New Avalon

by

Joseph Weber

424-703-3403
Somedork@hotmail.com
INT. FORT CARSON ARMY LABORATORIES - HALLWAY - DAY

Blood spatters across a pristine white tile floor.

The body of a SCIENTIST hits the ground. Bright red liquid pours from a gaping wound in his chest.

A man in full army regalia, brandishing a shotgun, steps over the body and peers into a retinal scanner, which identifies him as GENERAL EDWARDS and unlocks a door leading to a HIGH-TECH ELECTRONICS LABORATORY.

A trio of SCIENTISTS scatter like roaches, diving for cover behind benches piled high with half-finished circuit boards.

Edwards guns them each down in turn. The last body hits the floor, his blood-soaked lab coat and mauled safety goggles mere inches from a fourth, hidden scientist, CANDACE DIXON.

Candace (late 30s) is an abashed sapphire, a woman who has scuffed her pristine facets and marred her perfectly aligned edges for fear of being sold to the highest bidder.

She listens for the sound of fresh shells being loaded into the shotgun, then bolts for the back door.

In her panic, she trips over the body of one of her colleagues, falls into the X-RAY ROOM.

and lands hard on the floor, grimacing in pain as her left knee takes the brunt of the fall.

Edwards follows her into the room, biding his time.

She crawls toward the hallway on her hands and knees.

Behind her, Edwards PUMPS the shotgun.

Candace rolls onto her back, peering at the grinning general.

GENERAL EDWARDS

Don’t worry, Candy. I think we got ‘em all.

He chuckles, places the shotgun in his own mouth and blows his skull to pieces.

Candace’s shaky hands wipe the general’s blood from her face.
The clock on the wall ticks away second after second.

She scrambles to her feet.
EXT. FORT CARSON - DAY

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JOHNATHAN GORDON (early 50s), well-dressed with a commanding presence, marches through a throng of mutilated BODIES and charred husks of military vehicles.

If there was another person the President trusted to do Gordon’s job, the Secretary would be breeding horses on his ranch in Iowa. But that isn’t how life works, so here he is.

Gordon passes a handful of MARINES tasked with cataloguing the carnage and heads toward a large building.

A sign out front reads “FORT CARSON ARMY LABORATORIES”.

INT. FORT CARSON ARMY LABORATORIES - LOBBY - DAY

Gordon enters the spartan lobby. Two ARMY OFFICERS crouch over a dead RECEPTIONIST, lying next to a WWII-era steel desk, holding clipboards and wearing white forensics gloves.

The higher ranking officer is MAJ. FRANCIS WITMER (30s), a rugged man who would likely have been an NFL quarterback had he not joined the army.

His second in command is LT. TAWNY MADRIGAL (late 20s), a serious Hispanic woman with hair wrapped tightly in a bun. Madrigal could bring a black cloud to the sunniest of days.

SECRETARY GORDON
Witmer! Whatcha got for me?

WITMER
Everyone’s dead and everyone’s ours.

SECRETARY GORDON
Timeline?

WITMER
Base was locked down at 0800. Security cameras went dark shortly after, then the fight began.

Major Witmer stands and removes his gloves.

WITMER (CONT’D)
Some kind of internal struggle is my guess, but I’ve yet to determine who fired the first shot.
SECRETARY GORDON
You’re tellin’ me an entire base
full of tried and true American
soldiers turned on each other? For
no reason? With no survivors?

Witmer sighs. He knows exactly how it sounds.

WITMER
Yes, sir.
(beat)
We’re still short three scientists, though. Dr. James Renhousen,
neuroscientist, and two of his
team. Randall Hong, Candace Dixon.

SECRETARY GORDON
Renhousen? Shit...

WITMER
It could be helpful to know what he
was working on.

SECRETARY GORDON
Your clearance ain’t even close for
that, Major. I’ll handle the
fallout here. You find Renhousen.

Secretary Gordon pulls his phone from his pocket and stalks
away. Witmer looks down at his clipboard. The top page has
a photo and dossier for James Renhousen.

WITMER
Where are you hiding, Doctor?

INT. BELLAGIO HOTEL, LAS VEGAS - LOBBY - DAY

DR. JAMES RENHOUSEN (50s) stands at the front desk, staring
at his reflection in the polished tile floor, his calm
exterior masking a deep-rooted animosity.

James is flanked by his protégé, RANDALL HONG (late 20s), a
small-town, doe-eyed sprite whose pulse has tripled just from
being immersed in the elegance of the Bellagio.

Randy wears a ridiculous grin for the pretty young DESK CLERK
working the computer.

DESK CLERK
We’ll need a credit card for the
suite. Is it just the two of you?
Randy nudges James, pulling him from his reverie.

JAMES
Yes, but I’d like to pay with a cash deposit.

He pulls a stack of hundreds from his jacket and sets them on the marble counter. The desk clerk BLANCHES. Even in Las Vegas, it’s not a common sight. James waves it off.

JAMES (CONT'D)
The reimbursement paperwork is atrocious.

He gives her an easy, confident smile. She returns it, takes the money and asks no more questions.

RANDY
That’s a delightful blouse you’re wearing, miss...?

The desk clerk shoots him an overly professional smile and continues her work. She takes two hotel keycards, places them in an envelope and hands them to Renhouse.

DESK CLERK
Enjoy your stay, General Edwards.

INT. BELLAGIO HOTEL - SUITE - DAY

James and Randy haul several large black bags into the luxurious suite, barely glancing at the decor. James grabs a chair and drags it to the middle of the room.

Randy scampers to the full-length glass windows and flings open the curtains. He whistles at the amazing view of the Las Vegas strip.

RANDY
I appreciate the accommodations and all but why, exactly, did you choose this place?

James pulls out his pocket knife and slices through the back of the chair’s upholstery.

JAMES
Where else could we pull the wattage we’ll need without anyone batting an eyelash?
James knocks on the chair’s wooden frame several times. Satisfied, he returns to his luggage and pulls out a grotesque looking helmet that looks like it should be bolted to an electric chair.

JAMES (CONT’D)
We’re creating a brave new world,
Randy. A world without crime. Or
poverty. Where progressives can
live without the burden of those
who contribute nothing.

Randy pulls a laptop, along with a thick tangle of connector cables, out of his bag and sets it up on a nearby desk.

JAMES (CONT’D)
Vegas is a city without questions.
It’s a good place to hide while we
lay the groundwork.

RANDY
I’m sorry about Candy.

James sighs, dejected. He retrieves a power drill and a pair of safety goggles from another bag.

JAMES
Yeah, well. She’s a sharp kid.
She’ll come to her senses.

James puts on the goggles and fires up the drill.

EXT. HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT - STREET - DAY

BILLY SALTZMAN (30s), well-built and fashionable even in his jogging shorts, bounds up the apartment steps. He clicks his stopwatch, nods in admiration, then picks up the morning paper and heads inside.

INT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

From behind an ornate desk lamp a worn, battered clock radio emits a timid, warbling buzz. The noise is overpowered by the television, which seems less afraid of retribution.

Billy rambles into the room and drops off a cup of hot coffee next to a pair of women’s black, thin-rimmed glasses. He sits on the bed and roots beneath the covers for a body.

It GROANS.
The groggy head of his girlfriend, DR. ASHLEIGH RENHOUSEN (early 30s) peeks out from under the covers. Later in the day she’ll be spunky, but she’s just not a morning person.

BILLY
Rise and shine, Ashleigh.

ASHLEIGH
Ugh. Don’t you have your own apartment to go to?

He leans down and kisses her on the cheek.

BILLY
Yeah, but I left my clubs here.

ASHLEIGH
What time is it?

BILLY
7:30.

ASHLEIGH
7:30!? If I wanted to wake up at 7:30, I’d teach high school.

She tucks herself back under her the blankets, evading the morning sun. Billy grabs a handful of the covers and drags them from the room.

ASHLEIGH (CONT’D)
Bastard.

Ashleigh clutches her full-length pillow like it’s the last thing on the planet.

INT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT – KITCHEN – DAY

Ashleigh stumbles in with the cup of coffee, scratching her head. Billy, now wearing a pressed pinstripe suit, grabs his briefcase from the counter.

BILLY
Hey, sleepyhead. I’m taking the afternoon off - golf with the beer guys. I thought I’d come over and make dinner. Chili cheese dogs?

She nods, pours the coffee down the sink and sets the cup atop the precarious mountain of dirty dishes. Billy kisses her forehead, grabs his golf clubs and heads out.
After he’s gone, Ashleigh whips up an enormous breakfast. Bacon. Ham and cheese omelet. Bagel drenched in cream cheese. She pours half a carton of orange juice into a tall glass, then devours her meal.

EXT. HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT - ROADSIDE - DAY

IAN ZECKLER (early 30s), the very definition of computer geek, sits in the driver’s seat of his three year old hybrid. Flashing blue and red lights reflect off the windshield.

Ian hands his license and registration to a POLICEMAN, who takes down his information.

POLICEMAN
You know how fast you were going?

IAN
No, sir. I wasn’t paying attention to the speedometer.

POLICEMAN
Obviously. No alcohol in that cup, is there?

IAN
Just OJ. Got it with the donuts.

POLICEMAN
Where at?

IAN
The Sugar Shack, about a half mile back on your right.

The policeman’s eyes start to twitch. He drops Ian’s paperwork, then grabs his head, wincing in pain.

IAN (CONT'D)
Officer, are you...?

Suddenly, the policemen snaps to attention and walks calmly back to his cruiser, ignoring Ian completely.

He gets in, closes the door and drives off.

IAN (CONT'D)
Guess he really wanted a donut.
INT. BELLAGIO HOTEL - SUITE - DAY

James sits in the modified chair, eyes closed, the helmet attached to his skull.

Wires connect the device to Randy’s laptop and to a separate monitor. Thick cables stretch onto the balcony to a small satellite dish that has been recently bolted to the railing.

On the monitor, we can see the point of view of the Connecticut police officer as he leaves the scene.

JAMES
(whispers)
Drive to Baltimore.

On Randy’s laptop screen, a host of programs are open. Vital signs, text outputs from running processes and mapping software are among the throng of windows.

RANDY
Skeleton environment active.
Looping successful. Breaking connection.

He taps a few buttons on the keyboard.

JAMES
Alright, find me another one.

RANDY
You sure you don’t want a break?

James rolls his shoulders, stretching them a little bit.

JAMES
Not yet.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT SCIENCE HALL - OFFICE - DAY

Ashleigh, dressed closer to the casual side of business-casual, saunters inside the cramped office space. An OFFICE ASSISTANT hands her a pile of paperwork.

OFFICE ASSISTANT
The top page is the minutes from this morning’s meeting. Also, there’s someone waiting for you in your office.
ASHLEIGH
I swear to God, if it’s another
honor student complaining about a
B+, I’m going to stab them in the
face.

VOICE (O.S.)
Morning, grumpy. Wake up too early
again?

Ashleigh turns around as Ian approaches. He hands her a cup
of orange juice and a donut drenched in chocolate icing.

ASHLEIGH
Ian, you’re awesome.

IAN
Tell it to the cops.

ASHLEIGH
Have a run in with the 5-0, did we?
What was it? Murder I? Assault
and Battery?

IAN
Speeding.

ASHLEIGH
Pffft. Liar. You can’t speed in a
hybrid. How much was the ticket?

IAN
Didn’t get one. He saw the donuts
and walked away like this--

Ian does his best impression, which looks suspiciously like
“The Robot” dance.

ASHLEIGH
Well, that makes sense. Last time
I got pulled over, the cop did the
chicken dance and let me off with a
warning.

IAN
Swear to God. I’m never driving
anywhere without a dozen donuts
again.

ASHLEIGH
They ARE tasty. Thanks.
IAN
It’s not a gift, it’s a down payment on our future marriage.

She smiles coyly and strides down the hall to her office, munching on her donut. Ian keeps pace.

IAN (CONT’D)
Seriously, though. When are you going to dump that Cro-Magnon?

ASHLEIGH
C’mon, now, don’t be a sourpuss.

IAN
I just don’t understand the attraction. I mean, if you want me to drop my IQ 120 points and become a drooling imbecile, I’ll do it. Just for you.

ASHLEIGH
It’s purely physical. Go do some push-ups.

Ashleigh stuffs the remainder of the donut in her mouth and opens the door to her office.

INT. SCIENCE HALL - ASHLEIGH’S OFFICE - DAY

Ashleigh sets the stack of papers and her orange juice on top of her already disastrous desk. She plops down in her chair and takes a long look at the person sitting across from her. All levity and sarcasm evaporate from her voice.

ASHLEIGH
What the fuck are you doing here?

CANDACE
I didn’t know where else to go. I need your help. Your father... he’s gone over the edge.

ASHLEIGH
He went over the edge six years ago. He’s your problem now.

CANDACE
Please. He’s gone craz--
Ashleigh stands up and slams her desk, spilling orange juice all over the pile of papers.

ASHLEIGH
- I don’t care, Candy! Get your ass out of my office before I beat you to death.

Candace looks hurt, but not surprised. She stands, trying to impress upon Ashleigh the seriousness of the situation.

CANDACE
The machine, it’s not what it used to be. We’ve upgra--

Ashleigh cocks her fist and lets one fly.

Ian steps in to stop the fight at the exact wrong moment and catches Ashleigh’s right hook square in the eye.

Ian drops like an anvil, hitting the floor with a THUD.

Ashleigh, seething, steps closer, backing Candace to the doorway.

CANDACE (CONT'D)
Listen, I know what your father did to yo--

ASHLEIGH
- FUCK OFF, CANDACE!

Candace flinches, mostly from the anger in Ashleigh’s voice and takes the opportunity to flee the scene.

Ashleigh kneels down to help Ian, who is grimacing in pain, and holding his eye.

ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)
You OK?

IAN
Yeah, sure. No problem. I get punched all the time.

Ashleigh exhausts all her rage in a little laugh and pats him on the shoulder.

INT. SCIENCE HALL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Bored STUDENTS chatter amongst themselves. One of them, BRITTANY (19), uptight and headstrong, checks her watch.
Ashleigh races into the room and drops her binder onto her desk, next to a glass box split down the middle into two compartments, color-coded red and blue. Each compartment holds a small, white lab mouse.

ASHLEIGH
Morning guys.

STUDENTS
(in unison, with mock etiquette)
Good morning, Ms. Renhouesen.

Ashleigh smiles. The students giggle.

ASHLEIGH
Anyone remember where we left off?

BRITTANY
We trained the blue mouse to push a lever which releases food and water for both mice.

ASHLEIGH
Correct. Today, for part two, we’ll attach electrodes to Red and add a lever which gives him a flash of ecstasy any time he pushes it.

(beat)
Can anyone tell me why we didn’t train Red first?

JOSH (20), obviously the class clown, answers.

JOSH
Because he’s going to keep hitting that lever until he, you know, pleasures himself to death.

The class erupts in a cacophony of laughter. Ashleigh smiles and waves them quiet.

ASHLEIGH
That is essentially correct. Red’s enjoyment takes precedence over eating, sleeping, exercising and whatever micey things mice do. So, we’ve trained Blue to provide sustenance to keep them both alive.

Ashleigh looks around and lets that sink in.
ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)

Now, the big one. Why are we doing this?

Blank stares. Some of the students look down at their desks, praying not to be called upon. Finally, Brittany speaks up.

BRITTANY
So we can torture more innocent creatures with unnecessary animal testing?

ASHLEIGH
(joking)
Brittany, you fail.
(serious)
These two mice form a society. A small society, but a society nonetheless. We’ve split this society into two groups. The group that has all the fun...
(indicates red mouse)
And the group that does all the work.
(indicates blue mouse)
We’re showing that the division of labor, in any given society, can be ingrained upon the brains of its subjects.

BRITTANY
It’s grotesque. I’m starting a petition.

ASHLEIGH
Division of labor is present in all societies, from ant colonies to human civilization. For example, it’s Brittany’s job to save the world...
(indicates blue mouse)
And it’s my job to sit on the couch and eat chili cheese dogs.
(indicates red mouse)

Josh raises his hand.

JOSH
Will this be on the test?

ASHLEIGH
Absolutely.
INT. ENGINEERING HALL - LECTURE ROOM - DAY

Ashleigh wades through a crowd of departing students. Ian stands at the front of the room, packing away his notes. One last straggler, a FEMALE STUDENT (19) hangs around.

FEMALE STUDENT
Mr. Zeckler? What happened to your eye?

IAN
The first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club.

The student gives him a weird look, obviously missing the reference, then shrugs and leaves. Ashleigh raises her fists and gives her best Stallone impression.

ASHLEIGH
Adrian!

IAN
Shut up.

ASHLEIGH
How you feeling?

IAN
I’m all right.

ASHLEIGH
I think it’s starting to swell.

She raises her finger to poke at it, but he smacks it away.

IAN
It’s fine. Who was that woman?

ASHLEIGH
She’s nobody. Let me take you out for ice cream. I’ll bet some Rocky Road sounds pretty tasty right now.

IAN
You don’t have to do that. Besides, I have to go home and start my regimen of push-ups today.

ASHLEIGH
Fine, I can take a hint - but I’m buying lunch tomorrow, no arguments.
Ian smiles and raises his hands, accepting defeat.

INT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT – KITCHEN – NIGHT

Ashleigh ambles inside and tosses the mail and her cell phone onto the counter.

There’s nothing on the stove, but she spots Billy’s golf clubs next to the coffee table in the living room.

ASHLEIGH
Billy? Are you here?

BEDROOM

Billy sits on the bed, completely still, eyes glazed over, facing the doorway.

ASHLEIGH (CONT’D)
I don’t see my chili cheese dogs anywhere, slacker.

Billy does not acknowledge her.

ASHLEIGH (CONT’D)
Billy?

He looks up at her, slowly, and responds in a monotone voice.

BILLY
It is good to see you again, Pumpkin. You cut your hair.

ASHLEIGH
What are you talking about?
Wait... what did you call me?

Billy smirks. He stands up and looks her right in the eye.

BILLY
Peek-a-boo.

Ashleigh’s eyes go wide.

Billy grabs her arm and drags her, struggling, down the hallway and into the

LIVING ROOM

ASHLEIGH
Oh, this is NOT happening...
BILLY
I’m going to take you some place
safe. You’ll stay there until--

ASHLEIGH
- Safe? Safe from what?

BILLY
The world’s in bad shape, Pumpkin.
You know it, same as I do. I can
fix it, but there’s going to be...
casualties.

ASHLEIGH
I’m not going anywhere!

Ashleigh ELBOWS Billy in the trachea. He stumbles backward,
releasing her from his grip.

ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)
Stay away from me!

She dives for Billy’s golf bag, retrieves a nine-iron and
holds it in front of her, menacingly.

BILLY
When the dust has settled, I’ll
come back and--

Billy lunges for her.

ASHLEIGH
- I SAID STAY AWAY FROM ME!

She SWINGS the club with all her might.

It CONNECTS with his skull and SNAPS in two.

Billy’s neck whips around and he falls to the floor,
unconscious.

Ashleigh, still holding half the club, trembles with fear.

INT. BELLAGIO HOTEL - SUITE

The vital signs on Randy’s laptop leap into the red. He
rushes to James, who is drenched in sweat. The doctor yelps
in pain and removes the helmet. He doubles over, clutching
his skull.

RANDY
It’ll pass. I’ll get some aspirin.
James lays on the floor, blinking his eyes and wincing in pain. Randy returns with pills and a glass of water. James sits up and drinks them down.

RANDY (CONT'D)
I take it Ash was less than ecstatic about hearing from her old man again?

James just nods. Randy pats him on the shoulder.

RANDY (CONT'D)
That’s OK. We need a break anyway and I think you could use something to eat. Want to try the buffet?

JAMES
No. I should reconnect. She might leave, or try to hide. I need to make sure she stays put.

RANDY
You know it takes a while to clear the buffers and re-initialize the system after a sudden interruption.

James grinds his teeth. He doesn’t want to acknowledge it, but Randy’s right.

RANDY (CONT'D)
Go lay down in one of those ridiculously expensive beds. I’ll get us some room service.

JAMES
No, I have to--

RANDY
- Stop it. We have a lot to do and you can’t afford to work yourself into a coma.
  (beat)
  Go. Get some rest. I’ll knock when the food’s ready.

INT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Witmer and Madrigal knock on Ashleigh’s door.

WITMER
Doctor Ashleigh Renhousen?
No answer. He tries the door.

Unlocked. He nods to Madrigal. They pull their firearms and, covering each other, step INSIDE

They find Ashleigh, perched on the coffee table, a five iron in one hand, Billy’s stopwatch in the other.

Billy lies on the couch, his head wrapped in bandages and propped on a pillow. The stopwatch reads nineteen minutes, twenty-two seconds and counting.

WITMER (CONT’D)
Ashleigh Renhousen?

She scrambled to her feet, brandishing the golf club.

ASHLEIGH
Who the fuck are you?

WITMER
I’m Major Witmer, this is Lieutenant Madrigal. We’re special investigators for the US Army. We’re looking for your father.

She grips the five iron tighter.

WITMER (CONT’D)
Put it down. We’re not here to hurt you.

As a show of good faith, Witmer holsters his weapon. He motions to Madrigal toward Billy.

WITMER (CONT’D)
Who’s that on the couch?

ASHLEIGH
My boyfriend. I guess.

WITMER
Has he been hurting you?

ASHLEIGH
It’s complicated.

Madrigal checks Billy’s pulse and does a quick pass for broken bones. She gives Witmer a thumbs-up.
WITMER
What’s with the stopwatch?

ASHLEIGH
Seeing how long it takes him to reconnect.

Witmer looks confused. He wants to press the issue, but he’s got a job to do.

WITMER
Your father went missing last week. Has he been to see you?

Ashleigh looks at Billy’s prone body.

ASHLEIGH
Not exactly...

Ian bursts in from the hallway, gasping for breath. He takes one look at the scene and...

IAN
Holy crap, Ash! What happened?

Witmer spins around, hands automatically going for his gun.

ASHLEIGH
Whoa, hold on. I asked him to come.

IAN
Is this about that woman?

WITMER
What woman?

ASHLEIGH
Candace Dixon stopped by today.

Witmer sighs.

WITMER
Dr. Renhouse, I think you had better start from the top.

INT. PRINCETON NEUROSCIENCE LABORATORY - SIX YEARS AGO - DAY

A team of SCIENTISTS busy themselves around the laboratory, setting up for an experiment. Computers, monitors and oscilloscopes are connected by a vast network of cabling.
ASHLEIGH (V.O.)
I got my doctorate working in my father’s neuroscience lab.

In the center of the room sit two dentist’s chairs modified with thick straps around the arms and legs. Complicated masses of wires and electrodes are attached to the headrests.

WITMER (V.O.)
And Ms. Dixon?

Candace straps a GRADUATE STUDENT into one of the chairs and fastens the electrodes to his skull.

ASHLEIGH (V.O.)
(bitterly)
Research assistant.

CANDACE
(to grad student)
Just relax.

Randy runs a program on the computer, the display shows the student’s brain activity.

ASHLEIGH (V.O.)
We discovered a section of the cerebral cortex, near the cerebellum, which could be configured -

WITMER (V.O.)
I’m sorry... configured?

ASHLEIGH (V.O.)
Yes. Your brain is basically a bunch of neurons firing, which is an electrochemical process. The great thing about your brain, the reason you’re able to mature, to learn, is that these neural connections aren’t static. They’re adaptable. By stimulating certain areas, you can effectively rewire neural pathways.

Candace straps Ashleigh into the second chair.

ASHLEIGH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In our case, to receive signals from an outside source.
(MORE)
ASHLEIGH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then, a ‘client’ brain could
connect directly to a ‘host’ brain
using a series of electrodes.

CANDACE
Comfortable?

ASHLEIGH
(smiling)
I’m good.

RANDY
Configuration complete. Electrodes
online and reading positive. Ready
when you are.

JAMES
Make me proud, Pumpkin.

James nods to Randy, who types a command into the computer.

RANDY
Connection initialized.

Ashleigh’s brain activity lights up Randy’s screen. An old
printer spews out data.

Ashleigh’s face CONTORTS, showing signs of strain. Her
appendages contract, pulling against the straps.

The student’s eyes begin to twitch. He closes them, wincing
in pain.

Suddenly, the student’s eyes fly wide open.

He shakes back and forth involuntarily, testing the limits of
the straps. He locks eyes with James.

GRADUATE STUDENT
(straining)
Peek... a... boo.

INT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT
Everyone sits around the table, gawking at Ashleigh.

IAN
That’s creepy.

ASHLEIGH
That’s what Princeton thought, too.
We were quietly shuffled out the
door.

(MORE)
ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)
Dad went shopping for a new backer and the Army picked up the project. That was six years ago.

WITMER
So, when you clocked your boy over there, it was really--

ASHLEIGH
- My father.

WITMER
What’s the range on his machine?

Ashleigh scratches her head, then shrugs.

ASHLEIGH
Last time I saw it, the range was two feet and you had to be strapped to a chair covered in wires.

IAN
The signal must be wireless now.
(points at Billy)
He doesn’t have any electrodes coming out of his skull.

As if on cue, Billy groans and attempts to sit up. Ashleigh hops out of her chair and rushes to him.

ASHLEIGH
Hey, sleepyhead. How’s your noggin?

BILLY
Feels like I got shot. What happened? Who are all these people?

Ashleigh, now sure Billy is really Billy, kisses his cheek.

ASHLEIGH
I’ll explain later.

Witmer turns back to Ian.

WITMER
Think you can track it?

IAN
Sure. Phones can already measure signal strength.
(MORE)
I could whip up an app to track a different signal, but I’ll need to know the carrier frequency.

Everyone looks at Ashleigh expectantly.

ASHLEIGH
It’s not like I got it memorized along with my ATM PIN.

WITMER
It must be written down somewhere. Research notes, grant proposals?

ASHLEIGH
Princeton backs up their drives every six months. It might still be in the archives somewhere.

WITMER
Alright, we’ll try it. You... (pointing to Ian)
Get to work. And you... (pointing to Ashleigh)
Pack a bag. I’m not sure how long we’ll be gone.

ASHLEIGH
I’m not going anywhere. I have to take Billy to the hospital.

WITMER
It’s not a request. You’re the only one who knows what we’re looking for. Lt. Madrigal will get Billy some medical attention.

Ashleigh and Ian head off on their assigned tasks. Witmer takes Madrigal aside and whispers to her.

WITMER (CONT'D)
Search this place from top to bottom. Take the boyfriend to the Pentagon and let the techs have at him. See if there are any residual effects we can use.

MADRIGAL
Yes, sir, but--

WITMER
- But what?
MADRIGAL
She’s hiding something and, with all due respect, we don’t have the luxury of waiting for her to spit it out. Let me take her too.

WITMER
No, I need her and the geek together. She’s the only one her father has tried to contact and he’ll need something to track.

MADRIGAL
If his phone idea works.

EXT. ASHLEIGH’S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Witmer paces alongside a black SUV with tinted windows while talking on the phone.

WITMER
The young Dr. Renhousen claims her father contacted her using some sort of mind control device.

SECRETARY GORDON (O.S.)
Here’s more bad news. The top five neuroscientists in the country committed suicide this week.

WITMER
Eradicating the competition?

SECRETARY GORDON (O.S.)
That’s my guess. I don’t need to tell you this is a direct threat to the US of A, Major. Fix it.

Gordon cuts the connection as Ashleigh and Ian scamper from the building. Ian grabs his laptop from a backpack in the back seat of his hybrid, then hops in the SUV.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - NIGHT

Witmer pulls the black SUV into a vacant parking lot. All three hop out and stretch their muscles from the trip.

Ashleigh yawns and pulls her coat closed, fending off the slight breeze skipping through the trees. The rest of campus sleeps as quiet as the stonework on the buildings.
IAN
Do you know where they keep their backup drives?

ASHLEIGH
Actually, six years ago, we were still using tape. The storage vault is in the basement.

They head into one of the smaller buildings, passing a plaque near the entrance that reads “Department of Neuroscience.”

INT. NEUROSCIENCE BUILDING - BASEMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ashleigh leads them down a dimly lit corridor, makes a few turns and comes to a doorway in a forgotten corner of the building. The sign on the door reads “Tape Storage.”

The window on the door has been smashed in. Recently, judging by the bits of shattered glass on the floor.

Sounds of rustling can be heard from inside.

Witmer motions Ashleigh and Ian to stay behind him. He pulls his firearm and quietly opens the door.

TAPE STORAGE ROOM

Witmer creeps inside, Ashleigh and Ian follow.

Blue light escapes from a far corner, hidden by stacks of boxes and rows of magnetic tape reels.

Witmer sneaks around the last row of boxes, weapon ready.

A haggard woman hunches over a small laptop hooked up to the server. Witmer doesn’t recognize her, but Ashleigh does.

ASHLEIGH
Candy?

Candace spins around and sees Witmer pointing his gun at her.

She BOLTS for the door, tossing her chair in Witmer’s path.

He kicks it out of the way, catches Candace with one arm and throws her up against the wall.

ASHLEIGH (CONT’D)
Major Witmer ... Candace Dixon.