

Encapsulated Season 2 - Episode 2 of 9

FADE IN:

SUPER: One year later.

EXT. ROSA ESPOSITO'S MANSION - DAY

With his face glued to his phone, CHRIS (27) nearly runs into the cast iron fence that surrounds Rosa's sprawling, luxurious estate. The map on his phone shows a checkmark and the phrase 'You have arrived!'

Chris looks up and is taken aback at how close he came to hitting the fence. He clumsily puts his phone away and gapes through the bars at how grand the mansion on the other side is.

CHRIS

Holy what... This can't be right.

He looks around and spots the entry gates a few yards off to his left. They're wide open, and a few random people are going in. One of them is RAFAEL (25) who waves Chris over.

RAFAEL

Yo, Chris! What's up bro!

Chris jogs over to him. Rafael reaches out for a high five, but Chris goes for the handshake. Awkward. Chris tries to salvage it by dabbing, also awkward, but Rafael is amused.

CHRIS

Hey, yeah I'm here. And so are you, clearly.

RAFAEL

No shit bro. It's been a hot second, what you been up to man?

CHRIS

Oh, you know... the usual. Still trying to get my foot in the door.

RAFAEL

Right, the screenplays. How's that going?

CHRIS

I mean... not really, it's slow, but it's alright, I find other ways to stay busy.

RAFAEL

I feel you bro, everyone's waiting on the next big break.

CHRIS

Definitely...

There's an awkward pause as they linger by the gate. Several people have passed them by this point.

RAFAEL

Should we head in?

CHRIS

Yeah, I'm sorry, kinda got stuck there.

RAFAEL

Dude, story of my life. Come on!

They walk through the gates to the front lawn, which has enough seating for a hundred people. Most of the chairs are filled already, people of all backgrounds and ages, some of them conversing, others just waiting patiently.

At the front, between the lawn and the house, are a few dozen well-dressed butlers and maids, like something out of Downton Abbey. They're chatting amongst themselves as they wait for everybody to file in.

Chris and Rafael take seats near the back. Chris looks like a deer in the headlights, Rafael is relaxed.

RAFAEL

So how's the new place bro? We miss you.

CHRIS

Um, it's good. I think. Yeah, I like living closer to downtown. How are you all... doing?

RAFAEL

Pretty great man, can't complain.

CHRIS

I assume you found somebody else for the room?

RAFAEL

Yeah, barely dude. He moved in like just before the Rona hit. He's been super chill, name's Mark.

CHRIS

Neat. Neat... And you're still working at...?

(he tries to remember)

I'm really sorry.

RAFAEL

Dude, where WAS I working when you moved out? Just before Rona... oh yeah, the gym, cause then they closed. It's a blur man, what a decade...

CHRIS

Indeed. So are you back at the gym?

RAFAEL

Nah, just odd jobs, gig stuff. Like this.

CHRIS

I was wondering actually, do you know specifically what we're doing?

RAFAEL

No. Damn. Clue. I'm PUMPED.

CHRIS

Oh, okay. I just want to make sure I didn't miss something on the flyer, or - yeah, cool.

(he rummages through his pockets)

Shoot, shoot shoot shoot...

RAFAEL

What?

CHRIS

I forgot the flyer. Do you have one?

RAFAEL

(chuckles)

Dude, we're here, you don't need it.

Chris tries to mask his anxiety and pretend like it's no big deal. He looks around at the crowd - nearly all the seats are full now. The head butler, BRUNO (58), blows a whistle to quiet everyone down.

BRUNO

Thank you. A delightful morning to you all!
Welcome to Miss Esposito's manor, and on behalf of Miss Esposito herself, thank you in advance for your service. We hope that your time here is as valuable for YOU as it is for us.

RAFAEL

(whispers to Chris)

Dude, the fuck did we get ourselves into?

BRUNO

As you may know, Miss Esposito is running for mayor in the upcoming election. In the interest of transparency and accountability, she is commissioning a revolutionary study that YOU will all be a part of. Her goal? To ensure that she meets the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and decency that you should expect from a public official. Now, show of hands - how many of you are familiar with the Mind-Scape?

(only a few hands go up)

Fewer than I expected... no matter. The Mind-Scape is a way of visualizing the human mind. It's like a VR model of your brain. Over the next month, you all will have unparalleled, unlimited access to Miss Esposito's Mind-Scape.

The crowd murmurs with excitement and confusion.

RAFAEL

The hell is a Mind-Scape?

CHRIS

No way! I saw a video about this, I didn't think it was this close... Holy crap, hooooo-ly crap this is actually happening.

RAFAEL

Damn bro, must be pretty good!

Chris is rocking back and forth giddily, Rafael is even more excited than before. Bruno tries to quiet everyone.

BRUNO

Please, please - the sooner we can review the guidelines, the sooner we can start. Your job is very straightforward: you will be scouring every corner of Miss Esposito's mind, looking for any red flags, any skeletons in her closet, anything that makes you uncomfortable. You will then notify myself or one of the other assistants-

(he gestures to the other butlers and maids)
And we will pass your concerns to Miss Esposito, who in turn will make every effort to address and resolve said concerns.

RANDOM CROWD MEMBER 1

Why doesn't she do it herself?

RANDOM CROWD MEMBER 2

Who cares, it's twenty dollars an hour!

Most of them laugh, but some are skeptical.

BRUNO

To your point - Miss Esposito feels that an outside perspective from her electorate is the most balanced, unbiased approach. And lest you fear that we're trying to buy your vote, just consider that you're seeing the TRUE version of Miss Esposito, flaws and all. If anything, this might incline you NOT to vote for her, but that's a risk she's willing to shoulder.

More murmuring in the crowd. Rafael has a blank look.

RAFAEL

I'm so confused. What are we actually doing?

CHRIS

I think they want us to find dirt on her so she can clean it up proactively.

RAFAEL

Dope. Got it. I think... Actually no.

Bruno tries, again, to quiet them.

BRUNO

Silence, please. Ah, bother. Alright, everyone inside, it's probably easier that way. Follow me, but PLEASE don't touch anything.

They all get up and eagerly follow Bruno to the house.

RAFAEL

Ohhhhh shit, it's going down bro.

CHRIS

This is so bizarre... I mean, I guess it's a good PR stunt, but inside her MIND?

RAFAEL

Dude, you heard what that guy said. Twenty bucks an hour. Don't think about it.

CHRIS

Why would she expose herself like that?

RAFAEL

Twenty. Bucks. An hour.

INT. MAIN FOYER - DAY (cont.)

The hundred or so guests are clustered in the foyer, with Bruno and the other butlers and maids at the edges.

BRUNO

Everyone inside? Splendid. In a moment, we'll be breaking off into groups of five. Each group will have one of our staff as your guide - please remember who your guide is, you'll be with the same group for the duration of your time here. And again, do NOT touch anything, and do NOT explore the property unattended. If you need the restroom, simply ask your guide. And.. Disperse!

The participants haphazardly form their own groups, which the maids and butlers escort one at a time to their own private rooms. Chris, Rafael, and three others gather around JOANA (46), who leads them down one of the halls.

INT. VR ROOM - DAY

They enter an office that's been repurposed as a VR hub. All the office furniture (desk, chair, bookshelves) is clustered in the corner, leaving the rest of the room wide open for them to move around freely.

In the center of the room are six state-of-the-art VR headsets with wireless controllers. The headsets themselves have cables running through a supercomputer that looks like a giant oven. On the back wall are six flat-screen TVs, presumably to show the live feeds for each headset.

Rafael is grinning ear to ear, Chris is just speechless. The other three members of their group are mesmerized too.

RAFAEL

Now we're talking!

JOANA

Good morning, my name is Joana, I'll be your guide for the project. First order of business - have you all done VR before?

(everyone nods and says 'yes')

Oh wow, neat! I had a whole speech planned just to be safe, happy to skip it.

(they chuckle)

So, it's pretty easy to navigate.

(she grabs two controllers to demonstrate)

The triggers let you grab items and interact with the world. To move around, just point with this button here, aim at where you want to go, and you'll teleport. And this button is to call me, for whenever you find something that you want to bring to our attention.

CHRIS

So you'll - wait, you'll be there too?

JOANA

Mm-hmm. Yeah, all of us will be in there as moderators, although I'll step out every now and then to take notes. So if you don't hear from me right away, you can just flag down another moderator. I promise I won't be offended.

They chuckle again, Joana smiles and sets the controllers back down on the supercomputer.

JOANA

So when you first start, it'll have you make your own custom avatar, shouldn't take more than five minutes. Once that's done, just start exploring. And I don't really see the point of waiting, you all look smart enough to figure it out as you go, so let's just jump right in.

RAFAEL

Let's gooooo!

JOANA

That's the spirit! Oh and also, please write your names so we don't get your avatars mixed up.

(she hands out sharpies/nametags)

Just put the nametag on the headset. Have fun!

They all fill out the nametags excitedly, then claim their own headset. Joana walks around and helps them adjust the straps as needed. Rafael hasn't put his on yet, Chris has.

RAFAEL

Ready Neo? You're about to enter... the Matrix.

(Chris and the others laugh)

Wait sorry, so what are we doing again?

(Chris groans)

What? Not everyone has a perfect memory like you.

CHRIS

My memory's not perfect, I just listen.

RAFAEL

Yeah yeah...

(to Joana)

Yo, but seriously, what are we supposed to do?

JOANA

You're just looking for anything concerning, troubling, or unseemly about Miss Esposito.

RAFAEL

But like, what SPECIFICALLY?

One of the other participants chimes in cynically.

PARTICIPANT

Translated: anything that would make you not vote for her in November.

JOANA

Right. If it makes you uncomfortable, we want to know about it, so that Miss Esposito can fix it and HOPEFULLY get your vote, if not your trust.

RAFAEL

Ahhhhh. Now THAT makes sense.

(to Chris)

Why'd you make it so complicated, dude?

CHRIS

I didn't - what?

RAFAEL

Bro, you were all like 'we need to proactively find dirt and clean her up' or some weird metaphorical shit, way too confusing.

CHRIS

That's not-

(gives up)

No you're right, my bad. BRO.

RAFAEL

I would say. Gotta work on those writing skills, no wonder you haven't sold any scripts.

He punches Chris playfully. Chris, being in VR, is startled and nearly falls over. Rafael laughs.

RAFAEL

Nah, I'm just goofing. You got mad skills, bro.

CHRIS

Oh my gosh...

RAFAEL

(puts his headset on)

Alright, time to make me an avatar.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

An inquisitive visitor, MICHELLE (31), is wandering aimlessly through the second floor. She admires the artwork and sculptures decorating the hall.

Her solitude is rudely interrupted by Bruno, who spots her from a nearby stairwell and immediately accosts her.

BRUNO

Excuse me, I thought I made it very clear that you were NOT to-

MICHELLE

I'm not with the study. I'm Michelle Lewis, her new campaign manager? I was told that she was expecting me...

BRUNO

A thousand apologies Miss Lewis. I will notify Miss Esposito immediately.

He dashes off. Michelle is puzzled.

MICHELLE

(to herself)

Who still has butlers?

She continues wandering and admiring the decor. One painting catches her eye: an abstract rendering of a burning forest. She snaps a photo with her phone.

After a bit, she reaches an atrium that overlooks the first-floor foyer. The crowd from earlier is gone, everybody has gone off to their own rooms. She can hear the muffled sounds of conversations every now and then, but on the whole the house is silent.

She's so lost in thought that she doesn't notice Bruno approaching. She jumps when she sees him suddenly standing behind her, but quickly collects herself.

BRUNO

So sorry to have startled you. If you'll follow me please, Miss Esposito will see you now.

INT. ROSA ESPOSITO'S MIND-SCAPE - DAY

Chris is in awe (technically his custom avatar is in awe). He's standing in a blocky, low-resolution living room as dozens of other avatars mill about the house.

CHRIS

Woah... woah... no way...

He's not even doing anything, he's just frozen with wonder.

RAFAEL

Chris? Yo, dude!

Rafael's avatar suddenly pops up next to him. Chris is jolted out of his trance.

CHRIS

Hi! Yes! What?

RAFAEL

Bro, this place is ri-DIC-u-lous, you GOTTA check out the bedroom.

CHRIS

Oh boy...

RAFAEL

Come on!

He teleports to the end of the hall. Chris follows him to the bedroom, where about twenty other participants (also avatars) are gathered around the bed. Sitting on the bed is a handsome, shirtless young guy with: EDUARDO (21).

Eduardo is conversing with the participants, but his movements are jerky, his face only makes one of two expressions (smiling, or mouth opening to talk), and his speech is robotic and monotonous.

RAFAEL

Is it still Eduardo?

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 1

Oh yeah, we're just getting started.

CHRIS

Eduardo? Wait, oh no. Tell me this isn't one of her old boyfriends...

RAFAEL

Yeah! Isn't it crazy? She's got like thirty, but most of them are actors.

CHRIS

Interesting, so it doesn't distinguish between real people and celebrity crushes...

RAFAEL

And you can talk to them! Watch!

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 2

(to Eduardo)

So then what did her father say?

EDUARDO

You remember, baby. He threatened to shoot me if I ever kissed you again.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 3

But did you?

EDUARDO

Question not understood, error, too vague.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 3

Did you kiss her again? After her father threatened you?

EDUARDO

Mi amor, of course we did. You are the whole world to me. I remember that kiss.

They laugh at his obvious robotic nature, all in good fun. Eduardo sits still with the same basic smile on his face.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 2

Do you have that memory with you?

EDUARDO

How could you forget? Here!

Eduardo hands them a book, opened to a particular page with a video on it. They press play - the video shows Rosa passionately kissing the real life Eduardo. It's shot in first-person (as she would have remembered it).

The participants go nuts.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 1

Woooooo baby!

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 2

Work it, mmm, work it Rosa!

RAFAEL

Damn girl, WAAAAY too much tongue!

CHRIS

You are all disgusting.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 3

Who the fuck invited you?

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 2

You're allowed to leave, it's not like we want you here anyway.

RANDOM PARTICIPANT 1

This is what she's paying us for, dipshit.

RAFAEL

Hey, he's cool. So cool he can't take the HEAT.

They all laugh at Chris, then go back to interrogating Eduardo about Rosa's sexcapades. Chris teleports out into the hall and back to the living room. Rafael's voice quickly fades as Chris moves further away.

RAFAEL

Lighten up bro, we're just messing around!

Chris sighs with relief. Luckily, Rafael didn't follow him.

CHRIS

I could get used to this. Alright, let's find somewhere quieter.

He teleports around the house. Which, again, is very bland and boxy, with minimal decor, basic furniture items (couch, fridge, bookshelves, end tables), dozens of video albums, and very few colors or designs on the walls.

Each room also has an 'avatar station': an outline of a generic body on the wall and a keyboard/search bar, so that you can find a particular person from Rosa's memory.

However, the most unique element is the Threads. There are thousands of them: they look like large colored ropes that snake around through the entire house, intersecting with furniture, books, video albums, and even each other.

After some searching, he finds the office. Thankfully, no other avatars around. There's no desk, just bookshelves on the walls. On the shelves are hundreds of books, which are connected to hundreds of Threads. It's a dense, tangled, seemingly chaotic web. You can barely even see some of the books, there are so many Threads surrounding them.

CHRIS

Perfect. Let's take a look at these...

He picks up one of the Threads - it glows and displays a line of text.

CHRIS

Goal: be popular.

(he picks up another one)

Behavior: listen first, then act.

(another)

Behavior: lead by example.

(another)

Perspective: women have a harder time making it in politics than men. You're not wrong there...

(another)

Goal: leave a legacy.

(another)

Perspective: a city is like a family.

(another)

Behavior: own your problems.

(another)

Goal: make people feel heard. Oh, this is interesting. Hold up.

He sees that the Thread intersects with one of the others, the one that says: *Behavior: listen first, then act.*

CHRIS

How does it decide to split them between goals and behaviors... And why are they different colors?

He presses the button to call Joana. After a few seconds, she teleports into the room.

JOANA

Hi! What can I help you with?

CHRIS

So, the Threads - what do the colors mean?

JOANA

(chuckles)

Nothing.

CHRIS

Wait really?

JOANA

Mm-hmm. Apparently they just assign them a random color to make them more exciting.

(Chris doesn't believe her)

I'm serious, it's entirely aesthetics. Well, no, sorry, unless it's... let me find one quick.

She looks around, then spots a gray Thread. It doesn't glow when she grabs it.

JOANA

These basically mean that she doesn't think this way any more. So in this case... *Perspective: it's better to be feared than loved.* She used to think that apparently, but she doesn't anymore, so the Thread is defunct.

CHRIS

Got it. Thanks!

She nods and teleports away. Chris starts browsing the book collection, still utterly amazed at what it represents.

EXT. ROOFTOP BALCONY - DAY

Bruno and Michelle emerge on the balcony, which has a beautiful view of the nearby mountain ranges. ROSA (44) is gazing at them pensively.

BRUNO

Miss Esposito - Michelle Lewis is here.

ROSA

(turns to greet her)

Thank you!

(Bruno leaves)

Michelle, I'm delighted to meet you.

She hugs Michelle tightly and holds the embrace for a few seconds, which catches Michelle off guard.

MICHELLE

Okay...

ROSA

Something wrong?

MICHELLE

It's - sorry, I shouldn't, I'm just not used to hugs from my boss.

ROSA

(laughs)

Most people aren't. But if I learned anything from the last few years, it's the value of human contact, I hope you don't mind.

MICHELLE

No no, you're totally fine. I'll be okay, now that I know it's a thing

ROSA

Lovely. And if it's ever too much, just tell me. As you'll soon find, complete honesty is my m.o. So, what do you think of the view?

MICHELLE

It's beautiful.

ROSA

You're lying. Let's try this again. What do you think of the view?

MICHELLE

I'm sorry, did I do something to offend you?

ROSA

Not offend, per se. But don't feel like you need to lie to me to make me happy. This isn't going to work if we can't be one hundred percent honest with each other.

MICHELLE

Alright then.

ROSA

See? That's perfect! Just say the first thing that comes to mind, even if it's sarcasm. Now, what do you think of the view?

MICHELLE

It's excessive, and I think it's messed up that you live in a mansion while some of your voters are homeless - not that they would be able to vote anyways, but we'll just pretend like disenfranchisement isn't a problem. Or will you step off your high horse at some point?

ROSA

That was inspired! Can I hug you again?

MICHELLE

No.

Rosa chuckles to herself, then starts pacing.

ROSA

Doesn't that feel good? Honesty is liberating.

MICHELLE

It should be, except now I'm panicking that this is actually a test, and you're gonna fire me for insulting you, but you'll also fire me if I don't tell you the truth. So, no, it doesn't feel good.

ROSA

Fair enough. I promise I will never fire you for hurting my feelings, but I WILL fire you if you make a habit of lying. Does that help alleviate your concerns?

MICHELLE

Not really, but I'll get used to it, I guess.

ROSA

I have a feeling you'll be a natural at it.
(she winks at her)
So. I trust you're aware of my little experiment that's unfolding downstairs?

MICHELLE

Yes. And I think it's stupid.

ROSA

Go on.

MICHELLE

You're exposing yourself on a level that has literally never been possible in human history. Either you're insane, in which case I should get another job. You're the most virtuous person in the world, i.e. you run zero risk of them finding anything, in which case you're God. Or you're a politician, and there's some catch that I'm not aware of. Which will almost certainly be the top question on voter's minds when they find out you're doing this: what's the catch?

ROSA

What's the catch... isn't that always the question. Well, to start, I'm not God. Sorry to burst that bubble, but I'm not perfect.

MICHELLE

Shocking.

ROSA

(chuckles)

And I don't think I'm insane, although I suppose I wouldn't be able to tell if I was, would I?

MICHELLE

That's the general view, yes.

ROSA

And in case this thought had crossed your mind - as I'm sure it will cross the voters' - this is not a bait-and-switch. They really are exploring my Mind-Scape, not a sanitized, fabricated model designed to look like one.

MICHELLE

Wow. So maybe you ARE insane.

ROSA

Today's insanity is tomorrow's normal. You do realize that I'm not allowed to have ulterior motives, right? If I did, people could observe them in my Mind-Scape, and thus they would cease to be ulterior.

MICHELLE

That's a good point. I guess that explains the whole honesty thing. But there must be something. I've been around long enough to know there's always a hidden angle. Which I'm aware is SUPER cliché, but still true.

ROSA

It is cliché, but not necessarily true. The idea that we operate with hidden angles is not a universal mandate, it's a choice. We do that to mask our immorality, rather than acknowledge or address that we HAVE an immoral side. The way I see it, we're better off coming clean, confessing our sins, and striving to improve.

(Michelle is unconvinced)

But if you MUST know. I'm deeply paranoid. I too have been around long enough to know that people eat you alive if you're not careful. I believe this technology, once it's universally adopted, will redefine what it means to expose somebody. So I'm getting ahead of the curve. I'm playing all my cards on the table voluntarily, so that when the mob forcibly takes people's cards, I'll be prepared.

She steps closer to Michelle and looks at her smugly.

ROSA

Is that a good enough 'catch' for you?

MICHELLE

I don't know.

ROSA

Understandable. You'll have time, but don't take too long to figure it out. The landscape it is a-changin'. Now, as you can imagine, your first assignment is to review all the complaints that my constituents will be compiling, and then spin them by way of resolving them. There will be no sweeping under the rug, eggshell walking, or misdirection. We will address their concerns head-on, honestly, and thoroughly, because that's the only way we can earn their trust.

MICHELLE

So I'll actually have to do work?

ROSA

Is that a problem?

MICHELLE

I mean, I'm not used to it, but at least I won't hate myself every day.

ROSA

And just think, you'll be able to tell your kids: I remember the day it all changed, the day I realized that the future of politics was moral.

MICHELLE

Yikes. What have I gotten myself into?

They both laugh, then look out at the mountains in contented silence.

FADE OUT.