

STRANGE ATTRACTORS

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

An SUV races along a semi-rural road, city lights not far off.

INT. SUV - NIGHT - TRAVELING

LORENZ "LARRY" LAPACE, 26, is in the front passenger seat, hands in lap, bound with plastic ties. He is bruised and bloody, eyes red.

Driving is CAMDEN STORY, 58, a black man dressed somewhat well-to-do.

In the back seat is DURANCE CANTRELL, 38, a large, fit man in casual sports attire.

Both Durance and Camden are disheveled from recent violence. There is a bloody bullet hole in the shoulder of Durance's sweatshirt, though he seems unaware of it.

LARRY (V.O.)
The probability that I was going to
die was increasing exponentially
with every mile we drove.

SUPERIMPOSE: "IMMINENT DEATH 85%"

(NOTE: all data and percentages are visible only to Larry and are accompanied by various bar graphs, histograms, scatterplots, etc.)

LARRY (V.O.) (CONT.)
The chances of escape were almost
non-existent.

SUPERIMPOSE: "EXTRICATION FROM PRESENT AXIOM < 4%"

DURANCE
Dead or alive means dead in my
book, podna.

CAMDEN
Which book was that, exactly? "The
Vulgar Pugilist," or "Twenty-First
Century Neanderthals?"

DURANCE

I'm talking 'bout reducing our chances of apprehension by stuffing this here meat bag in the trunk.

CAMDEN

"Preferably alive" was part of the instruction set, was it not?

DURANCE

That was an adjunction--

CAMDEN

Supportive clause.

DURANCE

It was left up to us is what it was! And I'm saying meat-bagging him equals mission completed.

LARRY (V.O.)

Mission completed. They had an actual mission, and I had no plan and no idea how to escape. I had nothing. But, every time I looked at the steering wheel--

SUPERIMPOSE: "EXTRICATION FROM PRESENT AXIOM 28%"

The percentage rises, drops, rises even higher, until--

"TOPOLOGICAL TRANSITIVITY CONDITION CONVERGENCE 49%"

LARRY (V.O.)(CONT.)

I had no clue what that meant for real, but I knew I was going to die unless those numbers equaled up.

DURANCE

They can run juice to brain him at the facility. That much I know.

CAMDEN

So crass. So uncouth.

DURANCE

You think I don't know when I'm being insulted, don't you? You think I'm a simple fool, 'cause I'm from Loozie Anna.

(MORE)

DURANCE (CONT'D)

But I'll tell you what, you won't
be thinking nothing when I pass you
a slap that knocks that brick
shithouse you call a head off your
scrawny little girl shoulders.

CAMDEN

Retain control of your host! We
will be there in--

Camden produces a phone-size black rectangle and places it in
mid air, where it floats.

The interior of the vehicle is engulfed in a holographic
bubble of media and data; maps, stats, TV feeds, radio.

The media zooms to a map of the highway they are on, then
plots out a destination.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)

--less than three hours, at our
current pace.

DURANCE

Not soon enough. My general
disposition will improve when they
all're dead.

With a wave from Durance, the map and images shrink into a
world globe.

DURANCE (CONT'D)

Every last one a these here rock-
dwelling buggers.

(into Larry's ear)

Dead. Extinct. Shall no longer
abide.

CAMDEN

"You shall not pace forth, 'gainst
death and all oblivious enmity."

Durance sneers at the back of Camden's head.

SUPERIMPOSE: "EXTRICATION FROM PRESENT AXIOM 78%"

"IMMINENT DEATH 68%...67%...64%"

Larry's shirt sleeve has been nearly torn off and he looks at
a tattoo on his upper arm; a pair of dice surrounded by a
heart.

LARRY (V.O.)
Roll the dice. Not really a plan,
but--

Larry grabs the steering wheel and yanks.

EXT. SUV - NIGHT

The vehicle swerves, tips sideways, and plows into a concrete overpass column.

INT. SUV

Camden is knocked out against the windshield and Durance's door and window are pinned shut against the ground.

Larry shoves himself up over Camden, stopping to fish his phone from Camden's coat pocket, then struggles out the door.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Hands bound, Larry tumbles, gets up, runs.

Behind him, Durance extricates himself from the vehicle, but he limps badly.

Larry glances back, sees no pursuit.

He holds his phone up like a camera.

LARRY
Which way is safest? Come on! Which way? Show me!

Green icons on his phone indicate a direction.

Larry rests a moment, breathing hard.

LARRY (V.O.)
I was scared out of my mind,
because I didn't know how to stop
what was about to happen. But one
thing I knew for sure, if I didn't
find a way to stop it, there
wouldn't be any life to go back to.
Not for anybody.
(walks)
The irony was, just a couple weeks
ago I was the hottest young
millionaire in the country, even
the world.

(MORE)

LARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Three months before that, I was a
lowly messenger in the mail room of
my Uncle's stock firm...

He takes off running.

INT. MAIL ROOM - DAY

Larry is loading up a pushcart with mail and boxes, pulling
them from cubby slots.

A sign identifies the business: DATACACHE INVESTORS

PETE BERG, 25, is prepping outgoing FEDEX envelopes.

PETE
You better go see him, Lorenzo.

LARRY
Not planning on it, Pete.

PETE
This could be your last day.

LARRY
Yeah, like Unk's going to fire me.

PETE
Just go.

LARRY
He may be my uncle, but he's not
the boss of me.

PETE
He owns the company, ingrate. He
owns the whole stupid building.

LARRY
Eww! He owns this pile of crap
company, and the entire pile of
crap building. Whatever. He can
have it.

PETE
He does have it.

LARRY
Good for him. He still can't take a
dump on me.

PETE

Jesus Christ with the attitude,
dude. Don't you want anything?

LARRY

Look out, deliveries!

Larry pushes out the door.

INT. OFFICE FLOOR - DAY

The floor is cubicles, open space desks, and offices on the perimeter.

Larry pushes his cart along, smirking, mugging, teasing some of the females as he delivers mail.

LARRY (V.O.)

Yeah, that was me. Nowhere boy.
Punch in, punch out. The world of
finances. I saw it all as the
domain of greedy, corrupt
swindlers, and I hated my job. I
hated it so much, there was no
other job I'd rather have had. And
I had my crew--

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Larry sings in a band, along with Pete Berg, TERRY SELLERS,
24, RUDY ROMERO, 28. Punk rock in a small, dingy club.

(NOTE: The band plays a fast, raw cover of "Lilac Wine," by
James Shelton.)

INT. LARRY'S APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry, Pete, Terry, and Rudy, play a video game in a dingy
apartment.

On the TV, a splash screen appears: "BERSERKER WARS"

LARRY (V.O.)

--and enough cash for games, beer,
and pizza. Good enough, right?
That's what I figured. But, funny
thing is, if you're a player with
no game plan, you're gonna get
gamed...

INT. DATACACHE OFFICES/HALLWAY - DAY

Larry pretends to swerve and scrapes the wall, making car-chase noises.

His phone rings. He stops to answer.

LARRY

(into phone)

Hey, the Momster. Doing okay, you know, nothing much.

(beat)

I'm not going to see Dad...Because whatever he's got is contagious, and--and...Yeah, it's a joke. Okay, Mom, listen, I'm at work.

(beat)

Here we go. Don't cry. Stop. I'm sorry...Okay okay okay. I'll go see Dad. Tonight. Yes, promise, swear to god, cross my heart. Bye.

He disconnects, leans against the wall, crestfallen.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDENS - DAY

Larry pushes a wheelchair for his father, CHRISTIAAN LAPACE, 57, outside the sanitarium and into a very large garden.

Soleste is for the wealthy and famous.

CHRISTIAAN

Here, right here, stop. Row four, third planter. These are petunias.

LARRY

Yeah, swell.

Christiaan rises from the chair, making Larry nervous.

Christiaan's gait is discombobulated; his senses pull him in many directions at once and he flounders about, though his legs are healthy.

CHRISTIAAN

Count, eight planters down, cross two rows, you'll find hibiscus. Also known as rose-mallow.

As Christiaan babbles on, Larry makes a call.

LARRY

(into phone)

Yo, man, Rudy. Look, I'm going to be late for band practice. I'm visiting the old man. Sorry. Don't wait for me.

He hangs up, sees his father tangling with a large plant, and drops his phone in the wheelchair as he goes over to help.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Whoa Dad, settle down.

CHRISTIAAN

I was discussing strange attractors with this fine specimen. Strange attractors have a fractal dimension in probability theory, you see--

LARRY

Back to the chair, Pops.

CHRISTIAAN

And if there are derivations of position, you need a jerk equation to--to--

LARRY

You don't need to tell me about jerk equations, Poppa san. Lube, porn, hand, dick. 'Nuff said.

CHRISTIAAN

Oh now, a fourth position--that's a hyperjerk system. I'll tell you all about that...

Larry has seated his father and heads back toward the front doors.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES - NIGHT

Larry deposits his father with a male ATTENDANT outside the front door and walks away.

CHRISTIAAN

Larry. You forgot something.

Larry turns to see his father holding out his cell phone.

He goes back for it.

The handoff; eye contact.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
Hyperjerk equations are germane to
an area of probability theory--

LARRY
Thanks, Pops. Gotta run. Next time.

He hustles off.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Larry drives back to the city in his beater car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Larry listens to punk rock, but turns it down.

He fishes his phone out, finds it powered off.

It turns on to an intense fractal pattern and an
announcement:

PHONE
Welcome to Hyperjerk.

LARRY
Cute, Dad, you fuck head.

Larry receives a tremendous jolt of energy from his phone.

For a brief moment, his eyes sizzle with the fractal pattern.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Larry's car swerves off the road into a grassy embankment and
sideswipes several small trees before stopping.

Dust settles, then Larry emerges from the car.

He staggers and falls on his face.

The phone in his hand is visible, and on the screen a game
appears.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN

A cartoon Larry scampers Pac Man style through a labyrinthian
garden maze, chased by crab-like aliens.

The aliens catch him and zap his eyes with beams of light.

INT. MAIL ROOM - DAY

Larry angrily tosses mail and boxes onto his cart as Pete keeps out of his way.

A FEDEX MAN enters with boxes on a hand truck.

FEDEX
(works hand-held)
Twenty seven pieces, dropping right
on your work load, lads. Boom.

PETE
Thanks, bro.

FEDEX
No love from lil' Larry this
morning?

No response. Fedex looks at Pete.

PETE
Show him, Larry.

Larry, somber faced, activates his phone and hands it to Fedex.

The game starts up. Fedex pulls a not-getting-it face.

LARRY
Try to do anything with the phone
other than that.

Fedex tries several things, then inspects the phone closely.

FEDEX
That's a pernicious virus you got,
son. That's all that is. You gotta
get a new phone.

LARRY
What I gotta do is go see the old
man and strangle him by the neck
until he unscrambles this shit.

PETE
Dude, it's almost lunch. Go to the
gym with me and blow off a little
steam.

LARRY
Can't handle that.

PETE

Try calling him from my phone.

Larry rams his cart into the wall in frustration.

LARRY

I tried like fifteen times already!

PETE

Seriously. You haven't been to the gym in a month. Come on.

FEDEX

Or you're gonna have an a-pop-lexy.

LARRY

She's always there at lunch.

PETE

(to Fedex)

Ashley Dicen. The ex.

FEDEX

Only thing worse than car problems
and computer viruses; female
troubles. Later on, guys.

Larry frowns at his phone, throws up his hands.

INT. GYM - DAY

Larry jogs on a treadmill.

Behind him ASHLEY DICEN, 25, makes mockery of his huffing with exaggerated sounds.

Larry notices, pounds the off button, turns around.

ASHLEY

Working hard, slugger.

She continues to imitate his heavy breathing.

LARRY

Ash. I was hoping it was your day off.

ASHLEY

Aw.

LARRY

But I guess you come in here on your days off anyway, right?

ASHLEY

Lookit you. Flexing those jerk muscles, all "angwee" and full of "whage." Let's get some gloves on and channel that energy.

Fists up, she dances and jabs, making Larry dodge.

LARRY

Cut it out. I'm not boxing. Go pester Pete.

ASHLEY

Come on, Renzo. I'll be all nice and cutesy so you can pretend you're hitting your mom.

LARRY

Jesus.

Ashley nods at the tattoo on Larry's arm; the dice.

ASHLEY

Face it; I'm the best thing that ever happened to you.

LARRY

That was high school.

ASHLEY

And college.

LARRY

Not--you know, we weren't...

Larry mops his face with a towel, and the moment he is done, Ashley launches a kick. Her foot stops in mid air an inch from his face.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Durance Cantrell is with his agent, SANDRA MYERS, and promoter EUGENE TEMPLETON.

SANDRA

Sixteen years is a lot of name recognition--

EUGENE

That's part of the problem. Durance Cantrell equates to rap sheet.

SANDRA

He's willing to re-image, build a new brand, we've agreed to all that.

Eugene looks at Durance. His phone beeps.

EUGENE

I gotta take this. You two talk it out. Stay in touch.

With a nod, Eugene exits the room.

DURANCE

Golldag white-collar sack of--

SANDRA

Don't say it, Dee. Don't. You need the paycheck desperately. You don't take this, your career is essentially over. It's already over, and you can't say I didn't warn you.

DURANCE

I been Durance Vile my whole career! I cain't put on no cartoon costume, no matta what.

SANDRA

Nobody mentioned a costume.

DURANCE

No more Bubba-Slayer? No more Great Emancipator? Not even Gator the Hater?

SANDRA

It's a family network. You're getting a new image and rebranding. It happens all the time.

DURANCE

My brand got boo-coo history.

SANDRA

What he said; felony assault, drunken driving, child endangerment, concealed weapons charges, a history of drug abuse. It's time for something new, Dee.

Durance folds his hands, looks at the table.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

You haven't been in the ring for
almost nine months. How about it?
One last go.

DURANCE

Like none of it matters, anyhow.

SANDRA

You can make it matter.

Durance's jaws lock tight.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

On the top level of a parking facility, Durance finds his SUV
and gets in.

INT. SUV

Durance closes his eyes, breathing fast and erratically.

Then his eyes snap open as his body quakes violently.

After a brief spell, he stops, completely still.

From his p.o.v. the controls of the car are alien, gadgets
with bizarre markings, everything different.

He looks at the door latch, and with a trembling hand, grabs
it and pulls.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE

Durance exits the car and his wobbly legs collapse.

A female car park ATTENDANT sees him and drives her electric
cart over.

ATTENDANT

Sir! Are you okay?

The attendant hops out of her cart.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Oh dear. Do you have a medical
bracelet, sir? Hold on, I'll call
this in.

Durance attempts to stand and she assists.

He grabs her chin, locking eyes with her.

For a moment, the blacks of his pupils extend in rays of energy directly into her eyes.

She goes into a seizure. It is painful and violent, but Durance holds her up by placing the fingers of both hands on her temples.

She shakes uncontrollably as Durance grows visibly stronger.

INT. SUV

Durance gets back into the car, surveys the controls again, this time with confidence.

He looks into the visor mirror.

DURANCE

Durance Cantrell. Hello. Howdy,
podna. My name is Durance Cantrell.
I'm from Baton Rouge, Loozie Anna.

INT. MAIL ROOM - DAY

Larry returns, cart empty, room empty.

He sits down, turns his phone on.

INSERT -- PHONE SCREEN

The game is launched and little digital Larry scurries around the garden maze, pursued by the strange alien beasts.

Again, he is captured and zapped in the eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

Energy sizzles all over Larry's body.

He lurches up against the wall, slumps onto cartons of office paper.

INT. MAIL ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Pete enters, sees Larry sitting on the floor amid the toppled cartons, obsessed by the game.

INSERT -- PHONE SCREEN

Digital Larry passes through a hedge, followed by a flash of golden light.

BACK TO SCENE

Larry grins as if given a dose of happy pills.

PETE

Lair. The copy clerk said you were wiggin' out. What's with you, dude?

LARRY

I leveled up. I can feel it...I'm stronger now.

Pete gives him a look of incomprehension.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I gotta finish this. My phone won't turn on. Dad said...I gotta get all the strange attractors...

PETE

Right. Listen, I put out your faxes. I'll sign you out. Just go home. I think you need a shot or two of Jager. Okay? Feeling me? Lair?

Larry is back to the game.

PETE (CONT'D)

Don't respond or anything, that's okay. Does hyper-jerk want a baby bottle or pillow or anything?

Larry pauses.

LARRY

Hyperjerk? How did you know?

PETE

That you're a supreme twerp?

LARRY

The game is called Hyperjerk.

Pete shakes his head and leaves.

INT. MAIL ROOM - NIGHT

A Janitor enters, sees Larry still playing.

JANITOR
Hey, man, it's past six o'clock.

No response.

The Janitor gives him a wave of dismissal and leaves.

INSERT -- PHONE SCREEN:

A pattern, zooming out, shows Larry's progress through the garden maze; it is a vast, brachiated network.

Back to the Larry character as it hustles through the last wall of golden light.

A digital version of Christiaan awaits near a gazebo.

CHRISTIAAN
(digital character)
You made it! I knew you would, son.
You have the mind for it.

BACK TO SCENE

Suddenly Larry's phone comes alive with a fractal pattern.

The pattern blazes, reflecting in Larry's eyes.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Camden Story is at a table signing books after an in-store event.

A TV REPORTER is nearby, ready for an interview with camera and microphone.

BOOKSTORE OWNER cuts off the line of fans.

OWNER
Let's hold up for a minute, folks.
Mr. Story will sign more books
after this TV spot.

Camden signals agreement.

He closes his eyes. For a moment, he trembles and takes a few deep breaths.

His eyes pop wide open, bewildered.

TV REPORTER

We are here with Mister Camden
Story, linguist, poet, author,
literary critic, essayist, and
blogger. First off, I understand
your mother recently passed away.
My condolences.

Camden's vision is distorted; he sees the mic and camera as
if they were from another world.

The reporter clears his throat.

TV REPORTER (CONT'D)

So...Your latest collection of
poems has been under intense
scrutiny for an avant-garde style
that critics feel will exclude
modern black culture. How do you
want to be perceived as a black man
of letters in this era of social
media?

CAMDEN

(grunts, throat noise)
Menipholutos degarum ogultahg.

He pushes to his feet, sways for balance.

A stir in the crowd as Bookstore Owner rushes to his elbow.

OWNER

Pause. Stand by, everybody. We'll
be back shortly. I think Mr. Story
needs a moment. This way.

Owner leads Camden through a curtain into a back room.

INT. BOOKSTORE/BACK ROOM

The stock room is empty as Owner ushers Camden in.

OWNER

Here. Bottled water. Man-oh-man,
that was some cotton-mouth.

Camden puts a hand on Owner's shoulder.

They lock eyes and Camden's pupils exert black energy to
connect with the other man's eyes.

Owner seizes up, choking in agony.

Camden places his fingers on the man's temples, absorbing energy.

He is able to walk the Owner backward, like a puppet, and sit him on a chair.

INT. BOOKSTORE

Back before the crowd, Camden pauses.

CAMDEN
I am Camden Story, poet.

Polite applause.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)
Vernacularize. Clairaudience.
Solanders and conjunction, phrase,
alphitomancy, infinitive verbs,
degust subjunctive pabulum.

A beat.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)
I will exterminate every last one
of you in order to retrieve the
Axiom!

Loud applause and cheering.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Larry leans against a building as crowds of early evening workers stream by.

Cell phone out, he sees Hyperjerk's start screen of fractals, then it is gone.

From Larry's p.o.v. a barrage of SUPERIMPOSED DATA appears, trailing people and vehicles, all in percentages of probability, but without context.

Larry aggressively scratches his head, blinks hard, looks around suspiciously for hidden cameras.

LARRY
What the fuck...

A LADY, 62, strolls past, trailing stats:

SUPERIMPOSE: "CHANCE ENCOUNTER LEADING TO SEXUAL LIAISON
.02%"

A second LADY, 38, passes:

"CHANCE ENCOUNTER LEADING TO SEXUAL LIAISON 4.02%"

LARRY (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Whoa. Four percent is pretty good.

A young lady, TAYLOR FIORE, 24, passes:

"CHANCE ENCOUNTER LEADING TO SEXUAL LIAISON 94%"

Larry steps into pedestrian traffic to cut her off.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Hey! Do I know you?

TAYLOR
Oh. Um, maybe? Were you at Vestige last night? My birthday party?

LARRY
Oh yeah. I think I saw you there. You looked totally hot. I think we made eye contact for a second, but you were like, "Nah, beneath my stratosphere."

TAYLOR
No! Really? I'm so sorry.

LARRY
Maybe that was just me. When I see a super hot minx, I think; it's never going to happen. Give it up.

TAYLOR
Maybe you could've made it happen?

LARRY
I meant, you know, hooking up and all. My name's Larry. Really it's Lorenz. People call me Lozo, Ren, Renzo, but mostly Larry.

They shake hands.

TAYLOR
Taylor. What are you doing right now, Lozo?

LARRY
Hooking up, I hope?

She smiles gamely.

INT. TAYLOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry and Taylor make love.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Larry is on a busy nightclub street, phone out as if using the camera.

LARRY

Okay Hyperjerk. Now I want a free
drink. Where am I getting a free
drink?

He sweeps the phone 180 degrees.

SUPERIMPOSE: .04%...3%....05%...72%

Larry lowers the phone, realizing the data is all in his head.

He follows the data, gets a good reading outside a bar.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Larry looks around, a low-key establishment but not a dive, the bar half empty.

Larry drifts along, and next to a heavy man, BENNET KING, 42, the stats go to 96%.

Larry sits next to him.

The BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

LARRY

Jack and Coke.

BARTENDER

I'll need I-D.

Larry fishes his wallet out.

BENNET

(to bartender)

On my tab.

LARRY

I got it, no worries.

BENNET

Not when your friendly neighborhood
Liquor Rep is in town. It's on my
business account. My name's Bennet
King.

LARRY

(to Bartender)

Make that a double.

BENNET

Hell, make it a triple.

They laugh.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

TWO POLICE OFFICERS and an FBI agent, EDDY LI, 37, are inside
a taped off area, looking over the body of the Parking
Attendant.

Eddy is squatting, looking at dark burn patterns on her
temples.

He pries open an eyelid. The eyeball is crinkly black.

INT. CITY MORGUE - NIGHT

The coroner, VERNER ALLEN, 52, pulls a sheet over Attendant's
nude body, leaving only her head exposed, as Eddy Li watches.

VERNER

No signs of sexual assault or
resistance of any kind. We'll know
more in a day or two when the lab
reports are back, but, for now, I
don't have a clue.

EDDY

Are those burn marks?

VERNER

Apparently, but not thermal burns.
More akin to chemical burns.

Eddy's cell rings.

EDDY
(into phone)
Eddy Li speaking. Oh? Okay, I'll be
there in half an hour.

He disconnects.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Apparently we have a second case,
this one alive.

VERNER
Should I hold off on the autopsy?

EDDY
Cranial?

VERNER
We have to see.

Eddy nods approval.

INT. LARRY'S APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry is alone with his phone.

LARRY
What are you?

INSERT -- SPLASH SCREEN:

The vivid fractals, fading to nothing.

BACK TO SCENE

LARRY (CONT'D)
Right. Listen, Hyperjerk, where did
you come from?

No response.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Why do I see numbers? You did
something to my eyes, didn't you?

A beat.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Hello? Jerk-app? Hey--what's the
probability of me dying if I jump
out the window?

Larry consults his phone, gets nothing.

LARRY (CONT'D)
So, no philosophy questions, I
guess? G-P-S only seems to work
with the phone, so you do have
limitations. Would you work better
if I was smarter?...Nothing?

He moves to his game box controller and activates his TV. A
CLASH OF FANS fantasy football screen comes up.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Tell me this. What chance do I have
of making money this week with this
line-up?

SUPERIMPOSE: "CURRENT VARIABLE YIELD TO MAXIMUM RETURN: 5.6%"

LARRY (CONT'D)
Yikes. What if I drop Eli Manning
and pick up Russell Wilson?

The current yield rises to 38%

Larry nods, continues.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Agent Eddy Li is in his parked car on a city street.

INT. EDDY'S CAR - DAY

Eddy pages through his onboard computer.

CLAIRE BROUSSARD, 34, taps on his window.

INT. EDDY'S CAR - DAY

Claire gets in, they shake hands.

EDDY
You're agent Broussard.

CLAIRE
And you are agent Li.

EDDY
I'm guessing Secret Service?

CLAIRE
You, F-B-I?

EDDY

Let's see, special agent assigned
to securities and cyber fraud, so
in the field you might carry a Sig
Sauer P, three fifty-seven?

She draws the weapon from a shoulder holster.

CLAIRE

And F-B-I agents across the board
lug the same old Glock forty-five?

He presents the sidearm. He clucks in envy, then they holster
the guns.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

So my dick is bigger than yours. I
read the case files. I was
investigating a rash of coherent
cyber fraud, and you have the
murder of a parking guard and a
suspicious brain trauma victim.

Eddy starts the vehicle.

EDDY

We're going to see him now.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Camden walks. He is startled to see a dog on a leash.

The dog growls distrustfully as he gives it a wide berth.

He produces the solid black rectangle and sweeps it at arm's
length until it pulses green.

CAMDEN

(into air)

I'm close. Reveal yourself.

DURANCE (V.O.)

I am visible.

Camden sees Durance sitting on a park bench in the open.

Closer, he pauses and they inspect each other.

CAMDEN

I am a black man.

DURANCE

Hell, I'm white trash, and a red
neck, and likewise a good ol' boy.

Camden sits.

DURANCE (CONT'D)

Durance Williams Cantrell, the
Third.

CAMDEN

My nom de plume is Camden Carver
Story.

A beat.

DURANCE

This world...Bathed in radiation--
(indicates sun)
--and a nitrogen atmosphere. How
could anything live in such a
lethal environment?

CAMDEN

We have solid construction pylons
inside, "bones," to compensate for
the immense planetary gravity well.
To slog through an entire lifespan
carrying this much dull weight is
unimaginable.

DURANCE

Almost no spectrum scanning through
these light processing sensory
organs.

He makes wide eyes at Camden.

CAMDEN

We talk. We speak. Enunciation
through modulated pitch and
syntactical phrasing. I gain
employment through analysis of
these sound blocks. Words. I am a
poet.

DURANCE

I cause damage, actual and virtual,
to other similar life forms, and
live within an enclosure of popular
scrutiny.

Camden holds the communicator out before them and when he
takes his hand away it floats there.

Blackness flashes--

INT. PHASE SPACE - NIGHT

Three faces are visible in a pool of utter darkness:

Camden, Durance, and THOMAS CAGE, 48.

Their eye sockets are solid black with pinpoints of light for pupils.

For a moment, they communicate with high-pitched SONICS, exchanging rapid squirts of noise.

THOMAS

Wardens.

DURANCE

Ultrak. Where are we?

CAMDEN

This distance is formidable. My senses are utterly devoid of contact with our home.

THOMAS

Yes. A very long reach, but this world is a tremendous resource.

DURANCE

The radiation is unendurable.

CAMDEN

And these things--this shell, is soft and pliant and needs to exchange gasses constantly to survive.

THOMAS

It will be a simple feat to rid this mineral rich world of the hominid vermin. But for now, our plans cannot be executed because the Axiom is lost.

CAMDEN

Lost!?

DURANCE

How is that possible? How could we be here?

THOMAS

You were cast here at a fantastic cost to our campaign. Wardens, I am trapped and cannot effect but minor tokens of my will. It is imperative we have the Axiom back at once.

CAMDEN

Ultrak, how could you--

Thomas' eye points turn red.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

The black rectangle that floats before Camden and Durance turns red and they both seize up in intense pain.

They appear to sizzle and burn in silent agony.

Then the rectangle returns to black.

INT. PHASE SPACE - NIGHT

The faces of Camden and Durance gasp as they are relieved of pain.

THOMAS

No more discussion. You will not question my will.

DURANCE

What...what...

THOMAS

That is pain. These creatures are wired to register sensory input that causes harm, and it is very unpleasant. Disobey me or fail in this task and you will be sentenced to remain here.

CAMDEN

We will find the Axiom, Ultrak.

THOMAS

Good. I believe it was removed from my codex by this individual--

An image appears of Christiaan Lapace.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Start there. Coerce or exterminate
as you see fit. Retrieve the Axiom,
Wardens. Do not fail.

CAMDEN

Yes!

DURANCE

Yes!

THOMAS

One last thing. The central
processing organ is formulated with
individual constructs, called
personalities, and these traits
will become increasingly more
prevalent as time passes.
Expediency will be everything.

INT. CITY PARK - DAY

Camden and Durance return to their bodies.

Camden pockets his communicator.

CAMDEN

I've never felt anything so
primitive. So horrible.

Durance pinches his own hand.

DURANCE

Agreed. Pain. There it is. Pain is
part of my "repertoire." I "mess
motherfuckers up."

Camden looks at him closely.

CAMDEN

How gauche.

INT. LARRY'S APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry, Pete, Terry, and Rudy play Berserker Wars.

Rudy gets a message on his phone.

RUDY

Hey, hey, hey! Check it out.

He stands up for emphasis.

RUDY (CONT'D)
Orale vatos! Check this shit out!

They all gather around Rudy.

PETE
What is it?

RUDY
You took it down, Lozo. You fucking scored!

LARRY
Clash of Fans Fantasy football! I won! Ten thousand dollars!

Larry and his friends start hooting and tossing cans and trash around.

INT. CEO'S OFFICE - DAY

Larry is sulking in a chair in his Uncle's posh office.

NEILS LAPACE, 60, sharply dressed, sits behind his desk.

NEILS
"How's turnaround on the B-E-M shares, Unk?" You did send me that text, correct?

LARRY
Yup.

NEILS
First of all, I don't know how you got my direct number--

LARRY
The B-E-M shares, Neils. That was the question, "first of all."

NEILS
Young man--

LARRY
I put ten thousand on it last night, just before closing.

NEILS
Ten thousand...?

LARRY

Spondulics, baby. Rubles. Cold hard
living larges. How'd I do? Get on
that machine, oh Great Brother of
my Daddy, read me my fortune.

Neils hesitates as he tries to suppress his anger, but he
taps away.

NEILS

Oh Jesus. B-E-M split. You very
well may have doubled your
investment. Is this for real?

Larry makes a you-betcha face and finger-guns his Uncle.

INT. LARRY'S APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry makes a call as Pete and Terry listen in, their faces
lit up with barely contained excitement.

LARRY

(into phone)

That's right. One hundred thousand
on the Jets to beat the spread.
Yeah, got it. Thanks.

He hangs up. Pete and Terry make loud oh-oh noises.

INT. SOLESTE ESTATES/LAPACE'S ROOM - DAY

Larry sits near his father.

LARRY

It's so accurate it's scary. Dad--

CHRISTIAAN

In a stormy basin of attraction,
the winds of chaos swirl around
strange attractors.

LARRY

Thanks. Poetry helps so much.

CHRISTIAAN

Son.

(grabs Larry's arm)

Some life forms have mental
capabilities vastly in advance of
our own. But we have hearts. We
have emotional intelligence. They
don't. Remember that.

Larry holds his clasped arm up until his father releases it.

LARRY

So I get no explanation of this--
this whatever it is?

CHRISTIAAN

It was in the central gazebo, by
the lilac trees. Your mother's
favorite tree.

LARRY

Okay okay, Pops, enough. I get it.
You don't want to come back. Fair
enough. Mom and me will just fuck
off, for all you care. Right?

Christiaan contemplates.

CHRISTIAAN

They have black brains. I'm not
sure they're made of tissue at all.

Larry throws his hands up in resignation and stands.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

Beware, son. The black brains can
detect the Axiom. No matter what,
don't give it to them.

Larry shakes his head.

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH FACILITY - DAY

Eddy and Claire look at an image of a brain scan with Dr.
LYNETTE POWELL.

Behind them videos play of Bookstore Owner in a hospital
room, sitting upright, a speechless shell of a man.

LYNETTE

Mostly the temporal gyrus regions,
here and here. Syntax, vocabulary,
processing of speech. Massive
neuronal damage. I don't expect
he'll ever recover.

EDDY

Any theories?

LYNETTE

We won't know until he passes away
and we can do an autopsy. Even
then, who knows...?

Eddy looks at Claire, who is captivated by the brain scan
image of strings of dark fibers crisscrossing the lobes.

CLAIRE

Doctor, what, in theory, would
bilateral brain structure like that
do?

LYNETTE

Well...since the corpus callosum
already facilitates trans
hemispheric communications, I'd
have to say it would make our minds
less of a parallel processor and
somewhat more linear.

CLAIRE

Meaning?

LYNETTE

You'd know less about the latest
fashion or your cousin's wedding
plans, and get straight A's in math
in half the time. More sequential,
less broad spectrum awareness.

Eddy and Claire meet eyes.

EDDY

Thank you, doctor.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Larry follows SUPERIMPOSED data around, trailed by Pete and
Rudy.

PETE

I thought we were going to party,
Lair. What good is money if you put
it all on stocks, for Christ's
sake?

Ignoring them, Larry wanders through the slot machines until
he finds a promising one.

LARRY

This one. Wheel of Fortune.

RUDY
Serious, hombre? Twenty five cent
slots?

Larry nods, sits down.

LARRY
Who's got cash?

Pete and Rudy look at each other, then dig out bills.

INT. CASINO (A LITTLE LATER)

Pete and Rudy watch as Larry puts the last five dollar bill
into the machine.

RUDY
We could split a cerveza with that.

LARRY
(not turning around)
All or nothing. Max bet.

The wheels spin. He hits a big number and the big wheel on
top spins as Rudy and Pete high five.

The numbers climb into the thousands.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE WINNING STREAK

- A) Larry puts a stack of chips on a single roulette number,
wins.
- B) Larry bets big on a horse race in the sports book area
and they all have drinks and watch as his horse comes
from behind to win.
- C) Larry peels cash off a roll for his pals.
- D) Following data around, Larry stops at a slot machine
where an old lady sits. They eye each other,
then Larry peels off a couple hundred for her and she
relinquishes the seat.

As she walks away, she hears the machine chiming for the
lucky strike. Larry peels off more bills for her.

- E) In a lounge, Larry, Pete, and Rudy all have drinks, and
Three High-Roller HOOKERS sit with them. They toast.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Durance's SUV pulls to a stop along a University campus street.

They get out and head toward a building.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

ANTON BERESHKI, 52, works at his desk.

A KNOCK on his half open door.

Durance and Camden enter.

ANTON

Gentlemen. How can I help you?

Durance sits on Anton's desk, very close to him.

CAMDEN

Christiaan Lapace was a member of your faculty, correct?

ANTON

This is somewhat unprecedented. Do you have credentials, gentlemen?

CAMDEN

My colleague is he "who mumbles in the dark, and draws a veil across the stars."

ANTON

(baffled)

Robert Blake?

Durance grabs him by the throat, yanks him close.

CAMDEN

A white man who hasn't read Langston Hughes. What a shock.

He crowds in next to Durance and together they exert the beams of energy into the Dean's head.

Anton's face turns black, his hair smolders, his teeth fall out. He slumps to the floor leaking blood from every facial orifice.

DURANCE

I ain't read no Langston Hughes.

CAMDEN

That's because you "ain't" read
anything, you dimwit. Rednecks look
at pictures in magazines.

DURANCE

(clucks)

Reckon that's true. But I thought
all black folks do is--

Camden stands face to face with him.

CAMDEN

Maybe we better drop it before
everything comes unglued.

Durance raises hands in surrender.

INT. CEO'S OFFICE - DAY

Larry enters his uncle's office as Neils works.

NEILS

Ah, the lapsing Lapace. Do we have
a scheduled meeting?

Larry plunks down in a guest chair.

LARRY

No.

NEILS

Listen, Larry, I know why you're
here, and I can't save your job.
That's an H-R decision and if you
decide not to show up for a couple
days, then--

LARRY

Fuck the job, Unks.

Neils' head sinks.

NEILS

All right. I suppose I could give
you life coaching, but I'm not your
father, Larry. I'm just not.

LARRY

I drew all my funds from the stock
split, and with my other winnings,
I have almost half a million
dollars.

NEILS

You have--wait--other winnings?
Half a million dollars?!

LARRY

Yup. I plunked it all down on the
Intelligene I-P-O.

Neils is stunned. He tabs through pages on his monitor.

NEILS

This is very ill advised. No, no,
the confidential buzz is very cool
on that offering. You'll have half
your investment inside a week.

Larry shows open hands.

NEILS (CONT'D)

Such a waste. You actually do think
I'm your father, don't you? This is
some sort of vicarious revenge for
my brother not giving you his full
attention while you were growing
up, right?

LARRY

Full attention? How about any
attention? How about he remembers
my name?

NEILS

He knew your name, I'm fairly sure.

LARRY

He called my Neils, or Albert.

NEILS

Well, genius comes with a few
foibles, but he cared for you,
Larry. He still does.

LARRY

He thinks I've been captured by
aliens with black brains. He thinks
we live in a garden maze or
something.

A notice chime sounds, and Neils tabs his intercom.

NEILS

(into intercom)
Show Mr. Ridell in.

His expression says it's-out-of-my-hands.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

Larry gets in a brand new Tesla, rolls the window down to talk to the SALESMAN.

LARRY
Good to go, right?

SALESMAN
Cash is king, Mr. Lapace.

Larry gives him devil's horns and pulls out.

INT. STOCK EXCHANGE FLOOR - DAY

Larry, now in a slick modern suit, is in the clangoring mob, phone to ear and gesturing at a ticker.

LARRY
(into phone)
Ten thousand shares! Yes, now. Get ready for the next one. Another ten thousand shares...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Durance's SUV pulls over and stops on a suburban street.

Durance and Camden get out and approach a house that has a prominent row of flowering lilac bushes.

INT. LAPACE RESIDENCE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

NANCY LAPACE, 54, is exercising when the doorbell rings.

She opens the door to find Durance and Camden there.

NANCY
Hello?

CAMDEN
Ante meridian salutations, Miss Lapace. We are colleagues of your husband, and we have an urgent matter to discuss with you.

NANCY

Oh?

(steps aside)

Come in. Please.

They enter.

As she closes the door, Durance seizes her in a bear hug from behind, and Camden grasps her temples with both hands.

She screams, but quickly stops as their eyes meet.

She trembles in pain a moment, then stops. She goes limp.

Camden signals for Durance to bring her into the living room.

Durance sticks a finger in each of her nostrils.

DURANCE

Walk.

He leads her on.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Nancy rests, drowsy-eyed, while Camden sits on the edge of a coffee table before her and Durance loots through a desk.

CAMDEN

And the address of this mental health facility?

NANCY

It's in Brookwood.

CAMDEN

You're certain he's still there?

NANCY

He doesn't have off residence permission.

CAMDEN

He has a communicator?

She tilts her head.

DURANCE

Cell phone.

NANCY

No. They're not allowed.

CAMDEN

And this replicant--this son--of
yours, was the last person to
visit?

NANCY

Yes. Visitation rights are
restricted to family.

CAMDEN

I hope they will make an exception
for us. We shall go visit your
husband and your son. Now listen
closely. I'm leaving you with
instructions that must be followed.
If you follow them, your pleasure
centers will reward you--

Nancy suddenly breathes hard and fast, nearly orgasmic, then
it stops abruptly.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)

And if you fail, nothing will save
you.

She seizes up, choking with agony.

Durance comes over to watch. His fists clench up and he is
about to hammer her.

Camden stops Nancy's pain.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)

(to Durance)

Control yourself.

DURANCE

I respond to pain with greater
pain. I emancipate these here
creatures from the idea of a happy,
homogenized life. I am Durance--

CAMDEN

Stop. You are an unhinged demon of
commonplace cruelty.

A beat.

DURANCE

Say what?

CAMDEN

(to Nancy)

Listen closely...

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/PARKING LOT - DAY

Eddy pulls his car into a parking space. It is late afternoon, almost sunset.

INT. EDDY'S CAR

Eddy and Claire drink coffee. Eddy opens a laptop as they talk.

CLAIRE
Why was Professor Lapace committed?

EDDY
He went into a near catatonic phase, similar to our bookstore owner, then emerged into total psychosis.

CLAIRE
Your agency thinks they're related cases?

EDDY
And we have leads.

He brings up photos and security camera video of Durance and Camden.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Durance Cantrell, pro wrestler, and Camden Story, English teacher and poet of some sort. Both men caught on camera at the scene of the crimes, both men gone to ground.

A long moment of thought.

CLAIRE
So far, I'm not seeing what is specifically compelling to my field.

Eddy clicks through to morgue images.

EDDY
Brace yourself.

An image of the Parking Attendant's autopsied brain; it is nearly black with fibrous strings.

CLAIRE

Good god. Well, Mr. Li, that made my morning.

EDDY

It's Eddy. We don't know the nature of the trauma yet, but there are a number of structural modifications to most areas of the victim's brain. Very similar to what we just saw.

CLAIRE

If you had another I-D, Eddy, what would it be for?

EDDY

I could ask the same of you.

CLAIRE

Eight years of programming theory for the D-O-D and the N-S-A--

EDDY

Ah. Coherent cyber fraud, meaning...?

CLAIRE

Highly advanced cyber attacks upon ultra encrypted systems signals the forerunner of emergent artificial intelligence.

EDDY

Holy mackerel.

CLAIRE

And?

EDDY

In the ranks, I'm known as a tuna fisher. Threats of an unknown nature.

CLAIRE

Alien hunter?

EDDY

Possibly.

CLAIRE

Wow. Earth to this car.

EDDY

We have an A-P-B out for Cantrell
and Story, and we have your cyber
grids for the region.

Claire motions towards the laptop and Eddy gives the go
ahead.

CLAIRE

Two of your suspicious deaths
occurred near this facility,
Mindlink. It's a research think
tank for biocybernetics. Eight
months ago, Christiaan Lapace was a
probability theory mathematician
doing some consulting work there,
just prior to arriving here.

EDDY

So, merging your plots with our map
of suspicious deaths--

Claire taps a moment.

INSERT -- COMPUTER SCREEN IMAGE:

The two grids roughly match up.

BACK TO SCENE

CLAIRE

The viral coherence anomalies all
centered on Lapace or Mindlink.

EDDY

Past tense?

She tabs up an image of Larry.

CLAIRE

Somehow his son just accumulated
eight million dollars.

Their eyes meet.

EDDY

Let's go talk to the professor.

ON SCREEN -- A WEB-STREAMED INTERVIEW:

Larry is on a video-conference with a WEB HOST as financial
crawls and Fortune 500 ads go by.

HOST

But it can't be attributed to sheer luck.

LARRY

Oh no. I have a few simple formulas. My dad was a mathematician, after all.

HOST

Sure. Professor Christiaan Lapace. Well known to us geeks. How is your father? I understand it was a nervous breakdown?

LARRY

Yeah...He's okay, you know. Just wasn't the same for him after that.

HOST

No return to academia in sight for the esteemed Professor?

LARRY

No.

HOST

Okay. Back to the prodigal son. So you've started your own company, Spondulics, and are off and running with twenty five million in venture capital.

LARRY

Yep. We should double that within three months.

HOST

With no investors or sponsorship, how on Earth is this possible?

LARRY

I hired the right people. Need a plan? Hire people with plans...

EXT. "TESLA" - DAY

Larry drives through the city.

INT. "TESLA" - DAY - TRAVELING

Larry uses the hands-free speakerphone. On the line is stock broker ALEX WENDEL.

LARRY

...and you say your take of the profits was a neat one fifty last year?

ALEX (V.O.)

(on speaker, filtered)

Pretty steady the last five years.

LARRY

How 'bout I double that.

ALEX (V.O.)

Jesus. That certainly is something to think about.

LARRY

Plus commission. Work whatever hours you like.

ALEX (V.O.)

What are you calling this brokerage?

LARRY

Spondulics. It means money. Bank. What do you say? Offer might be off the table tomorrow.

ALEX (V.O.)

Well hell, I'll give it a go. Send me where and when.

LARRY

Awesome. Thanks, Alex.

Larry disconnects.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT

Larry manages a sound board as Pete, Terry, and Rudy rip through a punk rock number.

They stop.

TERRY

C'mon, Renz, quit fucking around. You're the front man.

LARRY

Quit fucking around? That song has less than a point oh four percent probability of even making us a hundred dollars.

RUDY

What?! It's punk fucking rock, ese!

PETE

It's just one song, Lair.

LARRY

Our best song.

TERRY

Yeah, so get up here. Let's thrash.

Larry throws up his hands.

LARRY

Delegate. Cut dead weight. I'm out.

The band members all exclaim as Larry walks away.

EXT. ROOF TOP - NIGHT

Larry attends a cultured party event with catered food and a DJ.

He stands against the edge wall with a cocktail, talking to aspiring model IZOLDA UTKIN, 24. She is a statuesque blonde of Russian heritage.

They both look at a YOUNG LADY mingling nearby.

LARRY

...They just look like shoes to me.

IZOLDA

(slight Russian accent)

Such talk is foolish. Those are everything. Christian Louboutin Maralena Flames.

LARRY

Big whoop. I see fancy sandals. Why don't you get a pair?

IZOLDA

If necessary, I would cut out her eyes and eat them for those shoes.

(MORE)

IZOLDA (CONT'D)
In U-S currency they are twenty-
five hundred dollars.

LARRY
For sandals? Fuck me.

She looks at Larry.

Larry squints, as if reading something.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Wanna go shopping?

INT. LARRY'S NEW APT/BEDROOM - NIGHT

The shoes sit on a dresser as Larry and Izolda roll in the sheets in his new, swanky apartment.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

Larry approaches a doorway as TWO MEN set a new door on the hinges. It bears the frosted glass moniker:

SPONDULICS.

GET SOME.

He pauses to appreciate it.

INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Larry, dressed in a suit, has bare feet up on the desk, reading a comic book.

ALEX WENDELL knocks on the open door and pokes his head in.

ALEX
Hey, kid. Norton wants to drop a
couple big on Fortrum. Thoughts?

LARRY
I'm on it. I'll ping you back.

ALEX
(thumbs up)
Good deal.

Alex exits.

Larry brings up the Fortrum index on his monitor.

LARRY
(at monitor)
What are the odds of the Fortrum
stocks making money in the next
three months?

SUPERIMPOSE: "RATE OF RETURN .68%"

Larry tabs up a video-conference window with Alex.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Alex. No go on that turkey. It's a
dud.

ALEX
(on monitor)
Crap. He's pretty gung-ho on that
opportunity.

LARRY
Well, he can go fuck that rolling
doughnut, or--

ALEX
(on monitor)
Hey, boss! No argument from me.
I'll do what I can.

LARRY
Cool beans. But don't try too hard.
This could be a learning
opportunity for our client. Who
banked fifty million in six weeks?
His friends at Spondulics, that's
who. Can I get back to my comic
book now?

Alex pulls a face and clicks off.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Larry emerges from his parked Tesla near a coffee shop.

He pretends to talk on his phone.

LARRY
(into phone)
What is the probability of a sexual
encounter resulting from me going
into that place?

He sweeps the phone across nearby restaurants, bars, and
coffee shops.

The phone displays green bars that rise and fall. Then--

SUPERIMPOSE: "PROBABILITY OF SEXUAL ENCOUNTER .00812%"

Larry walks, looking at the stats trailing pedestrians.

Suddenly the data indexes all turn red and blink.

SUPERIMPOSE: "HOST LIFE EXPECTANCY ALERT"

"IMMINENT DEATH WITHIN 40 MINUTES 98%"

Larry stops, spins around in alarm.

LARRY (CONT'D)

What?! Host? Is that me?

SUPERIMPOSE: "HOST LIFE EXPECTANCY ALERT"

"IMMINENT DEATH WITHIN 26 MINUTES 99%"

Larry snaps around every direction, gets the same red bars and IMMINENT DEATH results.

LARRY (CONT'D)

(shouts at phone)

What the fuck do I do?! Will
calling the police help? Does
somebody want this back?

No response. He hastens back to his car and hops in.

INT. "TESLA" - DAY - TRAVELING

Larry drives frantically.

The red status bars drop. He takes a couple turns, sees the bars and numbers go up and down.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Larry pulls up outside his parent's house.

He exits the car and hustles up to the front door, knocks, then opens it, calling out--

LARRY

Mom?

INT. LAPACE RESIDENCE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Larry enters.

His mother Nancy enters from the garage with a basket of clothes.

She is listening to music and singing along to Jeff Buckley's cover of "Lilac Wine."

LARRY

Hey mom.

NANCY

Why, Larry! Look at you. Mister fancy pants.

LARRY

You know, Daddy's Finger does an actual good version of this song.

NANCY

Oh, please.

LARRY

Is everything okay, Mom?

NANCY

(kisses his cheek)

Okay? Of course. Why, did something happen?

LARRY

I don't know. Have you ever wanted to go to Hawaii, or Paris, anything like that?

NANCY

I've been to Hawaii and your father and I honeymooned in Paris, you silly forget-me-not. How about some tea?

LARRY

Tea. I need something stronger. I think I'm having an anxiety attack.

NANCY

I used to make your father a Manhattan.

He follows her into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Larry sits on an island stool as his mother gets out cocktail supplies.

Larry looks at his phone, almost reluctantly thumbs the Hyperjerk app.

It activates, flashing red, then all around him--

SUPERIMPOSE: "WARNING! IMMINENT THREAT"

Larry looks up just as his mother swings a bottle of vodka at him.

It smashes against his head, sending him sprawling.

She pauses as rewarding orgasmic sensations wash over her.

Larry, dazed, head bloody, sees his mother's feet and legs approaching.

Larry rolls--

--a large chopping knife cleaves down.

He scrambles as his mother plunges the blade into the floor with both hands.

LARRY

Mom! What the fuck! Mom! It's me!
Mom!

She is up in a flash and grabs another bottle.

NANCY

(sexually excited)
Oh god, yes, please--

LARRY

Mom!

Then she howls in pain and rushes at him.

Larry fends her off.

They fight, mostly her attacking in a mad frenzy of pain and pleasure.

Finally Larry punches her, knocking her out.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Larry carries his unconscious mother to the couch.

He grabs a hand towel from the basket of clothes and presses it against the back of his bloody head.

Then he hears a shrill BEEPING, realizes he left his phone in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Larry grabs the phone off the counter, then--

SUPERIMPOSE: "HOST LIFE EXPECTANCY ALERT"

"IMMINENT DEATH WITHIN 24 MINUTES 97%"

LARRY

(to phone)

What is happening?! Where do I go?
I'll give it back. Tell them that.
Hello? Listen, please, you can have
everything back. I swear.

He sees the same warning.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Larry hurries to the front door.

LARRY

Sorry Mom. Sorry.

He leaves.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Durance's SUV accelerates through traffic and makes a quick turn.

INT. SUV - DAY - TRAVELING

Durance drives as Camden navigates by holding his communicator up, creating the electromagnetic bubble, a green line defining the Axiom signals.

CAMDEN

The carrier has contacted its
precursory unit.

DURANCE

These rock-dwellers bathe in electromagnetic energy but seem unaware of it. "Like pigs in slop," my pappy would say. "Pigs in goldurn slop!"

CAMDEN

"There's no reproach among swine, d'you see, For being a bit of a swine." Turn here.

Durance shoots him a look.

CAMDEN (CONT'D)

Rudyard Kipling. The signal from the precursory unit has ceased. Our quarry is on the move.

DURANCE

How could the signal be lost? Did he extinguish his gestator?

CAMDEN

Extinguish her? His own mother?

(deep frown)

They say, the passing of your mother is the first sorrow you shall weep without her. I...I think it means--

Tears come to Camden's eyes, and he is surprised and perplexed by them. He looks at Durance.

DURANCE

Concentrate! Bear down! We have a mission; retrieve the Axiom.

Camden sits up straight, breathes deep.

CAMDEN

Yes. Sorry. The subject matter has such overwhelming primal traction.

DURANCE

I'll pass you a slap that will put you in traction, I hear any more of that mumbo jumbo.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The SUV makes another sudden turn, accelerates.

A motorcycle POLICE OFFICER tags them with a radar gun, puts on his lights and pursues.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Pete, Rudy, and Terry eat pizza and start a video game.

The game splash screen: BERSERKER WARS

TERRY

Try-out better get here soon.

RUDY

Or no pizza for him.

TERRY

Yeah. He better be able to really eat some pizza to be in this band.

A loud pounding on the door.

PETE

(standing)

He knows how to knock, that's for sure.

Pete goes to the door and opens it.

Larry is there, a bloody mess.

PETE (CONT'D)

Larry! Holy fuck, dude--

Larry pushes past Pete.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Police Officer walks toward Durance's SUV, pulled over just ahead.

He motions for Camden in the passenger seat to roll down the window, which he does.

POLICE OFFICER

Afternoon, gentlemen. I pulled you over for going sixty four in a residential neighborhood. Driver's license and registration, please.

Camden tries to hand him the black rectangle.

CAMDEN
This should do.

POLICE OFFICER
Sir, license and registration.

CAMDEN
We have diplomatic immunity.
Please, you'll see, everything is
in order.

The Officer takes the black rectangle and instantly seizes up stiffly as energy fries his nervous system.

Durance gets out and catches the Officer before he collapses.

He hands the rectangle back to Camden in the car.

Then he takes the Officer's sidearm, nightstick, and mace.

He punches the Officer in the stomach.

DURANCE
Here's my license fo' malfeasance.

He kicks the Officer as he sinks to his knees.

DURANCE (CONT'D)
And I do believe I am registered to
administer severe damage to anyone
who dares oppose the Great
Emancipator.

CAMDEN
You splenetic ogre! Let's be on our
way.

Durance looks at the handgun, peers down the barrel, then points it at the downed Officer.

DURANCE
Your fate is that of all your kind.

CAMDEN
Stop! We draw too much attention.

Durance sees faces behind a curtain in a nearby house.

He returns to the driver's side.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Larry is on the couch, his band mates gathered around.

TERRY

Let me guess, it's the fucking
Yakuza, or the Russian mob. And
your plan is to bring them here?!

LARRY

I didn't know where to go. I was
bleeding all over. I think I have a
concussion.

Pete inspects the gash on Larry's head.

PETE

Lair, you need stitches.

RUDY

Who did this?

LARRY

My mom. She went maniac on me.

PETE

Whoa whoa, wait. Nancy clocked you?

TERRY

No way.

RUDY

I told you that bitch was loco.

PETE

You need stitches, for sure.
Meantime, I think there's a first
aid kit here somewhere.

Pete goes looking for it.

EXT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Durance stops the SUV outside the industrial warehouse.

EXT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Durance and Camden are at the door, which has a push button
lock code.

Camden holds his communicator before it and the door blinks
green.

He grips the nightstick and Durance produces the Officer's
revolver.

CAMDEN

The Axiom is at hand, I can feel
it. Are you ready?

DURANCE

Open the motherfucking door.

CAMDEN

Mother...fucking? What is this vile
disrespect--

DURANCE

Open the goddamn door, now!

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Pete winds electrical tape around Larry's head to secure a
bandage.

LARRY

...I mean, I had to stop her. I had
to.

RUDY

Punched your own mommacita. Dios
mio! That is wicked evil shit.

PETE

I don't get why she freaked out
like that.

TERRY

Unreal, dude. You truly are the
world's biggest asshole.

LARRY

I didn't have a choice!

TERRY

Sure. The high and mighty Lorenz
Lapace, abandons his loser friends
and takes up with some internet
slut--

The door slams open.

Durance and Camden barge in.

CAMDEN

Which one is Lapace?!

RUDY

Ay cabron! Who the fuck you think
you are?

TERRY

Hey--isn't that The Emancipator?

DURANCE

(points at Larry)
That one!

PETE

No badges! They got no badges!

Durance raises the gun and squeezes, but the safety is on.

Rudy throws a chair at him.

Terry grabs a large beer bottle and rushes forward.

Pete helps Larry up.

PETE (CONT'D)

Stay here. We'll get these clowns
away from the door. Then run.

Pete dives into the fray.

Rudy body slams Durance, who loses the gun as he crashes
down.

Durance rolls and locks Rudy into a wrestling hold.

DURANCE

Trademark move, nutria.

Larry throws himself on Durance.

Terry and Pete battle Camden's swinging club.

Durance elbows Larry away, picks up and pile-drives Rudy into
the floor, then stomps on him.

Larry and Pete knock him off.

Pete picks up the gun.

PETE

Wanna see how to use a gun,
asshole?

He shoots Durance in the shoulder.

Camden lands the stick and Pete drops.

Durance recovers the gun and points it at Terry.

DURANCE
Freeze!

Both Larry and Terry throw their hands up.

TERRY
Surrender! Done!

Pete recovers his feet, takes off running.

Durance shoots Pete in the back.

Then he shoots Terry in the chest.

Larry tries to run but Camden blocks him with the nightstick.

CAMDEN
You are not to move.

Durance grabs Terry as he doubles over and drains his neural energy as he writhes in pain.

The bullet in Durance's shoulder comes out and the hole seals over.

Then he proceeds to prone Rudy, forcing his eyes open and rolling his eyeballs to look into his.

Rudy's limp body twitches a few moments, then is dead.

LARRY
Jesus Christ! They didn't do anything!

Camden searches Larry, finds the cell phone, pockets it.

CAMDEN
The Axiom. Now.

LARRY
What?!

Camden rams the butt of the stick into his stomach. Durance holds him up by the collar.

CAMDEN
Games are done! You have something that doesn't belong to you and we need it back.

LARRY
You have it. My phone--

Camden inspects the phone.

CAMDEN
Fine. More persuasion.

Durance uses a wrist lock to make Larry cry out.

LARRY
(screams)
Stop! It's on there! I swear!

Camden nods and his partner relents. He hands the phone to Larry.

CAMDEN
Show me.

Larry swipes through his apps, but Hyperjerk is absent.

He looks up in bewilderment.

DURANCE
I can pinch this weasel's head
right off, fo' shore.

CAMDEN
No. Patience. We shall bring him to
the Ultrak.

Durance lifts Rudy's lifeless body and cracks his neck. He throws his hands up as if in the ring.

DURANCE
(to Larry)
Fear me! I am the pain! Durance
most Vile walks on your grave! I
shall free you from this meatsome
bag of bones.

Camden gives his partner a look of utter contempt.

INT. SOLESTE ESTATES/LAPACE'S ROOM - DAY

Agents Eddy Li and Claire Broussard watch Christiaan illustrating on a large whiteboard. He delineates a sprawling garden maze.

CHRISTIAAN
...at least three rows of oleander,
each one four microns--I mean
meters--thick--and then you come to
the promenade of roses--

EDDY

Camden Story? Name mean anything to you?

CHRISTIAAN

It means...we need to walk each step, carefully, count your steps and make sure the distance between the rose bushes is strictly uniform. Strictly.

Claire brings up a photo of Camden on her phone. She gets close to Christiaan.

CLAIRE

Has this man had contact with you?

Christiaan looks; for a moment his expression registers horror.

INT. SOLESTE ESTATES/LAPACE'S ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Durance has Christiaan pinned against a wall, fingers pressing into Christiaan's temples, as Camden watches.

DURANCE

Time for some in-depth palavering, mister Lapace.

Durance makes the connecting beams of energy from pupil to pupil, but after a brief struggle between them, achieves nothing.

Durance lets him go.

DURANCE (CONT'D)

He blocked me.

CAMDEN

That isn't possible. These rock crawlers have the cerebral development of inanimate objects.

DURANCE

We can do this another way--

He slugs Christiaan.

CAMDEN

No. We have other methods at our disposal.

DURANCE

That a fact?

Camden gets close to Christiaan.

CAMDEN

We have your son, mister Lapace,
and we know where your domestic
associate--

DURANCE

Wife.

CAMDEN

--where your wife resides.

CHRISTIAAN

Not within the topiary of this
estate--

Camden grabs his jaw, makes him pay attention.

CAMDEN

Your life form disgusts me, and I
will not hesitate to dismantle the
ligature of your body, one bone at
a time, if I don't get what I want.
Do you hear me, mister Lapace?

He looks into Christiaan's eyes. The pupils lock energy.

From Christiaan's p.o.v. Camden's pulsating black brains are
visible, an ethereal, external organ that sits atop a flat
head that has thick clusters of eye pods and insect features.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SOLESTE ESTATES/HALLWAY - DAY

Eddy pushes Christiaan in a wheelchair, Claire follows.

A male STAFF WORKER watches closely.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES GARDEN - DAY

They navigate through the spacious grounds until Christiaan
signals to stop and begins to get up.

EDDY

Hold on, mister Lapace.

CHRISTIAAN

It's okay. I can walk. That--
(indicates chair)
--is just protocol. See?

He nods toward a second male STAFF WORKER, watching them.

Claire brings up a photo of Durance, shows it to Christiaan.

CLAIRE

And this man? Jog any memories?

Again the stricken look, and Christiaan waves them to follow.

He dodders along like a man navigating in pitch black.

As Christiaan goes, he obsessively mumbles garden topography; steps, plants, row, steps, plants, row.

Finally they come to a central gazebo surrounded by several flowering lilac trees.

CHRISTIAAN

Yes. Here we are, between yesterday and tomorrow. Very important. Seize the day! And let us not forget, my wife's favorite, the lilac tree.

EDDY

Right. You know these men, don't you. Can you tell us anything that might help locate them, or your son?

CHRISTIAAN

They chased me through the garden. But I know where the fox went, zipping through the hawthorn and the holly. No, the black brains could not follow so swiftly.

EDDY

Black brains? What does that mean?

Christiaan waves away the inquiry. Claire puts a hand on his shoulder.

CLAIRE

Please. Christiaan. We need to know before anyone else gets hurt.

CHRISTIAAN

We're safe here, for the moment. In less than a hundred years, a fleet of remote controlled cybernetic salvage ships will arrive here and begin to dismantle our planet.

(he waves around)

Goodbye. Bye-bye. All gone.

Claire looks at Eddy.

EDDY

Mister Lapace, what can you tell us about your former workplace, Mindlink? What sort of work did you do for them?

CHRISTIAAN

Mindlink? They have a certain codex that you seek. The Axiom?

CLAIRE

Axiom? We've been tracking a very sophisticated pattern of cyber security anomalies that leaves no trace of infiltration or dissimulation. Can you tell us anything about that?

CHRISTIAAN

Go there. Mindlink...Yes...

Another shared glance between agents.

EXT. REHEARSAL SPACE - DAY

Durance and Cantrell lead Larry out, now bound in plastic cuffs.

They push him into the SUV.

INT. SUV - DAY

Larry sits up front with Camden behind the wheel and Durance in back.

Camden and Durance exchange a quick squirt of high-pitched SONICS, then Camden produces the black rectangle and it floats in the air before him.

LARRY

Who are you guys?

Suddenly the electromagnetic sphere fills the van with image and sound, then--

THE FACE OF THOMAS CAGE

appears amid the media wash.

More high-pitched SONICS, but as Larry concentrates, their language is translated.

THOMAS

...alive would be preferred; it
might help the incursion to have a
living model.

DURANCE

These hominid vermin choke on their
own filth. We would do this
resource deposit a great service to
simply rid it of all low order
pestilence.

THOMAS

We cannot initiate our plans
without engaging through their
neural processing lattice.

CAMDEN

It's so very far, Ultrak.

THOMAS

Precisely why these puppets will do
our work in advance.

CAMDEN

It would take a hundred lifetimes
to travel here.

DURANCE

We could never survive in such
severe radiation--

THOMAS

Enough!

Durance, Camden, and Larry, seize up in pain.

Then--

--everything is back to normal in the van. Even Camden's
communicator is idle in his lap.

Camden and Durance look at each other in confusion.

DURANCE

What happened?

Camden shakes his head, puts the vehicle in drive.

INT. SUV - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Just prior to the opening scene.

Larry has been crying, but is now stoic.

LARRY (V.O.)

It all came crashing down. For a while there, I thought I was in control of things, that I had a destiny. I thought maybe my life finally had some direction other than wherever anger and resentment led me day by day. But that was over. Whatever forces gave me that stupid ability must have seen me as a simple pawn in a game that had stakes so high I couldn't even imagine them. I mean, exterminating the human race?

LARRY

Those guys were my friends.

CAMDEN

"Silence fills my thoughts with the language of the soul."

LARRY

Why'd you have to do that--

From the back seat, Durance grabs a fistful of Larry's hair.

DURANCE

What my flowery-mouthed compatriot meant was, keep your trap shut.

He releases Larry with a violent shove.

Larry cringes in pain, wipes at his eyes.

LARRY (V.O.)

What was the probability of talking my way out of this jam?

SUPERIMPOSE: "PROBABILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO FAVORABLE OUTCOME .04%"

Larry looks at his captors. They are oblivious to the data.

LARRY (V.O.)

My next thought was: If I kick this
asshole in the head, and make us
crash, could I escape?

SUPERIMPOSE: "PROBABILITY OF VIOLENT INTERCESSION LEADING TO
FAVORABLE OUTCOME PROCESSING CONCURRENTLY
1.448%...4.74%...7.009%..."

LARRY (V.O.)

Not great odds, but the probability
that I was going to die was
increasing exponentially with every
mile we drove.

INSERT -- IMAGE

THE DICE TATTOO

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The SUV swerves and crashes.

EXT. OPEN LAND - NIGHT

Larry runs off road, data from the Axiom guiding him.

He sees apartment complexes ahead, races toward them.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Camden is out of the vehicle, resting limply against the
overturned undercarriage.

Durance uses his communicator and within the sphere of
electromagnetic media he sees the green lines of the Axiom
tracking.

Then, headlights coming.

He shuts off the black rectangle, waves.

A pick up truck arrives, pulls over.

DRIVER hops out, hurries over.

DRIVER

Hey! You got help coming?

DURANCE

No phone. I--

Durance pretends to double over in pain, reaching for Driver.

EXT. APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Larry rings a doorbell, breathing hard, nearly collapsing.

The door is answered by Ashley Dicen on intercom.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

(on speaker, filtered)

Yes?

LARRY

Ashley. It's Larry.

A beat, then Ashley opens the door.

She crosses her arms resolutely, then sees his bloody head and the plastic cuffs.

ASHLEY

Larry?! Oh my god! What's going on?

LARRY

Ash, let me in. Please.

She helps him enter.

INT. ASHLEY'S PLACE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry is slumped on a couch, hands freed. Ashley paces.

ASHLEY

If that's true, we have to call the police.

LARRY

No. That won't help. I know it. They'll track it.

ASHLEY

You're sure they're all dead?

LARRY

It happened just like that. A couple seconds and then they were gone. Pete, Rudy...Terry.

ASHLEY

You're a motherfucker, Lapace. You didn't think the mob was going to find out about whatever you were doing? Fixing bets or whatever.

LARRY

No, I swear. They weren't gangsters. They were something else. Something way worse is going on. I have to find out.

ASHLEY

Find out?! Worse?! How does it get worse than cold-blooded murder?

Larry takes out his phone.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Eddy and Claire walk out to their car.

Behind them, Staff #1 follows, gets in a car.

CLAIRE

I think we need to go all in, Tuna Fisher.

EDDY

I believe we need to go to a think tank for theoretical sciences near Medford.

CLAIRE

Mindlink is very much on our radar as well.

They arrive at their car.

EDDY

Biocybernetics, machine mind interfaces, stuff like that?

CLAIRE

Right. But black brains? A fleet of salvage ships? What kind of psychotic cult is this?

EDDY

It's an invasion, Miss Broussard.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Staff #1 pulls out, lights off, and aims his car at Eddy and Claire. He guns it.

Eddy notices at the last moment, shoves Claire aside as the staff car slams head on into their car.

Eddy and Claire both tumble; as they get up, Staff #1 is out of the car and on them.

They fight as Staff #2 runs up.

Staff #2 tasers Eddy just as Claire dispatches Staff #1.

Claire draws her sidearm as the taser hums back to full charge.

CLAIRE
Federal Officer! Discharge that
weapon and--

He runs at her. She shoots him in the leg.

Staff #2 crumples to one knee, gets back up, his intention clear.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Stay down!

He does not comply and she guns him down.

Eddy struggles up, draws his weapon.

EDDY
What just happened?

CLAIRE
You took a nap. I--
(beat; looks at body)
I'm a securities and cyber fraud
investigator. I've never discharged
my weapon in the line of duty.

Eddy stands up.

EDDY
I'm calling this in. We need
backup. And another car.

INT. ASHLEY'S PLACE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley flips a coin, catches it, puts it on her wrist.

Larry watches from a chair.

LARRY

The probability of the coin facing heads up? One hundred percent.

She reveals it: face up.

ASHLEY

Not possible! Random things can't fall under probability. Even a math dipshit like me knows that. What the hell, Larry?

LARRY

I don't know. My dad's the only one that does. He said something about strange attractors, like, in a basin?

ASHLEY

Fantastic. You shallow, self-centered little prick.

LARRY

Hey! Come on. I-I...Pete's dead, for Christ's sake.

ASHLEY

Yeah. Exactly. I'm putting my shoes on and then we're going to report this to the police.

Larry sits bolt upright.

SUPERIMPOSE: "IMMINENT DEATH 84%...85%...87%"

EXT. PARKING RAMADA - NIGHT

Durance pulls the truck over outside the apartments.

INT. TRUCK

Camden has the media bubble around them and the green lines converge on Ashley's apartment.

He pockets the device, about to get out, but Durance stops him.

DURANCE

This time, Shakespeare, it's my plan.

(MORE)

DURANCE (CONT'D)

I'm going to remove the entire
neural casing off the carrier's
body shell and bring that to the
Ultrak. Swamp-thang style.

CAMDEN

Whatever that means, I agree.

They get out.

INT. ASHLEY'S PLACE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A knock at the door.

Just inside the door, Ashley has strips of leather wrapped
around her fists and Larry grips a wooden training Katana.

LARRY

(whispers fiercely)

What about the bathroom window?

She smiles tightly, shakes head.

ASHLEY

(in his ear)

Hit me with that stick, I'm going
to screw you in the ass with it.

She opens the door.

Camden pushes his way in--

CAMDEN

Police!

Ashley slugs him in the face.

Camden lurches back against Durance, who shoves him out of
the way and brings the gun up.

Larry swats the gun hand with the wooden sword, knocking it
loose.

They fight.

Ashley handles herself with martial arts moves, saves Larry,
eventually knocks Durance out and they wrestle Camden down
together.

Larry plants a knee in Camden's back as Ashley ties his hands
and feet.

LARRY

Tell me what you want!

CAMDEN

You know what we want.

Larry springs up, kicks Camden in the gut.

LARRY

That's for Pete! And Terry!

He gives the unconscious Durance the same.

LARRY (CONT'D)

That's for Rudy, you fucking asshole!

ASHLEY

Larry! Let's go!

LARRY

Wait.

He grabs a large kitchen knife from the counter that separates the two rooms.

He puts the knife against Camden's throat.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I want to know what the hell's going on and why you killed my friends?! Talk or I'll do it!

CAMDEN

What creature is this, putrescence worse than swine, that kills and enslaves its own kind--

Larry draws the knife blade tight.

For a moment, he considers it.

He gets up, throws the knife down.

LARRY

(to Ashley)

Am I really that big of an asshole?

Ashley nods. She rattles her car keys.

EXT. PARKING RAMADA - NIGHT

Ashley and Larry arrive at her Miata.

LARRY
We're escaping in a Miata?

ASHLEY
Shut your hole, Lapace. Get in and
shut up!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Claire and Eddy race along in a new vehicle.

INT. VEHICLE - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Claire drives as Eddy talks on his phone.

EDDY
(into phone)
... and Christiaan Lapace needs to
be moved to a secure location. Yes.
His mother's under surveillance...
Her too. I think it's Izolda Utkin.
That's correct. Stopped at all
costs. Both of them. Thank you.

He puts the phone away.

CLAIRE
You have serious backup, sounds
like.

EDDY
They just initiated a protocol
called Terran Two Three Zone.

CLAIRE
Oh swell. Basketball drills are
really going to help.

EDDY
Hey, well...whoever thought that
when they came, there'd be no ships
involved. No energy weapons, no
force fields, no warp drives?

CLAIRE
Richard Bach, that's who.

Eddy is puzzled. Claire's phone buzzes.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
My turn.
(into phone)
(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Agent Broussard...Yes, we were
there half an hour ago...What? All
In is operational? But it's not an
emergent A-I...

(beat)
Okay. Yes sir, I understand.

She disconnects.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
We have to stop. New orders. You
need to go back and pick up
Christiaan Lapace yourself, and I'm
hot on Lapace Junior's tracks.

Eddy shakes his head in disbelief.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
That was the head of Homeland
Security. The same guy that placed
us together.

EDDY
Okay. And operation All In?

CLAIRE
The D-O-D just assumed full control
of the N-S-A computers. Threat
level is at maximum. Apparently, we
have enough bandwidth to actually
track the pattern in real time.

EDDY
And?

CLAIRE
Eye of the cybernetic hurricane is
Lorenz Larry Lapace. Pull over up
here. A Sheriff's car is on the
way.

INT. MINDLINK/CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas Cage's office is a small laboratory full of unusual
scientific gear and computers.

He sits with both hands on an opaque glass panel, and
hundreds of filigrees of energy extend through the panel to a
tank of glass that features a mass of vat-grown neural
tissue, all hooked up to electrodes and computers.

Thomas' desk phone chimes.

ULTRAK (O.S.)
(distorted, filtered)
A call for Thomas Cage. Answer it.

Thomas disengages his hands.

He has been in another world and it takes a moment to recall how to activate the speakerphone.

THOMAS
Yes?

CHRISTIAAN (V.O.)
(on speaker, filtered)
Ultrak. I send you interested parties.

THOMAS
You performed correctly. A vector of the Axiom intersects your position. It is weak, but be prepared.

CHRISTIAAN (V.O.)
I am.

Thomas hangs up, returns to place his hands on the glass panel. The threads of energy reconnect.

The dome of electromagnetic media familiar to Durance and Camden is suddenly visible, then--

A map tracks the green lines of the Axiom.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Ashley drives with Larry, speeding along.

INT. "MIATA"

LARRY
Ash, you were bad-ass back there.

ASHLEY
Been trying to tell you.

LARRY
If it were--oh shit! Oh no! We gotta go get Izolda. Ash--my place.

ASHLEY

Larry, I mean, Master of Arrogance,
I've just experienced a home
invasion and fought off two thugs.
I'm taking us directly to the cop
shop.

LARRY

No! They'll kill her! Please. Let's
go get her and then you can go to
the police. I promise.

ASHLEY

You want me, your kinda ex
girlfriend, to go save your current
rent-a-slut girlfriend?

LARRY

Yes?

ASHLEY

The hell kind of name is Izolda,
anyway?

LARRY

Russian. She's nice.

ASHLEY

Yeah? Do you want me to take you
there?

LARRY

Okay, she's a cold, calculating
bitch. But she's a model. I
guess...I never had a trophy for
anything. I thought, you know, what
the hell...Sorry, Ashley.

Ashley gives him a not-buying-it look.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Camden and Durance clamber in, nursing various cuts and
bruises.

CAMDEN

This primitive nervous system and
its pain feedback mechanism is very
inconvenient.

DURANCE

Inconvenient? My daddy ran a scrap
yard.

(MORE)

DURANCE (CONT'D)

He shot my momma and went to the
hoosegow when I was eight. That
there's a kind of inconvenience
your average book-learnt blue blood
don't have no knowledge of.

CAMDEN

Your use of language is perplexing.
If they do not have "no knowledge,"
then they must have some knowledge,
though that negates your stated
premise.

DURANCE

You ain't gonna have no fore-
knowledge of the fist of
retribution that knocks those
flashy-ass choppers down your neck.

CAMDEN

If you lose your hold on this
entity, they may not be able to
cast you back here.

DURANCE

Is that a fact? Maybe I'll take
this here personality construct
back home with me and really fuck
some shit up. Why we need this
radiation-soaked gravity hole,
anyway?

They lock eyes.

Durance looks at his hands, knuckles bleeding, gives Camden a
snarling face of rage.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Ashley and Larry pull up across the street from his new high-
rise apartment.

INT. "MIATA" - NIGHT

They both take a careful look around.

ASHLEY

Nice place. Ever invite your old
scumbag friends over?

LARRY

They're dead.

ASHLEY

Sorry.

LARRY

I didn't think you hated me so much.

ASHLEY

Well, I just underestimated how shallow and crass you really are. Now three people are dead because of your complete lack of foresight.

LARRY

Sorry, I--

ASHLEY

Don't say sorry to me.

Larry silently processes for a moment.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

You're like a chick who's always on her period. Aren't you a little old to be letting hormones and emotions do all your thinking?

LARRY

I guess I had a lot of anger--

ASHLEY

--Have.

LARRY

--have a lot of anger, that I was too immature to deal with. You know, mostly about Dad and stuff.

ASHLEY

Your father is a perfect gentleman. What's your beef, anyway? Nothing he did caused you to grow up like this.

LARRY

That's it, right there. He did nothing. Never played sports with me, never took me to a concert or even a movie, never even gave me a birthday present.

ASHLEY

Boo-fucking-hoo, Larry. Tough shit.
How about grow up and handle your
problems as a response to how you
were raised?

A beat.

LARRY

When I thought I didn't have any
more problems, I dumped my friends.
Now, look what happens...

He fights down emotions.

ASHLEY

Why me?

LARRY

It was an accident I got away near
your place, but then I thought, if
anybody can kick some ass, it was
you.

ASHLEY

You only thought that because you
were getting your ass kicked.

LARRY

Let's get Izzy.

ASHLEY

I have room in the trunk for her.

They exit the car.

EXT. APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Larry and Ashley hurry across the street.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

Receptionist ANDREW LONG greets them.

LARRY

Hey Andy. Is Izzy home?

ANDREW

I believe Miss Utkin is in.

ASHLEY

"Izzy."

LARRY

Great. Um, this is Ashley.
Visiting. Has there been anyone
else around? Asking for me or
anything?

Andrew fidgets a moment.

ANDREW

No. No, not that I know of.

LARRY

Thanks.

Larry escorts Ashley to the elevators.

INT. ELEVATOR

They ride up.

LARRY

Doesn't feel right.

Ashley wraps her knuckles with leather strips, then punches a
wall, kicks it.

ASHLEY

Practicing my Russian.

LARRY

I don't think that's appropriate.

ASHLEY

Wow, four whole syllables.

She punches the wall again.

The elevator door opens.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

Durance and Camden enter.

ANDREW

Gentlemen. Can I help you?

DURANCE

Don't remember us?

Camden emits shrill SONICS at Andrew, and a change comes over
him.

CAMDEN

If they come down, you will stop
them at all costs to life and limb.

Andrew brings up a large pipe wrench. His eyes are jittery,
his jaw clenched.

DURANCE

Good. Ignore any noise complaints
y'all might get.
(to Camden)
Ready?

Camden takes a hammer from his belt, hefts a long flat-blade
screwdriver in his other hand.

Durance produces the gun.

They head to the elevators.

INT. LARRY'S NEW APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Izolda examines Ashley's hair.

IZOLDA

Auburn hair is the most beautiful,
and yours is to be treasured. Truly
magnificent hair.

ASHLEY

Oh. Well.
(to Larry)
You didn't tell me she was so nice.

Larry is nonplussed.

IZOLDA

What do men know? Lorenz, you let
this gorgeous creature slip away?

LARRY

We have to go. Right now. Pete and
Terry and Rudy are dead. They're
dead! We're next!

IZOLDA

The apartment is secure and the
building is secure. Call the
police.

ASHLEY

That's what I've been saying!

IZOLDA

You see? Advice from a woman is
like advice from a chipmunk to most
men.

LARRY

Chipmunk?

IZOLDA

Let me trim your ends while the
Emperor of Supreme Ego makes a
simple phone call. Come, sit right
here.

She directs Ashley to a counter stool and disappears into her
bedroom.

LARRY

This is..this is...it's--

ASHLEY

You're in shock, Larry. Sit down,
for god's sake! You heard her. The
building is secure. Nobody's been
asking around. Take a few deep
breaths, try to think a few minutes
beyond your vapid little event
horizon.

Larry crashes down in an easy chair.

LARRY

I'm supposed to relax while you two
have a hair-trimming Lez fest and a
pair of known psychopaths are
stalking me?

Ashley levels a menacing fist at him.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Okay, fine. Let's bring the police
into this.

He takes out his phone. It pulses red with alarms.

SUPERIMPOSE: "IMMINENT DEATH 91%"

Larry springs up, about to sound the alarm, when he sees
Izolda raising a pair of scissors behind Ashley.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Ash!

Ashley just swings aside as the scissors plunge into the stool, grazing Ashley's upper leg.

Izolda is crazed and attacks.

Ashley hammers her back with kicks and punches.

Larry grabs Izolda from behind.

A LOUD BANG at the front door and the deadbolt smashes inward.

The door flies open.

Durance raises the gun and fires rapidly.

Two slugs hit Izolda as Ashley dives for cover behind the kitchen counter.

The gun clicks empty.

EXT. APARTMENTS - NIGHT

A Sheriff's cruiser is at the curb as Claire pulls up.

EXT. APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Officer TRENT DAYMUND, 28, walks with Claire to the front door.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

As Claire and Trent enter, Andrew stands behind the desk.

ANDREW

Yes? We didn't call the police.

CLAIRE

(flashes badge)

Federal Officer. Lorenz Lapace is which unit?

ANDREW

Oh, my. He's in Eight Eighteen. Use that elevator.

Andrew points, and as they head that way, he moves, the big pipe wrench in hand.

INT. LARRY'S NEW APT/LIVING ROOM

Gun empty, Durance and Camden rush Ashley and Larry.

Battle ensues.

At one point Larry notices that from his perspective, time seems to have slowed down:

He sees Durance's fist traveling at him and is able to swing aside, grab Durance's head, and smash it into a desk.

Ashley retrieves the scissors and plunges them into Camden's shoulder.

Camden's hammer cracks against Ashley's arm, then he throws her against a wall.

Larry is distracted long enough for Durance to get an arm bar around his throat.

Larry sees Camden place both hands on Ashley's temples, and as she writhes in agony, the scissors are forced out of his shoulder.

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

Receptionist Andrew bludgeons Officer Daymund.

He swings the pipe wrench again but Claire ducks. She throws a punch, kicks Andrew, dislodges the tool.

Andrew wrestles to get the downed Officer's gun.

Claire draws her sidearm.

CLAIRE

Freeze! Make another move and I
will shoot.

ANDREW

All cost--

He manages to get the gun out of the holster.

Claire shoots his hand.

Andrew rolls on the ground in agony.

CLAIRE

Stay down!

ANDREW

(crying)

You shot me! Why did you shoot me?

Claire is bewildered but she kicks the gun away from Andrew and picks it up.

INT. LARRY'S NEW APT/LIVING ROOM

Larry passes out from the choke hold as Ashley's body sinks to the floor.

DURANCE

Time to end this varmint's run of luck.

He takes the hammer and big screwdriver from Camden, places the tip against Larry's spine at the neck.

Suddenly, the media bubble surrounds them.

Inside the bubble, the phase space of the Ultrak becomes visible.

Thomas Cage manifests, face and shoulders, but voice deep and ALIEN.

THOMAS

What is this?!

CAMDEN

Not known, Ultrak.

(draws communicator)

We did not initiate the link.

DURANCE

(nods at Larry)

This one did. The Axiom has gone rogue in his neural lattice.

CAMDEN

An aberration. The Axiom was never meant for these primeval gnats. It mutates rapidly.

THOMAS

Terminate the life form immediately. We only need the cerebral matter intact.

Durance aims the screwdriver again and with a heavy blow, drives it into Larry's spine at the neck.

INT. APARTMENTS/ELEVATOR LOBBY - NIGHT

With Larry's body slung over his shoulder, Durance boards the elevator behind Camden and the door closes.

A moment later, the next car arrives, and Claire steps off.

She sweeps the hallway with her gun.

A ribbon of blood leads from the lobby to the apartment.

She follows it.

INT. LARRY'S NEW APT/LIVING ROOM

Claire enters behind her weapon.

Ashley is sitting up on a counter stool, a beatific smile on her face despite her bleeding leg and broken arm.

CLAIRE

You! On your knees, hands behind
your head! Now! Move!

Ashley looks around.

ASHLEY

Greetings.
(gasps, feels throat)
I speak. Sonic vibration as a means
of communication--it's so
wonderful!

Claire sees Izolda's body, the wreckage.

CLAIRE

Are you Izolda Utkin? Was Lorenz
Larry Lapace here?

ASHLEY

I don't know if I am an Izolda
Utkin. I cannot answer your
questions. I just came here, and
this life capsule lost all
neurological functioning when the
host ceased to exist.

Claire lowers her weapon.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

With two Police Cruisers nearby, Eddy pushes a wheelchair with Christiaan in it to his car.

Eddy waves at the Police.

EDDY

Thank you. I got it from here.
(to Christiaan)
Here we are, Mr. Lapace.

He offers to help Christiaan up, but is waved off.

CHRISTIAAN

That's quite all right.

Eddy opens the door for him and Christiaan gets in.

Eddy has a set of handcuffs.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)

That won't be necessary, sir.

EDDY

Precaution.

He cuffs Christiaan's hands together around the door handle.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Eddy drives.

EDDY

Do you know where we're going?

CHRISTIAAN

Mindlink, I would hazard?

EDDY

You seem to have regained some
composure, Mr. Lapace.

CHRISTIAAN

My name's Christiaan. Most people
call me Chris.

EDDY

You might be ahead of me on this
whole business, Chris, but I have
to inform you that your son is in
imminent peril.

CHRISTIAAN

I had to give the Axiom to him. I
couldn't hope to stay hidden
indefinitely.

EDDY

The "Axiom." Where did this
technology, if that's what it is,
come from?

Christiaan looks at the night sky out the window.

CHRISTIAAN

A very, very far place. A
civilization of beings that exist
in the vacuum of space, beings
encased in carbon-mineral shells.
Think Fiddler Crabs of deep space,
but highly advanced. I've come to
believe they have a broader spatial
relation to time itself.

EDDY

Time?

CHRISTIAAN

For these aliens, time is not now,
it's "was and will be," together.

EDDY

How could you know that?

CHRISTIAAN

The Axiom was never meant to be a
probability predictor, but
deposited in a being that exists
solely in the here and now, it has
a remarkable effect.

EDDY

Why did you give it to your son?
You must have known the danger.

CHRISTIAAN

I had to stop them. It was my son's
life against the life of our entire
species.

Christiaan levels his gaze at Eddy.

EXT. VAN - NIGHT

A surveillance van, sporting several small satellite dishes and disguised as a cable service vehicle, cruises down the freeway.

INT. VAN - NIGHT - TRAVELING

PORTER LOOMIS drives as Claire pages through a laptop hooked up to an array of high-tech gear installed in the compartment.

The back is separated by a door.

CLAIRE

Izolda Utkin is confirmed dead.

PORTER

If they jacked Lapace's Tesla, that shouldn't be hard to spot. Between us, the F-B-I, and local law enforcement, there's no way they can evade us for long.

CLAIRE

It's not tracking anymore.

PORTER

There were silences before.

She puts the laptop down and goes through the service door.

INT. VAN BACK

Most of the rear space is taken up by surveillance gear and monitoring stations.

Claire takes a seat facing Ashley.

ASHLEY

I have effected repairs to this life sleeve.

CLAIRE

Mind if I call you Ashley?

ASHLEY

I have no way to translate my name.

CLAIRE

And you're not Lorenz Lapace's ex-girlfriend?

ASHLEY

The previous inhabitant of this sleeve may have had relations. I'm sensing how you mate.

A couple monitors close at hand suddenly show erotic imagery.

CLAIRE

Got it. So, you came here from another world...psychically?

ASHLEY

Of course. Just like the Ultran came to us and destroyed our world.

CLAIRE

Psychic invasion. That puts a few things in perspective. How do you travel that way?

ASHLEY

We don't. I was selected and sent here by a faction of the Ultran who oppose their hostile colonization.

An image of an Ultran appears on the monitors: they are ovoid disks that orient vertically, with hard carapaces and many small manipulator arms, their external sensory organs in clustered pods.

CLAIRE

God help us.

ASHLEY

The Axiom will seize control of your planet's binary processing systems--

CLAIRE

Our computers?

ASHLEY

--and then infiltrate the mental codex of users. Non users will be eliminated. The Ultran view gravity dwellers as insects to be exterminated without further consideration.

Claire is left dumbfounded.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Larry's Tesla zooms along.

INT. "TESLA" - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Durance drives, Camden rides. The body of Larry is in the back seat, screwdriver still in his spine.

Camden has activated the media bubble from his floating device and they monitor police bulletins.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(on speaker, filtered)
...A-P-B on a black 2014 Tesla
model S, license plate Four Boy
Nora Adam Six Four Five...

DURANCE
To stop is to fail. Gator the Hater
does not fail.

CAMDEN
Agreed.
(to communicator)
Initiate electron wavefront
propagation. Use selected file.

The media bubble goes away and Camden places the black rectangle on the dashboard.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Tesla washes over with an electrical field, and the car suddenly looks like a VW bus.

EXT. CAR/KIOSK - NIGHT

Eddy stops at a guarded entrance kiosk, rolls his window down.

A sign proclaims: MINDLINK: THE FUTURE OF INTELLIGENCE

KIOSK GUARD leans out of his booth.

GUARD
Evening. I don't have any
appointments scheduled at this
hour.

Eddy flashes a badge.

EDDY.
(from car)
F-B-I.

Christiaan leans as far over as his cuffs allow.

He issues brief high-pitched SONICS, then--

CHRISTIAAN
(from car)
Do not report this to anyone. We
will pass by unobserved.

GUARD
(woodenly)
Thank you.

Eddy looks at Christiaan, and then the Guard.

The gate lifts.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Eddy pulls into the largely vacant parking lot.

EDDY
What was that?

CHRISTIAAN
I can tell when control protocols
have been imprinted.

EDDY
Control protocols?

CHRISTIAAN
Think of it as neuron-wired
hypnosis. I'm a victim of it
myself, outside the garden.

EDDY
How so?

CHRISTIAAN
I reported you to the Ultrak after
your visit, as instructed.

Eddy is taken back, takes out his cell.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
I wouldn't call in backup yet. They
will be monitoring your line.

EDDY

Not possible. The encryption on
this line--

CHRISTIAAN

Like swatting away flies, sir.
They'll skip the code and just
listen to the listener.

Eddy looks up at the sky, back at Christiaan.

He takes out his gun.

EDDY

This useless, too?

CHRISTIAAN

I wish I had one as well.

EDDY

We'll see about that.

He gets out.

INT. MINDLINK/LOBBY - NIGHT

Eddy and Christiaan look around the dim, after-hours lobby.

Christiaan is still in handcuffs.

EDDY

What exactly are we looking for?

CHRISTIAAN

The preeminent organism of the
invasion, known as the Ultrak.

EDDY

And what is that?

CHRISTIAAN

The original Axiom carrier, sent at
enormous expense by the Ultran
civilization to initiate harvesting
operations.

EDDY

So, we're looking for a human
being, a person that's been
compromised?

CHRISTIAAN

No. The Ultrak--

Car lights from the parking lot sweep the room.

They duck behind the reception desk, see the VW van pull up, then the camouflage vanishes, exposing the Tesla.

Eddy motions them to sit.

EDDY

That's them. Keep down, we'll see what their plan is. Can I trust you, Chris?

Christiaan holds out his handcuffed wrists.

CHRISTIAAN

Apparently not.

Eddy unlocks the cuffs.

Eddy ventures another glance, and --

--is staring down the barrel of a gun.

Thomas Cage motions him to stand up, and Christiaan does as well.

THOMAS

Ah, the prodigal thief has returned to the scene of the crime.

CHRISTIAAN

I did my part.

EDDY

(to Christiaan)

You son-of-a-bitch!

CHRISTIAAN

You took me out of the garden.

(to Thomas)

I want to plead for the safety of my son. He's an innocent bystander. I stole the Axiom. Please--

The door emits an entry tone.

Enter Camden and Durance, Larry's body slung over Durance's shoulder.

THOMAS

Too late for pleas. There are consequences for all probabilities, as you well know. Consider this a taste of things to come.

Christiaan cannot speak, staring at his son's body.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Eddy is now in handcuffs.

Durance yanks the screwdriver out of Larry's spine and plops the body onto a chair surrounded by high-tech gear, including a wired helmet, as Camden, Thomas, and Christiaan watch.

THOMAS
(nod to Eddy)
This one first.

DURANCE
Allow me.

CAMDEN
He may have information.

DURANCE
We'll do it the easy way, then.

Durance grabs Eddy's head with fingers on both temples.

Eddy kicks him, punches with handcuffed fists.

They fight; eventually Durance knocks him out cold.

Camden claps deadpan.

CAMDEN
The cantankerous Cro-Magnon has his
day. Bravo.

Durance glares at Camden, then lifts Eddy's prone body with one hand, forces his eyes open with the other.

A moment later, Eddy is quivering in agony.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE

Thomas lowers the wired helmet onto Larry's head, plants sticky diodes around his temples.

Then he places his palms on the glass interface and the tank containing the cerebral mass THRUMS.

A 3-D shape of a large alien brain becomes visible above the tank.

Energy sizzles around Larry's head.

INSERT--LIFE FLASH

A rapid end-of-life flurry of moments from Larry's life, starting with his time in the mailroom, up to the present moment.

BACK TO SCENE

A p.o.v. above everything, looking down--

LARRY (V.O.)

Well, there you have it. Apparently the world's biggest jerk, laid to rest. Can't say I'd argue it much. I bet if Pete, Rudy, and Terry were here, they'd be drinking a few, saying, "gotta say, little bastard deserved it." Damn, I miss those guys. But more than anything, I feel bad about Ashley. Jesus, what a fool I was. Guess that could go on my headstone too. The angry, bitter fool. And that brings us to Dad...

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE

The interface between Thomas Cage and the Ultrak suddenly goes dead.

Thomas stands.

THOMAS

The Axiom resists.
(points at Larry)
This entity is alive!

DURANCE

No chance in hell! I took that mangy mongrel down myself. He was cold as a gator's ass on a handbag.

They surround the chair.

CAMDEN

He breathes. It's the Axiom effecting repairs.

DURANCE

I'll kill him twice, it don't matter none to me.

He reaches for Larry's throat, but Thomas stops him.

THOMAS

No. We need to extract the Axiom from him alive. It's clearly been embedded too deep. He must be convinced to give it up.

CHRISTIAAN

Allow me. He's my son. I can reach him, I assure you.

A beat, then Thomas nods.

EXT. KIOSK - NIGHT

Porter and Claire arrive in the van, stopping at the security gate.

INT. VAN

Porter stops the vehicle.

PORTER

The Tesla's here.

CLAIRE

And Eddy Li's car.

(into cell)

Stand by, all units. Do not approach.

EXT. KIOSK - NIGHT

The Guard leans out.

GUARD

I'm sorry, I can't admit you at this time. We're experiencing technical difficulties.

Porter grabs Kiosk Guard and punches him unconscious.

INT. VAN

CLAIRE

We have badges, you know.

PORTER

Something fishy going on. Brace yourself for impact.

EXT. KIOSK - NIGHT - TRAVELING

The van crashes through the rail, pulls past the other cars and stops before the front door.

Two Security Guards and a Lab Tech wait outside.

As soon as Claire and Porter get out, the Security Guards bring out nightclubs and Lab Tech has a length of unistrut.

Claire points both a handgun and her badge at them.

CLAIRE
Federal Officers! We'll handle it
from here, gentlemen.

They don't move.

PORTER
Any of you don't want a trip to the
hospital tonight, cease and desist.
Now! Disperse!

Claire moves closer to Porter.

CLAIRE
(hushed tones)
I can't shoot them. They've been
compromised.

PORTER
Aim low.

CLAIRE
Good call.

She shoots Guard #1 in the foot.

The other two immediately rush forward, swinging.

They fight.

Claire and Porter eventually dispatch all three.

As they take a moment to recover, the front door opens and Eddy Li emerges.

EDDY
Looks like I missed the party.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Christiaan has the fingers of both hands on his son's temples.

They both tremble.

DURANCE

He won't get in. I know, I tried.

Christiaan and Larry grow very still.

Camden raises derisive eyebrows at Durance.

INT. PHASE SPACE - NIGHT

Dark rocky tunnels, lit dimly by bioluminescent alien flora.

A bewildered Larry explores with great trepidation.

An ULTRAN appears and approaches him; a hard-shelled ovoid disk (vertical) that can travel through the air.

Larry runs. He is pursued by a Two More Ultran, and also by smaller versions that scuttle like crabs on the ground.

Eventually Larry is cornered.

The Ultran emits high-pitched SONICS that make Larry cringe.

Then various ropy arm/tentacles seize him.

Larry screams--

INT. PHASE SPACE

--and screams, now in a large cavernous chamber with various alien gear and decor.

Before him is a larger alien, the ULTRAK, bristling with appendages and sensory clusters.

It reaches out, grips Larry's temples. Then it assumes the form of Thomas Cage, though his skull seems semi-transparent, with dark brain matter visible.

THOMAS

Does this suit you better?

LARRY

I'm dead. This is hell.

THOMAS

You might say that. You have something of mine that I must insist be returned at once.

LARRY

I never wanted it. You didn't have to kill my friends!

THOMAS

Oh, I did. I'm going to kill your whole family as well as everyone you've ever met.

LARRY

Why? What do you want?

THOMAS

It's nothing personal. You're an unwanted infection on a resource that we need. That's all there is to it.

LARRY

We're people. We're intelligent--

THOMAS

Pfft. Hardly. An intelligent species doesn't poison its own biosphere. Consider it a case of compassionate euthanasia.

Thomas seizes Larry's head and his fingers are alien tentacles that penetrate Larry's skull in numerous places.

INT. MINDLINK/LOBBY - NIGHT

Eddy holds the door open for Claire and Porter, then enters behind them.

PORTER

Sure hope we find out what the hell's going on here, 'cause--

Eddy pistol whips Porter from behind, knocking him down.

He points the gun at Claire.

CLAIRE

Eddy! It's me, Claire Broussard.

EDDY

Interference cannot be permitted.

CLAIRE

Think of your F-B-I training, your
home and family, think about--

EDDY

I care nothing for those things.

CLAIRE

You do care. You're one of us.

EDDY

This world is lost.

He shoots Claire in the heart.

INT. PHASE SPACE

Larry is in a space filled with electrical energy, then--

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDEN - DAY

--Larry is standing in the garden near the central gazebo.

He wheels around, startled.

Christiaan walks toward him, gait normal.

LARRY

Dad!

CHRISTIAAN

Son. We're safe for the moment.
Only a moment, I'm afraid.

LARRY

Where is this? There was something
horrible. I thought I was in hell.
Now...

His father comes close, puts hands on Larry's shoulders.

CHRISTIAAN

You're in my head, Lorenz. I made a
safe zone after I stole the
Axiom. When we took those walks
through the garden, I was creating
the same zone in your mind. They
want their codex back. But I gave
it to you for a reason, son. You
have the proper mind for it.

LARRY

Dad, I'm a fuck up. I let you down--

CHRISTIAAN

No, stop, please. I know the truth of it. I was so busy, so self consumed, so driven, that I never had time for my own son. I left all that to your mother, god bless her heart. It's the greatest regret of my life. You know I was on a team that won the Nobel prize?

LARRY

Yeah, believe me, Mom and I know all about it.

CHRISTIAAN

I would give it back in a heartbeat to have a few memories of sitting in the bleachers at your Little League games.

LARRY

I was never in Little League.

CHRISTIAAN

Of course. I meant your Christmas recitals--

LARRY

Drama? Seriously, Dad?

A beat.

CHRISTIAAN

I'm so sorry, Larry.

LARRY

Well--

(tearing up a little)

Thanks, virtual Dad.

They hug.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas Cage goes to the chair where Christiaan and Larry are locked in silent communion.

THOMAS

Let's move things along, shall we?

He turns a dial, and the helmet and patches on Larry's head bristle with energy.

Christiaan also shivers with the voltage.

INT. MINDLINK/LOBBY

Eddy returns his gun to his shoulder holster, then stands there staring at Claire's body abstractedly.

Behind him, Porter revives.

Porter gets up silently and punches Eddy in the kidneys.

They fight.

Eddy has more skill and takes Porter down.

As they fight, Claire struggles up, looks inside her coat at the slug in her bulletproof vest.

Just as Eddy is about to hammer Porter, Ashley has entered and places a hand on Eddy's shoulder.

Eddy goes slack, eyes dull.

Claire lands a kick to Eddy's head, sending him sprawling.

EDDY

Hey! Claire? Claire! I was--what the hell--you kicked me? What's going on?

Claire has her gun on him as Porter disarms Eddy.

PORTER

Exactly. Why don't you tell us what's going on, back-stabber?

CLAIRE

(to Ashley)
What did you do?

ASHLEY

I removed the control protocols.

CLAIRE

He's okay now?

ASHLEY

Yes, if you can call this calcium shelled parallel processing lattice "okay." It's terribly limited.

Porter shrugs at Claire.

CLAIRE
It's all we got. Let's go.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDEN - DAY

Suddenly Christiaan cringes, crying out in pain.

LARRY
Dad! What is it?

The gardens flash around them.

INTERCUT WITH --

INT. PHASE SPACE - NIGHT

The alien chamber, the Ultrak in its alien form with it's tentacles sunk into Larry's head. Then--

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas, Camden, and Durance, are OVERLAID with the semi-translucent skulls and alien brain tissue, watching Christiaan and son shiver with voltage.

CHRISTIAAN (V.O.)
Larry! Son!

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDEN - DAY

Larry's awareness snaps back as Christiaan sinks to his knees.

Visible currents of energy shake him.

CHRISTIAAN
I'm sorry. I can't hold them off any longer. I--

LARRY
Dad! No.
(stands up)
Take me! I have it! Leave him alone!
(kneels)
Dad--I'm not worth shit to this world. Don't take the heat for me.
(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)
I don't know what to do! Take the
stupid thing back!

He looks around frantically, spots the gazebo, then takes a more calculating look around.

Christiaan's face and that of Thomas Cage merge, also taking on aspects of the sensory lobes of the Ultrak.

CHRISTIAAN
(voice of Thomas)
You have failed. Release the Axiom
or see this one die!

Christiaan clutches his head, brain frying.

CHRISTIAAN (CONT'D)
(own voice)
No! You have the mind for it, son.
I believe in you!

Larry grabs his father by both shoulders, glares into his eyes.

--glares into the eyes-lobes of the Ultrak.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas, both hands on the tank panel, feels a surge of energy.

THOMAS
(Ultrak voice)
Yes. You cannot hold it!

Behind Camden and Durance, who watch transfixed, Claire, Porter, Eddy, and Ashley enter.

CLAIRE
(gun out)
Federal Officers! Hands above your
heads!

THOMAS
(Ultrak voice)
Stop them!

Camden and Durance turn.

CLAIRE
(to Porter and Eddy)
Weapons down.

Camden and Durance attack.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDEN

Thomas and Christiaan disappear as the Ultrak assumes its full form, while Larry watches from the gazebo.

Hovering between them is the Axiom, a scintillating helix/orb of golden energy, rippling with lines of code in both known and unknown scripts.

ULTRAK
(disembodied voice)
This planet is now forfeit.

LARRY
Yeah, well, don't get hypnotized by
any strange delights on your way
out.

Larry leaps off the gazebo and takes off running.

From Larry's p.o.v. the garden rushes at him, faster and faster, as he leaps rows, makes sharp turns, swings around trees, plunges through hedges.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fierce hand to hand combat continues. Eddy takes Camden down, but Durance is a trained fighter and manages to slam Porter against a wall and land a solid punch to Claire.

EXT. SOLESTE ESTATES/GARDEN

The Ultrak resumes using the physical form of Thomas. It begins to walk rapidly.

From the Ultrak's p.o.v. the garden pathways come at it swiftly, but the estate buildings never get closer. Again and again it ends up facing the gazebo and flowering lilac trees.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Syringa Vulgaris. The common lilac tree."

THOMAS
(alien voice)
Do you think this pathetic
labyrinth can forestall your doom?

Again, Thomas walks at a dizzying speed through the garden.

He spots Larry, accelerates, nearly catches him before Larry plunges through a hedge.

A frenetic chase sequence as Thomas pursues him.

When Larry glances back he sees a hybrid human/alien monster fast on his heels.

But after each close encounter, Thomas winds up back at the central gazebo, where the voice of Larry's mother can be heard:

NANCY (V.O.)
(sings)
"I made wine from the lilac tree/
Put my heart in the recipe/..."

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas frowns and slams a fist down.

THOMAS
No! What is this?!

Suddenly Christiaan lurches back from Larry, the contact broken.

He collapses.

As Durance fights the agents, he suddenly goes stiff and shudders.

Eddy raises a fist to hit him but Ashley holds up a hand.

Durance draws a deep breath, looking around at Thomas, Christiaan, and Larry, then at his own hands.

DURANCE
It's outta my head! I'm back. I'm
back and I can make it matter.

Durance goes to Thomas' station.

DURANCE (CONT'D)
Motherfucking alien nutria, you are
in Durance most Vile!

He lifts Thomas off his feet.

For a brief moment, Thomas is OVERLAID with the Ultrak's physical body; the alien shell, the tentacle-limbs, an orifice lined with teeth where two sections of the carapace come together.

A mighty struggle.

Ropy arms strangle Durance.

But Durance slams Thomas down on the large glass tank full of gray matter, which renders him inert.

Most of the participants gather around Larry, who seems to be in a waking coma.

CLAIRE

What's wrong with him?

ASHLEY

He gave the Axiom back. It might have done some damage.

EDDY

(points at Thomas)

Is that the Ultrak?

ASHLEY

No.

Ashley walks to the tank and the filigrees of black energy radiate over her entire body.

The same energy flares up from Larry.

Christiaan struggles up, rushes to his son's side.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

This is where it was cast.

CLAIRE

What is that?

CHRISTIAAN

It invaded a culture of vat-grown brain matter that we were developing. It was a prisoner, but the Axiom created carriers. Thomas Cage, a few others, and me. But I was ready.

ASHLEY

I, too, am ready. For my people--

The scintillating helix/orb rises from the tank.

As that happens, Durance goes to a panel and slams his fist into power meters. Then he yanks wires loose and throws the live ends into the tank.

The tank (with Thomas still unconscious on it) crackles with a momentary OVERLAY of the Ultrak as it dies.

The Axiom surrounds Ashley's head, then it is inside her.

She takes Larry's hand.

Larry startles back to life, lurching up, gasping.

LARRY

Ashley?!

CLAIRE

It's not her.

Larry gets up, peeling off the dermals. He clutches his head.

LARRY

I didn't want it back. Dad!

CHRISTIAAN

No. I'm too weak. My mind...

ASHLEY

Larry.

LARRY

I'm sorry, Ash. I've never done anything so stupid or thoughtless in my life than drag you into this.

ASHLEY

Maybe you should tell her.

She touches his face, and instantly--

INT. LARRY'S APT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In Larry's original, dingy apartment: Pete, Terry, Rudy, and Ashley.

There is a cheer and carrying on as Larry embraces his friends.

LARRY

I thought you guys were all dead, like seriously flat-out fucking dead.

PETE

Welcome to the afterlife, ya selfish prick.

RUDY

Took you long enough, pendejo.

Larry fights back tears.

LARRY

I imagined this scene like a hundred times. Goddamn, I miss you bastards! And--is that you, Ashley?

ASHLEY

Who else would it be, twerp?

LARRY

There was...something else. Hey, wait. What is this?

A touch on his shoulder, and Larry turns to find a SECOND ASHLEY, faintly radiant, her eyes luminous and alien.

Larry yelps and starts back. His friends laugh.

ASHLEY #2

Larry, this is a construct within the Axiom. I hope you don't mind.

LARRY

(looking between them)
A construct?

ASHLEY #2

The Axiom stores everything it encounters. The neural lattice imprints of your friends are here.

LARRY

So...it happened? They're all dead?

TERRY

Guess so, chum. Nice work getting us all slain, by the way.

PETE

Nice guys finish last, right?

ASHLEY

I would slap you if I could.

LARRY

But you're here. What do you mean, they're stored? They can come back?

ASHLEY #2

No. The Axiom has immense processing power, but recreating a living mind, even a relatively primitive one like yours, would utterly expend its life cycle.

LARRY

Then that means...one person can be restored?

ASHLEY #2

The other life sleeves--I mean bodies--are gone. Only this one--
(taps own chest)
--remains. You have to make a choice.

Larry looks at his friends.

Pete comes forward, gives him a bro hug.

PETE

I wouldn't know what to do without a dick, anyway.

LARRY

Pete.

Rudy and Terry also exchange hugs with him.

RUDY

You tried, ese, I gotta give you that. Never rubbed me the wrong way, except mostly.

TERRY

Yeah. Guess that edge kept you in the game, homes. Take care. See you when you level up.

They vanish.

Larry looks between the two Ashleys.

LARRY

Why does this have to happen?

ASHLEY #2

I will return to my life as an exile, warning other races about the Ultran expansion. When I leave, the body and mind that I occupy will be empty.

LARRY

But--

He gestures helplessly at Ashley.

Ashley #2 vanishes, leaving Larry and Ashley face to face.

ASHLEY

I guess that predictor thing of
yours can't help you now.

LARRY

I don't understand. You can go back
into your body, and the Axiom will
be gone forever, and then I'll be
dead too?

Ashley shrugs.

ASHLEY

Can the tears, big boy. I get it.
No surprise there. Besides, you're
gonna need all the help you can get
if those things ever come back.

LARRY

But...I never wanted this, Ashley.
I wanted you.

He kisses her.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I was always afraid of you. You had
a purpose in life. Your goals and
ambition were like fists, pounding
me in the face. I felt...little,
you know, kinda inadequate around
you. But not anymore.

Now she tears up.

They hold hands, and then the shimmering orb that is the
Axiom is between them.

INT. SUV - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Opening scene, Larry in handcuffs, Camden driving.

CAMDEN

"You shall not pace forth, 'gainst
death and all oblivious enmity."

Durance sneers at the back of Camden's head.

Larry's shirt sleeve has been nearly torn off and he looks at a tattoo on his upper arm--

INSERT - TATTOO

A PAIR OF DICE SURROUNDED BY A HEART.

INT. CAGE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ashley is still touching Larry when she snaps back into her body.

Larry collapses.

Claire and Eddy have been tending to the still unconscious Camden, but Porter comes to Larry's side along with his father and Durance.

ASHLEY

They're--I'm--

She sees Durance and assumes a fight posture.

Durance holds up empty hands.

DURANCE

I done had my fill of teenage girls
kicking my sorry ass. Think it's
about time I retire. 'Sides, how am
I ever gonna top saving the whole
goldurn planet?

EDDY

(into phone)

Support units, enter. All units.
Situation non-threatening.
Requesting an ambulance.

Porter pats Larry's cheek.

PORTER

He's alive.

Ashley hurries to Larry's side as he comes to. She kisses his face.

Nearby, Durance helps a groggy Camden to his feet.

DURANCE

I know you. You're that scribblah.
I mean, writer.

CAMDEN

And you; violent entertainment of
some sort?

DURANCE

Can't wait to read whatever poetry
you write about this here god awful
mess.

CAMDEN

You can read?

DURANCE

(shakes fist)

Second thought, maybe I still got a
Bubba or two to take down before I
retire.

Support Personnel rush into the room.

INT. LARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Larry is at his desk at Spondulics, playing BERSERKER WARS.

He wins a round and leans back in his chair.

Larry looks at a photo of himself and the band; Pete, Terry,
Rudy.

Ashley enters, dressed sharply.

ASHLEY

(smarmy)

Oh, Mister Lapace, sir. Del Rio
wants to cancel their one o'clock
today. I told them you were busy
with Candy Crush, anyway.

LARRY

Hahaha. It's Berserker Wars. Get
that straight! Goddamn, I can't
believe I hired you. Young lady,
you are a distraction and I must
insist on more conservative dress.
I demand it!

He pounds on his desk, gets a kiss from Ashley.

On his monitor, sounds of battle, and a loud cheer.

LARRY (CONT'D)

(back to game)

Made it, yes! Big level up.

ASHLEY

Maybe you should get a machine gun
tattoo next?

The screen goes to a cut scene as the levels change.

Larry holds out an arm and Ashley sits on his lap. They
smooch some.

LARRY

If you want to get more me time,
you could be on my team. I'll teach
you.

ASHLEY

That stupid game? I mean, sorry
Larry. You miss the guys, huh?

LARRY

Me and Pete and the crew had a
team. We were tight. I've been
afraid to turn team play back on.
You know...

ASHLEY

Okay, if you say so. You're the
boss, after all.

Larry gets out another controller and headsets for both of
them.

The game starts.

LARRY

Here we go. Check it out. So, where
we used to pick each other for
teams--

ON THE MONITOR: character faces and names: Pete, Rudy, Terry.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Hey, their profiles are still
there. I used to be able to talk to
them--

RUDY

(on monitor)

What're we, Sarge, chopped
churrasco?

LARRY

Ha! That's good. Auto response.

PETE
(on monitor)
Auto response this, dickweed!

Pete shoots Larry's character.

LARRY
Whoa. That was unreal.

TERRY
(on monitor)
This is Berserker Wars, not Unreal,
dumbass. You playing, or picking
your nose?

Larry stands, shocked, looking at the web cam on top of his monitor.

RUDY
(on monitor)
You're gonna get us all killed,
Sarge. Vamanos!

LARRY
Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa. Pete?

PETE
(on monitor)
Yeah?

LARRY
Is that you?

PETE
(on monitor)
Fuck yeah, it's me. Hey Ashley.
Looks like you two finally hooked
up. Took you long enough, Lair.

Ashley and Larry share an open-mouthed expression.

ASHLEY
They were in the Axiom. It dumped
their--their whatchamacallits--

LARRY
Neural lattice? For real?! Pete!?
Rudy! Terry! Guys?!
(choking up a bit)
Let's kick some ass!

The characters cheer, fire off weapons, then move out as Larry sits back down, Ashley in his lap, controllers ready.

At the top of the game screen, a character face (collar and shoulders in the enemy's uniform) appears.

The face of Thomas Cage, along with the text: "TEAM CHALLENGE ACCEPTED."

FADE OUT...

THE END