

CAPITOL

"Origin"

by

Alexander Bradley

8300 Osage Terrace
Adelphi, MD 20783
(301) 789-5425

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CAPITOL

"Origin"

ACT ONE

OVER BLACK, SOMBER, PATRIOTIC MUSIC. CUT TO:

GRANDFATHER'S EYES

Ice blue, glaring. This old man's gaze pierces through us to some abomination beyond.

PULL BACK to show more of this man's craggy features, set in a grim frown. He wears a steel gray military officer's uniform studded with stars, medals and Masonic regalia.

This is the hero of Capitol, REYNOLD CEPHAS, known to all as GRANDFATHER. He commands respect.

Then, long, silky eyelashes sprout from flinty eyes, under teal eye shadow. Cheeks bloom with rouge. Lips sparkle with cherry red lip-gloss. Iron gray hair becomes long enough to be gathered into pigtails by bright yellow ribbons.

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY CLOISTER - DAY

SIMON CHAO, 19, with Chinese features and a lopsided grin, overlooks a multi-level courtyard where students bustle under the gaze of Grandfather. He wears I-Shādz™, interactive sunglasses. His head darts around like a bird's.

SIMON'S P.O.V.

The red banner depicting Grandfather is draped on a high, marble-white wall. Digital paint tools float at the edges of the screen. A cursor picks a flower-print sundress from a menu and drags it onto Grandfather's uniform, replacing it.

Then the cursor paints a signature backslash: "\"

BACK TO SCENE

Simon nods happily and winks to upload his artwork to the Datanet, so that everyone with I-Shādz can enjoy his work.

The immaculate white cloister walls are draped in black and scarlet. Simon's effects are not visible without the shades.

Most students don't wear I-Shādz. Of those that do, a few grin, laugh, or whoop when they look at the banner. More of them look shocked and whip the offending glasses off.

One of the latter is a lovely girl with Middle Eastern features, named MIRI PEARL, 21.

MIRI'S P.O.V.

She double-checks the effect by raising and lowering the glasses in front of the banner, then snorts in disgust.

BACK TO SCENE

Miri continues towards class when a gaggle of girls bowls her over. They crowd around an Aryan masterpiece named DAVOT KENILWORTH, 20, asking inane questions about Deathball.

DAVOT

Hola, Miri! Sorry, are you okay?

MIRI

Sure, yesi, fine. Nothing broken this time. Ha ha!

Davot muscles past the girls to help her up and gather her things. A chime tolls the hour.

DAVOT

(to the gaggle)

I'll catch up with you all later.
I have to get to class.

The girls wave, wide-eyed, as he walks away with Miri.

GIRLS

So that's Davot Kenilworth! He's
cute in person! He is mine! (etc.)

Simon finds a column to slink behind until Davot and Miri pass, then sneaks up to dog their steps.

To one side, fluted columns overlook the courtyard. The opposite wall holds vending panels and ads, but mostly vidscreens starring sexy artificial media anchor NEWSIA.

MIRI

What possessed a Kenilworth to descend from on high, anyway? I mean it's one thing slumming in our classes remotely, but now you're staying in the dorm?

DAVOT

My parents have a rather large penthouse up in Arcadia...

MIRI

Yesi, exactly my point!

DAVOT

And yet it's not big enough to escape from my parents.

MIRI

Ah.

DAVOT

Besides, some things make it worth the personal interaction...

Simon blunders into them as they slow down. Miri yelps.

SIMON

Whoa, watch where you're going!

MIRI

You scared the life out of me! Why do you have to do that?

SIMON

If I had to do it, it wouldn't be fun. Why are you so twitchy, Miri?

MIRI

Things just seem to be jumping on me out of nowhere today.

DAVOT

Do you need something, Simon?

Simon pretends he hadn't seen Davot and apes Miri's yelp.

SIMON

Where'd you come from, Colosso?

MIRI

See what I mean?

DAVOT

I blame it on Newsia's cheery demeanor. For an objective computer construct, she sure harps on the bad news.

SIMON

Well of course today there's going to be bad news. Psychos and nut jobs always come out of the woodwork on Grandfather Day.

MIRI

Case in point.

SIMON

Be--hey, what?!

They turn a corner, into the tower complex, leaving us to watch a vidscreen. An ad for "Kelpeez" ends and fades out.

ON VIDSCREEN

Title: "JULY 3, 2045"

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. NATIONAL MALL (2045) - DAY

Reconstructed video of a generic newscaster interviewing a "man in the street," who is dressed for very warm weather.

NEWSCASTER #1

Would you say this heat is related to the increased number of natural disasters in recent years?

MAN IN THE STREET

Definitely, man. If I wasn't--

Solid white light flares off camera, throwing the scene into stark black and white. The view jerks and goes white.

EXT. GEORGETOWN (2045) - DAY

Reconstructed video of a different news team.

NEWSCASTER #2

Test, test. The strain of world
politics is being put to the test
as China's refusal to withdraw--

The light turns purple and the camera jerks erratically.

NEWSCASTER #2 (CONT'D)

Did you feel that? Was that an
earthqua--

The camera locks in on shockwave-borne debris coming straight
at it, which slams the camera to static.

EXT. GREAT FALLS PARK (2045) - DAY

Reconstructed video with time code records a cute young woman
dressed for kayaking, looking at the waters below.

BOYFRIEND (O.S)

Can you believe they want to
develop this place?

GIRLFRIEND

I know! Where will our kids--?

Another flash of light. The view drops to the ground.

GIRLFRIEND (O.S.)

What was that?

BOYFRIEND (O.S)

Oh God. Oh no. Don't look.

The view slowly rises to focus on something distant.

GIRLFRIEND (O.S)

Don't look at what?

As the camera tries to focus on a vision of Armageddon, the
girl screams bloody genocide. Washington D.C. is engulfed in
multiple mushroom clouds, with more missiles on the way.

The picture breaks up in chunky pixels.

Title: "CAPITOL"

Subtitle: "Origin"

SATELLITE P.O.V. - WASHINGTON D.C. (2045)

Expanding circles of light blossom on the satellite image of the capital of the United States. A calm, even, feminine voice narrates. This is the voice of NEWSIA.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

July third, twenty forty-five. For billions, it was the end of the world. But for us, it was only the end of the old world.

EXT. RUINS OF WASHINGTON D.C. (2052) - NIGHT

Bone-colored ribs of supersteel sketch a future dome rising from the ashes of the metropolis. Falling flakes of snow-like fallout soften the scene to a holiday postcard.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

For there were others who lived, who chose to rebuild atop the ashes, defying the craven Sinoviet regime who would have us live in terror in holes in the ground, if they would have us live at all.

INT. APOCALYPSE MUSEUM - DAY

The ruins of Washington D.C. are preserved beneath Capitol, eerily illuminated by powerful spotlights. Only the Washington Monument has been restored as a cenotaph.

An observation platform hovers above the ruins and forms the base of a cavernous hall decorated with giant banners and vidscreens that replay history.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

So on this anniversary of the Apocalypse, while we mourn those lost forever to history...

EXT. CAPITOL - DAY

Lavish "Hyperclassical" architecture: soaring columns, pediments and arches. Flying vehicles sparkle in the sun.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

We also celebrate the hundredth anniversary of our great citadel...

EXT. MINISTRY TOWER - DAY

The Ministry Tower is the colossal central support for the dome. Banners flank a platform where Grandfather orates.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

...and the vision of Reynold Cephas, the man we have come to know affectionately as "Grandfather."

EXT. ARCADIA - DAY

Heavenly golden light paints domes, cupolas, and pyramids capping towers at the top of the city. Newsia appears, beautifully framed in this futuristic Vermeer masterpiece.

NEWSIA

This is Newsia, saying: Citizens, take heart, for you live! And take pride, for you live... in Capitol!

EXT. FOUNDRY LEVELS - MINISTRY RECRUITMENT CENTER - DAY

The background shifts to a burning M.O.G. recruitment center at the bottom of the city. Acid rain sizzles in the fire.

NEWSIA

On to our top story. Riots in the Foundry levels reached a new peak today, with gangs now brazenly vandalizing Ministry of Governance recruitment centers. No one has claimed responsibility for these attacks, which leads some to believe the escalation is the work of the criminal Datarchist hacker known only as "Asterisk."

Footage of ASTERISK, a computer generated avatar, appears next to Newsia. It looks like tribal war paint made of neon light, suggesting an asterisk (*). The voice is garbled.

ASTERISK

Make no mistake, this is a war.
The MOG must answer for stripping
us of our inherent liberties.

NEWSIA

Asterisk's location is unknown.

EXT. GALLERIA LEVELS - CHURCH OF ATONEMENT - DAY

In commercial levels of the city, video billboards for everything imaginable compete for attention. A church façade is splashed with graffiti: "GOD IS DEAD. GET OVER IT."

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

Up next, the growing influence of
the Church of Kingdom Come has
some citizens on edge. But first a
word from this segment's sponsors.
This is Newsia.

COMMERCIAL - "DREAM SEEDS"

An ad for hallucinogenic pills that enhance dreams is interrupted by an inset panel showing PROFESSOR ABIGAIL MALCOLM. She is over 100, kept alive by ugly cybernetics.

PROF. MALCOLM

Mr. Chao, the question was
addressed to you.

A cursor selects the panel, which expands to fill frame:

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - DAY

SIMON CHAO P.O.V.

The cursor selects a playback feature and Malcolm rewinds.

PROF. MALCOLM

What office would one appeal a
legal decision to? Simon?

A byzantine map of the Ministry bureaucracy superimposes the scene. The correct answer zooms up from a messy corner: "Office of Judicial Inquiry - Citizen Plaintiff Division."

LECTURE HALL

Simon in his I-Shādz. Miri and Davot sit nearby, among others present both physically and remotely by video feed.

SIMON

That would be the Office of Judicial Inquiry, Citizen Plaintiff Division. Unless you have ties to a Minister, in which case you'd appeal to the Bureau of Nepotism, which usually gets better results.

A very few students snicker. Most gasp and murmur.

PROF. MALCOLM

This class is not a requirement if you are pursuing a career as a comedian, Mr. Chao. Are you sure you want to be here?

SIMON

Yes, Professor Malcolm.

PROF. MALCOLM

Then use your brain, Simon, not your Wizipedia. One day you may need to do without the latter.

Simon steals a grin at Davot and Miri, who are not amused.

PROF. MALCOLM (CONT'D)

And who may not apply to this office? Yes, Ms. Pojano?

FEMALE NERD

Mandatory recruits to the Ministry Security Force.

PROF. MALCOLM

Very good. And what manner of crime merits that sentence?

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY CLOISTER - DAY

An electronic carillon sounds from a bell tower. Students pour into the courtyard.

INT. DORMITORY HALLWAY - DAY

Simon and Miri hang back as Davot tries to get past a crowd of fans to his room. The door is decorated with adoring love notes, which he snatches up with a sigh before going in.

MIRI

Life is tough being famous.

SIMON

Could be fun!

MIRI

Yuck. So, uh, what are you doing this tardes-break?

SIMON

Playin' me some "Mutagen!" You?

MIRI

Oh, I thought I'd watch a storia. I'd ask if you wanted to come..

SIMON

Nah, have fun!

MIRI

Sure! You too. Vista!

Simon doesn't notice Miri's disappointment as she leaves. He gathers courage to wade into the crowd at Davot's door.

SIMON

Hola ladies! Coming through!

INT. DAVOT AND SIMON'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Half the room is immaculate, the other has electronic crap and geek paraphernalia all over it. Davot sits at a monitor, speaking to his mother, CORAL KENILWORTH, 50s. He worries at a bulky Ministry signet ring on his finger.

CORAL

You know how we feel about that barbaric sport and now you expose yourself on that campus? Do you have any idea what could happen to you there? The risks you take?

Simon comes in and shuts the door behind him.

DAVOT

Gotta go, mom. There's a match this tardes. You should come!

CORAL

I don't know why I bother! When they fish you out of the sewer, then you'll wish you'd listened!

DAVOT

Bye mom. Thanks for calling.

Davot hangs up and starts changing clothes. Simon chuckles.

SIMON

Fish you out of the sewer? Wow.

DAVOT

I should know better than to check my messages. I should just put a boot through that damn monitor.

SIMON

Just don't put it through my half.

DAVOT

Oh yeah. Sorry! This arrangement takes some getting used to.

Simon tries to ignore Davot's perfect torso but fails.

SIMON

I know what you mean. Did you say you have a match this tardes?

DAVOT

At sixteen. Why, you want to come?

SIMON

Would they have me up there?

DAVOT

As long as you don't mouth off the kinds of things you said in class, it should be no problem.

SIMON

Ohh-kay. No really, I'll be good.

DAVOT

I better get ready. Hey, why don't you invite Miri, too?

SIMON

I think she's busy... but I'll ask.

INT. MIRI'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Miri compares her face to a photo of MIRI'S MOTHER on her mirror. She pulls at features she doesn't like. She sighs and reaches for a sheet of pills, when the door chimes.

Miri scrambles to hide evidence of the pills.

MIRI

It's open!

Simon appears at the door, and Miri instantly brightens.

SIMON

Hola, Ms. Pearl! How do you feel about Deathball?

MIRI

(cheerfully)

It's unnecessarily violent and disgusting, and should have died with old D.C. Why do you ask?

SIMON

Okay, I told Davot you probably wouldn't want to come. Vista!

MIRI

Are you going?

INT. BELTWAY TAXI - TRAVELING - DAY

Davot, Miri and Simon float in an autopiloted car on a magnetic beltway. They ascend past vidscreens and offices.

MIRI

Well, we should probably honor old traditions on Grandfather Day.

The taxi provides audio for Newsia on vidscreens outside.

NEWSIA (O.S.)

This is Newsia.

ON VIDSCREEN

Security cameras capture a grubby terrorist planting a bomb on a giant atmosphere filter in an industrial chamber.

NEWSIA

A severe crisis was averted when security cameras captured a terrorist attempting to bomb Capitol's atmosphere scrubbers, potentially poisoning the air for a significant portion of the city.

Stock footage shows a messy hive of shacks made of scrap, built up on the face of the lofty inner walls of the city.

NEWSIA

Ministry officials suspect this terrorist gained access to the city's infrastructure by way of the poorly monitored shanty communities on the southeast Wall.

BACK TO SCENE

All three riders react to the story mutely.

NEWSIA (O.S.)

Winter Malachite, a member of the Earth's Angels faction, claimed responsibility for the attack, defending the group's policy of environmental defense.

ON VIDSCREEN

In any era, WINTER MALACHITE, 45, would be called a hippie. He holds a faded green sign reading "REMEMBER GREEN?"

WINTER MALACHITE

Mother Earth is trying to heal the injuries we have inflicted upon her - and if we become extinct in the process, she won't care! Until you start to restore the world that gave you life, we must act as the agents of her revenge!

BACK TO SCENE

DAVOT

I can't believe they're still a legitimate faction. That is terrorism, plain and simple, and we should shut them down.

MIRI

That's one way to do it. They're just misguided. If they only thought of who they really hurt...

SIMON

If they love Mother Earth so much, why don't they leave the dome? Problem solved!

DAVOT

If only it were that easy.

MIRI

They almost got to the atmosphere scrubbers! What if they got to the algae farms? Or the cisterns? Every day someone gets closer.

SIMON

Thanks, Newsia, for another cheery thought of the day. I liked it better when Grandfather was still alive. Now that's a face that could deliver bad news!

DAVOT

What do you mean, still alive?

SIMON

C'mon, you don't actually believe the Geezer is still a real person? He'd be, like, two hundred.

MIRI

What difference does it make if he's dead? It's what he still stands for that matters.

DAVOT

You too? Faithless traitors!

MIRI

Who's faithless? Maybe I trust in a higher power than Grandpa.

SIMON

Hey, I'm just joking around. It's a holiday, Davy. Loosen up.

DAVOT

Fine, but think about the people who had to haul civilization back from the brink and maybe show them some respect.

EXT. BELTWAY TAXI - TRAVELING - DAY

The taxi takes a gently curving exit through magnetic field generators and comes to rest at a bustling taxi station.

INT. DEATHBALL ARENA - DAY

An elliptical arena the size of the Roman Coliseum. Davot escorts Miri and Simon to a private box of seats in the very front. He uses his signet ring to unlock the door.

SIMON

Are you kidding me?!

DAVOT

If my folks shows up, you'll have to leave, but I wouldn't worry.

MIRI

What a... great... view.

Miri has noticed some blood on a plexiglass barrier.

DAVOT

I have to go change now.

SIMON

This is great, Davot! Uh, I'm
sorry I was such a donk.

DAVOT

It's forgotten. Wish me luck!

Miri and Simon sit. Newsia speaks on a Jumbotron.

NEWSIA

This is Newsia, with a declaration
from Grandfather Cephas.

Grandfather's face fills the screen, aged and stern.

GRANDFATHER

It is with resolve and regret that
I must declare that, due to the
actions of the Earth's Angels
faction, having threatened the
well-being of law-abiding citizens
of Capitol, from this moment they
no longer possess legal status and
are considered terrorists to be
eradicated with extreme prejudice.

SIMON

You see, he knows how to deliver
bad news that sounds bad!

MIRI

How can you joke about that?

SIMON

How can I not? How many terrorist
groups have been eradicated with
mild equanimity, much less extreme
prejudice? He's a toothless
puppet.

Simon dangles his arms like a puppet and acts toothless.

SIMON

I beplare bem perrorisps!

Miri snorts with laughter but stifles it, darting looks around to see if anyone saw her.

MIRI

Stop that, Simon! We're in Ministry territory up here. You don't want to get picked up and rehabilitated. Believe me.

SIMON

I've never even been habilitated, how could they do it again?

MIRI

Just trust me on this.

SIMON

Fine, fine. You want some Kelpeez?

Simon fiddles with a vending panel in the box.

MIRI

I think you need to be a Kenilworth.

Simon produces two packets of the candy, easy as pie.

SIMON

You don't see the resemblance?

MIRI

You don't know when to quit! When they finally get you, don't say I didn't warn you.

SIMON

You know your problem? You don't appreciate the needs of right now.

Deathball players emerge in the arena, in pads and helmets. Each one wears different colors, like medieval heraldry.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hola, it's starting.

MIRI

Which one's Davot?

SIMON

That tall black and red one.

Players huddle towards the center expectantly.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Citizens of Capitol, welcome to
the Omnicorp Coliseum and the
sector semifinal of DEATHBALL!

Thunderous cheers from all the bloodthirsty aristocrats.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

The best players in Georgetown
Sector are assembled today to
prove they have what it takes to
survive this WORLD OF PAIN! So I
hope you've said your farewells,
because it ALL STARTS NOW!

Ecstatic cheers as a ball drops from the Jumbotron. The athletes rip and kick at each other to get to the ball. The rules are simple but brutal: wrest the ball from the other players to keep it for yourself. It gets bloody quickly, with plenty of kicking, punching, biting, and breaking.

Davot excels at it, avoiding excessive damage but quick to deliver a low blow.

Solicitors wander the aisles, pestering big spenders for their business. Among these are bald robed acolytes of the Church of Kingdom Come, handing out free literature.

Simon is absorbed in the game, but Miri politely accepts a pamphlet. The acolytes have friendly, smiling eyes.

MIRI

Thanks, I'll read it later.

SIMON

Huh?

They are distracted by a bone-crushing pile-up in front of them that Davot caused, but eluded. New blood spatters up.

MIRI
Delightful.

The round ends. Davot's name is on the scoreboard with the fourth longest time. Davot pumps a fist for his friends, and Round Two starts when unconscious players are dragged off.

MONTAGE:

- A) The relatively unwounded players left play harder.
- B) Miri spends more time looking at Simon than the game.
- C) Round Two scoreboard: Davot has climbed the ranks.
- D) Only five people play round three, and they're exhausted.
- E) The audience starts to get antsy and bored.
- F) Davot spin kicks and breaks another player's leg.
- G) Simon goes wild, Miri barely musters up a golf clap.
- H) Davot holds the ball. Two gasping opponents circle him warily. The bell rings.
- I) Davot's name is on top of the scoreboard!

INT. DEATHBALL ARENA - LOCKER ROOM ENTRANCE - DAY

Miri and Simon applaud as a battered Davot limps out.

SIMON
Brillig, Davot! On to the finals!

Amid the hubbub of fans cheering emerging players, a few rich punks shove two serene Kingdom Come acolytes around.

MIRI
What are you doing?

BRAWNY RICH PUNK
Minding our own business, and you?

SIMON
So there's profit to be had in abusing defenseless monks?

WEASELLY RICH PUNK

What's a ching-chong doing here?

BRAWNY RICH PUNK

Couldn't be. A ching-chong would know the profit in a pre-emptive strike on the innocent!

Simon wishes he had the balls to hit this guy.

MIRI

Now relax, boys. Your blood is a little high after this stu--this match. You just need to cool off!

WEASELLY RICH PUNK

They let anyone up here now!

BRAWNY RICH PUNK

I think I know when my blood is high, Foundling.

He backhands her into Davot's arms.

BRAWNY RICH PUNK (CONT'D)

Oh, I guess it is!

Davot's fist finds its way to the punk's eye socket, and a brawl ensues. Miri wipes her nose and flees. Simon doesn't fight so much as get in the way of fists and knees. Davot would do better if it were before the match. The brawl gets messier and bigger as more bystanders are drawn in.

Suddenly blinding emergency lights stab down.

BOOMING VOICE

THIS IS A PUBLIC DISTURBANCE.
REMAIN STILL FOR PROCESSING.

Out of nowhere black-armored police arrive to arrest everyone. They are much less gentle than the brawlers.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. DEATHBALL ARENA - LOCKER ROOM ENTRANCE - DAY

An overhead security camera view of the brawl underway.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

A disturbance took place this
tardes at the Omnicorp Coliseum
following the Georgetown Sector
Semifinal Deathball match. An
eyewitness report claims members
of the Church of Kingdom Come were
an inciting factor.

INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

Miri, Davot and Simon share a cell with a few others, cuffed
to steel bars. They watch themselves on the vidscreen.

NEWSIA (O.S.)

One of the participants was the
winner of the match, Davot
Kenilworth, son of the Minister of
Agriculture, Jonatan Kenilworth.

DAVOT

Oh, wonderful. Thanks, Newsia.

ON VIDSCREEN

Newsia closes out the story over a generic background.

NEWSIA

And now a word from this segment's
sponsors. This is Newsia.

COMMERCIAL - "FLUME SHOWER GEL"

A showering girl turns to smile at the camera. It's Miri.

BACK TO SCENE

SIMON

You're the eyewitness?

MIRI

Hey, look, I'm on video! If only I had a shower cubicle like that.

SIMON

Do you even use Flume Shower Gel?

MIRI

Maybe. What was I supposed to do, Simon? Let you get trampled?

A booking officer at an observation window hits the intercom.

BOOKING OFFICER

Where's Davot Kenilworth?

DAVOT

Right here, officer.

The officer enters and undoes Davot's cuffs.

DAVOT

Are you moving me?

BOOKING OFFICER

I'm releasing you. Sorry for the mix-up, sir.

Simon wants to remark, but Miri elbows him soundly.

DAVOT

Well, that's cleared up. But what about my friends? If you check the surveillance you'll see they had nothing to do with the brawl.

The officer has heard that before, but what can he say?

BOOKING OFFICER

I just checked it myself. You're absolutely right, sir.

The officer frees Miri and Simon with a suspicious glare.

INT. TOWER ELEVATOR - DAY

Davot, Simon and Miri descend from the uppermost Arcadia levels to the extended shopping concourses and plazas of the Galleria levels. The view from the elevator is stunning.

SIMON

What did I say about the Bureau of Nepotism?

DAVOT

I knew I should have left you there.

MIRI

Show some gratitude, Simon! We could have been expelled for getting arrested.

SIMON

What, I'm grateful! In fact, let me thank you. Coffee? On me.

INT. JAVALOTL CAFÉ - DAY

An Aztec-themed café with the best fake coffee in Capitol. Davot drinks it black out of a pint-sized bowl. Miri mixes hers with cocoa and cinnamon. Simon has the fancy special.

SIMON

I got us some crème brûlees, too. Man, I love this place.

MIRI

Me too. All is forgiven.

DAVOT

I can't believe it's algae!

SIMON

(to his frothacchino)

Shh, I won't let him talk to you that way. Shame on you, Davot.

MIRI

I'm impressed, Simon. Standing up for the innocent.

DAVOT

Even when it does start a riot.

SIMON

Are we still talking about coffee?

DAVOT

You're all right, Simon.

MIRI

So are you, Deathball Hero. I guess this time I was as mouthy as Simon, in the wrong place.

SIMON

Nah, nowhere close, but thanks for backing me up.

Davot unconsciously twiddles his ring.

DAVOT

It shouldn't have come to that.
The air is too thin up in Arcadia.

SIMON

You came down to us just in time.

DAVOT

But, why did those Kingdom Come crazies have to show up? They set people off wherever they go.

MIRI

Don't tell me you're one of those anti-religious types.

DAVOT

Well, no, but religion does have a lot to answer for.

MIRI

So Kingdom Come is accountable? It hasn't been around long enough to cause any trouble. Not like that Asterisk and his "Datarchists." Seems like he's been raising hell as long as I can remember.

SIMON

Yesi, but only where they could use a little hell, where they've gotten too high and holy.

MIRI

You're just partial because you dabble in data hacking or whatever it is he does yourself. But he's not a legend, he's a terrorist.

DAVOT

It's true.

A bell chimes and Simon gets up to fetch their order.

SIMON

I'll tell you who the real terrorists are. The MOG. Did you see those scarabs rush us like we were mass murderers? I won't lie, I pooped myself a little.

DAVOT

You really won't rest until you've talked yourself into Pentacle Prison, will you?

Simon returns with three bowls of hideous brown muck.

SIMON

Speaking of poo... looks like the Metroproles have gotten into the food mixers again.

MIRI

Ha! Now they're the real threat to Capitol! Eww!

DAVOT

Heh... um, the who?

MIRI

You've never heard of the Metroproles?

SIMON

The rats in the basement?

DAVOT

What, from the Foundry Levels?

SIMON

Roaches under it, then. In the corpse of old D.C. Outcasts who fall through the cracks, or get squeezed through by the teeming masses in Capitol.

MIRI

They say they climb up the pipes and mess with the works all over the city.

DAVOT

Oh, the wall gremlins? That's just a bedtime story.

SIMON

Well, somebody pooped in our crème brulee.

INT. MAGLEV TUBE CAR - TRAVELING

Davot, Miri and Simon ride a tube train. Ads and vidscreens of Newsia replace windows and compete with riders' babble. There are regular stops every minute when riders change.

DAVOT

Do you ever wonder whether there might be someone behind Newsia, influencing her reports?

MIRI

First of all, Newsia's an "it," and no. I mean, reports can be influenced by eyewitnesses or faction statements, but the construct itself is just a fancy database. Right, Simon?

SIMON

Thirteen.

MIRI

He must be online again. You'll rot your brain with those I-Shādz!

SIMON

Okay.

MIRI

Useless. Anyway, that's what the experts say about it.

DAVOT

I was just wondering. I mean, every second of the day we're bombarded by news that says the world is getting worse. And yet statistically it can't be that bad because nothing bad happens to eighty percent of Capitol.

MIRI

Last year you could have said ninety percent. It is getting worse.

DAVOT

But part of that must be the influence of having this on all the time, everywhere! Just think of what a difference it might make if Newsia reported on the good things that happen?

MIRI

Well, anyone can report to Newsia. If you have such good news, why don't you call it in?

DAVOT

Maybe I will!

MIRI

Okay, do it!

Davot steels himself and taps a Newsia vidscreen. Half the screen fills with Newsia over a generic background.

NEWSIA

This is Newsia. Would you like to report an incident?

DAVOT

Yes. This is Davot Kenilworth. I'd like to report that I'm happy to be attending Tour D'Ivoire University in person because I got to meet Miri Pearl.

MIRI

What is that?

DAVOT

For the record, she's smart and beautiful and worth all the harassment I get from my parents.

He taps the screen again, ending the report.

MIRI

You are ridiculous! How long before Newsia shames you in front of the whole city?

DAVOT

I'm not ashamed. It's true.

MIRI

You realize you're going to make a million screaming fans kill themselves if you hook up with me.

DAVOT

That's probably how Newsia will spin it. Let's see.

On the vidscreen, Newsia presents a smoking elevator shaft.

NEWSIA

Automated alarms have detected tampering that has led to the shutdown of the central elevator in the Midastech stack. An anonymous reporter claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of the Metroproletariat.

DAVOT

We were just talking about them!

MIRI

Creepy! Hey Simon, you won't believe this...

Simon keeps staring in space. A coughing middle-class rider across from him looks irritated by Simon's staring.

NEWSIA

And now a word from the Ministry of Governance. This is Newsia.

On screen, Davot appears in front of a recruitment center.

ARTIFICIAL DAVOT

Hello, I'm Davot Kenilworth. When I'm taking a break from Deathball, I take pride in doing my part for our fair city. The Ministry of Governance needs people like you!

DAVOT

What? They used my face without airing my report?

MIRI

I guess your love for me is not today's top story!

COUGHING MAN

(to Simon)

What are you looking at?

DAVOT

I feel violated, I must say.

The coughing rider makes a "got your nose" gesture.

COUGHING MAN

Record this, pal!

MIRI

Oh, what now?

VIDEO GAME WASTELAND - SIMON P.O.V.

Simon plays "Mutagen," a first-person action game where he battles other mutants with his own mutant super powers.

A fire-breathing mutant gets into Simon's face. Simon fights back with hyper-fast martial arts skills.

MAGLEV TUBE CAR - SIMON P.O.V.

The coughing rider rips off Simon's I-Shādz, breaking them, and replaces the fire-breathing mutant with himself.

COUGHING MAN

I'm talking to you, ching-chong!

MAGLEV TUBE CAR

Miri puts a calming hand on the coughing rider's back. Simon is still disoriented.

SIMON

Wh-what?

MIRI

It's a misunderstanding, sir, he wasn't looking at you.

COUGHING MAN

He was, lady. He was giving me the evil eye.

DAVOT

Take it easy.

SIMON

What did you do that for? I had him right where I wanted him! Now I have to start all over!

COUGHING MAN

He was giving me the evil eye!

SIMON

I was playing a game, dumb ass!

MIRI

Simon...

COUGHING MAN

What did you call me?

DAVOT

He didn't mean it...

COUGHING MAN

Oh yeah? Then I want to hear it from him. I work hard for a living and I don't need some low life getting on my case!

SIMON

Whoa, I feel like I'm in opposite land. I'm the low life? I'm getting on your case? Someone's sucked up a little too much smog.

COUGHING MAN

Oh, you're dead.

Davot restrains the man but is furious at Simon.

DAVOT

What is your problem, Simon?

MIRI

Just apologize to this man, and...

SIMON

Why in the Good Granddaddy's name should I apologize? If you think you work hard I must have worked harder. You're still whining away in the Smog, but I earned my place! All the way up from a Foundry stink hole to the best university in Capitol! Eat that!

COUGHING MAN

I thought I smelled Foundry on you, slits.

SIMON

Ah, yes, the racial attack. Well played, sir. Never mind that the slits who built this city did it without money or protection from the poison outside. Never mind that they still get picked last for public housing--

MIRI

Simon! He's not worth it.

The coughing man still looks hostile, but he backs down when faced with Davot staring at him.

SIMON

And I should apologize?!

MIRI

I know it's not fair.

DAVOT

Are you going to go away?

COUGHING MAN

Too crowded on this train anyway.

The coughing man heads for a door but--

Everything goes black. An ear-splitting screech announces that the maglev field has cut off and the train is grinding to a halt in the tunnel. Riders slam into each other and against poles. The screeching finally stops.

Emergency lights flicker on, starkly illuminating the chaos.

Then, beyond the moans of the injured, comes a cacophony of howling, shouting, and banging.

DAVOT

Are those... Metroproles?

SIMON

Some bedtime story.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. MAGLEV TUBE CAR - EMERGENCY LIGHTING

The less injured help the injured back to seats. The howls of the approaching gang are unnerving.

DAVOT

With everything shut down, I don't think they can get in.

MIRI

Maybe, but we can't exactly call for help either.

The searing whine of power saws adds to the savage sounds.

SIMON

Oh, good, they've got the Jaws of Life. We're saved.

MIRI

How come they have power?

DAVOT

Look for something we can fight back with!

SIMON

Fight back with?!

MIRI

I hate Grandfather Day.

Cracking sounds and screams from the next car.

SIMON

Where the hell are my I-Shādz?

DAVOT

I think your friend broke them.

SIMON

Of course he did. How nice.

DAVOT

He's hurt bad, if that helps.

MIRI

I have a pair. Will that work?

SIMON

You do? Give here!

The power saw now works on the nearest door. Sparks fly.

Davot tries to work a pole loose to fight with.

Simon grabs Miri's shades and slaps them on. He grimaces at something, but starts darting his head back and forth.

SIMON

Could you ask those guys to keep
it down?!

Davot gets a pole free and takes a fighting stance.

A chunk of door falls in and Davot punches the pole through the hole. Someone outside yelps in pain. On the next thrust, someone out there grabs the pole. The cutter keeps cutting.

Miri's eyelids begin to flutter and her muscles spasm.

A huge chunk of door falls in and Davot yanks the pole over to that hole, knocking the saw away from the cutter.

Simon yanks off the shades and sees Miri have a seizure.

SIMON

Miri! You're flippin'!

Davot whirls to look and the pole is ripped away from him.

MIRI P.O.V.

Strobe effects flash between Miri's view of the tube car and ominous ancient ruins of Washington D.C. crawling with filthy savages, one of whom could be MIRI'S MOTHER.

Some savages bear banners with Arabic calligraphy.

BACK TO SCENE

Distant sirens are audible. A voice outside yells gibberish.

Instantly, sounds of the assault fade away as if they never were. Tube riders still scream and moan.

Davot registers the absence, then drops to help Miri.

DAVOT

What's wrong with her?

SIMON

I don't know, some kind of panic attack?

Marching police officers pass the hole in the door.

Davot rips off his jacket, pries Miri's teeth apart and shoves a wad of sleeve in her mouth.

A black-armored head pops into the car. Shaken riders wait for words of assurance. The head pulls out.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

Car three clear.

SIMON

We could use some help in here!

DAVOT

They'll be back.

Davot and Simon tend to Miri. The lights and the maglev field come back on. After a moment vidscreens play the news.

NEWSIA

...in pursuit, but for the moment they appear to have left no trace of an access point. This is the second attack claimed by the Metroproletariat in as many hours, leading many to wonder if there is a new terrorist faction in town.

Miri's tense body relaxes, and her eyes regain focus. Davot pulls the sleeve out of her mouth.

DAVOT

Miri! Are you all right?

MIRI

Am I? Where? What?

SIMON

Easy. The train's moving again.

On the vidscreen, Simon eats MacMammon burgers. Riders recognize the eyewitness reporter and applaud.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Oh, for crying out loud.

More people point Simon out and applaud louder. He glares at himself in the ad.

ARTIFICIAL SIMON

Mm, thanks MacMammon! This is the best meal I've had all day!

SIMON

Thanks, MacMammon, that's the last time I eat at your sump-hole!

DAVOT

Hey, you're the hero of the hour.

SIMON

The hell I am. HYPOCRITES!

The applause falters at Simon's outburst.

DAVOT

What is wrong with you?

SIMON

Well, you for one will never understand! Leave me alone.

Simon moves up a few seats to be alone.

MIRI

What's with Simon?

DAVOT

I suppose gratitude doesn't agree with him.

INT. UNIVERSITY TUBE STATION - NIGHT

Triage stations await victims of the train attack. Simon passes through, not really injured. Seeing the bruising from Simon's earlier brawl, a medic tries to stop him.

SIMON

Go away, I'm not hurt.

Davot helps Miri to a cot.

MIRI

I feel fine! Just thirsty. Maybe tired. Tired, but fine.

DAVOT

We'll just let them check on you and decide on that, yesi?

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY CLOISTER - NIGHT

Simon looks fondly at the unchanged, comforting cloister.

Simon walks along the colonnade towards the dorm. An ad for plastic surgery snags his eye for a moment.

PROF. MALCOLM (O.S.)

Simon? Simon Chao?

Simon turns to glare, but softens at sight of the professor.

SIMON

Evening, professor.

PROF. MALCOLM

I saw you were part of that train cock-up. Are you all sorted?

SIMON

Yesi, fine.

PROF. MALCOLM

Damn blind MOG, they knew this Metroproletariat problem was there, but they just ignored it until now someone gets hurt.

Simon is stunned by this outburst.

PROF. MALCOLM (CONT'D)

No minister would be caught dead on the Tube. If they did you can bet there would have been more security, right?

SIMON

Is this a test?

PROF. MALCOLM

Hah! Someone finally got through to you, eh? Playing more careful?

SIMON

I just... this is kind of a different side of you.

PROF. MALCOLM

You know, I saw the funniest thing today. You would appreciate it--it seemed like your sense of humor. Hell, you must have seen it. Some prankster painted up Grandfather Cephas with a pretty dress and makeup and posted it online!

SIMON

You didn't think it was childish?

PROF. MALCOLM

I think it took balls, Mr. Chao. More balls than you show picking low-hanging fruit in my class.

SIMON

Picking--what?

PROF. MALCOLM

Shooting fish in a barrel. Taking candy from a baby. Look them up! Everyone knows the things I teach in class are useless. As you demonstrated, nothing you can't look up in half a second.

Malcolm leans close to stare into Simon's eyes.

PROF. MALCOLM (CONT'D)

It's the things you can't look up that matter. Like what does ground zero of a nuclear blast really look like? How did video records survive an E-M-P? Or better yet, how do you make friends, how do you keep 'em? That question will serve you the rest of your life.

SIMON

(bewildered)

Are you all right, Professor?

PROF. MALCOLM

Not even remotely.

Simon watches in a daze as Professor Malcolm toddles off.

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Davot walks Miri to her room. She looks embarrassed by him.

Other girls poke heads out of rooms and notice Davot. They come out of the woodwork to swarm around him. Miri uses the diversion to get away to her room.

RED-HEADED TEASE

Look! It's Davot Kenilworth!

BLONDE BOOKWORM

I just saw you on Newsia. Are you all right?

BRUNETTE ATHLETE

Of course he's all right! Anyone who could win the sector Deathball match can face a few wall-rats.

RED-HEADED TEASE

So, there's nothing we need to kiss and make better?

DAVOT

Definitely not! Excuse me!

BLONDE BOOKWORM

But you look so worn out! What was it like? Were you scared?

BRUNETTE ATHLETE

Scared? A Kenilworth?

DAVOT

Will you please get out of my way? My friend collapsed and I need to see to her.

RED-HEADED TEASE

I didn't see anyone.

DAVOT

Move!

Davot loses his temper and shoves the girls away. They bang off the walls and shut up, rattled. Davot bites his lip and knocks on Miri's door.

INT. MIRI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Miri traces a page of Arabic calligraphy with her finger in a dog-eared old book. At Davot's knock, she hides the book under her sweater.

MIRI

Who is it?

DAVOT

It's me, Miri. Can I come in?

MIRI

I'm fine!

DAVOT

Well, I'm under siege out here.

MIRI

Come in then, if you must.

Davot opens the door and enters, closing it behind him.

DAVOT

Thanks. I'm rethinking my decision to come to campus.

MIRI

It is pretty hairy down here.

DAVOT

And that's without the terrorist attacks!

MIRI

How is it everyone can joke about this but me? I was scared for my life on that train! The MOG just can't do enough to keep us safe.

DAVOT

They'd do a lot more if I was in charge, I'll tell you that much.

MIRI

Well, someday you may be.

DAVOT

Not if my parents have any say. They want me safely locked away in our penthouse until I can take over dad's post in Agriculture. A glorified algae farmer.

MIRI

I think the Deathball league will make sure that never happens.

DAVOT

Deathball? That career's three years long at best. I'd rather put myself to good use. I even applied to the Pentacle Academy, but dad yanked pretty hard on those strings to keep me out.

MIRI

You might try something besides brute force. You have a campus full of students who can't see past your Arcadian halo. Why not use that and talk to people?

DAVOT

Talk? What would that accomplish?

MIRI

Weren't you the one telling me
Newsia's words do more harm than
good? Why not turn that around?

Miri stands up to continue and her book falls to the floor.

DAVOT

Oops, what's that there?

Miri snatches it back up and hides it behind her.

MIRI

Nothing. Just some old book.

DAVOT

Why are you hiding it?

(joking)

Is it forbidden literature?

Miri's hesitation says "yes."

There is a knock at the door.

MIRI

What now?

SIMON (O.S.)

Candygram!

MIRI

Come in, Simon.

Simon opens the door, holding a box of chocolates.

SIMON

You need to upgrade those I-Shādz.
The MOG would have been there five
minutes sooner if it wasn't for
your medieval connection speed.

MIRI

I'll make sure to do that before
I'm attacked by crazies again.

SIMON

You do that.

An awkward silence while Simon tries to get serious. He holds out the chocolates as a peace offering. Davot scowls.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hi Davot, glad you're here. Half of these are for you. They're the best chocolates I could... afford. I'm sorry I keep acting so--you're my best friends, you know that?

MIRI

We know.

DAVOT

We are?

SIMON

Yesi, you are. I should know, I use a clever vetting process where I insult everyone I know. The ones who still talk to me make the cut. And you two go above and beyond. I... I don't deserve you.

MIRI

What happened to you?

DAVOT

And where did you put the real Simon Chao?

SIMON

He'll be back. You guys still need somebody to set you straight. But first, I want to ask you for the only favor I will ever want from you. It may sound crazy.

DAVOT

What's gotten into you?

MIRI

What is it?

SIMON

I think we can all agree that we'll never see eye to eye on anything.

DAVOT

Sure, I mean no. I mean what?

MIRI

You mean politically?

SIMON

I mean we are as different as three people can be and yet still want to fix the world.

DAVOT

You want that?

MIRI

Go on.

SIMON

I'd like to propose a pact. That no matter where we go, whatever faction we choose to join when we graduate, however much we get on each other's nerves, that we still get together once a week. Just to hang out at Javalotl. As friends.

Davot and Miri look at each other, then look back at Simon.

Simon looks more earnest than he has ever been.

The sounds of explosions interrupt the mood.

A violent tremor shakes the dormitory, and Simon looks up the hallway at a charging fireball.

Davot and Miri see a wall of fire obliterate Simon.

Then the fireball billows into the room.

Davot throws himself between the flames and Miri.

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY TOWER - NIGHT

Explosions rip apart the university tower.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY TOWER - NIGHT

Smoke and flames boil out of the ruined university tower. Newsia appears on screen to dispense the news.

NEWSIA (V.O.)

This is Newsia, with an emergency report. Tour D'Ivoire University was bombed moments ago in a sophisticated attack that has cored the teaching annex and rendered it completely defunct.

Firefighting platforms fly above the flames and rain foam onto the burning wreckage. Standpipes on neighboring towers jet water into the inferno.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

As yet no one has claimed responsibility for the attack, and the nature of the target defies simple attribution.

INT. CHURCH OF ATONEMENT - DAY

UNCLE ANDROS ORACLE, a skeletal, bald prophet with fierce bright eyes, sermonizes in a futuristic cathedral.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

Twenty-two percent of polled citizens blame Kingdom Come, citing the religious sect's past criticism of the teaching of science over spirituality.

INT. PENTACLE PRISON CELL BLOCK - DAY

Captured punks in wild gang colors glare from cells.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

Twenty percent blame disgruntled Datarchists who have long accused the universities of brainwashing students with Ministry propaganda.

INT. APOCALYPSE MUSEUM PARADE GROUND - DAY

Ranks upon ranks of black-armored Ministry Officers fill the vast space of the museum hall.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

A surprising seventeen percent believe the Ministry of Governance may be responsible, consolidating their own power by proving the ever-present threat of terrorism.

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY RUINS - NIGHT

Paramedics in hazard gear rappel from hovering ambulances into the smoldering wreckage. Newsia fades out.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

Less than five percent consider the newly active Metroproletariat capable of destruction on this magnitude.

PARAMEDIC P.O.V.

Smoke obscures the first-person view of a paramedic in the ruins, but digital enhancement shows the outlines of bodies and a blinking beacon identified as "KENILWORTH, DAVOT."

The smoke clears to show the scorched body of Miri Pearl.

NEWSIA (CONT'D)

(fades to silence)

Many students attend the university through remote interfaces, but all the students and faculty who attended in person are listed as casualties...

NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE

The view floats up above the carnage, losing the quality of video. Miri looks remarkably intact. A badly burned body nearby was once Davot. Paramedics identify him and transfer him to a gurney. The view takes on a dreamlike quality.

The university wreckage becomes the ruins of Washington below the city. Glowing lines trace mystical geometries among the streets. People skitter like dirty beetles. One of them senses a presence and looks up. It is Miri's mother.

In a cluttered apartment seen from a child's eyes, the same woman and MIRI'S FATHER bow on prayer mats to an alcove decorated with a disc reading "Allah" in Arabic calligraphy.

The door explodes in smoke and Ministry Police burst in.

First person P.O.V. of a child running down a hallway after the police, who haul her parents away in restraints.

Darkness closes around the edges and the hall becomes a long, dark tunnel with a light at the end. Memories streak past in strobing glimpses to either side.

Then the tunnel opens up into a shining place of peace, and a spectacular ANGEL appears, glowing too brightly to see.

ANGEL

Poor thing. How are you, Miri
Pearl?

MIRI

I... I'm home?

ANGEL

Not yet, my dear one. We are all
ready for you, but your time below
is not yet done.

Heaven retreats as if Miri is falling down a well, but the angel's voice is still audible.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

You still have much to do...

Blackness closes in and hospital noises intrude.

MIRI (V.O.)

Am I dead?

MATRONLY NURSE (V.O.)

She's awake! Thank Grandfather!
No, honey, you're still alive.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Miri sits up in her bed, not even bandaged, but her eyes no longer work. A nurse takes her hand.

MIRI
Why is it so dark? Has the power
been hit again?

MATRONLY NURSE
Oh, sweetie. I'm so sorry.

MIRI
Am I... hurt?

Miri pats her face and body down, baffled. No bandages.

MIRI (CONT'D)
What happened? Why can't I see?

MATRONLY NURSE
You are in remarkable condition,
considering where you were found.
You barely have a scratch. I would
call that a miracle.

Miri weeps tears tinged with blood. They sting her.

MIRI
A miracle... ooh--ow! Did you find
Davot or Simon? Simon Chao?

NURSE
I'm afraid I don't know anything
about that. They are still
searching, if that's a comfort.

MIRI
And you call that a miracle?!

EXT. TOUR D'IVOIRE UNIVERSITY RUINS - NIGHT - SIMON P.O.V.

A view of the ruins blocked by wreckage. At a distance, paramedics pick their way. We hear ragged wheezing.

Suddenly, a man and woman in similar but grimy hazard suits look through the wreckage at the camera. Their voices are muffled, as if we have earplugs in.

MALE HAZARD SUIT

There, see it?

FEMALE HAZARD SUIT

Barely. Give me a hand.

They clear away the wreckage, and the wheezing falters. They peer closer at the camera. Inside their helmets, the man is a SCRUFFY MEATHEAD with tattoos, the woman an ETHNIC MISHMASH with stud piercings. Not paramedics.

MALE HAZARD SUIT

Glad I can't smell this.

FEMALE HAZARD SUIT

Hurry up, Bracket. I think they peeped us.

MALE HAZARD SUIT

Be lax! We're helping out, right?
Ain't like they're going to bug
with this one anyhow.

He stabs a DNA reader out of frame and looks around nervously. After a second, the reader beeps.

MALE HAZARD SUIT

It's a match. We take him.

FEMALE HAZARD SUIT

Is there enough left for salvage?

MALE HAZARD SUIT

Not for us to say. Got the bag?

INT. CLONE TISSUE VAT - NIGHT - DAVOT P.O.V.

From black, blurry eyes open to show the view from a green nutrient fluid-filled clone vat into a pristine clinic. A muffled beeping draws the attention of Davot's parents, CORAL and JONATAN KENILWORTH, who approach the tank.

CORAL

(muffled)

Oh, Davot, you're awake.

Davot tries to speak, but it is burbled and unintelligible.

JONATAN
(muffled)
Use the keypad, son.

INT. REGENERATION FACILITY - NIGHT

This immaculate facility for the wealthy allows the injured to regrow tissue and heal seamlessly. Inside a tube of green fluid, Davot looks moldy, but no longer severely burned. He types on a keypad. Words appear on a screen: "WHAT HAPPENED"

CORAL
It was so awful. The university
was attacked.

JONATAN
Apparently it was those religious
crazies. I always knew they'd
crack up sooner than later.

CORAL
Now do you believe us when we say
being on campus was a bad--

Davot interrupts his mother: "HOW ARE MIRI & SIMON"

JONATAN
Who?

CORAL
Probably students he got to know
down there. I'm sorry darling. We
don't know what happened to them.

JONATAN
Doesn't look good, though. You
were one of the lucky ones.

Davot thrashes in the tube, looking for an exit button. He gargles something, clearly furious.

JONATAN
Now what's his problem?

CORAL
Davot! Calm down, you'll slough
the tissue!

Davot gets a grip and stabs out a message: "GET ME OUT"

CORAL

Dr. Sauber says you need a few more hours for the tissue to set. Please! You'll be good as new.

Davot glares at his mother for a long moment. Then types "WHY AM I SO LUCKY". Jonatan's even temper slips.

JONATAN

Davot. You know Capitol doesn't have the resources to provide clone vats for everyone. You get the best treatment because this city needs future leaders like you to get the best treatment. It relies on keeping the Vault bloodlines as pure as possible for as long as possible and that won't work if you keep risking yourself for your foolish whims!

Davot has been typing to interrupt: "FUTURE LEADER SHOULD KNOW ALL CITIZENS BETTER"

CORAL

That sounds very pretty, Davot, but it doesn't work that way.

JONATAN

Damn right it doesn't. From now on, you're staying on the compound. That's the last word.

Davot bangs on the inside of the tube, furious.

JONATAN

No more of your "seeing the city." No more of your Deathball antics. We're done. We didn't pour all our genes and hope into you to let it get blown to hell.

Jonatan stalks away before Davot can talk back.

CORAL

You do set him off, Davvy. But we are very happy you're alive. Even if it doesn't seem that way.

Davot pivots in the tank to turn his back on his mother.

CORAL (CONT'D)

We love you, don't you see that?

Davot emphatically types: "NEED REST GO AWAY"

Coral takes the hint and leaves. At the door she pauses:

CORAL

Get well soon, my beautiful boy.

She leaves. Davot closes his eyes, jaw clenched.

INT. DATANET HOSPITAL CONSTRUCT - NIGHT - SIMON P.O.V.

From black, pixels assemble into a shiny computer-generated environment. Medical monitors form animated wallpaper. The clunky CG arms of a generic online avatar wave into the first-person view. Simon's voice is metallic.

SIMON (O.S.)

Whoa, a full V.R. implant! Nice! I could get used to this!

An exotic feminine CG avatar named ELLIPSIS steps into view.

ELLIPSIS

You may have to, Simon.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Ellipsis and Simon's avatar, a boring 3-D stick figure.

SIMON

Hel-lo, nurse!

ELLIPSIS

At least you still have your sense of humor. I'm not really a nurse, but I did save your life. Name's Ellipsis.

SIMON

Spectac. How are Davot and Miri?

ELLIPSIS

Don't know, don't care. When the MOG hit the U, all the blue-blood bodies got taken upstairs. You didn't. But we weren't going to let your mind get ground up for nutrient mash. Yet.

SIMON

Uh, thanks?

ELLIPSIS

Shut up. It might still end up that way. We got you some shi shi foo foo headgear so you'd be hooked into the Datanet. Maybe you should show us what you can do before we drop the serious cash it would take to keep you alive.

SIMON

What? What the hell are you talking about?

ELLIPSIS

All I'll say is don't try to unplug yourself yet. Focus on dying. You'll know what I mean.

Ellipsis winks out with an effect that looks like her name.

SIMON

Oh, I will, will I? Crazy bitch!

Simon examines his surroundings. The medical symbols everywhere don't mean a thing to him, except for the erratic blip of an EKG graph.

SIMON

Focus on dying... focus on dying...

Simon finds a shell menu and calls it up. A list of text commands joins the other windows decorating the room.

SIMON

I don't think I'm ready to die
just yet, thank you.

Simon presses "EXIT." A door expands for him to walk through.
As he does, the environment dissolves into pixels.

INT. FOUNDRY CLINIC - NIGHT

Simon comes to. His skin is almost all burned off, and tubes
pierce lacerations all over his body. He is missing his legs
and a fair bit of arm and jaw. He looks more like a wreck in
a greasy garage than a patient in a clinic.

Simon lets out a horrible moaning scream.

Alarms join the din as Simon's wrecked body crashes.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. FOUNDRY CLINIC - NIGHT

A screaming Simon flails about, and manages to hit a button for pain medication.

Alarms wailing, Simon blinks a command to go back to VR.

INT. DATANET HOSPITAL CONSTRUCT - NIGHT

The computer environment quickly reassembles itself, but now all the monitors flash red with the word "CRITICAL!"

The 3-D stick figure staggers around the space erratically, accidentally hitting buttons that expand option menus.

SIMON

Fo--focus!

The stick figure grabs the edges of a monitor showing his fluctuating EKG and stares at it.

SIMON

Focus--on dying!

Simon stares at the line and struggles to think straight. He gropes at a "Self-Medication" menu and fumbles at buttons for "Adrenaline" and "Endorphins," flooding his body with them.

Simon's avatar appears to relax.

SIMON

Focus on dying. Focus on dying...

Then it snaps to attention.

SIMON

Oh! That's what she meant!

Simon smoothly calls up "Datanet Options," taps a button and a door labeled "Enter" expands before him. He enters.

EXT. DATANET - NIGHT

Simon hovers above a city built of neon data. He gestures and streaks past blocks of code as large as skyscrapers.

All the virtual streets lead to a massive red and black edifice with the insignia of the Ministry of Governance.

SIMON
Ministry Registration.

Shimmering lines of avatars wait to enter the edifice through portals labeled by bureaucratic department. Simon focuses on one marked "Office of Ministry Registration."

SIMON
I'm not going in with the peons.
Where's the elite entrance?

Simon flies around the structure. He discovers a small area where the computer graphics glitch, not quite randomly.

SIMON
Bingo bango!

Simon dives into the chaotic hole.

INT. DATANET OFFICE OF MINISTRY REGISTRATION - NIGHT

A honeycomb of tunnels stretches in every direction.

SIMON
Fetch!

A SEARCH ENGINE forms around Simon and takes him into the maze. On its console, he enters his name and ID number.

The engine takes him through many tunnels to a wall of hexagons. One of them glows. The search engine vanishes.

Simon taps the glowing hexagon and his official Ministry data appears, flashing red and reading "CRITICAL."

Simon slashes at the file. It fades to gray and the word changes to "DECEASED."

SIMON
Vista, Simon Chao.

Simon's generic avatar breaks apart and vanishes.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Miri lies in bed, awake. Hospital noises and Newsia's voice fills the darkness. Miri takes a deep breath and her nose wrinkles at the harsh antiseptic smell of the ward.

A chime sounds and Miri hears a door open. Lights come up.

MIRI

N-nurse? Is something wrong?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

No, Miryam, it is me.

Miri's father stands in the doorway, tears in his eyes.

MIRI

Who? I can't see.

MIRI'S FATHER

It is your father, Miri.

MIRI

Oh. Hola.

MIRI'S FATHER

I came as soon as I found where you were. They tell me you are... much better than you should be.

MIRI

I am surprised you bothered.

MIRI'S FATHER

Please don't be that way. It is always difficult for me, since... They watch my every move.

MIRI

Heaven forbid they watch us be together once in a while!

MIRI'S FATHER

Heaven has nothing to do with it, as you well know.

MIRI

Maybe I know the opposite.

MIRI'S FATHER

Oh, yesi, I heard about your episode!

MIRI

Don't call it that. It was the last thing I ever saw! And the most beautiful--

MIRI'S FATHER

And I heard you were off your medicine. What did you see, a shining presence? An angel? Flashes in an epileptic brain, Miryam. We've been over--

Miri's father sees Miri's book on a bedstand.

MIRI

No, you've been over it! How do you know epilepsy isn't just some Scientist name for prophecy?

MIRI'S FATHER

What is that?!

MIRI

What?

MIRI'S FATHER

What are you doing with that book?

Miri's eyes widen and she gropes around for the book.

MIRI

Give it to me! Where is it?

Miri's father angrily snatches it up and flips through it.

MIRI'S FATHER

You know this book killed your mother! This is the reason we were taken away! How did you get it?

MIRI

Give it to me, father. Please!

MIRI'S FATHER

I will not, and you need no greater proof that I still love you. I will not see you killed for this book of lies.

Miri clutches at her father desperately, but he breaks free. He finds a biohazard disposal port on the wall and shoves the book in, to incinerate it.

MIRI

Father, please, give it back! It's all I have left of mother! Please!

MIRI'S FATHER

It is done. The last taint of that poison religion is gone. I thought you would be smarter than that, but I see I was wrong.

Miri's father sees his daughter wracked by sobs, and softens, trying to embrace her. Miri struggles against it.

MIRI'S FATHER (CONT'D)

I see I will have to be here for you more often, my sweet Pearl. I never should have let you go.

Miri's father is too strong and he subdues her. Miri sobs.

Miri privately presses a call button on a panel by the bed.

A large male nurse answers the call.

MALE NURSE

Is everything all right?

MIRI

No, please take this man away. He is not welcome here ever again.

Miri's father stares at Miri in shock.

MALE NURSE

Please come with me, sir.

INT. KENILWORTH PENTHOUSE - DAVOT'S BEDROOM SUITE - NIGHT

Davot is at a wall-sized window with a gorgeous view of the twinkling lights of Arcadia and the stars beyond ribs of the Capitol Dome. But he studies the signet ring in his hand.

He scowls at his spacious room. Most of the furniture is stowed in the wall, making it seem even emptier.

Davot wakes up a vidscreen on one wall panel and examines the security around the perimeter of the penthouse.

A window pops up showing a sleepy Jonatan Kenilworth.

JONATAN

Don't even think about it, son.

The vidscreen reverts to a wall panel, which Davot punches.

He glares a moment further, then hurls his ring across the room and whips off his pajama top.

Even in the dim light, it is clear Davot is fully healed.

INT. KENILWORTH PENTHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Davot, fully dressed, opens the fridge panel for a snack.

The butler, a burly salt named OPIE, appears.

OPIE

Can I help you, sir?

DAVOT

Hi, Opie. Just fetching myself a snack, if that's all right.

OPIE

I'd be happy to prepare one for you, sir.

DAVOT

Of course you would. You've served us, what, twenty-eight years? That makes you practically kin.

OPIE

Flattered to hear it, sir.

Davot offers a dish of gelatinous green pie.

DAVOT
Key lime pie?

OPIE
No, thank you, sir.

DAVOT
Your loss.

Davot throws the pie in Opie's face and attacks his throat and groin. Opie tries to shrug off the pie and fight back, but Davot presses the surprise with brutal efficiency, breaking both Opie's arms.

INT. KENILWORTH PENTHOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Davot heads for the front door with Opie in a painful headlock. The butler's arms dangle uselessly.

The front door slams open and two perimeter guards, HECTOR and JAX, draw huge weapons on Davot.

HECTOR
Drop the butler now, sir!

DAVOT
Or what, you shoot a Kenilworth?

JAX
We're authorized.

DAVOT
Sorry, Opie's coming with me. Do you understand?

HECTOR
Can't let that happen.

DAVOT
Listen to me, Hector. It's better than the alternative. Do you understand?

JAX
Davvy, what are you doing?

DAVOT

I am kidnapping a member of the
Kenilworth household.

JAX

No way. We can't let you.

DAVOT

You have to, Jax.

HECTOR

Grandpa's sack! Are you out of
your mind?

Davot flicks a glance at a security camera.

DAVOT

No, I know exactly what I am
doing.

JAX

Don't do this, Davvy.

DAVOT

Don't make me do something worse.

More guards approach from other corners of the penthouse.
Davot sees them coming and knows they will knock him out.

DAVOT

Damn it!

OPIE

Don't let him kill me!

JAX

No one's killing anyone,
Oppenheimer! Just relax!

DAVOT

Sorry, Opie.

Davot breaks Opie's neck.

Three guards shoot Davot with heavy tranquilizers.

INT. DATANET HOSPITAL CONSTRUCT - NIGHT

The EKG monitor shows a flatline for a few seconds.

Then it spikes to life with a mechanically regular beat.

Data readouts begin to flow again.

A streak of light slashes space, and from the slash a sleek, shiny avatar builds itself. It looks like a ninja made of neon. When the humanoid figure is built, it jumps to life.

BACKSLASH

Hola, Backslash.

BACKSLASH looks at medical readouts and calls up a window that shows video surveillance of the Foundry operating room.

In the video, Simon is being rebuilt with clunky looking prosthetic legs, arm and jaw. He still has no skin.

BACKSLASH

Man, I've looked better. Yeesh.

ELLIPSIS (O.S.)

Like the new suit.

Backslash closes the video window and turns to see Ellipsis.

ELLIPSIS (CONT'D)

Backslash, was it?

BACKSLASH

Yesi, like the symbol to access a directory in medieval code.

ELLIPSIS

Be lax, we're impressed already. So, access is your modus? That's always useful.

BACKSLASH

Ellipsis, what's that? Stealth, I guess. "This text is missing."

ELLIPSIS

If you're trying to show off, I wouldn't bother. Unless you plan to be the pex of the elite.

BACKSLASH

Gives me something to aim for!

Ellipsis waves off this bravado.

ELLIPSIS

Let's start off by aiming just a smidge lower, hey? As you may have noticed, there's work to be done on your meat body. You won't be dancing a jig for quite some time.

BACKSLASH

Aw, and I loves me a good jig.

ELLIPSIS

Kill it. This is business now.

Backslash mimes zipping his mouth shut.

BACKSLASH

Zip.

ELLIPSIS

Meanwhile, you have a brand new V.R. rig and you will exercise your brainy bits with that. I suppose you're ready to start.

Backslash unzips his mouth.

BACKSLASH

Zap. Yes, ma'am!

ELLIPSIS

Vista then, wise ass!

The medical environment instantaneously transitions to:

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY RACETRACK

Backslash is wrapped in a shiny racing jet and propelled into a breakneck race with a dozen other racing jets.

SIMON

Whaaaaahooooo!

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL - MORNING

A persistent haze of smog obscures the hospital levels of a block of towers. Flying ambulances land on platforms.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

A constant babble of agitated patients, announcements and Newsia's reports fills the reception area.

The Discharge Nurse signs Miri out of the hospital. Miri fingers an electronic device looped on her ear.

DISCHARGE NURSE

Did you get an overview of how
your Guide works?

MIRI

Yesi.

DISCHARGE NURSE

Then I guess you are ready to go.
Good luck, and call immediately if
you have any complications.

MIRI

Thank you.

Miri fumbles towards the exit, confused by all the noise.

At her ear, a calm voice offers directions.

GUIDE

Mercy Hospital exit is three
meters ahead. Proceed.

Automatic doors open for Miri and she steps outside.

EXT. SMOG CONCOURSE - DAY

Miri is overwhelmed by noise all around, from mechanical humming, to ground vehicle traffic, to conversation and coughing from pedestrians weaving through the thick smog. Newsia appears on a large vidscreen, startling Miri.

NEWSIA

This is Newsia, with an update on the casualty list from the Tour D'Ivoire bombing. Six hundred twenty one deceased, one thousand three hundred eighty two critical...

MIRI

Guide! Please direct me to a meditation booth!

GUIDE

A meditation booth is twenty two meters ahead on your left.

Miri covers her ears and lumbers forward.

NEWSIA

A memorial service has been scheduled for tomorrow mediodia, in the Apocalypse Museum.

GUIDE

Stop!

Miri jerks to a halt as someone rudely cuts in front of her.

GUIDE

Proceed.

Miri gets to the meditation booth without further incident. It is the size of a phone booth. Miri fumbles her way in.

INT. MEDITATION BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

The cramped gray space expands holographically into a comfortable lounge. Newsia stands before Miri. As the door closes, all outside noise goes away except for Newsia.

NEWSIA

This is Newsia. Would you like to report an incident?

MIRI

No, give me information on casualties from the university bombing please. Simon Chao and Davot Kenilworth.

NEWSIA

My apologies. Data is still being collated on that subject. Would you like an update when that data becomes available?

MIRI

Yesi. I also want to request a meditation session, Newsia.

NEWSIA

Please deposit sixty credits. Music selection?

MIRI

None! No music, no sound. Give me total silence!

NEWSIA

Would you like visual stimuli?

MIRI

More than you know.

Miri dips a card into a slot. Uncle Andros Oracle, head of the Church of Kingdom Come, steps out of nowhere. He looks terrifying, but his voice is utterly soothing.

UNCLE ANDROS

God be with you for the next two hours. Thank you for your donation to the Church of Kingdom Come.

Uncle Andros fades away, replaced by animated mandalas. All sound fades to silence and Miri sobs in relief.

INT. PENTACLE - MANDATORY RECRUITMENT STATION - DAY

Shaven bald, in prison grays and cuffs, Davot stands flanked by guards before a huge vidscreen. It reads: "KENILWORTH, DAVOT. CHARGED, 014345-07042152, ATTEMPTED MURDER (DEG 1A)."

SENATE OFFICER HAAKON FEER replaces the text. His face seems genetically designed to provoke terror. He has shiny black implants where eyes should be. When he speaks, we recognize the booming voice of the police announcements.

S.O. FEER

This is Mandatory Recruitment.
That means that you have in some
way attacked the heart of Capitol.
If the heart dies, we all die.
EVEN YOU. Humanity is too precious
to let that happen. You are here
to learn what it means to be a
survivor. You are here to remember
what it means to be a citizen. You
still have a duty to your city.
YOU WILL NOT FAIL IN THAT DUTY!

INT. PENTACLE PRISON - BARRACKS - DAY

Free of the cuffs, Davot is shoved into a barracks. Newsia babbles away on a prominent vidscreen. A clutch of ritually scarred recruits strut up to Davot, leering. Their leader is CULKIN TOTH, a veteran Foundry-level ganglord. YAKO is a giggling henchman, and RUNK a silent mountain of a man.

TOTH

Hola, pretty boy! Come to visit
all the way from Arcadia, I see!

YAKO

All the way from Arcadia!

Davot looks at each man warily as they circle him.

TOTH

Such smooth skin, your highness! I
bet you never scarred once in your
life!

YAKO

Never once! Ha ha!

Toth produces a combat knife.

TOTH

You're gonna scar now.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. PENTACLE PRISON - BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Davot holds up his hands to plead.

DAVOT

I'm sure we can work this out--

Toth swipes the knife to slice Davot's fingers off.

Davot grabs Toth's knife wrist and spins to close with Toth, and smash Toth's nose with the back of his head.

Toth falls back in a daze, Yako is stunned, Runk charges.

Davot proceeds to use all his Deathball skills to dodge attacks and land crunching blows on Yako and Runk.

Yako is not much of an opponent, but he distracts Davot at critical points in the fight.

Runk is slow but when he does land a punch, it drives Davot to the floor.

Toth uses his recovery time to ambush Davot, and scores a vicious slash down Davot's spine with his knife.

Davot gets angry at being wounded, and makes some mistakes, getting trapped by the steel bunks bolted to the floor.

Then Davot uses the bunk as an anchor to swing and kick Yako under the jaw. Yako loses some tongue and consciousness.

Runk elbows Davot in the sternum, knocking him down.

Davot sweeps Runk's legs, knocking him into Toth, drives a fist into Toth's groin and squeezes. Toth drops the knife.

The fight goes on but Toth no longer has his heart in it.

SGT. VOKE (O.S.)

What in the good grandpappy's name
is going on down here?!

Toth and Runk freeze at the voice, letting Davot get a free one-two punch in on Toth, knocking him out. Then Davot sees hard-as-granite DRILL SERGEANT VOKE, eyes red with rage.

INT. SERGEANT VOKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Voke stands at his desk, unhappy. Davot and the other recruits are lined up across from him, still bloody from the fight. Each of them has an armed guard.

SGT. VOKE

You know what you did, then?

DAVOT

Yes, sir! It was my fault and I take full responsibility.

SGT. VOKE

Ratcrap, private! You don't think there's any surveillance on you dung-chutes? We got that room so wired we can look up your ass and see what you had for breakfast!

Voke lets this sink in. Toth fidgets.

SGT. VOKE (CONT'D)

Private Toth, we know exactly what brought you and your sewer-mates here. You're as predictable as a crap after coffee. Hot damn, boy, I'd have been disappointed if you hadn't tried something!

Toth relaxes a little, grins to his mates.

SGT. VOKE (CONT'D)

But this ain't your sewer, where turds like you float up to the top! You know what we do with turds in the Pentacle, private?

TOTH

No sir!

SGT. VOKE

Show 'em, boys.

The guards remove Toth, Yako and Runk, all much paler now.

Voke sits down and stares at Davot for a moment.

SGT. VOKE

What brings you here, Private Kenilworth? Ain't no damn holiday spa down here.

DAVOT

I want to get the terrorist bastards who hit the U, sir!

SGT. VOKE

Okay, kid. We know who you are. Your application to the Academy was blocked, you were exempted from enlisting. But you're a Deathball champion and you tried to kill your own butler just to join the military. The minister must be crappin' cinder blocks.

Davot lets a grim smile escape.

SGT. VOKE (CONT'D)

Don't get used to taking blame that isn't yours. We need ability like you showed tonight.

DAVOT

Yes sir!

SGT. VOKE

You don't get me, boy. Not just the brawn, Kenilworth. We need the brains. And we need them now. There's no time for the usual runaround. You're marked for Secret Security training and we have to take you off the grid.

DAVOT

Off the grid, sir?

SGT. VOKE

Gonna make you dead to the world, boy. You get a new name now. Private Killian.

DAVOT

Sir, yes sir!

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL CONCOURSE - DAY

The sector of Capitol just outside the hospital is still noisy and bustling with activity. Thick smog obscures the view beyond a few dozen meters.

A red "in use" light on Miri's meditation booth turns amber.

INT. MEDITATION BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Miri looks much calmer now in the dead silence. Colorful graphic animation ends and the room fades to black.

Uncle Andros appears out of the shadows again.

UNCLE ANDROS

I hope you find yourself rested
and assured in the love of God.
Please consider joining us for
more healing at a church
convenient to your location.

A local map of the sector pops up with a church labeled.

Newsia appears with a message.

NEWSIA

I have new information on Simon
Chao and Davot Kenilworth. The
status of both is now "deceased."

The peace from meditating drains away and Miri tears up.

MIRI

Damn, damn!

EXT. CHURCH OF HEAVENLY WELCOME - DAY

The church is a converted warehouse block with neon signs. A few bald, robed acolytes try to draw people inside.

Miri approaches, battered by street noise again.

GUIDE

The entrance to the Church of
Heavenly Welcome is five meters
ahead. Proceed.

THIN MALE ACOLYTE

Would you like to spend an hour
out of the smog?

TALL FEMALE ACOLYTE

If you need refreshment, we have
some to offer.

Most people stream past the entrance, but one or two people
with patched up clothes go in. Miri stops to listen.

THIN MALE ACOLYTE

(to Miri)

Listen for a minute or listen for
an hour. You'll learn more here
than in a lifetime of schooling.

GUIDE

The Church of Heavenly Welcome is
two meters ahead. Proceed.

TALL FEMALE ACOLYTE

We're so glad you came, dear.

MIRI

I need help finding a seat.

TALL FEMALE ACOLYTE

Speak to Brother Francis inside,
and welcome!

INT. CHURCH OF HEAVENLY WELCOME - DAY

The interior is painted white and blue. Regularly spaced
vidscreens show a closer view of a distant podium and the
distinctive "Cross of Life" symbol of the church: a tall
Christian cross with four squares around the intersection.

Brother Francis, an usher with short hair, leads Miri to a
pew where a few disheveled drug addicts sleep.

BROTHER FRANCIS

Will this do, dear?

MIRI

Anything is fine, thank you.

Miri turns the volume off on her ear-guide and sits.

UNCLE PATRI FADO, a middle-aged man with long hair and kind eyes, appears at the podium and on all the vidscreens. His words sound like a salesman's easy patter.

UNCLE PATRI

Welcome, cousins, nieces and nephews. Peace be with you in these After Times.

Many of the congregation respond: "And also with you." Miri looks around blindly, unsure of what to do.

UNCLE PATRI

I especially wish to welcome those visiting us for the first time. Please relax and listen, and if you like what you hear, or have any questions at all, please stay afterwards to share food and fellowship with us. I will be more than happy to speak with you.

Soothing New Age meditation music plays through speakers.

UNCLE PATRI (CONT'D)

The book of Conflagration tells us we have survived the end of the world. Just by living each day, we do an amazing thing. As far as we know, the entire population of the human race lives within the city of Capitol, a mere ten million souls--and that makes us family.

You may not think ten million is a small number when you must compete with so many others for a place to sleep, a place to work, a place to live. But as the NewBible records, our planet was once home to ten billion. We are lucky to be alive.

Then why don't we act lucky? Why does it seem like so many want to reduce our number even more? My family, there is a reason.

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY RACETRACK

Of a dozen jets, only four still race. The track loops in all three dimensions. Obstacles leap out of nowhere, and power-ups allow racers to inflict damage on other jets.

Backslash's ORANGE-BLUE JET is maimed but staggers in second place. The VIOLET LEADING JET is far ahead. A BLACK-RED JET and a GOLD-WHITE JET clash somewhere behind Backslash.

BACKSLASH P.O.V.

Data readouts on the screen show the finish line a short way ahead. The Violet Jet will win easily.

BACKSLASH
Cheatin' purple pukestick!

Backslash reacts to a deadly obstacle, which shears off one of the Gold-White jet's wings. Gold-White spirals into Red-Black and both plow into the walls.

A super-speed power-up glows in Backslash's path.

RACETRACK

Orange-Blue streaks into super-speed, gaining on Violet.

A neon harpoon streaks out from Orange Blue, lodging in Violet's rear.

Orange-Blue reels in the harpoon, gaining even faster. Both jets approach a grinding obstacle that blocks the track.

Violet brakes to a full stop, letting Orange-Blue catapult ahead into the grinder.

BACKSLASH P.O.V.

Backslash howls as his jet gets ground up.

RACETRACK

The grinder falls apart from the deadly impact with Orange-Blue, and Violet zooms through to the black and white checkered finish field, towing Orange-Blue wreckage.

EXT. VIRTUAL REALITY COMBAT TERRAIN

Backslash carries a blue flag and runs through difficult terrain. A GREEN-BLUE ARMORED KNIGHT intercepts Backslash and they fight with glowing computer swords.

Backslash takes out the knight's legs and continues running.

A PINK-WHITE ANGEL swoops down. Backslash tosses the flag aside, and the angel dives for the flag.

Backslash slices the angel's wings off and grabs the flag.

Backslash has the red base in sight and makes one more dash.

Backslash freezes. A spherical window shows "RED: 2 - BLUE: 2" and a VIOLET-SKINNED BARBARIAN jumping up and down with the red flag in the blue base. The blue score becomes "3."

BACKSLASH

Grape Ape again! Dammit!

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY SKY

A dozen wildly colored skydivers without parachutes are falling. One parachute backpack falls with them. Most of them struggle to grab the parachute, but Backslash and the Violet Barbarian hold back and watch the melee.

BACKSLASH

After you!

VIOLET BARBARIAN

No, man, I insist.

BACKSLASH

What's your cheat this time?

VIOLET BARBARIAN

You really wanna know? Let's chat afterwards.

The barbarian hands Backslash a card showing an asterisk.

Off Backslash's shock, the Violet Barbarian stabs him in the back and dives for the parachute. Backslash disintegrates.

INT. PENTACLE - SURGICAL THEATER - DAY

Davot is laid out, naked and face down, on an operating table. In adjacent bays, Toth, Yako and Runk are too.

A surgeon in mask and scrubs sees Davot's slashed back.

SURGEON

Who stabbed you in the back?

Davot gestures awkwardly towards Toth.

DAVOT

That guy.

SURGEON

It was a rhetorical question.
Don't move. We'll clean this up
when we're done here.

DAVOT

No, leave it.

SURGEON

Why? A scar doesn't count for
anything here.

DAVOT

It counts for my own screw-up.

SURGEON

Fine. As long as I live I won't
understand this honor crap.

Toth looks at Davot with new respect.

The surgeon applies an electronic anesthetic.

INT. PENTACLE - CLONE VATS - DAY

Davot and other new recruits awaken in military clone vats. Sutures wrap their arms and legs, where cybernetic muscle enhancements bulge.

A technician oversees the vats from a computer console. A security captain also inspects the vats.

TECHNICIAN

All the sutures have knit to
eighty percent, captain.

SECURITY CAPTAIN

Proceed with conditioning session
oh one.

TECHNICIAN

Conditioning session oh one.

The technician hits a button on the console.

In the vats, wires lead to neural jacks embedded in the back
of each recruit's skull.

DAVOT'S P.O.V.

From black, a dot of light explodes into chaotic images:

...flesh is blasted off of skeletons of nuke victims

...a suicide bomber explodes on a crowded street

...a psycho killer stabs Davot in the heart

...and so on; Davot suffers from every form of violence.

IN THE CLONE VATS

The recruits all thrash and scream green bubbles.

INT. LYND'S APARTMENT - DAY

A strung-out addict named LYND opens the door onto a tiny
efficiency, further split down the middle with a curtain.
Lumpy pallets and a few belongings clutter the space. A
Newsia vidscreen is inset on the back wall.

LYND

--the most eye-opening thing I
ever heard. Here we are. Theda
been out for a week, so she
probably dead. That her doss. Um,
on your left. Watch the crap.

MIRI

I appreciate it. Thank you. But
are you serious about the church?
It didn't bother you?

Lynd plops onto her pallet and gnaws on a food bar. Miri
cautiously feels her way to a seat on her pallet.

LYND

No, it make so much sense. It
explain all the evil everywhere.

MIRI

So you actually believe we are in
hell? Literal hell?

LYND

You don't?

MIRI

Things are bad, yesi, but to say
we are sinners who weren't taken
home in the Last Judgment? That we
were abandoned on Earth to suffer
for our transgressions? What sort
of hope does that leave us with?

LYND

Don't you see? Oh--sorry...

MIRI

No worries, I'll get used to it.

LYND

What I meant, I can do without
hope now. I have something more.

MIRI

Lynd... it is Lynd, right? What
could be more important than hope?

LYND

Understanding.

Miri shakes her head vehemently.

MIRI

This is wrong. Don't go back.

LYND

What? Look, I sorry you don't find
what you looking for, but I did,
so don't tell me what to do!

MIRI

Of course I can't tell you what to
do. But they're just out to
brainwash poor wretches like you!

Miri winces at a twinge of pain in her head.

LYND

That below the belt, lady! I may
be addict, but that don't mean I
be brainwashed by--

Miri interrupts with a shriek and falls into a seizure.

VISION - MIRI'S P.O.V.

Miri hurtles through a veiny red hell. A painful light
coalesces into a masculine ANGEL, bearing a fiery sword.

FURIOUS ANGEL

HOW DARE YOU FLEE THE GLORY OF
YOUR PURPOSE? DO YOUR WORK, OR
FACE YOUR FAILURE.

The angel's sword blossoms into a nuclear mushroom cloud.

The cloud reverses, collapsing into Capitol's Ministry Tower.
Glowing lines trace mystical geometries in the city.

Miri's vision dives inside the base of the tower, to the
crowded viewing platforms of the Apocalypse Museum.

Miri descends to the ancient Washington Monument, dives into
an eye-shaped hole in its pyramidal top.

Here is the source of the explosion, a column with a data
readout: "\\BURN\\BASTARDS\\BURN\\"

The backslashes grow and merge to fill Miri's vision.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

INT. LYND'S APARTMENT - DAY

Miri blinks her dry blind eyes. Lynd looks spooked.

LYND
You back? What you take?

MIRI
Wh-what? Take? Oh!

Miri weeps uncontrollably.

LYND
You on a bad trip.

MIRI
I--I saw Capitol explosion--
nuclear bomb, Apocalypse...

LYND
Ha, one of my better dreams!

MIRI
The Apocalypse Museum, there's
going to be a nuclear bomb!

LYND
No, no, it just you tripping.

MIRI
I'm not on drugs, it was a vision!
God, what did I miss on those
anti-seizures? I have to tell, I
have to report--

LYND
Screen right behind you. But
report won't do no good.

Miri fumbles for the screen, wiping away tears.

NEWSIA
This is Newsia. Would you like to
report an incident?

MIRI

Yesi. Tomorrow during the University Memorial a nuclear bomb will explode from the top of the Washington Monument.

NEWSIA

Please wait a moment.

LYND

Why you put it like that?!

An OFFICER in black armor takes over the screen.

OFFICER

Are you making a threat? Where did this information come from?

MIRI

No! No, I had a vision and I saw it happening... in the future.

OFFICER

A vision. Ma'am, perpetrating a hoax is a serious matter. Do you have any credible evidence of the threat you described?

MIRI

It seemed... so real...

The officer vanishes and NEWSIA returns.

NEWSIA

Miri Pearl, you are fined five hundred credits for a false report. Failure to pay the fine will result in your detainment.

MIRI

Damn it! It's not false! Where am I going to get that much money?

LYND

The Church pay it if you join. They said they clear up my debt.

Miri puts her head in her hands.

INT. DATANET - CHAT ROOM - DAY

A virtual cocktail party in progress. Clumps of avatars talk to each other. Newsia dispenses news from mid-air.

Backslash sits with Ellipsis, holding Asterisk's card.

ELLIPSIS

What do you want, an engraved invitation? Oh look, you got one!

BACKSLASH

I just don't want to geek out in front of him.

ELLIPSIS

He's used to that. What he's not used to is being ignored.

BACKSLASH

Whoo. Here goes nothing then.

Backslash expands the card to door size and walks through.

INT. DATANET - ASTERISK'S DEN - CONTINUOUS

A cozy log cabin. As Backslash enters, a fire blazes up in the stone fireplace. Two easy chairs face the fire. Photos around the cabin depict Asterisk's most notorious hacks.

Then the door opens and the violet barbarian walks in. He shimmers a moment, and reappears as a bearded lumberjack.

Then a very good likeness of Simon Chao replaces Backslash.

ASTERISK

Siddown! Put those dogs up.

SIMON

Yes, sir!

Simon sits down immediately.

ASTERISK

Kid, you're slick as snot and I don't mind telling you. So if I hear any false modesty out of you, you can leave.

SIMON

Um, okay.

Asterisk uses a potholder to get a kettle out of the fire and pours water into two mugs with teabags in them.

ASTERISK

Okay. So, you want my cheats?
Hell, everybody does. It's simple.
You're damn good at riding the
game's--the system's--rules to the
limit. We'll teach you how to bend
or break those rules. But me, I
figured out how to make new rules.

SIMON

Spectac!

Asterisk grins, offers a mug of tea, and Simon accepts.

ASTERISK

Hells yeah it is! Questions?

SIMON

Yesi, a buttload.

ASTERISK

Drink up then. You're holding the
Datarchist Redbook in that mug.

Simon sips, and blinks rapidly as something downloads.

SIMON

Whoa.

ASTERISK

Tasty, ain't it? Read up on that,
it should answer most of your
questions. Don't worry about
deleting it, the MOG won't even
hear about this kind of encryption
for another hundred years.

Asterisk settles into the other easy chair.

ASTERISK (CONT'D)

Now, this is just a formality.
Read the Mission Statement aloud.

SIMON

The Datarchists exist to replace the totalitarian Ministry of Governance with true democracy and equality for all, by any means.

ASTERISK

The rest of the book explains "by any means," but let me summarize. We're at war. No one in Capitol is free, not even the Ministry pukes. Our main tool is the technology they love to death, the Datanet you've already proven yourself in. But when the time comes, we will attack the government openly and directly and physically. This prison city will burn. Got that?

SIMON

(nods carefully)

I do.

ASTERISK

Are you personally ready to do that? You'll have the whole--

SIMON

With these eyes you still have to ask? I was born ready.

ASTERISK

I guess you were. Good thing.

SIMON

Why, what if I wasn't?

ASTERISK

Let's just say there was more in that tea than words, kiddo. Now, you ready for a job?

Simon blinks through his shock. Nods soberly.

EXT. CAPITOL - DUSK TO NIGHT

Time lapse: the sun sets blood red in the sky dome.

INT. PENTACLE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Davot and eleven other recruits sleep restlessly. They all seem to twitch with sweaty nightmares.

An air horn blasts them all awake to a state of panic.

SGT. VOKE
Asses up! Fall in!

As if trained for weeks, the recruits form perfect lines.

SGT. VOKE (CONT'D)
I hope you all slept well, 'cause I know you didn't! If you had the worst nightmares of your life, GOOD! If you're seeing terrorists in every shadow, GOOD! If you don't trust your own ass when it farts, GOOD! This ain't nursery school and you ain't choir boys. You messed up big time and we're gonna fix that for GOOD!

Voke pauses to sniff at the air.

SGT. VOKE (CONT'D)
Smell that? That nasty mix of sweat and bowel? Remember that smell, 'cause your gonna live with it from now on. It's called FEAR. Now wash it off and get dressed. Briefing room in one hour.

INT. PENTACLE BARRACKS - SHOWERS - NIGHT

The recruits wash, shell-shocked. Toth sees Davot's scar.

DAVOT
What? See something you like?

TOTH
No, sir.

DAVOT
Eyes to yourself, amigo.

INT. PENTACLE - BRIEFING ROOM - NIGHT

Davot and the rest of his squad assemble, in dark jumpsuits. A large vidscreen fills one wall. Sgt. Voke sits with them.

Senate Officer Feer appears on the screen.

FEER

Good morning, men. Normally you would undergo physical calibration before your first mission but that can wait. We have actionable intelligence concerning today's memorial in the Apocalypse Museum requiring an elevated response. You are assigned to sentry duty. You are a deterrent force only. You are to observe and report any and all suspicious activity. You will not engage anyone, suspicious or not. We have other units in place for that. Am I understood?

VOKE'S SQUAD

Sir, yes sir!

ON VIDSCREEN

Feer is replaced by a floor plan of the Apocalypse Museum, with key elements and unit locations labeled. A dense cluster of units surrounds the Washington Monument.

FEER (V.O.)

You will be on raised platforms around the entire Washington Monument Observation Deck.

INT. APOCALYPSE MUSEUM - DAY

Crowds mass on the Washington Monument Observation Deck. Somber music plays and recovered footage of the students and faculty play on titanic vidscreens for all to see.

Voke's squad is in place on platforms around the hall.

PRIVATE DAVOT KILLIAN (formerly Kenilworth), with a huge assault rifle and matte black armor, scans the crowd.

FEER (V.O.)

Your eyes are never to leave the crowd. Look for anything out of the ordinary--people looking or going where they shouldn't. Most will be looking at the vidscreens.

ON VIDSCREEN

Davot Kenilworth speaks to the camera from a Maglev tube.

DAVOT

I'd like to report that I'm happy to be attending Tour D'Ivoire University in person because I got to meet Miri Pearl. For the record she's smart and beautiful...

IN THE CROWDS

Miri Pearl and Lynd are now shaved bald, with white Kingdom Come robes. Miri hears the video and blinks back tears.

MIRI

I can't believe they're all gone.

LYND

They have pleased God and been taken home to Him, sister.

MIRI

Then we've all pleased God, Lynd, because we're all about to die.

LYND

Hallelujah. It come from the Monument, down below?

Lynd points at the Washington Monument. It does not have the eye-shaped hole Miri saw in her vision.

MIRI

Yesi, from the hole in the pyramid on top.

LYND

No, no, no hole in top. You sure?

MIRI

I could have sworn I saw an eye-shaped hole...

LYND

Uncle Patri says swearing a sin.

NEAR A BANDSTAND

Ellipsis, the facially-pierced Datarchist who found Simon's body, is dressed as a medical assistant for Simon, who is encased in bandages in a wheelchair.

ELLIPSIS

Powering up. Should warm your ass up in this ice hall. But I guess everyone will be hot enough soon!

SIMON

Mmph.

ELLIPSIS

I think I like it better when your mouth is wired shut.

Ellipsis flips a switch on a bomb-sized box built into the base of the wheelchair, then wheels Simon up to the stand reserved for survivors. An official waves them through.

ON VIDSCREEN

The montage of recovered footage is replaced by Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER

We mourn the senseless loss of future heroes of Capitol, as well as the legacy of the past, our teachers. We must unite to bring those responsible to justice.

DAVOT'S P.O.V.

Davot scans the bandstand for survivors he'd recognize. His eye passes right over Simon's wheelchair.

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

What monsters use a time of celebration to mount a horrific attack on the innocent? We know the answer all too well. Those who use terror as a weapon.

Davot looks at the crowd nearby, and stops on someone with a video recorder. He zooms; the person is ABIGAIL MALCOLM.

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

Far more appalling than the loss of life is the state of fear this attack has put our city in.

DAVOT

Check Professor Abigail Malcolm against the U casualty list.

An inset window pops up in Davot's view, scrolling a list of names. Malcolm's name pops up, beside the word "MISSING."

DAVOT

Sergeant, I have a possible anomaly...

ON VIDSCREEN

Asterisk's exotic avatar breaks up Grandfather's image.

ASTERISK

This is a city in terror, because Capitol is ruled by terrorists. But don't take my word for it.

The screen shows a Senate Officer at a Pentacle conference.

SENATE OFFICER

The new sophistication of recent attacks points to educated terrorists. That means that at least we must monitor the universities more closely, and at worst shut them down permanently.

Subtitle: "MOTIVE"

DAVOT'S PLATFORM

Voke's voice buzzes in Davot's helmet.

VOKE (O.S.)

I said log it, Killian. We're doing a sensor sweep for that pirate signal.

DAVOT

Malcolm is leaving the area.

VOKE (O.S.)

Later!

DAVOT

She was recording the survivors and she's supposed to be missing!

VOKE (O.S.)

We're on it, private. Pipe down.

ON VIDSCREEN

A Pentacle arsenal full of bomb canisters. Subtitle: "MEANS"

Restored surveillance footage from the university shows a MAINTENANCE WORKER at a power conduit with a cartload of equipment. The cart holds bombs like those in the arsenal.

The crowds gasp at the implication. This is the terrorist.

IN THE CROWDS

Miri turns from the vidscreen to the Washington Monument.

MIRI

Is it happening?

Lynd looks around nervously for the answer.

ON VIDSCREEN

Another angle of the maintenance worker connecting a bomb to the conduit, mostly out of frame. Then a clear close up of an old woman's hand, wearing a Ministry signet ring.

Subtitle: "METHOD"

THE CROWD

Gapes at the vidscreen and goes insane with rage.

Surges in every direction at once, howling.

DAVOT'S PLATFORM

Davot loses Malcolm as a can of food clocks him in the head.

DAVOT

What the hell?!

He aims his gun at the crowd, looking for the can-thrower. Others have joined in, throwing whatever is to hand at him.

DAVOT

Sergeant, we have a situation!

VOKE (O.S.)

Withdraw, private, we are not authorized for riot control!

DAVOT

I do not see an avenue of retreat, sergeant.

VOKE (O.S.)

Make one, damn it!

Davot dives into the crowd, which scatters a bit. He tries to fire a warning shot, but his gun is command-locked.

DAVOT

No!!

ON THE SURVIVORS' BANDSTAND

Survivors hobble off the bandstand to flee.

ELLIPSIS

We're done here.

Ellipsis turns off the box and the vidscreen blanks. She wheels Simon quickly off the bandstand.

IN THE CROWDS

Miri grips a railing, buffeted by swarming crowds.

MIRI
Is this it? Is this it?

LYND
Sister, I think we should go!

Lynd grabs Miri and they join the throng.

MIRI
It didn't happen. It didn't
happen! Thank God!

DAVOT'S PLATFORM

Davot is rushed by rioters who rip at his armor. His facemask gets cracked open.

He jerks an arm back, and his enhanced muscles bash a knot of rioters back about twenty feet.

Davot sweeps the arm around, clearing a path of retreat.

DAVOT
Toth, Yako, Runk! I am headed for
Evac Exit B-3.

TOTH (V.O.)
Confirmed, Killer! Love these new
muscles!

YAKO (V.O.)
Yako smash!

DAVOT
It's Killian, and chat later. We
need to get clear.

Davot plows his way through the rioters.

He gets to the emergency exit, where people are more interested in leaving the museum than attacking him. He watches the chaos, deeply upset at what he sees.

INT. JAVALOTL CAFÉ - FIVE DAYS LATER

The café is almost empty. Through the windows, few people seem to be shopping in the Galleria levels. Newsia still speaks on the vidscreen, though.

A bald acolyte, Miri, enters. The other patrons glare.

She blindly gropes her way to the bar and gets her usual cinnamon cocoa coffee.

She sits at the same table as a week ago.

After a while, Davot, in civvies but amplified physically, joins her with his black coffee, saying hola.

They embrace tearfully, then sit and talk sadly.

Over all this, Newsia reports:

NEWSIA (O.S.)

This is Newsia. One week after the Tour D'Ivoire bombing, there are still no leads on the terrorists responsible. Ministry Security claims to be working around the clock to locate and apprehend those responsible. Referring to the alleged evidence presented by the Datarchist Asterisk at the memorial service, which caused extensive rioting, Senate Officer Haakon Feer had this to say..

S.O. FEER (O.S.)

The evidence manufactured by Capitol's most wanted terrorist only proves that this city is locked in a state of fear, and will seize on any explanation as a way to allay that fear. Even the disgusting suggestion that our government could be responsible for such a heinous act.

We approach the table until we can hear Davot and Miri talk.

DAVOT

So he didn't make it?

MIRI

Well, you didn't make it either,
so I'm not giving up yet.

DAVOT

How we've changed in just a week.

MIRI

A day, really.

DAVOT

Yesi.

MIRI

I'm glad you came, I know he
wasn't your favorite person.

DAVOT

Did I seem that way? No, in
retrospect he was a great guy. I
may not have let him know.

The door chimes and both of them turn to the door.

Simon is there, looking absolutely awful. His skin looks like
mottled plastic, he wears a terrible wig. A bulky metal cast
around his pelvis is all that holds his prosthetic legs on.

DAVOT

Ohhhh...

MIRI

Who is it?

Simon does his best to grin, then croaks:

SIMON

Whoa, who died?

THE END