



**UNIVERSAL CABLE PRODUCTIONS**

# CIPHER

“The God View”

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ACT ONE

INT. JUMP PLANE - CIPHER - NIGHT

OVER BLACK. The throaty rattle of a twin engine Beech Super King. Then --

We startle awake. First person POV. An empty jump plane.

We look down at the HARNESS strapped to our chest. A LOCK connects the harness to a TETHER. The tether is connected to the plane.

The plane climbs. We look to the cockpit. The pilot. Maybe he can help.

We get up, staggering as the plane ascends. We pause to look out of the GAPING DOOR. Below the plane, a dark canopy of trees, peppered with lights.

We stumble through the body of the plane to the pilot, gripping his seat to steady ourselves. We look around. Aside from the YOKE, the cockpit is COMPLETELY BLANK.

The Pilot whips around. We'll come to know him as JACK.

JACK

What are you doing? Sit down!

We don't move. Jack shakes his head, incredulous.

JACK

Fine.

We look out the windshield to the SKYLINE in the distance. On the top of one building, a RED LIGHT BLINKS out "Stay away" in morse code.

JACK (O.S)

You ready? Because you don't look ready.

The Pilot nods to the jump door.

JACK

Everything you need is down there.

We look to the OPEN DOOR, and beyond it, all the black to fall through.

JACK (O.S.)

Hey!

We look back as Jack tosses a SMALL KEY we're meant to catch. The key sails past, landing on the floor of the plane.

We dive for it, scrambling to keep the key from falling out the open door. But at the last second, the plane banks to the right. The key begins to slide.

We crawl toward the key, almost reaching it, but it's too late -- we watch as the key falls out of the open door and soundlessly out of sight.

JACK (O.S.)

Tough break.

We look up. Jack's gotten out of his seat. He steps past us and stands in the open doorway of the plane.

JACK

Redline with the door removed is  
205 KIAS.

He grimaces.

PILOT

Good luck.

Jack presses his thumb to the inside of his left wrist as if taking his own pulse and a NANOTECH SUIT spreads from his feet to his head, covering him in a camouflage of STARRY SKY.

He nods to us and then he FALLS BACKWARD OUT OF THE PLANE!

We hold on the doorway, it's empty eeriness. Then we snap to. We look around frantically, desperately yanking on the TETHER, pulling on the LOCK. We're stuck. And there's no one flying the plane.

We jump up, rush to the cockpit and slide into the seat. The tether pulls taut. Our eyes dart around the blank cockpit.

We look out the windshield at the night sky -- punctuated with WHITE PARACHUTES, a smack of jellyfish in the depths. It's a mesmerizing sight.

But then a hand waves in front of our face. Our eyes snap to the co-pilot seat to find a GIRL. We'll come to know her as ANNIE (16, a doe). Where the fuck did she come from?

She leans past us, wiping the air as if cleaning off the windshield from the inside. As she does, ELECTRONIC CONTROLS APPEAR where she wipes. We take in the incomprehensible constellation of lights.

We turn to Annie. She stares back blankly.

ANNIE

We don't hurt things that help us.

We take her in, trying to make sense of who she is, what she is. But then the plane begins to dive...

We grab the YOKE. We're going to have to try and land it. We panic, trying to pull out of it. But the plane starts to ROLL -- The control lights BLUR, a kaleidoscope of spinning as we PLUNGE TO THE GROUND -- AND THE PLANE EXPLODES in a BALL OF FLAME. Then --

A CHYRON BLINKS:

**MISSION FAILURE! MISSION FAILURE! MISSION FAILURE!**

STATS flood the screen. It's then we realize -- we're inside a photorealistic video game called CIPHER. And we've just lost.

CUT TO:

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - NIGHT

ASA BEREK (13, a pup) plays a GAMING DEVICE in bed.

Asa slumps back and closes his eyes, his heart POUNDS LOUDLY in his chest. But then through this beat bleeds another -- TAP TAP TAP. Asa bolts upright.

He looks to his window nervously. The tapping stops. Asa exhales, relieved. It was nothing. But then -- TAP TAP TAP. There it is again.

Asa gets out of bed and walks slowly to the window. His reflection staring back at him in the glass. He gets closer. He can't see what's outside. He leans in slowly, cupping his hands and bringing them to the glass when --

A FACE POPS OUT OF THE DARKNESS!

It's his best friend KYLE (13, mousey) perched on the roof. Asa throws open the window.

ASA

Are you insane? What are you doing on my roof?

KYLE

(re: the gaming device)  
Let me borrow that.

ASA  
You scared the shit out of me.

KYLE  
Come on. Just for an hour. My mom's  
at bible study.

Kyle climbs through the open window.

ASA  
Why didn't you just ring the  
doorbell?

KYLE  
Your dad seemed busy.

ASA  
Doing what?

KYLE  
Some lady downstairs.

Asa rolls his eyes.

ASA  
That's just my Aunt Bridgette.

KYLE  
(ew)  
Aunt?

ASA  
I just call her that. She worked  
with my mom.

KYLE  
Uh huh.

ASA  
What?

Kyle thinks about saying more, decides not to.

KYLE  
Nothing. Your dad's so boring he's  
probably a superhero. So can I  
borrow it?

ASA  
No. I started Cipher. I can't even  
get past the first level. It's  
pissing me off.

KYLE

Give it to me. I'll pass it for you.

ASA

No!

KYLE

How about tomorrow? I'll play during school.

ASA

How are you going to play during school?

KYLE

Don't worry about it.

Kyle climbs back out the window.

KYLE

Just bring it. Do your part to corrupt the religious right.

Asa shakes his head. He shuts the window behind Kyle, the lights once again making the window a mirror.

We HOLD on that REFLECTION, watching as Asa climbs back into bed, picks up the gaming device and begins to play.

And behind the reflection of this scene, night FADES into...

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - DAY

Morning. Asa asleep in bed. Device on his chest. His eyes SNAP OPEN as the front door CLICKS CLOSED. He looks over to the window, far less menacing in the light of day.

He gets up and looks out, watches as BRIDGETTE KELLY (40's, put together even now) gets in her car and pulls away.

Asa scowls, gears turning. His eyes drift down the line of parked cars until he comes to a LURKING MAN sitting in one of them. The man intently watches Bridgette drive away and then his eyes SNAP TO ASA'S WINDOW.

Asa ducks out of sight. Then he covertly peeks back out. But the car is empty. The man is gone. What the fuck?

Asa's looking down at the empty car, trying to shake it off, when there's a KNOCK on the door. Asa jumps, then smiles. He's got to get a grip.

JOHN BEREK (40's, handsome through the defeat) pokes his head in. He wears BOXERS and a FADED PAVEMENT T-SHIRT. He's also the SPITTING IMAGE OF JACK, the Pilot from the videogame.

John eyes Asa nervously.

JOHN

What are you looking at?

ASA

There was a man outside, sitting in his car. He was watching the house.

John relaxes, relieved Asa wasn't clocking Bridgette leave.

JOHN

A man?

John moves to the window, looks out.

JOHN

There's nobody there.

ASA

He's gone now.

JOHN

All that gaming's making you paranoid. How late did you stay up?

ASA

I wasn't playing...

John walks over to his bed, pulls back the covers to reveal Asa's gaming device.

ASA

...all night.

John grimaces.

JOHN

Why aren't you dressed?

ASA

I'm sick.

JOHN

Asa...

ASA

Really.

JOHN  
Have some breakfast.

ASA  
It's a public health issue!

<p>JOHN Last month you had a cold and then there was that rash you swore was contagious and I just feel like maybe... Because you can only miss so many days of school, you know, legally, before... So why don't you go to school and then if you're still not feeling well by lunch then...</p>	<p>ASA The flu starts with one person. ONE PERSON. Patient zero. Do you want me to be patient zero? Is that what you meant when you said I could be anything I wanted to be? Because I don't want to be patient zero, Dad. People hate that guy. History hates that guy.</p>
---	--

JOHN  
You know what? Fine. Stay home.

ASA  
Fine.

John closes the door.

INT. BEREK HOME - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

John pantomimes strangling someone.

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Asa smiles, picks up his GAMING DEVICE. But then the door opens back up unexpectedly. Busted.

John crosses the room and yanks the gaming device from Asa's hands.

JOHN  
All that screen time is rotting your brain. If you're not going to school, you can at least read a book.

ASA  
(innocently)  
All my books are on there.

John shakes his head and hands the gaming device back.



INT. BEREK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Asa pours so much CEREAL into his BOWL it overflows. He scoops up the excess and tries to pack it back on the mound.

John enters, his PHONE to his ear, dressed in a wrinkled PARK RANGER UNIFORM. It doesn't fit, in every sense.

Asa goes to the REFRIGERATOR, stares into it.

John takes a travel MUG out of the cabinet, begins to fill it from a COFFEE POT.

ASA  
There's no milk.

John looks over at Asa and misses his mug. Coffee pools on the counter. He puts the coffee pot down.

JOHN  
Have something else--  
(then, into the phone)  
Hello, yes. I'm calling to excuse  
Asa Berek.

John goes to the sink. It's cluttered with DIRTY DISHES. He rummages half-heartedly for a sponge. Can't find one.

JOHN  
He's not feeling well today, so he  
won't--

John opens the DISHWASHER. It's full. He SIGHS a sigh of single parent weariness and begins to unload the dishwasher.

JOHN  
Sure, I'll hold.

Asa glances to John. Uh oh. Asa closes the refrigerator door and stealthily exits the kitchen.

JOHN  
(not seeing it coming)  
This is he.

John stops unloading the dishes.

JOHN  
How many days this month?

John looks over to where Asa was just standing, but he's nowhere to be found.

JOHN  
Yes, I understand. Today?

John looks at his watch.

JOHN  
It's actually not-- Uh huh. Uh huh.

He covers the phone with his hand.

JOHN  
(whisper yells)  
Asa?

He hears FOOTSTEPS upstairs.

JOHN  
Okay, yes.

He hears FOOTSTEPS rushing down the stairs.

JOHN  
(covering the phone)  
Asa?!

ASA (O.S.)  
I'm feeling much better. Gotta run.  
Don't want to be late.

The front door OPENS.

JOHN  
(into the phone)  
Of course. I'll be there.

John hurries from the kitchen.

JOHN  
Asa?!

INT. BEREK HOME - FOYER - DAY

The front door CLOSES just as John enters. John stands there confused. What just happened?

EXT. BEREK HOME - DAY

Asa rushes from the front door, pulling on his JACKET. As he runs down the block, a CAR ENGINE STARTS UP.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Asa hurries down the block. He notices his shoe is untied. As he crouches to tie it, an OLD CAR creeps up beside him.

INT. BEAT UP OLD CAR - DAY

LURKER POV through the windshield. REVERSE to reveal: a man who looks like he hasn't slept. Call him THE SCIENTIST (30's, Edward Snowden).

The man eyes Asa, then turns and POPS OPEN the latches of a TAN PELICAN MEDCHEST, sitting on the seat beside him. He lifts up a DRY ICE PACK to reveal a STAINLESS SYRINGE.

The man goes to open the car door, but Asa POPS UP. Thwarted, he slumps back down in his seat. We follow his gaze as he watches Asa continue down the block.

EXT. ASA'S SCHOOL - FRONT YARD - DAY

Asa approaches the school. Kyle waits for him on the front steps. He spots Asa and bounds down the stairs.

KYLE

Hey!

ASA

Hey.

Kyle hands Asa a SCIENCE TEXTBOOK. Asa looks at it.

ASA

I could have--

KYLE

Please. You haven't been to your locker in weeks.

ASA

Were they...

Kyle shakes his head.

KYLE

Stairwells 1 and 2 are clear. There's a girl crying in the south hallway. Possibly unrelated. And a vomit situation next to the cafeteria. I thought that might be you.

Asa shakes his head. He looks up at the school, sees only landmines. Kyle looks up at it, too.

KYLE

My parents were right to keep me  
from this hellscape.

Asa nods. His eyes drift down to the stairs. SYLVIA (13 since she was 9), Asa's secret crush, stands there talking to a friend.

Kyle waves a hand in front of Asa's face.

KYLE

Yoo-hoo!

Asa swats it away.

ASA

Stop.

KYLE

You see what her shirt says, don't  
you?

Asa looks down. Sylvia's wearing a "Topple the Patriarchy" t-shirt.

ASA

What about it?

KYLE

You're the patriarchy.

ASA

(not sure what that means)  
I am?

Asa grimaces. Sylvia looks over at Asa and Kyle. What?

KYLE

You should probably stop staring at  
her chest. You look like a psycho.

Asa reddens.

ASA

You told me to!

Kyle laughs.

KYLE

Forget about her. Talk to me about  
Cipher. Did you pass that level?

Asa shakes his head.

KYLE  
(exasperated)  
Give it to me. I've got a sub in  
third period.

Asa thinks for a second, then hands over the GAMING DEVICE.

ASA  
Don't get caught with it.

Kyle shoots him a look. Duh.

ASA  
Kyle, seriously.

KYLE  
Okay, Okay.

ASA  
McHaley'll take it if she sees it.

KYLE  
You think I'm worried about  
Principal McHaley? You've clearly  
never met my mother.

Kyle flashes a winning smile and heads off in another  
direction.

Asa turns toward school, stealing himself to go in.

We PULL OUT until-- A SLAP on the windshield interrupts the  
view.

INT. BEAT UP OLD CAR - DAY

A SCHOOL MONITOR leans into the car's open window.

SCHOOL MONITOR  
If you've dropped your child off,  
please move along.

The Scientist tucks the SYRINGE, hidden inside his closed  
hand, beside his thigh. The school monitor moves on, as the  
Scientist takes one last unsettling look at Asa, standing  
unaware.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. ASA'S SCHOOL - OFFICE - DAY

John shifts uncomfortably in his chair. On the other side of the desk, Asa's guidance counselor, PATRICIA GIBBONS (50's, earnest) reads over Asa's FILE. She glances up at John.

PATRICIA

Nervous?

JOHN

No, uh, I--

She smiles warmly.

PATRICIA

Relax. No one likes to get called in here. We know that. But we need to get on the same page.

JOHN

Sure.

PATRICIA

Poor attendance can be the beginning of a larger problem. One we'd like to keep small.

John nods.

JOHN

Okay.

She takes him in.

PATRICIA

(re: the uniform)

You some kind of security guard?

JOHN

Park Ranger. Out at Balcones.

She nods.

PATRICIA

Beautiful country.

JOHN

It is.

PATRICIA  
Interesting work?

JOHN  
I mostly try and stop people from  
leaving trash all over the place.  
The garbage cans are everywhere,  
but still...  
(trailing off)  
...they can't seem to help  
themselves.

She nods, glancing back down at the file.

PATRICIA  
Other than that, things at home  
are...?

JOHN  
Good. You know, fine.

PATRICIA  
Asa's mother passed away.

JOHN  
Six months ago.

PATRICIA  
And you moved here?

JOHN  
Uh huh.

PATRICIA  
That's a lot of change for Asa.

John nods.

PATRICIA  
And you. How are you fitting in to  
Texas life?

JOHN  
Is this Texas? I thought it was  
Austin.

She smiles, but she's clearly waiting for an answer.

JOHN  
I grew up here. In Texas. Asa's  
mother and I met here. We moved to  
DC a couple of years back for her  
work.

PATRICIA

As?

JOHN

Excuse me?

PATRICIA

What did she do?

JOHN

She was an analyst.

PATRICIA

Analyzing what?

JOHN

Computers.

PATRICIA

Ah. Well the school just wanted to touch base. Make sure there's not an issue we don't know about.

JOHN

Just those things you mentioned.

PATRICIA

Okay.

She closes the file, leans back in her chair.

PATRICIA

You know, I'm a single parent, too. I know how lonely it can be.

John looks away, unable to hold her eyes. But then he pushes it back in the box.

JOHN

My father's here. Just outside of town.

PATRICIA

It's good to have that support. So then, there's no other reason Asa wouldn't want to come to school?

JOHN

Other than being a 13 year old boy?



INT. ASA'S SCHOOL - GYM - DAY

The CRUNCH of a Wes Anderson music cue as we PAN DOWN a line of 8TH GRADE BOYS sitting on a gym class BENCH. Some look 16. Some look 11. Puberty is a fickle mistress. Last in line, Kyle and, finally, Asa watch a basketball scrimmage.

PLAYERS jostle and shoot. Push each other and fuck around.

KYLE

There's a new skateboarding club meeting out in Dripping after school.

ASA

So?

KYLE

It gets you out of gym.

ASA

Like forever?

Kyle nods.

KYLE

But your parents have to sign a waiver.

Asa frowns.

ASA

My dad would have a heart attack.

KYLE

Yeah...

The whistle BLOWS. The Coach looks down the line, spots Kyle.

COACH

Feder, you're in.

Kyle shoots Asa a wary glance.

ASA

Be the change you want to see in the world.

Kyle looks at Asa dubiously. Asa nods supportively. There's a naivety to Asa that's worrisome.

Kyle heads out onto the court as the ball is passed in bounds. Kyle maneuvers to the far side of the basket. No one covers him. He begins waiving his hands maniacally.

KYLE

I'm open! I'm open!

A PLAYER clocks Kyle, and seeing no other option, tosses him the ball. Kyle's eyes go wide as the ball sails toward him. It looks like he's going to catch it, but just as the ball is about to reach him--

TYLER STEWART (13, looks 16) snatches the ball out of the air. Tyler pivots with the ball, throwing his shoulder into Kyle. Kyle goes flying, landing hard.

Kyle looks up at Asa imploringly as the game moves over him and down the court. Asa looks at Kyle and shrugs sheepishly.

EXT. ASA'S SCHOOL - DAY

Asa streams out of school with other STUDENTS. They part to reveal John, across the street, leaning against his car. He's not amused.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

Asa gets in beside John. They both know what this is about. John doesn't start the ignition.

JOHN

So they say you haven't been going to school.

ASA

I have been going. Mostly.

JOHN

Asa...

JOHN

Help me out here. I gave up writing. I took this job. I'm wearing a uniform for fuck's sake. Your job is to go to school and not be a complete pain in my... Wait, what?

ASA

Why did you even bring me here? You hated it here. You didn't fit in. I'm basically destined to be a misfit. Did you know I'm the patriarchy?

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

JOHN

You're not the-- I'm the-- I mean, look at the-- You have to go to school.

ASA

Then I want to join a club.

Asa pulls out the SKATEBOARDING CLUB WAIVER.

JOHN  
That's a great idea.

John takes the paper, looks at it.

JOHN  
Wait. Skateboarding? No. Not happening. Too dangerous. Just no. I can't... You can't.

ASA  
Instead of gym. It meets in Dripping Springs. I can take the bus there. It means I don't have to go to gym.

JOHN  
Try something that doesn't require a helmet. Because that's a pretty clear sign that it's, like, super dangerous.

Asa shuts down, turns toward the window.

JOHN  
We're late for dinner at grandpa's. We can talk about this later if you want.

Asa doesn't look at him.

ASA  
What's the point? You've already made up your mind.

John opens his mouth to say more, but then stops. He turns toward the road. Then he starts the car.

INT. HAL'S RANCH - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

John, Asa and HAL BEREK (70's, real Texas) sit around a 70's dinner table. Orange vinyl seats that spin. Formica top.

Asa and John silently chew. Hal clocks the tension between them.

HAL  
You know I can get this amount of chatter from the cows out there.

John helps himself to more peas. Asa pushes his food around.

HAL  
Alright. What is it?

JOHN  ASA  
He wants to join the                                He wants me to live in a  
skateboarding club at school                        bubble for the rest of my  
to get out of doing actual                        life.  
physical exercise.

Hal chuckles, shakes his head.

                                HAL  
Skateboarding, eh? Did you show him  
the scar?

Asa looks to John, confused.

                                ASA  
The scar?

                                HAL  
Now, football. There's a sport.  
Genius over here used to  
skateboard.

Asa looks to John, surprised.

                                ASA  
You did?

                                HAL  
Never much understood the  
attraction. Hard enough to stand up  
in this world, you want to go and  
put wheels under your feet?

                                JOHN  
Have you seen what football does to  
your brain?

Hal reaches over toward John's chin.

                                HAL  
13 stitches.

John moves his head out of the way.

                                ASA  
I thought you got that scar--

                                HAL  
Or was that from the fight?

                                ASA  
You were in a fight?!

Hal gives Asa a wink that says he'll tell him later.

JOHN

Thanks, Dad. Really. Big help. Skateboarding is dangerous. Try theatre. Or something in the STEM family we've been hearing so much about.

ASA

That's not fair.

JOHN

(tired)

What about the last year made you think life is fair?

Asa darkens, looks away. They both sit there sullenly a beat, stewing in it. Hal looks between them.

HAL

Asa, there's a heifer out in the barn. Just started to freshen. Go and see if that calf's headed our way.

Asa nods, glad to have an excuse to get away from his father. He exits.

John throws down his napkin, mad at himself. Hal sits back in his chair, takes him in.

HAL

You and Asa never used to bicker like this.

JOHN

Welcome to the new normal.

Hal raises his eyebrows.

JOHN

What? I'm screwing this up.

HAL

Well, now, maybe?

John looks at him aghast, not the response he was expecting.

HAL

How the hell do I know. Because you turned out so great?

John smiles, rolls his shoulders, trying to relax.

JOHN

I thought coming back here would be good for us.

Hal chuckles.

HAL

You didn't exactly love it here.

JOHN

I guess I thought moving here would give us space to figure out who we are now, without her.

HAL

Listen, I love having you close.

He points to the cattle out in the chute.

HAL

But a wide open path only makes the cows more afraid. You can taste it in the meat. Take a hard line with Asa. Let him know you're in charge. He'll fall in line.

OFF John, maybe his father's right...

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - BARNYARD - NIGHT

Asa steps out of the barn and latches the barn door. A gate CREAKS in the distance. Asa freezes. He looks over his shoulder. The EXPOSED BULBS of the yard lights flicker and wane, peppered by a halo of frantic insects.

The wind picks up. The gate blows OPEN and CLOSED. Asa exhales, relieved. It was just the gate. He turns and walks toward the house, but then the GRAVEL SHIFTS.

Asa stops. IS SOMEONE THERE? A train's AIR HORN sounds in the distance. He looks to the safety of the glowing house, so far away in the dark. Then back at the foreboding Texas scrub. Silence.

JOHN (O.S.)

Asa! Let's go!

The screen door SLAPS against its frame.

Asa takes one last look into the unknowable dark. Then he turns and RUNS back to the house.

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - HOUSE - NIGHT

John stands on the porch. He notices the look on Asa's face.

JOHN  
What is it?

ASA  
There's something out there.

John looks out, grimaces.

JOHN  
Do you want me to take a look?

Asa glances out toward the fields nervously.

ASA  
Let's just go.

Asa pushes past John and goes inside.

But John doesn't follow. He scans the darkness, unsure.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. BEREK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Asa sits at the kitchen table eating breakfast. The TV's on. It plays FOOTAGE of a simulation of two satellites colliding. It cuts back to a NEWSCASTER (40's).

NEWSCASTER

Still no official cause of the collision earlier this year between Russian and US satellites.

John enters. Asa stares straight ahead.

NEWSCASTER

The satellites were part of a global mobile communications system owned by an international consortium spearheaded by Petrichor.

JOHN

So now you're not talking to me?

Asa keeps eating, ignoring him.

NEWSCASTER

Now Petrichor's CEO Elias Spencer is claiming--

John reaches across and turns off the TV. Asa finally looks at him.

JOHN

Listen, sometimes you're going to hear the word no. And you're going to have to be okay with that.

ASA

(changing the subject)  
Why is Aunt Bridgette in town again?

John shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

JOHN

Business. There's a field office here.

ASA

I saw her leave in the morning.



JOHN

It was late. She didn't want to drive back to the hotel.

ASA

She could have just taken an--

JOHN

What is this about, Asa? You want to make the decisions now? Well, it's not going to work that way. I'm in charge. And you should go ahead and get used to that.

John stands.

JOHN

Now get ready for school.

John exits. Asa stares at the door, fuming. He takes out the SKATEBOARDING CLUB WAIVER and looks at it. Then he picks up a PEN and forges John's signature.

INT. ASA'S SCHOOL - SCIENCE CLASS - DAY

The bell RINGS. Asa takes a seat next to Sylvia.

MR. BOYER (50's) weaves through the desks handing back tests.

Tyler Stewart enters just after the BELL, slides in behind Asa.

Mr. Boyer places a test face down on Asa's desk.

MR. BOYER (O.S.)

Today we begin our unit on thermodynamics.

Asa picks it up and looks at his score. A 72. He slides it under his notebook.

SYLVIA

How'd you do?

ASA

86.

MR. BOYER (O.S.)

Please open your textbooks to page 47.

ASA

You?

SYLVIA

I did ok.

ASA

(awkwardly)

I could tutor you, if you want.  
We're lab partners, so it's kind of  
like we're a team.

MR. BOYER (O.S.)

The main goal of physics is to  
understand how the universe  
behaves.

Sylvia holds up her test. She got a 96. Asa reddens.

ASA

Go team.

Sylvia smiles.

MR. BOYER

Asa? Would you like to explain it  
to us?

Asa looks around, at a loss. He has no idea what was just  
said.

TYLER

(through a cough)

Idiot.

MR. BOYER

Folks, this is complex stuff. And  
if you're hoping to ace the quiz  
this Friday...

The class GROANS.

MR. BOYER

...you're gonna have to start by  
paying attention.

EXT. JUSTINE'S PATIO - DAY

John waits at an outside table. Bridgette slides into the  
seat across from him.

BRIDGETTE

I'm late.

He smiles.

JOHN  
(warmly)  
You're always late.

BRIDGETTE  
I know, I know.

She scans the menu. He studies her.

JOHN  
Asa suspects something.

She looks up.

JOHN  
About us. He knows we're having an affair.

Bridgette looks away, biting her tongue.

JOHN  
(as apology, but pained)  
But I'm not having an affair.  
Because I'm not married anymore.

BRIDGETTE  
Right.

They both avert each other's eyes, awkwardly, not sure what to say.

JOHN  
I'm sorry.

BRIDGETTE  
Don't apologize. She was your wife.  
She was my best friend. She's in  
this. Even if you're not,  
technically, married.  
(beat)  
Maybe it's time we told Asa.

JOHN  
(uncomfortable)  
I don't know. He's having a hard  
time at school. I need to figure  
out what's going on before I bring  
an outsider into it.

She blanches, hurt.

BRIDGETTE  
If I'm outside it's because you've  
kept me out here.

John darkens, a gift for making things worse.

JOHN

I know.

BRIDGETTE

I'm sorry. Really, it's okay. I'm just hungry.

JOHN

No, it's not okay. It's just that, well, 13 year-olds are sociopaths. You can't talk to them like an adult. But heaven forbid you treat them like a child.

He stops talking. Her mind's clearly on something else.

JOHN

What?

BRIDGETTE

I didn't want to bring this up.

JOHN

What?

BRIDGETTE

He thought I should mention it in case...

JOHN

Who?

BRIDGETTE

Speck.

John let's that sink in. Fucking Speck.

JOHN

Jesus.

She pulls a FILE out of her bag and takes out a PHOTOGRAPH.

BRIDGETTE

Have you seen this man before?

John looks down at the photograph. It's THE SCIENTIST -- the same man we saw earlier WATCHING ASA.

CUT TO:

EXT. SKATEPARK - PARKING LOT - DAY

The Scientist sits in his car, window rolled down. He's in the parking lot of a skateboard park -- a network of BMX ramps and skateboard half-pipes whizzing with KIDS.

His eyes dart around the park until they land ON ASA, climbing up a WOODEN LADDER.

EXT. SKATEPARK - HALF-PIPE DECK - DAY

Asa climbs on top of a half-pipe. He looks around nervously, taking in the view. KIDS jostle to get around him and drop in.

A hand waves in front of his face. Asa turns to find Sylvia.

SYLVIA

When'd you join the club?

ASA

It's my first day.

SYLVIA

Newbies have to check in over there.

She points to a group of little kids standing on their decks in the grass. Asa blanches. There's no coming back from her seeing him skate with little kids.

ASA

Not my first day skating. My first day here. At the club.

Sylvia brightens, relieved.

SYLVIA

See you on the other side then.

Sylvia drops in and skates away. She's good at this.

Asa immediately tries to bolt for the ladder, hoping to climb down the half-pipe before Sylvia finds out he can't skate. But when he gets to the top and looks down, Tyler Stewart is climbing up.

He looks back to the ramp. Trapped. He's going to have to drop in. He weighs his fate as Tyler gets closer. And just as Tyler ascends the top rung of the ladder, Asa GOES FOR IT.

For one lucky moment it's GLORIOUS... But then his DECK SHOOTs OUT FROM UNDER HIS FEET and ASA GOES FLYING. He lands with a final bone-cracking THUD.

ON TYLER as his eyes widen with concern... as a CROWD surrounds Asa's splayed out body.

THE SCIENTIST (O.S.)  
Make some room. I'm a doctor.

The crowd parts and a face appears, blocking out the sun overhead.

Asa blinks his eyes, trying to focus -- IT'S THE SCIENTIST.

JOHN (PRELAP)  
Who is he?

EXT. JUSTINE'S PATIO - DAY

John looks at Bridgette, confused. The photograph lays between them.

BRIDGETTE  
A researcher that used to work for us.

JOHN  
Why would the NSA think I'd seen one of its researchers?

Bridgette hesitates.

BRIDGETTE  
I can't say anything else. You know that.

John shakes his head.

JOHN  
I'm done with all of this.

BRIDGETTE  
This is exactly why I didn't want to ask you. I told Speck--

JOHN  
Speck? You tell your boss that I'm done with--

BRIDGETTE  
I will. He knows.

John looks away, gears turning.

JOHN

But I still don't get it. Why would  
Speck think he'd come looking for--

BRIDGETTE

(to shut him up)  
He's looking for me.

JOHN

And they know we're together.

BRIDGETTE

You'd be surprised what they know.

JOHN

No, I wouldn't.  
(a beat, then dawning)  
Should I be worried about you?

Touched, she takes his hand.

BRIDGETTE

He's just a crackpot looking for an  
audience.

JOHN

Ok.

BRIDGETTE

Don't do anything brave.

JOHN

That doesn't sound like me.

BRIDGETTE

Don't do anything stupid, either.

John smiles, relaxes.

JOHN

That I can't guarantee.

Bridgette smiles, relieved.

BRIDGETTE

Now can we just order? I'm  
starving.

Bridgette looks down at the menu.

OFF JOHN, his face creased with concern...

EXT. SKATEPARK - DAY

SOLAR FLARES and a MOVING BLUR. Asa begins to come to. The Scientist comes in and out of FOCUS. Light GLINTS off something metallic in his hands. Then an ICEPACK is pressed to the back of his neck.

Asa wakes up. He's laying under a tree. He struggles to sit up, looks at the icepack.

SCIENTIST

Take it easy.

Asa rubs the back of his neck near the base of his skull. He lays back down.

ASA

Did I pass out?

The Scientist nods.

THE SCIENTIST

You might have a headache for a day or two. But you'll be fine.

Sylvia approaches hesitantly. The Scientist clocks her coming, looks to Asa.

THE SCIENTIST

I've got to go. You take care of yourself.

He heads quickly away as Syl steps up.

SYLVIA

You okay?

Asa nods, sits up.

SYLVIA

What am I going to do with you?

Asa looks up, is she flirting?

SYLVIA

See you tomorrow?

Asa smiles, watches her walk away, then he looks down at his WATCH. Shit. He's late. He gathers his BACKPACK and JACKET and rushes past--



INT. SCIENTIST'S CAR - DAY

The Scientist sits in his parked car. He watches Asa run off.

INT. BEREK HOME - FOYER - NIGHT

Asa rushes in the front door. John comes out of the kitchen, wiping his hands on a KITCHEN TOWEL.

JOHN

Where have you been?

ASA

Sorry. I lost track of time.

JOHN

Doing what?

ASA

I went to the library with Kyle.

JOHN

That's strange. Kyle just dropped that off for you.

John points to the GAMING DEVICE sitting on the entry table. Asa glances over, can't tell how busted he is.

JOHN

You know you're not supposed to have that thing at school.

ASA

(making it up)

That's why I asked him to drop it off here.

JOHN

Uh huh.

John watches Asa bound up the stairs, suspicious.

INT. JUMP PLANE - CIPHER - NIGHT

Back inside the game. But now Asa is playing third person POV.

Asa stumbles through the body of the plane to Jack. Jack reels, turns around.

PILOT

What are you doing? Sit down!

Asa doesn't move. The Pilot shakes his head, incredulous.

PILOT  
Fine. You ready? Because you don't  
look ready.

The Pilot nods to the jump door.

PILOT  
Everything you need is down there.

The Pilot tosses Asa the SMALL KEY. But this time, Asa catches it.

Asa smiles, holding the key in the palm of his hand. He reaches to unlock the tether when his WHOLE BODY GOES SLACK, a marionette whose strings have been cut. He's no longer being played.

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - MORNING

Asa clutches his head as PAIN SHOOTS DOWN THE BACK of his neck. His whole body tenses around it. Then as quickly as it came -- the pain subsides. Asa lays back, breathing heavily.

John opens the door.

JOHN  
You're still in bed? It's late.

ASA  
I don't feel well.

JOHN  
You're going.

ASA  
I swear this time. I think there's  
something wrong.

JOHN  
You're going to school. Get your  
stuff. End of discussion.

John closes the door, and the conversation.

INT. ASA'S SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Asa shuffles through the cafeteria line. He grabs a PLATE OF FOOD and sets it down on his TRAY. Asa turns, scanning the room for a seat when PAIN SHOOTS THROUGH HIS HEAD, sudden and debilitating. He DROPS the tray. The PLATE SHATTERS.

The cafeteria ERUPTS IN APPLAUSE. Asa drops to the floor and gathers the broken dishes, salvaging what he can. He gets to his feet and takes a seat next to Kyle.

KYLE  
You look like shit.

ASA  
I feel like shit.

Asa pulls up his pant legs, shows Kyle his BRUISED LEGS.

ASA  
Skateboarding club.

KYLE  
Oh, I know.

Asa frowns. How?

KYLE  
It's all over school. Some kid I don't even know played me a video of you biting it.

Asa shakes his head, covers his eyes with his palms.

KYLE  
You're trending on Reddit. And not like a cat video. Like those videos where someone takes it in the sack. Hard.

Asa shakes his head.

ASA  
Great.

INT. BALCONES FOREST PRESERVE - RANGER OFFICE - DAY

John sits at a DESKTOP with a SEARCH ENGINE up on the screen. He types in: Renee Berek.

He looks at the results. He clicks on a link that reads "1 Dead in Early Morning Car Accident."

A PHOTO of a mangled car appears. John blanches.

MEG LARKIN (early 30's, earthy, no bullshit) enters, carrying a CASHBOX.

John clicks the window closed.

MEG

Hey.

JOHN

Honor box?

Meg nods. She sets down the box, takes out a stack of CASH.

MEG

\$20 for the honor of killing doves.

JOHN

The bird of peace.

Meg puts the money in a BANK BAG, puts it under the counter.

MEG

It's really just a glorified  
pigeon.

Distracted, John looks out the window behind her at a FAMILY walking past. The MAN carries a TODDLER on his shoulders. The toddler's small hands grip the man's ears like handles.

Meg turns and follows his gaze.

MEG

Haven't seen Asa in a bit. How's he  
doing?

JOHN

(weary)  
I don't know.

MEG

Wanna talk about it?

John shakes his head.

JOHN

I'm tired of talking.

John watches the family walk away, an idea forming.

EXT. ASA'S SCHOOL - DAY

Asa exits school to find John waiting for him again.

ASA

I'm here at school. Just like you  
ordered.

JOHN  
Get in. I want to show you something.

ASA  
Where are we going?

JOHN  
Hiking.

Asa groans.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Come on. It'll be fun. You remember fun, right? That thing you used to have with mom?

Asa rolls his eyes.

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - WOODS - DAY

John walks with determination down a trail. Asa lags behind.

JOHN  
I used to come out here all the time when I was your age. Sometimes I'd tell your granddad I was hunting and I'd sit in a deer blind and read comic books. I'd even fire into the air once in a while just to make it seem legit.

ASA  
Can we go back to grandpa's?

JOHN  
You're not even giving it a chance.

ASA  
I'm not feeling well.

Asa walks sullenly behind him.

JOHN  
Come on. It's over here.

Asa falls behind. He looks up at the sky, squinting. He's begun to get a little dizzy. He closes his eyes and we --

FLASH OVERHEAD -- Asa and John walk through the woods -- specks in a maze of trees. A GRID PATTERN is SUPERIMPOSED over the shot. Some squares of the image are blank.

As they walk, the squares FILL IN as if Asa's collecting data as he walks through the woods.

ASA

Dad I--

Asa's upturned face CONTORTS IN PAIN.

John doesn't notice. He's excited to let loose, to share something from his childhood with Asa.

JOHN

Check this out.

John approaches a barely visible triangle-shaped hole in the ground, covered by LEAVES and SLABS OF LIMESTONE.

He parts the ground cover and starts climbing down INSIDE THE HOLE, grinning. He doesn't notice Asa's grown VERY PALE.

JOHN

This area is full of underground caves. Some of them even have waterfalls.

We FLASH again to the OVERHEAD SHOT, but now there's TOPOGRAPHIC LINES over the image. Asa's jaw clenches.

ASA

DAD! I want to go back to the car.

John stops climbing. He frowns.

JOHN

Okay...

John climbs out and walks brusquely past Asa.

ASA

(feebly)

Dad.

His feelings hurt, John keeps walking.

JOHN

I just thought... maybe we could have some fun for a change.

John stops walking, at a loss.

JOHN

I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to be everything.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Your mother was the current, you know? All those years, we just floated along in it... Does that make sense?

John turns back to look for Asa. But when he turns around --  
ASA'S BODY LAYS CRUMPLED ON THE TRAIL!

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Bridgette rushes down the hospital corridor, her face creased with concern. At the end of the hall, John sits with his head in his hands. He looks up at her, anguished.

JOHN

He said he was sick. I didn't believe him.

They embrace.

BRIDGETTE

Can I see him?

John nods. They enter...

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - ASA'S ROOM - DAY

Asa looks up, then puts down his GAMING DEVICE.

BRIDGETTE

Hey.

ASA

Hey.

Bridgette takes a seat at the end of the bed.

BRIDGETTE

How are you feeling?

ASA

I don't know. I don't really remember what happened. I guess I passed out.

Bridgette nods. The DOCTOR enters, interrupting. John steps forward eagerly.

DOCTOR

The bloodwork's back.

John glances at Asa, worried.

DOCTOR

Results are normal.

John relaxes. He searches the doctor's face.



JOHN  
That's good, right?

DOCTOR  
Yes, it's good. But it doesn't give us much to go on. Asa, can you tell me anything else about when the headaches began? Anything it all. It could help.

They turn and look at Asa. Asa darkens with guilt.

ASA  
There is something.

Asa looks to John nervously.

ASA  
Yesterday, I went skateboarding.

JOHN  
Asa!

ASA  
I know I shouldn't have, but I tried skating the ramp. And I fell.

JOHN  
This is exactly what I was afraid of.

ASA  
I know. But the doctor said--

JOHN  
There was a doctor there?

Asa nods.

ASA  
He said I'm fine. That I might have a headache for a couple of days, but that's all. I guess I hit my head when I landed or something.

DOCTOR  
Where did you hit your head?

ASA  
Here.

Asa points to the base of his skull.

ASA

You can watch the whole thing on video if you want. You're probably the only person who hasn't seen it.

DOCTOR

I think it would make sense to do an MRI at this point. It's probably just a mild concussion, but I'd like to rule out anything else.

John nods, worried. Bridgette looks to Asa.

BRIDGETTE

Skateboarding, eh?

Asa nods sheepishly. Bridgette tugs on Asa's toes through the blanket.

BRIDGETTE

(sotto voce)

Your mom would've loved that.

Asa smiles.

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - ASA'S ROOM - DAY

Bridgette comes back in with COFFEE, sets it down. John's on his PHONE.

BRIDGETTE

Did they take Asa?

John nods.

BRIDGETTE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JOHN

Looking for that video.

BRIDGETTE

Don't torture yourself.

JOHN

(can't help it)

Found it.

Bridgette steps up beside him. They watch as...

EXT. SKATEPARK - CAMERA PHONE FOOTAGE - DAY

Cellphone camera footage from a distance. The camera PANS, finds Asa. Asa drops in. Asa falls mercilessly to the ground.

VIDEOGRAPHER (V.O)

Oh shit!

Kids GROAN, some LAUGH.

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - ASA'S ROOM - DAY

John looks to Bridgette, sick to his stomach.

JOHN

Jesus.

Bridgette looks back down at the phone. The video continues.

BRIDGETTE

Wait. Go back.

John scrubs the footage back.

EXT. SKATEPARK - CAMERA PHONE FOOTAGE - DAY

Asa falls, then -- A MAN moves quickly past the phone. He bumps the VIDEOGRAPHER'S ARM. The camera SHAKES.

VIDEOGRAPHER (V.O.)

Dude.

The man glances back at the camera. He doesn't apologize. It's the Scientist, walking quickly toward the CROWD that's formed around Asa.

THE SCIENTIST

Make some room. I'm a doctor.

The Scientist disappears into the crowd.

BRIDGETTE (O.S.)

Rewind it.

The footage scrubs back. The Scientist glances back at the camera.

BRIDGETTE

Freeze.

We HOLD on the Scientist's face. John looks to Bridgette, confused.

JOHN

Is that the man in the photograph  
you showed me? What was he doing--  
You said he was a researcher.

BRIDGETTE

He is.  
(distracted)  
What else did this kid post?

John scrolls through the kids feed, plays the next  
SKATEBOARDING VIDEO.

BRIDGETTE

Fast forward.

They scrub through the video.

BRIDGETTE

Next one.

John brings up the NEXT VIDEO.

JOHN

What are we looking for?

The angle of the camera shifts and Asa and the Scientist  
appear in the background.

The Scientist leans over Asa. There's a GLINT and then the  
Scientist pockets something. He pulls out an ICEPACK and  
applies it to the back of Asa's head.

JOHN

It looks like he... Did he just  
inject my son with something?

Bridgette walks over to the bed, presses the HELP BUTTON.

BRIDGETTE

You need to stop the MRI.

JOHN

What? No.

BRIDGETTE

Listen to me.

JOHN

What was he researching?

BRIDGETTE

Technology designed to be implanted  
in a biological system.

JOHN  
Implanted...

BRIDGETTE  
And Asa's getting an MRI right now.

JOHN  
If he has something inside him...

Bridgette looks back at him, afraid.

JOHN  
What's it going to do?

EXT. WHITE OUT - DAY

STATIC. Like on a TV whose broadcast has ended. MUSIC PLAYS. The same song as before, but now a RELENTLESS BEAT drones on beneath it. The MRI machine as EDM.

Then we see something. This isn't static at all, but a blizzard. White out conditions. Barely visible through the haze, a WHITE SNOWSUIT. It's Asa. His frightened face, a speck in the static. He's running for his life.

The camera DARTS and ZOOMS, following his frantic scrambling. He STUMBLES to the ground -- nowhere to hide -- he turns to face whatever it is that's chasing him and we finally see what he sees -- what he's so afraid of -- it's not snow at all, but a SCRIM of NAILS, sailing toward him.

Asa looks around frantically -- desperate to stop them. But there's nothing to hide behind. He squeezes his eyes shut -- and the FUR surrounding his hood BURSTS INTO FLAMES -- illuminating his face in a HALO of light --

And THE PINS STOP. They hover there -- inches from his face -- suspended in the PLANE OF WHITE. Asa slowly opens his eyes. He looks around -- marveling at what he's done. What he's capable of.

Then the pins FALL AROUND HIM -- surrounding his body like Our Lady of Guadalupe. We HOLD here on our reluctant saint, before we SNAP TO BLACK.

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - MRI ROOM - DAY

Asa slides out of the MRI machine. MUSIC CONTINUES through his headphones, but the relentless beat is gone. He gazes up at the fluffy clouds of the SKY PANELS covering the overhead lights. And for a minute, it's lovely.

But then a TECHNICIAN's head appears in the sky, blotting out the clouds. He removes the headphones and the music FADES.

TECHNICIAN

Sorry about that. We seem to be experiencing some kind of technical problem with old Mira here.

ASA

Mira?

TECHNICIAN

That's what I call her.

The Technician wheels over the wheelchair.

TECHNICIAN

Probably just a glitch. I'll have them take you back to your room. See if we can get you scheduled on another machine.

Asa gets off the table and takes a seat. As the technician wheels him away, Asa glances back at the machine, guiltily.

ASA

Sorry, Mira.

INT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - ASA'S ROOM - DAY

The nurse enters, interrupting the bloom of panic in the air.

NURSE

It'll be just a minute. They're bringing Asa back from radiology now.

JOHN

Is everything okay?

NURSE

There was a problem with the machine during the test. We're going to have to reschedule.

The nurse exits. John sighs, relieved. He looks back at Bridgette, clocks the look on her face.

JOHN

What? That's good.

Bridgette doesn't respond, she's lost in thought.

BRIDGETTE

We've got to get Asa out of here.

JOHN

What? Why?

BRIDGETTE

The MRI. Asa might have... stopped it.

JOHN

(confused)

Stopped it?

Bridgette goes to the closet, starts taking out Asa's things.

JOHN

I don't understand. You heard the nurse. The machine malfunctioned.

BRIDGETTE

Maybe it didn't.

JOHN

What are you talking about?

BRIDGETTE

That researcher was working on a prototype. A direct interface between the brain and a computer.

JOHN

That's the tech you think he put in my son?

John reels, begins to pace.

JOHN

Everything's going to be fine. We're at the hospital. We'll tell them what's going on and they'll figure out how to take it out.

BRIDGETTE

Take it out? They won't even know what it is. Taking it out could cause irreparable damage. Or worse.

JOHN

So we'll keep him here until you find the man in the video. Then we'll make him take it out.

BRIDGETTE

I don't think you understand. The tech is supposed to be for soldiers. To dull pain, to keep targeted memories from implanting. Artificial intelligence is the arms race of the future. Corporations would pay billions for what's inside of Asa. Governments would kill for it.

John's eyes flit to Bridgette's. Kill for it.

BRIDGETTE

If they know where it is.

JOHN

That "it" is inside Asa.

BRIDGETTE

That's exactly why we need to get him out of here.

EXT. DELL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

John opens the car door for Asa.

ASA

And the doctor just said we can go?

Asa gets inside the car.

JOHN

Uh huh.

John SHUTS the car door hurriedly. He pauses, scanning the surrounding cars, nervously. He glances back at the car window. Asa watches him suspiciously through the glass.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - NIGHT

John gets in beside Asa, puts on his seat belt.

ASA

Dad?

JOHN

(distracted)  
Yeah, pal?



ASA

I don't understand why we're going to grandpa's.

JOHN

It's quieter there. You can rest. Without any distractions.

ASA

(Cheshire cat)

Does that mean I don't have to go to school tomorrow?

John smiles, his eyes well. He fucking loves this kid. He starts the car.

INT. HAL'S RANCH - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Asa sleeps on the sofa. John enters, covers him with a blanket.

INT. HAL'S RANCH - KITCHEN - NIGHT

John joins Hal back in the kitchen. John pulls a mug from the cabinet, sets it down on the counter. Hal eyes the mug. More coffee?

HAL

You should sleep.

John closes the cabinet.

JOHN

You're probably right.

HAL

What are you going to do now?

John leans back on the counter, exhausted.

JOHN

Bridgette's looking into it. She's going to find out who knows what.

HAL

Then...

JOHN

I don't know.

HAL

You don't know?

JOHN

I'm trying here, Dad.

HAL

Listen, Renee and I... we didn't always get along. That's no secret. But I'll say one thing about her. She was a real strong woman. Shit, she might've been too strong. Maybe she was so strong you didn't feel like you had to be. But you have to be strong now. You understand me?

John nods. He looks past Hal into the living room, where Asa sleeps on the couch. We PUSH IN on his sleeping face, his eyes dart back and forth beneath his closed lids.

EXT. HAY FIELD - DAY

Asa walks through a shredded hay field. It's impossibly quiet. Ahead of him: a single BLACK HORSE. Perfectly still. Asa approaches hesitantly, half expecting the animal to spring to life.

He reaches his hand out and brushes his fingertips against the VELVETY bridge of the animal's nose. It doesn't move. Asa looks around. He's suddenly surrounded by a ring of them. A ring of frozen monoliths.

And then they begin to move, slowly at first, then faster, a HERD of BLACK CLOUDS circling him. It's Muybridge's "The Horse in Motion (1882)" come to life before his eyes.

The horses move faster and faster until they're galloping, kicking up clumps of earth. The sound of their POUNDING HOOVES DEADENING the quiet of the field.

Asa drops to his knees and covers his ears with his hands. He squeezes his eyes shut -- a moment here of BLACKNESS and the muffled sound of the horses hooves ripping apart the field.

Then, through it, a woman's voice.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Asa.

Asa opens his eyes.

INT. HAL'S RANCH - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

The horses are gone. The field is gone. Asa looks around, bewildered. John is sound asleep in the chair.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Asa.

There it is again. It wasn't a dream. Asa sits up and peers out the window.

ASA

Mom?

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - FRONT PORCH - DAWN

Asa steps out on the porch and looks out into the dark woods. He doesn't want to go out there.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Asa.

Without thinking, he steps off the porch.

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - WOODS - DAWN

Asa walks through the dense scrub, unsure. He hears it again.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Asa.

The voice seems to be floating. He can't pin it down. He stands in the middle of the woods. Lost and afraid. He closes his eyes and FLASHES to --

The FEED of an INFRARED TRAIL CAMERA. A PHANTOM FIGURE moves past the camera and disappears from sight. A ghostlike aberration.

Startled, Asa opens his eyes. The image disappears. The woods are back to full color.

He closes his eyes again. And we FLASH to DIFFERENT TRAIL CAMERA FOOTAGE. The same FIGURE moves eerily past again.

Asa opens his eyes, trying to make sense of it. He looks up at the sky lightening above him. AND WE POP OUT --

The GOD VIEW -- the woods he's standing in shot from above -- The same view from his earlier hike with John, but now all the grid squares are filled in. The picture is complete.

A small red light begins to BLINK and we tunnel down to find -- a TRAIL CAMERA strapped to a tree -- one of a network of hunting cameras scattered throughout the woods that transmits images using Wifi.

Asa's seeing through the camera's eye -- tracking the FIGURE as it moves through the woods.

Asa CYCLES through the views of the cameras. Then he begins to slowly move through the woods -- eyes closed -- as if he can see the path before him using just the cameras -- triangulating the figure's location as he moves.

Asa reaches a clearing and opens his eyes -- and The Scientist steps out from behind a DEER BLIND.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. WOODS - CLEARING - DAWN

Asa stands before the Scientist. He looks around, confused.

ASA

It's you. I thought I heard my mom.

SCIENTIST

You did.

Asa's eyes well.

ASA

Is she here?

The Scientist darkens.

SCIENTIST

No, no. I'm sorry. It's just a recording of her voice.

He holds up a PHONE to explain.

SCIENTIST

I needed to get you out here.

ASA

Oh.

The world cannot contain the disappointment held in that "oh."

ASA

It sounded so loud. How could I hear that?

SCIENTIST

Your senses are growing more acute.

Asa glances down at the phone, confused.

ASA

Why do you have a video of my mom?

SCIENTIST

She made it for you.

A lump rises in Asa's throat. He begins to shiver.

ASA  
I don't understand.

SCIENTIST  
She always said you were a special  
kid. And here you are.

Asa looks at him, confused.

JOHN (O.S.)  
(in the distance)  
Asa?

Asa looks back through the woods.

ASA  
Dad?

The Scientist reels. There's no time. He looks down at his  
phone.

SCIENTIST  
(hurried)  
The video of your mom. I can play  
it for you. But you have to come  
with me.

Asa glances down at the phone, desperately wants to see it.

SCIENTIST  
You're going to do extraordinary  
things. But you have to be brave.  
You have to come with me.

Through the woods, the sound of RUNNING.

JOHN  
(closer)  
Asa?

Asa takes a step away.

ASA  
I don't want to do extraordinary  
things. I just want to be like  
everyone else.

The Scientist shakes his head, frustrated.

SCIENTIST  
It's too late for that.

He steps toward Asa, considers taking him by force. Asa takes a step back, afraid. The Scientist registers the fear, decides against it. He wants to say more, but he's got to go.

SCIENTIST

Your mother was going to save the world.

He takes in Asa, so small and cold in his pajamas.

SCIENTIST

Now you have to.

The absurdity of that task passes between them. The Scientist smiles, a small, pitying smile. Then he TURNS AND RUNS.

John and Bridgette break into the clearing. They look around, only Asa remains.

JOHN

Are you okay?

Asa stands there paralyzed. John takes him by the shoulders.

JOHN

Asa?

Bridgette looks off into the distance.

BRIDGETTE

Take him back to the house.

John nods. Bridgette takes off after the Scientist.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

We TRACK the Scientist sprinting through the woods as Bridgette pursues, the distance between them narrowing as they weave through the overgrown, uneven ground.

They break from the thicket of scrub. In the distance -- an OLD WOODEN BRIDGE straddling TRAIN TRACKS. The Scientist takes off -- sprinting for the bridge's embankment.

EXT. WOODEN BRIDGE - DAY

He scampers up -- almost cresting the hill when Bridgette YANKS HIS LEGS OUT FROM UNDER HIM. The Scientist lands with a THUD.

He tries to get free from her grasp. Clawing at the hill -- desperate to crest the embankment until -- KA CHUNK! A gun cocks.

The Scientist freezes. Caught. He flips over on his back -- Bridgette has a gun trained on his head.

The Scientist scrambles to shield his face with his hands.

SCIENTIST

Wait, wait, wait. Speck!

Bridgette stares down at him, her chest heaving. She's Speck.

BRIDGETTE

You put it in a kid?!

The Scientist darkens.

SCIENTIST

I didn't have a choice. It was coded for Renee. The boy shares her DNA.

Renee angrily shakes her head.

BRIDGETTE

Get up.

The Scientist gets to his feet. A train HORN sounds in the distance.

SCIENTIST

I won't help you.

BRIDGETTE

I'm pretty sure you will. We're going to make sure Asa doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

The Scientist reels.

SCIENTIST

Yours are the wrong hands.

Bridgette winces, adjusts her grip on the gun. The train's horn grows LOUDER.

The Scientist takes a step back.

SCIENTIST

You won't shoot me.

Bridgette's eyes trail down his body.



BRIDGETTE

I won't shoot you in the head.

The Scientist looks over his shoulder, sees the train approaching. But before he can run--

JOHN CHARGES HIM, throwing him against the guardrail. John grips the Scientist's COAT, leaning him over the tracks.

JOHN

You're going to take it out! John!

BRIDGETTE

\*  
\*

The Scientist shakes his head.

SCIENTIST

I can't.

A TRAIN approaches beneath the bridge. The Scientist glances down, then looks at John desperately.

SCIENTIST

He's the future. Can't you see?  
Renee gave her life for this.

John PUNCHES him.

JOHN

What do you know about my wife?

Bridgette grabs John's arm, trying to restrain him.

BRIDGETTE

John, stop. We need him.

JOHN

He's just a kid.

The Scientist smiles sadly, a slick of BLOOD on his teeth from the punch. The TRAIN THUNDERS below them.

SCIENTIST

He's so much more than that now.

And with that -- the Scientist THROWS HIMSELF OVER THE GUARDRAIL.

John and Bridgette rush to the railing as the Scientist's body falls, landing with a THUD on a train car. They watch helplessly as the train recedes -- and with it, THE SCIENTIST.

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - DAY

Bridgette and John walk silently back to the house. Bridgette eyes the lost look on John's face.

BRIDGETTE

There's no chatter about the scientist. Or the tech.

John doesn't respond. Bridgette puts a hand on his arm.

BRIDGETTE

Did you hear me? That means Asa's safe. No one knows about him.

John turns to her, overwhelmed. He looks out over the fields.

JOHN

He wasn't looking for you, was he?

Bridgette looks down, not sure how to respond.

BRIDGETTE

No, he wasn't.

JOHN

Renee was involved?

Bridgette nods.

BRIDGETTE

I thought he just wanted to talk to you. To tell you about their work.

JOHN

She was going to inject that thing in herself?

Bridgette nods.

BRIDGETTE

You lost so much this year. I wanted to protect what you had left.

John takes that in.

JOHN

I need to get back to Asa.

John looks to the house. He sees Asa peering out of the window, watching them as they approach Bridgette's car.

JOHN  
I need a favor.

John opens the car door for her. Bridgette pauses, the door between them.

BRIDGETTE  
Anything.

JOHN  
No one can know about this.

BRIDGETTE  
John--

JOHN  
When Renee died, the world felt different to me. So I made it different. That was the wrong play. Asa needs structure while we figure out what this thing is, what it does.

Bridgette looks off, into the night.

BRIDGETTE  
I get that.

JOHN  
So I'm going to ask you not to tell anyone. Not even Speck.

Bridgette bites her lip, thinking.

BRIDGETTE  
I've been meaning to talk to you about something. There's a position opening up. Here. In Austin. And the thing is...  
(unable to stop herself)  
I love you.

John closes his eyes. He doesn't want to do this now.

BRIDGETTE  
I know we agreed not to bring that into it. But I do. Let me help you get through this. As far as the agency knows, the scientist still has the tech. They'll be looking for him, not Asa. We can figure out what to do. Together.

John nods, overwhelmed with gratitude.

JOHN

Thanks.

Bridgette gets in the car. They look at each other a beat, the glass between them. Then she drives off.

EXT. HAL'S RANCH - DAY

John walks slowly to the house, defeated. Hal watches him approach, searches his face for some sign of which way it went.

JOHN

Is Asa inside?

Hal nods.

HAL

What happened out there?

John thinks, unsure.

JOHN

Whatever's inside of Asa is going to stay there.

Hal nods.

HAL

You'll figure out how to see him to the other side of this. Wherever that is.

JOHN

Looks like I'll have to.

John opens the screen door, walks inside.

INT. BEREK HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

John and Asa chew slowly, eating in complete silence. Asa eats cereal. John eats a meatball sandwich. Comfort food.

JOHN

I, uh...

He can't find the words. He goes back to eating. Tries again.

JOHN

I wish I could tell you that you can ask me anything.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(saddened by his own  
futility)  
But there's so much about what's  
happened that I don't understand.  
(gritting his teeth through  
this hard fact)  
You've got something inside you  
now, implanted in your brain.

ASA  
Why can't they just take it out?

JOHN  
We need to figure out what it is  
first. What it's doing.

Asa's eyes well. He looks down at his cereal, trying to make sense of it. They sit in silence.

JOHN  
I've got something for you.

John gets up and goes to the hall closet. He pulls out his OLD SKATEBOARD (a Mark Gonzales Old School Vision deck). He sets it down in front of Asa.

Asa looks at him, confused.

ASA  
Aren't you afraid I'll get hurt?

JOHN  
Of course I am...  
(he hesitates, trying to  
find the words)  
I may not have answers for you now.  
But I will fix this. Someone knows  
what this tech is and what it does.  
And I'm going to find them. And  
until I do, you're going to enjoy  
your life. And god damn it, I'm  
going to help you.

Asa nods, tears streaming down his cheeks. Asa looks down at the skateboard.

ASA  
Can I be excused?

John nods.

JOHN  
Sure.

Asa picks up the skateboard, pauses in the door.

ASA

Dad?

John waits for him to puzzle it out.

ASA

That man. The doctor? He said I was going to do extraordinary things.

John nods.

ASA

What did he mean?

JOHN

I don't know.

ASA

I'm afraid.

John nods.

JOHN

I am, too.

They look at each other, united in the unknown.

INT. NSA OFFICE - NIGHT

After hours. Empty cubicles visible beyond the open door.

Bridgette watches the VIDEO of Vladimir Putin speaking on the panel for Russia's National Knowledge Day. He speaks in Russian. There is no translation.

RAY (50's, company man) appears in the doorway, KNOCKS on the open door. Bridgette glances from the feed.

RAY

No sign of him.

BRIDGETTE

Shit.

RAY

He'll turn up.

Bridgette nods, turns back to the feed. Ray looks over.

RAY

What's he saying?

BRIDGETTE

He's saying whoever controls  
Artificial Intelligence, controls  
the world.

RAY

Think he's talking about those  
satellites that collided? Do you  
think he knows it was an AI that  
caused them to glitch?

Bridgette shakes her head, Putin reflected in her eyes.

BRIDGETTE

It wasn't a glitch.  
(beat)  
It was a declaration of war.

Ray's eyes snap to her, but she doesn't look at him.

RAY

How's the kid?

Bridgette looks to the window, the view beyond it. She takes  
in the city, all of the people going about their lives,  
unaware. Her eyes well.

But then she blinks back the tears, and when she turns and  
looks at Ray, she's resigned.

BRIDGETTE

Controllable.

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Asa slumps down on his bed. He picks up his GAMING DEVICE and  
begins to play, the game reflecting in the dark saucers of  
his eyes.

INT. JUMP PLANE - CIPHER - NIGHT

Back inside the game. Asa catches the SMALL KEY. He reaches  
up, and unlocks the tether.

Jack gets up out of his seat and moves past him, standing in  
the open doorway of the plane. Jack activates his NANOTECH  
JUMP SUIT.

JACK

Redline with the door removed is  
205 KIAS. Good luck.

Jack jumps.

Asa steps to the JUMP DOOR, pausing at the precipice. One plane in a swarm of planes. He looks out at the world beneath him -- the SKYLINE with its RED BLINKING LIGHT, the dark gnarl of forest surrounding it, a SHIMMER of river snaking through. And the bloom of parachutes, other players, all descending to the ground. Pushpins in the map of this world.

Asa reaches down and places his thumb on his wrist, just as Jack did. But nothing happens.

ANNIE (O.S.)

You don't have that upgrade, silly.

Asa whips around, sees Annie.

ASA

What do you know about it?

ANNIE

I've been playing a long time.

Asa grimaces, looks down at the ground.

ASA

I don't know what to do.

Annie walks toward him. She puts a hand gently on his shoulder, an approximation of comfort. Asa turns to look at her. And she SHOVES HIM OUT OF THE PLANE.

Asa flails -- falling through the air. But then a parachute bellows out of him. He jerks up and out of sight.

The screen ERUPTS in STATS as he LEVELS UP. He's passed this level of the game.

INT. BEREK HOME - ASA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Asa looks up, victorious. He smiles broadly, a moment of celebration.

He turns the screen off and tosses down the device on the bed.

But then the screen lights back up. A cursor begins to BLINK.

ANNIE (O.S.)

Where'd you go?

Asa grimaces. Didn't he turn that off?



He looks around. He's alone in the room. He looks back at the screen, his reflection stares back at him from the screen's glossy surface.

ANNIE

Don't you want to play?

ASA

Uh...

Asa looks around, unsure. The cursor BLINKS, waiting.

ASA

I'm actually kind of tired.

ANNIE

(disappointed)

Oh, okay. I understand.

(brightening)

Let me know if you change your mind.

(beat)

I'm always here.

Asa darkens. What did she mean by that? He looks out his bedroom window to the world beyond and then back to the GAMING DEVICE.

The cursor BLINKS. Like a beacon. Like a warning. And then the screen goes DARK.

END OF EPISODE