

PARADIGM  
PILOT  
"Relativity"  
  
written by  
  
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TEASER

FADE IN:

1       **ESTABLISHING SHOT - EXT. SORRENTO VALLEY - INDUSTRIAL PARK - 1**  
**ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT**

The Warehouse is perched in a cozy valley, rising above the night mist like some dark, brooding spectator. Places like these are meant to be hidden, tucked away some abandoned secret.

At the foot of the building, a BLACK MAZDA-3. IDLE, like the end of a sports car commercial, or the beginning of one, because...

FROM ABOVE...CRACK! the 3RD FLOOR WINDOW...

2       **EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - 3RD FLOOR WINDOW - CONTINUOUS**       2

...SHATTERS! Emerging through it, STEVEN WILCOX, 35, in a torn button-up shirt. In his hand, he clutches a BLOOD-SMEARED MANILA FOLDER.

So much for secrets.

                          STEVEN (V.O.)  
                  Everything is pure theory.

He hurtles towards the ground. Glass shards follow him down like falling stars. Some edges are smeared with blood.

                          STEVEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
                  A great circle of beginnings...

Steven lands and ducks into a somersault. Glass smashes against dirt and gravel. He sprints to his car.

THREE MEN in SUITS, DAPPERS (NOTE: GOVERNMENT SHADOW AGENTS), land on the ground. They stand up, just in time to watch Steven's MAZDA KICK UP DUST and jet off into the night.

                          DAPPER  
                  He's headed your way.

                          STEVEN (V.O.)  
                  ...and ends.

Past the clouds of dust, somewhere down the road, four COP cars flash their RED and BLUE LIGHTS, a DISTANT ECHO of their SIRENS.

Meanwhile, WHIRRING OVERHEAD, a NEWS CHOPPER. On its tail, the KXSD CHANNEL 4 LOGO.

ANNOUNCER (PRELAP)  
Live from K.X.S.D San Diego, it's  
the eleven o'clock news!

The Helicopter chases after the Mazda.

3

**INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - NIGHT**

3

KEY LIGHTS brighten behind the silhouettes of a MALE and FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
With Jeannie Lucille. And Steven  
Wilcox.

JEANNIE LUCILLE, buxom, stunning, blonde. CHASE LEE, bro-look Hawaiian with an unfitting business suit. Both raise their heads with the best smile their five-figure salary can buy.

JEANNIE  
Good evening, San Diego, thank you  
for joining us tonight. I'm Jeannie  
Lucille. Sitting in Steven's place  
tonight is...  
(unamused)  
...weatherman Chase Lee.

Chase jerks his head upward, 'sup' style, bro in a bar.

JEANNIE (CONT'D)  
Breaking news, we got word of a  
high-speed chase on the fifty-two  
east freeway. Kelly the Helly, is  
on the scene now.

DUAL FRAME: Jeannie on the left. On the right, the Mazda weaves through traffic. Car chase of Grand Theft Auto proportions. A BLACK S.U.V. is on his tail, with four COP CARS trailing close behind.

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)  
He left Sorrento Valley ten minutes  
ago from an industrial park. Cops  
in pursuit.

In TRAFFIC FRAME: Steven's car drives under an overpass where a COP CAR SWERVES LEFT to enter the freeway. It catches air, cuts across to...

4 **EXT. EASTBOUND 52 JUNCTION / INT. STEVEN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER** 4

...SLAM into Steven's CAR! The impact sends Steven's car over two lanes. The CARS in THOSE LANES swerve out of harm's way, dodging the Cop's path by MERE CENTIMETERS.

Steven looks up, phone in hand, at Kelly the Helly, following overhead.

STEVEN

You better be getting this, man.

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

(broken)

Just keep your eyes on the road.  
Incoming!

As if on cue, a BLACK SUV slams into Steven's BUMPER!

BOOM! Steven jerks forward. ANOTHER SUV gains on his right. Steven looks to his left to see...

ANOTHER COP CAR, flashing the BLUE and REDS behind him, rear driver's side. If a shot was fired, neither would be in each other's crossfire.

COPS

(from Car's Loud Speaker)

PULL OVER!

Steven's eyes dart to the signs two lanes to his right: "805 EXIT ONLY." Steven snatches up the...

EMERGENCY BRAKE!

SKRRRR! CAR WHEELS EXHALE SMOKE, then drifts over four lanes onto the on-ramp, lifting the car as he bumps over the divide.

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

She's about to wrap another  
segment.

STEVEN

Perfect. Patch me in.

Steven hangs up his call with Kelly and dials another.

5 **INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - NIGHT** 5

Jeannie's expression turns attentive as she reaches for her earpiece. Chase follows her lead. Monkey-see, Monkey-do.

JEANNIE

It seems we're getting a phone call  
from the driver. Can we pull up  
Kelly's camera?

Back to DUAL FRAME, where the Mazda is now on the 805-NORTH  
freeway. No Cop Cars in sight, yet.

JEANNIE (CONT'D)

Hello?

STEVEN (V.O.)

Jeannie.

On the TELEPROMPTER, TEXT APPEARS: VAMP TO COMMERCIAL BREAK!  
END CALL. Jeannie turns ashen, then politely laughs.

JEANNIE

Quite a way to play hooky, Steven.  
Sticking me with Chase and all.

Chase looks confused.

STEVEN (V.O.)

Couldn't pass up a lead to a case  
I've been working on.

JEANNIE

Hence, your "ocular migraine"?

STEVEN (V.O.)

Yes.

(beat)

I found something.

The LIGHTS CUT OUT! A PAIR of EMERGENCY LIGHTS turn on,  
reducing our NEWS ANCHORS back to their SILHOUETTES before...

...the SCREEN CUTS OUT to SMPTE COLOR BARS, to KXSD LOGO,  
then finally to "PLEASE STAND BY!"

6

**INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

6

LIGHTS BLACK OUT. Leaving Jeannie and Chase as haunting  
silhouettes in the glow of emergency lights.

A PRODUCER, ECKHART, 40's, pulls out a FLASHLIGHT and walks  
towards the Anchor Desk. He CRACKS a HANDFUL of GLOW STICKS  
and shakes them.

CREW MEMBER

This has never happened!

ECKHART

It is today, folks.

Eckhart walks through the floor and hands out GLOW STICKS to Crew Members.

Eckhart looks over to Jeannie. She's bent over the Anchor Desk. A bright glow bounces off her radiant, but distraught, face.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

Jeans, We could be live in any minute.

JEANNIE

I have to make sure he's okay.

Eckhart walks to her side. In a very reassuring way, he sets his hand over the phone.

She simply looks up, meets his gaze in the dark. No terror on her face. Just a haunting, knowing look.

JEANNIE (CONT'D)

You knew about this.

Eckhart nods.

ECKHART

Just cover the story.

JEANNIE

But Kelly's out there with him!

ECKHART

Everything will be all right.

OFF JEANNIE, she nods her head and locks her phone.

7

**EXT. 5 FREEWAY - RANCHO SANTA FE DRIVE - NIGHT**

7

Steve's car races off the exit and through the intersection. Cops trail not far behind.

Steve looks up to his eye in the sky. It still tails him.

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

Station's offline.

STEVEN

Figures. You still getting this?

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

Of course.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! from his dashboard console. He looks down to see the THERMOMETER. The NEEDLE breaches well past the RED OVERHEATING "F." WHITE SMOKE billows from the HOOD.

STEVEN

C'mon. Don't quit on me!

He winds through the dark road, turn by turn. His headlight beams cutting through the darkness.

SNAP! His CAR'S ENGINE SEIZES. The wheel locks. The CAR VEERS OFF the WINDING ROAD. CRASH! The CAR HISSES, SPILLING OUT FLUIDS. He runs out of the car, sprinting on foot.

8           **INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - MOMENTS LATER**           8

Eckhart and Jeannie remain close together when the LIGHTS COME BACK ON.

ECKHART

Back in thirty seconds. Final looks?

Makeup Artists walk up for final looks, powdering over Jeannie's tear stains.

9           **EXT. WILCOX RESIDENCE - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT**           9

Steven's home is a simple Victorian two story with a large front porch. Inside, the lights are on.

Instead of entering the house, he races around the corner to grab a GAS CAN. He POURS the GAS around the sides of his house, onto the walls, on plants.

Steven passes by the windows. He looks inside and sees his WIFE.

They take a QUICK BEAT to exchange fearful glances. They both knew it would come to this.

She STRIKES a match. The BURSTING FLAME show a shadow of a single TEAR on her cheek. She sets her curtains on fire and steps back, away from the window.

Steven is desperate. He EMPTIES the GAS CAN and tosses it across the yard. He grabs his Zippo lighter. Just before he can drop it...

TALL DAPPER (O.S.)  
STOP! Just hand it over.

Steven turns around to see THREE DAPPER, TALL, BLONDE, and GREY. The SAME ones who jumped out of the warehouse. All three are beat, thrashed. Grey is armed with a vintage pistol.

Above them, the Helicopter whirls around the house. Steven turns around, then throws his hands up! The LIGHTER FLIES into the AIR! Flames lick into the night sky.

10           **INT. PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWS STATION - SAME MOMENT**           10

Key lights come to life and shine down. Cameras are set.

ECKHART  
We're live in three...

INTERCUT WITH:

11           **EXT. WILCOX RESIDENCE - FRONT DRIVE - SAME MOMENT**           11

The LIGHTER DESCENDS to the ground. Still LIT.

ECKHART (V.O.)  
Two...

The Lighter crashes to the floor. The fire IGNITES. DUSTED GAS PUDDLES BLOSSOM BLUE FLAMES, spreading, right back to the GAS CAN. Then back to...

STATION. Eckhart points to Jeannie. Her face bright. Same million dollar smile. In just one moment. It goes from all smiles to...

DUAL FRAME: Jeannie's expression betrays undulating horror. BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT CONSUMES the NEIGHBORING FRAME. The THREE DAPPERS and Steven COLLAPSE onto the grass.

Jeannie looks completely helpless. Until Steven gets to his feet. He picks up the phone and begins dialing.

Jeannie puts her fingers to her earpiece.

JEANNIE  
Steven?

STEVEN (V.O.)  
This is Steven Wilcox of K.X.S.D,  
signing off.



Steven hangs up. Then walks TOWARDS the HOUSE! STEVEN opens his front door, and walks through the smoke. Into the house.

Jeannie takes off her earpiece and walks OUT-OF-FRAME. Before she can go. Before the FEED PIXELATES OUT to a...

QUICK CUT: AS IF BETWEEN CHANNELS. AN INSIGNIA with the words DEPARTMENT of MORALITY around a CIRCULAR EMBLEM of a MALTESE CROSS. Then a JEWEL WASP.

A WINDOW POPS up on A SCREEN. SEND E-MAIL? YES. E-MAIL SENT! ANOTHER WINDOW. COPY COMPLETE. SAVE IMAGE?

A MOUSE CLICKS NO. COMPUTER PURGES DATA, then a DVD.

A HAND grabs it, and slips it into a SLIP with an ESCHER's famous LITHOGRAPH "RELATIVITY" printed on the JACKET.

The hand reaches for the monitor and we...

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF TEASER



VERONICA (CONT'D)

Don't worry about Jeannie and Jules. I'll talk to them when I get to the station.

The bedroom door opens. Ben pokes his head through the door.

BEN

Happy anniversary!

She hangs up and swivels around to see Ben, holding the tray.

She creases her lips, where a WANING SMILE surfaces. The same a parent makes when the kids make breakfast and they see eggshells mixed into their eggs.

VERONICA

Saving my appetite for dinner.

She takes the card and rose, followed by a quick peck on the cheek. Her kiss, touch, is distant. Cold.

She walks away from him, back to their walk-in closet. Ben sets down the tray.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

You made the reservations, right?

BEN

La Croix, eight o'clock.

Ben grabs the remote and changes the channel. Without so much as a look at the news. Veronica stops dressing, almost in disbelief that he didn't even watch what was on TV.

VERONICA

It's funny. You work for a reporter, yet refuse to watch the news.

BEN

Why let tragedy ruin my day? New job and five years with my kickass pinup.

VERONICA

Executive pinup. Got promoted this morning.

BEN

That's great, babe!

VERONICA

New job with Steve, huh? What's it about? Still writing those silly book reports?

BEN

Maybe now he can explain why I'm writing them.

VERONICA

I told you before: it's for those sites that sell reports to frantic students.

Ben looks unsure.

BEN

He did text me.

Veronica perks up, interested.

VERONICA

What did he say?

BEN

I don't know. My phone's still downstairs. My brother called, though.

VERONICA

Would it kill you to keep your phone on you?

BEN

Got carried away with breakfast.

Ben brings the tray back up. One more try wouldn't hurt. But simply Veronica kisses his forehead, and walks away.

BEN (CONT'D)

I want to try again...to start a family.

Veronica looks away from her husband.

VERONICA

I need more time.

BEN

I know. Just want to let you know I'm here and I care.

Then grabs the remote from the bed and changes the TV back to the NEWS. Almost as a defense mechanism.



Jeannie's voice trails off, trembling.

ECKHART

You shouldn't've left the show.

Now Jeannie's pissed. She shoves him, irate.

JEANNIE

You shouldn't leave me in the dark!

ECKHART

Keep your voice down.

Another CAR ENTERS. This one is NICE. High-level baller status. They watch the car enter the structure and...

...pull right into Victor's spot. Eckhart and Jeannie watch, crossing the structure towards the elevators, and Victor's parking space.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

That's not his car.

JEANNIE

Maybe he upgraded.

The person that gets out of the car is not Victor, but Veronica. They don't know who she is. But, OFF VERONICA'S SMIRK, she clearly knows them.

VERONICA

Just the two people I needed.

ECKHART

That parking spot is reserved.

VERONICA

I know, but Victor won't be in the office today.

ECKHART

And you know that because...

VERONICA

I am LaMerc's and the station's Media Liason. Veronica Thorn.

JEANNIE

I thought the merger wasn't until the spring.

VERONCIA

Things moved up, Jeannie. But we can discuss this in private, upstairs. Chase is up there waiting for us.

Veronica leads him to the elevators. It's packed. But they squeeze in. Jeannie looks over to Eckhart, for assurance. But it seems he is confused, maybe even worried? She looks forward, scared as the doors close.

STEVEN (PRELAP)

This is Steven Wilcox of K.X.S.D.  
Signing off.

MATCH CUT TO:

16 **FLASHBACK** - INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - NIGHT 16

Jeannie sits in front of the Camera, same expression: spell-bound. STEVEN HANGS UP then WALKS TOWARDS the HOUSE!

JEANNIE

Kelly, can't you land and stop him?

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

The flames would damage the chopper!

JEANNIE

So we just sit and watch?

KELLY THE HELLY (V.O.)

It's all we can do.

Steven enters the house and shuts the door.

Jeannie can't take it anymore. She rips the earpiece out and STEPS AWAY FROM the CAMERA. OUT of the NEWSROOM.

ECKHART (O.S.)

(distant)

Jeannie? Jeannie? Don't leave!

NEWS BROADCAST

DUAL SHOT: Jeannie removing the piece from her headset. In the neighboring frame, the continuing shot of Steven's house on fire. Along with a new MARQUEE underneath: ANCHORWOMAN LEAVES MID-BROADCAST.

The CAMERA in frame PANS over to CHASE, who saves the day with his endearing empathy. Enough to charm you into believing everything is going to be all right.

We PULL OUT...

MATCH CUT TO:

17 **EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

17

...to showing the SAME BROADCAST displayed on a Television from a PAWN SHOP GLASS. Passerbys ignore what's on TV. They're too busy looking down on their phones.

We keep PULLING OUT, even crossing the street, until...ZOOM! A SPEEDING CAR'S TAILWIND nearly knocks us over.

Jeannie, a woman on the verge, grips the steering wheel. Jeannie grabs her phone and tries Steven's cell.

VOICEMAIL.

She hangs up. The SCREEN SHOWS she's tried TWELVE TIMES. She drives faster. She tries again. Thirteenth time's a charm?

Up ahead, the fires from the Wilcox estate. A pillar of purple hazing smoke rises among the darkness.

18 **EXT. WILCOX RESIDENCE - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT**

18

Flames surround the once beautiful home slowly caving in to the wreckage. The Firemen on site neglect the house, work on its borders. To save the nearby homes.

Jeannie gets out of her car. Walks past the NEIGHBORS and other BYSTANDERS entranced by the glow of the hellish light before them. Then, the Bystanders notice Jeannie.

BYSTANDERS

It's the reporter. That's her.

In the same manner of a celebrity sighting, people begin snapping photos, videos, anything to capture the moment.

Jeannie pays them no mind. She grips the gates, peering into the Steve's Home, now a BLAZING INFERNO. Her eyes, flooded with tears, drift upward to the great helicopter in the sky.

Her PHONE VIBRATES. A TEXT MESSAGE from KELLY: GO BACK HOME BEFORE THEY SEE YOU, BABE.



She puts the phone away, her eyes remain upward. WE GET A POV of SOMEONE'S PHONE as

A PAUSE BUTTON APPEARS OVER THE FOOTAGE. The FRAME FREEZES OVER JEANNIE'S FACE....

MATCH CUT TO:

19

**INT. KXSD - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT**

19

The video is embedded into a FACEBOOK POST, which has been shared over four thousand times in the past hour. Reddit, Facebook, Twitter. The posts don't stop.

TRENDING SUBJECTS: #NOWOMANNOCRY, SAN DIEGO REPORTER WALKS OFF BROADCAST. #shitsgettingreal, y'all.

Veronica stands in front of the Projector Screen. Jeannie, Eckhart and Chase sit opposite of her.

VERONICA

One hundred and seventy five  
thousand views.

Eckhart keeps up his poker face. Jeannie, not so much.

JEANNIE

I've gone viral.

VERONICA

And suspended. Effective immediately. Chase will be our temp anchor, unless he wants the job full-time.

CHASE

Sounds like a sweet deal.

Before Jeannie can react, Eckhart takes her hand and calmly looks to Veronica.

ECKHART

You can't do that. Did she let it get the best of her? Yes, but it's a quick fix.

VERONICA

Your responsibility, right?

ECKHART

Yes. She didn't know what was going on.

VERONICA

And you did?

Eckhart is quiet. Pleading the fifth? Veronica looks to Jeannie, searching for an answer.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

You know how much money it takes to keep this under wraps?

JEANNIE

It looks like it's still up there.

ECKHART

Why keep it a secret?

JEANNIE

Because people need comfort, not chaos. And it seemed the person to deliver said comfort was Chase.

Jeannie and Eckhart look towards Chase, who's beaming at the very mention of his name.

CHASE

Thanks.

JEANNIE

(scowling)

Kiss ass.

VERONICA

Now, Jeannie, Chase. Leave. I'd like to talk to Jules. Alone.

Chase gets up and walks out. Head held high. Jeannie, however, doesn't move. Eckhart exchanges a glance with her, smiles. Jeannie gets up to go, reluctantly.

Eckhart scoffs with a light chuckle. Bitches be trippin'.

ECKHART

Our station needs her.

VERONICA

Let's agree to disagree. Since we're past social graces, perhaps you can indulge me.

Eckhart's all ears.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

You enabled Steven's research,  
enough to cause three car  
accidents, a fire that had to be  
contained, and a missing  
helicopter.

ECKHART

You can't pin any of that on me.

VERONICA

I can't. But your text messages  
can. Remember, LaMerc is the city's  
largest phone distributor.

Eckhart gets uneasy in his chair. The smile, long gone from  
his face.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Where's the disc, Julian?

ECKHART

It burned with him.

VERONICA

You can tell that to the  
authorities. They're on their way.

Veronica smiles, even winking.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

I'll give you a head start.

Eckhart gets up from his chair. And storms out.

20

**EXT. WILCOX RESIDENCE - GATE - DAY**

20

Ben's Jeep pulls up to the property. The gate is open, but  
blocked by YELLOW CAUTION TAPE. He gets out, passing through  
the tape.

Before him, the Wilcox Ruins. A smoldering pile of sticks,  
ash, and smoke. Even the gates over him look as condemning as  
the gates of Hell. Abandon All Hope.

Around the gate and the property, several NEWS CREWS stand  
with their cameras focused on their REPORTERS. Each one  
almost finishing each other's sentences like besties.

BLONDE REPORTER

Firefighters couldn't get to the  
house in time...

ANOTHER REPORTER  
...so they fought to protect the  
surrounding homes.

LATINO BLONDE REPORTER  
(in Spanish)  
...There are reports of arson  
turned suicide...

DAPPERS and POLICE OFFICERS are scattered about, taking  
photos, leaving evidence markers.

POLISHED MALE REPORTER  
...As networks witnessed him walk  
into the burning building after  
setting it on fire.

A BULKY POLICE OFFICER blocks his path. He's easily twice the  
size of Ben.

BULKY POLICE OFFICER  
You aren't allowed to be here.

Ben stops, not because of the Officer in his path. But of  
what's past him.

Through the smoke, two DAPPERS EMERGE from the ruins with a  
GURNEY. On its bed, a SINGLE BLACK BODY BAG. News Reporters  
and their Cameramen alike swarm to the two, a STORMING FLURRY  
of QUESTIONS. No bites.

Ben moves past the Officer, as if to join the Reporter with  
questions of his own. When the Bulky Officer grabs him by the  
arm. The jerking force shakes Ben from his dazed state.

BEN  
What? No, no... I work for him!

Despite Ben's resistance, the Bulky Police Officer continues  
to escort him off the property, speaking into his walkie.

BULKY POLICE OFFICER  
(to radio)  
We have a two-oh-one forty here.

BEN  
What?

Three Dappers arrive. The same ones who attacked Steven the  
night before.

TALL DAPPER  
You're coming with us, Mister  
Thorn.

UP ABOVE, the KXSD HELICOPTER gets a bird's eye view of Ben being hauled away by Dappers.

21 **INT. KXSD - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

21

Eckhart stands outside the conference room. He turns his gaze to the TV MONITORS along the wall. The footage cuts out of Steven's ruins to cover Collin Wilcox's anniversary of his death. It happens almost abruptly, as if planned.

"The LIFE and LEGEND." The sluglines say. Eckhart notices follow suit. A virus of lies spreading across networks.

ECKHART

White noise.

His PHONE BUZZES. He reaches for it, reads the

TEXT: BEN'S IN TROUBLE. PINGING U HIS 20. KELLY.

As if he wasn't already in a rush...

PASSING the NEWSROOM and a MAZE of CUBICLES, FOUR COPS STORM THROUGH THEM. CREW and STAFF alike exchange concerned and curious glances.

He GROANS. So much for a clean break. ECKHART walks by an EMERGENCY LEVER. He pulls DOWN.

BRRRING!

PEOPLE GET UP from the CUBICLES, following protocol like well-tended sheep. To their nearest exit. Against the Cop's flow.

Eckhart smiles, so far so good. He turns to walk back to see Jeannie leaving her office, also following protocol. She looks his way to see his hand still on the emergency lever. Her face turns pale. Riddled with a haunting knowing.

Eckhart takes Jeannie's arm and exit through the Fire Escape. Other people take lead and do the same.

22 **EXT. KXSD NEWS - FIRE EXIT - CONTINUOUS**

22

Jeannie and Eckhart travel down the stairs. Jeannie stops but it doesn't stop the Multitudes who continue to pass through.

ECKHART

We can't stop. They're coming.

JEANNIE

Then tell me what I missed?

ECKHART

We're trying to keep you safe. So the less you know. The better.

JEANNIE

You knew...and still did nothing.

ECKHART

We're trying to stop the merger, okay? What Steve died for, what Kelly did. What I am about to do.

JEANNIE

And what is that, exactly?

ECKHART

Protecting you and Steve's assistant. You're all that's left.

JEANNIE

Where is my husband, Eck?

The DOORS SWING OPEN ABOVE. FOUR COPS and Veronica RACE DOWN THE STAIRS. Eckhart shows her the message.

ECKHART

He's our eye in the sky.

He kisses her on the cheek then takes off, weaving his way through the crowd. Small little tears of relief well Jeannie's eyes. He looks up, then joins the rush of people.

Jeannie remains there. Looking at her phone to call Kelly one more time. The Four COPS rush past her, just like everyone else.

One floor above, Veronica watches Jeannie, scheming.

23

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

23

Ben sits in a small, cramped room. A table divides the space between himself and a fuming BLONDE DAPPER. A TALL DAPPER hangs in the shadows.

BLONDE DAPPER

Answer our questions, Mister Thorn.

BEN

Once I get my lawyer.

Tall Dapper smirks, a cruel endearing one.

TALL DAPPER  
That's not going to work here.

BEN  
Then I ain't got shit to tell you.

TALL DAPPER  
Your employer possessed government secrets.

One of the Dappers takes Ben's MESSENGER BAG and opens it.

BEN  
You need a warrant to search my things.

TALL DAPPER  
Not sure if you guessed it by now, but we don't answer to authority.

The Tall Dapper opens the BAG and empties the contents onto the table. A couple NOTEPADS and some PRINTED ESSAYS. All with Ben's name on them.

TALL DAPPER (CONT'D)  
Where's the disc?

Ben shakes his head. Confused.

BLONDE DAPPER  
There's nothing in here but high school term papers.

BEN  
I did research for him.

TALL DAPPER  
On what?

BEN  
Odds and ends. Rise and fall of civilizations. Scientists. He never explained it.

Tall Dapper pinches the bridge of his nose. The Blonde Dapper readies his fist.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You're government officials, right? How soon can I receive unemployment?

Then, the door swings open. Eckhart enters with a briefcase in hand. He's no novice to breaking up the party. He lives for this shit.

ECKHART

Okay, that's enough.

TALL DAPPER

Who the hell are you?

ECKHART

Ben's lawyer. I won't tolerate you interrogating my client into answering questions he doesn't know.

Ben's just as confused as the Dappers. Who is this guy?

Eckhart opens his briefcase and hands him a FOLDER. COPIES of BEN'S 1099, W-2's, and underneath that, ANOTHER FOLDER with "EXPENSE REPORTS" written on the tab.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

It's his employment with the late Steven Wilcox. There's more where that came from.

TALL DAPPER

This doesn't mean....

ECKHART

Next page are expense reports.

The Tall Dapper goes through them in haste. In denial.

TALL DAPPER

His computer searches...

ECKHART

...are his chances to be on Jeopardy. Now, you wanna keep comparing dick sizes, or should I indict you for obstructing his fundamental rights?

The Blonde Dapper opens the EXPENSE REPORT FOLDER. As soon as he opens it...

BANG! A MINI FLASH from within the FOLDER. BOTH DAPPERS are blinded.

Eckhart takes a quick glance to Ben. He's still confused. So many questions just on the tip of his tongue.



ECKHART (CONT'D)

You're just going to sit there? Or you going to follow me?

BEN

What am I doing, exactly?

ECKHART

You're gonna tell the world what really happened to our friend.

Eckhart pushes a Dapper over.

BEN

And my promotion?

ECKHART

How does a couple mill sound for salary?

Ben's silence answers that question. Eckhart then doesn't give Ben time to react as he steps out.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

Great, now blend in.

And with that, Eckhart exits. Ben, dumbfounded, chases after him.

24

**INT. NECTAR HOMES - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

24

Only to find himself in the middle of a commercial real estate office. With Eckhart nowhere in sight. Just a busy flurry of Brokers, Sales Agents, and Assistants pacing about.

Oh there's Eckhart, a glimpse of his hat, waiting by a WATER JUG, shooting the shit, blending in.

Up AHEAD, the ELEVATOR OPENS, DAPPERS spill onto the cubicle floor.

Dappers behind him, Dappers dead ahead. What's a guy to do?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

25 INT. NECTAR HOMES - OFFICE - LATER

25

Any visible EMPLOYEES are somber, with INAUDIBLE MUMBLING and TYPING KEYBOARDS. Ben walks, casually, towards the cubicle maze.

He storms through, trying to blend in with the environment. Anyone passing by, he gives a friendly nod, taking memos from folders and moving them to another, all while avoiding eye contact.

BEN

Shit.

Ben walks into a cubicle, where a LARGE CAT LADY sits at her desk. Just as the Dappers pass within eye-sight, he kneels.

Completely hidden. Around him fabric walls polluted with pictures of cute kittens, cross-stitched-designs of cat playing with yarn. A CAT sleeps on an extra wheelie desk chair.

BEN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Excuse me.

The Cat Lady turns around, surprised to see a new face leaning into her cubicle.

ANGLE - DAPPER'S POV

One Dapper finally turns the corner. No sign of Ben. He growls, pacing around the office floor.

ANGLE - BEN AND CAT LADY

The Cat Lady's eyes are beaming. Ben's eyes look around, as if looking for the bathroom.

CAT LADY

You must be new here. Have you been given the ol' Nectar Homes' welcome?

The Cat Lady gets up and hugs him. Ben recoils.

BEN

Just finished orientation.

(beat)

Where's the bathroom?

CAT LADY

You know, I get that same thing  
after my morning coffee. Our bodies  
love those cycles. You see...

Cat Lady DRONES ON and ON...Ben's eyes peek above the wall.  
She's unaware she is being ignored.

The ELEVATOR is off to the right. Blocking his path, a Dapper  
walks through the cubicles. Down Ben's aisle. Shit.

Suddenly, a FAMILIAR BELL chimes into the air. Ben's head  
pops over the cubicle, out of hiding, like a meerkat, towards  
the elevators. Eckhart waits beside the elevator.

CAT LADY (CONT'D)

...There are those times when you  
just want to...

The DOWN ARROW LIGHTS UP. The door opens and Eckhart enters.  
Ten feet ahead, Dapper, blocking his one way out, catches  
Ben's gaze. He charges right for Ben, who returns to hiding.

BEN

Shit!

CAT LADY

Um, a strong word, but yes.

Ben hesitates, nearly timing the moment. The Dapper is about  
to pass by the Cat Lady's cubicle when...

Ben kicks out the CHAIR in time for it to cause a COLLISION  
between Dapper, chair, CAT. It HISSES in protest. The Dapper  
topples over, crashing onto the thin rug.

CAT LADY (CONT'D)

How dare you interrupt Sprinkles'  
nap!

Ben leaps over him, sprinting towards the now closing  
elevator doors. The Dapper chases after Ben, and every  
employee at Nectar Homes watches his dash for the elevator.

He dives in as the doors close.

ECKHART

Not bad for a trial run.

The elevators close in front of the Dapper.

## 26 INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

26

The elevator opens and Eckhart leads the way, Ben trails behind, checking his surroundings. Businessmen and Women pass by, hardly noticing Eckhart and Ben.

ECKHART

Julian Eckhart. Steve's Producer and confidante.

BEN

So you're not a lawyer?

ECKHART

I got a B.A. in bullshit. Life is all about persuasion.

(beat)

With confidence, you can do anything.

Eckhart moves onward with Ben practically riding his coattails. The sliding glass doors open. A Fancy MERCEDES is parked outside. We've seen this car before...but from where?

## 27 EXT. UTC BUSINESS BUILDING - VALET DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

27

A Valet driver stands at the open driver's side door. Calm, cool, collected, Eckhart turns to flash him a smirk.

ECKHART

Remember, persuasion. Take the wheel, Mister Thorn.

BEN

I've never driven a Mercedes.

ECKHART

Neither have I. Get in, driver.

Ben flashes a surprised look to Eckhart, who hands the Valet driver a \$20.

VALET

Thank you, sir.

Calm, cool, collected, Eckhart winks at Valet and gets in the passenger seat.

## 28 INT. ECKHART'S CAR / EXT. GENESSEE AVENUE - AFTERNOON

28

Ben drives the Mercedes, Eckhart relaxes in the passenger seats, playing with the seat warmer.

ECKHART

It warms and cools your ass? No way!

BEN

You just buy this car?

ECKHART

No. I...borrowed it. Your wife won't mind.

BEN

My wife doesn't drive a Mercedes.

ECKHART

She does now. Or did, rather.

BEN

How do you know my wife?

ECKHART

Let's just say, she's the furthest thing from a warm welcome back at the station.

BEN

She got a promotion.

ECKHART

Yeah, her job is to see that our merger with LaMerc succeeds.

They come to a stop at a RED LIGHT. Eckhart reaches into the backseat.

BEN

Where am I taking you?

ECKHART

Away from here. We gotta get a good distance from the Dappers...

BEN

...Dappers?

ECKHART

Dapper Dans, shadow-op agents. They got big enough egos to make Kanye West jealous. You'll want to avoid them for now.

Eckhart comes back to his seat and sets a BLOODIED MANILA FOLDER on his lap.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

Now that we've been acquainted.

Eckhart hands him the folder. He opens it up to show a DVD. The same one from our Teaser. The RELATIVITY drawing on the jacket cover.

STEVEN (PRELAP)

Who controls reality?

Ben continues studying the Lithograph.

MATCH CUT TO:

29

**FLASHBACK - INT. STEVEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

29

The Lithograph rests above Steven's mantle. Steven stands next to the fireplace, proud.

BEN

This is Escher, right?

STEVEN

Uh-huh.

Ben looks at the Lithograph. Stairs in every which way, with faceless figures moving travelling up, down, cross-ways. Ben shakes his head, giving up.

BEN

The artist?

Steven shakes his head.

STEVEN

(re: faceless figures)

They do.

Ben looks confused by the paradox. Steven draws himself closer to the mantle, where a baseball is perched. He picks it up and tosses it in the air.

BEN

And gravity? Do we control that?

Steven throws the baseball over to Ben.

STEVEN

It's an unspoken rule, much like reality. We know it works. So we accept it. Everything, in a sense, is pure theory.

Ben looks at the ball, as if it holds the answers. But tosses it back.

BEN  
(re: lithograph)  
Like the people on the stairs?

Steven shakes his head and points to the painting once more.

STEVEN  
They're oblivious to it. They go about their business. Ignorant.  
(beat)  
That's what we've become. Blind to what is directly in front of us.

BEN  
So that's what you do? Tell the world that they aren't people on the stairs?

STEVEN  
Our research is about paradigms. Shifting perspectives. Remember Schrödinger's Cat?

BEN  
The cat is both alive and dead?

STEVEN  
Similar. Quantum mechanics. With each choice we make, from choosing between cereal and eggs, we open a new reality.

BEN  
Like Choose Your Own Adventure?

STEVEN  
But what if you could go back. Undo what you started?

BEN  
Now you're talking time travel.

STEVEN  
Again, everything is relative. Time. Space. Reality. It's circular. It can bend.

BEN  
How are they connected?

STEVEN

We go about our lives, but choose to remain ignorant, on our phones, on the news, when we are meant for something more.

Steven tosses the ball to Ben. He catches it. He tosses it back. Steve catches it.

BEN

So my work wasn't about laundering panicked high schooler's money?

STEVEN

You'll learn, everything you researched, was for a reason. It's all here.

Steve points to his head, then to Escher's LITHOGRAPH. Ben studies it some more as if trying to find the answer within the drawing.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

In plain sight.

Steve tosses the ball into the air. It stops, MID-AIR, and floats.

MATCH CUT TO:

30

**EXT. ECKHART'S CAR / EXT. GENESEE AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER**

30

Ben is still looking down. Up ahead, the Red Light turns GREEN. Eckhart nudges him.

ECKHART

Does that look familiar?

Ben looks up and drives forward. Shaking off the memory.

BEN

He just had this hung over his fireplace yesterday.

Ben slams his hands on the steering wheel.

BEN (CONT'D)

Can I get some goddamn answers?

ECKHART

I wish I could. But we have bigger fish to fry.



BEN

Like...

ECKHART

...Like, how 'bout those two  
Dappers behind us for starters?

Ben looks into his rearview mirror, SHIT! TWO SUV's trail  
behind.

BEN

What do they want?

ECKHART

What's on your lap.

Ben grips the wheel and downshifts to pick up speed. The  
Dappers follow close behind.

Ben ROLLS DOWN the WINDOW and HOLDS the DVD out the WINDOW.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

You have a death wish?

BEN

I want answers.

ECKHART

You were around Steven for five  
years. He didn't give you any?

BEN

Whatever he did say, was cryptic.  
Only now did that drawing make  
sense. But what does Escher have to  
do with this disc?

Ben keeps the DVD out the window. Zero fucks given.

ECKHART

Okay, okay! The answers are on that  
disc! It begins there!

BEN

Why do they want it?

ECKHART

So they can keep the truth hidden.

Ben rolls up the window and hits the pedal to the metal.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

If you'd only answered your phone,  
you would have got some answers.

BEN

I'm really bad about keeping my phone on me. Steve knew this.

Meanwhile, the SUV runs a car off the road. Just to get closer to Eckhart's car.

ECKHART

Steve also knew not to go to that warehouse, but he went anyway.

BEN

Maybe he was tired of vague answers too.

ECKHART

He had answers. He was going to go public. But he wanted one more source. He chose truth.

Ben drives dangerously close to the sidewalk. Threatening to scratch the car.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

This morning, you chose ignorance.

BEN

Because of one message? One missed call?

ECKHART

That's all it takes. Now get us to safety and I'll tell you more.

Four hundred yards ahead, he can either turn onto the freeway, or blaze through the red light and possibly collide onto intersecting cars.

Ben begins to merge onto the freeway. There's a CLOSED FOR REPAIRS over the entrance.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

Take the sidewalk!

SWERRVE! The car skids along the shoulder, the passenger side lifts itself onto the sidewalk.

He glides past both the Dappers and the Red Car, running the red light as he makes a clean break at an escape.

Just as he passes the acceleration lane onto the freeway, he steals a quick glance to see...

...two Dappers cars parked on the shoulder, awaiting their arrival. With a spike strip.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

Lucky miss.

BEN

About luck, did Steven's run out?

ECKHART

He died to begin your career.

BEN

Should've written me a letter of recommendation.

ECKHART

Quit sulking.

TWO DAPPER SUV'S MERGE into his lane! The DAPPER SUV blazes through, weaving through possible collisions to gain distance.

As he travels across the overpass, another Dapper SUV merges up the exit lane from the freeway.

BEN

Christ! These guys don't play around.

Ben races up the hill. One of the three SUV's clip the CAR. A CRUSHING THUD! Eckhart flashes Ben a dirty look.

BEN (CONT'D)

Take it out of the estate.

Eckhart's car climbs a hill and makes the first right he sees. The two SUV's follow.

BEN (CONT'D)

So what's in this for me?

ECKHART

Every man's dream. Car chases, espionage... Bond Babes.

(beat)

Make a left.

Ben makes a left to see a gate opening, leading downhill.

At the touch of a button, Eckhart presses a button and FLICK! BLADES come up from the ground. A Dapper SUV speeds up and makes the left, but is blind to see a sign next to the closing gate: DO NOT ENTER! SEVERE TIRE DAMAGE!

POP! The Dapper's SUV comes to a GRINDING HALT. Blocking the path of the trailing SUV's.

BEN WHOOPS and HOLLERS! His first successful car chase escape...and his first brush with death.

ECKHART (CONT'D)

That was too close.

BEN

But we did it.

ECKHART

It's not going to stop them.  
They'll keep coming for me. It's a  
good thing they didn't see you.

Eckhart lights a cigarette. The car drives over some loose dirt and gravel. Eckhart gets out of the car. Ben looks at the sight before him.

31

**EXT. TORREY PINES CLIFFS - AFTERNOON**

31

The Mercedes comes to a stop right along a beautiful viewpoint along the cliffs. Several hundred feet below, the secluded coast.

Eckhart gets out of the car, Ben follows right behind him and looks up at the SUN, it's bright. They stand along the cliffs.

Eckhart kicks a rock over. It bounces off a slope before casting itself over the edge.

Eckhart looks morose. He nods his head before turning back to see Ben. He pulls out a PHONE. On the SCREEN, there's a line with an X.

ECKHART

Sign here.

Eckhart hands the phone to Ben. With his finger, he signs his name on the screen with his finger.

BEN

Why did Steve die? What was he  
hiding?

ECKHART

The funds are allocated to Randy  
Thorn's account...

BEN  
...My brother?

ECKHART  
...The Bank will wire them over  
before five this evening.

BEN  
Why not me?

ECKHART  
Because of your wife.

BEN  
What about her?

Eckhart heads back to the car. Ben grabs him by the arm.

BEN (CONT'D)  
You promised answers.

Eckhart opens his hand, palm facing up.

ECKHART  
You want answers? Hand me the keys  
and get in.

Only Eckhart unlocks the doors. Ben is confused, especially  
as the CAR REVS, but gets in.

Eckhart puts the car in DRIVE. DUST KICKS UP from underneath  
the BACK WHEELS. The CAR CHARGES towards the CLIFF!

BEN  
What are you doing?

ECKHART  
The answer is here.

TIME SLOWS DOWN. Inside the car, Gravity takes a hike as they  
float. Eckhart closes his eyes, accepting his fate. Ben,  
however, is losing his shit.

STEVEN (V.O.)  
Who controls reality?

Ben peers towards the driver's side, falling alongside the  
car is the ROCK. The same one Eckhart kicked over.

A QUICK FLASH of the ESCHER LITHOGRAPH. THEN the ROCK.  
Finally, the FLOATING BASEBALL. A FLASH of the CAR CAREENING  
towards the sandy shore below.

Ben closes his eyes.

BEN

Me.

A QUICK SHOT BACK to the CLIFF. Kicking his foot and seeing the shores below. Then looking up to the bright sun.

CAR. It is merely yards away from touchdown when EVERYTHING STOPS. TIME, like the car is SUSPENDED, mid-air.

ECKHART (PRE-LAP)

Sign here.

Ben follows his direction back to the voice. When he does...

32

**EXT. TORREY PINES CLIFFS - AFTERNOON**

32

Eckhart kicks a rock over. It bounces off a slope before casting itself over the edge.

Eckhart looks morose. He nods his head before turning back to see Ben. He pulls out a PHONE. On the SCREEN, there's a line with an X.

His finger lifts off the screen.

BEN

Dejá vu.

ECKHART

What?

BEN

I was just here.

(beat)

You drive off the cliff.

ECKHART

You made a shift.

BEN

Did I go through time? Some loophole?

ECKHART

You bent reality. You chose...

BEN

...I chose to survive. You can too.

Eckhart shakes his head and opens his palm.

ECKHART

I still have to.

BEN

What if you didn't? What if you  
chose to live?

ECKHART

This isn't my first time in this  
loop, son. Sometimes even farts  
like me just have to accept fate.

BEN

So Steven chose his?

ECKHART

Yes, and now it's time you make  
yours. Starting with that phone.  
(beat)  
Keys.

Only Eckhart LOCKS the DOORS. Ben bangs his head on the  
window. The CAR REVS. He watches it fly off the cliff, Thelma  
and Louise style.

He nears the cliffs, MERCEDES in FLAMES. Like someone started  
a bonfire.

BEN

Oh shit. My fingerprints. FIBERS?  
They'll peg me for sure!

As if in REPLY, ABOVE HIM, the WHIRRING CHIRPS of BLADES  
OVERHEAD! COPS? Ben freaks out, unsure where to run!

Shit no, it's the KXSD CHOPPER! IT COVERS the SUN. A ROPE-  
LADDER COMES DOWN. He hesitates for a BEAT, then begins to  
climb.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE33      **INT. KXSD - PRODUCTION FLOOR - NEWSROOM - AFTERNOON**

33

Veronica leads Jeannie into the empty newsroom. Cameras stand like silent spectators.

VERONICA

Your little video is costing the channel a lot of money.

JEANNIE

Whatever I can do to keep my spot.

VERONICA

I've decided to lean more towards more diversity hires. Chase, it seems, qualifies for the spot.

Jeannie laughs. You gotta be kidding me.

JEANNIE

Then tell them I'm Scandanavian!

A Dapper emerges through the shadows.

SECURITY OFFICIAL

Ma'am, the Helicopter just landed.

JEANNIE

Kelly!

VERONICA

Perfect.

Jeannie exchanges glances with Veronica, who extends her hand out to Jeannie.

34      **EXT. KXSD - ROOFTOP - DAY**

34

Ben holding the DVD with the RELATIVITY JACKET COVER. Still searching for these answers. And still not finding anything.

Next to him is KELLY the Helly. Rugged 30's, near Brawny guy build and look. Also staring at the DVD.

KELLY THE HELLY

This is what he gave you?

Ben nods, albeit in the same daze as earlier.



KELLY THE HELLY (CONT'D)

What's on it?

BEN

I don't know. But those guys were asking for it.

KELLY THE HELLY

Were they from Year Zero? Steven mentioned something like that.

For the first time, Ben laughs. Relief? Kelly's unsure.

BEN

It was his favorite album. He revered Reznor as some hero. Not a day went by when we didn't listen to the album.

KELLY THE HELLY

Doesn't make sense why he kept referencing it.

BEN

Because the album was a warning. About the beginning of the end.

KELLY THE HELLY

Of the world?

Up ahead, the ROOFTOP DOOR opens. Jeannie steps out, tears mixed with relief and anger, seep down her face. Kelly and Ben stand up to greet her.

A couple of steps behind her, Veronica.

Jeannie passes Ben, to go right for Kelly. Before he can even say "Hi Honey..." She SLAPS him.

He looks more shocked than angry, because when he reverts his gaze back. She collapses into his arms.

JEANNIE

Don't ever do that again.

Veronica catches up to complete this menacing reunion. Sees Ben.

JEANNIE (CONT'D)

I called you earlier, Ben. Why didn't you pick up?

BEN

I will do better next time,  
promise.

Kelly looks ahead, to the woman approaching them.

KELLY THE HELLY

Who is this?

JEANNIE

LaMerc's Media Liason.

BEN

My wife.

Veronica kisses Ben on the cheek.

VERONICA

(to Ben)

So we got a helicopter ride?

KELLY THE HELLY

He got stuck on the slopes near  
Blacks' beach.

VERONICA

(to Kelly)

Just taking a little joy-ride?

KELLY THE HELLY

B-Roll of the Wilcox ruins,  
traffic, then rescued your husband.

VERONICA

Thank goodness you did.

(to Ben)

I can drive you back to your car.

BEN

No, I'll Uber it back.

VERONICA

You sure?

BEN

Yeah, I'll be fine. See you  
tonight?

Veronica leans in, landing a wickedly elegant kiss. To Jeannie, it's like kissing a Black Widow.

Kelly, Jeannie, and Veronica walk together, separating themselves from Ben.

Just before they can reach the doors. Six DAPPERS SURROUND Kelly, Jeannie, and Veronica. One of them, Tall Dapper, approaches Kelly. He turns him around, rather forcefully, and grabs his hands. Kelly wriggles in protest.

The Tall Dapper pulls out ZIP-TIES, which fit around his wrists.

KELLY THE HELLY

What are you doing?

TALL DAPPER

You're under arrest for theft and accomplice to acts of terrorism.

JEANNIE

Stop!

VERONICA

You did say you would do anything, did you not?

Jeannie watches her husband be hauled away. One of the Dappers hands Veronica a set of papers.

JEANNIE

But he was just doing his job.

VERONICA

Perhaps, but there's a way you can keep him out of federal prison.

Jeannie hangs on Veronica's word.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Sign. You get to keep your anchor position, and your husband will be placed in temporary confinement. Just until he comes to his senses.

Jeannie starts to read. But something bothers her in the fine print. She looks conflicted, even if for a BEAT, but she looks reluctant enough to sign it.

35

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

35

Curtains sway to the breeze, reaching into the open space of the living room. A CAR'S HEADLIGHTS BEAM ACROSS the ROOM. FRAMED PICTURES of Veronica and Ben in their happier times, their WEDDING DAY, for instance, catch the beam's rays.

36 **EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT** 36

Ben exits his car and drags his feet to the door, burdened.

37 **INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MANCAVE - CONTINUOUS** 37

His Mancave is the finished product at the end of a home improvement show. Big Screen TV, Leather Couch, Scotch Decanter, decked like a muhfuggin' boss.

But none of that matters to him right now. Well, except the Scotch, he bee-lines right to it and helps himself to a generous pour.

BEEP! His PHONE BEEPS. This time, Ben finally answers it. Took him long enough.

He flipped through his MISSED NOTIFICATIONS show 17 missed calls. 19 text messages. 43 e-mails. He starts with his E-MAILS. There's one from STEVEN. He opens it. HTTP://RELATIVITY.TKZ. He clicks the link. And opens to

404: FORBIDDEN GATEWAY ERROR.

Underneath the heading a MAN, a FACELESS ETCHING from ESCHER'S DRAWING, staring upwards at an upside-down staircase. With the words. OH NOES! YOU GOT LOST, LITTLE ONE. GO BACK AND FIND YOUR WAY!

Ben pulls out the DVD from the jacket. On the DVD itself is what we'll later know as a JEWEL WASP. It's wings open, with an EMERALD BODY.

He turns on the TV, his Blu-Ray player, and sticks the DVD into the slot. The SCREEN TURNS BLUE...before...

#### **FOOTAGE - SERIES OF SHOTS**

NOTE: THE FOOTAGE IS GOING TO HAVE STATIC, as if BETWEEN CHANNELS.

- FIRST, FOOTAGE. The CAR CHASE. The DUAL FRAME of JEANNIE. EXPLOSION! which CUTS OUT...

-TO: A JEWEL WASP attacking a COCKROACH. It struggles before succumbing to its predator.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The Jewel Wasp stings its victim twice. One sting disables the front legs, and the other goes into the brain, where it enslaves the roach.

- QUICK CUT. Kids in front of their phones at the table. Their face aglow, but their mind miles away from the conversation.

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

The victim is now enslaved to the Wasp's poison. Bending to its will as it is dragged into the Wasp's burrow.

- A DUAL SCREEN. One side. Jeannie is live in the newsroom. Other Frame: Steven outside of his now burning house. On his phone. He turns to head towards the burning house. Enters.

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

The eggs hatch from within the victim. Restarting the process all over again.

JEANNIE'S FRAME. She removes her earpiece, before walking away from her desk.

BEN

He died for an educational video?

- QUICK CUT - THE DEPARTMENT OF MORALITY INSIGNIA.

- LAST CUT. A website. HTTP://RELATIVITY.TKZ. The STATIC makes it difficult to read.

Ben goes to his computer and goes to his e-mail once again. He clicks the link. The SAME DAMN MESSAGE.

BEN (CONT'D)

Wait a sec.

He types .TKZ in the search bar. The Search Engine pulls up.

RESULTS

NO COMMON ROOT. Seven rows down. There's a suggestion. TKZ is a TOR DOMAIN.

Ben smiles, then opens his ONION BROWSER, the kind that is used to access the DARKNET.

He copies and pastes the same link over to TOR. Only instead of getting the same cheeky line, the page opens to

WELCOME TO PARADIGM, BEN. ENTER SITE.

He clicks the ENTER and his LAPTOP's iSIGHT comes ON! He covers it with his thumb, until he finds a nearby POST-IT.

Then the SOUND of FOOTSTEPS. CRUNCHING LEAVES on the GRASS. JUST OUTSIDE HIS WINDOW.

The BACK KITCHEN DOOR OPENS and SHUTS. He goes to the...

Mancave DOOR. A BASEBALL BAT hangs above the frame, on hooks. He takes it in his hands and creeps out of his office.

He looks down the hall. No movement.

BEN (CONT'D)

Honey?

Still no answer. He moves past the stairwell to turn the corner into...

38

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

38

A SHADOW of a MAN stands with his back to him, holding onto a lighter, as if guiding his way.

Ben stands next to a dinner table, where a bowl of APPLES rests on top. He grabs one and tosses it at the Shadow.

It hits the INTRUDER on the HEAD.

SHADOW

Ow!

Ben knows that voice...then turns on the KITCHEN LIGHTS.

BEN

Randy!

Ben's brother, RANDY, LATE 20's, SCRUFFY, HIPSTER, stands with his hand reaching into the cupboard. Ben sets down the bat.

RANDY (SHADOW)

Still got the pitcher's aim, I see.

BEN

Still never answer when called.  
What are you doing here?

Randy finds a bag of ramen and eats it, seasoning the top with the chicken flavoring.

RANDY

Figured a house call was in order.

BEN

Whatever happened to your gypsy  
freelove caravan?

RANDY

You mean, film crew? We broke up.  
And your white-picket perfection?

Randy opens up his backpack and rummages through it. Pulling  
out a HERB GRINDER and goes to town.

BEN

You're looking at it.

(beat)

So why are you Steven's primary  
beneficiary?

Randy turns around once again. This time, with a BONG in his  
hand. Shit-eating grin on his face.

RANDY

He asked me to come back.

Ben looks confused as ever.

RANDY (CONT'D)

You got greens.

BEN

I have dinner reservations.

Randy offers him the Bong. Freshly packed with some POT.

39

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MANCAVE - NIGHT**

39

Ben and Randy stand in front of the TV, replaying the video.  
Randy smokes from the bong. Ben still can't seem to  
understand the footage.

RANDY

There's something behind this  
video.

Randy reaches into his bag to pull out a banged-up laptop.  
It's got more skateboard stickers than actual casing, maybe  
that's what's keeping it together?

In any case, takes out the DVD and sticks it into his laptop.

BEN

What do you mean?

RANDY

Remember as kids, we'd toggle the TV dial to get a glimpse of the Spice channel?

BEN

Yeah, so?

RANDY

Whoever cut this, used a Dual-Layer image composite. That's why there's static.

BEN

So if you can splice the channels.

RANDY

We can see what's behind image number two.

The FOOTAGE appears on his laptop. A couple quick keystrokes and a WINDOW POPS up. SPLICING. The footage scrubs over the DEPARTMENT of MORALITY EMBLEM.

RANDY (CONT'D)

Does this look important to you?

BEN

Another Nine Inch Nails reference. From his A.R.G.. The department was in charge of a society's overall happiness, trafficked by the media.

RANDY

What's an A.R.G.?

Ben goes over to his computer. He accesses his PARADIGM research, random files, from Schroedinger's Cat to the Suffrage Movement. He opens up the ARG Word document file.

BEN

A.R.G. stands for Alternate Reality Gaming. Think like a scavenger hunt that used various methods to find clues.

RANDY

You think this is what Steve is doing? Hiding secrets?

BEN

(self-realizing)

How else can he hide a trail in plain sight?



Ben takes a BEAT to reflect.

Randy goes over to the TOR Window. To the PARADIGM PAGE. He peels off the Post-It Note over the iSight camera. But Ben stops him.

BEN (CONT'D)

Don't! We could be tracked.

RANDY

Even if it is, you think a Post-It Note is going to stop them?

Ben relents and Randy removes the note then hits ENTER on the page. VERIFYING IDENTITY. The screen flashes. Randy takes off the Post-It, the GREEN DOT to the iSIGHT REVEALS ITSELF.

Ben steps forward. The iSight turns OFF. The WEB PAGE opens and begins printing up documents. Ben collects them.

BING! The FOOTAGE is DONE SPLICING!

RANDY (CONT'D)

You ready?

BEN

It's already done?

Randy hits the Spacebar.

#### **FOOTAGE - SERIES OF SHOTS**

NOW it's a DUAL FRAME. In one frame will be the same footage from before. But now, we have the new footage on the left.

-A MAN stands, bound and gagged. Standing in front of him, Steven.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The Jewel Wasp stings its victim twice. One sting disables the front legs...

Then, from BEHIND, the Man is PISTOL WHIPPED! He falls to his knees. A Woman holds the gun to his head.

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

...and the other goes into the brain, where it enslaves the roach.

Steven tries to inch forward, but the Woman pulling the hammer back on the gun discourages any further movement.

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

The victim is now enslaved to the Wasp's poison. Bending to its will as it is dragged into the Wasp's burrow.

- BANG! A SHOT is FIRED! The Man falls to the ground! DEAD. Steven jumps out the window, breaking the glass.

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

The eggs hatch from within the victim. Restarting the process all over again.

- DAPPERS RUN INTO FRAME and JUMP AFTER STEVE. The Woman turns around. She's on her phone.

It's Veronica.

- Final SHOT. THE SCREEN NOW HAS WORDS: STOP THE MERGER.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

40           **EXT. LOS ANGELES THEATRE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT**           40

A crowd of people lining up outside. ON the MARQUEE: THEY LIVE. FEATURING COMMENTARY by RANDY THORN.

RANDY (PRELAP)

Thank you for coming out. Wake up.  
Don't consume.

41           **INT. LOS ANGELES THEATRE - MEN'S BATHROOM - LATER**           41

A large hall of key-lime green urinals. Seriously, this bathroom looks like it's out of some Kubrick Overlook Hotel backdrop. Randy uses the stall along the far right. Alone.

The SCUFFLING of FEET and CONVERSATION ECHO into the hall.

Steven enters. Randy pays him no mind. You don't make eye contact with other men while doing your thing. Not in this case, at least.

Which stall does Steven choose? Oh, the one right next to Randy. Randy scowls. Of all stalls. Seriously?

Steven does his business. Glancing over to Randy, still looking up.

STEVEN

I have a favor to ask you.

RANDY

Bro, I'm not shaking it for you.

STEVEN

(laughing)

I'm married.

RANDY

So were those guys in Brokeback.

STEVEN

How would you like to make a couple mill?

Randy raises an eyebrow. Still not convinced.

RANDY

And do what?

STEVEN

What you said at the end of the film. You're right. It's time to wake people up. Especially Ben.

RANDY

You know him?

STEVEN

He's my protégé.

Steven flushes, zips up, and exits. Randy hurries himself, flushing and all, to follow after him.

42

**INT. LOS ANGELES THEATRE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS**

42

People with their faces aglow. Not from their movie experience, but off their cell phones. Not talking to each other, per se, unless if you count their text messages and selfies.

STEVEN

Every tweet, viral post, LaMerc planned it all.

RANDY

Right, a cell phone company plans all my selfie moments too.

Steven flashes him a knowing glance. Maybe they do that too. But Randy still isn't convinced.

STEVEN

It's all White Noise. A distraction.

RANDY

Against what?

STEVEN

I haven't quite gotten there yet. But it starts here.

RANDY

(unconvinced)

Nice.

(beat)

And my brother...believes all this?

STEVEN

Guess skepticism runs in the family. You two close?

RANDY

Used to be thick as thieves, until  
he got married.

STEVEN

What happened?

RANDY

There's a reason why I call his  
wife the wicked bitch of the west.

(beat)

What does my job entail?

STEVEN

You're going to be his prime  
investor.

Steven walks away, Randy watches him leave. Curious what he  
means.

RANDY (PRELAP)

It all makes sense.

43

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MANCAVE - NIGHT**

43

Now it's Ben's mouth over the Bong. Smoking it up. To calm  
his nerves.

RANDY

It would explain why Steven has  
your name on the Trust.

Ben blows smoke into the air. His spirits low, but is getting  
the best body high.

BEN

Why didn't he tell me?

RANDY

The same reason why you didn't  
answer your phone.

BEN

Jesus, will everyone get off my ass  
about that damn phone?

RANDY

No, because I was waiting outside  
your house this morning. While you  
were busy playing house with She-  
Devil.

LIGHTS FLOOD the LIVING ROOM.

RANDY (CONT'D)  
Speaking of...

BEN  
Eck drove her car over the cliff.

RANDY  
Do you think she can do the same  
trick you did? Bending or shifting  
or whatever you call it?

Ben panics. Randy hands him the bong.

RANDY (CONT'D)  
Maybe she took an Uber.

BEN  
What do I do? Confront her?

RANDY  
Ehhh. Probably not the best idea.  
She killed one man already.

BEN  
It's our anniversary.

RANDY  
Dude. Bad timing.

BEN  
You're telling me.  
(beat)  
I'm gonna go get dressed.

RANDY  
You're seriously still going?

BEN  
What else can I do? If I don't,  
she'll know, I die. If I tell her,  
I die. Right now, we just keep it  
under wraps.

RANDY  
And what do I do?

BEN  
Read up? We're in this together,  
right?

RANDY  
I got your back.

BEN

Thick as thieves.

Ben exits the room and goes upstairs. Just as the KITCHEN DOOR OPENS OFF-SCREEN.

VERONICA (O.S.)

Honey?

Randy returns the bong back to its spot in his bag. He covers his appearance behind the pages.

VERONICA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ben, is that you?

Randy shows his face. Veronica enters, clutching a nice purse, doesn't look thrilled.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

I thought I smelled bong water.  
Still driving your probable-cause-  
mobile?

RANDY

Yup, can see you are riding the  
cotton pony yourself. On borrowed  
time before the big drought?

Just as she is about to leave, she steals a glance off Randy's laptop. The DEPARTMENT of MORALITY EMBLEM still on the computer screen.

VERONICA

Nice design.

Randy looks to the laptop then back at her. He pulls out his phone and sends out a text message. Veronica inches forward and reaches into her purse.

RANDY

You can find some weird shit on the  
internet.

Veronica pulls out a NAIL FILE.

VERONICA

Some might even argue it was on a  
disc.

Randy sends the message, then finally comprehends what she said. But it's too late. She sticks the NAIL FILE into Randy's NECK.

She gets real close to his ear, femme fatale in action.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Where's Ben?

BUZZZ! BUZZZ! BEN'S PHONE. Next to Ben's computer. They both look at it. Randy falls to the ground, clutching his neck. Veronica grabs Ben's phone. She reads the message and walks upstairs.

Randy writhes on the floor, blood seeping down his neck and onto the floor. He crawls after Veronica, slowly.

44

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

44

Meanwhile, in the walk-in-closet, Ben is busy trying to button up his shirt.

The DOOR OPENS, and he freezes.

BEN

Hey honey? Can you pass me that tie on the bed?

No answer. But he HEARS his PHONE BEEPING.

VERONICA (O.S.)

You have a text message.

Ben stops buttoning, the buttons are out-of-alignment, so it shirks off to one side. He moves out of the closet and turns around the corner to see...

...Veronica sitting there, holding the phone in her hand and a smile on her face.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

It's from your brother.

Veronica reaches into her purse and pulls out a GUN. He looks down to see her hands are covered in BLOOD.

END OF ACT FOUR



ACT FIVE

45

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

45

Ben stands there, shirt button out of place. No pants. If we didn't know any better, this would look like one fucked up Risky Business cosplay.

VERONICA

This'll be a funny story to tell later.

BEN

All this time...

VERONICA

Save me the wax-poetics. Just give me what I want. That disc.

BEN

It's downstairs. Just take it and go.

VERONICA

And the money.

BEN

What money?

VERONICA

There was a Trust fund left with your name. I want it.

BEN

What trust fund?

Veronica pulls the hammer back on the gun, but instead of pointing it at Ben, she points it at her own head.

VERONICA

Do you really want me to wake up the neighbors?

BEN

Please don't do this.

VERONICA

Why not? You're already on a roll. Killed KXSD's producer.

BEN

No I didn't. He killed himself.

VERONICA

Not according to the evidence we can pull up from the wreckage. Forensics ain't nothing like you see on T.V..

BEN

Kelly was there?

VERONICA

Kelly's arrested on account of grand theft of corporate property, do you think his testimony will stand up in court?

Ben is trying to inch himself closer.

BEN

Just put the gun down.

VERONICA

You know what they'll find in this crime scene? Jealous rage. A steamy affair between brother-in-law and lovely wife. All because of some unemployed schmuck.

BEN

You can't pin this on me. You have the gun in your hand.

VERONICA

Maybe you forced my hand.

BEN

All of this is about control?

Veronica nods her head. Then she hears a MUMBLED GARGLE from down the HALL. It's Randy. He leaves a bloody trail as he crawls down. Without hesitation, she fires the GUN!

BANG! BANG! Ben's baby shot him down.

VERONICA

Waking or sleeping. We tell you what to buy. We tell you what to believe. All at the touch of your fingertips.

Ben's gaze is transfixed on his dead brother. Almost in disbelief.

BEN

All for what? Huh? Some company merger?

The SIRENS GROW LOUDER. He falls against the bed. Thinking when

BUMP, BUMP, BUMP! from the FRONT DOOR.

DISTANT VOICE (O.S.)

This is S.D.P.D., OPEN THE DOOR!

VERONICA

It goes beyond that. Much deeper. That is just the tip of the iceberg. Even Steven couldn't find it. You'll see it behind bars.

BEN

But it will end if you die.

VERONICA

(laughing)

You think they would have just one person on this project?

BANG! BEN CRIES OUT! Veronica fires the GUN. Her body collapses, spewing BLOOD and BRAIN MATTER SPRAY across the bed and adjacent walls.

He stands over Veronica's body. Blood floods the bed sheets. The DISTANT SOUND of SIRENS can be HEARD. Time is running out.

He looks to his phone, soaked in blood. The TEXT "SHE KNOWS" flashes again. You know, to rub it in.

The FRONT DOOR SHATTERS! WOOD SPLINTERS FORWARD. TIME DECELERATES. FLASHLIGHTS BEAM THROUGH, cutting into the darkness.

BEN (V.O.)

What if you didn't? What if you chose to live?

ECKHART (V.O.)

Sometimes even farts like me just have to accept fate.

The WOOD CHIPS spin into the air. TIME GROWING SLOWER and SLOWER, until they hang MID-AIR. SUSPENDED.

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

...now it's time you make yours.

The DOOR BURSTS OPEN! A cavalry of Armed-Officers burst through.

STEVEN (V.O.)  
We open new realities.

CUT TO - The PANCAKE. The BURNT SIDE, falls, with grace, back to the pan.

LIGHTS BEAM on BEN'S FACE, who remains resigned. Time still moving slowly.

BEN (V.O.)  
Like Choose your Own Adventure?

Back to PANCAKE. Now it's UNCOOKED PASTY side. It keeps flipping down. Down. Down.

HALLWAY. An OFFICER throws a FLASH GRENADE down the hallway. Ben watches it comes towards him. FLIPPING, SPINNING. CLOSER to him.

MATCH CUT TO a LIGHTER, FLYING into the air.

STEVEN (V.O.)  
What if you could go back?

Ben closes his eyes.

STEVEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Undo what you started?

The WOODCHIPS. The FLASH. The PANCAKE. ALL REVERSE BACK to...

MATCH CUT TO:

46

**INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING**

46

A PANCAKE SOMERSAULTS. One side, uncooked, the other, BURNT. WAY BURNT. It tumbles towards the PAN BELOW, where it lands on its burnt side.

BEN is busy trying to salvage a pan of OVERCOOKED EGGS. He swears under his breath but takes the pan to

a BREAKFAST TRAY, decorated with a miniature vase, a ROSE, some greek yogurt, and a HAPPY ANNIVERSARY CARD. So cute, can't even. He sets the eggs on the dish.

As he does, his gaze is distracted when a nearby

CELL PHONE FLASHES. A MESSAGE from STEVEN. It hasn't been touched for a while, since there's FOUR MISSED CALLS from a RANDY too.

Ben swears under his breath before realizing...HE'S BACK.

He glances at the PHONE. It's a call from RANDY. He picks up the phone and answers the call. Final-fucking-ly!

BEN

You outside?

He walks over to the window above the sink and looks outside and he sees a MINIVAN. SPRAYPAINTED with GRAFITTI. Randy's Probable-Cause-mobile.

Ben laughs to himself. He puts his phone in his pocket. His gaze kept at the

47 **INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - LATER**

47

In front of the vanity, Veronica, dressed in a tight business suit. The MUTED TV, KXSD is covering Steven's house in ruins. NEWS MARQUEE READS: REPORTER ARSON TURNED SUICIDE.

VERONICA

Yes, I'm seeing it. Just in time.

BRRAAAAAAAHHH! A FIRE ALARM COMING FROM DOWNSTAIRS. Veronica opens the bedroom door. Smoke clouds the hallway.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Hey. Let me call you right back.

Veronica hangs up her phone and walks out.

48 **INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

48

The Kitchen is covered in smoke. She reaches for the FIRE ALARM. It's too high to reach. So she grabs a broom and STRIKES IT with the broom's tip until it falls apart.

On the stove, the source of the fire, a BURNT PANCAKE. Like Steven's house, breakfast is the smoldering remains of bacon, eggs, and pancakes. Left within the smoke, the tray, along with the Happy Anniversary card. But where's Ben?

49 **EXT. ROAD / INT. RANDY'S PROB-CAUSEMOBILE - DAY**

49

Randy is behind the wheel. He hands Ben a joint.

RANDY

Where to, partner?

Ben takes a long drag while putting the phone up to his ear.

JEANNIE (V.O.)

Ben. It's Jeans. Something's happened to Steve.

50 INT. KXSD - PARKING STRUCTURE - MORNING

50

Jeannie is in her car.

JEANNIE

His voicemail says we need to stick together. But I fear the station might link me to whatever he was up to.

Jeannie gets out of her car.

JEANNIE (CONT'D)

Just call when you get this.

Just before the message ends, there is a slight, URGENT SCREAM.

51 EXT. ROAD / INT. RANDY'S PROB-CAUSEMOBILE - MOMENTS LATER

51

The CALL ENDS. He deletes the message.

BEN

The News Station. We some friends to save and a story to tell.

Ben smiles, looking ahead at the road before him.

END OF SHOW.