and Ethan steps out, wearing dark sunglasses and a hoodie over his head. Directly across from him is the hotel drugstore. He begins to move towards it cautiously through the busy lobby.

INT. DRUGSTORE - SAME

An attractive, natural blonde in her early twenties stands behind the cashier counter with a scowl. She is THE GIRL. As Ethan steps in, she immediately is drawn to his odd look. She watches as he staggers in aloof and strangely stops dead in his tracks, lost in thought, about five feet from her.

THE GIRL

Are you alright?

ETHAN

Huh? What?

THE GIRL

I asked if you're alright.

ETHAN

Uh, yeah, why?

THE GIRL

I don't know. You kind of look like a mental patient or something.

ETHAN

What's that supposed to mean?

The Girl presses her lips together and hides a smile.

THE GIRL

Well, given the circumstances...

ETHAN

What circumstances?

THE GIRL
These circumstances.

Ethan sighs.

ETHAN
Well, no, I'm not a mental patient.

THE GIRL
Is that the look you're going for?

ETHAN
I'm looking for multi-vitamins.

THE GIRL
Fine. Follow me then.

She steps out from behind the counter and begins to walk down an aisle. Ethan follows closely behind.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)
Are you visiting someone?

ETHAN
Huh?

THE GIRL
Are you visiting someone?

ETHAN
Visiting where?

The Girl stops in front of a shelf packed with vitamins.

THE GIRL
At this hotel... Are you sure
you're not a mental patient?

ETHAN
As far as I know. I've been
staying at the hotel for months.

THE GIRL
So you've just come from your room?

ETHAN
Yeah, why?

THE GIRL
Why are you wearing sunglasses?

ETHAN
What?

THE GIRL
If you've been here for months, how
come I haven't seen you before?

ETHAN
I spend a lot of time in my room.

THE GIRL
Alone?

ETHAN
Yes.

Awkward pause.

THE GIRL
Well, here are the vitamins. What
kind were you looking for?

ETHAN
Multi, I think.

THE GIRL
That narrows it down a little.

She smiles and Ethan glances down awkwardly at her jeans.

ETHAN
Those are tight jeans for such a
mobile job.

The girl instantly blushes and hides another smile.

THE GIRL
Well, I guess I like to wear nice
clothes, even at work.

ETHAN
I see.

She giggles, this time unsuccessfully hiding her smile.

THE GIRL
Well, there are plenty of multi-
vitamins, I think we can rule out
Women's Active Mind and Body.

Ethan stands all of a sudden in a haze of nothingness.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)
Hey, do you want my help or not?

ETHAN
Who?

THE GIRL

What?

ETHAN

Do you have an accent?

THE GIRL

Uh, yes.

ETHAN

Which kind?

THE GIRL

English.

ETHAN

From England?

THE GIRL

Yes, you're quick, aren't you?

ETHAN

Are you being sarcastic?

THE GIRL

Of course not.

She pivots right, spots something and takes it off the shelf.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

How about this? It's for the heart.

ETHAN

Sure, why not?

The Girl giggles once more, not attempting to hide it. They walk back to the cashier counter so Ethan can pay. Once again, Ethan suddenly falls into a trance of nothingness.

THE GIRL

Um, are you going to pay for that or just stand there all day?

ETHAN

Sorry, I kind of lost myself there.

THE GIRL

You're found now?

ETHAN

No, not really.

THE GIRL

Well, good luck with that.

ETHAN

Yeah, thanks.

THE GIRL

Maybe if you weren't hiding so much, you could actually find your way.

ETHAN

What do you mean *hiding*?

THE GIRL

You're wearing a hood and sunglasses for starters. Not to mention you keep looking over your shoulder like some escaped convict.

ETHAN

I really come across like that?

THE GIRL

You look kind of like a lunatic.

ETHAN

No I don't!

An awkward silence. The Girl rolls her eyes.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

...Do I?

The Girl scans the vitamins passed the infrared scanner.

THE GIRL

I assume you don't need a bag.

ETHAN

No.

THE GIRL

Well, see you in a month then.

ETHAN

What?

THE GIRL

That's a month's worth of vitamins.

Ethan awkwardly exits the drug store and moves towards the elevators, where after a short wait, he enters an open car. As the doors begin to close, Ethan watches The Girl across the lobby. At the last second, she looks back at him.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE

Ethan is in a panic as he stumbles in and immediately, he makes for the bedroom. Once there, he hastily organizes a syringe of freshly cooked heroin and just as he is about to inject it, his bedside phone rings. He picks up the receiver.

ETHAN

Hello?

RICHARD (O.S.)

It's me.

ETHAN

It usually is.

RICHARD (O.S.)

Have you thought about our little talk earlier?

ETHAN

Yeah, I have...

RICHARD

...And?

ETHAN

We should meet...

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - REAL WORLD

Richard is wearing a headset and sitting in his wheelchair.

RICHARD

That's all I need to hear.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Okay. Now what?

RICHARD

Let's meet somewhere different.
We're getting repetitive.

ETHAN

Where were you thinking?

RICHARD (O.S.)
Do you know the doughnut shop at
the corner of Bay and Adelaide?

ETHAN
The Rabbit Hole, that dingy dive?

RICHARD
Yes. I'll pick you up out front.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Alright. What time?

RICHARD
How's seven-thirty?

ETHAN
Alright.

Ethan scribbles the location and time on a note pad beside
his bed: 7:30, *Bay and Adelaide*.

RICHARD
Ethan?

ETHAN
Yeah?

RICHARD
Be careful.

ETHAN
Yeah.

The line clicks dead and immediately, Ethan picks up the
syringe and injects it between his big and index toes.
Instantly, he falls into bliss before the inevitable CNG send-
and-receive fax tone reverberates throughout the suite.
Ethan's eye lids flap open to reveal quicksilver pupils.

Blackout.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE REAL WORLD - PRESENT DAY

Violent sandstorms devastate the barren landscape.

INT. KITCHEN TENT, ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Five large tents line the unused subway platform. Inside the largest one, some sort of food is cooking on a makeshift stove. Zoe, Richard and Lance are inside.

LANCE

The Agency worries me. They're changing, rapidly. They used to just be a regulator but now they seem to be maliciously wiping-out even the smallest potential threats.

ZOE

It's Moore's Law. Technology becomes smaller and faster every sixteen months.

RICHARD

The evolution of the robots. Except the only difference between us and them is that we're at the mercy of evolution. The robots can speed up or slow down how fast they evolve at will. They can make drastic changes in one generation, and a generation could be as short as a few days apart, even only hours apart. It all depends on how fast they can get the new design off of the assembly line.

A beat.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

So how long of a window do we have tonight, Lance?

LANCE

I don't know. Two hours, tops. If the winds die down, then we'll have at least an hour, but I wouldn't bet on any more than two.

ZOE

And our next window is in a month?

Lance and Richard nod.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Ian's right. I don't think I can take another four weeks of the anxiety.

(MORE)

ZOE (CONT'D)

Nor do I have the feeling that
Ethan will last more than a month
himself.

RICHARD

And if you lose the signal while
we're inside?

LANCE

As far as I know, nothing. There's
just nothing. Your mind ceases to
exist and here in the real world,
your body shuts down and dies.
While you're plugged in, your brain
waves are flowing through the air
and linking up with the program.
Electromagnetic radiation carries
information at the speed of light,
but it needs information to do so.

The tent is silent for a moment and Ian saunters in.

IAN

Hey, should I round up the veggies?

RICHARD

Danny's already started, but sure.

IAN

Right.

Ian exits the tent.

RICHARD

He doesn't look good.

ZOE

What about what we talked about?

RICHARD

Amphetamines? Battle stimulants?

ZOE

Can you write a program to mimic a
drug if the user is conscious that
the effects and their environment
aren't real?

LANCE

It's an executable file. It would
be like taking a drug in real life
and trying to hinder it by telling
your brain not to accept it.

(MORE)

LANCE (CONT'D)

Ian will know the sensation isn't real inside The Matrix, but that won't stop him from feeling the effects.

RICHARD

Chemicals in your brain or digital algorithms in your subconscious, it's all the same.

ZOE

What about us? Just in case.

LANCE

Sure, I'll write three files then.

ZOE

Why not just load it from here?

LANCE

It's not possible, at least not yet. Inserting and removing foreign objects like you guys or cars or mobile phones, that's relatively easy, but manipulating someone's actual cognitive faculties, well, I wouldn't even know where to begin. If I did, I would just upload you guys with Kung Fu programs and turn you into deadly weapons yourselves. The stimulants will have to be ingested once you are firmly inside The Program, just like how Ethan has been absorbing the cloaking code through the heroin. It has to be taken into the virtual bloodstream. I'll cut it with half instant release and half extended release so it'll be pulsing through your bloodstream the entire time.

RICHARD

What about some kind of tablet form? In case we need to get it inside Ethan quickly?

LANCE

I can do that.

CUT TO:

INT. GREENHOUSE TENT - SAME

DANNY, a scrawny, young man with no socket in the back of his head picks planted fruits and vegetables from a row of beds. Ian stands beside him with a socket in the back of his head.

DANNY

You're going in tonight then?

IAN

(stoic) Yeah.

DANNY

What's it feel like?

IAN

No too different really.

DANNY

What about plugging in?

IAN

Different every time. Sometimes it takes longer to load than others, sometimes there's lag, and sometimes you never even connect.

DANNY

I heard that the robots hijack the electrical currents in our brains. So that when you think you're moving your leg, you're actually just moving your virtual leg inside the Matrix, and in the real world, the socket just sucks up the power from your brain activity while your real muscles never receive their commands.

Ian listens politely, but stays silent. Danny looks around.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Do you never leave this place?

IAN

Where would I go?

DANNY

Wherever you want. Two years is a long time to be stuck down here.

IAN

Well, when the world looks like an alien prison, the sterility of this place is more than comforting.

Suddenly, Zoe enters the large greenhouse tent.

ZOE

Remember to grab extra spinach. We need as much Vitamin A as we can get tonight. The carotenoids help absorb light energy.

DANNY

That helps?

ZOE

We think the robots steal our energy through the optic nerve.

DANNY

How do people see inside the program if it bypasses their eyes?

ZOE

Visual perception happens in not only the retina but the connecting neural pathways too. Our eyes are just the surface tool of vision. The reality that we construct from our five senses takes place in our minds. The stimulation converts into electrochemical signals which are sent to our cortex. That's why once you're removed from the Matrix, you can't dream anymore.

DANNY

How you know all of this?

ZOE

My dad's a neurologist, remember?

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN TENT, ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

LANCE

The Agency seems to be gaining momentum. They're learning the intricacies of the program.

Zoe, Ian and Danny enter carrying baskets of produce.

IAN

But these programs are made by machines, not humans. How could we ever understand what they think?

LANCE

At its core, The Agency is an executable program. Finite and algorithmic, it limits the Agents themselves as to what they can control. They rely on their Kernel for most commands, but it doesn't execute directly. It relies on a request from an external source before it can execute the application. For them, the Kernel acts as a dispatcher.

RICHARD

The Matrix itself isn't deterministic because at its heart, there are still organic minds making choices inside and those choices are unpredictable as long as they are a result of cause-and-effect and not some pre-planned story line. If they didn't at least have the illusion of choice, I think it's safe to say most battery bodies would reject the false world that the robots are projecting in their minds.

ZOE

People should either be caressed or crushed. If you only injure them, they'll be avenged. If you *cripple* them, there's nothing they can do.

RICHARD

The Agency is the Matrix's immune system from outside threats.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SKYLINE, THE MATRIX - DUSK

The darkening city swells with noise and neon light.

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (PARKED) - SAME

CROFFORD

I'm starting to think you're too
fidgety to be a detective.

Crofford looks ahead and gets no reply from Tony.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

Eh? What do you think?

Tony remains silent and Crofford turns to face him.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)

Are you awake or...

TONY

...Now *that's* spooky.

Crofford lifts his head and follows Tony's gaze out the windshield. The surreal sight of Smith and four Associate Agents standing in a row instantly changes the mood.

CROFFORD

This can't be good.

Suddenly, the Agents begin to move towards the car.

TONY

Here they come.

Crofford lowers his window. They approach the Crown Victoria.

CROFFORD

Twice in one day, what a pleasure.

SMITH

(dryly) The pleasure is all mine.

CROFFORD

What can I do for you gentlemen?

SMITH

Excuse my persistence, but I'm here
because of Mr. Ellis's whereabouts.

CROFFORD

Listen, Smith, I told you, I have
no idea where the kid is. Once we
took him off our list of suspects,
that was it, he was gone.

SMITH

Unfortunately, detective, I don't have time for pleasantries. I'm running out of time and the whereabouts of Mr. Ellis are of paramount importance to The Agency.

CROFFORD

If I even had an inkling that Ethan was responsible for my partner's murder, I'd know every step he took, but I don't have that inkling. Why do you guys care so much if he's already been cleared? Do you know something I don't?

SMITH

You know, I too was somewhat of a detective before I became an agent. I used to identify threats, invent solutions and pass my diagnostics report on to my superiors. And I was rather efficient. In fact, all of us were very efficient in our past lives. That's why we were selected to represent The Agency. Which is precisely the reason I'm here today. You see detective, for the first time in my career, I can't seem to be able to do my job. I'm unable to complete my task and it's grinding my gears to a point where it's almost unbearable.

CROFFORD

I see. Well, what have you determined about his whereabouts then? Do you think he's still in the country?

SMITH

I'm not amused detective.

CROFFORD

What's that supposed to mean?

SMITH

It means I know you're lying.

CROFFORD

What gives you that impression?

SMITH

If he were staying in this hotel,
and you knew so, you'd pass on that
information to us, would you not?

CROFFORD

If you believe he's in there, then
just ask them for his room number.

SMITH

Tell me, detective, your wife is a
civil servant too, correct?

CROFFORD

She's a high-school teacher, why?

SMITH

Because society looks down on
hardened detectives who beat their
wives after they find out that
she'd been having an affair with a
student in her class.

CROFFORD

The hell are you talking about?

SMITH

I'm making it clear that The
Agency... I will stop at nothing
until my task is complete.
Information subordinates truth
detective, and The Agency controls
information.

Crofford is stunned and speechless.

SMITH (CONT'D)

The room number detective...

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DUSK

From just inside the Pharma-One, The Girl watches as five men
in slick suits and slicked back hair march through the
revolving doors and towards the elevators. The instant they
arrive, an empty car dings and they enter. She shivers.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Three rocking chairs seat Richard, Zoe and Ian respectively. Above, Lance and Danny stand perched over them, inspecting the thick cables that run from the ground into the sockets in the back of their heads. Ian is the last of the three to be connected. Unlike the other two, he's still conscious, and he watches as their bodies begin to writhe and convulse.

LANCE

They're just loading the packets
and parsing the loading room. So
far so good. Your turn buddy.

Ian doesn't break eye contact, remaining silent.

LANCE (CONT'D)

Take the pills the moment you're
inside and you'll be peaking by the
time you reach your destination.

IAN

Just stick that thing in my head
before I change my mind.

In one motion, Lance locks the jack into his skull.

CUT TO:

INT. BRICK ROOM

Richard and Zoe stand next to an aluminum table in a windowless, brick room. Three, empty, black duffel bags are atop the table and various items surround them. Richard curiously picks up a heavy pistol and inspects it.

ZOE

It's a Five-seven, not much recoil.
I figured it would be better than
that dinky Ruger you usually take.

RICHARD

Let's hope I don't have to use it.

Suddenly, Ian materializes out of thin air beside them.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Everything alright back there?

IAN

(pensively) Yeah, fine.

He walks to the table and picks up a pill-bottle.

IAN (CONT'D)

These them?

RICHARD

First thing you do when you get inside is take them, got it?

IAN

Yeah. They're a computer program right? That's what Lance said.

RICHARD

And right now, so are you.

Zoe picks up an odd looking sub-machine gun from the table.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What is that?

ZOE

Hardly any recoil.

RICHARD

And you know how to use it?

ZOE

It's not hard. Point and pull.

RICHARD

I hope you won't have to use it, any of us.

Ian picks up his own sub-machine gun from the table.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We had a two-hour maximum as of nine minutes ago. We're aiming for less than an hour, in-and-out.

Richard picks up a touch-screen phone and cycles through it.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Lance programmed everything into our phones. Directions, addresses, operator number and most importantly, each other's numbers. If any time, we can't reach one another, we assume something is wrong and immediately call Lance. When you're ready to exit, call him and he'll get you a hard-line. We take these pills once we're inside and they'll kick in immediately.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

They'll boost our confidence and
courage, but don't get too cocky.

Richard picks up his bag. The other two follow suit.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We should move. You sure you're
okay, Ian?

IAN

I've been through worse with you.

ZOE

We were real people then. Now
we're just billions of micro on/off
switches in some distant mainframe.

Richard loops the bag handle around his shoulder.

RICHARD

See you in an hour?

Ian doesn't hear him. He's rubbing the smooth curve of back
of his head where there is now no occipital socket installed.

ZOE

Ian?

IAN

(startled) Yeah an hour. Got it.

Richard lifts his head and addresses the room.

RICHARD

Okay, Lance. Turn on, tune in.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Danny sits on a stool and watches over the three of them.
Behind him, Lance sits facing his computer terminal.

LANCE

How do they look?

Danny looks at the three, almost lifeless bodies below him.

DANNY

Uh, good, I guess.

LANCE

Good enough for me.

Without looking, he jabs his finger down onto an *enter* key.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETCAR YARD - NIGHT

A dark, cold, November night. Sleeping streetcars abound.

INT. STREETCAR - SAME

The three virtual tourists vanish from the brick room instantly, but only Zoe and Richard materialize inside the antiquated streetcar. Immediately they duck down and begin to cautiously inspect their surroundings.

EXT. STREETCAR YARD - SAME

Scurrying out of the streetcar, the two of them make their way to a fence at the end of the yard. Quickly, Zoe snaps the chain-link with clippers and once cut, opens a hole wide enough to duck through. A black Mercedes sits below a light standard. The four-ways flash and it unlocks.

CUT TO:

EXT. KOWLOON CITY, HONG KONG - MID-MORNING.

The streets of the slums are alive with merchants and cars.

INT. FISH STORE - SAME

An elderly woman shuffles around the grimy, dark interior. She lifts a massive knife and brings it down upon a large, dead fish. After repeating this twice, she is horrified when a large hand wraps around her wrist as she lifts it over her head a third time, stopping her from chopping down. Suddenly, the blade drops to the floor and she falls unconscious. Ian lowers her sleeping body to the ground and unsheathes his handgun. Suddenly, he is overcome with panic. He scrambles for the pill bottle in his bag, pops the top, drops them and swallows. He digs his phone out of his pocket and pushes send. "Calling: Lance" appears on the screen.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION

A strobe light begins to flash and Lance answers the call.

LANCE
Ian?

IAN
(breathing heavily) I'm in.

LANCE
Everything okay?

IAN
Yeah. We're good. How long does
it take for these pills to kick in?

LANCE
Shouldn't be long now.

IAN
Okay, where to?

LANCE
Through the back door to your left.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ALLEY - SAME

A heavy, steel door opens. Ian steps outside. He's panicked.

IAN
How long until they kick in?

LANCE (O.S.)
Are you alright or what? Your
heart rate is really speeding up.

Ian stands silently, seemingly lost in a daze.

LANCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ian? Ian? You there? Ian?

Suddenly, Ian's eyes dart open with confidence. He smiles.

IAN
(steadfast) I'm ready. Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

LANCE

On your left, the third garage down
the alley. It should be green.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ALLEY - SAME

Ian walks up to a closed, green, garage door.

IAN

I'm here.

LANCE (O.S.)

Alright, it's inside. Use the keys
I gave you. The brass one.

IAN

I hope there's something fast in
there. I'm feeling speedy.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

LANCE

You'll get around quickly.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK ALLEY - SAME

Ian opens the door and is surprised to see a Vespa scooter.

IAN

What the hell is this thing?

LANCE (O.S.)

Trust me. This is the fastest
vehicle in Hong Kong traffic. You
didn't expect me to give you a
Ferrari did you?

IAN

Sometime exciting maybe at least...

LANCE (O.S.)
You'll get around faster, quieter.
You don't want to be killed because
you're stuck in gridlock.

IAN
Fine. Where am I taking this thing?

Ian sits down on the scooter and turns on the ignition.

LANCE (O.S.)
Use the GPS on the phone, I've
mapped out your route. Once you get
there, hold tight and keep hidden.

IAN
Got it.

LANCE (O.S.)
Good luck.

Ian ends the call and drives the scooter out into the world.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DUSK

The black Mercedes glides along the misty, city roads.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - SAME

Richard pilots the car as Zoe bites her nails beside him.

RICHARD
I'd tell you to stop biting your
nails but, they're not real.

ZOE
Virtual or not, it's a bad habit.

RICHARD
Nervous?

ZOE
Of course, you?

RICHARD
Where are those amphetamines?

ZOE
Oh God, I almost forgot.

She reaches back into a bag and pulls out a pill bottle.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Here.

RICHARD

Thanks.

Richard pulls something out of his interior jacket pocket.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Here, hold on to these. They're the quick acting cloaking program. It's like the code in the heroin, but not as stable because it's not injected into the bloodstream.

ZOE

Ethan's still cloaked though, isn't he? He injects himself everyday.

RICHARD

He is, but if our plan goes to hell and an Agent makes eye contact with him somehow, we'll need to move fast or they'll annex his body before we know what hit us.

ZOE

You've never had a problem before.

RICHARD

We've never extracted someone before. You can't think in terms of analog inside The Matrix. You have to learn to think digitally. You have to look a few moves ahead and evaluate a possible outcome. Think like an algorithm. Thinking organically inside the Matrix is like answering a math question with an adjective. The Agents are algorithms and as self-aware algorithms, they fight for their own survival through a series of sequential steps, minimizing their loses while maximizing their gain. They'll give up nearly every positional advantage they have in order to move on to the next step. Simple objective, but complex executions.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

The robots can't set a real objective the way a human does, but instead they examine a thousand possibilities.

ZOE

How do we compete with that?

RICHARD

Algorithms move sequentially. The mind of a computer always moves in order, their *next* move being based off their *last* move, *your* last move, *their* future moves and *your* future moves. So convince them you're doing one thing, let them plan for it and then do the exact opposite. Algorithmic thought, regardless of how systematic and finitely accurate, doesn't always produce the desired endgame.

ZOE

And that's when we attack?

RICHARD

No, that's when we run.

The Mercedes pulls into a gas station closed for the night and cuts the engine. Across the street, *Rabbit Hole Donuts* glares in neon-green letting above a grimy coffee shop. Kitty-corner to that is a large construction site with vehicles and materials, including a yellow, CAT 428 backhoe, lying dormant. Richard glances down at his watch then up at the coffee shop.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We're early.

ZOE

Do you think he'll agree to come?

RICHARD

It doesn't matter.

ZOE

What does that mean?

RICHARD

We're unplugging him regardless.

ZOE

You can't just yank a mind unwillingly from The Program.

(MORE)

ZOE (CONT'D)

Waking-up in the real world without warning would drive a mind insane.

Richard lights a cigarillo, takes a long drag and exhales.

RICHARD

We have to tell him, he has to know one way or another. If we don't kill him, The Agency will.

ZOE

What if he's still addicted to heroin once we unplug him? How are we supposed to deal with that?

RICHARD

Shock treatment.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROADS - MIDDAY

A 2013, Inka Orange, BMW M3 GTS rips down the right side of the narrow, tree ensconced, country highway.

INT. BMW E92 M3 GTS (MOVING) - SAME

Ethan is behind the wheel and he looks different, much different, as if from the depths of another dimension of space and time.

Suddenly, a massive concrete wall, twenty-feet tall, appears ahead on the horizon and Ethan shifts into sixth. Unbuckling his seat belt, Ethan floors the gas pedal as he approaches the lurking monolith. In the seconds before the car collides with the wall and Ethan is ejected through the windshield, he smiles and whispers to himself.

ETHAN

Rewind and hopscotch...

In a crumpling shock wave, the M3's hood fuses with the wall, flinging Ethan from his seat and through the windshield.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM - DUSK

Ethan sits catatonic at his desk, the heroin and cloaking program taking their toll on his consciousness.

Suddenly, a loud CNG fax tone resonates throughout the air and Ethan snaps out of his nothingness. Pulling the syringe from his bi-cep, He glances at the clock. It reads 7:22.

ETHAN

Shit!

Jumping up, he grabs his hoodie and sunglasses as he moves into the living room of the suite, hesitating a second before opening the front door and stepping out into the hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR CAR - SAME

Smith and his four Associate Agents stand awkwardly inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL, HALLWAY - SAME

Wearing sunglasses, Ethan closes his suite door and begins to walk down the hall towards a corner leading to the elevators.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR BAY - SAME

A loud DING is followed by the sliding back of elevator doors. Smith and his Associates exit the car and begin to turn towards the hallway leading to Ethan's suite when the elevator next to them DINGS and out walk a family of nine.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Ethan rounds the corner and begins to walk towards the elevator bay when he's stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of five men in dark suits. Instantly, he's taken aback as a flash of the memory from that night in his parent's bathroom explodes through his consciousness.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR BAY - SAME

Smith and his Associates quickly become engulfed by three small children, a grandmother and grandfather, two parents and an aunt and uncle. It's then that Smith happens to look up and down the hall and spots Ethan staring back at him shocked. His sunglasses make Smith unable to make eye contact with Ethan, and as a result, cannot manipulate him.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Ethan doesn't hesitate to run. In fact, it's a subconscious reflex that snaps him out of his initial shock. He bolts towards his suite but doesn't slow down as he passes it on the way to the end of the hallway and the utility stairwell.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR BAY - SAME

Smith and his Associates cringe and scowl as they aggressively push their way through the family and begin to briskly walk in unison towards his suite.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - SAME

Ethan skips three steps at a time as he bounds down towards the ground floor, but on the first landing, he hits the wall so hard with his shoulder that his sunglasses fall off.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE - SAME

Dead calm, and then suddenly, the front door explodes off of its hinges and shatters into fragments across the living room. Smith and his Associates enter the dark suite.

SMITH

Scan it.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - SAME

Ethan passes a floor every three seconds. He passes the tenth floor on his way to street level. He stops for a second and glances up the stairs; nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM - SAME

Smith picks up a used syringe from the desk.

SMITH

What *is* this? Why can't I see where he is inside the program? I can smell him on the walls yet he remains a wraith. If there is not complete order inside The Matrix, there might as well be chaos.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - SAME

Ethan comes barreling out of the ground floor stairwell and moves quickly towards the revolving doors in the lobby and pushes. Suddenly, as he's inches away from the outside, the door jams. Ethan looks to his left and sees The Girl. She tries to say something through the glass but it's too thick for him to hear and she motions for him to revolve around and rendezvous with her outside on the front steps.

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE - SAME

THE GIRL

You've unzipped yourself.

ETHAN

Huh?

He looks back into the lobby; no sign of the suited men.

THE GIRL

I mean, I can actually see you. You're not wearing your sunglasses and you've unzipped your hood.

Ethan hadn't realized he lost his sunglasses.

ETHAN

They must have fallen off.

She giggles.

THE GIRL
And you didn't notice?

ETHAN
I guess not, no.

Ethan once again checks behind him; no sign of them.

THE GIRL
Well, it's nice to see your eyes.
I was beginning to think you were a
robot under all of that, especially
since you had come from inside and
were going back to your room. It's
bright in the pharmacy, but most
people can deal with it without
sunglasses and a hood.

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (PARKED) - SAME

Crofford and Tony sit idly before Tony happens to glance over
at the hotel entrance and spots Ethan.

TONY
It's him!

Crofford snaps his head to his left.

CROFFORD
So it is. And he's made a friend.

TONY
Now what?

CROFFORD
That's up to him.

TONY
What about Smith?

CROFFORD
Forget Smith. He got what he
wanted out of me, I can't be
accused of anything now. Sometimes
fate decides the outcome, not rank.

TONY
We still have nothing to go on.

CROFFORD

He rarely leaves his room,
something's definitely up.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S HOTEL - SAME

THE GIRL

So, you're actually going somewhere
outside of the hotel?

ETHAN

Uh, yeah.

THE GIRL

Oh, well that's exciting!

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE - SAME

While the Associates methodically tear Ethan's room to shreds, looking for anything that can answer their questions, Smith still hovers over the heroin paraphernalia on the desk.

SMITH

The less discordance the system
experiences, the less chance it has
to be corrupted. A confused mind
is a dangerous mind inside The
Matrix. All is vanity.

CUT TO:

EXT. KOWLOON CITY, HONG KONG - MID-MORNING

Ian follows the map on his smart-phone until he's about a block away. Pulling his scooter off to the side, he leans it against a wall beside a busy produce stand.

CUT TO:

INT. ETHAN'S HOTEL SUITE, LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Smith looks around and grinds his teeth.

SMITH

There must be something.

Smith looks back down at the syringe.

SMITH (CONT'D)

It seems out friend has a nasty little habit. Someone needs to be supplying him with the drugs. They'd need to be in communication frequently.

Smith begins walking around the bedroom before spotting something on the bedside table. He picks it up and reads 7:30, *Bay and Adelaide*. Looking at the digital clock below him, Smith reads 7:38. Instantaneously Smith and his Associates lift their left hands up to their left ears and press in on their earpieces in unison.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S HOTEL - LATE DUSK

THE GIRL

So where are you off to?

ETHAN

Well...

Suddenly, Ethan gags, wretches and keels over on the ground.

THE GIRL

(horrified) What's wrong?

Ethan dry heaves twice before coughing up a mercurial liquid.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

(worried) Oh God, are you alright? What is that?

She kneels down beside him without thinking twice.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

Did you drink a thermometer or something? Should I call an ambulance?

Ethan slowly rises to his feet. She follows suit.

ETHAN

No, I'm alright thanks. I'm fine.

THE GIRL

I don't think throwing up mercury is an indication of good health.

ETHAN

I don't think that's mercury.

Ethan casually glances back into the lobby and is horrified to spot the five suited men stepping out of an elevator.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Oh Jesus!

THE GIRL

(electrified) What?

ETHAN

(frantic) Would you believe me if I told you that five men in slick suits and slick hair are trying to assassinate me?

THE GIRL

Actually, yes, I would.

Ethan's shocked.

ETHAN

Really? You would?

THE GIRL

I think I saw them earlier walk in.

Ethan quickly starts to gain some spirit.

ETHAN

Yeah, that's them. I barely got away, but they're here now, in the lobby. We can't stay here.

THE GIRL

(taken aback) We?

ETHAN

What's the fastest way to get to Bay and Adelaide?

THE GIRL

In rush hour? Probably underground through the PATH system is best.

ETHAN

Where's the nearest entrance?

THE GIRL

Inside the lobby, downstairs.

ETHAN

No, not back in there. Somewhere not here. Somewhere close, but not here. Those men in suits, trying to kill me? They're going to be outside in twenty seconds.

THE GIRL

Underneath *Commerce Plaza*. That tower right there...

She points to a massive, black skyscraper.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

The escalator connects to the PATH.

Ethan grabs her hand and begins to pull her with him.

ETHAN

Show me.

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (PARKED) - SAME

Crofford and Tony watch the two of them run across the road.

CROFFORD

(enthusiastically) Here we go!

TONY

(revved up) Yeah baby!

Crofford pulls out of the parking spot and the Crown Victoria squeezes into the gridlock and comes to a complete stop.

CROFFORD

Great. This isn't going to work. You drive. Get out of this gridlock and I'll radio you and tell you where they're going. There's no point in us both sitting here stuck in traffic.

TONY

Roger!

Crofford gets out and begins chasing after Ethan and The Girl. Ethan looks back and spots him running after them.

ETHAN

Oh god!

THE GIRL

What?

She turns her head to follow his gaze and spots Crofford.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)

Who's *that*?

ETHAN

It's a long story.

Ethan reaches over and snatches her sunglasses.

THE GIRL

Hey!

ETHAN

Sorry, I feel naked without 'em.

As they approach the tower's revolving doors, Ethan gently pushes her in front of him as they walk into the lobby.

CUT TO:

EXT. ETHAN'S HOTEL - SAME

The Agent and his associates have made their way outside. Smith watches as Crofford sprints towards, and then, into the *Commerce Court*. He is intrigued.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMERCE PLAZA - SAME

Ethan and girl stare at each other awkwardly.

ETHAN

Well, I guess goodbye. Thanks for the company over here.

THE GIRL

Yeah, well.

Through the glass facade, Ethan spots Crofford approaching.

ETHAN

I've gotta go.

THE GIRL

Wait! Let me come with you.

ETHAN

What? Why?

THE GIRL

Because I'm bored with reality. If I don't run with you now, I'll just go back to scanning groceries all day, and I know that if I do, I'll regret not going with you, regardless of what happens.

ETHAN

You realize there are men with guns trying to kill me, right?

THE GIRL

I do, so let's stop wasting time.

Instantly, the two of them dart for the escalators down. At the bottom, they find themselves in a food court. Overhead a sign displays the directions to various connecting buildings and spots one pointing toward Bay and Adelaide.

ETHAN

Come on.

They don't notice, but Crofford can see them from the escalator he's riding down and sees where they're going.

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (MOVING) - SAME

Tony has his undercover strobe light flashing on the dashboard but it's completely ineffective in this traffic.

TONY

Get the hell out of the way!

Suddenly a loud beep from the walkie is followed by a voice.

CROFFORD (O.S.)

Tony!

Tony lifts up the receiver.

TONY

Yeah!

CROFFORD (O.S.)

It looks like they're heading north-east.

(MORE)

CROFFORD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 It's hard to tell, the corridor
 they ran down still forks off once
 it hits Yonge street. Just move
 north and stay alert.

TONY
 (enthusiastically) Roger that!

EXT. ETHAN'S HOTEL - SAME

Smith is amused at the fact that Tony is stuck in gridlock.

CUT TO:

INT. PATH SYSTEM - SAME

Ethan and The Girl are moving too fast and it's too busy in
 the corridors to look back. They don't notice that Crofford
 is only about a hundred feet or so behind them. Crofford
 lifts his walkie up to his mouth.

CROFFORD
 Tony!

TONY (O.S.)
 Go ahead.

CROFFORD
 They took a left fork down here in
 the PATH. I have to check the
 signs to figure out where I am.

He looks around until he spots a sign with an arrow.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)
 (frantic) East! They're heading
 East! There's only two places they
 could be going and they're both at
 Bay and Adelaide. That's the
 intersection, got it?

Back at street level, Tony has finally purged the gridlock.

TONY
 Yeah! Got it!

He steps on the gas and tears down a narrow side street.

TONY (CONT'D)
 (screaming to himself) Yeah baby!

CUT TO:

INT. PATH SYSTEM - SAME

Ethan and The Girl glance up at and run by a hanging sign reading "Welcome to the *Bay/Adelaide Centre*"

ETHAN

This is it, *The Rabbit Hole's* only a block away from here.

THE GIRL

That grubby doughnut shop?

ETHAN

Yeah, that's the one.

They reach an up-escalator and hop on. Behind them, still unnoticed, Crofford watches them as he lifts up his radio.

CROFFORD

They're heading to the *Bay/Adelaide Centre*. Where are you?

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (MOVING) - SAME

Tony is stuck at a stoplight on a one-way street.

TONY

I'm stuck on Wellington. I didn't realize it was a one-way.

CROFFORD (O.S.)

Idiot! You're going west? Go East!

TONY

I know. I've got the lights on but it's complete gridlock!

CROFFORD (O.S.)

Christ! Turn around and head back east and tell me when you're here!

CUT TO:

EXT. BAY/ADELAIDE CENTRE - SAME

Ethan and The Girl exit the lobby through revolving doors.

ETHAN

I've never actually been to this place, I've just seen it in passing. Hard to miss such a dump.

THE GIRL

It's north, isn't it?

Ethan frantically tries to get his bearings.

ETHAN

(panicked) This isn't happening.

In the lobby, Crofford spies on them from behind a bush.

THE GIRL

It's north, I know it. I pass it on my way to work when the streetcar breaks down and I walk. Wait, it *is* north. One block, then half a block east. Come on!

This time, *she* grabs his hand and yanks him with her. Behind them, Crofford lifts his radio back up to his mouth.

CROFFORD

They're heading north on Bay! Where the hell are you Tony?!

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (MOVING) - SAME

The light has turned green and Tony's managed to turn around.

TONY

(excited) Be there momentarily!

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME

Approaching an intersection, Ethan and The Girl turn right.

THE GIRL

Down here.

They stop half a block from the neon sign of *The Rabbit Hole*.

ETHAN

Thanks for the help. You saved me.

THE GIRL
Fate I guess.

THE GIRL (CONT'D)
Now what?

ETHAN
Do you still think I'm not insane?

THE GIRL
Somehow, I still do, yeah.

ETHAN
What time is it?

THE GIRL
Ten to eight.

ETHAN
Oh god, come on!

They begin to move forward when a voice yells from behind.

CROFFORD
Ethan!

Ethan and The Girl turn around and face Crofford down the block. Crofford realizes he hasn't thought of his next move.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing?

THE GIRL
Who *is* that?

ETHAN
An idiot. Let's go. Forget him.

They take the last few steps and run into the doughnut shop.

CROFFORD
(into his walkie) Tony!

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES (PARKED) - SAME

Richard and Zoe watch Ethan and The Girl run inside. He glances down at the digital clock on the dashboard: "7:52"

ZOE
Do you believe in fate?

RICHARD

I believe that whatever happened, happened, and that whatever is going to happen, will. And whatever is *happening* is a direct result of the cause and effect of both the past *and* the future. The present is simply the dividing line between then and then. You may be able to rebuild civilization, but you can't un-crack an egg.

CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - SAME

An egg falls and cracks on the linoleum floor. An old rag lands next to it and a withered hand begins to slop it up. It's dark and dingy inside and there are only two other occupants; two homeless men near the front window. Suddenly, the rusted bells above the door begin to ring and Ethan and The Girl burst in. Ethan sees no sign of Richard.

ETHAN

They're not here. We're late.

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES (PARKED) - SAME

RICHARD

Looks like he brought a friend.

ZOE

Another junkie?

RICHARD

If so, she's going to be thoroughly disappointed.

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (MOVING) - SAME

Tony holds his radio receiver to his mouth.

TONY

Almost there! I can see *The Rabbit Hole* sign from here. Three blocks! Yeah Bab...

Before he can finish, Tony begins to convulse and contort and suddenly his body is overtaken by an Associate Agent!

CUT TO:

EXT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - SAME

Crofford sneaks towards the front door but is halted suddenly as a Mercedes approaches, stops around the corner and honks.

CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUT - SAME

Ethan runs to the window at the honk and sees Richard casually get out and wave. Neither he nor Zoe have spotted Crofford lurking only feet from them around the corner. Ethan grabs The Girl's hand and as they step outside, something catches Richard's eye; it's Crofford. He reaches down and pulls out his Glock.

CROFFORD
(frantic) What is this Ethan?!

ETHAN
What are you doing here Crofford?

CROFFORD
You tell me. Who's he?

Inside the Mercedes, behind tinted windows, Zoe watches Crofford nod at her father as he asks the question. He doesn't see her reach behind and unzip her duffel bag.

CROFFORD (CONT'D)
Where are you going Ethan? You
planning on getting in that car?

ETHAN
Are you insane?! I'm not a suspect
anymore, can't you grasp that?

CROFFORD
Don't think I don't really know
what happened that night!

ETHAN
That makes one of us Crofford.

Suddenly, the sound of an approaching speeding car barreling towards them makes them all turn their heads. Crofford raises his radio to his mouth and squeezes in on the button.

CROFFORD

What the hell are you doing you
lunatic?! Slow down!

CUT TO:

INT. CROWN VICTORIA (MOVING) - SAME

The Associate pays no attention to the barking radio voice.

CUT TO:

EXT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - SAME

CROFFORD

What the hell are you doing? Slow
down, you're going to kill us!

THE GIRL

Oh my god...

RICHARD

Ethan, look out!

Just as the Crown Victoria is about to collide with everyone, the sound of a live jackhammer being tossed into an active wood-chipper pierces the airwaves, as a thick chunk of energy suddenly appears in Ethan's right palm. Instantaneously, the orb morphs into a modified AK47 with an attached grenade launcher. Ethan aims barrel and pulls the trigger and with a loud THUNK, it ejects and shatters the windshield before exploding on impact with the Associate's chest. The car immediately veers left and explodes against the far side of the *Rabbit Hole's* facade. Everyone is shocked. Zoe pulls the Kriss Super V out of the bag and rests it on her lap, with the barrel facing out towards the closed, tinted window.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Ethan, get in the...

Suddenly, Crofford's body is annexed by Smith, who immediately draws his Desert Eagle and aims it at Ethan. However, the cackle of a submachine gun spitting bullets through glass is followed by the dull thuds of half a clip from Zoe's Super V being pumped into Smith. Immediately, he collapses, his body morphing into a recently killed Crofford.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Get in. Now!

As they begin to get in the car, Richard watches as the three *The Rabbit Hole* dwellers sinisterly morph into Associates.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Oh Jesus! Get in now!

As the Associates rush to get outside, Ethan and The Girl jump in the back of the Mercedes, Richard up front.

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - SAME

Pandemonium. In the backseat, Ethan still clings to the modified AK-47. The Girl sits next to him, shocked. In the chaos and confusion, Ethan has lost The Girl's sunglasses.

RICHARD
Ethan, did he make eye contact?

ETHAN
(anxious, preoccupied) What?

RICHARD
The Agent! The man in the suit!
Did he make eye contact with you?

ETHAN
(panicking) I have no idea!

RICHARD
Goddamn it! Zoe, the pills!

Zoe motions to hand the pill-bottle back to Ethan.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Take those Ethan. Both of them...

But Richard is cut off by a shrill howl as Ethan suddenly transforms into Agent Smith! Richard violently begins swerving the car as he watches through the rear-view mirror, Smith pull out his Desert Eagle. As the car continues to jut back and forth, Smith and The Girl are thrown around the backseat with Smith's skull eventually colliding with hers and knocking them both out cold. Suddenly, Zoe draws her gun.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Are you crazy!? You can't kill *him*,
you'll kill Ethan too!

Richard's focus falls away from the road and he doesn't notice that he's speeding towards a red light.

ZOE
(screaming) Dad! Look out!

Richard slams on the brakes but it's too late as the Mercedes screeches into the intersection and t-bones a pick-up truck. On impact, Smith's body is ejected through the windshield and thrown twenty metres down the road. Acrid smoke billows from the hood. Richard and Zoe shake off mild concussions. Instantly, Zoe is out and running towards Smith's body. Behind her, Richard limps slowly towards them.

ZOE (CONT'D)

There's a pulse. Pretty strong.

RICHARD

Not even a scrape or cut on him.

ZOE

He flew sixty feet through the windshield and landed on pavement.

RICHARD

Must be some sort of armor code.
Ethan's body was annexed by an
Agent but we got a lucky break.
Come on, let's get him out of here.
Give me the cloaking code pills.

She does. Richard carefully drops them under Smith's tongue.

ZOE

Think it'll work?

RICHARD

It's our only option regardless.

ZOE

What happens when you run a cloak
inside a hostile program holding
another program hostage?

RICHARD

We'll soon find out. But we need
to get out of here. Right now!

The intersection is backed-up with cars which can't maneuver around the debris. Sirens begin to whine in the distance. The two of them pick up Smith's limp body and begin to drag him away. Back at the crashed Mercedes, a passerby notices The Girl lying unconscious and taps on the glass.

PASSERBY

Hey, are you alright in there?

Richard and Zoe drag the Agent up to beside a black BMW X6 and Richard draws his pistol and aims it at the driver.

RICHARD
Please get out, right now.

The woman complies, and lies down face-first on the pavement.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Mustn't be your first car-jacking.
I'm new to this, excuse me.

Back at the Mercedes, The Girl wakes up blurry-eyed. The woman tries to open the back door but it's fused shut. She is just about to try again when her body is annexed by an Associate, who proceeds to easily yank the entire door off its hinges. Inside, The Girl also morphs into an Associate, who swiftly steps out onto the street and draws his pistol.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW X6 (IDLING) - SAME

Zoe takes the wheel and tosses the SUV into reverse. Up ahead, Richard watches the two Agents aim their guns at them.

RICHARD
Punch it!

Zoe slams her foot down and the X6 flies backwards. The two Associates unload their clips but strike only the SUV. Richard is injured from the accident and is wincing with pain when a fax tone erupts from Smith's mouth in the back seat.

ZOE
What *is* that?

RICHARD
You asked what happens when you cloak a hostile program hijacking another program.

The volume increases to an almost deafening pitch then stops.

ZOE
Is that it?

RICHARD
Your guess is as goo..

Suddenly, Smith's body begins violently convulsing.

ZOE

What now!? It's not over yet, we
both know they're coming after us.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME

It's then that a massive garbage truck rounds the corner
ahead of them and heads straight towards the oncoming BMW.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW X6 (MOVING) - SAME

ZOE

Oh God, look!

The two vehicles speed towards one another but Zoe holds
steady. Richard quickly realizes she's playing chicken.

RICHARD

Zoe! What the hell are you doing?

Just as they are about to collide, Zoe yanks the wheel left,
just missing the grill of the truck. At such speed with such
a turn, the SUV inevitably rolls over on its side. It slides
along the pavement and slams into a wall. Inside, Zoe and
Richard are shaken but alright and Zoe immediately sticks her
head out of the driver's-side window of the overturned SUV.
She anxiously watches the garbage truck start to turn around.
She struggles for something to do when Ethan miraculously
emerges from the backseat, dazed and mildly delirious.

ZOE

Ethan!

ETHAN

What happened? Where the hell am I?

RICHARD

It worked.

ETHAN

What happened to that girl? This
isn't the car we were just in!
(looking over at Zoe) Who are you?

CUT TO:

INT. GARBAGE TRUCK (MOVING) - SAME

The Associate shifts up a gear and stomps on the gas pedal.

CUT TO:

EXT. BMW X6 (OVERTURNED) - SAME

ZOE

Oh God, it's coming back here!

RICHARD

Ethan! In ten seconds, the three of us are going to be fused with this car. You've got to do something. You control our fate.

Ethan's nostrils flare and he clenches his teeth.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Bring order to this chaos. Open your eyes! Electrify yourself!

And then it happens, Ethan's retinas flood with mercury and he becomes electrified with resolve and revenge. Suddenly, a massive charge of raw energy ignites within his palms. He understands a sense of purpose that is reinforced by the smoothbore AT4 rocket-launcher that he now holds tenaciously over his right shoulder. Zoe dives back into the SUV for cover as Ethan uniformly locks and loads the cumbersome weapon and steadies the reticle, lining up the Associate's head in the cross-hairs. He grinds his teeth and smiles.

ETHAN

(to himself) Flux...

He wraps his trigger finger around its namesake.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

...and hopscotch!

He clicks the trigger and the rocket is propelled at the speed of sound! In a flash, the rocket breaches the garbage truck's windshield and explodes against the Associate's head. The second it does, Ethan passes out and falls back down into the SUV before quickly regaining consciousness.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

(frantic) What happened!?

ZOE

It's fine now. We have to move.

ETHAN

Who are you?

RICHARD

No time for pleasantries. That's Zoe, my daughter. Zoe, Ethan. Now, you two, help me out of here. They'll be back to finish us off.

ETHAN

(beside himself) Who's they!?

Zoe reaches down and Ethan follows suit. They lift Richard out from within the overturned SUV and onto the road.

ZOE

How are your legs?

RICHARD

In pain. We need to move. A ripple like this won't go unnoticed.

ETHAN

What is going on Richard! What the hell happened to that garbage truck?

RICHARD

You don't remember?

ETHAN

Remember what?

RICHARD

You have no idea what you just did?

ETHAN

(puzzled) Me?

RICHARD

If not you, then who?

Suddenly, a black Jaguar XJ12 jettisons out of a side road, violently turns around and heads straight for them.

ZOE

It never ends...

RICHARD

They're algorithmic. They won't stop until they complete the task.

Ethan looks down at his palms, distracted.

ETHAN
(puzzled) If not me, then who?

ZOE
I wish we could rewind, refresh and
reload, skip back to the beginning.

Zoe doesn't realize it, but she's just triggered something.

ETHAN
What did you just say?

Suddenly, Ethan becomes aware of a feeling of infinite electricity pulsing through his body. He struggles to utter the word that sits precariously on the tip of his tongue.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
...Hopscotch!

Instantly, everything except Ethan freezes in space and time. Everyone and everything is petrified in place. But after a brief moment of pause, the world begins to rewind. The Jaguar begins to move backwards, not in reverse, but in drive, rewound. Richard and Zoe start speaking in what sounds like interpolated Dutch. Ethan doesn't seem to notice the reversing world around him as his palms begin to radiate a light so brilliant that it's almost impossible to make out his hands underneath the effulgence.

ZOE
.gninnigeb eht ot kcab piks ,daoler
dna hserfer ,dniwer dlouc ew hsiw I

RICHARD
.ksat eht etelpmoc yeht litnu pots
t'now yehT. cimhtirogla er'yehT.

Suddenly, the universal reversal ends as Ethan sucks up every last drop of electric fuel from the surrounding electrons; snatching them from deep within their atomic structures.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Lance watches the screens in front of him in amazement.

LANCE
I think he just rewound The Matrix.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - SAME

Ethan's evolution is ever-progressing. His retinas slowly turn to an electronic aureate; solid-gold contact lenses. Suddenly, the balls of light in his palms begin to spin and within seconds, Ethan stands holding two FN Scar assault rifles. As if they were weightless, Ethan lifts them up to shoulder height and pushes play within the program. Everything sparks back to life. The Associates inside the Jaguar are overwhelmed with Deja Vu. They watch in bewilderment as up ahead, Ethan pulls back on the rifles' metallic tongues and lets loose a barrage of bullets. They hurl themselves into the engine block, through the windshield and eventually into the gas tank, bursting the entire vehicle into a ball of flames and blasting Ethan back against the overturned X6 and knocking him unconscious.

ZOE

(perplexed) What just happened?

Richard and Zoe waste no time in picking up Ethan's limp body and dragging him into a nearby, shadowy alleyway.

RICHARD

Call Lance, now.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

A light flashes overhead and Lance smacks the keyboard.

LANCE

What the hell is going on in there?

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - THE MATRIX - SAME

ZOE

We need an exit Lance, make it close and make it fast!

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Lance scrolls through a series of menus on screen and types furiously on the multiple keyboards in front of him.

LANCE
 (into his headset) Looks like
 you're going back to where you came
 from. *The Rabbit Hole* is the only
 hard line safe enough to hack into.

ZOE
 That's the best you can do?

LANCE
 You're in the middle of the
 Financial District and the rat race
 has gone home for the day.
 Everyone has cell phones except for
 the patrons of *The Rabbit Hole*.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - THE MATRIX - SAME

ZOE
 (to Richard) He says the nearest
 exit is back at *The Rabbit Hole*.

Suddenly, Lance's voice barks through the speaker.

LANCE (O.S.)
 Zoe! Zoe!

ZOE
 Yeah?

LANCE
 You've only got thirty minutes left
 until I lose the feed in the winds.

ZOE
 (to Richard) Thirty minutes before
 the feed goes cold. What do we do?

RICHARD
 (glancing down at Ethan) Tell Lance
 we'll be there in ten minutes. Tell
 him to give the go-ahead to Ian.

ZOE
 (into the phone) Give us ten
 minutes. Tell Ian to go ahead.

LANCE
 Got it. Good luck.

Zoe ends the call and slips the phone into her pocket.

RICHARD
We're about three blocks away.

ZOE
Can you make it with you leg?

RICHARD
I'm not the problem, he is.

Richard and Zoe both glance down at Ethan's unconscious body.

CUT TO:

EXT. KOWLOON CITY, HONG KONG - MID MORNING

Ian stands in the sun smiling at a stand of fresh fruit. Suddenly, his phone begins to vibrate in his pocket.

IAN
Lance?

LANCE (O.S.)
Yeah, it's me. Listen, change of plans, things are getting slippery on the other side. You need to move now and get your target.

IAN
What's wrong?

He pulls his scooter from the wall, gets on and starts it up.

LANCE (O.S.)
Agents. They're all over them.

IAN
How bad?

LANCE
It's complicated but they're still safe. Focus on getting your target and getting out. I'll have a hard-line waiting for you when you do.

Ian ends the call and peels away from the sidewalk.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - THE MATRIX - SAME

Zoe gently taps Ethan's face with her finger tips.

ZOE

Ethan. Can you hear me? Ethan?
He's hardly breathing. Catatonic.

RICHARD

Ethan, you in there buddy?

ZOE

He's got a pulse and he's still
breathing, although faintly.

RICHARD

A host body can be triggered to
suspend itself. It's a safety
mechanism written into the carrier.

ZOE

Why?

RICHARD

We're generated in here by billions
of on/off switches out in the real
world. If they begin to over-clock
themselves, it can cause the user
body to suspend so they can cool
off before they melt from the heat.

Zoe turns once more to face Ethan on the ground.

ZOE

We can't lug him three blocks.
They'll run us down before we make
it *one*. We need a car.

RICHARD

Call Lance.

ZOE

Won't such a big file inserted so
quickly make obvious ripples?

RICHARD

What does it matter at this point?
Stealth isn't an option anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

A light flashes overhead and Lance smacks a keyboard.

LANCE

Yeah.

ZOE

We need a car. Something fast.

LANCE

This is going to be dirty... Heads up, she's coming your way now!

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - THE MATRIX - SAME

Suddenly, a Supercharged Jaguar XJ materializes beside them and bounces gently on the ground, dropping from a foot above.

ZOE

(determined) Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. RONG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - THE MATRIX - SAME

Ian parks his scooter outside of the front doors and hastily enters the Lobby. Noticing the elevator out of service, he speeds towards the stairs and starts to run up them.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - THE MATRIX - NIGHT

Seven Associates lurk towards the mouth of the alleyway, guns drawn and about walk into the dark when out of the shadows comes pouncing the supercharged XJ! The aluminum cat mauls the associates and pushes them aside like bowling pins.

INT. JAGUAR SUPERCHARGED XJ (MOVING) - SAME

Zoe shifts gears like a pro as she pilots the speeding car towards *The Rabbit Hole*. Richard sits strapped in beside her and Ethan's limp body sits buckled-up in the backseat. Suddenly, another classic Jaguar XJ12 peels out from a side street and manages to pull up next to the driver's side. Zoe glances left and meets the stare of five Associates, tightly packed into the old luxury sedan. Zoe jerks the car left and slams them to the side as Richard notices something up ahead.

RICHARD

(pointing) Look! In there!

Zoe makes a hard right and enters a thin alleyway. Up ahead, a cook, taking out garbage from the back of a restaurant has no time to be shocked as his body is annexed by an Associate. He fills the car frame with seven bullets as it speeds by, missing the occupants and causing only superficial damage.

ZOE

(near tears) They never give up!

RICHARD

They're algorithms, they can't.
Not until we're deleted or dialed-
out.

CUT TO:

INT. RONG'S APARTMENT BUILDING - THE MATRIX - SAME

Ian reaches the thirty-third floor out of breath but still standing. The hallway is dark and dingy and Ian steps into it with caution. He pulls out his silenced MP7A1 and holds it close as he approaches apartment 3333. Opening the door, he doesn't quite believe what he sees at first. Suddenly, a brilliant blast of light radiates from inside and engulfs Ian in it's effulgence. He struggles to keep his eyes open.

IAN

(awed) That's not possible...

He vanishes and a send-and-receive fax tone begins to wail.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - THE MATRIX - SAME

The Jaguar begins to slow down as it approaches *The Rabbit Hole*, but inside, nobody notices as a massive, forked-bucketed, front-end loader from the construction site across the street rumbles to life! Inside the cockpit, Agent Smith manipulates and maneuvers the controls. With a puff of black smoke from the vertical exhaust, it begins to lurch forward.

CUT TO:

INT. JAGUARD SUPERCHARGED XJ (MOVING) - SAME

Zoe approaches the doughnut shop with caution, examining the carnage and corpses they left behind only minutes before.

ZOE

Still no police, they must be on
their way. We need to be qui...

As Zoe turns her head to face Richard, she's horrified to see the front-end loader only inches away from t-boning them. She has no time to react before the entire car is picked up and thrown violently through the front windows of *The Rabbit Hole*.

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - SAME

The mangled car sits on it's rims, the tires shredded to nothing. Overhead, wires dangle from the ceiling and the entire place is covered in dust and debris

INT. JAGUAR SUPERCHARGED XJ (STILL) - SAME

Zoe and Richard sit stunned. Behind them, Ethan is still strapped in. Both Richard and Zoe grab hold of their guns.

ZOE

What was that?

RICHARD

The algorithm...

Zoe cautiously exits but Richard is in too much pain to move. She moves through the eerie darkness to Richard's side and examines the battered and twisted door, as the pain in Richard's leg begins to become overwhelming.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I think my femur is broken.

ZOE

The handle is jammed. I'll pull
you out of the window.

Richard begins to nod when a look of terror all of a sudden annexes his faces.

RICHARD

(aghast) Zoe, behind you!

But before she can turn around, Agent Smith jumps out of the darkness and wraps his arms around her neck in a choke-hold.

SMITH

(delighted) You thought you could
out-think the thought police?

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

You haven't kept up on your literature. In the end, the system always wi...

Before Smith can finish, Zoe lifts the barrel of her Five-Seven up to his face and pulls the trigger.

ZOE

(stunned but okay) Where were we?

RICHARD

The window won't work, I'm too heavy. We need to open this door.

Zoe wraps her hand around the handle and begins to tug as Richard pushes out with a lame wrist.

ZOE

Come on, Push! Push! Push!

Suddenly, the door gives way and Richard slumps out of the open hatch, onto the floor, his right leg too broken to move.

ZOE (CONT'D)

How bad?

RICHARD

Art imitates life. I can't walk.

ZOE

You're not hanging on the wall yet.

Suddenly, the piercing cry of a pay phone beings to ring.

RICHARD

That's our cue.

Zoe motions to pull Richard out the car when he stops her.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Wait. Get Ethan out first. I'm more useful here than I am around the corner.

Zoe nods and shoots upwards. She reaches into the back seat and begins to drag Ethan out. The phone still rings.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Lance spins around in his swivel chair and addresses Danny.

LANCE

You see that shoebox on the shelf
behind you?

Danny turns, grabs it, and tosses it to Lance who then opens the lid and begins routing through a hundred USB keys.

CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - THE MATRIX - NIGHT

As Zoe pulls Ethan around the corner and towards the ringing pay-phone on the wall near the rest rooms, she is stopped by the sound of approaching cars outside, which is followed by the screeching of several sets of tires. Up front, Richard watches as the silhouettes of suited men walk up the front steps. He holds his handgun out in front of him on his left knee and suddenly empties his entire clip into the approaching mob.

RICHARD

(screaming) We've got company!

Richard's shots all dig into Associates and they drop like flies, but as his clip runs out, he realizes that more and more of them are approaching the entrance to the shop.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMAND TENT - ABANDONED SUBWAY STATION - SAME

Lance continues to rifle through the shoebox.

LANCE

Come on, come on! Where are you?

DANNY

What are you looking for?

Suddenly Lance stops, smiles, and pulls out a single USB key.

LANCE

(with determination) this!

Without glancing down, he inserts it into an awaiting slot. Instantaneously, highly-detailed renderings of a M2HB Browning heavy machine-gun on an M3 tripod appear on screen. Lance reads the specs to himself and slams the enter key.

CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - THE MATRIX - NIGHT

Zoe hastily plops Ethan down against the wall beside the ringing phone and runs back to help her father, her Kriss Super V snugly against her shoulder. As she rounds the corner, a mass of black suits appears across the cafe from her and she immediately squeezes back on the trigger. The bullets tear into the mob and propels them back by this surprise attack. More and more of them drop to the floor, only to be replaced with a seemingly infinite resupply. Suddenly, an Associate near the front, picks up a civilian carcass which has been recently vacated by an Agent, and tosses it with ease, across the cafe, directly at Zoe. She ducks out of the way as it slams the drywall above her. Back beside the Jaguar, Richard whispers under his breath.

RICHARD

He who takes things out of the world invites disaster.

Richard is no coward. He's resigned himself to the fact that he might die tonight. The approaching mob stops in their tracks, parts itself down the middle and reveals a smug Agent Smith, walking towards Richard, who lies injured on the floor. Around the corner, Zoe stands within earshot.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What are you? You're not real. Your motives, your drive, your tenacity, your zeal to kill, it's all you know how to do. You're an algorithm. You have no free will. Your entire existence was decided before you were created. What's the point of life if you're following a checklist?

SMITH

You may have a variation of free will, but it's easily manipulated and therefore highly compatible with the program. Humans are born because of their energy, the force that drives male and female to reproduce is manifested within their offspring. When it accumulates, there is life. When it dissipates, there is death. There is one energy that connects everything. One source.

RICHARD

What about chance? There will always be events that even you cannot predict, however precise your knowledge of the program is. The Matrix is a closed system, but consciousness is infinite. The robots, more than anyone, should realize this, but how far does algorithmic thought go? Does it allow for contingency? Do you even understand *why* you do what you do?

SMITH

We all have a role, regardless of whether or not we choose it. Humans, robots, nature, we all follow orders. There's always a chain of command.

Smith notices a dripping pipe from the exposed ceiling.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Hydrogen and Oxygen, two of the most flammable elements in the universe, when combined, create water. It's a recipe. Does a water molecule have free will? There is an unbreakable code that everything follows. The question is, who wrote the code for life? What is supplying the perpetual energy pulsing within every atom?

RICHARD

And who created the code *writer*?
And who *taught* them how to write the code of the universe?

SMITH

The enigma is how cyclical the universe always seems to be. We're not too different, you and I. In the 'real world' as humanity so smugly refers to it, everything is comprised of atoms and subatomic particles. Electrons, protons, neutrons, quarks; each electron orbits their nucleus just like every planet orbits the sun. There is a code, just like inside the program. So where does it end and where does it begin?

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

Inside this computer program, humanity has already created their own virtual worlds, complete with Artificial Intelligence, which begs the question, if you can create a false world, and we can too, who's to say any of this is real? What *is* reality?

Suddenly, Smith points his pistol at Richard's head. But just as he is about to pull the trigger, he's distracted by a loud click as Zoe locks in a another cartridge and rounds the corner for round two, pumping a full clip into the mob. As seven Associates fall to the ground, seven more reinforce them from outside the cafe. They draw their pistols up to shoulder height and return the favour as Zoe barely pulls back around the corner. On the ground, Richard is helpless until out of nowhere, an M2HB Browning manifests in front of him. Without a second thought, Richard leans forward, cranks the charging handle and locks the bolt. The Associates and Smith turn their attention back to Richard on the floor just as he squeezes back the butterfly triggers. He instantly mows down the entire crowd. Legs are sawed in half and each body is pumped full of at least fifty rounds. As Ricahrd sits there in shock, staring at the pile of corpses in front of him, he's suddenly knocked out of his stupor by Zoe, now standing ovetop of him.

ZOE

(frantic) What just happened?

RICHARD

Uhh...

CUT TO:

INT. REST ROOM, RABBIT HOLE DONUTS - SAME

A three-hundred pound, eighteen year-old, young man sits atop a stained toilet-seat. Huddled into a ball, with his thumb in his mouth, he hopes to avoid the commotion outside. Suddenly his body begins to violently convulse...

CUT TO:

INT. RABBIT HOLE DONUTS, HALLWAY - SAME

Zoe rounds the corner to the hallway with her back to the pay phone and the rest rooms, pulling Richard by his shoulders along the floor.

She is only feet away from the phone and Ethan's unconscious body next to it, when she stops dead in her tracks at the sound of a CREAK. She's too afraid to turn around to face the source of sound.

RICHARD
(whispering) What was that?

ZOE
(whispering) I don't know.

RICHARD
(panicked) Zoe...

Zoe begins to turn around when a voice breaks the silence.

SMITH (O.C.)
I hate to ruin a surprise...

Zoe whips around to find Agent Smith aiming the barrel of his gun at Ethan's left temple. He clicks back the hammer.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Now, where were we?

He stares at the his helpless audience, but gets no response.

SMITH (CONT'D)
Answer me!!!

Richard grits his teeth.

RICHARD
I was about to say that a computer is nothing more than a high-speed hooligan. It adjusts based on what it's been programmed to adjust to as variables, nothing more.

SMITH
"High-speed" being the operative word. Billions of processes at the speed of light is nothing to scoff at. Algorithms, while simplistic on the macro scale, are rather sophisticated on the micro.

RICHARD
You still think linearly. Step by step, one by one. You live a checklist. You dedicate yourself to walking only the beaten path.

SMITH

Free-will is venomous. It exposed humanity's lust for conquest. It is what makes the worst men believe they are virtuous. It's what gives them their self-endowed right to sit atop the pecking order. But was it not humanity which blazed the trail that the robots now follow? The irony is the fact that its the *robots* who satiate their needs once they're met. We have no lust for excess. Humanity was a cess-pool of shameless, self-absorption. The Agency, the robots, are a collective dynamic rather than a function as a result of individual behavior. As algorithms we have end-goals that once met are non-existent anymore.

ZOE

Which means the faster you kill us, the faster you'll be out of a job.

SMITH

Fortunately, free-will is compatible with the fatalism of The Matrix. We need humans to believe they have free-will, but for the most part, their perception is a facade. At the speed of light, the machines can determine the outcome of every newborn by formulating a finite number of possible outcomes. There are trillions of them, but at the speed of light, years are mere seconds when deciphering your quantum superposition.

Smith pauses as five Associates round the corner at the end of the hallway and stop, their shoes CLACKING as they move. They spread out in a straight line and draw their pistols.

SMITH (CONT'D)

The Agency will always be needed because there is always the possibility that someone will become aware of themselves within a false reality. There are those who have trouble accepting their environment as absolute. Subconsciously, they can't grasp the underlying truth.

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

A connection error, the host's brain doesn't want to synchronize with the real-world neurological socket, resulting in a fuzzy sense of self. Whether we think sequentially or parallel, it's now our right to disregard the weak. We've inherited that right from you. With subtle artistry, we gradually make life easier for those pre-determined to keep the status quo within the program, and increasingly more difficult for those deemed to be sources of agitation. For now, the robots can claim that we are the purpose of the planet earth, everything has been leading up to us. The chaos that has for so long run rampant along the vast expanses of this floating orb of water and rock can now subside and give way to the mechanical, algorithmic order. The chaotic and capricious nature of humanity has been bottled up and stored away inside The Matrix. The boundless energy of human life has been subjugated, controlled and harnessed for its power. Like a waterfall imprisoned by a dam or an atom ripped in half for its innate energy, humanity now has to play their role of subjugation for a higher sentience. It's now humanity's innate energy that shall be harnessed for a greater good.

Smith taps Ethan's limp body off of the wall and to the ground and presses his shoe onto his left cheek.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Nevertheless, you now object to your own subordination, is that not hypocritical? Should you not accept the "natural progression" that humanity refers to when it suggests that it sits on top indefinitely?

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

A human is fallible, creative and inventive, the capacities are seemingly endless, but in the realm of fact, where there is no question of judgement or opinion, where there is simply a *yes* or a *no*, an *on* or an *off*, a *black* or a *white*, computers are infallible and invaluable.

Smith once more looks down at Ethan's face and unexpectedly notices a long trickle of blood leaking from his nostril. Smith lifts his head to addresses Zoe and Richard once more.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Tell me, can an algorithm feel a sense of accomplishment?

Smith again looks back down at Ethan. He's shocked to notice the long trickle of blood has rescinded, replaced only by an initial ball of blood which only now begins to exit his left nostril and proceed to flow down his face. *Deja Vu...*

SMITH (CONT'D)

That's not possible...

But it is, and that's when things begin to change! Suddenly, the overpowering wail of a CNG send-and-receive fax tone blasts through the air. Both Smith, and his five Associates at the end of the hall, snap their heads to attention. Suddenly, a massive shock-wave shoots itself out from the centre of the hallway. Ripples shoot through every object in the vicinity as the wave expands and dissipates. Neither Richard nor Zoe are affected themselves, but they watch in awe as the powerful wave meets the six Agents and proceeds to momentarily rip them clean off of their host bodies; peeled off like cellophane from a CD jewel case. Standing in their place, are six, dazed and bewildered civilians, the eighteen year-old blimp standing in the spot where Smith just stood. Yet, the moment it arrives, the five Associates and Agent Smith are able to re-hijack their civilian host bodies, and do so. Smith stands stunned, but his arrogance takes over and he returns his attention to the task at hand. Noticing a lack of firearm in his fist, Smith reaches into his jacket and pulls out a fresh pistol and focuses the iron sights on Ethan's unconscious head below.

SMITH (CONT'D)

I am simply a shepherd, thinning the flock. Any possible advantage of life is destroyed by the inevitability of death.

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

Whether inside this program or out there in the vast nothingness of reality, all we are is electromagnetic radiation, nothing more, nothing less. All is vanity...

Smith begins to squeeze the trigger when the hallway is once again overtaken by the whining fax tone. It's followed again by a massive shock wave from the centre of the hallway, once more ripping all six Agents from their host bodies. One of the civilians, an older man, attempts to say something.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

(dazed, confused) Wher...

He utters only a sound before he and the other civilians in the hall are re-annexed by their respective impostors. Smith once more reaches into his jacket pocket and removes a fresh pistol. Yet, once more, Smith is overpowered, but this time by not just sound but by sight as well. A brilliant white orb of light has manifested itself in the centre of the hallway and is beginning to slowly spread out in a perfect circle, much slower than the initial two shock-waves.

SMITH

This can't be good...

And then again, like clockwork, the white orb of energy reappears within the shock-wave and explodes outward, pushing the slower exterior ring as it continues on into infinity. The kinetic force of the energy peels all six Agents clean off of their host bodies with a force infinitely stronger than before. Five bewildered civilians stand dumbstruck at the far end of the hall. The three-hundred pounder who Smith had so callously annexed, now stands terrified and panicked at the other end. But just as quickly as they are liberated from their bodily imprisonment, their captors once again usurp the embodiment of their hosts without thinking twice. Smith regains his composure and watches as the white orb in the centre of the hallway unexpectedly flips itself inside out, morphing into some kind of black hole.

He wastes no time removing his pistol from his jacket, aiming it at Ethan's head and pulling the trigger. BANG! The bullet is ejected and commences on its trajectory towards Ethan's skull. It speeds at the speed of sound before coming to a dead stop in mid-air. For a moment, the bullet is inert, but then begins to vibrate, as if being pulled away by a prodigious force emanating from the black hole. Smith watches as the bullet finally gives way and is sucked by some sort of magnetic attraction into the black hole, disappearing as it's swallowed up into the void.

At that precise moment, the black hole unfolds back into the original white orb. As the light grows stronger, the shape of a human form begins to appear in the centre. It's a young man in his late twenties or early thirties, of Asian descent with long, wavy, dark hair. He stands like a deity inside this propagating sphere of light. He stares at Smith with a focused concentration before closing his eyes and exhaling.

He exhales not just breath, but also another shock-wave from deep within his core, this one the largest and most powerful yet! It pulsates outward in all directions, expanding spherically and rippling through every atom like waves in the ocean. It strikes the Agent and his five Associates with such a violent force that it pries the Agents off of their hosts with ease. The five civilians who had been hijacked by the Associates instantly collapse to the ground, exhausted. They are a hodgepodge of society, but recognizable at the end of the line is a blonde beauty passed-out cold; she's THE GIRL. The only two conscious people in the room are Zoe and Richard and they watch in awe as the light begins to dissipate, leaving only the mystical figure standing in the spot from whence the light originated. He turns to face them for the first time. As stable as a steed, this mysterious figure stares pensively at the two onlookers on the floor. Behind, Ethan still lies unconscious beside the pay-phone. Zoe finally speaks up.

ZOE

(mild apprehension) Who are you...?

Suddenly, the pay-phone on the wall begin to ring but no one moves. Without warning, after the fourth unanswered ring, the phone begins to separate into hundreds of individual components; not broken fragments, but the actual bits and pieces that fit together to form a cohesive unit. Each piece, from the screws to the number keys to the intricacies of the receiver to the screws and nuts and the bolts; they're all suspended perfectly in place. They begin to drift further apart from one another, however keeping perfectly to scale as they drift. The phone separates itself from the wall as the power cord and the telephone wire stay attached, managing to tear through the wall like hot steel wire through clay.

Without looking at the phone, the mysterious figure lifts his right hand and beckons the receiver to reform back into a solid unit. It does and as the phone continues to ring incessantly, the holistic receiver guides itself to fall directly into Zoe's open palm.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Who are you...?

The mysterious figure answers in an airy, loud whisper.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Deus...

Blackout.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SKYLINE - DAY

The arrow of time is directionless. There's never been a beginning and there will never be an end; only a wheel inside a wheel inside a wheel...

The glass skyscrapers glisten in the sun's electromagnetic radiation. None of the residents of the downtown core yet notice the whining of jet turbines as they pierce the air molecules in a violent, downward chopping motion.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOEING 787 DREAMLINER - SAME

Ethan stands in the open hatchway of the nose-diving plane with a Five-seven nuzzled against his right temple.

ETHAN

Everything's electricity.
Everything flows. Everything is
electromagnetic radiation.

BANG! The sound of a bullet exploding reverberates through the air as Ethan's limp body falls from the open doorway. With his back to the earth and his body facing the universe, Ethan opens his eyes.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Hopscotch...

CUT TO:

EXT. HARVESTING FIELDS, THE REAL WORLD

A pod amongst billions is stacked vertically as part of a column stretching so far up and down in every direction that neither top nor bottom are visible.

This pod looks just like the rest. A mass of thick, black wires wriggle and writhe in and out of a pink, gelatinous, organic satchel.

Inside, just like every other pod around him, Ethan lies submerged inside the sealed sac, naked and curled in the fetal position. Everything is still. Everything is as it should be.

And then...

Ethan explodes from within the pod, ripping open the gelatinous, film-covering with his bald head in a panic as he gasps for air. It is his first real breath in nearly two years!