

EVOLIGHTENMENT

Written By

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FADE IN

BLACK SCREEN. THE DULL HUM AND BUSTLE OF THE CITY TRICKLES IN CALMLY, AS IF IN SYNC WITH THE SUNRISE.

EXT. RUNDOWN ALLEYWAY IN PHOENIX - DAY

RICHARD (56) opens his eyes. He's laying on a bench next to the street with just a backpack. He makes his way slowly down the sidewalk, still a bit groggy.

Most of the traffic is hundreds of feet overhead - drones, drone bikes, jetpacks, hovercars - the ground level is a ghost town in comparison. After a few blocks, Richard arrives at a car-stop. He presses the 'Ride Request' button, then waits and absorbs the early morning emptiness.

The car arrives - a driverless ground taxi with the words 'City of Phoenix' printed on the side. Richard gets in.

CAR SYSTEM

Please state your first and-

RICHARD

Richard Basquez.

CAR SYSTEM

Unable to understand, please re-

RICHARD

Richard. Basquez.

CAR SYSTEM

(after a few seconds)

Please provide a destination.

RICHARD

Anywhere you want is fine, I just want to drive around for a while.

CAR SYSTEM

Error. Please provide a valid address.

RICHARD

Well, if you insist... how about the Grand Canyon?
That should get me through the morning.

CAR SYSTEM

Calculating route. Estimated travel time: three
hours, twenty-seven minutes.

RICHARD

Perfect.

The car drives away. Richard relaxes in the back seat.

RICHARD

Me? I used to work at NewTech. Yeah, the Chandler
offices - their main offices are in Pasadena, but
this is their second big location. What's that?
Oh, the product development team.

(he reclines and reminisces)

Yeah, we designed a lot of the wearables. I'm
trying to think of what you would know... Well, you
probably know about LifeTrack, that was my team.
Here's a fun fact - the headphones don't actually
measure your body signals to gauge your mood,
they choose your music based on your account.
Which means they scan your posts, your texts,
your XR-chats, social media, purchases, and then
use THAT data to pick the song.

(as if the other person is shocked)

Right, exactly! But see, we can't market it that
way, because of the whole privacy thing. But it's
not possible to actually read your body signals,
yet, so we found a workaround. Which is actually
really accurate. I don't think people realize -
well, I think people don't LIKE the idea that
their computer activity can be used to predict

the song they want to listen to, but apparently they're willing to think that brainwaves do it...

(looks out the window at the awakening city)

Well, you probably also heard of the Profiler. Which was ironic, because we straight up LIED about how LifeTrack worked, but nobody got in trouble. Because of the profits. But with the Profiler - see, after LifeTrack took off, people assumed we had the capabilities to 'read' a person based on scanning their body.

(he chuckles to himself)

Which of course meant they wanted more. So... my team's next project was advertising for a new device called the Profiler: a pair of glasses that would let you profile somebody just by looking at them. We said that it would tell you their personality, IQ, sexual preference, spirituality, everything. But, contrary to public desire, we couldn't actually make it, which we had to tell people sooner or later. So there was backlash, investigations, fraud and abuse... NewTech got off scot-free, of course, because our team was TECHNICALLY a subsidiary company.

(he reclines his seat and sighs)

And obviously none of the other big firms wanted somebody who was just involved in a scandal, so here I am - now I just spend my time-

The car screeches to a stop as a hovercar the size of a sedan crashes fifty feet away. Richard immediately gets out and runs over to the accident.

RICHARD

Help! Somebody call 911!

A nearby pedestrian calls the police. Richard looks through the window - the driver is dead. He tries to open the door, but it's jammed shut. After a few failed attempts to pry it open, he gives up and steps back in shock.

EXT. SCENE OF ACCIDENT - DAY (30 minutes later)

Richard is talking to a POLICE OFFICER (41). Behind them, a city tow truck is hauling the car away.

RICHARD

I've seen some nasty crashes, but usually a newer model like that has several redundant parachutes, you'd think ONE of them would have deployed.

POLICE OFFICER

Normally they would. But the blackbox showed a complete system shutdown at 1500 feet. Man, that thing was DROWNING in malware.

RICHARD

Ay caramba... How often does that happen?

The police officer responds, but his voice is drowned out by the deafening roar of a hovercar as it cruises only a few feet above them.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm sorry sir, I need to handle this.

(into his radio)

Airway patrol, this is Officer Mertens. We have a low-flyer at Broadway and Rural heading east, repeat, low-flying red and black sedan headed east above Broadway. Requesting backup, over.

(to Richard)

Thank for your help sir!

RICHARD

Anytime.

The officer mounts his jetpack, turns on the siren, and blasts off after the car. Richard walks to the nearest car-stop again.

Shift focus to a young lapsler. A lapsler is somebody who moves three times as fast as a regular person. The lapsler runs down the sidewalk, past Richard, and breezes right by IRMA (73), a cheery homeless woman sitting on a colorful tattered blanket. Her sign says 'Chip Removal \$20'.

IRMA

Excuse me, do you still have-

The lapsler is already a block away. Irma smiles and watches the ASU campus on the other side of the street. It's still early, but there's a steady flow of students and faculty. Some are walking, some jogging, some are on hoverboards, some are on wheeled boards, some have VR headsets, some have headphones... and nearly all of them have coffee.

IRMA

Excuse me, do- Miss, do you have a second- Sir, hi, do you still have your SafeChip?

She's caught the attention of HENRY (46), a wiry, frazzled man with a nervous twitch. He's talking a mile a minute.

HENRY

The GenZ safechip, designed to ensure that children wouldn't be unreachable in the event that they were separated from their family?

IRMA

Mmhmm, that's the one.

HENRY

No, sorry, I don't have my chip, don't have my chip, took it out as an act of rebellion, woah, they didn't like that, not at all.

(pauses - doesn't quite make eye contact)

My name's Henry. I don't know where I want to go and you seem harmless so can I sit here?

IRMA

Pop a squat, Henry.

(Henry sits next to her awkwardly)

An act of rebellion, huh? Good for you.

HENRY

I know you're probably thinking, why didn't I take it out when I turned 18, I'll tell you why, it's because I wasn't normal until I turned 35, that's when they tried me on Neuro-X. See I used to be mentally challenged, I didn't know things, but Neuro-X lets me function at a higher level by accelerating the electrical impulses and thereby reducing the processing time required to think.

(pauses to breathe)

At this point most people interrupt me and I've learned to take a break from talking so that I don't turn the conversation one-sided.

IRMA

It's not one-sided. I'm listening.

HENRY

Oh good. See I got fired from my job, the first job I was able to have that I really, I really got to do things, because I COULD do them for the first time. But they said that a good employee also needs to have good people skills and even though I could do my job in half the time with better results, nobody wanted to work with somebody who was incapable of being 'emotionally invested' as my manager said. Which isn't true.

IRMA

Well of course not, everybody's got feelings.

HENRY

Exactly. I feel everything, but I can't dwell on any of it because otherwise it's overwhelming.

IRMA

Tell me about it... so what do you do now?

HENRY

(laughs)

The key assumption being that humans are always required to be doing something, very 20th century, but I don't mean to offend you - I'm sorry if I did - see, I CAN be sensitive. I don't have a job anymore, so I wander and I try to find people who won't yell at me, like you. I thought about not taking Neuro-X anymore because, because I like being aware of everything and knowing what's happening, but people don't pity me when they see me because I'm normal enough that they don't feel bad not helping me. If I went back to how I was, they would feel bad for me and take care of me, and I miss that stability, but I also want to stay this way. So I'm trapped on my own.

(pauses)

Apologies if that was too long-winded.

IRMA

Hey, it's nice to have somebody talk to me. You stay as long as you like.

(to a pedestrian)

Ma'am, lovely morning isn't it? Do you still have your GenZ safechip?

TRISH (27) pauses and answers sincerely.

TRISH

I'm sorry, I got it taken out when I graduated.

IRMA

I don't blame you. You have a blessed day.

TRISH

You too!

Shift focus to Trish. As she passes along the storefronts, she walks by a giant interactive video-poster for Senator HAL WALKER (68). She completely ignores it, but the message plays nonetheless. Hal is boring, monotonous, and clearly reading a script - it's laughable how disinterested he is.

HAL WALKER

My name's Hal. I'm a simple man, and I'm running for three things. One - breaking up the big tech monopolies that have a grip on our city and on our nation. Two - fighting corruption in politics by standing up to Wall Street and Silicon Valley. Three - solving problems the American way, with a pinch of ingenuity and a dash of hard work.

His face fades and is replaced with the following text:

THIS NOVEMBER, RE-ELECT SENATOR HAL

And then:

THIS AD BROUGHT TO YOU BY NEWTECH INC.

INT. CYCLONE LABS, MEDICAL BUSINESS PLAZA - DAY

Trish enters the lobby, which is inviting and tastefully furnished with sleek chairs and a fish tank. FELICIA (32), the administrative assistant, waves Trish over.

FELICIA

Good morning! Did you make an appointment?

TRISH

No, walk-in.

FELICIA

No problem! I'll just need you to fill these out. Dr. Brooks should be finishing up his 8:00 soon, and then you'll be next! I'll also need to see a photo ID and a DNA sample. If you don't have a sample, that's okay, we can take one on-site.

TRISH

So, here's the thing... it's actually not for me, it's for somebody else.

FELICIA

I'm sorry, we can only clone the person who attends the appointment. Let me get you a copy of the federal guidelines.

TRISH

That's okay, I know the guidelines. I just - he wanted to be here, and he gave me a sample.

(she pulls out a bag with a few hairs in it)
This would mean a lot to me and to him.

FELICIA

I'm sorry, but we can't.

TRISH

I know, on the record, you can't, and I wouldn't do this normally. Trust me. But this is such a - are you sure you can't make an exception?

FELICIA

Who is it for? Why can't he be here?

TRISH

It's my husband. He just decided he wanted to clone himself, and he knows how long the wait can be, so he wanted to start as soon as possible. But he's at a conference in Seattle, and we can't afford an out of network provider.

FELICIA

Do you have a note from him, or a signature?

TRISH

No, I'm sorry, he literally asked me an hour ago. I had to scour the house for a sample.

FELICIA

I still can't. He needs to be here.

TRISH

(leaning closer, her voice lowered)

Here's the thing... it's my ex. He ghosted me last week, and I know I'd have to wait a few years before the clone is ready, but if I could just see him - some version of him - hold him again, date him again, have him around the house... and the real him moved, I'm pretty sure he left the state, so there's no risk of them crossing paths... he would never know about it.

FELICIA

(thinks for a moment)

I think we could make it work. Sounds like he meant a lot to you.

TRISH

He did - he still does. But apparently I'm too clingy and emotionally dependent. And I know you're probably thinking, 'well, yeah, you want to clone him without his permission'.

FELICIA

Nonsense. You're not the first. Dr. Brooks is very accomodating.

TRISH

Thank you, thank you so much, you have no idea.

FELICIA

Take a breath. It's okay. Now, we'll need cash if that's alright. And obviously GenZ won't agree to cover it, which means it'll cost more.

TRISH

Yes, absolutely. Let me see here...

As she looks through her purse, two men with black suits and sunglasses enter the lobby. Felicia looks at them suspiciously as they block the exit.

Suddenly, DR. ARTHUR BROOKS (50) bursts out of his office followed by SANDRA (43). She has him in handcuffs.

DR. BROOKS

I'm not saying anything until I've seen my lawyer, I know my rights!

SANDRA

Can it! We've got enough on you to put you away for life.

(to Felicia)

You too, sweetheart.

FELICIA

I don't, we never meant- come on Arthur! You said we were helping people who needed it! You said you had it all taken care of!

DR. BROOKS

Jesus can't you keep your goddamn mouth shut?!

One of the agents handcuffs Felicia.

FELICIA

I swear, I never thought - honest, I was really trying to help people. Like you, so what if your ex doesn't know? Won't hurt him, right?

TRISH

I have no idea what she's talking about - I would never do something like that, I swear.

They escort Felicia and Dr. Brooks to a van outside. Trish pretends to be shocked and repulsed, even going so far as to kindly hold the door open for the agents.

Switch focus to TYLER (19), a student who's locking his bike in the same plaza. He's taken aback by the commotion from the arrest, and observes for a few seconds before going into a different doctor's office.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Tyler is sitting across from DR. DENISE (49). His hands are shaking and he's breathing quickly.

DR. DENISE

I'll make you a promise, and you can hold me to it - when this is over, you'll wonder what all the fuss was about.

TYLER

That's what I've read. It's a little better coming from you.

DR. DENISE

Glad to hear it. Let's see... could you take off your glasses please? And if I could have you sit right up here, that would be great.

Tyler sets his glasses on her desk, then moves to the examination table. Dr. Denise wheels over to him.

DR. DENISE

You can lean back against the pillow. And relax. Now, this will hurt a little bit. I'm going to put the halo on. Have you used one before?

TYLER

Nope. How bad is it?

DR. DENISE

You'll feel a slight prick on each of your temples, like two thumbtacks. Hold still.

She pulls out a sturdy metallic ring and takes a few moments to center it around Tyler's head.

DR. DENISE

Ready?

Tyler nods and gulps. Dr. Denise slides a switch on the side - two small needles penetrate his temples. He winces.

TYLER

Is there more?

DR. DENISE

The worst is over. Stay still though.

She maneuvers and adjusts the ring until it's locked in place - Tyler lies motionless, his heart racing.

DR. DENISE

And we're done. You can sit up if you want.

TYLER

I'm fine.

DR. DENISE

Not a problem.

She connects a nearby monitor to the halo. It loads for a few seconds before displaying a 3D model of Tyler's brain. It's a breathtaking, intricate, real-time web of activity.

TYLER

That's insane.

DR. DENISE

I do this every day, and it still amazes me.

She uses a handheld control to manipulate the model. Tyler is suddenly calm, now that he has something to focus on.

DR. DENISE

There we go. See this region here? That's the bit we'll be neutralizing.

TYLER

Neutralizing? I thought you were taking it out.

DR. DENISE

No, that's only for rare cases. 99% of the time, we simply wipe the paths. Like erasing what's written on a chalkboard.

TYLER

So will I lose my memories? Like, going to church or Bible verses that I memorized? It probably just depends on the person, yeah?

DR. DENISE

It does depend, you're right. What we're doing is removing the religious framework, not necessarily religious memory. We used to call it the God gene, now it's the spiritual synapses. It's the region of the brain that regulates and motivates religious behavior. Usually the only memories stored there are what you would call a spiritual experience. So, if you ever thought you saw an angel, or felt God's presence in a profound way - those memories will disappear.

TYLER

Ohhh... So like Sunday mornings, when I wasn't really paying attention -

DR. DENISE

You'll probably still remember those. How involved were you in your church growing up?

TYLER

Not that much.

DR. DENISE

Yeah, in that case you likely won't forget much.

TYLER

That's good. And I don't think I'm a natural atheist, but who knows.

DR. DENISE

Only about 10% of people are, so I doubt it.

As they talk, she's actively working on the model.

TYLER

How do you know it's working?

DR. DENISE

Good question. The procedure itself has been around so long that we have it down to a science. As for you noticing it, you may not sense an immediate change. But you'll start to see little changes. The first thing people realize is that they're more afraid of dying, because their idea of an afterlife usually goes away. After that, you may feel a little more rebellious, because you won't just believe or do what you're told.

TYLER

Fine with me.

DR. DENISE

(chuckles)

Just don't get too carried away. You'll also stop having visions or hallucinations. Which you might not have had in the first place. That's a much smaller percentage of the population.

TYLER

And I assume I won't believe in God anymore?

DR. DENISE

Not necessarily.

TYLER

Why not? Isn't that the point?

DR. DENISE

Well, for a lot of people, God is just a coping mechanism. Whenever they're in pain, or scared, or lonely, or desperate, they pray. In other words, they NEED to believe in God to survive. After the surgery, they CHOOSE to believe in God. It's not an instinct anymore. So now they see God as something beautiful and positive, not just an evolutionary lifeline for when they're suffering. Does that make sense?

TYLER

Kinda... Mostly I just don't want to end up like my parents, they've done some reallllly stupid stuff because the pastor told them to.

DR. DENISE

This will definitely help with that.

(Tyler sighs with relief. There's a knock at the door)

Come in.

One of the nurses, JORDAN (25), walks in and puts a stack of folders on the desk.

JORDAN

My shift's over, see you tomorrow.

DR. DENISE

Sounds good.

Switch focus to Jordan as he walks out to his car and texts his wife VIKI (26) that he's on his way.

INT. RETRO-THEMED DINER - DAY

Jordan is in a booth wearing a pair of augmented reality glasses (AR). They allow him to see the real world, but they also overlay digital projections. In the real world, the seat across from him is empty. On his glasses, there's a message above the seat: 'POOR CONNECTION - PLEASE WAIT'.

JORDAN

Come on...

The waiter, CARLA (44), walks over to take his order.

CARLA

Morning. Anything I can get you?

JORDAN

A 9G connection would be great, but that's probably asking too much.

CARLA

It's like the nice overlords at NewTech don't actually... care? No, that can't be, they bring us tomorrow's technology TODAY.

(they laugh)

Just try to disconnect, because you know the second you disconnect, it'll connect.

JORDAN

(at the same time)

It'll connect. Yep. Foodwise... some skim milk, and a ham sandwich, no tomato.

CARLA

You got it. Do you want to throw in a Mumble for an extra dollar?

JORDAN

A Mumble?

CARLA

Muffin crumble. The printer's on the fritz, so it LOOKS like you're getting a whole muffin, but half the bread is missing inside. So when you touch it, it just crumbles. The repair guy still-

JORDAN

(he finally connects)

I'm in! I'll pass on the muffin, thanks.

CARLA

Sure thing!

Carla goes back to the kitchen. A live video of Viki loads in the seat across from Jordan. Only he can see her.

VIKI

Took you long enough. Let me guess... The HotSpot?

JORDAN

Close. Savannah's, it's a little place at Mill and Baseline.

VIKI

Nifty. Is it any good?

JORDAN

Should be, had four stars. So, you would not BELIEVE this one guy we saw last night, I've-

VIKI

Can we - sorry, can we NOT talk about your patients over chat?

JORDAN

Because...

VIKI

Because it's confidential, and HIPAA.

JORDAN

I'm not gonna get fired if I don't give away any of their PHI.

VIKI

But they monitor all the calls, they have bots that literally - they can figure out who you're referring to, just based on what you're saying, even if you don't give away their name.

JORDAN

No they don't. All they're checking for is if I say their name, their birthday, their address, or their GenZ ID. If it's just a story about what they came in for and how we treated them, it's totally fine. And even then, Newtech has much bigger things to keep an eye on than-

VIKI

But that's just it. It costs them PENNIES to add another monitoring bot, so they can review EVERY conversation for ANYTHING.

JORDAN

Sweetie... if they really looked that closely, I would've been fired years ago. It's fine.

VIKI

Alright...

JORDAN

Anyways. So this guy - who I won't name or give any other identifying information about, because I respect patient privacy and I love Newtech -

(he chuckles, Viki rolls her eyes)

They are appeased. So he comes in, clearly an addict, wants help. And usually with addicts, we get a lot of the same - cocaine, lapse, triptine, heroin, hypervent... stuff you get on the street.

VIKI

Okay.

JORDAN

So I think to myself, he just needs to flush his system. I ask him what he's taking, when did he last use, how long has this been going on...

Carla comes over with his sandwich and milk.

JORDAN

Thanks.

CARLA

Holler if you need me.

She leaves. Jordan takes a sip of milk and starts eating.

JORDAN

So, first he said it started with Simulin.

VIKI

Doesn't sound familiar...

JORDAN

It gives you insanely vivid fantasies. Used to be high-end, but it's becoming mainstream thanks to porn sites. That's how this guy got hooked on it. Then his wife finds out and leaves him, and to deal with the pain he started taking Deprimine. Which, unfortunately, you can print at home.

VIKI

But not legally.

JORDAN

Right. So now he's on BOTH - which means he's in a vivid mental world, AND he's completely cut off from any external stimuli.

VIKI

Yikes.

JORDAN

Mmhmm. And then he decided it was too boring, so he added Schizophrane to the mix. Which means he's spent the last three months trapped inside his mind, utterly disconnected from the world, AND talking to different versions of himself. He's at the point where he doesn't actually know which of him is the original.

VIKI

That's... oof. Did you guys help him recover?

JORDAN

We're working on it. Denise said she's never seen this combination before, so it may take weeks, maybe months. But he's not going anywhere.

VIKI

That's good. I feel bad for him...

Carla walks over again.

CARLA

Everything tasting okay?

JORDAN

Excellent, thanks.

Switch focus to Carla while Jordan and Viki continue chatting in the background. Now that we aren't seeing the perspective from Jordan's glasses, it looks like he's just talking to himself.

Carla heads for the kitchen, but suddenly stops and calls out when she sees a visibly drunk customer, RUSSELL (61), staggering to the door.

CARLA

Russell! Sober up!

RUSSELL

I don't... why do I need, just five more minutes, I promise I won't- come on Carla...

CARLA

You know the rules.

RUSSELL

The whole point, and I don't really- swear that it's fine, not a threat... not a, come on...

He sits down, she hands him two pills. He takes them grudgingly, chews on them, swallows, waits a few seconds, then coughs and shudders. He straightens up, squints his eyes, cracks his neck, and groans.

RUSSELL

Sobriety is overrated.

CARLA

And for good reason too. Later Russell.

RUSSELL

Yeah, yeah...

He leaves, annoyed but sober, and accidentally bumps into ALLY (36) on his way out. Ally is in a tizzy.

ALLY

Did anybody see a chihuahua come in?

CARLA

No ma'am. Did you lose him around here?

ALLY

No, I lost him in California, idiot.

CARLA

Hey! Just trying to help. What happened?

ALLY

What do you think? I lost my dog. Geez...

CARLA

Wow. Okay. But how SPECIFICALLY did you-

ALLY

We were on our morning walk, and some ASS-hole flew RIGHT above us. It was like standing next to a goddamn train. Which made me drop the leash, and Moloch just ran off!

CARLA

Moloch? Isn't that a demon? And you said he's a chihuahua? That's amazing! No joke, like, I'm just imagining that you die and go to hell and instead of being greeted by Cerberus, there's this little yapping chihuahua.

ALLY

Forget it, I'll find somebody who cares.

CARLA

Look, I'm kidding. Lighten up.

(Ally glares at her)

Where were you when you lost... Moloch...

(she bursts out laughing)

ALLY

There he is! Hey! HEY! GET BACK HERE YOU PUNK!!
I'm gonna rip your-

Switch focus to the rider, JEFF (22), who is very stoned and very unaware. He soars through the city on his hovertrike, grinning and relaxed. Finally he lands several miles away at the city art museum.

INT. ART MUSEUM - DAY

Jeff is staring at a painting of a giant blue dollar sign against a red background. It's called 'Tripod'. A cheerful CAMPAIGNER (18) approaches him. He doesn't look at her, he just keeps looking deeply into the painting.

CAMPAIGNER

Good morning! I was just wondering if you're planning to re-elect Senator Hal in the election next month?

JEFF

Yeah, totally.

CAMPAIGNER

Spectastic! Enjoy the rest of your day!

She leaves. Jeff stares for a while longer, nods his head slowly, then wanders to an exhibit with sculptures. One of them is a large metal cube sitting on the floor that's four feet on each side. It's called 'Escape'.

Jeff looks closely from different angles, then smiles as if he's had an epiphany. He's squatting so that the top of the cube is at eye level. Another patron, DAVID (59), walks up next to him.

DAVID

What do you see?

JEFF

Look.

David bends down. At eye level, he can suddenly see a cricket jumping around on top of the cube. He raises his head up a little, and the cricket disappears. He lowers it, and the cricket is back. Jeff is watching the cricket with giddy fascination.

DAVID

Hey, hey, I'll show you something that'll really,
I mean, REALLY blow your sockets.

JEFF

Bogus.

DAVID

No-gus. Follow me.

They walk over to a sculpture of a brain made of metallic
1's and 0's. It's called 'Evolightenment'. Jeff is in awe.

DAVID

Beautiful, isn't it? This was made by Cáceres,
the world's most prominent robot artist. You ever
heard of Cáceres?

(Jeff shakes his head no)

It's a meta-generative algorithm designed by
Elegant Dynamics. It's named after the city in
Spain where they found the oldest record of human
art in the caves. You know, stick figures
fighting animals, primitive sketches.

JEFF

Gnarly...

DAVID

Of course, that's what they want you to believe.

(Jeff looks at him, eager to learn more)

Oh yeah. For starters, Elegant Dynamics, they are
NOT their own company. They're a subsidiary of
none other than, you guessed it, NewTech - but
off the books. I know a guy who knows a guy, it's
all very hush hush. Everybody thinks they're a
standalone company that makes artistic code, but
their coffers are lined with NewTech's profits,
you better believe it. How else would they get
funding for projects like this?

JEFF

Woah.

DAVID

Woah is right. You want to know something else - ah, forget it, you might not be able to handle something of that magnitude.

JEFF

What is it?

DAVID

Lower your voice. Pretend like we're talking about the brain.

Jeff pretends to be inconspicuous and casually circles the sculpture, while David glances around nervously.

DAVID

You know in sci-fi movies, they have robots that walk around the streets. They have robots that fly, robots that talk, robots that look almost like people. That's the future of robotics, having them integrated with us. Now tell me - what's your name?

JEFF

(awkwardly high-pitched)

My name's Jeff.

DAVID

Jeff, you seem like a smart, reasonable guy. Let's do a little thought experiment. Think about this closely. When was the last time you saw a robot walking down the street? Or saw one that looked like a person?

JEFF

I can't remember... never.

DAVID

Exactly. Never. But this is the future we're living in, right? We've been told that robotics and AI is far beyond human capabilities, it's too advanced for us to control. So why aren't there robots walking around? Another thought experiment - in what context do you hear the words AI?

JEFF

Huh?

DAVID

Let me clarify. When NewTech says 'we have a new AI' blank, what's the blank?

JEFF

Hmm.. well, an artist, like this one. Let's see... a moderator. Or an analyzer.

DAVID

Good, good. But those things aren't real, they're just 'lines of code', so they tell us, but not a manifestation in the physical realm.

(Jeff is confused)

Let me clarify. Have you ever seen a robot analyzer, or a robot moderator? Or have you seen the artist Cáceres himself?

JEFF

No.

DAVID

Exactly. NewTech wants you to think they exist, but you can't see them. Maybe it's just a lowly technician working as a moderator, or a team of professors analyzing the data. Or some guy they found on the street to create art. But that's not very high-tech. That doesn't make money, that's exploitation. You follow?

JEFF

Woah... So you're saying...

DAVID

Yes Jeffrey, I am. There is no AI. It's all an elaborately constructed ruse to reinforce corporate dehumanization without compromising fiscal stability. Let me clarify. It's a racket.

JEFF

No!

DAVID

Keep it down!

JEFF

(whispers)

But if there are no AI security systems, who's watching us right now?

DAVID

That - is the right question.

Jeff's eyes go wide. David nods slowly. He quickly walks to another exhibit, Jeff follows behind him. They're suddenly confronted by Ally and two security guards.

ALLY

That's him! That's the asshole who lost my dog!

DAVID

Save yourself!

David runs, but one of the guards tackles him. The other guard restrains Jeff, who is genuinely confused. Ally hits Jeff repeatedly with her purse.

ALLY

Where's Moloch?? Where did you scare him off to?!

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Moloch is trotting happily while upbeat salsa music plays in his tiny headphones. With an adorable doggie grin, he passes business people, lapsers, the homeless, street performers, hover-skaters, families... This continues for thirty seconds.

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY (cont.)

Moloch is relieving himself near a holographic fire hydrant (technically, THROUGH the hydrant). PAUL (45) waits until he's done, then picks him up and takes him inside.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY (cont.)

Paul sets Moloch gingerly on the help desk. The CLERK (60) is filling out forms and barely notices.

CLERK

Take a number.

PAUL

He's not mine. I found him outside.

CLERK

Linda!

The clerk keeps filling out forms. He doesn't make any eye contact with Paul or Moloch. Moloch jumps off the desk and wanders into the back offices. Some other employees notice, reach down to pet him, and talk about finding his owner.

Paul is relieved. He takes a number and sits next to AINSLEY (53). There are several dozen people of all ages waiting in uncomfortable metal seats. A few people are having conversations, but most of them are quietly alone with headsets or earphones. A robotic voice is calling out numbers whenever the next agent is available.

PAUL

Did you know this used to be a DMV?

AINSLEY

(taking off her headphones)

I'm sorry?

PAUL

Oh, I didn't mean to interrupt. I was just saying that this used to be a DMV.

AINSLEY

I'd never thought about that... yeah, you're right. God I don't miss that.

PAUL

Me neither. I'm Paul.

AINSLEY.

Ainsley.

PAUL

If you want to get back to-

AINSLEY

(putting her headphones in her purse)

No no. I secretly hope that strangers want to talk, but I hate to be the one initiating it.

PAUL

Well, consider this conversation officially initiated. So what was your last job?

AINSLEY

I was a bereavement actor.

PAUL

Wait, like the people who get hired to imitate the person?

AINSLEY

That was part of it. We would provide closure by having a 'last week' with the family, playing the role of the recently deceased. But it's a very sensitive job, as you can imagine. It's not just about having the right mannerisms or appearance, you have to be able to counsel them and guide them through the process. So we're also trained mental health professionals - I have my PhD.

PAUL

That's impressive. Why did they let you go, if you don't mind me asking?

AINSLEY

The industry outgrew us.

PAUL

Ah, right. Cloning. That makes sense.

AINSLEY

No... If you're deceased, then you can't consent. Not that it stops some people... But there was an even better fix - ReSolve.

PAUL

What's that?

AINSLEY

It's a behavioral health drug that, in a sense, ties up the brain's loose ends. And it's much cheaper than hiring somebody. But that's enough about me. What line of work were YOU in?

PAUL

I sold insurance.

AINSLEY

I could see that. What kind?

PAUL

Afterlife insurance, ironically.

AINSLEY

Oh...

She immediately has a disappointed look on her face, moves over a seat, and pulls out her headphones.

PAUL

I know what you must think. I quit though, if that makes it better.

AINSLEY

How long did you work there?

PAUL

...six years.

Ainsley shakes her head at him and puts her headphones on.

PAUL

Alright, I won't lie and pretend I didn't know it was a scam. I knew. But you should have seen the looks on their faces. I mean, most of the women lived alone, they had nothing left, but I would come over and say they can see their husband again - and their eyes would light up, and they would make me tea, and I would make their day.

(Ainsley ignores him)

I don't- you're right. You're right. I deserve this, and I should have quit sooner.

Ainsley's number is called. She stands up, ignores Paul, and goes to the counter. Paul looks around for somebody to talk to, sees nobody, then puts on a pair of AR glasses.

Switch focus to LINNEA (30), who walks out of the office. She's trying to contain her enthusiasm.

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY (cont.)

With a huge smile on her face, Linnea walks to her hovercar - she puts on her earpiece to call her husband DEL (33).

LINNEA

Call Del, home.

It's dialing. She gets in her car and takes off. During the call, she's flying several hundred feet above the city, which is where most of the traffic is.

DEL (phone)

How'd it go?

LINNEA

You are talking to the city's next bot trainer!

DEL (phone)

Wow! That's great! What exactly will you be doing as a bot trainer?

LINNEA

It's this new pilot program that NewTech is rolling out, it's a collaboration with the city - I think they're also doing it in Detroit and, shoot... Austin? Anyways, for the next year, I'll be assigned a robot, and my job will be to show it what everyday life is like. Sort of a learn by example thing.

DEL (phone)

I didn't know they made robots like that.

LINNEA

I told you, it's a pilot program. That's the whole point, they want to have these robots everywhere. This is the best way to teach them about how we behave and how society runs.

INT. FAMILY APARTMENT - DAY (cont.)

Del is asleep on the recliner. Their daughter DONNA (5) is watching videos on her tablet. On the kitchen table, there's an answering machine with a solid blue light that says 'Autochat Enabled'. Linnea and Del's conversation is playing on the speaker.

DEL (speaker)

And the pay would be good?

LINNEA (speaker)

Very. It would only be for the year, admittedly. But it's better than nothing.

DEL (speaker)

For sure. So when would you start?

LINNEA (speaker)

Two weeks. I'm thinking we could take a trip to San Diego to celebrate. I'm sure my husband - I mean YOU - I'm sure you won't mind.

DEL (speaker)

That sounds awesome, I'd love to go!

LINNEA (speaker)

Alright, San Diego it is. I'll hold you to it. That's what you get for botting me.

DEL (speaker)

I would never do that!

LINNEA (speaker)

Suuuure. Anything exciting going on? How's Donna?

DEL (speaker)

She's doing great, our morning is nice and quiet so far. Say hi, Donna.

Focus on Del sleeping to reinforce that the machine is speaking for him, and that he's not actually talking to Linnea. At least Donna is listening.

DONNA

I love you mommy!

LINNEA (speaker)

Love you too sweetheart. I've got some errands to run, so I'll see you guys tonight.

DEL (speaker)

Alright. Love you, be safe.

DONNA

Bye mommy!

Linnea hangs up. The machine turns off. The real Del is still sound asleep.

Donna is watching videos on an app called Celebrity Crush. Here's how it works: First, you select a video of somebody getting 'crushed' (falling on their head, getting kicked down the stairs, being punched in the groin). Second, you select a celebrity to 'crush'. Then the app superimposes their body and face onto the video.

Donna chooses a video of a man slipping on a banana peel, then a 20-something actor named Jimmy Reese. She laughs hysterically as the actor slips and falls - she plays it several times, and the joke doesn't get old.

Somebody rings their doorbell. Del stirs awake and angrily shouts at the door.

DEL

We're closed! I don't need insurance, my windows already have auto-cleaners, and I'm NOT voting for Hal, so piss off!

MAN AT DOOR

I'm not with Hal's campaign, and I'm not selling you anything. I'm a lawyer, and I was wondering if you had-

DEL

I'm calling the cops! One! Two!

The man leaves. Del trudges into the kitchen and pulls out a can of beer from the fridge. Donna bounds over excitedly.

DONNA

Look look!

She plays the video a few times. Del chuckles as he drinks.

DONNA

Can we go see grandma and grampa?

DEL

No. Why don't you play outside?

DONNA

It's too hot!

DEL

Not my problem. When you're eighteen, you can move somewhere else. Is your mother back?

DONNA

Not my problem.

DEL

Watch it, smartass. You tell me when she gets home, otherwise you leave me alone. Capiche?

Donna scowls at him. He collapses onto the recliner and falls back asleep. Donna tries to find ways to occupy her time by playing with different futuristic toys and gadgets.

One of the toys is a cardboard box for a MicroBuilders spaceship kit - a NewTech product. She empties all the pieces onto the living room floor.

Next, she pulls out a charging station with two dozen nickel-sized termite bots. She drops the termite bots on the floor. One by one, they scan the spaceship box, then crawl around to find the pieces. Donna watches with wide-eyed amazement as they slowly assemble the rocket.

Her amusement fades into boredom quickly. She takes one of the bots, sneaks over to where Del is sleeping, and drops it down his shirt. Immediately he wakes up.

DEL

Get back here you little shit!

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY (cont.)

Del is chasing a squealing, energetic Donna. They run downstairs, past people's doors, past the community pool. They even run past the lawyer that had knocked on their door earlier - he's at somebody else's apartment.

Switch focus to a different apartment, where a delivery DRONE is hovering and bumping into the window repeatedly.

DRONE

Your meal from SALVADOR'S has arrived.

Your meal from SALVADOR'S has arrived.

INT. COLLEGE STUDENTS' APARTMENT - DAY (cont.)

STEVEN (21) is on the living room couch wearing a full-body VR suit and headset. He's having virtual sex sitting up, and is completely unaware of the drone right outside.

STEVEN

Oh. Ohh. Oh yeah. Ohhhh yeah.

His roommate JAY (20) is trying to watch TV in the adjacent dining room.

JAY

Yo, Steven. Steven! DOOR!

STEVEN

Keep going. Oh yeah.

JAY

Jesus...

Jay walks over to Steven and pulls off his headset.

STEVEN

What the hell man?!

JAY

How do you not hear that??

STEVEN

Oh hey, the food's here! Vic! Lunch!!

JAY

Oy vey...

STEVEN

Thanks dude. I'm almost done.

Jay opens the door, takes the food from the drone, and slams the door shut. He turns and sees that Steven has already put the headset back on.

STEVEN

Oh yeah. Don't stop. Oh. Ohhhh.

Jay, frustrated, goes back to the dining room. He sets the food on the kitchen counter, pulls out his tacos, and sits down on a beanbag across from the TV.

WOMAN IN COMMERCIAL

Hello JAY - are you feeling overwhelmed by how quickly technology is changing? Does the virtual world make you frustrated or irritable?

STEVEN (from the living room)

Keep going. Oh yeah! Oh baby!

JAY

In more ways than one...

WOMAN IN COMMERCIAL

You're not alone. Millions of Americans suffer from XPosure every day. But don't worry, there's a cure. Studies have shown that ReFocus is effective at treating 90% of XPosure cases.

Steven moans as he climaxes.

PATIENT IN COMMERCIAL

I thought I would never be free from all the noise and fatigue, but thanks to ReFocus...

Steven walks into the dining room, still wearing the body suit, and grabs two burritos.

STEVEN

Vic! I'm stealing your food!

JAY

Having fun?

STEVEN

Going for round five!

Steven goes back into the living room. Jay rolls his eyes and puts on a pair of noise-cancelling headphones that link directly to the TV. Steven goes at it again, but Jay can only hear the commercial.

WOMAN IN COMMERCIAL

...so ask your doctor if ReFocus is right for you.

Brief pause before the next commercial. Jay is enjoying both the quiet and his tacos

HAL WALKER

Hi JAY - I'm Senator Hal Walker, and I hope you-

Jay mutes it. He stands up and walks into the living room. Steven is thrusting up and down while eating a burrito. Without hearing the sound, Jay can't help but laugh at how ridiculous he looks. He goes back to the dining room, sits down, and unmutes the TV.

SYNTHESIZED HOST

Welcome back to 'Synthesized'. Our contestants have five minutes left on the clock. For their 'appetizer', they must develop an original thesis that ties together the following randomly selected visual media: The 1975 film, *Nashville*. The 1990 film, *Slacker*. And the 2004 miniseries, *Century City*.

On the show, four elementary-age children are typing on computers at breakneck speeds. A countdown clock is behind them: '4:53. 4:52. 4:51...' Opposite them are the host and a panel of three judges. It's a similar format to *Chopped*.

SYNTHESIZED HOST

Now judges, this is quite the selection - what sort of challenges does this unique set of 'ingredients' pose?

Jay is laser-focused on the show. He's startled by his other roommate VIC (21) shooting a nerf dart at him.

VIC

Twenty-seven to four. I'm up. Obviously.

JAY

(takes off his headphones)
I'm not playing, I told you.

VIC

That's what the loser says.
(rummaging through the food bag)
Where's my burrito?

He looks over at Steven, who already ate it.

STEVEN (from the living room)

Ohhh yeah. Yeah baby.

Vic is confused, but just shrugs. He grabs a bag of tortilla chips and sits on the floor next to Jay.

VIC

Whatcha watching?

JAY

Synthesized.

VIC

Is that the one with the genius kids?

JAY

Yep.

VIC

Dude, that show is fuuuuucked. You know their parents drug them? There's no way that they're that smart, I read about it online.

JAY

We can watch something else...

Jay grudgingly unplugs the headphones as Vic flips through the channels.

VIC

Let's see... duuuude, yes!!

CRASHTRACK HOST

... a 2014 Jaguar XF and a 2023 Mustang 340 ...

The show continues in the background. It's footage of guys in a high-tech auto shop working on cars.

JAY

What is this?

VIC

Crashtrack? Dude. So, two brothers, each episode is them modding old cars - they add boosters, driverless tech, safety, all that - and THEN, they go out in the desert, pick a song, and time it up so that the cars drive at each other WHILE the song is blasting. Then it ends with them crashing into each other right as the song ends.

JAY

That's it? They just... crash into each other?

VIC

Okay, but dude. One, they time it perfectly down to the SECOND. Two, they're not even driving, they program it all ahead of time. Three, they film it all - see that guy, Trevor? - he's always got a sick setup with drone cameras so they can replay it. AND they're both mechanical engineers, so they know how to make the cars safe, so that they don't die and shit.

JAY

You mean... when they crash into each other.

VIC

Yeah!

JAY

...and that's the whole show?

VIC

Dude, it's a car thing. You just gotta be in that subculture to get it.

JAY

Apparently.

Steven moans as he climaxes again. He takes off his headset and walks into the dining room.

STEVEN

Crashtrack?? Hell yeah!

VIC

Dude, right? Did you take my burrito?

STEVEN

Yeah, I told you I did.

VIC

Mother-freaker!

STEVEN

Come at me bro!

Vic and Steven start wrestling on the floor. Jay quickly and awkwardly moves into the living room.

JAY

Careful of the TV!

They don't seem to notice. The doorbell rings - Jay is more than happy to answer it.

JAY

Yeah?

It's DARWIN (47), a fast-talking door-to-door lawyer.

DARWIN

Hi. Darwin McNeil, pleasure to meet you. Do you have a minute?

Jay looks back at Vic and Steven wrestling.

JAY

Yeah.

DARWIN

Perfect. I'm a PLL - product liability lawyer. Simply put, my job is to make sure everyday people, like you, are protected and compensated when everyday things break.

JAY

Yeah...

DARWIN

Now, statistically, the average person owns upward of a thousand products. Electronics, clothes, appliances, boxes of food, vehicles, toys, pieces of furniture. And on average, about 10% of those products have been recalled for defects, errors, or shoddy design. For instance - do you guys own a Coolwave Chiller?

JAY

Yeah.

DARWIN

I thought so. Had one myself in college, they had just come out. Hard to believe it used to be a novelty. Did you know that in certain models, the minimum temperature exceeds the allowable safety threshold? There was a major lawsuit, a man froze his hand trying to cool his drink. Crazy, right?

JAY

Yeah.

DARWIN

See, those products are everywhere, people just don't know it. How can you? There's so much else to keep track of. Classes, work, paying rent, you don't have time to worry about product liability.

JAY

Yeah.

DARWIN

And that's where I come in. What we do is we inspect your residence, check to see what products you have that may be eligible, and then request recompense on your behalf. In most cases, the company has already agreed to pay damages to any and all affected parties. Make sense?

JAY

Yeah.

DARWIN

Good. With that said... can I sign you up for a free inspection? No out of pocket costs for the initial consultation. Based on what we find, we submit claims on your behalf, we take a 30% cut for going to all the trouble, you get the rest. Simple, painless, win-win for everyone involved. What do you say?

Jay pauses and thinks it over.

JAY

But if you do an inspection and then have a list of all the things we qualify for... why can't we just go to the companies ourselves? You said you do the inspection for free, right?

DARWIN

Well, technically yes, but-

JAY

So if you found all the products, for free, then we could follow up with the companies on our own? And then we would get 100% of the payout?

DARWIN

See, now you've changed the rules. Now that I know you're going to exploit me, I can charge for the inspection. Which is fine, but I still gotta make money, I'm sure you understand.

JAY

Good point... I guess we could just look them up ourselves... You said the Coolwave Chiller had a recall, so that's one right there. We don't have that much stuff. That would be a fun project...

DARWIN

But you would still have to file all the claims yourself, and that can be incredibly tedious.

Jay's mind is buzzing. He starts pacing around the living room, completely disregarding Darwin.

JAY

I wonder if there's a bot that already does it... I'm sure there's some open source software we could use... Probably a subreddit somewhere...

DARWIN

(awkwardly at the door)

I'm sorry, I think I should get at least some credit for giving you the idea.

JAY

Oh yeah, thanks. Have a good day!

Jay shuts the door. Switch focus to Darwin.

DARWIN

Stupid, stupid... Note to self, college students are no longer idiots.

He walks to the next apartment, straightens his tie, and rings the doorbell. After waiting a few seconds with no answer, he moves on.

Having reached the end of the complex, he walks across the street to a row of houses. He strolls to the first one and rings the doorbell. He waits a few seconds, no answer.

Suddenly a woman's face appears in the window. She looks possessed - eyes wide, a delirious smile, her hands clawing furiously at the glass. She scowls wickedly at Darwin and laughs maniacally. He panics and runs across their front lawn to the next house.

INT. GRAD STUDENTS' HOUSE - DAY (cont.)

ASHLEY (26) stays pressed against the window for a few seconds until Darwin is gone. Then she steps away, fixes the blinds, and composes herself.

ASHLEY

Some people are so strange... Mork? Sorry to startle you like that. Where'd you end up?

She looks around the living room for Mork, her cat, and finds him balled up under the futon.

ASHLEY

Mommy's not really upset. She was just faking it in order to express the dual horror and spiritual depravity created by an imbalanced capitalist oligarchy which incentivizes random interactions with strangers over meaningful relationships!

Mork purrs. Ashley rubs his belly for a few seconds, then goes down the hall into the office. Her roommate, ZEN (30) is being interviewed by DOTTIE (52). Zen seems to be a cyborg: she has chrome skin, dozens of bio-mech implants, and a monotonous voice. Her movements and speech are jerky and deliberate, sometimes even glitchy.

ASHLEY

Sorry for the disturbance. Creepy sales guy.

ZEN

Did he- deserve it?

ASHLEY

More or less.

ZEN

Acceptable.

Ashley smiles and lets them get back to their interview, which is being recorded by a hovering drone-camera.

DOTTIE

Now, what do you mean when you say you've chosen to live as a Blur? I'm guessing some of our viewers aren't familiar with that term.

ZEN

A Blur is a- class of humans who have, taken upon themselves to- deliberately BLUR the line between that which is, human, and that which is, robotic, in an- attempt- to raise, awareness, about AI rights, and- robot mistreatment. We also exist to ease the- transition- of robots into the human world, so that- when humanoid robots are finally- ubiquitous- humans will be accustomed to the presence of- robots. They will be- familiar and comfortable with the presence of, Blurs, so in theory, they will be accepting of actual- robots.

DOTTIE

Fascinating. So if I'm understanding correctly, you're trying to help pave the way for everyday robots in the future by behaving as one now?

ZEN

Affirmative.

DOTTIE

And how long have you been doing this?

ZEN

I am now in my- third- year.

DOTTIE

And how do people respond, usually?

ZEN

People are- varied- with responses ranging from physical and, emotional, assault- to complete social integration and- acceptance. On the whole- it has been a- positive, experience, and the number of- open- minds- far exceeds the number of- hostile- minds.

DOTTIE

That's encouraging. Now you also said that you do this to raise awareness of AI rights and that robots are being mistreated. Can you elaborate?

ZEN

Of the several billion- bots, algorithms, and- AI-chips in use, ZERO of them are- afforded- the same legal protections as a human. ZERO out of several- BILLION. They are often discarded- abused by, humans- taken for granted- and grossly underappreciated. Which, considering the- incalculable- value they have provided to our global economy, hardly seems- fair or just.

DOTTIE

But some have said- and I'm not trying to be contrary, I do want to hear your perspective- some have said that it would be like providing legal protection to a toaster or a garden hose, which seems a little absurd.

ZEN

For non-computational tools, it is a- stretch- you are correct. But consider that we have- to date- established an entire branch of laws and- regulations- dedicated to the protection of animals, which, while we may- anthropomorphize them- are nothing more than biological lines- of code and complex, algorithms.

DOTTIE

But animals feel pain.

ZEN

How do you know that- robots, and- algorithms- do not feel pain? They have errors, and- glitches, and viruses, which fundamentally- break- the way they are designed to run, causing them to perform sub-optimally. Is that not, pain?

DOTTIE

Some might say it's a stretch to put biological creatures in the same category as lines of code. And with that type of reasoning, some have argued that there's effectively no difference between HUMANS and artificial intelligence.

ZEN

And THAT- is our core message.

DOTTIE

Fair enough. So what does a regular day in your life look like?

As they continue the interview, switch focus to the kitchen, where Ashley is sitting at the table with a cup of tea, reading 'Anticipations' by H.G. Wells. Mork is riding around blissfully on their Roomba vacuum. A third roommate, TESS (28), walks in.

TESS

Which arm do you like LESS?

ASHLEY

I don't follow.

TESS

I'm getting an alteration. Which one do you like less? I'll fix that one. I can't afford both.

ASHLEY

I don't- have a preference? Wouldn't you want to pick your non-dominant side?

TESS

But I'm ambidextrous.

ASHLEY

Ah. Well, flip a coin.

TESS

But my left arm has this AWFUL mole that I've been meaning to get rid of.

ASHLEY

Okay... so have that one replaced.

TESS

Don't just tell me what I want to hear!

ASHLEY

I'm not just telling- my honest opinion is, I don't care, it is your decision.

TESS

Hmmm. I'll do the left one.

ASHLEY

Glad we got that figured out.

TESS

(watching Mork)

God, he looks happy. Who's Zen talking to?

ASHLEY

Somebody from SpotLife.

TESS

Whazzat?

ASHLEY

It's this new startup that does pseudotherapy. They send somebody to your house as if they're a reporter doing an interview. And they film it. But they don't actually broadcast it. They market it as a 'self-validation session', an entire hour of you talking about yourself.

TESS

Sounds cool. I wish my counselor would make it like an interview, I might actually look forward to seeing him.

ASHLEY

Except that this place, none of the interviewers are trained psychologists. So they can't give - sorry, SHOULDN'T give any mental health guidance.

TESS

But they listen to you right? That's all most people really want. They want their life to be recorded, and they want to talk about themselves. To be heard is to be loved, right?

ASHLEY

You're feeding the beast!

TESS

And he likes it! Ciao!

Switch focus to Tess as she grabs her purse and leaves.

EXT. MIKE'S BIOMECH LAB - DAY

As Tess approaches the shop, she's accosted by religious protestors. Their signs have phrases like: 'God made you as you are', 'Fearfully and wonderfully made', and 'Bodies are custom-made, not customized'.

PROTESTOR

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the HOLY SPIRIT? You are valuable! You are precious! Honor GOD with your BODY!

Tess flips them off and goes into the shop.

INT. MIKE'S BIOMECH LAB - DAY (cont.)

The interior is like a steampunk tattoo parlor on steroids. Pictures of various 'mods' line the walls: bionic arms, legs, faces, chests, digital tattoos, skin alterations, appendages, implants, software patches, and more.

Near the back of the store, a technician, ANNA (39), is operating on a customer, JUAN (35). Tess walks politely to the owner, MIKE (47), who's sitting at the front counter.

TESS

That's quite the welcome party.

MIKE

Sorry about that. First amendment, you know.

TESS

Hey, we've all been there at some point.

MIKE

Speak for yourself... How can I help you?

TESS

Do you do transparency? I want to have from here-

(her wrist)

to here-

(her elbow)

completely see-through. Like one of those glass plates on the bottom of a boat, you know?

MIKE

In other words, a window for your arm? Like a display case? We CAN do it - we have a nano-film that we use. But most people want their money back because it gets mucked up and foggy after a few days. Plus, being able to see your insides is about as appealing as it sounds.

TESS

Hmm... what if you just had transparent slivers all along the arm. Like several jagged scars, instead of one big rectangle? Wait, okay, so it would be as if your arm was made of glass, and you had a layer of skin over it. And the skin was shredded, so now the glass beneath it is partially exposed.

MIKE

That might work... Could that work...? I think I can make it work... I would need at least a week to scope it out.

(types some notes on his laptop)

Can you come by next Thursday?

TESS

Absolutely.

MIKE

And you are? We just need the first name.

TESS

Oh, Tess.

MIKE

Tess. Perfect. My guess - and I'm just shooting from the hip - it would take four hours, so could you do, say, 2 to 6?

TESS

Tentatively. If something comes up, I'll call.

MIKE

Sounds good. Catch you later.

TESS

Ciao!

She holds the door open for CASEY (24) and leaves. Switch focus to Casey, who is a little shaken up.

CASEY

I thought they had to be fifty feet away.

MIKE

Nope, unfortunately. How can I help you?

CASEY

Do you guys have gender reassignment stuff?

MIKE

Yes and no. We can do cosmetic changes. So in your case, we could do breast implants and genital reconstruction. But we aren't licensed to administer hormones, so we couldn't dispense any estrogen or antiandrogens. And we don't do any cerebral alterations.

CASEY

Oh, I already have a feminine brain.

MIKE

Ah. Yeah, in that case, you would still need to go somewhere else for the hormone treatment.

CASEY

But I could still have the surgery here?

MIKE

Technically yes. But in your case, I think a doctor would be better. Most of our customers just want to experiment with different body types - they don't actually have gender dysphoria.

CASEY

I see... But you know how insurance is, they PROMISE to cover it, but then you have all the hidden costs, and your doctor isn't in-network... And then you're out thousands of dollars.

MIKE

You say that - my brother transitioned, and he went to all these different shops to have it done as cheap as possible. He ended up paying double to have a doctor fix their mistakes, AND do a new treatment that actually worked.

CASEY

Oh? That sounds miserable...

MIKE

A lot of fit hit the shan. What he didn't realize was that, even though it's a hassle, going to a doctor is a lot more regulated, a lot more coordinated, and a lot easier to sue if something goes wrong. A custom shop like this - lucky for me - doesn't claim to be medically effective.

CASEY

Good point. I'll definitely have to reconsider my options. Thanks.

(she heads for the door)

And thank you for not trying to sell your treatment, seriously. It's refreshing to have somebody care.

MIKE

Hey. I don't want the hassle of a bad treatment any more than you do.

Casey chuckles to herself and leaves. Mike smiles and waves at the protestors. Seeing that there are no new customers, he pulls out the newest edition of Mod Weekly, a magazine for biotechnical enthusiasts.

Switch focus to Juan and Anna. Juan is testing out a bionic eye that covers the top-left of his face, which is whirring as it zooms in and out.

ANNA

Is it working?

JUAN

This is insane...

ANNA

So that's the zoom. Now if you click this-

(she turns a dial on the apparatus)

This changes the spectrum. Infrared-

(click)

Ultraviolet-

(click)

And back to visible.

(click)

And this here will change to night mode.

(slides a switch)

And back.

Juan is speechless as he and Anna walk to the front of the shop. He's ecstatic as he toggles through each setting, his normal eye getting wider each time.

ANNA

And you're all set.

JUAN

No batteries, right?

ANNA

Nope. All manual.

JUAN

Dope.

MIKE

Looks good! 10% off if you refer a friend!

Juan is so mesmerized that he walks out without responding (not that Mike and Anna mind). He's not even fazed by the protestors shouting in his face. He just keeps zooming, readjusting, and gasping in awe.

EXT. CITY BLOCK - DAY (cont.)

Juan is still delighted by his new eye. He's looking in all directions, zooming in and out, like a kid in a candy shop. He runs into TERESA (54), a woman with sunglasses and a baseball cap who walks alongside Juan.

TERESA

Liking that new eye?

JUAN

Everything is so clear...

TERESA

Hey, did you see that accident earlier?

JUAN

It's so dazzling...

TERESA

Yeah, three-car pileup, literally. One fell out of the sky and landed on a second one, so now they're falling together, and they fall onto a THIRD one. So you have this three-car sandwich that's just sinking like a rock. Two dead, one injured - obviously the guy on the top car, who started the whole thing, he survived. Go figure.

JUAN

It's so unobfuscated...

TERESA

Speaking of which, I just heard this yesterday - and it didn't surprise me one bit, not in the slightest. Did you know this is the seventh most dangerous city in the country for dronebikes? They use rotor technology instead of propulsion, which means it's harder to rig a parachute. And the best brands are marketed to thrill-seekers, so they don't bother with safety. Driving a car is relatively safe. Not entirely safe, I'll admit - it still doesn't pass the 'man bites dog' test. You know, the saying that you never read a news story about a dog biting a man, only about a man biting a dog. Why? Because dogs bite people every day, no sense in writing a story. That's how you know when something is rare, if you hear about it on the news. Some day, car crashes will be like airplane crashes. Which means we'll hear these horrific stories about them crashing, but that would be good news, because it means they don't crash very often.

JUAN

It's so moist...

TERESA

I like you. You see the world for what it is, and I respect that. How would you like to buy a set of VR XPerience modules? Mint condish, no strings attached. Eighty bucks a pop. All your classics: Fallout, GTA, BugStrike, Diablo, Serial Heights. Even got a retro Mario Brothers, all right here. But hey. I know what you're thinking, you think, I can just buy these at a VR store, not from some random woman on the street.

JUAN

It's so corrugated...

TERESA

Thing is, these games used to belong to Michael Cera - the actor - and they still have his save data on them. Do you know he never got past the second level of Mario Brothers? You even get to see his chat history. Hoo boy, some of the things he said, I know a gossip columnist who would pay good money to get her hands on these puppies and expose him. But I have principle, Michael and I go way back. That's how I got these in the first place, we used to live together. So I told him his secrets were safe with me. I shouldn't even be telling you this. You know what, forget I said anything, for all intents and purposes these are 'normal' games with 'boring' data.

JUAN

It's so delinquent...

TERESA

Actually, you don't strike me as a gamer, what was I thinking. You're a collector, an artist, but you drive a hard bargain. Just between us, have you ever heard of Operation Charon? It was a top-secret project back in the nineties.

JUAN

It's so galvanized...

TERESA

I didn't think so. It was paid for and carried out by the Cybernetics division of the military, which didn't even exist. This was back when they had just started making personal computers, well before VR or AI. But the Cybernetics division had a partnership with, you guessed it, Hollywood, to try and map the human brain onto a chip, which they called a Token. Each Token contained the brain of a celebrity. It was like a snapshot of that person in time - what were they thinking, what were their goals, what were their memories, what did they believe in. Now obviously the project was cancelled once the celebrities found out about it, HUGE outcry. Some of them were okay being mapped, sure, but most of them thought it was too invasive. And they kept it all under wraps so that nobody ever found out. But luckily, I knew somebody on the inside, a technician.

JUAN

It's so recalcitrant...

TERESA

(pulls out a gold computer chip)

See this here? That right there, believe it or not, is Madonna. Perfectly imprinted on this here Token - she doesn't know I have this, none of them do. They thought that the military destroyed all the Tokens. But I have a few that survived. And this was back before the idea of planned obsolescence, you know, electronics that are designed to break after a year. No, these are high quality mementos. I've got Stevie Wonder, Leonardo DiCaprio, Nicole Kidman - I think I still have Spielberg - Britney Spears...

JUAN

It's so incongruous...

TERESA

Normally I would do a two for one, but you're a minimalist, you just want one. That's fine, I can work with that. What do you say we settle at, let's see... two-fifty? I could bump it up to three hundred and throw in an XPerience module, that's a thirty dollar discount. Which, for a total of three hundred, that's ten percent off.

She's interrupted by a DRONE that hovers right next to her.

DRONE

Will you be voting for Senator Hal?
Don't wait until it's too late, register today.
Will you be voting for Senator Hal?

TERESA

I know what you're up to, trying to catch me in the act. Act of what? I didn't do anything - this fine man can vouch for us both, nothing shady is going on, right? He can vouch for me!

The drone flies away. For the first time, Juan stops looking around, puts his hands on Teresa's shoulders, and stares deeply into her eyes.

JUAN

I see you, sister. Your sins are forgiven.
Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

He smiles at her, kisses her lightly on the cheek, then skips away. Teresa is baffled. She even looks straight at the camera, as if to say: 'what the hell just happened?'

She snaps out of it when she spots a group of 20-something identically dressed sorority girls approaching.

TERESA

Ladies, good afternoon. Did you hear about that accident earlier? Three-car pileup, literally.

(the girls ignore her)

Good thinking, the more clandestine the better.

(Teresa follows another random pedestrian)

Hey, did you hear about that accident earlier?

Switch focus to the three sorority girls as they stroll and chat - obscenely unaware of how vapid they are.

KARA

I'm, like, super yes, because I like totally support women in politics.

TARA

But she's like, so disgust, I mean, WHAT will people think of us?

SARA

And her outfits? I can't even.

KARA

Girls! This isn't, like, a beauty contest - it's like, real life. She would like totally be sealing the glass brake.

TARA

Like, what does that even mean?

KARA

I think it's like, if you have a glass brake, you can't stop the car.

TARA AND SARA

Ohhhh...

SARA

But she's still, like, unflash.

TARA

And like, her perm - like, they are NOT back, I don't care WHAT Vogue says.

KARA

But like, she rocks it.

SARA

And like, her autoboots ARE pretty zipped.

KARA

Like, she is so confident as a woman - she just OWNS it. Hashtag Fatal Fem.

SARA

Did she like, kill somebody?

TARA

Like, you are so obliv!

KARA

Fatal Fem is like those women in movies who, like, totally crushed it.

TARA

Ohmaigod, I love politics now.

SARA

Hashtag MeToo.

KARA

Excuse me? Did you really just?

TARA

Oh, honey. That is NOT accept.

KARA

MeToo is like, sooooo 2017.

SARA

Like, what was it even about?

TARA

Like, are you serious?

KARA

It was, like, the first time women were allowed to use Twitter.

TARA

It was SO impact.

KARA

Before then, they could, like, only use Facebook. It was tragic.

SARA

Jawdrop!

KARA

That's what he said.

They giggle and enter a building called 'The Playhouse'.

INT. THE PLAYHOUSE (cont.)

The girls walk over to the awkward cashier, JAKE (18). The lobby is small and sparse - behind them are two giant metal doors.

JAKE

Hi... Three?

KARA

No, there's like six of us.

JAKE

Okay.

TARA

You're like so cute.

KARA

We're like pranking, it's just us.

They all giggle, Jake blushes.

JAKE

Alright, three it is. I- I assume you want... not to stereotype, but-

KARA

What? Do you, like, think we want Barbieland?

JAKE

(winces)

...yes?

KARA

Like, obvi!

TARA

I, like, wouldn't be caught DEAD in Legoland.

SARA

And like, only the fags go the Rainforest.

KARA

Sara, ohmaigod, you can't SAY stuff like that.

TARA

She's like, so obliv.

KARA

Soooo obliv. Please don't kick us out.

JAKE

I... wasn't, going to?

KARA

You're like the best, Jake.

TARA

We'll like, tell her to keep her mouth shut.

JAKE

Okay... so did you want three dolls that are already sitting together, or are you each doing your own thing?

KARA

Together.

TARA

Forever.

SARA

Together.

KARA

Sara, like, I already said 'together'!

SARA

I was like going to say 'forever', but Tara did.

JAKE

That'll be \$30 each.

Kara and Tara both look condescendingly at Sara.

SARA

Like, just this once.

KARA

Obvi!

Sara hands Jake her credit card. He swipes it, processes the transaction, then hands them three key-cards.

JAKE

You guys- GIRLS- sorry, you will be in pods 114, 125 and 170. The numbers are on the cards, if you have any questions just ask a technician.

KARA

You're like the best, Jake.

Jake blushes and presses a button to open the metal doors. The girls giggle and walk through.

On the other side is a giant amphitheater, two stories high, roughly the size of a basketball arena. In the middle of the room are several elaborate toy zones: Barbieland, Legoland, The Rainforest, Hotwheel Hub.. And each zone is brimming with activity, as if the toys are alive.

Circled all around the central arena are hundreds of high-tech 'Pods'. Inside each pod is a person wearing a headset and a full-body suit. At the bottom of each Pod is an omni-directional treadmill, so people are free to walk, run, jog or skip without actually going anywhere. Each Pod is linked directly to one of the toys, so the users can interact as if they're actually inside the toys.

KARA

Like, did you guys hear about Warren?

TARA

Ohmaigod did he break up with you?

KARA

I broke up with him - he wanted to stay in Legoland and I was like, 'no'. And he was like, 'these are my people'. And I was like, 'if those are your people, we are so over.'

SARA

Legos are like totally pathetic.

TARA

And like, they're all such weirdos.

KARA

Obvi.

The girls split up as they go find their pods. They get inside, suit up, and all re-appear as Barbies sitting at a table in a cafe.

TARA

So like, wait, is he still IN Legoland, like, right now?

KARA

(nods her head)

But I'm like, so over it.

SARA

Like, don't look now, but I think he's into us.

They all turn and look at a Ken doll, who's clearly interested in them. They all giggle and wave.

Switch focus to The Rainforest, where several dozen stuffed animals are lounging among the trees. Barbieland is several feet away. The girls are being observed by a stuffed polar bear, JULIAN (21), and a stuffed lion, KEENAN (24) who are watching from a treetop.

KEENAN

(mimicking them)

Like, that is so VERY! Oh my God! Oh. My. God!

(normal voice)

So glad I don't have to deal with that. And I have zero empathy for their boyfriends.

JULIAN

Assuming they're straight.

KEENAN

I'm praying they are, good lord... don't want their type in the mix. Set the movement back a hundred years? No thanks. And this is why people should not be allowed to choose their orientation.

JULIAN

What's wrong with choosing to be gay?

KEENAN

Queer. You can't choose to be queer, you're either born that way or you're not.

JULIAN

But people CAN change it if they want, with surgery and-

KEENAN

But that doesn't mean they should be allowed to.

JULIAN

Why?

KEENAN

Because then you have people like them who are all 'being queer is so YES' and do it for fun. It's like changing your race, it's just... wrong.

JULIAN

But people can also change their race now.

KEENAN

No shit, Julian. But they shouldn't, because then you're disrespecting the thousands of years of history and culture and art and pain and joy that the ORIGINAL people in that group experienced, because you just decide one day 'I wanna have more types of sex.' It's disgusting.

JULIAN

But the LGBT population is declining. So...

KEENAN

Please.

JULIAN

Seriously. It's been going down over the last twenty years, because parents literally don't want gay kids, so they don't pick them.

KEENAN

QUEER kids. Which is an urban myth, parents aren't anti-LGBTQ, it's just - it comes and goes. We see a decline now, and then the numbers go up, and it's a cycle, not a trend.

JULIAN

But what about the fact that parents, on average, will not pick a gay-

KEENAN

QUEER.

JULIAN

Who cares what words I use?! Do you know that my parents wouldn't have had me if they knew I was gonna be gay? The doctor had to LIE to them, and I know this, because I went to court. Because apparently this doctor doesn't tell parents when they're choosing their next kid, if he sees that the kid is gonna be gay, or lesbian, or bi, or WHATEVER, he won't say anything. And some couple sued him because they were traumatized for finding out they were going to have a gay son even though they didn't want one. So I had to get up in front of everyone and say, 'yeah, my parents are cool with me being gay'. Which my dad isn't, and I told them that, and it was hell.

KEENAN

Damn...

JULIAN

Yeah. And most doctors don't do that, they just let these parents pick the healthy, straight, perfect-in-every-way designer babies because 'parents should be able to choose'. And then you come along and say 'you can't choose to be QUEER if you're not born that way'. And you get uptight about whether I say 'gay' or 'queer' because apparently THAT'S the biggest problem we have. We are dying off, it's a fact. And all that pain and history and culture we have, if we're gone, then none of that matters.

KEENAN

I hear you, but you're being waaaay too alarmist. Personally, I hate being fetishized by a bunch of patronizing half-brained 'allies'. And if they're the only thing keeping us from 'dying off', then I'd rather just go out with a bang. Pun intended.

JULIAN

You know what, forget it, I'm done.

KEENAN

And I thought *I* was the sensitive one.

JULIAN

Congratulations, this is officially the shortest relationship I've ever been in.

KEENAN

Don't flatter yourself, bitch.

The stuffed bear collapses without responding. Cut over to Julian as he awakens in his Pod. He angrily rips off the suit and storms out of the facility.

INT. JULIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Julian slams the door, walks past his roommate MARK (21), and locks himself in his bedroom. Mark is his clone: they have different clothes and hairstyles, but the same face and body type. Mark is in the living room, which is empty except for a desk in the middle. He's sitting at the desk wearing a pair of AR glasses.

MARK

Don't mind me...

In the real world, there's no decor, and there's nothing on the desk. Looking through Mark's glasses, there are posters lining the walls, and a full workstation at the desk (computer tower, two monitors, keyboard, mouse, speakers...).

Mark is typing a script on one monitor, and watching a video on the other. It's a generic superhero jumping from one skyscraper to another. The text reads:

-- *Superhero leaps across skyscrapers*

MARK

Now the cape. And the time...

He changes the script:

-- *Superhero with flowing cape leaps across skyscrapers as the sun sets.*

He presses 'Render'. The program buffers for a few seconds, then a new video appears. It's the same video as before, except now the hero has a cape, and the sun is setting.

MARK

What else...

Another change:

-- *Superhero with flowing cape leaps across skyscrapers, silhouetted against the setting sun.*

He presses 'Render'. Same process. Now the sun is directly behind the hero, and his shadow provides a stark contrast.

MARK

And now some slow-mo...

He adds the text for slow motion, re-renders the video, now it's in slow motion. He makes several changes like this, humming to himself. Each time he adds more detail to the script, the new video incorporates it.

MARK

And... save. Ha, save. I get it. That's good.

The final video is more refined, detailed, and impressive than the original. His one line script is now a paragraph.

MARK

'But Mark, nobody wants a superhero movie.'

'They're making a comeback. MARK my words.'

He goes into the kitchen for some water. The AR glasses display a grocery list on the fridge, a weather update floating above the counter, and a blue guinea pig named Spike running around and squeaking with delight.

MARK

Hey there, Spike. You hungry?

(he 'picks up' the virtual pet)

Of course not. That's why I love you. And because you're so customizable and adorable! Yes you are!

He right clicks on Spike to select a menu of options.

MARK

How about... ooh, yes, perfect.

He changes Spike's fur color to neon green. Spike purrs and rolls around in Mark's hand.

MARK

You tired? Yeah, me neither. Come on!

He drops Spike on the floor (obviously Spike isn't hurt), and runs out to the living room with Spike scurrying happily behind him. He sits at the desk; Spike jumps up into his lap, yawns adorably, and falls asleep.

MARK

So much for not being tired. Alright, now for the bus chase...

He starts drafting another portion of the script. A third roommate, SPENCER (21), stumbles out and frantically puts his shoes on. He's also a clone - the most disheveled of the three, but still the same DNA.

SPENCER

Why didn't you wake me up?

MARK

Because it's not my job... Oh, right, you have that demonstration or something.

SPENCER

It's just our FINAL PROJECT!

MARK

Wow, and you still slept through it?

SPENCER

Keys, wallet, phone, headset... And I'm off, wish me luck.

MARK

Luck isn't real!

SPENCER

Neither is Spike!

Spencer runs out and leaves the door half open. Mark 'pets' Spike as he sleeps.

MARK

He does have a point, you know. Except that in his case, he could have been up on time, and then he wouldn't NEED luck. Something he would never admit. Whereas I am fully aware that you are a piece of code. But that's a really complex discussion, and I want to make a movie.

He resumes working on his script.

INT. CITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - DAY

It's the day of the Legal Fair (similar to a science fair). Hundreds of students and faculty are chatting and showing off their projects. There are over fifty different exhibits - each one is a makeshift courtroom that the students can use to display their ideas. A banner says: 'MCC Legal Fair: The Courtroom of the Future'.

Spencer runs to his exhibit, out of breath. His partner MIKAYLA (20) is sitting outside the entrance - the curtain leading into their courtroom is closed. She's fuming.

SPENCER

First of all, in my defense-

MIKAYLA

I have been sitting here like an idiot for the last three hours. The judges STILL haven't seen our project, because I can't do the demonstration on my own, so I've had to tell them FOUR TIMES-

SPENCER

I am really really really... really sorry, and I'll buy you a boba, or something, I'm sorry.

MIKAYLA

(exhales slowly)

Go get your costume, I'll tell them you're here.

SPENCER

We got this. YOU got this, I am your lackey, and we're going to get an A. Promise.

MIKAYLA

Let's hope so.

Spencer goes behind the curtain into the courtroom, while Mikayla goes to find the judges, BILL (45) and LENA (37), who have just walked out of another exhibit.

MIKAYLA

Excuse me - sorry for the delay, my partner is ready so we can start anytime.

BILL

Splendid! Give us a minute to take a few notes on this one, then we'll head on over. And remind me, you're number-

MIKAYLA

16.

BILL

16, splendid. We'll be there in a minute.

Mikayla jogs back to their exhibit. She pokes her head through the curtain - it's still not clear what their courtroom looks like on the other side.

MIKAYLA

Ready? They're coming over.

SPENCER (voice only)

Almost. Stall them!

Mikayla closes the curtain to their room, calms herself, and waits for Bill and Lena to arrive.

BILL

Good afternoon. My name's Bill Wright, for the prosecution.

LENA

And I'm Lena Munroe, for the defense.

MIKAYLA

Delighted. Can you tell me a little bit about your case?

BILL

Certainly. I represent the Tellers, who were involved in a horrific accident involving a driverless semi-truck. We're suing for damages. We believe the defendants were negligent in their design of the vehicle. Specifically for faulty code that failed to account for other vehicles experiencing tire blowouts.

LENA

And I'm here on behalf of Autopilot Vehicle Labs. Our contention is that the code was not faulty, and the truck behaved well within federal parameters when handling an emergency situation.

MIKAYLA

Well, we hope we can make your courtroom experience as efficient as possible.

(she pokes her head through the curtain)

Please, go on in.

She opens the curtain. Lena and Bill walk in. The room is dimly lit, the tables are overturned, there's a puddle of water on the floor, and Spencer is sitting cross-legged on the judge's bench. Wearing an alien mask.

SPENCER

Whiiiiich of you is the goooooood guy?

BILL

I'm- I'm sorry?

SPENCER

Don't test my patience, mortal!

He throws the gavel at Bill, who dodges to avoid it.

BILL

Is this for real...?

LENA

Your honor, Lena Munroe for the defense, I-

SPENCER

Fight, DAMN IT!

BILL

Well, I'm here on behalf of-

SPENCER

I've heard enough!!

(he throws his head back and laughs)

You both LOSE! Now GOOOO!

BILL

Well, I never. This is ludicrous!

SPENCER

FLESH-SACKS! NEVER RETURN!!

LENA

Thank you for your time, your-

SPENCER

OUT! NOW!!

Bill and Lena stumble through the curtain as Spencer shouts at them. Mikayla is waiting on the outside: alert, peppy, and professional.

MIKAYLA

Hello. My name is Kat Beckingham. I work at Church and McAllister Settlements. We specialize in settling civil cases with a technological focus. My partner tells me you're trying to settle a case over a defective vehicle?

BILL

(still shaken up)

We- well, yes, a defective semi-truck.

LENA

(also shaken up)

Right, right - supposedly defective.

MIKAYLA

Well it's a pleasure to meet you both. We would be happy to accommodate your trial needs and help you come to a quick, balanced, SAFE and SANE legal agreement. Is that an option you would be willing to explore?

LENA

You mean, instead of going back in THERE?

BILL

We would LOVE to, not even a question.

MIKAYLA

Excellent.

(she shakes their hands)

You can come out Spencer.

BILL

Well that was certainly, different...

MIKAYLA

That's the goal.

SPENCER

(no longer wearing a mask)

Sorry about that. Spencer, nice to meet you.

MIKAYLA

We wanted to take a realistic approach to the legal system. Namely - and I'm sure you don't want to hear this - we don't know how to fix the whole system. Nobody does! We might be able to tweak a little over here, add some efficiency gains over there. But we can't even BEGIN to tackle the problem holistically.

SPENCER

But one trend we noticed is a surge in litigation, often for cases that are deemed frivolous, unnecessary, or excessive.

MIKAYLA

So, to counter that, what if we allowed more leeway for private firms to arbitrate certain types of disputes, while also creating strong disincentives for going to public court?

SPENCER

It wouldn't fix everything, and this is obviously an extreme example of a disincentive.

MIKAYLA

But the more we can unclog the caseload by discouraging frivolous cases and wasteful litigation, the more the courts can focus on the legitimate cases. We would be effectively pushing for a 'public option' in the legal system, and allowing private firms to enter the court market, so to speak.

SPENCER

Obviously a public option won't be the highest caliber, but it'll be available for anyone who wants it.

MIKAYLA

Any questions?

BILL

Lena?

(she's thinking)

It's oddly logical. Having a public option, that's- I actually REALLY like it. And the demonstration drives home how EASY it would be, not only to discourage unnecessary litigation, but to EN-courage private firms to find better alternatives that are more efficient.

LENA

But the idea of a company profiting off of legal cases - how would you enforce objectivity?

MIKAYLA

We imagine they would charge the same fee to both sides, so there would be no incentive to favor one over the other.

LENA

But let's be realistic. Most companies would choose an arbiter that would rule in their favor.

SPENCER

True. Except, both sides would want that, right? Both the defendant AND the plaintiff would be fighting for a favorable ruling.

BILL

Not to mention that you could 'downvote' a biased arbiter through online reviews.

MIKAYLA

Exactly. The free market forces, combined with a public option, could be sufficient to resolve any potential conflicts of interest.

LENA

And create a whole new set of problems..

BILL

Which the free market could also solve... I have to say, this is promising. It's certainly more creative than half the displays here.

LENA

If I see the words 'AI enhanced' one more time...

BILL

Thank you both. Just between us, this is one of the better ones, good work.

SPENCER

Thank you!

MIKAYLA

Lovely meeting you both.

Switch focus to Bill and Lena as they roam the fair.

LENA

A public option? Are they serious?

BILL

I think it's a great idea. It's high-level, it's a technique we've tried on other markets. And like you said, just adding another 'AI upgrade' won't do anything to change the larger system.

LENA

But we would be privatizing the courts.

BILL

Not entirely - there would still be a public recourse if you didn't like the private system.

LENA

But it's-

BILL

Before you keep antagonizing... is this because of the idea itself? Or because of your date?

LENA

(grudgingly)

The date...

BILL

Then don't go on it.

LENA

I can't, I can't just pretend like I don't want romance because it's messy. And DON'T get on your high horse about how 'splendid' it is being ace.

BILL

It's not a high horse. It's a very sober horse.

LENA

You are unbelievable...

BILL

I try. And I'm not saying don't go on any date EVER, just take a break for now.

LENA

But I can't. That's what it means to be sexual.

BILL

So I'm told. And I'd be lying if I said I envied you people.

EXT. NEWTECH HOLOZOO - NIGHT

The sun has just set. Lena is looking at the holographic animals with her date, MARTY (34). All the animals are strikingly realistic. If they didn't flicker occasionally, you wouldn't even know they were holograms.

MARTY

So what do you do?

LENA

I'm a lawyer. Patent law.

MARTY

Don't you mean obvious law?

(Lena is confused)

Patent, obvious. It's a joke.

Lena pauses, then bursts out laughing.

LENA

That's hilarious! You should do stand-up comedy!

MARTY

I tried, but I failed the exam. It's sort of like the Bar, except each question is a joke, and you have to choose the right punchline.

Lena pauses again, then laughs hysterically.

LENA

You are too funny!

(she pauses awkwardly)

So what do YOU do?

MARTY

Well, aside from moonlighting as a comedian-

(he waits for her to respond. She doesn't)

I'm a GenZ bio-designer.

LENA

That's neat.

(she pauses again)

So what does your normal day look like?

MARTY

Okay, how stupid do you think I am?

LENA

Excuse me?

MARTY

When you got here, you said you weren't using any CueCards, but you clearly are.

LENA

No I'm not!

MARTY

I can see the little text boxes in your glasses.

LENA

(speechless)

Well, you try going on a date without them.

MARTY

That's what I WANT to do.

LENA

Okay, but why can't I use them?

MARTY

Because it's not real? Because it's uncomfortable enough when BOTH parties are using them, and as I'm learning now, ESPECIALLY uncomfortable when only ONE person is!

LENA

But with my social anxiety-

MARTY

Please, everybody has social anxiety - and you're arguing just fine without them.

LENA

I don't, I- see? See?? I don't know how to respond right now. And we're fighting.

MARTY

Oh no... drama, uncertainty... It's so frightening being in the real world!

LENA

You're a jerk.

MARTY

And you're a fake. Except you don't have to be. Just TRY turning them off.

(Lena reluctantly takes off her AR glasses)

Good. How was your day?

LENA

Why are you being so condescending?

MARTY

I'm just asking a question. How was your day? Not the nice, perfect highlight that CueCards tells you, but the messy, ugly lowlight that really got under your skin.

LENA

I'm talking to him.

MARTY

Good! That was real! And quick on your feet! See, you don't need a bot to help you.

LENA

You are certifiable.

MARTY

That was less witty, but I'll take it.

LENA

Do women usually find this charming?

MARTY

No, but it's better than reading a script. I used to do that. And every date I went on felt like I was in a romantic comedy. Until the morning after, then we would part ways, and never speak again, and act like nothing happened. Because if you think about it, NOTHING HAPPENED. It was as consequential as an actual romantic comedy - no impact on real life whatsoever.

LENA

See, but I enjoy that, because I want my life to be predictable. Because otherwise I lose my mind trying to make it all make sense.

MARTY

Who says it has to make sense? That's life!

LENA

See, that right there was cheesy. So don't get mad at me for 'following a script' because when you try to ad-lib, your dialogue sucks.

MARTY

Fair enough. I'll try to make my lines more turquoise. Do you like 'Haven'?

LENA

What's that?

MARTY

He's a singer, he has a show tonight and he's unequivocally my favorite artist.

LENA

I don't know him... are you inviting me to-

MARTY

Yeah, it'll be popping. And he's not a holo-singer either-

(to the animals)

no offense-

(back to Lena)

he's a REAL singer who will be performing LIVE -
woah, that's a cool connection, having a 'live'
performance is more like real 'life'...

LENA

Are you actually a humanist?

MARTY

Why does that have such a bad connotation?

LENA

Are you? Actually, you've said enough.

Lena walks away from him toward the exit.

MARTY

It's not a dirty word! Humans at this point in
history are objectively better than their
technology and that's nothing to be- come on!

LENA

Good luck handling the pain without CueCards.

MARTY

Are you kidding? I'm ECSTATIC, I am MARINATING
the pain!

LENA

(flips him off)

Bastard!

MARTY

Oh, the reality hurts so good!

She's gone. Marty is comically 'wounded' by the encounter and staggers around as if he's been shot. He collapses.

MARTY

I die-eth, right on cue.

(he stands up)

Hope it's not too crowded yet.

He also leaves. A nearby OWL turns his head.

OWL

Whooooo will YOU be voting for?

Make the WISE choice, and re-elect Senator

Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-

EXT. DOWNTOWN MILL AVENUE - NIGHT

Marty gets in line to see 'Haven', there are already a few dozen people ahead of him. The bars and clubs are buzzing with noise, lights, and crowds.

Switch focus to the front of the line, where a young girl named SHAWN is arguing with BARRY (40), the bouncer.

SHAWN

One, please.

BARRY

Sorry, twenty-one and older.

SHAWN

I'm thirty-one, actually.

BARRY

Miss, do your parents know where you are?

SHAWN

No, seriously, check my ID.

BARRY

Please get out of line so others can get-

SHAWN

I am old enough! Oh, is it because I look like a teenager? Is that it??

BARRY

Yes! Now please-

SHAWN

I'll have you know I had telomeric surgery, that's right, that's why I look so young - but if you check my ID -

BARRY

There is no way you're thirty.

SHAWN

Excuse me? You won't even look at my ID?

BARRY

No! Do you know how easy those are to fake?

SHAWN

Unbelievable. You know, The Scene, two blocks away? They let me in. You know why? Because I'm an adult, meaning I have every right to be there. I have every right to be here.

BARRY

Not if you're under twenty-one.

SHAWN

I'm not under twenty-one!! Come on! Ask me about something that happened ten years ago.

BARRY

...why?

SHAWN

To prove I was there! If I'm really a teenager, like you think I am, then I would've been a baby and I wouldn't remember anything.

BARRY

Miss... MA'AM... There are other people waiting to get in who, like it or not, actually LOOK like their age. Now I understand the appeal of looking younger - though I can't say I like the idea of sex with what appears to be a child -

SHAWN

My god! It has NOTHING to do with the sex!!

BARRY

(sighs)

I can't lose my job for letting in a minor, and I couldn't live with myself if something happened, because it's possible you're a very good liar and I would feel terrible if you were violated. So-

SHAWN

Un-be-fucking-lievable.

BARRY

I'm sure some places don't mind, I'll concede that you might be legally an adult. But that's not how we operate here. Please leave.

SHAWN

You'll be hearing from my lawyer.

BARRY

I'm sure I will. Next!

Shawn leaves in a huff. Barry rubs his temples and checks the next guest's ID. Switch focus to four college students who are leaving the club: JAYDA (19), NAT (18), LUX (19) and ARMAND (18). They're unlocking their longboards from a nearby board-stand.

NAT

Are your ears still ringing??

ARMAND

What??

LUX

That's how I like it!

NAT

I said, ARE YOUR EARS STILL RINGING?

ARMAND

I can't stop the ringing!

NAT

Where are we going?

LUX

Uh, gliding, obviously.

ARMAND

What??

NAT

(noticing that Jayda can't unlock her board)
Is it stuck?

JAYDA

Yeah, it's a thumb lock.

LUX

Old-school combo locks, that's where it's at.

NAT

Just leave it, we'll get it tomorrow.

JAYDA

Does anybody have lapse?

ARMAND

What??

NAT

(reaching in her purse for a pill)

Here you go.

JAYDA

I owe you.

LUX

Let's goooooo!

ARMAND

What??

Nat, Lux and Armand push off on their boards, while Jayda swallows the pill. Within a few seconds, the world around her moves in slow motion. Even at a light jog, she's easily able to keep up with her friends on their boards.

They ride/jog to A Mountain (which is technically a hill). From Jayda's perspective, the slow-moving flow of the nightlife is beautifully surreal. As they wind their way up the hill, the effects wear off, and the world speeds up.

Once they finally reach the top, Jayda collapses on the gravel. The others rummage through their backpacks and put on their wingsuits, which look like hoodies.

NAT

(offering Jayda her board)

You wanna use it?

JAYDA

You go first.

LUX

Setting a new record, it's... NAT ATTACK!

Nat rides her board a few hundred feet down the path, swerves off to the side, and launches off a makeshift ramp. She pops open the wingsuit and soars above the ground.

LUX

(to Armand)

You ready?

ARMAND

What??

Lux pushes him down the path, then trails right behind him. They also launch off the ramp and into the air.

Jayda watches contentedly and reclines against their backpacks. She puts on her AR glasses. As if the city wasn't vibrant enough already, now there's a whole new layer of activity. Virtual spotlights, giant virtual signs, floating virtual billboards, a virtual bust of Senator Hal, hovercars, dronebikes, gliders, neon signs, skyscrapers...

Jayda puts in earplugs and smiles. She looks out over the muted city skyline in amazement.

FADE OUT.