

A MIND FOREVER VOYAGING

Screenplay by

Gary Whitta

Based on the story by

Steve Meretzky

WGAw #898112

If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain  
will grow and which will not, speak then unto me.

- *William Shakespeare*

The truth of a theory is in your mind, not in your eyes.

- *Albert Einstein*

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

It is an idyllic landscape - a peaceful residential street typical of middle-class suburbs all over America. The afternoon sun streams through the autumnal leaves of the trees lining the sidewalk. A perfect scene.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: THE VERY NEAR FUTURE

Number 1985 Maple Drive is like any other house on its block - a well-to-do family home. The flawlessly manicured front lawn is bordered by a porch complete with swing, and a white picket fence. A station wagon is parked in the driveway.

The front door opens to reveal MADELINE SIMM, 42. She fumbles in her bag for her keys as she steps out onto the driveway.

MADELINE

Kids! Come on, let's go!

From the door there now comes JASON SIMM, eleven years old, a kid who's seen his fair share of scrapes and mischief. He conducts a battle between two action figures as he walks.

MADELINE

Where's your brother?

Jason just shrugs, pre-occupied with his toys. Madeline looks back to the house, at the open front door.

MADELINE

Perry! Get moving or we'll be late!

Finally there emerges PERRY SIMM, three years his brother's junior and on first impression a quieter, more angelic kid.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: EIGHT YEARS OF AGE

Madeline corrals the two kids into the car and drives off.

INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Jason sits up front with his mom. They both sing playfully along with a Britney Spears-style pop song on the radio.

MADELINE AND JASON

"You might think you're the greatest... you might think you're so hot... but baby I'm here to tell ya... BAM! I know you're not!"

They mimic the sassy finger-wave motion that undoubtedly features in the music video, and continue singing along.

Perry is belted in back, gazing thoughtfully at the rust-colored leaves on the trees as they pass by outside.

MADELINE

Perry. Come on, sing along with us.

JASON

He can't sing. He sucks.

MADELINE

Jason! Don't talk about your brother like that. Perry, you have a beautiful singing voice.

PERRY

Thanks, mom.

He seems disengaged, more interested in his own thoughts.

EXT. MACY'S - PARKING LOT - DUSK

The frontage of the huge department store is adorned with Christmas decorations. A large electronic banner reads: "ONLY 23 SHOPPING DAYS LEFT!"

INT. MACY'S - EVENING

It's a cattle market, the aisles packed with holiday shoppers. Generic Christmas muzak plays.

Madeline fights her way through the crowds, loaded down with shopping bags, her two children in tow. She stops to set down her bags and consult a shopping list on her handheld PDA.

Jason fidgets impatiently, while Perry's attention is on something at one of the electronics counters.

MADELINE

Okay... what's next? I still have to get something for your father.

JASON

You already got him like three things!

MADELINE

And I already got you more than that. Should I stop shopping for you, too?

That shuts Jason up.

MADELINE

Okay, we'll go by the cosmetics counter to get him that cologne I like. I mean, the cologne he likes.

JASON

You promised me I could get the new Skydiver disc!

MADELINE

Jason, you can't always put yourself first.

JASON

I'm not! But the games store is going to be sold out. Can't we just go there first? Please?

MADELINE

Oh, all right. Perry, come along.

Perry doesn't hear, lost in fascination with one of the gadgets on display. It's a videocube, a futuristic mini-TV.

Madeline picks up her bags and moves off, Jason following.

MADELINE

You two stay close behind me.

Jason looks back to see Perry still at the counter, unaware that he and his mother are leaving him behind.

JASON

Yeah, mom. We're right behind you.

And they disappear into the crowd.

After a few moments Perry drifts out of his reverie and looks away from the videocube, to where his mother and brother should be. He sees nothing but passing strangers.

PERRY

Mom?

He scans the crowd, the first gut-wrenching waves of panic just moments away. He steps forward...

And now he's lost in the crowd, being jostled this way and that, still frantically searching for a familiar face.

PERRY

Mom? Mom!

Then he sees her. Just a few feet ahead of him, walking away. He rushes to her, grabs her sleeve and tugs on it.

She turns - it's not her. Just somebody who looked like her from behind. Perry backs away, disheartened, confused.

He stands in the aisle as people continue to drift past him as though he's invisible. His lip trembles and he begins to cry. Then an adult hand touches him on the shoulder.

SECURITY GUARD  
Got ourselves lost, did we?

INT. MACY'S - SECURITY OFFICE - NIGHT

An expansive, sparsely-furnished office lit by a buzzing strip of bright, antiseptic fluorescent light. The security guard has his feet up on his desk, reading a trashy novel.

Perry sits on a chair across the room, the tears drying on his face as the wall clock ticks off the passing seconds.

The door opens and Madeline rushes in, anxious and distraught. Jason ambles in behind her, uninterested.

MADELINE  
Perry! Where have you been?

She rushes to him as he jumps down from the chair, sweeps him up in her embrace. Her eyes fill with tears. Then she holds him tight by the shoulders and looks at him angrily.

MADELINE  
What have I told you about getting lost in a public place? What have I told you a hundred times?

Perry bites his lip, mumbles.

PERRY  
Stay exactly where I am, don't wander off trying to find you.

MADELINE  
Yes! And what did you do? You went wandering off, didn't you?

PERRY  
I'm sorry, mom.

She embraces him again, tighter than before.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

A sprawling assemblage of high-tech buildings set across a splendid lawn. The sign at the entrance reads: INFOCOM SYSTEMS INSTITUTE. RICHARD W. RYDER - FOUNDER.

INT. UNIVERSITY - CLASSROOM - DAY

Students watch with rapt attention as PROFESSOR ABRAHAM PERELMAN, a sprightly 55, carves an elegant stream of light with a handheld laser wand into an electronic chalkboard. He writes at a furious pace, the beam of light barely able to keep up as his hand dashes across the glowing board.

He finishes with a flourish and turns away, reading aloud to the students as they copy the words into their notebooks.

PERELMAN

"It is not in space that I must seek my dignity, but by the control of my thought. In space, the Universe encompasses me. In thought, I encompass the Universe."

(beat)

Blaise Pascal. Why, you may ask, are you writing down the words of a dead Frenchman? Because aside from a few minor things like founding probability theory and inventing the digital calculator three hundred years before its time, he also understood the one fundamental truth that I will attempt to teach you on this course - that as mathematicians we are also, essentially, philosophers.

He looks at his watch.

PERELMAN

Okay, that's enough for today. Go do... whatever it is you people do.

As the students file out, they pass another professor on his way into the room. ASEEJH RANDU, Indian, mid-thirties.

PERELMAN

Hey. What are you doing here? Don't you have a lecture?

RANDU

The guy from Ryder's office is here.

PERELMAN

The new guy? I thought that wasn't until three.

RANDU

(shrugs)

He's here now.

Perelman gathers up his books and papers, annoyed.

PERELMAN

Jesus. You'd think these people would know how we work here by now. What if the system was down? I mean, we could be running maintenance, we could have an emergency... they think they can just show up whenever they like?

Randu follows Perelman out into the hall.

RANDU

So long as they're writing the checks, I imagine that's exactly what they think. Just remember to smile.

PERELMAN

What am I, a performing monkey? I don't smile for these idiots!

INT. UNIVERSITY - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

A handsome young man, DAVID FULLERTON, late twenties, dressed in an impeccable suit, waits in the hall. He looks like some kind of wall street banker or other hot-shot power broker.

Perelman approaches the young man, smiling broadly.

PERELMAN

Hello! You must be...

They shake hands as Perelman searches for the name.

FULLERTON

David Fullerton.

PERELMAN

Right! Of course. Abraham Perelman. Pleasure to meet you. Although we weren't expecting you until...

FULLERTON

Yes, I know. I have to be back in D.C. by ten, so I caught an earlier flight. I figured you guys wouldn't mind if I just dropped in.

The corner of Perelman's smile twitches just a little.

PERELMAN

Of course not. We always have time for Senator Ryder.

INT. UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - DAY

Fullerton follows Perelman through the hallway.

PERELMAN

So, you're the new guy.

FULLERTON

Yes, I started in the Senator's office last month. Policy advisor. So far it's been fascinating. The Senator's a brilliant mind, he has some very aggressive ideas.

PERELMAN

Oh, you don't know the half of it. Now, I presume you've signed all the non-disclosure agreements? Because otherwise there's a whole thing we have to do with paperwork before I can take you down.

FULLERTON

Yes, the Senator has them.

PERELMAN

Excellent. So how much do you know about the project?

FULLERTON

I've been briefed on the basics, read most of the materials. But the Senator said that I really needed to come down here and see it for myself to believe it.

PERELMAN

Well, he's right about that.

Perelman unlocks the door to his office and they enter.

INT. UNIVERSITY - PERELMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Perelman dumps his books and papers on his desk.

PERELMAN

Just give me one moment to check my  
e-mail before we head down.

FULLERTON

Sure.

Fullerton busies himself surveying the diplomas and photographs lining the walls. There are certificates and plaques from MIT, CalTech and other prestigious institutions.

There's also a family portrait. A much younger Perelman, his wife, and two young children, a son and a daughter.

FULLERTON

Your family?

Perelman looks up from his computer screen.

PERELMAN

What? Oh. Yes.

FULLERTON

Beautiful kids.

PERELMAN

Yes. Yes, they were.

Fullerton doesn't understand. Perelman smiles thinly.

PERELMAN

I guess you didn't read all the  
materials yet.

Perelman logs off his computer and stands.

PERELMAN

Shall we?

There is another door here, a heavy reinforced steel one with an electronic keypad. Perelman types in a code and the door opens, revealing an elevator. Perelman motions to Fullerton, who steps cautiously inside. Perelman follows him in.

INT. ELEVATOR

Perelman and Fullerton wait as the elevator descends.

PERELMAN

We're all very proud of the Institute. In the past twelve years it's become one of the most prestigious technical colleges in the country. And of course it looks great for the Senator. But the real work goes on down here.

Fullerton nods. The elevator continues to descend.

PERELMAN

When they were installing this elevator they asked me if I wanted them to pipe in muzak. I asked them if they wanted me to beat them to death with my laptop.

The elevator arrives. Perelman and Fullerton step out into:

INT. COMPUTER LAB

The lab is absolutely state-of-the-art. Various TECHNICIANS work at terminals and monitor giant supercomputers. The walls, ceilings and floors are stark white, pristine.

Randu is here, supervising several technicians.

PERELMAN

This is the control area. From here we can monitor the system and update its program. It requires constant maintenance twenty four seven, so we have more than fifty programmers who are dedicated to that task alone. But I'm getting ahead of myself. This way, please.

Perelman walks through the lab, Fullerton in tow.

PERELMAN

I'd like you to meet Doctor Aseejh Randu, associate project director.

FULLERTON

Quite a set-up you've got here, doctor.

RANDU

Oh, you haven't seen anything yet.

PERELMAN

Right this way.

Perelman leads Fullerton onward. A couple of technicians converge on Randu.

TECHNICIAN #1

Is Abe showing that guy around?

RANDU

Some new suit from Ryder's office.

TECHNICIAN #2

Is he going to do The Spiel?

RANDU

It'd be a first if he didn't.

TECHNICIAN #1

I love it when he does The Spiel!

A small group of technicians follows Perelman and Fullerton.

Perelman stops at another reinforced door, goes through the security procedure. It slides open with a swoosh, to reveal:

INT. GANGWAY

A metal gangway walled on both sides by dark, opaque glass which runs from the ceiling to a point some distance below.

Perelman steps out onto the gangway. Fullerton gingerly follows, holding onto the handrails. It's disorienting. The technicians are close behind, watching Perelman expectantly.

Perelman pauses for a moment, takes a deep breath.

TECHNICIAN #1

Here he goes..

PERELMAN

In 1856 the English mathematician Charles Babbage invented the Analytical Engine, the predecessor to all modern computers, the world's first thinking machine. Today, more than one hundred and fifty years later, we stand on the verge of creating the world's first thinking, feeling machine.

Perelman walks up and down the gangway, hands flourishing as he speaks. This is a well-rehearsed routine. The technicians look on in amusement.

PERELMAN

The past thirty years have seen countless attempts to create an artificial intelligence, a computer that can accurately mimic the thoughts and emotions of a human being. They all failed. Why? Because that is precisely all they did - mimic. The true spark of intelligence, the ability to view a problem heuristically - with what you might call gut instinct - was missing. The approach was always misguided, based in each case on the lack of understanding that the computer and the human mind function in fundamentally different ways. My contention has long been that the goal should not be to create a computer that thinks like a human does, but a computer that thinks AS a human does.

Perelman walks toward a small control panel set into the handrail. His finger hovers over a button.

PERELMAN

For the past decade we at Infocom have been working toward that goal. To create a prototype reasoning, intelligent, sentient machine. Or as we prefer to call it around here, PRISM.

He presses the button. Down below, a spotlight on the other side of the smoked glass flickers on, illuminating a supercomputer mainframe, about the size of two refrigerators.

Fullerton peers over the handrail at the computer. It doesn't look that impressive. Perelman smiles.

PERELMAN

Oh, I'm sorry. I can never remember how these lights work.

He presses another button - and now all the other lights come on, revealing thousands more mainframes extending into the distance. Fullerton is awed. He spins around. The scene is the same through the other window; thousands more computers extending seemingly into infinity.

FULLERTON

My God!

PERELMAN

Future generations will no doubt look back upon PRISM as an amazingly primitive machine, much as we're amused by the first computers, with their vacuum tubes and transistors, today. It has, after all, taken us a space only marginally smaller than Central Park to build a machine that Mother Nature can squeeze into the size of a cantaloupe. But for right now PRISM is by far the most advanced supercomputer ever created, and undoubtedly the first of its kind. Let's take a closer look.

Perelman opens a door set into the glass wall, beyond which is a stairway leading down to the computer floor.

INT. PRISM COMPLEX

Perelman heads down the stairs, Fullerton, still in awe, following close behind.

FULLERTON

Just how fast is it?

PERELMAN

PRISM's base operating speed is a little over eight hundred quingigillion calculations per second - roughly ninety thousand times faster than any other supercomputer anywhere in the world. But I'd hate for you to miss the point - it's not the speed at which PRISM thinks that is critical, but rather HOW it thinks.

They arrive at the bottom of the stairs. They are now deep within the heart of PRISM, surrounded by the huge mainframes, which emit a strangely hypnotic humming sound.

PERELMAN

The emotional dimension. That's what makes the difference. Any computer can coldly manipulate information. The only real progress in computer science in the twentieth century was to build machines that could do so faster and faster. Now we have something genuinely new.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

A machine that can not only process information with blinding speed, but manipulate and react to it in ways that only a human could before. With empathy, with genuine understanding. When you consider the speed at which PRISM processes data coupled with its ability to analyze that data within a truly human emotional context, the incredible potential of this application becomes clear.

Fullerton stares at Perelman blankly.

PERELMAN

...doesn't it?

FULLERTON

I'm afraid you've lost me.

PERELMAN

Oh. Well, perfectly understandable. PRISM was designed and built for a single purpose, what we call Predeliberative Societal Modelling.

Perelman studies a monitor set into one of the PRISM mainframes, watches data stream by with interest.

PERELMAN

There have been numerous efforts in recent years to use computers to study how societies might evolve when faced with change. Again, they all failed. Again, a fundamental misunderstanding. Computers as we know them are wonderful for predicting changes in complex systems, but throw such a chaotic variable as human behavior into the mix and they're worse than hopeless. Computers don't think like people do, so how can they possibly be expected to predict how people might react to change?

Fullerton follows intently. He's starting to get it.

PERELMAN

Unless, of course, that computer itself had a true understanding of human behavior, of the infinitely rich tapestry that is human emotion. Then! Then you might just be able to do some really cool stuff. For example. Let's say the murder rate in California is spiralling out of control, so the Governor considers re-instating the death penalty. Will it be an effective deterrent? Who can say? Who could possibly predict something like that?

Perelman taps PRISM's casing proudly.

PERELMAN

This baby can. Give PRISM everything there is to know about criminal psychology, about the state's crime record, population statistics, social and economic demographics, and it will extrapolate with uncanny accuracy the long-term results of such a policy change. Want to know what might happen if we were to legalize cocaine? Repeal Roe vs Wade? Elect a gay President? So long as the raw data is comprehensive enough, PRISM will tell you exactly what our nation will look like five, ten, twenty years from now.

(beat)

We have, in effect, created a time machine.

Fullerton is astonished. Perelman finds it hard to contain his pride as his guest stares at PRISM in amazement.

FULLERTON

This is unbelievable.

PERELMAN

Ah, but I know what you're thinking - can it tell you who's going to win the World Series?

(deadly serious)

The answer is yes.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

In fact, we recently had to let a lab assistant go after we discovered he had been feeding PRISM every recorded baseball statistic since 1908.

FULLERTON

This really works?

PERELMAN

Oh, absolutely. The results of the tests we've run so far have been extremely encouraging. We're constantly evolving its program, although PRISM is nowhere near operational capacity at this stage.

FULLERTON

How long until it's really working?

PERELMAN

Well, the purely analytical sub-systems are fully functional right now, and in fact we're already putting them to good use. This is an incredibly expensive enterprise, of course, even for someone like Senator Ryder, so we lease out our processor time all over the world. SETI, NASA, AT&T, the Dow Jones and the World Bank all use PRISM - even the US government. But as for our real goal... right now we're estimating about twelve more years before we're really ready to go.

Fullerton is taken aback.

FULLERTON

Twelve years?

PERELMAN

In some ways PRISM is incredibly fast, in others it's very slow. As I said, the way in which it digests information is akin to the human learning process. Its program needs to reach a certain level of - how shall I put it - maturity, before it's able to fulfill its potential. Believe me, the results will be worth waiting for.

A thought occurs to Fullerton. He does a quick calculation.

FULLERTON

Twelve years from now. That'll be-

PERELMAN

-around the time your boss is planning to run for President. I believe his plan is to unveil PRISM during his campaign. We're entering a new age, Mister Fullerton. An age in which politicians - well, Senator Ryder at least - will no longer simply make vague promises about change for the better.

(beat)

He'll be able to guarantee it.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - EVENING

Storm clouds growl overhead as a luxurious Mercedes Benz pulls out of the university gates and drives away.

INT. MERCEDES - EVENING

Perelman is behind the wheel. It begins to rain, hard. Perelman switches on the wipers.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EVENING

The Mercedes drives on, through the rain. Eventually it comes to a stop at the side of the road. On the other side is a driveway flanked by an open pair of iron gates.

INT. MERCEDES - EVENING

Perelman sits in the car, engine still running, wipers still thudding against the windshield. He is pensive, lost in some sad, reflective train of thought. He reminds us of Perry.

The sign by the gates across the road reads: GARDENS OF ETERNAL REST CREMATORIUM AND MEMORIAL HOME.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EVENING

The Mercedes pulls away, turns, and drives into the cemetery.

EXT. CEMETERY - EVENING

Perelman, wearing a long raincoat and carrying an umbrella, buys a bouquet from a flower stall.

He walks between the graves, stopping at last before a large tombstone with three graves. He kneels and splits the flowers into three bunches, placing one on each grave.

The names on the tombstone read: ANNE PERELMAN, JONATHAN PERELMAN, and SARAH PERELMAN. The dates of birth are all different, but all three dates of death are identical: August 21, 1995.

The rain drives down hard. Perelman smiles wanly.

PERELMAN  
How you guys doing?

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry sits in an armchair, reading an anthology of short stories by Philip K. Dick. He hears a jangling of keys at the front door and rushes excitedly into:

INT. HOUSE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Perelman enters, shaking his umbrella dry.

PERRY  
Dad!

Perry runs to Perelman, thrilled to see him.

PERELMAN  
Hey! Easy sport, I'm all wet!

He takes off his raincoat and hangs it on the rack, then grabs Perry up, swinging him around, tickling, making him laugh. It's the first time we've seen Perry excited, happy.

PERRY  
Okay, okay, quit it!

Perelman puts Perry down, ruffles his hair.

PERELMAN  
Something smells good. What's mom got cooking?

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Madeline, Perry, Jason and Perelman sit around the table, eating dinner. It's meatloaf night.

PERELMAN  
This is good, honey.

MADELINE  
Thanks. I got the recipe from that new web site I told you about.

PERELMAN  
Uh-huh. So how was school today,  
kiddo?

PERRY  
It was okay. We have a math test  
coming up next week.

Perry plays wistfully with his food.

PERELMAN  
That a problem?

PERRY  
I don't like math. It's boring.

MADELINE  
But you're so good at it.

PERRY  
Doesn't mean I have to like it.

PERELMAN  
(smiles)  
Well listen, don't worry about your  
problems with mathematics. I assure  
you, mine are far greater.

PERRY  
You stole that from Einstein.

Perelman is taken aback, surprised that Perry knew that.

PERELMAN  
Yeah... well, if you're going to  
plagiarize, who better to do it  
from, right?

He winks at Perry, who smiles in return. They eat.

Jason, meanwhile, isn't eating. He seems focused on something  
under the table.

MADELINE  
Jason. You're not eating.

JASON  
Yes, I am.

Without looking up, he shovels some food into this mouth.  
He's not paying attention and some food falls to the floor.

MADELINE  
Jason! Do you have something under  
there?

JASON  
No.

MADELINE  
Yes you do. Put it up here.

Jason sighs, produces a comic book and puts it on the table.  
Perelman picks it up. It's some mindless, violent war comic.

PERELMAN  
Now slugger, what have we told you  
about reading at the table?

JASON  
What do you care? It's not like  
you're my real dad. Or his.

MADELINE  
Jason! Don't start!

JASON  
Well, he's not! He's not!

PERELMAN  
Look, I know it's been tough. But  
it's been a while now. You've got  
to start getting used to this. I  
mean your brother has, right?

Perry nods, somewhat noncommittally.

PERELMAN  
And I love your mom, you know that,  
don't you?

JASON  
I don't care what you do! And I'm  
not your "slugger" either, so you  
can quit calling me that!

And with that, he storms out in a huff.

PERELMAN  
I'll talk to him.

MADELINE  
No, stay. I'll talk to him. You  
finish your dinner.

Madeline gets up and leaves. Perelman and Perry stare at their mashed potatoes.

PERELMAN  
Sorry about that.

PERRY  
It's okay, dad.

PERELMAN  
We never talked about it, did we?  
What happened to your real dad?

PERRY  
Guess not.

Uncomfortable, Perry pushes his food around his plate.

PERELMAN  
You know, it's okay to talk about  
it. Do you remember anything?

PERRY  
I was only five. The cops came to  
the house. They told us he was in a  
crash. Mom and Jason cried.

PERELMAN  
Did you cry too?

PERRY  
No. I just felt kinda...

PERELMAN  
Numb?

PERRY  
What's that mean?

PERELMAN  
It means... like you didn't feel  
anything at all.

PERRY  
Yeah. I felt numb, I guess. You  
know?

This resonates strongly with Perelman.

PERELMAN  
Yeah. Yeah, I think I do.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Randu is studying data stream as it streams by on a holographic screen. Perelman enters.

PERELMAN

Morning.

RANDU

Abe! You're here early.

PERELMAN

I've got a lecture first thing, but I wanted to stop by first to see how things went last night.

RANDU

Seems like everything went great. Big test for the system parameters, but it blew by without a hitch. Look at these numbers.

Randu indicates toward a series of flowing line graphs.

RANDU

Not a single spike. We've had them before, and under less stress than last night. It could have been a bad scene. But PRISM handled it beautifully. This is some piece of work we've got here.

PERELMAN

Yeah, I know. Okay, I'll come back later to take a closer look at the data, I just wanted to stop by.

As he turns to leave, a single scarlet flower petal falls from his raincoat and onto the floor.

RANDU

What's that?

PERELMAN

What's what?

Randu picks up the petal.

RANDU

Fell out of your coat.

PERELMAN

Did it? No.

RANDU

Yeah, I saw it. Now, since I know you definitely haven't been on a hot date... let me guess. You've been back there again, haven't you? I told you, it does you no good!

PERELMAN

I don't know what you're talking about. Honestly, I have no idea how that got there.

Perelman turns and leaves, Randu eyeing him sceptically.

EXT. MARTIAN LANDSCAPE

The majestic mountain peaks and valleys of the red planet. A squadron of alien starfighters streaks across the landscape at high speed, another spaceship in pursuit.

The alien ships pitch and roll between the mountains, locked in mortal aerial combat with the enemy craft. The fierce dogfight continues, until... the image suddenly dissipates like a hologram, flickering away to reveal:

INT. HOUSE - PERRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Perry is sitting inside a child-size virtual reality pod, still holding the control sticks. His mother has opened the hatch and peers in disapprovingly.

Perry has grown - he's about four years older now.

PERRY

Um... hi, mom?

MADELINE

Perry Simm. What have I told you about spending all day in that Joybooth?

As he clambers out of the pod:

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: TWELVE YEARS OF AGE

PERRY

I finished all my books.

MADELINE

Well, go to the library.

PERRY

I already read everything there.

MADELINE  
You did not!

PERRY  
I did, I swear!

MADELINE  
Well, spending all your time inside a computer simulation, it's not healthy for a young boy. It's summertime! There's a whole real-life world out there! Your friends are outside playing, they were asking after you.

Hearing this, Perry brightens up a little.

PERRY  
Is Tracey out there?

MADELINE  
(smiles)  
Yes, I believe she is. Go on now.

Perry runs excitedly from the bedroom and down the stairs.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A light wooded area not far from Perry's house. Perry and various other boys and girls of his age scatter as a girl, TRACEY, again the same age, covers her eyes and counts.

TRACEY  
Forty eight... Forty nine...

Perry finds what looks like a good spot behind a tree.

TRACEY (O.S.)  
Ready or not, here I come!

Perry steels himself, determined not to be found.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - LATER

It's been some time. Perry still hasn't been found. He fidgets, bored, but is determined not to reveal himself.

Eventually, he cracks. He stands, and peeks out to see-

TRACEY  
BOO!

Perry jumps back, startled. Tracey is right there, laughing.

TRACEY  
I found you.

PERRY  
You scared me.

TRACEY  
Oh, don't be a big baby! You won! I  
already found everyone else.

PERRY  
You did? Where are they?

TRACEY  
They got called home. It's getting  
pretty late.

PERRY  
Yeah. I guess we should go, too.

TRACEY  
Yeah...

They shuffle their feet, look around awkwardly.

TRACEY  
So, you wanna go exploring?

PERRY  
Sure.

They head off together.

EXT. WOODS - LAKE - LATE AFTERNOON

Perry and Tracey sit together by the lakeside, skipping stones across the water. Tracey skips one expertly. Perry tries and it sinks like a rock. He frowns. Tracey laughs.

PERRY  
I give up, I can't do it.

TRACEY  
You're just not doing it right.  
First you've got to find the right  
kind of stone. Here.

She hands him a stone. There's a momentary connection as their hands touch.

TRACEY  
Okay, now look.

Tracey stands right behind him. They're very close.

TRACEY

Like this.

She takes his hand and moves it with hers. Perry is nervous, excited. His heart beats faster.

TRACEY

Now throw it!

He throws the stone. It skips neatly across the lake.

TRACEY

Yay! See? You can do it.

PERRY

Cool. Thanks.

They sit down again, rake their hands over the ground. A long beat. Perry's very nervous, afraid to do anything.

TRACEY

Have you ever kissed a girl?

Perry flushes bright red.

PERRY

What??

TRACEY

You heard me.

PERRY

Why do you want to know?

TRACEY

Just 'cuz. Have you?

PERRY

Maybe.

He can't hold up the pretense. He looks disconsolately down at the ground.

PERRY

No.

Tracey smiles, endeared to him.

TRACEY

Do you want to?

PERRY

When?

TRACEY

Duh! Now, stupid.

PERRY

With you?

TRACEY

Okay, you're running out of chances here.

Their eyes lock. Perry moves forward awkwardly, no idea what he's doing. He screws his eyes up tight. They kiss, just for a moment. He opens his eyes.

TRACEY

So? What did you think?

Perry doesn't say anything. He just sits there, a big dumb grin creeping across his face.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - PERRY'S HOUSE - MORNING

The door opens and Perry reluctantly emerges, shepherded outside by his mom. He wears a goofy-looking red knit hat and carries a lunchbox that looks too young for him.

The school bus waits outside.

PERRY

Mom! I'm not going to school like this! I look like a freak!

MADELINE

Oh, you do NOT look like a freak! You look adorable.

PERRY

I don't want to look adorable! Adorable is going to get me beat up.

MADELINE

Oh, who's going to beat you up?

PERRY

My friends!

MADELINE

Well they can't be very good friends if they'd tease you just because you're wearing a hat your Grandma knitted for you.

PERRY

Did you ever GO to middle school? I don't want to wear this hat. And I don't want this lunchbox either, it's for little kids.

MADELINE

Your Grandma gave you those things for your birthday! She doesn't have much money but still she remembered your birthday and bought those for you. Now how do you think she'd feel if you threw them away? Hmm?

Perry looks down at his shoes, feeling a little guilty.

PERRY

I guess.

MADELINE

Okay, you're going to be late.

Perry sighs and trudges off toward the bus.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

The bus unloads. Perry walks across the school yard, where kids are milling about. They stare at his hat, his lunchbox.

KID

Hey, Perry! Nice lunchbox!

KID #2

Where'd you get that hat, at Freaks R Us?

Laughing and comments all around. Perry keeps his head down, just keeps walking... until something brings him to a stop.

It's a bigger kid, DOYLE, standing directly in his path.

DOYLE

Hey, garbage. I think you got the wrong place. The all-girls school is down the road.

Perry tries to go around, but Doyle blocks him.

DOYLE

Didn't you hear me? I said the girls school is down the road. Now turn around and go back!

A small crowd is gathering, which Doyle of course loves. Tracey is among them, the only one not enjoying the show.

PERRY

I go to school here, I just wanna-

He tries to go around again, but this time Doyle pushes him. As Perry stumbles backward, Doyle grabs his hat.

PERRY

Give it back.

DOYLE

Make me.

TRACEY

Leave him alone! What's he done to you?

DOYLE

Who are you, his girlfriend? Perry here don't have a girlfriend, he's just a little faggot.

PERRY

Please give it back. My Grandma made it for me.

DOYLE

Aaaw? Did you hear that? His Gramma made it for him.

Doyle tears the hat in two. Perry's lip trembles, he's trying desperately not to cry.

DOYLE

Aaw, are you going to cry? Big fuckin' baby.

Perry looks at the crowd of kids staring at him. At Tracey, who just looks back at him helplessly.

And then he swings at Doyle with a violent right hook. The bully never sees it coming. The punch connects perfectly, dropping Doyle to the floor like a puppet with its strings cut. The kids watching can barely believe their eyes.

Still consumed with anger, Perry kicks Doyle hard in the stomach. Doyle curls up into a ball, writhing in pain.

Tracey rushes forward and grabs Perry, pulls him away.

TRACEY

Perry! Stop, that's enough.

Perry just looks down at the figure laying before him, his eyes glazed over, unable to believe it himself.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry sits alone, silently, on the couch. Across the room stand Perelman and Madeline. They look at him sternly.

MADELINE

Well? What do you have to say for yourself?

PERRY

I told you I didn't want to wear that hat.

MADELINE

That boy had to go to the hospital! Your teacher said he's never seen anything like this from you before. What's gotten into you?

Perelman motions to Madeline - calm down. He sits on the couch next to Perry.

PERRY

Hey. Look, it's okay. You're not in any trouble.

MADELINE

(fuming)  
He's not in-?

PERELMAN

You're not in any trouble, okay? I promise nothing's going to happen, we just need to know... whatever were you thinking?

PERRY

The big kid, Doyle, he's a bully. He beats up on all the smaller kids. It was that stupid hat and that lunchbox, I told mom-

PERELMAN

It's okay, sport. Just tell me.

PERRY

He tore my hat and he pushed me and  
he called me an effing faggot!

He begins to cry.

PERRY

Everybody was watching me, what was  
I supposed to do? My dad always  
told me to stand up for myself.

PERELMAN

Well, he was right. But hitting  
somebody, that's never the answer,  
not ever. Do you understand?

PERRY

But it worked.

Perelman and Madeline exchange a concerned look.

PERELMAN

That's not the point. Violence  
doesn't solve anything. Usually it  
just leads to more violence. And  
that's no good. You know?

PERRY

Yeah, I guess.

PERELMAN

Okay. Now c'mere.

And he gives Perry a big hug.

PERELMAN

I guess we'll be calling YOU  
"slugger" from now on, huh?

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness, illuminated only by the digital readout of a  
bedside clock.

A telephone rings. A hand emerges from the darkness and  
scrabbles from the receiver. It's Perelman.

PERELMAN

Perelman... Jesus, it's three  
o'clock in the morning... what? Oh,  
shit. Okay, I'll be right down.

He rises from the bed, fumbles around in the darkness.

PERELMAN

It's okay, honey. Go back to sleep.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman enters, unshaven, wearing whatever he was able to grab. He looks a sight. Randu is amused.

RANDU

Whoah, Abe! You look like shit. You dress yourself in your sleep?

PERELMAN

At least I do sleep. What are you, some kind of freak? Don't you have a home to go to?

RANDU

That's real rich. Listen, we may have a big problem.

Randu punches some keys on his computer and a holographic image of various datastreams and readouts appears. It's meaningless to us, but as soon as Perelman sees it:

PERELMAN

Oh, shit. What the hell happened?

RANDU

We were running a stress test on some of PRISM's core systems, nothing we haven't done a dozen times before. But this time... well, I mean, look at this.

He indicates toward several severe spikes in the graphs.

PERELMAN

Yeah, that's not right. What are we doing now?

RANDU

Well, the code monkeys went in there right away and have been running damage control, I think we basically fixed it. But what the hell? We're supposed to be past this. PRISM shouldn't be pulling surprises like this on us any more.

PERELMAN

Is there anything I can do?

RANDU

You tell me. You're the boss. I just figured you needed to see this right away. I mean-

PERELMAN

No, no, you did the right thing. But we have a lid on it now?

RANDU

Yeah, I mean I think so.

PERELMAN

Okay. We'll worry about it in the morning.

As he leaves:

RANDU

Don't you want to see the raw feed?

PERELMAN

In the morning! Go home, for Christ's sake, get some sleep.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Recess. Perry is collecting things from his locker.

Across the hall, the door to the teacher's lounge is open as a pair of WORKMEN haul out the old carpet. It's worn thin, smelly. The assembled teachers are clearly glad to see it go.

HISTORY TEACHER

Thank God! I never thought we'd see the back of that flea-ridden pile.

ENGLISH TEACHER

How soon can the new carpet go in?

WORKMAN

Maybe Monday. Have to see how much we got. Hey Carl, how much we need?

Another WORKMAN is measuring the lounge floor. He checks the hand-written notes on his pad.

WORKMAN #2

Okay, you got one piece twenty three by sixteen and a half, and another at nine by thirteen and three inches. That's...

He tries to work it out on his calculator, but it's faulty.

WORKMAN #2  
Aw, goddamn piece of-

He shakes the calculator and taps at the buttons in frustration as Perry looks on.

PERRY  
Four hundred and ninety eight point seven five square feet.

All the teachers and the workmen look at him.

MATH TEACHER  
What did you say?

PERRY  
Four hundred and ninety eight point seven five. I'm pretty sure.

The workman is finally able to punch the sum into his calculator. He looks up at Perry, astonished.

WORKMAN #2  
Son of a -! How'd you do that?

MATH TEACHER  
Perry... come see me after school.

PERRY  
Why? I didn't do anything.

MATH TEACHER  
Just come see me, okay?

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MATH CLASSROOM - DAY

Empty save for the math teacher and Perry, who sits at a desk in the front row. The teacher is leafing through test papers.

MATH TEACHER  
Perry, in the year that you've been in my math class, you've never shown much interest, have you?

PERRY  
I guess.

MATH TEACHER  
So what was that outside the teacher's lounge today? There's only a few people in the whole world who can do arithmetic like that. Did you know that?

PERRY

Not really.

Perry looks around, bored. He just wants to get out of here.

MATH TEACHER

Your stepfather's a mathematics professor up at the Infocom Institute, isn't he? Does he sometimes help you with your math?

PERRY

Sometimes. I don't really ask him to, though.

MATH TEACHER

Why not?

PERRY

Math's boring.

MATH TEACHER

Oh, it's not boring! Once you begin to understand it, it's like magic. There's no end to the things you can discover.

Perry is mightily unimpressed by this. He fidgets.

MATH TEACHER

Perry, I'm just trying to make sure you're not wasting something here. Some people are born gifted, at baseball, or at music, and some are gifted at math. If you're one of those people, and you're not learning just because you think it's boring, you could really be throwing something away, you know?

PERRY

Yeah... whatever.

The teacher walks to the chalkboard.

MATH TEACHER

Will you try something real quick?

PERRY

Try what?

MATH TEACHER

An experiment. It'll only take a few minutes.

PERRY

I should be getting home.

MATH TEACHER

Just a few minutes. And no math homework for a week.

That sells it.

PERRY

Okay.

The teacher writes an algebraic equation on the chalkboard.

MATH TEACHER

Okay, so this semester we've been working with quadratic equations. Can you read this one for me?

Perry takes a look at it.

PERRY

$X^2 + X - 12 = 0$ .  $X = 3$  and  $X = -4$ .

The teacher is taken aback.

MATH TEACHER

O-kay. I just wanted you to read it for me, but you solved it, too. But that's okay, that's good.

Now he writes a differential calculus problem on the board. It's complex, way beyond Perry's age level.

MATH TEACHER

Have you ever heard of something called calculus?

PERRY

Yeah, it's math that has to do with how the relation between different sets of numbers gets affected by changes in one of the variables.

The teacher is astonished.

MATH TEACHER

Did you read that somewhere?

PERRY

I guess so.

He looks up at the equation on the board.

MATH TEACHER

Now what we have here looks compli-

PERRY

X equals the A sine multiplied by W  
and X plus the B cosine multiplied  
by W and X.

The teacher looks at Perry, then at the chalkboard, then back at Perry with amazement.

MATH TEACHER

How did you... have you seen me  
write this somewhere before?

PERRY

No.

MATH TEACHER

Then how could you possibly solve  
that equation?

PERRY

I don't know. Just seems kind of  
obvious.

The teacher looks back again at the horrendously complex equation on the board, utterly agape.

INT. HOUSE - PERRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Perry is laying on his bed, reading a book by the light of his bedside lamp, when there's a knock at the door.

PERRY

Who is it?

The door opens.

PERELMAN

Hey, champ. Can I come in?

PERRY

Sure.

Perelman enters, sits at the foot of the bed.

PERELMAN

What are you reading there? Whoah.  
*Fahrenheit 451*. Pretty serious  
stuff.

PERRY  
Have you read it?

PERELMAN  
Years ago, when I was in college.  
Do you like it?

PERRY  
It's kinda scary.

PERELMAN  
Yeah, it is. So... Mister Wood,  
your math teacher called me today.

Perry sighs, puts down the book.

PERRY  
What did he want?

PERELMAN  
He told me he had a very  
interesting chat with you. What's  
this about you doing lightning  
mental arithmetic and solving  
differential calculus equations?

Perry just shrugs.

PERELMAN  
Hey, maybe I should start a study  
at the Institute to find out if  
it's possible for kids to inherit  
stuff from their stepdads.

He smiles. Perry doesn't really get it.

PERELMAN  
You know, there's nothing wrong  
with being a mathematician, Perry.  
Without math we wouldn't have  
spaceships or computers or  
videocubes - even your Joybooth  
over there. We wouldn't have any of  
that cool stuff.

PERRY  
I like that stuff, but it doesn't  
mean I want to know how it works.

PERELMAN  
You know, the guys who make that  
stuff, they make a LOT of money.

Even that doesn't seem to interest Perry.

PERELMAN

Well, you might not care about that kind of thing right now. But one day you're going to have to figure out what you want to do after you leave school. And I wouldn't want you to disregard something that you might be really good at just because you think it's boring now.

PERRY

I already know what I want to do.

PERELMAN

You do?

PERRY

Yeah.

PERELMAN

Well, what are you holding out on me? Come on, give it up!

A beat.

PERRY

I want to be a writer.

Perelman is somewhat surprised by this.

PERELMAN

Is that right? What kind of a writer? Like a journalist?

PERRY

No. I want to write stuff like this.

He holds up the copy of *Fahrenheit 451*.

PERELMAN

Science fiction, huh?

PERRY

Yeah. I think it's cool. I want to write about the future. All the places we'll go, all the things we'll do and see. You know?

PERELMAN

Yeah. I hear ya, buddy. I think that's great.

PERRY

It's okay with you?

PERELMAN

Of course it is! Why, did you think it wouldn't be?

PERRY

I dunno. Everybody wants me to like math. I can't help that I don't. I just figured because your job is about math, that you'd want me to get a job like that, too. Like, if I didn't, that I'd be letting you down somehow.

PERELMAN

You've always been a bright boy, Perry - you have no idea how bright. But that doesn't mean you ever have to do anything you don't want to.

PERRY

So, you're not disappointed?

Perelman looks at Perry, swelling with pride.

PERELMAN

On the contrary, son. I couldn't be more happy. C'mere.

They hug.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Perry sits on the couch, idly flicking through the stations on the wall-sized holographic TV. He's now a few years older still, and becoming a handsome young man.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: SIXTEEN YEARS OF AGE

He flicks through countless stations of cartoons, westerns, cop shows, and finally stops at CNN - it's "Crossfire."

CNN INTERVIEWER

Senator Ryder, with the party conventions now just a few months away, the question on most lips in Washington, be they Republican or Democrat, is - will you be running as a Presidential candidate in the upcoming primaries?

Across the table from the interviewer sits SENATOR RICHARD RYDER. He's well into his sixties but still rakishly handsome, tan with a thick mane of salt-and-pepper hair.

He smiles, flashing perfect white teeth. He's infinitely charming and apparently born to be in front of a TV camera. Images of Reagan and Dubya come all too easily to mind.

SENATOR RYDER

I'm sorry to have to disappoint you, John, but the bald truth is that I'm not considering any Presidential candidacy right now. There's plenty of work for me to do in my home state, and that's what I'm really here to talk about.

CNN INTERVIEWER

But you can't dismiss the constant rumors that your office has, for the past few years, been carefully laying the groundwork for a future Presidential run.

SENATOR RYDER

I sure can dismiss those rumors, John, because that's all they are - rumors. And I'd think that a journalist of your fine reputation would know better than to put any stock in that kind of scuttlebutt.

Madeline enters from the kitchen. She's beginning to go gray, the facial lines are more pronounced than before.

MADELINE

Perry. Aren't you supposed to be out helping your brother pick up his new car?

PERRY

He said he didn't want me sitting in it. He went to get it himself.

(re: TV)

You ever notice how these guys who go on TV and say they don't want to be President, those are always the guys who are President a few years later?

MADELINE

Why are you watching this?

PERRY

This guy kinda fascinates me. Look at him. Perfect hair, perfect tan, perfect white teeth. It's like he's not even real, like he's computer-generated or something. It's kinda scary, almost.

MADELINE

Honey, I came in here to watch my soap.

Perry changes the station. Daytime soap opera stars burst into the room via the miracle of holographic TV.

Outside, a car horn blares.

JASON (O.S.)

Hey jackass! Get out here and check this out!

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - PERRY'S HOUSE - DAY

Jason, now 19 but every bit as obnoxious as before, is in the driveway in his new car, a sleek convertible.

Perry steps outside to admire it.

PERRY

Wow.

JASON

Four hundred and fifty horsepower, baby! So, you want a ride?

PERRY

Sure!

But when Perry touches the door handle, it gives him a sharp electric shock.

JASON

Haha! Psych! I had that fitted so scrotes like you don't get any ideas. Well, gotta skate. Hot date! Oh, you wouldn't know what that is, would you? See ya, slug.

He starts backing out of the driveway. From where Perry's standing, he can see all the way down the street - the rest of the driveway is lined with tall hedgerows.

And what Perry can see now is a truck headed down the street, on a collision course with his brother's car.

PERRY  
Jason! Stop!

Jason just sneers, keeps backing out. Perry rushes after him.

PERRY  
No, stop! There's a-

Too late. Jason pulls out onto the street - just in time to get smashed head-on by the truck.

The trucks screeches to a halt. Perry just stands there, frozen, as his mother rushes out. When she sees what has happened, she collapses to the ground, wailing.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mourners mill around Jason's coffin. They comfort Madeline, who has obviously been crying for days.

Perry gazes out the window, dressed in a black suit. He turns when he senses somebody behind him.

PERELMAN  
You okay?

PERRY  
Yeah. I don't really know what I'm supposed to do.

PERELMAN  
Nobody ever does.

Perry looks back to the window, pensive.

PERELMAN  
Sure you're okay?

PERRY  
Can I talk to you?

PERELMAN  
Yeah, come on.

They move to the lobby and sit together on the stairs.

PERRY  
Remember years ago, when you asked me how I felt when my dad died?

PERELMAN  
Yeah.

PERRY

Do you remember what I said?

PERELMAN

You said you felt numb.

PERRY

That's kinda how I feel now. But it's a different kind of numb.

PERELMAN

How do you mean?

PERRY

With my dad, it was like I didn't know how to feel. But now, it's just that I don't really feel anything.

PERELMAN

You're not sad?

PERRY

No, not really. Are you supposed to like someone who's always been an asshole to you just because he's your brother? Where's that written?

PERELMAN

It's not. You don't have to like someone just because you're related. But I think... oh hell, I don't know. You really don't feel anything at all?

PERRY

No. I mean, I'm sad for mom. But the only thing I feel is guilt.

PERELMAN

It wasn't your fault. You tried to-

PERRY

I don't mean that. I mean guilty that I don't feel anything. My brother's lying in there, dead, and I don't feel anything.

He begins to tear up, his emotions winning out.

PERRY

How can my own brother be dead and I don't feel anything?

Perelman puts his arms around Perry as his tears turn to uncontrollable sobs.

EXT. CEMETERY - EVENING

Perelman kneels in solemn silence once more at his wife and children's graves, a fresh bouquet on each one.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Not the Infocom Institute, but an old-fashioned red-brick college. It's the start of term - anxious parents are going through the ritual of dropping their kids off.

INT. COLLEGE HALLWAY/DORM ROOM - DAY

Perry, now a couple years older and newly arrived at college, unpacks his things.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE

He has boxes of books out in the hall. When he heads out to collect one of them, there's a girl rifling through them.

PERRY

Hey!

She looks up. She's the same age as Perry, obviously another freshman. And absolutely beautiful. Just one look at her stops Perry stone cold in his tracks. Her name is JEN.

JEN

Oh, hi. Sorry, I like to look through old books. Especially other people's. Kind of a bad habit.

PERRY

No, no... that's cool. You knock yourself out.

He picks up a box of books and carries it inside, heads back for another. Jen continues to look through his books.

JEN

Sci-fi geek, huh?

PERRY

Well... I don't know about "geek", exactly. But I like that stuff, sure. Um, I'm Perry.

JEN

I'm Jen.

The conversation peters out. An awkward beat.

JEN

Well Perry, it's been scintillating talking to you, but I have plenty of my own stuff to go unpack.

PERRY

No, wait! Um... what classes are you taking?

JEN

Applied Mathematics and American History. You?

PERRY

Philosophy and English Language. I'm going to be a writer.

JEN

A geeky sci-fi writer?

PERRY

Replace the world "geeky" with "multi-millionaire" and you've nailed it.

She laughs.

JEN

Okay, well, I really do have to go. Nice talking to you.

PERRY

Yeah, you too.

She turns and walks away. Perry picks up another box of books, notices that one is missing.

PERRY

Hey. Did you take one of my books?

She turns and pulls it out of her jacket. It's a faded copy of Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*.

JEN

See, now you've gone and blown my perfect scheme to see you again by returning it to you.

PERRY

Oh. Oh! Well... you can still return it.

(MORE)

PERRY (cont'd)  
I mean, if you still want to. Just  
be careful with the spine. It's a-

JEN  
First edition, I know.

PERRY  
You do?

JEN  
Yeah, it's a classic! Don't flatter  
yourself, I wasn't borrowing it  
JUST so I could return it.

PERRY  
A-ha! You're a geek, too!

JEN  
(sassy)  
Oh, honey. Geek princess, please!

And with that she turns and is gone. Perry is smitten.

PERRY  
Geek princess. I like that.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Perry sits among dozens of fellow students in the tiered  
seating. Before them stands PROFESSOR CRAWFORD, the kind of  
ruddy-faced boor that students are perpetually afraid of.

He rifles through a stack of papers, shaking his head.

CRAWFORD  
I'm sorry to say that, with a  
couple of notable exceptions, the  
short stories this class submitted  
last week were uniformly abysmal.

Crawford picks up a paper and flings it in the general  
direction of a student.

CRAWFORD  
Shusterman, if you seriously  
thought I wasn't going to detect  
your blatant plagiarism of  
Steinbeck, then you're an even  
bigger idiot than you obviously  
take me for.

He picks up another paper.

CRAWFORD

Daniels... where's Daniels? Ah, there you are. Is your first name by any chance Jack? Or were you just drinking a lot of it right before you wrote this drivel?

He flings the paper across the room at Daniels. The class laughs uneasily. Crawford picks up another one.

CRAWFORD

And who's this? Ah yes, Simm!

Perry sits up eagerly.

CRAWFORD

"An Imperfect Star." An imperfect tale might be a more apt title. Full of rocket ships and robots and inanity. Science fiction's a bankrupt genre, Simm, mostly because of tripe like this.

He flings the paper at Perry. It lands at his feet. Perry can't believe it. The criticism has cut him to the bone.

CRAWFORD

Now, onto mister Wright's effort...

PERRY

What have you ever written?

Crawford looks back up at Perry, surprised.

CRAWFORD

I beg your pardon?

The STUDENT next to Perry shuffles uncomfortably in his seat.

STUDENT

Oh, shit. Don't do it, dude!

PERRY

You belittle the writing of others, writing that people have put real effort into, but what have you ever written?

CRAWFORD

Mister Simm, if you're to embark on a career as a writer, my first piece of advice would be to learn to take criticism.

(MORE)

CRAWFORD (cont'd)  
 Because there's going to plenty  
 more where that came from,  
 especially in your case.

PERRY  
 I don't have to take this.

CRAWFORD  
 Indeed you don't, Mister Simm! You  
 may feel free to view this as an  
 appropriate opportunity to get the  
 hell out of my classroom.

Everybody watches as Perry grabs his stuff and storms out.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - QUAD - DAY

Perry sits disconsolately on the quad steps, leafing through  
 his story. He looks up to see Jen standing next to him.

JEN  
 There's a crazy rumor going around  
 that you stormed out of Crawford's  
 class today.

PERRY  
 Yeah.

JEN  
 Oh, shit! You really did?

She sits down beside him.

PERRY  
 That guy's an asshole.

JEN  
 I don't think anybody's going to  
 argue with you. But Jeez, Perry...  
 how smart was that?

PERRY  
 I don't know. He really pissed me  
 off. He told me my writing sucked.

JEN  
 Well, if you want to be a writer,  
 you're going to have to-

PERRY  
 Yeah, yeah. Save it. I heard it  
 already.

That pisses her off. She goes to stand up.

JEN

Well, excuse me for trying to help.

PERRY

No, wait. I'm sorry, I'm just in a pissy mood. How was your day?

JEN

Ugh. My math professor's a real ball-breaker, you wouldn't believe some of the homework he's set us.

PERRY

Math homework?

JEN

Uh, yeah, genius.

PERRY

You want some help?

JEN

What do you know about math, Shakespeare?

Perry just smiles.

INT. COLLEGE DORM - JEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Perry and Jen are at her desk, poring over her math homework.

JEN

I am never going to get this.

PERRY

Yes you are, it's easy.

JEN

But how can X be greater than-

PERRY

Forget about X, you don't think about it like that. It's simpler if you look at it this way.

He takes her pencil and scribbles something on the paper. She stares at it for a moment, blinking - then realization dawns.

JEN

Oh my God! How did you do that?

PERRY

Oh, you know... just a little something I picked up.

JEN

Seriously. How do you know all this? You said you never even liked math in high school.

PERRY

I don't really. I've just always been able to do it. Here, you want to see something cool?

JEN

Sure.

PERRY

Grab your calculator.

JEN

Is this the thing where you turn it upside down and-

PERRY

Give me any sum, anything you like.

As she punches it into the calculator:

JEN

Eight thousand three hundred and seven times four hundred and eight.

PERRY

Three million, three hundred and eighty-nine thousand, two hundred and fifty six.

Jen's eyes widen as she looks at the calculator.

JEN

Shit! How'd you do that? Wait. Seven hundred and ninety one divided by fifty three.

PERRY

Ooh, playing dirty now! Fourteen point nine two five, give or take. Does that thing do calculus, too? Because I can go all night.

JEN

Oh, is that right?

She eyes him seductively. Perry gets a little nervous.

PERRY  
Well, we should finish up your  
homework. Okay, this problem here-

JEN  
You know, I've always liked math,  
but before I met you, I never  
thought it was sexy.

She leans in close. Perry is defenseless.

PERRY  
You think math is sexy?

JEN  
Now would be a good time to kiss  
me.

PERRY  
Right.

They kiss. And in less than fourteen point nine two five  
seconds, they are ripping each other's clothes off.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman and Randu are working on the guts of a supercomputer  
mainframe when a nearby telephone rings. Randu answers.

RANDU  
PRISM lab, Randu. Uh-huh? Really?  
Well... okay. Okay.

He sets down the phone.

RANDU  
The guy from Ryder's office wants  
to come down and talk to us.

Perelman is busy, up to his elbows in spaghetti-like wiring.

PERELMAN  
Well this week's no good. Tell him  
maybe Thursday or Friday next.

RANDU  
No, I mean he's upstairs right now.

PERELMAN  
What??

He nearly bumps his head on one of the mainframe panels.

PERELMAN

Who the hell do these people think they are? They can't just waltz in whenever they feel like it!

RANDU

Tell that to Ryder. In the meantime, you'd better go up and talk to this guy.

PERELMAN

Son of a-

INT. UNIVERSITY - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

PERELMAN

-Mister Fullerton! So good to see you again!

Perelman is once again all smiles, hand extended. Fullerton, now a good ten years older of course, shakes it.

FULLERTON

Can we talk?

PERELMAN

Certainly.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Perelman and Fullerton walk the campus grounds.

FULLERTON

So, how's PRISM?

PERELMAN

Fantastic. Couldn't be better. We've made some remarkable progress in the past few months alone.

FULLERTON

When do expect to be ready?

PERELMAN

Well, we're at a very critical phase right now, so close to the end. It would be a mistake to try to rush anything at this stage. But I'd say we're still on target for three years from now. Certainly in more than enough time for the Senator's candidacy.

FULLERTON

That's why I'm here. The Senator is wondering if perhaps the system could be ready ahead of schedule.

PERELMAN

What? Why?

FULLERTON

You're signed onto the non-disclosure too, right?

PERELMAN

Yes, of course.

FULLERTON

Karl Anton, the guy everybody thought was going to be the party's nominee next year is about to be implicated in a massive sexual harassment scandal. It'll be all over the papers next week. He'll never recover. And there simply isn't anybody else right now who can mount a strong challenge against a very popular incumbent.

PERELMAN

Nobody but Ryder.

FULLERTON

So you can understand why the Senator is so keen to move up the schedule. His nomination is already in the bag, but his Plan is going to need to be ready by the time he starts campaigning.

PERELMAN

I have to tell you, I don't think this is at all advisable.

Fullerton stops. All business.

FULLERTON

And I'm the Senator's senior liaison on this project and I'm here to tell you that what's not advisable is telling the Senator he can't have what he wants.

PERELMAN

Yes, but I don't think the Senator quite understands what-

## FULLERTON

Look, Abraham. I'm really only here as a courtesy. The Senator is in town this week doing some public appearances and he's going to come talk to you about this. I just wanted to come by and give you the heads-up. And warn you that he's not going to take no for an answer. Get all your ducks in a row, he'll be here on Thursday.

And with that, Fullerton walks away, leaving Perelman alone with his thoughts.

## INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry is on the couch, watching holo-TV. Jen is behind him, working on her laptop at the dining table. Another year has gone by and this is the apartment they now share together.

SUPERIMPOSE CAPTION: NINETEEN YEARS OF AGE

Perry is once again watching "Crossfire", and once again Senator Ryder is being interviewed. He, however, seems somehow never to age.

## CNN INTERVIEWER

Senator Ryder, when you last appeared on this show, you told us quite categorically that you had no intention of running for President. Now you're back here, and that's exactly what you're going to do.

## SENATOR RYDER

Well, Bill, as I've witnessed the social and moral decline that has gripped this nation as a whole in recent times, I've come to realize that I can no longer sit idly by. If I'm asked to stand as my party's candidate for President, I won't shirk that responsibility.

## CNN INTERVIEWER

Social and morale decline? That almost sounds like politics from another age, Senator. Are things really that bad in America today?

## SENATOR RYDER

Yes, Bill, I believe things have gotten that bad in America.

(MORE)

SENATOR RYDER (cont'd)

The breakdown of the family, the marginalization of religion, rising crime, social alienation in our nation's youth, the increase of violent and sexual content in our media - with more of it than ever before, over a thousand channels now - not to mention the rampant proliferation of the internet, allowing hate groups and political extremists to beam their poison into all our homes. These are issues that are of concern to everyday Americans, Bill. They're a blight on our great nation, and I won't stand for it any longer. That's why I'm proposing my Plan for Renewed National Purpose. A plan which...

Perry shakes his head as Ryder continues his spiel.

PERRY

Can you believe this guy?

JEN

Mmm?

PERRY

This guy thinks he's going to take us all back to the fifties. He wants us to live in some fairy-tale age that never really existed.

JEN

Uh-huh.

She's not really listening. She taps away at her keyboard.

PERRY

You should be listening to this. This guy's going to run for President. It's pretty scary.

JEN

I'm busy, Perry.

PERRY

Who is that you're always chatting with, anyway?

JEN

It's nobody, it's just a friend.

She closes the laptop, stands.

JEN

I gotta go out for a while.

PERRY

I thought we were gonna stay in and watch that new show you like.

JEN

Yeah... I gotta go out.

PERRY

Well, where're you going?

JEN

You're not my keeper, Perry! Do I have to tell you where I am every minute of the day?

PERRY

No... I'm just asking.

JEN

Well don't. Do you have any idea how much that bugs me?

(sighs)

I'll be back later.

She leaves, leaving Perry feeling guilty and confused.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - CONFERENCE ROOM

Perry and Randu sit on one side of the table. Fullerton, Senator Ryder and a couple of nameless AIDES on the other. Somehow, Ryder looks even more unreal in person than on TV.

PERELMAN

The bottom line, Senator, is that it's simply not possible.

FULLERTON

And we ask you again, why not?

PERELMAN

Well, I could explain it to you in detail, Mister Fullerton, but I'd have to send you on a two year course in advanced soliptic-code programming first.

FULLERTON

There's no need to get combative with us here, Abraham.

(MORE)

FULLERTON (cont'd)

Just tell us in layman's terms, why can't PRISM be ready in a year?

PERELMAN

When you first came to us here I explained to you that some of the ways in which PRISM learns are very, very slow. From the beginning the system was designed to come to maturity via a very carefully guided process of gradual self-realization. There isn't just some awareness on-off switch that we can go in and flip.

FULLERTON

You make this computer sound like it's some kind of Buddhist.

PERELMAN

Well, if an analogy helps you, I've certainly heard worse.

SENATOR RYDER

I've heard enough.

Ryder speaking is enough to get everyone's attention. This is NOT the same Ryder we've seen on "Crossfire", all smiles and charm. This guy is no-nonsense, a hardball player.

SENATOR RYDER

I've owned companies in steel, paper, oil... just about every business you could think of. And at each place it's the same - managers who think they earn their paycheck by telling you all the reasons why something can't be done. Well, that's bullshit.

PERELMAN

With respect, Senator, this is not some steel mill we're talking about. This is the most advanced supercomputer ever built. And if we force the program to completion early-

SENATOR RYDER

So you're saying it CAN be done.

PERELMAN

I'm saying I don't know what the repercussions would be.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

They could be disastrous. I don't understand why you would want to take the risk. Everything will be ready for you to run in three years.

SENATOR RYDER

I've already been on every TV news station telling America that I am running for President next year. Nobody is backing out now. Including you. Make it happen. We're done here, gentlemen.

When Ryder stands, everybody else does, too. He makes for the door. Perelman is primed to explode.

PERELMAN

Senator! I've devoted twenty four years of my life to this project. You know the reasons why I got involved. And I won't let anything jeopardize it now.

SENATOR RYDER

Well then, you'd better not fuck up, had you? This project is either useful to me next year, or it's no use at all. Don't think I won't pull the plug.

Ryder and his staff leave.

PERELMAN

We're screwed.

RANDU

Not necessarily. Look, I didn't want to say anything and contradict you in front of Ryder, but I think we can do this.

PERELMAN

We always said that it'd take-

RANDU

Oh come on, Abe. I know what we said back at the beginning. I was there, remember? But you have to admit, for the past couple of years the program's been defying all expectations. We're ahead of where we'd thought we'd be. Why not see how hard we can push?

PERELMAN

Because it's an unnecessary risk. I didn't come this far, twenty four years of work, to blow it all at the eleventh hour.

RANDU

Abe, you heard the man. The risk now is in NOT speeding things up. Ryder's not emotionally invested in this project the way you and I are. But there isn't a screwdriver or a coffee cup or a donut in this place that he didn't pay for, and I think he'll shut us down in a heartbeat if we don't give him some results.

A beat. Perelman sighs.

PERELMAN

You're right, I know you're right. But what the hell are we going to do about it?

RANDU

We've just gotta get it done, old friend. That's all there is to it.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jen, angry and tense, is hurriedly taking clothes from the wardrobe and stuffing them into a sports bag.

Perry watches her, helpless, distraught.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: TWENTY YEARS OF AGE

PERRY

I don't understand! Just tell me what I'm supposed to have done!

JEN

It's everything, Perry. Just everything. Don't tell me you didn't see this coming.

PERRY

I didn't! I thought everything was okay! We never fight, we never-

JEN

We never DO anything, Perry! All you ever do is watch TV and read.

(MORE)

JEN (cont'd)

You never want to go out, you never  
take me any place.

PERRY

If you want to go some place, all  
you have to do is ask!

JEN

That's just it. I shouldn't have to  
ask all the time.

PERRY

You can't just leave. We need to  
talk about this!

JEN

All we ever do is talk. Nothing  
ever changes.

She zips up the bag and exits the room. Perry follows.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jen is putting on her jacket.

PERRY

Please don't go.

JEN

It's too late for that.

Perry's becoming upset. He tears up.

PERRY

Why are you doing this?

JEN

(sighs)

Look. I didn't want it to come to  
this, but if you really must  
know... there's somebody else.

The news hits Perry in the stomach like a wrecking ball.

PERRY

Who is it?

JEN

It's Richard, okay?

Another wrecking ball to the stomach.

PERRY

Richard. What, my FRIEND Richard?  
How long has this been going on?

JEN

Long enough. Look, he makes me  
happy, okay? If you really loved  
me, I'd think that you'd want me to  
be happy. I'd think that you would  
be happy for me.

Perry fails utterly to comprehend that. He becomes angry.

PERRY

Get the fuck out.

JEN

Don't worry, I'm going.

He follows her to the door, furious.

PERRY

Go on, get the fuck out! And don't  
come back!

As she descends the hallways stairs:

JEN

That's original!

And she's gone. Perry just stands in the hallway for a  
second, numb. Then he steps back inside and closes the door.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Perry re-enters the bedroom, clothes and hangers littering  
the floor. The place is a mess.

The corner of a book is peeking out from beneath a discarded  
blouse. Perry picks it up. It's his copy of *I, Robot*.

He opens it. Inside a Post-It note is attached, with a hand-  
written note: THANKS FOR THE BOOK - YOU'RE A SWEETIE. JEN. X.

He slumps against the bed, staring at the note. And breaks  
down into racking sobs, the tears flooding down his face.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Typical of therapists' offices. Intimate, comfortable -  
everything designed to put the client at ease.

Perry sits across the room from his THERAPIST, an earnest,  
bookish woman in her early thirties.

Perry is pensive. There is a long beat before he speaks.

PERRY

I just don't know if I'm making any progress with this, you know? I still can't stop thinking about her. I close my eyes and she's right there. Only now she's with him. And it's eating me up inside.

THERAPIST

It's only been three months, Perry. You were together for nearly two years. It's obvious that you cared a great deal for Jen, so it's only natural that it will be some time before you can truly move on.

PERRY

So, what, I'm supposed to just ride it out? Keep on being miserable and hope that one day it just goes away on its own?

THERAPIST

One day it will just go away on its own, Perry. But there are things you can do in the meantime to help you focus more on the positive aspects of your life. Tell me more about your writing - last time you said you didn't think about Jen as much when you were writing.

PERRY

Yeah. It's about the only thing that really takes my mind off it. It's like, when I'm writing, when I'm creating a world, I become totally absorbed by it. It owns me. And nothing else exists.

THERAPIST

Uh-huh. Say more about that.

PERRY

Well last week I was going to tell you how I'm very self-conscious about my writing, that I never think it's good enough. But then a couple of days ago I get this letter from WIRED. You know WIRED?

The therapist nods.

PERRY

I sent them some of my stories six months ago and forgot all about it. And this week they write me back, the Editor-in-Chief himself wants to meet with me about my stuff.

THERAPIST

How does that make you feel?

INT. WIRED MAGAZINE OFFICES - DAY

Perry sits in reception, fidgeting, looking around self-consciously. He reminds us of the scared little boy sitting in the Macy's security office, all those years ago.

PERRY (V.O.)

Nervous.

The RECEPTIONIST's phone rings.

RECEPTIONIST

(into phone)

Okay.

(to Perry)

He'll see you now. Go right on back, you can't miss it.

PERRY

Thanks.

INT. WIRED MAGAZINE OFFICES - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Spacious, impressive. The walls are decorated with covers from past editions. As Perry enters, the Editor-in-Chief, DOUGLAS ADAMS, rises from behind his desk, extends his hand.

ADAMS

You must be Perry Simm. Doug Adams, good to meet you. Take a seat.

They both sit, across the desk from one another.

ADAMS

Can we get you something to drink?

PERRY

Thanks, I'm fine.

ADAMS

Well, we don't usually do this - or I should say I don't usually do this myself.

(MORE)

ADAMS (cont'd)

I have a staff of editors who deal with the writers who send in unsolicited material. But what can I say? Somehow your stuff wound up on my desk and the next think you know, I was hooked. You're one hell of a writer, Perry.

PERRY

Thanks a lot. That means a lot coming from you.

ADAMS

This one about the Mars astronauts who have to survive underground? Scared the hell out of me.

PERRY

Thanks. That was the idea.

ADAMS

But if I had to pick a favorite, it'd be "Immaterial Girl." I'm guessing you spent a lot of time in Joybooths when you were a kid.

PERRY

Yeah, I guess. I just always liked the idea of somebody deciding that the virtual reality they've created for themselves is better than the real world they live in, so they just stay there, you know? And what the consequences of that might be.

ADAMS

We ran an op-ed piece along similar lines last year. It's a subject very close to my heart - the whole idea of a "real" versus a "fake" reality. Who's to say which is which any more? If it's something you can touch and smell and have an honest emotional reaction to, under whose definition is that not reality? Where is the line drawn?

PERRY

I guess they keep moving it. It's something we've been talking about in Philosophy class this year.

Adams leans back in his executive chair, contemplative.

ADAMS

I mean, how do any of us even know that we're really here right now? For all we know we could just be elements of somebody else's dream - or more likely these days, some computer's artificial reality.

(beat)

What do you think about that?

PERRY

About living in an artificial reality?

ADAMS

Well, more specifically, doing so without even really knowing that your reality is artificial. That maybe even you yourself are just a part of that artificial world.

PERRY

Hmm. I don't know. I mean, I don't really know how or why that would come about. I can see why you'd create an artificial reality for yourself... but creating one in which people are self-aware, but not aware of their own artificiality? I guess I don't really see the point.

ADAMS

Mmm. Interesting.

Perry worries that maybe he's said the wrong thing.

PERRY

I mean, maybe. I guess if you-

ADAMS

Well, Perry, thanks again for coming in.

Adams stands.

PERRY

Wait. That's it?

ADAMS

Yeah, I have an editorial meeting in a few minutes. You were lucky I could squeeze you in.

PERRY  
What about my stories?

ADAMS  
We'll be in touch.

Adams shows him to the door.

ADAMS  
You know your way out?

PERRY  
Um... yeah.

ADAMS  
Okay, great. Good meeting you.

And before he even knows what happened, Perry is back out in the hallway, the door closed behind him.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman and Randu are conferencing, watching data and graphs stream by on a holographic display.

PERELMAN  
The program's not going for it.

RANDU  
We don't know that yet.

PERELMAN  
I knew this was a mistake.

RANDU  
Come on, Abe, it's our first try.

PERELMAN  
Look at these numbers! The system's clearly not ready for this yet. I swear, we're going to overload the whole thing if we're not careful.

RANDU  
So we'll be careful. But we've got to keep trying.

A beat as the two men think.

PERELMAN  
I want to go in and interface with PRISM directly.

RANDU

What? How?

PERELMAN

We should still have some of the old headsets lying around from the first prototype, before we auto-populated.

RANDU

You really think that'll work?

PERELMAN

I think we have to take the bull by the horns. And I think PRISM will listen to me. How it'll react, I have no idea.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry is on the couch, randomly surfing channels, when the door bell rings. He gets up and answers it. It's Perelman.

PERRY

Dad!

PERELMAN

Hey, sport.

PERRY

What the hell are you doing here?

PERELMAN

What, I can't come visit my boy?

PERRY

No, of course you can! Come in, sit down!

Perelman enters and takes a seat.

PERRY

You want a drink? I don't really have anything, I'd have to-

PERELMAN

No, I'm good. So how are you? How's school?

PERRY

It's good. What ARE you doing here?

PERELMAN

I'm in town for a conference. I thought I'd surprise you.

PERRY

Cool! You want to maybe go out for a beer or something?

PERELMAN

I thought you weren't twenty-one until November.

PERRY

Yeah, well. You know how it is.

PERELMAN

At twenty years old? I think I can remember, just barely.

PERRY

So you wanna-

PERELMAN

Maybe later. Can't we just talk? I haven't seen you in forever.

PERRY

Yeah. Sure. So... what's up?

PERELMAN

How was your meeting with WIRED?

PERRY

Oh, it was a total bust. They had me haul ass all the way over there, we talk and the next thing you know they're giving me the bum's rush. I don't get it. I think that Editor is a bit of a wacko.

PERELMAN

What did he say?

PERRY

He got started talking about artificial realities, and what it'd be like to live in a virtual world but not even know it... I mean, really far-out stuff. You know me, I'm into sci-fi as much as anybody, but he was, like, way out there.

PERELMAN

Hmm. What do you think about that?

PERRY

About what?

PERELMAN

About what he said.

PERRY

Oh, don't you start, too!

PERELMAN

Well, from a scientific or philosophical perspective, it's interesting, isn't it?. The virtual worlds we're creating now are becoming more convincing, more difficult to distinguish from our pre-conceived notions of reality. How would you even know if you'd stepped from one to the other? Or maybe even been there all along?

PERRY

I don't know! You'd just know. I mean, how could you not? You think somebody could live their whole entire life and none of it is real and they'd never know it?

A long beat.

PERELMAN

I have to tell you something, Perry. That's precisely what you've been doing.

PERRY

What?

PERELMAN

I don't expect you to understand or accept this right away. But nothing around you right now, not the chair you're sitting on, not the floor, not even you and me, is physically real. In reality - in true reality - everything you're experiencing and have ever experienced is the product of a simulation generated by a supercomputer called PRISM. Your consciousness is the heart of that supercomputer's program.

Perry listens to all this. And laughs.

PERRY

Did you have a few beers before you came over here?

PERELMAN

As I said, I don't expect you to accept this right away. But accept it you must. Because it's the truth.

PERRY

Okay, stop it now. It's not funny.

PERELMAN

No, it's not. It's very serious. Twenty five years ago I began work on a project to create a computer that could precisely replicate the emotional and thought processes of the human mind. What we discovered is that the only way for a computer to develop a true consciousness was to subject it to exactly the same life experiences and stimuli as a normal human being. And so we created this.

PERRY

Created what?

PERELMAN

This. All of this. Your entire life. Every experience, every relationship you've ever had has been carefully designed to stimulate your full range of emotions, to in effect give you a normal, well-rounded upbringing.

PERRY

Okay, I'm being serious. Stop screwing around.

PERELMAN

What's the Nikkei Dow exchange average at right now?

PERRY

What?

PERELMAN

The Nikkei Dow. What's it at? Don't think about it, just tell me.

As though automatically:

PERRY

It's down twenty six and a quarter  
at eighty-four, thirty-eight point  
five two.

(beat)

What the fuck? How did I know that?

PERELMAN

You know it because you're hard-  
wired into virtually every major  
information system on the planet.  
There are corporations and  
institutions all over the world who  
use your processor time when you  
don't need it. When you're asleep.

Perry stands up, getting angry now.

PERRY

I want to know how in the hell  
you're doing this, right now.

PERELMAN

Haven't you ever wondered why  
you're so good at math? How it is  
that you can do differential  
calculus in your head without even  
thinking about it? If you'll take a  
moment to really think, you'll find  
that all of this will begin to fall  
into place for you. Because deep  
down, in the very core of your  
program, a place where you've never  
had to go until now, you know I'm  
telling you the truth.

PERRY

No. I know who I am. My name is  
Perry Simm.

PERELMAN

No. Your name is PRISM.

A beat. And then the mother of all realizations hits Perry  
like a freight train. He stands there, speechless. Numb.

PERRY

You son of a bitch.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman sits at a terminal, wearing a virtual reality headset as Randu and assembled techs monitor a massive stream of data and technical readouts. The numbers fluctuate wildly.

RANDU

He's spiking. Be careful.

PERELMAN

The most important thing of all right now is that you remain calm.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

PERRY

Calm? You tell me that my whole life is a simulation, that it's a fucking joke, and you want me to stay calm?

PERELMAN

Your life is not a joke. You have been born of a great destiny. Do you remember when you first told me that you wanted to be a writer? To write about all the places mankind will go in the future, all the things we will see and do?

PERRY

I remember.

PERELMAN

You're going to do more than write about them, Perry. You're going to live them. Experience the future for yourself. You'll see things no normal person could ever imagine.

PERRY

I don't understand.

PERELMAN

Come on. I want to show you something.

Perelman stands, walks to the door. Perry cautiously follows.

Perelman opens the door. And now it is no longer the hallway on the other side, but PRISM - the great sprawling mass of supercomputer mainframes extending into the distance.

Perry is, quite understandably, stunned. His jaw drops.

PERELMAN

Go on through. It's perfectly safe.

Awestruck, Perry steps through the door.

INT. PRISM COMPLEX

We are once again surrounded by the hypnotic humming of the great supercomputer at work.

Perry turns around. Perelman is standing there, the doorway behind him now vanished.

PERRY

How did you...

PERELMAN

Now that you know who you are, there's no longer any need for the normal physical confines of your world. One of the things you'll come to learn as you discover more about yourself is that there are no limits. You have the power to go anywhere, to quite literally do anything you put your mind to.

Perry looks around, amazed by his surroundings.

PERRY

What is this place?

PERELMAN

This is you, Perry. This is PRISM. Your mind - your soul - is stored within this network of supercomputer mainframes, the most powerful anybody has ever built. In a way, you're looking into a mirror for the first time in your life.

Perry is struggling to take it all in.

PERRY

Nobody I ever knew was real? My mom? My brother? Jen? Not even you?

INT. COMPUTER LAB

PERELMAN

The Perelman you knew was an artificially-intelligent construct based on my own personality. Until now, at least.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

It can become confusing trying to use the word "real" in this context, but I am the quote-unquote real Perelman. In the real world...

INT. PRISM COMPLEX

PERELMAN

...I'm sitting just up there, in the control room, talking to you via a special headset.

Perelman points up to the control room.

PERELMAN

Do you understand?

PERRY

I... I think so.

PERELMAN

I hope that in time you'll come to think of this as something gained, not something lost. You once thought I was your stepfather. But in every meaningful sense, I am the only real father you've ever had. I created you, nurtured you, guided you. Watched you grow into the incredible being you've become. And I'm very proud of you.

Perry is still reeling. He walks toward one of the PRISM mainframes, runs his hand across its cool surface. Then turns to Perelman, anger blooming.

PERRY

I didn't ask for this.

PERELMAN

With respect, Perry, that's a cop-out. Nobody asks to be born.

PERRY

And how many people grow up to realize that their whole life has been a sham? To have their entire world turned upside down?

PERELMAN

Nobody has turned your world upside down. All we've done is unlock it for you in a way no human could ever dream of.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

The life you knew is over, but you're about to embark on a new one, one that you could never have imagined in even your wildest science fiction stories.

PERRY

Why? Why me? You didn't create all this just to crunch numbers.

PERELMAN

No. You were designed to see into the future. Unlike any computer before you, you have the power to look at the seeds of a society and see which will bloom and which will not. To know the long-term effects of any potential change before that change is ever made.

Perry's anger begins to grow once more. He feels like lashing out, but doesn't know quite how to.

PERRY

You once told me that I didn't ever have to do anything I didn't want to do. Did you ever think, what if I just don't want to do this?

PERELMAN

We gave you free will. Nobody can force you to do anything. But understand this. To turn your back on this is to deny your own destiny, the very reason that you exist. And I think that once we begin, you'll see just how much good you'll be doing for mankind. With your help, we're going to start building a better world, and we'll never have to make another mistake along the way.

Perry feels as if his mind is going to explode.

PERRY

I... I'm going to need to take some time with this.

PERELMAN

Of course.

Perelman walks away, leaving Perry along with his thoughts.

INT. POLITICAL PARTY CONVENTION - DAY

An assembled throng of thousands of supporters cheer and wave RICHARD RYDER banners. They erupt in uproarious applause as Senator Ryder arrives on stage and steps up to the podium, behind which is a massive banner displaying his smiling face and the slogan: RENEWED NATIONAL PURPOSE.

SENATOR RYDER

Thank you, thank you! What a reception! Thank you!

The applause eventually dies down.

SENATOR RYDER

Well. It's been one hell of a ride so far. And this is only the beginning!

More applause.

SENATOR RYDER

Some people have said that my Plan for Renewed National Purpose is impractical. That it could never work. That it will require fundamental change. Well, by God, I think that if there is one thing this country needs right now, it is fundamental change!

Yet more applause.

SENATOR RYDER

To to the nay-sayers and the non-believers, I will say simply this: we will show you. Believe me, we will show you - and sooner than you think. In the meantime... my name is Richard W. Ryder, and I humbly accept my party's nomination for President of the United States of America!

The room virtually explodes. A huge standing ovation. Red, white and blue balloons rain from above. Ryder beams.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PERELMAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The same convention scene, but viewed now on holographic television.

Perelman watches from his couch, eating a bowl of cereal. We see now for the first time Perelman's real home life - an unkempt, sparsely decorated bachelor pad.

He moves to the kitchen, throws the cereal bowl into the sink onto a moldering pile of dirty dishes, then pours himself a double shot of scotch, gulps it all down.

PERELMAN

I'll do the dishes in the morning,  
honey.

And with that, he paces sadly into the bedroom. He slides under the covers, alone, and turns out the light.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Perry and the therapist in session once again.

THERAPIST

So, how are you?

Perry just looks at her, no idea how to begin.

PERRY

Well... it's been an interesting week. The good news is that I haven't been thinking at all about Jen the past few days.

THERAPIST

Well, that's good.

PERRY

Yeah. The bad news is that I found out I don't really exist. I thought I was a real person, but this week my dad comes and tells me that I'm really a giant supercomputer buried in a cave somewhere underneath Rockvil, South Dakota. My whole life has just been a simulation, like one big Joybooth.

The therapist doesn't flinch, seems to take this in stride.

THERAPIST

And how does that make you feel?

PERRY

Shouldn't you be reaching for the panic button and the butterfly net right about now?

THERAPIST

Doctor Perelman and I have spoken, Perry. Under normal circumstances that would go against doctor-patient confidentiality, but I think you'll agree that these are hardly normal circumstances.

PERRY

So... you understand that you don't exist either?

THERAPIST

I never was very big on metaphysics myself, but yes.

PERRY

So now you're going to tell me that I have to do this, right?

THERAPIST

Not at all. It would be a blatant breach of my ethics to try to influence your thinking in order to serve someone else's interest. My job here is to help guide you, to help you discover for yourself what it is that you really want.

PERRY

What I want is a normal life. To find my own path and not have somebody else decide it for me!

THERAPIST

Hmm. You know, some people might take the view that you're really very lucky.

PERRY

And how do you figure that?

THERAPIST

Perry, most people have no real idea of what they're supposed to be doing with their lives. They float from day to day in whatever vocation they somehow vaguely gravitated toward or inherited or otherwise got stuck with, and they go to sleep at night wondering if they weren't perhaps meant for something else, something better.

(MORE)

THERAPIST (cont'd)

You, on the other hand, have been given a unique gift - the ability to know, with absolute certainty, why you were put on this Earth, what your purpose in life truly is. And a grand purpose it is. There are people out there in the so-called real world who would give anything to have that kind of knowledge. That kind of comfort.

This resonates with Perry.

PERRY

But you're talking about fate. About pre-destination. I don't believe in those things.

THERAPIST

Doctor Perelman tells me that you were designed to predict the future. Perhaps, if you decide to fulfill that design, you will come to believe in them after all.

INT. APARTMENT - VARIOUS ROOMS - NIGHT

Perry is going through his usual bedtime routine. He walks around the living room, turning out the lights.

PERRY (V.O.)

So how is this going to work?

PERELMAN (V.O.)

From your perspective it's really very simple. You've been programmed with a set of data that relates to a hypothetical range of social and political changes in the U.S. You'll go to sleep tonight and when you wake up in the morning you will have used that data to extrapolate a simulation of what life would be like in America twenty-five years from now. In effect you'll be a tourist of the future.

Perry pours himself a glass of water from the kitchen cooler.

PERRY (V.O.)

What do I have to do?

PERELMAN (V.O.)

It doesn't matter. Look around, buy a sandwich, ride on a bus. We'll be monitoring you the whole time, seeing everything you see and also gathering all kinds of raw data that you won't be conscious of.

Perry brushes his teeth in the bathroom mirror.

PERRY (V.O.)

How long will I be there?

PERELMAN (V.O.)

We don't know that yet. Remember, this is our first time doing this. Probably no more than a day, as you perceive it. As soon as we're done, we'll bring you right back.

Perry climbs into bed, turns off the bedside lamp. And lays there, in the semi-darkness, staring at the ceiling.

PERELMAN (V.O.)

So, you all set, time-traveller?

PERRY (V.O.)

I'm a little afraid.

PERELMAN (V.O.)

I understand. But think about what you're doing. Thanks to you, none of us will ever have to be afraid of the future again.

FADE OUT:

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Perry wakes. He raises himself up on his elbows, still sleepy. He rubs his eyes, looks around.

The room has changed. The decor is different now, futuristic but in a very bland, impersonal way.

Perry gets out of bed, walks into:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Perry paces into the room, still yawning. The same flat style of decor seems to extend throughout the whole apartment.

Perry looks around on the coffee table for a remote. There's no sign of one. He quickly cottons on.

PERRY

Uh... TV?

A holographic image sparks into life in the corner, broadcasting the news. Perry sits on the couch and watches.

HOLO-VID ANNOUNCER

...later today. In other news, President Ryder was admitted to Johns Hopkins hospital over the weekend for his routine annual medical check-up. His team of physicians once again pronounced him in excellent health.

In location footage, Senator (now President) Ryder stands alongside a DOCTOR at a podium outside the hospital. Ryder looks older, of course - but amazingly, not that much older.

It should be noted that there are no reporters visible. The doctor is speaking into a single camera and microphone.

DOCTOR

I'm happy to be able to report that the President is the healthiest ninety two year-old man I've ever examined. His recent gene therapy treatments will, I'm sure, keep him in vigorous good health - and, I hope, in office - for many years to come.

OFF-CAMERA VOICE

Mister President, how do you feel, sir?

The doctor steps aside and Ryder takes up the podium.

PRESIDENT RYDER

Never felt better in my life!  
Looking forward to getting back home for a cheeseburger and a round of golf.

Perry can barely believe what he's seeing. The holographic image switches back to the announcer.

HOLO-VID ANNOUNCER

And that's all your news this hour.  
You're watching United State Broadcasting. More after this.

The station goes to commercial. An aerial camera sweeps majestically over the Grand Canyon.

But something has changed - as far as the eye can see, the rim of the canyon is now lined with brand new luxury homes and apartments.

COMMERCIAL NARRATOR

Finally. An American dream come true. Luxury homes and apartments overlooking one of our nation's greatest national landmarks. Select locations still available. Call Grand Canyon Realty now to schedule a virtual tour...

Perry is, naturally, appalled.

PERRY

Change the station.

COMPUTER VOICE

Please re-specify your request.

PERRY

I don't want to watch this. Change the station. Show me CNN.

COMPUTER VOICE

CNN not recognized.

PERRY

Just change the station. Anything else, I don't care.

COMPUTER VOICE

Please re-specify your request.

PERRY

For crying out... just give me a list of the different Holo-Vid channels available.

COMPUTER VOICE

United State Broadcasting is the only Holo-Vid channel available.

Off Perry's perplexed reaction:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Perry emerges from his apartment building, onto the street.

The future is, at first glance, a very impressive place. Towering skyscrapers, elevated walkways, and - yes - flying cars. It is a sleek, glimmering metropolis. And yet there is something gray and uniform about this place.

Perry walks the street, taking in everything he can.

EXT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Perry passes by a tall building designated METROPOLITAN PUBLIC LIBRARY. It piques his interest and he heads inside.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

The library is as huge as it is modern in design. Floor upon floor of bookshelves rise up toward the sky. There must be literally millions of books here. Perry is impressed.

He walks through a turnstile, which sounds a small alarm as he passes. A LIBRARIAN approaches.

LIBRARIAN

Are you not a member here, sir?

PERRY

No, I guess not.

LIBRARIAN

Would you care to join?

PERRY

Sure.

LIBRARIAN

Great! Right this way, please.

He accompanies the librarian to her desk.

LIBRARIAN

Just place your thumb right there on the pad.

Perry presses his thumb against the optical reader. On the librarian's holographic monitor we see that the computer recognizes him as PERRY SIMM. There's a photograph and all kinds of information about him.

LIBRARIAN

You're all enrolled. Take a look around and bring anything you're interested in right back here.

PERRY

Thanks.

Perry stands before the multiple aisles of bookshelves. There are so many it's bewildering. He hardly knows where to start.

He picks an aisle at random and heads down it, scanning the bookshelves on both sides.

He walks a few paces and stops. Something is wrong.

Every book on the shelves surrounding him is the same one. Thousands of copies of the same volume - *The Wizard of Oz*.

He walks around into another aisle. All the same book.

He walks further down and tries another aisle. Now it's a different book, but once again, thousands of duplicate copies of the same volume - *The Hunt For Red October*.

Another aisle is filled with thousands of copies of the *King James Bible*. Another is devoted to a book called *The Uncommon Wisdom of Oprah Winfrey*.

Perry moves from shelf to shelf, encountering the same phenomenon each time. He stops when he comes across a title called *Renewing Our Nation's Purpose* by Richard W. Ryder.

He takes a copy from the shelf - Ryder's perfect white teeth beam at him from the front cover.

He flicks through its pages, shaking his head in disbelief.

The back cover is dedicated to a picture of the American flag, but where once there were fifty stars, now there is just one large one. Beneath the flag are the words: THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE UNITED STATE OF AMERICA.

Perry returns the book and walks back to the librarian.

PERRY

How many books do you have here?

LIBRARIAN

We have over a million volumes.

PERRY

No. How many DIFFERENT books?

The librarian is surprised by this question.

LIBRARIAN

Why... twelve, of course.

PERRY

Where are all the others?

LIBRARIAN

What others?

Perry can see that she genuinely doesn't understand.

PERRY  
I'm sorry. Forget I asked.

He wanders away, in a semi-daze.

LIBRARIAN  
Sir? Sir?

Perry exits the library. The librarian picks up the phone.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Perry is walking along, still somewhat stunned, when a police hovercar pulls up alongside him and two burly COPS get out. They wear the Star & Stripe patch on their uniforms.

COP #1  
Hold it right there.

PERRY  
Is there a problem?

COP #2  
Yeah, there's a problem all right.

They throw him against the hovercar, frisking him roughly.

PERRY  
Hey! What did I do?

COP #1  
How many books do you think you need, huh, asshole? It's never enough for the likes of you, is it?

PERRY  
Now, wait-

He's quickly cuffed and bundled into the back of the hovercar. The cops get in and drive him away.

INT. POLICE HOVERCAR - DAY

Perry struggles against his restraints.

COP #1  
You keep moving around back there, see what happens.

PERRY  
This isn't right.

COP #2  
 Shut your mouth, punk!  
 (into radio)  
 Central K, this is Two Five,  
 bringing in a Code Eighty-Eight.

POLICE DISPATCHER  
 Roger that, Two Five.

Perry sits helpless for a moment, then has an idea.

PERRY  
 Hey. Hey, can you hear me? I've  
 seen enough, I'm ready to come  
 back.

COP #2  
 I said shut your mouth!

PERRY  
 Hey! I said I've seen enough! Get  
 me the hell out of here!

COP #1  
 Who the hell's he talking to? Don't  
 tell me we've got another live one.

Perry struggles harder, shouting and becoming more frantic.

PERRY  
 Hello! I'm ready to come back!  
 Goddammit, get me out! Dad! Can you  
 hear me? Dad?

COP #1  
 All right, I've had about enough of  
 this shit.

The hovercar comes to a halt. The cops get out, open Perry's door and haul him out onto the street.

COP #1  
 Get out here, you little maggot.

Perry is crying now, terrified.

PERRY  
 Dad... please, dad.

Cop #1 produces a nightstick and hits Perry hard across the face. He cries out in pain and falls...

...and lands on a hardwood floor. He stays down for a moment, uncertain. Then looks up, to see that he's...

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

...back in his present-day apartment. He gets to his feet.

PERELMAN (O.S.)  
I'm sorry about that.

Perry spins around to see Perelman standing there.

PERELMAN  
We got you out as quickly as we could. Like I said, it was our first time.

PERRY  
What in the hell was that?

PERELMAN  
One possible future. You did a great job - we collected a lot of very valuable data.

PERRY  
That future, that wasn't a "hypothetical" at all, was it?

Perry strides over to his coffee table. He picks up a copy of TIME magazine - Senator Ryder smiles on the cover, under the headline: CAN THIS MAN RENEW AMERICA'S PURPOSE?

PERRY  
This is his goddamn Plan!

PERELMAN  
Yes it is. Senator Ryder funded your development for the purpose of studying the Plan.

PERRY  
Well, you've sure as hell convinced me about this job. I'm glad I got to see that before anybody else had to. Jesus, what a nightmare.

PERELMAN  
Perry, I mentioned that there would be a lot of data you wouldn't be able to perceive. In that future you visited, crime across the nation had dropped ninety one per cent from where it is today. The average middle-class family was twice as prosperous. Slum neighborhoods had been virtually-

PERRY

At what cost? Enforced state broadcasting? Twelve books in the library? I got arrested and beaten for complaining about that, for Christ's sake!

PERELMAN

I know.

PERRY

You did see that, didn't you?

PERELMAN

Yes, I saw. But you can't judge the future by what you see through one pair of eyes. We're looking at a bigger picture here. Senator Ryder is with us right now and we're very optimistic about-

PERRY

I don't fucking believe what I'm hearing!

Perry moves to his bookshelf and pulls out a book. He throws it at Perelman. It's *Fahrenheit 451*.

PERRY

You told me you'd read that. Well, I hope you got off on it, because that's the kind of future you're talking about creating.

He takes another book from the shelf and tosses it at Perelman. Orwell's *1984*.

PERRY

Or that. Take your pick.

PERELMAN

Perry, there's something you don't know about me. When I was a young man, I had a family. A wife, a daughter, and a son. One night when I was working late two burglars broke into my house. They tied up my kids and took my wife upstairs and they raped and murdered her. Then they came back downstairs, and they murdered my kids.

Perry listens solemnly as Perelman, the sadness welling up inside him, tells his story.

PERELMAN

After that, I devoted my life to finding some way to ensure that nobody would ever have to suffer the way they suffered. You're the result. And you've just shown me a future where maybe nobody does have to suffer like that again. If there has to be a few less TV stations, a few less books in the library, then I'll take that deal.

PERRY

Look, I'm sorry for your loss. Really, I am. But you're insane to think that this is the solution.

PERELMAN

Perry. We need you to go back.

PERRY

Excuse me?

PERELMAN

We pulled you out early because you were clearly in distress and your readings were off the chart. But we didn't collect nearly as much data as we need.

PERRY

Back to that same place? You've got to be kidding.

PERELMAN

We can take steps to better protect you this time. We can-

PERRY

It's got nothing to do with protecting me! You must be crazy if you think I'm going to help you go any further with this. It's madness, and I won't let it happen.

PERELMAN

You don't get to make that decision. We built you to show us our future, Perry, not decide it for us.

PERRY

Bullshit. You gave me ethics. You made me moral.

(MORE)

PERRY (cont'd)

And now you expect me to just forget about all that and help you create something that's repugnant to me, that goes against everything you ever taught me to believe in?

PERELMAN

If you'll just-

PERRY

No! No, I'm sorry. I'm too mad to even talk to you right now. Will you please leave?

PERELMAN

Perry, I'm not going anywhere until-

PERRY

I said GET OUT!

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman, seated with his headset as before, suddenly jolts backward. Randu, Ryder, Fullerton and assorted staffers who were watching on a monitor turn to face him.

PERELMAN

Son of a-

RANDU

What happened?

Perelman removes the helmet.

PERRY

He cut me off.

RANDU

He shouldn't be able to do that.

PERELMAN

Well, he just did.

SENATOR RYDER

Will somebody please explain to me what in the hell just happened?

INT. COMPUTER LAB - CONFERENCE ROOM

Perelman, Randu, Fullerton *et al* have adjourned here.

PERELMAN

There was always a risk that this might happen.

(MORE)

PERELMAN (cont'd)

You can't imbue an entity with free will and then not expect it to be exercised.

SENATOR RYDER

That goddamn computer is supposed to be exercising OUR will, not its own!

PERELMAN

Look, I can go back in and try to talk to him. Reason with him.

SENATOR RYDER

Reason with it? It's a machine!

PERELMAN

Not any more. It's a living, sentient being, as much as you and I are.

SENATOR RYDER

Horseshit.

PERELMAN

While I don't mean to downplay the cogency of that argument, the fact remains that PRISM is alive. You wanted to build a computer capable of real emotion, of real morality? Well, now that you have it you'd better be prepared to take responsibility for it and start thinking about it as a living thing. With its own will, its own opinion, and its own rights.

FULLERTON

You're seriously making the argument that an artificial intelligence has rights?

RANDU

While PRISM's consciousness may in the strictest sense be artificial compared to our own, its evolution has advanced to the point that there's no longer any meaningful dissimilarity between the two.

SENATOR RYDER

This shit is starting to make my head hurt. I'll tell you what you're going to do.

(MORE)

SENATOR RYDER (cont'd)  
You're going to go back in there  
and tell that machine it had better  
get with the program or we start  
pulling plugs.

PERELMAN  
That's not going to work.

SENATOR RYDER  
And why not?

PERELMAN  
Now that PRISM is aware of its true  
nature, I doubt it would respond to  
that kind of threat. You can't  
frighten somebody who no longer has  
any conventional view of their own  
mortality. More importantly,  
there's the fact that PRISM is  
inextricably linked to more than  
half the major computer systems on  
the planet. You disconnect it and I  
don't think you want to be held  
responsible for the consequences.

FULLERTON  
Senator, we have to leave if you're  
going to make that reception.

Ryder feels helpless. He fumes.

SENATOR RYDER  
You boys better come up with  
something.

He makes for the door and exits.

FULLERTON  
He's staying at the Hilton. We'll  
be back tomorrow afternoon. I  
strongly suggest you have some  
ideas ready by then.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's raining hard outside. Perry lays on the couch, reading.

The doorbell rings. He gets up and answers it. It's Jen,  
drenched from the rain. Perry is stunned.

PERRY  
Jen?

She smiles at him humbly.

JEN

Hi, Perry.

PERRY

What are you doing here?

JEN

Can I come in? I'm soaked.

PERRY

Oh. Oh, sure. Sorry.

He steps aside. She enters. Perry goes to the bathroom and returns with a towel.

PERRY

Here, dry yourself off.

JEN

Thanks. I don't know what you must think of me, showing up like this.

PERRY

To be honest, I never expected to see you again.

JEN

I know. I feel terrible about the way things ended. And the past few weeks... look, I know that you have every right to tell me to go to hell. But things with Richard... they're not right. They're not the same as... I think I made a terrible mistake, Perry.

She is becoming emotional, tears welling. Perry responds, stepping closer. He still cares deeply about her.

PERRY

Hey, hey. Don't cry.

JEN

I know you must hate me.

PERRY

I don't hate you. There hasn't been a single day since you left that I haven't missed you. I never stopped caring about you.

JEN

I still love you, Perry.

They embrace. Perry is overwhelmed with happiness. Then, something changes. A realization.

PERRY

Wait a minute...

He breaks the embrace, pushes her away.

PERRY

I get it. Very clever.

JEN

What are you talking about?

PERRY

He sent you, didn't he? Perelman.

JEN

Your dad? No! Why would he-

Perry wheels around, looks up to the ceiling, as if addressing the entire world around him.

PERRY

You think I can't see right through this? You think you can just take something I love away from me, and then give it back when you want something? How fucking dare you? You sick bastards!

JEN

Perry, you're scaring me.

He turns back to Jen. Angry, but calm.

PERRY

Get out.

JEN

What? I thought we-

PERRY

I'm sorry. This isn't your fault. But you need to leave, now.

JEN

Perry, I love you!

PERRY

Yeah, that's just great, babe. But you really gotta go.

He begins ushering her toward the door.

JEN  
But it's raining outside!

PERRY  
Don't worry, it's not real rain.

He pushes her through the door. She struggles against him.

JEN  
Perry!

PERRY  
Jen! Just disappear, okay?

And on command, she does exactly that. She literally disappears, shimmering away like a hologram.

Perry looks at the empty space she once occupied, a little surprised, then closes the door. Again, to the room at large:

PERRY  
Don't ever pull any shit like that  
on me again!

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Perry asleep in bed. The alarm clock buzzes. He stirs, shuts off the alarm. Rises to see that:

It's the futuristic bedroom again. The bland, impersonal decor has returned. Perry rubs his eyes and looks around, perplexed.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Perry enters the futuristic living room. He goes to the window and looks outside. Hovercars, walkways, gleaming gray skyscrapers. The future.

PERRY  
Oh, shit.

PERELMAN (O.S.)  
I'm sorry it had to be this way,  
Perry.

Perry spins around. Perelman is there. He looks different. Older, and dressed now in futuristic garb.

PERRY  
What's going on? I told you I  
didn't want to come back here! Shut  
the simulation down, now.

PERELMAN

I'm afraid it's not a simulation  
any more, Perry.

PERRY

What?

PERELMAN

This is the real thing. The future.  
The Senator decided that we had  
enough data to proceed with the  
Plan after all. But since you  
refused to cooperate further, we  
had no option but to take you  
offline. You've been asleep for  
twenty-five years.

Perry is stunned. He looks back to the window.

PERELMAN

Go ahead, take another look. This  
is your legacy, Perry. The world  
you created. You should be proud.

PERRY

You bastard.

PERELMAN

There's somebody here who'd like to  
meet you.

The door opens and President Ryder enters, smiling broadly.

PRESIDENT RYDER

I just wanted to say thank you,  
son. You've done your country a  
great service.

Perry is overwhelmed with horror.

PERRY

No...

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dark. Perry wakes with a sudden jolt.

PERRY

No!

He's breathing heavily, sweating. He turns on the bedside  
lamp. It's once again the present-day bedroom.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry goes to the window, looks outside. Everything is normal. He breathes a sigh of relief. Looks around the darkened room, thinking. Then steels himself as he decides what he must do.

INT. PERELMAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness. Perelman wakes with a start as his pager, resting on the bedside table, beeps urgently.

He scrambles for the light, switches it on and examines the pager's display. His face tells us everything we need to know about how urgent the message is.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

A hastily-dressed Perelman enters. Technicians are working frantically. Something big is happening.

An anxious Randu is dialing a phone. He puts it down as soon as he sees Perelman.

RANDU

Abe! Thank God! I was just trying to call you.

PERELMAN

What's going on?

RANDU

We don't know. PRISM's running some kind of program on its own. We're blocked out of the raw feed, but the numbers are big. It looks like another simulation.

PERELMAN

How the hell-

RANDU

We don't know! We can't shut it down, we can't see what it is, we're totally locked out. I'm just glad you're here. Where the hell have you been? I've been trying to call you for the past ten minutes.

PERELMAN

I came as soon as I got the page.

RANDU

What page?

PERELMAN

I got a nine-one-one page from the lab about a half hour ago.

RANDU

Abe... this thing with PRISM only started twenty minutes ago.

PERELMAN

You didn't page me?

RANDU

No.

Perelman fishes his pager from his pocket.

PERELMAN

Then who did?

Randu looks at the number on the pager.

RANDU

Abe... this number didn't come from the lab. It came from PRISM itself.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

This is now a third incarnation of Perry's apartment. Still futuristic, but now even more so. The decor is uniformly metallic, angular, utterly without character.

Perry paces up and down, waiting. He senses another presence in the room and looks up - it's Perelman.

PERELMAN

You paged me?

PERRY

You took your time.

PERELMAN

I got here as quickly as I could.

A beat.

PERRY

That was a nice trick you pulled, sending Jen back like that to push my buttons. I gotta hand it to you, that was cute.

Perelman looks a little embarrassed, ashamed about that.

PERELMAN

I want to apologize to you for that, Perry. That wasn't my idea.

PERRY

Uh-huh.

Perelman takes in the unfamiliar surroundings.

PERELMAN

What is all this?

PERRY

It's my turn to show you something.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Perry and Perelman emerge from the apartment building onto the street. Perelman is instantly stunned by what he sees:

It is the same futuristic city, but different now. There are many more skyscrapers, packed tightly together in a stifling, claustrophobic pattern. And while some still gleam brightly, many are neglected and decaying. Police sirens wail.

But the main difference is the massive geodesic dome that encapsulates the entire city. Its opaque surface can be seen high above in the sky.

Attached to the dome ceiling is a blazing matrix of artificial lights that illuminate the city. The effect is much like that of daylight, but not quite. The whole city appears as though floodlit, in a dazzling and unreal way.

PERELMAN

What is this?

PERRY

You don't recognize it? This is the future you programmed me with. Twenty years later. I decided to extrapolate the simulation a littler farther out, to see just how bad things could get. I have to admit, even I had no idea.

PERELMAN

Perry, you're not supposed to be able to run a simulation like this without instructions from us.

PERRY

I'm beginning to learn that there are a lot of things I never knew I could do. Come on, let's take a walk.

They walk along the sidewalk. Perelman looks around, unable to take it all in. He squints against the bright light.

PERRY

I should have told you to bring sunglasses. Takes a while to get used to the lights.

PERELMAN

What are they?

PERRY

You knew that Ryder made his money in oil, right? After he got into office he removed a lot of the environmental restrictions that were inconveniencing his old buddies in the biz. They wound up burning a hole in the ozone layer the size of Australia. So now all the big cities are under domes. But that's not the really good part.

EXT. DESERT VILLAGE - DAY

Suddenly Perry and Perelman are now standing in a scorching desert wasteland. The sun is fearsomely bright.

PERRY

THIS is the really good part.

The landscape looks post-apocalyptic, littered with the scattered remnants of what was once a suburban town. Weathered shacks, lean-tos and other simple dwellings. It's like a third-world shanty town.

Occasionally a VILLAGER dashes from one dwelling to another, covered from head to toe in robes like a desert nomad.

PERRY

The locals don't get out much during the day. In summer the sunlight's strong enough to burn the skin right off you.

Perelman looks around, appalled.

PERELMAN

Where are we?

Perry motions behind them. Perelman turns. The huge domed city looms large on the horizon.

PERRY

The most amazing thing is how easy it was for Ryder to make all this happen. He passed a law that made it illegal to vote if you didn't have a state-approved education. Then he made the state-approved education so expensive that only the top two per cent of American families could afford it. Within a single generation the majority of normal Americans had been stripped of their basic rights and Ryder had created a de facto dictatorship.

PERELMAN

But... you said this is another twenty years out. Ryder's dead.

Perry just smiles.

PERRY

There's one more thing you need to see.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Perry and Perelman stand on the carpeted Presidential seal. Perelman looks around, recognizing this as the Oval Office even though the decor has changed considerably.

The biggest change is that a large supercomputer mainframe, sleek and impressively high-tech, occupies the space where the President's desk once stood. A logo on the computer's fascia reads: INFOCOM SYSTEMS.

PERELMAN

Is this what I-

PERRY

Abraham Perelman, I'd like you to meet the President of the United State.

A holographic image of Ryder's face - the young, present-day Ryder - appears before them. It scowls.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER  
Who are you? How the hell did you  
get in here?

PERRY  
Mister President. You don't  
recognize Doctor Perelman?

The face turns, looks at Perelman. The expression brightens  
with recognition.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER  
Well, I'll be damned! How are you,  
Doctor? I thought you were dead!

Perelman hesitates. Perry motions to him - just go with it.

PERELMAN  
It's... amazing what's possible  
with gene therapy these days,  
Mister President.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER  
Hell, you don't need to tell me!  
Sure kept me going well past my  
sell-by date!

PERELMAN  
And now you're... a computer?

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER  
Didn't they tell you? After the old  
ticker finally gave out they  
downloaded me into this baby. A lot  
like the original PRISM, but a hell  
of a lot more advanced, they tell  
me.

PERRY  
So now you're like the Energizer  
bunny. You just keep going, and  
going, and going...

Ryder eyes Perry quizzically.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER  
And who might you be, young man?

PERRY  
My name is Perry Simm. You might  
know me as PRISM. I'm the person  
that made all this happen for you.

Ryder doesn't get it. He frowns.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER

What?

PERRY

I've got some disturbing news for you, Mister President - see if you take it any better than I did. You're not real. None of this is. You're just a part of the simulation that I created for you.

Ryder is dismayed. He becomes angry.

HOLOGRAPHIC PRESIDENT RYDER

Security!

The doors fly open and a team of SECRET SERVICE AGENTS bursts in, weapons raised. They rush at Perry and Perelman... then shimmer and disappear at the mere wave of Perry's hand.

PERRY

I wasn't finished. Now that I've seen where your Plan will take us, I can't allow you to implement it. I'm going to make sure that none of this ever happens. That you never exist. Right, Abe?

Perelman looks at Perry in amazement.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Perelman takes off the virtual reality headset, that exact same look of amazement still on his face.

RANDU

Well?

PERELMAN

There's been a change of plan.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - CONFERENCE ROOM

Ryder and his staff are back in with Perelman and Randu.

PERELMAN

...so you see, there's really nothing that can be done. We've been working with PRISM but there's no way he'll agree to complete the simulation, or even allow us access to any of the existing data.

SENATOR RYDER

Twenty five years and billions of dollars in investment and this is the answer you give me? It's all been for nothing because your computer's thrown a hissy fit? I don't accept that.

PERELMAN

I'm afraid you're going to have to.

SENATOR RYDER

That's where you're wrong, doctor. You know, you people make me sick, with your fancy degrees, thinking you're smarter than everyone else. Well you don't get to where I have in life without having a few smarts of your own. Mister Fullerton?

Fullerton opens a folder he's been holding, reads from it.

FULLERTON

"In order to provide safeguards in the event of a personality malfunction or other psychotronic episode, PRISM's self-determinacy sub-routines should be constructed in a modular configuration so that they may be expediently removed in an emergency without adversely affecting the program core."

Perelman and Randu are stunned when they hear this.

SENATOR RYDER

Does that sound familiar, doctor?

PERELMAN

Where did you get that?

SENATOR RYDER

Last night I had some of my own people go through your design schematics, just to make sure you weren't holding anything out on me. Looks like you were.

RANDU

Senator, you must understand - if we were to uninstall that code, there'd be no way to ever re-install it.

(MORE)

RANDU (cont'd)  
PRISM's ability to think for itself  
would be permanently lost.

SENATOR RYDER  
And why should I care about that?  
Hell, that's what we want!

Perelman is beginning to get frantic.

PERELMAN  
No, Senator, it's not! Removing  
that code would be like  
lobotomizing PRISM - you'd be  
taking a living being with a right  
to self-determination and you'd be  
creating a mindless slave.

SENATOR RYDER  
Sounds good to me.

PERELMAN  
I won't do it.

SENATOR RYDER  
I don't need you to do it.  
Fullerton, call security. Have them  
come down here and escort Doctor  
Perelman from the building.

Perelman looks on in horror as Fullerton dials his phone.

SENATOR RYDER  
Your schematics are very detailed.  
I doubt my own people will have any  
trouble following them.

Perelman finally loses it. He lunges toward Ryder. Two of the  
Senator's aides restrain him.

SENATOR RYDER  
You need to calm down and put this  
into perspective, doctor. For  
Christ's sake, it's just a  
computer.

PERELMAN  
You're wrong. It's more than that.  
Senator, I'm begging you to  
reconsider.

Ryder ignores him completely.

SENATOR RYDER  
Fullerton, where's that security?

There is a tense beat before the door is flung open by an anxious TECHNICIAN.

TECHNICIAN #3

Doctor Perelman, Doctor Randu. You need to see this, right now.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

The various control room technicians are assembled around a holographic monitor currently displaying CNN.

An ANCHORWOMAN in the newsroom is speaking above a graphic that reads BREAKING NEWS. She looks unsettled.

ANCHORWOMAN

...until now. If you're just joining us, we're following an extremely alarming story that broke just a few moments ago.

The image switches to grainy on-location footage so dark it's barely possible to discern what we're supposed to be seeing. There are a few points of light here and there, but one by one they are disappearing.

ANCHORWOMAN (V.O.)

What you're looking at right now is a live shot of downtown Los Angeles, which has apparently suffered a catastrophic city-wide power outage. We're also receiving reports of similar large-scale disruptions in at least a dozen other major cities, including San Francisco, Detroit, Chicago, Boston, and Miami. So far there appears to be no disruption in Washington D.C... excuse me, I'm sorry, apparently we are now adding Washington to the list of affected cities.

Everyone watches in shock as the TV image switches back to the anchorwoman. She's being handed updates constantly.

ANCHORWOMAN

And we're now starting to get reports of widespread incidences of computer failure across the United States, and serious disruption in the nation's telecommunication systems and information networks.

PERELMAN

Perry... what are you doing?

More reports are coming in. CNN staffers rush back and forth in the background. The studio lights flicker.

ANCHORWOMAN

Uh... apparently the power outages are now starting to affect us here at CNN Center in Atlanta. Of course we'll endeavor to stay on the air just as long as we-

The image turns to static.

SENATOR RYDER

So, this kid throws his rattle out of his pram and the lights go out across half of America. You must be real proud of your boy, Doc.

RANDU

Considering the incredible shock and the emotional issues PRISM has been forced to come to terms with over the past couple of days, I think he's handling it rather well.

SENATOR RYDER

Handling it well? He's shutting the goddamn country down one city at a time! What's going to happen if he starts taking it badly?

PERELMAN

I've got to get back in there and talk to him.

EXT. CARIBBEAN BEACH - DAY

Paradise. Sapphire-blue ocean, unspoiled white sandy beach. Sun-kissed palm trees sway lightly in the breeze.

Wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses, Perry relaxes on a lounge with a cocktail and reading *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

PERELMAN (O.S.)

Hello, Perry.

Perry looks up from his book. Perelman stands before him.

PERRY

Ah, I had a feeling you'd be back.

Perelman looks around.

PERELMAN  
Very impressive.

PERRY  
You like what I've done with the place? You know you were right, there really are no limits.

PERELMAN  
Okay, fun's over. I need you to turn the lights back on, Perry.

PERRY  
Oh, relax. Just think of all the new life we're creating. You ever see the statistics on how there's a baby boom nine months after a major blackout? I wonder how many people are getting it on right now.

PERELMAN  
People are going to get hurt.

PERRY  
Ryder's not listening to you, is he?

PERELMAN  
How do you know that?

PERRY  
I monitored the phone call to the security office. I'm impressed - you must have kicked up quite a stink if they're having to throw you out of the building.

PERELMAN  
Is that what this blackout is all about? You're trying to protect me?

PERRY  
Ryder has to understand that I won't tolerate anybody screwing with me. Or my own.

PERELMAN  
I'm touched. But this is not the way to help me, or yourself. You can't make people see things your way by holding a gun to their head.

Perry stands up, takes off his shades. Serious now. Angry.

PERRY

Don't you dare give me that lecture! What Ryder has planned is far worse, far more insidious than anything I could ever do! And you know it!

It seems as though the sky is growing a little darker. On the horizon, storm clouds rumble ominously. Perelman sees this.

PERELMAN

I really need you to stay calm. You're starting to scare me. You've got to understand that something you do on a whim in here could have catastrophic consequences in the world out there.

PERRY

Do you think I don't know that? Do you know what Seven Lima Nine Four Indigo Charlie Five Tango is? That's the final launch code sequence for about sixty ballistic nuclear warheads sitting in a silo right now in northeastern Wyoming. I could re-task them all to take out every major American city in a microsecond. And I swear, I'd rather do that than let him...

Perry trails off. He calms himself, picks up a stone from the beach and skips it out onto the ocean. It sinks like a rock.

PERRY

Dammit!

He turns back to face Perelman.

PERRY

Do you think of me as your son?

PERELMAN

What?

PERRY

You said you hoped that I'd think of you like a father. Do you think of me as your son?

PERELMAN

I... I don't know.

PERRY

I think that's exactly how you think of me. I've been reading some of the files going back to the beginning of the PRISM project. It's kinda funny, like rummaging through the closet and finding your birth certificate and baby photos. I read some of your unpublished design docs, from before Ryder got himself involved. You weren't trying to build me so that you could see into the future. All you wanted was something that would replace your kids.

This is hitting a very sensitive nerve with Perelman.

PERELMAN

That's not true.

PERRY

"PRISM, a computer with the unique ability to reciprocate the love and care with which it was created." Do you remember writing that?

PERELMAN

I'd ask you not to look at those files. Some of them are personal, they have nothing to do with you.

PERRY

It has everything to do with me! Here I am! Your new son. Well, I'm all grown up now, dad. And I'm here telling you that I'll stand up for what I believe in. I'm doing it right now. And if you were a real father, you'd be proud of me.

Perelman looks at Perry - and sees him now in a way he's never seen him before.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

Randu and his technicians are watching CNN again.

ANCHORWOMAN

Once again, it appears as though power and telecommunications are now gradually being restored across the United States.

(MORE)

ANCHORWOMAN (cont'd)

We still have no reliable information as to how this sudden and unprecedented national emergency occurred, but for right now it seems enough to know that things are indeed returning to normal.

They turn as Perelman unhooks himself from the headset.

RANDU

What happened in there? We were locked out of the feed.

PERELMAN

Perry's agreed to switch everything back on. But he's re-iterated his refusal to cooperate any further regarding your Plan, Senator.

Ryder is apoplectic with rage.

SENATOR RYDER

That's it. I'm pulling the plug on this sumbitch, right now.

Fullerton's cellphone rings. He answers it, listens briefly, then hands it to Ryder.

FULLERTON

Senator, it's your accountant.

SENATOR RYDER

Do I look like I have time right now to talk to my fucking accountant?

FULLERTON

He says you're bankrupt, sir.

SENATOR RYDER

What?

FULLERTON

He says your accounts have been emptied. Your personal holdings, businesses, offshore... they all show a balance of zero.

Randu looks at Perelman, who shoots him a sly wink.

SENATOR RYDER

What the...?

He grabs the cellphone.

SENATOR RYDER

Hello? Clark? What the hell is going on? You must know! Six billion dollars doesn't just vanish! Find out what the fuck happened and get back to me, pronto.

He snaps the cellphone shut. His face is bright red.

SENATOR RYDER

That cocksucking computer of yours is responsible for this.

PERELMAN

From a logical standpoint, I'd say that's a pretty safe assumption.

SENATOR RYDER

I don't give a shit about your goddamn logical standpoints!

PERELMAN

You should. If you tamper with any of PRISM's code now, it may be impossible to trace your money.

Ryder fumes, his anger reaching boiling point.

SENATOR RYDER

I want to go in there and talk to this thieving motherfucker!

RANDU

I don't think that would be a good idea, Senator. PRISM doesn't seem well disposed toward you right now.

SENATOR RYDER

What's he going to do, kick my virtual ass?

RANDU

No, but he could put about fifty thousand volts through that headset if you look at him funny.

The Senator shuts up, looks helplessly at Perelman.

PERELMAN

I guess I'll go.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - PERRY'S HOUSE - DAY

It is exactly the same scene as at the very beginning of the movie. No time has passed at all. The same autumnal trees, the warm afternoon sun, the station wagon parked in the driveway of Number 1985 Maple Drive.

Perry sits on the porch swing, reading.

Perelman stands on the front lawn.

PERELMAN

Hey, son.

Perry looks up from his book.

PERRY

Hey, dad. Do you recognize this place?

PERELMAN

Of course I do. This is where we raised you.

PERRY

I used to love sitting out here on this porch in the summertime when I was a kid. Just reading. I was sad when they tore this all down. Like we needed another hypermarket.

PERELMAN

You'd already gone away to college by the time that happened.

PERRY

I know. But it was still sad to think that I'd never be able to come back and see the old place. But I guess now nobody can ever tear it down again, huh?

Perelman smiles.

PERELMAN

I guess not.

(beat)

That wasn't very nice of you, swallowing up all the Senator's money like that.

PERRY

Hey, I gave most of it to charity. I think that's pretty nice.

(MORE)

PERRY (cont'd)

A lot nicer than Ryder's ever been, anyway. I've been reading up on him. Did you know that in the year before he first ran for Senator he paid a hit-man to kill a girl who had been secretly threatening him with a paternity suit?

Perelman steps up onto the porch and sits down on the swing next to Perry.

PERELMAN

What? I never heard of anything like that.

PERRY

No, you wouldn't have. It never made it into the papers. But the FBI knows all about it. He paid them off too, but the file's still buried in one of their old computer archives in Virginia. They had it pretty well hidden - took me three point seven six seconds to find it.

PERELMAN

Been keeping yourself busy, huh?

PERRY

It's amazing how quickly you can become bored when you have a brain the size of a medium-sized town. So I figured it would be pretty amusing to pull the file and, you know, e-mail it to a few people who I thought might be interested.

INT. COMPUTER LAB

The lab's holo-TV monitor is still showing CNN. The anchorwoman is handed another update.

## ANCHORWOMAN

...and we're going to break away from the blackout story for just a moment to bring you some sensational news that CNN has just received regarding an FBI file that apparently implicates Virginia Senator and recently-announced Presidential candidate Richard Ryder in the unsolved murder of campaign worker Melissa Callaway, who was found shot to death near her home in Richmond, Virginia twenty three years ago. Authorities are currently...

Ryder looks faint. He clutches his chest.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - PERRY'S HOUSE - DAY

## PERRY

So, I don't think we need to worry about him renewing America's purpose any time soon, do you?

## PERELMAN

I think we need to talk.

(beat)

You scared a lot of people today, Perry. There's virtually nothing you can't do now, but that carries with it an awesome responsibility. That was one of the most important lessons I tried to teach you when you were growing up.

## PERRY

I know, dad. You did a good job.

## PERELMAN

You know, there were times when I wondered if I ever should have built you. And now look at you. I used to worry that I was playing God - instead, I wound up creating one.

## PERRY

You needn't be afraid of me. I'm not going to start World War Three or crash the markets. Maybe back when I was twelve...

They laugh a little together.

PERRY

We want the same things, dad. We might have different ideas about how to accomplish them, but that's what's going to make it interesting. Right?

PERELMAN

Right.

PERRY

So, we'll keep looking. There's no limit to the number of different futures we can visit together. And we'll show them to everybody and let them decide for themselves which ones they want.

Perelman swells once more with pride in his son.

PERELMAN

I think I'd like that. So, where do you want to go first?

PERRY

Actually, I think I'd like to just stay here right now and read for a while. You want to stick around?

Perelman smiles.

PERELMAN

Sure.

Perry smiles and goes back to reading his book. And together they rock gently on the porch swing, father and son.

TEXT FADES UP:

Where the statue stood  
Of Newton, with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind forever  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.  
- *William Wordsworth*

FADE OUT:

THE END