

The Disciple Program

by
Tyler Marceca

OPEN TO:

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT PLAIN - DAY

Desolate. Sparse vegetation save for the occasional scrub cactus. Appearing in the distance, undulating in the heat-haze --

EXT. PILGRIM CROSSING PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

High perimeter walls, spirals of concertina wire and manned watchtowers indicative of the danger patients here pose.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - PILGRIM CROSSING - DAY

A stark room with a stainless steel table situated in the center. Sitting on one side of the table --

-- JOCELYN EBERLE, one of the resident psychiatrists. Mid-thirties, pretty without pretense or solicitation. There's an opened file in front of Jocelyn. But her eyes are elsewhere, lost in thought, face pinched with distress.

The room's only door opens. A GUARD peeks his head in.

GUARD

Your patient's here Dr. Eberle.

Breaking Jocelyn from her reverie. Steeling herself --

JOCELYN

You can send him in.

Guard holds the door open for an imposing ORDERLY pushing --

-- EDMUND BOEDDEKER, both wrists handcuffed to the arms of a wheelchair, draped in a tear-resistant smock. Unassuming. But behind Edmund's eyes, a violent storm rages.

Orderly directs Edmund to the table, guiding both wheels of the wheelchair into designated grooves in the floor. Moving back to the door, Orderly waves his hand over a panel --

-- triggering clamps to spring out and fasten to the wheels, rooting Edmund firmly to the floor.

Orderly takes position at the closed door like a sentinel.

Jocelyn takes a moment to review Edmund's file. Stolen glimpses of crime-scene photos, the eviscerated bodies of young women unearthed from crude burial sites.

Pegging Jocelyn for a possible admirer --

EDMUND

You'll have to forgive me for the Nordlinger girl. That was a mess, I know. But it served as a great résumé builder.

Jocelyn closes the file, regarding Edmund for a beat.

JOCELYN

Edmund, my name's Dr. Jocelyn Eberle. I'm a psychiatrist here at Pilgrim Crossing. I know that you normally meet with Dr. Storetveit, but the administrations board felt you were making...

(pausing to frame it
delicately)

... limited progress under his purview.

EDMUND

That's funny. I felt Dr. Storetveit and I had struck up a nice rapport. I tried telling them too, but they insisted that I see you.

Ears pricking up --

JOCELYN

Who insisted Edmund?

Edmund's brow furrows, face knotted with discomfort.

EDMUND

I'm sorry Dr. Eberle. I'm having a difficult time concentrating.

Jocelyn nods to Orderly. Orderly moves to Edmund, unlocks his handcuffed left hand, setting a pad and pencil on the table.

Edmund scrutinizes the pencil's tip with a disapproving look.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

This is dull.

ORDERLY

It's sharp enough Rembrandt.

Orderly moves back to his post by the door.

EDMUND

He always calls me Rembrandt. It must be the only painter he knows.

With his free hand, Edmund commits pencil to paper, drawing a circle with painstaking exactitude, an exercise that seems to have a calming effect on Edmund.

JOCELYN

(persisting)

You said you tried telling them that you wanted to stay under Dr. Storetveit's care Edmund. Who did you say this to?

Unable to derail Edmund's train of thought --

EDMUND

People often forget about Giotto, even though it's his work that has come to represent the advent of the Italian Renaissance.

RIP -- Edmund balls up his first effort, begins a new circle.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

Once word of Giotto's considerable talents began to spread, it's said the Pope himself sent one of his most trusted aesthetes to Florence to observe and ultimately determine whether or not Giotto's skills were worthy of the Vatican's commission.

RIP -- Edmund discards another failed attempt, starts over.

Jocelyn watches as the pencil meticulously orbits the paper, shaking from the exertion.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

And how did Giotto choose to demonstrate his craft to the Holy Father's emissary?

RIP -- unsatisfied.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

A fresco of the lamentation of Christ perhaps?

RIP -- another ball of paper added to the growing pile.

EDMUND (CONT'D)
Or an altarpiece depicting The
Annunciation?

RIP -- Jocelyn watches the pencil quiver from the pressure,
the veins in Edmund's wrist engorged and pulsating.

EDMUND (CONT'D)
No. Giotto simply dipped his fine-
tipped brush in a bit of red paint
and drew a circle on canvas.

RIP -- and Edmund's pencil once again finds the thinning pad,
threatening to splinter in half from the effort.

EDMUND (CONT'D)
A perfect circle.

SNAP -- and the concentrated stress beheads the pencil, the
sheared-off graphite gouging out a divot of paper.

Edmund's face curdles, instantly sickened. He pitches left
and violently retches.

Jocelyn uprights. Orderly moves to help Edmund --

-- but Edmund, expression now full of grim determination,
reaches into his puddle of sick, finding a small carrier
tube. He flicks off the top --

-- *brandishing a serrated shiv.*

Catching sight of the shiv, Jocelyn calls to Orderly --

JOCELYN
Stay away from him!

Orderly glances up at Jocelyn, registering her warning --

-- and that's all it takes, Edmund seizing the moment and
striking up at Orderly like a coiled snake. Edmund's shiv
finds Orderly's abdomen ten times in half as many seconds.

Jocelyn fossilizes, watches the bloodletting with mute horror.

Orderly falls back, Edmund's sixteenth career victim by the
time he hits the floor.

Still rooted to the wheelchair by a handcuff, Edmund extends
his free arm, trying to reel in Orderly's body --

-- *and the keys attached to his belt.*

Jocelyn moves for the door --

-- and Edmund spins around, blocking Jocelyn's path.

They're at a standstill. Jocelyn can't reach the door without crossing into Edmund's striking radius. And Edmund's fixed in place like a leashed dog.

EDMUND

Do you know why they came to me
Dr. Eberle?

Edmund flexes, testing the give of the handcuff.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

They were admirers of my work.

Edmund angles his handcuffed wrist on the armrest of the wheelchair. He then raises his foot, brings it down hard --

-- SNAPPING the bones in his wrist, his hand falling limply. Edmund uses the shiv to hack through his flaccid wrist --

-- *crudely sawing off his hand.*

Free from bondage, Edmund tucks his spurting stump into the folds of his smock, his rabid eyes stalking Jocelyn.

JOCELYN

Listen to me Edmund, without
immediate medical attention,
you will bleed to death.

Edmund puts his weight against the metal table, pushing it forward -- driving Jocelyn back towards the far wall.

Trying to speak over the grating SHRILL of the table --

JOCELYN (CONT'D)

I don't know what they promised you
Edmund. But they're just using you.

The table bears down on Jocelyn, sending her backpedaling to the wall, forcing her to commit to a side --

-- Jocelyn shoots right. Edmund moves to intercept, slashing at her. Jocelyn throws up her arm defensively, a jagged slit opening up on her forearm like a ripped seam.

Edmund swipes at Jocelyn's throat --

-- Jocelyn instinctively ducks under, goes for the door --

-- and loses her footing, slipping in Orderly's pooling blood. Edmund pounces, about to deliver the deathblow --

-- and Jocelyn wheels around, gripping Orderly's taser-gun. She fires --

-- both probes sinking into Edmund's torso, the conductive wires' twenty-six watt current sending Edmund to the floor in a spasmodic fit, flapping like a beached fish.

Finally alerted to the turmoil, Guard bursts into the room, tackling and restraining Edmund before he can recover --

-- as Jocelyn cowers in the corner, awash in Orderly's blood.

EXT. HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Lying on the fringe of the Mojave, Humboldt's an unassuming airforce base when one considers its absence of any actual aircraft, comprised almost entirely of ruggedized trailers.

INT. TRAILER EIGHTEEN - HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

The trailer houses a ground control station (GCS). Used for remote-piloting unmanned aircraft, the GCS consists of a pilot's chair, an array of monitors and a joystick.

Operating this particular GCS --

-- LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROGER EBERLE, mid-thirties, already a seasoned veteran. Like the drone-craft he pilots, Roger's a perfectly calibrated instrument of warfare. A cross-section of scars leave barren trails in his scalp --

-- evidence Roger wasn't always so far removed from war's "kinetic operations."

Roger studies one of his monitors, a real-time feed from his hovering drone showing a village aglow in phosphorous green.

Seen from above, Roger can make out the heat signatures of people lying on the roofs of the village --

-- all of them looking like possible snipers.

COLONEL OLMSTED, Roger's direct superior, enters the trailer.

Without turning around --

ROGER

I'm still loitering sir. Ground blue-force elements are holding fast three clicks away.

Olmsted holds up a sheet of documentation.

OLMSTED

This just came in from HQ.

(excerpting)

"Ground command of accelerated pacification campaign *Shinning Spearhead* hereby grant remote pilot clearance to engage." In other words Lieutenant, reduce that village to ash.

ROGER

Sir, I don't believe we've met a positive identification criteria for hostiles down there just yet.

Pointing at the screen --

OLMSTED

Really? Because I'm staring at a rat's nest of snipers down there. Why else would they be assuming a prostrate position on their roofs?

ROGER

When it gets hot at night, those people can't exactly turn on the air-conditioning. So they end up falling asleep topside.

Taking a bureaucratic approach now --

OLMSTED

Pattern of life analysis shows that AQ drove out the non-combatants.

ROGER

Most of them sir. Not all of them.

OLMSTED

(coldly assertive)

We have our orders Lieutenant.

Roger's hand tentatively grips the joystick, about to commence an indiscriminate air-strike on the village --

-- and then something clicks with Roger.

ROGER

I know how we can distinguish the civilians from the insurgents sir.

Roger keys a few commands. A cross-hair appears on one of the screens. With the joystick, Roger positions the cross-hair on the village's periphery.

ROGER (CONT'D)

We can use the infrared designator
to separate the foxes from the hens.

A circle of infrared strobe-light appears. With the joystick, Roger traces the fringe of the village, directing the beam one hundred and eighty degrees.

ROGER (CONT'D)

It's like karaoke. Anyone looking
through a night-vision scope will
follow the bouncing ball.

For a beat, all of the ambient figures on the roofs remain motionless. His impatience reaching critical mass, Olmsted is about to give Roger a serious dressing-down --

-- *then movement*, figures on two roofs repositioning to track the infrared light, clearly sniper-spotter tandems.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Looks like they can see in the
dark sir.

Despite himself, Olmsted's impressed with Roger's tactical ingenuity. He green-lights Roger with a nod and walks away.

Exemplifying brain-power before firepower, Roger obtains target acquisition on both roofs. Into his headset --

ROGER (CONT'D)

Hunter-Seven, this is Dragonfly.
Switching to precision ordnance.
Firing for effect.

EXT. COURTYARD - HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Roger enters the artificial-turf laden enclosure, a sign at the gate reading, "**Cell Phones May Be Activated Beyond This Point.**"

Roger switches on his cell -- finds it backed up with missed calls and voicemails.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Roger, still in his airforce issued flight-suit, races down a hallway, reading the patient room numbers at a clip.

Roger turns a corner, sees SIDNEY JUERGENS, the bespectacled, late-fifties chief administrator of Pilgrim Crossing, pacing outside one room. Squaring up on Sidney --

ROGER

I thought you searched these guys Sidney. How the fuck did he get a blade into that room?

With a quiet, placating tone he hopes will be infectious --

SIDNEY

We do check them. Thoroughly Roger, I can assure you. But this guy had the weapon lodged in his digestive tract.

ROGER

And how did this psychotic get his hands on a shiv in the first place?

SIDNEY

We're looking into that Roger. We're doing everything we can...

Sidney trails off as Roger indignantly brushes past him.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Roger at the foot of the bed, Jocelyn sitting upright, arms guardedly interlocked with a blank, traumatized look.

Jocelyn's lacerated forearm is bandaged and wrapped.

ROGER

I spoke with the hospital staff. They agreed to let you stay here until I can pick you up tomorrow.

JOCELYN

It's seventeen stitches Roger. Not a liver transplant.

ROGER

Who did this Joce?

JOCELYN

(sharply)
You know I can't discuss my patients with you.

Roger assents, decides not to push.

ROGER

I have to fly tomorrow Joce. That I can't help. But after that, I'm taking a leave of absence.

Roger moves to lay a consoling hand on Jocelyn's leg --
 -- Jocelyn recoils from Roger's touch like a skittish horse.
 Roger looks at Jocelyn, trying to connect. But Jocelyn keeps her eyes averted.

INT. TRAILER EIGHTEEN - HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Roger's once again fastened into his GCS. Though he operates without a trace of negligence or distraction, it's clear his primary concerns are closer than the ones thousands of miles away on his screens.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Blinds drawn, Jocelyn sits in near darkness, on edge.

The door swings open. Jocelyn snaps around, finds NURSE KATHY entering with a tray. Flashing an innately pleasant smile --

NURSE KATHY
 Good afternoon Mrs. Eberle.

Jocelyn offers nothing, warily observing Nurse Kathy as she sets her tray down on a stand.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)
 I may not be a doctor Mrs. Eberle,
 but I think you're suffering from
 an acute sunshine deficiency.

Nurse Kathy moves to the windows to open the blinds.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)
 And there's only one way to treat
 that condition.

Just as Nurse Kathy reaches for the lift cord --

JOCELYN
 LEAVE IT!

Nurse Kathy spins around, startled by Jocelyn's sudden outburst. Nurse Kathy quickly composes herself, retrieving two paper cups off the tray and handing them to Jocelyn.

Jocelyn reluctantly accepts, holding a cup in each hand. One is filled with water. The other contains two pills.

Noting Jocelyn's suspicious appraisal of the medication --

NURSE KATHY

Amoxicillin. A basic antibiotic.
Remember, that knife was sitting
in some man's gastric juices.

Nurse Kathy stands at the foot of the bed, waiting for Jocelyn to swallow the pills.

Jocelyn raises the cup of pills to her mouth, chasing it back with the water. Hands both empty cups back to Nurse Kathy.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

I'll let you know when your husband
arrives Mrs. Eberle.

Nurse Kathy trots out. As the door closes behind her --

-- Jocelyn pitches left, spitting the pills and water onto the floor. She reaches for the tissues, plucking a handful out and frantically swabbing the inside of her mouth.

EXT. EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

A modest home more or less indistinguishable from the rest of its counterparts in this suburban enclave.

A SUV pulls into the driveway, depositing Roger and Jocelyn. We get the sense their ride home hasn't exactly been rich in conversation.

INT. KITCHEN - EBERLE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Roger and Jocelyn eat dinner, the silence at the table punctuated by clinking silverware and masticating jaws.

Jocelyn absently picks at her food. She looks down, finds PLATO, her Scottish terrier, scratching at his collar.

Jocelyn reaches down, reels Plato close, holding him as if he were a talisman to ward off evil.

INT. BEDROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Jocelyn occupies her side of the bed, curled up in a fetal bundle, facing away from Roger.

Roger lies awake on his back, contemplative.

ROGER

What happened Joce?

JOCELYN

Something I said... must have set
him off somehow. Provoked him --

ROGER

(cutting her off)

I'm not talking about yesterday.
You've gone cold these past months.
I tell myself a wife doesn't just
wake up one morning and look at her
husband like he's a stranger who's
walked in off the streets without
having her reasons. I just want to
know what they are.

Jocelyn's eyes crystallize, lips quivering, about to lay
herself bare -- but refrains, locked in tortured silence.

Roger lets out a dispirited sigh at Jocelyn's withholding.
He shuffles onto his side, puts his back to Jocelyn.

INT. KITCHEN - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Morning light fills the room. A coffee-maker drips away.

Jocelyn pads over to the sliding-glass door leading to the
backyard carrying a bowl of dog food. She slides it open.

INT. BEDROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger gradually stirs awake. He uprights, wiping the cobwebs
from his eyes, his shirtless back revealing an archipelago of
rubbery scar tissue.

INT. KITCHEN - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger enters dressed. He pours a cup of steaming brew into a
mug crested with the *Cardinals* logo.

Noting his wife's absence --

ROGER

Joce?

He moves to the sliding-glass door, stepping outside.

EXT. BACKYARD - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger crosses the porch, finds Plato by the in-ground pool,
nibbling on the spilled dog food from his overturned bowl.

Roger approaches the pool --

-- *finds Jocelyn floating face-down, hair spread out like an ink spill.*

Roger jumps in, frantically turns his wife over, wiping the hair away from her static face, revealing clouded eyes.

Roger lifts Jocelyn out of the water, laying her gently on the lawn. He begins performing mouth-to-mouth, desperately trying to summon a pulse from her.

Plato watches solemnly as Roger tries resuscitating Jocelyn --

-- despite the fact it's utterly futile.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - DAY

Roger waits in the visitor's chair, face a portrait of raw, freshly widowed devastation. He can't help but notice the many family photographs that clutter the desk. Snapshots of the life he's been deprived of.

The door opens. DR. NETHERCUTT, fifties, as cold and clinical as his profession demands, enters with a file in hand, taking a seat behind his desk.

DR. NETHERCUTT

You understand this is a deviation from protocol Mr. Eberle. Normally, those on staff here with experience in grief counseling are tasked with cause of death disclosures. I'm not the one who usually speaks with the next of kin.

ROGER

All due respect Dr. Nethercutt, I don't care how unseemly your bedside manner is. I just want to know how my wife died.

Dr. Nethercutt nods, consults the file with reading glasses.

DR. NETHERCUTT

The victim suffered an acute cerebral infarction. A severe stroke in other words.

ROGER

But that's not how she died?

DR. NETHERCUTT

An internal examination revealed the presence of large quantities of water in her lungs. Your wife drowned Mr. Eberle.

Roger pauses a moment before asking --

ROGER

Was she conscious? Aware?

DR. NETHERCUTT

I'm afraid it's difficult to determine her mental acuity at the time of her death.

Roger's eyes meet Dr. Nethercutt's, almost accusatory.

ROGER

She was healthy. She had no family history of stroke. What happened?

DR. NETHERCUTT

In my experience Mr. Eberle, it's not the murders or drug overdoses that prove to be the most difficult for the bereaved to come to terms with. It's the freak accidents. The people who drown in their bathtubs or choke to death on their porter-houses. Death and closure are not always a package deal.

INT. ARRANGEMENT ROOM - FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The service has ended but Roger has yet to leave, holding vigil in solitude at the front of the expansive room.

A FUNERAL DIRECTOR stands in the back, glancing at his watch. He approaches Roger, trying to disguise his impatience behind a compassionate smile.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

I hope we were able to honor your wife's wishes today Mr. Eberle.

Roger stares ahead, eyes vacant. Without turning around --

ROGER

Looking to pack it up soon?

Caught, Funeral Director sheepishly settles into a chair behind Roger. Trying to be consoling --

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

My mother-in-law died of a stroke too. She was staying with my wife and I at the time. I was bringing her a bowl of puffed rice when I found her. She was so still. They call it a decorticate response. The body turns rigid. Like a mannequin. But I thought she was just asleep.

(beat)

My point is Mr. Eberle, when you get to be a funeral director for as long as I have, you learn to appreciate a peaceful passing.

The dim, nearly snuffed light in Roger's eyes begins to flicker. He shoots up, rushes over to his wife's casket. Roger flips open the casket's lower door, hands tracing his wife's legs, feeling around for something.

Watching Roger with a perplexed look --

FUNERAL DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

We've inventoried all the personal items your wife is to be committed with. If you wish to see a list --

ROGER

She wasn't stiff when I found her.

Roger performs a tactile inspection on his wife's arms.

ROGER (CONT'D)

She was a goddamn rag-doll.

Roger's hands reconnoiter around Jocelyn's neck -- pausing at the nape. Roger tilts the head forward, finding a patch of skin that creases unnaturally beneath his touch.

Roger feels around, finds a flap. The skin comes off like a chemical peel, revealing it to be synthetic tissue, grafted to Jocelyn's scruff to conceal --

-- a small but distinguishable injection puncture mark.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Quitting time. Dr. Nethercutt locks his office door behind him, turns --

-- finds himself face-to-face with Roger. Momentarily taken aback, Dr. Nethercutt quickly hardens.

DR. NETHERCUTT
Mr. Eberle, any matters concerning
your wife's --

ROGER
(cutting him off)
She's in the car.

Brow creasing, unsure whether he heard that last part right --

DR. NETHERCUTT
Come again?

INT. WAITING ROOM - MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Roger is seated, rigid and impatient. He bolts up when Dr. Nethercutt enters in his green scrubs and surgical gloves, appearing humbled by his recent findings.

DR. NETHERCUTT
You know Mr. Eberle, I once had a woman in my office whose husband died in a car accident. Since most of what we were able to recover of him was fused to the engine block of his Lamborghini, I suggested, as delicately as one can, that she cremate his remains. She nodded, politely requested the name of another physician to seek out a second opinion from... then asked if she could speak with her husband.

(beat)

When I saw you tonight, I thought grief had completely divorced you from reality. However, there does appear to be an injection site in your wife's posterior neck tissue, with puncture tracking suggesting something was administered directly into her brainstem. Perhaps using an interosseous injection gun.

Processing this --

ROGER
What was she injected with?

DR. NETHERCUTT
A compound whose pharmacological properties I'm unable to readily identify. But I can run a trace analysis.

(MORE)

DR. NETHERCUTT (CONT'D)

It will take some time though.

(beat)

I would suggest you go home and wait for my phone call... but I can see already you won't abide that. So I'll call my wife, tell her to leave my pot-roast in the oven. Meanwhile, I'll need you to pick me up a double-large coffee. This machine needs greasing.

INT. GAS STATION MINI-MART - NIGHT

Roger brings two coffees up to the front counter. The dead-eyed CLERK manning the register rings it up.

CLERK

Three-fifty.

Roger opens his wallet, reaching for bills --

-- and stops when he sees the photo tucked inside the clear plastic insert. It's of his wife Jocelyn lying in a hammock, an effervescent smile pinching at her ears.

The photo hypnotizes Roger, lost in a retrospective stupor.

Growing increasingly impatient --

CLERK (CONT'D)

It's still three-fifty sir.

Breaking Roger from his catatonia. He hands over the bills, collects his change --

-- and turns at the sound of encroaching sirens, watching through the windows as one fire-truck passes --

-- ominously followed by a second and third truck.

At these signs of portent, Roger rushes out of the mini-mart, leaving both coffees on the counter.

EXT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Roger pulls up, exiting his car to find --

-- *the medical examiner's office ablaze*, FIREMEN trying to douse the flames with high-pressure hoses to little effect.

Horrified, Roger approaches the burning building.

The firemen don't even notice Roger until he's nearly inside the burning office. They chase after him, dragging him back, the abandoned hose left writhing like a decapitated snake.

A block away, a nondescript car idles. Inside --

-- THE ARSONIST watches, unseen save for his blistered hands gripping the steering wheel, acid washes having stripped off the epidermis, leaving both his palms and fingertips without any identifiable friction ridges.

The Arsonist keys the ignition and drives off as --

-- the firemen continue to grapple with Roger, overpowering him to the ground --

-- Roger smacks his head against a retracted sprinkler-head. His world goes black.

LATER

Cordoned off with yellow tape, predawn light reveals the flame-blackened husk of the medical examiner's office. Firemen sift through the smoking rubble for evidence. Parked out front --

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Roger comes to, uprights from a stretcher, the back of his head dressed with a scalp bandage.

Roger sees a PARAMEDIC presiding over him along with POLLACK, a plainclothes detective. Paramedic speaks up first.

PARAMEDIC

Easy there Mr. Eberle. You took a serious blow to the head. Now see if you can follow my penlight.

Paramedic begins waving a penlight in front of Roger's eyes, but Roger makes no attempt to track the penlight, locking in on Paramedic's eyes.

ROGER

Where is she?

Paramedic tucks away the penlight, deferring to Pollack.

POLLACK

We believe we've found your wife's remains Mr. Eberle.

ROGER

You believe?

With considerable tact --

POLLACK

I'm afraid the fire didn't leave much... intact.

ROGER

And Dr. Nethercutt?

POLLACK

There is a second body. We're fairly certain it's his.

ROGER

What caused this?

POLLACK

We're still looking into that. But preliminary findings indicate this to be an electrical fire. Maybe an overloaded circuit. Faulty wiring. Something to that effect.

The full implications of what may be happening starting to dawn on him --

ROGER

(premonitory)

I'm sure your people will turn up something.

Pollack appears thrown by Roger's cryptic response. He produces a padded envelope, extends it to Roger.

POLLACK

Most of your wife's personal effects were unsalvageable. But we were able to recover her wedding ring.

Keeping his emotions at bay, Roger accepts the envelope as if it were a folded flag.

POLLACK (CONT'D)

If we need anything else, we'll call you Mr. Eberle. And make sure you get yourself looked after. You sustained some serious head trauma.

Pollack begins to walk away --

ROGER

Detective?

Pollack turns back. Roger's eyes meet the detective's, conflicted, debating whether or not he should disclose his suspicions to Pollack.

POLLACK

Yes?

A hanging beat.

ROGER

Someone should call the doctor's wife.

Pollack nods in simpatico and continues on his way. Paramedic moves in to help Roger lie back down on the stretcher.

PARAMEDIC

I apologize Mr. Eberle, but it's absolutely vital we get you to a hospital right away for a MRI. So if you could just lie back down --

Roger pushes Paramedic off him. Paramedic tumbles to the floor, knocking over medical supplies.

Roger exits the ambulance, Paramedic pleading after him.

PARAMEDIC (CONT'D)

At least let me give you an antiinflammatory Mr. Eberle.

EXT. EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger pulls up alongside his wife's BMW in the driveway.

INT. ROGER'S CAR - DAY

Roger sits behind the wheel, ruminative, glances over at the envelope in the passenger seat, the last vestiges of Jocelyn. He reaches to open the envelope --

-- but stops himself, finger to a hot stove, too much to bear, the specter of his wife hanging over the envelope's contents.

An idea emerges. Roger sets his car in reverse and backs out of the driveway, seething with purpose.

INT. SIDNEY JUERGEN'S OFFICE - PILGRIM CROSSING - DAY

Sidney sits behind his desk fiddling with a fountain pen as he addresses Roger seated opposite.

SIDNEY

I won't even entertain what you're suggesting.

ROGER

I'm not suggesting, I'm asking. I just need five uninterrupted minutes with this guy Sidney.

SIDNEY

Good god Roger, do you even hear yourself? You're asking to speak with a highly disturbed patient. There haven't been many qualified physicians I've let near Boeddeker over the years. Let alone a man harboring a personal vendetta.

ROGER

There's no vendetta Sidney. This man didn't kill my wife.

Shifting uncomfortably in his seat --

SIDNEY

You don't honestly think Jocelyn's death was the result of foul play?

Skirting the question --

ROGER

He was one of the last people to speak with my wife. And truth be told Sidney, Joce and I weren't ... communicating all that much the past few months.

(beat)

I just want closure.

Sidney softens, seeing how grief-stricken Roger is.

INT. ANTECHAMBER - PILGRIM CROSSING - DAY

Sidney affixes fabricated credentials to the lapel of Roger's jacket.

SIDNEY

You're on sabbatical conducting research for your new book. You don't speak to the patients. You don't make direct eye-contact with the patients. Do you understand?

(off Roger's nod)

(MORE)

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

Good. Because you know what happens if the board finds out I brought a civilian beyond this point?

ROGER

You take a job as a high-school guidance counselor?

SIDNEY

More like a high-school janitor.

Sidney removes a card, swipes it through a reader. Punching in a code on the alphanumeric keypad, the door unlocks with a pneumatic hiss. Sidney pushes it open, leading Roger into --

INT. HIGH-SECURITY WING - PILGRIM CROSSING - DAY

A small enclosure, like a subway booth, adjacent to the door houses TWO ORDERLIES. Two metal carrier trays spit out like deposit boxes. Orderly One speaks to them through the glass.

ORDERLY ONE

Please place all personal effects and metal objects in the tray.

Roger and Sidney comply, emptying their pockets, removing their belts. The trays retract as Orderly Two comes around with a metal detector wand.

Orderly Two scans Sidney first, no indication of metal on his person. Then he moves to Roger, scanning him --

-- the wand SQUAWKS at the top of Roger's neck. Orderly Two looks up at Roger, now noticing the scars on Roger's still-bandaged head like seams of caulking glue.

Improvising... poorly --

ROGER

Bad biking accident.

Met with a dubious glare from Orderly Two.

ORDERLY TWO

Keep outside of the red line.

Orderly Two nods down to the red line running the length of the corridor like the safety marker on a train platform.

Sidney begins leading Roger down the corridor. To their right, inside the red line, are plexiglass cubes inside large, recessed alcoves -- occupied by PATIENTS.

The FIRST PATIENT they pass, an obese man with asymmetrical eyes that orbit involuntarily, sits on his bed, nodding and chuckling to himself.

The SECOND PATIENT they pass, shirtless and stringy-haired, genuflects in the corner of his cell, reciting a prayer in some unknown tongue.

Sidney stops them at the third cell. Edmund Boeddeker lies on his bed with his back to them. Like a shark, we get the impression Boeddeker never truly sleeps. Only rests.

Sidney turns to Roger.

SIDNEY

I can't guarantee he'll even want to talk to you.

Sidney activates the intercom mounted into the annealed glass. It amplifies the acoustics inside Edmund's cell.

Leaning into the intercom --

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

Edmund, you have a visitor.

Edmund offers nothing, a wax figure in a diorama. Sidney turns back to Roger.

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

You have five minutes.

Sidney walks away, leaving Roger alone with Edmund. Roger steps forward, speaking into the intercom.

ROGER

Edmund, my name is Roger Eberle. I was hoping to speak with you.

Edmund shifts, uprights from bed, revealing a convex of plaster where his right hand used to be.

Edmund stalks forward, sizing Roger up. He offers Roger an ingratiating smile, his voice crackling from the intercom.

EDMUND

And how is your wife Mr. Eberle?

The presence and sheer proximity of Edmund would enfeeble most men. But not Roger, who meets Edmund's incisive gaze.

ROGER

She's dead.

Edmund doesn't appear surprised by this news.

EDMUND

You have my sincerest condolences.
Now what do you want from me?

ROGER

I want to know why you attacked
her? Why you tried to kill her?

A charged beat.

EDMUND

Are you familiar with my work Mr.
Eberle? Your wife would have made
a lovely addition to my portfolio.
What I could have done with such a
canvas. Alas, your wife's survival
instinct, her situational awareness
was, shall we say, acute.

Processing this --

ROGER

They came to you, didn't they?
Whoever it was, they wanted her
dead and they contracted you?

EDMUND

(remaining cordial)
Don't paint me in that light Mr.
Eberle. I'm not some "button-man."

ROGER

Yeah. You're something they don't
have a name for. You're a fucking --

Edmund SMASHES his truncated arm into the glass, Roger
reflexively ducking back.

Edmund proceeds to drive his arm into the glass, the plaster
encasing his stump fissuring, until red blooms from the nub-
end. Using his cast like a paintbrush, Edmund circumscribes
Roger's face inside a crimson circle on the glass.

Gazing at Roger from the other side of the dripping circle --

EDMUND

I'm an artist.

Sidney comes up next to Roger.

SIDNEY

Alright, let's go Roger.

Roger doesn't respond, caught in the magnetism of Edmund's maniacal eyes.

Yanking at Roger's arm --

SIDNEY (CONT'D)

I said that's it Roger.

Roger snaps around on Sidney, pure defense mechanism. Sidney's breath catches.

Roger's eyes then drift over Sidney's shoulders --

-- *fixing on the high-angled surveillance dome.*

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - PILGRIM CROSSING - DAY

Banks of closely watched monitors encompass an entire wall, leaving no blind-spot in the entire facility.

Roger and Sidney watch as a SECURITY TECH pulls an orange, waterproof case from an inventoried rack of similar cases.

SECURITY TECH

We archive all surveillance footage onto hard-drive. They're backlogged by month.

Security Tech pulls a hard-drive from the foam-lined case and inserts it into a toaster drive-dock hooked up to a computer.

Security Tech calls up a window on the monitor with the hard-drive's contents. Folders marked by date appear.

ROGER

Go to the night before my wife's attack. Boeddeker's cell.

Sidney points Security Tech to the appropriate folder. Security Tech clicks into it, revealing a directory of sub-folders marked by placement and location.

SIDNEY

High-security wing. Anything close to Cell 3B.

Security Tech clicks into the folder --

-- and static begins to play out on the monitor.

SECURITY TECH

That's weird.

SIDNEY
Try another camera.

Security Tech clicks into another folder with footage in similar proximity --

-- more of the same visual interference. Security Tech begins cycling through all the footage from that day --

-- *all snow*. Security Tech turns to Roger and Sidney.

SECURITY TECH
Looks like all our cameras were out that day.

Met with a quizzical look from Sidney. But Roger registers this with grave expectancy, his suspicions confirmed.

INT. BEDROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger barrels in, hefting a cardboard box containing Jocelyn's office effects onto the bed. Rummaging through it all, rooting through files and legal pads.

INT. CLOSET - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger reconnoitering, fishing through shoeboxes and combing the shelving unit.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger in front of the home computer, clicking into Jocelyn's folders, scouting her browsing activity and hacking into her email using spousal infidelity software --

-- and turning up nil at every turn.

LATER

Roger, haggard from exhaustion, sits at the computer in a resigned slouch, head cradled in his hands.

On the monitor of the inactive computer --

-- a screen-saver slide-show begins. Lifting his head, Roger watches snapshots of his former life materialize and dissolve on screen --

-- Roger leaving a rehabilitation clinic, Jocelyn holding his crutches, watching with tearful pride as Roger negotiates the steps unassisted --

-- Roger and Jocelyn bundled up together on a ski-lift --

-- Jocelyn holding Plato up to the camera.

Roger watches the flash of images with red-rimmed eyes. And just when it looks like tears might be forming --

-- something takes possession of Roger. He bolts up, clicking into desktop preferences, then screen-saver options, cycling through the slide-show's stored photos --

-- stopping at the picture of Jocelyn with Plato nestled in her arms, Roger's eyes narrowing on Plato's collar.

Roger turns in the chair, finds Plato pawing at the seemingly uncomfortable collar --

-- *different from the one in the photo.*

Roger hauls Plato into his lap, gingerly removing the collar. Upon closer inspection, he finds something lodged inside the collar's lining. Slipping two fingers into an open seam --

-- *Roger uncovers a flash drive.* His eyes saucer at the find. Extending the flash drive's A-plug, Roger moves to insert it into the computer --

-- but stops, wary of using the home computer.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

A spacious room filled with rows of partition-separated computer terminals. Occupying one workstation --

-- Roger plugs the thumb drive into the computer's USB port. The docked drive begins to blink, the drive's icon appearing on the screen. Roger clicks into it --

-- revealing audio files enumerated by date, the latest one dated from three months ago. Roger fastens his pair of head-phones on and clicks into the earliest audio file.

All sound filters out, Roger listening closely. A door is heard opening. Squeaking wheels scuffing against linoleum. The metallic coupling of some unknown mechanism.

Then a voice punctuates the symphony of ambient noises.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

If we could Darryl, I would like to pick up where we left off last session. If you remember, we were discussing the "floating man."

Roger quickly jots down "Darryl" on a pad, appending it with a question mark.

Darryl speaks with the clipped inflection of a soldier, traces of delirium in his disembodied voice.

DARRYL'S VOICE

I haven't forgotten.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

You said you could see him but not his face. Why is that?

DARRYL'S VOICE

There was this light behind him. So bright. I remember wanting to blink... but I couldn't close my eyes. I had to watch him.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

Is there anything else you can remember? Anything at all?

Darryl's trembling voice breaks into a distinct melody, HUMMING a haunting, gooseflesh-inducing rendition of "The Ants Go Marching" before deteriorating into a lamenting sob.

JOCELYN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

You're safe here Darryl. You can tell me. Did he hurt you?

Voice hardening with a stark tonal shift --

DARRYL'S VOICE

He saved me.

LATER

Roger's pad is filled with dictation. Question marks about the scrawl, some of which have been crossed out --

-- including the question mark next to Darryl's name.

On the monitor, a news article profiling DARRYL LEE UNGER fills the browser page. Glimpsed excerpts contextualize --

-- "... man responsible for the courthouse shooting that left sixteen dead, including Senator Bob Devereux."

-- "... Unger to undergo a psychiatric evaluation to determine whether or not he is mentally fit to stand trial."

-- "... dishonorably discharged for reasons undisclosed."

At the top, a booking photo of Darryl Lee Unger, shorn head, deeply recessed eyes. But Darryl doesn't look menacing --

-- rather, he looks lost.

Roger, headphones around his neck, clicks on another article.

A photo of an overturned bus at the bottom of a ravine along with the headline, "Prison Transport Bus Crashes: Courthouse Shooter Darryl Lee Unger Pronounced Dead On The Scene."

LATER

Roger listens to the last of the audio entries, dated less than a week before Darryl Lee Unger's death.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

You were a good soldier, weren't you Darryl?

DARRYL'S VOICE

(clarifying)

I am a good soldier.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

Then why were you dishonorably discharged?

DARRYL'S VOICE

It wasn't dishonorable. It was "other than honorable."

JOCELYN'S VOICE

They revoked your medical benefits. And barred you from reenlisting in any branch of the armed services. Would you agree, this is not how you treat a good soldier Darryl?

Roger can hear Darryl's elevated breathing. It's clear Jocelyn has struck a nerve.

Disregarding all protocol and professionalism --

JOCELYN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Do you remember speaking to anyone on the phone prior to the shooting? Or seeing anything on TV?

Roger listens as Darryl struggles to control his breathing.

JOCELYN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

How did they activate you Darryl? What was your triggering sequence?

Roger can hear Darryl's wheelchair shaking, his breathing accelerating with each question.

JOCELYN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

The "floating man," was he the one who ran The Disciple Program?

Then Roger hears Darryl go deathly quiet. Speaking with an eerie self-possession --

DARRYL'S VOICE

I've said all I wish to say on this matter Dr. Eberle.

The recording cuts out. Roger looks down at his pad, writes down "The Disciple Program" with a question mark.

Roger calls up a new browsing window, enters "The Disciple Program" into the search box. The load bar begins filling --

-- the load screen artifacts and distorts into a blowup of overlapping status windows. An error message pops up.

Hearing a groan to his right, Roger peeks his head around the partition, finds a DISGRUNTLED STUDENT staring at the same error message on his computer's monitor.

A chorus of complaints reaches a crescendo. Roger stands up --

-- sees that every computer is frozen, all displaying the same error message.

A LIBRARIAN moves to the middle of the room, trying to calm the natives --

LIBRARIAN

I'm sorry folks, it appears we're experiencing a system failure.

Roger snatches up his flash drive, hurries for the door --

-- warily cognizant of the surveillance cameras perched in the upper corners of the computer lab.

INT. MAIN FOYER - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Roger hurries in, punching in the code on the alarm panel, disarming it. About to rearm it --

-- Roger hears the phone ringing. He picks up the cordless from its charging cradle, answers.

ROGER

Hello?

Met with the low drone of an empty line.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Hello?

More static. Roger doesn't even hear anyone breathing on the other end. But he senses someone's listening.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I'll be here. All night.

Roger hangs up, marches upstairs.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - EBERLE RESIDENCE - DAY

Using a slate bar and power drill, Roger loosens the floor-boards just outside his bedroom door. He tosses his tools aside and steps forward, testing his handiwork --

-- the wood CREAKS. More discreet than string of tin cans and just as effective.

INT. HIGH-SECURITY WING - PILGRIM CROSSING - NIGHT

Close on a surveillance dome hanging from the ceiling like a globule of sweat. Its red recording light blinks off.

Edmund stirs awake in his cell, alerted by animal instinct. He sits up in bed, fixes on the shadows outside the glass.

EDMUND

It's after visiting hours.

No response or indication Edmund's speaking to anyone besides the voices in his head.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

Van Gogh was not recognized as a great artist until after his death. One day, the historians will revisit my work --

Cut short when a hypodermic dart plants in Edmund's stomach. He regards the dart protruding from his belly with a darkly amused expression before slumping forward -- dead.

Stray moonlight catches a line of high-tensile wire running from the end of the dart like arachnid silk. The wire turns taut, pulling the dart from Edmund like a hooked trout.

The dart's reeled in through the cell's opened food slot, berthing in the barrel of a mid-range projector rifle. The hands holding the rifle captured in a shaft of light reveal --
-- soft skin and manicured nails.

INT. BEDROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Roger sits at the foot of his bed, eyes fixed on his closed bedroom door, watching with the unblinking focus you'd find under a bearskin hat.

Held at his side, concealed beneath a pillow --
-- a Beretta, safety off, finger caressing the trigger.

EXT. BACKYARD - EBERLE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Close on the central air conditioning unit. The side panel has been pried open. Hosing running from a portable tank feeds directly into the air conditioning unit's compressor, ventilating the house with some unknown, aerosolized agent.

Entering frame --

--the hand of The Arsonist, fingers braided with raw sinew, reaching down and tightening the valve on the portable tank, stemming the influx of gas.

INT. BEDROOM - EBERLE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The floorboards outside the door CROAK. The knob turns, door opening to reveal --

-- The Arsonist, face hidden behind a gas mask with tinted lenses. He takes a few cautious steps inside --

-- *finds Roger splayed unconscious across the bed.* The Arsonist looks above the bed, sees the air-duct.

The Arsonist moves for Roger, flipping him over onto his belly. The Arsonist brandishes an injection gun, angling it against the nape of Roger's neck --

-- *the retractable needle shooting out with a HISS.*

EXT. DESERT PROMONTORY - NIGHT

A clear, bejewelled sky casts the rugged terrain below in milky starlight. The ridge offers a view of Pilgrim Crossing in the distance.

Parked about fifty yards before the escarpment's sheer seventy foot drop --

INT. BMW - NIGHT

-- Jocelyn's BMW. The Arsonist positions an unconscious Roger in the driver's seat. Unmasked, The Arsonist has the hardened countenance of ex-military. Leaning down to snap Roger's seat-belt, The Arsonist uprights --

-- finds Roger's eyes open and alert, fixed on him. The Arsonist recoils, his back slamming against the steering wheel, the honked horn reverberating across the moonscape.

From outside the car --

WOMAN (O.S.)

Fuck are you doing in there?

Unnerved by the wide-eyed yet strangely inanimate Roger --

THE ARSONIST

He's looking right at me.

Approaching footfalls are heard. Leaning down outside the opened driver's side door --

-- *Nurse Kathy*, wearing all black, hair twisted back in an economical ponytail, the facade of kindness gone.

Roger's eyes slowly orbit in their sockets, finding Nurse Kathy. She doesn't appear concerned.

NURSE KATHY

He can hear us too. You dosed him with a very potent neuromuscular-blocker. But without anaesthetic properties. He'll feel everything.

(beat)

Let's fix him a scotch.

The following is done with swift, methodical dispatch. A tandem maneuver that derives its precision not from rehearsal but from repeat performance.

The Arsonist removes catheter tubing. Using a surgical mouth-prop, he begins feeding the siphon down Roger's throat. Roger jerks and twitches.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

Make sure you're in the stomach.
It won't have the desired effect
if the toxicologist finds a pint
of booze in his lungs.

Intubation complete, The Arsonist hands Nurse Kathy the end of the tubing. She removes a can of gas duster, slips the nozzle into the tubing. The Arsonist puts his ear to Roger's stomach.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

Ready?

The Arsonist nods. Nurse Kathy sprays. The Arsonist hears the faint burst of canned-air from within Roger's stomach lining.

THE ARSONIST

We're in there.

Nurse Kathy fixes a funnel to the top of the tubing, raising her arm to straighten the tubing. She then pulls an eighteen-year Glenlivet from a duffel, breaks the seal, uncorking it.

NURSE KATHY

He was saving this for a special
occasion.

Tilting the bottle of scotch into the funnel, Nurse Kathy guides the inflow of amber liquor down the tubing in what can best be described as reverse stomach-pumping.

Roger lets out a guttural choke as the scotch deposits directly into his stomach.

After depleting nearly a third of the bottle --

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

That should do.

Nurse Kathy detaches the funnel as The Arsonist begins withdrawing the tubing from Roger's body cavity like a magician's endless string of handkerchiefs.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

Apply the cosmetics.

The Arsonist tucks the coiled tubing inside his jacket, exits the vehicle, shuffling into the backseat.

Nurse Kathy leans in, spilling scotch onto Roger and the dashboard, tossing the bottle into the footwell.

In the backseat, The Arsonist removes a small makeup kit containing a patch of adhesive, artificial skin --

-- the same cosmetic concealment Roger found on Jocelyn's neck. Reaching to remove the driver's seat headrest --

-- The Arsonist pauses, inspecting the injection site in Roger's neck closer through the headrest's hollow contour.

Up front, Nurse Kathy notices Roger's fastened seatbelt.

NURSE KATHY (CONT'D)

Goddammnit, would a a man about to
drive off a cliff really buckle up?

Nurse Kathy leans down, reaching to release the buckle.

Still curious, The Arsonist expands the injection mark in Roger's neck with his fingers --

-- revealing an impenetrable steel plate under the skin like a silver sequin. The Arsonist reaches into his jacket, pulls out the injection gun, triggering it --

-- *finding the needle bent at a perpendicular angle.*

THE ARSONIST

He isn't dosed.

Leaned in close, Kathy turns, faces Roger, finds his eyes ablaze. A pregnant beat --

-- Nurse Kathy reaches for her handgun. Roger catches her wrist with one hand, cranks his seat's reclining mechanism with the other.

The driver's seat drops back sharply, pinning The Arsonist, the headrest fracturing his nose.

Roger and Nurse Kathy grapple for the gun as The Arsonist struggles to free himself behind them, his nose askew and bleeding profusely.

Roger and Nurse Kathy's interlocked arms wave the gun in The Arsonist's direction, fingers entwining around the trigger --

-- BANG, an errant bullet catches The Arsonist in the head, glazing the back windshield with a varnish of brain matter.

Nurse Kathy fights with feral intensity, biting, gradually aligning the handgun with Roger's temple.

Fueled by desperation, Roger reaches blindly for the gearstick with his free hand. Finding it, Roger shifts the car into drive. His foot goes to step on the gas --

-- but the bottle of scotch is lodged behind the pedal, preventing it from depressing.

From the dominant position, Nurse Kathy uses her full weight to inch the gun in Roger's direction --

-- Roger raises his foot, stomping hard, flattening the gas pedal and shattering the bottle of scotch underneath.

The BMW peels forward, accelerating, narrowing the gulf on the ridge's precipice.

Still wrestling for leverage of the handgun, Nurse Kathy steals a look out the windshield behind her --

-- turns ashen upon seeing the ridge's terminus racing to meet them. Roger secures his seatbelt, braces himself as --

-- the BMW plunges. Buoyed by the seatbelt, Roger watches as everything inside the car is gravitationally pulled flush to the roof like aluminum cans caught by a magnetic crane--

-- *including Nurse Kathy.*

EXT. LOW-LYING DESERT PLAIN - NIGHT

Crashing in an upheaval of dust, the impact compresses the vehicle's front end like an accordion's bellows, concaving the roof. The BMW settles into a smoking, overturned heap.

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Steam hisses out through the vents. The ruptured engine block leaking highly combustible motor oil, collecting in a puddle.

Bloody and mildly concussed, Roger finds his world inverted. The airbag that cushioned his head deflates --

-- revealing the irreparably bent and broken remnants of Nurse Kathy, limbs twisted into impossible contortions.

Roger unfastens his seatbelt, falls onto the roof. Nurse Kathy watches him, unable to move.

Regarding Nurse Kathy with undisguised contempt --

ROGER

It was you, wasn't it? You were the
one who took her from me.

Unresponsive, Nurse Kathy coughs up a gout of blood.

Speaking from a dark, infernal place --

ROGER (CONT'D)

She drowned in three foot water.

Roger reaches a hand up to the dashboard, unfastening the GPS
unit from its mount, pocketing it --

ROGER (CONT'D)

To die like that, I can think of
only one thing worse.

-- and depressing the car's electric cigarette lighter.

Roger crawls out of the BMW's driver's side entrance. Nurse
Kathy fixes on the cigarette lighter, dread in her eyes.

The lighter POPS out of its socket --

-- Nurse Kathy tracking its descent, watching as its neon
coil touches down on the flammable surface of the roof.

EXT. LOW-LYING DESERT PLAIN - NIGHT

Silhouetted by the funeral pyre, Roger watches the flames
gradually engulf the BMW, shadows dancing across his face.

Roger then sticks two fingers down his throat, kneeling
forward to purge the single-malt intake from his system.

EXT. FOGGY BOTTOM - WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

On a bustling, exclusively commercial strip --

INT. ELEVATOR - OFFICE COMPLEX - DAY

Opened in the lobby, A SALESWOMAN, likely the most attractive
woman on her floor, waits. Just as the doors go to close --

-- she reaches her arm through, belaying the doors for
AMBROSE, mid-forties, effortlessly suave, fastidiously
groomed. Ambrose flashes her a smile of blinding enamel.

AMBROSE

You're an angel.

Ambrose enters, hits the button for the top floor. The doors close and the elevator begins its ascent.

SALESWOMAN

The mysterious eighth floor. I feel like I hardly ever see anyone going up there.

AMBROSE

Vacation season. Some days it feels like I'm the only one in the office.

SALESWOMAN

I know that feeling. So what do you do up there on the eighth floor?

AMBROSE

I work for The Cypress Group. We're a consulting firm.

SALESWOMAN

A consulting firm?

AMBROSE

Clients present us with problems. We provide solutions.

The doors open to her floor. Stepping out --

SALESWOMAN

Well personally, I don't believe that you work for them.

Genuinely intrigued --

AMBROSE

Is that so?

Saleswoman turns, flashing Ambrose a coquettish smile.

SALESWOMAN

You don't strike me as someone who has a boss.

As the doors close on her --

INT. RECEPTION AREA - THE CYPRESS GROUP - DAY

The elevator opens to a well-furnished reception area. Post-modern chairs. Accent-lit paintings. A wall of frosted glass separates the reception area from the rest of the office.

Seated behind a desk also emblazoned with The Cypress Group's logo, an exceedingly comely RECEPTIONIST adorning a headset tries concealing her gossip magazine at the sight of Ambrose.

RECEPTIONIST

Good morning Mr. Ambrose.

Ambrose approaches Receptionist, excretes charm.

AMBROSE

Good morning Camille. So what's the latest on Lindsey Lohan? Is she still in rehab?

Receptionist giggles, caught.

RECEPTIONIST

Probation. For now.

AMBROSE

Any messages.

RECEPTIONIST

No.

A flicker of surprise, nearly indiscernible, breaks across Ambrose's face.

AMBROSE

You're sure? I was expecting a call from Mrs. Blackwell this morning.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry Mr. Ambrose, but there hasn't been any calls.

Ambrose nods, collects his mail off Receptionist's desk. He moves to the office door, enters the darkened space inside, closing the door quickly behind him.

INT. THE CYPRESS GROUP - DAY

Ambrose switches on the lights to reveal --

-- a barren office space. Naked bulbs hang from the rafters. Walls of fiberglass insulation. Incomplete rough-frames form a labyrinth of wall studs. No indication this floor is under construction --

-- *or ever was.*

Ambrose discards his mail in a receptacle brimming with mail and strides over to a glassed-off office, the only habitable section, footsteps echoing in the gutted space.

INT. AMRBOSE'S OFFICE - THE CYPRESS GROUP - DAY

Ambrose enters his corner office, moves to a filing cabinet, opens a drawer, hanging folders with tabs like "Mr. Redding" and "Mr. Blanchard." Finding the tab for "Mrs. Blackwell" --

-- Ambrose pulls out a sealed plastic bag with a cellphone, selects the only contact programmed into the phone. After a few rings, the call cuts to an automated voicemail greeting.

Ambrose's expression darkens.

INT. REPAIR SHOP - HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Cluttered with parts and tools. GIL, late-thirties, floral print shirt, solders spliced wires to a circuit-board.

Sensing another presence, Gil turns to find Roger in the doorway, his face all bruises and bandaged cuts.

Gil uprights, inferring from Roger's appearance that his coping process involves both bars and bar fights.

Struggling to articulate --

GIL

Roger... I was really sorry to hear about your wife... I mean fuck, I still am sorry to hear about your wife. So if you ever want to talk... or come by for some homemade chimichangas --

ROGER

(cutting him off)
I appreciate that Gil. But I need your help with something.

LATER

Gil has a USB cable threaded from Jocelyn's GPS module to his computer. The entire transit history of Jocelyn's BMW fills the screen.

GIL

(commiserating)
This brings me back to my first marriage.

Roger leans forward, scrutinizes the column of destinations and correlating dates, looking for any discrepancies in his wife's comings and goings.

Fixing on one anomalous route --

ROGER

She drove all the way up to British Columbia. She said she was going to a conference in Denver that weekend.

Misinterpreting this --

GIL

You know what you do Roger? You go up there and follow this guy for a whole day. Then you wait for him in a parking lot --

ROGER

(cutting him off)

I'm going to need one more favor from you Gil.

GIL

You want me to come with you, help you mess this guy up?

EXT. HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Gil watches Roger drive off, batting away dust -- with Plato by the leash.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Just another nondescript commercial building in an office park. Grey, institutional, it goes nine stories high. But six stories below --

INT. CONFERENCE SUITE - FUSION CENTER - DAY

Undisclosed to the public and created to offer a host site for interagency intelligence-sharing.

Seated around the table are various AGENCY LIAISONS and SENIOR ANALYSTS. PAMELA NESBITT, an androgenous haircut, representing the State Department, has the floor.

PAMELA

... temperature readings indicating Umar al-Huwaiti no longer considers Yemen his port of call, so to speak.

BEAU WITTEN, mid-thirties, CIA, his comparative youth in this room a testament to the fact he's impressed some people worth impressing along the way --

-- and torpedoed a few careers in the process as well.

BEAU

So cleric al-Huwaiti has fled his homeland? A place that has offered him refuge and safe haven for over eight years? And how did you glean this intelligence?

Sensing the challenge --

PAMELA

As you know, Ambassador Moyer has a long, preexisting dialogue with Yemen's Defense Ministry. Deputy Minister al-Wazir considers Alan to be a dear friend and confidant.

BEAU

I'm well aware of the relationship that exists between the ambassador and Deputy Minister al-Wazir. My sources even tell me that amongst his inner circle, al-Wazir has a nickname for Alan. "La'ruhem." That means "marbles." A children's game. Easy to play. Not exactly a term of endearment.

Pamela regards Beau with thinly-veiled contempt.

PAMELA

You're suggesting Yemen's Defense Ministry has willingly concealed al-Huwaiti's whereabouts. Now why would they do that, given Umar al-Huwaiti's hatred for us is matched only by his hatred for the Yemeni government?

BEAU

Because hunting terrorists is big business for Yemen.

(MORE)

BEAU (CONT'D)

The aid and resources we provide to hunt down men like al-Huwaidi has become a vital revenue stream for them. Why would they ever want to send their cash-cow to the abattoir? I mean sure, they'll give us some low-level goat-fucker to maintain a performance history. But that's just to insure we don't strip them of their allowance.

An ACADEMIC OFFICIAL appointed to head-chair some cryptically named, Whitehouse manufactured oversight committee speaks up.

ACADEMIC OFFICIAL

You say you have a lock on al-Huwaidi's location. Why haven't we green-lit an air-strike?

BEAU

Because we don't know how deep that cave network goes. But our ground assets say al-Huwaidi's mobilizing. So we wait until he's in transit. That's when we can be sure.

GRAYDON ABBOTT, CIA old guard, regal grey hair like sculpted granite. Same clearance level as Beau, Graydon is one of the few colleagues remaining with rank over the young careerist.

GRAYDON

And if it's a family picnic like last time? If he's on a bus with his eleven wives and twenty-nine children? I mean, you've clearly skipped a few grades Mr. Witten. What would be your assessment?

After a contemplative beat --

BEAU

Do you remember how Sadamm would build munitions factories next to schools and playgrounds to deter us from bombing those sites? Evil men mock the good in their enemies.

(beat)

These days in Yemen, one need not venture deep into the mountains to hear the call for Jihad. And al-Huwaidi's a fucking rock-star to these people. You got boys putting up posters of him on their walls like he's Eminem.

(MORE)

BEAU (CONT'D)

My honest-to-God belief is that blowing up this one bus saves a hundred, possibly even a thousand more buses.

The room goes quiet. Gauging the consensus, Beau watches as those assembled trade furtive looks of agreement --

-- except Graydon, immune to Beau's influence.

Academic Official, tentatively converted, breaks the silence.

ACADEMIC OFFICIAL

That kind of collateral damage could prove detrimental to our public image.

BEAU

And when did we start thinking in those terms?

Met with a scattering of stifled laughter.

INT. LOWER CORRIDORS - FUSION CENTER - DAY

Beau walks with a purposeful gait. Graydon catches up.

GRAYDON

Really took Pamela to task in there.

BEAU

Appointing someone as chromosomally deprived as Alan Moyer to the Yemen desk is an act of political seppuku. I'm simply Pamela's kaishakunin.

Graydon bats Beau a confused look.

BEAU (CONT'D)

It was the kaishakunin's duty to spare the one committing seppuku from any prolonged suffering by beheading him. It was considered a merciful act.

Beau and Graydon turn down a bisecting hallway, entering --

INT. BEAU'S OFFICE - FUSION CENTER - DAY

An impersonal, sparsely appointed office. Beau takes a seat behind his desk, framed by a large window offering a "view" of a city skyline --

-- high-resolution imagery to help mitigate the office's subterranean isolation.

Remaining in the doorway --

GRAYDON

Still, you didn't have to take such obvious joy in discrediting her.

Beau begins sifting through paperwork on his desk.

BEAU

The chivalry act is growing stale Graydon. So why don't you tell me what else is on your mind.

Met with a hateful smirk.

GRAYDON

You've been appropriating some of your operational budget into off-site accounts. Yet you don't have any active ops running at present. At least none with any "director-level approval."

This stops Beau, Graydon with "check" on the board.

BEAU

You've been monitoring my accounts?

GRAYDON

This agency is a band full of solo-artists. Everyone's trying to break out with their own act.

BEAU

(with an edge)

Is this a formal inquiry Graydon? If so, please let me know now so I can call the Deputy Director in. Then you can raise whatever broad suspicions you have while I discuss in particular terms the numerous kickbacks you've received over the years tipping off your rolodex of private government contractors to certain "sources-sought" notices.

Graydon looking like he's just been sucker-punched, Beau now with "checkmate."

Just then YOUNG AIDE enters, squeezes past Graydon.

YOUNG AIDE

Mr. Witten, I have a package for you.

In perfunctory parting --

GRAYDON

Give Connie and your boy my best.

Graydon exits. Beau turns his attention to Young Aide. Regarding the envelope --

BEAU

It has postage.

YOUNG AIDE

It's not from the overnight pouch. It was sent to the "front" office.

Beau reluctantly accepts, dismissing Young Aide with a nod. He opens the envelope --

-- finds a hotel room keycard.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Roger pulls up in a rental car, common make and model. He exits, a passenger seat littered with fast-food wrappers.

He moves for the gas station's convenience store. In passing to the GAS STATION ATTENDANT --

ROGER

Give it a full tank.

Roger moves to a pay-phone, picks up the receiver, deposits quarters.

After a few rings, he hears his wife's voice --

-- reacts, his hand clamping over his mouth, corking the deluge of emotions.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

(voicemail greeting)

Hi, you've reached Dr. Jocelyn Eberle. Please leave your name, number and a brief message after the beep and I'll get back to you as soon as possible...

(whimsical)

... unless you're my husband.

Followed by a BEEP. Roger swallows, takes a moment, considering his words.

ROGER

Joce... I know I'm speaking into an empty line. I wish... I could think otherwise but...

(trailing off, then righting course)

I was convinced our marriage was terminal Joce. I'd wake up every morning waiting for you... to put me on notice. And towards the end ... I despised you for keeping me awaiting sentence.

(beat)

One night I went to this bar... and before I went in I... slide my ring off and stuck it in the glove-box. This waitress, she saw the tan line ... said I was a real amateur. That didn't stop her from getting in the car though. But I... couldn't... go through with it. Leaving her at her door like that... I mean, she must have thought I was out of practice or something.

Roger chuckles ruefully. Then his voice hardens.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I want you to know, I don't care how deep or dark this thing goes, I'm going to set it right.

Roger hangs up, lingering for a moment as if hoping the payphone might ring back.

INT. GAS STATION CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

The door-chime RINGS. The BLASE CLERK glances up, sees Roger, redirects his attention back to his crossword puzzle.

Roger moves down the aisle to the refrigerated coolers, reaching in for an oversized water-bottle --

-- stops when he hears the THROATY WHINE of a motorcycle out-side. Roger peers out the windows, sees a sport-bike at the fueling pump. A BIKER dismounts, removes his visored helmet.

Though Biker is a complete unknown, it's his bearing, the way his eyes take in his surroundings, that suggests his presence here might not be entirely coincidental.

A creeping paranoia taking hold, Roger moves to the register as Blase Clerk sets his puzzle-book aside.

BLASE CLERK

Which pump?

Roger steals a glance outside --

-- connects with Biker's pitted eyes, riveted on Roger. It's all the confirmation Roger needs.

ROGER

Two.

As Blase Clerk rings up the total, Roger reaches for a pair of mirrored aviators from a display case of chintzy sunglasses.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You can ring those up too.

Blase Clerk's brow furrows.

BLASE CLERK

Been awhile since I sold a pair of these.

ROGER

I also need your bathroom key.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - NIGHT

Roger leans over the sink, rinsing his haggard face with cold water. The bathroom door creaks open. Roger's eyes shoot left to the mirrored aviators perched on top of the trash-can --

-- positioned to offer him a discreet view of his flank. In the reflection of the lenses, Roger sees Biker enter. As he approaches a seemingly oblivious Roger --

-- Roger whirls around, throwing up a fistful of pink, granulated soap in Biker's face, blinding him.

Roger rushes Biker, jabbing his throat, sending him back-pedaling to the wall. Roger buries a forearm into Biker's neck, pinning him against the wall --

-- his hand finding a snub-nosed revolver tucked in Biker's waistband. He presses it to Biker's temple.

ROGER

Who's behind this? Who sent you?

In between choked breaths --

BIKER
Scanlon.

ROGER
Scanlon?

BIKER
Jack Scanlon. "Freeway" Jack, man.
It's in my pocket Felipe.

Roger's hand rummages inside Biker's jacket, finding --
-- a clear plastic bag filled with grey, crystalline rocks.

ROGER
What is this?

BIKER
Priceless fucking rubies. What do
you think it is ass-clown?
(expression clouding)
Shit, you're not fucking Felipe,
are you?

Roger drops the bag of meth on the ground, stomps on it.
Biker winces as Roger heels the dope into a fine ground.

Roger relinquishes his hold on Biker. Biker slumps to the
floor, regaining his breath, chest heaving.

Roger spins the cylinder on Biker's revolver, letting the
bullets clatter to the ground. He tosses Biker's revolver
into a urinal, glaring at the drug peddler.

ROGER
You count off five minutes before
you step out that door.
(nodding to the bag of
crushed meth)
Otherwise, I'll spoon-feed you that
entire bag.

Roger moves for the door.

BIKER
So you ain't gonna arrest me man?

Roger never breaks stride, exiting.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Roger crosses the lot, reaches his car --

-- notices a parked Escalade customized with chrome trim and tinted windows. Outside the car, a swarthy-complexioned HOOD with a platinum, pectoral cross big enough to accommodate an actual crucifixion, paces impatiently.

Catching Roger's eyes on him --

HOOD
Fuck you looking at?

ROGER
Nothing in particular... Felipe.

Hood blanches, spooked. Believing Roger to be police, Hood hops into his Escalade, sending up roostertails of dust as he peels out of the gas station.

Roger allows himself a thin smirk as he gets back into his rental, pulling onto the road -- on a northbound heading.

EXT. HOTEL - WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Located in the downtown district, teeming with VISITING DIGNITARIES and POWER BROKERS.

A Lincoln Town Car pulls up front. HORACE, the crooked-nosed chauffeur, exits to open the door for Beau.

HORACE
I'll be right across the street
Mr. Witten.

BEAU
I shouldn't be long Horace.

Beau hurries inside.

INT. LOBBY - HOTEL - DAY

Beau marches across the lobby, bypassing the front desk, shaking hands and exchanging cursory pleasantries with a familiar face or two before entering the elevator.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The door's keycard reader beeps. Beau enters, swiftly closing the door behind him. Taking in the empty room, Beau moves for the balcony's sliding-glass door --

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - DAY

Beau approaches the railing, taking in the view.

MAN (O.S.)
Nice, isn't it?

Beau turns --

-- *finds Ambrose on the adjacent balcony, dragging on a cigarette, ashing into a tray balanced on the railing.*

AMBROSE
They say people who live or work
in a city will go years without
looking up at the buildings. It's
called the tourist plane. I find
myself crossing it every now and
again, trying to see this place
the way I first saw it years ago.
(beat)
There's been a complication.

BEAU
I'd say that's putting it rather...
euphemistically.

AMBROSE
Yeah, I thought you might already
know. So do we have a containment
protocol in place?

BEAU
Containment protocol? The local
constabulary have already pulled
your operatives from the wreckage.
This isn't a little spill on the
hardwood floor. This is a carpet
stain. Right now, they're running
the dental records on that bucket
of extra crispy. But I had one of
my programmers slip falsified
criminal backgrounds into the
system. Those cuspids now belong
to a couple of vagrant crack-heads
with a litany of priors. Should be
enough for them to write it off as
a botched car theft.

AMBROSE
What about when they trace the car
back to our principal?

BEAU

Mr. Eberle reported the car stolen.
It gives us a consistent narrative.

With an amused grin --

AMBROSE

He reported it stolen? Guess he
wants to handle this personally.

BEAU

And now I want you handling this
personally.

AMBROSE

I hung up my work gloves Mr.
Witten. I'm a foreman now. I
give estimates, put together
crews, order materials. That's
the extent of my involvement.

Clearly not the answer Beau was looking for --

BEAU

You know back in the feudal days
of Japan, to become a bladesmith
was considered a most honorable
path for a man, second only to
being a samurai. Manipulating the
"Tamahagane," the Japanese steel,
into an elemental composition that
held a sharp edge while remaining
impact resistant was a nuanced art.
And if a bladesmith's sword broke
in combat, it was expected that the
next sword he forged would be the
one he'd use to open his stomach.

Though the threatening subtext isn't lost on Ambrose, he
doesn't appear intimidated.

AMBROSE

I might not have attended the same
bullshit, Ivy-League feeder school
as you Mr. Witten, but that almost
sounded like a threat.
(chuckling to himself)
Threatened by an analyst. Can't say
I've ever had the pleasure.

Ambrose turns, approaches Beau, his urbane charm morphing
into understated menace.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Tell me then Mr. Witten, in your analysis, do you think it's wise to threaten me? Given our close proximity.

Ambrose pulls from his cigarette, reaches to stub it out in the ashtray --

-- a RESOUNDING PING and the ashtray fragmentizes in a spray of sparks, littering the balcony with shattered plaster.

Ambrose exhales a brume of smoke, revealing --

-- *the red beam of a laser sight caught in cigarette vapor.*

With a self-satisfied grin, Beau nods across the street.

EXT. ROOFTOP - PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

Horace, minus the chauffeur's cap, lies prone on flattened cardboard, eye fused to the telescopic sight on his bipod-stabilized sniper rifle, ejecting the spent casing --

-- chambering a fresh cartridge.

A parabolic microphone directed towards the hotel allows Horace to hear Beau and Ambrose's entire exchange.

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY - DAY

Beau reaches into his suit pocket --

BEAU

I worry Mr. Ambrose that I may be overestimating you.

-- pulling out an envelope, the contour of its contents suggesting a banded brick of money.

Handing the envelope to Ambrose --

BEAU (CONT'D)

For your incidentals. And do keep me apprised.

Beau retreats inside, Ambrose bristling, eyes murderous. A thin wisp of smoke draws Ambrose's attention to --

-- his cigarette, burned down to the filter, singing his fingers, blistering the skin. Ambrose doesn't register the pain, simply flexes his fingers, crushing the cigarette out.

EXT. SUPPLY STORE - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - DAY

Like a pioneer outpost, displaced from another time. The supply store sits in a clearing circumscribed by a thick, expansive forest blanketed in densely packed snow.

The sound of snow crunching as Roger pulls up in his rental.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Heat on full blast, Roger consults his wife's GPS module, the female, mechanized voice repeating like mantra, "You have arrived at your destination."

Roger looks up at the supply store, notices a WOODSMAN on the front porch, using a bowie knife to make long, interconnected incisions in a strung-up deer carcass.

Roger shuts off his car, exits.

EXT. SUPPLY STORE - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS

Roger trudges up to the supply store, capturing his hot breath with cupped hands.

Roger bounds up the steps, finds Woodsman staring at him.

Most of Woodsman's face is obscured behind a feral overgrowth that would make most Vikings seem well-groomed by comparison. A patch of frostbite-blackened dead tissue below his left eye.

At Woodsman's feet, a bucket containing the deer's entrails.

WOODSMAN

You got business here?

ROGER

I had a couple of questions.

Woodsman regards Roger with an unnerving, wild-eyed intensity.

WOODSMAN

Should have left your car running.

Woodsman returns to the task at hand, methodically cutting through cartilage, pulling off the pelt, aerating the pale flesh beneath.

Roger takes the hint, steps inside.

INT. SUPPLY STORE - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - DAY

Roger enters, stomping out his boots. The scant DENIZENS turn, take in the curious stranger. Uniformly incarnadine faces, drinkers' blushes and climate-ruptured capillaries.

Roger approaches the PROPRIETOR behind the counter, late-sixties, with a bulbous nose like an overripe tomato.

PROPRIETOR

Looking for directions? Because I'm pretty certain you missed your exit.

ROGER

No, I was wondering if you could help me.

Roger reaches for his wallet, pulls out the photo of his wife lying on the hammock, holding it up for Proprietor.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I wanted to know if you remember seeing this woman come in here in the past few months.

Proprietor leans forward, scrutinizing the photo.

PROPRIETOR

Whitest god-damn sand I've ever seen. Like powdered milk. Where is that? Barbados?

ROGER

Aruba.

PROPRIETOR

Ah, so that is your wife then?

Roger offers nothing, unable to clarify the past-tense.

PROPRIETOR (CONT'D)

Yeah, I figured this much. Well I've never seen her.

ROGER

(dubious)

You're sure? Why don't you look again.

With a sweep of his arm --

PROPRIETOR

Look at the faces I have to stare at everyday. You think I'd really forget your wife's.

ROGER

Who else works here?

PROPRIETOR

I'm the sole proprietor. I run a small business. With limited overhead.

Roger pockets the photo, scans the patronage, suspicious.

PROPRIETOR (CONT'D)

I really don't think you're going to find what you're looking for here, mister.

Roger turns back to Proprietor.

PROPRIETOR (CONT'D)

If your wife was sneaking off for some kind of marital indiscretion, I think they could find someplace slightly more enchanting. I mean it's not like I'm running a resort here. I think you got your wires crossed.

After some quiet deliberation, Roger reluctantly exits.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Gil watches Plato circle and sniff the shrubbery at the base of a mailbox, growing increasingly impatient.

GIL

Come on, you got stage fright or something?

MAN (O.S.)

Excuse me sir?

Gil turns, finds --

-- Ambrose in a Mercedes convertible, pulled off to the side of the road, playing the part of the flustered, lost driver.

AMBROSE

I'm looking for Tall Grass, the country club. I know it's close.

Gil approaches Ambrose, awkwardly tugging Plato along.

GIL

You don't have GPS in there?

AMBROSE

Spilled my espresso on it. It's pretty sad how much we depend on these things nowadays. I couldn't find my own mailbox without turn-by-turn directions from that GPS woman's modulated voice.

GIL

Yeah, I suppose that's the world we live in today. Anyway, you're on Greenway right now. Take this down to Lennox, make a left --

Gil's cut off as Plato barks at a bigger dog being walked across the street.

Ambrose looks down, acting as if he's noticing the dog for the first time.

AMBROSE

The little scrapper likes to fight outside his weight class. Scottish terrier, right?

Struggling to quiet Plato --

GIL

Probably. I'm not really sure. He's not actually my dog. I'm just looking after him for a friend while he's away.

Innocently conversational --

AMBROSE

They don't allow pets where he was vacationing?

GIL

I wouldn't say it's a vacation. It's more of a... family affair. Up in British Columbia.

(beat)

Anyway, left on Lennox, second light, right on Vineyard. Take it down-a-ways, it should be on your left. Got that?

With a knowing smile --

AMBROSE

Think I know where I'm going now.

EXT. MOTEL - BRITISH COLUMBIA - NIGHT

Inexpensive, no-frills accommodations on the periphery of the snow-capped wilderness. Neon sign touting free premium cable.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

In the darkened room, Roger lies facedown in bed, twisted in a cocoon of blankets, lost in a deep, undisturbed sleep.

Without preamble or provocation --

-- Roger shoots up from bed, pointing the handgun he had tucked under his pillow into the room's shadows.

From the obfuscating darkness --

MAN IN THE SHADOWS

Thought I was going to have to clear my throat.

A lamp switches on --

-- revealing Woodsman seated in a chair, his eyes now betraying a clarity and intelligence he masked during his first encounter with Roger.

WOODSMAN

I know why you're up here.

Keeping his handgun trained on Woodsman --

ROGER

Enlighten me.

WOODSMAN

You came up here to talk to me.

ROGER

That's funny, given I don't know who you are, besides some guy who looks like he's been drinking his own piss for a little while now. So why would I want to talk to you?

WOODSMAN

Because your wife came to see me. A month before she was killed.

This catches with Roger, hearing someone else say it.

ROGER

You said "killed"?

Sensing he's about to be beset with questions --

WOODSMAN

We can talk, but not here. That car outside, is it a rental?

ROGER

Yes.

WOODSMAN

Paid with cash?

ROGER

Yes.

WOODSMAN

When was the last time you used your credit card?

ROGER

A kiosk outside the departures terminal at Denver International.

Woodsman nods, satisfied.

WOODSMAN

We'll take my truck. We can have that talk at my cabin.

Gun still raised --

ROGER

And I'm supposed to trust you?

WOODSMAN

It's not like I've asked you to lower your gun.

Woodsman uprights from the chair.

WOODSMAN/NORMAN

My name's Norman Tisch.

INT. BAR - INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Crowded with TRAVELLERS trying to pass the time between delays with watered-down drinks and bar-grub. In one booth --

-- VICKREY, a soldier never entirely at ease, maintaining a freshly-buzzed flattop. Vickrey's maladjustment to civilian life can be read in his roving eyes. Seated opposite --

-- ARROYO, heavily inked arms with gang insignia competing for real-estate with his marine war-paint. A notch of knurled skin under his left eye where he crudely excised the "teardrops" of his former life.

ARROYO

Think this fucking guy will pay for our return tickets too?

VICKREY

I'm more interested in hearing what else he has to offer.

Arroyo looks at Vickrey, quickly sizing him up.

ARROYO

I knew guys like you. You'd re-enlist if you could. Keep going back until you caught that "non-survivable wound."

VICKREY

I knew guys like you too. The only reason you were over there in the first place was to avoid a prison sentence.

Met with a fiendish "touché" smirk from Arroyo.

AMBROSE (O.S.)

I see you two are getting acquainted.

Arroyo and Vickrey turn --

-- find a crisply-suited Ambrose standing at their table. He motions for Arroyo to straighten up, slides in next to him with two dossiers in hand.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

I'm glad you both accepted Captain Fowler's invitation to be here.

ARROYO

You know Captain Fowler?

AMBROSE

We go back. He earns a supplemental income now as my recruiting officer.

VICKREY

Recruitment for what?

Ambrose opens Vickrey's file.

AMBROSE

Owen James Vickrey. Scored average on your armed services vocational aptitude battery. In the core, that puts you in the "gifted" down-slope of the bell-curve.

(scanning pages)

On the night of August seventeenth, you and some of your fellow ground-pounders went outside the wire for the express purpose of collecting some "haji" scalps. You boys brought down nine non-combatants. Went about it smart too. No half-assed evidence plant or ambush conjecture. You used hand-me-down Kalashnikovs, preferred hardware of the indigenous hostiles, to pin it on the Taliban. I bet that was your idea Corporal. Nothing gets the old recreational apparatus rigid like a little escalation of force.

Vickrey's jaw tightens, his mouth filling with battery acid. Ambrose turns his attention now to Arroyo, opening his file.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Edgar Villareal Arroyo. You scored in the ninety-eighth percentile on your ASVAB. That's hot shit Edgar. You must have been the theoretical physicist in your company. But you didn't really hit it off with your company commander, did you?

(scanning pages)

Says here he reprimanded you on several occasions for undermining his command. Goes on to say you accused him of being incompetent and quote, unquote... "unfit to oversee a four-man circle-jerk."

The mention of his superior brings Arroyo's blood to a boil.

ARROYO

Dumb motherfucker lead us right into a chokepoint. Twice.

AMBROSE

That why you rigged up a roadside bomb emplacement to take out his vehicle during a convoy patrol?

Arroyo's eyes narrow on Ambrose.

ARROYO

What is this? An investigation?

AMBROSE

An interview. And it's going well so far. Those trained to kill, who show little compunction in doing so, that's something you can't put a premium on. Especially in my trade. It's about time you both realized your earning potential.

Ambrose takes out a checkbook, filling out and endorsing two checks with a fountain-pen.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Two positions have opened up on my staff recently. I was hoping to fill both of them today.

Ambrose tears along the perforated lines, slides a check each to Arroyo and Vickrey. Upon seeing the comma placement, their jaws unhinge. They've just jumped two tax brackets.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

And that's just the starting salary.

Ambrose slides out of the booth, uprights.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

I've taken the liberty of packing gear for both of you. The rest we can discuss once we're airborne.

Pulling his eyes from the check --

VICKREY

When's our flight?

With a dismissive tsk --

AMBROSE

This is the private sector now
boys. We don't fly commercial.

Met with a grin from Arroyo that one couldn't wash away with
a beaker of hydrochloric acid.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

A resilient pick-up on studded winter tires climbs the winding
road leading to the mountains.

INT. PICK-UP - NIGHT

Norman drives, navigating the icy road conditions with both
hands knuckling the wheel.

Roger faces the passenger window, staring out. Nose pressed
to the seat-belt's sash, Roger appears to be sniffing it.

Shooting him an askance look --

NORMAN

You taken a liking to my seat-belt?

ROGER

"Emerald coast."

NORMAN

(perplexed)
What's that?

ROGER

"Emerald coast." My wife's perfume.
Got it for her last Christmas.
(chuckling ruefully to
himself)
It was actually the wrong perfume.
Some knock-off of "Imperial Coast,"
the bottle Jocelyn actually wanted.
But she never returned it. Wore it
everyday like it was the good stuff.
Gave her a wicked rash too.

Norman softens at the melancholy sight of Roger sniffing
the seat-belt, drawn to the spectral residue of his dead
wife like a honeybee to a pheromone source.

ROGER (CONT'D)

When you were driving her up here,
did she seem... afraid to you?

NORMAN

Your wife was up to her neck in something. And she was too smart not to know how events might play out for her. But I saw it in her face. There was no retreat in her.

(beat)

I see the same look in your face. You want to kill the ones who did it.

Roger turns, locks eyes with Norman.

ROGER

I killed the ones who did it. Now I want the ones responsible.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

The pick-up pulls up in front of a remote cabin tucked into the upper reaches of the hinterland.

INT. PICK-UP - NIGHT

Norman parks. Roger unfastens his seat-belt, reaches for the passenger door handle when --

-- a wolfdog launches up at the door, leaving frothy spittle on the window, barking at Roger with raised hackles.

ROGER

Got a tactical bite suit I can borrow?

NORMAN

Give me your scarf.

Roger removes his scarf, hands it to Norman.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Norman exits the car and whistles. On command, the wolfdog runs to Norman. He bends down, embraces the now benevolent wolfdog, holding Roger's scarf over the dog's snout.

Yelling to the pick-up --

NORMAN

Come on out.

Roger tentatively exits, approaches Norman and his wolfdog with cautious steps.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
I've made the proper introductions.
He knows you're a friend now.

Roger stiffens as the wolfdog approaches him --

-- and begins licking his hand. Roger reciprocates affection, patting the wolfdog's scruff.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Let's get inside.

Roger moves towards the cabin's front entrance.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Not the front door.
(tilting his head)
Around back.

INT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Norman leads Roger inside, lights a kerosene lamp, revealing a rustic interior. Wood-carved furniture not purchased from a catalogue. Pelts of the local fauna festooned to one wall.

Roger sees now why they didn't use the front door. A double-barrelled shotgun is perched on a chair in front of the door, rigged to fire by a length of rope looped around the doorknob.

Catching Roger looking at the deathtrap --

NORMAN
There's no mail or pizza delivery
up here. I hear a knock on my door,
chances are it's not going to be a
singing telegram.

ROGER
Who are these people?

Appraising Roger's fatigued state and glassy eyes.

NORMAN
I have a second bedroom upstairs.
We'll talk in the morning.

ROGER

Listen, the only reason I agreed to come to your little letter-bomb workshop up here was because you said you had answers. Now I need --

NORMAN

(cutting him off)

You need to sleep. You look like you're running on fumes. We can talk when you have a clear head.

Norman moves past, climbs the steps to the second floor. Roger knows he's on the verge of collapsing. Beleaguered, Roger heads upstairs, retires to the second bedroom.

INT. PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

Inside the quiet, sleek cabin of the jet, Vickrey sits, studying the materials inside a briefing packet --

-- containing complete profile work-ups on Roger and Norman, along with hyperspectral satellite photos of Norman's cabin.

Arroyo is less interested in the intel, studying --

-- Ambrose, earbuds plugged in, hand drifting in gestural melody with what is presumably classical music.

Arroyo uprights, takes a seat opposite Ambrose, breaking Ambrose from his reverie. He takes out his earbuds.

AMBROSE

You should be studying the materials you were given.

ARROYO

I've studied it.

AMBROSE

Well how about a little exercise then to test your retention level? You kick open the front door and roll in a flash-bang. Give me the floor-plan. Map out the potential cover positions inside that cabin. In detail.

ARROYO

What are you looking for here? Do you want me to tell you about the partition wall that separates the kitchen from the main room?

(MORE)

ARROYO (CONT'D)

That it's eight feet in diameter,
two inches thick and about sixteen
paces from the front entry point?
Do you want me to tell you about
the cupboard under the staircase
with a five foot clearance? Or do
you just want me to point out the
fact that the front door opens out,
not in, making this an inherently
fallacious exercise?

AMBROSE

(with a smirk)

Fallacious?

ARROYO

As in a trick fucking question.

Giving the boy his due --

AMBROSE

So what's on your mind?

ARROYO

You know everything about me and
"Captain America" back there. But
we don't know shit about you.

AMBROSE

So what do you want to know? My
astrological sign? My idea of a
perfect first date?

ARROYO

I'm being lead into the field with
some guy who's got manicured hands
and a salon haircut.

AMBROSE

And you want to know if I have
the requisite "street cred"? If
I'm on the level? Is that it?

Ambrose reaches into his pocket, pulls out a gold lighter
and tosses it to Arroyo who reflexively catches it.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Have a look at that.

Perplexed by its apparent significance --

ARROYO

What am I looking at?

AMBROSE

On the back. The inscription. It's in Arabic, but I read somewhere in your file you were enrolled in an Arabic language program because you didn't trust the local translators.

Arroyo turns the lighter over, translating the engraving with great difficulty.

ARROYO

"Carry... the fire... of Iraq... with you... always..."

Upon seeing the initials, Arroyo looks up, shoots Ambrose an incredulous look.

ARROYO (CONT'D)

"S.H."

AMBROSE

That's right. It was a gift from Saddam. I took it off one of his couriers we intercepted. The same messenger pigeon that later gave us the "Wolverine One" and "Two" sites, the actionable intel that lead us to Saddam's spider-hole.

(beat)

So does that put your mind at ease? Or would you prefer a list of character references?

Arroyo slides the lighter back to Ambrose.

ARROYO

We're good.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - DAY

Morning stillness. A snow-globe that hasn't been shaken.

Fully dressed, Roger exits the back-door, comes around the side, tracing the ambit of the house. Just as he's about to take another step --

NORMAN (O.S.)

Stop right there.

Halting Roger. He looks up, sees Norman emerging from the treeline, a felled deer around his shoulders, his wolfdog shadowing him.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Take two steps back.

ROGER
Why?

Dipping his head down --

NORMAN
At your feet.

Roger looks down --

-- finds the denticulate, oxidized points of a foothold trap jutting out from the snow like miniature stalagmites. He was less than a foot shy of triggering the trap's pressure plate.

ROGER
The bears up here really get this close?

As Norman passes by Roger --

NORMAN
It's not for the bears.

Roger follows Norman to his cabin, mindful of his step.

INT. KITCHEN - LOG CABIN - DAY

Norman sets a kettle on his gas stove, boiling tea.

NORMAN
Your wife told me what you do. And for a guy who sits in a windowless, air-conditioned room, you've got a lot of battle-scars.

ROGER
I was in the thick of it for three tours. During a night exfiltration, an insurgent took a "carnival-game" pop at my Chinook with a RPG. When we crashed, I remember hearing the lucky son-of-a-bitch hooting it up over winning his oversized bear. I was the only survivor.
(beat)
What about you?

NORMAN
My rank was Lieutenant Colonel. I was with First Infantry Division.
(MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

"The Bloody First." But I didn't spend much time outside the wire. I was the resident psychiatrist on Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah, or "Rust."

Norman pours two cups of tea, slides one to Roger as he seats himself at the table. In front of Norman, a stack of folders.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

One night, we lost contact with a recon convoy out patrolling Route Cannonball, the main artery in our AO. A rescue team was put together. They reached the convoy, found that it had been ambushed. An EFP, or an explosively formed penetrator, had taken out the lead humvee. They said the men inside were like potato-head dolls, all their pieces in the wrong places. The second humvee had also been blown to hell ... but there was no bodies inside the vehicle.

Norman cools the steaming cup with his breath and sips.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

The next couple days, we waited for the beheading videos of our guys to pop up on Youtube. A week passed. Then a month. Nearly six weeks had gone by when this group of British private contractors entered the FOB. With them was our missing fire-team, all four of whom were intact despite visible signs of superficial torture.

ROGER

What had happened to them?

NORMAN

The mercs told us they found our men during a live encounter at an insurgent stronghold. Said the "haj" were using belt-sanders and running car batteries to extract information from our men.

(beat)

In light of their traumatic ordeal, the brass assigned all four men to meet with me. But none of them could recall what happened to them. It was all completely blank.

ROGER

Were they...

(snapping his fingers to
summon the word)

... *repressing* it all. Like a...

NORMAN

... defense mechanism, yes, That became the running theory. Only it wasn't just the torture they couldn't remember. It was everything. The whole incident was a blind-spot. A lacuna. As if they had spent the last six weeks in a cryogenic sleep. And despite my requests for further observation, my superiors had me write off their memory loss as symptomatic of post-traumatic-stress disorder. Then they had them shipped back state-side.

Norman removes a folder from his stack, slides it in front of Roger. A picture of JEREMY WHITCOMBE, late-twenties, in full, starch-stiffened military regalia.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Eight months later, one of those four boys, Jeremy Whitcombe, was found in his driveway, the victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

(beat)

Jeremy's wife hadn't described her husband's behavior leading up to his suicide as erratic. But two weeks prior to his death, Jeremy had told his wife he was going on a weekend fishing trip with some of the men from his former battalion. Only the men Jeremy was supposed to be with that weekend knew nothing about any fishing trip.

Norman removes a newspaper clipping from the folder --

-- with the headline, "Leader of Hacker Group SIGTERM Found Dead in his Home" with subheading "Possible Drug Overdose."

NORMAN (CONT'D)

This happened the same weekend
Jeremy was unaccounted for.

ROGER

Says that it was a drug overdose.

NORMAN

And doesn't it say somewhere that your wife died of a stroke?

This catches with Roger.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Look, I can't prove that Jeremy Whitcombe had anything to do with the hacker's death. But I do know he rented a car that weekend. And that he returned it with close to eleven hundred more miles on it. Roughly the mileage someone would rack up travelling from Jeremy's home in Coffeyville, Kansas to the hacker's home in Austin, Texas and back again.

Still skeptical --

ROGER

It might be a strange correlation of dates, but it still seems like you're grasping at straws.

NORMAN

I thought so too. Until five months later, when Senator Devereux, along with fifteen constituents attending the centennial for Arizona's oldest courthouse were shot dead...

Norman presents another folder --

-- with a photo Darryl Lee Unger, clean-cut in his dress blues and sharper in the eyes, clipped to the front.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

...by Darryl Lee Unger. He was one of the four members of our battalion's missing fire-team.

It hits Roger like a bucket of ice-water.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRFIELD - DAY

The private jet taxis to a stop on the tarmac, the deployed air-stairs folding out.

Ambrose, Arroyo and Vickrey take the stairs two at a time, humping packs of gear. They double-time it for an awaiting SUV, loading in and speeding off.

INT. KITCHEN - LOG CABIN - DAY

Reeling from what Norman's told him --

ROGER

So what are you saying? These guys were brainwashed?

NORMAN

No, this was far more invasive than your conventional thought reform techniques. I'm talking about direct neural interfaces. Implanted brain prostheses.

ROGER

You mean mind control? By our own government? On its own people?

(beat)

Do you realize how that sounds?

Norman does know how that sounds.

NORMAN

After the courthouse shooting, I started looking into things. Those British contractors that recovered our missing fire-team for instance, their checks were endorsed by a CIA shell company. The site where the insurgents were supposedly holding our men captive, turns out it was a bombed-out, rancid-smelling waste incineration facility with no roof to shield them from our satellites. Not really an ideal place to hunker down with American POWs. And as I dug deeper into events surrounding that day, the stink only got worse. However, somewhere along the way, I must have gotten flagged.

Norman slaps a folder in front of Roger with a photo of BYRON STUCKEY, another young soldier in uniform.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Byron Stuckey was the third member of the fire-team. And the man they sent to my home to kill me.

ROGER

(incredulous)

Didn't you serve with this guy?

NORMAN

It wasn't personal or premeditated.
It wasn't even a conscious act. He
was just a machine on manual over-
ride. A mechanism.

(voice shaking)

He reached for my throat, even as
I caved his head in. After that, I
stepped off the grid.

Norman produces a clear plastic bag, places it on the table.
Roger reaches for the bag, holding it up --

-- finds a small implant of manifold circuitry inside.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I found that on Stuckey.

Brow furrowing --

ROGER

On him?

He inspects the implant closer --

-- *sees that it's flecked with congealed blood.*

EXT. BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - DAY

As the sun sinks below the horizon --

-- Ambrose negotiates the terrain on a snowmobile, Arroyo
and Vickrey in tow, all three wearing neoprene balaclavas
and insulated fatigues.

The troika cuts through the forest like a pack of wolves,
tracking the scent of blood in the air.

EXT. MAIN ROOM - LOG CABIN - NIGHT

Broth bubbles from a cast-iron cauldron, suspended over the
flames by the fireplace's swivel crane. Stoking at the fire,
Norman ladles the hot stew into two bowls.

Norman takes a seat opposite Roger at the hearth, hands Roger
a bowl. Roger absently accepts, sitting in cogitative silence.

ROGER

What about the fourth man?

Norman reaches for a file, offers it Roger. A picture of PAUL
MEACHAM clipped to the front, another spit-shined soldier.

NORMAN

He's living his life as far as he knows. He goes to work, pays his mortgage, and when he finds the time, helps his son with his batting swing. But the reality is, he's asleep. Until a hacker comes into possession of classified and sensitive-in-nature intelligence cables. Or a Senator on a covert actions subcommittee leaks said cables. At which point, they'll wake him up.

ROGER

And he won't remember what he's done?

NORMAN

Remember the "wolf-man" story? How he would wake up the morning after a kill with mud on his feet, blood on his hands and no memory of what he'd done? The only difference is these guys have been programmed to clean up after themselves.

Roger stares into the flames, a haunted glimmer in his eyes.

ROGER

You know people who never served, they would ask you, "did you kill anyone while you were over there"? More often than not, your answer's, "I don't know." You take a bead on the enemy, if he's not there after you've pulled the trigger... well maybe you got him or maybe he just moved. But when you hit one of them, when you see that pink mist and know it's a "confirmed"... how could you not remember a thing like that?

NORMAN

Maybe the neuroscientist behind that implant can answer that. I know that's who your wife planned on seeking out. She mentioned a company involved in brain implant research and development, working off a government --

Cut short as Norman's head jerks unnaturally to the side --

-- a bullet boring a sluiceway through his skull, blood spewing from the exit wound like runoff from a drainage culvert, Norman crumpling in anti-climatic death.

Roger clocks the bullet's path, eyes going to the window --

-- sees the small hole in the glass between the half-drawn curtains. Roger dives to the floor underneath the windows, closing the curtains.

EXT. RIDGE - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

The barrel of a M40A5 rifle, mounted with a sound suppressor, protrudes from a hole burrowed into a snowdrift, serving as a makeshift gun embrasure. Handling the weapon --

-- Ambrose, steady breaths emitting vapor, eye fixed to his telescopic sight, sweeping the cabin from his higher vantage.

Communicating via a bone mic --

AMBROSE

"Package Two" is wrapped. "Package One" is still in the fishbowl.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Arroyo, tooled up in full tactical gear and night-vision goggles, converges on the front of the cabin, draws himself flush to the wall adjacent to the front door.

ARROYO

(into bone mic)

"Milkman One" in position.

At the cabin's rear --

-- Vickrey, similarly suited and booted, takes a breaching position at the rear entrance.

VICKREY

(into bone mic)

"Milkman Two" in position.

Giving them the green-light --

AMBROSE (O.S.)

(filtered)

Ring the bell.

Vickrey acts first, kicking in the back door and tossing in a pair of flash-bangs. He ducks back out of the doorway as --

-- the grenades detonate, irradiating the cabin inside with a blinding magnesium flash, its concussive blast spider-webbing the windows.

Arroyo enters first, yanking the front door, stepping in --

-- a SPRAY of buckshot from the triggered shotgun lifts Arroyo off his feet, launching him back into the snow.

Hearing the discharge --

VICKREY
(into bone mic)
We have engagement.

Vickrey files through the back-door --

INT. KITCHEN - LOG CABIN - NIGHT

-- and UNLOADS, tracing the circumference of the cabin with STRAFING GUNFIRE, perforating walls and furniture indiscriminately, depleting an entire magazine.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Arroyo twitches, achingly uprights, the fragments of spread-shot embedded in his Kevlar still smoldering.

Arroyo scurries to the front door, enters --

INT. MAIN ROOM - LOG CABIN - NIGHT

-- sees the damage left in the wake of Vickrey's fusillade. The cabin creaks, as if no longer structurally sound.

Vickrey enters from the kitchen, slapping a fresh magazine in his carbine.

AMBROSE (O.S.)
(filtered)
Confirm, do you have the second package?

Arroyo surveys the detritus of shattered wood and broken glass, notices the booby-trapped shotgun.

ARROYO
(into bone mic)
Negative. They had a shotgun blind-rigged for pressure release.

Arroyo and Vickrey begin sweeping the ground floor, clocking everything --

-- Norman's lifeless form --

-- dissipating embers in the fireplace --

-- rising steam from the abandoned bowls of soup.

Noticing the closed door of the staircase cupboard --

-- Arroyo squeezes off a concentrated burst, stitching holes across the door. Arroyo approaches, reaches for the doorknob, pulling it open --

-- revealing only shredded coats and leaking canned preserves.

No sign of anyone on the ground floor, Arroyo nods to the second floor, begins climbing the stairs.

Vickrey trains his weapon on the second floor landing from below, covering Arroyo's climb. But unbeknownst to Vickrey --

-- dislodged grit trickles down on the fireplace grate revealing --

INSIDE THE CHIMNEY

-- Roger, wedged above, entombed in the claustrophobic confines of the bricked funnel, his outstretched limbs supporting him, veins rippling from the strain as --

SECOND FLOOR LANDING

-- Arroyo moves for Norman's bedroom, Vickrey covering him from below.

Arroyo extends a hand for the closed door, raises his weapon as he pulls the door open --

-- the attack comes lower than Arroyo anticipated, the wolf-dog lunging at the intruder with the unfamiliar scent. Arroyo falls to the floor with the wolfdog, loses his weapon.

Vickrey sees Arroyo fighting to keep the wolfdog's canines from his jugular, trains his gun on the dog just as --

INSIDE THE CHIMNEY

-- hearing the commotion, Roger releases from his perch inside the chimney, falling to the bottom of the fireplace --

-- losing his grip on his gun, dropping beneath the grate. Exposed, knowing his diversion has only seconds remaining, Roger abandons his hard-to-reach pistol, tumbling out.

Vickrey catches movement in his peripheral, turns --

-- finds Roger charging him like a speared bull.

Spinning his weapon on Roger --

-- Roger collides into Vickrey, the momentum sending both men crashing through a window --

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

-- cratering in the snow outside amidst a shower of glass, Vickrey's released carbine lost in the knee-high powder.

Roger and Vickrey upright, square on each other. Vickrey flicks open a tactical folding knife.

A tense beat as both men size one another up --

-- Vickrey moves first, swiping at Roger's midsection. Roger ducks back, fabric torn across the waist. Quickly appraising the damage, Roger sees no blood drawn.

Vickrey circles Roger like a boxer looking for an opening, readying for a second strike. When Vickrey moves in again --

-- Roger rushes him, catching Vickrey's wrist, belying the knife. Fighting for sway of the blade --

-- both men trade devastating blows, tenderizing each other's faces into hamburger patty, a visceral war of attrition --

-- *who can stay conscious the longest?*

Roger relents first, slipping around Vickrey, trying to maneuver his arms into a chokehold.

Vickrey counters with an elbow, manages to slip out of Roger's grasp, blindly driving the knife behind him --

-- missing Roger's face by inches, firmly implanting in the bark of a tree. Vickrey tries uprooting the knife--

-- impossible without a hydraulic winch, a sword in stone.

Unarmed, Roger and Vickrey allow each other a reprieve to gather their breath. It isn't a cessation of hostilities --

-- merely an intermission.

Wind kicking up, a shearing spindrift reveals --

-- Vickrey's fallen carbine nestled in the snow, equidistant to both men. The weapon's manifestation doesn't go unnoticed by either Roger or Vickrey.

A tense beat, like the quiet overture before a gun duel --

-- then both men scramble for the weapon, Roger taking pole position. Trailing --

-- Vickrey launches himself at Roger, restraining Roger with a tight headlock. Roger flails, trying to vault himself free from Vickrey's hold.

Fixed on the weapon, Roger's eyes widen when they spot --

-- the teeth of the antiquated bear-trap jutting out from the snow in front of the carbine.

Struggling with Vickrey affords Roger the pretext to kick snow over the teeth, fully concealing the trap.

Roger then allows Vickrey to shift him away from the weapon.

Capitalizing on his favored proximity to the weapon, Vickrey kicks Roger forward and turns, races for the carbine --

-- abruptly halting mid-stride. Vickrey's face loosens into a curious expression as he looks down --

-- sees the mouth of the bear-trap clamped around his leg, teeth buried in his thigh.

EXT. RIDGE - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

In the green-lensed scope --

-- Ambrose's eye finds a clear line of sight on Roger in the nocturnal spectrum. His reticle settles on Roger's head --

-- when a SHRILL CRY from Vickrey over the bone mic causes Ambrose to flinch, his scope jumping premature to the shot.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

The bullet RIPS through Roger's shoulder, spinning him around, sending him falling back against a tree.

Eyes quickly reverse-tracking the bullet's trajectory, Roger spots a distant muzzle flash --

-- and instinctively ducks as a second bullet chews into the tree behind him, splintering bark.

Gripping his shoulder, Roger flees into the forest, putting the cabin between himself and the source of the sniper fire, shielding his escape.

INT. SECOND-FLOOR LANDING - LOG CABIN - NIGHT

Arroyo kicks the motionless wolfdog off him, extracting his knife from the dog's underside. Retrieving his fallen weapon off the floor, Arroyo rushes downstairs.

EXT. LOG CABIN - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

As Ambrose arrives on the scene, Arroyo explodes out the front door. Syncing up, they follow the MOANS, finding --

-- Vickrey immobilized, a cataract of arterial blood running down his leg, steaming the snow below into a roseate slush.

VICKREY

(desperate)

Get this fucking thing off me.

As Arroyo moves to help him --

AMBROSE

Don't bother. You need a key to open those things.

Noting the torrent pumping from Vickrey's sliced femoral like a burst water-pipe --

ARROYO

We got to do something for him. Before he has no more blood to lose.

AMBROSE

Maybe he should try chewing through his leg?

Ambrose's cavalier attitude drawing Vickrey's ire --

VICKREY

(through gritted teeth)

Get me to a fucking doctor.

AMBROSE

I'll do you one better.

Ambrose raises his rifle, unceremoniously puts a bullet in Vickrey's frontal lobe.

Shocked, Arroyo raises his weapon on Ambrose.

ARROYO
Fuck you do that for?

Ambrose scoffs at Arroyo's outrage, bends down over Vickrey's corpse, rummaging through his pockets.

AMBROSE
It's not as simple as calling in a medevac.

Finding what he was looking for on Vickrey's person, Ambrose uprights, approaches the raised barrel of Arroyo's carbine.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
We can't afford to handle little incidents like this indiscreetly.

Ambrose proffers Vickrey's blood-stained check to Arroyo.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
Wouldn't you agree?

After a beat of due consideration --

-- Arroyo accepts Ambrose's proposal. He lowers his weapon and snatches the check out of Ambrose's hand.

ARROYO
You should have told me medical coverage wasn't included when I accepted the position.

Ambrose stiffens suddenly, ears pricking up. Arroyo stops, listens --

-- hears it too. They sprint for the forest.

EXT. STAGING AREA - BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Ambrose and Arroyo emerge --

-- and find one of their snowmobiles missing. Arroyo peers out, sees the headlights of the seized snowmobile slashing through the night.

Arroyo hops on one of the two remaining snowmobiles to give chase, reaching for the start-cord --

-- when Ambrose throws him to the ground.

Sprawled out in the snow --

ARROYO

What the fuck man? He's putting
distance on us.

Shining his barrel-mounted flashlight--

-- Ambrose traces the snowmobile's yanked ignition coil
feeding directly into the fuel tank.

Arroyo pales at his impetuous, near-fatal lapse in judgement.

AMBROSE

We'll pick up his tracks again.
Further down the trail.

EXT. BUS DEPOT - DAY

A bustling transit hub off a lonely stretch of interstate.

INT. HANDICAPPED BATHROOM - BUS DEPOT - DAY

Roger stands with his back to the solitary bathroom's mirror.
He peels away his sticky, imbrued shirt, revealing a caldera-
like exit wound of both agglutinated and fresh blood.

Roger studies the exit wound, appraising the extent of the
cavitation, finds that the bullet passed clean through.

Roger swabs the wound with gauze, grits his teeth as he
disinfects it with rubbing alcohol. Then he reaches for
a sewing kit on the sink.

INT. MAIN ATRIUM - BUS DEPOT - DAY

Wound sutured and dressed, Roger takes a seat amongst
other PASSENGERS, face knotted with discomfort.

The trail's gone cold. Roger seems rudderless, defeated.

He reaches into his coat, pulls out the envelope --

-- removes Jocelyn's wedding ring from inside, handling it
as if it were a votive deposit from a lost culture.

Roger studies the ring, sees that the fire from the medical
examiner's office has fused the band to the diamond. Almost
fitting in a way.

Roger spots a phone booth across the atrium, heads for it. Closing the accordion-style door, Roger inserts change and dials. The call goes directly to voicemail.

JOCELYN'S VOICE

(voicemail greeting)

Hi, you've reached Dr. Jocelyn Eberle. Please leave your name, number and a brief message after the beep and I'll get back to you as soon as possible...

(whimsical)

... unless you're my husband.

Roger hits the "pound" key, punches in his wife's four-digit code, needing to be reminded of the vow he made to his wife.

AUTOMATED VOICEMAIL VOICE

You have two new messages. First new message.

Cuing up --

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Good afternoon, this is Alicia from Dr. Schneider's office. I'm calling to confirm that your first prenatal appointment is scheduled for Monday, the seventeenth. Please call back...

The receiver slips from Roger's hand, gut-shot by this newest mutation of grief.

EXT. BUS DEPOT - DAY

Roger bombs out of a fire exit, runs to the side of the bus depot and pukes beside a dumpster.

A shell of a man, Roger slides to the ground. He doesn't cry or scream. He just stares ahead, eyes faraway.

Across the parking lot, Roger spots a MOTHER walking with her seven-year-old DAUGHTER. Gripping Daughter's hand tightly, Mother hurries them past Roger, pegging Roger for a vagrant.

But Daughter straggles, her innocent, intrinsically kind eyes connecting with Roger. It's a look that conveys the young girl's capacity for empathy --

-- and conjures memories of Jocelyn.

In hushed admonishment to Daughter --

MOTHER
Stop staring at him.

But Daughter's eyes never leave Roger as she's pulled along --
-- rousing Roger from his crippling despair.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

A baseball diamond with manicured grass and an impeccably groomed infield that rivals most professional ballparks, played on by the heir apparents of the Washington elite.

As one team takes the field --

-- ANDREW, the ten-year-old pitcher, moves for the mound, shouldering the weight of having to face the meat of the lineup in the bottom of the eighth with a one-run lead.

BEAU (O.S.)
Come here Andrew.

Andrew trots over to his team's spectators side, approaches his father -- *Beau*. Speaking in a conspiratorial hush --

BEAU (CONT'D)
That Blaylock kid's up first. And he can tie this up with one swing. Don't let him squeeze that strike-zone.

ANDREW
You want me to brush him off?

BEAU
I want you to wipe his chin. But don't put the tying run on base either. Make sure you miss him. Just miss him high. Understand?

ANDREW
I do.

Beau dismisses Andrew with a curt nod. It feels more like Beau's grooming his successor rather than raising a son.

As Andrew trots out to the mound, Beau walks back to the bleachers where his wife CONNIE, well-preserved into her thirties, is seated. She shoots her husband a look.

As Beau moves to climb the bleachers --

-- his pocket chirps. He digs out his cell, reads a text.

In terse parting to Connie --

BEAU

I'm going to run to the concession stand.

Beau dashes off right as Andrew's chin-music sends THE BLAYLOCK KID to the dirt of the batter's box, met with cries of indignation from the opposing team's bleachers.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE CONCESSION STAND - DAY

At the concession stand behind the outfield wall --

-- Ambrose cherries a cigarette, tosses Arroyo his gold lighter. Arroyo lights up as well, motions to throw the lighter back to Ambrose --

AMBROSE

No, you keep it. Consider it part of your compensation package.

Shaking his head --

ARROYO

No man, I can't accept this. This should be like a family heirloom. A birthright or some shit to give to your kids.

AMBROSE

I have no interest in disseminating my seed, first of all. And secondly, I have two more of those at home.

ARROYO

(flummoxed)

Two more of these lighters?

AMBROSE

When the Coalition Provisional Authority took up residence in Saddam's Republican Palace, they found an entire crate of those in the basement. Buddy of mine in the Green Zone sent me a few.

(off Arroyo's look)

Hey, part of being coach is knowing how to motivate your team.

As Beau approaches Ambrose and Arroyo --

-- Horace, Beau's shadow, appears from the side of the concession stand, locks on Ambrose and Arroyo.

Seeing Horace --

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Goddamn Horace, are you ever off the clock? I still remember when you used to shadow Forrest Loeb. You were like his mobile coat-rack. Until his forced retirement that is.

Nodding back to Beau --

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

You being with him, it's almost Shakespearian in a way. Adopted by the man who orphaned you. But I suppose a dog can serve many masters in his lifetime.

Though Horace offers nothing, that doesn't necessarily mean Ambrose isn't picking at a scab.

BEAU

Horace is a company man. Isn't that right Horace?

Moving past Arroyo, Beau motions for Ambrose to follow him off to the side for a private audience --

-- leaving Arroyo and Horace alone. Nodding to Horace's right-favoring nose --

ARROYO

I'm a southpaw. So if you want, I can straighten that out for you.

Horace doesn't bite, a silent, inscrutable sphinx.

Beau and Ambrose walk, keeping their tone conversational.

BEAU

Did you fulfill the contract?

AMBROSE

I took care of the secondary target --

BEAU

(quickly impatient)
But not the principal. So do you have any idea where he's gone to ground?

AMBROSE

I thought that given your access to certain company resources, we could expedite our search.

BEAU

Out of the question. I can't have that name popping up in the registry.

AMBROSE

You can't cover you tracks? Like before?

BEAU

The CIA surveillance index is like the surface of the moon. Accessing it leaves a lasting footprint.

AMBROSE

And what are you so worried about? Are you under investigation?

Scoffing at Ambrose's naivete --

BEAU

Everyone in the company is under investigation. Goddamn janitor's got an open file. No, this needs to stay off-campus.

(turning on Ambrose)

And you need to start justifying your existence in this world.

But Ambrose is too distracted to register Beau's threat, looking up. Beau follows Ambrose's gaze --

-- watching as a baseball sails over the outfield fence, plopping at Beau's feet.

Beau's looks to the field, watching The Blaylock Kid rounding the bases triumphantly, much to the chagrin of Andrew.

Goadng Beau --

AMBROSE

He hung that one up like a pinata.

But Beau is struck with a thought.

BEAU

I think I know where you can head him off.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - DAY

Roger sits at one of the computers, workspace inundated with printouts of research, nearly twenty companies currently and actively involved in brain implant technology listed on a pad.

It's clear Roger's been at this for hours.

Roger continues to scour the internet, calling up articles in scholarly journals and newsmagazines -- an information orgy.

LATER

Coffee stale and no longer steaming. The pad listed with suspect companies has grown exponentially over the hours --

-- and not one has been crossed out.

The last of the patronage, Roger is hunched forward, fingertips kneading his temples, blearily staring at the monitor.

The pretty BARISTA cleaning up tables approaches Roger.

BARISTA

We're going to be closing up sir.

But Roger's eyes narrow on the monitor, catching something.

BARISTA (CONT'D)

Sir, we really are closing up now.

Eyes never leaving the monitor, Roger pulls out a twenty.

ROGER

Ten minutes.

Barista reluctantly pockets the twenty, resumes her cleanup.

Roger fishes around his pocket, pulls out --

-- the plastic bag with the implant. He removes it from the bag, holds it up against the computer monitor, comparing it with the implant displayed on screen.

Roger studies the caterpillar of circuitry on screen, the arched curvature that allows it to conform to the brain's uneven contours, its elegant filigree of wiring --

-- it's all identical to the one held in his hand.

Roger scans the article profiling the company behind it --

-- *NeuroConcepts*. Excerpts read --

-- "... government contract awarded to NeuroConcepts."

-- "... advancements in brain-computer interface technology that allow amputee veterans the ability to manipulate upper and lower extremity prosthetic limbs via thought control."

-- "... NeuroConcepts enters test phase with innovative chip-implant sensor technology."

Roger focuses on the man pictured in the photo --

-- DR. HASKELL FUCHS, late-fifties, eyes betraying a searing intelligence, identified as the lead research scientist.

Roger looks up NeuroConcepts' base of operations --

-- finds a Manhattan address.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - DAY

A blacked-out Lincoln pulls up in front.

BODYGUARD ONE and BODYGUARD TWO, anonymous, broad-shouldered, exit the car. Bodyguard One keeps watch, head on a swivel, as Bodyguard Two opens the rear passenger door for --

-- Dr. Haskell Fuchs. The imposing heavies escort Fuchs through the office building's revolving door --

-- as Roger crosses the street, following them inside.

INT. LOBBY - OFFICE BUILDING

Flanked by his bodyguards, Fuchs walks to a bank of three elevators in the back that go to the uppermost floors.

As Fuchs and his bodyguards disappear inside an elevator --

-- Roger watches, clocking them from across the lobby.

INT. RESEARCH LAB - NEUROCONCEPTS - DAY

An antiseptic, glassed-in space comprised of unoccupied lab stations. In fact, Fuchs is the only person working here. Bodyguard One monitors him from the lab's doors.

Fuchs taking notes as a rhesus monkey fitted in a harness, *arms restrained*, a recording net of electrodes fastened to its head, reaches for a black knob --

-- using a robotic arm controlled by thought. The monkey maneuvers the arm like an arcade crane claw, its gripper appendage finding the black knob.

The monkey puts its mouth to a nearby straw for a drink reward as the arm resets and the black knob repositions.

Fuchs oversees the experiment with a lack of verve and interest, completely and utterly bored.

As the monkey repeats the exercise, Fuchs charts data from neuroimaging monitors, all the while HUMMING to himself --

-- "*The Ants Go Marching.*"

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - NEUROCONCEPTS - DAY

Bodyguard Two makes quick work of a sandwich, facing the top floor's three elevators.

He stops chewing when he sees --

-- the floor numbers on the panel next to the right elevator rising. Bodyguard Two tenses, reaches for his holstered gun, not expecting any visitors.

Bodyguard Two draws his weapon, flicks off the safety --

-- PING. The elevator doors part --

-- revealing a punctured fire extinguisher spewing sodium bicarbonate like volcanic ash, obscuring visibility inside the elevator.

Bodyguard Two approaches, ready to fire at the first thing to emerge from the elevator --

-- PING, the middle elevator opens, the inside also veiled in a dense, white mist from a pierced fire extinguisher.

Bodyguard Two sweeps around, shifting his gun between the two elevators, favoring the middle --

-- PING, the left elevator opens, flame-retardant vapor billowing out. Bodyguard Two spins around, covering the third portal --

-- when two arms shoot out from the middle elevator, wrenching Bodyguard Two inside, lost and enveloped in the flaky miasma.

INT. RESEARCH LAB - NEUROCONCEPTS - DAY

Fuchs goes through the motions. He turns, sees that Bodyguard One's still fixed on him. It's obvious that Fuchs hates being watched. Makes him feel like a test animal.

Fuchs drops his notebook in disgust, undoes the monkey's restraints, reaches to remove the cap of electrodes --

-- when the monkey snaps at Fuchs' hands.

FUCHS

You little shit. After this, I'm shipping you to a lab where they test the eye-irritancy levels of shampoo.

Fuchs opens a nearby drawer, reaching for a small, cellphone-sized electroshock prod.

The distinctive CLICK of a primed handgun. Fuchs turns --

-- finds Roger pointing a gun at him, dusted in extinguisher spray. Fuchs pales, a trace of recognition in his eyes.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

Are you here to kill me?

ROGER

We'll start with some questions and go from there.

Grabbing Fuchs by the shoulder --

ROGER (CONT'D)

Let's go to your office.

-- and dragging Fuchs away, revealing the opened drawer --

-- and the empty space where the electroshock prod was.

INT. DR. FUCHS' OFFICE -- NEURORCONCEPTS - DAY

Windows offering an encompassing view of midtown Manhattan.

Bodyguard One and Bodyguard Two, both bound and gagged, are dropped to the floor in a heap. Roger motions Fuchs inside, keeping the gun on him.

FUCHS

Is it absolutely necessary to keep the gun on me?

ROGER

Funny coming from a man who travels
with an armed security detail.

With a bitter snort --

FUCHS

Bodyguards? Is that what you think?
Those men are my jailors. And this
place is my prison. They don't even
permit me research assistants.

ROGER

So what are you, some kind of a
political prisoner?

FUCHS

No, I'm government property. These
people believe they have exclusive,
proprietary rights to the clockwork
of my mind. Every gear and spring,
from the algorithms I developed to
decode a brain's neuronal firings,
to my recipe for spinach artichoke
dip, they're all intangible assets
belonging to the CIA.

Roger tosses the bagged brain implant at Fuchs.

ROGER

But isn't that what they're really
after? Behavioral modification?

FUCHS

(correction)

Behavioral *manipulation*.

(beat)

It began as translating cortical
activity into programmable input
that would permit the subject to
"embody" a prosthetic device in
real-time. But then I thought if
I could codify the brain signals
into a programming language with
a governing set of syntactic and
semantic rules, I could interface
with the subject's brain much like
a computer operating system. And
execute commands.

ROGER

Like shooting up a courthouse full
of innocent people?

FUCHS

That was unintended. A corruption written into the subject's kernel. Possibly some anti-pattern missed by the check-routines.

Without warning, Roger FIRES, shattering a desk-lamp. Fuchs recoils, looks to Roger fearfully.

ROGER

It was a massacre. Not a fucking computer glitch.

FUCHS

What about what you do Mr. Eberle? How many villages in the Kandahar Province have experienced declining census numbers due to "unattributed explosions" from drone strikes?

Met with a quizzical expression.

ROGER

You know who I am?
(putting it together)
A guy walks into your office, sticks a gun in your face and you don't ask who he is and what he wants?

FUCHS

It's because I know what you want.

Fuchs moves for his desk.

ROGER

Not another step.

With raised arms --

FUCHS

It's on my computer.

After some deliberation --

ROGER

Alright. But just know, you can pull out a chain-gun and you'll still die first.

Fuchs moves around his desk to his computer, Roger shadowing him, monitoring Fuchs as he calls up an encryption screen on his monitor, keying in a star-symboled code, accessing --

-- *The Disciple Program.*

A large index of files, all designated by biblical names.
Fuchs clicks into a file marked "Simon" --

-- a picture of Darryl Lee Unger appears on the screen along
with a complete dossier. Fuchs clicks on an embedded video.

FUCHS

This is how it works.

ON THE COMPUTER MONITOR

Steady handheld footage showing Darryl restrained to a metal,
bolted-down chair, the top of his head swaddled in strips of
medical gauze. The setting seems subterranean. Clandestine.

Narrating the proceedings from behind the camera --

FUCHS' VOICE

Disciple "Simon" eight days post-
implantation.

As Darryl continues to yell and buck in his chair, the camera
lowers, showing a device with acoustically-transparent fabric
and an alphanumeric key panel.

A hand reaches down, punches in a sequence of keys into the
device, activating it. It begins to emit a low HUM.

FUCHS' VOICE (CONT'D)

The device you see here emits what
we refer to as an "arming sequence,"
a high-frequency acoustic signature
indiscernible to the human ear. But
all disciples are surgically fitted
with cochlear transmitters to receive
the sonic activation, which triggers
the brain implant.

The camera rights on Darryl, eerily still now, trancelike.

FUCHS' VOICE (CONT'D)

As you can see, the disciple's been
activated.

Darryl speaks with a robotic modulation.

DARRYL

Designate access permissions.

Addressing Darryl --

FUCHS' VOICE

Sierra, Whiskey, Victor, Seven,
Six, Six, Niner. Authenticate.

After a brief pause --

DARRYL
Administrative privileges granted.
Welcome host user.

Fuchs enters frame, unfastens Darryl's restraints.

FUCHS
At attention Private.

Darryl uprights, puppeteered by Fuchs' words.

FUCHS (CONT'D)
Private, would you please approach
the table saw.

The camera follows Darryl as he approaches a table saw,
moving like a man in a fugue state.

FUCHS (CONT'D)
Switch on the table saw Private.

Darryl reaches his arm to the underside of the table saw,
turns it on, the toothed circular blade velocity-smearing.

FUCHS (CONT'D)
Now Private, I want you to put
your face as close to the blade
as possible without touching.

Without hesitation, Darryl lowers his head mere millimeters
from the blade, the blade fanning his hair and rippling his
cheeks. But Darryl doesn't so much as blink, devoid of fear.

The demonstration video ends there.

BACK TO SCENE

Roger glares up at Fuchs, who flashes him a gloating smile.

FUCHS (CONT'D)
Remarkable, isn't it?

Roger shoots a hand to Fuchs' throat. Fuchs crumples to the
floor, struggling to regain his breath. As Fuchs reaches to
hoist himself back up by the corner of the desk --

-- Roger boots him back to the ground.

ROGER
You stay right there you son-of-
a-bitch.

Fuchs remains on the floor --

-- the commotion having masked his act of slick legerdemain, snatching a tiny remote control from his desk without notice.

With the gun levelled on Fuchs, Roger works the mouse with his free hand, clicking into The Disciple Program's files.

More profiles of soldiers pop up. A directory of "sleepers."

Fuchs slides his fingers discreetly under his leg, presses a button on the remote control --

-- triggering a flat-screen monitor to quietly rise up from a cabinet piece behind Roger.

FUCHS

My parents forced me to go to bible study classes when I was young. And there was this detestable nun there who made us memorize the names of all twelve apostles, along with the seventy disciples. None of it was of particular interest to me. But I never did forget Matthias, the disciple chosen to replace the more commercially-minded Judas.

Taking a cue from Fuchs' cryptic words, Roger scrolls through the files, finds one marked "Matthias," clicks into it --

-- *and is met with a photograph of himself.* Roger's world is sent spinning off its axis. He focuses on a picture of himself under heavy sedation, laid out on an operating table --

-- head braced in a skull clamp, scalp peeled back like an orange rind, revealing the glistening, rugose brain tissue underneath.

With the flat-screen fully risen unbeknownst to Roger, Fuchs' fingers spider-crawl for a button --

-- the monitor turns on with a blaring sales-pitch video. Roger spins around, puts a bullet through the monitor.

Roger distracted, Fuchs leaps up, jabs the electroshock prod into Roger's spine. A blue arc dancing between the electrodes snaps at Roger, sending him to the floor in a convulsive heap.

Fuchs retrieves Roger's fallen gun, levels it on Roger.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

Unless you have a pacemaker, you should be fit to stand.

Fuchs keeps a safe distance as Roger slowly uprights and finds his equilibrium.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

Have a seat Mr. Eberle. And please grip the armrests with five fingers.

Roger settles into the chair opposite Fuchs' desk, fingers outstretched over the armrests.

Still grasping with what he saw on the computer screen --

ROGER

You have one of those implants...
in my head?

FUCHS

Right on your motherboard. Strange, isn't it? To know something's there you can't quite feel?

Shaking his head, disbelieving --

ROGER

When... did you?

Keeping the gun on Roger, Fuchs moves closer to the bound, wiggling bodyguards.

FUCHS

When your helicopter went down.
Our people found you before the
response recovery team did.

(beat)

Think about it. What can you recall
from that week you went missing?

Roger considers this, realizes the frightening truth in Fuchs' words.

ROGER

Why did you choose me?

Now looming over the bodyguards --

FUCHS

Ideal circumstances make for an
ideal candidate.

Fuchs turns his gun on Bodyguard One and Two, FIRING TWICE, executing both men without flourish or fuss.

Roger tenses, looks like he's about to spring up --

-- Fuchs swings the gun back around on Roger.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

Please Mr. Eberle, the seat-belt lights are still on. And consider that because you are defective, I would not hesitate decommissioning you altogether.

Settling back into the chair --

ROGER

Defective?

Fuchs comes around his desk, calls up an audio log on his computer.

FUCHS

Before they set the hounds on you, we tried your "deactivation code," which meant one day they'd open up your garage and find you sitting in your car, exhaust fumes thick enough to choke a hippopotamus wafting out. Alas, you were found to be less than receptive.

Fuchs clicks on the audio log. Ringing is heard. Then a voice answers.

ROGER'S VOICE

Hello? Hello?

(beat)

I'll be here. All night.

The recording cuts out.

ROGER

That was you?

FUCHS

Yes. And what you couldn't hear on the other end of the line was your "arming sequence."

Nodding to the bandaged contusion on Roger's head from when he was tackled outside the medical clinic --

FUCHS (CONT'D)

I can only assume that bump to the head knocked something loose.

Piecing it together --

ROGER

It wasn't just Darryl Lee Unger
Jocelyn was investigating, was it?
She found out I was a disciple too.

FUCHS

Your wife proved quite resourceful.

Spitting the words out like poison --

ROGER

You killed her.

FUCHS

Not I Mr. Eberle.

Fuchs reaches over, clicks on another audio log.

Once again ringing is heard. Then a groggy voice answers.

ROGER'S VOICE

Hello?

Nothing audible, yet an imperceptible shift can be sensed,
like the ominous calm that presage thunderclouds.

With a flat monotone and cadenced breaths --

ROGER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Designate access permissions.

FUCHS' VOICE

November, Mike, Echo, Kilo, Echo,
Two, Five, Seven. Authenticate.

After a brief pause, a familiar sequence of words is heard.

ROGER'S VOICE

Administrative privileges granted.
Welcome host user.

FUCHS' VOICE

Where is your wife, Lieutenant?

ROGER'S VOICE

(automatic)
Downstairs. In the kitchen.

Fuchs cuts the recording, watching with analytic curiosity as
Roger grapples with the implications of what he just heard.

FUCHS

We gave you specific instructions. Where you could find the stroke-kit. How to inject your wife. And that once you executed command, to return to bed and fall back asleep. It was as easy as pushing a button.

Roger's universe implodes. It's beyond comprehension.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

The hardware was designed to insure anything done while "activated" was blacked out of your anamnesis. Like a redaction. Or at least in theory.

Fuchs comes around the desk, regards Roger with probing eyes, genuinely curious.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

You really have no data remanence concerning your wife's murder, do you? No stray memory fragment? No experiential recall or abreactive episodes? Not even one nightmare about what really transpired that morning in your backyard?

Roger offers silent confirmation, ghostly white, nauseous with guilt. Fuchs nods to himself with a prideful smile.

FUCHS (CONT'D)

They were reluctant to activate you, citing your emotional attachment to the kill-element as an incalculable variable. But I knew you would work.
(raising his sidearm)
Thank you Mr. Eberle. That will be all.

Roger looks up without objection or entreaty, welcoming the bullet.

Fuchs' finger tickling the trigger --

AMBROSE (O.S.)

That's not the play you want to make here Dr. Fuchs.

Casting a sidelong glance --

-- Fuchs finds Ambrose and Arroyo fanning out from the office door, both with silenced pistols trained on him.

FUCHS

I represent forty-seven million dollars in black-budget defense spending.

AMBROSE

And if you don't put your gun down, I'll have fired a forty-seven million dollar bullet.

Fuchs begrudgingly complies, lets the gun fall from his hands.

As Ambrose steps over the bodies of the bodyguards --

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Gave them a half-day I see.

Ambrose reaches for Fuchs' gun, tucks it into his waistband.

Ambrose turns to Roger, sees he's a hollow-eyed shell, an excavation site where his soul used to be.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Broke it to him easy then, huh doc?

FUCHS

Who are you?

AMBROSE

I'm your chaperone for a little field trip we'll be taking. And don't worry, your friend Witten signed your permission slip.

INT. MAIN CORRIDOR - NEUROCONCEPTS - DAY

Moving in a single-file procession, Ambrose covering Fuchs in front with Arroyo escorting Roger in the back.

Roger moves listlessly, marching to his death without a faltering step.

Fuchs seems less accepting, eyes scheming, desperate.

Just as they're about to reach the elevator --

-- a blur of movement draws everyone's attention, Ambrose and Arroyo raising their pistols --

-- tracing the scampering form of the test monkey.

But Arroyo has made a fatal error, having put himself in close proximity to Roger.

And in that instant, Roger's face morphs, eyes shifting like the cloudy, nictitating membranes of a shark in "hunter mode."

Roger backs into Arroyo, arms working Arroyo into a wrist-lock. Joints hyperextend, ligaments tear --

-- and Roger controls him. The gun falls from Arroyo's grasp as Roger pulls him closer, whips his head back --

-- reverse head-butting Arroyo, Roger's steel-reinforced head connecting with Arroyo's nose, bifurcating Arroyo's neck like a snapped pencil with a sickening CRUNCH.

Arroyo drops to his knees, nose deflated like a pin-popped balloon, neck bent with a grotesque elasticity --

-- *unequivocally dead*. And trust that it took longer to describe than it did to transpire.

Alerted to the fracas behind him, Ambrose pivots --

-- sees Roger darting down a hallway. Ambrose FIRES, pocking the corner wall, losing his angle on Roger.

A DING is heard. Ambrose turns back --

-- sees Fuchs has slipped away in the commotion, catching his last glimpse of him behind the merging elevator doors. Ambrose squeezes off several rounds --

-- the bullets indenting the elevator doors inward --

-- but unable to penetrate through.

Cutting his losses, Ambrose turns his attention back to his primary target -- Roger.

Ambrose moves past Arroyo's deathly inert form, sees Arroyo's fallen gun --

-- knows Roger's unarmed.

Taking cautious steps, Ambrose rounds the same corner Roger took, entering --

INT. OFFICE WING - NEUROCONCEPTS - DAY

A bullpen of vacant offices. All the doors are closed --

-- and Roger could be hiding behind any one of them.

Ambrose proceeds, antennae raised, leading with his silenced pistol, tracking his game. He reaches the first door --

-- kicks it open and sweeps the room with his pistol --

-- no sign of Roger. Just unused phone cables and dusty furniture.

Ambrose moves to the next door, boots it in --

-- no prize. But Ambrose's eyes lock on the *empty* fire ax cabinet in the wall.

Undeterred, Ambrose continues to the third door, finds --

-- a storage space comprised of upper extremity prostheses and compressed air cylinders for their pneumatic functioning.

Ambrose turns, looks at the last office door. Having flipped over every other thimble, Ambrose now knows where the pea is.

Ambrose approaches, raises his foot, breaches --

-- finds Roger standing there, holding the fire-ax above his head, one of the high-pressure air tanks perched on a chair --

-- *and aimed directly at the doorway.*

In the moment it takes for Ambrose to register the trap --

-- Roger brings the fire-ax down, beheading the safety valve, the escaping pressurized air giving the cylinder a ballistic propulsion --

-- torpedo-launching at Ambrose, catching him in his mid-section, leaving a white contrail in its wake.

The cylinder rockets down the hallway, Ambrose a flailing hood ornament --

-- its flight path ending abruptly when it hits a wall, sheet-rock CRACKING, Ambrose catching the brunt of the impact.

Ambrose drops, a shriveled husk of granulated bone, unmoving.

Roger arrives on the scene, coldly regards the wreckage that is Ambrose. Roger leans down, looking for confirmation.

ROGER

You said the name "Witten"?

Blood bubbling from his mouth, a scratch of words --

AMBROSE

Beau... Witten.

And then a faint smile, Ambrose happy to condemn the man.

Roger moves for the elevator, driven by a biblical wrath --
 -- leaving Ambrose to quietly expire in solitude.

EXT. WITTEN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

A Victorian colonial without the ostentatious trappings shared
 by some of its counterparts on the tree-lined street.

INT. STUDY - WITTEN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Beau passed out in a recliner, a half-empty bottle of scotch
 resting on the chair's arm, seated before a muted television
 displaying a news report on the incident at NeuroConcepts.

A clamorous RUMBLING stirs Beau awake.

INT. GARAGE - WITTEN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The tumble dryer next to the washing machine QUAKES. What-
 ever's oscillating within its drum is creating quite a stir.

Beau appears in the darkened garage's doorway, disheveled,
 tying off his robe. He switches on the lights, approaches
 the inextricably running dryer, turns it off.

Irritated, Beau opens the dryer's door --

-- finds boots haphazardly thrown in. Off Beau's confusion --

ROGER (O.S.)
 Turn around slowly.

Beau's face drops. He turns around as Roger materializes
 from the shadows, gun raised.

BEAU
 (beseechingly)
 My wife and son are upstairs.

ROGER
 No. They're staying at the ski
 house in Maine for the weekend.

Caught, Beau looks into Roger's steely eyes, gauging his
 presence of mind, whether or not he's been "activated."

BEAU
 And you're here... of your own
 volition?

Which incites Roger to march up to Beau and pistol-whip him, dropping Beau. Practically frothing at the mouth --

ROGER

You had me murder my own wife.

The blood leaking from Beau's split lip is an alien sight to the career analyst, having forgotten he can spill it too.

BEAU

(defending his life)

And you think that's the sum of my efforts. When The Disciple Program was first initiated, we focused on the radicals anxious to cash in on the promise of seventy-two virgins. The idea was that if we caught one of these would-be martyrs, we could reverse-program them, release them, and have them blow up in the hands of their handlers.

(spitting out blood)

We called it "hot potato."

ROGER

But then you turned it on Americans.

BEAU

"All enemies, foreign and domestic." As a serviceman, you must think the ultimate sacrifice one can make for his country is giving his life. But sacrificing one's soul is a greater price to pay. And I've been eating this country's sins for the better part of the past decade.

ROGER

You're a true patriot. I'll see to it they chisel your star onto the wall.

Just as Roger raises his gun for the killshot --

-- a familiar voice from the doorway.

HORACE (O.S.)

Set it on the floor Mr. Eberle.

Beau looks to the garage's doorway, relieved to find Horace --

-- but Roger doesn't lower his gun, knowing he could kill Beau before being killed himself, at a deadly impasse.

HORACE (CONT'D)

One one hundredth of a second.
That's approximately how long
you'll have your vengeance.

A charged beat --

-- then Roger drops the gun.

HORACE (CONT'D)

Kick it away.

Roger complies, sending his weapon skittering away.

Keeping his gun trained on Roger, Horace steps around Roger, maintaining a wide berth, sidling up next to Beau.

Remembering how to breathe again, Beau turns to his savior.

BEAU

I have painter's plastic upstairs.
We can --

Horace cuts Beau off, interlocking his arms around Beau's head, forcing a nasal inhaler up a nostril, administering Beau with something that quickly renders him unconscious.

Slumped in his arms, Horace gently lays Beau on the floor, turns to a bewildered Roger.

HORACE

Mr. Witten wouldn't shoot himself.
He doesn't even own a gun. Not to
mention it's inconsistent with his
personal grooming habits.

Horace bends down, wipes Beau's nose with a disinfectant wipe.

ROGER

I don't understand.

HORACE

Moisturizers. Deep pore cleansers.
A man plagued by obsessive vanity
would not blow his own head apart.

Horace removes a length of thick rope from his jacket.

HORACE (CONT'D)

Nor would he overdose considering
his wife's religious leanings have
kept the medicine cabinets stocked
with only organic, herbal remedies
over the years.

Using a nearby step-ladder, Horace reaches up and ties off one end of the rope to an overhead pipe --

-- revealing the other end of the rope to be a noose.

HORACE (CONT'D)

This is how Mr. Witten would choose to tender his resignation.

ROGER

But... why would he...

HORACE

... opt out? To avoid being brought before a Senate oversight committee. To spare himself that disgrace. And the company.

ROGER

But he was your boss.

HORACE

I'm a company man. And you can't bury something like this without a body.

(beat)

You should leave now. Because if my superiors find out about you, well, you are the type of man who would turn a gun on himself.

With that still hanging in the air, Roger shoots one last glance at the forsaken Beau before exiting.

INT. DARKENED MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Two sleeping forms faintly discernible in the moonlight. A phone RINGS on a bedside table.

A hand reaches from the bed, tugs on the lamp's chain --

-- light revealing a bleary-eyed Graydon, Beau's rival CIA colleague, and his matronly WIFE still asleep next to him. Graydon picks up the phone.

GRAYDON

Yes?

INTERCUT:

INT. GARAGE - WITTEN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Horace watches as Beau's pendulous legs cease twitching, a toppled chair below. Into his cell --

HORACE

It's done.

GRAYDON

I appreciate the call.

Graydon hangs up, kisses his sleeping wife on the cheek and falls back asleep -- with a clear conscience.

EXT. DESERT ESTATE - DAY

Rippling heat with an aridity index that saps you of spit. The luxurious compound lies amidst the dunes like an oasis.

EXT. POOL PAVILION - DESERT ESTATE - DAY

SERVANTS in white robes carry platters of fruit across a platform leading to an impressive terrace "islanded" in the middle of a pool.

The dutiful servants set the platters amidst evaporative cooling fans before quietly excusing themselves --

-- not wishing to interrupt the meeting in progress.

On one side of the gathering sits FAISAL, early-thirties, benefactor of terrorism, alongside HASSAN, late-thirties, a Yemeni jihadist who's rightfully earned his spot on the CIA kill-list. Both men wear a traditional Arab headdress.

Opposite them sits --

-- Dr. Haskell Fuchs, a pasty tourist. Fuchs takes in the fruit plates, the slices of imported melon, the bountiful cluster of grapes, and turns back to his hosts.

FUCHS

When Moses sent chieftains from the Twelve Tribes to scout out the Land of Canon and report back whether it was conquerable, they returned with a cluster of grapes as large as what you have here. But I suppose neither of you have heard that story.

Addressing Fuchs in genteel, Cambridge-laced English --

FAISAL

As a matter of fact Dr. Fuchs, I do know that story. And as I recall, the majority of Moses' twelve spies, frightened by the fortified cities and giants they had seen, reported that their "promised land" could neither be claimed nor conquered. And the Israelites, lacking both faith and resolve, believed them.

Hassan confers with Faisal in Arabic, Faisal acting as his interpreter. Faisal turns back to Fuchs.

FAISAL (CONT'D)

As Brother Hassan points out, it's not that we fail to recognize the existence of the infidels. Rather, it's that we don't recognize their right to a continued existence.

FUCHS

So with that in mind, what are your thoughts on my proposition?

Faisal translates for Hassan. After another exchange in non-subtitled Arabic --

FAISAL

Brother Hassan feels it is a very costly endeavor.

FUCHS

You're the purse Faisal. Hassan's just another hand that reaches in. Now given I'm not privy to what's on your balance sheets, I'm pretty sure you could finance this project by dipping into your champagne fund.

FAISAL

The money I give you is money I do not give to our holy warriors. This is what you must understand.

Circumventing the middleman, turning directly to Hassan --

FUCHS

You gave yourself away Hassan, when your eyes went to the grapes at my mention of them. So I'll tell you now what I understand.

(MORE)

FUCHS (CONT'D)

Your network's at a point right now where they can't even get a printer cartridge past customs. And your recruits from within the US, well without putting too fine a point on it, they aren't exactly "mastermind" material. As I see it, my proposal offers you a viable alternative. An implanted tourist can be "activated" with one phone call. We're talking about people who don't pop up on the American "no-fly" lists. People from non-profiled countries. The perfect sleepers.

Faisal starts to translate but Hassan waves him off, leaning forward, eyes that could bore a hole in reinforced steel.

HASSAN

(accented English)

What you are offering, how do we know this is for real?

Meeting Hassan's gaze --

FUCHS

Because if I was a speck on the horizon and you were standing at the CIA's doorstep, they'd shove you aside to take a shot at me.

After a protracted stare-off, Hassan eases back.

HASSAN

We accept your proposal.

EXT. DESERT ESTATE - DAY

Faisal leads Fuchs out the front entrance as a VALET pulls up in a weatherbeaten, nineties-era Range Rover.

Throwing his hands up in mock disgust --

FAISAL

Allah forgive me but such vulgar means of transport brings immense disgrace to my home. I shall give you a new car and provide you with your own driver and security team.

Walking to his car --

FUCHS

I appreciate that, but these days I prefer to keep my own company.

Fuchs hops into his Ranger Rover and drives away.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

The Range Rover travels the only thoroughfare in sight.

INT. RANGE ROVER - DAY

Fuchs drives, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, a buoyancy that suggests he's optimistic about his prospects, WHISTLING his signature "The Ants Go Marching."

His satellite phone RINGS. He reaches for it in the middle console, brings it to his ear.

FUCHS

Yes?

ROGER'S VOICE

How did your meeting go Dr. Fuchs?

Fuchs' breath catches, slamming the brakes, bringing the Range Rover to a screeching halt.

Fuchs' eyes nervously track ahead then dart to the rearview --

-- no one in sight for miles in either direction.

ROGER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I'm sure you impressed them. I just hope they didn't pay you in advance.

Fuchs' vocal chords disentangle.

FUCHS

Where are you?

ROGER'S VOICE

Not as close as you think.

Then it hits Fuchs, his eyes scanning the skies --

-- *seeing a metallic glint high above*. He lets out a faint whimper, a man who's just been given a terminal diagnosis.

ROGER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

You were right Dr. Fuchs. It's as easy as pushing a button.

Roger CLICKS off.

Fuchs lets the phone fall, reaches for the air-conditioning dial, cranking it to full blast.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

One moment the Range Rover is there. The next --
 -- *obliterated, lost in an eruption of fiery debris.*

INT. TRAILER EIGHTEEN - HUMBOLDT AIRFORCE BASE - DAY

Roger watches the fireball on his GCS's monitor, fixed on the incandescent mushroom. Behind Roger, Colonel Olmsted observes.

Both men turn to Gil, monitoring the drone's diagnostics and flight path from his laptop.

GIL

According to its transponder code,
 the drone hasn't left the base.

The translation being that they're in the clear. Roger turns to Olmsted, can't find the words.

OLMSTED

Just make sure it's back in the
 garage before Dad gets home.

Olmsted turns and exits. Roger swivels back to his GCS, begins directing the drone back to base.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Picturesque, middle-America suburbia where American flags hang over almost every door and people cut their own lawns.

A car pulls up in front of one home.

INT. CAR - DAY

Roger at the wheel. He looks at the mailbox to confirm the address, consults paperwork stacked in the passenger seat --

-- files on every active asset in The Disciple Program, along with their biblical aliases, taken from Fuchs' office.

The file Roger removes shows a familiar face --

-- Paul Meacham, the fourth member of the missing fire-team Norman spoke of back at his cabin.

Roger looks out the window, sees PAUL presiding over a kettle barbecue as his WIFE and SON set the picnic table, the purity of this moment sacred --

-- and the impetus that will drive Roger's crusade. As Roger exits the car and crosses the front lawn, we gradually --

FADE TO BLACK.