

MANIAC

Pilot Episode  
"Reality Test"

FIRST DRAFT

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INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM -- NEW YORK -- DAY

We begin on a face.

A nice, human face.

A young man, early 30s, clean-shaven, simply-dressed, a little nervous. He's framed like a portrait. Behind him, a glass window, and through it-- Manhattan, 50 stories below.

We hear SHUFFLING and a DOOR CLOSING. Then a voice--

FIRST VOICE

Okay, Owen. Let's get started.

Our human face nods. This guy we're staring at is **OWEN MILGRAM**, 32, Data Entry Temp, Lonely Soul, Future Hero. Right now he's stuck in a roomful of lawyers.

OWEN

Okay.

FIRST VOICE

The name of the witness is Owen Milgrim, the location of this deposition is the, uh, fifty-second floor of the Watson Building at 217 6th Avenue. Today's date is November 12th, 2022.

Throughout this, Owen fidgets, looks around the room...

FIRST VOICE (CONT'D)

Good afternoon, Mr. Milgrim.

OWEN

Hi.

FIRST VOICE

Mr. Milgram, can you tell us about the psychotic break you experienced on the night of May 14th, 2013?

Owen stares at the asker. For some time. Finally--

OWEN

Really?

FIRST VOICE

I'm just asking the--

OWEN

Is that how they're gonna start?  
 (turns to another head)  
 Dad. Come on. They don't even--

SECOND VOICE

(quite nasal)  
 We're actually inside the roleplay  
 now, so you can't...

Owen's eyes burn holes in whoever just said that. Eventually he turns to a new head. His dad's. And now a new voice-- calm and collected-- responds:

THIRD VOICE (DAD)

It doesn't mean it'll necessarily  
 happen at the deposition, Owen.  
 This is why we prep.  
 (then)  
 The unexpected.

Owen stares for a moment longer. The unexpected. Sure.

OWEN

Okay...  
 (to another head)  
 On that night, May 14th, which was  
 near the end of college for me,  
 during a... super-stressful and  
 difficult time in my life, I...  
 (shrugs)  
 ... I had a delusional episode.  
 After it happened, I was  
 hospitalized, and medicated, and...  
 (shrugs)  
 ... and that was the last  
 delusional episode I ever had.

FIRST VOICE

What was the nature of the episode?

Owen blinks. And then--

**A FLASH -- INT. A ROCKET SHIP -- 3030**

Owen *SCREAMS* a silent M.O.S. scream as a rocket he's piloting accelerates to 9 Gs, shaking him as he and his 80-ton vehicle exit Earth's atmosphere. Something's wrong, though. Somewhere, an alarm flashing. Yellow lights. He struggles to *UNLATCH* himself from his seat, tugging and pulling on the *STRAPS* and *BUCKLES* holding him in...

**A FLASH -- INT. AN AMBULANCE -- 2009**

*...and now, inexplicably, one reality bleeding into the other, and Owen's on a gurney, struggling against RESTRAINTS as a number of PARAMEDICS hold him down as they load him up into an ambulance. Owen SCREAMS, all still M.O.S., and as the doors of the ambulance close we're--*

**INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM -- CONTINUOUS**

--BACK, just like that, looking at Owen as he remembers...

OWEN

I don't remember.

Owen sips his water. Smiles at someone.

FIRST VOICE

And you were diagnosed with schizophrenia at that time, correct?

(then)

After your hospitalization?

Pause. Less anger from Owen now.

OWEN

During.

More shuffles.

FIRST VOICE

And are you still on any anti-psychotic medications?

OWEN

Yes.

FIRST VOICE

What medication or medications?

**INT. OWEN'S MICROAPARTMENT -- THE KITCHEN -- DAY**

M.O.S. again. Owen sets a WEEKLY-PLANNER PILL BOX down on his kitchen counter, pops the top, and as we hear him talk, we see him remove pills from the "M" section of the box....

OWEN (V.O.)

20 milligrams of Abilify until two years ago. I changed to 10 milligrams of Ziprexa around there.

(MORE)

OWEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I also take klonopin for anxiety  
 and dexadrine to manage side-  
 effects of the anti-psychotics.

FIRST VOICE (V.O.)  
 Which are what?

Owen sweeps the little pile of pills into his hand.

**INT. OWEN'S MICROAPARTMENT -- THE BATHROOM -- DAY**

We watch Owen dropping that pile of pills into the toilet.

OWEN (V.O.)  
 Sluggishness. Depression.  
 Agoraphobia. Lack of sex drive.  
 Weight gain. Nausea. Mood  
 swings. Fractured sense of  
 wellbeing. Fear of the Earth.  
 Fear of... squid. Fear of swords,  
 fear of people with swords.  
 Hypersensitivity. Numbness. Fear  
 of the apocalypse. Chronic  
 boredom.  
 (then)  
 Sudden, inexplicable anger.

He flushes. Off Owen, watching the pills go down.

**INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY**

BACK ON OWEN, here in this mysterious prep-session, still  
 looking out at those unseen lawyers.

FIRST VOICE  
 And do you believe your mental  
 illness or these various  
 medications or side-effects should  
 disqualify you from serving as a  
 witness on your brother's behalf?

For that one, Owen doesn't skip a beat.

OWEN  
 Not at all.

**INT. THE SUBWAY -- DAY**

A busy subway station. People milling. In the b/g we see a  
 COUPLE ARMY GUYS, in fatigues, both of them with big  
 automatic weapons. No one acknowledges them.

Owen steps forward to the MTA MACHINE, inserts his card, inserts a credit card, taps as he tries to add funds.

The machine SPITS OUT his card. The text reads, "**Declined.**"

Below that: "**Would you like to use an Ad Buddy to add funds?**"

Owen sighs. Fuckin' Ad Buddies. Hits "**Yes.**"

**INT. THE SUBWAY -- DAY**

A PACKED SUBWAY CAR trundles along. Owen sits in a seat, crammed between afternoon commuters, young and old alike. He's working a **RUBIK'S CUBE**, lost in his own world.

So is everyone else.

Everyone-- EVERYONE-- is on a device. Phones, watches, tablets, computers. And it's more than just the usual iPhone ubiquity. Several riders have on intense **VR HEADGEAR** and some of the riders with smart watches seem to be communicating and chatting with **SMALL HOLOGRAPHIC HEADS** projected up over their wrists. This tech is **BIGGER** and **MORE RIDICULOUS** than we've ever quite experienced.

Beside Owen sits his **AD BUDDY**, a 55 year-old, possibly drunk, poorly shaven man in a khaki trenchcoat and a pork-pie hat, looking down at a **TABLET** in the way your confused father might look at one while failing to remember a wifi password. He has a healthy Peter Falk/Princess Bride thing going on.

AD BUDDY

Okay, Mr. Milgrim. This next one has a, uh, video with it. I guess.

Owen glances at the screen in time to see a **WOMAN ON A GOLF COURSE** tee off, turn, look at him, smile, and wink.

Owen looks at her for a moment.

OWEN

Can you play that again?

The Ad Buddy taps on the screen. Has no idea how to run it.

AD BUDDY

I can't. I just gotta, uh, read you the lines now...

Owen goes back to his cube.

AD BUDDY (CONT'D)

"Your dreams do in fact exist,  
Owen. They're just in... Hilton  
Head." Huh.

(turns)

Would you be interested in  
purchasing a special package for a  
vacation to Hilton Head?

Owen does not look up.

OWEN

No.

AD BUDDY

Suit yourself. Up next we got  
something called... Neiberdine  
Clinical Labs. You ready for this  
one? Sounds interesting. Pills.

OWEN

Please just read it.

AD BUDDY

"Good afternoon, Owen. Did you  
know your rent comprises eighty-  
seven point two percent of your  
annual income?"

(glances)

Is that actually true?

Owen frowns, working his cube.

OWEN

I just got my own place.

AD BUDDY

Sure, sure. Completely understood.  
Manhattan these days? I'm over in  
a, uh, warehouse unit. South of  
Jersey City.

(off look)

Okay, here we go. "A catastrophic  
interruption in your professional  
life-- like a furlough-- could  
create a headache, Owen. Ever  
thought about supplementing your  
income?"

OWEN

No. Next.

AD BUDDY

"You can't afford Hilton Head,  
Owen. Consider N.C.L. instead."

(then)

Now you're supposed to look at it.

Owen looks. And as those three letters tumble out, the acronym melts into three words and a symbol: **NEBERDINE CLINICAL LABS**. And the symbol with the words is a **TRIQUETRA**, a triangle comprised of three interlocking rings.

OWEN

Next.

AD BUDDY

All right then. Oh-for-two. Let's see what else we got here. Okay.

"Your shampoo is like a good friend... always there, always ready to help..."

Owen goes back to his Rubick's Cube. As he focuses intently on his cube, the sounds of the train and his Ad Buddy fade out. For a moment, peace. Silence. But soon--

Soon we hear another voice...

MALE VOICE (PRELAP)

Hey bud, just making sure you're good on all the furlough stuff. Totally caught us off guard, too. I feel you. Economy's weird right now. I think it's, like, oil.

**INT. CREBATECH -- THE CUBICLE FARM -- DAY**

OWEN

What?

Owen's at a desk with a phalanx of huge monitors flanking his head. All show Excel spreadsheets-- windows upon windows.

His desk is one of about twenty in this open office space. Around him, lined up in neat rows and files like-- well, like an Excel spreadsheet-- are other workers.

His boss **ANDY** (20s, twee, mustache-y, market-y, hemp choker) stands in front of him, hands in pockets.

ANDY

The furlough. For DE temps.

(then)

The R088 cost-saving initiative.

(MORE)



ANDY (CONT'D)  
Rozo did the anonymous Hammerhead  
from the top-down and came back  
with a twelve-bullet short-termer.

OWEN  
What?

Andy blinks--

ANDY  
We're rotating you guys out. One  
at a time. They randomized the  
draw and you came up first. We've  
put out like 30 memos on it.

Nothing.

ANDY (CONT'D)  
Since this morning.

OWEN  
I was uptown at that-- at the thing  
I had.

ANDY  
You weren't online?

OWEN  
I was out of the office.

Andy stares, deeply confused.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
I'm not online when I'm out of the  
office.  
(then)  
For medical reasons.

ANDY  
Right-right-right-right-right.  
*Riggghhhhtt*. Right. Your, uh,  
thing. I remember now.

OWEN  
My thing. Yeah.

They look at each other for an uncomfortable moment.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
So this furlough-- it's unpaid?

ANDY  
That's what a furlough is.

OWEN  
It's temporary?

ANDY  
It's a furlough. But you are a  
temp. So.

OWEN  
I don't understand what you're  
saying.

ANDY  
Yes.

Owen, getting frustrated

OWEN  
How long does it last, Andy?

ANDY  
Forever.

Owen stares.

ANDY (CONT'D)  
No, I'm kidding. I'm using your  
kind of humor. When you say one  
thing but mean something else and  
no one laughs.

OWEN  
Please just tell me how long it's  
going to last, Andy.

ANDY  
I have no clear sense. But I will  
eventually. And I can tell you  
then.

(then)  
Is that gonna be a problem?

Owen's reading, trying to figure out if he should make a big  
deal or not. Because it IS gonna be a problem. A big one.

But he's just an underling. No leverage. No fight.

OWEN  
No, no, totally cool. I can just,  
uh, dip into my savings.  
(then)  
To ride it out. Thank you, Andy.  
For everything today, including  
your shirt. Thank you.

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)  
 (then)  
 Maybe I'll go on vacation.

ANDY  
 Really? Where?

OWEN  
 What.

ANDY  
 Where will you go on vacation?

Owen stares for some time. He is at a permanent, unsolvable communication impasse with his boss.

OWEN  
 Hilton Head.  
 (then)  
 Hilton Head golfing... destination.

**INT. CREBATECH -- THE BATHROOM -- LATER**

Owen DRY-HEAVES in one of the stalls. Sweating, worry on his face as he wipes his mouth. He does not golf. And he is sure as fuck not going to Hilton Head.

Inside the stall, a small monitor on the door advertises anti-nausea medication.

Owen turns, stares at it. Taps the corner of the screen to try to turn it off, much like you might try to do in an unbearable New York cab. He TAPS it harder. Nothing.

Finally, he PUNCHES IT very, very HARD and he begins a WEIRD **SILENT, BREATHY SCREAM** as he tries to rip it off the wall.

He cannot rip it off the wall.

**INT. AN OFFICE SPACE -- OWEN'S DESK -- LATER**

It's the end of the day. A group of four other workers laugh as they walk out together.

They don't even look toward Owen, the last worker left. He doesn't look at them, even though he's aware of them.

We know this because Owen glances up, sees them, and begins narrating their conversation to himself, under his breath:

OWEN  
 Sure, let's get that drink. I love my new hat.

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)

Do you love my new hat? I totally want to have a nice time and unwind with you after a long day of work here at the work that we do while I'm wearing this hat. My job doesn't matter. My job doesn't matter. Mine neither mine neither mine neither mine--

The door closes. Owen's all alone.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Hey, Owen, wanna come? Nah, no thanks. I'm good. No.

His head is still buried in his computer, examining a website with three big letters across the header: **NCL**. And again, we see that pesky **TRIQUETRA** symbol.

Owen starts filling out a form. Clinical trials. What's the worst that could happen?

**EXT. THE LOWER EAST SIDE -- NIGHT**

Owen walks the sidewalk, looking around at the many people again focused on their devices.

*[He doesn't notice, but an ad beside a bus stop bench BECOMES that same Hilton Head ad, same woman, as he walks by. And what the hell, we'll just tell you now-- that woman? That's EMMA STONE. And it was her on that ad back in the subway, too. The video Owen asked to see again.]*

A PANHANDLER sits in the doorway of a vacant building. Owen steps over and drops some change in his cup. As he does, he watches an ANGRY MAN forcefully arguing with a HOLOGRAHPIC WOMAN popping out of his watch. She is glitchy as fuck.

ANGRY MAN

Because when I don't know where you are, that means I can't fuckin' concentrate, you understand me?

HOLOGRAM WOMAN

What did you say? You sound like you're underwater.

ANGRY MAN

I said go fuck yourself, Delores.

Owen and the Panhandler glance at each other.

INT. A HALLWAY -- OWEN'S APARTMENT COMPLEX -- NIGHT

Evening. Cramped NYC hallway, Owen trudges up the stairs to the fourth floor.

INT. OWEN'S MICROAPARTMENT -- LATER

Here it is. The apartment that costs **87 per-fucking-cent of Owen's annual income**. It's 200 square feet. Microapartment. It's the size of a closet. His own little ward room.

Owen sits on his twin bed, his sole piece of furniture, reading a book and eating broccoli. At peace. Home. His sanctuary, no mater how small it is.

INT. OWEN'S MICROAPARTMENT -- DAWN

LATER. Owen's fast asleep on his bed when we hear three loud **KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKs**. His eyes pop open.

**KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!**

Owen gets out of "bed," grabs his robe, shuffles toward the door. **KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!**

OWEN

I'm coming! I'm coming, Jesus.

Finally, Owen gets there, pulls the door open. Before him stands a snappily-clad, exceptionally-put-together **CHARLA BROOKS**, Professional Pharma Recruiter.

CHARLA

Owen Milgrim?

OWEN

Yeah.

CHARLA

I'm here to change your life.

Owen looks at her, then closes the door.

CHARLA (CONT'D)

(through the door)

Mr. Milgrim. My name is Charla Brooks. I represent Neberdine Clinical Labs. I believe you sent us an application.

OWEN  
 (through the door)  
 The thing I filled out last night?

CHARLA  
 (through the door)  
 I'm here to register you for a  
 study. Something... very exciting  
 has come up.

Owen opens the door.

OWEN  
 Lady. It's dawn.

CHARLA  
 You were unreachable. Digitally.

Owen stares for another beat. Eventually, he steps aside. CHARLA steps in. She struggles to find anywhere to set up, as the only furniture is Owen's bed.

Near the sink, she moves aside his RUBIK'S CUBE, opens up her briefcase on the kitchen counter, lays out papers. In a half-daze, quarters cramped, Owen watches.

Charla is all business, arranging and organizing everything. She talks rapidly as she does so--

CHARLA (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry about the furlough. The  
 timing is difficult for you, yes?  
 If I'm not mistaken, you refuse to  
 take money from your family? On  
 principle? Is that true?

OWEN  
 How the-- how do you know about the  
 furlough? I didn't--

Charla turns to Owen, holding a TABLET to her chest.

CHARLA  
 Now. What's crucial for us with  
 regards to this study is that you  
 are not, in fact, on any  
 antipsychotic medications at this  
 time. *Quite* crucial.  
 (then)  
 I know you said so in your  
 application, but I need you to say  
 it out loud. Here.  
 (then)

(MORE)

CHARLA (CONT'D)

Go ahead, Owen. It feels good to tell the truth.

She holds her tablet toward Owen's face. *QUITE* close to his face. Owen just stares. This is... super-weird.

OWEN

I don't really--

CHARLA

According to our research, despite regularly refilling your medications and maintaining to your relatives that you are medicated, you stopped taking all anti-psychotic medications in... August of 2019.

(off look)

Just over two years ago.

Owen's still staring.

OWEN

How do you know the... date?

Charla just waits.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Are you-- are you a P.I. or something? Oh God.

(realizing)

Are you from the *trial*? Fuck me. Fuck. Are you, like, one of their lawyers, trying to get me to admit that I--

CHARLA

Sir, I'm a recruiter for Neberdine Clinical Labs. You contacted *us*.

(then)

I need to verify this information because it qualifies you. You fall into a unique subset.

OWEN

Subset of what?

CHARLA

The unmedicated mentally ill. With few if any meaningful relationships.

Owen laughs defensively.

OWEN

I'm-- okay, I see. Okay. Here's the thing. I'm not actually mentally ill. There was a mistake. A really long time ago.

(then)

That's why I quit taking the pills. It was a misdiagnosis, back then. But when you get a diagnosis and it gets in the system, and everyone around you...

(then)

...believes it...

(then)

...it turns into a whole thing...

(finally)

...with momentum...

He trails off. Defensive, flustered. Charla looks at him for a moment, then down at her tablet. She nods, begins packing up. Owen watches her. She glances around the room, then looks back.

CHARLA

(carefully)

Mr. Milgrim, I can see you value your independence very much. Moving out of your parents' home last November, carving out a niche for yourself here, in this lovely... room.

OWEN

How and why the fuck do you know so much about me, lady? Seriously.

Owen walks her to the door. Opens it for her. She steps out, turns back.

CHARLA

As I was saying, I know how much you value this apartment, and that you're in danger of losing it. If you elect to participate in the study, even though you've just informed me that you are *not*, mentally ill, I've just now been authorized to cover your rent...

(then)

...for the next...

(calculating)

...two years.



OWEN

Just now.

CHARLA

(isn't it obvious?)  
Through my glasses.

OWEN

They look like regular glasses.

CHARLA

They're actually very high-tech  
glasses.

Owen nods. Fine.

OWEN

Two years.

CHARLA

That's right.

OWEN

How long does the study take?

CHARLA

Three days.

Owen softens. Hesitates. Man. Would solve so much...

OWEN

That's it?

CHARLA

That's it. The trial begins  
tomorrow morning. In just over 24  
hours. Hence the urgency.

OWEN

What's the drug... do?

CHARLA

They don't know if it works yet, so  
they don't know what it does.

OWEN

If it does work.

CHARLA

If it does work?

(nods)

If it does work, it... well, it  
cures loneliness.

Owen stares. For a long time.

CHARLA (CONT'D)  
Mr. Milgrim?

OWEN  
(snapping to)  
Huh. Interesting. Interesting,  
uh, problem to be trying to tackle.

Charla looks at him compassionately. She's got him.

CHARLA  
Loneliness is our world's hidden  
epidemic, Mr. Milgrim. And Dr.  
Mantleray, the man behind the  
study, is a true visionary. You'd  
be doing the world a tremendous  
service by participating. This  
opportunity is... heroic, you might  
say. It's a way to be a hero.  
(then)  
But they don't know if it works.  
Hence the study.

OWEN  
Hence the study.

**INT. A CAB -- UPPER WEST SIDE -- NIGHT**

TIGHT ON Owen as his cab trundles north and the lights and sounds of the city wash over his blank face. As he looks out at the city, we begin to hear... SCREAMS!

Well, joyful screams. KID screams. And then--

OWEN (V.O.)  
Wait wait wait wait *wait* though.  
There's more, there's more. It  
wasn't just that the hero's arm was  
*gone gone*. I mispoke! Children, I  
mispoke! Hold on! The original  
was gone, yes. But there was  
something... *else* in its place.  
She'd grown something... new. And  
it was *really, really... gross*.

**INT. THE MILGRIM MANSION -- THE PLAYROOM -- NIGHT**

We're in a dark playroom, where A DOZEN children under the age of 7 sit, legs crossed, eyes wide, staring forward. A mini-audience of terrified, enraptured minds listening to--

**OWEN.** The storyteller, sitting at the front of the room beside a HUMAN-SIZED PINK BUNNY, wearing orange goggles and shining a flashlight into his own face.

OWEN  
Doesn't anybody wanna know what it  
was?

The whole GAGGLE of kids scream out together:

COLLECTIVE KIDS  
YEESSSSSSS!!!!

Owen nods. He's into it. He's *good* at this-- he's good at kids and he's good at stories.

OWEN  
The hero had a giant...

Owen gets to his feet...

OWEN (CONT'D)  
...yellow...

Owen takes a step toward them, leaning forward...

OWEN (CONT'D)  
...*FLIPPER*!!!!

Every kid in the house **SCREAMS AND LAUGHS** as Owen flaps around them crazily, with one arm, at the climax of his crazy story, whatever the hell it was about...

CAMERA then FINDS Owen's sister-in-law **ROSE MILGRIM**, standing near the door, smiling and watching this go down. She steps out as the screaming fun continues and we CUT TO:

**INT. THE MILGRIM MANSION -- THE DINING ROOM -- LATER**

Owen's entire extended family -- parents, five brothers, five wives, about fifteen kids in all -- sit at a HUGE table in this lux NYC brownstone's dining room. The decor is modern and cool, and the family conversation is lively around Owen.

Owen is down at the end, right at the border between the grownups and the kids. He's still going, entertaining all the kids with big, expressive storytelling.

But it's clear. *That's* the end where he belongs. The kid's table. He's not allowed to be in the grownup conversation.

Owen glances toward the adults and makes quick eye-contact with his brother **JED's** wife Rose. She sees him, smiles and he smiles back. She's been watching.

Soon, though, she gets pulled back into the talking right beside her...

ROSE (PRELAP)  
(British accent)  
You're so good with them. I would seriously pay you that much to just be our fucking nanny.

OWEN (PRELAP)  
That would probably be a very bad idea. For a lot of reasons.

ROSE (PRELAP)  
What reasons?

**INT. THE MILGRIM MANSION -- THE KITCHEN -- LATER**

Owen and Rose sit in a breakfast nook of the kitchen, playing SKIP-BO. At the sink, the housekeeper **FRIDA** does dishes.

Rose pauses in order to hit her little VAPE PEN. Weed.

ROSE  
Want some?

OWEN  
My mother would Road House you if she saw you smoking that in here.

ROSE  
Oh, you're no fun anymore.  
(then)  
Besides, she can't tell.

Rose smiles, puts her vape away, plays a card.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
What reasons, though? Seriously.

OWEN  
I just meant that money and families gets complicated.  
(then)  
It's better to keep them separate.

ROSE  
But don't you think that's kind of an... unrealistic position?  
(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

Your family's rich. So they're never separate.

(then)

People with money talk like that.

OWEN

Maybe let's just not talk about it.

Rose looks at him, goes back to her cards.

ROSE

I'm sorry, I don't mean to... do that. I'm just stressed about the civil suit. All of it.

OWEN

He won the criminal, he'll totally win the civil, too.

She plays a card.

ROSE

It's all just so fucking... humiliating. You know?

(then)

*Frottage*. It sounds like a style of skiing.

OWEN

But he didn't do it. So...

Owen glances. Rose holds his gaze.

ROSE

You're positive, right? I mean I know you are, but you are... right?

(then)

You were with him? He wasn't even on the train.

Owen nods.

OWEN

Positive.

Owen keeps his eyes on her. A moment of empathy as he sees Rose is suddenly, deeply upset. But it ends there, as someone BACKS THROUGH the SWINGING DOOR and the sounds of MARVIN GAYE momentarily filter into the kitchen...

**PORTER MILGRIM**, holding a stack of dirty dishes, smiles at the two. He presents the plates to Frida.

PORTER  
More work for the wicked!  
(then, to Owen and Rose)  
How are you two?

And yes, we hear it. The voice we heard in the first scene. One of the voices "prepping" Owen: his dad.

OWEN  
Great. I actually needed to get a second with you before I head out.

PORTER  
Sure, son. I've gotta walk Colby. Everything okay?

OWEN  
Yeah, yeah. I just wanted to tell you I'm going to, uh, this little package trip to Hilton Head tomorrow. Because of the furlough.  
(then)  
For just three days. I'll be back for the deposition.

Porter stares at his son, squinting.

PORTER  
South Carolina?

Owen's mom ALICE comes in holding another stack of dishes.

ALICE  
Boys, come on. Come on! We need to get the table cleared so we can play.  
(to Owen)  
Owen, you're staying to play, aren't you?

OWEN  
I gotta go, actually. I have a--

ALICE  
You love Balderdash.

OWEN  
No I don't. I actually have fundamental problems with Balder--

PORTER  
Owen says he's going to Hilton Head tomorrow.

OWEN

Mom. I do not love Balderdash.

ALICE

Hilton Head? You're not going to Hilton Head tomorrow. With who?

OWEN

By myself. For a vacation.

ALICE

Owie, I don't think that's a good idea.

OWEN

Why isn't it a good idea?

ROSE

I think it's a great idea. I want to go to Hilton Head.

(to Porter)

What do you do in Hilton Head?

PORTER

What about your job?

OWEN

You seriously don't know about the furloughs? Even though I keep telling you about the furloughs?

ALICE

His *job* isn't the problem.

As she speaks, two of Owen's (very large) brothers -- JED AND MICHAEL -- come into the kitchen, followed by a line of about eight children, all of them marching, all of them chanting--

CHROUS OF MARCHING CHILDREN  
Ice cream! Ice cream! We  
want ice cream!

JED  
Yo. Mom. We playin'  
Balderdash or what?

Alice steps a little closer to her son.

ALICE

What if you have an episode? You can't be alone in another state.

OWEN

I've been fine for eight years and I was fine for twenty-two years before that. I--

CHROUS OF MARCHING CHILDREN  
*Ice cream! ice cream! We  
 want ice cream!*

OWEN (CONT'D)  
 I'm a grown man. I can go on  
 vacation if I want to go on  
 vacation.

Alice considers. Looks at him a beat or two.

ALICE  
 You know what? Easy. Your father  
 and I will come with you.

OWEN  
 Mom.

ALICE  
 (to Porter)  
 You can get off, right hon? Come  
 on, it'll be fun. We'll just hop  
 on the jet. Easy peasy.

OWEN  
 I am not taking my parents on  
 a private vacation.  
 (sotto)  
 I got a package deal.

MICHAEL  
 You guys going to Hilton  
 Head?

JED  
 (to Rose)  
 We should go! Right babe?  
 (then)  
 Sweet courses there. My HC is down  
 to bazilchy.

OWEN  
 I have to leave. I'm sorry. I  
 have to go. This house is making  
 me feel crazy.

Owen starts making his way through the children and others in  
 the kitchen, heading for the door.

ALICE  
 So you've decided against it?

OWEN  
 I don't know.

ALICE  
 And you're not playing Balderdash?

OWEN  
 I can't. Bye.



ALICE  
You love Balderdash.

Owen turns.

OWEN  
I DO NOT LIKE FUCKING BALDERDASH!

Suddenly the room is SILENT. Every kids stares.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
BALDERDASH IS PREMISED ON BULLSHIT.  
(then)  
DO THE PEOPLE IN THIS FAMILY NOT  
REALIZE WHY YOU ALL LIKE IT SO  
MUCH?

Owen's mom looks horrified. A couple kids are scared.  
Tearing up.

PORTER  
Come on, son. I'll walk you to the  
train.

Owen takes some breaths.

Old training to calm down when he loses it like this.

Everyone staring.

He grabs his stuff. Head down, heading out of the room--

OWEN  
Sorry. Sorry, Mom. Sorry you  
guys.  
(then)  
I just... don't like Balderdash.

**EXT. A MANHATTAN STREET -- NIGHT**

Owen and Porter walk down a side-street, both led by the  
family dog COLBY. Owen's got on his backpack.

PORTER  
... And so to me the whole thing  
amounted to an elaborate cost-  
benefit analysis. But of feelings.

OWEN  
I don't know what you're talking  
about.

PORTER  
(chuckling)  
Just outrageous behavior.

OWEN  
You're rambling because you're  
uncomfortable. About what I just  
did in there.

PORTER  
Absolutely not true, son.

OWEN  
Okay.

Porter glances over at Owen.

PORTER  
Son. Look, your mom and I are  
protective, I know, but if you--

OWEN  
Did you get me fired?

Porter stops, looks at him.

PORTER  
What?

OWEN  
Did you call some friend somewhere  
so I would get fired from my job?  
At Crebatech?  
(beat)  
Is this just some elaborate  
roundabout way you're doing it? To  
force me to move back home?  
(then)  
Not that I would have any reason to  
think you're capable of elaborate,  
roundabout, secret plans.

PORTER  
I had no idea you even got fired.  
And I don't know a single person at  
Crebatech. Do you want me to see  
if I can--

OWEN  
No.

PORTER

I can help get you set up somewhere else. I know that apartment's an expensive place to rent...

The two of them approach the subway stairs, slow down. Porter keeps rambling.

PORTER (CONT'D)

I don't know why you won't just let us *buy* the thing for you. At least then you'd have some security.

OWEN

Dad. I gotta say something.

Porter looks up.

PORTER

Okay.

OWEN

It feels like you getting me jobs, and you offering to buy apartments for me, is a way for you to get me to act how you want me to act.

(then)

And say what you want me to say.

This stops Porter in his tracks. It's not normal to hear Owen pushing back like this...

PORTER

Maybe you could be more explicit.

OWEN

You're paying me off to lie for Jed. In his trial.

Owen starts walking again, and Porter follows.

PORTER

The two things are entirely unrelated.

(then)

You're saying what you're saying -- and you said what you said at the criminal trial -- because we all know he's innocent. And getting pulled any deeper into this morass is bad for everyone. Rose. His kids. Us. The entire family.

(then)

(MORE)

PORTER (CONT'D)

Which is why you're going to say  
what you're going to say at the  
deposition on Friday.

OWEN

Right.

PORTER

Look, I know it's a little muddled,  
but this is how reality works.

OWEN

How's that, Dad?

PORTER

With adjustments.  
(then)  
For the sake of the truth.

Owen looks at him. Bullshit. And then--

**INT. A ROCKET SHIP -- 3030**

*Owen, inside a new part of his rocket, in anti-gravity, crab-crawls frantically along a steep chamber, eyeing a LIGHTED KEYPAD on a CLOSED DOORWAY. As he tries to make his way, a TUBE attached to his suit gets caught on a bank of gear on the wall, and it begins WHIPPING WILDLY in the anti-gravity, apparently shooting out some kind of GAS.*

*Behind him, two new ASTRONAUTS, both in sleek gray and black suits, grab at his ankles. And we see Owen's face as he tries to reach for that KEYPAD: he's suffocating.*

**INT. THE YALE-NEW HAVEN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL -- 2009**

*And he's suffocating because A COP has a CHOKEHOLD on Owen, who reaches back for the doors of the facility. Behind him, a gurnee is overturned and a PARAMEDIC nurses a BLOODY NOSE.*

*But the Cop has Owen now, and is not letting go. A SECOND COP runs into frame during the struggle, raising up a nightstick, aiming for Owen's head...*

**EXT. A MANHATTAN STREET -- NIGHT**

Owen looks at his father again. Nods.

OWEN

See ya, Dad.

PORTER

Hey. This Hilton Head thing is a joke, right? I wasn't really...  
(then)  
I couldn't tell if you were joking.

OWEN

Why can no one ever tell if I'm joking? I feel like I give really good, clear delivery signals.

PORTER

Why would a joke need a signal?

Porter's honestly confused. And we're realizing-- Owen's at a permanent communication impasse with EVERYONE, pretty much.

OWEN

I'm actually going. Three days. Special rate.

Porter accepts this at face value.

PORTER

If it's all the same to you, then, I think I will... lie to your mother about that. Call her while you're there, will ya? Just so she thinks you're still in the city?  
(then)  
And hey. Just do me a favor. Be safe. I know you can handle it.

Porter hugs him. Owen stands there.

OWEN

Great. Thank you. I'm 32.

PORTER

You *sure* good for money? For rent, bills, all of that?

Owen stops at the stairs. His dad.... never hears him.

OWEN

I'll figure something out.

**SMASH TO BLACK:**

The sounds of a subway station trickle in, along with a persistent **ROLL-CLICK, ROLL-CLICK, ROLL-CLICK...**

Here, then, is Owen figuring it out:

**EXT. NEBERDINE LABS BUILDING -- QUEENS -- DAY**

TIGHT ON the wheels of a ROLLING SUITCASE as it gets dragged up the last steps of a subway exit. The wheels continue to roll along the sidewalk until we PULL BACK and find--

**OWEN.** He stands looking at a nondescript fortress of a building somewhere on Steinway. **NEBERDINE LABS** -- we see the Triquera on the door. Queens life all around him. He holds the handle of the small roly suitcase at his side.

He's across the street from the building, and he stands looking at it for a beat.

He's about to cross when he glances to his right and sees something... weird. A couple of DUMPSTERS. Behind them, a **GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN.**

Dressed in a white lab coat, smoking a cigarette, holding a phone (as compact) up with one hand as she tries to arrange her hair in a TIGHT BUN with the other. There is a STRAND of **SILVER-PINK** hair in her bangs.

Owen squints, watching her, because there's something... familiar...

She turns, looks at him, skeeved by his stare.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN

What?

OWEN

Sorry, I... I thought I recognized you...

(beat)

From somewhere.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN

You don't.

Owen keeps staring.

OWEN

Excuse me. Sorry.

(a step)

Do you-- do you do ads? For, uh, golf vacations?

She looks again.

OWEN (CONT'D)

On the subway.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN

No. Go away.  
 (then)  
 I have a gun.

She drops her cigarette and goes back to her hair. Glances, sees Owen is still there.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'll kill you.

Owen chuckles. She keeps looking. Ha ha ha. Death threat.

OWEN

Oh. Cool. Sorry.

He looks for one last beat, then turns, heads across the street to Neberdine Labs.

**INT. NEBERDINE LABS -- THE WAITING ROOM -- LATER**

Owen sits at a chair in the waiting room, filling out a form on a clipboard. Seven or eight others are in here doing the same; all of them have bags or suitcases, too.

At the desk, a **RECEPTIONIST** behind the counter and glass wall deals with another patient. To the right of her is a large glass door with a **DIGITAL SECURITY LOCK**.

The entrance to the inner chambers of Neiberdine Labs.

Owen scratches at the form, then looks around the room. Assessing the other participants. [**Note: we'll meet many and flesh out many in Episode 103.**] In the corner, sleeping on three chairs, there appears to be a **HOMELESS MAN**. A few seats down there is a woman with Ally Sheedy levels of **CRAZY HAIR**, much of it covering her face. Next to Owen, a **VERY HANDSOME MAN** with his legs crossed.

The main doors to the street pop open, and Owen glances.

He watches as the Ginger-Haired Woman strides in, heads directly for the **SECURED DOOR**, and swipes a **SECURITY CARD** in front of the lock. Nothing happens.

She tries it again.

Nothing happens again.

No one else has really noticed this, but Owen continues to watch, intrigued.

She tries a third time. It fails again, and she turns and strides out of the room as though nothing at all happened.

After she goes, Owen turns to a VERY HANDSOME MAN beside him.

OWEN

Hey. Hi.

The Very Handsome Man glances.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Did you just see a woman-- like a sciencey lady-- walk in here and, uh...

Owen trails off as those main doors open up again. This time a GROUP OF SCIENTISTS, all of them in white lab coats, walk in together, chatting and laughing to themselves.

The Ginger-Haired Woman follows close behind. Chuckling, too. As though she's GLOMMED ON to their group.

Each member of the GROUP OF SCIENTISTS swipes a card as the door opens up and they walk through. The GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN swipes her card, too, laughing with them. She CATCHES THE DOOR and enters the lab...

...but not without one last look directly at Owen.

She disappears inside. And we RACK TO--

VERY HANDSOME MAN

I'm sorry, what?

Owen glances at the man.

RECEPTIONIST

(calling out to the room)

Owen Milgrim!

OWEN

(to the man)

Nothing. Uh. Sorry.

Owen gets up and goes to the desk. He puts his clipboard down and the Receptionist lays out a LANYARD, a FOLDER, and a PLASTIC CUP. As she does, a couple of ORDERLIES step into the waiting room. One takes Owen's suitcase and rolls it away, while the other stands beside Owen...

RECEPTIONIST

There's a few tests to run before you're officially enrolled in the ULP study, Mr. Milgrim.

(MORE)



RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Your recruiter will meet you when you're finished. Your signature guarantees that you are free to leave this facility at any time, but that leaving the facility constitutes a breach. Violating any of the rules laid out in the contract will constitute a breach, and a breach means you will not be paid. Do you understand?

OWEN

Sure. Yeah.

**INT. AN ELEVATOR -- NEBERDINE LABS -- LATER**

Owen rides an elevator with the Orderly. Owen watches watches the digital readout on the elevator move DOWNWARD: - 2, -3, -4, -5...

OWEN (V.O.)

I don't understand.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

What don't you understand?

A distinct CLICK.

OWEN (V.O.)

What's the question again?

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

What do you feel?

OWEN (V.O.)

Dread.

CLICK.

OWEN (V.O.)

Uhhh. Cuteness, I guess.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Try to answer with an emotion rather than a description.

**INT. NEBERDINE LABS -- EXAM ROOM -- LATER**

TIGHT ON a picture of a fuzzy, adorable kitten mid-leap, all four legs akimbo, eyes wide. It's on a FLATSCREEN.

OWEN (O.C.)  
Whose emotion?

Beside the screen, a **TECH** sits at a bank of monitors.

TECH  
I'm sorry?

OWEN (O.C.)  
Whose emotion? What people would  
feel or what the cat feels? In  
that moment?

REVEAL OWEN with a giant **COLANDER-SHAPED HELMET** on his head,  
hundred of wires sticking up and out of it, heading back  
toward a computer setup and a variety of instruments.

TECH  
What you feel. Looking at it.

OWEN  
Okay. Uh, calm.

The cat on the display becomes ADOLF HITLER. Easy, obvious:

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Anger, hatred.

CLICK. Adolf Hitler becomes a FAMILY OF FOUR around a dinner  
table, two parents and two kids, everyone happy and laughing.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Suffocation.

CLICK. The family becomes a NASA ROCKET taking off into the  
sky. Owen takes a beat. Finally--

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Glory.

The Tech types some notes into her machine. The picture  
stays as it is--

TECH  
Now, Mr. Milgrim, just concentrate  
on the picture as I ask you a  
series of questions. Please answer  
honestly. This is the last part.

OWEN  
Okay.

TECH  
Are you afraid of the dark?

OWEN

No.

TECH

Do you believe advanced civilizations exist somewhere else in the universe?

OWEN

I mean. I lean heavily toward the Fermi Paradox. Drake Equation people are usually ludicrous and desperate due to...

(off look)

...emotional reasons.

TECH

What?

OWEN

Sorry. No. I don't.

(then)

We're alone.

The Tech nods. Okay.

TECH

And since your recruiter approached you, has anyone attempted to steal your identity or pay you for false entry into this facility?

Owen looks for a beat.

OWEN

Uh, no.

(then)

Is that a problem you guys have?

TECH

Just answer, please.

OWEN

Sorry.

TECH

Last one.

(then)

Have you ever tried to take your own life?

PUSH IN on Owen as he stares at the rocket for a long time.  
*That question.*

That question goes back a very, very long way. It's possible no one's ever asked. It's possible he's just never said it. But for whatever reason, he's telling the truth today:

OWEN

Yes. One time.

Very little response from the Tech. Just typing.

TECH

Excellent. Thank you.

She types a last few keystrokes, and as she does, the door OPENS--

CHARLA BROOKS steps into the room, her TABLET clutched tight to her chest. Beaming.

Out in the hallway, Owen can see Charla has a couple people in tow-- that CRAZY HAIR woman and the HOMELESS MAN from the waiting room. They wait patiently...

CHARLA

Mr. Milgrim. How are you today?  
I'm so pleased you decided to join  
us for the study.

Owen blinks, looking at her.

OWEN

You got new glasses.

Charla instinctively touches her glasses, and we realize Owen is *right*, they are different. Bigger, bubblier. For the first time, Charla is *slightly* flustered.

CHARLA

I lost my primary pair. How are  
you?

OWEN

I'm... good. They just put me into  
this thing.

CHARLA

Of course. Standard blatholyzer.  
(then)  
Just some pre-screening.  
(to the tech)  
Are we done?

She glances at the Tech, who nods back at her. The Tech comes over and starts removing the huge helmet.

TECH  
 (to Owen)  
 You passed.

OWEN  
 Awesome.

CHARLA  
 Please. Owen. Come with us.

**INT. NEBERDINE LABS -- A LONG HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER**

Charla leads them down a long hallway, walking very fast as Owen and the others try to keep up.

OWEN  
 Do you know if they're going to give us our suitcases back? I didn't know they were gonna go through them. I have kind of a special old memento in there and I just wanna be sure...

CHARLA  
 It'll be waiting in your room after the orientation.

Owen glances down another LONG hallway and sees a huge gray door at the end of it. A large inverted **TRIQUERO** SYMBOL is painted on the door of different elevators.

OWEN  
 What's down there?

CHARLA  
 Please try to keep up.

Owen hustles to keep up, moving past Crazy Hair, who is somehow walking okay with her eyes covered.

But neither Owen, Charla, or the Homeless Man notice, then, when Crazy Hair **DARTS** into a doorway, disappears, and immediately a SECOND CRAZY HAIR woman pops back out into the hall and hustles to catch up.

Hair still down over her face. But that hair-- it's a slightly *different* shade.

**It's ginger.**

Someone else just jumped in to this procession.

Owen glances. Looks away. Glances again, this time staring. Then starts to realize who it is...

She won't turn to look. They all keep walking.

**INT. NEBERDINE LABS -- ENTRANCE TO LAB C -- MOMENTS LATER**

A long glass wall separates the hallway from the foyer of Laboratory C, the self-contained living space where all 20 of the participants of this study will be living for the next 3 days. You'll learn *much* more about it soon.

Participants are queued up at the entranceway, and at the door, a **SCIENTIST** checks people's lanyards and credentials. A couple other recruiters, including the sleek **JOHNSON COPATONE**, linger near the door, chatting. Johnson glances up as Charla's three recruits line up.

JOHNSON  
Charla! Only *three*?

CHARLA  
Three excellent candidates.

JOHNSON  
Where'd you find 'em? Dumpster diving out in the alley?

Charla absorbs this with dignity, glances at Owen.

CHARLA  
Excuse me.

She heads over to the other recruiters near the doorway, leaving Owen and the Ginger-Haired Woman at the end of the line together. Owen at the very back.

OWEN  
(whispering)  
Hey. I know what you're doing. I saw you sneaking in.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN  
(whispering, over her shoulder)  
So fucking what? Shut up.

OWEN  
I don't know if you're some kind of pharmacological corporate spy or drug fiend or whatever but I--

She spins around. Moves her hair out of her face. Takes Owen by the hands. Looks him in the eye.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN

Please.

This is the first time Owen has really seen her. Looked closely. And he is transfixed. Like he recognizes her, or knows her from somewhere beyond that advertisement. He's frozen by her touch and by her gaze.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN (CONT'D)

You can't possibly understand this, but I have to get inside there. I have to get in without them recognizing me. I'll explain everything to you when we're inside, I promise. But I need you to help me now...

(then)

Owen.

Owen's eyes go wider as she holds his gaze one more beat. SHE KNOWS HIS NAME. But then again, it's written on that lanyard around his neck. But he's transfixed. Because--

**INT. A ROCKET SHIP -- 3030**

Owen's finger TAPS OUT a code on that Keypad-- a Keypad whose colored squares are reminiscent of a Rubik's Cube-- as the men behind him pull and he loses the last of his oxygen...

**INT. THE YALE-NEW HAVEN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL -- 2009**

Owen, clearly sedated now, sits in a large chair staring at the wall. PUSHING IN on him as we go back to--

**INT. A ROCKET SHIP -- 3030**

SPACE. Owen manages to COMPLETE the code, and a circular doorway DILATES open, revealing a woman sitting at a computer console. She turns to look at him. Her hair floats up above her head in anti-gravity.

The same ginger hair. The same woman.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN

Help me.

*But how-- how could Owen have hallucinated her TEN YEARS AGO? Before he ever MET her? And just like that, the door slams CLOSED. The man behind him pull him away...*

**INT. NEBERDINE LABS -- ENTRANCE TO LAB C -- MOMENTS LATER**

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN  
Please. Owen. Help me.

Owen blinks.

OWEN  
That was you. In space.

We see the Ginger-Haired Woman try to process that. Maybe she doesn't get it, and maybe she's talking to a crazy person right now, but she sees an advantage. And takes it--

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN  
Yes. Yes it was.

OWEN  
Who are you?

She glances to the door. Looks back.

GINGER-HAIRED WOMAN  
You have to help. Now.  
(then)  
Will you help?

Owen stares another beat.

OWEN  
Sure.

She nods, spins back around. As the line moves forward, Owen sees that Charla and Johnson stand on either side of the line, bickering the participants step through.

The Homeless Man steps to the doorway, leaving the Ginger-Haired Woman right between Charla and Johnson.

CHARLA  
(to Johnson)  
That was an anomaly.

JOHNSON  
(to Charla)  
I think you're slipping.



CHARLA  
(to Johnson)  
All you have to do is look at the  
roster to see I've consistently--

Charla breaks off, squinting at the side of the Ginger-Haired Woman's mop. **As though she sees something is not right...**

OWEN  
Excuse me, Ms. Brooks?

Charla glances back at Owen. One last glance at the Ginger-Haired Woman, then again at Owen.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
I just wanted to say how glad I am.  
To have the opportunity.  
(then)  
To be a hero. Like you said.

Charla smiles. The distraction worked. Ahead, the Ginger-Haired Woman steps into Lab C. Owen hands his Lanyard to the Scientist at the door.

CHARLA  
Of course. It's my job, Owen.  
(then)  
Now go do yours.

The Scientist hands back Owen's lanyard, gestures for him to walk inside. Owen looks into the lab, where twenty patients are milling around, finding their luggage, getting ready to begin the study. Owen spots the Ginger-Haired Woman.

OWEN  
I'll try.

He steps into the lab. And the CAMERA PULLS BACK, away from the glass doorway as it swings closed, sealing the patients into the facility as we...

**SMASH TO CREDITS**