



**HALT
AND
CATCH
FIRE**

"NPC"
(Non-Player Character)

A Spec. Episode

Written By
Marshall Knight

Noah Jones
The Gersh Agency
9465 Wilshire Blvd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90212
(310) 205-5836

Marshall Knight
326 N. Spaulding Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90036
M.Alex.Knight@gmail.com
(707) 287-3851

PREVIOUSLY ON "HALT AND CATCH FIRE"

Texas, 1984. The "Silicon Prairie" -- midway between East Coast IBM functionality and West Coast Apple innovation.

Last year, JOE MACMILLAN, a charismatic ex-IBMer, joined mid-tier business-computing firm Cardiff Electric. Appealing to the ego of engineer GORDON CLARK, Joe forced the hand of his boss, NATHAN CARDIFF, to enter the fledgling PC market.

Together with punky programmer CAMERON HOWE and Gordon's wife, DONNA CLARK -- an engineer who put her own dreams on hold to raise their daughters -- they developed a portable PC, the Cardiff Giant. But the road there was strewn with casualties.

Among them was BRIAN BRASWELL -- fired to make room for Cardiff's PC division -- who broke into the Clark home and came within minutes of getting violent retribution.

Joe hired former flame SIMON CHURCH to design the exterior of the Giant -- Simon later revealed his affliction with AIDS -- and blew up a bad deal with wealthy heiress LOUISE LUTHERFORD by seducing her boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Donna and Gordon's marriage was pushed to the limit. Donna's trip with her boss HUNT WHITMARSH -- in which she advised Texas Instrument brass to discontinue their flagship PC -- nearly turned into an affair.

But Hunt was manipulating Donna. At the Giant's unveiling at the 1983 Comdex Expo, Hunt and the disgraced Brian teamed up to unveil a quicker, cheaper knockoff of Cardiff's design.

By stripping Cameron's innovative operating system out of the Giant, the team outperformed the pretenders. But an alienated Cameron walked out. And Donna, having quit her job, joined her new venture: a gaming company called MUTINY.

Realizing he'd been wrong to side against Cameron, Joe set fire to their first PC shipment. After revealing the origins of his scars -- his freewheeling mother, high on drugs, allowed him to fall from their roof while stargazing -- Joe disappeared on a journey of self-reinvention.

And despite Joe's fiery gesture, the Giant was a success. But one that left Gordon deeply unsatisfied, asking, "What's next...?"

NOTE: This episode was written before the Season 2 premiere. It takes place after Joe's exit from Cardiff, but prior to his arrival at Colorado's Fiske Observatory in the final scene of Season One.

TEASER**INT. CLARK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING (DAY 1)**

Click click click. GORDON CLARK types his name into a DOCUMENT on the Clark Family's TI-99 PC. He strikes a key and the PRINTER grinds to life.

DONNA (O.S.)
Seriously, Gordon? Don't put your coffee there.

DONNA CLARK steps up, ready for work. She eyeballs Gordon's COFFEE MUG, as it sits on the TI-99's power regulator.

GORDON
Oh come on, it's a gag. Can't I have a little fun at the expense of my wife's old company?

DONNA
That joke started at Comdex '81, and hasn't gotten any funnier since.

GORDON
Well what if I actually need to keep my coffee warm?

DONNA
The regulator's not that hot and you can use the microwave.

Her tone's sharp, not finding it funny. Gordon drops it. Then Donna notices the document spooling out of the printer.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Hey what's this?

GORDON
Can't tell you.

DONNA
Letter from your secret family?

GORDON
It's an NDA and I've already said too much.

DONNA
I guess we both have big days then.

(CONTINUED)

GORDON
(just remembering)
Right, today's your Electronic Arts
pitch.

DONNA
Yes but don't worry, I'll be out in
time to pick up the girls.

GORDON
Have I told you I love you lately?

She rolls her eyes and makes to leave:

DONNA
Joanie, Haley, in the car!

GORDON
Good luck...!

He clings, grinning clownishly. Finally she cracks a smile
and exits.

A beat. Gordon takes a sip of his coffee, nice and hot, then
sets the mug back on the TI-99, grinning to himself:

GORDON (CONT'D)
It's funny 'cause it works.

INT. MUTINY GAMES - OFFICE - DAY

Donna steps into the MESSY COLONIAL HOUSE that doubles as the
Mutiny office, arms full of file folders.

DONNA
Okay gang, we've got five hours
before EA gets here and --

But the place is empty.

Cameron Howe's roommate and sometimes fuck-buddy, KYLE, peers
in from his bedroom, shirtless.

ROOMMATE KYLE
Morning.

DONNA
Where is everybody...?

CUT TO:

INT. MULTIPLEX - THEATER 7 - SAME

A door bursts open from a theater showing "Dune."

CAMERON HOWE, LEV LEVITAN and "YO-YO" ENGBERK swarm out with the crowd. But instead of heading for the exit, they check that the coast is clear and duck into --

INT. MULTIPLEX - THEATER 11 - MOMENTS LATER

Cameron, Lev and Yo-Yo hunt for seats. A MOVIE is already in progress. Laser fire sizzles in surround sound. Tank treads crush a mound of skulls.

ON SCREEN, a TITLE CARD reads:

"The machines rose from the ashes of the nuclear fire. Their war to exterminate mankind raged for decades, but the final battle would not be fought in the future.

It would be fought here, in our present."

Cameron stands in the aisle, reading.

MOVIEGOER

Hey d'you mind?

She moves to take her seat, transfixed.

INT./EXT. MUTINY GAMES - LATER

Donna is practicing with Kyle:

DONNA

...and a "village hub" where players can chat and trade and team up on quests...

(checking her watch)

And my god I've been rambling for forty minutes, what do you think?

ROOMMATE KYLE

(shrugs)

I'd buy it.

Hearing voices O.S., Donna peers out to the PORCH. The Coders approach, munching theater snacks.

(CONTINUED)

YO-YO

The thing is, you totally *buy*
Schwarzenegger in the role.

LEV

You mean as a mindless killing
machine impersonating a human?

CAMERON

They could've saved a bunch of
money and hired Joe MacMillan.

They laugh... Until they ENTER to find an unhappy Donna.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

Hey--

DONNA

Where the hell were you?

CAMERON

What? We had a mooch.

YO-YO

We split up and caught five
matinees between us.

LEV

Before security caught *us*.

DONNA

Why?

CAMERON

Because... zeitgeist?

DONNA

Well I hope you've got something
brilliant to tell E.A., because I
have nothing.

CAMERON

Jesus, is that today?

DONNA

I didn't know where you were, so I
told them to meet us here...
(indicating the office)
...and we'll obviously have to take
them to a third location.

CAMERON

Okay, so? How long do we have?

(CONTINUED)

Before Donna can answer, there's a KNOCK on the door.

DONNA
Wait, Lev--!

But Lev opens it. A trio of E.A. SUITS waits on the front porch. Lev chews his Caramello bar and stares like an idiot as the Suits gape from the door.

This "office" wouldn't pass for a pig sty.

INT. MUTINY GAMES - DINING ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Donna's head is buried in her hands. Cameron sets a beer in front of her and Donna takes it without looking up.

After a beat:

CAMERON
Look, I'm sorry.

DONNA
No, you know what, it's okay.

CAMERON
They could have at least let us get to the game part of the game.

DONNA
Yeah but honestly? If we'd spent a hundred hours working on our pitch, would it have gone any better?

Cameron thinks a beat, then admits:

CAMERON
This isn't exactly our strong suit.
(then)
But so what, a couple suits can't understand how we make art. We should just publish ourselves.

DONNA
With what funds? How do we get the game on store shelves if we can't even pay to put it in a box?

CAMERON
We'll put a disk in magazines or--

DONNA

Cameron. One of these days, we're gonna need to convince guys like that to take a flyer on us.

(beat)

And as much as he could be an aggravating prick, you know who'd be great at doing that?

CAMERON

No. We do not need Joe.

DONNA

No of course not. Even if we wanted him, how would we find him?

(then)

But we need someone who can do what he does. We need *our* Joe.

Cameron does not like the sounds of that. But doesn't object.

DONNA (CONT'D)

I'll make some calls.

Donna exits. Cameron sips the rest of Donna's beer and looks out the window, wondering. Where *is* Joe?

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - DAY

A JUNKER PICKUP TRUCK motors out of Dallas, a far cry from the Porsche that splattered that poor armadillo to start the series. Nonetheless --

We find JOE MACMILLAN at the wheel. Italian suit ditched in favor of a BOMBER JACKET. No radio. Only the drone of wind and the highway reflected in AVIATOR GLASSES.

A FIGURE blows past, with a muffled cry that could be "Oh come on!"

Joe spots a HITCHHIKER in the rear view. He slows.

EXT. EAST STATE HIGHWAY 114 - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls over.

The Hitchhiker grabs his bag and hurries over. Joe rolls down the passenger-side window and --

BRIAN (O.S.)

Son of a bitch.

(CONTINUED)

Joe looks up. The unkempt man standing before him is BRIAN BRASWELL -- who took revenge on Joe and Gordon for firing him by ripping off their computer.

Brian throws up his hands.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

I've been walking with my thumb out for three hours and the first person to slow down... What are the goddamned chances.

JOE

Low.

BRIAN

Are you pranking me or something?

JOE

Now why would I do that? Why would I purposefully come anywhere near you?

Joe hasn't taken his hand off the window crank.

BRIAN

Right. Well I guess this is goodbye then.

An awkward beat.

Brian doesn't go, but he won't meet Joe's eye. Seemingly inconsequentially, he shifts his duffel from his shoulder into his arms.

Joe reads desperation in Brian's body language and --

JOE

(sighing)

Where are you headed?

Brian is a deer in headlights. He stares at Joe, trying to read him:

BRIAN

Uhh, just... Anywhere. Far out of town as I can get.

JOE

Well I'm on my way to Colorado Springs. I don't have a fourth gear so it'll be slow going, you okay with that?

BRIAN

Okay now you're pranking me.

JOE

No. You just caught me as I'm making some changes in my life.

BRIAN

That explains the truck.

JOE

What do you think, Brian, are you capable of leaving the past in the past?

A long beat. Brian looks down the road.

BRIAN

What's in Colorado Springs?

JOE

Hopefully, a place for reinvention.
(then, re: duffel bag)
That all you need to get "as far as you can go?"

BRIAN

I came prepared.

JOE

Well then... get in.

Brian's still processing. But he hurries to the liftgate, throws his duffel in the camper and climbs into the passenger's seat.

INT. CAMPER - JOE'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The duffel rattles as Joe accelerates onto the highway.

Partially unzipped, it's possible to make out a faint glint of polished wood and black metal.

Brian's SHOTGUN.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**INT. LONE STAR OPTICS - CLEAN ROOM - DAY**

A LASER BEAM fires into a prism. Mirrors reflect quivering flecks of red light at a small GLASSY CUBE in a mechanical housing.

Gordon stands between two LAB TECHS. All three wear static free CLEAN SUITS.

OLDER LAB TECH

By splitting the reference beam into dark and light pixels, we create an interference pattern in the optical medium. That's the hologram. Then to read, we locate the appropriate interference pattern and project it as data onto the detector.

GORDON

Sort of like a Laserdisc in three dimensions.

OLDER LAB TECH

Sort of. But with a hundred times the storage capacity.

YOUNGER LAB TECH

In a two-inch block. Take a look.

He retrieves the glassy cube and presents it to Gordon.

GORDON

Jesus, it's so light. Now I know why I had to sign those forms.

(then)

You're telling me you stored the Library of Congress on *this*?

YOUNGER LAB TECH

Well...

OLDER LAB TECH

We will.

YOUNGER LAB TECH

We're improving our resolution.

GORDON

Oh. What's the data transfer rate?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNGER LAB TECH

In theory, we'll be able to read a million bits in parallel, so--

GORDON

Let me stop you. Cardiff Electric doesn't build test rigs for prototype tech. We build PCs. We're shipping our next one in six months.

(then)

So how close are you to making that theory a reality?

Off the Techs as they exchange a look --

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - KILL ROOM - DAY

SKREEEAAAK!

Gordon crosses "~~Holographic Storage~~" off a WHITEBOARD, to groans from his Engineers -- ED, STAN and LARRY. The latest casualty in a long list of innovations under the heading "GIANT II IDEAS."

STAN

Damn. I had high hopes for that.

ED

What was it, too big a power suck or too little performance?

GORDON

A little Column A; a little Columns B through Z.

LARRY

We are wasting time with this Buck Rogers shit...

The Engineers banter as Gordon peels off and approaches NATHAN CARDIFF -- their boss -- who watches from the back of the room.

GORDON

Would've looked great on the box though.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Hmph, fine by me. I don't understand half of the words up on that board.

(CONTINUED)

GORDON

Long way from transistor radios.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Your boys have their minds set on a "gooey" something-or-other? Frankly I draw the line at plugging a non-solid into my computers. It's unnatural.

The Engineers overhear and chuckle at Cardiff. He glares back.

GORDON

Nathan, can we take a minute?
(to the Engineers)
I want a dozen more ideas up when I get back.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - GORDON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Gordon sits on his desk as he confers with Cardiff.

GORDON

Nathan, we love having your input. But I wonder if the close supervision might be a little...

NATHAN CARDIFF

Stifling? Hell, I know that. But I'm not taking my eye off of you this time.

GORDON

Excuse me?

NATHAN CARDIFF

Even without Joe MacMillan in the picture. Fool me once.

Gordon seethes. Nathan softens.

NATHAN CARDIFF (CONT'D)

It's not *personal*, Gordon. I do trust you--

GORDON

Well would you at least give us some indication of what you want then? Instead of just hovering?

NATHAN CARDIFF

What I want is a Macintosh with PC guts.

GORDON

So IBM-compatible, but with every bell and whistle.

NATHAN CARDIFF

And one of those virtual desktops with the clickable file folders.

GORDON

Right. How hard could it be.

NATHAN CARDIFF

You know who else wants that? Louise Lutherford, who holds our friendship dear -- despite MacMillan's best efforts -- and who's coming to visit with a 10 million dollar check...

(pointed)

If we earn it.

Gordon is not happy about this, but suppresses any further comments. He starts for the door.

GORDON

I'd better get back to it then.

(then)

And it's called a Graphical User Interface. "G. U. I."

He leaves. Nathan mouths it to himself, and realizes:

NATHAN CARDIFF

"Gooley..."

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - LATER THAT NIGHT

Brian and Joe sit in a sparsely populated diner, a long way from anywhere. Joe's scanning the menu closely.

BRIAN

So. Were you gonna ask how I wound up hitching?

JOE

You mean you haven't taken up as a snake-oil salesman?

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Wife kicked me outta the house.
Actually, she had the locks changed
while I was out.

Beat.

JOE

I'm sorry to hear that.

BRIAN

After the Slingshot failed she said
'three strikes, you're out.'
Actually said those words.

JOE

'The Slingshot,' meaning your
illegal knock-off of the Cardiff
Giant.

BRIAN

Ha! So you *haven't* put it behind
you.

They're interrupted by a SERVER:

SERVER

You fellas make up your minds?

JOE

To be honest, we're a little light.
What's the most economical thing on
the menu?

SERVER

Most bang for your buck, huh?
Welp...

He glances at Joe's menu. Then he looks Joe up and down.

SERVER (CONT'D)

D'you serve?

JOE

Do I...?
(understanding)
Oh. Yes. Air Force, retired.

SERVER

Yeah you've got that look about
you. Hot shot. Well, y'know what,
meal's on the house.

(CONTINUED)

JOE

Oh that's too kind...

(off the Server)

Well if you insist. How about two
eggs, sunny side up, and a side of
hash browns.

SERVER

Yes sir. And you?

Brian stares at Joe. Joe's lies come so naturally.

BRIAN

Just water for me.

JOE

You sure?

BRIAN

No such thing as a free meal.

SERVER

Fair enough, friend.

(to Joe)

Two eggs sunny and a hash brown
coming up. And thank you for your
service.

The Server leaves with the menus, claps Joe on the shoulder.
A beat. Joe breaks the silence.

JOE

I'm curious, you said the Slingshot
was 'strike three.' And I guess
strike one was...

BRIAN

Getting fired from Cardiff.

JOE

So what was strike two?

BRIAN

Nearly murdering Gordon Clark and
his whole family.

Joe stares. What the fuck?

Brian barks a laugh. Ha ha, totally kidding. Grins so the
other patrons can see.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Yeah. She didn't think it was funny
either.

Joe looks warily at his new companion.

INT. CLARK HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donna carefully packs her business finest into a suitcase.
There's a commotion and giggling from the other room:

GORDON (O.S.)
Uh oh, I've got a barnacle on my
backside. Looks like I'll have to
pry it off.
(crash)
It's too strong! Help! Donna--!

Gordon caroms into the room with HALEY (their youngest
daughter) clinging to his back.

Gordon stops when he notices the suitcase.

GORDON (CONT'D)
What's all this?

DONNA
I have to leave tomorrow.

GORDON
(sotto)
Is this about the coffee thing? It
was a shitty joke alright?

DONNA
No, Gordon. It's a Mutiny
recruiting trip.

GORDON
Oh... And you can't just run to the
arcade and pick up some guys?

She shoots him a look. Gordon pries Haley off his back and
shoos her into the other room.

DONNA
You remember Lori Powell from
college, don't you?

GORDON
Phonebooth Lori? How could I
forget.

(CONTINUED)

DONNA

Cameron and I are going to San Francisco to offer her a position as our VP of Sales --

GORDON

I thought Cameron didn't do titles.

DONNA

-- which means you'll need to handle Joanie and Haley for a day or two.

GORDON

What? What about your mother?

DONNA

She's got a hundred-and-one fever, shouldn't have been troubling herself over them this week already.

(aside)

Of course she wouldn't admit it was any trouble 'til I caught her swallowing a fistful of Tylenol.

A beat as this lands on Gordon.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Try not to look too shell-shocked Gordon.

GORDON

I've got a deadline.

DONNA

I've had thousands of deadlines. But I always managed to make time to cook the girls dinner. You'll find a way.

She zips her suitcase authoritatively and that is that.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - ESTABLISHING (DAY 2)**

The San Francisco financial district circa 1984 is nearly identical to today -- except for the freeway running through it.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - THE CARNELIAN ROOM - DAY

Cameron washes up at a marble sink. She adjusts the sleeves of her POWER SUIT, squirms, uncomfortable in shoulder pads. We've never seen her like this. Neither has she.

Finally she sighs and --

INT. THE CARNELIAN ROOM - B OF A BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Cameron walks through the restaurant atop San Francisco's Bank of America tower, where executive brass make handshake deals and dine on \$60 Crab Louie.

Cameron finds Donna, mid-conversation with LORI POWELL (40), a statuesque firecracker who oozes success.

CAMERON

Sorry. Small bladder.

LORI

That's got to be a liability when you're on a coding binge.

Lori sips her negroni with a smile. Cameron doesn't return it.

DONNA

Cameron, Lori knows her way around a terminal.

LORI

It's true. I'm the conduit between our engineers and our clients; I have to be conversant in an array of technical matters.

CAMERON

So a mile wide and an inch deep.

LORI

If you want to put it that way.

(CONTINUED)

CAMERON

So you know Basic. What about C++?

LORI

I'm proficient.

CAMERON

Lisp?

LORI

...moderately proficient.

CAMERON

Bocce?

LORI

(beat, then)

I can't say I know that one.

CAMERON

See, what I really need is a droid
that understands the binary
language of moisture vaporators.

Lori recognizes she's being made fun of, but the Star Wars reference goes over her head.

LORI

I'll have to refer you to our
software department.

Donna gives Lori an apologetic look, glares at Cameron.

DONNA

Hey. Why don't we get down to it.
Lori, we're willing to offer you an
ownership stake in Mutiny. 20%.

LORI

Donna, getting in on the ground
floor of a start-up would've
sounded great when we were at Cal.
But you want me to give up SVP at
Bank of America.

DONNA

Come on, my Lori never missed out
on something new and exciting. Even
if it was a little dangerous.

LORI

Electronic banking *is* new and
exciting.

(CONTINUED)

CAMERON

And as safe as new can be.

A beat as that lands with Lori. Donna looks at her pleadingly.

LORI

Okay, I'll bite. What am I owning, what am I selling?

CAMERON

Our first game. A science fiction action adventure.

DONNA

Though we're not married to sci-fi. Could be fantasy. You know, like Tolkein.

CAMERON

But probably post-apocalyptic.

DONNA

But the *setting's* not as important as the tech. Our server-side processes will allow players to interact, track one another's progress--

CAMERON

And the NPCs will have lifelike artificial intelligence.

A beat.

DONNA

They will?

Donna shoots a look to Lori. First she's heard of it. Lori puts on a smile.

LORI

That's very... ambitious.

CUT TO:

EXT. BANK OF AMERICA BUILDING - A LITTLE LATER

Donna and Cameron aren't far out of the lobby when --

DONNA

What is the matter with you?

(CONTINUED)

CAMERON

I guess Lori isn't my type.

DONNA

I know anything 'corporate' freaks you out but Lori Powell isn't just a prospective hire, she is my *friend*. Not to mention a mentor who's had a hell of a lot to do with shaping my career. And you just alienated her.

A beat. Cameron sees just how agitated Donna is.

CAMERON

Sorry.

DONNA

I'm going to see her again tomorrow. Alone. See if I can't win her back.

CAMERON

Fine. I've got my own meetings to take anyway.

(peeling off)

See you back at the hotel.

They go their separate ways.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Gordon paces before a seated Nathan Cardiff, and Gordon's daughters Haley and JOANIE CLARK. The Engineers watch. DEBBIE, from the secretarial pool, takes notes.

GORDON

This generation of personal computing is about accessibility. The Giant II needs to be something that a child can use just as easily as a, um...

Nathan folds his arms, dares Gordon to say it.

GORDON (CONT'D)

...as someone whose childhood is well behind them.

Gordon produces a BOX full of plastic gizmos. The girls peer in excitedly like it's a chest of toys.

(CONTINUED)

GORDON (CONT'D)

We'll try out some interfaces and if you can agree on one, we'll know we're onto something. Let's start with an easy one...

NATHAN CARDIFF

No offense to your girls, Gordon, but I'm hardly a computing novice.

GORDON

Not that it's a competition, but neither are they.

Gordon lays out a series of devices adorned with BUTTONS, KNOBS or SCROLL WHEELS. The girls immediately start playing with them.

GORDON (CONT'D)

So you're at home, reading on your beautiful new monitor. You're at the bottom of the page; what's the best way to flip to the next one?

Nathan picks up a gizmo.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Button press seems obvious enough.

HALEY

Ha, listen!

CRI-CK-CK-CK. Haley's spinning a scroll wheel device like a noise-maker.

NATHAN CARDIFF

These aren't toys.

LARRY

But you know, with analog you *can* swipe as quickly or slowly--

GORDON

Larry. No engineers.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Well, no one in *my* household will be using a computer that makes that godawful noise.

He snatches the scroll wheel from the girls--

(CONTINUED)

JOANIE

Hey!

GORDON

It's okay, girls. Just remember,
you're *reading*, not playing.

A beat as the girls stare at the gizmos, not sure what to do. Debbie looks up from her notes.

DEBBIE

Gordon, I have an idea.

Gordon shrugs, go ahead.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Haley, Joanie, I saw you had those multiple-choice adventure books in your bag? Why don't you get them and do an adventure. And when it tells you what page to go to next, stop and tell us what you're thinking.

The girls shrug, okay. They take a pair of "Choose Your Own Adventure" books from their day bag and make a show of reading the first page...

Then, exchanging a troublemaker grin, they fan the pages with a NOISY FLUTTER.

NATHAN CARDIFF

You do *not* turn your pages that way!

The girls giggle at Nathan's frustration. Gordon sighs. This is going to be a long day.

INT. "PENINSULA COMMUTE" - TRAIN CABIN - DAY

Cameron rides a commuter train. Her headphones blare jittery post-punk -- The Flaming Lips' *My Own Planet*. Out the window, Stanford University swims into view. Silicon Valley stretches as far as the eye can see.

CONDUCTOR (OVER INTERCOM)

Palo Alto.

Cameron smiles broadly. She's headed into the nerve center of her industry.

INT. XEROX PARC - ADMIN FLOOR - DAY

HEATH -- the enthusiastic prodigy from last year's Comdex expo -- leads Cameron through the glassy corridors of PARC, Xerox's west coast research lab.

HEATH

So games, huh? That's a hell of a way to make a living.

CAMERON

We'll see, I haven't made one yet.

(then)

Used to be I'd daydream about this stuff at work. Now the stuff I daydream *is* my work.

HEATH

Well if you ever find your heart's not in it, there're plenty of openings here.

CAMERON

Really? But everyone wants to work here; it's a dream factory.

HEATH

Well. Some folks realized dreams alone do not pay the bills. Xerox canned Bob Taylor. Simonyi bolted for Microsoft, Warnock and Geshke to Adobe, a bunch of people went to Apple...

(then, sincerely)

We could use another dreamer is all.

CAMERON

So how do you pay the bills?

HEATH

Government contracts mostly. NASA. DARPA.

CAMERON

Which is how you wound up working on A.I.

HEATH

That's right.

CAMERON

...can I see it?

(CONTINUED)

He purses his lips, looks either direction. Then smiles --

HEATH

Okay.

INT. XEROX PARC - MAINFRAME ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They're in a long room. Floor-to-ceiling MAINFRAMES on each side are fronted by glass curtain walls.

HEATH

The Rochester lab'd never let you in here. But management's half a world away, we kinda get the run of the place.

She indicates the impressive machines.

CAMERON

So this is them?

HEATH

Yeah, that whole bunch right there.
(indicating others)
We're installing these right now, adding capacity. Getting ready for some War Games.

CAMERON

Too cool.
(then)
Can we try it out?

HEATH

Ahh now that would get me in trouble. It's all self-modifying code, super unstable. I've screwed it up a couple times, locking down fixes is not fun.

They arrive at a console. Its command line is open, taunting Cameron. She so wants to get under the hood. Heath senses her disappointment.

HEATH (CONT'D)

But seriously, ask me anything.
State secrets, anything, I'm yours.

He's half serious. She smiles appreciatively.

HEATH (CONT'D)

And hey if you're not busy, I've got another war game I think you'd get a kick out of.

Cameron follows, curiosity piqued.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - SUNSET

Joe and Brian continue their drive, high desert, approaching the mountains. The glare of the setting sun gets in Joe's eyes and he dons his aviators.

BRIAN

Huh.

JOE

What?

BRIAN

Just, that man from last night. You really do look like a fighter pilot.

JOE

You think so?

BRIAN

No wonder he was so easily deceived.

A beat.

JOE

You know, when I was a teenager, my father took me to tour the service academies. Wanted me to join the greatest fighting force the world has ever know.

BRIAN

You ever wish you had?

JOE

I got all the way to a recruiter's desk actually, when Vietnam was heating up.

BRIAN

Of course. You wanted to burn down some villages at the touch of a button.

(CONTINUED)

Joe shoots him a look.

JOE
Actually, I'd heard the Air Force
was the best way to become an
astronaut.

BRIAN
An astronaut. Really.

Joe squints up at the first STARS in the darkening sky.

JOE
My mother was a stargazer.
Something I inherited from her.
(then)
But computers were safer. And the
last time I followed my mother's
lead, I wound up impaled on a
fence. So no Air Force, no NASA...

Brian takes that in, not sure what to make of it.

JOE (CONT'D)
Now that you mention it though, the
way warfare is going, I bet they'd
love a guy with your skillset. To
design the button.
(beat, then)
Something to consider anyway.

They drive on.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT (NIGHT 2)

The team has been at it for a long time. Joanie and Haley are slumped over the conference table, bored to tears. Debbie enters with take-out menus and a notepad.

DEBBIE
Alright y'all, it's that time.

STAN
Oh thank God, I am starving.

DEBBIE
(to Gordon, re: the girls)
Morsels has mac 'n cheese and mini
hot dogs.

HALEY
Mac 'n cheese!

(CONTINUED)

GORDON
Thanks, Debbie.

JOANIE
This is awesome, Mom never lets us
order out.

Gordon pauses, realizes that's true, remembers the challenge
Donna issued him.

GORDON
Actually, you know what, Deb? We're
going to sit this one out.

JOANIE
What?

HALEY
Nooooooo.

Off Gordon, as the girls loudly express their displeasure...

INT. BERKELEY HOTEL ROOM - SAME

Donna enters, still sour. No sign of Cameron.

Donna kicks off her heels and gets comfortable. Lies on the
bed. Picks up the room service menu and dials:

DONNA
Hi, can you send a bottle of the
Frog's Leap cab and a rib-eye,
medium-well, to room 904?

At the affirmative response on the phone, her scowl melts
into satisfied grin.

Donna settles in. Enjoys the silence.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

Gordon's in the kitchen, assembling an ad hoc dinner for
Joanie and Haley. Ramen noodles boil on a hot plate.

JOANIE
But daaad, noodles are boring.

GORDON
Do you complain to your mom like
that?

HALEY
She thinks noodles are boring too.

GORDON

Girls, I'm doing the best I can.

He is about to crack an egg into the ramen when he sees the expiration date on the carton. He chucks it, continues flipping through cabinets.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Why don't you do some *Choose Your Own Adventures* and I'll... figure something out.

JOANIE

I've done all the adventures in these ones.

HALEY

Me too.

GORDON

That's impossible, there are too many permutations. Gotta be... 32, 64... Well, a lot of them.

(then)

Uh, hey, you girls like hot sauce right?

He grabs a bottle of Tabasco and turns -- the girls are gone.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Haley? Joanie?

(no response)

Of course, everyone likes hot sauce.

Gordon searches the office. He finds Haley and Joanie splayed under a coworker's desk, and stops suddenly.

ON GORDON -- his eyes dart from the girls sitting on the floor, to dishes scattered around them, to books in laps and cradled in arms.

Then he looks at the rest of his coworkers: Nathan is LYING on the conference room couch reading *Byte Magazine*, the Engineers PACING or RECLINING as they scribble notes.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Oh my god, guys! We've been going about this all wrong.

Off the others, looking at him expectantly...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. PALO ALTO HOUSE PARTY - BEER PONG TABLE - NIGHT**

SPLISH!

A BALL lands in a BLUE PLASTIC CUP, one of ten arrayed in classic Beer Pong formation.

OPPONENT

That's two, balls back.

Heath and Cameron are at a raging HOUSE PARTY. Heath pulls two balls from their cups and rolls them back to their OPPONENTS.

He hands one beer to Cameron, downing the other.

HEATH

Cheers.

Cameron surveys the table: Unlike Cameron and Heath's neat pyramid, their Opponents' red cups are SCATTERED RANDOMLY -- but filled to the brim.

CAMERON

Okay, I get it: higher degree of difficult, higher reward. As the Americans, we're sitting ducks but our cups are only a little full...

HEATH

And the Viet Cong are damn hard to hit. But when you do, it really hurts them.

Cameron chugs her beer. Heath then takes her cup, pours fresh beer into it and PUTS BOTH CUPS BACK IN FORMATION.

CAMERON

Wait, but you put ours back? So can the Viet Cong even win?

SPLISH. SPLISH.

Two more hits. Two balls rolled back to their Opponents. Heath pulls TWO MORE BEERS, hands one to Cameron.

HEATH

Sure. But only if the Americans give up.

(CONTINUED)

A beat. Then Cameron gets it.

CAMERON

Hah! Oh god, that's messed up. I
should be so offended.

(then)

Let's wipe 'em out.

They cheers, challenge accepted.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - GORDON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gordon chatters excitedly into the phone:

GORDON

It's an integrated keyboard-and-
mouse that fits in your lap. You
can operate your PC from the
comfort of your living room couch,
because it's wireless.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SIMON'S HOME OFFICE - SAME

SIMON CHURCH is on the line -- the talented industrial
designer who helped realize the Cardiff Giant, and with whom
Joe MacMillan had a fiery romance.

But he is not well. Painfully thin, his skin is marred by
Kaposi's sarcoma, a telltale sign of ADVANCED AIDS.

SIMON

Wireless is intriguing. RF or
infrared?

GORDON

Honestly, doesn't matter. As long
as your drawings are amazing, I can
sell them on either.

SIMON

Aren't you the guy always saying
form follows function?

GORDON

Yes, but they both follow purpose.

(CONTINUED)

SIMON

(smiles)

That's nice. Don't know if it *means* anything, but it's nice...

GORDON

Look, do you want this? You did incredible work for us on the Giant; as far as I'm concerned you're the only man for the job.

Simon sighs, settles creakily in his chair.

SIMON

Gordon, I'm in no condition to travel--

GORDON

We'll book you first class and have a driver waiting on you.

SIMON

--and the last time I was in Texas, it was to tell Joe goodbye. I don't want to re-open that wound.

GORDON

Well Joe's no longer with us.

SIMON

He's what?

Gordon realizes how that sounds, quickly corrects:

GORDON

No longer with Cardiff Electric. He went out in a blaze of glory.

(then)

Don't you think you have another great piece of work in you, Simon?

SIMON

I have a bottomless well of great works. What I don't have is time left to see them through.

A beat as Gordon hears that awful truth.

GORDON

Well you're in luck because we don't have much time either.

Simon laughs, coughs.

(CONTINUED)

SIMON

Man, Gordon, you really can be a persistent son of a bitch...

INT. PALO ALTO HOUSE PARTY - HALLWAY - A LITTLE LATER

Back at the party, the challenge has gotten the better of Cameron. She and Heath slouch in the hallway.

They are drunk.

HEATH

What do you mean, why *wouldn't* you want to be a Terminator?

CAMERON

Let's see: Manipulative. Abusive. Strict plans for the future you either live up to or die.

HEATH

Wow you're right, sounds like my ex.

A beat. Then:

CAMERON

Hey. I want to ask you something. I was afraid to ask before, but now I think I'm not-afraid enough.

HEATH

Syntax error.

CAMERON

Ha-ha, shut up.

HEATH

It's okay. Lay it on me.

He leans in close. Thinks he knows where this is going...

CAMERON

Can I use your A.I. for our new game?

Beat.

HEATH

What?

(CONTINUED)

CAMERON

Like, Mutiny would lease the PARC mainframes, players send moves and the A.I. counters them. Wouldn't that be awesome?

HEATH

Cameron, are you serious? It doesn't... I mean, we're talking about military-grade hardware.

CAMERON

You mean like Skynet.

HEATH

But it's not science fiction. This thing is important, it'll save lives. It's just... not suitable for a *game*.

This isn't going as planned.

Without warning, Cameron KISSES Heath -- and he immediately breaks away.

HEATH (CONT'D)

Whoa, is that what this is? So I'd agree to this?

CAMERON

No, not at all, I like you!

HEATH

Well you chose a weird time to show it.

Cameron stops. Sees his point. She blew this.

CAMERON

Dammit... I'm sorry.

It's directed at herself more than anything. Heath lightens up.

HEATH

Look, it's okay. It's just not going to happen and not because I don't like you. *Believe me, I do.*

(then)

But to scale our system so it's responding to thousands of requests in real time?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HEATH (CONT'D)

I mean, Cameron, the stuff we're working on is 20 years out. What you're asking for -- that's 50 years out.

A long moment as all that settles on Cameron.

EXT. PINNACLE MOTEL - EARLY NEXT MORNING (DAY 3)

A roadside stop in an unremarkable town.

Joe's crosses the parking lot, stretching, enjoying the sunrise. Something across the street catches his attention -- a SIGN IN A SHOP WINDOW.

INT. PINNACLE MOTEL - BRIAN'S ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

KNOCK--

A single knock and the door swings open. Joe enters, finds Brian in a deep sleep.

Joe's about to rouse Brian when he spots a book splayed on the bedside table:

A GIDEON'S BIBLE. Joe flips through. Nearly every page is dog-eared, the margins are filled with scribbles, lengthy passages frantically underlined.

BRIAN

Jesus!

Brian startles awake with Joe standing over him. Joe smirks, indicates the Bible:

JOE

A little light reading?

Brian snatches the Bible away.

BRIAN

You can't just come creeping in here.

(then)

What time is it--

(seeing the clock)

Christ, why are you up so early?

(CONTINUED)

JOE

I was stretching my legs. This place belongs in a coffee table book.

BRIAN

Whatever that means.

JOE

There's a radio and TV repair shop across the way. They're hiring.

BRIAN

So?

JOE

So, you're out a job and trying to start over. I talked to the owner--
(as Brian blanches)
He'd love to have you. Not many electrical engineers in these parts.

Brian sinks his face into his palms.

BRIAN

I'm not looking for a job, I'm looking for the job. God gave me a gift, I have a responsibility to do something of significance.

JOE

And what if you're not good enough for the job?

BRIAN

If I believed that, it wouldn't hurt so much every time I fail.

JOE

(beat, then)

If God gave you a gift, it shouldn't matter where you land. You want to prove I was wrong about you? Your chance is right across the street. Take a leap, Brian.

But Brian just rolls out of bed and heads into the bathroom.

BRIAN

Nice try, Joe...

EXT. BERKELEY, CA - LATE MORNING

Donna and Lori Powell walk through Berkeley, under gaze of the University's campanile tower. They teeter, arms linked -- are they drunk?

DONNA

God I miss this. Do you come back here all the time?

LORI

Almost never.

DONNA

I'd live here if I could.

(then)

Is that Sig Tau? I'd have thought they'd tear this place down by now.

They approach a house, where A CUTE FRAT GUY is lugging party supplies up the stairs.

LORI

(calling out)

Hey! Do you guys still have that stolen phone booth in the basement?

CUTE FRAT GUY

Huh?

(seeing them)

Uh yeah. How do you know about that?

LORI

We were there the night they put it in.

He glances between Donna and Lori.

CUTE FRAT GUY

I'm sorry I missed that... You want to come inside? We've got some beers.

DONNA

It's a little early for us.

CUTE FRAT GUY

Yeah? So why are you carrying a champagne glass?

Donna realizes she is holding onto a FLUTE, lined with telltale mimosa pulp. She giggles:

(CONTINUED)

DONNA
Oh shit. Don't tell anyone.

LORI
(to Frat Guy)
Maybe next time.

Lori waves, steering Donna away as she sets her stolen glassware on the bannister. Once they're a little FURTHER DOWN THE STREET:

DONNA
God. He was so young he didn't even know to check for rings.
(looking back)
And so cute.

LORI
Well we could go back... but you wanted to talk. And if we have any more to drink I might not be able to say things delicately.

DONNA
(uh oh)
That doesn't sound good.

Lori gives her a strained smile.

LORI
Donna, I love spending time with you. And if we had struck out together right out of school...
(beat)
But I can't accept your offer.

DONNA
God, I should've made Cameron stay home.

LORI
It's not her. She's got some brass, I like that. But her vision...

DONNA
Cameron is a genius.

LORI
I don't doubt it, but that doesn't mean she's realistic. I've come a long way. I've got structure I can count on not to collapse under the weight of my boss's ambition.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LORI (CONT'D)

(then)

You understand?

DONNA

(beat, then)

Yes. Of course.

Lori takes her by the shoulders, looks her in the eye.

LORI

And Donna. You only get so many chances. You should be absolutely sure about whose star you're hitching your wagon to.

(then)

Let's do this again soon.

Lori embraces Donna, kisses her, and is gone.

EXT./INT. ELECTRONIC STORE - A LITTLE LATER

Donna walks through Berkeley, disheartened.

She glances into an ELECTRONICS STORE window... and gets a jolt at what she sees. She rushes inside to find a CLERK.

DONNA

You're selling this computer for \$79?

CLERK

Sure am. That's the TI-99, a--

DONNA

What's wrong with it?

CLERK

Pardon? Oh, you mean the price. They're discontinued, we're making room for new models. But that's a great little computer for what it is, just runs a little hot...

(then)

You alright, ma'am?

Donna's breathing has become erratic, the color gone from her face. Panicked. She makes a beeline for the door.

EXT. BERKELEY, CA - PAYPHONE - MOMENTS LATER

CLINK. Donna drops quarters into a payphone and dials. No dayplanner, she knows this number by heart.

HUNT (ON PHONE)

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WHITMARSH HOUSE - HOME OFFICE - SAME

Find HUNT WHITMARSH on the line -- Donna's former manager at Texas Instruments, last seen helping Brian rip off the Cardiff Giant and nearly blowing up the Clarks' marriage.

DONNA

Hunt, it's Donna.

HUNT

Donna?

(then)

Hold on.

Hearing his wife in the other room, Hunt closes the door.

HUNT (CONT'D)

I honestly didn't think I'd hear from you again--

DONNA

What killed the 99, Hunt?

HUNT

The 99/4A? Well you did. Or do you not remember our little trip to Lubbock?

DONNA

I know it was my recommendation, I mean *why* did we have to kill it. How did we get there?

HUNT

Huh...

He takes a beat to think. This really isn't the call he was expecting.

HUNT (CONT'D)

I guess we tried to pack in too much innovation;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUNT (CONT'D)

everything short of a toaster-oven,
and I think there was a port for
that. So it was too slow, ran too
hot, which is why people called it
the 'coffee--'

DONNA

'Coffee warmer,' I know. God.

HUNT

It's not that there weren't good
ideas in there, there were too
many. We reached too far.

(then, sensing her
anxiety)

Donna, you alright?

DONNA

I don't know. I just needed to hear
that out loud.

HUNT

Donna...

Hunt softens. Could this be a moment of reconciliation
between them?

HUNT (CONT'D)

Are you at home? I can come over,
if Gordon's not around--

Nope. Donna hangs up. Gross.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - MEN'S BATHROOM - DAY**

Simon Church stands at the mirror with Debbie. Armed with a makeup kit, she applies CONCEALER to the discolorations on Simon's cracking skin.

Joanie and Haley Clark watch, curious.

JOANIE

But *girls* wear makeup.

SIMON

That's not true, lots of people wear makeup. Everyone on TV wears makeup.

HALEY

She's jealous because she's not allowed to.

SIMON

Well that's because you're beautiful as you are.

(then)

Although...

He roots through Debbie's kit and applies a MARILYN MONROE BEAUTY SPOT to Joanie's cheek.

SIMON (CONT'D)

There you go. A regular heartbreaker.

Joanie checks herself out, pleased. Debbie puts the finishing touches on Simon.

Makeup can't hide the fact that he's dying.

DEBBIE

All set. You look great.

SIMON

(touched, whispering)

Liar.

(then)

Alright, ladies. Let's knock 'em dead.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - CONFERENCE ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Simon shows off a dozen SKETCHES to Gordon, Nathan Cardiff and LOUISE "LOULU" LUTHERFORD -- last we saw the 60-something debutante, Joe MacMillan had derailed LouLu's takeover by 'involving' himself with her boyfriend.

SIMON

...with a trackball in the center of the keyboard, it's a single, elegant device that you can operate from anywhere in the room.

The group murmurs approvingly.

NATHAN CARDIFF

You're talking wireless. Gordon, does he mean radio or infrared?

SIMON

Doesn't matter.

GORDON

Doesn't matter.

They exchange a grin. Simon continues as the team passes around a MATERIAL SAMPLE.

SIMON

The edges are wrapped in ergonomic rubber foam, surfaced with supple leatherette. It's as comfortable lying in bed at night as it is sitting on your desk. You'll want to wrap it in your arms.

LouLu eyes the image of a couple in bed with the device -- the SCULPTED MALE FIGURE, naked in the sheets, arm around his significantly less detailed wife.

LOULU

(to Cardiff)

Nathan, why are we listening to this cocksucker?

SIMON

Excuse me?

NATHAN CARDIFF

Now, LouLu --

LOULU

Far as I'm concerned, he's no better than that MacMillan, the one who seduced my Travis.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Simon's taken aback. Gordon looks at him apologetically, this is news to him.

GORDON

Ms. Lutherford, you can't mean that.

LOULU

Sure I can. He defiled my beloved, in my own house, and made a damned fool of me. Wherever Joe is it's on the road to hell...

(steamrolling, to Simon)

And if you took a look in the mirror you'd know you're on the way too. You want to know why you're sick? God's made your body rotten to match what's inside.

Everyone's stunned. Simon storms out wordlessly.

Gordon's about to go after him -- when he realizes Joanie and Haley, sitting in back, have heard the whole thing.

INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - GORDON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Gordon has the phone off the hook, roots through his pockets. Haley and Joanie are worked up. Joanie wipes at a tear, smearing her Marilyn beauty spot.

JOANIE

Why would that lady say those horrible things?

GORDON

Well baby, sometimes when two people love each other very much, they, uh... and they're *men*... some *other* people don't like it...

It's like a fumbling version of "the talk."

Gordon finally finds what he's looking for, a PHONE NUMBER. He dials, relieved:

GORDON (CONT'D)

Donna Clark's room.

(then)

Well did she leave a forwarding number? I'm having kind of a crisis.

(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GORDON (CONT'D)

Look, just tell her... I don't know what to do.

Debbie pokes her head in:

DEBBIE

Mister Church's car is here.

Gordon looks out the window, sees she's right. Damn. Then Gordon has a realization -- he hangs up, taking the girls by the hand:

GORDON

Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMON'S CAR SERVICE - DAY

Simon has just eased himself into the back seat when Gordon catches the door. He, Haley and Joanie pile in.

SIMON

Uh-uh, no more.

GORDON

I'm footing the bill, Simon, I'm allowed to ride in this car.

SIMON

Then I'll get a cab.

Simon starts to exit. Gordon catches his arm.

GORDON

Please. Give me until the airport.

Simon sneers, then eyes Haley and Joanie.

SIMON

You think your kids giving me puppy eyes is going to convince me to stay?

GORDON

No, I -- that back there -- I haven't prepared them for that and I just thought...

(desperate)

Look, go or don't go. But I think they need to hear that you're going to be okay.

(CONTINUED)

A beat. Simon sees the girls are upset. He sighs and closes the door.

GORDON (CONT'D)
(to the Driver)
Okay, to the airport.

The car moves out. Awkward silence for a beat.

JOANIE
So it's true what that lady said?
You really like boys?

SIMON
Yes, I like men.

HALEY
Like our dad?

SIMON
No, not like your dad.

HALEY
But it's true that God's punishing
you?

GORDON
Come on, Haley, of course not--

SIMON
Honestly, girls, I don't know.

A moment. Gordon seems like he wants to say something, but --

HALEY
...because that doesn't sound like
Him.

SIMON
(to Gordon)
Don't read much of the Old
Testament do they?

GORDON
We don't actually have a Bible in
our house.

JOANIE
But we know what's important!

HALEY
David beats Goliath.

JOANIE
Turn the other cheek.

HALEY
God loves you no matter what.

Simon sighs. Looks at the girls' earnest faces. Finally:

SIMON
Okay Gordon, I yield. I'll give it
another go --

GORDON
Great, you won't regret it.

SIMON
-- if Ms. Lutherford promises to
behave like a human being.

Gordon cringes. That may take some convincing...

INT. BERKELEY HOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Cameron enters the hotel room to find Donna. Her stuff is packed, suitcase on the bed.

CAMERON
Hey. How did it go?

DONNA
It didn't.

CAMERON
(beat, then)
Well, plenty of fish right? We'll
find someone--

DONNA
I don't know if I can do this,
Cameron.

CAMERON
'Don't know if you can do...'
Mutiny?

Donna shakes her head. Cameron scoffs.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
You don't trust me to pull this
off. I should've known. When Gordon
cut the heart out of the Giant, you
just stood back and let him.

(CONTINUED)

DONNA

Cameron...

CAMERON

You want to quit? We didn't sign anything, I'm not holding you against your will. If you can't get behind what I'm trying to accomplish, maybe you don't have the guts to be an original anyway.

DONNA

Maybe I don't.

She gets up, takes her bag.

DONNA (CONT'D)

I'm catching an early flight. I've got a lot to think about.

She pushes past Cameron and out of the room. A beat. Cameron KICKS OVER a chair in frustration.

INT./EXT. JOE'S TRUCK - COLORADO HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Brian and Joe sit in silence. A passing sign tells them they've arrived in "COLORADO SPRINGS."

BRIAN

"The greatest fighting force the world has ever known."

(then)

That's how my father put it too. He wanted me to enlist, to 'tame the Hun.' But I'm not interested in conquest, Joe. It goes against my moral fiber.

Rounding a bend, the U.S. Air Force Academy comes into view. The iconic, angular CADET CHAPEL looks like a spotlight scarab in the dark. Brian tenses, his breath shortens.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

'course, you knew all that already.

JOE

What? How could I possibly--?

BRIAN

Stop the car.

(CONTINUED)

Joe obliges, pulls over. Brian exits. Joe's guard is up as Brian opens the tailgate.

JOE
Good call, why don't you pick up
another ride from here--?

Brian reappears on the driver's side -- the SHOTGUN BARREL pressed through the window against Joe's face!

JOE (CONT'D)
Jesus, what are you doing!

BRIAN
I knew it was you from the day you arrived. The signs were there, your quicksilver tongue. First you broke me down. Now you took me through the desert, beckoned me to become a subjugator of the weak. But I will not submit!

JOE
Brian, come on let's breathe. Talk me through this --

BRIAN
You are an agent of mortal sin. But If I'm to be a killer, it's because I used the last of my strength taking you to hell with me.

Joe's terrified, trying to piece together Brian's ravings. He breathes deep.

JOE
Brian. None of that is true.

BRIAN
Of course you'd deny it just to save yourself.

JOE
I am trying to save myself. You may think I'm the devil, that pulling that trigger will send me to hell -- but I *know* it won't send me anywhere but oblivion. So keep your religion out of this for one minute.

Brian shifts, but doesn't speak and Joe presses on.

JOE (CONT'D)

When I saw you were hurting, I extended an olive branch; more than once, against my best judgment. And you threw it aside every time.

BRIAN

Trying to lead me from the path--

JOE

There is no path, Brian.

(then)

You spun yourself a narrative and left no room to fail. But I have to break it to you: you're not a martyr. You are a loser.

BRIAN

What did you call me!?

He presses the barrel into Joe's cheek, but Joe's words have rocked him and Joe keeps at it:

JOE

A loser with delusions of greatness. But you're not great, you're not even *good*. The only thing you ever made of any significance, you stole. Now you've 'found God' because that's the only way you people derive meaning in this part of the world --

BRIAN

Stop it.

JOE

But we make our own meaning, Brian. If you shoot me, then you're not just a loser and a thief, but a killer too. And not 'cause God's testing you or the Devil tempted you, but because you're as sick and petty as the rest of us.

A long, tense beat as Brian trembles, his finger quaking on the trigger. Joe stares right at him and --

HEADLIGHTS round the bend.

Brian lowers his weapon, hides it from a passing car. When he looks up at Joe again, his eyes are wet with TEARS. He whimpers:

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

*I failed, Joe. I'm so afraid I'll
never be called again.*

JOE

None of us are called. We choose.
And we do.

Joe puts the truck in gear. Brian doesn't raise arms against him.

And Joe drives away...

...as he rounds the next bend, he lets out a deep, shuddering breath. Holy shit.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Brian stands alone in the dark.

He looks ahead, at Joe's receding taillights and the road into Colorado Springs. He looks back, at the road down the mountain.

And he looks at his weapon. A road to nowhere. As Brian faces a choice about what to do next, we --

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. CARDIFF ELECTRIC - BULLPEN - NIGHT**

Cardiff is with LouLu Lutherford when Gordon arrives.

LOULU
Is he gone?

GORDON
Ms. Lutherford--

LOULU
I don't know what you told him, but I'm holding the purse strings and I won't work with him, simple as that.

(then)
Nathan, is this really the hill you want your ten million dollars to die on?

NATHAN CARDIFF
Simon Church is a hell of a designer.

GORDON
You were in that presentation; the work speaks for its damned self!

LOULU
You're not hearing me. I don't care about the work.

Gordon fumes.

GORDON
Unbelievable...

NATHAN CARDIFF
LouLu, I have trouble with this myself. I've memorized Leviticus. But Mr. Church is a good man, and I'm asking you to be reasonable--

LOULU
Did your man Bosworth think it reasonable to bring MacMillan into my home, knowing what depravity he was capable of?

(CONTINUED)

NATHAN CARDIFF

I'm awful sorry about that. But you know, Joe and John -- neither of them work here anymore.

LOULU

I mean, really, you should have heard my friends when I sent Travis away -- "There goes another one."
(then, quietly)
I mean those gals are just *awful*.

She trails off, upset. But Gordon sees a sliver of light.

GORDON

(whispered, to Cardiff)
'Those gals?'

Nathan nods, getting it.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Ms. Lutherford, what if we put you on the box?

LOULU

Pardon?

Gordon looks to Nathan.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Right. We could make you the face of the Giant. We'll put you on the box. On magazine covers.

GORDON

And on stage at all the trade shows, if you want.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Why pay some model no one's ever heard of to be our spokeswoman when we've got LouLu Damn Lutherford. You're perfectly relatable...

LouLu leans in. Gordon realizes she's looking for more.

GORDON

...not to mention glamorous. Every computer-shopping Texan will want to take home a little of that uh...

NATHAN CARDIFF

That Lutherford Sparkle.

(CONTINUED)

GORDON

Yeah.

NATHAN CARDIFF

Most importantly, all your friends
will be just *green*.

LouLu can't help but eat it up. After a moment --

LOULU

"Face of the Giant" is hardly
flattering.

GORDON

Then we'll change the name.
Whatever it takes.

A moment.

LOULU

Fine. Agreed. Simon Church will
design the damned thing.

(then)

But only if he designs the cover
shoot as well. If I'm going to work
with that queer, he can at least
make me look fabulous.

She gets up to leave. Cardiff and Gordon exchange a look of
disbelief.

GORDON

We can make that work.

INT. MORSELS FAMILY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Gordon, Simon, Haley and Joanie sit at a booth. Joanie
finishes a MAC N CHEESE plate. Gordon dips the last of his
fries in his shake. Haley's slumped, asleep on Simon's arm.

GORDON

Heck of a day.

SIMON

Mmmhm, you really tuckered these
two out.

GORDON

Joanie, I'm really sorry. Summer
should be about running through
sprinklers, not sitting in my
office dealing with grown-up stuff.

(CONTINUED)

JOANIE
(yawning)
I'm fine.

GORDON
(to Simon)
Their mother's a heck of a lot
better at this.

SIMON
Parenting. The thing I'm most sorry
I won't get the chance to do. For
what it's worth, I think you did a
bang-up job.

Simon fights the sadness creeping into his voice.

GORDON
Well. Apology still stands.

Gordon directs it at Simon. He nods appreciatively, before
Joanie jumps in.

JOANIE
What about a reward for saving your
butt?

GORDON
Oh my god, you're right, you did.

SIMON
Gordon, your girl may be a little
too smart for her own good.

Joanie grins impishly.

GORDON
No idea where she gets it.
(checking his watch)
You know what? Boards n' Bytes is
still open...

Off Joanie's excitement as she nudges Haley awake.

INT. CLARK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Donna enters, luggage in tow.

She hears children's laughter, peers in from the entryway.
Haley and Joanie are up and playing a game on the family
computer.

(CONTINUED)

GORDON
Hey you're home.

Gordon appears in the doorway.

DONNA
Gordon, why are the girls up, it's almost midnight.

GORDON
They earned it. I'll explain in the morning. How was your trip?

Donna's face falls.

DONNA
Not great. I actually -- got a little panicked and, I called Hunt.

She cringes with guilt, waiting for Gordon to lash out.

GORDON
Oh.

DONNA
I feel so stupid. I saw a TI-99 on some trash heap and I suddenly felt like this huge failure and--

GORDON
Donna, it's okay.

He takes her in his arms for a warm beat.

GORDON (CONT'D)
Let me show you something.

He leads her into the other room. The girls are gathered around the family TI-99. They're playing "Alpiner," a mountain climbing game famous for SASSING BACK at players:

ALPINER VOICE (ON COMPUTER)
Did you mean to fall like that?

Haley and Joanie burst into giggles.

GORDON
You hear that?

DONNA
The speech synthesizer...

GORDON

Your speech synthesizer. That was the whole reason they put you on the Speak & Spell. And look at how much fun they're having.

Haley and Joanie light up as the voice in the computer taunts and encourages them.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Donna, the 99 failed -- but not because of you. Your contribution is the best thing about it.

(nods at the girls)

Same goes for raising Haley and Joanie, if I'm being honest.

DONNA

Gordon...

GORDON

The point is, whatever you do next -- it's going to be incredible.

Off Donna, touched...

INT. MUTINY GAMES - OFFICE - MORNING (DAY 4)

It's barely light out as Cameron creaks into the office. The PHONE is ringing. She scrambles, picks up:

CAMERON

(disbelief)

Mutiny. It's very early in the morning.

JOE (ON PHONE)

'Mutiny.' I like that.

CAMERON

Joe?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY - SAME

Joe's on a pay phone in the mostly-empty quad of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

JOE

Hello Cameron. How are you?

(CONTINUED)

CAMERON

Not great, actually, so if you
don't mind--

JOE

You're still angry with me. That's
fine. But this will be our last
chance to talk for a while.

Cameron stops. She detects the sincerity in his voice.

CAMERON

Alright.

JOE

What happened at Comdex last year;
I was wrong.

CAMERON

Yeah, you said that.

JOE

Not just for taking sides against
you. I was wrong for trying to
protect you.

CAMERON

You mean you called just to tell me
you realized I'm a big girl?

JOE

Look, most of my life, I've treated
people like automatons, their only
role to help me achieve my own
goals. To let me play the hero.

CAMERON

Okay...

JOE

I've seen the face of failure. I
didn't want that for you.

(then)

But you didn't need a hero half as
much as I needed to be one.

Beat.

CAMERON

And the moment you realized that,
you decided to burn a truck full of
Cardiff Giants?

(CONTINUED)

He smiles.

JOE

I'm on a government line and I don't know what you're talking about.

(then, sincerely)

Truth is, I was afraid because you were so right: you are the future. But those of us stuck in the present aren't quite ready.

This lands on Cameron, as she realizes --

CAMERON

And I've been trying to drag you all kicking and screaming.

(then)

Jesus. I'm the Terminator.

A beat as that sinks in.

JOE

I'm going to miss you, Cameron.

She can't help herself:

CAMERON

Where are you?

JOE

Trying to stay out of trouble. I hope you do too.

LOSE INTERCUT as Joe hangs up.

He looks around, gets his bearings. A CADET passes, on her way into the CHAPEL at the heart of campus.

CADET

Morning, aviator. You looking for the recruiter?

JOE

Now what gives you that idea?

CADET

You've got that look.

JOE

Hotshot?

(CONTINUED)

CADET

Wannabe.

He grins, removes his shades.

JOE

No I'm headed to Fiske Observatory.
I'm just stopping by to remind
myself...

CADET

Remind yourself of what?

JOE

Of what could have been.

She gives him a warm smile.

CADET

Still could be, you know.

He meets her smile... then looks up into the Rockies. His
destination still ahead.

JOE

It's tempting.

(then)

But there's someone up there with
her eyes glued to a telescope, and
I need to pry her away long enough
to tell her I forgive her.

A beat.

CADET

You listen to The Police? Because
that was Too Much Information.

JOE

(grinning)

Sorry...

CADET

Well, services are starting. You
coming at least, or do you not want
to keep your girl waiting?

He looks up at the Cadet Chapel in its searing white
splendor.

JOE

Thanks, but I'm not sure they have
a place for me.

(CONTINUED)

CADET

Oh they have a place for everybody.
They designed it that way.

She heads inside.

A beat. Then Joe pockets his shades, peels off his jacket,
and follows.

INT. MUTINY GAMES - CAMERON'S ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

A light knock and Donna enters Cameron's bedroom to find her
staring at her ceiling, lost in thought.

DONNA

Cameron?

CAMERON

You here to collect your things?

Donna approaches and sets down a folded slip of paper.
Cameron picks it up -- it's a CHECK.

CAMERON (CONT'D)

What's this?

DONNA

I'm buying in. It's not much, but
if we're gonna self-publish, it's
at least a start.

(then)

I'm prepared to go all the way with
you. No matter what crazy future
you want to take us to.

A beat. Cameron stares at the check, smiles.

CAMERON

I was just thinking: maybe we
should start off with a couple 20th
Century ideas.

Donna grins back, liking the sound of that. Off Cameron and
Donna, and their budding partnership...

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE