

INVARIANT

*People like us,
who believe in physics,
know that the distinction between
past, present, and future
is only a stubbornly persistent
illusion.*

-- Albert Einstein

OVER BLACK:

VIDEO HUM and MACHINE SOUNDS - fans and servo motors. And VOICES - the casual jargon of scientists working in a lab...

FADE IN:

PHYSICS LAB - HOME VIDEO FOOTAGE (1995)

Handheld home video of a YOUNG BOY'S FACE. He's about seven, with wide, searching eyes. And he is FASCINATED. A TIMESTAMP is burned into the corner of the frame: 3:23pm 4.AUG.1995.

The camera pulls back. The boy is on tiptoes, staring at an APPARATUS on a worktable - a maze of lenses and mirrors on a metal pegboard. He reaches for something at the center of it -

ROBERT (BEHIND CAMERA)

Max - don't touch that -

STERN

(Bronx accent)

Here you go, kiddo -

Max is suddenly LIFTED up - by JULIAN STERN. He's in his 50s, with wild graying hair, equal parts genius and boyish mischief-maker. It's clear he loves Max.

The camera ZOOMS to see what Max is so taken with: a tiny CRYSTAL in a clamp. It's DEEPLY, EERILY BLACK. Light reflects off it in a RAINBOW, like an oil slick. Max leans in, awed...

MAX

What is it, Uncle Julie?

BURST OF STATIC:

TIMESTAMP: 3:40pm 4.AUG.1995 - later that afternoon in the same lab. LINA - 30s, intense and serious in thick glasses - works in a LAB NOTEBOOK, oblivious to the beautiful summer day outside. The camera catches her writing an EQUATION -

STERN (BEHIND CAMERA)

(sotto)

Now we observe the rare studius maximus in her natural habitat...

ROBERT - 30s, as warm and easy-going as Lina is intense - carries Max over, upside down, squealing in delighted terror.

ROBERT

Lina, your son is being a nuisance.

LINA

That's because you let your son eat
three donuts, Robert -

BURST OF STATIC:

Max is staring at the crystal again as Lina works in the background. Stern gives Max a conspiratorial look.

STERN

Be patient, kiddo. This'll change
the world. Just a few more weeks
and we're gonna see some...amazing
things...

BURST OF STATIC:

TELEVISION NEWSCAST - TIMESTAMP 6:07 PM 20.NOV.1995

A late fall day - bundled-up students watch SMOKE POUR from
the windows of a large UNIVERSITY BUILDING -

BURST OF STATIC:

Side-by-side photos of ROBERT and LINA -

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

- both killed in the blaze -

BURST OF STATIC:

Video of STERN delivering a lecture -

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

- famed physicist Julian Stern is
in critical condition at this hour,
and is not expected to -

BURST OF STATIC:

DAY CARE CENTER - TIMESTAMP 3:27 PM 20.NOV.1995

SILENT video of a DAY CARE CENTER - shot from outside,
through a window. Inside, MAX happily builds a LEGO SPACE
STATION by himself. An adult hurries over to him -

BURST OF STATIC:

A GRAY-HAIRED WOMAN hugs Max, murmuring to him through her
tears. He stares, space station forgotten in his hand.

An insistent RINGING starts to seep in...getting LOUDER as
the camera ZOOMS in on Max's face...his world crumbling...

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

RING... RING...

MAX - now about 30 - WAKES, nestled in blankets and pillows on a sofa. He rubs his unshaven face as the ringing STOPS.

The sofa is the last amenity in a wood-paneled office that's been clumsily converted to a LAB - the desks pushed together and covered with EQUIPMENT, cables running everywhere. There's barely room for the LAPTOP Max now sits down at.

DATA scrolls by. He STARES at it, his father's warm features hardened by his mother's intense focus. Without looking away, he grabs a PROTEIN BAR from a huge WHOLESALE BOX.

MAX
(muttering to himself)
Come on...come on...

A RESULT appears: $D = 0.00$. Max SLUMPS. He sighs, resigning himself to yet another failure. He types:

TRIAL # 4372: NO RESULT

The RINGING starts again...and Max suddenly SLAMS his fist on the desk - pent-up frustration spilling out. He GRABS for his phone amid the mess - answers it -

MAX
What?

He listens a moment - then BOLTS up, cursing silently -

MAX
I'm on my way -

But he stops short - runs back to the laptop and hits a key. On the screen as he rushes out: STARTING TRIAL # 4373...

PRESENTER (PRE-LAP)
What is time?

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A fiftyish PRESENTER stands at a podium in a small, packed theater under a banner: *INTERNATIONAL PHYSICS SOCIETY - 2016 FELLOWSHIPS.*

PRESENTER
Amazingly, nobody actually knows.
But our next recipient may get us a
step closer -

Max slips in the back, pulling a tuxedo jacket from a *FRIAR TUX RENTALS* suit bag and putting it on.

PRESENTER

- with his algorithm to -
 (reading his notes)
 - discretize...spacetime manifolds
 in arbitrarily high dimension.

PETER - in his 50s, an aging hippie in a tux - rushes over to Max. As he helps Max with his clip-on bow tie -

PETER

(sotto)

Where the hell have you been?

Max shrugs an apology -

PRESENTER

This year's Hofmann Fellowship in
 theoretical physics goes to James
Maxwell Alden. Max?

The well-heeled audience APPLAUDS as the presenter squints, looking for Max. Peter finally gets the tie on and pushes Max down the aisle. The applause SWELLS...

INT. AUDITORIUM LOBBY - LATER

A black-tie reception. Max, holding a framed CERTIFICATE, is the uncomfortable center of a tight circle of well-wishers. All of them seem to be talking to him at once, as other guests watch and take pictures.

PETER

Can I borrow him?

He pulls Max out of the circle.

MAX

God, thank you, Peter -

Peter proudly shows Max an ENVELOPE. Max looks at it blankly.

PETER

I did it! The Hofmanns want you to
 present your work at the Fellowship
 dinner.

MAX

Nah, that's OK.

PETER

Max - this is a golden ticket to the chocolate factory! It's like a Nobel alumni meeting - with international press coverage.

(excited)

They never let first-year fellows present! Make a good impression and your career will -

MAX

I can't. I'm in the middle of a set of trials.

Peter stares - unable to quite believe what he's hearing.

PETER

Dammit, Max, I told you I'm not funding that nonsense -

MAX

(loud)

I asked you not to nominate me for the Hofmann. I don't want to spend three years -

PETER

Shh!

Several nearby guests turn. Peter pulls Max aside angrily.

PETER

I stuck my neck out on this. My reputation's on the line. So let me make it simple.

(hands him the envelope)

You're doing this presentation, or I'm cutting off your funding. Your office - and all the crap you've filled it with - belong to the university, not you.

Max stares at Peter, dismayed. Peter sighs.

PETER

I'm trying to help you, Max. Just - do the presentation, OK?

He turns to return to the party - then remembers something -

PETER

Oh - the Hofmanns want to meet you. I set up a lunch for next week.

Max, defeated, watches Peter gladhand his way back into the crowd. Max turns and heads for the BAR. On the way, he passes a THIN MAN filming him on a phone. Max waves weakly, but the man just keeps filming.

INT. AUDITORIUM LOBBY - BAR - LATER

Max drops the certificate on the bar, which a banner declares is *SPONSORED BY PTAC - PACIFIC TERASCALE ACCELERATOR CENTER*.

The bartender is in her 20s, elfin, with punk hair and an open, friendly face. A nametag on her uniform reads *LOUISE*.

MAX

Can I have a drink please?

LOUISE

(amused)

I need a little more detail.

MAX

Alcohol.

LOUISE

(beat)

Good enough.

She mixes a drink expertly as he glances back at the party. Everyone seems to be looking at him. She hands him a glass -

LOUISE

One alcohol.

He looks at the napkin she gave him with the drink - branded with a *PTAC* logo. He shakes his head.

LOUISE

Yeah, fancy.

(looks around)

So what is this shindig?

MAX

It's a...distraction.

She picks up the certificate.

LOUISE

Nice distraction. Congratulations.

Max sighs, unable to muster a fake smile.

LOUISE

I mean...I'm so sorry you won this?

MAX

No, I...I'm grateful, of course. I just...

He gives up and looks down at his drink.

LOUISE

Come on, tell me.

MAX

It's boring.

LOUISE

I'm hourly.

He can't help a tiny smile. She glances around, pours a shot - and DOWNS it. He stares. She looks back expectantly.

MAX

I'm have to spend the next three years doing work I don't care about any more. It's not...fundamental.

LOUISE

So what do you want be working on?

MAX

I have this...equation. It gets at the core of - well, everything.
(getting fired up)
The nature of time!

LOUISE

Sounds neat.

MAX

It will be if I ever get to finish it. I've been doing this experiment - trying to, sort of, manipulate light...
(gives up)
It's technical.

LOUISE

(deadpan)

Sure, no. Maybe if you talk slowly and use really small words?

Max misses the sarcasm completely.

MAX

Well...um...my equation is like...a drink that's missing an ingredient.

He holds up his drink. She nods gravely, enjoying this.

MAX

Only...it's not really an
ingredient, more like a - a number.
A ratio, technically -

LOUISE

(as if trying to follow)
So what you're saying is...you need
to derive the Stern Invariant?

Max stares - caught completely off-balance -

MAX

You...read my paper?

LOUISE

(feigning outrage)
Oh, a bartender can't read Physical
Review? Or is it that I'm a girl?

Max goes beet red, mortified -

MAX

I - no, I didn't mean - I just -
you said -

LOUISE

(alarmed)
Whoa, it's OK. I'm fucking with
you. Jesus. Deep breaths. I'm a
grad student, applied physics.

Max exhales, relieved. Then -

MAX

Wait. "What is this shinding"?

LOUISE

(caught)
Yeah. I begged for this shift. Have
you seen who's here?

MAX

Which group are you in?

LOUISE

McCarron. For a few more weeks
anyway.

That rings a bell...

MAX

Paul McCarron? Didn't he build that
Bose-Einstein EIT trap?

LOUISE

(snorts)

I built that.

MAX

That was -

(looks at her nametag)

Wait. Louise. You're L. Van Wyck?

LOUISE

(pleased)

Don't look so surprised.

MAX

(pause)

When do you get off work?

She stares at him, taken aback.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

It's late and the campus is quiet. A well-maintained old
stone building sits mostly dark. A SIGN in front of it reads:

JULIAN STERN PHYSICS BUILDING

A window LIGHTS UP on the second floor.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Max, his bow-tie unclipped, leads Louise - still in her
uniform - into the office and shuts the door. She takes in
the chaotic mess - bookshelves crammed into a corner...
snaking cables...sofa clearly used for sleeping...

LOUISE

Nice lab.

MAX

I'm a theoretician. This isn't
exactly...official.

She looks at the equipment on the shoved-together desks. It's
an APPARATUS, like Stern's - all mirrors and lenses - but far
less competently built. It seems to be held together with zip-
ties and duct tape.

She steps on something CRINKLY - looks down - and sees a mess of protein bar wrappers all around her. Max removes a FOIL COVER from the center of the apparatus. Louise leans in.

LOUISE
What is that?

It's the CRYSTAL from Stern's lab, GLINTING blackly...

Max shows her the laptop. Onscreen is a 3D model of a CRYSTAL LATTICE labeled *SAMPLE T*. It looks like an impossibly complex tinker-toy. Louise examines it, manipulating the model...

LOUISE
It's a - metamaterial...

MAX
A naturally-occurring metamaterial -

LOUISE
(amazed)
Where'd you get it?

MAX
- probably the only one like it in the world!

He props a whiteboard on the sofa and draws a CRYSTAL on it, labeling it *SAMPLE T*. He draws a LINE into the crystal -

MAX
If you send in a beam of light, the lattice structure should actually alter the flow of time -
(stops the line)
- so the photons slow down...

LOUISE
(getting it)
...or even stop -

He nods - then continues the line through the crystal -

MAX
- and then emerge later.

LOUISE
Oh - I got it - the delay gives you the Stern Invariant, and from that -

He points to another whiteboard, this one covered with a set of dense EQUATIONS -

MAX
The first complete, physical
definition of time itself.

LOUISE
(simply)
Wow.

MAX
But it doesn't work.

He switches on the power and beckons her for a closer look. A small LASER is aimed at the CRYSTAL, which is nestled in a silicon DETECTOR (it looks like a tiny, curved solar panel).

MAX
(points at the LASER)
So I'm measuring the delay between
the moment this laser fires into
the sample, and when it emerges.

He hits a BUTTON. A loud POP as the laser FIRES a faint BLUE BEAM into the crystal - which GLOWS BLUE as the beam PASSES THROUGH, sparkling off the detector.

MAX
The beam's going right through.
It's not slowing down at all.

Data streams in on the laptop. He scrolls through and highlights $D = 0.00$. Louise frowns. She searches through the data...and SEES something. She pokes around inside the apparatus, thinking...

MAX
I've been working on it for two
years, had everybody I know look at
it - a couple Nobelists from
Caltech once - and nobody has -

LOUISE
I see the problem. You're not
generating a coherent coupling
field. And the probe beam isn't
tuned right for the lattice.

He just blinks at her. She shrugs.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL - DAY

Louise runs along a scenic trail with EKUWA, a tiny Ghanaian woman. Louise has a whistle around her neck and periodically checks on a pack of other RUNNERS trailing them.

EKUWA

I thought you couldn't wait to get out of here.

LOUISE

It seems like fun.

EKUWA

(skeptical)

You know Megumi used to share that office, right? She moved out after two weeks.

LOUISE

Why?

EKUWA

Where to start. The mess. The muttering. Sudden freakouts. One time he threw a shoe at the wall.

This is news to Louise. She finally shrugs.

LOUISE

It's just a couple days.

They run on.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - DAY

Sun streams in the window as Louise tests the apparatus with an OSCILLOSCOPE - wavy GREEN LINES dancing as she probes it. Max paces impatiently behind her, looking over her shoulder. She tries to ignore him. He MUTTERS something as he paces -

LOUISE

(annoyed)

Max - what?

MAX

I thought you said it'd be simple.

She puts down the probes and looks at him earnestly.

LOUISE

So don't take this wrong, but... bite my ass.

Max blinks.

MAX

There's a right way to take that?

Just then, Peter pokes his head in the door.

PETER
Max, can - oh.

He stops short as he sees Max and Louise - clearly working on the apparatus. Max's face falls. *Shit.*

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Max stands outside his office with Peter, who scowls at him, arms crossed over his tie-dye t-shirt.

MAX
It's just one last trial, I promise. Tomorrow I'll start on the presentation.

Peter sighs skeptically. He's heard this before.

PETER
Just be ready to go over it with the Hofmanns.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - DAY

Late afternoon light slants in. Max watches Louise flip a switch and POWER UP the apparatus.

LOUISE
Ready?

Max nods. She pushes a button. POP! The laser FIRES a faint BLUE BEAM - and the crystal GLOWS blue.

She looks at Max hopefully. He checks the laptop...and shakes his head. She frowns, checking the apparatus.

LOUISE
Oh - wait. Idiot.

She reconnects a cable.

LOUISE
OK, that should do it.
(reaches for the button)
Unless I jinxed it by saying that -

BEFORE she even touches the button, the crystal GLOWS RED and a RED BEAM shoots from it, sparkling off the detector. Louise reacts - startled - then finally TAPS the button -

POP! The LASER FIRES its blue beam - which VANISHES into the inky black of the crystal. Max and Louise both stare at the apparatus, totally baffled.

LOUISE
Did...um. Did you see that?
(he nods slowly)
I don't...

She reaches for the button. Again, the crystal GLOWS and a RED BEAM shoots out - a second BEFORE Louise taps the button, firing the BLUE LASER BEAM into the crystal.

They look at each other. This makes no sense. Max suddenly turns to the laptop. He scrolls down...and STARES: $D = -0.88$.

MAX
Negative...the delay is negative! I
never even considered -

LOUISE
That...can't be right.

MAX
Can I try?

Once again, a RED BEAM shoots from the glowing crystal...a second BEFORE Louise FIRES the blue laser beam into it.

MAX
Louise, lemme -

LOUISE
God, that feels weird. It's like
it's...anticipating me. I'm gonna
try to not hit it next time it
lights up.

Max nods reluctantly - it does seem like a good test. They stare at the crystal...but it just sits there, BLACK...

LOUISE
Can't fool it, I guess.

MAX
My turn.

He steps in impatiently, staring at the crystal. The RED BEAM shoots out - and a second later he hits the button, firing the laser. He looks at Louise, stunned.

LOUISE
This can't be real.

MAX
Can we...increase the delay?

LOUISE
(of course)
The coupling field! I'll max it
out.

She types, changing a setting. The apparatus WHINES loudly.

MAX
How much delay -

The crystal GLOWS and the RED BEAM shoots out. They stare,
caught off-guard...

Max rushes to the button, and - THREE SECONDS after the
crystal flashed - he hits the button, FIRING the blue laser.
They look at each other, THRILLED. Louise checks the laptop -

LOUISE
Almost three seconds!

Max stares at the crystal, thinking...

MAX
I want to try something...

He COVERS HIS EYES.

MAX
Don't tell me -

LOUISE
Gotcha.

He rubs his forefinger and thumb together over the button. A
moment later, the crystal flashes - in a DISTINCT, RAPID
PATTERN - FLASH-FLASH-FLASH-FLASH - pause - FLASH-FLASH -

Louise GASPS - as Max TAPS out the same pattern with the
laser's blue pulses. POP-POP-POP-POP - pause - POP-POP. He
uncovers his eyes - *Well?*

LOUISE
(shocked)
That was Morse code! You said hi -

MAX
(leaps up)
This changes the whole system!

He rushes to the whiteboard with the equations and ERASES
several terms. He begins rapidly scribbling NEW terms -

LOUISE
Max...Max!
(he turns)
Forget the equations! We just sent
a message back in time.

MAX
(it sinks in)
Y-yeah. We did.

They stare at the apparatus, trying to absorb it all...

INT. LOUISE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A 12-SIDED DIE lands on a gameboard.

Louise, Ekuwa and three more friends TALK and LAUGH around a table in a cramped but cozy apartment -

LOUISE
I can't talk about it! I promised!
Not till it's ready.

GROANS and heckling from around the table.

RENEE
Well, at least tell us about the
eccentric genius...

RAVI
Eccentric doesn't imply genius.

LOUISE
No, I think he's the real deal -

RAVI
(scoffs)
He's an asshole who's gotten a free
ride his whole life cause of what
happened to his parents.

LOUISE
What...what happened to - ?

ZANE
Fascinating as this is, is someone
gonna roll?

Laughter. Conversation moves on as the next player rolls...

INT. LOUISE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Louise, in pajamas, sits alone at the dining table, the detritus of game night around her, reading on her laptop as Ekuwa and Zane do the dishes together.

Louise is looking through news articles on the 1995 lab fire. She flips past Stern's OBITUARY, scrolls through the next article...and stops, looking at photos of ROBERT and LINA...

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Max stares at the apparatus, alone in the dark. The crystal FLASHES RED. He hits the button - the laser FLASHES BLUE. The crystal FLASHES again...and Max fires the laser again. He does it OVER AND OVER, staring into the crystal...

Suddenly he sits up - a THOUGHT hitting him.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK -

INT. LOUISE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ekuwa rushes to the front door in a robe - Zane close behind. She opens it. Max stands outside, out of breath.

MAX

Hi. Is, uh...

(notices their clothes)

Oh. Is it late?

Louise emerges from a bedroom, bleary. She sees Max.

LOUISE

What's going on?

MAX

(flustered by her pajamas)

I - I have to show you something.

LOUISE

Now?

Ekuwa gives her a look - *what'd I tell you?* as she and Zane head back to their room. Louise turns back to Max, annoyed.

LOUISE

Well? What?

EXT. MAX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A hilltop neighborhood. Louise pulls her beat-up Honda into the driveway of a large HOUSE about thirty years overdue for a remodel. She and Max step out.

LOUISE
You live here?

MAX
It was my grandmother's house.

LOUISE
Your driveway's bigger than my apartment.

INT. MAX'S HOUSE - LATER

Louise follows Max through a big, empty house, slowing to look at wall PHOTOS of ROBERT, LINA and YOUNG MAX - and MAX with his GRANDMOTHER (the old woman at the day care)...

They pass a staircase with a broken electric STAIR LIFT. Louise glances in at a bedroom - and stops. The only thing in the room is an unused HOSPITAL-STYLE BED...

MAX (O.S.)
Louise?

She hurries to catch up with him.

INT. MAX'S BEDROOM - LATER

Max and Louise stand over a desk in a tiny bedroom. The bookshelves are stuffed with physics texts and the bed is unusable, covered with books and papers.

LOUISE
All right, what's the big mystery?

Max opens a LOCKBOX on the desk. He pulls a pile of NOTEBOOKS out - the same kind Lina had in Stern's lab. He opens one and starts flipping through.

MAX
It's in here somewhere. Might take me a while to find.

Louise pulls an empty VIAL labeled *SAMPLE T* from the lockbox.

LOUISE
Where'd you get this?

MAX
It was my parents'. I found it in
the attic a couple years ago, after
my gramma died.

As he flips through notebooks, Louise reaches into the
lockbox and pulls out an old VIDEOTAPE...

INT. MAX'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

ON TV: *Timestamped HOME VIDEO from 1995. Stern chases Max
around the lab like a monster as Max SHRIEKS in delight.*

Louise sits on the sofa, watching on an old tube TV as Max
continues to search through the notebooks.

LOUISE
I can't believe you knew Julian
Stern.

MAX
My parents met in his lab.

ON TV: *Stern and Max play with Legos at a worktable.*

MAX
He just made everything...
fascinating. Look -

He hands her an open notebook -

MAX
I always thought they were just
trying to observe time. But...I
think they knew what it could do.

He goes back to his search as Louise reads notes scrawled in
the notebook he gave her: ...MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH! ...BENEFIT
TO HUMANITY... She reads on - ...RISKS? ...PRECAUTION...

MAX
Here - yes!

He lays out a notebook dense with detailed GRAPHS. She looks.

LOUISE
(surprised)
It's...a power curve. Full
spectrum?

MAX
My mom spent years measuring
everything about the sample.
(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)
I could never understand why she
was so...thorough.

Louise scans the pages - absorbing it all as fast as she can.
She looks up, startled -

LOUISE
It's unbounded.
(he nods knowingly)
But...that means...we could send a
lot more data -

MAX
A lot further.

LOUISE
Course I'd have rebuild the whole
thing.

MAX
If we could send real information
back - even just a few minutes...
it'd change...

LOUISE
Everything.

MAX
Weather data...

LOUISE
Flood warnings -

MAX
We could prevent accidents...

LOUISE
Crimes.

MAX
Wars.

Silence as they contemplate it...

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - DAY

Louise rolls a CART through the door, LOADED with the
disassembled apparatus from Max's office. Max follows,
carrying his whiteboards, looking worried -

MAX
You sure we have to do this?

LOUISE
Your office is - Yes. We do.

Max looks around as she unloads the cart. Her lab is the OPPOSITE of his - small, tidy and full of personal touches - PHOTOS of Louise with friends and family, posters of runners, nerdy toys. Max examines a complex LEGO construction.

MAX
I used to have this set...

He sees something in a corner and picks it up. It's a small DEVICE PROTOTYPE - a plastic chamber with steel components around it. It's on a base attached to a FOAMBOARD POSTER. In large print across the top:

BLUESTREAK
LOW-COST SOLAR-POWERED LASER-BASED WATER PURIFICATION SYSTEM
L. Van Wyck, MS

MAX
BlueStreak...is this your
dissertation?

She looks - and isn't happy to see it. She turns back to her work, putting on a casual tone -

LOUISE
I'm not doing one. I decided to get
out of here and have a life
instead.

MAX
But - this could make a big
difference -

LOUISE
Yeah, huge. Oh, except if nobody
thinks it'll work, nobody will give
you the money to actually build it.
(shrugs)
They were probably right.

MAX
How do you know if you don't -

She turns, unable to hide her irritation any more -

LOUISE
Will you forget that?

She grabs it from him and TOSSES it back into the corner. It lands with a CRUNCH. She thrusts a box of parts at him -

LOUISE
You wanna help me or what?

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - MONTAGE

A series of DISSOLVES - DAYS PASS as Max and Louise work.

- She builds a BASE STATION for the crystal on her worktable.
- Max CODES on his laptop, eating protein bars.
- Louise sweeps away empty wrappers, annoyed.
- They pace, argue over a whiteboard, nap on the floor. Max's STUBBLE gets longer...

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - NIGHT

Max and Louise work side by side, both looking exhausted. She uses a pair of angled LONG-REACH FORCEPS to carefully insert the CRYSTAL into the half-finished base station. He frowns at the GARBLED DISPLAY of a red HANDHELD VIDEO GAME CONSOLE. He taps random buttons on the console - with no effect.

Louise finally stands, stretches and puts on her jacket.

MAX
You're leaving?

LOUISE
Don't start. I'm fried. Aren't you?

MAX
(grabs his backpack)
I'll go work in my office.

Louise watches him pack, equal parts annoyed and admiring.

LOUISE
Hey...you wanna grab some dinner?

Max pulls a PROTEIN BAR from his backpack and waves it at her. She laughs wearily as they head for the door.

LOUISE
Do you ever eat actual food?

MAX
Waste of time. I'd take a food pill
if I could.

LOUISE
You're a strange dude.

MAX
(mouth full)
I know.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Max yawns as he walks down the empty, darkened hall to his office. He suddenly STOPS. There's a MAN at his office door, working the doorknob. Hard to make out in the dimness...

MAX
Hello?

The man TURNS. He's in his 40s, with a calm air of authority - and he's wearing a JANITOR'S UNIFORM and has a SUPPLY CART.

MAX
Oh. I -

JANITOR
I'll come back later.

Before Max can reply, the janitor heads off down the hall. Max watches him go, uneasy for no reason he can identify.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Max and Peter sit at a table in an airy, upscale restaurant. Max has shaved and is wearing a suit. He pulls at his collar as a well-dressed OLDER COUPLE enter. Peter waves them over.

PETER
The Hofmanns aren't technical, so
just give an overview of what
you'll present at the Fellowship
dinner. Don't inundate them -

Max's phone BUZZES. He looks. It's a TEXT from Louise:

Ready!

MAX
(stands abruptly)
I - I gotta go.

PETER
What? Max!

But Max is already rushing out past the surprised couple...

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - DAY

The finished BASE STATION sits in the middle of the worktable - a dense CUBE of metal parts with the CRYSTAL at its heart. Max, still in his suit, watches as Louise POWERS IT UP. It comes to life with a low HUM.

LOUISE
OK. Pick your poison.

She holds up two HANDHELD VIDEO GAME CONSOLES - the RED one is hand-labeled RX. An otherwise identical BLUE one is labeled TX. Max takes the red console.

LOUISE
So. If neither of us fucked up,
whatever I type -
 (taps the BLUE CONSOLE)
- into the transmitter, gets sent
wirelessly -
 (taps the BASE STATION)
- through the sample, and comes out
- or has already come out -
 (taps the RED CONSOLE)
- on the receiver.

She adjusts a slider on the BLUE CONSOLE (the transmitter). A TIMECODE display on its screen reads TO: -15s.

LOUISE
OK. Fifteen seconds. Ready?

Max nods. He stares at the RED CONSOLE (the receiver),
WAITING...a long moment...

LOUISE
Nothing? What am I waiting for?

Deep inside the base station, the CRYSTAL suddenly PULSES RED. At the same moment, the red console vibrates - an alert BUZZ. Max looks - and LAUGHS.

LOUISE
 (excited)
Is it - ? What'd I write?

MAX
 (scoffs)
I'm not gonna show you.

She starts to protest - annoyed - then laughs -

LOUISE
Oh. I know what I wrote.

She types on the blue console and hits a button to SEND the message. The base station PULSES BLUE as the laser fires. They show each other their consoles. On both screens:

BITE MY ASS.

MAX LOUISE
Yes! That is so fucking hot!

They just stare a moment, elated.

LOUISE
Wanna push our luck?

Max nods.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - DAY

The BLUE CONSOLE is TAPED TO A LAMP on the worktable. Max adjusts it, pointing its BUILT-IN CAMERA at Louise. They look like they haven't been home in days.

MAX
OK, fingers crossed.

He adjusts a slider - TO: -10s - and the base station, now enclosed in a metal cover, starts to WHIR. Max hurries around to join Louise, looking down at the RED CONSOLE.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *GARBLED VIDEO* slowly resolves...and *SNAPS* to a *BLACK-AND-WHITE* shot of *LOUISE* and *MAX*, from the blue console's perspective. The video *GLITCHES* occasionally, like an iffy Skype connection.

They're looking down at the red console, talking. Max POINTS at it - and they LOOK at each other.

LOUISE
Is that -

MAX
Ten seconds ahead -

He POINTS at the timecode display on the red console - the
exact move they just saw on video TEN SECONDS EARLIER.

Whoa. MAX

They LOOK at each other, amazed - again EXACTLY as they had ten seconds earlier on the red console. Every move they make is an EXACT ECHO of they've just seen on video.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *Louise and Max HUG - spinning around...*

LOUISE
(laughs, shocked)
It fuckin' works!

She HUGS Max - laughing - spins him around giddily. They look at each other - out of breath with excitement...and abruptly pull apart, both abashed. They look at the red console -

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *Louise talks. Max NODS slowly.*

LOUISE
This is making me dizzy. Everything
we do is...exactly the same.
(Max NODS slowly)
Jesus, every little move.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *Louise stands and walks off...*

Louise watches herself walk out of the video. She thinks a moment - then stands, crosses to her SPORTS BAG and opens it.

LOUISE
I want to try something.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - LATER

Louise sits by the blue console, which is rigged so its camera points down at the tabletop. Max has the red console and a YELLOW PAD, which has a LONG LIST OF NUMBERS on it.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *A 12-SIDED DIE rolls into frame. It lands showing 11.*

MAX
Eleven.

He adds an 11 to the end of the list. Louise rolls the die under the blue CONSOLE. It lands 11 - EXACTLY as it did on video. She picks up the die.

LOUISE
Right again. So much for Monte Carlo.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *The die rolls in again, landing 4.*

Max adds a 4 to the list. Louise looks at the yellow pad.

LOUISE
Do they have to match? I mean, the
future isn't just...fixed. Right?

She rolls. The die lands 4.

MAX
(trying for certainty)
No - of course not...

As they talk, they keep rolling the die and writing down the results - matching perfectly each time.

LOUISE
I mean, what if we saw ourselves -
I don't know...beating up a hobo at
3am. Would we have to beat up a
hobo at 3am?
(off his look)
Just for example.

MAX
I guess...I guess it depends on the
nature of time.

LOUISE
Well, you're the expert. What do
your equations say?

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *The die rolls into frame and lands 1.*

MAX
I'm - still working on it. I can't
get the math to...
(gives up)
I don't know yet.

Louise looks at the die, hesitant. She ROLLS. It lands 1.

LOUISE
I don't know if I like this.

EXT. CAMPUS - DUSK

Max sits on a bench as Louise walks back from a FOOD TRUCK.
She hands him a foil-wrapped object. He takes it dubiously.

LOUISE
Shawarma. Think of it like a big
food pill.

They unwrap the shawarmas and eat. Max looks surprised -

MAX
That's really good.

LOUISE
Welcome to food.

EXT. CAMPUS - LATER

Max and Louise walk, post-meal.

LOUISE
(troubled)
But...what if - anything we see, we
just - can't change? Then we'd -
what we do wouldn't matter at all.

Max thinks about that. Finally -

MAX
It'd still be better to know what's
coming.
(pause)
I mean, if you could - see an
earthquake hit - even five minutes
before -

LOUISE
Yeah, what if you see it kill a
million people. And you can't do a
fucking thing to stop it.

That gives Max pause. But then he shakes his head -

MAX
At least you could...prepare. Say
goodbye.

LOUISE
What good is that?

MAX
(quiet)
It's better than nothing.

Louise doesn't know how to respond. They walk on silently.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - NIGHT

Max STARES at the base station as Louise packs to go home.

LOUISE
You all right?

MAX
I wish they could've seen this.

She watches him, affected.

LOUISE
Hey - um. We're - playing board
games tonight, if you want to join.

Max wants to say yes...but then shakes his head reluctantly.

MAX
Better not. I still haven't derived
the Stern Invariant. Something's
not right with my math.

LOUISE
You sure? There'll be ice cream.

MAX
I just learned about dinner.

Louise laughs.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - LATER

Max hunches over his yellow pad in the empty lab, frustrated.
Amidst crossed-out EQUATIONS he draws a large QUESTION MARK.
He stretches his back - and notices the BASE STATION. He
stares at it for a long time, lost in thought...

ROBERT (PRE-LAP)
Lina, your son is being a nuisance.

INT. MAX'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Max sits in the dark, watching the old TV.

LINA (ON TV)
*That's because you let your son eat
three donuts, Robert.*

Max stands and walks toward the TV. He kneels in front of it.

ON TV: *Lina kisses Robert and takes Max -*

LINA
Come here, bean.

Max squirms happily as she wipes sugar off his face.

Max is looking PAST his mother and himself on the TV...at the
grainy image of the APPARATUS on the worktable behind them.

He STANDS bolt upright - a powerful THOUGHT hitting him.

TRANSITION TO:

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - DAY

Louise enters, sweaty, carrying her sports bag. Before she's even in the door, Max RUSHES over, impatient -

MAX

Where were you? I've been calling -

LOUISE

I coach cross-country on Tuesdays -

He pulls her over to the whiteboard - and she notices he's wearing the same clothes as yesterday -

LOUISE

Have you been up all night?

MAX

(intense)

Is this right?

She looks. He's drawn a complex GRAPH surrounded by numbers -

LOUISE

(catching up)

That's - the power curve...?

MAX

We've been sending lots of data -
video - but we could allocate our
power to send just a little data -
much further. Right?

(she nods)

So this is possible?

He points to a set of numbers. Louise looks. Her eyes widen -

LOUISE

Twenty years? Why would you...

(realizing)

Oh.

MAX

(excited)

When I found the lockbox, I
remember thinking, if I could just -
finish what they started, it
would...keep them alive somehow.
But this -

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)
 (points at the numbers)
 This is even better.

LOUISE
 Max...I don't know...

MAX
 It wouldn't have to be much at all -
 a couple pulses - Morse code! The
 crystal would flash - they could
see it -

LOUISE
 Is that...is that a good idea? We
 know so little about this thing.

MAX
 We wouldn't even have it if it
 wasn't for them. If there's any
 chance we can use it to help them -
warn them...

He stares at her, brimming with passion for this idea.
 Reluctantly, she takes a closer look at the whiteboard.

LOUISE
 (gently)
 Max - this is...way more power than
 we can generate.

MAX
 I know.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - DAY

Louise drives Max up a sloping driveway past a concrete sign:

PTAC - PACIFIC TERASCALE ACCELERATOR CENTER
National Laboratory - U.S. Department of Energy
Established 1997

LOUISE
 I don't know about this.

They approach a barrier arm. A GUARD steps out of a kiosk.

EXT. PTAC - LATER

A huge complex of buildings. A low STRUCTURE stretches out
 from it, arrow-straight, TWO MILES into the hills.

As Max and Louise cross the manicured grounds toward the main building, two high-ranking MILITARY OFFICERS pass by, chatting. Louise glances at them nervously.

INT. PTAC - CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Max and Louise, wearing visitor badges, sit across a table from two ADMINISTRATORS, who look over sheafs of papers.

ADMIN 1

Well...you have an impressive CV.
(holds up a letter)
And Peter's endorsement of the
project is...glowing.

Louise looks at Max - *what did you do?* He gives a tiny shrug.

ADMIN 1

But...it's a lot of energy. We'd
have to shut down everything else
on the beamline.

ADMIN 2

(re: the papers)
I couldn't sign off on this without
knowing a lot more. Where are the
specifics? I can't even figure out
what it's supposed to do.

Admin 1 nods. Max sees he's losing them. He makes a decision -

MAX

I'll demonstrate it for you. We've
built -

He FLINCHES as Louise KICKS him under the table. She leans close, whispering -

LOUISE

What are you doing?

The administrators watch, bemused, as Max and Louise have a short, heated argument. After a moment -

LOUISE

Would you excuse us a minute?

INT. PTAC HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Max and Louise stand in the hall outside the conference room.

LOUISE
You're the one who wanted to keep
it secret -

MAX
We need that power. I need it.

LOUISE
Not like this. It's too risky.

She nods at the dark HEMISPHERES dotting the ceiling -

LOUISE
(sotto)
You know what kind of research they
do here. Can you imagine what the
military would do with this?

SECURITY CAMERA FOOTAGE - TIMESTAMP 5:07PM 24.FEB.2016

*Black-and-white - looking down on Max and Louise as they
argue silently in the hall. He pleads with her - but she
shakes her head - adamant. He finally shrugs, defeated...*

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Max and Louise walk in morose silence. Louise looks at him.

LOUISE
Maybe...maybe this is better. It'll
give us time to test it more.
Understand it.

Max doesn't respond. Louise lapses back into silence. Max
suddenly stops. She stops too. He studies her a moment.

MAX
Do you even believe it could work?
Warning them?

Louise is caught off-guard. She fumbles for a kind way to
express her doubts...but Max SEES the answer on her face. He
turns and walks on. Louise - dismayed - hurries to catch up.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Max strides down the hall, Louise trying to keep up.

LOUISE
Where are you going?

MAX

My office. I'm gonna see who I know
at other accelerator labs.

He fishes for his keys as he approaches his door.

LOUISE

Max, wait. I'm not sure that's a
good idea -

MAX

Well this isn't your dissertation.
I'm not giving up.

She stares at him, stung. He starts unlocking the door - then
realizes it's not even latched. He pushes it open -

LOUISE

That's not...I didn't just give up -

MAX

Louise.

He's frozen in the doorway. She moves to see into his office -

It's been RANSACKED - bookshelves emptied, desk drawers
yanked out, papers everywhere...

They have the same thought - LOOK at each other - and start
RUNNING down the hall -

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - LATER

Max and Louise BURST in - flip on the light -

The base station is sitting on the worktable, right where
they left it, HUMMING away. Louise LOCKS the door.

LOUISE

You think someone was looking for
this?

MAX

Nobody knows about it.

LOUISE

We should call campus security.

Max nods. Louise crosses to the phone...and stops - noticing
something. She slowly picks up - the RED CONSOLE.

LOUISE

Max. Look.

A VIDEO IMAGE is resolving. As it SNAPS into focus, they react - SHOCKED. They're looking at THEMSELVES.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *LOUISE and MAX sit at a table, looking at the camera. Traffic rushes by outside a window behind them.*

LOUISE
This is...what is this?

Max points at the timecode: FROM: +13h 35m 57s.

LOUISE
Tomorrow morning?
(looking)
Where are we?

Louise holds up a napkin. Written on it in sharpie: HELLO.

MAX
OK...what do we do? We can't
exactly - say hello back -

Max holds up a napkin: YES YOU CAN.

They look at each other - amazed.

Louise is writing a new note. She holds it up: USE F90.

Max is confused - but Louise's eyes light up. She rummages in her sports bag - and pulls out a small CAMCORDER.

LOUISE
I record our cross-country meets.
(turning it on)
We can shoot video of ourselves.
The file will have a timestamp, so
when we watch it later -

MAX
(catching on)
It'll be like - a conversation.

She hits *RECORD* and puts the camcorder next to the red console...then just stares, unsure how to start.

LOUISE
Um. Hi. Hi...us.
(laughs nervously)
Can - can you hear me?

Louise and Max both NOD.

Max and Louise look at each other. This is insane.

Louise and Max look at each other. Max says something.

LOUISE
What's going on? Is everything OK?

Louise holds up a note. In large block letters, it says: NO.

Max and Louise look at each other - chilled.

LOUISE
What's wrong?

Louise writes another note. Max says something to her. She writes again, then holds it up:

**WE'RE IN TR
DANGER**

LOUISE
Wh - what do you mean?

*Louise talks. Max finishes a note and holds it up. It says:
THEYRE COMING.*

MAX
"They're coming"? That doesn't help
- Who? Who's coming?

Louise and Max talk heatedly -

LOUISE
I wish we'd had time to get sound
working...

Max passes something to Louise. They talk intensely for a long time...

MAX
Hey - what's going on?

Louise puts up a hand - wait. She and Max talk again.

LOUISE
What? Talk to us!

Louise turns to the camera - as the video becomes GARBLED -

LOUISE
Hello? You're breaking up -

They lean in, trying to make sense of the image...

*The video clears up for a moment - Louise and Max are looking
OFFSCREEN - and then the transmission abruptly ENDS.*

LOUISE
Shit, where'd we go?

They stare at the red console, unsettled. Its blank screen suddenly seems ominous. Louise finally stops the camcorder.

LOUISE
What was that? "They're coming."
Does that mean then - or - now?

She looks out the window. A few students cross the nighttime campus. Max stares at the blank screen of the red console.

MAX
It doesn't make sense. Why wouldn't we send another message? Even if we had to send it from later...

LOUISE
If someone's coming now, we should leave. Right?

MAX
Unless they're waiting for us out there. Maybe we should lock ourselves in here. Call security.

They suddenly see the bind they're in -

LOUISE
Anything we do could be wrong.

Max makes a decision. He hands Louise the red console.

MAX
Call security. I'll check the building. See if I can get help.
(re: the red console)
Call me if you get another transmission.

LOUISE
Be careful.

He nods and walks out. She watches him disappear down the hall, then picks up the landline and dials. As it RINGS - the red console BUZZES. She looks - and her eyes WIDEN. It says:

HANG UP.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Max walks slowly down the dark hall, past empty offices and labs. He HEARS something behind him - turns - but the hallway is empty. He pushes the elevator call button.

INT. ELEVATOR - LATER

Max hits the *L* button. As the doors start to close, FOOTSTEPS sound in the hall - RUNNING toward him. He backs up, alarmed - as an arm SHOOTs in - the doors REOPEN...

PETER steps in, out of breath - clutching a briefcase, coat halfway on - and FURIOUS -

PETER

Did you tell PTAC I'm backing your experiment? What the hell is wrong with you, Max?

MAX

Peter -

PETER

The Fellowship dinner is in two days! You have any idea the dance I had to do for the Hofmanns - ?

The doors close, trapping Max with Peter.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING LOBBY - LATER

The doors open revealing Peter and Max standing silently. Peter sighs and walks out - then stops and turns back.

PETER

This presentation...it's up to you,
I can't force you to do it.

(shrugs)

I hope you make the right choice.

He walks out. Max watches him go, shaken. He scans the quiet lobby and the campus beyond...and doesn't see anybody.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - LATER

Max walks in.

MAX

There's nobody out there -

He FREEZES. Instead of Louise, he's looking at the THIN MAN - the one filming him at the fellowship reception.

Max STARES...then turns to RUN - as the door SLAMS shut, TRAPPING HIM. In the doorway -

THE JANITOR who tried to enter Max's office days earlier - but now wearing a suit. Max BACKS UP...but the thin man is behind him. He stops, caught between them.

JANITOR
Where is it, Max?

And Max finally notices the worktable. THE EQUIPMENT IS GONE.

Max's phone BUZZES in his pocket. He tries to stifle it, but the janitor gives a small nod - and the thin man GRABS Max, pinioning his arms -

The janitor pulls Max's phone from his pocket. A look of surprise flashes briefly across his face. He holds the phone up for Max. There's a TEXT from Louise:

They're coming NOW! Get out!

JANITOR
How did she know that?

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Louise emerges from a back stairwell, pocketing her phone. Her SPORTS BAG, full of equipment, is over her shoulder and she carries the RED CONSOLE, which still shows the last message, timestamped FROM: +13h 11m 01s:

LEAVE RIGHT NOW - BACK STAIRWELL

She runs to her car, glancing around nervously as she goes.

INT. MAX'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The janitor steps close to Max, looming over him.

JANITOR
Tell me where she's going.

A radio CRACKLES -

VOICE (ON RADIO)
Red team, you have incoming. Two civilians.

The janitor and thin man look at each other. Max hears the elevator DING. He looks out at the hall, hopeful -

JANITOR

Bag him.

Max has a second to process that - before the thin man throws a black HOOD over his head -

CUT TO:

BLACK. The sound of FOOTSTEPS on carpet.

INT. HALLWAY

Max, his head still under the hood, is hustled down a hall by the thin man. Max's hands are ZIP-TIED behind his back.

MAX

Where are you taking me?

(no response)

Who are you?

INT. CELL - LATER

The thin man SHOVES Max into a chair and whisks the hood off. Max SQUINTS against the fluorescent glare.

He's in a tiny, bare room. No furniture other than the chair he's sitting in. An analog clock on the wall. The only window is a tiny one in the room's only door.

The thin man exits, LOCKING the door behind him. Max can see him through the tiny window, standing guard in the hallway.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Louise's car is parked in a strip mall lot. She rummages in the trunk and pulls out an AC POWER INVERTER with a car plug.

INT. CELL - LATER

Max stares at the wall clock, exhausted. It's after 11. The janitor and thin man enter. The thin man walks behind Max. The janitor stands in front, looking down at him.

JANITOR

Where did she take it?

MAX

I - I don't know what -

The janitor SLAPS Max in the face - HARD - Max recoils - tears springing to his eyes -

JANITOR

(leans in close)

I'm a professional. You're not.
Just answer my question.

MAX

I - I really don't know -

The janitor SLAPS him again - MUCH HARDER - nearly knocking him out of the chair. Max stares - shocked - his lip BLOODY.

JANITOR

You're scared. That's appropriate.
You don't know where you are.
Nobody does. I can do whatever I
need to, for as long as I need.

He slowly flips open a KNIFE. Max stares at the blade. The janitor moves in, raising the knife - leaning close to Max -

And he cuts the zip-tie off Max's wrists. Max rubs them, trying to get circulation back into his hands.

JANITOR

(sympathetic)

Max, I was hired to do one job -
obtain that device. As soon as I
have it, you can go home.
Understand?

Max nods. The janitor glances at the thin man - who grabs Max's arm and expertly TWISTS IT behind his back. Max WINCES. The janitor holds up MAX'S PHONE.

JANITOR

You're going to find out where she
is and tell her to stay there. If
you try to warn her - well -

He gives a small nod. The thin man makes a tiny movement - and Max CRIES OUT - writhing in AGONY. The Janitor nods again. The thin man relaxes his grip.

A tear spills down Max's cheek. The janitor puts the phone on speaker. It RINGS...and the call CONNECTS -

MAX

Louise? Louise -

LOUISE (ON PHONE)
Don't bother trying to find me.

Max reacts, taken aback. He glances at the janitor, scared -

MAX
Louise, listen -

LOUISE (ON PHONE)
I'm not talking to you, Max. I'm
talking to the assholes who
kidnapped you.

Silence as that sinks in.

LOUISE (ON PHONE)
You're gonna let him go.

JANITOR
Why would we do that?

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Louise sits in her car, parked at a turnout on a high bluff.
The BASE STATION sits on the floor, HUMMING, plugged into the
car through the AC power inverter.

LOUISE
Because I know you brought him to
2575 Pine Hill. PTAC.

She looks down at the sprawling PTAC complex below.

INTERCUT MAX/LOUISE

Max reacts, surprised -

THIN MAN
(whispering)
How does she -

The janitor silences him with a gesture -

LOUISE
You're in a small room on the
second floor.

THIN MAN
How can she know all this?

JANITOR
(hisses)
Shut up!

LOUISE
Do I have your attention?

Max listens, alert - she has his attention -

Louise looks at the red console. The last few incoming messages are visible - **I'M AT PTAC. 2575 PINE HILL...TURNOUT AT ANSELM & ALPINE...2ND FLOOR FORMER SERVER CLOSET.**

LOUISE
(significantly)
It used to be a server closet. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Max DOES. He looks around - at an ARRAY of outlets and jacks in one corner - and down at the CORK-TILE FLOOR...

JANITOR
Whatever you think you know, the only way to help Max is to bring -

Louise HANGS UP. The janitor stares at Max's phone, livid. He pockets it, pulls his own phone and dials.

JANITOR
(into phone)
It's me.
(listens)
No - not yet. There's a problem -
(listens)
Uh - no. No sir, I alerted local police. If she goes to them, they'll detain her.

Max reacts to that. The janitor beckons the thin man, who releases Max's arm and follows the janitor out.

JANITOR
(into phone)
I think she may try to run. We need to escalate -

His voice CUTS OFF as the door CLOSES. Max bolts up. He peeks out the window in the door. The janitor is on the phone, relaying orders to the thin man. Neither is watching Max.

Max looks around the room - thinking fast. He sees a DUCT VENT in the ceiling. Drags the chair under it and climbs up, but the vent cover is just out of reach...

He hears VOICES outside and looks. In the hall, the janitor has hung up and is talking heatedly to the thin man.

Max, panicked, STRETCHES - and CATCHES the latch. The cover SWINGS down - nearly hitting him. He stares into the duct...

INT. CELL - MOMENTS LATER

The janitor UNLOCKS the door and enters - to find the room EMPTY. He sees the chair - the open vent cover -

JANITOR
Get in here!

He climbs onto the chair as the thin man rushes in. The janitor SNAPS his fingers impatiently - the thin man pulls out a FLASHLIGHT - hands it to the janitor -

JANITOR
Moron thinks he can get out through
the ducts -

He shines the flashlight into the duct as the thin man shifts to get a better view, walking over the FLOOR TILES...

INT. CRAWLSPACE - CONTINUOUS

...directly OVER Max, who lies silently UNDER THE FLOOR among snaking cables. He FLINCHES as the janitor jumps down from the chair, landing right above him.

JANITOR (O.S.)
(muffled)
Lock it down. Room by room search.
And get me DHS. The director wants
them tracking her phone.
(pause)
Get your ass moving! I want
security on every floor...

RADIO STATIC - FOOTSTEPS - VOICES as the search begins...

INT. CRAWLSPACE - LATER

Max crawls uncomfortably under the floor, following the cables. He looks around as he goes, but can't see any light.

From up ahead, he hears the faint DINGS of a messaging app - in some kind of PATTERN. He FREEZES - listening. DING-DING-DING-DING - pause - DING-DING. He exhales sharply -

MAX
(whispers)
"Hi"... Hi, Louise...

The pattern REPEATS. He turns to crawl toward it...

INT. SERVER CLOSET - LATER

Max pushes up a FLOOR TILE and emerges into a tiny, dark closet filled with blinking servers.

INT. CUBICLE FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Max peeks out of the closet. He's at the end of a long, darkened room with three rows of OFFICE CUBICLES. Windows along one wall look out over an empty parking lot.

He sees an illuminated *EXIT* sign at the far end of the room. As he starts for it, the pattern of DINGS repeats - right next to him. He looks for the source...

And sees an IPAD on a desk. He picks it up - as a SKYPE CALL comes in. He ANSWERS, expecting to see Louise. Instead -

ON THE IPAD: *A black-and-white shot of the second-floor windows of a building. MAX is dimly visible in the cubicle farm, staring at the iPad. The timestamp reads **FROM: +11s**.*

Max stares at the iPad, trying to make sense of it.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Louise puts down the RED CONSOLE, which is TETHERED to her phone. She checks the BLUE CONSOLE - it's propped on the dashboard, aimed down at PTAC - then grabs a pair of BINOCULARS and looks at the building.

LOUISE
Come on, Max.

INTERCUT MAX/LOUISE

Max stares at the iPad.

ON THE IPAD: *MAX crosses to the window and stares out. He suddenly WAVES.*

Max rushes to the window and stares out, looking for Louise -

IN LOUISE'S CAR

LOUISE
I see you.

She FLASHES her headlights -

IN THE CUBICLE FARM

Max sees headlights FLASH on a far hilltop. He WAVES, relieved - IDENTICAL to the wave he saw ELEVEN SECONDS EARLIER on the iPad. He checks it again -

ON THE IPAD: *MAX is looking down at the iPad. Suddenly he looks up - and DIVES - disappearing below the windows - as the EXIT DOOR opens and three SECURITY GUARDS enter.*

Max stares at the guards on the iPad, paralyzed...

He hears FOOTSTEPS - looks up - and DIVES to the floor as the EXIT DOOR opens. He looks at the iPad -

ON THE IPAD: *A guard flips a set of wall switches - LIGHTING UP the cubicle farm.*

Max crawls into nearest cubicle as FLUORESCENT lights flicker on overhead. He ducks under the desk, eyes FIXED on the iPad.

ON THE IPAD: *The guards fan out to start searching the rows of cubicles. None is checking the row Max is in.*

Slowly, Max PEEKS out from his hiding place. Nothing but EMPTY CUBICLES between him and the door.

He starts crawling toward the door. Before he gets far, he sees a GUARD coming down the next row. Max DUCKS into a cubicle - holding his breath as the guard passes.

He emerges again. The coast is clear, the guards all behind him. He crawls for the door, watching the iPad as he goes.

ON THE IPAD: *A guard STOPS - and POINTS IN MAX'S DIRECTION. The others turn to look -*

Max FREEZES - eyes wide -

ON THE IPAD: *The nearest guard runs between the dividers - pulling a GUN - and aiming RIGHT WHERE MAX IS NOW -*

Max REACTS - scrambles into a cubicle - and KNOCKS his head on the desk with a soft THWACK - jarring a PILE OF PAPERS resting precariously on the edge -

GUARD 1 (O.S.)
You hear that?

Max holds his breath...as the pile of papers starts SLIDING off the desk. He reaches for it - too late - and the whole pile FALLS with a THUMP -

GUARD 2 (O.S.)
I heard that. On it.

IN LOUISE'S CAR

Through the binoculars, Louise watches tensely as GUARD 2 rushes to Max's row, pulling his gun.

The red console BUZZES, SCARING her. She looks. The VIDEO has been replaced by a MESSAGE, timestamped FROM: +03h 25m 02s -

CALL 650-339-3983 RIGHT NOW

LOUISE
Shit -

She fumbles for a pen -

IN THE CUBICLE FARM

Max stares at the iPad, confused. The video is gone, replaced by: **CALL 650-339-3983 RIGHT NOW.**

Guard 2 starts moving slowly down Max's row - checking each cubicle as he goes. Max looks desperately at the iPad - as the message disappears and VIDEO returns -

ON THE IPAD: *Guard 2 pauses - shakes his head - then continues toward Max - three cubicles away...then two...*

GUARD 3 (O.S.)
Anything?

Guard 2 - still three cubicles away - shakes his head, eyes alert. He moves another cubicle closer to Max...

IN LOUISE'S CAR

In her haste, Louise MISTYPES the number into her phone. She DELETES the mistake - reading the number off her hand -

IN THE CUBICLE FARM

Max hears guard 2 approaching. He looks up - iPad forgotten - cowering back under the desk...

The guard's LEGS appear - Max TENSES - as a PHONE RINGS in the next cubicle - guard 2 TURNS SHARPLY -

GUARD 2
Damn, scared the shit out of me.

He steps into the cubicle with the ringing phone, checking it out. Max remembers the iPad. He looks -

ON THE IPAD: *Guard 2 is still in the cubicle with the ringing phone. He says something to the other guards.*

Max's EYES WIDEN at what he sees next -

ON THE IPAD: *MAX APPEARS IN FRAME - rising into a low crouch BEHIND guard 2 -*

Guard 2 turns to the others, away from Max -

GUARD 2
Who the hell's calling at this
hour?

The other guards LAUGH -

Max FORCES himself into a crouch. He exits the cubicle, eyes darting to the iPad as he moves DIRECTLY behind guard 2 -

ON THE IPAD: *Guard 2 TURNS. Max SHIFTS to stay behind him -*

As guard 2 starts to TURN to exit the cubicle - Max REPEATS what he's just seen, SHIFTING to stay DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM - eyes flicking between the guard's back and the iPad -

Guard 2 steps out of the cubicle - and Max ducks into it, crouching against the divider. Guard 2 steps into the cubicle Max just left, checking it. Max looks at the iPad -

ON THE IPAD: *The guards talk - then move to the exit. As they reach it - the video call ENDS.*

Max LISTENS - breath held -

GUARD 1 (O.S.)
We clear?

GUARD 2 (O.S.)
Clear.

The guards EXIT - switching off the lights as they go. Max COLLAPSES against the divider, hyperventilating.

IN LOUISE'S CAR

Louise starts the car and backs out of the turnout while TYPING RAPIDLY on her phone -

IN THE CUBICLE FARM

The iPad DINGS - Max JUMPS - then looks at it -

Get phone num.

He stares, mystified. Then he UNDERSTANDS -

He looks at the PHONE that distracted guard 2. He finds its number and types it into the iPad, then heads for the door.

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Max peeks tentatively into a concrete stairwell. It appears empty. The iPad DINGS: **Basement.**

He starts down the stairs. The iPad DINGS several more times. He looks at it. More messages have arrived:

Left at hallway. Door at end.

Open wall panel.

Gotta go. No wifi down there. Good luck!

MAX

Wait - shit -

He starts typing a reply - then notices a *NO SIGNAL* icon.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Max peeks out of the stairwell. He's at the corner of a windowless linoleum hallway. He steps in, closes the door silently behind him, and starts down the hall to his right -

A TECHNICIAN in a labcoat emerges from a room - Max quickly BACKS around the corner -

MAX

(muttering to himself)

She said left, idiot.

He hurries down the long hallway. At the end is a solid metal door. As he reaches it, he can make out a sign:

BEAM SOURCE ACCESS - AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

INT. ACCELERATOR CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Max steps into a large CHAMBER lined with RACKS OF COMPUTERS and other unidentifiable EQUIPMENT. He closes the door.

He checks the iPad - reviewing the final messages Louise sent. He finds the relevant one: **Open wall panel.**

He crosses to a large STEEL PANEL on the far wall. A sign next to it reads: *WARNING - DO NOT OPEN DURING OPERATION - SEVERE RADIATION DANGER*. He puts an ear to the panel.

MAX
(mutters, nervous)
Don't be running...

He flips up a large HANDLE and PULLS with all his might. With a GROAN, the panel HINGES out from the wall. There's a large cavity behind it - PITCH BLACK inside. Max climbs in, hesitating on the lip. *This is not a good idea...*

He DROPS into the hole -

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

And lands about SIX INCHES down. He snorts, sheepish. He's in a dimly-lit tunnel that seems to go on FOREVER. Huge MAGNETS and CABLES line the walls. There's a faint HUM.

He pulls the panel shut - and it's COMPLETELY DARK. He turns on the iPad, using the screen as a flashlight as he walks...

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - NIGHT

Max emerges from a DOOR. He's at the end of the two-mile PTAC ACCELERATOR STRUCTURE, in a stand of sparse trees. He looks around in the pre-dawn gloom, trying to get his bearings...

HEADLIGHTS suddenly blind him - an ENGINE revs - he rushes back to the door he just exited - but it's LOCKED. The vehicle BEARS DOWN - SKIDDING to a halt in front of him.

LOUISE (O.S.)
Max!

He shades his eyes - and can just make out LOUISE leaning out the driver's-side window of her car, beckoning urgently.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - LATER

Louise drives them down out of the hills as dawn breaks - a panoramic view of the San Francisco Peninsula all around. Max cleans the blood off his lip with a napkin.

MAX
I can't believe that worked.

LOUISE
I just did what I was told.

She hands him the RED CONSOLE. Max flips through the messages that guided them through the escape. He looks at the BASE STATION, plugged into the car through the AC POWER INVERTER.

MAX
I told you how to get me out...

He notices Louise DIALING her phone -

MAX
What are you doing?

LOUISE
I'm calling the police.

MAX
We can't! That man - I heard him -
the police are helping them.

LOUISE
(looks at him)
What? Are you sure -

She SEES something, and slows the car to a halt. Max looks. The PTAC complex is visible below - SWARMING with official vehicles, lights FLASHING...

LOUISE
God. Is that - for us?

She looks through the binoculars.

LOUISE
(shocked)
Homeland Security? The government's
behind this?

MAX
I don't know. I heard them talking
about "the director." Like the head
of a company, or a lab or
something...

LOUISE
(softly)
There probably isn't a government
or company out there that wouldn't
kill us both to get this.

As they watch, a VAN bristling with antennas pulls out of the parking lot below. Several vehicles fall into line behind it -

And Max suddenly REALIZES something -

MAX
DHS...Department of Homeland
Security!

He GRABS Louise's phone, rolls down the window and TOSSES it -

LOUISE
Hey - !

MAX
Go. Turn around, we gotta go -
they're tracking your phone. Go!

She turns the car to head back up the hill -

LOUISE
Oh my god, we're so fucked.

Silence. Then Max has a THOUGHT -

MAX
We need to find a coffee shop.

Louise stares at him, mystified.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Text is TYPED into the BLUE CONSOLE:

LEAVE RIGHT NOW - BACK STAIRWELL

Max and Louise sit at a table in a crowded coffee shop. The base station is on the floor, plugged into a wall outlet.

Max hits *SEND* on the blue console. He looks at the RED CONSOLE'S LOG of received messages. Next is: *I'M AT PTAC. 2575 PINE HILL*. He starts COPYING it onto the blue console.

LOUISE
(looks around nervously)
We shouldn't be here. The police -
or whoever - could be on their way -

Max shakes his head, determined. He holds up the RED CONSOLE.

MAX
If they were, we'd have warned
ourselves. We'll always be a step
ahead.

He returns to the blue console. Louise watches him, troubled.

LOUISE
We weren't a step ahead last night.

Max REALIZES something. He looks behind him. Morning traffic rushes by outside the window - just as it did in the video.

MAX
This is where we were sitting.
She looks - and nods slowly, seeing it.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Max and Louise have a pile of napkins and a sharpie in front of them. Louise is holding up a napkin: *USE F90*.

Max watches the clock tick by on the BLUE CONSOLE, which is set up with its camera pointed at them. He waits...then hits *PLAY* on the camcorder and sets it next to the blue console.

ON THE CAMCORDER: *LOUISE and MAX sit in Louise's lab - in the recording they made the night before.*

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
Um. Hi. Hi...us.

She laughs nervously.

LOUISE
(laughs nervously)
OK, this is...eerie.

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
Can - can you hear me?

Max and Louise NOD, then look at each other - remembering being on the other side of this...

ON THE CAMCORDER: *Louise and Max look at each other.*

MAX
You remember what we wrote?

Louise nods, writing on a napkin.

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
What's...going on? Is everything OK?

Louise holds up her note: *NO*.

LOUISE
No, it is not.

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
What's wrong?

Louise starts writing *WE'RE IN TROUBLE* on a napkin -

MAX
 It said "danger."

LOUISE
 Right -

She corrects the mistake and holds the note up:

*WE'RE IN ~~TR~~
 DANGER*

A passing customer gives them a confused look. Max manages an awkward smile.

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
Wh - what do you mean?

Louise lowers the note and looks down at what she's written.

LOUISE
 God...this is identical. It's
 making my brain hurt.

Max finishes writing *THEY'RE COMING*. He holds it up.

MAX (ON CAMCORDER)
*"They're coming"? That doesn't help
 - Who? Who's coming?*

LOUISE
 I mean, why'd we write that? We
know it didn't help. We're just
 copying what we saw. It's
 so...circular.

MAX
 (thinking)
 You're right. We've been wondering
 if we can change what we see,
 right?

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
*I wish we'd had time to get sound
 working...*

MAX
 Let's try and break the circle.

He writes on a napkin - passes it to Louise. She looks:

PTAC COMING TO GET YOU. LEAVE NOW!

LOUISE
Right...if we'd seen this - they
wouldn't have gotten you.

Max nods. Louise picks up the note - but hesitates...

LOUISE
We won't - will we...see -
ourselves - get it?

MAX
(at a loss)
This is a recording - we know how
it ends.

MAX (ON CAMCORDER)
Hey - what's going on?

LOUISE
(puts up a hand - wait)
OK - just hang on -

MAX
There's something...paradoxical
about this...I mean, if we got that
warning, we wouldn't be here now,
sending it.

LOUISE
(semi-joking)
You think we might...wink out of
existence? Or - destroy the
universe or something?

MAX
(simply)
I have no idea.

They look at each other, scared -

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
What? Talk to us!

MAX
Now or never.

LOUISE
What the fuck.

She turns to the blue console and HOLDS UP the note.

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
Hello? You're breaking up -

LOUISE
I remember this - something's
messing up the signal...

LOUISE (ON CAMCORDER)
Shit, where'd we go?

MAX
Look -

She follows his gaze to - THE RED CONSOLE.

VIDEO is coming in, an image slowly RESOLVING...

Louise points to the TIMESTAMP. *FROM: +1d 12h 47m 50s.*

LOUISE
This is...tomorrow night...

MAX
Around...9:30...

LOUISE
No wonder it stomped on our signal.
Sending video that far would take -
a ton of power.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *The image SNAPS into focus. LOUISE is sitting at a table in front of the BASE STATION. On a wall behind her, racks of computers...and a large STEEL PANEL.*

MAX
Oh. No. I was just there.

MAX enters. Louise rises - her shirt has a dark STAIN on it. Max RUSHES to her and they talk intensely. Louise YELLS at someone out of frame. Max says something to her. She stares at him...and they KISS deeply.

Max and Louise glance at each other - both embarrassed -

Max turns - revealing his face - which is BRUISED and CUT. It looks like he's been BEATEN.

LOUISE
(disturbed)
God...

The THIN MAN enters and hustles Louise - STRUGGLING - out of frame. Max sits. He looks into the camera, then speaks to someone across the table - out of frame. He suddenly LAUGHS.

MAX
(confused)
Maybe it's...OK?

THE JANITOR steps into frame. Max says something to him... then closes his eyes and folds his hands. The janitor puts a GUN to Max's temple. Max inhales -

MAX
Wait -

A FLASH - Max pitches - BLOOD sprays - spattering the lens - he disappears below the table -

They watch silently - horrified.

The janitor aims where Max fell. FIRES - FIRES - FIRES - OVER AND OVER...then turns - saying something -

The video ENDS - frozen on the janitor's grim face.

LOUISE
Is that - ?

MAX
It's him. But he looks -
different...

In the video, the janitor is unshaven, pale - and has a small BANDAGE above his left eye. They stare for a long moment...

LOUISE
(abruptly)
We gotta think. Think this out.
What did we just see?

MAX
He...he just -

LOUISE
You were - laughing - just before.
Why would you do that?

MAX
(scared)
I don't know! It doesn't make
sense.

A TINKLE as the door opens - and two UNIFORMED COPS walk in. Max and Louise stare, FROZEN...as the cops walk right past them, chatting and laughing.

MAX
We gotta get out of here.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - LATER

The car is parked in an alley behind a dumpster. Max and Louise are staring at the red console, RE-WATCHING the video.

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *LOUISE sits at the table in the PTAC accelerator chamber. Max enters.*

MAX

We need to figure out how we got there. Anything we can use...

Louise rises - her shirt has a dark STAIN on it -

MAX

There. Is that blood?

Louise and Max talk - then KISS -

LOUISE

I don't know what that's about.

MAX

(quickly)

Yeah - me either.

Max turns - revealing his BRUISED and CUT face -

They both cringe. Max SCROLLS forward, past the shooting...

The janitor turns - the video FREEZES on his face -

Max points at the BANDAGE above the janitor's eye -

MAX

He didn't have that last night.

They stare silently, thinking...

LOUISE

I don't see how this helps. We don't know how any of these things happen, so how can we stop them?

They lapse back into silence...then Max has a thought -

MAX

Maybe...we're thinking too small.

He scrolls all the way back to the beginning, PAUSING as -

ON THE RED CONSOLE: *Max and Louise talk intensely -*

MAX

It doesn't matter what else happens, if - if we're not there.

LOUISE

(catching on)

We somehow...make it impossible for us to be in that room tomorrow at 9:30...

MAX

Right. So how do we do that?

Louise thinks - then reaches into the car's map pocket -

LOUISE

We go somewhere - somewhere we have no connection to. No credit cards - no way they can track us.

(spreads out a map)

Close your eyes.

Max hesitates a moment, then closes his eyes.

LOUISE

OK. Choose.

He blindly POINTS at a random spot on the map.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Louise's car is parked behind a CHEAP MOTEL, hidden from the street. She pops the trunk. Max pulls out two GROCERY BAGS.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Louise hangs a *DO NOT DISTURB* sign on the door of a small motel room with two twin beds and faded island decor. She LOCKS the door as Max closes the blinds.

LOUISE

Home sweet home. We don't leave for any reason till...after.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Max and Louise sit at the room's small dining table, eating a makeshift meal in nervous silence.

FOOTSTEPS approach outside. Louise glances up. The footsteps slow...and STOP. They both look - as a SHADOW appears under the door. Someone is out there.

They stand slowly as a KEY is inserted in the lock. They back away, TERRIFIED...

VOICE (O.S.)
(muffled)
Dude, we're in twelve...

Laughter. The key is REMOVED - and the footsteps move on.

LOUISE
(shaky)
Fuck me.

She rummages in one of the grocery bags.

MAX
What're you doing?

LOUISE
Twenty-four more hours of that,
we're both gonna die of heart
attacks.

She pulls out two bottles of wine.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

80s POP plays on a clock radio. Max sits on the carpet, leaned against one of the beds. Louise is at the table pouring wine into a plastic cup. The other wine bottle is toppled over, empty. They're both DRUNK.

LOUISE
...so the cop says, "You know how
fast you were going?" And
Heisenberg says, "No, but I know
where I am."
(Max smiles weakly)
C'mon, uncertainly principle joke!
That's funny. OK, it's kinda funny.

She slides down next to Max and hands him the cup.

LOUISE
We gotta try to chill. Talk to me.
(grins)
How's your love life?

MAX
(seriously?)
I don't even waste time eating.

Louise laughs. Max drinks. Then, trying for casual -

MAX
How about yours?

LOUISE
Oh...busy. You get lots of
attention when you're outnumbered
five to one.

Max's heart sinks a little. He hides it by drinking again.

LOUISE
They'd always get weirdly
competitive, though. Like they had
to prove they were smarter than me.

MAX
That can't've gone well for them.

She shrugs, pleased.

LOUISE
I finally swore off. Just couldn't
wait to get the hell out of there.

Max watches her a moment - working up his courage.

MAX
I'm - sorry what I said yesterday -
about your dissertation. That
wasn't - it's none of my business
what you work on.

LOUISE
You were right.
(off his surprise)
Don't get used to it.

He manages a slight smile. She drinks.

LOUISE
When I got here, I was so sure I
was gonna - you know - kick ass. I
just knew BlueStreak would save the
world.
(sad laugh)
Then I spent five years as a PhD
student.

MAX

That'll crush the hope out of anyone.

LOUISE

Not you. I never met anyone as - persistent as you.

MAX

I think the word is "obsessive."

(pause)

I dunno. At least you have - friends. You have fun. Even when you're working, it feels like you're just - screwing around - playing, you know? I haven't felt that since...

He falls silent.

LOUISE

Maybe we're allowed to do both. Screw around and kick ass.

Max laughs. They look at each other, full of drunken, but genuine, mutual admiration...and suddenly realize how close they're sitting. They shift apart, abashed -

LOUISE

OK - so then the same cop pulls Schrödinger over -

(Max groans)

- no, come on - so he goes, "Sir, did you know there's a dead cat in your trunk?" And Schrödinger goes - "Well I do now!"

(he can't help laughing)

Ha! I win!

They LAUGH, troubles finally forgotten. Max holds up his cup.

MAX

Hey - to screwing around and kicking ass.

LOUISE

Yes!

They toast drunkenly - misjudging the distance and KNOCKING their cups together - spilling wine -

LOUISE

(laughing hard)

Oh my god, we're spazzes...

She trails off - as Max's face FALLS - going pale...

LOUISE
What...?

She looks down. The wine has left a DARK STAIN on her shirt - EXACTLY like the one in the video. All the air goes out of the room - they're instantly sober.

LOUISE
Oh. Jesus. That's it.

MAX
It doesn't mean anything -

LOUISE
It means we're a step closer.

MAX
(adamant)
This can still work.

LOUISE
Can it? What makes you so sure?

His silence says it all. They look at each other, more frightened than ever...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Max sits at the table, intent on a MOTEL NOTEPAD filled with equations. Louise tidies up compulsively, her eyes distant.

MAX
(muttering)
Dammit...

LOUISE
What's wrong?

MAX
I-I'm not sure. It's...maybe
nothing...

She crosses to him and looks over his shoulder.

LOUISE
Why are you working on this now?

MAX
I can prove it - prove it's
changeable...

He suddenly CROSSES OUT what he's written.

MAX

I must be doing something wrong.

He starts writing again. She squeezes his shoulders.

LOUISE

We should try to get some sleep.

She moves off toward the bathroom.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Max stares tensely at the pad as the sound of a TOOTHBRUSH comes from the bathroom. He TEARS off the top sheet and crumples it up. He stares down at the blank page...

Then glances toward the bathroom. The door is ajar. He can see a sliver of LOUISE - t-shirt - underwear and bare legs. She glances up - SEES him watching her - he quickly turns back to the pad as she SHUTS the bathroom door.

IN THE BATHROOM

Louise turns to the mirror, embarrassed - and sees her own scowl. Her expression softens - more flattered than insulted.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Louise sleeps in one bed while Max tosses restlessly in the other. Finally he stands and crosses quietly to the table...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

It's dark - blinds blocking out the midday sun. FLICKERING LIGHT washes over Louise. She wakes, disoriented...

Max sits motionless at the table, light playing over his face as he stares at the RED CONSOLE.

Louise walks over, groggy, noticing CRUMPLED SHEETS all around...and the notepad, COVERED with crossed-out equations. She looks over his shoulder. He's watching the VIDEO.

The thin man drags Louise out of the chamber. Max sits. He says something - suddenly LAUGHS...

MAX
 (softly)
 Why am I laughing? I have to know
 what's about to happen...

Louise shakes her head, at a loss...

Max closes his eyes. The janitor puts the gun to his head -

They flinch, faces LIT UP by FLASHES from the screen -

The janitor turns, holstering his gun -

Max starts the video again from the beginning.

MAX
 The Stern Invariant...the whole
 system keeps collapsing. Almost
 like it just...adds up to nothing.

LOUISE
 And if it does?

MAX
 Then...time doesn't really exist.
 (pause)
 It's just...an illusion. Every
 event - past and future - they all
 just are. Eternally. This -
 (re: the red console)
 - has already happened.

Louise stares at him, silent. He abruptly turns to the pad -

MAX
 I have to figure out what I'm doing
 wrong -

The red console BUZZES. They look. A MESSAGE has arrived:

LOOK AT THE TIME.

MAX
 What's that mean - ?

Louise's eyes WIDEN. She points at the TIMECODE -

FROM: +21y 124d 20h 05m 22s

MAX
 (softly)
 Oh.

LOUISE
 Twenty-one years - that can't...can
 that be...right?

Max pulls up a READOUT. They stare - STUNNED -

COUPLING FIELD: 6.734 GV/M

LOUISE
 There isn't a power source in the
 world capable of generating that.

MAX
 Yet.

LOUISE
 It must be...massive. Somebody
really wanted to reach us...

Another message arrives:

THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY.

They stare at it - stunned...

Another message: **LEAVE NOW.**

LOUISE
 Is this real? How could they have
 found us so fast? We were careful.

MAX
 But if they did -

Louise crosses to the window and peeks out.

LOUISE
 I don't see anything.

Another message: **FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS IN CAR.**

MAX
 Maybe we should go.

LOUISE
 Do you trust this? It's from so far
 ahead...

Another message: **LEAVE NOW!**

They look at each other...

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Max and Louise lug the equipment across the parking lot. They look around - no sign of trouble.

LOUISE
Maybe it's a mistake...

Max shrugs - *No idea*. They pile into Louise's car.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - LATER

Louise drives down the back driveway as Max struggles to plug the base station into the power inverter. She turns a corner onto the main driveway - and STOPS -

LOUISE
Shit.

Max looks up. Two BLACK SEDANS are parked in the front lot. A half-dozen MEN hurry away from them - toward the building.

MAX
Just go. Go.

She pulls slowly toward the exit as Max watches the men. The lead man pauses...then turns back...

It's THE JANITOR - looking right at them. He YELLS - the men all wheel - reaching for guns -

MAX
GO!

Louise has already FLOORED IT - SCREECHING down the driveway - as SHOTS ring out - one PANGS into the back of the car as it CAREENS onto the street -

LOUISE
Shit - !

She SLAMS on the brakes - Max turns, startled -

There's a ROADBLOCK at the end of the street. Three SUVs - manned by AGENTS in blue DHS jackets. Louise starts to turn the car - STOPS again -

ANOTHER ROADBLOCK behind them. TRAPPED. They look back at the motel. The janitor and his men are RUNNING down the driveway -

MAX
(grabs the red console)
It said "further instructions" -

A message is already on the screen: **RECORD**. Max pulls out the camcorder. He starts recording -

MAX
(to the camcorder)
OK - what do we do?

TURN THE CAMERA.

He's momentarily mystified - then gets it. He **URNS** the camcorder to point out the windshield.

The janitor and his men close in, fanning out around the car. The janitor is talking on a radio. A message arrives:

FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS EXACTLY.

LOUISE
OK - OK, we got it! What do we -

DRIVE-THROUGH ON LEFT.

Max looks - and points at a TACO BELL -

MAX
There!

LOUISE
We'll be trapped.

Max shrugs. *What else can we do?* Louise **HITS THE GAS** -

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

The janitor watches Louise's car lurch into the drive-through exit. He starts back toward his car, still on the radio -

JANITOR
Contain them in the parking lot!

The AGENTS manning the closer roadblock jump into their cars -

INT./EXT. LOUISE'S CAR - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Louise's car races past a bewildered **DRIVE-THROUGH** employee and emerges into the parking lot. Max points -

MAX
There!

Louise speeds toward a GAP in the fence between properties. They CRINGE as the fence SCRAPES down both sides of the car -

They emerge into another parking lot - as two DHS SUVs barrel into the lot they just left, lights FLASHING - and STOP - too wide to fit through the gap.

Louise eases onto the street. She sees a FREEWAY SIGN off to the RIGHT - starts to turn - as a message arrives: **TURN LEFT.**

MAX

Left.

Louise hesitates - the freeway just two blocks to the right -

MAX

Go left!

She turns left - as a DHS cruiser SCREECHES out from the next street on the right and comes after them, siren WAILING -

LOUISE

OK. Now what? What do we do?

Max stares at the red console intently. A MESSAGE arrives -

MAX

Right on Palomar - here!

She makes the turn. Max looks at the screen, waiting...

LOUISE

Intersection -

MAX

(a message arrives)

Left. Left.

Louise turns onto a wide, curving street, lined with warehouses and loading docks. Max looks back - as the cruiser ROARS around the corner, speeding after them -

Another car follows - and a THIRD swoops in from another street - all three BEARING DOWN ON THEM...

MAX

They're coming -

LOUISE

I - this car - we have some practical fucking restraints here -

MAX

I know - I know -

A message arrives: **STOP.** Max stares at it.

MAX
It says...stop?

LOUISE
What?

Another message arrives: **STOP NOW.**

MAX
Stop. Stop!

Louise looks at him like he's crazy -

MAX
What choice do we have?

She BRAKES - the car fishtails...and SKIDS to a halt in the middle of the street. The DHS cars stop twenty feet behind them, arrayed across the road. Doors start OPENING -

LOUISE
What are we doing?

VOICE (ON LOUDSPEAKER)
Step out of the vehicle with your hands visible!

Max looks back. AGENTS in blue jackets are taking cover behind their open doors - GUNS DRAWN -

VOICE (ON LOUDSPEAKER)
Come out now and surrender to the agents...

LOUISE
Max -

MAX
I don't know!
(to the camcorder)
OK, we stopped. What now? Come on...!

The red console is BLANK as the loudspeaker drones on. Agents are slowly APPROACHING from behind the car. Max and Louise look at each other. *How did we end up here...?*

A message arrives: **GO.**

MAX
Go! Go!

Louise hits the gas - the tires SQUEAL as they take off - the agents scramble back into their cars to give chase -

Louise's car rounds a curve...as a message arrives -

PASS ON THE RIGHT.

Max looks at it, confused -

LOUISE

Shit!

A HUGE SEMI is backing out of a loading dock on the left, blocking the entire road as it turns to drive toward them. Louise starts to BRAKE -

MAX

No!

(points to the right)

Go around!

LOUISE

I can't fit -

MAX

Do it!

Louise ACCELERATES toward the back of the truck - as the gap between it and the building narrows FAST -

The DHS cars come around the curve behind them - Max GRIPS the armrest - Louise's car BOUNCES up onto the sidewalk with a CRUNCH - JUST skirting the semi as it finishes backing up.

The DHS cars roar up and SLAM on their brakes - sirens BLARING, HONKING at the bewildered semi driver -

Max and Louise look back. The DHS cars are TRAPPED behind the semi. Louise lets out a giddy laugh -

MAX

(points at a sign ahead)

Freeway!

She hits the gas - as a MESSAGE arrives. Max stares at it...

MAX

Um...turn around.

Louise stares at him. He shrugs.

MAX

Got us this far.

She makes an unhappy noise - but stops, turns the car and heads back TOWARD the semi.

LOUISE
The hell are we doing.

A message arrives: **KEEP RIGHT.**

MAX
It says keep right.

She snorts - *I give up* - and eases the car right. As they approach the semi, it starts to pull FORWARD. And they suddenly get it -

MAX
Yes!

LOUISE
Beautiful.

She HOPS the car onto the sidewalk to the right of the semi - just as the DHS cars RACE past on its left, oblivious...

Max looks back, marveling, as Louise shadows the semi, staying next to the double axle at the back of the cab. The semi driver glances down at her in the side mirror, mystified. She gives a sheepish shrug.

Max looks back - as the janitor's two sedans speed off after the DHS cars. A message arrives - Max looks -

MAX
Turn right.

Louise turns, peeling away from the semi. Max looks back -

MAX
They're gone.

Louise lets out a breath, relieved. She shakes her head -

LOUISE
How the hell did they find us?

Max is at a loss. A MESSAGE arrives. He looks.

MAX
It says to turn left up here.

Louise makes the turn...

TRANSITION TO:

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

They drive slowly through a residential neighborhood.

LOUISE
It's been almost an hour. Where's
this thing taking us?

The red console BUZZES. Max looks -

MAX
Right.

She turns - onto a street that dead-ends in a cul-de-sac.

LOUISE
Oh - stellar. Now what?

She pulls over as another MESSAGE arrives. They look:

937 MIRIAM AVE.

MAX
Miriam - that's -

He looks out at the sign for the cross street - *MIRIAM AVE.*

LOUISE
What's at 937 Miriam?

MAX
I guess we'll find out.

Louise TURNS OFF the camcorder.

LOUISE
Max. Are you sure we should be
listening to this? We don't even
know who it is.

Max nods slowly. It's a good point. He aims the camcorder at himself and starts recording.

MAX
Who are you?

They wait, tense. A message arrives on the red console:

MAX.

Max STARES - wanting to believe it...

MAX
So I...I can...live?

YES.

MAX

How?

A pause...and then another message appears:

937 MIRIAM AVE.

He looks at Louise - and unbuckles his seatbelt -

LOUISE

Wait a sec!

She turns off the camcorder again -

LOUISE

That didn't prove anything. What if
this is - them somehow?

Max's expression darkens - impatient with her doubts -

MAX

It just saved our lives! Why would
they do that?

She has no answer for that. They look at each other...

EXT. STREET - LATER

Max and Louise emerge from the car. The base station sits on
the floor of the car, RUNNING.

EXT. 937 MIRIAM - AFTERNOON

They walk up to a red brick house, looking around nervously
at the empty street. Louise holds the camcorder, recording.
Max peers in a window. The house looks empty.

He tries the door. Locked. He frowns at the red console,
unsure what to do next.

LOUISE

Is the wifi reaching?

MAX

Couple bars. Should be OK -

The red console BUZZES. He looks - and shakes his head, still
amazed by it all. He hunts in the shrubs next to the door.

LOUISE

What are you -

He turns over a large ROCK and pulls a white plastic cover off the bottom. He takes out a KEY.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

They walk into a sparsely-decorated living room. As they close the front door, they notice an insistent BEEPING -

LOUISE
(whispering)
Alarm!

They rush to the alarm panel. They stare at the red console nervously as the beeping SPEEDS UP...

The red console BUZZES. Max looks - and punches in the code. The beeping STOPS. They exhale, relieved.

They look around. Max notices a framed, signed sports jersey. Louise examines a display of military medals...

LOUISE
Wolensky.
(Max looks over)
I think whoever lives here is named
Thomas Wolensky. That mean anything
to you?

Max shakes his head. BZZ - a message arrives. They look:

GARAGE.

INT. GARAGE - LATER

A door opens and Max and Louise enter from a small hallway. They're in a two-car garage. An old Mazda Miata is up on blocks, mid-restoration. An extensive, well-organized collection of TOOLS lines the walls.

LOUISE
What are we doing here?

BZZ - a message arrives on the red console. Max looks - frowns - then hands the console to Louise.

MAX
I think it's for you.

She looks: **TOP DRAWER LEFT. 14 AWG WIRE. GLOVES.**

They look at each other. She sighs and crosses to a set of drawers. She opens the top one and pulls out a SPOOL OF WIRE.

INT. GARAGE - LATER

Louise has the the house's CIRCUIT BREAKER BOX open. She's wearing gloves, using pliers to run wire inside the box. The red console BUZZES. She looks - nods - continues her work.

MAX

What're you doing?

LOUISE

Unclear. Bypassing a circuit breaker for some reason.

Max, feeling useless, wanders the garage, checking out the Miata, the tools, storage boxes. Meanwhile, the red console BUZZES periodically with more instructions for Louise.

Max looks through a cardboard box marked *OFFICE*. Mostly stationery supplies. He picks up a couple framed PHOTOS...

BZZ - another message comes in. **SHORT 50A BREAKER.**

LOUISE

(frowns)

But...that'd...

MAX

Louise.

She turns. He looks shaken.

MAX

I know who Thomas Wolensky is.

He shows her a FRAMED PHOTO. It shows two men and a woman grinning, muddy, after finishing an obstacle race.

One of the men is THE JANITOR.

MAX

What are we doing at his house?

LOUISE

I think we're supposed to kill him.

He stares at her, shocked.

LOUISE

The last instruction was to short the main breaker. The way it's rigged - he gets home, finds the power off, comes out here to turn it back on -

She demonstrates - lifting the breaker box lid with one hand and miming reaching in to flip the breaker with the other -

MAX

Maybe it'd just - incapacitate him?

LOUISE

Fifty amps AC across his chest?
He'd be dead before he hit the
floor.

They look at each other, trying to grapple with it.

LOUISE

We can't...we can't do this. Right?

Max is silent for a long time...

MAX

(quiet)

We've seen what'll happen to us if
we don't stop him. It's...self-
defense.

LOUISE

But he hasn't actually done any of
that yet.

MAX

The only way to be sure he can't is
if - if he's...

They fall silent. Then Max reaches into the breaker box and uses a corner of the photo frame to FLIP the breaker.

LOUISE

(dismayed)

Max...

They hear a car PULL INTO the driveway outside. They turn - as the engine shuts off - the car door OPENS and CLOSES -

Max GRABS Louise's hand and PULLS HER to the door - and away from the breaker box cover, which SLAMS shut -

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Max and Louise look for somewhere to hide. They hear a KEY in the front door. As it OPENS, Max pulls her into a bedroom -

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He closes the door just as FOOTSTEPS sound in the hall...

JANITOR (O.S.)
(angry)
...don't care how it happened...we
need to find them before the
director gets back...

The janitor's voice fades as he walks away. Max and Louise finally have a chance to look around: posters for the 49ers and Call of Duty - toys and sports equipment - a small bed with Star Wars sheets. This is a CHILD'S BEDROOM.

LOUISE
(whispers)
Max...

The janitor's voice becomes audible again -

JANITOR (O.S.)
...we don't have time...gonna
change and head right back out...

Max looks around the room...and finds a PHOTO of the janitor and a 10-YEAR-OLD BOY in the stands at a Giants game. He sees something next to the photo. An army tank - made of LEGOS...

LOUISE
We have to stop this -

But Max is paralyzed, staring at the Lego tank. They hear a SWITCH being flipped. Then again.

JANITOR (O.S.)
The hell...I'll call you back...

They listen, scared, as the janitor walks away...and the door to the garage OPENS. They look at each other. Too late now.

MAX
(half-hearted)
We had to do it. It was him or us.

Louise looks at Max, miserable. He just stares tensely at the closed bedroom door, listening. They hear the breaker box cover being lifted...

An agonizing silence...

POP! - they FLINCH - a CRASH as the breaker box cover slams - and a heavy THUMP.

Then silence.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

They walk quietly down the hall toward the open door to the garage...a BODY gradually coming into view...

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

THE JANITOR - sprawled horribly on the concrete floor.

LOUISE
Oh. God. What did we do...

MAX
(fighting tears)
We had no choice.

They stare down at the janitor's body for a long time...

LOUISE
We have to go.

She opens the breaker box - still wearing the gloves - and starts pulling out wires. Max moves to put back the photo -

The janitor GASPS - Max DROPS the photo - SHOCKED - SHATTERING it. The janitor is STARING at them, disoriented... trying to sit up. He COLLAPSES, breathing shallowly...

MAX
(panicking)
He's not...it didn't -

LOUISE
We gotta get outta here!

As they start to move - the red console BUZZES. They look.

FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED.

They stare at it a long moment.

LOUISE
This can't be you. You wouldn't do this -

MAX
We - we can't stop now. He saw us - he'll - we have to.

He pulls himself away from her and crosses to the janitor. Louise sinks to the floor, back to the wall, staring...

Max steels himself. He puts down the red console and crouches over the janitor. Pulls his sleeves over his hands...

And CLAMPS a hand over the janitor's mouth. The janitor makes a muffled NOISE. Sweat trickles down Max's face. He brings his other hand toward the janitor's nose...but hesitates...

He looks to Louise for absolution - but she has her head in her hands, staring at the floor. He turns back to the janitor, trying to WILL himself to bring his hand down...

Next to him, the red console BUZZES -

FINISH IT.

Louise looks up - sees the message. Max grits his teeth - still hesitating. The red console BUZZES again - and AGAIN -

FINISH IT.

FINISH IT.

FINISH IT.

LOUISE

Max - this isn't right -

He looks over at her - unsure...and a hand CLAMPS DOWN on his wrist. He SPINS - to find THE JANITOR - eyes huge and BLOODSHOT - STARING RIGHT AT HIM -

Max RECOILS - trying to free his wrist - but the janitor is far too strong - he PULLS Max toward him -

Louise lunges forward - trying to PRY the janitor's hands away - as he grabs Max by the NECK...starts to CHOKE him...

And Louise KICKS THE JANITOR IN THE HEAD - HARD - he REELS back - Louise pulls Max away -

They lurch for the door - the janitor scrambles to a drawer - pulls out a GUN - swings it toward them - face twisted with pain and rage -

And HISSES as blood POURS into his eyes from a GASH over his eye where Louise kicked him. He wipes at it - trying to see -

Giving Max and Louise a SPLIT SECOND to get away. He FIRES - at an empty doorway. And falls back to the floor, dizzy.

The RED CONSOLE lies next to him on the floor, forgotten...

INT. LOUISE'S CAR - DUSK

Louise drives, white-knuckled. Max stares, shell-shocked.

LOUISE

His head.

(Max nods)

We're not changing anything.

Everything we do just makes it
worse. I...I don't think we can -

MAX

No. No!

(HITS the dashboard)

If I'd just listened! Finished it
when I told myself to...

He reaches for the sports bag - and REALIZES - horrified -

MAX

I left the receiver. I must've put
it down...

He looks down at the base station, still humming on the floor
between his legs. He stares in utter dismay.

MAX

This was the only thing keeping us
alive.

He STARES at it...and then PULLS THE PLUG.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Louise's car is parked in front of an empty playground. Max
sits alone on a swing, staring off at nothing...

IN LOUISE'S CAR

Louise watches Max through the windshield, worried. She looks
down at the STAIN on her shirt...then at the BASE STATION...

ON THE PLAYGROUND

LOUISE (O.S.)

Max!

He turns dully to see Louise RUNNING up to him.

LOUISE

I know what we have to do.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Louise peeks out from the stairwell. The hall is empty. She steps out, carrying the sports bag. Max follows, glancing nervously at the empty offices and labs as they go...

MAX

We shouldn't be here. Someone's gonna see us.

LOUISE

I need my tools.

INT. LOUISE'S LAB - LATER

Louise carefully works the long-reach forceps into the open base station. She pulls out the CRYSTAL and sets it on the worktable, where it glints blackly as she and Max stare down at it. She picks up a HAMMER.

LOUISE

If it's gone, they won't have any reason to come after us.

(pause)

But even if they do - it won't be possible to send that video back. What we saw - couldn't happen.

Max nods - reluctantly. Louise holds the hammer out to him.

LOUISE

It was yours. You should do it.

Max finally takes the hammer. He slowly RAISES it...but then hesitates, struggling with himself...

He LOWERS the hammer.

LOUISE

Max -

MAX

They'd really be gone.

(pleading)

There's gotta be another way.

LOUISE

You know there isn't.

Max stares at her, miserable. Finally he raises the hammer again. He steels himself -

The crystal FLASHES - DEEP RED - a fast PATTERN - MORSE CODE.
They stare - stunned. The code REPEATS - over and over -

"Dinner." MAX "Dinner." LOUISE

MAX
What the hell does that -
(gets it)
The Fellowship dinner. It's - now.

LOUISE
I don't -

MAX
We - present it. Let them use it.
Once the whole world knows about
it, nobody'll be able to touch us -

LOUISE
But - we can't show them anything
without the receiver.

MAX
Yes we can. The first test we ever
did. Morse code.

The crystal finally stops flashing. Max picks it up with the
forceps and starts putting it back into the base station -

LOUISE
I don't trust this. Nothing we've
done has changed anything. This is
the only way to be sure.

MAX
I have to try.

LOUISE
No you don't! You don't have to do
anything. We can walk away from
this right now.

Max starts packing the base station into the sports bag.

LOUISE
(desperate)
I won't go. I won't go with you.
(he stops)
I'm not gonna die for this thing.

They stare at each other a long moment. Then Max NODS.

MAX

Find somewhere safe to hide till...
after.

He closes the sports bag and crosses to the door -

LOUISE

(simply)
Please don't do this.

Max turns - overwhelmed by the bare emotion of her plea. He looks around her lab. Posters - running gear - photos...

MAX

You have - a whole life. I wish...
(re: the sports bag)
This is my life. My parents died
trying to build this. To make a
difference. If I'm not willing to
risk everything for that...
(trails off)
I hope - I'll see you...after 9:30.

He exits. As the door closes, Louise looks around...past the photos...and settles on the damaged BLUESTREAK PROTOTYPE, still on the floor by the bookshelf...collecting dust...

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Max keeps to the shadows as he approaches an ORNATE BUILDING lit with upturned FLOODLIGHTS. He passes a placard - *PRIVATE EVENT - 2016 *IPS FELLOWSHIP DINNER*. He stops a hundred feet from the building to peek from behind a tree -

A tuxedoed DOORMAN is at the entrance. WAITERS move through the lobby. Max scans the PLAZA between him and the door...

He sees a FIGURE in the shadow of a pillar. Then he sees another...and another. THE JANITOR'S MEN - all around the plaza. He leans against the tree. No way he can make it...

Someone GRABS his arm - he SPINS - ready to lash out -

It's LOUISE. He stares -

MAX

(whispering)
What are you doing?

LOUISE

(whispering)
I changed my mind.

MAX
They're here. We can't get in.

LOUISE
Not both of us.

Then he sees - she's carrying a DUFFEL BAG. And he GETS IT -

MAX
(dismayed)
They'll catch you -

LOUISE
I've run every inch of this campus.
I got this. Just get in there.

Without waiting for a reply, she starts toward the plaza -

MAX
Louise. Louise!

LOUISE
Don't fuck this up.

She starts across the plaza, carrying the bag conspicuously. As she nears the building, the janitor's men EMERGE from the shadows, forming a cordon, converging on her...

She suddenly BREAKS to the side - the men RUN after her - she throws a wild glance back at Max - GO!

Max starts walking across the plaza as fast as he can without drawing attention. As he goes, he sees the men close in on Louise - who suddenly THROWS the duffel bag, darts to a fence, scrambles up and over - and is gone into the night.

Max breathes a sigh of relief as the men rush to the bag. He continues toward the building -

As a YELL goes up from the men. He looks - one of them is holding Louise's GYM CLOTHES - and POINTING at MAX.

Max RUNS for the door. He can hear MUSIC, VOICES, CLINKING GLASSES inside. The DOORMAN holds up a hand, stopping him.

Max pretends to reach for a wallet, then SHOVES the doorman - clumsily - but the doorman, caught off-guard, goes SPRAWLING - and Max sprints past him into the lobby -

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Max races through the lobby. Surprised waiters stop clearing empty glasses and stare. He hears a COMMOTION behind him - looks - the janitor's men are IN -

He sprints down a marble staircase - the men closing in - the SOUNDS from the dinner getting much louder now -

One last glance at the men - still a dozen feet back - he BURSTS through a pair of huge double doors -

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And FREEZES - staring in total shock and confusion...

The vast dining room is EMPTY.

He looks around, disoriented, the DIN of a nonexistent party still all around him -

The doors SLAM shut behind him - he SPINS - tries to open them - LOCKED. As he struggles with the doors -

The party sounds STOP - cut off suddenly. The room is SILENT.

VOICE (O.S.)
Come on in, Max.

Max turns, searching the sea of empty tables. A MAN stands at the coffee station, his back to Max.

Max walks toward him, passing a COATRACK - incongruous among the tables - hung with a SHIRT, a JACKET, and a DISHTOWEL.

MAX
Wh - what is this?

As he nears the man, Max's fear starts to turn to ANGER...

MAX
You're the one doing this to us?
Who are you?

The man turns - and Max STARES in disbelief.

It's JULIAN STERN. He's older - hair thin and white - but still recognizeable. He gazes at Max placidly.

MAX
(softly)
Uncle Julie?

STERN
Good to see you, kiddo.

MAX
You're...alive.

STERN
That's debatable.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Max sits across from Stern at one of the tables, staring at Stern's ARM, which is criss-crossed with BURN SCARS. The sports bag is on the table next to Max.

MAX
But why fake your death?
(realizing)
Were they after you too?

STERN
There is no they.

Stern is imperturbably calm, never betraying any emotion. He rolls his sleeve down - then reaches for something.

He sets the RED CONSOLE on the table. Max STARES in disbelief as Stern stands and crosses to the coffee station.

MAX
You're the director?

STERN
How do you take your coffee?
(no response)
Max, how do you -

MAX
I don't - black.

Stern has already set a cup of black coffee in front of him. He sits across from Max and puts a hand on the sports bag.

STERN
You found your parents' materials.

MAX
We got it working.
(Stern nods)
Listen - we got - messages - from -
from twenty years ahead -

STERN

Max -

MAX

A power source way beyond any
that's even - conceivable today -
probably a - collider of some kind -
huge -

STERN

Max.

MAX

Help us. If we worked together -

STERN

(re: the sports bag)
I can't let you keep it. You don't
understand how dangerous it is.

MAX

Please...Uncle Julie - all I want
to do is send them a message.

STERN

I'm sorry, Max. You're not gonna be
around to do that.

It takes a beat for Max to realize what Stern is saying.

MAX

I'd never tell anybody about you -
I promise -

STERN

I'm not threatening you. I'm
telling you what you already know.
(pause)
Nothing can change what happened to
your parents. And nothing can
change what happens tonight at
9:33.

Shocked silence. Then Max realizes the obvious -

MAX

You have another crystal.

STERN

The rest of this one, actually.

MAX

That's how you found us. You've
been a step ahead the whole time...

STERN

Not just a step.

(pause)

The government thinks PTAC is an energy lab, but I built it to my own design - for one purpose.

MAX

The accelerator.

STERN

The most advanced power source in the world. I've known what'll happen tonight for eight years.

Max reacts - STUNNED.

MAX

But - then - why not just - stop us before we ever built it?

STERN

I know it's hard to understand -

MAX

You don't have to kill us!

STERN

I never wanted you to get hurt. I was very clear with my people. But after seeing what you tried to do to Tom Wolensky today - the lengths you'd go to - I have no choice.

MAX

We only did that because he -
(stops - realizing)
He doesn't know...

STERN

Of course not. Nobody knows about any of it but me.

(pause)

You were so desperate to prevent your death - that you've brought it about.

Max stares at him, horrified.

MAX

Please. Don't do this. There has to be...a way - some way - to change -

STERN

(quiet)

You know there isn't. You've been
trying so hard not to see it in
your equations -

Max starts shaking his head slowly -

STERN

- but you knew, the first time you
pushed that button. If a beam of
light can travel backward -

MAX

(desperate)

No - no -

STERN

Then the future cannot be
changeable. Time must be an
illusion.

Max stares - unwilling to accept the truth.

MAX

I...I don't believe that.

STERN

Yes, Max. You do.

MAX

No - it can't be right -

STERN

No - it can't be right -

Stern speaks in PERFECT SYNC with Max. Max stares at him.

MAX

What are you doing - stop it.
Stop doing that!

(pause)

Stop!

STERN

What are you doing - stop it.
Stop doing that!

(pause)

Stop!

The word REVERBERATES through the hall before fading into
silence. Max looks around for the camera -

MAX

You've seen this...

Stern removes his glasses and pinches his nose wearily.

STERN

Years ago. Exactly like it's
happening. Like it had to happen.

Max looks down at his coffee, processing it all...

And LEAPS up - knocking his chair over - THROWS the coffee -
it SPLASHES Stern full in the face -

MAX
(vicious)
You didn't see that coming.

He grabs the sports bag and backs away from the table,
looking for a way out - as Stern stands, dripping -

STERN
Of course I did.

He walks to the coatrack, removing his jacket and shirt.
There are BURN SCARS all across his back and shoulders. Max
stares as Stern dries himself with the DISHTOWEL.

STERN
Seeing isn't the same as
controlling. I do what I can to
prepare -

He changes into the SHIRT AND JACKET as he talks -

STERN
Make coffee at room temperature.
Step down the voltage to a fusebox -
(Max reacts - *of course*)
- but I can't change what I see any
more than you can.
(pause)
Neither of us had any choice but to
end up here.

Max sinks slowly back into his chair, gutted.

MAX
I still...feel like I can...fight
this...somehow...

STERN
So did we. That's what makes it so
dangerous. And it's why I have to
take it.

He gently takes the sports bag from Max and sits back down
across the table, the bag at his side.

STERN
We were going to change the world,
your parents and me. End war and
crime and suffering.
(pause)
(MORE)

STERN (CONT'D)

Then we saw what was about to happen to us.

MAX

You...knew? Why didn't you stop it?

STERN

Well, we tried like hell.

(shrugs)

And we learned what you're learning now. That nothing we did - or didn't do - could make a bit of difference. What we thought of as our free will was only - a mirage.

(pause)

In the end, we accepted the truth. Your parents were at peace when they died.

SILENCE as Max fights back tears, overwhelmed. Finally -

MAX

But you lived.

STERN

I saw my future. Continuing our work - but in secret, cut off from the world - to preserve the illusion of freedom for the rest of humanity, and make sure what happened to us would never happen to anybody else.

(pause)

Not a life I would've chosen. But of course it wasn't a choice. I finally...accepted the inevitable.

(stands)

It's time for you to do the same.

He picks up the sports bag and crosses to the double doors.

MAX

Where - where are you going?

STERN

When you're ready, Tom's waiting for you outside. Take your time.

MAX

(weakly)

But - you're not - I could just - run...

STERN

You could. But you don't.

He exits. Max stares at the open door, the huge empty dining hall silent around him.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Max walks numbly through the lobby, now empty and dark, and looks out at the front parking lot. THE JANITOR is leaning against his car. He starts to TURN -

Max backs away, scared. He rushes to a SIDE DOOR. It opens on an UNLIT STREET, a thicket of trees on the other side.

He watches SHADOWS move with the wind...leaves RUSTLING... Impossible to say what might be out there...

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Max walks toward the janitor, a man going to the gallows.

The janitor is holding the SPORTS BAG. He looks pale and grim, a small bandage on his forehead - just as he looked in the video. Max reaches him. They look at each other...

The janitor PUNCHES Max HARD in the stomach. Max crumples.

JANITOR

Get in.

INT. JANITOR'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Max climbs into the back seat - and stares, dismayed. LOUISE is in the other seat, bruised and grass-stained - zip-tied to the armrest. Max FLINCHES as the janitor SLAMS the door.

LOUISE

What happened?

MAX

I...I don't...

LOUISE

It doesn't matter -

(re: the zip-tie)

If we can get this off - we only need another hour and a half. We can make it -

MAX

No. We can't.

(pause)

You were right. We should've
destroyed it -

(realizes)

I guess we couldn't...

LOUISE

What are you talking about?

Max looks back. The janitor is putting the bag in the trunk.

MAX

My math was right. We never
could've changed anything.

Silence. The janitor SLAMS the trunk.

MAX

Why'd you come back? Why'd you help
me?

LOUISE

You don't know?

(mutters)

You're an idiot.

And he suddenly sees it in her eyes - UNDERSTANDS. The
janitor gets in. Max turns to him as he starts the car -

MAX

Let her go. Please. This was my
fault. She didn't -

JANITOR

(turns - quiet fury)

You're both going to get what you
deserve.

MAX

She tried to stop me -

JANITOR

She should've tried harder.

He puts the car in gear, maneuvering out of the parking lot.
Max turns to Louise, who looks stricken. He reaches out
tentatively - trying to speak -

She turns away and stares out the window. Max watches her a
moment, then turns to the janitor again.

MAX

You can't.

(no response)

You can't do this. You can't do
this to her!

He KICKS the seat -

LOUISE

Max, don't -

The janitor SLAMS on the brakes - the car SCREECHES to a
halt. In a flash his GUN is out - aimed at Max, POINT BLANK.
Max RECOILS - trying to get away from the barrel -

LOUISE

No! Please!

JANITOR

(grim satisfaction)

If you prefer, I could do it right
now.

Max cowers - the janitor ENJOYING it...until something DAWNS
on Max. He looks at the gun barrel...fear DRAINING AWAY...

MAX

(to himself)

No, you couldn't...

JANITOR

(furious)

What? What did you say?

But Max isn't listening. He's LOST IN THOUGHT. The janitor
gives up, disgusted. He holsters the gun and starts driving
again. Louise looks over at Max, mystified.

INT./EXT. JANITOR'S CAR - FREEWAY - NIGHT

The janitor's car joins the RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC on the freeway.

Max is deep in thought. In the distance, a train WHISTLES.
Max looks out the window, searching. He sees multiple TRAIN
TRACKS converging just off the freeway...

And he KNOWS what he has to do. He casually reaches for the
door handle. He tests it - LOCKED. He frowns -

MAX

(whispering)

Is there a way to open a trunk from
the inside?

LOUISE
 (whispering)
 Um - there should be - like - a
 white plastic - handle thing. Why?

MAX
 We don't know what's gonna happen
 to you.

LOUISE
 Yes we do - he just said -

MAX
 But we don't - we don't know. We
 haven't seen it.

LOUISE
 (scared)
 Max, what are you gonna do - ?

MAX
 They're not gonna hurt you. I
 promise.

He maneuvers slowly - keeping an eye on the janitor -

LOUISE
 But - I thought you said we
 couldn't change anything!

MAX
 (scared)
 I'm counting on it -

He pulls the seat RELEASE KNOB - the seatback falls with a
 THUNK - the janitor looks up sharply as Max dives for the
 hole, wriggling into the trunk -

JANITOR
 (disbelief)
 Where do you think you're going?

He WRENCHES the wheel - cars HONK as the janitor's car cuts
 across traffic. Gravel CRUNCHES under the tires as it pulls
 onto the shoulder -

Max wiggles into the trunk, searching. He sees it - a HANDLE,
 GLOWING faintly. He grabs it - PULLS - the trunk POPS open -

The janitor's eyes widen. He SLAMS on the brakes. Max -
 halfway out of the trunk - FLIES forward - SLAMS into the
 frame - bounces back - TUMBLES out with the SPORTS BAG -

The car SKIDS to a halt - door opening -

Max rolls to a stop on the gravel. He struggles to his feet, banged up - searching for an escape as traffic FLIES by -

The janitor leaps out, pulling his gun - strides toward Max, silhouetted by passing headlights - Max backs away shakily -

JANITOR

Stop. Just stop!

Max stumbles - falls - gets up. Nowhere to go - cars WHIP by on the left, a high retaining wall to the right - Louise watches wide-eyed from the back seat -

JANITOR

You are not taking that bag. I will shoot you.

MAX

No you won't.

The janitor FIRES - Max and Louise both FLINCH - the bullet TEARS past and POCKS the wall behind Max -

JANITOR

That was a warning. Give me the bag!

MAX

(terrified)

You don't have any idea what this is, do you?

JANITOR

It doesn't matter.

MAX

Yes. It does.

He glances at Louise - STEELING himself - then back to the janitor -

MAX

I know how I die - and this isn't it.

He turns and STRIDES INTO THE SPEEDING TRAFFIC -

Louise GASPS -

The janitor - SHOCKED - aims - can't get a clean shot through the traffic. Cars TEAR by Max - brakes SQUEAL - HONKING - a car WHIPS past behind him - the wind PUSHES him - another flies by in front - a flash of the driver's huge eyes -

Louise, slackjawed - the janitor in DISBELIEF - gun wavering -

One more lane to go - Max glances over - cars in the two left lanes HURTLING at him - nothing to do - he SPRINTS -

A sickening CRACK as the last car SIDE-SWIPEs him - side-view mirror snapping off - THROWING HIM into the center divider. He picks himself up -

A SHOT ricochets off the divider inches away - PEPPERING him with concrete shards - he spins - sees the janitor trying to get another clear shot between speeding cars -

Max jumps the divider and sprints across the lanes - much less traffic on this side.

He looks back, but can't see the janitor. He clutches the sports bag, starts down the embankment - TWISTS his ankle - stumbles - and SLIDES to the bottom.

EXT. CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Max stands shakily, panting. He touches his nose - it's bloody. He looks around, unsure which way to go. A train WHISTLES in the distance. He runs - limping - toward it.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - LATER

Max RUNS - panting raggedly, sports bag banging against him painfully. He passes a sign: *DIRIDON TRANSIT CENTER - AMTRAK.*

He crosses the parking lot, dodging around a limo parked at the curb - and catches his REFLECTION in its tinted window. His face is pale, bloodied and bruised - just like in the video. He wipes at it, trying to get the blood off.

Tires SCREECH behind him - he turns. THE JANITOR'S CAR - stopping halfway past the intersection - now backing up, turning to follow him -

Max SPRINTS, teeth gritted. As the car ROARS toward him, he SHOVES open the front doors and rushes inside.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Max MOVES - limping through the lobby - as the janitor's car SKIDS to a halt just outside. Max pulls out his cash - not much left - then looks around - searching for something -

The front door opens behind him - he turns to see the janitor stride in, hand HIDDEN in his jacket - looking right at him.

Max looks RIGHT - ticket window. LEFT - hallway marked *TO TRAINS*. He darts LEFT, fighting through the crowd, into the hallway. The janitor runs after him -

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The janitor turns the corner - pushing past commuters. Max - hiding behind a pillar - watches him run past, then steps through a DOOR into a large room.

INT. TRAIN PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

The janitor runs onto the train platform, scrutinizing the few commuters. No trains in the berths - nowhere Max could hide. He turns and rushes back into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The janitor walks slowly - scanning. He nears the pillar...

And Max STEPS OUT into the hallway - DEFIANT - sweat pouring down his bloodied face. The janitor starts toward him -

JANITOR

No way you get out of here -

MAX

I'm not trying to get out of here.

Only then does the janitor notice - the sports bag is GONE.

JANITOR

Where is it - ?

Max POINTS. The janitor looks - and reacts, DISMAYED. He rushes through the door -

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And stops cold - facing a large bank of LOCKERS with electronic keypads. He spins, FURIOUS - rushes Max - JAMS the gun in his side -

JANITOR

Which one -

MAX

Shut - up - and call him.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - LATER

The janitor leads Max out, talking on the phone.

JANITOR

He wants a guarantee - whatever that means. He said you'd understand.

STERN (O.S.)

I do.

The janitor looks up, startled. STERN sits in the back of the LIMO - parked a few feet away, the window lowered. Max is not surprised. The janitor - stunned - tries to form a question -

STERN

It's all right, Tom. Max will drive back with me. Would you bring the bag?

JANITOR

I can't - it's -

STERN

It's in locker 42. The code is 5684.

Max's face falls. The janitor stares, dumbfounded. He starts to speak - then just turns and walks back to the building.

STERN

Shall we?

IN THE JANITOR'S CAR

Louise, craning her neck to see, watches Max step into the limo. It's too dark to see who else is inside.

EXT. FREEWAY - LATER

The limo speeds north through the city.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Stern watches as Max finishes a drinking a bottle of water.

STERN

Now. Why don't you tell me what you want in return for the bag.

MAX
 (still out of breath)
 It - doesn't matter. You already
 have it.

STERN
 You're still thinking temporally.
 How do you think I knew where it
 was?

Max laughs mirthlessly - finally getting it...

MAX
 Because I'm about to tell you.
 (Stern nods)
 I want to know - for sure - that
 she'll be safe.

Stern holds out a TABLET COMPUTER with earphones plugged into it. Max takes it - a little afraid. He switches it on.

The screen shows a list of THUMBNAILS. The first is labeled 2/22/02016 14:56:23. Max glances at Stern uncertainly.

MAX
 That's tomorrow.

Stern nods. Max puts in the earphones. He taps the first timestamp. A VIDEO CLIP fills the screen.

ON THE TABLET: *LOUISE'S LAB, from a hidden camera - in perfect high-definition color video. LOUISE stares out the window, eyes red - either from crying or lack of sleep.*

Finally she crosses slowly to her bookshelf. She stares down a moment - then picks up the BLUESTREAK PROTOTYPE.

The clip ends. Max glances at Stern - then taps a timestamp several months down the list - 08/10/02016 19:41:06.

The camera moves from a kitchen into a DINING ROOM - maybe hidden in someone's lapel. A raucous group crowds around a table playing a BOARD GAME. Among them -

Louise. Her hair is longer. She laughs, moving a piece as her friends groan. She looks up, right at the camera, grinning -

It ends. Max taps the LAST ENTRY - 06/14/02019 12:09:44.

Louise speaks at a podium in front of a CROWDED ROOM. She brings up a SLIDE on a large screen behind her:

BLUESTREAK
A Dissertation for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Physics

She says something - the audience LAUGHS -

Max smiles faintly - happy for her. As the clip ends, the list of timestamps reappears - and Max reacts, SURPRISED -

The list has RE-CENTERED - the clip he just watched ISN'T THE LAST ONE. There are MANY MORE below it.

He SCROLLS down the list. It goes on...and ON - further and further ahead. 02020...02021...02022...thumbnails FLASH BY as he scrolls - tiny snippets of Louise's life -

- receiving a doctoral hood over her academic robes - at an old man's hospital bed - installing a BlueStreak filter on a rural water main - lecturing in front of a classroom - holding a baby, laughing - lying on a sofa, leg in a cast -

It passes in front of Max in rapid succession - her LIFE, with all its ups and downs - OVERWHELMING him...

He switches off the tablet and YANKS out the earbuds. He stares down at the black screen.

MAX

How far do they go?

STERN

All the way.

(off Max's stunned look)

You asked for a guarantee.

MAX

(finally)

Is she happy?

STERN

She lives a full life.

Max hands the tablet to Stern.

STERN

You're satisfied?

(Max nods)

Then would you tell me where you put the bag?

Max shakes his head at the madness of it. He looks up - finds the CAMERA in the ceiling liner and speaks to it.

MAX
Locker 42. Combination 5684.

STERN
Thank you, Max.

Max looks out the window. They're ascending into the hills.

MAX
I don't want to die.

STERN
We all live under the same sentence. Most people just don't know their execution date.

MAX
Do you?

STERN
Early next year I'll be diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer. I'll die on September seventh at four in the afternoon.

MAX
Why don't you - do something...

He trails off, shaking his head. He knows why.

STERN
My death - and yours - are just... stitches in the fabric of the universe.

Silence. Max looks out at the city lights spread below.

MAX
How far can you see?

STERN
Two hundred seventeen years - and getting further every day.

Max stares in utter disbelief. Finally, softly -

MAX
What's it like?

STERN
It's a kind of...unmooring from the present.

(MORE)

STERN (CONT'D)

Once you've seen the death of every person you'll ever know, it becomes impossible to remain attached. Uncertainty, mystery - love. The illusion that anything might happen - that you can make it happen. Those are gone.

Max is silent, watching Stern.

STERN

I've become a strange sort of...god. Outside humanity - outside time - watching over it all. This moment isn't any more real to me than any other, past or future.

MAX

It sounds...lonely.

EXT. HILLS - CONTINUOUS

The limo is tiny, winding along the Santa Cruz Mountains.

STERN (O.S.)

When you know everything, you're never afraid. You never grieve.

(pause)

It's...peaceful.

On one side of the mountains, constellations of city lights. On the other, the vast darkness of the Pacific...

EXT. PTAC - NIGHT

The thin man stands waiting as the limo pulls up. He opens the door. Max steps out.

INT. CELL - LATER

Max stands motionless in the same small room he was locked in earlier. His eyes are fixed on the WALL CLOCK. The second hand glides around, approaching 9:30...

The door OPENS. The thin man is outside.

INT. ACCELERATOR CHAMBER - LATER

The thin man lead Max into the accelerator chamber. The entire room THRUMS - something immensely powerful happening behind the walls.

Max sees LOUISE, seated at a small table across from the BASE STATION. She's been crying. He rushes to her - she rises -

MAX

It's OK. You're gonna be OK.

She looks at him, confused -

MAX

You're gonna do amazing things.

LOUISE

(catching up)

You...saw something. What - ?

MAX

(shakes his head)

It's...better not to know.

Behind him, the thin man steps forward - Louise SEES him -

LOUISE

No! Just wait -

MAX

It's OK. I just -

(pause)

I never felt more alive than I have since we met. I'm sorry...we didn't have more time.

She stares at him - and he KISSES her. They melt into it, everything else forgotten for one last moment...

He finally pulls away and just looks at her - AT PEACE. The thin man takes her by the arm - starts to hustle her away -

LOUISE

(in tears)

Why are you so happy?

MAX

You don't know?

(as she exits)

You're an idiot.

And the heavy door CLICKS shut between them.

Max sits, contemplating the base station on the table in front of him. Two thick POWER CABLES run to it from the wall panel. He looks over at the BLUE CONSOLE, which is mounted on a tripod, its camera aimed at him.

STERN (O.S.)

Are you ready?

Max looks up as STERN AND THE JANITOR step out from behind a rack of computers. Stern sits across from him.

MAX

It doesn't matter. It's time.

Stern nods to the janitor, who starts forward, GUN drawn, cold satisfaction on his face...

And Max LAUGHS. The janitor stops - confounded. Max turns to Stern -

MAX

I just remembered - how - how we
kept watching over and over, and...
(laughs again)
We could never figure out why I was
laughing.

They laugh together a moment. The janitor looks on, confused. Max's laughter fades. He looks up at the janitor.

MAX

I'm sorry. For what we tried to do.

He closes his eyes, hands folded calmly on the table. The janitor looks to Stern, who nods. The janitor puts the gun to Max's temple.

Max takes a deep breath -

The janitor FIRES - Max PITCHES - his chair TOPPLING - the janitor stands over him - aiming down -

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Louise is led into the elevator by the thin man - as muffled SHOTS echo through the hall - POP - POP-POP - POP - her composure COLLAPSING as the doors close...

INT. ACCELERATOR CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The janitor FIRES - FIRES - CLICK. Empty. He steps away, holstering the gun, turning to Stern.

JANITOR

(sighs)

OK? That what you wanted?

Stern nods, turning off the base station. He stands and walks around the table to join the janitor.

STERN

Max?

Max lies fetal on the floor. Slowly...he OPENS HIS EYES - to find himself looking up at Stern and the janitor.

The janitor pulls him up. Max looks down at himself - intact. He SHIVERS uncontrollably as the janitor helps him lean on the table.

Max looks at the toppled chair. Two of the legs are folded under it - HINGED. Behind him, the janitor turns to Stern.

JANITOR

(quiet)

By now I know not to ask, but
Christ -

STERN

(hand on his shoulder)

We're almost done. Head on
upstairs.

The janitor nods wearily and exits.

MAX

(shaking)

I'm alive.

STERN

No, you're dead. Like me.

MAX

But - how - it looked so real - the
blood...

STERN

(re: the base station)

What I just sent back to you was a
recording I had someone touch up
next week - make it a bit more...
convincing.

MAX

(undone)

Why?

STERN
Follow me.

INT. ELEVATOR - LATER

Stern turns a KEY. The elevator ASCENDS...

STERN
I've been watching over you since
the fire, waiting till you were
ready before I gave you the
lockbox.

MAX
(stunned)
You...? So...this was - what? A
test?

STERN
A lesson. It takes a rare mind to
truly accept a universe without
time or free will. I had to show
you what it means to live with that
truth.

MAX
All those messages - leading us...
You sent - will send them.

STERN
No. You will.

The elevator doors slide open.

INT. ANTECHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

They step off the elevator - and Max stops, STUNNED. They're
in an antechamber enclosed in frosted glass walls. Beyond the
glass are hints of a vast ATRIUM, flooded with light from a
vaulted glass ceiling. It looks like a sunlit cathedral.

STERN
For twenty years, I've studied the
entire sweep of time - from here -

Stern points to the only entrance to the atrium - a heavy
FROSTED GLASS DOOR with a BIOMETRIC PANEL next to it.

STERN
An endless stream of knowledge. And
all of it was sent to me...
(MORE)

STERN (CONT'D)

(turns to Max)

By you - and your successors.

He crosses to the door and rests a hand on it.

STERN

Your equations are just the beginning. Behind this door are vistas of discovery you can't imagine.

(steps toward Max)

The depth of understanding you'll need to continue what I started - directing human progress, and protecting them - sometimes from themselves.

MAX

But...I can't actually change anything.

STERN

Not through your own will. But just as I've used my knowledge to change the course of your life, what you learn will flow through your actions to shape science and history - for generations. It's what you've wanted your whole life.

(pause)

You'll change the world.

Max stands there - floored. He finally finds his voice -

MAX

What about...my life - outside?

STERN

It's over.

(pause)

The things you'll know - you can't ever come back. You'll watch over humanity...from a distance.

MAX

But - Louise - this is hers too.

STERN

You know she'd never accept this life.

Max stares - OVERWHELMED...not so sure he wants it either.

STERN

(smiles)

You won't miss your old life. The present is - boring. You're about to transcend time.

(pause)

Let me show you what that means.

He beckons Max to a TV MONITOR with a chair in front of it. He inserts a VIDEOCASSETTE into an old VCR and presses *PLAY*.

ON TV: *STATIC...then ANALOG VIDEO of ROBERT and LINA in the lab, looking into the camera. TIMESTAMP: 2:17pm 13.NOV.1995.*

MAX

(barely audible)

What is this...?

Stern points to a WEBCAM on top of the TV.

STERN

Talk to them.

Max SWAYS, lightheaded. Stern helps him into the chair.

LINA (ON TV)

It's hard to see.

STERN

We had to relay you back. The picture got a bit degraded.

ROBERT (ON TV)

Is that him?

(to the camera)

Is that you?

Max nods slowly - still struggling to believe this.

MAX

(choking up)

Hi Dad. Hi Mom.

LINA

Oh, Max. You're so handsome -

ROBERT

We're so proud of you. You've come further than we ever imagined.

MAX

(fighting back tears)

I miss you. I miss you so much. I wish you hadn't died.

Lina stifles a sob. Robert puts his arm around her.

ROBERT

*We're here now. There's so much we
want to tell you.*

(chuckles)

I don't know where to start.

LINA

What do you want to know, bean?

Max looks at Stern - and at the DOOR...

MAX

What should I do, Mom? Should I -

LINA

Oh -

ROBERT

(reaching off)

That's all - ?

The video ENDS - cutting abruptly to STATIC.

MAX

What happened?

(rising)

Bring them back - !

STERN

*1995 technology. We could only
receive about a minute at a time.
Don't worry. Time isn't a barrier
any more.*

(points to the door)

You can be with them.

Max rushes to the door...but STOPS short. He looks at Stern.

MAX

I - don't know if I want this.

STERN

*It's not a choice, Max. This is
where your whole life has been
aimed.*

(steps close)

*I saw you walk through this door a
decade before you knew it existed.*

Max seems to DEFLATE. He nods slowly...

...and walks numbly toward the door...

...watching his own hand REACH for the panel...

He REALIZES something - BACKS AWAY, surprised -

MAX

No. I haven't seen this. I still
have a choice. I'm still free.

STERN

That's an illusion. You know it is.

MAX

Yeah. But I...I don't care.

He turns and crosses to the elevator -

STERN

(agitated)

Think about your parents, Max.
You'd never see them again.

Max turns and looks at Stern - dwarfed by the soaring atrium.
He's silent a long moment, just studying him.

MAX

You used to be - so - full of life.
Look what this has done to you.

Stern sags slightly.

MAX

My parents are gone. I want to
live. And...
(pause)
...and screw around and kick ass.

He pushes the call button, building momentum -

MAX

(turns - realizing)

Louise - maybe I'm in some of those
clips.

Stern SIGHS - seeming suddenly old - TIRED - and when he
speaks, the emotion is back in his voice.

STERN

Maybe you are. Or maybe you're not.
Maybe I can't risk you letting the
outside world know about this.

Max turns - faltering...

STERN

Maybe Tom's waiting down there -
with real bullets this time - and
you don't leave the building alive.

The elevator doors SLIDE open. Max doesn't move - CHILLED -

STERN

(pleading)

If you take that step, you'll never
know your future till it's too
late.

Max stares at Stern for a long moment. Then takes a BREATH -

MAX

I can live with that.

He backs into the elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Max watches Stern disappear as the doors CLOSE. He looks up.
LIGHT plays over his face in a quickening rhythm as the
elevator descends, floor by floor, back to earth...

The elevator reaches ground level. Max faces the doors, eyes
wide and searching, ready for whatever the future holds.

As the doors SLIDE OPEN -

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END