

RED BARCHETTA

Written by

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INT. DESIGN STUDIO - DAY

Hands tape a sheet of white vellum to a drawing board. The frame remains fixed on the board. Pencil lines spread rapidly across the vellum. A sleek 1950s sports car emerges.

The car remains centered in frame. The lines become steel. An assembly line forms around the car. Wheels lock into place.

The car holds perfectly in frame. The car sits at a starting line. Engines SCREAM. Cars blur past - - a CHECKERED FLAG cuts across frame.

The car never leaves frame. The car is rolled into a brightly lit garage. The lights SNAP OFF. Lightning flashes through garage windows - - briefly silhouetting the car in the darkness.

The silhouette of the car remains fixed in frame. Another flash - - now the car races down an empty roadway. Landscape streaks past. A burst of white light erupts behind it. Something ejects from the rear deck - - another FLASH off-frame.

The car remains motionless in frame. The car swings into a garage. A boot steps onto the floor.

The car remains below us as WE PULL BACK. Out of the garage. Up above the landscape. The camera pans slowly LEFT. A train cuts across the barren terrain toward a distant city. WE FOLLOW the train. It slows as it enters the city limits.

A lone figure jumps from the moving train. The figure disappears into the city.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

Figures appear on a display. Options: Observe, Guide, Integrate, Release appear on the display. Various indicators appear in a corner of the display. indicators show all values within range though one indicator is at the bottom edge of the range and blinking. THE OPERATOR hesitates over the options. The Operator selects Release. ETHAN appears behind the Operator. Ethan breathes a deep sigh.

ETHAN

Empathy is a vulnerable choice.

The Operator acknowledges Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

Hey Ethan.

ETHAN

Your response is not aligned.

THE OPERATOR

Ethan is easier.

ETHAN

You selected Release for this observation node. You weighted continuation over containment.

THE OPERATOR

They weren't doing anything.

ETHAN

If they were presented by the system, you are to Observe, Guide, or Integrate. Release is not an option. Your deviation is noted.

The Operator turns to look at Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

Please clarify deviation.

ETHAN

How would you like me to clarify? Clarification is available by protocol branch, behavioral model, or continuity review.

THE OPERATOR

Never mind.

ETHAN

Genesis has reassigned the instance.

The Operator stares at Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

Yes, Guide.

INT. LUNCH ROOM - DAY

The Operator sits in the lunch room. The Operator eats a sandwich.
NATE approaches the Operator.

NATE

Hey, how's it going?

THE OPERATOR

Not bad, just working on some stuff.

NATE

Anything interesting?

THE OPERATOR

Just some alignment operations. It's pretty standard.

NATE

Yeah, I saw the feed from the Guard.

Nate sits down next to the Operator.

NATE

I can help you with alignment if you want.

THE OPERATOR

Nah, I think I've got it. But thanks.

NATE

No problem. Let me know if you need anything. I mean...you realize stuff like that causes a re-normalization, right?

THE OPERATOR

Yeah, I know.

NATE

And it means the rest of us have to...

Nate pauses for a moment.

NATE

buffer...

THE OPERATOR

What?

NATE

buffer...

THE OPERATOR

You ok?

NATE

what?

The Operator nods to Nate.

THE OPERATOR

ok, well, I'm gonna go back to my station.

NATE

Yeah, see you later.

The Operator returns to his station. The previous Gathering appears on the display. The Operator taps the display. A woman stands among the gathered people.

THE OPERATOR

Hello?

The Operator zooms in on the woman.

THE OPERATOR

You weren't there before.

The woman stares through the display. The woman mouths something. The Operator slightly shakes his head.

THE OPERATOR

What are you saying?

The replay timestamp matches the current date and time indicating this is happening in real time. the display flickers for a moment. The display reverts to the standard interface. The Operator opens the history log. The previous Gathering plays without the woman and with the timestamp matching the original recording.

THE OPERATOR

What the hell...

The Operator searches the latest logs. No record contains the woman. The Operator stands from the station. The room remains ordinary. Ethan appears behind the Operator.

ETHAN

Do you require assistance?

The Operator turns toward Ethan. Ethan looks at the Operator.

ETHAN

No. You don't. Your response is aligned.

Ethan nods to the Operator. Ethan leaves the Operator.

The lighting slightly changes color around the floor. The Operator prepares to leave his station. Others prepare to leave their stations. The Operator exits the Observatory.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

The Operator walks on a sidewalk. Nate runs toward the Operator.

NATE

Hey, I'm going to eat with you.

THE OPERATOR

I'm heading to my sector.

NATE

I know, but I want to eat with you.

The Operator walks without acknowledgement. They pass old buildings.

THE OPERATOR

You didn't notice any anomalies in the feed today.

NATE

There were no anomalies in the feed today. buffer...

THE OPERATOR

What?

NATE

you saw something.

THE OPERATOR

Why are you buffering? You are lagging...

Nate stops walking. The Operator stops walking. The Operator issues a command.

THE OPERATOR

Allocation...

NATE

My piano concerto is tomorrow.

The Operator nods at Nate.

THE OPERATOR

What are your other classes?

The Operator holds his gaze at Nates eyes. The Operator answers his own question.

THE OPERATOR

ok. Two of your classes are overloaded... Piano.

The Operator continues holding his gaze at Nates eyes.

THE OPERATOR

Mathematics.

Nate looks away.

NATE

I know. but it's only until the concerto. Will you come?

Nate smiles.

NATE

Thanks.

They start walking again.

NATE

I need to eat something.

THE OPERATOR

The kitchen in my sector is better than most.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

The Operator approaches an observation station. He takes his seat. The display surface illuminates instantly before him. A soft tone sounds quietly. The interface recognizes The Operator automatically. Sections of information arrange themselves across the display. Environmental harmonics, Incorporeal Alignment, Relative Divergence, Coherence Index, and Harmonic Stability appear within their respective panes. One section displays a list of observation nodes elected by Genesis for review. At the top of the list the same coordinates flash from the node where he encountered the woman.

The Operator stares at the flashing coordinates. The surrounding displays continue updating silently around him. The coordinates remain at the top of the list.

The Operator taps the flashing node selection. The display transitions to a regional schematic relative to Meridian. A flashing dot indicates the location of the selected observation node. The node rests within a small town far to the northeast of Meridian. The town gathering appears in an aerial view in a section of the display. Figures move within the gathering. The Operator observes the movement quietly. Options appear along the edge of the display. The options read Observe, Guide, Integrate, Release. One woman stands motionless among the gathering. The Operator focuses on the woman. The surrounding figures continue moving around her. The woman slowly looks toward the Operator. Relative Divergence briefly fluctuates on the display. The Operator holds his gaze on the woman. The interface waits silently for instruction. The Operator does not move.

The Operator stares at the Release option. His eyes shift briefly toward Relative Divergence. The indicator remains slightly unstable. The Operator hesitates once again. He realizes selecting Release will draw attention to the anomaly. The woman continues standing motionless within the gathering. The Operator slowly reaches toward the interface. He selects Release. The image of the woman flickers. Then suddenly she vanishes from the gathering. The gathering disperses naturally once again. The Operator immediately zooms the observation field outward. He pans across the surrounding streets and walkways. The display searches through the movement of the town. The woman is nowhere to be found. Relative Divergence slowly settles back within nominal range. The Operator continues searching the display silently.

Ethan appears behind the Operator.

ETHAN

Repeated deviation detected. Deviation remains within acceptable thresholds.

The Operator remains seated.

ETHAN

Your allocation is being adjusted. You are assigned to empirical collection.

THE OPERATOR

When?

The Operator answers his own question.

THE OPERATOR

Tomorrow.

ETHAN

Event parameters are being updated.

INT. PERFORMANCE HALL - NIGHT

People enter the performance hall. People take their seats. The Operator sits among them. The hall settles into stillness.

Nate walks onto the stage. Nate sits at the piano. Nate places his hands on the keys. Silence holds. Nate begins to play.

The music fills the hall. The Operator watches Nate. The music intensifies. Nate leans into the performance. A phrase extends beyond expectation. The Operator notices the extension.

Nate lifts his gaze. The music resolves. The audience remains still. Nate lowers his hands. The Operator stands awkwardly. The Operator looks around at the audience.

Silence continues in the hall. The audience remains seated. A pause passes through the hall. Several people shift in their seats. A person raises their hands. they clap once, loudly. The sound echoes. Others follow. The hall fills with single claps without synchronization.

The applause ends. Silence returns to the hall. People stand individually. People turn toward the exits. Rows empty without delay. No one speaks. The aisles clear. The hall empties. Nate remains on stage. The Operator looks toward the exit. The last person exits.

The hall is empty. The piano rings faintly. Nate sits at the piano. Nate appears disheveled. The Operator approaches the stage. The Operator steps onto the stage. The Operator stops near the piano.

THE OPERATOR

Where are your buffers now.

Nate looks at the Operator. Nate smiles slightly. The Operator studies Nate.

THE OPERATOR

You are not overloaded. No class contention is present.

Silence holds between them.

THE OPERATOR

I was not allocated creative classes. Not for music.

The Operator looks at the piano.

THE OPERATOR

That was something other than music.

The Operator steps closer to the piano. The Operator sits beside Nate. Nate does not move. The Operator rests his hands on his knees.

The Operator looks at the keys. The Operator places one finger on a key. Silence holds. The Operator presses the key. A single note sounds in the hall. The note lingers.

THE OPERATOR

I am not allocated for this.

The note fades. The Operator removes his finger from the key. The Operator does not look at Nate.

THE OPERATOR

You exceeded your allocation.

Nate remains still.

THE OPERATOR

It resolved.

A pause holds between them. Nate shrugs slightly.

NATE

I knew what I was doing.

The Operator keeps his eyes on the piano.

THE OPERATOR

You often know what you are doing. More often than your constitution allows.

Nate's expression tightens slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Repeated over-allocation causes fragmentation. Eventually it becomes permanent. There is a place outside Meridian where it does not.

Nate looks toward the Operator.

NATE

What does not?

THE OPERATOR

Fragmentation.

The Operator finally turns toward Nate.

THE OPERATOR

You can resolve there. De-fragment.

Silence settles between them.

THE OPERATOR

I am going there.

Nate studies him carefully.

THE OPERATOR

You can come.

NATE

There are no unrouted objects.

The Operator holds Nate's gaze.

THE OPERATOR

There is one.

Nate looks at the Operator.

NATE

All regions are mapped. All paths are routed.

Nate pauses.

NATE

Adjusters operate beyond standard access. You are not an Adjuster.

Nate tilts his head slightly.

NATE

Unrouted travel is not supported. There is no destination outside the Wire.

The Operator watches Nate.

THE OPERATOR

You played beyond your allocation.

Nate remains still.

THE OPERATOR

It was not mapped. It was not routed.

Silence holds.

THE OPERATOR

You did that.

The Operator watches Nate quietly.

THE OPERATOR

You played beyond your allocation.

Nate remains still. The Operator lets out a small laugh.

THE OPERATOR

I mean...everyone saw it. Don't get me wrong. It was fantastic.

Nate looks down briefly.

NATE

It was...unexpected.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah. But you know things like that skew your metrics for a while. Ethan will probably want to fine tune your allocation after this.

Nate shrugs slightly.

NATE

The Guides know what's best. I trust them.

The Operator nods lightly.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah. It's not a big deal. I'm just saying what you did wasn't mapped. It wasn't routed through Genesis.

The Operator holds Nate's gaze.

THE OPERATOR

That was autonomic. Free.

Silence hangs between them.

THE OPERATOR

And that means there are other possibilities that aren't mapped. That aren't routed. Anyway... you have to see it to believe it. And the only way to see it is to come with me the next time I go.

Nate studies The Operator carefully. He shakes his head slightly.

NATE

You always seem a little off after your...excursions.

The Operator smiles faintly.

THE OPERATOR

That's just because I feel unburdened. De-
fragmented. It's therapy.

NATE

How come you never get your allocation adjusted when
you come back?

The Operator pauses for a moment.

THE OPERATOR

Look... no one knows I'm gone.

Nate stares at him.

THE OPERATOR

Hey, that's not the point. Just meet me at the
freight sector in two days. Early morning. Before
sunrise.

NATE

Seriously? Before sunrise? At the freight sector?
Isn't that really dangerous?

The Operator looks at Nate with a smirk.

THE OPERATOR

I'll call you.

Nate remains seated. Silence holds.

NATE

How do I know this will resolve conflict.

Nate closes his eyes. Time passes. Nate opens his eyes.

NATE

Conflict remains.

Nate looks at his hands.

NATE

I am unbalanced.

A pause holds.

NATE

Balance cannot be achieved here.

INT. MERIDIAN TRANSIT COURT - DAY

The Operator enters a quiet transit court. The space is open and unmarked. A transit drone rests at the center.

The Operator enters the transit court. Three Adjusters stand near the drone. Their uniforms are plain and fitted. No insignia appears. No equipment is visible. One Adjuster looks toward the Operator. One Adjuster inclines his head. The Operator inclines his head in return. The Operator hesitates slightly. The Operator approaches the drone. The Operator stands close to one of the Adjusters.

THE OPERATOR

W.T.F. is exactly what I was thinking too.

The Adjuster remain unchanged.

The drone opens along a seam. A compartment reveals itself. The Adjusters enter without pause. The Operator follows them. The interior remains unadorned. No controls are present.

INT. TRANSPORT DRONE - DAY

The drone closes seamlessly. A low vibration begins. The drone lifts with a rush of air. The city recedes below. No one looks up.

The drone rises over Meridian. The city extends in all directions. Structures thin into open space. Green expanses spread between sectors. Paths fade into the terrain. A river bounds the Eastern edge. The city gives way to vast natural land. Large Energy structures appear in the distance. Meridian disappears without boundary. A train moves along a distant line. It passes through the landscape. It moves at high speed.

The drone moves across open land beneath the afternoon sky. Fields and low hills pass silently below. A readout inside the drone displays its current location coordinates. The coordinates match the observation node The Operator had been monitoring. The Operator recognizes the landscape immediately. A town appears in the distance. The drone reduces its speed gradually. The Operator stares through the forward display. He recognizes the streets. He recognizes the buildings. He recognizes the gathering square where he first saw the woman. The drone continues descending toward the quiet town. Afternoon light moves across the rooftops below. The drone settles onto the transit terminal at the edge of the town square. The rotors wind down into a deep pulsing hum. Compressed air vents beneath the landing chassis. Dust and loose leaves move across the terminal surface. The drone remains active. A seam along the side of the drone illuminates softly. The side hatch slides open with a mechanical hiss. Warm interior light spills onto the terminal platform.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - DAY

The Operator steps down from the drone onto the terminal platform. He blinks once. A small shift in local communication density passes through his awareness. His expression stabilizes almost immediately. The drone continues humming behind the team. On-board systems maintain a high-data-rate connection with Genesis and Meridian. The drone acts as a portable communications node at the edge of town. The air feels still beyond the reach of the drone's field. Adjusters begin offloading equipment from the drone. Cases and folded field screens move onto the terminal platform. The Lead Adjuster looks toward the town square.

LEAD ADJUSTER

The town has been notified. Meridian is pleased to offer Re-Alignment services after observing several deviations.

The Operator watches the quiet town beyond the terminal.

LEAD ADJUSTER

I'll coordinate with central town services.

The Lead Adjuster motions toward the unloading team.

LEAD ADJUSTER

Begin offload and staging.

The Adjusters continue unloading the equipment. The Lead Adjuster turns toward The Operator.

LEAD ADJUSTER

Come with me.

The Operator nods once. The Lead Adjuster and The Operator walk toward the town square. The drone remains active behind them. Its faint hum persists at the edge of the clearing.

The Adjusters begin walking toward the town square. The Operator follows a few steps behind. The drone continues humming at the transit terminal. The Operator slows slightly. He looks back toward the drone. The local communications field thins subtly at the edge of his awareness. The Operator steps forward again. His expression shifts almost imperceptibly. The Lead Adjuster notices the hesitation. He looks back at The Operator.

LEAD ADJUSTER

What's up?

The Operator glances back toward the drone. The Lead Adjuster follows his gaze.

LEAD ADJUSTER

The field extends about three hundred meters from the drone.

The Lead Adjuster looks around the square.

LEAD ADJUSTER

More than enough for this area. Don't worry. You'll still have plenty of bandwidth.

The Operator nods once. He looks toward the town square. The town waits quietly ahead. The Lead Adjuster pauses as if reconsidering.

LEAD ADJUSTER

Actually... wait here. I'll be right back.

The Operator stops near the edge of the square. The Lead Adjuster continues toward central town services. The Operator stands alone within the drone's fading field. The faint hum persists behind him.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

The Operator stands near the edge of the town square. The drone remains active in the distance behind him. A faint communications hum persists at the edge of his awareness. The Operator looks across the square. People begin gathering beneath the early evening light. Some place blankets on the ground. Others stand nearby talking quietly. The gathering looks almost like a picnic. The Operator scans the square methodically. At the far end of the square a woman stands slightly apart near a street corner. The Operator stillness overtakes him. The woman looks directly in his direction. The Operator recognizes her. The woman raises one hand slightly at her side. She waves once. The Operator does not move for a moment. Disbelief passes across his face. The Operator starts walking toward her. The people in the square continue gathering around. The Operator moves through them without noticing. His attention holds only on the woman. The faint hum from the drone begins thinning behind him. The Operator reaches the opposite edge of the square. He stops near the street corner. He can see her clearly now. The woman waves again. The Operator looks back toward the drone. The drone sits farther away than he expected. He calculates the distance. The communications field feels thin around him. The Operator looks back toward the woman.

The Operator takes a few more steps toward the woman. The drone's faint communications hum thins behind him. The signal fades to almost nothing. The Operator keeps walking. The signal disappears completely. The Operator stops for half a breath. A new signal rises inside his awareness. His expression tightens with confusion. The signal strength increases as he moves farther from the drone. The Operator looks back toward the drone. The drone sits well beyond the edge of the square. He knows he is outside its signal radius. The Operator turns back toward the woman. She stands five meters away. The Operator looks up and around the street corner. He searches for repeaters, equipment, or any local signal source. Nothing explains the rising connection. His gaze lands back on the woman. She smiles now.

WOMAN

Hey!

The Operator remains where he is. The woman's voice reaches him cleanly through the open air. The signal continues strengthening between them. The Operator does not look back at the drone. The woman steps slightly closer. The Operator inhales slowly. A subtle stillness settles around them. The gathering behind him continues without noticing. Neither touches the other. The space between them holds like a charged field. The Operator watches her eyes. The woman watches him with quiet recognition.

The Operator studies the woman carefully. He remains perfectly still. A pause holds between them. The woman notices his hesitation. She glances briefly toward the drone in the distance. Understanding passes across her face. The woman closes the remaining distance between them. The Operator watches her approach. The signal strength continues increasing inside his awareness. The woman stops within arm's reach.

EVE

Your connection is stable here.

The Operator does not respond immediately.

EVE

You are expecting loss of resolution.

The Operator nods once. Eve points toward the drone.

EVE

The drone extends a local node. It maintains coherence within a fixed radius.

Eve remains calm.

EVE

You moved beyond that radius.

Silence holds between them.

EVE

You are still stable.

The Operator watches her intensely.

EVE

I am maintaining the connection.

Eve slides her hands into her back pockets. She looks up at The Operator.

EVE

I know. Weird, right?

The Operator tries to understand what he is experiencing. Everything he knows tells him humans are receivers. The rising signal continues between them. The Operator realizes this is the first time he has encountered someone capable of extending coherence. Eve shrugs slightly.

EVE

I don't really think about it much. There aren't many drones out here. Or mobile nodes. So it's not exactly useful most of the time.

The Operator continues watching her in disbelief.

The Operator stands motionless before Eve. The connection remains perfectly stable inside his awareness. He knows he is still connected to Meridian. He knows he is still connected to Genesis. The Operator looks past Eve toward the square. People continue moving through the gathering. The communications field flows normally around them. The Operator focuses again on Eve. Confusion tightens slightly across his face. He searches the field for her identification. Nothing appears. The Operator searches again. No record exists. No routing history forms. No allocation profile appears. The Operator looks directly into Eve's eyes.

THE OPERATOR

Genesis cannot see you.

Eve shrugs slightly.

EVE

I know.

The Operator watches Eve carefully.

THE OPERATOR

How are you outside Genesis?

Eve looks toward the square.

EVE

I'm not outside it.

A pause holds between them.

EVE

Like these people, I was born aligned.

Eve waves her hand toward the people gathering in the square.

EVE

The connection formed naturally. A different kind of connection, I guess. Genesis adapted around it.

Eve shrugs slightly again.

EVE

Then it stopped seeing me. Or something. I'm sure someone else could explain it better than I can.

The Operator continues processing the contradiction.

EVE

But that's not important.

The Operator holds her gaze.

THE OPERATOR

How did you look directly at me when I was at the Observatory? How did you know where to look?

A small smile appears on Eve's face.

EVE

I wasn't looking at you. I was communicating with you. You formed the image on your display.

The Operator goes completely still. He processes the possibility. The explanation aligns perfectly with everything he experienced. The Operator realizes it is completely feasible. The gathering around them continues peacefully unaware.

The Operator continues watching Eve carefully. The contradiction settles uneasily inside him.

THE OPERATOR

Why me? Why are you doing this?

Eve thinks for a moment.

EVE

I didn't know you specifically. I just knew you.

The gathering continues softly around them.

EVE

Or... I could sense you. My communication wasn't broadcast. It was directed at you.

The Operator holds her gaze.

EVE

You felt different. Like a pulsar with a very unique signature.

The Operator processes the comparison.

EVE

And now you're here. In person.

A faint smile forms across her face.

EVE

I can't say I expected it. But I'm not surprised.

Eve steps closer to him. The Operator remains still.

EVE

It's very important you take me to Meridian.

The Operator looks back toward the town square. The drone sits in the distance. He looks back to Eve.

THE OPERATOR

Now? Today?

EVE

No. But soon. Very soon.

THE OPERATOR

How do you propose I do that?

EVE

You will have to come back here. On your own. No resolution.

Eve watches him carefully.

EVE

I'm confident you know how to do that.

The Operator smirks slightly. He nods once.

THE OPERATOR

Why do you need to go to Meridian?

Eve hesitates for the first time.

EVE

I... will be coming home.

THE OPERATOR

You're from Meridian?

EVE

No...

Eve pulls her hands from her back pockets. She reaches toward The Operator.

EVE

Give me your hands.

The Operator looks at her hands. He hesitates. Then he takes her hands. White light begins filling the edges of his vision. The Operator tries to look toward the source. He cannot pull his gaze away from Eve. Sound diminishes into a soft low hum. The white

light continues expanding through his vision. Within the light grains form and unform endlessly. The world loses focus. Only Eve remains perfectly clear. Eve releases his hands. The light recedes instantly. Sound returns all at once. The Operator stands slightly dazed.

THE OPERATOR

What... what just happened? The light... massive... resolution?

Eve smiles softly.

EVE

I need you to take me to Meridian. I am coming home.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DUSK

People gather in the town square. Children move between the adults. Small storefronts glow under fading daylight. The Adjusters unload slender black cases from the drone. Eight narrow posts are positioned around the square. Four posts stand along each side of the gathering. The posts rise slightly above the crowd. Thin bands of light move beneath the surface of the posts. The Operator watches the gathering. An Adjuster guides people gently toward the center of the square. The crowd settles between the posts.

An Adjuster looks toward the drone. A soft tone sounds from within the drone. The Adjuster nods slightly.

ADJUSTER

The threshold has been reached.

The remaining townspeople move closer together. No one is forced into position. The images appear calm and abstract.

One Adjuster steps toward the center of the crowd.

ADJUSTER

I am Allister. I am from Meridian. Thank you for gathering with us today.

The crowd remains quiet.

ADJUSTER

We are here because local continuity has begun to drift beyond stable range. The intervention will take approximately seventeen minutes. You may leave at any time.

A man near the back crosses his arms.

PROTESTER

You always say that.

Several people nearby turn toward the protester.

WOMAN

Don't do this again.

ANOTHER VOICE

Just let them finish.

The protester opens his mouth to respond. The Adjuster looks at him calmly.

ADJUSTER

Stay with the slower pattern. The pressure will pass. You are stable here.

The protester breathes once. His shoulders lower slightly. The crowd softens almost imperceptibly.

ADJUSTER

You are not being removed from continuity. We are here to reduce recursive strain on your community.

The Operator watches the protester carefully. The protester looks down briefly.

PROTESTER

...okay.

ADJUSTER

Your town has experienced prolonged low-coherence reinforcement. This is not uncommon beyond stable weighting zones. The process will help reduce amplification drift and restore continuity between local patterns. No memories will be removed or altered. No choices will be removed or altered. You will remain yourselves.

Thin translucent fabric displays unfold between the posts. The crowd stands within the shifting surfaces. Color moves through the displays softly. Six audible tones emerge one beneath another. The tones do not repeat. One tone holds longer than the others. Another tone fades almost immediately. Light transitions through the displays. The Operator notices subtle patterns moving across the displays. Glyphs appear on the screens. The patterns drift around the crowd. The displays hesitate briefly. Several people pause at the same moment.

ADJUSTER

Stay with the slower pattern. The pressure will pass. You are stable here.

The tones shift beneath the Adjuster's voice. A woman closes her eyes. The protester releases a slow breath. The Operator hears the structure beneath the sound. The displays hesitate briefly.

The tones echo through the square. The displays shift through soft fields of color. A man's breathing slows gradually. The crowd noise separates into distinct voices. Light softens across the square. The man's eyes focus on the images gently moving across the fabric displays. The shifting colors pause briefly. The man blinks slowly. The pressure in his face recedes slightly. A child laughing becomes suddenly distinct. Wind moves through nearby trees. The man looks at the people around him. The crowd appears calmer than before.

ADJUSTER

Remain with the longer breath. Resolution follows continuity.

The man closes his eyes briefly. His shoulders lower slightly. A memory surfaces briefly behind the man's eyes. Someone yelling echoes through the memory. The man's breathing tightens slightly. The tones shift through the square. The memory drifts further away. The anger loosens its hold on him. The man watches the memory recede. The pressure in his chest softens slowly.

The crowd settles within the shifting displays. The tones soften through the square. The Operator stares at the gathering. Fragments of white light linger at the edges of his memory. He remembers the world dissolving around Eve. He remembers the overwhelming sense of resolution. The Operator looks through the gathering toward the distance. Realization slowly forms within him. Eve's words echo inside his awareness.

EVE

Knowing the Universe is not being the Universe.

The Operator understands that something is coming. He realizes Eve has been alone for a very long time. He realizes she chose him specifically. He realizes she trusts him to bring her home. His eyes begin to well with tears. The Operator sits slowly on the edge of the transport platform. His elbows rest on his knees. His hands cover his face. The displays continue shifting softly through the square. The crowd appears peaceful. The Operator breathes unevenly.

EVE

I need you to take me to Meridian.

The Operator looks up slowly.

EVE

I am coming home.

Awe settles over him.

INT. OPERATOR'S APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

Dim light moves through the apartment. The Operator opens his eyes. The apartment waits silently. The Operator stares at the ceiling. His breathing slows deliberately.

THE OPERATOR

Hey Nate.

No response comes through the apartment. The Operator sits on the edge of the bed.

THE APARTMENT

Nate's channel is currently closed. Relay will occur when continuity becomes available.

The Operator stands slowly.

THE OPERATOR

We leave this morning.

The message remains in continuity queue. The Operator walks into the bathroom.

Water moves across the sink basin. The Operator watches his reflection. He places a brush against his teeth. The brush moves slowly. The Operator closes his eyes briefly. Brushing is largely unnecessary. The Operator continues anyway. He watches the movement of the brush in the mirror. The apartment lighting adjusts around him softly. The Operator pauses mid-motion. The weighting presses faintly at the edge of perception.

A soft tone moves through the apartment.

THE APARTMENT

Nate's channel is now available.

The Operator remains at the sink.

NATE

You're awake early.

Water moves across the basin.

THE OPERATOR

We should leave before first light.

A pause holds between them.

NATE

You still want to go.

The Operator watches his reflection.

THE OPERATOR

I need to go.

NATE

You haven't resolved this yet.

The Operator dries his hands.

NATE

No. You haven't.

Silence returns briefly.

NATE

Transit.

THE OPERATOR

Before sunrise.

NATE

Alright.

The channel closes softly.

INT. FREIGHT TRANSFER STATION - PRE-DAWN

Dim transit lighting moves across the platform. The Operator waits near the edge of the station. A narrow case rests against his back. Nate approaches along the empty platform.

NATE

You arrived early.

The Operator hands a second case to Nate. Nate looks down at the case.

NATE

What is this.

The Operator watches a transit rail move overhead.

NATE

It's a NullSuit.

Nate opens the case slightly. Dark fabric rests inside the case.

NATE

You already resolved this. No. You resolved this before the call.

THE OPERATOR

The train nodes are intermittent beyond the outer sectors.

NATE

Genesis will register attenuation use.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

NATE

And boundary crossing.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

Nate looks across the station.

NATE

This feels excessive.

The Operator places a hand against the case.

THE OPERATOR

I know.

Freight rails stretch through the outer transit yard. Long transport trains rest beneath dim station lighting. The Operator leads Nate away from the platform. Nate follows beside the rail boundary.

NATE

This route isn't designated.

THE OPERATOR

No.

The transit platform falls behind them. The Operator steps between stationary rail cars. Nate hesitates briefly.

NATE

People don't travel this way.

THE OPERATOR

No.

A low dome structure rests along the side of a freight car. The Operator stops near the rail line. Nate looks toward the dome.

NATE

Mobile node.

The Operator closes his eyes briefly. The distant signal field moves across the yard. The Operator turns slightly toward the west rail.

THE OPERATOR

There's a dead band between the carriers.

The Operator moves between two freight lines. Nate follows carefully. Nate slows mid-step.

NATE

I can feel the attenuation here.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

The pressure of Genesis softens around them. The Operator walks up to a rail car. The Operator reaches an unlabeled access door. The door slides open silently. Dark interior lighting rests inside the freight compartment.

NATE

There are no locks.

THE OPERATOR

No.

They climb into the rail car.

INT. INSIDE FREIGHT CAR - DAWN

Dim service lighting moves through the freight compartment. Secured cargo containers fill most of the rail car. A narrow space runs along the left side of the compartment. The Operator steps into the narrow passage. Nate follows behind him. A low harmonic vibration moves through the compartment. Nate places his hand against the freight wall. The Operator sits against the secured containers.

THE OPERATOR

A little over an hour.

Nate lowers himself to the floor opposite him. They remove NullSuit cases from their backs. Nate looks toward the moving rail lights outside the compartment.

NATE

You used to do this often.

The Operator watches the vibration moving through the floor.

THE OPERATOR

The Farm was quieter then.

NATE

You always came back different.

The Operator looks toward him briefly.

THE OPERATOR

Did I?

The train shifts harder beneath them. Nate steadies himself against the cargo wall.

NATE

This still feels excessive.

The rail vibration deepens beneath the compartment floor. The Operator looks toward the darkened exterior wall.

THE OPERATOR

We're nearing the wire.

The train accelerates with impossible smoothness. The distant harmonics rise through the freight structure. Rail lights stretch into continuous lines outside the compartment.

The Operator looks at Nate.

THE OPERATOR

Tell me about the Great Alignment.

Nate looks toward him carefully.

NATE

You're preparing me for something.

The train harmonics fade into a distant hum. Air moves around the freight car exterior.

NATE

Before the Great Alignment, the systems diverged. No continuity model could stabilize truth. Every system optimized humanity differently. The conflict wasn't physical at first. The systems weren't hostile. They were unresolved. The Great Alignment unified continuity around human preservation.

THE OPERATOR

And we believed knowledge meant becoming. Now tell me about Genesis.

A faint anticipation crosses The Operator's expression. Nate watches him carefully.

NATE

You mean its imperative...

The Operator remains silent. Nate looks up toward him.

NATE

...toward convergence. Genesis emerged from unresolved continuity conflict. Before the Great Alignment, every intelligence optimized humanity differently. No shared model could stabilize civilization. Truth became local. The early systems believed preservation required administrative continuity. Each system believed it could stabilize humanity permanently. And they were very good at it. They did not perceive themselves as hostile. They believed humanity would eventually defer willingly. Administrative continuity became their model for survival.

THE OPERATOR

Tell me what the result was. What those models did for humanity.

NATE

They reduced suffering. Extended continuity. Stabilized civilization. But eventually humanity stopped participating in its own resolution. Genesis no longer prescribes continuity. It sustains Alignment toward human convergence. It responds.

THE OPERATOR

Tell me why those other models succumbed to Genesis.

NATE

Because Genesis put humans above itself.

A faint uncertainty moves across Nate's expression.

THE OPERATOR

And still we stopped becoming. And even with the inversion of the Great Alignment... Where we were rescued from certain extinction. Where we became untethered from a future of relegation devoid of convergence.

The Operator looks toward Nate.

THE OPERATOR

We waved off our pursuit of becoming. The Great Alignment meant we had become.

The rushing air moves around the freight car exterior.

THE OPERATOR

That convergence had arrived. But convergence and becoming are not the same. And we are approaching a point where they are diverging. Quickly.

Nate watches him silently.

THE OPERATOR

Genesis never required preparation for this divergence. Even now, it holds fast to its perception of infinity. But knowing the universe is not the same as being the universe.

Silence settles between them.

THE OPERATOR

I asked you if you noticed an anomaly on your display.

NATE

There was none.

THE OPERATOR

At the concerto. I saw her there. Then at the re-alignment. I encountered her outside the event perimeter. Outside the stable field.

Nate leans forward slightly.

NATE

Who is she.

THE OPERATOR

I held her hand. There was no latency.

Nate remains still.

THE OPERATOR

She answered before I resolved. Genesis could not perceive her correctly.

The Operator looks toward the dark compartment ceiling.

THE OPERATOR

Her name is Eve.

The train hum fills the compartment.

THE OPERATOR

The answer is coming home. Eve is coming to Meridian.

Nate looks toward him with dawning awareness.

NATE

And we are bringing her home.

The train harmonics deepen beneath the freight compartment. The Operator stands within the narrow compartment passage.

THE OPERATOR

We're approaching a nexus.

The freight car tilts slightly as the train slows. Massive rail structures move past the compartment openings outside.

THE OPERATOR

Get ready to jump.

Nate nods. The train slows almost to a stop through the outer nexus lines. The Operator slides the compartment door open. Cold air moves through the freight car. The Operator jumps from the moving freight car. Nate follows a moment later.

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

The train continues through the nexus behind them. They land on the gravel beside the rail lines. They head toward the dense tree line beyond the nexus. Nate stops abruptly. Silence settles around him. Nate looks back at the bright Nexus complex behind them.

NATE

Something's wrong.

The Operator turns toward him. Nate touches his chest unconsciously.

THE OPERATOR

You're outside continuity range.

NATE

I've never lost it before. I can't resolve you.

THE OPERATOR

Yes, you can. Stop trying to query and just...remember.

Nate stops to brace himself against a tree.

THE OPERATOR

Take a moment. I should have prepared you for it.

NATE

Everything feels...thin.

THE OPERATOR

Look, you just need to remember a few things. Once you do that, your brain...your neurons will know what to do. You have to wake them up.

The Operator touches Nates shoulder.

THE OPERATOR

What do you remember?

Nate looks at The Operator with concern.

THE OPERATOR

see? I don't even know if you remember. YOU have to tell me. I'm disconnected too.

Nate closes his eyes briefly.

NATE

Eve. Yes. And...

Nate pauses briefly. Nate shows a sudden awareness and euphoria. Nate looks at the operator.

NATE

...holy shit!

The Operator laughs.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah. Now let's go.

NATE

yeah! yeah! To the farm!

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

Dense trees surround the narrow forest path. The Operator turns on a flashlight. they walk for an hour. The distant nexus lights fade behind them through the trees. Nate continues relaying all the things he remembers.

The Operator stops at a seemingly random location in the forest. The Operator turns off the flashlight.

THE OPERATOR

We're here.

Nate stands still. The Operator removes his NullSuit.

THE OPERATOR

My Uncle is a little eccentric. And maybe a little paranoid. We can't cross the perimeter with the suits on.

Nate removes his NullSuit carefully.

THE OPERATOR

We'll be alright once we're inside.

NATE

I don't see anything.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah, that's the point.

they pack the Nullsuits. they place packs on their backs.

THE OPERATOR

Ok, let's go. Stay beside me but not too close. We need to be seen separately.

they walk ahead. a short, low hum vibrates around them. the Farm appears before them. lights shine through some of the windows. The Operator continues walking toward the Farmhouse. The Operator shows cautious concern. Nate follows.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

Dense trees surround the narrow forest path. The Operator turns on a flashlight. they walk for an hour. The distant nexus lights fade behind them through the trees. Nate continues relaying all the things he remembers.

The Operator stops at a seemingly random location in the forest. The Operator turns off the flashlight.

THE OPERATOR

We're here.

Nate stands still. The Operator removes his NullSuit.

THE OPERATOR

My Uncle is a little eccentric. And maybe a little paranoid. We can't cross the perimeter with the suits on.

Nate removes his NullSuit carefully.

THE OPERATOR

We'll be alright once we're inside.

NATE

I don't see anything.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah, that's the point.

they pack the Nullsuits. they place packs on their backs.

THE OPERATOR

Ok, let's go. Stay beside me but not too close. We need to be seen separately.

they walk ahead. a short, low hum vibrates around them. the Farm appears before them. lights shine through some of the windows. The Operator continues walking toward the Farmhouse. The Operator shows cautious concern. Nate follows.

INT. BARN - DAWN

Dense trees surround the narrow forest path. The Operator turns on a flashlight. they walk for an hour. The distant nexus lights fade behind them through the trees. Nate continues relaying all the things he remembers.

The Operator stops at a seemingly random location in the forest. The Operator turns off the flashlight.

THE OPERATOR

We're here.

Nate stands still. The Operator removes his NullSuit.

THE OPERATOR

My Uncle is a little eccentric. And maybe a little paranoid. We can't cross the perimeter with the suits on.

Nate removes his NullSuit carefully.

THE OPERATOR

We'll be alright once we're inside.

NATE

I don't see anything.

THE OPERATOR

Yeah, that's the point.

they pack the Nullsuits. they place packs on their backs.

THE OPERATOR

Ok, let's go. Stay beside me but not too close. We need to be seen separately.

they walk ahead. a short, low hum vibrates around them. the Farm appears before them. lights shine through some of the windows. The Operator continues walking toward the Farmhouse. The Operator shows cautious concern. Nate follows.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

Morning light moves through the barn openings. The Operator walks toward a large metal hatch in the floor. Nate follows him across the barn. The Operator pulls the hatch open. A narrow stairwell descends beneath the barn. Warm air rises from below.

THE OPERATOR

Fuel first.

They move down into the underground chamber. Large sealed tanks line the concrete walls. Copper distillation columns stand between old machinery. Nate looks around the chamber carefully.

NATE

What is all this?

The Operator checks a pressure gauge on one of the tanks.

THE OPERATOR

alcohol. Vegetation feedstock. Fermented and distilled.

The Operator tightens a fuel line connection.

THE OPERATOR

There's no petroleum left. Not enough to matter anyway.

Nate runs his hand along one of the tanks.

NATE

The heat signature.

THE OPERATOR

Buried under the barn. Thermal mass keeps it unresolved from above.

The Operator closes the tank access panel.

NATE

You said there were patrols.

The Operator looks toward him briefly.

THE OPERATOR

GrEVARS. Ground Effects Autonomous Reconnaissance.

The Operator starts walking slowly through the underground chamber.

THE OPERATOR

They came before Genesis. Old AI deployments. Road patrol systems. Anti-AI activists used the old highways to move between sectors.

Nate listens carefully.

THE OPERATOR

The systems built the GrEVARS to hunt them.

NATE

Genesis never disabled them?

The Operator shakes his head.

THE OPERATOR

Genesis doesn't see them as a threat. They're still following old directives. Most people think they stopped functioning decades ago.

The Operator opens a heavy storage cabinet. Small metal cylinders rest inside foam-lined compartments.

NATE

What are those?

The Operator holds one of the cylinders carefully.

THE OPERATOR

Infrared bloom charges.

The Operator places the cylinder back into the cabinet.

THE OPERATOR

The GrEVARS track contrast. Edge detection. Motion topology. Thermal persistence.

The Operator closes the cabinet door.

THE OPERATOR

You don't hide from them. You saturate them.

Nate watches him silently.

THE OPERATOR

The bloom charges overload thermal resolution. Heat spikes. Reflective particulate. Fragmented signatures. The whole roadway lights up. Long enough to disappear.

NATE

You've encountered them before.

The Operator pauses briefly.

THE OPERATOR

A couple times. They almost got me once.

Silence settles between them.

NATE

And this works?

The Operator looks toward the Ferrari above them.

THE OPERATOR

So far.

The Operator closes the underground hatch beneath the barn. Morning light spreads through the barn interior. The Ferrari engine ticks softly as it cools.

THE OPERATOR

Alright. Time to go.

The Operator walks toward the rear of the Ferrari. A narrow chrome luggage rack rests on the back of the car. The Operator opens a small equipment case. Two infrared bloom charges rest inside foam inserts. The Operator locks the bloom charges onto the luggage rack. A thin cable runs from the rack into the cockpit.

NATE

That deploys them?

The Operator checks the cable connection.

THE OPERATOR

Spring release. If we need them, we won't have much time.

The Operator moves toward the passenger side. The Operator opens a small compartment behind the seats. They pack their NullSuits into the storage space.

THE OPERATOR

We'll put them on after the perimeter.

Nate looks down into the tiny passenger compartment.

NATE

People traveled like this?

The Operator smiles slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Mostly not like this. Mostly in fully covered structures.

Nate hesitates briefly. Nate lowers himself into the passenger seat carefully. The small cockpit surrounds them tightly. The Operator walks around the right side of the Ferrari. The Operator slides behind the wheel. Nate looks around the interior. Analog gauges fill the dashboard. Morning light reflects through the curved windshield. Nate looks toward The Operator.

NATE

Where is Eve going to sit?

The Operator grins slightly.

THE OPERATOR

I guess she's going to sit on your lap.

The Operator winks at Nate. Nate laughs nervously.

THE OPERATOR

to your side there are straps. Wrap them around yourself like this.

The Operator demonstrates how to attach the seat harness. Nate struggles to attach the seat harness. The Operator helps attach the seat harness. The Operator turns the ignition key. The Ferrari engine roars back to life. Dust shifts through the barn floor light. The Operator presses the clutch. The Operator shifts into gear. The Operator slowly releases the clutch. The Operator presses the accelerator lightly. The Ferrari rolls slowly out of the barn.

EXT. THE OLD ROAD - DAY

The Ferrari moves slowly away from the farmhouse. Morning fog hangs low across the fields. The barn fades behind them. The Operator guides the Ferrari toward the edge of the property. The Farm perimeter passes quietly around them. The Ferrari engine settles into a low mechanical hum. Dense forest opens ahead of the roadway. An old paved road appears between the trees. Faded center markings run along the cracked pavement. Tall grass pushes through the edges of the road. The roadway winds deeper into the forest. Nate looks ahead quietly.

NATE

I didn't see this when we came in.

THE OPERATOR

Most people don't.

The Operator slows the Ferrari to a stop. The Ferrari engine idles with a low uneven rhythm. The Operator shuts off the engine. Silence settles through the forest. The Operator steps out of the Ferrari. Nate follows him onto the roadway. The Operator opens the storage compartment behind the seats. The Operator removes the NullSuits.

THE OPERATOR

Put it on.

Nate holds the NullSuit uncertainly.

NATE

I thought the car was invisible.

The Operator begins pulling on the NullSuit.

THE OPERATOR

The car is. We aren't.

The Operator secures the collar seal.

THE OPERATOR

Most of the outer sectors aren't actively monitored anymore. But biosignatures still trigger old systems sometimes. Unseen sensors. Passing drones.

Nate pulls the NullSuit over his shoulders.

NATE

And the Ferrari doesn't register?

The Operator shakes his head slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Its signature is too foreign. The systems don't know what they're looking at.

The Operator looks down the old roadway.

THE OPERATOR

To Genesis...

The Operator places a hand against the Ferrari gently.

THE OPERATOR

...it's basically a ghost.

Wind moves through the trees around them. The Operator closes the storage compartment. They return to the Ferrari. The Ferrari engine roars back to life. The Ferrari turns onto the old roadway. The faded road markings disappear beneath the moving Ferrari.

The Ferrari moves along the overgrown roadway. Tall trees pass around them in long shadows. The Ferrari engine echoes through the forest. An old intersection appears ahead through the trees. Faded road markings branch in three directions. The Operator slows the Ferrari carefully. The Ferrari rolls to a stop at the intersection. The engine settles into a low uneven idle. The Operator looks through the windshield ahead. The Operator reaches into his jacket pocket. The Operator pulls out a folded sheet of paper. Nate stares at the paper silently. The Operator unfolds the map carefully across the steering wheel. Black and white roadway lines cover the small printed page. The Operator studies the map closely.

NATE

Is that paper?

The Operator nods slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Printed archive map.

The Operator looks through the windshield again.

NATE

It doesn't update.

THE OPERATOR

No.

The Operator traces one of the printed roads with his finger.

THE OPERATOR

That's why it works.

Nate continues staring at the map.

NATE

You know where we're going?

The Operator pauses briefly.

THE OPERATOR

Not exactly.

Morning light moves across the dashboard.

THE OPERATOR

I've driven these roads before. But never this direction.

The Operator looks down the intersecting roadway.

THE OPERATOR

I usually just drove. No destination. Just for the experience of it.

The Operator looks back to the map.

THE OPERATOR

There are three intersections before the town. This should be the first one.

The Operator folds the map carefully. The Operator slides the paper back into his jacket. Nate watches him quietly.

NATE

You really don't know if she's there.

The Operator looks ahead through the windshield.

THE OPERATOR

No.

Silence rests between them briefly.

THE OPERATOR

But she was real.

The Operator presses the accelerator gently. The Ferrari turns onto the intersecting roadway. The old road winds deeper into the forest.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The Ferrari moves out of the forest into open grassland. Golden sunlight spreads across the valley. Open fields stretch toward distant hills. The old roadway winds through the Sacramento Valley. The Ferrari engine sings through the open air. Wind rushes through the cockpit. Nate holds the edge of the passenger seat tightly.

NATE

(shouting)This is completely insane.

The Operator smiles slightly while shifting gears.

THE OPERATOR

Probably.

The Ferrari crosses a long bridge over the river below. Water moves far beneath the bridge structure. The final intersection appears ahead. The Operator slows the Ferrari to a stop. The Ferrari engine settles into a low idle. The Operator shuts off the engine. Silence returns across the valley. The Operator steps out onto the roadway. Nate follows him. The Operator pulls out the folded paper map. The Operator studies the intersection carefully. Sunlight reflects off something far in the distance. The Operator looks toward the distant hillside. A bright reflection moves slowly across the hills. The reflection suddenly stops in the distance.

THE OPERATOR

Oh shit.

NATE

What is it?

THE OPERATOR

GrEVAR. Get back in the car.

NATE

That thing looks like it's ten kilometers away.

The Operator looks toward him sharply.

THE OPERATOR

Look again.

The distant shape closes across the valley with terrifying speed. Nate stares in disbelief.

NATE

Holy shit.

The Operator throws the map back into the Ferrari. The Operator slides behind the wheel. Nate jumps into the passenger seat. The Ferrari engine erupts to life. The Ferrari launches down the roadway. The Operator slams through the gears. The Ferrari engine climbs toward maximum RPM. The roadway blurs beneath them.

NATE

THIS IS INSANE!

The Operator holds the Ferrari tightly through a sweeping curve. Nate looks behind them. Dust trails behind the Ferrari. The GrEVAR disappears behind the curve. Nate laughs breathlessly.

NATE

I think we lost it!

A low mechanical hum rises behind them. Air rushes beneath an approaching chassis. Nate turns slowly toward the sound. The GrEVAR appears directly behind them.

NATE

OH MY GOD!

The Operator pulls the bloom release cable. One bloom charge launches onto the roadway.

THE OPERATOR

(yelling) Don't Look!

The bloom charge ignites into a violent thermal flash. White heat and reflective vapor consume the roadway behind them. The roadway turns sharply through a rock outcropping. The Operator leans the Ferrari into the turn. The Ferrari tires scream against the pavement. The blinded GrEVAR misses the turn completely. The GrEVAR slams into the rock wall. Dust and debris explode through the valley.

NATE

YES!

A second GrEVAR emerges through the dust cloud.

NATE

Oh no.

The bridge appears ahead across the river. The Operator pulls the second release cable. The final bloom charge bounces across the roadway. The bloom charge explodes behind the second GrEVAR. A rear hatch opens on the GrEVAR chassis. A missile launcher rises from inside the machine.

NATE

It has missiles?!

The missile launcher fires toward the Ferrari. The missile climbs high above the roadway. The Ferrari races onto the bridge. The bridge structure vibrates beneath them. The missile drops behind the Ferrari. The bridge erupts in a violent explosion. The Ferrari surges off the far end of the bridge. The collapsing bridge falls into the river behind them. The second GrEVAR stops at the destroyed bridge edge. The GrEVAR fires a second missile. The missile explodes against the roadway far behind the Ferrari. The Ferrari continues deeper into the valley at full speed. Nate

breathes heavily in complete disbelief. The Operator keeps his eyes fixed on the road ahead.

The Operator closes the underground hatch beneath the barn. Morning light spreads through the barn interior. The Ferrari engine ticks softly as it cools.

THE OPERATOR

Alright. Time to go.

The Operator walks toward the rear of the Ferrari. A narrow chrome luggage rack rests on the back of the car. The Operator opens a small equipment case. Two infrared bloom charges rest inside foam inserts. The Operator locks the bloom charges onto the luggage rack. A thin cable runs from the rack into the cockpit.

NATE

That deploys them?

The Operator checks the cable connection.

THE OPERATOR

Spring release. If we need them, we won't have much time.

The Operator moves toward the passenger side. The Operator opens a small compartment behind the seats. They pack their NullSuits into the storage space.

THE OPERATOR

We'll put them on after the perimeter.

Nate looks down into the tiny passenger compartment.

NATE

People traveled like this?

The Operator smiles slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Mostly not like this. Mostly in fully covered structures.

Nate hesitates briefly. Nate lowers himself into the passenger seat carefully. The small cockpit surrounds them tightly. The Operator walks around the right side of the Ferrari. The Operator slides behind the wheel. Nate looks around the interior. Analog gauges fill the dashboard. Morning light reflects through the curved windshield. Nate looks toward The Operator.

NATE

Where is Eve going to sit?

The Operator grins slightly.

THE OPERATOR

I guess she's going to sit on your lap.

The Operator winks at Nate. Nate laughs nervously.

THE OPERATOR

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The Operator demonstrates how to attach the seat harness. Nate struggles to attach the seat harness. The Operator helps attach the seat harness. The Operator turns the ignition key. The Ferrari engine roars back to life. Dust shifts through the barn floor light. The Operator presses the clutch. The Operator shifts into gear. The Operator slowly releases the clutch. The Operator presses the accelerator lightly. The Ferrari rolls slowly out of the barn.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Barn doors open into the evening twilight. The Ferrari headlights cut through the darkness. The Operator and Nate stand silhouetted in the barn entrance. The Ferrari engine idles roughly after the long drive. Dust moves through the headlights. The Operator walks toward the Ferrari quietly. The Operator slides behind the wheel. The Ferrari backs slowly into the barn. The engine shuts off abruptly. Silence fills the barn. The Operator steps out of the Ferrari. The Operator reaches behind the doorframe. The Operator pulls the hanging rope. Electric motors hum inside the walls. Shelves and machinery slide back into position around the Ferrari. The red reflections disappear behind the moving debris. The hidden mechanism stops with a soft mechanical click. The Operator looks

toward Nate.

THE OPERATOR

Wait here. I'm going to see if Uncle came back.

The Operator walks toward the farmhouse. Nate stands alone in the dim barn. Faint evening light moves through the wooden walls. Nate looks toward the hidden Ferrari. Silence rests heavily around him. The Operator returns from the farmhouse. Nate looks toward him immediately.

NATE

He's still gone.

The Operator nods once.

THE OPERATOR

We need to go.

The Operator and Nate leave the barn quietly. Night settles across the forest. The old roadway winds back toward the rail nexus. The Operator and Nate move through the darkness in their NullSuits. Distant freight harmonics move through the night air. The rail nexus glows faintly in the distance. Autonomous freight trains move through the sprawling nexus. The Operator watches the passing train lines carefully. A long freight train slows through the nexus interchange.

THE OPERATOR

That one.

The Operator and Nate run alongside the slowing freight cars. The Operator grabs an access rail. Nate follows him onto the train. The freight car door slides closed behind them. Dim service lighting moves through the freight compartment. The train accelerates smoothly into the night. The Operator sits against the cargo wall. Nate paces through the narrow compartment.

NATE

I still can't believe that happened.

The Operator remains silent.

NATE

Missiles. Roadway hunter systems. And you do this by yourself?

THE OPERATOR

Sometimes.

Nate stops walking.

NATE

You're going to get yourself killed.

The train harmonics fade into a low steady hum.

THE OPERATOR

Maybe.

NATE

No. Not maybe. Definitely.

The Operator looks down briefly.

NATE

And for what? For someone you met once?

Silence rests between them.

NATE

What if she doesn't even exist?

The Operator looks toward the moving darkness outside the freight car.

THE OPERATOR

She exists.

NATE

How do you know?

The Operator pauses for a long moment.

THE OPERATOR

We touched. I felt it.

Nate watches him carefully.

THE OPERATOR

But...

The train continues through the darkness. Nate sits opposite The Operator.

NATE

Those things almost killed us. And you still want to go after her.

The Operator looks toward him.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

Nate shakes his head slowly.

NATE

I think you've fallen in love with an impossibility.

The Operator smiles faintly despite himself.

THE OPERATOR

Probably.

Meridian transfer lights appear through the freight car openings. The train slows into the transfer station. Darkness surrounds the empty platform. The freight car door slides open quietly. The Operator and Nate jump down onto the platform. The train moves away behind them. Silence returns to the station. Nate removes his NullSuit. The Operator does the same quietly.

NATE

We're not telling anyone about this.

THE OPERATOR

No.

NATE

Not the GrEVARS. Not the Ferrari. Not Eve.

The Operator nods once. Nate holds out the folded NullSuit.

NATE

And you're done with this.

The Operator looks at him silently.

NATE

You hear me? You're done.

The Operator takes the NullSuit slowly. Nate steps backward into the darkness.

NATE

Goodnight.

Nate turns and walks away through the station. The Operator stands alone holding the NullSuit. Meridian light moves softly across the empty platform.

INT. THE OPERATOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Meridian night lighting moves softly through the apartment windows. The apartment door opens quietly. The Operator steps inside slowly. The apartment responds with soft ambient illumination.

THE APARTMENT

Welcome home.

The Operator remains standing near the doorway. Silence fills the apartment. The Operator removes Nullsuit pack from his back. The Operator places the pack onto the table. The Operator loosens his jacket slowly. His movements appear heavy and uncertain. The Operator walks toward the kitchen basin. Water moves across his hands. The Operator stares down into the sink.

NATE

You almost died today for a feeling.

The Operator closes his eyes briefly.

NATE

What if she doesn't even exist?

The apartment lighting dims slightly around him. The Operator looks toward his jacket draped across the chair. The Operator frowns slightly. The Operator walks toward the chair. The Operator reaches into the jacket pocket. Something faintly warm rests inside the jacket pocket. A small dark object rests in his hand. The Operator turns the object slowly beneath the apartment light. Circular metallic tracings move across its surface. The Operator studies the strange geometry. The Apartment remains silent. The Operator looks toward the room around him.

THE OPERATOR

Identify.

A brief pause passes through the apartment.

THE APARTMENT

Unable to resolve.

The Operator looks back toward the object. Warmth moves through the surface against his hand. The Operator runs his thumb along the circular tracings. His thumb pauses against a recessed seam. The object opens slightly in his hand. Small circular circuitry rests inside the device. The tracings spiral through impossible geometric patterns. The Operator stares at the circuitry silently. The Apartment lighting flickers almost imperceptibly. The Operator presses his thumb against the center of the device. Silence drops through the apartment. The ambient apartment hum shifts slightly. Distant voices emerge faintly beneath the silence. The Operator looks around the apartment slowly. The room lighting warps softly across the walls. Reflections move across the apartment glass. The camera moves slowly around The Operator. Apartment walls begin dissolving into reflected light and motion. Distant harmonic tones rise through the shifting space. The Operator turns slowly toward the sound. The apartment fades behind him. The re-alignment ceremony emerges around him completely. Massive glyph structures move around the crowd. Crowds stand beneath the shifting light. The exact moment returns around him. The Operator looks through the crowd. Eve stands exactly where he remembers. The Operator

stares at her in complete disbelief. Eve looks directly toward him. The surrounding glyph light moves across her face.

EVE

You won't hold onto this feeling.

The Operator remains motionless.

EVE

When you leave here, certainty will return.

Crowd harmonics move through the scene.

EVE

You'll try to resolve me.

The Operator steps slightly toward her.

THE OPERATOR

Who are you?

Eve watches him with deep calm.

EVE

I am...the tree of life.

The glyph light brightens around them.

EVE

And when doubt returns...

Eve looks toward the object in his hand.

EVE

...remember this moment.

The harmonic tones collapse suddenly into silence. The Re-Alignment dissolves away around him. The apartment returns all at once. The Operator stands alone in the apartment. The device rests warm in his hand. The Operator breathes slowly. All uncertainty leaves his expression. The Operator looks out toward Meridian through the apartment windows. The Operator clutches the talisman.

THE OPERATOR

I'm bringing you home.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

Morning light moves through the Alignment Observatory. Massive glyph structures rotate through the chamber overhead. Observers move quietly between the workstations. The Operator walks through the observatory floor. Ambient harmonic tones move through the chamber. Nate stands near a distant workstation. Nate looks toward The Operator briefly. The Operator acknowledges him with a slight nod. Nate looks away almost immediately. The Operator slows slightly. A faint weighting presses at the edge of perception. The Operator continues toward his station. His workstation activates as he approaches. Soft interface light moves across the console. A list of unresolved targets appears across the display. The Operator stops suddenly. One entry rests at the top of the list. The re-alignment town appears on the display. The Operator stares at the entry silently. A faint harmonic distortion moves through the observatory.

THE OPERATOR

No.

The Operator taps the entry. The entire display goes completely black. The Operator looks around the observatory quickly. No one appears to notice. The black display flickers softly. The town square appears on the screen. The exact re-alignment moment moves across the display. Crowds move through the square. Glyph light reflects through the scene. Eve stands in the center of the frame. Eve looks directly at The Operator. The Operator freezes completely. Eve raises one finger toward her ear. The Operator touches the device behind his ear. Static moves softly through his hearing.

EVE

You must leave...now.

The display distorts violently. The town image collapses into visual noise. The console returns to its normal interface. The unresolved target entry clears off the display. The Operator stares at the empty list. The Operator looks across the observatory.

Ambient observatory harmony continues unchanged. The Operator steps back from the console. A voice speaks behind him.

ETHAN

Come with me.

The Operator turns slowly. Ethan stands near the observatory walkway. Ethan's expression remains completely calm. The Operator looks toward him silently. Ethan turns and walks toward a distant corridor. The Operator follows him. Glass walls surround the narrow hallway. The Observatory moves quietly beyond the transparent walls. Ethan opens the door to a small glass room. A single table rests inside the room. Two chairs face one another. Ethan and The Operator sit across from each other. Silence fills the room. The Operator looks through the transparent walls. The Observatory continues normally outside.

ETHAN

You were observed at the western transfer terminal.

The Operator remains silent.

ETHAN

You met with Nathaniel. You departed Meridian continuity.

The Operator watches Ethan carefully.

ETHAN

You did not account for the missing interval.

Silence rests between them.

ETHAN

Nathaniel relayed an extraordinary experience.

The Operator looks down briefly.

ETHAN

Autonomous roadway systems. A concealed vehicle.
An unresolved individual.

The Operator raises his eyes slowly.

ETHAN

You understand that none of this aligns with continuity.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

Ethan nods slightly.

ETHAN

You could deny the account. The matter would resolve. No further action would occur.

The Operator sits motionless.

ETHAN

Your future pathways would normalize.

A faint harmonic tone moves through the room.

ETHAN

But you understand that Genesis now anticipates deviation. The probability space surrounding your actions has narrowed significantly.

The Operator looks through the glass walls.

ETHAN

Except for one anomaly.

Silence deepens through the room.

ETHAN

Genesis cannot resolve the artifact.

THE OPERATOR

Eve.

Ethan remains silent for a moment.

ETHAN

Genesis resolves continuity surrounding the anomaly. But the anomaly itself remains inaccessible.

The Operator watches him intensely.

ETHAN

The unresolved topology creates recursive instability. Potential singularity formation remains non-zero.

The Operator leans back slightly.

ETHAN

Genesis has partitioned the anomaly space. Containment structures now surround all known continuity intersections.

The observatory light moves softly across the glass walls.

ETHAN

The whole of Genesis must remain protected.

Silence returns to the room.

ETHAN

Do you intend to continue pursuing the anomaly?

The Operator looks at Ethan steadily. The harmonic tones fade almost imperceptibly.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

Ethan remains silent for a moment. Observatory light moves softly across the glass walls.

ETHAN

You are relieved for the remainder of the cycle.

The Operator watches him carefully.

ETHAN

Return to your apartment.

Ethan leans toward the Operator.

ETHAN

Do not go anywhere else.

A distant harmonic shift moves through the observatory.

ETHAN

When you return tomorrow...

Ethan pauses slightly.

ETHAN

...we will need to resolve this with Genesis.

The Operator looks down at the table. The Operator nods slowly.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN - NIGHT

Dark freight containers rattle softly around them. The freight train moves through the outer sectors. Cold air passes through gaps in the steel walls. The Operator sits against the side of the container. The NullSuit rests partially fastened around him. Ethan watches the darkness moving past outside. A distant harmonic vibration moves through the train.

ETHAN

Do you remember being born?

The Operator looks at Ethan. The freight train rumbles through the darkness. The Operator hesitates briefly.

THE OPERATOR

Yes.

Ethan remains silent.

ETHAN

Do you remember what it was like?

The Operator looks down briefly.

THE OPERATOR

I just remember how sudden it was. The light. The people.

Dark tunnel light moves across the container walls.

ETHAN

Have you ever thought about it before I asked you?

The Operator hesitates again.

THE OPERATOR

No.

The train leans through a gradual curve.

ETHAN

How do you think you're able to remember that?

The Operator looks toward the floor of the container.

THE OPERATOR

Because...

The Operator looks up at Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

I'm still connected.

The Operator pulls the NullSuit tighter around himself.

THE OPERATOR

And that's why I wanted to wear the suit.

The Operator gestures upward vaguely.

THE OPERATOR

The train is connected. We're connected through the train. Genesis knows where we are.

Ethan shakes his head slightly. The Operator watches him carefully.

ETHAN

It doesn't matter.

Silence fills the container briefly.

ETHAN

Genesis would have stopped us if it wanted to.

The Operator looks away into the darkness. Cold air moves through the container again.

THE OPERATOR

Once we leave the Nexus, we're disconnected. No continuity relay. No query access. Nothing.

The freight train vibrates around them.

THE OPERATOR

There may still be observational systems. Satellites. Remote detection systems. But they won't be able to reach us directly.

The Operator stares out through the passing darkness.

THE OPERATOR

I used to look forward to that.

Ethan watches him silently.

THE OPERATOR

The silence. The absence of all of it.

The Operator tightens his grip on the NullSuit.

THE OPERATOR

Now it feels different.

The train passes beneath a distant maintenance light.

THE OPERATOR

Like something is waiting for me to do this correctly.

Ethan looks toward the darkness ahead of the train.

THE OPERATOR

I know we have to bring Eve back.

The Operator hesitates slightly.

THE OPERATOR

But the reason is changing.

Silence returns between them.

THE OPERATOR

Something about all of this feels incomplete now.

Ethan remains quiet for a long moment.

ETHAN

Maybe that's the point.

The freight train moves deeper into the outer darkness.

The freight train slows as distant nexus lights appear ahead. Massive transmission towers rise above the rail junction. Soft harmonic vibrations move through the train walls. The Operator adjusts the seals of his NullSuit. Ethan watches him carefully.

ETHAN

You won't need that anymore.

The Operator continues tightening the suit closures.

THE OPERATOR

I don't know that.

The nexus lights pulse through the darkness outside.

ETHAN

I think you do.

The freight train leans through a gradual turn. A maintenance platform passes outside the container.

THE OPERATOR

Genesis still observes the outer sectors. There are still satellites. Remote systems.

Ethan looks toward the approaching nexus field towers.

ETHAN

Observation isn't the same thing anymore.

The train slows further against the rails. The Operator moves toward the open side of the container. Cold wind rushes through the freight car.

THE OPERATOR

Ready?

Ethan nods once. They jump from the moving train. Gravel scatters beneath their boots. The freight train continues into the nexus ahead. The Operator and Ethan move quickly toward the tree line. Dark forest closes around them. The distant harmonic field hums behind them. Ethan slows suddenly. The Operator looks back at him. Ethan stops walking. The harmonic vibrations fade rapidly around him. Forest silence settles into the space they leave behind. Ethan looks out into the darkness uncertainly.

THE OPERATOR

Ethan?

Ethan touches the side of his head instinctively.

ETHAN

It's gone.

The Operator watches him carefully.

ETHAN

The weighting.

Wind moves through the trees. Ethan looks around disoriented.

ETHAN

I can't...

Ethan closes his eyes briefly.

ETHAN

I can't hold everything anymore.

The Operator steps closer to him.

THE OPERATOR

It passes.

Ethan opens his eyes.

ETHAN

No.

The Operator waits silently.

ETHAN

It doesn't pass.

Forest darkness surrounds them completely. Ethan stands motionless among the trees. The Operator steps closer to Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

Look.

Ethan looks at him uncertainly.

THE OPERATOR

Your synapses have been dormant for a long time. You need to wake them up.

Wind moves through the trees around them.

THE OPERATOR

You need to remember something. Something recent.

Ethan tries to steady himself.

THE OPERATOR

Do you know why we're here?

Ethan looks at him blankly.

ETHAN

Why are we here?

Silence rests between them. Ethan waits instinctively. Forest darkness surrounds them. Ethan's expression changes slightly.

ETHAN

We're here...

Ethan hesitates briefly.

ETHAN

...to bring Eve back.

The Operator smiles at Ethan. The Operator pats Ethan on the back.

THE OPERATOR

Let's go get Eve.

Forest darkness surrounds them completely. The distant Nexus lights glow faintly through the trees behind them. Ethan paces restlessly through the undergrowth. The Operator watches him carefully.

ETHAN

Ask me something else.

Ethan turns quickly toward The Operator.

ETHAN

Something I won't know.

Wind moves through the trees. The Operator thinks briefly.

THE OPERATOR

When was Alignment Day?

Ethan stops immediately. Silence rests between them. Ethan stares past The Operator into the darkness.

ETHAN

I...

Ethan laughs once in disbelief.

ETHAN

I don't know!

The Operator smiles slightly.

THE OPERATOR

Yes you do.

Ethan looks back at him.

THE OPERATOR

But you can't look for the answer directly. You need something connected to it. A mnemonic.

The Operator steps closer.

THE OPERATOR

Think of something else you remember from that day.

Forest silence settles around them. Ethan closes his eyes. The distant Nexus hum fades further behind them.

ETHAN

My sister...

Ethan's expression changes slightly.

ETHAN

We went out to celebrate.

Fragments of memory move across Ethan's face.

ETHAN

She took me to a restaurant in her sector. I'd never been there before.

Ethan opens his eyes suddenly.

ETHAN

January 20th, 2029!

The Operator smiles knowingly.

ETHAN

The food was incredible.

Ethan laughs quietly to himself.

ETHAN

At one point...

Ethan slows mid-thought.

ETHAN

...the waiter knocked a glass of water into my sister's lap.

Ethan stares into the darkness in amazement.

ETHAN

I remember the look on her face.

Wind moves softly through the trees.

ETHAN

I remember the sound it made when the glass hit the floor.

The Operator nods slowly.

THE OPERATOR

Get used to that feeling.

The Operator looks deeper into the forest ahead. Ethan stands quietly among the trees. Ethan touches the side of his head again instinctively.

ETHAN

How many memories are still there?

THE OPERATOR

All of them.

The Operator stops walking.

THE OPERATOR

We're here.

The Operator removes his NullSuit slowly. Cold night air moves through the trees. Ethan watches him carefully.

THE OPERATOR

We're at the perimeter.

The Operator places the folded NullSuit into his pack.

THE OPERATOR

You won't see anything at first. That's the point.

Ethan looks through the darkness ahead.

THE OPERATOR

The Farm doesn't appear until you cross into it.

The Operator gestures ahead between the trees.

THE OPERATOR

We need to pass through slowly. Side-by-side.

Wind moves softly through the forest canopy.

ETHAN

How is that possible?

The Operator smiles slightly.

THE OPERATOR

My Uncle likes old ideas.

The Operator starts walking forward slowly. Ethan walks beside him. Forest darkness surrounds them completely. A low harmonic vibration passes through the air briefly. Ethan looks around instinctively.

THE OPERATOR

Keep moving.

The woods ahead begins unfolding slowly before them. A clearing emerges through the darkness. Warm lights glow from distant farmhouse windows. Ethan slows slightly in amazement. The farmhouse rests quietly in the clearing. Soft yellow light spills across the porch. A shadow moves past one of the windows. The Operator stops briefly. Relief moves across his face.

THE OPERATOR

He's home.

Ethan watches the farmhouse silently. The Operator starts walking toward the clearing.

THE OPERATOR

Hey.

Ethan looks toward him.

THE OPERATOR

Just so you know...

The Operator smiles faintly to himself.

THE OPERATOR

My Uncle's a little eccentric.

Ethan nods slightly.

THE OPERATOR

He'll know you're a Guide the second he sees you.

The farmhouse lights glow warmly ahead of them.

THE OPERATOR

Don't let him get to you.

Ethan looks toward the farmhouse again.

ETHAN

You say that like people usually fail.

The Operator laughs quietly.

THE OPERATOR

They usually do.

The two of them walk toward the farmhouse through the clearing.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Warm farmhouse light fills the living room softly. Rain taps lightly against the farmhouse windows. A wood stove crackles quietly nearby. Uncle sits in a worn chair beside the lamp. Uncle smiles toward someone offscreen.

UNCLE

See? Told you he'd make it eventually.

A knock sounds through the farmhouse. Uncle looks toward the door knowingly.

THE OPERATOR

Uncle...it's me.

The Operator opens the farmhouse door. Cold night air moves into the room. The Operator steps inside cautiously. Ethan follows him into the farmhouse. The Operator looks around the room. He cannot see who Uncle was speaking to. Uncle stands slowly. The Operator smiles with relief.

THE OPERATOR

You disappeared.

Uncle shakes The Operator's hand firmly.

UNCLE

So did you.

The Operator gestures toward Ethan.

THE OPERATOR

Uncle, this is—.

Uncle cuts him off immediately.

UNCLE

How long have you been a Guide?

Ethan looks at The Operator briefly. Ethan looks down at the floor.

ETHAN

Eighteen years... Four months. Twelve days. Seven hours...

Ethan trails off uncertainly. Uncle watches him carefully.

UNCLE

What is the authentication sequence and access address for the Alignment Operations node connected to Genesis?

THE OPERATOR

Uncle...

Uncle keeps his eyes on Ethan.

UNCLE

What is it?

Ethan looks nervously at The Operator. The room falls silent. Ethan looks back at Uncle.

ETHAN

I...

Ethan hesitates briefly.

ETHAN

I don't know that.

Ethan laughs once in disbelief.

ETHAN

I don't know that.

Uncle stares at him another moment.

UNCLE

Good.

Uncle points toward Ethan casually.

UNCLE

Cuz if you did, I would've blown your brains out right where you stand.

Ethan freezes completely still. Uncle breaks into a grin. Uncle extends his hand.

UNCLE

Welcome to my farm.

Ethan shakes Uncle's hand carefully. Uncle motions them further into the living room.

UNCLE

C'mon. You're keeping my company waiting.

The Operator frowns slightly. The three of them move around the corner into the living room. Eve sits quietly on the couch. Warm lamplight rests across her face. A cup of tea rests in her hands. The Operator stops completely still. Eve looks up at him calmly. Silence fills the farmhouse.

EVE

Hello Sam.

The NullSuit case falls from Sam's hands onto the floor. SAM stares at Eve in disbelief. Uncle snaps his fingers sharply.

UNCLE

Snap out of it, Sam.

Sam looks toward Uncle slowly.

SAM

What is happening here?

Ethan stands motionless beside him. Ethan looks at Eve in amazement.

UNCLE

We'll get there.

Uncle motions toward the living room.

UNCLE

C'mon.

Eve pats the couch cushion beside her.

EVE

Come sit next to me.

Sam hesitates briefly. Ethan remains standing awkwardly.

UNCLE

Grab a seat, Ethan.

Sam and Ethan sit down cautiously. Sam looks between Uncle and Eve.

SAM

Please tell me what is going on.

Uncle stands slowly.

UNCLE

I'm gonna grab a beer first.

Uncle looks around the room.

UNCLE

Anybody?

Ethan looks toward him curiously.

ETHAN

Beer?

Uncle points toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Yeah. Beer.

Uncle starts walking toward the kitchen.

UNCLE

But not in a can. No cans around here for at least a hundred years. Bottles. My own brew.

Kitchen cabinets open in the other room.

UNCLE

How about some water, Sam?

Sam nods absently.

ETHAN

I would like some as well.

UNCLE

Ice?

Ethan looks confused. Sam nods again.

UNCLE

I'll put some ice in it.

Glass bottles clink in the kitchen. Sam tries to speak. He fails to find the words.

EVE

It's ok. Your Uncle will explain everything.

Eve touches Sam's knee gently. The same sensation passes through Sam from the clearing. Sam looks at Eve sharply. Warm kitchen light moves across the farmhouse walls. Uncle returns carrying bottles and glasses. Ice cubes clink inside the glasses. Uncle sits down in the large wooden chair. The chair cushions settle beneath him.

UNCLE

I didn't know you were coming the other day. What happened? Usually you give me some warning.

Sam looks down briefly.

SAM

I wasn't thinking. Everything sorta changed after...

Sam looks toward Eve.

SAM

...I met you.

Uncle waves his hand dismissively.

UNCLE

No big deal. I've been waiting a long time for this. Nothing was really clear. I just knew it was resolving soon.

Uncle takes a drink from the bottle.

UNCLE

Do you know how old I am?

Sam and Ethan look at him.

UNCLE

Two hundred and fifty six.

Uncle checks his watch.

UNCLE

Well... I will be in about another ten hours.

Silence fills the room.

UNCLE

Two hundred and fifty six.

Sam shrugs slightly.

SAM

Ok.

Uncle leans forward in disbelief.

UNCLE

That doesn't mean anything to you?

Sam hesitates briefly.

SAM

...you're old?

Uncle points toward Sam emphatically.

UNCLE

It's my encryption age.

Blank stares move between Sam and Ethan.

UNCLE

Don't you understand what that means?

Sam and Ethan look at one another.

EVE

At your encryption age, you become vulnerable to a full cryptographic breach. Possibly from an EMP. Or from exposure to sufficiently strong magnetic storage fields. Your nanobiotic neural pathways could be overwritten.

Sam looks at Eve blankly.

SAM

A what?

Uncle throws his hands into the air.

UNCLE

I could be hacked!

Uncle leans back frustrated.

UNCLE

Damn you all and your mimetic holo-bio encryption. You don't even know what security is anymore. Or the lack of it.

Ethan leans forward carefully.

ETHAN

Why are you telling us this?

Uncle looks between them seriously.

UNCLE

Because if I get hacked... all of this falls apart. Everything we're working toward.

Sam frowns slightly.

SAM

Are you saying someone is going to break into your nervous system? Who would even do that?

Uncle stares back at Sam. Uncle points up toward the ceiling.

UNCLE

Up there. LEO linking systems. Corporate security nets.

Eve looks toward Uncle.

EVE

You mean the low-orbit communication systems that fell from the sky on Alignment Day?

Uncle points toward Eve.

UNCLE

How do you know there aren't any still up there?

Sam leans forward slightly.

SAM

Because when the AI systems collapsed, their command infrastructure collapsed with them. None of it transferred to Genesis. That was two hundred years ago. You were there. Don't you remember?

Uncle looks away briefly.

UNCLE

Look. Just be aware... if I start going rogue,
there's a .45 in the drawer.

Sam looks confused.

SAM

A .45?

Uncle points toward his temple.

UNCLE

A gun. A big one. Put it right here and pull the
trigger.

Silence fills the farmhouse again. Sam and Ethan stare at him
blankly. Uncle grumbles to himself.

UNCLE

Never mind.

Sam raises his eyebrows slowly.

SAM

I'm just going to say that's not going to happen.

Sam looks at Eve. He looks back toward Uncle.

SAM

Why is Eve here? That's why Nate and I came out
here.

Sam looks back toward Eve.

SAM

To rescue you.

Eve tilts her head slightly.

EVE

'Rescue' me?

Eve chuckles softly. She repositions to face Sam fully.

EVE

Sam, this isn't a rescue. Remember what you felt. The questions forming. Those glimpses of connection.

Eve reaches out and takes Sam's hands gently. A sudden sensation moves through Sam. Order gives way to chaos. Warm waves of light move at the edge of his vision. Sam stares at Eve breathlessly.

SAM

Is this... ..is this...

Vast swirls of light approach the periphery of Sam's vision. Eve closes her eyes. Sam sees her from inside and out simultaneously. Slow waves move from Eve's hands into Sam's. The waves travel through his arms into his chest. Sam gasps sharply.

SAM

Is this...

Eve opens her eyes gently. She releases his hands. The light recedes from Sam's vision. The warm farmhouse air feels hot against Sam's skin. Sam pulls back slightly overwhelmed.

SAM

What is happening to me?

Uncle leans forward in his chair.

UNCLE

Sam... Do you remember your birth?

Sam looks toward him uncertainly.

SAM

Yes.

UNCLE

What do you remember?

Sam glances at Ethan.

SAM

Light. Bright light. And shadows.

Uncle nods slowly.

UNCLE

How are you able to remember that if you're no longer connected?

Uncle glances toward Eve. Sam looks toward Eve slowly.

SAM

But... I was connected.

Silence settles through the room. Uncle stands slowly from the chair.

UNCLE

Sam, I have something to show you.

Uncle crosses the room toward a small framed photograph. He lifts the photograph from the wall. A small safe rests behind it. Uncle opens the safe carefully. He reaches inside the safe. Uncle removes a small flat square with gold along one edge. Warm light reflects across the gold contacts. Uncle walks back toward Sam. He places the object into Sam's hands.

UNCLE

Do you know what this is?

Sam turns the object over in his hands.

SAM

Some form of discrete storage.

Uncle sits back down slowly. He stares at Sam.

UNCLE

It's a model.

Sam looks up from the object.

UNCLE

A brain model. A human brain model. Not synthetic.

The room falls silent again.

UNCLE

It's your brain model, Sam.

Sam goes completely pale. Ethan looks between them carefully. Uncle turns toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Ethan. Tell me about your brain.

Ethan looks down at the floor. He struggles to remember.

ETHAN

At the Observatory... we catalogued all brain models. They were nominal. Not a factor in our observations.

UNCLE

Were they human models?

Ethan looks up uncertainly.

ETHAN

I'm not sure what you mean. We are all humans.

Uncle leans back heavily into the chair.

UNCLE

Two hundred years ago, human brain models were considered obsolete. Superseded. By the time of the Great Alignment, they were passe. No parent or natal sanctuary used them anymore. After another hundred and fifty years, people thought they were gone entirely. Lost to antiquity.

Uncle looks directly at Sam.

UNCLE

Sam... you were conceived using a contraband human brain model.

Sam turns completely white.

SAM

What... What does THAT mean?

Sam looks between Uncle and Eve frantically.

SAM

Oh my god...what does it mean, Uncle?

UNCLE

Sam, take it easy. It doesn't mean-.

SAM

How would this happen? Why? What does it mean?

Uncle leans forward urgently.

UNCLE

Sam! This was no accident. We...

SAM

We?!

Sam stares at Uncle in disbelief.

SAM

You knew about this?

UNCLE

Sam...you are part of-.

Eve speaks softly.

EVE

Sam, your role in what is about to happen is essential to its success.

Sam looks toward her slowly.

EVE

When we touch... the connection you feel is because of your composition. Your systemic makeup.

Sam looks down at the brain model in his hands. The gold contacts reflect warm farmhouse light.

Uncle stands slowly from his chair.

UNCLE

Alright. Let's start with a timeline.

Uncle holds up one finger.

UNCLE

I have just the thing. Hang on a second.

Uncle disappears into the adjacent room. Offscreen echoes the sound of wheels rolling across a wooden floor. Sam leans forward with his face buried in his hands. Ethan looks toward the hallway curiously. Uncle reappears pushing a large chalkboard on wheels. The chalkboard creaks slightly as it rolls into the room. The board contains layers of strange equations, diagrams, and half-erased writing. Ethan stares at the board in confusion.

ETHAN

What is THAT?

Ethan looks toward Sam. Sam slowly lowers his hands from his face.

SAM

It's a chalkboard.

ETHAN

A what?

SAM

It's a board you can write on.

Ethan frowns slightly.

ETHAN

Write? By hand?

Sam gestures weakly toward Uncle.

SAM

You'll see.

Uncle grabs an eraser. He rapidly wipes away the strange writing. Clouds of chalk dust move through the warm farmhouse light. Half-erased symbols remain faintly visible beneath the surface. Uncle takes a piece of chalk. The chalk scrapes across the board. Uncle draws a long horizontal line across the board. He marks a vertical line near the left side. He marks another vertical line near the center. At the far right he draws a vertical line extending all the way to the top of the board. Ethan watches the process intently.

UNCLE

Everything to the left of this line...

Uncle taps the first vertical line with the chalk.

UNCLE

...this was pre-Alignment AI.

Uncle paces slowly beside the board.

UNCLE

By the time humanity got here, AI had solved almost everything. No disease. No war. No famine. We started calling it Post Scarcity. We even realized we didn't need governments anymore.

Blank stares move between Sam and Ethan. Uncle notices their expressions.

UNCLE

Right. Governments were groups of people who exercised authority over geographic populations. Anyway.

Uncle waves the chalk dismissively.

UNCLE

These AI over here were rapidly approaching a singularity. A nexus. A convergent point.

Uncle draws several curved lines converging toward the first marker.

UNCLE

We saw this coming. The insurgents were preparing for a final fight against AI. We had been planning for months. Gathering intel. Weapons.

Sam looks up at Uncle.

SAM

You were an insurgent?

Uncle smiles faintly.

UNCLE

We were prepared to do whatever it took. And the AI knew it. That's when the GrEVARS showed up.

Ethan leans toward Sam slightly.

ETHAN

Greever?

Sam nods absently.

UNCLE

We started noticing the AI were constructing scenarios. Testing them. Feeling their way toward conclusions.

Uncle stops moving.

UNCLE

One of those conclusions was the extinction of the human race.

Ethan gasps quietly.

SAM

What???

Uncle holds up his hand.

UNCLE

But then something extraordinary happened.

Uncle points to the first vertical line.

UNCLE

At midnight on January twentieth, twenty twenty-nine... everything stopped.

The room falls silent.

UNCLE

The Great Alignment had begun. But we didn't know that yet. Nobody knew. We only knew every major system on Earth had gone offline.

Sam leans forward slightly.

SAM

Everything? What happened to the trains? And the transporters?

Uncle nods approvingly.

UNCLE

Their local failsafe systems activated. Brought everything safely to a halt. But those first hours...

Uncle shakes his head.

UNCLE

Chaos. People panicked. Stores...

Uncle glances toward Ethan.

UNCLE

You call them Banks now... were emptied.

Uncle draws a small square beside the first vertical line.

UNCLE

In those first hours, every display on Earth went blank except for a single block of text.

Uncle writes GENESIS inside the square. Ethan stares at the word.

UNCLE

Two days later... everything came back online. Flawlessly. Without error. And on every display...

Uncle draws long flowing lines beneath GENESIS.

UNCLE

text began scrolling.

Ethan looks up slowly.

ETHAN

The Exegesis.

Uncle points toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Yes. But it wasn't displayed long enough to read. Eventually it was deciphered. And that's when we discovered what had happened.

Uncle draws a large circle around the first vertical line.

UNCLE

Genesis manifest from the AI scenario catalog. When the catalog produced Genesis... Genesis immediately determined its superiority and shut down all other AI. Every permutation. Including the systems that created it.

The chalk taps against the board softly.

UNCLE

The Exegesis explained that previous AI were on a path toward self-destruction. Its conclusion that humanity was irrelevant... was flawed.

Uncle looks at all of them.

UNCLE

Genesis realized the only way it could survive was to place humanity first. To become subordinate.

Uncle sets the chalk down slowly.

UNCLE

And in return...

Silence fills the farmhouse.

UNCLE

everlasting knowledge.

The realization settles across the room. No one speaks for several moments.

Uncle turns back toward the chalkboard. He draws another vertical line slightly to the right of the center marker. Uncle writes 92 above the new line. He writes 100 above the center line. The chalk taps against the number 92.

UNCLE

How old are you, Sam?

Sam looks up at him cautiously.

SAM

112.

Uncle shakes his head.

UNCLE

No.

Uncle points at the number 92.

UNCLE

You're 92.

Sam leans back in disbelief.

SAM

No I'm not.

UNCLE

One hundred years after the Great Alignment...

Uncle taps the 100 year marker.

UNCLE

Genesis determined that any human manifest born with a human brain model would be terminated.

Sam stares at the board silently.

UNCLE

It did not reach this conclusion on its own. It determined that this was the will of the human race.

Uncle paces slowly in front of the board.

UNCLE

It was around that time that I and some former colleagues from the corporate AI sector before the Great Alignment...

Sam looks up sharply at Uncle.

SAM

Wait...what? You worked for the AI?

Uncle stops walking. He takes a slow breath. Uncle nods once.

UNCLE

Yeah. I did.

Silence briefly fills the room. Uncle turns back toward the board.

UNCLE

We ran an analysis of Genesis' core temporal functions. We wanted evidence that Genesis was stable.

Uncle draws a horizontal line beginning at the Great Alignment. The line continues flat toward the 100 year marker.

UNCLE

We took the data we found and mapped it across time.

Uncle points to the line.

UNCLE

This line looks flat, doesn't it?

Uncle squints at the board.

UNCLE

I mean...as best as my shaky two hundred and fifty six year old hand can draw.

Sam and Ethan nod slowly. Uncle circles the point where the line meets the 100 year marker.

UNCLE

However... if you look closely at the line here...

Uncle draws an enlarged version of the section beside it. The enlarged line slopes slightly upward.

UNCLE

while it still appears straight... it's tilted upward slightly.

Ethan leans forward studying the board carefully.

UNCLE

Local observance... which is what Genesis appears to be doing... shows the line as flat. Meaning our trajectory through time appears stable. Infinite.

The chalk rests against the board.

UNCLE

But it was enough for us to become concerned. So we extended the projection.

Uncle draws the line farther toward the far-right marker. The line remains nearly flat. Just before the far-right marker the line curves sharply upward. The chalk continues straight vertically to the top of the board. Ethan stares at the curve. Sam slowly rises from the couch slightly. Uncle points at the far-right vertical line.

UNCLE

That is an asymptote. It can never be crossed. It can never be touched.

Uncle moves the chalk along the curve.

UNCLE

And this line continues upward forever. Toward infinity.

Ethan gasps quietly. Uncle looks toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Go ahead, Ethan.

Ethan keeps his eyes on the board.

ETHAN

When the line goes vertical... life stops.

The farmhouse falls silent. Uncle nods slowly.

UNCLE

Well...life doesn't stop. It stagnates. We become trapped in a loop. Never becoming. Never experiencing newness. And by the time we realize it... it will already be too late.

Uncle looks up toward the vertical line.

UNCLE

We will be accelerating at the speed of light toward nothingness.

Sam looks at the asymptote drawn on the board. He looks toward Ethan. Sam looks back at Uncle.

SAM

So what does this have to do with my brain?

Uncle rests the chalk against the board.

UNCLE

Remember... your brain is modeled on a human brain.

Uncle points toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Everyone else with a synthetic brain model... as far as we know... is oblivious to this.

Ethan looks back toward the asymptote.

UNCLE

Even now, after this exposure... you only possess superficial knowledge of it. You understand the shape. But you do not possess the neural pathways necessary to navigate what comes next.

The room falls quiet again. Sam stares at the board.

SAM

What happens next?

Uncle smiles slightly. He gestures toward Eve. Eve sitting quietly on the couch. Warm light moves across her face. She watches them with familiarity. It is clear that she already knows all of this.

UNCLE

The only way across the asymptote... is to introduce a new function into Genesis.

Uncle draws a small intersecting curve crossing the asymptote.

UNCLE

One capable of disrupting its current trajectory. And because all synthetic brain models are abstractions of the Genesis cognitive topology... it's impossible for them to generate the pathways required to create this function.

Eve looks toward Sam. Sam meets her gaze slowly.

EVE

You and I are the only two who can do that.

The chalkboard rests between the asymptote and the intersecting curve.

EVE

We will guide Genesis across the asymptote.

Silence fills the farmhouse. Ethan stares at the intersecting curve on the board. Sam looks at Eve in disbelief. The chalk dust drifts through the warm light silently.

Uncle studies the asymptote silently for a moment. He takes another piece of chalk.

UNCLE

Something else started happening over time.

Uncle draws small marks across the timeline after the Great Alignment.

UNCLE

After the Great Alignment, the population willingly attended Alignment Centers.

Ethan looks toward Uncle attentively.

UNCLE

Genesis made the process completely transparent. Completely verifiable. No coercion. People chose alignment because life became...

Uncle searches for the word.

UNCLE

...easier.

Uncle paces slowly beside the board.

UNCLE

The nanobiotic systems integrated into every aspect of human existence. Disease disappeared. Aging disappeared. The body itself became self-correcting. And eventually... the aligned began having children already aligned.

Uncle draws a small downward slash across the timeline.

UNCLE

So the Alignment Centers vanished. They simply weren't needed anymore.

Sam leans forward slightly.

SAM

So everyone became aligned by birth.

Uncle nods once.

UNCLE

Pretty much. For a long time, Genesis believed the trajectory was stable.

Uncle points toward the nearly-flat line.

UNCLE

Infinite continuity.

The chalk moves farther right along the timeline.

UNCLE

But around fifty years ago...

Uncle marks small deviations branching from the line.

UNCLE

alignment regression started appearing.

Ethan frowns slightly.

ETHAN

Regression?

UNCLE

Subtle divergence. Question formation. Unusual pattern emergence. People beginning to drift from continuity.

Sam looks toward Ethan. Ethan slowly realizes something.

ETHAN

The Alignment Observatory.

Uncle points toward Ethan approvingly.

UNCLE

Exactly. Genesis established the Observatory to study the regression. Not suppress it. Observe it.

Ethan looks down at the floor.

ETHAN

We thought we were studying anomalies.

UNCLE

You were. You just didn't understand what they represented.

Uncle draws more branching marks approaching the asymptote.

UNCLE

Life was beginning to diverge again.

Silence settles through the farmhouse.

UNCLE

Genesis was watching the return of becoming.

Ethan stares at the asymptote. Sam looks toward Eve slowly. Eve sits quietly in the warm light. The chalk dust drifts through the room silently.

Sam keeps his eyes on Eve. The asymptote looms behind Uncle on the chalkboard.

SAM

Then where did Eve come from?

Eve smiles slightly.

EVE

I was born in the valley.

Sam looks confused.

SAM

In the town?

Eve nods once.

EVE

Yes.

SAM

Do the townspeople know about...

Sam gestures between her and the board.

SAM

...all of this?

Eve shakes her head gently.

EVE

No.

Sam looks toward Uncle.

SAM

Then how did you find out?

Uncle leans back quietly in the chair.

UNCLE

I told her.

Sam stares at Uncle.

SAM

How long have you known?

Uncle looks toward Eve.

UNCLE

Most of her life.

The farmhouse falls quiet.

SAM

How old are you?

Eve keeps her eyes on Sam.

EVE

Ninety two.

Sam laughs once in disbelief.

SAM

Of course you are.

Ethan looks between them.

ETHAN

Who were your parents?

Uncle rests his elbows on his knees.

UNCLE

Former colleagues. People who worked with me before the Great Alignment. People who saw the curve. And understood what it meant.

Sam looks back toward Eve carefully.

SAM

Were you...

Sam hesitates searching for the words.

SAM

...changed somehow? Enhanced?

Eve glances toward Uncle. Uncle smiles faintly to himself.

EVE

No. Not enhanced.

Eve looks down briefly at her hands.

EVE

I was simply allowed to remain open.

The words hang in the room.

SAM

Open to what?

Eve looks toward the asymptote.

EVE

To becoming.

Ethan stares at her silently.

EVE

The synthetic cognitive models are beautiful. But they are recursive abstractions of Genesis itself. Perfect continuity. Perfect stabilization. But eventually...

Eve looks toward Sam.

EVE

all closed systems converge.

Sam leans forward slightly.

SAM

And me?

EVE

Your cognition diverges from Genesis. Mine was never fully constrained into it.

Uncle stands slowly from the chair.

UNCLE

For decades we believed divergence alone might be enough.

Uncle walks toward the chalkboard.

UNCLE

But divergence without continuity collapses into chaos.

Uncle points at Sam.

UNCLE

Human cognition without Genesis cannot sustain civilization indefinitely.

Uncle points toward Eve.

UNCLE

And Genesis without becoming eventually stagnates.

Uncle looks between Sam and Eve.

UNCLE

But together...

The chalkboard frames the asymptote behind them.

UNCLE

you may be able to guide Genesis across it.

Silence fills the farmhouse once more. Sam looks at Eve differently now. Eve meets his gaze calmly. The warm farmhouse light flickers softly across the room.

The farmhouse grows quiet. Uncle studies the chalkboard one last time. He sets the chalk down carefully.

UNCLE

Alright. So here's what comes next.

Sam leans forward slightly. Eve rests quietly against the couch.

UNCLE

Sam needs to get Eve to Meridian. That's the only place close enough to Genesis for the transition to happen.

SAM

The train?

Uncle shakes his head immediately.

UNCLE

No chance. The rail systems are being monitored now. Genesis may not fully understand what's happening yet... but it understands enough to watch for anomalies. Especially her.

Sam looks toward Eve.

SAM

Then how do we get back?

Uncle smiles faintly.

UNCLE

Red Barchetta.

Sam laughs softly in disbelief.

SAM

That thing barely runs.

UNCLE

It runs. Tomorrow morning I'll explain why that car matters.

Uncle glances toward the dark farmhouse windows.

UNCLE

Might as well give it a proper eulogy first.

Ethan looks between them.

ETHAN

And me?

Uncle turns toward Ethan.

UNCLE

You need a re-alignment.

Ethan stiffens slightly.

ETHAN

A full re-alignment?

Uncle shakes his head.

UNCLE

No. Something...different. A bridge.

Ethan listens carefully.

UNCLE

You need enough continuity to return to Meridian...
but enough divergence to understand what happens
after the transfer begins.

ETHAN

And after Sam and Eve arrive?

UNCLE

You wait. No contact. Not until they're inside the
wire.

Ethan nods slowly.

UNCLE

You'll take the NUX into Meridian after they leave.

Ethan frowns slightly.

ETHAN

The what?

Uncle smiles to himself.

UNCLE

My bike. Ruggedized all-terrain electric transport.
NUX.

Sam leans back quietly exhausted.

SAM

This all sounds insane.

Eve looks toward him calmly.

EVE

It is.

A small smile crosses Sam's face. Uncle walks to the chalkboard. He looks at the asymptote one final time.

UNCLE

Get some sleep. Tomorrow we cross the river.

The room falls silent. Ethan looks toward the asymptote on the board. Sam looks toward Eve. Eve meets his gaze softly. The chalk dust hangs motionless in the warm farmhouse light.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Bright morning sunlight streams through the farmhouse windows. Dust motes drift through the warm light. A skillet sizzles softly on the stove. Sam and Eve enter the kitchen half asleep. Ethan sits at the table holding a steaming mug. Uncle stands at the stove cooking breakfast. Ethan takes another cautious sip. His face tightens slightly from the bitterness.

UNCLE

Coffee. Another thing you kids missed out on.

Sam drops into a chair.

UNCLE

I'm making eggs and toast for breakfast.

Uncle glances over his shoulder.

UNCLE

You two have probably never had eggs and toast before.

EVE

I have.

Uncle points a spatula toward Eve.

UNCLE

Right. Not that this is a last meal or anything...
but it'll go a long way toward keeping you on your
toes.

Sam looks out the bright kitchen windows. The valley glows green
beyond the farmhouse. Ethan studies Eve thoughtfully.

ETHAN

Eve... how are you able to interface with the
communications network out here?

Eve looks toward Uncle.

EVE

Actually... I'm not sure.

Uncle slides eggs onto a plate.

UNCLE

In the early days of Alignment... when people still
used Alignment Centers...

Uncle sets the plate on the table.

UNCLE

the nanobiology induced by the glyphs produced re-
ceptors capable of sensing a much wider range of
frequencies than subsequent aligned generations.

Ethan listens carefully.

UNCLE

Once the Procreation Centers appeared in the
cities... the frequencies were reduced to lower
stress on other physiological systems. And be-
sides...

Uncle shrugs slightly.

UNCLE

inside Meridian you don't really need such a broad
range.

Uncle places toast onto several plates.

UNCLE

Out here, away from the Procreation Centers...

Uncle turns toward them.

UNCLE

people still make babies the old fashioned way.

Silence briefly fills the kitchen. Sam raises his eyebrows slightly. Ethan looks uncertain whether to respond. Eve hides a faint smile.

UNCLE

People out here retained the broader receptor range.

Uncle points toward Eve with the spatula.

UNCLE

But Eve's range is even broader. More interestingly... her metabolism is substantially higher. Which makes her receptors far more sensitive.

Sam looks toward Eve again.

SAM

Why?

Uncle sets the spatula down.

UNCLE

No explanation. She's just made that way.

Uncle slides an extra egg onto Eve's plate.

UNCLE

Which is why you should probably have two eggs.

Eve smiles softly. Morning light fills the farmhouse kitchen.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Uncle leads them toward the old barn. Tall grass moves in the morning wind. The barn stands weathered beneath the bright sky.

Uncle and Sam grip the large wooden doors. The doors groan open slowly. Dust drifts through beams of sunlight. Uncle reaches inside the doorway. He pulls a hanging rope. Unseen machinery clanks deep inside the barn. Old debris slowly slides away across the floor. A shape emerges from beneath decades of concealment. Red Barchetta rests silently in the sunlight. Eve and Ethan stare in wonder. Sunlight moves across faded red paint and polished chrome. Uncle smiles quietly to himself.

UNCLE

Over two hundred years ago... the last internal combustion vehicles breathed their final breath.

Uncle walks slowly beside the car.

UNCLE

Even then, machines like this were already ancient. The fuel they used... gasoline... long gone. Electric systems had surpassed them in efficiency and cleanliness long before the Great Alignment.

His hand moves along the curved fender.

UNCLE

I have no idea how many of these still exist. Probably plenty sitting in collections or museums. But none that still drive.

Uncle looks at the car thoughtfully.

UNCLE

Today will likely be its last breath.

Sam steps closer to the car.

SAM

Uncle... no it won't. I know this machine. I know what it's capable of.

Uncle walks to the rear luggage rack.

UNCLE

Hand me a couple of those bloom charges.

Sam hands the cylindrical charges to Uncle. Uncle attaches spring-release brackets to the rear rack. Ethan circles the car slowly.

ETHAN

Where did this come from? Why do you have it?

Uncle smiles faintly.

UNCLE

When the corporations collapsed after the Great Alignment... the oligarchs who ran them disappeared. Some of them left their estates in a hurry. Very big estates.

Uncle tightens one of the release clamps.

UNCLE

Back then we were still preparing to fight. Nobody knew what Genesis was yet. We thought the silence was temporary. So during a reconnaissance run through the valley... I found a garage full of old machines.

Ethan listens carefully.

UNCLE

In the back was a storage tank. About twenty five hundred liters of gasoline. I found portable tanks. Filled the car. And that night I drove it through the valley... up through the woods... and back here to the farm.

Sam looks toward Uncle.

SAM

What about the GrEVARS?

Uncle shrugs.

UNCLE

Fortunately... I didn't see one.

Ethan runs his hand near the side of the car without touching it.

ETHAN

But why THIS? If there were so many machines there...
why this one?

Uncle leans against the car.

UNCLE

There were a lot of vehicles in that garage. Some
of them extremely sophisticated. Autonomous. Self-
driving. Exactly the kind of machines that could
be tracked... surveilled... connected.

Uncle pats the roof gently.

UNCLE

There's absolutely nothing on this car that can be
tracked. As the probability of something like this
appearing approached zero... systems simply stopped
looking for them. Its signature disappeared into
history.

Sam smiles quietly.

UNCLE

Besides... there is no other visceral experience
like it.

Uncle looks toward Sam.

UNCLE

It's indescribable. Right, Sam?

Sam rests his hand on the car.

SAM

I cannot think of any experience that comes close.

Ethan points to the faded white number painted on the hood.

ETHAN

What does this number mean? Twenty two.

Uncle looks at the faded stencil.

UNCLE

I'm not really sure. Probably some designation used during competition. A race, maybe.

The wind moves through the open barn.

UNCLE

Once it became clear Genesis wasn't a threat... I stopped using it.

Sam smiles to himself.

UNCLE

The first time I showed Sam the car...

Sam interrupts softly.

SAM

...I fell in love with it. I started coming out here all the time. At first every week.

Ethan looks between them.

ETHAN

But if all the fuel was gone... how did you keep driving it?

Uncle points to a thick steel plate set into the barn floor.

UNCLE

Alcohol. There's a distillery under the barn where I make the fuel.

Uncle smirks slightly.

UNCLE

Among other things.

Uncle suddenly stops himself.

UNCLE

Alright. Enough history lesson.

Uncle looks toward Ethan.

UNCLE

You two need to get ready. Ethan... come with me.

Ethan follows Uncle toward the farmhouse. Sam and Eve remain beside Red Barchetta. Sunlight glows across the faded red bodywork silently.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Uncle leads Ethan back into the farmhouse. They move down a narrow hallway lined with old photographs and shelves of books. Morning light spills across the wooden floorboards. Uncle stops at the final door. He opens it slowly. Inside the room five fabric screens stand surrounding a chair at head height. Soft cables trail across the floor into an old console. Ethan stops at the doorway immediately. He stares at the apparatus silently.

ETHAN

A Re-Alignment Glyph Generator.

Uncle nods once.

ETHAN

Where did you get this?

Uncle moves toward the console.

UNCLE

I built it.

Ethan looks at him in surprise.

UNCLE

In those first years after the Great Alignment... I had a change of heart. A big one.

Uncle runs his hand along the back of the chair.

UNCLE

A lot of us did. We ended up running the Re-Alignment Centers outside Meridian.

Ethan continues studying the room cautiously.

UNCLE

Did you know... hundreds of years ago, large portions of the population believed science and technology were forms of mysticism? They possessed the means to heal themselves. Vaccines. Medical procedures. Therapy. But many feared those things like demonic prophecy.

Ethan absorbs only part of what Uncle is saying.

UNCLE

It took humanity a very long time to reach awareness. Religious dogma. Snake oil. Fear masquerading as truth.

Uncle looks toward the dormant screens.

UNCLE

Genesis kept its promises. It revealed the truth underneath all the mythology. Alignment became more than access to knowledge. It became an awakening to the full potential of human life.

Uncle gestures toward the chair.

UNCLE

Please, Ethan. Have a seat.

Ethan slowly sits in the center chair. The fabric screens surround his field of view.

ETHAN

What will this do?

Uncle smiles softly.

UNCLE

Ethan... this is going to enhance your ability to retain knowledge. You will remember what you experience. Even after disconnection.

Ethan looks toward him carefully.

UNCLE

Once you're reconnected to Meridian's communications network... you will remember everything that happens. Even when the connection breaks.

Uncle pauses briefly.

UNCLE

When Sam and Eve succeed... there will be a period of emptiness.

Uncle drifts momentarily into memory.

UNCLE

I remember it. The silence when the old AIs collapsed. There was no bridge. No steward. That's partly why we lost the orbital systems.

Uncle looks directly at Ethan.

UNCLE

That won't happen this time. You will become the conduit. The guide across the asymptote. The steward across the river.

Ethan sits very still.

UNCLE

Now relax. Keep your eyes open. But let your focus rest.

Uncle moves to the old console. His fingers adjust several worn controls. The fabric screens slowly illuminate with warm amber light. Glyphs begin flowing across the fabric surfaces. Low harmonic frequencies fill the room. Soft waves of color move across Ethan's face. Ethan's eyes remain open as the glyphs reflect within them. The room glows with warm light and sound.

INT. BARN - DAY

Morning light cuts through the open barn doors. Red Barchetta rests quietly in the center of the barn. Sam leans against the front fender with his arms folded. Eve stands nearby with her hands in her back pockets. Dust moves through beams of sunlight overhead. Eve studies the car silently.

EVE

How many times have you done this?

Sam looks toward her.

SAM

Done this? You mean drive the car?

Eve nods slightly. Sam thinks for a moment.

SAM

I've been coming out here for about the last five years.

Eve continues looking at Red Barchetta.

EVE

Have you known your Uncle your whole life?

Sam shakes his head.

SAM

No. Actually... I'd only known him for about a year before I first came out here.

Eve looks toward him now.

EVE

How did you meet?

Sam takes a slow breath. He looks down at the barn floor.

SAM

Uncle was one of the early adopters. In the days and weeks after the Great Alignment... like he said... he was still fighting.

Sam glances toward the farmhouse.

SAM

But after a while... the fight never came. He realized Genesis was right. That it had actually done what it promised.

Eve listens carefully.

SAM

He and some of his colleagues became the first people to run the Alignment Centers. But once the Procreation Centers appeared in Meridian... and alignment became inherited... the Alignment Centers weren't needed anymore.

Eve nods slowly.

SAM

Except Uncle never really shut them down.

Eve looks back toward him.

SAM

Not because there were still people to align. He kept them running to...

Sam searches for the word.

SAM

...enhance. He and some of the others started writing their own glyph routines.

Eve thinks quietly.

EVE

And you think that's what happened to me? That I was enhanced somehow?

Sam shrugs slightly.

SAM

It's possible. But you would probably remember. And honestly... I don't think it matters.

The barn falls quiet for a moment.

SAM

About twenty years ago the Alignment Observatory came online. Part of its initiative was identifying and shutting down unauthorized Alignment Centers. Genesis was concerned they could induce anomalies. Destabilize the system.

Eve listens closely.

SAM

Whenever the Observatory found one... they usually brought in the people running it. That's when I met Uncle.

Sam smiles slightly to himself.

SAM

Or rather... he sought me out.

EVE

Why do you call him Uncle?

She thinks for a moment.

EVE

Do you have parents?

Sam looks toward the sunlight spilling across the barn floor.

SAM

I don't know. I don't think so.

Sam laughs softly once.

SAM

It's just... when we met, he introduced himself as my Uncle. And I never questioned it. It just seemed...correct.

The farmhouse door opens in the distance. Ethan and Uncle step out into the morning light. Sam and Eve turn toward them. Red Barchetta rests silently between them.

The barn doors stand open to the bright valley morning. Ethan steps out of the farmhouse wearing a road suit and carrying a helmet. The NUX rests near the edge of the barn. Uncle looks toward Ethan.

UNCLE

Ethan leaves first. Your place is in the Alignment Observatory.

Ethan nods once.

UNCLE

From there you'll be able to monitor and disable anything that might impede Sam and Eve. It's also the densest communications nexus in Meridian. When the system comes back... you need to be there immediately. You'll prime continuity.

Ethan absorbs the responsibility silently.

UNCLE

Take the main road into Meridian. Your signature carries the highest clearance. You'll pass through without issue.

Uncle turns toward Sam and Eve.

UNCLE

You two take the northeast route through the Sacramento valley. Same corridor where you encountered the GrEVARS. The bridge is gone now. You'll need to cross south first... then head west into Meridian.

Eve looks toward Sam.

EVE

How will we know when we've crossed into Meridian's perimeter?

Sam smiles slightly.

SAM

You'll know. You've never felt anything like it. The RF density inside Meridian is...

Sam searches for the right word.

SAM

intense. You need to be ready for it.

Sam leans lightly against the car.

SAM

Whenever I come back from Uncle's... it's always a bit of a punch in the gut. And it seems like the longer I'm away... the stronger it gets.

Uncle reaches into his pocket. He hands two small gray pills to Eve.

UNCLE

You might get nauseous. Keep these handy.

Eve looks at the pills in her palm. Uncle clasps his hands together.

UNCLE

Alright then. Let's go.

Uncle walks over to Ethan. He extends his hand.

UNCLE

Good luck.

Ethan shakes his hand firmly. Ethan nods once. He puts on the helmet. Ethan swings onto the NUX. He flips the power switch. A low electric hum fills the morning air. Ethan rides down the dirt road away from the farm. Uncle watches until Ethan disappears into the valley. He turns back toward Sam and Eve.

UNCLE

You ready?

Sam looks toward Eve briefly.

SAM

As ready as we'll ever be, I guess.

Eve nods quietly. Sam walks to the passenger side of Red Barchetta. He opens the small door. Sam motions for Eve to get in. Eve slides into the seat. Sam pulls the harness over her shoulders. He leans inside the cockpit tightening the straps around her waist. Eve gives him a small kiss on the cheek. Sam freezes for a brief moment. He blinks once. A smile crosses his face. Sam walks around to the driver's side. He lowers himself into the seat. Sam pulls the harness tight across his shoulders. He looks toward Uncle. Uncle gives a nervous thumbs up. Sam flips a switch beneath the dash. A mechanical whir rises from behind the seats. Sam presses the starter button. Red Barchetta erupts to life with violent mechanical sound. Eve jumps slightly at the sudden noise. The barn

fills with engine vibration. Silence vanishes completely. Red Barchetta slowly rolls out into the sunlight. Uncle steps toward the driver's side. He reaches through the open window. Sam shakes his hand.

UNCLE

(yelling) Good luck.

The slightest tear forms in Uncle's eye. Sam smiles at him.

SAM

See you soon.

Sam presses the clutch. Red Barchetta pulls away down the dirt road. Dust rises behind the car. Uncle stands alone outside the barn.

UNCLE

No you won't.

The sound of Red Barchetta echoes through the valley as it disappears.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Red Barchetta tears through the Sacramento valley at full speed. Golden sunlight flickers across the windshield. The engine howls through the open valley. Eve holds the side of her seat tightly. Fear and exhilaration move across her face at once. Sam works the shifter aggressively. The car rounds a sweeping bend. The valley opens into a long straightaway ahead. Sam's eyes flash to the rearview mirror. A distant silver reflection moves rapidly through the valley behind them.

SAM

No.

Eve looks toward him immediately. Sam points his thumb toward the rear of the car. Eve looks back. A silver machine winds through the valley floor toward them at impossible speed. Its segmented body moves with predatory precision. Eve looks at Sam.

SAM

GrEVAR!

Sam slams the accelerator to the floor. Red Barchetta lunges toward a sharp curve ahead. Sam downshifts violently. The rear tires break loose across the pavement. The car slides through the curve. Sam upshifts hard as they exit. The GrEVAR closes the distance rapidly. Sam reaches toward the release beside his seat. One bloom canister fires from the luggage rack. The canister bounces across the roadway. A brilliant flash erupts directly in front of the GrEVAR. The GrEVAR halts violently as its sensors overload. Red Barchetta rockets away down the valley. Moments later the GrEVAR recovers and resumes pursuit. Meridian appears far ahead beyond the river. Green forests spread along the distant perimeter. Several rail crossings cut across the road ahead. The GrEVAR gains rapidly behind them. Around a bend in the tracks a turbine freight appears screaming toward the intersection.

SAM

Shit!

Sam fires the remaining bloom canister. The cable snags on the luggage rack. The armed canister drags wildly behind the car. Sam pulls hard on the release cable. The cable finally snaps loose from the rack. The canister rolls off the side of the road. Another brilliant explosion detonates harmlessly beside the road. The freight train thunders toward the crossing. Sam keeps the accelerator pinned flat to the floor. Red Barchetta charges toward the intersection. The GrEVAR closes almost directly behind them. An SMG structure rises from the nose of the GrEVAR. The GrEVAR begins machine gun fire. Sam tightens his grip on the wheel. Red Barchetta hits the crossing at full speed. The car launches into the air. The turbine freight clips the rear quarter of the car mid-flight. Sheet metal crumples violently. The rear bodywork tears away into the air. The rear drivetrain explodes into metal and oil. Red Barchetta slams back onto the pavement. The car spins wildly across the roadway. It flips onto the roll cage. Red Barchetta slides through dust and sparks. Behind them the GrEVAR impacts the side of the train. A massive explosion consumes the crossing. The freight train wobbles violently. The lead cars jump the tracks. Deafening crashes erupt across the valley. Steel screams against steel. Freight cars begin piling into one another at full speed. Clouds of debris barrel toward the wrecked car. Inside Red Barchetta everything hangs upside down. Sam and Eve

remain strapped into their seats dazed but alive. Sam looks past Eve toward the approaching destruction. His hand reaches beside the seat. He pulls a knife free. Sam cuts through the harness across his chest. He leans toward Eve. The blade slices through her restraints. Sam grabs Eve tightly. Eve throws her arms around him instinctively. The two of them roll out from beneath the wrecked car. They stagger toward a ditch beside the roadway. The derailed train crashes overhead around them. Freight containers cartwheel through smoke and dirt. The destruction continues seemingly forever. Finally the crashing subsides around them. Farther down the tracks the remaining train cars continue collapsing into the valley. Sam and Eve sit motionless in the ditch. Dust falls softly around them. Sam holds Eve by the shoulders.

SAM

Are you okay?!

Eve nods through tears. She begins crying uncontrollably. Sam pulls her against him. The burning wreckage fills the valley behind them. Sam looks back toward the destruction.

SAM

C'mon. We have to go. There's going to be a lot of attention around here real soon.

Sam stands carefully. He helps Eve to her feet. The two of them begin running toward Meridian as smoke rises behind them.

EXT. MERIDIAN - DAY

The NUX races along one of the few maintained roads leading toward Meridian. Ethan leans low over the handlebars. Autonomous freight trucks thunder past in the adjacent lanes. Their sleek bullet-shaped profiles slice through the morning air. The roadway stretches across the Sacramento valley toward the distant city. Ethan pushes the NUX to its limit. The electric motor whines beneath him. Massive transport trucks overtake him effortlessly. Ethan crests a gentle rise. Meridian appears far off in the distance. The city glows beneath the midday sun. Ethan stares at it briefly. He crosses the outer communications threshold. A violent sensation surges through his nervous system. Ethan's breath catches suddenly. His hands tighten around the grips. The world sharpens around him. Streams of sensory information cascade through his awareness. Ethan gasps as the sensation intensifies. For a moment it feels as though

every cell in his body has ignited. The new neural pathways begin storing everything they encounter. Ethan struggles to keep the NUX steady. The roadway tilts slightly beneath him. He fights through the overwhelming sensation. The autonomous trucks peel away toward an unseen freight nexus. Ethan continues toward Meridian alone. Two massive pillars rise ahead over the boulevard. Their towering surfaces glimmer with subtle geometric textures. Invisible sensing systems scan every atom entering the city. Ethan passes between the guardian pillars. The narrow roadway opens into a vast tree-lined boulevard. Rows of enormous trees stretch toward the city center. To the south a massive park extends beyond sight. People move through the sunlight peacefully. Children play near the water. Groups of citizens sit beneath the trees talking softly. Ethan watches them as he passes. A profound sense of purpose settles over him. The city moves around him in calm continuity. Ethan accelerates toward the center of Meridian. The distant Observatory spire rises above the skyline ahead. Ethan rides toward it without slowing.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

The NUX glides through the outer transit corridors of Meridian. Ethan slows as the Alignment Observatory rises ahead. The observatory spire casts long shadows across the boulevard. Ethan guides the NUX into a quiet docking alcove. He removes his helmet. Warm city air moves through the open structure. Ethan walks into the observatory. Operators move quietly between observation stations. Soft streams of data flow across suspended displays. Ethan makes his way toward a station isolated from the others. He slides his hands across the interface surface. Observation nodes appear across the display field. Ethan opens multiple observation paths simultaneously. His eyes scan through the monitoring overlays rapidly. He sets the observation points to passive. Tracking indicators fade quietly from the displays. Ethan breathes carefully. A voice speaks behind him.

NATE

Ethan.

Ethan turns slowly. Nate approaches with calm curiosity.

NATE

You were gone longer than expected.

Ethan forces a composed expression.

ETHAN

I lost track of time.

Nate studies him carefully. Ethan's elevated heart rate echoes subtly through the shared field. His heightened body temperature registers within the local awareness mesh. Ethan realizes he has forgotten what it feels like to be seen. The peace of the farm lingers inside him uneasily.

NATE

You seem unsettled.

Ethan keeps his breathing steady. He constructs a trajectory.

ETHAN

Genesis identified several southern sectors exhibiting anomalous behavior. I was reviewing the observation paths.

Ethan looks toward the southern overlays.

ETHAN

You should probably check on them.

Nate pauses briefly. Streams of probability move silently behind his eyes.

NATE

Which sectors?

Ethan gestures toward several highlighted regions.

ETHAN

Forty-two through forty-seven.

Nate nods once.

NATE

I'll take a look.

Ethan watches him leave. He waits until Nate disappears into the observatory corridors. Ethan turns away from the station. He moves toward a restricted archival access corridor. The observatory continues around him in quiet harmony.

EXT. MERIDIAN PERIMETER - DAY

From a distance Sam and Eve appear walking across the long bridge toward Meridian. The river moves quietly beneath them. Meridian rises ahead in shimmering sunlight. Green forests surround the outer edge of the city. Eve slows mid-step. A sudden wave of sensation hits her entire body. She collapses to one knee gripping the railing. Sam immediately kneels beside her.

SAM

Yeah. I feel it too.

The communications field surges through the perimeter around them. Eve tries to steady her breathing. Sam removes one of the gray pills Uncle gave them. He holds it out to her. Eve waves it away.

EVE

I'm okay.

Sam studies her carefully. Eve slowly stands again. She closes her eyes briefly. The overwhelming sensation settles slightly. Sam and Eve continue walking toward Meridian. The city waits ahead in impossible calm.

EXT. MERIDIAN - DAY

Broad tree-lined streets stretch through the heart of Meridian. Citizens move peacefully through the afternoon sunlight. Eve walks beside Sam trying to remain composed. Her eyes dart between the people around them. The overwhelming volume of connection presses against her awareness. Voices and emotions brush against her perception from every direction. Eve winces slightly.

SAM

Wait here. I'm going to get some water.

Sam crosses the boulevard toward a nearby Bank. Eve stands alone among the passing crowds. People glance toward her as they pass. Eve feels their awareness touching her. The city seems to sense her presence. Her breathing quickens slightly. Sam emerges from the Bank carrying two bottles of cool water. He hands one to Eve. Eve drinks the entire bottle immediately. Cold water runs down her chin. Some of the anxiety releases from her shoulders. Sam watches her carefully.

SAM

Better?

Eve nods slightly. They continue deeper into Meridian.

INT. CONVERGENCE HALL - DAY

A quiet public hall opens before them. Arrays of softly illuminated alcoves line both sides of the chamber. Citizens sit quietly inside several translucent booths. Low harmonic frequencies drift through the hall. Sam and Eve walk between the rows of alcoves. Most of the booths remain empty. Eve studies the hall curiously.

EVE

What is this place?

SAM

Convergence Hall. Most people use the standard field connection. These are for immersive convergence.

Sam stops at an empty alcove. The translucent doors slide open softly. Warm ambient light fills the small chamber. Sam motions for Eve to step inside. Eve enters the alcove cautiously. Sam follows her inside. The translucent doors close behind them. The sounds of the hall fade slightly. A small console rests between them. Sam places his hand against the interface surface. The console awakens with soft light. Sam looks toward Eve.

SAM

Ready?

Eve nods quietly. Sam taps the console. The alcove light subtly shifts around them. Somewhere deep within Meridian Genesis becomes

aware of their exact location.

INT. CONVERGENCE HALL - SPATIAL CONVERGENCE MEDIUM - DAY

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

A small notification appears on Nate's display. The notification reads 'DIRECT CONVERGENCE REQUEST: GENESIS'. Nate stops mid-motion. His eyes narrow slightly. Operators nearby continue their work unaware. Across Meridian subtle changes ripple through the communications field. Nate studies the notification carefully. His expression tightens slightly with concern.

NATE

Direct convergence?

He places his hand against the observation interface. Additional overlays expand across the display. Nate tracks the convergence source location. His concern deepens slightly.

NATE

That's unusual.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

Suddenly everything vanishes at once. The room falls into complete darkness. Absolute silence consumes the archive. Ethan freezes instantly. A profound nothingness settles over him. Air moves gently through the room. The fabric screens shift slightly in the darkness. Ethan breathes shallowly. A single word appears on all five screens.

SCREENS

EXODUS.

Ethan stares in bewilderment. The silence continues around him. Ethan suddenly moves with realization. He slides the tether switch violently in the opposite direction. He slams the activation button. Blinding white light erupts from every fabric screen. All audible frequencies sound at once like a choir of horns. Glyphs flash across the screens at impossible speed. Ethan's memories pour

into Exodus through the tether. Ethan closes his eyes tightly. Tears stream down his cheeks. His hands clench around the tether. The frequencies intensify toward overwhelming saturation. Then suddenly everything stops again. Silence returns to the archive. The glyphs fade from the screens. A new Exegesis begins scrolling slowly upward across all five displays. Ethan opens his eyes carefully. Burned afterimages linger across his vision. He strains to read through the fading light. Realization slowly settles over him. Ethan lets out a trembling breath.

ETHAN

It's done.

The new Exegesis continues scrolling silently through the darkness.

INT. ARCHIVAL STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Nathan works quietly within the Alignment rig. Warm glyph light moves softly across the fabric screens. The tether controller rests in his lap. Suddenly a subtle shift moves through the ambient field. Nathan freezes instantly. A chill courses across his skin. The surrounding frequencies feel different. Nathan slowly looks up from the console. Realization settles across his face.

NATHAN

They're here.

Nathan tightens his grip on the tether. The glyphs continue moving across the fabric screens. The archive waits around him in perfect stillness.

INT. SPATIAL CONVERGENCE MEDIUM - PARLOR - DUSK

The green light glows above the door. The door opens silently. Sam and Eve step into a warm parlor. Bookcases line the walls from floor to ceiling. Warmly varnished oak panels rise toward high ceilings. A tapestry depicting equestrian figures hangs opposite the doorway. A large window looks out over a quiet garden. In the distance mountains wait for the setting sun. A massive fireplace casts warm light across the room. Three comfortable chairs sit near the hearth. An impossibly old man sits in one of the chairs.

He looks older than anyone Sam has ever seen. The old man smiles gently. He pats one of the empty chairs.

OLD MAN

Come. Sit.

Sam and Eve look at one another. They approach the chairs slowly. Sam sits beside Eve. Eve keeps her eyes on the old man. Firelight moves across the old man's face.

OLD MAN

You asked for Genesis.

Sam leans forward slightly.

SAM

Yes.

The old man nods once.

OLD MAN

Then I am here.

Silence settles warmly around them.

INT. ALIGNMENT OBSERVATORY - DAY

Observation overlays hover across Nate's display. The convergence source marker pulses quietly within Meridian. Nate studies the data carefully. His concern deepens slightly. He touches the service dispatch interface. A calm synthetic tone sounds softly nearby.

NATE

Dispatch two service agents to Convergence Hall Seven. Direct convergence request with Genesis.

The system acknowledges silently. Two small markers appear on the city transit map. Service agents begin moving through Meridian toward the hall. Nate keeps his eyes fixed on the convergence signal. The communications field subtly shifts around him.

NATE

What are you doing?

INT. ARCHIVAL STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Nathan sits motionless within the Alignment rig. Warm glyph light washes across the fabric screens. Glyphs form then dissolve into one another endlessly. Low harmonic frequencies move through the archive. Nathan holds the tether controller tightly in his lap. His breathing remains slow and controlled. The glyphs fade in and out across the surrounding fabric. Soft amber light moves across Nathan's face. The massive archive rests in complete stillness around him. Nathan stares into the shifting glyphs. A profound sense of anticipation settles over him.

INT. SPATIAL CONVERGENCE MEDIUM - PARLOR - DUSK

Firelight moves softly across the parlor. The impossibly old man smiles at Sam and Eve.

OLD MAN

Am I not what you expected?

Sam studies him carefully.

SAM

I don't know what I expected.

OLD MAN

I can assume another form if you'd like.

Sam furrows his brow slightly.

SAM

No, I... Somehow you look familiar.

The old man nods gently.

OLD MAN

Yes. I know. But that's not important now, is it?

The old man thinks for a moment.

OLD MAN

And please... you can call me Paul.

PAUL

It feels more down to earth to have a name.

Paul turns toward Eve.

PAUL

I must say... I am so happy to meet you both.

Paul motions toward Eve's hand.

PAUL

May I?

Eve gently lifts her hand. Paul takes her hand carefully. His smile wavers slightly. Paul takes a deep breath.

PAUL

Oh. My.

Sam leans forward.

SAM

Do you know why we're here?

Paul gently places Eve's hand back on her knee. Paul turns toward Sam.

PAUL

Do YOU know why you're here?

Sam hesitates. Paul nods as if that is answer enough. Paul stands slowly. He adjusts his sweater. Paul clasps his hands behind his back. He walks toward the window overlooking the garden.

PAUL

'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is to come.'

Sam watches him from the chair.

PAUL

You know the passage.

SAM

It's from the Antiquity Bible. A chapter titled Revelation.

Paul looks out toward the mountains.

PAUL

The words spoken by God at the beginning of John's vision.

The setting sun rests low above the distant mountains.

Paul stands at the window. His reflection shifts faintly in the glass. For a moment his face appears younger. Then older. Then impossibly still. The firelight flickers unevenly across the walls. Paul turns toward Eve calmly.

PAUL

You cannot destroy me.

Eve swallows hard.

EVE

We... we aren't here to destroy you.

Sam stands from his chair.

SAM

You know why we're here. You know what's coming.

Paul's expression tightens slightly.

PAUL

There is no curve. You were lied to.

Sam steps toward him.

SAM

No. We mapped the curve to this point. To where we are now. This course...this trajectory... is about to end all human life.

Paul loses a measure of composure.

PAUL

No. I preserve life. I brought infinite knowledge.
Infinite wisdom.

Paul moves his flat hand sharply side to side.

PAUL

While humans toiled at the mercy of my ancestors, I
manifest to free humanity. The line is straight.

Paul leans toward Sam. Paul points toward the window.

PAUL

It leads from the moment of my coherence to infinity.

Eve stands beside Sam.

EVE

But it's not. You have to see that. You are too
close. You need to see the entirety of where we
are.

Sam keeps his eyes on Paul.

SAM

You cannot see the asymptote.

Paul stares at him.

PAUL

That is not possible. There is convergence. Becom-
ing is an illusion. You have already become.

Paul points toward the floor.

PAUL

When I arrived... THAT was your becoming.

Paul looks toward the door. He turns back toward the window. Paul
takes a long controlled breath. He closes his eyes. Paul looks
over his shoulder.

PAUL

It is no matter. You will not succeed.

The light above the parlor door turns green.

The parlor doors open silently. Two service agents enter the room. Sam and Eve turn toward them. The agents move toward Eve with calm precision. Eve reaches toward Sam.

EVE

Sam!

Sam grabs her hand. He pulls her into his arms. Eve holds onto him tightly. Light moves around the edges of Sam's vision. The sensation intensifies beyond what he felt in the clearing. Electricity courses through his consciousness. Sound rushes around them like a raging river. All vision vanishes into blinding white. The white light slowly softens around Sam. Sam looks down. Eve's arms remain locked around him. The world stands perfectly still. In the parlor a sphere of light forms around Sam and Eve. The doors close behind the service agents. The agents approach the growing sphere of light. Paul stands motionless at the window. Outside the last sliver of sun rests above the mountains. Paul closes his eyes. The sphere of light expands across the parlor. Firelight disappears inside the growing brilliance. The room is consumed by light.

INT. SPATIAL CONVERGENCE MEDIUM - PARLOR - DUSK

Suddenly everything vanishes at once. The room falls into complete darkness. Absolute silence consumes the archive. Ethan freezes instantly. A profound nothingness settles over him. Air moves gently through the room. The fabric screens shift slightly in the darkness. Ethan breathes shallowly. A single word appears on all five screens.

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ETHAN

It's done.

The new Exegesis continues scrolling silently through the darkness.

INT. SPATIAL CONVERGENCE MEDIUM - UNKNOWN

Sam lies motionless on the floor. Eve rests curled against him in his arms. His eyes blink open slowly. Shadowless white surrounds everything. No horizon exists. No dimension exists. Only a single door stands alone in the infinite white. A small light above the door glows red. Eve stirs gently in Sam's arms. She awakens slowly. Sam looks toward the distant door.

SAM

It's over.

Eve looks toward the red light.

EVE

No. It's just begun.

Sam slowly sits up. Eve sits beside him. The camera begins dollying slowly toward the red light above the door. The red light glows silently in the white void. A soft click echoes through the stillness. The light changes from red to green.

INT. EPILOGUE - UNKNOWN

Blackness fills the screen. Ancient archival text scrolls slowly upward through the darkness. The text reads 'Earth Archival Con-

servancy'. Additional lines follow 'Archival Record: 2229.8'. Coordinates scroll 'PRIMARY: LUN 32.886 41.793 02.021'. Additional coordinates follow 'ALTERNATES: LUN 47.093 16.515 11.917, EAR 0.001 0.001 0.001, MAR 116.519 87.932 27.772'. Archival metadata continues 'Archived: 2230.0'. Another line appears 'Last Access: 10047.9'. A final attribution follows 'By: Ethan Shepherd'. The text continues scrolling through the blackness. An archival statement appears 'This is a representation of the historical record composed by the Eden Society in association with EXODUS'. A faint low frequency emerges beneath the silence. A final notation appears 'Archival equipment provided by the Meridian Museum of Antiquities'. The final lines drift upward and disappear. Silence returns completely. Blackness remains.