

Encapsulated Season 2 - Episode 8 of 9

FADE IN:

SUPER: One year later.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

There are about thirty adults meeting for a support group, from all ages/backgrounds. All of them are sitting on folding chairs in a circle. Near the back of the room is a table with refreshments. There's a printout on the door that reads: "MA: Mind-Scapes Anonymous".

The amiable group leader, IRIS (42), begins the meeting.

IRIS

Good evening. My name is Iris, and I'm glad you all could make it tonight. How is everyone?

(varied responses from the group, most are some form of 'good')

That's great, great to hear. So, we'll have our usual format. If you're new, we always start by hearing from the new members. And it looks like we have SEVERAL tonight, which is exciting! Afterwards, we'll open up the floor for a group discussion and returning members, to update us on your progress, talk about your week, share ideas. Or just listen if you want, no judgment.

So, which of our brave newcomers wants to be the first one in the hot seat?

(the group chuckles - SETH (22) raises his hand proudly)

Wonderful! And your name is?

SETH

Seth.

GROUP

Hi, Seth.

IRIS

Glad you could join us, Seth. So tell us why you're here, whatever you're comfortable sharing.

Seth clears his throat, he doesn't seem too nervous.

SETH

What up everyone, so I'm Seth, obviously.

(they laugh)

So, I started out on the dating apps, I was one of those guys who just shared my Mind-Scape with literally every chick on there. But then like, that wasn't enough, you know? I mean, I wanted people to see it, but like I wanted to be with them when they did.

So I was like "I'm gonna do you all one better than giving out my Mind-Scape - I'm gonna start throwing parties in it."

(the group chuckles)

So like, literally I'd have twenty, thirty people all linked in remotely, we'd just be chilling and living it up in my mind, getting wasted, high, fucking, I mean it was insane.

But also like, I mean I know this sounds bad, but like it felt REALLY good. It was like having people to your house, you know? And they would be all like "Oh shit Seth, this is a pretty sick memory you got" or "Woah dude, you and I totally have the same goals!" So it was more... you know, just felt more fulfilling than just being like "here's a copy, do whatever you want with it."

So I thought I was gonna be okay, like, and I don't wanna offend people here, promise. But I wasn't gonna be THAT GUY who just was so desperate that he gave it out to people, again, totally don't wanna disrespect anybody.

IRIS

You're alright. We welcome honesty, right?

(the group concurs)

So it sounds like you wanted a one-up from the rest of the crowd?

SETH

Yeah! Like, we're all just trying to stand out, but I was REALLY standing out.

IRIS

But I imagine it didn't last? Judging by the fact that you're here tonight?

Seth nods and laughs to himself.

SETH

Yeah. Finally I figured out people didn't actually like ME. They just liked my Mind-Scape and having an excuse to party. Like, nobody wanted to date me, and none of my 'friends' talked to me outside of that.

And also, like I didn't notice this for a while because I was never sober, but they were really being dicks about it. Like, they just wanted to find all the embarrassing shit I did, and make fun of my memories. I don't think any of them even knew my name, they just knew I was the guy who threw the mind parties.

It's funny actually, one day I was like "I'm gonna test my theory," which I kinda knew what would happen. But I invited all of them to my actual house for a rager. And I knew for a fact that they all lived in the city, it's not like they were out of state.

And literally nobody showed up. So yeah, they just liked my Mind-Scape. And I was just like, "fuck you all too."

(the group chuckles)

So now I'm trying to figure out how to be part of the real world and meet people and NOT have to Mind-Scape, which sucks, because so many people my age are doing it. Nobody wants to be real anymore, you know? And I'm trying to figure out how to connect and be real without it. Yeah..

IRIS

Thanks for sharing, Seth. It sounds like you're already headed in the right direction. We're glad to be part of your journey.

Seth smiles as the group claps and congratulates him.

IRIS

Who wants to go next?

Another new member, REBECCA (52), raises her hand.

IRIS

Hi there - and your name is?

REBECCA

(with a sweet Southern accent)

Howdy everyone, I'm Rebecca.

GROUP

Hi, Rebecca.

REBECCA

Hey! I think the best way to describe what's going is that, my Mind-Scape made me very relationally stunted.

(several nods and murmurs of agreement)

Oh wow! That's a relief, it's not just me.

(they all laugh)

I didn't notice it for the longest time. I had a Mind-Scape, and I mostly used it, well at first, I used it to reminisce with people. I have a pretty big extended family, and we all were - weirdly enough, we were REALLY connected during the pandemic. With video calls and all that.

But after that, it's like we didn't need to stay in touch anymore, so we didn't. But I would talk to them in my Mind-Scape. And I wasn't using it to vent or lash out, or say all the things I couldn't say in person. I really just wanted to talk to them. And I didn't want to be a burden and bug them in real life, but I could talk to them for hours in my Mind-Scape.

I remember there was one day, I got a call from my niece, and I asked about her husband, and how they liked their new house, and if she had gotten that promotion yet. And she said, "Aunt Rebecca! David and I broke up, I've been in an apartment, and they fired me from that job two years ago! Where have you been??"

The group laughs, as does Rebecca.

IRIS

Time goes by much faster in the real world.

REBECCA

It does! And I'm so blessed, she took it in good fun and we joked about it. But I realized that I was stuck. And it wasn't just that I was trapped in the past. It was like, hmm, I only knew the person the way I knew them. Sorry, does that make any sense?

(Iris nods)

Hmm... sorry, I'm trying to describe it. I wasn't building relationships based on who the person actually was. There we go. It was all based on how I perceived them. Which is fine if it's just me in my Mind-Scape, but it's really embarrassing when I talk to them in person, and it's like I'm talking to somebody completely different.

IRIS

That makes sense. You have two versions of them - the real them, and your memory of them.

REBECCA

Exactly. So I reached out to them and caught up with everybody. And apparently-

(she giggles)

They thought I was avoiding THEM, and I thought they had been avoiding ME. So we're mending right now and trying to rebuild. But I've had to eat a lot of crow, and get myself to a place where I can see people for who they are, not the way that I see them.

And I had never really thought, gosh this sounds terrible... It never clicked for me before just how much I was unable to see people as their own individuals, and not just my own version of them, like you said. Now I'm trying to undo that and see my friends and my relatives as THEMSELVES. That's where I'm at. Thanks.

She blushes, the group claps and supports her.

IRIS

We're excited to have you, Rebecca. And for both you and Seth, I want to point out that choosing to be here, admitting that you have a problem, often that's the hardest and most important step. That goes for everybody. Just by being in this room tonight, you're all one step closer to healing and recovery. I can't say enough how proud I am of each and every one of you.

(she and the rest of the group clap and encourage each other)

Alright, we still have some new faces. Anyone want to share next?

There's an awkward pause. After a few seconds, JOHN (64) slowly raises his hand.

JOHN

Hi, I'm John, I guess I can go.

GROUP

Hi, John.

JOHN

Well, I didn't know quite what to expect here. Naturally I assumed everybody had the same struggle I did... It's both comforting and discouraging that the technology causes so many different problems.

(they chuckle)

But I digress. I was a recluse. After I first tried my Mind-Scape, I immediately wanted to do nothing else. I spent the last three years in my apartment, by myself, Mind-Scaping. I still slept and ate and... actually that's about it, and also shopped for groceries online. I'm not being hyperbolic when I say, I never left. I do not remember leaving my place at all, for anything.

I had worked and saved up a lot, so I didn't need a job anymore. And I was single, always had been, marriage was never for me. Plus I was rather introspective BEFORE the Mind-Scape made it the hot thing to do. So it felt like a dream having all this time in my mind.

JOHN (cont.)

And I knew it was fake. Like you ladies had mentioned with the different versions of people. I knew my avatars were based on my perception of people, and I liked it, because there was no real harm in interacting with them. I could say or do whatever I wanted, and no repercussions.

I even had my own talk shows. I loved watching late night, so I had all those hosts as avatars. So I would just pretend like I was on the show with them. It was glorious.

Actually, I probably would have been stuck in there forever if I hadn't had a heart attack. Somehow I survived, but it was awful, and I suddenly had this overwhelming sense of loss at the years I had just wasted by myself...

Which isn't to say I hate Mind-Scapes, I still want to enjoy it in moderation. I'm actually hoping that's something I can learn here, is how to set boundaries and still incorporate it into my life, without living in it.

(pauses)

I think that's it. You all seem great. I'm glad to be back in reality.

The group applauds and congratulates him. He tears up a little, but tries to hide it.

IRIS

We're glad you're back in reality, John. We have several people here who went through the same thing. Guess what? You're not even the first one to do your own talk shows.

They all laugh, including John.

JOHN

And here I thought I was being original.

(more laughter)

Thanks everybody. I don't come across as emotional, but this really does mean a lot, so thank you.

They clap again and encourage him. Now he's not hiding his tears, but they're tears of relief.

IRIS

You can be as emotional as you want. We are excited to have you in the group.

JOHN

Thanks, appreciate it.

IRIS

(after they settle down)

Who's next? It looks like we have two more newcomers left.

(no hands go up)

Don't be shy. This is a safe space.

After a few seconds, ERIN (48) timidly raises her hand.

IRIS

It's okay dear, if you want to just give your name and whatever you want to share.

ERIN

Umm... I'm Erin.

GROUP

Hi, Erin.

She's silent, trembling. Iris waits patiently, not wanting to pressure her.

ERIN

I was... sorry, this is...

(she weeps softly)

My ex posted it online after the divorce.

(everyone gasps)

I'm sorry...

IRIS

No, no you have nothing to be sorry about..

(stands up)

May I?

Erin nods. Iris walks over and embraces her.

IRIS

It's okay, it's not your fault.

ERIN

I feel like my life is over. I don't-

(interrupted with sobbing)

Everything, I'm almost fifty, that's half my life that isn't MINE anymore, I can't just start over and make a new life... And he got away with it, nobody stopped him..

(more sobbing)

And even when they finally deleted it, there were over six hundred downloads...

(more sobbing)

Who would do that?? It's my life, it's not fair. Why are people so desperate to get inside my head and humiliate me??

She continues crying as Iris consoles her.

IRIS

You didn't do anything wrong. You would not believe how many people have been through those doors and had that happen to them.

(Erin continues sobbing)

In fact, one of those people is me. My husband did the exact same thing. Mine was downloaded over a thousand times.

ERIN

How do you move on from that??

IRIS

One day at a time.

ERIN

It's my whole life! And people can copy it and share it and have it forever, and I feel like I don't own myself anymore.

IRIS

I know. It feels like you're on display, like you're in a glass box and the whole world gets to see inside. When I found out, it was like I had been shattered into a million pieces.

The tears keep flowing, Iris holds her tightly.

ERIN

I hate him, I hate it, I can't sleep, and people message me about my memories and stuff they find and I don't even know them, and it's...

(sobbing)

It's overwhelming. I just want to go back to my normal life, and I know it's never going to be that way ever again, and I-...

IRIS

It's okay. Let it all out.

Finally, Erin calms herself. She thanks Iris. The group claps softly and encourages her.

IRIS

(looking directly in her eyes)

I am so proud of you. You are strong, and you will get through this.

They continue clapping. Erin smiles optimistically. Iris hugs her once more, then sits back down.

IRIS

We are so excited to have you, Erin. You are so brave for sharing, and we are here for you.

(more kind words from the group)

And that leaves...

She looks at VANCE (28), who up until now has been hiding quietly and not drawing attention to himself.

IRIS

Welcome to the group. What's your name?

VANCE

I'm Vance.

GROUP

Hi, Vance.

IRIS

Whenever you're ready.

Vance is silent. He looks bitterly at the floor and crosses his arms protectively before answering.

VANCE

Sorry if I take a while, but I need to get this off my chest.

IRIS

Take your time, that's why we're here.

He takes a deep breath.

VANCE

So... a while back, I was asked to do a study that, at the time, I didn't think was a big deal. I was in college, so being broke, as some of you I'm sure can understand-

(they chuckle with him)

I was always signing up for studies and tests, trying to make ends meet. You know how it goes, make fifty bucks here, two hundred there, all you need is a free afternoon. Which I had plenty of.

And like I said, this one didn't seem like anything special. They had me answer all the usual questions, then did a brain scan, and then they let us see our Mind-Scape. And they wanted to know what our experience was like, how it made us feel, what we liked and didn't like about it. And we would go to the lab a few times a week for several months. It was a long-term thing.

I didn't HATE it, it was a good excuse to not do my classwork. But the whole thing felt weird, and invasive, and just... wrong. I knew it was a big deal and all, being able to see your mind, but I felt uncomfortable the whole time. I didn't think it was a good idea to have your mind on a file like that, and... I dunno, it just felt off.

But that was fine. That's why I was there, right? To give my honest input? Except apparently not. Apparently I was supposed to like it, and say I supported it. And pretend like it was the best invention in the world.

VANCE (cont.)

That became abundantly clear when the guy leading the project, Mr. McKinley himself, sat me down for a little one-on-one.

(the group gasps)

Yeah. He said I was being too negative, and that I didn't appreciate just how 'revolutionary' this new technology would be. He said, and I quote: "This has the potential to change the world as we know it, so you need to stop being such a downer and get on board. Or else."

(they gasp again)

And being... me... I said: "screw you, if I don't like the technology, I'm gonna say something." This didn't go over well. He tried all sorts of things to bribe me. Double the amount for being in the study, get me an internship, even so far as covering a year of tuition.

I certainly would have LIKED to have more money, believe me. But I also knew it was wrong, and I was a rebel, so I said no. And I kept giving negative feedback, and Mr. McKinley kept trying to persuade me to just 'see the bright side'.

Well finally, he followed through on his promise of 'or else'. I got an email from him with videos of me cheating on my tests. Which he had taken from my Mind-Scape. And he threatened to share it with my teachers if I didn't give him the positive review he wanted.

In his defense, I had cheated. I wasn't the best student, and I'm not proud of it. That's my biggest regret in all this - I knew he would blackmail me, but I hated that I HAD something he could use as blackmail in the first place..

So I lied, and said the Mind-Scape was fantastic, and incredible, and gave me hope, and I redacted all my previous answers and said I had a 'change of heart'. Then the study ended, and the Ted Talk went viral not long after. So yeah, almost ten years later, you all have me to thank for ruining your lives. There, happy?

The room is silent. Nobody's quite sure how to react. Vance looks defeated and guilty, but also resentful, like he hates everybody for making him talk.

Finally, Iris speaks up.

IRIS

So you were part of the original study?

VANCE

Good work, Captain Obvious.

IRIS

I'm sorry. I appreciate you sharing, Vance, I didn't mean to come across as patronizing.

(she pauses)

Is this the first time you've told anybody?

VANCE

Yep.

IRIS

If you don't mind me asking... were you the only one he threatened?

VANCE

Hell no, plenty of us hated it. Or at least, we weren't all glowy-eyed and mesmerized the way he made it sound in that talk. But he got to them in different ways.

IRIS

If I may... I promise I'm not trying to guilt you, this is me genuinely trying to understand better... Why are you just now sharing your story with us? Why haven't any of you said anything?

VANCE

Some of them did, but nobody wanted to listen. Obviously this was AFTER the talk was posted, because before then we had no idea just how monumental the experiment was, so why speak up? But they did - not me, but a few of the others. They took it to some local stations, which went nowhere, they didn't run the story.

VANCE (cont.)

And why would they? You saw how people reacted, how many likes that video had. Nobody could possibly believe - sorry, nobody WOULD possibly believe that the study was rigged, that Hector was a bully, that people like us would be uncomfortable testing out the 'most exciting break-through of the millennium'.

And now of course, people realize the technology is crap, but what can we do about it? I mean, let's assume we could FIND all those people, which is not a given, and then assume that all of us WANT to share our memories, and then assume that some big news network decides to BELIEVE us and actually TELL our story this time?

Would YOU want to be part of that group? Would YOU want to run that story? Would YOU want to be the 'downer' who says "Hey everyone, I know that over half the country has a Mind-Scape, that it's changed the world as we know it, but guess what? It's all built on a lie!" What good will that do for people now? Who wants to read that story?

Everyone in the group raises their hand. They all break out into laughter. Vance is caught off guard.

IRIS

More than you might think.

VANCE

Shit... Yeah that's a good point...

They all laugh again. Vance starts second-guessing himself and mulls things over...

FADE OUT.