

SWERVE

By the Collaborative Media Commons

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CHAPTER 1: WELCOME TO THE ZONE

EXT. FANTASY SPACE NIGHT - SCENE A1

Adelle stands in empty space, dressed as her avatar. Armor made out of circuit boards and wires appears out the darkness, piece by piece, and snaps to her body until she is completely covered.

ADELLE (V.O.)

In the space between, I don't know
if my body is data, or a vessel
through which data passes. Data
gets dissolved and is reborn from
the ashes until that cryptic code
becomes a neologism, a secret
language: words never repeat
themselves, everlasting and ever-
changing, the Heraclitean,
(im)possible arche.

EXT. ROADBLOCK DAY - SCENE 1

A dusty southern California hillside. An old road abruptly ends at a fence. On the fence hangs a rusted metal sign: "DANGER: CONTAMINATED ZONE". Behind it stretches sheer wilderness. It is a hot, windy day. Dust blows over the road. We hear a door slam shut, then the sound of a car or truck driving away.

KAJA (20s, female) steps into the frame. She is carrying a backpack. She surveys the sign and the fence. Part of the fence is damaged, presenting a sizeable hole large enough to easily squeeze through.

She slings the backpack onto her shoulders, slips through the fence, and disappears into the trees beyond.

KAJA (V.O.)

Adelle... You are the center for
me. You hold it all together, my
sign, my self, my sun.

(MORE)

KAJA(cont'd)

I sense that here, in the Zone,
language is violent, I must learn
to wear it like a charm or a potion
that poisons my drinking water with
dizzying intoxication, a
vertiginous abyss, the ocean's
apertural gaze, let more in, let me
in...

ADELLE (V.O.)

I shed my safe skin, of being able
to rely on communicative avenues
previously open to me. I feel a new
skin growing in thin, lucid layers,
a sheer curtain backlit by fire or
a jellyfish swept to shore, frail
putrescence hardened, made
beautiful, by hours of sun. This
new covering fits me a little
loosely at the tips of my toes and
fingers, stretching comfortably
over the small of my back, exposing
blood and bone, woven and bound,
knotted up in spheres of color--my
new palette of deep, saturated
sound.

KAJA (V.O.)

Who stole you, Adelle? Who took
you away? Your family wouldn't
speak. No one has any information.
Just a backtrace that lead to the
Zone. Why the Zone? Always an
absence that is a presence. I
press the trace to my skin, leaving
an imprint in time, just to see
that I am connected to something,
to some data, and not so utterly
alone.

MAIN TITLES

EXT. HILL DAY - SCENE 21

PAX (late 20s, female) and SAMM (50s, male) approach a double
barbed-wire fence. Samm carries an old, Army-style rucksack.
The fence contains a small Biohazard sign that reads:
"DANGER: CONTAMINATED ZONE". They ignore the sign.

Pax immediately goes about locating a break in the fence, a shallow area that can be slipped under. She does so, then helps Samm, who has much greater difficulty performing the maneuver. They dust themselves off and continue hiking, into the Zone.

EXT. WILDERNESS DAY - SCENE 2

Kaja hikes through the wilderness. No people are visible, but she passes a hulking, rusty storage tank.

She stops for a moment, looks down at her left palm. The skin lights up, displaying various icons. She presses a telephone icon. The screen flashes: "No Signal".

She begins to descend from the hills into a valley.

EXT. FOREST LATER - SCENE 22

In a thick forest, Pax and Samm continue to make their way at a slow pace. Pax is methodical, hyper-alert; Samm appears uncomfortable, a bit clumsy. The forest seems to oppose his every step.

SAMM

You really think it's safe to use
the same shack?

PAX

Yeah. That was two jobs ago.

SAMM

(mumbling, skeptical)
Two jobs ago...

They continue hiking. Samm tries to avoid touching any undergrowth.

PAX

It's the spiders, right?

SAMM

What spiders??

PAX

You're worried about spiders.

SAMM
(muttering)
I'm not worried about spiders. I
just hate that shack.

They continue hiking.

PAX
You don't have anything to worry
about. Only thing that ever bit or
stung me here was a goddamn tick.

SAMM
Really?

PAX
Yeah.

SAMM
I don't remember that.

PAX
That's because I didn't tell you.

SAMM
(shrugging)
Why would it concern me anyway?

She eyes him with a slight smirk, withholds a laugh. Beat.

SAMM
You know about DDT?

PAX
Sounds familiar.

SAMM
(indicating his palm)
Yeah, well, you can't look it up,
because we're in the Goddamn
Zone...

PAX
Pesticide, right? 20th century?

SAMM
Yeah. It was supposed to be a
miracle chemical. Could kill off
all the mosquitoes.

(MORE)

SAMM(cont'd)

People sprayed it everywhere, took baths in it, drank it in cocktails.

PAX

I know, I know. It turned out to be toxic.

SAMM

Toxic? Yeah but that's not... That's not the point. What I'm talking about is the mosquitoes. This stuff caused some real mayhem with the mosquito populace, you know what I mean? It *really worked*. But the thing was, after they stopped spraying DDT, pretty soon the mosquitoes were breeding like crazy, and they all came back. But they didn't stop there: because of the ecological imbalance or something, they could just keep breeding, and in the end, in spite of fifty years of eradication, there were even more of those bastards than before DDT was invented.

PAX

I don't think there are any mosquitoes in the Zone.

SAMM

No, no. Most animals can't make it for long. But some can, right? That's the sick irony: only arachnids can survive in the Zone indefinitely. You see what I'm trying to say?

PAX

There are no natural predators?

SAMM

Predators? No. That's true, but that's not my point. Look, it's like cane toads. You know about cane toads? They were introduced in Australia to eat the cane beetles, but instead they ate just about everything else. *Oh shit*.

Pax instantly tenses, swivels around to survey the area.

PAX

What??

SAMM

I felt something on my back. I think it's a... it could be a tick. It feels like a tick.

He reaches back, tries to run his hand down his shirt, but can't reach the spot he's going for.

SAMM

Pax, can you help me? Please? I can't reach...

PAX

All right, Samm, but you can't scare me like that.

SAMM

(with attempted humor)
Well, I can't help it if you're easily scared.

She shakes her head, steps behind him, and lifts up his shirt. She pokes him in the middle of his back.

PAX

(wide-eyed)
Oh god... what the hell is that??

SAMM

What??

PAX

Do ticks mutate in the Zone?

SAMM

What? What??

PAX

(matter of factly)
Nope, no ticks.

He pulls his shirt down in mock anger.

SAMM

Thanks a lot. You probably didn't even check. It's a serious issue-

PAX

Shhhh!

She holds one hand cupped behind her ear, and closes her eyes. She rotates her head, listening intently.

PAX

(whispering)

Someone's coming. You know what to do.

SAMM

(unconcerned but ironic,
whispering)

Yeah, I'll be the bait.

Pax has already ducked down and slid, spider-like, into the bushes and out of sight.

Samm waits impatiently. Soon footsteps can be heard in the underbrush. He peers through the trees, trying to visually locate the origin of the sound.

A BOY (16, male) appears, walking in the opposite direction, without any apparent concern. When he sees Samm, he stops.

They stare at each other.

Without a word, the Boy continues on his way, leaving Samm alone.

Pax emerges from the bushes on the opposite side from which she disappeared.

SAMM

Just some weird kid. Probably a Tammy.

She doesn't say anything, but continues walking. Samm follows.

SAMM

Hey, Pax.

She turns her head to look at him over her shoulder.

SAMM

What would you have done if that
hadn't been a kid?

PAX

Wouldn't matter if he's a kid or
not.

SAMM

Okay, then if he'd been hostile.

She doesn't answer. He shakes his head in amazement and follows her.

EXT. TOWN DAY - SCENE 3

Kaja comes to the edge of a vast concrete ruins: endless storage tanks, rusted metal pipes, cement and cinderblock structures. She walks through what appears to be a long-abandoned oil refinery.

Suddenly she sees TWO CULTISTS. One is crawling on the ground, as if looking for something. The other stands still, staring at her.

KAJA

Hey!

She approaches them.

KAJA

Hey, do you know where I can find
Alsa?

They stare at her blankly.

KAJA

Alsa? She rents out rooms? I'm
supposed to meet her.

They continue to stare. Finally one speaks, with possible hostility:

CULTIST #1

What're you doin' here?

KAJA

I... I'm looking for Alsa...

CULTIST #2
 No, what're you doin' in the *Zone*?

She realizes that he is gripping a metal rail so hard that the veins are popping out of his hand and arm. She backs away, slowly. They watch her go.

EXT. SHACK LATER - SCENE 23

Samm is crouched down in some bushes, peering into a small clearing in the forest, where a tiny, shabby shack stands. There is no sign of activity inside or around the shack.

Samm grows impatient, nervous. He fidgets with his hands, itches his skin.

Finally Pax emerges from behind a tree on the other side of the shack. She walks toward its front door.

PAX
 (to Samm)
 All clear. No signs of life.

EXT. CINDERBLOCK HUT DAY - SCENE 4

Kaja uncertainly approaches several cinderblock buildings that appear to have been partially destroyed, perhaps by fire. She continues toward them, nervously.

ALSA (50s, female) appears behind Kaja, unnoticed, and ascends a pile of rubble.

ALSA
 (calling out)
 Welcome to P-Town!

KAJA
 (startled, spinning round)
Jesus Christ...

ALSA
 The tour can now commence!

KAJA
 What's P-Town? Is that... I'm supposed to find-

ALSA
*This is P-Town! 'P' is for
 'Petroleum.' It's sort of a joke.
 Heart of the Zone.*

She begins walking toward the cinderblock hut, gesturing exaggeratedly as she takes on the mock airs of a tour guide:

ALSA
 Yes, this is where it all happens... The industrial center! Where the elite hobnob, the deals are made, destinies decided-- where the entrepreneurial spirit burns bright!

KAJA
 What's that sound??

ALSA
 Generators!

KAJA
 Generators? But how do they-

ALSA
 That's all controlled from Above. Me, I stay Under. Alsa's my name.

KAJA
 Oh! I'm Kaja.

Alsa laughs.

ALSA
 I figured that much.

KAJA
 Sorry it took me so long. I tried to call but there wasn't any signal...

Alsa stops abruptly, turns and scrutinizes her, incredulously for a long moment.

ALSA
 You know you're in the Zone, right?

Kaja stares back, not knowing what to make of this. She nods.

ALSA

And you know that you can't
transmit nothin' in the Zone,
right?

Kaja doesn't answer.

ALSA

Nothing wireless. No waves. Here
you got to *plug 'er in!*

She breaks into a grin. They've reached the edge of a dilapidated, seemingly half-demolished, rubble-strewn cinderblock hut.

KAJA

(annoyed)

Okay. Why don't you show me where
I'm staying.

ALSA

You can see for yourself!

KAJA

You mean *this* is the it??

ALSA

Home sweet home! Here, I'll give
you the tour. Over there's the
bathroom...

She indicates a debris-strewn stall with a small toilet inside.

ALSA

And around the corner, your private
room...

She walks around the corner. Kaja follows. She opens a metal door, revealing a dark, foul, tomb-like room. She snaps on an ancient metal switch wired to the wall in a makeshift fashion. A naked lightbulb illuminates.

ALSA

That's the light. Over there's
your terminal.

She points to an old, beat-up box against one wall. Kaja looks on the room with horror. Other than a small, camp-style gas stove in one corner, there isn't much else there.

ALSA

And of course, here's your biohazard sensor. This is one of the cleanest sectors of the Zone, but that stuff fluctuates all the time, so I'd keep an eye on this puppy. This is your lifeline, honey.

She stares at it. It reads "9.2". Alsa flicks it hard with her finger.

ALSA

There, that's more like it.

It now reads "6.7".

ALSA

If that thing gets up in the nines, it's time to bail!
 (she laughs heartily)
 Ta ta, darling!

She walks out, leaving Kaja alone in the room.

She touches one of the blackened walls, looks at her hand disgustedly.

She kneels in front of the TERMINAL. She presses a button and its primitive alphanumeric display comes to life, displaying "READY". She presses her left palm, which also lights up, but displays only "No Signal". Kaja presses her palm repeatedly, growing increasingly frustrated--finally she is slapping it in desperation and anger.

EXT. TECHNOLOGY MONTAGE - DAY

PAX (V.O.)

"Technology." Techne. What does it reveal? What does it create?

(pause)

In the Zone you have to get creative. The EM field makes radio transmission impossible.

(MORE)

PAX(cont'd)

That means you're outside the warm embrace of the Grid. Improvising. Twisting wires, jamming together hunks of metal and plastic like some hobbyist from the 1920s. Whatever works... you do it yourself or you pay someone. Either way, you're talking about handmade craftsmanship. Not very fancy, though-- only hardcore retros would even take a second look Outside. It's basically cables or crude infrared pulses of light. Line of sight. The digital can't range any further than the eye.

INT. SHACK LATER - SCENE 24

Pax and Samm examine the interior of the single-room shack. Pax immediately scans everything, tests the hinges on the windows, etc. Samm goes straight to the corner and checks for the data cable.

SAMM

Data cable looks good.

He digs into his rucksack and removes a small black box. He unlatches and opens it: inside, well-padded, is a delicate, handmade, blown-glass figurine of a fish. He gingerly removes it from the box and hangs it from the ceiling. He admires it for a brief moment.

Pax notices.

PAX

I can't believe you haven't broken that thing yet, with *your* ogre hands.

He shoves the box back into his rucksack, removes a small, slick, TERMINAL.

SAMM

It could break. That's true. It's delicate. But it will not be broken by an ogre.

PAX

Why do you take the chance?
Bringing it with you? I mean, she
can't make any more, can she?

SAMM

Not Under, of course not. She's
completely paralyzed now.

PAX

I'm sorry, Samm. That's tough.

He takes his terminal to the data cable and connects it. A
small light illuminates on the device.

SAMM

I want to go Over and check
everything out.

PAX

Not yet, Samm. Let me set up the
perimeter first.

He looks up at her, ruefully. He sets the Terminal on the
floor under the counter and sits down himself, using the wall
as a backrest.

She removes, from her own bag, an array of small devices,
sorts through them, then scoops them up and heads for the
door.

SAMM

I have other ones. She made a lot
of those. But this one... This is
the only one she ever burnt herself
making.

EXT. CINDERBLOCK HUT LATER - SCENE 5

Near the hut, Alsa is scurrying across a stretch of open
ground, carrying a basket, perhaps scavanging. Kaja calls
out to her:

KAJA

Hey!

Alsa turns.

KAJA

Alsa! I can't connect to your damn terminal!

Alsa scrutinizes her.

ALSA

Take off your shirt.

KAJA

What? What would that matter??

ALSA

(laughs)

No, right now.

KAJA

(angry)

Look. I've never done anything like this before, and it's not a fucking game for me! I'm here for a reason, and if you won't help me, then I'll find someone else...

ALSA

(softer)

Take off your shirt.

Kaja stares at her, defeated. She takes off her shirt. Alsa scrutinizes her upper torso.

ALSA

Listen, honey, things are real different in the Zone. You don't even have a skinport.

KAJA

A skinport?

ALSA

Everything's wires here, remember? Plug 'er in. You have to hardwire to your biochip.

With one finger she traces a line from Kaja's cheek down her neck to her clavicle.

ALSA

For that you need to have a
skinport installed. Then you can
plug into the terminal and go Over.

KAJA

(shaking her head)
So it's pointless, then? Me being
here?

Alsa breaks into a grin again.

ALSA

Oh no! You just need to see The
Kid.

INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 28

Pax stands in the middle of the shack. She wears a black, synthetic glove on her right hand, which she holds out in front of her, at the height of her head, palm facing away from her, toward the open door. She holds her left hand--palm up--out before her. It's skinscreen is illuminated, showing the status of a host of remote devices.

PAX

Everything looks good.
I still have a connection.

She uses her right thumb to press a button, toggling through several options and settings.

SAMM

You have the visuals?

He points toward his eyes.

PAX

Yep. A little flicker on one feed,
but it's fine.

SAMM

(slightly impatient)
So I can go Over now?

She moves her gloved hand away from the window. It emits a beep. Her left hand displays "IR Pulse Lost".

She moves the gloved hand back up. Her left hand now displays "IR in Pulse, Strength 7".

SAMM

I'll stick with wires as my Zone technology of choice.

He withdraws a cable from his Terminal.

PAX

Okay, you can go Over.

He breathes a sigh of relief and plugs his Terminal cable into a port near his clavicle. The cable lights up and his eyes glaze over. He looks peaceful, relaxed.

EXT. VR POPPY FIELDS DAY - SCENE 29

Samm's avatar, MARIA (late 20s, female) appears in the midst of poppy fields. She wears a blue dress and carries a long, translucent length of turquoise fabric. She holds it into the air, allowing it to catch the wind.

She walks slowly and deliberately through the area, exploring.

EXT. HILLTOP DAY - SCENE A5

Kaja hikes up the side of a steep hill. As she reaches the crest, the sound of a TUBA halts her in her tracks.

A TUBA PLAYER stands at the top of the hill, sounding notes over the valley below.

A RECORDIST, with a large 1960s reel-to-reel tape deck strapped to his back, approaches the Tuba Player, aiming a microphone attached to a pole at her. He patiently records her as she plays. Both of them ignore Kaja, who watches in wonder.

A PERCUSSIONIST, carrying a large cymbal, descends the hill toward the ridge that the others occupy. He hits his cymbal with a drumstick, sending a ringing reply to the tuba. The Recordist stands in between the two, his microphone pointed into the air, perpendicular to their axis.

Kaja steps forward, uncertainly. The Recordist turns and points his microphone directly at her. All three are staring at her, blankly.

KAJA
I'm sorry to intrude. I'm just
trying to find The Kid's farm...

RECORDIST
No kids around here.

The Tuba Player and Percussionist grin widely.

KAJA
I'm sorry. I must be lost.

The Recordist nods, amiably. Then suddenly frowns.

RECORDIST
(to musicians)
Did you hear that?

He turns around and points his mic toward the distant hills.

TUBA PLAYER
Corps!

All three turn and hurry down the hillside, playing their
instruments as they go.

Kaja glances at the hills, then turns and hurries back the
way she came.

INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 31

Samm disconnects from the Terminal, stands up.

PAX
Feel like more of a woman?

SAMM
I feel better, thanks.

He goes to his rucksack, removes an orthopedic cushion,
places it on the floor.

PAX
I don't know if I like that spot
for you. You're too exposed.
Someone could see you from outside.

She indicates the window.

SAMM

Jesus. Why don't we hang a curtain, then?

PAX

(smiles grimly)

Can't cover up the sensor. If that happens, we lose the whole Array. No more information.

CU on sensor, stuck to the window. Pax makes a throat-slitting gesture with her finger.

SAMM

Well I can't move anywhere else: this cable's too short!

He tugs gently on the data cable disappearing into the wall: there's no more slack.

They consider the situation for a moment. Samm shrugs. Pax laughs.

SAMM

Welcome...

PAX AND SAM

...to the Zone.

They laugh.

SAMM

Okay, so here's the situation. There's security everywhere Above. Corporate shit, private, weird stuff, even military. I've never seen this much ICE in the Zone.

PAX

I'm sure you can handle it.

SAMM

Of course, no problem for Maria.
(beat)
It'll take some time to find the Rabbit. I have to sort through a lot of data. It'll take a little longer than usual.

PAX

No one's ever got away from you,
old man.

SAMM

You either, Rabbit Catcher.

PAX

(shrugging)

My job's easy. I have physics on
my side.

SAMM

Now if there's one thing I *don't*
trust... I'm going back Over.

PAX

Knock yourself out.

EXT. VR CLIFFS DAY - SCENE 29

Maria tests the air, standing at the top of a bluff
overlooking the ocean.

SAMM (V.O.)

There's only one way to find a
Rabbit when you're Over in the
Zone. The air. I've already
traced back half a dozen currents.
It's easy to lose yourself up here,
to forget that there's something
under all the work, all the play.
I can't feel it, but every hour
Over is another hour of bodily
decay Under. And when I wipe
someone here, when I complete a
job... someone Under stops
breathing.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 2: INSCRIPTION

SCENE A32 HILLSIDE DAY - SCENE A32

Vector Bruno walks down a hillside and slowly, deliberately sits down on a fallen tree. He faces the camera, addressing an unseen audience.

He reaches into a deep pocket of his overalls and removes an OLD RUSTED HARD DISK. He holds it up for all to see.

VECTOR

Do any of you know what this is?

Murmurs offscreen.

FIRST VOICE (O.S.)

A terminal?

SECOND VOICE (O.S.)

A computer.

VECTOR

You are close, my brothers and sisters, but you must think back a little further, to a time when computers were as present and visible as terminals, when they sat on the desk like any other machine, taking up space, human space. You could pick them up, press buttons, tap on keys like a typewriter. Yes, keys. They had screws, and if you used a screwdriver, you could take them apart. This is one of the things you would find inside. It is a hard disk. It stores data magnetically. Sickle Jean found this and brought it to me this morning. She wondered if we could take it to a Miner to extract its data, if we might learn something interesting about someone who lived or worked here sixty or seventy years ago. And so I wonder now, here, with you: what information might this disk contain? What could it tell us about its owner?

(MORE)

VECTOR(cont'd)

(pause)

It may contain some "documents."
These are strings of characters
that its owner has scanned or typed
or copied. They are the output of
her labor. Perhaps she drove to a
box every morning, sat down inside,
and began to work on these
"documents." She was paid to do
so. Each one would be read from
and written to this disk. Yes,
written. This is a machine for
writing. An inscription machine.

(pause)

Inside there is an arm, and the arm
has a finger, a digit. It writes
on a platter, but it also writes on
us, on our bodies. It writes our
identity, our informational
content. Every contact leaves a
trace, an inscribed data set, a
mark of blood. Workers used to
think of their material existence
and their data existence as
separate, separated by a screen.
But then, at some point, the screen
disappeared, an invisible idol.
Now we don't see the data space,
because its all we see. Material
space is just a metaphor now.

(pause)

But the hard disk reminds us: there
is a real world. Information is
always embodied in something.
Under all the ones and zeros are
magnetic flux reversals. Yes, that
is the name of Evil.

EXT. FARM - SCENE 6

Kaja approaches a small, completely isolated farm. A few
crops are growing; a barn is the only structure visible.
STARTER (30s, male) is repairing a fence. He looks up, sees
Kaja.

STARTER

(warmly)

Hello.

KAJA

Hi... Uh, I'm looking for The Kid...

STARTER

Over there.

He points toward THE KID (male, appears to be in his early 20s), who is kneeling on the ground nearby, digging into the earth with a hand spade. She walks up to him. He looks up.

KAJA

Hi, I'm Kaja...

THE KID

The Kid.

KAJA

I guess so.

He holds out his hand. She shakes it.

KAJA

Alsa sent me. She said you could retrofit me with a skinport.

(looking around
uncertainly)

Can you do that?

STARTER

(calling over)

This is a man who grows squash in the Zone!

KAJA

(smiling despite herself)

Yeah?

The Kid nods, smiles.

THE KID

It's my favorite vegetable.

STARTER

You're talkin' to a man who grows squash!

KAJA

How much does it cost? I don't have much money left. I'm a student...

THE KID

Money? Oh no, that's... We don't take money here.

STARTER

Money free farm! Special economic zone!

He laughs. The Kid smiles.

THE KID

Intrinsic value. You have to trade.

KAJA

Intrinsic value? Like what?

THE KID

Food, raw materials, energy, information. And whatever you can do with them.

KAJA

Work.

He nods.

KAJA

I don't... I'm *looking* for information myself... I don't know what I have to give you. Once I can get Over, I can work for you... But I need the skinport to do that.

THE KID

It's possible to work Under. In the material world.

KAJA

What do you mean? Delivering goods?

THE KID

That, or...

He digs his hands into the soft earth that he has been softening with the spade, pulls some up in his hand. She looks at him and the earth, curiously. He looks up at her, thinking.

THE KID

I'll do it. You can owe me.

Starter stops working, seems surprised.

KAJA

Thank you.

THE KID

Come inside.

He leads her into the BARN. She is amazed to see that one corner is entirely strewn with cables, displays, and various archaic-looking electronic devices. Parts lie on a workbench.

KAJA

So you really are into electronics.

He smiles.

THE KID

Hate the stuff. Never use it if I can help it.

INT. BARN LATER - SCENE 7

At his workbench, The Kid solders together two tiny wires.

Kaja lies on a pad on the floor. The Kid kneels over her. He soaks a cotton ball in isopropyl alcohol and applies it to an area around the base of her neck and clavicle. He does the same with a second substance.

Using a scalpel, he cuts into her skin. It doesn't hurt, but she grits her teeth, very anxious. He daubs up the blood, uses a forceps to extract two thin wires from under her skin.

He uses a hot, smoking soldering iron to connect a port to the wires.

He sews the whole thing back together.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT NIGHT - SCENE 8

Illuminated by the naked light bulb in her room, Kaja turns on the Terminal. Its screen flashes "READY". She slightly pulls down the collar of her shirt to reveal her freshly installed skinport, a small, round knob recessed above her clavicle. She touches it gingerly: it is quite painful.

She leans against the wall, then draws a long wire out of the Terminal. She takes a deep breath, plugs the wire into her port. The screen counts down: "3"... "2"... "1"...

The wire lights up, giving her a slight jolt. Her eyes go glassy. The Terminal screen reads: "CONNECTED".

EXT. VR POND DAY - SCENE 9

A pond in a pristine setting, its surface undisturbed. After a few moments, Kaja (in avatar form) bursts chaotically out of the water, in the center of the pond, splashing madly.

KAJA (V.O.)

I remember, once, as a child,
walking along a path, and the
ground was soggy. I could feel the
water seeping up through my shoes,
between my toes. I started to cry;
I thought I was gonna be swallowed
up. My Mom told me that when we
got back inside I could dry my feet
by the heater, but I knew that they
would never dry.

Gasping for air, she reaches the edge of the water so that she no longer needs to swim. She slowly catches her breath.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT DAY - SCENE 25

Kaja ineptly attempts to cook some rice and vegetables on the camp stove in her room. She has clearly never used such a device before. She spills some rice out of the pan, attempts to catch it with her hand, and burns herself. She rushes out.

INT. CINDERBLOCK BATHROOM - SCENE 26

Kaja rushes to the dirty sink, turns the faucet on, and allows the water to pour over her burnt hand. The water begins to turn darker and darker, contaminated with dirt or rust.

She breathes heavily, perhaps hyperventilating.

EXT. P-TOWN LATER - SCENE 27

Kaja approaches Alsa, who is washing a small shack next to 50 yards of isolated railroad track.

KAJA

Alsa! What-- what are you doing?

ALSA

Train's -a-comin!

Kaja looks around. The track goes nowhere.

ALSA

Wanna buy a ticket outta here?

KAJA

No. It's just... the water's dirty.

ALSA

You mean it has character.

KAJA

Yeah, the character of being dirty!

ALSA

(laughing)

I don't think it's the water that'll kill 'ya.

Kaja becomes deadly serious.

KAJA

What do you mean by that?

ALSA

Well, we've got mercenaries,
bandits, hackers, crackers,
cultists, spies, revolutionaries,
and crazies on the loose for
starters. Meanwhile, every time
you go Over you're in danger of
getting V-sheared. But really, all
that's pickled herrings, 'cause
every hour you spend in the Zone
your body's being invaded. Check
your biohazard meter.

KAJA

(smoldering)

I don't even think it's working.

ALSA

(laughing)

Well, that's probably for the best!

KAJA

(softly)

I... I can't stay here much
longer. I really need to find my
friend. I need to find Adelle.

Alsa exits the structure as she speaks, goes to the track,
examining it:

ALSA

Well, I told you I never saw her
around here. 'Course, the Zone is
pretty darn big. It ain't easy to
find anybody. 'Course most people
in the Zone don't want to be
found...

She puts her ear to the track, listening.

KAJA

I think she was kidnapped.

ALSA

Kidnapped? By who?

Kaja stops, realizes she may have said too much.

KAJA

I don't know. It doesn't matter.
I don't really know what happened
to her.

She backs away, then turns to go. Alsa stands up, faces her.

ALSA

(warmly)

Hey. I'll tell you how it works.
The Tammies have the best network
around here. They pretty much
track what's going on. They make
most of the food, and basic
supplies. It's the Corps--the
Corporates--who string most of the
wire, keep most of the generators
going. They have an agreement with
Vector Buno--that's the leader of
the Tammies... It's sort of a
truce. Anyway, everyone else just
lays low. So that's what you're
dealing with on the ground. Over's
another story: it's chaos. That's
probably the best way to find
people, but also for them to find
you. There're a lots of projects,
things going on. There's virtual
labor even in the Zone.

(beat)

For what you want, you gotta work
the interface.

KAJA

The interface?

ALSA

Over and Under. Two ends of the
same snake.

Long beat.

KAJA

Thank you.

Alsa smiles faintly.

EXT. FARM LATER - SCENE 30

Kaja approaches The Kid's planter boxes, where he is tending some plants.

THE KID
Kaja! How's the port healing?

KAJA
Okay, thanks.

THE KID
Did you try it out? Did you go
Over?

KAJA
Yes.

THE KID
And...

Beat.

KAJA
I want to pay you back.

THE KID
Yeah?

KAJA
I want to work here. I'll help you
with whatever you need.

THE KID
(smiling)
Sure. What would you like to do?

KAJA
I don't know. Anything, except...
You'll have to train me. I've only
ever worked Over.

THE KID
Sure, sure.

KAJA
And I'll need food.

THE KID

You know, most people only come to the Zone for a day or two...

KAJA

I'm gonna be here longer.

THE KID

How long?

KAJA

I don't know.

Beat.

THE KID

Why are you here, Kaja? What do you want from the Zone?

KAJA

I'd rather not talk about that.

THE KID

Okay...

KAJA

I'm a student. Let's leave it at that.

THE KID

What kind of student?

KAJA

(reluctantly)

I'm training to be a V-therapist.

THE KID

Wow! You mean neural stuff?

She softens a little.

KAJA

Yeah. VR cognitive-memory interface. Simulations that re-program people's brains.

THE KID

But you don't work on the technology?

KAJA

No, I'm learning how to build custom simulations, to actually find the orphaned data in patients' brains.

THE KID

I heard that's all the rage these days. Before I came to the Zone.

KAJA

Yeah. It's a career. How long have you been here?

THE KID

Couple of years now.

KAJA

Couple of years?? But...

THE KID

I know. I should be dead or something, right? I'll tell you what, though: there's something weird about my body already. I barely age. The Zone doesn't have much of an effect on me.

KAJA

How old are you?

He shrugs.

THE KID

I guess I've been here awhile because I like it. I'm trying something different, you know?

KAJA

Different! Yeah.

THE KID

I mean with the farming. Growing things. It's a different life out here. I make everything I need. I can be a hermit.

KAJA

Apparently you make most of the
Terminals in the Zone. It seems
like everyone else needs you.

He shrugs. She smiles.

KAJA

Teach me how to grow a squash?

THE KID

Okay, but just one!

She laughs.

THE KID

Just one squash...

EXT. VR POND LATER - SCENE 10

Now calm and collected, Kaja wades through the pond, holding out her hand, tracing several streams of bubbles rising from the depths of the water. Each is accompanied by an undifferentiated stream of voices and other sounds. She moves her hand from stream to stream. Eventually, she discovers a large, steady stream, and seems satisfied.

KAJA (V.O.)

I think you are something I could
drown in: I might wrap your wetness
around my waist like a transparent
snake. But I have not found a way
to refuse a kind of joy that flows
and flows into a line defined by
water. No time for lines.

She walks across a WOODEN BRIDGE, away from the pond.

INT. VR HALL DAY - SCENE 11

A large conference-style hall. THE HOSTESS stands in the middle of the room, still and silent, as if in suspended animation. Kaja advances slowly toward her. On either side she hears a flurry of voices in hushed, conspiratorial conversation, but no one can be seen.

As Kaja nears her, The Hostess suddenly comes to life. She remains cold, even slightly contemptuous, throughout the following exchange:

THE HOSTESS
Authentication.

Kaja holds up her hand, palm facing The Hostess.

THE HOSTESS
Thank you. Welcome to the bazaar.
(pause; Kaja doesn't
respond)
What are you looking for, and what
do you have to offer?

KAJA
I'm looking for... I need help
finding someone.

THE HOSTESS
Over or Under?

KAJA
Both.

THE HOSTESS
Are you certain that this person is
in the Zone?

KAJA
Yes. (softer) I mean, I think so.

THE HOSTESS
Do you know her name? Her personal
details, connections?

KAJA
Yes! Adelle! She's my best
friend!

The Hostess looks horrified.

THE HOSTESS
Don't tell me! I am your host. I
can't make any deals.

KAJA

I'm sorry. Will you send my request?

THE HOSTESS

I already have. So far no takers. All negatives. There is one... no. No one is interested in trading with you. Of course, your request will remain active for one week or until you cancel it. More potential sellers will consider it. You can check in any time.

Kaja hesitates.

THE HOSTESS

Good bye.

She turns her back to Kaja. Kaja turns and walks away, a flurry of voices again audible.

As she nears the end of the room The Hostess suddenly turns back around to face her back.

THE HOSTESS

There is someone willing to meet with you. The Programmer. Will you accept?

KAJA

Yes.

The Hostess guides her to a curtained door off the side of the room.

THE HOSTESS

The meeting space will remain secure and active for as long as you are both present. All data packets should be placed in the provided secure containers for inspection. When one party exits, the other should also leave immediately. Exit trails can be backtraced and your security will be compromised. Keep it respectable.

The Hostess gives her a final sour look and rather forcefully ushers her through the door.

EXT. GARDEN DAY - SCENE 12

Kaja steps into a small garden-like space. At the center is a small table, at which is seated a middle aged woman, THE PROGRAMMER.

THE PROGRAMMER
(smiling mischievously)
Quaint, right?

Kaja nods uncertainly. She sits down, across from The Programmer.

THE PROGRAMMER
You're looking for someone.

KAJA
I am, yes.

THE PROGRAMMER
I'm looking for myself.

KAJA
What?

THE PROGRAMMER
If you look for others before you find yourself, you'll only find reflections.

KAJA
Was that free?

THE PROGRAMMER
Yes. The cup is empty.

She indicates a COPPER CUP sitting in the middle of the table. Kaja looks inside. It is indeed empty.

THE PROGRAMMER
I can help you.

KAJA
Do you know where Adelle is?

THE PROGRAMMER

No. The Zone is a very big place.
But it's a small world. I can find
her. But you don't look like you
have much to offer.

KAJA

I'll do anything I can...

THE PROGRAMMER

Would you consider yourself lazy or
stupid?

KAJA

(slightly offended)

No!

THE PROGRAMMER

Would Adelle?

KAJA

I... I don't know what she thinks
of me. I've never proven... This
is the first thing I've been able
to do for her.

The Programmer's eyebrows go up slightly. She closely
scrutinizes Kaja for a long moment.

THE PROGRAMMER

You're hired.

KAJA

What?

THE PROGRAMMER

I'm offering you a job.

KAJA

What would I do?

THE PROGRAMMER

(shrugs)

All sorts of things. I run the
largest workshop in the Zone. We
keep most things around here
flowing. Can you dance?

KAJA

No.

THE PROGRAMMER

Well, whatever you're good at. Do you have reliable terminal access?

KAJA

Yes.

THE PROGRAMMER

Okay. Six hours a day, your schedule. Here's your contract.

She pushes the cup over to Kaja's side of the table. Kaja peers inside and is illuminated by a soft glow of light emanating from the cup.

Kaja hesitates. The Programmer smiles.

KAJA

Okay.

She briefly dips her finger into the cup, then passes it back to The Programmer, who briefly passes her hand over the glow. She slides the cup back to Kaja.

THE PROGRAMMER

Here's where to find the workshop.
I'll see you tomorrow.

She abruptly stands, steps past Kaja, and exits through a free-standing door frame that opens onto a purely white space. The door closes most of the way behind her, but a crack remains.

Kaja waits a moment, then approaches the door. Hesitantly but curiously, she opens it.

ADELLE (V.O.)

Is there such a thing as love? Can you ever know me? When I become digestible, transferable, downloadable, I am still not there. I am a cloud...

Kaja looks in for a moment, and is then hit by a sudden flash of light. She stumbles backward, then herself flickers and disappears.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT NIGHT - SCENE 13

Gasping, Kaja comes out of her trance, disconnected from VR. Her Terminal reads "DISCONNECTED". The room has become very dark. She seems scared.

KAJA
Scanned. Jesus Christ. Scanned.

She turns on the light, moves about the room uncertainly, checks the biohazard sensor.

Suddenly the Terminal beeps. The screen displays: "1 Message".

INT. VR BLACK MESSAGE SPACE - SCENE 14

Kaja sits in a small hut.

KAJA (V.O.)
I didn't expect any messages. I know my parents are frantically searching for me; they don't know I'm in the Zone. Messages must be pouring in, but they won't reach me here. The only messages I can receive come from within the Zone itself. And I don't know anyone here.

A MESSAGE BOT appears out of the blackness.

MESSAGE BOT
(speaking in an artificial, mechanical voice, completely without affect)
They know you're here. They know who you're looking for. You must leave the Zone.

KAJA
No!

MESSAGE BOT

You are in terrible danger. You must not identify yourself to anyone Under.

KAJA

Who are you?

MESSAGE BOT

I will send your reply.

It disappears.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT NIGHT - SCENE 15

Kaja stands up, moves away from the Terminal. She opens the door. The wind howls in the pitch darkness. She kneels to the ground, suddenly and weakly, holding onto the door handle.

KAJA

(calling out faintly)

Alsa? Alsa??

There is no reply, and no sign of life.

KAJA

Alsa? I need help, Alsa. Please help me. Please help me.

But she is alone.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 3: WORK

EXT. VR POND DAY

MULTIPLE CHARACTERS (V.O.)

Convergence. Network shear Over and Nano-contamination Under.

(MORE)

MULTIPLE CHARACTERS(cont'd)

The witch's brew of the Zone. Fair
 is foul and foul is fair; hover
 through the fog and filthy air.
 The Zone is a nervous system.
 Enlightenment, data become
 carnivorous. A system that is
 nervous. Seek to know no more.

EXT. SPIDER-ANT TREE DAY - SCENE A53

A Tammy (TV) carries a medieval-style banner past the spider-
 ant tree.

INT. VR WORKSHOP LATER - SCENE 33

A large, cavernous studio space. The Programmer smiles
 mischievously at Kaja and gestures for her to follow. She
 steps through a doorway and into the center of the workshop.
 A number of couples are dancing a Latin dance, weaving
 amongst each other, ranging over the floor.

The Programmer leads Kaja through them to the other side of
 the room and onto a small platform. A few feet away, NN is
 seated at a WORKBENCH tending several PLANTS.

The Programmer faces the dancers, raises her hand, and makes
 a circular gesture. Instantly they all stop dancing and face
 her. Complete silence.

THE PROGRAMMER

This is Kaja. Please welcome her
 to the Workshop.

ALL DANCERS

Welcome!

The Programmer makes another gesture and they instantly take
 up dancing again.

THE PROGRAMMER

(to Kaja)

Do you see anything out of place?

KAJA

(looks around)

No...

THE PROGRAMMER

That's good, because nothing *is* out of place here. Chaos always masks order. Do you understand?

KAJA

I don't know.

THE PROGRAMMER

Order does not come out of chaos. In the beginning, there was order. Do you know how to take care of plants?

KAJA

Actually, I'm learning...

THE PROGRAMMER

(indicating NN)

This is NN. She mostly doesn't kill things. You can help her for now. We'll find the best work for you soon enough.

She leaves. Kaja sits down next to NN.

KAJA

(awkwardly)

Hi.

NN

Welcome to the sweatshop.

KAJA

Oh... What are they all doing?

NN

Today they're optimizing network data propagation, or something like that. Re-routing links to cut out some dud nodes.

KAJA

Oh.

Long pause.

NN

Do you know how to take care of plants?

KAJA

Actually, I'm learning... What do you do?

NN

I just take care of these plants.

(brief pause)

I don't know what I'm doing for realsy reals.

(almost whispering)

You shouldn't really ask questions about that. I had a friend once who found out that she was actually torturing people in Pakistan.

(pause)

Not here, at another Workshop. But still, I stopped trying to figure that stuff out. Not good for the CPU, you know?

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 37

The Tuba Player, Percussionist, and Recordist march through the forest, occasionally sounding their instruments and recording.

At a slight distance, up a hill, Pax quietly slips down behind a fallen tree and observes the Team.

The Team begins to play in earnest. The sounds of the tuba and cymbal pulse through Pax. She notices a leaf near her tremble. She picks it up and drops it in the palm of her hand. It begins to vibrate to the frequencies of the tuba. It becomes more and more animated, standing up in her hand. She watches it in wonder.

The leaf slowly begins to float, rising several inches above her hand.

The Team stops playing. The leaf drops back into Pax's palm.

EXT. FIELD DAY - SCENE A54

Vector Bruno and several Tammies stand on a bare, dirt stage on a hillside. Old sheets hung on rope strung across trees act as a makeshift curtain.

VECTOR
Collect your Selves!

CONGREGATION (TOGETHER)
We are collected!

Vector reaches down and scoops up a handful of dirt.

VECTOR
Behold! Here I hold wisdom. I can
feel it. Not data. Not information.
But wisdom.

The wind blows some dirt from the hand.

VECTOR
You see, even the wind wants to
play with it. Our ideas, our
thoughts, fluid like water, play
along the surface of this hard holy
dirt. We are gathered together to
remember this dirt as Children of
the earth.
(hurls dirt)
Feel the dirt!
(hurls dirt)
Feel the dirt!
(hurls dirt)
Feel the dirt!
(pause)
We will now see a morality play,
the correct way we've chosen to
remember that world we left behind.
You know very well the dangers of
seeing fictions. That cloud which
those on the outside are connected
to pixilates their reality, numbing
them. But the flesh we present here
embodies the wisdom of the earth
and our being within it. It begins
long ago, when the earth was queen.

He pulls aside the curtain. In a old, wooden CHAIR sits The EARTH as if on a throne. She is covered in mud, with flowers, vines, and leaves clinging to her body. Leaves cover her eyes. Behind her hang several crude BANNERS depicting the stars, moon, and planets.

VECTOR (O.S.)

Earth!

TECHNOLOGY enters and stands on Earth's left. She holds a small black FRAME before her face throughout the play, always looking through it.

VECTOR (O.S.)

Technology!

EARTH

How beautiful this world must be. Look at how the ocean swells and bursts within me, how I give myself to all that grows and how they tend to themselves with the fruits of my body. They tread on me lightly, nibble on my sides but return it all. How wonderful this all must be to see. How blind I am to my own glory. Tell me Technology, how does it look when the sun dawns over the ocean and spreads light over the trees?

TECHNOLOGY

It is the color orange, which has a wavelength in the visible spectrum of about of about 585 to 620 nanometers...

EARTH

Enough! These numbers are meaningless to me. They blind me even more to my own beauty. I need someone to help me see myself, to reflect me.

TECHNOLOGY

Well, there is a certain species you have not...

EARTH

Yes, yes, this *human*... Thinks he
can build a tower to the moon, and
use me for parts. You'd like him,
wouldn't you?

TECHNOLOGY

All respect to Your Majesty but
this human's ingenuity is rivaled
by only his gratitude and sense of
worship. If you want him to reflect
you, to see you for what Your
Majesty really is, you must give
him these powers of consciousness.

EARTH

A gamble I'm willing to take. How I
long to see myself and be free from
this darkness. Behold, the man!

EXT. RIDGE DAY - SCENE 41

BENJAMIN HUGO, on foot but carrying a stuffed SADDLE BAG,
takes the last few steps up a ridge and then stops to survey
the valley below him. He tips up his hat, smiles with
pleasure, and recites from William Blake as he begins to
descend into the valley:

BENJAMIN

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains
green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures
seen?
And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

SCENE 42 (MARIA VOICE OVER)

Maria searches a poppy field and the pond bridge.

SAMM (V.O.)

It doesn't take long to get the lay of the land if you understand how people think. The landscape of the mind follows familiar contours most of the time. This is one of the more clever rabbits I've tracked, but I'm close. I'm very close.

EXT. P-TOWN DAY - SCENE 44

Samm lies behind a dirt berm, peeking over the top with a pair of small binoculars. In his left hand he holds up one of Pax's tiny sensors. She cannot be seen, but he is clearly in communication with her via the device.

SAMM

I got a couple people in the plant.
You see that?

POV: Binoculars. Two figures are visible moving in and among the metal structures of the plant.

PAX (O.S.)

(via transmission)

Yeah, I'm close. I don't think they're the ones we want.

SAMM

Pax?

PAX (O.S.)

Yes?

SAMM

You're bisexual, right?

PAX (O.S.)

Of course.

SAMM

(to himself)

Of course...

(to her)

Which do you prefer? Men or women?
As lovers.

Long pause.

PAX (O.S.)
Who's asking, Samm or Maria?

SAMM
Well, I'm laying here in a goddamn ditch. I can feel my body deteriorating. I'm pretty sure we're Under...

PAX (O.S.)
That dirt is the feeling of reality, Samm.

SAMM
Oh come on: "reality". That word doesn't mean anything.

PAX (O.S.)
Well, you're talking to someone who actually has sex Under.

SAMM
Christ, I knew you were crazy.

PAX (O.S.)
I'm not he one lying in the dirt.

SAMM
Oh, well, you should try it. It's full of diseases. You'd love it. Very real.

EXT. FARM DAY - SCENE 48

The Kid is tending to some vegetable plants in his garden. Kaja pops out from behind the barn, startling him.

KAJA
Hey!

THE KID
You shouldn't surprise me like that!

KAJA
I brought you a present.

THE KID
Oh yeah?

KAJA

Here.

She removes a can from her backpack and holds it out to him, stepping close.

KAJA

It's canned peaches!

THE KID

Holy shit! I haven't had peaches in years... Where did you get this?

She shrugs mischievously.

THE KID

(jokingly)

I bet you got this from the Tammies!

She smiles but reveals nothing.

THE KID

Seriously! What did you have to do? I bet you renounced all technology and did a rain dance! You spoke in tongues to Vector Bruno? You worshipped the Peach God? I'm eating this right now!

(calling out)

Starter, where's the can opener?!

Starter appears at the edge of the forest.

STARTER

Can opener?? You used the last can opener to build that ten-thousand-volt bridge rectifier!

THE KID

Oh yeah.

(to Kaja)

That's what we traded for the new water tank. But obviously I wasn't thinking ahead!

KAJA

It's always a good idea to plan for peaches.

THE KID

Yeah, to hell with the farm...

STARTER

My kingdom for a can opener!

THE KID

You said it!

Beat.

KAJA

Why do you trade for everything? Wouldn't it be easier to just use money?

THE KID

Money? Use it for what?

KAJA

I don't know. To buy and sell things.

THE KID

Well, here's the thing...

She sits down, smiling.

KAJA

What's "the thing"?

THE KID

The thing is money. Money becomes the thing. If Starter writes some code, and you grow some peaches, and you trade one for the other, then we know what each one is worth, right? You grew the peaches: you know their value. But if you start growing peaches and someone just pays you money, pretty soon the value of the peaches is only the money.

(MORE)

THE KID(cont'd)

Starter writes code for someone else who pays him, and now, if you want his code, you pay someone with the money you earned from the peaches. Then there's no connection, right? The code is equal to the peach because of this third thing, money. And the peach isn't yours even though you're growing it. It has no value to you any more, except the amount of money it brings in. The *money* has the value, not your work.

Throughout his speech she's been watching him closely, smiling.

STARTER

That's called "reification," and it's a real bitch.

KAJA

You're a coder?

STARTER

Aren't we all?

KAJA

(to The Kid, humorously)
And you're a bridge rectifier?

THE KID

Nope, I don't fix bridges. I do diodes and squash. Someone else has to fix the bridges.

Starter and Kaja both laugh. The kid, relaxed, lies down on his side.

STARTER

(sitting down)
I don't think there are any bridges left in the Zone.

KAJA

You know, if it weren't slowly killing me from the inside out, the Zone wouldn't be so bad.

(grimly)

(MORE)

KAJA(cont'd)

It suddenly seems like all my friends are here.

THE KID

Maybe it's a good place to build bridges...

KAJA

As long as they're rectified, right?

She lies down on her back, staring up at the sky. Long beat.

THE KID

If you don't want to end up with polarity problems.

KAJA

(humorously)

Oh. Finally I know what I've been doing wrong.

They smile.

INT. VR WORKSHOP DAY LATER - SCENE 34

Kaja sits at the workbench next to NN. In front of her sits a large WATER BASIN filled almost to the brim. The basin is connected via various tubes and wires to the wall. The water inside vibrates and churns, apparently of its own accord. Kaja watches it closely.

KAJA (V.O.)

The Programmer determined that my optimal work would be with hydrogen, so she created a water sim for me. I'm supposed to look for "interesting patterns." *Interesting.* It sounds so simple, but AIs have a hard time determining what's interesting before they've been programmed with the patterns themselves. They only function by tautology: it's interesting because its in the "interesting" database. So I'm employed.

The Programmer steps up to the workbench, casting her shadow over the water basin.

THE PROGRAMMER
I found something for you.
Consider it your first paycheck.

She hands Kaja an ORCHID. Kaja looks at it with wonder.

THE PROGRAMMER
Go ahead. Take a break.

INT. VR FOREST - SCENE 36

Kaja materializes into a lush forest space. She runs to a clearing and crouches down, holding the orchid that the Programmer gave her. It begins to glow, bathing her in light.

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)
This is Charlie. He knows about Adelle. He will never come to you. You have to go to him. Now you have the key to get in. But be very careful. No one in the Zone trusts Charlie.

Kaja sees flashes of multiple paths. One is highlighted. A HOUSE is visible. Flashes of CHARLIE.

The orchid's light fades.

EXT. FIELD DAY - SCENE B54

EVERYMAN enters onstage.

VECTOR (O.S.)
Everyman!

Technology removes the leaves from before Earth's eyes. She follows Everyman's movements. Everyman wanders around looking bewildered.

EARTH
Child! Look at me. Oh, are you hungry? There, there, nibble on this my son.

She hands him a POMEGRANATE. Everyman nibbles eats at it like an animal.

EARTH

Well, is this that grateful animal you spoke of?

TECHNOLOGY

Wait 'till his hunger is satiated, then you will see his beauty reflected. Give him another one.

Earth hands him another pomegranate.

EVERYMAN

Well, uh, thanks
(looks at the pomegranate and gives an *aw shucks* look)

Thank you...very much.

(Suddenly looks up and notices the world)

Oh! Look at the way the water seems to be burning as the sun drops from the sky. The trees seem to extend shadows as the light goes through. I feel, I feel... like my heart wants to say thank you, thank you, thank you to it all.

TECHNOLOGY

It's not in verse, but I assure you he will get much better at it.

EARTH

(with a wide smile, staring in wonder)

No, it's beautiful! Look at me more, creature. Look at me. Yes, I can see, I can finally see.

VECTOR

As the Earth stares at herself through the eyes of humanity, Technology slowly works his conquest over her Queen.

Reveal: Everyman is now working the ground with a hoe. He is sweating.

TECHNOLOGY

So you've built farms and cities,
and worked yourself to the Earth's
graces while you're at it. I mean,
look at those cultivated fields,
and these beautiful gardens. You've
done well for yourself. But don't
you think you need a rest from all
this hard work? I could do your
work for you.

EVERYMAN

Thank you, but I like doing things
with my own hands. With them, I get
to know this earth.

TECHNOLOGY

But if you're always working, how
can you truly know the earth?

EARTH

Yes, with all that time, my
children may delight in looking at
me, and through their eyes I will
delight in them.

TECHNOLOGY

Everyman, if you help me build
these machines, you will have
leisure all the days under her sun.
The Earth demands it. Live free and
worship the Earth.

EVERYMAN

Yes, I will follow my duty and use
this leisure for the glory of the
earth.

TECHNOLOGY

Look at the Earth, closely.

Everyman and Technology both approach Earth. Technology spins
Earth's chair around in a slow circle.

TECHNOLOGY

Look...closely. Touch.

Everyman begins exploring the Earth with his hands.

EVERYMAN

Yes, I can feel the blood flowering through her veins. I see wonders in her body that have been growing for thousands of years. I see gardens growing unspoiled by my hands.

TECHNOLOGY

Her blood feeds the machines. You can name all these parts for yourself. Every piece of her body. Here.

Technology gives Everyman a LEGAL NOTEBOOK, a PEN, and a CALCULATOR.

TECHNOLOGY

Let us look closer.

Technology takes out a large, wet sponge and begins slowly taking off the mud from one side of Earth's face.

EVERYMAN

What are you doing??

TECHNOLOGY

Look! Feel. Her skin is like your skin. Find yourself in her. All your thoughts. You can find them in the landscape of her body. She is you.

EARTH

No more. You're too close. Stay back!

TECHNOLOGY

Shh. It's okay. This is for her own good.

She covers the Earth's mouth with a CLOTH.

EVERYMAN

I want her.

TECHNOLOGY

Wait, let me clean her more. There, there. What do you see?

Her face is bare, human.

EVERYMAN

No, this can't be?

He turns away from the Earth and Technology. Technology grabs the Earth from the chair and drags her behind the banner backstage. She is no longer visible.

EXT. STORAGE CONTAINER DAY - SCENE 43

A large storage container sprawls across the open ground. Not much to look at from the outside: weather-worn and seemingly abandoned.

Benjamin Hugo steps up to the door, unlocks it, and hauls it open. It is pitch black inside. He opens a small panel and flips a heavy switch. A thin strip of overhead fluorescent lights flicker on, along with a number of LEDs and various instrument panels. Fans whir to life. The cavernous space is transformed into an electronic den.

Benjamin blows a thick layer of dust off one of the instrument panels, inspects it closely. He attaches several cables.

He mounts an IR receiving unit on the outside roof of the container.

He sits contentedly on the roof, staring into the distance.

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 37

The Tuba Player, Percussionist, and Recordist march through the forest, occasionally sounding their instruments and recording.

At a slight distance, up a hill, Pax quietly slips down behind a fallen tree and observes the Team.

The Team begins to play in earnest. The sounds of the tuba and cymbal pulse through Pax. She notices a leaf near her tremble. She picks it up and drops it in the palm of her hand. It begins to vibrate to the frequencies of the tuba. It becomes more and more animated, standing up in her hand. She watches it in wonder.

The leaf slowly begins to float, rising several inches above her hand.

The Team stops playing. The leaf drops back into Pax's palm.

INT. CHARLIE'S FRONT DOOR DAY - SCENE 45

Kaja stands in front of Charlie's house, facing a closed door. She raises her hand and knocks on the door. It is immediately opened by a grinning CHARLIE, startling her.

CHARLIE

Kaja! Come in!

He sweeps her inside.

KAJA

You know who I am?

CHARLIE

Of course! I've been waiting for you!

KAJA

But how did you know...

CHARLIE

Oh, the Zone isn't that big! Infinitely big, of course, but not that big in actuality. Are you hungry?

KAJA

Hungry?

He sweeps her into a large, open kitchen that is brimming with food. She seems disoriented.

Charlie goes to the oven and removes a full TURKEY. As he continues to talk, sometimes directly and sometimes telepathically, he places the fowl on a platter, garnishes it, and serves it on the dining room table.

CHARLIE

This one's a beauty! Perfectly browned. I've been working on it all day!

He winks merrily at her.

KAJA

Oh...

CHARLIE

Please, sit down!

She sits at a large dining room table. A plate, glass, napkin, and utensils are laid out before her.

KAJA

I've heard that you might be able to help me.

CHARLIE

I'm sure I can! I'm sure I can! Wing?

He serves her a turkey wing.

KAJA

Oh, I don't really...

CHARLIE

Don't be shy!

He produces a filleted SALMON lying on a bed of greens, sets it on the table.

KAJA

I'm looking for someone.

CHARLIE

Now you see, what happens when you add a salmon to a turkey?

KAJA

Is that a riddle?

CHARLIE

No, it's an experiment. Do you cook?

KAJA

No.

CHARLIE

Ah, but you live, you live! You can't escape that! *Élan Vital!*

He produces a teeming BOWL OF FRUIT.

KAJA

I'm looking for someone named
Adelle. I think she's in the Zone.

Charlie serves her a heaping scoop of MASHED POTATOES.

CHARLIE

That is the basic question of life:
what happens if we add more?

KAJA

I'm afraid for her. She
disappeared three weeks ago.

CHARLIE

Every addition, however, is a
differentiation, a separation, a
line traced through the infinite
space of potential.

He carefully carves the turkey.

KAJA

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

The Whole. To produce something,
to add something to something else,
we must at the same time divide,
again and again, to reduce this
totality to the singular. We must
actualize it.

He serves her a choice slice of turkey.

KAJA

I just want to find my friend.

CHARLIE

I can cook you anything, but only
because I am willing to grabble
with every dish I *could* cook-- that
is, with potentiality itself. You
cannot have Adelle without the
entire virtual universe.

He produces a PUNCH BOWL, serves her a glass of punch.

KAJA
How does that help me?

CHARLIE
What would help you is to eat.
Partake.

He produces a steaming, beautiful, freshly baked PIE.

CHARLIE
Will you test this for me? I need
someone to test it.

He cuts a slice of the pie, heaps it on a fork, and holds it out in front of Kaja. He slowly pushes it closer to her mouth.

Suddenly, angrily, she swipes it aside. The pie falls on the table, the fork clattering away.

KAJA
I don't want food!!

Charlie is taken aback. He stares at her. She bows her head, ashamed.

EXT. P-TOWN RUINS DAY - SCENE A46

Alsa searches the ruins, wearing a straw hat to fight off the searing mid-day sun. She carries a small BASKET containing several scavenged electronic and metallic ITEMS, as well as some old, rusty TOOLS.

EXT. OUTSIDE CHARLIE'S HOUSE DAY - SCENE 46

Kaja walks slowly away from the house. She stops and stares back at it.

KAJA (V.O.)
Information is carnivorous in the
Zone. Every byte is dangerous.
It's like poker. If I want
information about Adelle, I need to
keep silent.

EXT. FIELD DAY - SCENE C54

TECHNOLOGY

You don't need to look at Earth anymore. You were made for even greater visions. Come. Sit down here. The Earth does not need this anymore.

Everyman sits in Earth's chair.

TECHNOLOGY

Are you comfortable?

EVERYMAN

Yes, but all I see is you. Nothing but you. Where has fled the beauty of the Earth?

TECHNOLOGY

Now you just sit right there. Why look out into the Earth? A mess you have made of it, really. But don't worry.

From the side of the stage, Technology pulls out a CABLE.

TECHNOLOGY

There is a new, unspoiled world that I have created for you. It's not hard and unmovable like your Queen. It's soft, like dreams. If you stay here now all you will find is emptiness, an emptiness you have created.

EVERYMAN

I'm sorry. Please. I want to go back.

TECHNOLOGY

You will soon see the light.

Technology places the end of the cable in Everyman's mouth. Vector Bruno walks on stage.

VECTOR

Now you see! He is in a deep sleep,
like your brothers and sisters on
the outside. They all lie like
this, their bodies being eaten away
while they play in a dream created
by Technology. Some even hire
others to clean them. They come to
collect their waste and to feed
them with tubes while these
dreamers work, can you believe it,
actually work in a world of lies,
sorting and managing information,
keeping this empire of data intact.

EARTH

(from behind the curtain)
Come back to me!

VECTOR

The Earth calls. Wake up, man!
Return to her!

TECHNOLOGY

It's no use. He's gone.

Vector becomes the star of his own play. He stabs the actor
playing Technology with a stage dagger. He disconnects
Everyman from the cable.

VECTOR

It's not too late. Wake up.

EARTH

(from behind the curtain)
I forgive you. Come back to me!

Everyman wakes up. When he hears her voice he breaks down and
buries his face in Vector's breast.

VECTOR

It's going to be alright. The Earth
has given us a second chance. If
only we can see it!

(Pause)

Rip the curtain. Rip open the
fabric of your empty dreams!

He tears down that hang before the "stage." He hurls aside the props. He tears down the banners, revealing the hills and trees behind him.

INT VR WORKSHOP DAY - SCENE 49

Kaja sits at her workbench, closely scrutinizing her basin of churning water. NN is not present. They are alone in the room.

She makes a small gesture with her hand and the water in the basin immediately freezes as if suspended in time. She makes another gesture and the water continues its motion.

The Programmer approaches her.

THE PROGRAMMER

Did you see Charlie?

KAJA

He wouldn't tell me anything.

THE PROGRAMMER

Figured as much. That bastard likes to talk but doesn't say much.

KAJA

So you know him?

The Programmer doesn't answer at first; she seems lost in thought.

THE PROGRAMMER

Yeah. I know him.

(pause)

Listen. I don't know exactly what he's up to these days, but it has something to do with neural field aggregation. I think he's trying to develop a new process... Anyway, he's been collecting neural scans. That's the rumor.

KAJA

Mind harvesting.

THE PROGRAMMER

Yes.

KAJA

He didn't say anything about Adelle.

THE PROGRAMMER

Of course not.

KAJA

Then why did you send me there?

THE PROGRAMMER

(smiles)

I thought he would let you in.

KAJA

Oh.

THE PROGRAMMER

He has some data of mine. He stole it. He's also suppressing someone's trace. I've been able to discover that much. Someone who appeared in the Zone three weeks ago. I think it's your friend Adelle. So you should be able to get access to what I want and what you want at the same time.

KAJA

You want me to steal data from him?

THE PROGRAMMER

I just want you to steal it back from that bastard.

KAJA

(slowly, deliberately)

Do you think he could have kidnapped her?

THE PROGRAMMER

Kidnapped? Charlie isn't a kidnapper. But he has ties to the Underground, and my guess is that they have her. She's hardly the first one.

INT. SHACK NIGHT - SCENE 47

Pax and Samm sit at their rickety table, eating canned beans. Samm eats from a small plate. Pax spoons hers directly out of the can.

SAMM

I found an important trace. I've been examining a cluster... There's a backdoor right at the heart, and I think it's reserved for our Rabbit.

She continues to chew her beans.

PAX

You really don't have sex Under, do you?

SAMM

No. No, I do not.

PAX

Have you ever?

SAMM

Of course. When I was a teenager, Over was different. Under was a necessary compromise. I don't know; that was a long time ago.

PAX

It's only once the virtual has become real that the true potential of the material is evident.

She puts down the can, finished.

SAMM

What's that supposed to mean?

She rolls out a sleeping pad.

PAX

You don't know what you're missing. And I don't just mean sex.

(MORE)

PAX(cont'd)

I mean the freedom from code, from programming. The force, the inertia, of the real world.

SAMM

Everything is programmed. Every cell in your body. Every molecule in this shack. Your laws of physics... It's all code. The difference is that you're stuck with what you've got. You're dealing with compiled binaries, not source. You can't change anything.

PAX

You're wrong. It's those limits, those boundaries, that make creativity possible.

He seems upset, but she continues, lying down.

PAX (CONT'D)

The world is a playground for artists. When you can make your own playground, what you do in it has no meaning. But to work with givens, to have *material*... Then you can paint with life. Then you can be an artist.

Beat.

SAMM

(deadly serious)

Not everyone has that privilege.

(beat)

My daughter is an artist. Not was, *is*. She can only twitch one muscle in her face now. She's hooked up to a machine. Do you think that stops her? She does amazing work. But maybe you should tell her that it isn't real! Maybe you should let her know what she's missing out on in this world of freedom down here!

PAX

I'm sorry, Samm. I didn't mean it like that...

He angrily gets up, goes outside.

SAMM

You don't know about anything that happens outside of your precious fucking body.

PAX

(angry)

That's not true! I connect with other people. I can look 'em in the eye and share something with them. I don't have anything to run away from.

SAMM

I'm going Over.

He comes back inside, grabs his terminal, prepares to connect.

PAX

Tell me the truth, Samm. How much time do you really spend with your daughter? Under or Over? Huh??

Breathing heavily, he raps the Terminal and goes Over.

INT. BLACK SPACE LATER - SCENE A49

Pure black space. Flashes of light, flashes of Adelle, flashes of Charlie, flashes of DAVEY (male, late 20s).

KAJA (V.O.)

The Underground. They targeted her from the beginning. I knew the moment Davey showed up. He seduced her, tricked her. She was a different person around him. Disconnected. Unfocused. I knew it was something about her Aunt and Uncle that he was after. Something about Nanscop. Well, I hope he got the data he wanted, cause I'm gonna get her back.

INT. SHACK NIGHT - SCENE A50

Pax, sleeping restlessly, wakes up. She sees that Samm, lying on his back, is currently Over. He is uncovered, and it is clearly quite cold.

With a look of concern, she takes the blanket that is crumpled at his feet and carefully covers him up.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 4: INFORMATION**INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 50**

Samm is plugged in to his Terminal. Pax works on her skinscreen, drawing various shapes.

Suddenly, a beep. She glances quickly at the sensor in the window and back to her palm. Her skinscreen displays "1 approach, 50 yds, Northeast".

PAX

Samm!

His Terminal flashes and beeps. He is instantly back.

SAMM

What? What??

PAX

(rapid but calm)

Someone's approaching the shack.
Get up. I don't know who it is.
You know what to do.

SAMM

Yeah, I know: I'm the fucking bait.

Pax straps a thin, narrow device to the inside of her glove. She quickly arranges the two chairs. She stands in the corner of the shack.

There is a knock on the door. Samm opens it to reveal VECTOR BRUNO (30s, male) standing in the doorway. He holds his hand out for Samm to shake.

VECTOR
Hello! I'm Mr. Bruno.

Samm very reluctantly takes his hand and shakes it.

VECTOR
May I enter your dwelling?

SAMM
Uh, I'll come out.

He steps outside. Vector waves hello to Pax; she smiles coldly.

SAMM
Sorry we don't have any chairs.

Vector smiles. He and Samm sit on the ground. Pax stays inside, by the doorway.

VECTOR
I'd like to welcome you to the Zone.

SAMM
Thanks.

VECTOR
I know this area well. I'd be happy to help you if you need anything.

SAMM
Oh, thanks. We're doing well. Finding our way around.

VECTOR
Good, good. And... What is it that you do?

SAMM

We're scientists. Arachnologists.
We're studying the predatory
behavior and breeding patterns of
spiders and ticks.

VECTOR

Who's doing better?

SAMM

What?

VECTOR

Whose doing better? The spiders or
the ticks?

Samm's nervousness begins to show. He fumbles for an answer.

PAX

The ticks. Parasites always
thrive.

VECTOR

I would think that would depend on
their hosts.

SAMM

Yeah, that's true...

VECTOR

(to Samm)

Do you know how a windmill works?

Pax has her gloved hand, in her lap, pointed directly at
Vector. Her thumb rests on one of the buttons.

SAMM

It spins and makes electricity.

VECTOR

The wind pushes its sails. Gives
it energy.

Samm nods, nervously.

VECTOR

When there's no wind, what does the
windmill do?

SAMM
I'm not quite sure what you're
getting at...

VECTOR
It waits.
(he smiles)
That's all. It just waits.

Samm doesn't answer. Vector looks from him to Pax.

VECTOR
There are other technologies, my
friends, that do not receive as
you've received me here today.
They extract. They take something
away from something else.

SAMM
Energy.

VECTOR
Information.

Samm looks at Pax, questioningly. Pax remains silent and still.

SAMM
Aren't they the same thing? Energy
and information?

VECTOR
Quite right. You are a scientist.
The world is your oyster, is it
not? You know how to pry it open.
You know how to extract. There's
information everywhere, ripe for
the taking.

Pax tenses. Her left hand skinscreen displays a live video image of Vector, taken from the window sensor.

SAMM
It's all for the good of humankind,
Mr. Bruno.

Vector reaches out to Samm's glass figurine, lifts it up until it catches the sunlight. Samm freezes.

VECTOR

Yes, we live off information,
feeding from the trough of science.
It's something to observe, isn't
it? Predatory behavior and
breeding patterns.

He holds the figurine out to Samm. Samm hesitates a moment,
then slowly reaches for it. Pax tenses, entirely fixated
upon Vector.

Samm takes the figuring from Vector.

VECTOR

(to Pax)

Good afternoon.

He bows slightly, then turns and walks away, into the forest.

Pax checks her skinscreen.

PAX

Do you know who Vector Bruno is?

SAMM

Yes.

PAX

A very dangerous man.

EXT. TRAILER DAY - SCENE 52

Benjamin sits in front of his trailer, apparently enjoying
the scenery. A TAMMY KID approaches. Benjamin salutes him.
He says nothing.

BENJAMIN

(pleased)

You're faster than I thought. Did
you get the photos?

He nods and hands over a small electronic DEVICE.

BENJAMIN

Excellent. I'm sorry you have to
keep running back and forth for
miles. No wireless transmission:
that's the fucking Zone, eh?!

He just stares back blankly. Benjamin beams.

BENJAMIN

Can I tell you something?

He just stares back.

BENJAMIN

I love the fucking Zone. Most people outside think it's a place of decay. Nanites clinging to every surface, eating away at anyone stupid enough to make contact. But I'll tell you what I think-- I'll tell you what I honestly think. It's a new beginning. The start of somethin' fresh. Tender sprouts, tender sprouts. The new flesh. Yeah! You know what I'm talkin' about: you *live* it!

He slaps the kid on the back, rather violently.

BENJAMIN

(reciting)

'I have no name;
I am but two days old.'
What shall I call thee?
'I happy am, Joy is my name.'
Sweet joy befall thee!
Pretty joy!
Sweet joy, but two days old.
Sweet Joy I call thee:
Thou dost smile,
I sing the while;
Sweet joy befall thee!

He hands the kid a wad of MONEY.

BENJAMIN

Check the sensor array, will you?

He nods, turns, and walks away, pocketing the money.

EXT. VR FIELD DAY - SCENE 42

Camera slowly tracks forward along an idyllic pathway through a field. Ahead is a freestanding doorway, without any other building or structure visible. The door is closed.

Maria appears and walks up to the door.

She opens the door and is bathed in orange light.

SAMM (V.O.)

I found the rabbit hole. Now it's
only a matter of setting the trap.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE DAY - SCENE 53

Charlie is seated at a grand piano in his living room. He plays something simple. While playing, he glances up. Outside, standing in front of a window, looking in, is Kaja.

CHARLIE

Well, you're back!

Kaja is instantly inside the room.

KAJA

I want to apologize.

CHARLIE

No need, no need!

KAJA

I didn't mean to be rude. I'm just
getting used to the Zone.

CHARLIE

Oh, you never get used to the Zone!

He begins to play the piano again.

She notices that a large MASON JAR filled with a colored fluid sits atop the piano. A tube extends from it and disappears into the piano's innards. She stares at it.

Charlie notices her gaze.

CHARLIE

A mind like any other...

KAJA
I thought that was illegal.

CHARLIE
What?

KAJA
Mind harvesting...

CHARLIE
The Zone is a legal state of
exception. Here the harvest is
always in. Let's celebrate!

He pounds the piano harder. She waits patiently.

CHARLIE
Everything is more complex than it
seems to the naked eye. Do you
know why that is?

KAJA
Because everything is connected to
everything else?

He stops playing the piano, stares at her.

CHARLIE
You're a V-Therapist in training,
right? You know about navigating
complexity. Order in chaos...

KAJA
Yes.

CHARLIE
Yes!

He begins playing again.

CHARLIE
I knew a V-Therapist once. I mean
she used to be a V-Therapist. I
convinced her to quit.

KAJA
Why?

CHARLIE

Because there's a fundamental flaw to V-theory, and that's that memory can be spatialized. It sees everything as being on one flat plane: homogeneous data. The assumption is that the mind is pre-given, exists objectively, can be read from any perspective and will consist of the same content.

KAJA

(timidly)

But it works...

CHARLIE

It works. Yes, that's exactly it, isn't it? That's exactly the problem! V-theory makes perfect sense when all we're concerned with is the pragmatic, the calculable. Reading, reading... The mind is not for reading, it is for writing! It is for creating!

Long pause.

KAJA

(indicating the jar)

What are you creating? With that?

CHARLIE

I do not yet know.

KAJA

What?

CHARLIE

That's the beauty of complexity. New properties emerge at each level. I can't measure in advance the nature of those emergences. All I can do is connect one assemblage to another assemblage, and see what- Oh, but there's tuning! I have to carefully tune every element in the system, the simulation.

(MORE)

CHARLIE(cont'd)

With each local neural net tuned, I connect them together, and tune again, until I produce the results I want!

KAJA

But you don't know what you want in advance...

CHARLIE

A quick study indeed! Do you know about the Swerve?

She shakes her head.

CHARLIE

Well, you must encounter Lucretius. It's a question of production, of differentiation. You see, in the beginning there was rain. A rain of atoms. Imagine it! Falling straight down, each atom parallel to the next, in endless streams. It could have gone on like this forever... Drip, drip, drip... But then something happened. The clinamen, the Swerve... the slightest deviation from that downward path, the barest hint of non-uniform motion. And do you know what happened?

She shakes her head.

CHARLIE

Everything. One atom made contact with another, and they formed something new. It was a chain reaction. And soon we had a heterogeneous world, an entire universe teeming with difference!

(pause)

That simple Swerve inaugurates all production. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower! The creative spark that would eventually come into its own in life itself.

INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 54

Samm wakes up. Pax regards him.

SAMM
(groggy)
What time is it?

PAX
It's the middle of the day.

SAMM
Christ. You should woken me up. I
don't want you to waste time
looking after me.

PAX
I spent some time away, since you
were Under. I actually think in
another day I'll be ready for the
deletion.

SAMM
That's good. I'm close too.

PAX
There's someone hanging around.
Close to the shack. I'd like you
to come with me to take a look.
Let me know what you think.

SAMM
A Tammy? What's he doing?

PAX
Not a Tammy. He's painting.

EXT. RIDGE DAY - SCENE 55

Pax and Samm, crouched down, creep along a ridge. They take cover behind a ROTTING LOG.

PAX
(whispering)
See?

Over the crest of the hill, below them, stands THE PAINTER, concentrating on the landscape beyond.

An EASEL stands before him, displaying a mostly finished painting of an impressionistic version of the landscape on view.

He adds a couple of brush-strokes to the canvas.

SAMM
(whispering)
It's just some looney toon.

PAX
(whispering)
I don't know. Watch.

The Painter removes a HANDHELD ELECTRONIC SCOPE from his belt and uses it to closely scan the landscape in front of him.

Samm cranes his neck to get a better view. He leans forward, his hand on a small branch. Suddenly it breaks, snapping loudly.

The Painter turns, stares right at Samm, sees him.

SAMM
Shit!

Pax is exasperated.

SAMM
(whispering to her)
Just stay put. He didn't see us.

THE PAINTER
(calling out)
Hello?
(pause, then cheerily)
Hello there!

He starts up the hill, toward Pax and Samm.

THE PAINTER
I didn't see you there! I get so absorbed in the painting, you see!
I didn't mean to be rude!

Samm, after a moment of confusion, raises his head.

SAMM
Uh, hi! We were just... Admiring your work...

THE PAINTER

Not my best, not my best!

He walks right up to them. Reluctantly, Pax rises as well.

THE PAINTER

(bowing slightly toward
her)

Enchante!

She nods curtly, suspicious.

SAMM

So you're a... painter?

THE PAINTER

Ah, well, yes. A topographer,
actually. You could say as much.
You could say as much.

SAMM

Do you realize you're in the Zone?

THE PAINTER

I could hardly forget it, monsieur.
The paintings do not lie.

SAMM

Aren't you worried about the
danger? Your health?

THE PAINTER

Never felt better! Yes, well. You
could say that, or you could say
otherwise... But anyway, hopefully
I'll be done before it's too late!

PAX

Done with what?

THE PAINTER

What? Done? With the mapping,
with the mapping! At least, so I
understand these changes...

SAMM

I know... I swear to God I can
feel it in the marrow of my
bones...

THE PAINTER

No, no, not changes to the body.
Changes to the Zone! It's hard to
see, you know. But the evidence is
right here!

He points at his painting.

PAX

What changes?

THE PAINTER

Everything. The landscape. It's
constantly changing. The paintings
don't lie.

SAMM

Why don't you just take photos?

THE PAINTER

The lens sees only what is
reflected, monsieur. To capture
the Zone you need pigment. Le
peinture est vrai.

PAX

What are you going to do with this
information?

THE PAINTER

Well, what *does* one do with
information? Contemplate it, I
suppose. Contemplate it.

Pax and Samm exchange a look.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE LATER - SCENE A55

Charlie sits on a sofa, across from Kaja.

CHARLIE

I've worked with a lot of other
people, but they've dropped away
one by one, fallen behind, given
up.

(pause)

They all became passive, reactive.
Suckling at data flows.

(MORE)

CHARLIE(cont'd)

That's baby's milk, Kaja! Not real
food! Not a good, hearty-

Suddenly a loud, clarion-like alarm sounds, and a GLASS CUBE
appears at the other end of the room, glowing red. Charlie
is immediately concerned.

CHARLIE

(to himself)

The Kid?

KAJA

What?

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. Wait here.

He rushes to the other end of the room, places his hand on
the cube, flickers, and disappears.

Kaja hesitates for a moment, then stands up and hurries to
the piano. She opens its lid, closes her eyes in
concentration, and reaches inside.

Kaja is transported to a white room with rows upon rows of
jars similar to the one atop the piano. She glides along one
row of jars, holding her hand above them.

She stops, her hand hovering over a particular jar.

Taking a deep breath and looking apprehensive, she unscrews
the top and reaches inside. She draws out an orchid.

She glances left and right, apprehensively, and then
transports out of the space.

EXT. VR POND DAY - SCENE 56

Kaja's stolen orchid floats in the water.

INT. BLACK SPACE - SCENE 57

The contents of the orchid flash by with extreme,
disorienting speed: A flood of fragmented, organic network
diagrams. It is overpowering.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT DAY - SCENE 58

Kaja comes Under, gasping.

EXT. P-TOWN ARCH SUNSET - SCENE A59

Alsa walks along the ruins of P-Town, carrying a SATCHEL.

She approaches an old SUNDIAL, checks the time. She hurries a little faster.

She arrives at the concrete archway at the edge of P-Town. She sits down, wearily.

[Later]

In the distance, through the archway, with the sun behind him, the MAILMAN appears. He's carrying a tattered MAIL BAG.

He walks through the arch and waves hello to Alsa.

MAILMAN

The sun always shines on P-Town!
Civilization's last outpost.

Alsa laughs.

ALSA

We're keepin' the dream alive...
Any love from the Outside?

He digs through his mail bag, pulls out three rather TATTERED ENVELOPES.

MAILMAN

Big week for mail!

He hands them to her. She eagerly looks at their return addresses. For a moment she registers disappointment. The Mailman watches her. She snaps herself out of it, looking back up at him.

ALSA

Well, here you go!

She produces a letter out of her satchel with exaggerated flair, hands it to him.

She follows it up with two pieces of scrap electronics from her scavenging efforts. He scrutinizes them wearily.

MAILMAN

Postage has gone up.

She frowns briefly, then digs into her satchel. Meanwhile, the Mailman looks over her letter.

She hands him another scavenged piece. He nods, absent-mindedly slipping it into his mail bag.

ALSA

Well, see ya.

She turns to go. He is still looking at her letter.

MAILMAN

Alsa.

She half turns toward him.

ALSA

Yeah?

MAILMAN

Do you think he actually reads these?

(pause)

Your son?

She faces him, abruptly.

ALSA

(sharply)

Sure he does!

(pause)

Why wouldn't he?

He shrugs, uncomfortable with this tack.

ALSA

(upset)

That's your job, isn't it? To make sure packets reach their destinations?

MAILMAN

Yep, that's my job. To deliver.

(pause)

(MORE)

MAILMAN(cont'd)

That doesn't mean I know if
anybody's home.

ALSA

Somebody has to wonder what's on
the other end, mailman.

He stares at her.

MAILMAN

I'll see you on the other side,
Alsa.

He hoists his mail bag and trudges off.

INT. BLACK SPACE - SCENE 59

Maria stands in a purely black space, illuminated by light.

She releases a rose petal into the air. It floats upward.

Numerous rose petals float upward.

They converge to form a rose.

Maria holds it in her hand, in front of her.

MARIA

The rabbit hole is open.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 5: DELETION

EXT. VR POND - DAY

MULTIPLE CHARACTERS (V.O.)

Nothing gets in or out of the Zone
without being corrupted. There's a
certain integrity to that. What
happens here stays here, whether
Over or Under.

(MORE)

MULTIPLE CHARACTERS(cont'd)

It's the last real possibility of privacy, but purchased at a price too dear for any but the most desperate, insane, or truly perverse. And the categories have a way of converging. No one stops you from entering the Zone anymore. They don't have to. Come like shadows, so depart.

INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 62

Samm, on the floor below the counter, disconnects the Terminal from the data cable. He seems particularly nervous.

PAX

Everything's set?

SAMM

Yeah, everything's set. As long as we're ready when the Rabbit surfaces, the trap closes. The avatar won't get away.

PAX

Fine. Let's pack it out of here. It's time to do this.

She removes the sensor from the window. Samm hesitates.

SAMM

I think I should do a viral.

PAX

Now??

SAMM

Yeah, I don't know. The interface has been a little rubbery. Yesterday and today. I checked, and my count's down.

PAX

When was the last time you injected?

SAMM

Two weeks ago.

PAX

Jesus. How could you be down? I only inject once a year.

SAMM

Yeah, sure. That's it for most people. But I've had a harder time keeping my count up lately. I don't know. Maybe its my immune system. It's too damn strong? I don't know...

He has gone to his rucksack, removed an injector that looks like an Epi-Pen. He removes his shirt, lifts one arm, and holds the device under his armpit. He releases the catch and it makes a POP sound. He holds it steady for a few more seconds. Pax watches him uncertainly.

He places the device back in his rucksack, removes the black box, and carefully puts away his glass figurine. He places his Terminal in the bag as well. He avoids meeting Pax's gaze.

INT. VR WORKSHOP DAY - SCENE 63

Kaja enters the workshop, weaving past a number of DANCERS, to NN, who works on her plants.

NN

Are you okay?

KAJA

Where is-

The Programmer appears behind her.

THE PROGRAMMER

I'm here.

Kaja spins around.

KAJA

I got it.

THE PROGRAMMER

Let me see it.

KAJA

Wait. I couldn't understand it. I need you to extract the information about Adelle.

THE PROGRAMMER

Yes, of course.

KAJA

Promise me you'll do that. Right away. Right now.

THE PROGRAMMER

(regarding Kaja intently)

Okay. I'll do it right now.

Kaja holds out the orchid. The Programmer eagerly picks it up.

THE PROGRAMMER

I'll be right back.

She disappears. Kaja waits.

NN

Wow. Looks like you just made her fuckin' day!

Kaja doesn't answer.

NN

Right? I mean, I've never seen anyone give her something she *wants*...

The Programmer re-appears on the other side of the room, across from the dancers. They have the remainder of the conversation silently, without speaking, the dancers weaving in between them.

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)

You were right. Adelle has been taken by the Underground.

KAJA (V.O.)

What do they want from her?

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)
They probably think she has Nanscop
secrets. From her family.

KAJA (V.O.)
How can I find her?

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)
You have to understand something.
These aren't just kids playing
around with Patty Hearst sims.
This is a serious organization.
They're information terrorists.
They want to tear down everything
we believe in. Return to a state
of digital anarchy. They're
dangerous.

KAJA (V.O.)
I don't care. I have to help her.

Long pause.

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)
Charlie's information doesn't
include the whereabouts of your
friend. But he's traced her
through someone else. Someone who
knows her precise location.

KAJA (V.O.)
Who is it?

THE PROGRAMMER (V.O.)
They call him The Kid.

EXT. JUNGLE-LIKE FOREST DAY - SCENE 64

Pax and Samm hike through a dense forest.

SAMM
What do you think happens, Pax,
when a person--an individual person--
becomes information, or even just
a copy of information, and you
destroy it? Delete it?

PAX

I don't know what you mean.

SAMM

Do you call that death?

PAX

I don't know. If someone is already information, even before they're copied, or multiplied, or digitized, then can you call the disruption of their organic systems 'deletion'?

SAMM

I don't know, maybe you can. The residue, though... It's still information, but only for others. It doesn't have a relation to itself anymore. It can only be extracted for others. It's just data.

PAX

Fine, Samm. And what we get paid is just money. But without it we're nowhere. You can't pay for your daughter's treatment and I'm back on the monkey track.

SAMM

It's real up there, Pax. It's just as real as down here.

PAX

I know that, Samm, because I know that everything you do up there is connected to something down here. There's a causal chain. Most of the people outside the Zone don't know that. They only go Under to eat their fucking wheat bran and don't notice that anything changes until the milk goes bad.

(beat)

We don't have that luxury.

SAMM
 (heavily)
 No. No we don't.

Behind a thicket of bushes, Pax discovers a painted metal rod sticking out of the ground.

PAX
 Here we go.

Samm digs around the rod, immediately unearthing a pipe with an endcap. He unscrews the endcap and begins to reach inside, but stops.

SAMM
 Pax? Can you get the cable?

She shakes her head, unamused, but reaches in and fishes out the cable. Samm takes it, removes a protective plastic cover, and plugs it into his Terminal.

He interfaces with the Terminal and in several seconds he's gone Over.

Pax moves on through the forest.

INT. VR WORKSHOP DAY - SCENE 65

The dancers and NN are gone. Kaja stands over her basin of water, in which she is reflected. The programmer stands on the other side of the workbench, facing her.

KAJA
 How did The Kid get this
 information? Why does he know
 where Adelle is being held?

The Programmer dips her hand into the basin, scattering Kaja's reflection. She raises her hand up in the air, allowing the water to fall back in hard drops.

THE PROGRAMMER
 Information has a way of falling
 into the wrong hands. Maybe the
 terrorists made a mistake. Maybe
 he made a mistake. Either way, he
 has something that you need.

(MORE)

THE PROGRAMMER(cont'd)

And I think he'll trade for
Charlie's data. It's the one thing
he doesn't have. Here: this is
your key to Adelle.

She deposits Charlie's orchid in the water basin. Kaja picks
it up.

THE PROGRAMMER

Will you do it? Will you meet him
Over and exchange?

KAJA

Yes. I have to.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT DAY - SCENE 66

Kaja, connected to her Terminal, comes Under. She
immediately disconnects herself and rushes outside. She
hurriedly jogs away from the hut.

Behind another building, unseen by Kaja, Alsa watches her go,
curiously.

EXT. FOREST LATER - SCENE 67

Pax conceals a tiny but nasty-looking device on a tree.

On another tree, she adds another.

Reveal: it is pointed directly at The Kid's barn. From Pax's
POV, Kaja arrives and begins talking with The Kid near the
barn.

EXT. FIELD LATE AFTERNOON - SCENE 68

Maria approaches the solitary door. She holds up the rose
that she previously constructed. She opens the door and is
once again bathed in orange light. She steps through and
closes it behind her.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 69

Kaja and The Kid are in the middle of a conversation near the
barn. Kaja angrily stares at The Kid, who fidgets nervously.

KAJA

So you knew about Adelle all this time??

THE KID

You never told me you were looking for her. Maybe if you'd have trusted me...

KAJA

What do you know? Is she okay?

THE KID

I don't know much. But yeah, I think she's okay.

KAJA

And you know about who's holding her? The Underground?

THE KID

A little.

KAJA

You know how to get to her?

THE KID

I... Yes.

KAJA

And you'll trade me that information for Charlie's?

THE KID

What exactly did you get from him?

KAJA

I got the data from his entire project. Some kind of mind harvesting. I'll transfer it all to you if you'll go Over with me.

THE KID

You know I don't like to go Over. And it's not what you're expecting.

KAJA

I don't care! I've gotta find my only fucking friend!

THE KID

She... Got a message out. I received it. She knows you're here.

Kaja's eyes widen.

KAJA

She does?

THE KID

She doesn't want you to get involved. She wants you to leave the Zone.

KAJA

(almost whispering)

What?

THE KID

That's it. That's all I know.

Kaja narrows her eyes.

KAJA

How do you know all of this?

(beat)

What's your connection to the Underground??

She backs away from him.

THE KID

Now wait a minute...

She continues to back away. There are tears in her eyes.

THE KID

Okay, look... I'm gonna show you, okay?

KAJA

Show me what?

THE KID

I'm gonna show you everything.

She looks skeptical.

THE KID

Please. We can do it right now.

He takes a couple of steps backwards, then goes into the barn. After a moment, she follows him in.

He sits next to his Terminal. He holds out a connection cable to her. She takes it and sits down, facing him. He takes one for himself.

They both plug in and go Over.

INT. VR KID'S SPACE DAY - SCENE 70

Kaja and The Kid appear in a strange room.

KAJA

What is this place?

THE KID

It's a gateway.

He lifts up the front of his shirt, exposing his navel. He reaches, as if into his navel, and pulls out an orchid bud, attached to him by a fine thread.

Instantly, Maria materializes in the room, dropping to a crouch, pointing one arm each at The Kid and Kaja. A series of flashes go off in a circle around the two.

Reveal: at Maria's feet, on the floor, lies an ornate BOWL. She drops several rose petals into the bowl.

KAJA

What the fuck is happening? I can't move!

THE KID

(to Maria)

Who are you? How did you get in here?

She doesn't answer, but rises up and moves toward him. Kaja clenches her eyes closed, then opens them again. Maria turns to her.

MARIA

That's right. You can't go Under.

She holds her two hands flat, several inches apart, palms facing each other. Concentrating intensely, she steps right up to The Kid, who is frozen, and moves her hands closer until his hand--containing the orchid bud--is in between her palms. As her hands close around his, he grits his teeth in intense pain. She swipes the bud from his hand. It remains connected to his navel. As she moves away from him, the thread lengthens indefinitely.

She steps over to the far wall, where a GLASS PANEL is offset from the wall. She slowly holds the orchid bud up to it.

THE KID

(scared)

No! You'll expose them all!

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 71

Vector Bruno and TWO OTHER TAMMIES move purposefully through the forest. They scan everything carefully, clearly searching for something.

TAMMIE #1

Over here.

He indicates a white-painted nail, embedded in the trunk of a nearby tree.

All three cluster around it.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 72

Pax crouches, concealed among several bushes, on the edge of the farm's clearing. From her position she has a clear line of sight into the barn through its open doors, where The Kid and Kaja sit.

She uses her skinscreen to flip through several live video feeds of The Kid as well as several status screens of various constellated devices she has set.

She waits, watching The Kid like a hawk.

INT. VR THE KID'S SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 73

Maria uses the tethered orchid to activate the glass, which pulses with light.

The Kid's face is locked in an expression of horror.

Maria removes the orchid from the glass; it continues to pulse. With a gesture of her hand, she snaps it from the thread connecting it to The Kid. He howls and doubles over in pain, now on all fours on the floor.

She pops it into her mouth and it disappears.

Maria releases a white feather, blowing on it while whispering:

MARIA
(whispered)
Pax...

(A message sent.) The feather drifts downward, then disappears.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 74

Pax's skinscreen lights up with a text message from Samm/Maria: "Rabbit snared."

She immediately raises her gloved hand high up like an antenna and uses her thumb to depress a switch on the side of the glove.

Her skinscreen emits a slight BEEP and flashes: "Transmit Failed: Out of Range".

PAX
Shit!

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 75

Starter, walking through the forest, catches a glimpse of Pax behind trees and bushes ahead of him. He moves to one side in an attempt to make out who it is.

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 76

Vector and his companions have produced hand spades and are digging under the white nail.

They unearth a buried data cable.

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 77

Samm lies behind his own bushes, still connected and catatonic.

INT. BARN CONTINUOUS - SCENE 78

The Kid's and Kaja's bodies continue to sit next to each other, plugged in and catatonic.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 80

Pax leaps up and begins to sprint into the clearing, parallel to the barn. As she runs she holds her gloved hand out before her.

Suddenly the glove emits a slight BEEP and her skinscreen begins to flash rapidly.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 81

Starter frantically reaches behind him and draws an ancient REVOLVER from his pocket. He aims it at the running Pax and pulls the trigger, releasing a deafening sound.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 82

Pax's thumb closes over the activation button on her glove and depresses it.

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 83

Intercut CUs of three micro-rocket devices, placed by Pax. Each emits a rocket with a sharp pneumatic *whoosh* and a blast of oily air.

INT. BARN CONTINUOUS - SCENE 84

Two dart-like rockets hit The Kid's body. He immediately collapses onto the floor and begins to convulse violently.

EXT. FARM CONTINUOUS - SCENE 85

Pax collapses onto the ground, clutching her stomach with her gloved hand, gasping for air. Her left arm and hand is splayed out on the ground. Her skinscreen flashes: "Successful Injection", then a live video feed of The Kid's convulsing body.

INT. VR THE KID'S SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 86

A white feather floats down before Maria. She catches it in one hand. She then opens and flattens her hand completely, steps up to The Kid, and makes a cutting motion. Wide-eyed with fear, he flickers and then disappears.

Maria turns to Kaja. Kaja watches her transfixed. Maria hesitates, watches Kaja.

EXT. FOREST CONTINUOUS - SCENE 87

Vector produces a pair of rusty WIRE CUTTERS and maneuvers them into the hole they have dug around the data cable.

VECTOR

Return to the earth.

He violently severs the data cable.

INT. VR KID'S SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 88

Maria still faces Kaja, who appears terrified.

Maria freezes as if turned to glass. Kaja stares at her, confused. After a few moments, she flickers and disappears.

INT. BARN CONTINUOUS - SCENE 89

Kaja awakes in the barn. She immediately sees The Kid on the floor. He is no longer convulsing. She bends over him, breathing heavily. He stares up at her with fixed, open eyes. She touches his face, then feels his neck for a pulse. There isn't one.

He is dead.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 6: ADELLE

EXT. TRAILER DAY - SCENE 91

Six CORPS CRONIES emerge from some trees and trudge across the field toward Benjamin's trailer. He stands out front and heartily welcomes them all, clapping a few on the back, violently, causing them to wince with pain.

(He jokes with them about how pale and worn out they look. Isn't the Zone treating them well?)

INT. TRAILER LATER - SCENE A91

Benjamin sits at the back of the trailer, facing forward. He's connected via skinport to a data cable. In front of him sit the six Cronies, three on each side of a slim workbench, facing each other.

BENJAMIN

On my mark, in twos. Ready? Shoot
for the stars...

In pairs, the six Cronies go Over.

Benjamin goes over.

INT. VR WORKSHOP DAY - SCENE 92

The Programmer is seemingly alone in her Workshop. Her hand hovers over the basin of water. A steady stream of churning, bubbling data rumbles beneath her hand. It suddenly surges upward and touches her palm.

THE PROGRAMMER

It's open.

She turns around to face her listener. It is Benjamin. His six Corps Cronies stand behind him.

He nods. They all exit.

INT. VR THE KID'S SPACE LATER - SCENE A92

Benjamin and his six Corp cronies materialize within the room and immediately spread out and examine every detail: Maria's bowl of rose petals is still on the floor, the glass panel is still pulsing with light, but Maria and Kaja are missing.

CORP CRONY 1

No one's here.

Benjamin appears slightly perplexed.

BENJAMIN

We have access anyway. Everyone ready?

They nod. First Benjamin, then everyone else places their hand on the glass panel. They exit.

INT. VR CONCRETE HALLWAY - SCENE 93

A very long concrete corridor, like a bunker, filled with light smoke. At the end, against the wall, are several pieces of furniture: couches and chairs. A huge NETWORK MAP adorns one wall. A THICK BOOK rests on an end table. The room is otherwise austere.

Adelle, Davey, and three REBELS are seated, talking.

Benjamin and the Corps appear out of the smoke. They instantly subdue all of the others with bright flashes of light. They are frozen in suspended animation. One of the Corps distributes rose petals.

Throughout, Benjamin recites:

BENJAMIN

Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
(MORE)

BENJAMIN(cont'd)

In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

DAVEY (V.O.)

How did you get in here?

BENJAMIN

We just poked around a little.

Out of the smoke emerges The Programmer. Adelle's eyes narrow.

ADELLE (V.O.)

So you finally found me.

THE PROGRAMMER

Maybe. Haven't found myself yet
though.

She walks over to the book, reaches her hand inside it, and withdraws an orchid.

ADELLE (V.O.)

You must be one spiteful bitch. I
don't know what keeps you going.

THE PROGRAMMER

What keeps me going is order.
Messy code fucks with my head. I
can't help it.

ADELLE (V.O.)

Information is messy, until you
categorize it, prune it,
instrumentalize it-

THE PROGRAMMER

No it isn't. Noise is messy.
Information is the possibility of
order. Its what's left when you
throw away the garbage.

BENJAMIN

We all feel enlightened, thank you. Now I think we should stow the lady chat and get back to the task at hand. Do we have the information we need?

THE PROGRAMMER

Yes. Access points throughout the Zone, all their personal files, operation plans... It's all here. The only thing we don't have is The Kid's personal file.

BENJAMIN

The rabbit hunters have that. They don't get paid until they hand it over. So we're good on that count. Send the access points to the Under team.

She drops a white feather. It gracefully floats to the ground.

Benjamin half-lunges forward and viciously slices the air with his palm. One of the Rebels flickers out of existence. He repeats this with a second one.

He turns to Adelle.

THE PROGRAMMER

Wait. I think she can help us. If she'll cooperate.

BENJAMIN

That's not what the Board has requested.

EXT. JUNGLE-LIKE FOREST DUSK - SCENE 95

Samm frantically tries to repair his connection to the terminal, but it only flashes.

SAMM

(shouting to himself)
Dead! It's dead!!

We hear a crashing in the pushes.

Pax, mostly crawling on all fours, appears, gravely wounded.

PAX

Samm...

She crawls toward him.

PAX

Samm, I'm wounded Samm, I'm
wounded...

INT. VR CONCRETE HALLWAY CONTINUOUS - SCENE 94

Kaja walks through the smoke until she reaches the end of the hall. Everyone turns to look at her.

ADELLE (V.O.)

Kaja...?

KAJA

Adelle. I came for you.

ADELLE (V.O.)

What? You came?

KAJA

(to Programmer)

Why are you here?

(panicked)

What's happening?

Adelle's eyes widen.

PROGRAMMER

(to Benjamin)

Let her speak.

Benjamin waves his hand absently. Adelle stands up, slowly.

ADELLE

(to Kaja, understanding)

You lead them here. You got
through The Kid.

(pause, then growing
anger)

You were the worm. You burrowed
your way in. Innocent little Kaja.
Selfish little Kaja...

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

Of course you opened it to them.
It was probably my uncle's idea.

KAJA

(faltering)

It was my idea, I... I thought
you'd been kidnapped by the
Underground. I was worried...

ADELLE

Kidnapped? I *AM* the fucking
Underground!

(pause, then with deep
horror)

How could you do this??

Her fists balled up, she steps toward Kaja. Benjamin holds out his palm, pushing against her from a distance. She is borne backwards, struggles, falls to her knees, still facing Kaja.

ADELLE

(screaming)

You killed them! Do you know what
you destroyed?!! You killed them
all!

Benjamin steps up to Adelle, raises his hand to make the same chopping motion he used on the others.

Suddenly Charlie appears, running through the smoke toward the others, the fingers of one arm outstretched. A blast of light emanates from him, with beams spreading out and striking Benjamin, The Programmer, and several of the Corps. Disoriented, they fall to the ground, blind.

Blue light envelops Kaja, then Adelle. Blue pools of light remain for a moment where they were, but they have disappeared from the space.

Benjamin, beginning to recover, is horrified.

BENJAMIN

(shouting)

Who was that?! Who was that?! You
let them escape! Who was that??

EXT. JUNGLE-LIKE FOREST DUSK LATER - SCENE 96

Samm carries Pax out of the edge of the forest and down a dirt trail.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE NIGHT - SCENE 98

Inside Charlie's den, Adelle lies on a sofa, her eyes closed. Charlie sits near her, watching her.

ADELLE

I can still barely move.

CHARLIE

Your avatar's damaged. It's still reconstructing. You should suspend.

ADELLE

I want to know what happened!

CHARLIE

I got you out of there. That's all.

ADELLE

What happened to Davey and the others?

CHARLIE

Wiped. If they were at the primary hideout, they've been killed.

ADELLE

Davey was.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. Where are you?

ADELLE

I'm at a secondary.

CHARLIE

It isn't safe there. You should leave. Just in case the location is unencrypted in the Underground database they just stole.

ADELLE
What happened to Kaja?

CHARLIE
She escaped.

ADELLE
Why didn't you bring her here?

His face betrays anger.

CHARLIE
This is her fault. She betrayed
me, stole from me, before I could
get to you.

ADELLE
Why were you trying to get to me?
You're not Underground.

CHARLIE
No. I don't work for Nanscop
either.

ADELLE
All that makes you is one more
unknown wanker.

CHARLIE
I saved you from them.

ADELLE
You wouldn't have had to if Kaja
hadn't fucked everything up.

CHARLIE
She was looking for you. She
seemed to think you were kidnapped
by the Underground.

ADELLE
I know. She's an idiot.

CHARLIE
I don't think so.

ADELLE
She's naive. That makes her
stupid. At least in the Zone.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

There's no safety net here.
Everyone's on their own. You have
to get smart fast.

CHARLIE

Yes.

ADELLE

That's why I don't trust you.

CHARLIE

That's probably wise.

ADELLE

But I need your help. So you tell
me what you want from me.

CHARLIE

I want to do a neural scan.

ADELLE

Surface or Depth?

CHARLIE

Depth. Everything. Into a virtual
substrate.

ADELLE

That's mind harvesting. No fucking
way.

CHARLIE

There's something in your brain
that Nanscop wants. I want to know
what it is.

ADELLE

I'm sure you do. Thing is, nobody
can decrypt it. Not even the
Underground. Not yet, anyway.
They've been trying.

CHARLIE

The Kid is dead. Without him, the
Underground isn't underground
anymore. That game's over. You
need to trust someone.

(gently)

You need help.

He places a hand on her forehead. She tenses.

CHARLIE

You carry a great burden, but it is the burden we all bear. The virtual. It's the weight of everything. It's not behind us, something we selected from in the past in order to get to the present of our choice. It is always real, always co-existent with the present. It is memory, our every experience, every potential experience. Always focused to a single point, the present, the actual. You know that, don't you?

ADELLE

Yes...

CHARLIE

It's a lot of work squeezing the whole of the virtual, all potential happenings, into every actual moment. It's the entire work of the mind, of life... But some of us feel this more than others. It is your cross to bear.

His voice is soothing. She is visibly relaxing.

CHARLIE

Disengage now... Suspend. Repair.

ADELLE

Okay...

She goes limp, closes her eyes.

INT. SHACK NIGHT - SCENE 97

Pax lies on the floor of the shack, in tremendous pain, gritting her teeth. A large section of her abdomen is exposed. Blood is everywhere. A rough cloth bandage has been tied around her. She remains calm.

Samm is in a panic, floundering around the shack. He brings her a can of water, spilling some on the way.

SAMM

Pax, here. Some water. Pax, I don't know what to do!

PAX

Check the wound. You have to inspect it.

SAMM

Oh Jesus!

He unties her makeshift bandage; she winces, causing him to wince. He uses a second rag to daub up the blood.

SAMM

I think you lost a lot of blood, Pax...

She nods grimly.

Samm reveals a BULLET WOUND. He tries to daub up the blood from it; more seeps out. He is visibly shaken by the wound, but tries to steady his hands.

PAX

See if the bullet went all the way through...

He traces down to a second wound on the side of her back, an exit wound.

SAMM

(shakily)

I think it went clean through.

PAX

Okay. Use the graph pads. Seal them up.

SAMM

I don't... I don't know how...

PAX

Samm, please... You *do* know, you can do this!

There are tears in Samm's eyes. He removes several dark, rubbery PADS from Pax's kit. He tears open a sterilized bandage and applies it to the entry wound.

He then applies a thin, dark layer of material over it. It adheres to her skin. He then applies a layer of thick salve around the edges. Meanwhile he talks haltingly:

SAMM

Okay. First the white pad, right?
Okay... Everything was working,
Pax. I got the information from
The Kid, just like the contract. I
captured him. Something happened
to the line. The connection just
died. Not mine, the data line...
I think someone sabotaged it, Pax.
I'm so sorry! I did everything I
could...

He repeats the procedure on her exit wound.

SAMM

Pax, Pax.. Are you gonna be okay?

Pax checks her skinscreen, with great difficulty, through the pain. She can't focus on it.

PAX

You look...

He regards her palm. It displays a list of health indicators and warnings.

SAMM

I don't know... It looks like
elevated levels of... Low white
blood cell count. I don't know
what this means...

(pause)

I have to get you out of the Zone!

She blindly grasps for him, grabs his forearm.

PAX

Samm... You can't move me. I have
to stay here. You've done all you
can. The green injection. Give me
half of the green.

He retrieves his injector and loads it with the vial indicated.

He injects her.

PAX

I need to sleep now, Samm. It's gonna be okay. You did everything right...

(drifting off)

It's gonna be okay... The orchids... Are in bloom...

He drifts off to sleep, Samm nervously watching over her.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE NIGHT - SCENE 99

Adelle is pseudo-sleeping on Charlie's sofa. He slowly, quietly steps up to her, standing over her. He holds a GLASS DISC above her head. Light silently flashes through it, illuminating her in a flash.

Charlie backs away from her, turns to leave the room.

ADELLE

You son of a bitch.

He spins around, surprised.

ADELLE

You scanned me!

CHARLIE

Only a surface scan! Just to see-

She leaps up.

ADELLE

You DO work for them, don't you??

CHARLIE

Hey now, calm down...

ADELLE

You are one deceitful piece of garbage!

CHARLIE

(angered)

I don't work for anyone!

ADELLE

I can't trust you. I can't trust anybody!

CHARLIE

Don't make yourself into such a victim!

(pause)

Look at you! React, react, react!
You need to stop reacting to others
and start *acting*! Make your own
present!

ADELLE

That's real easy for you to say.
My parameters for making anything
have already been set by someone
else. My "potentiality" has
already been determined.

CHARLIE

That's nonsense! Defeatist!

She flickers once, trying to transport herself away, but
Charlie reaches out and grabs her arm.

CHARLIE

What are you doing??

ADELLE

(desperate)

You don't know what it's like to be
a hostage to data inside your own
head! You're just information to
everybody else. You can only count
on yourself. And you don't even
really have that.

Charlie let's go of her.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I can't hold you here.
Please stay.

She shakes her head.

CHARLIE

Please?

She flickers and disappears.

INT. CINDERBLOCK HUT NIGHT

Adelle frantically scoops up her belongings, stuffs them in her backpack, and rushes out into the night.

EXT. TOWN NIGHT

Kaja scampers up to a crumbling block of cement, calls to Alsa, who is about ten yards away, in a sharp whisper.

KAJA

Alsa!

ALSA

Kaja...?

KAJA

Alsa, I need your help! It's awful. Something terrible has happened. They're trying to find me.

ALSA

I know!

KAJA

I need you to find me a place to hide. Where no one would think to look...

ALSA

Okay. Yes, I know a place. They'd never think to look there.

KAJA

You'll help me?

ALSA

Yes.

EXT. HILLSIDE NIGHT - SCENE 101

Vector Hugo and a number of Tammies sit on a hillside. Several torches illuminate Vector. He delivers the following speech, his face continually emerging and receding into the darkness according to the flickering of the firelight.

VECTOR

A sister asked me today: Why do we cooperate with the Corps and the scientists and the tourists? Why don't we just unplug them? And I say to you: the time may soon come for unplugging. Humanity's umbilical cord will be de-electrified. But I say this to you today: our liberation must start here, now, within us. You must accept in your heart that you are tied to a greater network. This is our Omphalos. We share something, my brothers and sisters. We share cells. We share this space. WE WILL NOT BECOME INFORMATION. Binary chains do not hold us together, but tear us apart. You must not place your faith in machines, for they will always drive us further from our goal. We must open our hearts instead to the healing power, the redemptive power, of the Tide that carries us all, that deposited us here and will sweep us up again. And what we leave behind for the archeologists

(holding up hard disk)

will not be us, will not represent us, will not capture us.

(growing in intensity)

The fruits of our labor will not be written in ones and zeros. The fruits of our labor will not be written behind our backs and beyond our vision. The fruits of our labor must be given back to the Tide. And the time is coming, brothers and sisters, to take this message to the others, to all others. The time is coming when we will have to pull the plug, to prevent our brothers and sisters from profaning themselves.

(MORE)

VECTOR(cont'd)

Their bodies must no longer be the surface of inscription, for they write only lies upon themselves. By the grace of the Tide we will save them, I promise you now.

(pause)

A woman has come to us, come to the Zone. She is no ordinary human. She links Overspace with Underspace. Perhaps she does not know her own powers, or the danger that she represents. If we are not careful, she will make everything virtual. But she may also be the instrument of our salvation. For this, to bring this about, we must prepare ourselves. We must be ready. *Get down on your knees!*

(pause, then continuing softly, reverently)

Get down on your knees and listen to the Tide, Life Force of the Zone. They think it eats their bodies, but I tell you now it only eats their data. They flee to the virtual, but they cannot flee their ultimate fate. But us... the Zone cannot hurt us. Accept the healing power and you will be saved, you will be purified. Your body will be made whole again, my brothers and sisters. The plague of data will end in the fire of our faith.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 7: RUINS

INT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 111

Pax wakes up from a deep sleep. She looks parched and ashen.

Samm, sitting on the other side of the shack, leaps to life, immediately at her side.

SAMM

Pax... You're awake...

PAX

(grimacing in pain)

Oh... God...

SAMM

Here, drink water!

He gives her water. She half-heartedly tries to sip it, sputters.

SAMM

No, you need water! As much as you can drink! God, you need water! For the blood count, or whatever...

PAX

(hoarse)

What if I have to pee?

SAMM

Uh... Yeah. I've got a pan you can use. You can't move. No. Just tell me, and I'll go outside.

PAX

Samm.

SAMM

Yeah?

PAX

How long... Have you slept at all?

SAMM

No.

PAX

Have you gone Over?

He shakes his head.

SAMM

No. The line's dead here too. I think maybe somebody cut it.

PAX

Where can you go?

SAMM

Nowhere until you're better. I
can't leave you here.

She doesn't have the strength to argue. She weakly shakes
her head.

PAX

But the rabbit's data...

SAMM

I know. Maria would have gone into
a protective sub-routine when the
line went dead. I think it's safe,
but I have to go in a back way, to
get back to her. I can't do that
until you're safe.

PAX

Samm... Sam, I realized something.
That data... It was The Kid's...

SAMM

The rabbit's.

PAX

And he was their firewall. What do
you think they're going to use that
data for?

SAMM

I don't know. That isn't any of
our business.

PAX

(drifting away)

Maybe... Maybe it should be... I
don't think you should give them
the data, Samm...

She closes her eyes and drifts back to sleep.

EXT. CULVERT DAY - SCENE 112

Adelle camps at the mouth of a dried up culvert. She has an old, patched up SLEEPING BAG and a few pots and pans. The remains of a campfire smoulder nearby.

She dumps some extra water out of the pot and rolls up her sleeping bag. She looks around for something else to do, but there is nothing.

She climbs to the top of the culvert and sits, her legs dangling over her campsite. She looks forlorn, lonely, and desperate.

ADELLE (V.O.)

Mum tried to call me when the attack happened. I was Over, at work. She didn't have time, or she forgot, to tag it "emergency" so it didn't come straight through. I got it as a message a few minutes later, after it was all over. The bot was confused; the message wasn't fully formed. In the voicestream, I could hear Dad screaming somewhere behind her. That was it before their flesh disintegrated in a cloud of nanoparticles. I was sixteen.

(pause)

Afterwards I moved to the US, where my Aunt lived. When she and her husband became my legal guardians, it was like being adopted by Nanscop. They got me a job there. I thought I was working for them. Of course there was no way to know that they were working on me.

In the distance, she hears a tuba, followed by an even more distant cymbal crash.

EXT. FOREST LATER - SCENE 113

Adelle approaches the Recorder Team, amongst dense undergrowth.

ADELLE
(quietly)
Hey!

The cymbalist hears her and turns to face her.

ADELLE
I'm Adelle. Has Charlie left you a
message? About someone called
Davey? I need to know if he's...
If they killed him.

CYMBALIST
No message from Charlie. But
someone else is looking for you.

He fishes in his pocket, takes out a crumpled piece of paper,
hands it to her.

CYMBALIST
That's where you can find him.

EXT. MAILBOX ROAD DAY - SCENE A113

Adelle walks past a solitary MAILBOX on the side of an old
dusty road. No buildings are in sight. She inspects it
briefly and continues on.

EXT. WINDMILL DAY - SCENE 114

Adelle approaches an old windmill. There is no one within
view. She steps up to it, walks around it, then begins to
walk aimlessly toward a large tree nearby.

The Painter suddenly comes running out of the forest, toward
her. He's carrying his easel in one hand and a half-finished
canvas in another. He's wildly flailing his arms in order to
attract her attention. He continues this long after she has
turned to face him.

THE PAINTER
Hello! Attendez! Don't go! I'm
coming!

He lets his painting drop into the grasses and continues to
run toward her. He finally reaches her, out of breath.

THE PAINTER

I didn't know if you'd come, you see! I was up the hill, painting... C'est tres difficile to get a message out in the Zone, you know. No confirmation of receipt!

ADELLE

What do you want?

THE PAINTER

Want? Eh? What we all want, I suppose! Good conversation, good wine... Maybe a well-trained dog!

ADELLE

Am I supposed to be your conversationalist or your dog?

THE PAINTER

What? Ha! Yes, clever, good!

ADELLE

(unamused)

I don't want to be either. Unless you have news about Davey, I'm takin' off...

THE PAINTER

Davies? Well, I haven't heard-

ADELLE

Davey. I don't think you can help me.

She turns and walks briskly toward the forest.

THE PAINTER

But... But... I need you to test the Interface... To see if I'm right...

She walks past his painting, lying in the grasses. She glances at it and freezes. She instinctively takes a step back. Though unfinished and a bit impressionistic, it is clearly a painting of her uncle.

She stalks back to the bewildered Painter.

ADELLE

How do you know my uncle?!

THE PAINTER

Your uncle! I've just met you!
Already you are talking about
extended family!

ADELLE

Your painting. It's of my uncle.
When did you see him?

THE PAINTER

Oh, yes, this is extraordinary!
Yes, truly marvelous... Just as I
thought! It's the interface...

ADELLE

Did he come here? To the Zone?

THE PAINTER

I really couldn't say, mon cherie.
I've never met the man in my whole
life!

ADELLE

You're painting him!

THE PAINTER

Yes, yes, that's just it! I mean,
it's right out of your brain, isn't
it?

She grows cold.

ADELLE

What do you mean by that?

THE PAINTER

The Parthenon! Here! Right here;
follow me!

He sets off across the field, practically wading through the
tall grasses. She follows.

They arrive at a crumbling cement foundation with several
large upright slabs.

THE PAINTER

It's here.

ADELLE

What is? This is just a pile of ruins. The whole Zone is like this.

THE PAINTER

Oui! You see, you've really hit upon it! The ocean in a teardrop, yes? It's a beautiful place to paint, you see?

ADELLE

No.

THE PAINTER

You are standing, mon cherie, in the center of a feedback loop.

She stares at him.

THE PAINTER

Now I have heard, through *certain channels of communication*, that quite a few people are looking for you. I thought it wouldn't hurt to add one more to the stack. My reasoning, simply, is this: there's something in your brain that people want. And some of it is already out, so to speak... Out in the wild, in the landscape. You wouldn't necessarily see it everywhere, but there are certain points, certain nodes where two informational systems collide. At least two! Feeding into each other. Over and Under. The Interface.

ADELLE

You're fucking nuts, man. "The Interface"? Sounds like a great game, lots of fun. But we're Under now, okay? This is the real fuckin' world, and the Corps just killed my friends.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

So unless you can help me attack those fuckers, you're just wasting my time.

THE PAINTER

(deflated)

Oh, well... I thought you might be excited...

She grimaces.

THE PAINTER

I thought you could make sense of it. Give me some answers.

ADELLE

I don't have any answers.

THE PAINTER

I think you do. You're written all over this place.

ADELLE

I don't know why, okay?! I don't know what this means!

In exasperation, she turns, takes a few steps away as if to leave, and kicks one of the cement slabs.

THE PAINTER

(softly)

And don't you want to find out, then?

She turns back and stares at him in silence.

THE PAINTER

I'm sorry. It was just an idea. It is all I can do. I leave it in your hands.

He turns with a wave and begins to walk back toward the windmill.

ADELLE

What idea?

THE PAINTER

Oh, nothing, nothing. I just thought, you know, if you could harness the feedback loop for one of those brain simulation thingys, it could... Well, it could unlock something...

ADELLE

You mean a V-sim?

THE PAINTER

V? Well, I suppose so. Never done one myself. But my niece sent me some information once... You can find the hidden data in your brain, no? The parts locked away in the landscape, eh? Well, if I remember right, and that's by no means certain, they work by harnessing local feedback loops... The whole simulation bit is just to set up a loop. Well, here we are in loop of just that sort, and you're part of it somehow, and so maybe... Maybe whatever would come out of your head would fill in the missing pieces here, explain the changes... Les changements de contours. Perfectionnement. Ba; it's all just an old artist's fancy, you know...

ADELLE

You think doing a V-sim here could unlock whatever's stored in my brain?

She taps her skull.

THE PAINTER

Oh, who knows, really? I don't. It might not work, eh? Too dangerous, probablement. You'd need one of those people trained to run the simulation, right?

ADELLE

A V-Therapist.

THE PAINTER

Hmmm? Yes, yes. And finding one of those in the Zone is probably not a likelihood, eh? I just got carried away, pay me no mind!

ADELLE

No. There is someone.

THE PAINTER

What? Who do you speak of?

ADELLE

A V-Therapist. I know a V-Therapist, or at least someone training to become one. She's here, in the Zone.

THE PAINTER

Now you're pulling my leg! It's too absurd, too convenient...

ADELLE

No, it's not convenient at all. I hate her fucking guts.

INT. P-TOWN HUT DAY - SCENE 115

Kaja inspects a tiny cement room: her new abode. She tries to clean up some of the scraps and litter strewn about the place. She fights with the door, which won't quite close all the way. She sits down in frustration and stares out the window, miserable.

Outside, on the balcony atop a large TOWER in the middle of P-Town, Alsa is struggling with a heavy box hoisted on her shoulder with a rope. Kaja watches closely, baffled.

EXT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 116

Samm sits at the base of a tree outside of the shack, watching over it.

The crackling of twigs can be heard. Samm becomes more alert, cranes his neck to see who or what it may be that is approaching.

Benjamin Hugo emerges from the trees. Samm tenses. Benjamin sees him, holds up his hand.

BENJAMIN

I found a "Lucky Rabbit's Foot".

SAMM

Uh. Shit. "Not so lucky for the owner."

BENJAMIN

I'm your contact.

SAMM

I thought you might come...

BENJAMIN

Yes, it's rather uncommon, but as you might imagine, our mutual client has some concerns. It seems there were two parts to your contract. An Over-Under hit and the securing of certain data...

SAMM

The information is secure. Something happened. We were interrupted.

BENJAMIN

What happened?

SAMM

My partner was shot.

Benjamin is surprised.

BENJAMIN

Well good mornin' to 'ya!

SAMM

Excuse me?

BENJAMIN

Is he okay?

SAMM

She. She isn't in good shape. She needs medical attention.

BENJAMIN

I think I can help with that. One of those yokels the Corp sent is trained as a medic. I could send him.

SAMM

Yes. Yes, please do!

BENJAMIN

I think our employer is quite firm on one particular point, however: there can be no further delays. Our team has been rounded up far too long as it is...

SAMM

Yeah, but... I can't go Over. The line's been cut. And I have to look after my partner.

Benjamin scrutinizes him for a long moment.

BENJAMIN

Let me propose a little narrative to you. You come with me to my terminal. When we get there, I send help for your partner. You go Over and get the information, thus completing your contract. We all help get her out of the Zone, like one big extended, dysfunctional family. Finally, we all go back to our lives, playing electric bumble frisbee to our hearts' content. What do you say to that?

SAMM

Hold on.

He goes to the shack, sticks his head inside the door. Pax is awake.

PAX

I heard. It's okay to leave me here for awhile, Samm. I'm fine. You don't have any other choice.

He hesitates a moment, then agrees:

SAMM

Okay. I'll be back soon.

He backs out of the shack. Benjamin approaches him, hand outstretched.

BENJAMIN

Shall we, then, go into the story business together?

SAMM

Yeah.

At Benjamin's insistence, they shake hands.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE DAY - SCENE 117

Adelle sweeps through Charlie's living room, animated, all business.

ADELLE

I need you to find Kaja for me!

CHARLIE

(amused)

Well, what use do you have for the wrecking ball?

ADELLE

I'm stuck in the middle, between Overspace and Underspace. I think she can help unlock my brain.

CHARLIE

Feedback. Fine. I'll bring her here, and we can make music.

He sits down at the piano, prepares to play.

ADELLE

No. I don't want to be part of your damn experiment!

He glares at her.

ADELLE

Listen. I'm asking for your help. But I'm going to do this my way.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

As myself. Not as a brain in a jar.

CHARLIE

You have to enter the network if you want a new perspective on yourself.

ADELLE

Just find Kaja and set up a meeting. Under. In the real fucking world. I'm gonna do this alone.

CHARLIE

Alone! You can't get anywhere alone. You're nothing alone! Just a container for data! A folder!

She glares at him.

ADELLE

(in a low, cutting voice)
Don't tell me about being alone.

INT. TRAILER LATER - SCENE 118

Inside Benjamin's trailer, Samm plugs in and goes Over.

INT. THE KID'S SPACE - SCENE 119

Samm, as an avatar that resembles himself, appears in The Kid's space, carefully inspecting it. He follows a trail of role petals on the ground. He inspects the glass plate: it is now cracked; he traces the odd pattern with his finger.

Clouds in the sky. He traces a similar pattern with his hand in the air.

SAMM (V.O.)

An avatar has instincts. If you let them, they will operate autonomously. Most of the time this means defending themselves when their creator is Under. For most people it doesn't go much further.

(MORE)

SAMM(cont'd)

But information accrues, layer upon layer, every time you perform an action. The residue, the pattern that emerges once all conscious intentionality has been removed: that's instinct. Habit without will, a certain way of doing things. You don't consciously construct it, but you sculpt it every minute you are doing something. It can go to waste, or you can choose to trust it. It's like trusting yourself in another person. I trust Maria, and if I've done everything right, her instincts will be good, even if she has no will. That's how we find each other.

EXT. MYSTERIOUS YARD DAY - SCENE A119

Samm approaches a mysterious WINDOW. Inside, Maria is sitting, frozen, her chin resting upon her fist in "The Thinker"s pose.

Someone clears his throat behind Samm. He spins around. Charlie stands behind him.

CHARLIE

Your avatar was getting lonely. I was wondering when you'd come!

Instantly, Samm exits.

INT. TRAILER LATER - SCENE 120

Samm comes Under. Benjamin watches him closely.

SAMM

I couldn't get to the data. It's being guarded by someone.

BENJAMIN

Who?

SAMM

He goes by "Charlie." He's very active in the Zone.

BENJAMIN

(quietly, thinking)

I think I've encountered the fellow
before. He's a big man here.
Knows the terrain.

SAMM

I need your help.

BENJAMIN

Just say the word, and daggers will
fly.

Samm gives him a strange look.

SAMM

I need your team to attack. I'll
show you the entry vector. It'll
have to be at a very precise time.

BENJAMIN

I can round up these halfwits in
less than ten minutes.

SAMM

No. Tomorrow morning. I have to
see Pax, and prepare. I'll find
another terminal, closer to her.
I'll be ready. All the details are
already waiting for you Over.

BENJAMIN

(reluctant)

That's a long time to kick up my
heels.

SAMM

I can recommend some fun Zone games
if you like.

Benjamin raises one eyebrow slightly, but says nothing.

SAMM

Flick the tic: that's a good one.
Maybe you wouldn't enjoy that one,
though. Disintegrating body.
Loses its novelty after awhile...

EXT. FOREST LATER - SCENE 121

Samm hikes through the forest, on his way back to the shack.

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 122

Kaja sits under a tree in the forest. Adelle appears from out of the undergrowth, stalking directly up to Kaja. Kaja watches her apprehensively. Long pause as they regard each other.

KAJA

I'm so sorry...

ADELLE

I don't care.

KAJA

I thought I was helping you.

ADELLE

(suppressing anger)

I don't want to talk about that.

Kaja waits.

ADELLE

I may need you for something.

KAJA

I don't know what I can do... I've been trying to think of something...

ADELLE

V-Therapy. That's what you've been training for, right?

KAJA

Yeah...

ADELLE

How good are you?

KAJA

I don't know. I'm getting better...

ADELLE

But you know how to set up and
guide Sims, right? On your own?

KAJA

Yes.

ADELLE

Could you do it here?

KAJA

(meekly)

Wherever there's a terminal and
some Overspace with enough raw
material.

ADELLE

Yeah, well, there's plenty of raw
material.

KAJA

What kind of Sim?

ADELLE

Kaja, my brain is a fucking petri
dish. It's crammed full of data
put there by Nanscop. I need to
set up a V-Sim to try to retrieve
it.

KAJA

What kind of data?

ADELLE

I don't know. No one knows, except
maybe my asshole uncle. But I have
a feeling its bigger than him.
They want me pretty fucking bad.

Kaja considers this.

KAJA

Why... Why did you leave without
telling... Without telling me?

ADELLE

I found out the truth, Kaja. Davey
had infiltrated the Nanscop
records.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

He found something called "Abderitan 3". It's a secret nanofabrication project. A lot of their research happens here, in the Zone. According to Davey, I'm a central node in the project. When he found out that I don't know anything about it, he offered to investigate if I'd help him. That's why I came to the Zone. We couldn't let anyone at Nanscop know where I'd gone, so I didn't tell anybody.

(pause)

I'm sorry you didn't know. I should have told you.

KAJA

I was so worried...

ADELLE

Well, anyway, it didn't work: Davey couldn't figure out what they put in my brain. It's locked away.

KAJA

So what chance would I have?

ADELLE

It's a crackpot theory somebody here has. That there's an Over-Under feedback loop here that's somehow keyed to my mind. He thinks we can harness it to open the "landscape." I don't know. What do you think?

KAJA

V-Sim is all about topography. Unraveling neural networks into flat space.

She demonstrates by pressing her two palms together, her fingers pointing upward, then fanning them out, forming a flat surface with her wrists still touching.

KAJA

The neuronal data is reconfigured in Overspace so it can be navigated.

(MORE)

KAJA(cont'd)

The whole process relies on feedback loops. If there's already a feedback current working in Overspace, maybe it could help. I don't know...

Adelle nods.

ADELLE

Okay, I trust you. Can we do this?

Kaja nods vigorously.

ADELLE

How soon?

KAJA

I should be ready by tomorrow.

Adelle produces a crumpled piece of paper and an old pencil. She begins to draw a map.

ADELLE

I'll show you where to meet.

INT. SHACK NIGHT - SCENE 123

Pax and Samm sit together. He has cooked her some STEW. She eats it very slowly and without gusto.

SAMM

Are you sure you want to go through with this?

PAX

It's dangerous, Samm. I don't want something to happen to you.

SAMM

We have another option: get the hell out of here.

PAX

I wouldn't fault you if that's what you wanted to do.

SAMM

I'm willing to take a risk. Now that you're getting better.

(MORE)

SAMM(cont'd)

Especially now that I can go Over here.

PAX

You're sure?

SAMM

I checked again while I was cooking. It's definitely back on.

PAX

That worries me, Samm.

SAMM

Why? It a *good* thing!

PAX

Yeah, but *why* did it go off, and then come back on?

SAMM

Look, you need to eat your food. I cooked that to give you strength. Straight from the dubious supplies of Benjamin Hugo. Come on, at this rate it'll be breakfast before you finish. Take a big bite! Scoop it up!

PAX

(unconvincing)

It's delicious, Samm. Thank you. It's just hard for me to eat.

(pause)

Someone's manipulating us with the data connection.

SAMM

Oh, come on... There isn't exactly industrial level service out here. What do you want? Hey... Welcome...

PAX AND SAMM

To the Zone.

She smiles faintly.

PAX

We've been through a lot together,
Rabbit Catcher.

SAMM

Yeah, but this is the most
important thing we've ever been...
ever been involved in.

She nods.

PAX

It might ruin us.

SAMM

It might.

They contemplate this for a moment. Pax smiles.

With a flourish of her spoon she scoops up an overflowing
spoonful of the stew. With a wry grin, she takes the bite.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 8: SIMULATION

INT. TRAILER DAY - SCENE A113

Benjamin and his six Corporate cronies sit huddled together
in the trailer, connected to the multi-terminal.

Benjamin checks his WATCH, an old wind-up variety.

BENJAMIN

Ready?

They all nod.

BENJAMIN

Over in five.

He counts down the remaining second with his fingers.

EXT. MARIA IMPRISONED HOUSE NIGHT - SCENE 131

WS: Side of building. Inside, through the window, Maria is visible as before. Samm stands in the foreground, but faces away from the window.

In a strange CORRIDOR, Benjamin and the Corps rush forward en masse, then leap into the air.

Near the window, Charlie appears and runs in the opposite direction.

Reveal: to the left of the building in which Maria is imprisoned stands another building. A light goes on in an identical window.

The camera moves into and through Maria's window.

Samm and Maria in the same room. He touches her arm and she comes to life, stands up. She holds Samm's hands for a moment.

Samm disappears: they have merged.

Behind them, through a window, Benjamin and the Corps fall in slow motion past the window toward an unseen space outside and below.

Maria floats upward. We see that there is no roof to the structure that contains her. She floats toward the open sky.

In the open air, still floating, she follows a wispy trail of smoke, tracing it with her hands as she continues to rise.

SAMM (V.O.)

Each of us is a puppet, each of us
has our strings. A puppeteer
controls others only at the cost of
making her presence known. Instead
of tugging on strings, I follow
them.

Benjamin and the Corps stand in a completely empty room. Benjamin looks disgusted.

BENJAMIN

Not a soul in sight.

He looks at the baffled Corps.

BENJAMIN

Now what do you suppose that means?

Maria emerges inside the same corridor that Benjamin and the Corps previously ran down. She walks forward, exploring.

She comes to a dark intersection, chooses a direction, and passes through black curtains, disappearing.

EXT. WINDMILL RUINS DAY - SCENE 132

Adelle and Kaja cross the open field to the cement ruins. Adelle carries a small portable terminal with her.

They reach the cement slab and hunt around for the data cable.

ADELLE

The Painter said there was a connection here.

KAJA

Here.

She finds a buried data pipe. She removes the cap and draws out a data cable. Adelle connects her terminal.

ADELLE

You set everything up?

KAJA

Yeah. I found the Overspace. It's keyed to this location. It's sort of an alternate version. Almost like it's Under.

ADELLE

And what'll I do there?

KAJA

Just start by concentrating on something. Maybe related to Nanscop. Some thought-pattern as a starting place. From there we'll just keep unfolding, following any traces that seem promising.

ADELLE
What if nothing seems promising?

KAJA
It's your brain. We can go
wherever you want.

ADELLE
I don't think it's too pretty in
there. You won't like it.

Pause.

KAJA
(softly)
Maybe I'll like it.

Adelle looks at her sharply. She hands Kaja a cable, and
plugs one in herself.

They each take a deep breath and go Over.

EXT. VR RUINS DAY - SCENE 133

Adelle's Uncle steps up into the center of the ruins. Adelle
appears there too. He approaches her. He stands behind her
and runs his fingers through her hair.

ADELLE
(to Kaja)
My Uncle.

Kaja steps forward.

KAJA
Concentrate on his edges. I'll
unfold from there.

Pulses of light.

Row of broken porcelain shards (rack focus down rows, moving
away from camera).

Adelle's Uncle and Aunt stand together, arms around each
other.

ADELLE
My Aunt.

UNCLE
We're your parents now.

INT. VR KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Inside a suburban kitchen. Aunt turns on a gas burner. She fills a tea pot with water, puts it on the burner. She smiles toward Adelle, who sits at a small breakfast table, watching her.

AUNT
Rest. You need to stay inside.

Exterior of house.

Adelle sits by a window, looking outside into the bright sun.

Exterior of house.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Adelle's Uncle utters a collection of slogans, one after the other:

UNCLE
God gives all things to industry.

Your life begins at the nano-scale.

Little strokes fell great oaks.

Feel like something's tugging you
Under? Nothing should pull you out
of your life. Make those
Underrupts a thing of the past.

Great estates may venture more,
But little boats should keep near
shore.

Re-configure your body.

A small leak will sink a great
ship.

Uncle approaches Adelle.

UNCLE

There's an opening at Nanscop.
I've convinced them to give you a
shot. It's in my division. It's a
very rare opportunity. You're
extremely lucky.

Davey appears.

DAVEY

Your desires, your preferences,
they don't belong to you. They
didn't come from you. Until you get
past them, you cannot understand
how you've been assembled.

Adelle walks along the ground, revealing a trail of further
porcelain shards, and various toys.

Kaja closes her eyes, concentrating, unfolding.

INT. VR BEDROOM CONTINUOUS

POV: staring up at a white ceiling. A bright lamp shines
down toward the camera. Uncle appears, looking down,
examining Adelle.

Reverse: Adelle lies in bed, her eyes closed. Her Aunt sits
down on the bed next to her, covering her up with a blanket.

AUNT

It's okay, honey. Just sleep...

EXT. VR CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND CONTINUOUS

An old children's playground. The camera moves through old
tire swings and then slowly begins to travel up a large RED
ROCKET.

Underwater: calm.

Kaja closes her eyes, concentrating, unfolding.

Strobe light into camera.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Adelle's Uncle and Aunt stand in a new location.

UNCLE

We're going to go camping this summer. Hike the Coyote trail.

ADELLE

We've done this before.

Kaja appears in a new location.

KAJA

A pattern. A ripple.

INT. VR BEDROOM CONTINUOUS

Adelle lies in her bed; jib up to reveal that she is connected to many wires.

Above her, peering through a large optical apparatus, is her Uncle. He examines her carefully.

UNCLE

Just concentrate. What do you see?
Do you remember our trip last summer?

A look of horror comes over Adelle's face.

Her Uncle closes the iris on his lens.

EXT. SHACK DAY - SCENE 135

Vector Bruno approaches the shack. Pax appears in the doorway, alarmed. Behind her, Samm is Over.

VECTOR

Hello!

PAX

Vector Bruno. So nice of you to visit us again.

VECTOR

I heard that you were unwell. I wouldn't wish to neglect a neighbor.

PAX

I'll be okay. Thanks.

Long pause. He looks past her, trying to catch a glimpse of Samm.

VECTOR

Is our friend enjoying the conveniences of modern living?

PAX

(carefully)

The data streams around here seem to have a way of turning themselves off and then back on again.

VECTOR

Poof!

PAX

What?

VECTOR

Poof! That's the metaphorical sound of data ephemerality.

She seems unimpressed.

VECTOR

It strikes me as bad for one's health to rely too heavily on a constant stream of data.

PAX

I agree. But a lot of things are bad for one's health.

VECTOR

Health risks of a different order.

Long pause.

VECTOR
Have you considered making
improvements to this place?

PAX
Improvements? What, like razing it
to the ground?

VECTOR
I was thinking of a rope swing.

PAX
(genuinely curious)
A rope swing?

VECTOR
(pointing to a tree)
Yeah, right there would be perfect.
Using the slope of the hill to your
advantage.

Pax is lost in thought.

PAX
You know, I actually used to love
rope swings when I was a kid.

VECTOR
I'm not surprised.

PAX
There was a sort of bluff over a
polluted river out back where we
lived. Well, more a creek than a
river. But there was a huge tree
on top of the bluff, and I would
swing way out, above the water.

Vector smiles.

VECTOR
I brought some medicine for you, to
help you heal. If you need it.

She regards him skeptically. He removes several old-
fashioned-looking GLASS VIALS and a ROLL OF BANDAGES from his
overall pockets.

Gingerly, she takes them from him.

PAX

Thanks.

He tips his hat to her.

VECTOR

G'day. Take care of yourself, now.

PAX

Yeah...

He trudges off.

EXT. VR RUINS DAY

A tabletop sandbox appears amidst the ruins. Atop a thin layer of fine sand lie a number of colored glass beads. Adelle reaches in and begins to arrange them in a pattern.

Adelle blindfolded against a white wall: She concentrates hard on something.

EXT. VR REDWOOD FOREST CONTINUOUS

Fast motion POV from tree to tree, in a large-scale pattern.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Sandbox: the same pattern in the sandbox, drawn with beads.

Adelle finds and collects several more porcelain shards.

EXT. VR CONCRETE CANAL CONTINUOUS

A trail of porcelain shards leads into a culvert that disappears into a hill of concrete. Adelle steps up to the culvert.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Adelle walks past an old soccer ball, then an old pair of tennis shoes. Then a stuffed animal.

Impressionistic paintings of molecular structures flash by.

Paintings of dark faces, blindfolded figures.

EXT. VR CONCRETE CANAL CONTINUOUS

Adelle steps out onto a large concrete pad. She seems alarmed.

Adelle in front of white wall, still blindfolded: She holds her hands out in front of her, controlling something.

On concrete: Adelle re-assembles, in fast motion, her collection of porcelain fragments. She produces a small plate.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Sandbox: a series of patterns.

Underwater: beads drop, en mass, through the water.

Kaja concentrating deeply.

KAJA
Adelle? Adelle??

Concrete: Adelle assembles, in fast motion, a saucer.

INT. VR KITCHEN CONTINUOUS

Adelle's Aunt steps over to the table where Adelle is sitting, carrying the steaming teapot. On the table sits the plate, saucer, and teacup that Adelle assembled. The teacup reads "Mum" in large, childish letters. Adelle's Aunt steps up to Adelle, who lifts the painted teacup, containing a tea bag. Her Aunt pours the hot water into it.

Adelle sets the teacup down on the plate before her and looks inside the cup.

Reveal: it contains sand and several beads arranged into a pattern like those in the sandbox.

Pulses of light.

EXT. VR RUINS CONTINUOUS

Kaja shudders. She tries to hold onto the V-sim, but it slips away.

EXT. WINDMILL RUINS DAY - SCENE 137

Adelle and Kaja come Under. Adelle is exhausted: she lies on her back on the pavement. Kaja silently cleans up the cables.

ADELLE

Not a single fucking orphan.

KAJA

What?

ADELLE

Orphaned data. That's what we were looking for, right?

KAJA

Did all of that make sense to you?

ADELLE

Fuck no.

KAJA

Then it was orphan.

ADELLE

It was all scrambled.

KAJA

There's an underlying logic. Links aren't actually arbitrary.

Adelle is lost in thought. Suddenly she leaps to her feet in anger.

ADELLE

That fucker was everywhere.

KAJA

Your uncle?

ADELLE

Yeah.

She stalks around the ruins for the remainder of the scene.

ADELLE

Not just connected to Nanscop.
Connected to everything. All those
childhood memories... Why so many
memories? I could've just gone to
a shrink. I thought V-Sims were
about data.

Kaja thinks.

KAJA

Yeah, but it can be a kind of
therapy.

(somewhat defeated)

It's supposed to, anyway.

ADELLE

I wanna know what it fucking
means!!

Pause.

KAJA

I don't think it's just basic data.
It's also experiences. I mean, the
data is somehow encoded through
your experiences.

ADELLE

Experiences. But those are random,
Kaja. Pure contingency, just the
things that actually happened.
Chaos.

Kaja doesn't say anything.

ADELLE

Unless someone is controlling it
all. But I mean *everything*.

KAJA

God?

ADELLE

Maybe Nanscop. I don't know.

KAJA

Maybe we couldn't find what we were looking for because it was everywhere. Subroutines interacting in a series of interconnected neural networks.

ADELLE

(growing more angry)

I'll get that motherfucker by the balls somehow. It's like I was his guinea pig. Both of them.

She kicks, then swipes her hand against one of the upright concrete blocks. She cuts her hand.

ADELLE

Damn it!

Kaja watches her, painfully. After a long pause:

KAJA

Adelle. I've never seen anything like that in a V-Sim.

Pause. Adelle is all attention.

KAJA

It's like your brain is software in the process of coding itself.

ADELLE

You have no idea.

Long pause.

Adelle tears up some of the long, dry grasses.

ADELLE

I'll tell you what we don't have. We don't have anything concrete. No orchid we can do anything with. We came down empty-handed, and now what? What are we supposed to do now??

KAJA

I don't know, but we have to keep moving.

(MORE)

KAJA(cont'd)

This place isn't safe anymore.
We've created a huge trace spiral
here.

Adelle turns on her.

ADELLE

The whole Zone isn't safe for us
anymore. Whose fault is that,
Kaja? Why are we suddenly unsafe?

Kaja stands up, approaches her. She backs away.

KAJA

We have to leave the Zone.

ADELLE

Leave the Zone? And go where? Go
back to what??

KAJA

Some kind of normal life.

ADELLE

Whoa, whoa... *Normal??*

Suddenly she smiles scornfully.

ADELLE

What's your fantasy of normal,
Kaja? Working Over every day,
oblivious of what you're actually
doing to other people? Taking
little breaks to flirt at Ha Ha
Slim's? Exchanging Monstergrams
and sensory feedback algorithms?
(pause)

I thought you were cute, Kaja. I
always thought you were cute. But
cute doesn't get you to the Real.

Kaja watches her in silence, her eyes starting to tear up.

ADELLE

I'm gonna try to re-form the
Underground. Here in the Zone.
We'll continue where Davey left
off, fight back against Nanscop.
Maybe they did program me, maybe
they made me who I am.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

But that's all I've got to work with. You didn't really know me until today, Kaja. What's the difference if I've been programmed? I can't imagine myself any other way. Whatever they gave me, I'm gonna use it to fight. I accept this role.

KAJA

I don't. I'm going back outside. That's real too.

She turns and hikes away. Adelle watches her go.

INT. VR ORCHID FARM - SCENE B131

Maria crosses through a door and emerges inside an enormous, enclosed ORCHID FARM. Rows upon rows of orchids grow in complete silence and tranquility. No one is around.

She glides down a row of orchids, holding her hand over them, sensing them as she passes.

She passes through a black curtain on the opposite side of the orchid farm.

INT. VR BACK ROOM NIGHT - SCENE 139

Maria steps through a door into a dark back room. It is barely lit. It contains several CRATES and other unidentifiable OBJECTS.

A strange TABLETOP SANDBOX stands against the far wall. She approaches it. It contains a thin layer of fine sand. She senses something, concentrates on the table.

Concentrating, she runs her hand through the air above the box. She looks down. In the sandbox, a long streak of sand has been pushed aside, and below it lies revealed the stenciled words: ABDERITAN III.

She moves to one wall, which contains a black curtain. She draws it aside, revealing a round, nautical PORTHOLE in the wall. Beyond, outside, it is daytime. A pier is visible, with a lone figure, THE CAPTAIN, sitting on the end, fishing with tackle and pole. She concentrates.

The image through the port hole changes to a SAILBOAT. Then to the open ocean. Then the shore of an Island.

Suddenly there is a sound behind her. She starts, then spins around just as a masked SECURITY AGENT opens the door to the room. She ducks down and transports out the space.

EXT. ANT COLONY DAY

A surreal landscape of circuit board components crawling with ants, in extreme macro.

BENJAMIN HUGO (V.O.)

There are two sides to data, what is encoded and what is decoded. What you see at the end of the line isn't necessarily connected to the original. We all know this. A tiger can look like a lamb, and a lamb can look like a tiger. What people can't accept, just can't wrap their minds around, is that in the end, there may not be a lion, or a lamb, underneath all the code. That is our unspeakable nightmare: that there is no original, that nothing was ever encoded at all. That we have built our house on clouds.

PAX (V.O.)

For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost, and for want of a horse the rider was lost...

CHARLIE (V.O.)

When I want to get lost, when I want to lose my way, I do not step off the path. I follow whichever one I'm on to its logical conclusion.

ADELLE (V.O.)

Are you ever drawn to a place, a particular point, and you don't know why? You know that it's right.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

On a canvas, on a map, in a field.
The Painter was right about his
"Parthenon"-- it's one of those
places. And there are more... many
more. But I don't know, when I
step into a shadow, whether I've
felt something, something in the
Zone, or whether I've only revealed
something in my own mind.

EXT. FIELDS DUSK

In timelapse, night sets over the Zone.

INT. SHACK MORNING

Samm removes his glass shark from the window sill and carefully wraps it in a cloth and places it inside a small jar. He screws the lid on the jar.

EXT. MOUNTAINS DAY - SCENE 140

Adelle hikes through the mountains. She stops for a moment, surveys the landscape. She changes her direction slightly, clearly focused on a particular spot on the horizon, and continues hiking.

EXT. FOREST NEAR SHACK DAY - SCENE 138

Samm and Pax hike along the ridge, away from the shack. Samm wears his bulging backpack and additionally carries Pax's harness. She hikes gingerly, careful of her wound, but also seems alert.

PAX

I sort of feel like I'm going to
miss our little shacky shack.

SAMM

Yeah, well, if you're feeling
really attached, really nostalgic
for all the good memories at the
shack, we can stay. Be my guest!
Luxury awaits!

PAX

(turning serious)

No. We should've left even sooner. Benjamin Hugo will definitely come looking for his data.

(pause)

And he might find us wherever we go.

SAMM

You think so? I don't understand how anyone finds anyone else Under. No traces.

PAX

There are traces.

SAMM

Well, we better find a new place soon. We've got the key. Nanscop's weakest security link. A single exchange of data with this Captain AI and I'm in. We just have to decide what to do.

PAX

You're "in". In to what, exactly?

SAMM

It's some kind of massive control interface. They call it "the Island". It seems like its software to control some device.

PAX

What kind of device do you think it is? A device Under?

SAMM

Yeah, Under, I guess. I don't know what it could be, though. Something that uses the most massive storehouse of data I've ever seen.

PAX

What could require that much data? Something pretty huge.

SAMM
Or really small?

PAX
Something worth killing for.

Long silence as they continue to hike.

PAX
What are you going to do once
you're in? I mean, what good will
that do?

SAMM
What do you mean "what good"?
We'll find out what this is all
about! We'll know what Abderitan 3
is, and why they hired us in the
first place.

PAX
That's what I mean. We'll have
information. But so what? What
can we do with it?

SAMM
Well, we can try to blackmail them,
sell their own data back to them.
Or sell it to someone else...

PAX
No, I mean what effect on the real
world will it have? What can we *do*
with it? How will it help anyone?

SAMM
Well, what do you want to do? I
can tell you one thing: information
is never at equilibrium. It's
always a potential differential.

Pax stops hiking, faces Samm.

PAX
Yes, its a mover in the real world.
So why don't we try to use it to
create some change? We need to
find this Abderitan 3's link to
Underspace.

(MORE)

PAX(cont'd)

Not by looking at its algorithms,
but by looking at what it affects.

SAMM

How would we do that?

PAX

I know where I would start.
Adelle. She was the target all
along.

Samm stares at her, slightly apprehensive.

PAX

She's the link.

EXT. MOUNTAINS DAY - SCENE 141

Adelle, hiking through the mountains, comes upon a small, flat overlook. As she steps into it, she suddenly notices a STRAW HAT resting on a rock. She cautiously approaches it.

She steps on a twig, which snaps with a loud CRACK. Instantly, Alsa jerks awake and sits up with a jolt behind Adelle. She has been sleeping in the shade.

Adelle spins around, on her guard.

ALSA

What are you doing here??

Adelle eyes her suspiciously.

ADELLE

Do you know me?

Alsa seems confused for a moment. She stands up.

ALSA

No, no. I just don't ever see
anybody else here. How did you
know about this place?

She steps toward Adelle, who quickly steps backward, away.

Alsa passes her and retrieves her hat.

ADELLE

I'm just following the pattern.

ALSA

What?

ADELLE

The contours, you know? There's a pattern.

She turns in a 360-degree circle. She points to the contours of the horizon, of the rocks, of the trees.

ADELLE

This is one of the places it converges, right?

ALSA

If that's what you're seein', sure.

ADELLE

Yeah, these points are all over the Zone. Do you know what they are?

Alsa doesn't answer, but scrutinizes her closely, frowning.

Again, Adelle traces a pattern only she can see, converging her hands on the place she is standing. Suddenly she notices something on the ground. It is an old, faded photograph. She bends down to pick it up.

Alsa jumps forward.

ALSA

That's mine.

She tries to snatch it up but Adelle grabs it before she can.

ALSA

It's just a photo. Give it to me!
It's my son.

Adelle evades her.

ADELLE

Your son?

Alsa retrieves her basket and impatiently indicates that she wants to leave.

ADELLE

I've seen you around. How did you know about this point? Who are you?

ALSA

(reticent)

Alsa. I've gotta get back to town.

ADELLE

Alsa, yeah. Kaja mentioned you. She didn't say you had a son. Is he in P-Town?

ALSA

(tersely)

He's not in the Zone. He's on the Outside.

ADELLE

Then why are you here?

ALSA

Where? In the Zone? What brings anybody here?

ADELLE

The truth.

ALSA

(snorts)

There's no truth.

ADELLE

In the Outside everything is just simulation. At least the Zone is under all of that. At least it's real!

ALSA

Is that what you're looking for? The Real?

(pause)

What if the Zone is just more simulation?

Pause.

ADELLE

If that were true you wouldn't be here. Not in the Zone, not at this point. You'd be with your son, safe, Outside.

ALSA

(angry)

My son's locked up. I can't be with him.

ADELLE

Locked up? How come?

Alsa glares at her but says nothing. Adelle holds the photograph out for Alsa, who grabs it, upset. Adelle stares at her intently.

ADELLE

Do you know where the other points are?

Alsa trudges down the mountain.

ADELLE

(yelling)

Do you know where the other points are??

Alsa doesn't answer, keeps hiking away.

ADELLE

What did your son do to get put away, huh?? Or wasn't that real either??

Angry and exhausted, she slumps down.

EXT. SHACK FANTASY - SCENE A135

A heavy-duty rope swing hangs from the tree that Vector had indicated. Vector swings out over the slope, near the shack, in a wide arc.

Pax replaces him on the swing and, smiling, traverses the same path in the air.

END OF CHAPTER 8

CHAPTER 9: FEEDBACK**EXT. ABANDONED DAM DAY - SCENE 151**

The DAM KEEPER, female, 50s, wearing sunglasses with one lens missing, leads Pax and Samm along an overgrown road to an ABANDONED DAM. Several concrete buildings, old rusted rails and chain-link fences adorn the crumbling site. Small streams of water cascade down the curved dam into an unseen abyss below.

SAMM

(skeptically)

And the terminal access here is reliable?

DAM KEEPER

Depends on what you consider reliable. Put it in myself, though. Nobody else knows it's here.

Samm and Pax exchange a look.

DAM KEEPER

You won't want to stay in these service buildings. They'd be scanned right away if somebody were to come lookin' for ya. Anyway, they're full of spiders.

SAMM

(alarmed)

Spiders??

She laughs.

DAM KEEPER

Every kind you've heard of and some that haven't been discovered yet. That's my retirement.

PAX
Retirement?

DAM KEEPER
Gotta keep a few things stashed
away for the scientists. Insurance
policy for the apocalypse.

Samm and Pax exchange another look. They have no idea what she is talking about. They are approaching closer and closer to the dam itself. The Dam Keeper appraises Pax.

DAM KEEPER
You into some fetish thing or
somethin'? Huh? Reality fetish?

Pax shakes her head. They continue walking. The Dam Keeper waits for a further answer, but soon gives up.

DAM KEEPER
Well anyhowse, I got a nice, cozy
little hidden spot behind the dam
for you...

PAX
(slightly annoyed)
What did they use to use this place
for? Before the Zone got
contaminated?

The Dam Keeper laugh shrilly.

DAM KEEPER
I s'pose they used it to dam up the
river!

Pax rolls her eyes.

SAMM
(bemused)
Pax's hobby is collecting
information about the old world.
She finds it very real. I'm sure
she'd like to know why they wanted
to dam up this river...

DAM KEEPER
Oh, had their reasons, I s'pose.
Can't let *everything* flow, right?
(MORE)

DAM KEEPER(cont'd)

Gotta control it somehow. Turn it on and off.

She stops to survey the dam, makes a light switch motion with her thumb: on, off... She laughs.

She points around past the control houses.

DAM KEEPER

Your place is back that way.

(pause)

You can stay here as long as you like, just so as you pay up. And don't disturb my sunflowers.

PAX

Your sunflowers?

DAM KEEPER

Sure, my pride and joy!

Samm looks around but can't find any sunflowers.

DAM KEEPER

They just sprouted up on their own one day last year. Weren't here before that. Ain't from any seeds neither.

(pause)

I know what yer thinkin': I should be charging extra.

PAX

For sunflowers?

DAM KEEPER

Fer a miracle. This is consecrated concrete, kiddo. Site of a bona fide miracle!

EXT. MONTAGE OF RUINS AND OIL PRODUCTION

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Let me tell you about the difference between the possible and the virtual...

(beat)

The possible is not real. It's just the actual before it becomes

(MORE)

CHARLIE(cont'd)

real. We think, "that could have been" or "that could have been" or "this could have been" and that we eliminated the other choices and selected what actually came to be. But that's false reasoning. We've just taken the actual as a choice that was pre-given, something off the supermarket shelf.

(beat)

The virtual, on the other hand, is the totality that we really work from when we actualize the present. It is just as real. It is what we navigate, differentiate, and condense into the actual. The virtual, then, implies creativity, requires creativity. It isn't pre-given. It's wildly different from the actual. We have to do real work to get from the virtual to the actual.

(beat)

So don't talk to me about possibilities. Throw all of that away and talk to me about the virtual. I want to hear about *life*.

EXT. CONCRETE HUT DAY - SCENE A151

Inside the hut, Samm is setting up his Terminal. Pax dresses her wound, gingerly. Samm looks up at her.

SAMM

How's it looking?

PAX

Oh, it looks adorable! (serious)
It's healing, though.

SAMM

Are you okay?

PAX

Yeah. A new graph pad oughtta keep me going.

SAMM

Speaking of new pads, how do you like this dam? She laughs despite herself.

SAMM

I've already got a concrete block picked out for my pillow. I'm calling dibs!

PAX

I'm sure you'll be on a glorious virtual waterbed somewhere.

SAMM

Well, more like wherever I find Adelle.

PAX

IF you find Adelle.

Samm rolls his eyes as if there's no question about this. She finishes applying her patch, pulls her shirt down, winces very slightly.

PAX

I'm going exploring.

SAMM

Me too.

She ducks out of the hut.

SAMM

Keep a lookout for spiders, okay?

EXT. VR ADELLE'S HOME SPACE DAY - SCENE 152

Adelle sits in her home space, a green, flowery, landscaped garden with several Renaissance-like statues. She appears to be sleeping or in a trance.

Maria drifts into view.

Adelle comes alive, instantly alert.

ADELLE

Who are you?

Maria holds out her hand in a gesture of conciliation, trying to calm Adelle.

MARIA
I want to help you.

ADELLE
Seems like a lot of people are real keen to "help." It's amazing how friendly the Zone is...

MARIA
I know something about your brain.

This gets Adelle's attention.

MARIA
I was hired to find you. But I've been looking into my employers instead.

ADELLE
Nanscop?

Maria nods.

MARIA
Yes.

Abruptly, Adelle laughs. Maria seems confused.

ADELLE
You can spend the rest of your life "looking into" them. Behind every door is another corridor...

MARIA
No. Behind one door is an orchid farm.

Adelle shrugs.

MARIA
A whole *farm*! A massive storehouse of data!

ADELLE

(unimpressed)

Sounds like they're stocked up for a good, long winter. What do they need me for, then?

Pause.

MARIA

You're part of it. Part of their secret project, Abderitan 3. They seem to have a special interface for you.

ADELLE

Look, it's simple. They put some data in my brain. For safekeeping, maybe. I don't know. They scrambled everything up, and now they're pissed off because their investment walked out the door.

Maria shakes her head.

MARIA

No. It's not about data. Whatever they did to you, it's some kind of process. Something they've programmed you to feel, or do. You can't separate the information from your embodied existence.

ADELLE

I did a V-Sim and it was all mixed up. Tied up with my whole life. So maybe you're right. But so what?

MARIA

We want to figure out what Nanscop is making. The best way to do that, the only way to do that, is to get you in there, to interface you with the system.

ADELLE

Get me in there?? No fucking chance!

She turns to go.

MARIA

Wait! They won't know. I can use the V-Sim data to make a backdoor key, a trojan horse. We'll be in before they ever know what happened. By then you'll know everything.

ADELLE

(skeptical)

Where is it?

MARIA

A high security Overspace. Here in the Zone. It's isolated from all other traces. The Island. Impenetrable except for one AI: The Captain. I can trick him into letting you in.

ADELLE

I'll give you my V-Sim data. See what you can make of it. But I'm not going in there.

She hands Maria an orchid. Maria takes it.

MARIA

Please consider it. I think you'll change your mind.

She looks down at the ground.

MARIA

We, uh...

Pause.

MARIA

We're trying to do the right thing.

ADELLE

(noncommittal)

I'll think about it.

MARIA

All right. Just don't do it here.
You were way too easy to find.

EXT. VR ADELLE'S HOME SPACE DAY - SCENE 153

Just after Maria exits Adelle's space, Charlie appears.

CHARLIE

What did she want?

ADELLE

She wanted to smuggle me into
Nanscop's Overspace.

CHARLIE

No, no no! We have to keep you
safe!

She nods.

CHARLIE

Listen. No one else will be able
to figure out your mind because no
one else can harness the scale I
can.

She takes an interest, but is still skeptical.

ADELLE

What do you mean by that?

CHARLIE

Scalar differential. It's the key
to opening up your mind.

(contemptuously)

Not laying it out flat like a V-
Sim.

She shakes her head uncertainly.

CHARLIE

(pleading)

At least let me show you...

ADELLE

Okay.

EXT. ABANDONED DAM DAY - SCENE 154

Pax explores around the dam.

INT. VR CHARLIE'S LAB DAY - SCENE 155

Charlie leads Adelle up a ladder into a white attic-like room. The walls are lined with row upon row of mason jars, filled with various colored fluids and interconnected in series with tubing bursting out of each one. The tubes come together in a central patch bay. At one end of the room, a virtual reel-to-reel tape deck is running. It is connected to the network.

Adelle takes it all in.

ADELLE

So what is all this, exactly?

CHARLIE

It's a simulation bed. I feed data from the Under-Zone and the Over-Zone into this neural network and let make its own version. Distributed cognition. Eventually the system produces something: a series of connections. Pressure points, feedback nodes.

ADELLE

Okay, but why?

CHARLIE

To understand.

ADELLE

I think it's to control.

CHARLIE

To harness the potential of the Zone. Not for power, not to destroy, but to create.

She hesitates.

CHARLIE

In order to harness such large-scale differentials, we have to work with something larger than a single human mind. That's what I've created here!

ADELLE

And you want to use my brain as part of some giant network?

CHARLIE

You'll be a very special node.

ADELLE

I don't want to be a fucking node! That's exactly it!

CHARLIE

Don't be naive! You already are a node! An input-output machine! That's what this is all about! That's what you are to Nanscop! The difference is that right now you're flailing around like a pinball in a machine that someone else is playing. I'm giving you a chance to be part of something larger. To have some control over the flows of information that already envelop you.

ADELLE

Yeah right...

CHARLIE

There are two types of information: spatial and temporal. Or two different ways of seeing information. The spatial, the discrete information that can be plotted on a coordinate system, can be processed by computers. The temporal, the continuous, that which exists in flowing time, can only be grasped, can only be controlled, by the human mind. Only the mind exists as duration.

Long pause.

CHARLIE

You know this. You live it every day.

ADELLE

Maybe...

CHARLIE

(softly)

You have special abilities. Tell me about them.

ADELLE

What abilities?

CHARLIE

You tell me. What can you see that others can't see? What can you do that they can't?

She thinks.

ADELLE

It's nothing, really.

CHARLIE

What?

ADELLE

I can sort of re-arrange things. Like spatially.

(pause)

I can travel all over the Zone without a map. Without directions, without a trace tether.

(pause)

I see structure where everyone else sees only chaos.

CHARLIE

What kind of structure?

ADELLE

I don't know, really. I've been hiking around the Zone, sort of drawing a map in my mind. Filling in points of intensity.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

After I talked to the Painter I could sort of see those points. I don't even have to move around anymore. I know where they'll be.

He grows excited.

CHARLIE

Draw it for me.

ADELLE

I can just give you the points.

CHARLIE

No, draw it.

EXT. ABANDONED DAM DAY

Pax approaches the shore of the lake and notices a single, enormous SUNFLOWER HEAD floating on the edge of the water. She approaches it, studying the pattern of its seeds.

INT. VR CHARLIE'S HOUSE DAY - SCENE 156

In Charlie's dining room, at a large table, Adelle has drawn a diagram of pressure points in the Zone. It forms an elaborate spiral-like structure, identical to Pax's sunflower.

Charlie is impressed.

CHARLIE

It's like acupuncture. Perfectly precise pressure points. It's beautiful. I need you to be part of my simulation.

She doesn't answer.

CHARLIE

Do you know the difference between the possible and the virtual?

She shakes her head.

ADELLE

No.

CHARLIE

The possible is not real. It's just the actual before it becomes real. We think, "that could have been" or "*that* could have been" or "*this* could have been" and that we eliminated the other choices and selected *this*, what actually came to be. But that's false reasoning. We've just taken the actual as a choice that was pre-given, something off the supermarket shelf.

(beat)

The virtual, on the other hand, is the totality that we really work from when we actualize the present. It is just as real. It is what we navigate, differentiate, and condense into the actual. The virtual, then, is creative. It isn't pre-given. It doesn't resemble the actual. We have to do real work to get from the virtual to the actual. That's life.

ADELLE

Are you talking about Overspace?

CHARLIE

I'm talking about more than Overspace. I'm talking about the human mind. But Overspace is a kind of virtuality, and we must understand it as such. Nothing is pre-given. We have to build every moment from scratch.

She thinks for a long moment.

ADELLE

I'll tell you what. I'll do this; I'll let you scan my brain for your network. But only if you give me first access to it. Me as an individual. You want to use my brain to unlock this feedback loop. I want to use this feedback loop to unlock my brain.

(MORE)

ADELLE(cont'd)

I want to see it, right in front of me, to navigate it myself. Then you can do whatever you want with it.

CHARLIE

(thinking hard)

It's not set up to work that way. You wouldn't know how to navigate it yourself. You wouldn't see anything.

ADELLE

I know someone who could navigate it with me. Who could use your system to really get inside.

CHARLIE

Kaja?

ADELLE

Yes.

(beat)

I'll upload if you allow her to interface.

CHARLIE

(slightly miffed)

Fine. Let's start the process.

ADELLE

No. First we get her here, and set everything up. You don't scan me until she's here.

CHARLIE

(reluctantly)

Okay.

INT. VR BLACK SPACE - SCENE 161

Maria reforms several flowers into a fish.

MARIA (V.O.)

So, when by hollow shores the
fisher-train

(MORE)

MARIA(cont'd)

Sweep with their arching nets the
 roaring main,
 And scarce the meshy toils the
 copious draught contain All naked
 of their element, and bare,
 The fishes pant, and gasp in
 thinner air;
 Wide o'er the sands are spread the
 stiffening prey,
 Till the warm sun exhales their
 soul away.

EXT. VR BEACH - SCENE 162

Maria carries her fish to the edge of the ocean and deposits it into the water.

EXT. P-TOWN OUTSKIRTS DAY - SCENE A163

Alsa crouches down near a medium-sized puddle of water on the outskirts of P-Town. No objects are visible inside the water, but we see Alsa reflected, staring into the puddle.

Suddenly the water ripples as if there were something in it.

INT. CONCRETE HUT NIGHT - SCENE 163

Pax and Samm tidy up and prepare for bed.

SAMM

I've analyzed the data Adelle gave me. Her V-Sim topography.

He trails off, lost in thought. Pax stops what she's doing.

PAX

Yeah? And?

SAMM

It's like a machine interface.

PAX

Does that surprise you? She's connected to Nanscop, our illustrious former employer. They're nanotech, right? They're all about control;

(MORE)

PAX(cont'd)

I'm not shocked that they'd have her programmed so they could control her.

SAMM

Well, that's the thing... It's more like she's programmed to control something else. Something really complex. Something that's more about intuition and spatiality than anything rational.

PAX

The Abderitan III interface. Is she a control circuit?

SAMM

Sure, maybe. But it's really fundamental stuff. Really low level, like modeling atomic structures.

Pause.

PAX

No, not modeling. Manipulating. Abderitan III is a nano-Fabricator.

He frowns.

PAX

Right? Matter as information, matter become data itself. It makes sense, right?

SAMM

But nano-Fabs have never worked, Pax. People've been dreaming about that stuff for a hundred years. A Fab in every home. Feel like a meat burger? Instead of the black market, you just press a button and out it pops. You can re-make anything with just the press of a button. It's a fairy tale. Things are too unstable and unpredictable down there. And why bother when you can have absolute stability Above?

PAX

Well, that's just it. Everyone prefers it Above because it's completely programmable. But this would make everything Under programmable too. That's the fantasy, right? I remember all of that when I was a kid. Lots of big promises, but all we ever got was contaminated Zones. But maybe they found a way. You say "intuition." Maybe Adelle is meant to control this thing in some way that bypasses the uncertainty. You can't build these things directly, from the top down. Maybe she can do it from the bottom up.

SAMM

That sounds pretty farfetched. But if it were true, if it weren't completely absurd, we'd be talking about nano-weapons of the first order. That would make Adelle pretty damn valuable.

PAX

(shrugging)

Never underestimate the value of a human mind.

SAMM

Okay, then, we'll send her.

PAX

Send her where?

SAMM

To the Island. I set up the trojan fish today. It'll strike by tomorrow, and we'll have a conduit. I'll sail her in, courtesy of the Captain, and we'll figure this out.

PAX

Is it safe?

SAMM
 Nothing expressed in high level
 code is ever safe.

She shakes her head, prepares her sleeping matt.
 Behind her, Samm plugs back in to his Terminal.
 She notices, startled.

PAX
 What are you doing?

SAMM
 I'm going back Over. To set
 everything up with Adelle.

PAX
 Can't you get some sleep first?
 Tomorrow's a big day.

SAMM
 That's exactly why I can't get any
 sleep.

He goes Over.

EXT. HILLS DAY

Kaja hikes away, toward the border of the Zone.

EXT. VR POND DUSK - SCENE 164

Adelle approaches Kaja's Home Pond. Neither Kaja nor anyone
 else is visible.

Adelle wades into the water. She looks around, frantically.

ADELLE
 Kaja?

The Message Bot appears.

MESSAGE BOT
 (without emotion)
 Kaja is not available.

ADELLE

Okay, I have an urgent message for her: 'I found the right simulator. Please stay until we can figure out my programming. Please help me.

(softer)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.

MESSAGE BOT

Kaja is no longer available in this space. She has relinquished her access. No message can be left. She is leaving the Zone.

The Message Bot flickers and disappears, leaving Adelle alone in the pond.

EXT. CULVERT DAY - SCENE 157

Near the culvert where Adelle is camped, she comes Under. She tucks the data cable away into its piping, concealed amongst a pile of large rocks.

She hikes back up to the culvert itself. She packs a backpack.

She sets out hiking.

EXT. P-TOWN DAY - SCENE 158

Adelle arrives at P-Town.

EXT. VR SUNFLOWER FIELD DAY - SCENE 165

A vast sunflower field shines in the sun. Charlie steps up to it, regards it thoughtfully.

INT. P-TOWN HUT DAY - SCENE 159

Adelle steps up to the boarded over door of Kaja's new hut. She checks her scrap of paper: it's the right place.

She approaches the door and calls out, softly:

ADELLE

Kaja?

(pause)

Kaja?

She opens the door but sees no one inside. Slowly she walks into the room.

Alsa steps out of the deep shadows. We have never seen her look so menacing.

ALSA

Looking for somebody?

Adelle stares at her, growing apprehensive.

ALSA

You know, Kaja really thinks the world of you. I've never seen anybody so devoted.

(pause)

We thought you'd come for a visit eventually.

ADELLE

What happened to her?

ALSA

Kaja isn't the important one.

Adelle backs up and spins around to leave, but Benjamin Hugo moves into the doorway, blocking her. She is now trapped inside.

BENJAMIN

(reciting)

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunnèd it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.
And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,
And into my garden stole,

(MORE)

BENJAMIN(cont'd)

When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the
tree.

As he recites, Adelle backs away, into Alsa, who grabs and restrains her wrist with one hand. With the other, she strokes Adelle's hair.

END OF CHAPTER 9

CHAPTER 10: THE SNAKE

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 171

Kaja, climbing a hill on her way out of the Zone, comes upon The Painter. He is standing near the crest, facing down the hill, from where she has come. His easel is set up and he works on a painting.

THE PAINTER

Beautiful day for a hike!

She keeps walking toward him.

KAJA

Actually I'm leaving.

THE PAINTER

Leaving behind? What's that you're leaving behind?

KAJA

No, I'm leaving the Zone.

THE PAINTER

Oh, well, then: Welcome!

KAJA

Welcome to what? I'm leaving!

THE PAINTER

The end. After that is the beginning. That's why I'm here.

KAJA

Yeah.

She walks past him without stopping or looking back. He calls after her:

THE PAINTER

There eventually comes a moment when you realize that it's raining upwards.

(pause)

It's then that you retract your finalities.

She stops walking.

THE PAINTER

I'd like to give you this painting.

Kaja turns to face him.

KAJA

Like some kind of souvenir?

THE PAINTER

A souvenir! An idea! Plus: a business! But really, you can have it for free. A souvenir of the outside world to accompany you in your travels through the Zone.

KAJA

But I'm *leaving* the Zone!

THE PAINTER

Ah, well, then, I hope you find what you're looking for! Here you go...

He hands her the painting.

KAJA

I was looking for Adelle. I found her.

THE PAINTER

I believe it's Adelle who's looking for you.

KAJA

What are you talking about?

THE PAINTER

(he shrugs)

I only know the landscape. I don't trust what I can see without paint.

Disturbed, she turns the canvas over, studies the painting he has given her.

It is an image of a snake, curved into a full circle, its head eating its own tail.

EXT. P-TOWN OIL TANKS DAY - SCENE 172

Benjamin Hugo drags Adelle, her hands bound and her eyes blindfolded, through a row of towering oil tanks.

BENJAMIN

You can't see this, but we're surrounded by a beautiful sight.

(pause)

Do you know why oil makes a rainbow when there's a slick?

Adelle doesn't answer. She struggles with her bonds.

BENJAMIN

No?

(pause)

You've got some very valuable data in your brain, but I'm not sure what it is.

ADELLE

That makes two of us, asshole.

BENJAMIN

Do you know how many miles one can ride a horse at a gallop before endangering it?

ADELLE

No.

BENJAMIN

Do you know how to fix a 20th century Willy's Jeep that won't turn over?

ADELLE

No.

BENJAMIN

Do you know why the nanites in the Zone don't spread outside of it?

ADELLE

No.

BENJAMIN

Well, you probably just have an IP database or something in there.

ADELLE

I'm sure that's all it is. So why don't you let me go?

BENJAMIN

Gotta get paid, my sweet. And more importantly, I wish to see what they do with you. The Zone works in mysterious ways, but I'm going in for a little Enlightenment....

They arrive at the base of the Tower. He indicates for her to start climbing the stairs.

BENJAMIN

Stairs. Start climbing.

Begrudgingly, she does.

EXT. VR ADELLE'S HOME SPACE DAY - SCENE 173

Kaja walks slowly through Adelle's home space. It is empty.

Suddenly Charlie appears.

CHARLIE

Looking for Adelle?

KAJA
I can't find her Under or Over.

CHARLIE
She's disappeared. Something
happened to her.

Kaja is alarmed.

KAJA
What can we do?
(beat)
I'll do anything!

CHARLIE
She made contact with someone. A
renegade. Someone hired by Nanscop
who's now working against them.

KAJA
(astonished)
The assassins?
(slowly)
The ones who killed The Kid?

CHARLIE
(sharply)
They're the only ones who can help
her Under. And I need Adelle!
(beat, softer)
We want to get her back, right?

KAJA
Yes.

CHARLIE
You have to go to them. It doesn't
matter what they did before. You
have to get them to help you.

KAJA
But...

CHARLIE
I'll tell you how to find them.

EXT. P-TOWN DAY - SCENE A174

Alsa stands in the oil refinery of P-Town. She glances around, apprehensively. She paces a bit.

She stops and mouths to herself, "I'm sorry."

She walks to the base of the Tower and begins to climb it.

EXT. VR COVE DAY

A remote cove. Waves lap up against the shore.

KAJA (V.O.)

We stood on rocks thrust against a muted ocean,

you were just a thrashing tongue slithering from my grip-

I came out to you, came into you.

Beyond this globular hardware I found only unstable land on which to lie,

So I swayed away, feeling fine grain of sand-

My body, under your tongue tide, how fooled was I to breathe underwater where I mistook light for sound.

As you appeased me, wrung and squeezed me, You dreamt of entering my skin

without leaving yours behind.

EXT. CONCRETE HUT - SCENE B174

Pax sits near the entrance of her concrete hut. Samm is Over. Suddenly her skinscreen beeps: an intruder. She rushes out. Behind her, Samm snaps Under.

EXT. ABANDONED DAM - SCENE C174

Pax moves quickly but cautiously along a rocky ridge, checking her skinscreen. She is stalking the intruder. She stops for a moment and bends over in pain, clutching her side. She winces, takes a deep breath, and continues on.

EXT. ABANDONED DAM - SCENE 174

Kaja walks hesitantly closer to the dam. Suddenly Pax appears behind her.

PAX
Why are you here??

Kaja spins around, scared.

KAJA
I'm Kaja, I-

PAX
I know who you are.

KAJA
I had to find you. I didn't know-

PAX
How did you know we were here??

KAJA
Charlie! Charlie told me how to find you!

PAX
How did Charlie know?

Kaja doesn't answer, but stares at her, firm, cold, facing The Kid's killer.

Samm appears behind Pax.

SAMM
Charlie?? That son of bitch! What the hell's going on here?

PAX
(to Kaja)
Look, we're sorry about what happened to The Kid. But we don't want to involve you.

KAJA
(cold)
Listen, I wouldn't be here if there were any other way. I need your help.

PAX
We're in the middle-

KAJA
They captured Adelle!

PAX
(confused)
What? What do you mean??

KAJA
Alsa and the Corps. She's helping
them.

SAMM
Adelle! But she's supposed to go
to The Island! She's meeting me!

PAX
Not if they've got her. Look, she
could be anywhere now...

KAJA
No, I think I know where she is.

PAX
What do you mean?

KAJA
There's a tower. At the center of
P-Town. I've seen Alsa carrying
things there. I think that's where
she is.

PAX
(to Samm)
The Fabricator! That's probably
the Fabricator!

SAMM
Maybe, but you don't control it
from Under, only Over. That's why
we have to sneak her onto the
Island!

KAJA
I can show you exactly where it is.
I don't know what else to do... I
can't get past the guards.

SAMM

There's no time! She's supposed to meet us at four o'clock! That's when the fish strikes!

KAJA

Can I go?

PAX

What?

KAJA

Let me go to the Island. I know her brain. I did a V-Sim. Maybe I can control it...

SAMM

(anxious, shaking his head)

We don't know if that'll work...

KAJA

At least let me try.

SAMM

I don't know, I don't know...

PAX

Do it, Samm. We don't have any other choice. I'll try to get to Adelle. You take Kaja to the Island.

SAMM

(unhappy, to Kaja)

Okay, but as soon as you show Pax, find the nearest terminal where you're safe and go Over. I'll leave you a trace.

KAJA

Okay. But one more thing. I want you to splice a duplex feed for Charlie.

Samm and Pax stare at her.

KAJA

I promised him. That's the deal.

SAMM

Fine.

He brushes past her, coldly, and steps up to Pax. He takes her gently by the shoulder and leads her a few paces away. They speak in hushed tones as Kaja looks on:

SAMM

Pax, this is too dangerous. I don't want you to try to get Adelle out. It's impossible. You're not recovered yet.

PAX

I don't know, Samm. We need Adelle if we're gonna fix this mess.

Pause.

SAMM

I don't want anything to happen to you, Pax...

She smiles, places her hand on his shoulder.

PAX

It might not be possible to get Adelle out. But maybe I can get *in* instead.

SAMM

(shaking his head
worriedly)

How, Pax?

PAX

Well, it *is* a messy world down here. Maybe what we need is an even bigger mess.

Pax and Kaja hike off together, as Samm watches them go.

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 175

Kaja and Pax hike through the underbrush. After a long silence:

KAJA

Pax, what's "The Snake"?

PAX
The snake? Why?

KAJA
Somebody gave me a painting...

Pax gives her a sharp look.

KAJA (CONT'D)
A snake eating its own tail. And
Alsa said something to me about
Over and Under being the same
snake.

Pax thinks a moment.

PAX
Well, there's feedback, right?
When a process Over affects
something Under, which changes the
original process, you can get some
pretty weird nonlinear effects.
What you get out is much more than
what you put in. I mean, I saw
something the other...

When she doesn't complete her sentence, Kaja glances at her.

KAJA
What?

PAX
Nothing.

Pax quickens her pace, taking off ahead of Kaja.

EXT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE 176

Inside a dark, cylindrical chamber, inside the P-Town Tower, Adelle sits on a small STOOL, her hands tied behind her. The floor of the chamber contains a HATCH. The wall contains a crude instrument panel with various switches and knobs, a primitive INTERCOM, a VIDEO DISPLAY PANEL, and a Terminal.

A shaft of sunlight appears, causing her to look upwards.

Alsa descends a ladder attached to the wall of the chamber.

She approaches Adelle, who eyes her hostilely.

ALSA

I'm not your enemy, Adelle.

She reaches behind Adelle and unties her hands.

ALSA

There's nowhere for you to go. I don't see why you should be all tied up.

ADELLE

Why are you doing this?

ALSA

What, helping you?

ADELLE

Helping *them*. Nanscop!

ALSA

Well, they're doing important things, aren't they? Moving humanity forward?

ADELLE

I worked for them, through my uncle, for years. All of their miracle nano-products are about one thing: control. How to control matter, make it do what they want.

ALSA

Well what's wrong with that? That's what *makes* us human, isn't it? Articulated joints, tool using, all that jazz...

ADELLE

What's so special about animals with toys? Do you think the world would miss us at all if we went *POOF* and disappeared?

ALSA

Look, why don't you help them? You don't have anything to lose.

(pause)

There's a terminal right here. Why don't you go Over?

(MORE)

ALSA(cont'd)

It's a special link. You can help them control this thing.

(points down, toward the hatch)

They say you can do it. You're special. You're evolved. Why fight it?

ADELLE

I'm special because they *made* me that way! I have evolved programming, that's all!

ALSA

Hey, don't ask me about the technical details. All I know is that you have the key to making this thing work.

Pause. Alsa becomes more introspective.

ALSA

There's a whole new world that I don't know anything about. That I'm not part of. The next generation. The next version.

ADELLE

Then what do you get out of this, huh?

ALSA

We all have to do our part, Adelle. My son used to talk about this, about Fabrication, for as many years as I can remember. It drove him crazy. He wanted everybody to be able to make whatever they wanted, cure every disease, become immortal. He hated how imperfect everything is. He wanted to make it perfect, to fix it. And it'll happen, it'll come true. Someday we'll fix it. But until then, he's too sensitive for this world. He's hurt people, he's hurt himself. How can you not, in this world?

Adelle doesn't know what to say. Alsa has begun to tear up.

ALSA

How can you not hurt people? He's
a dreamer. That's his only crime.
He just wants to fix things...

EXT. FOREST DAY - SCENE 177

Pax meets a Tammie in the forest.

PAX

I have a message for Vector Bruno.

The Tammie nods.

She hands him a piece of paper.

EXT. P-TOWN DAY - SCENE B177

Kaja strings a cable across the ground, out from behind an outdoor panel and behind one wall of a ruined building. She checks to make sure she is well concealed, then plugs in her bulky wall terminal.

She plugs herself in to the Terminal and goes Over.

EXT. VR PIER - SCENE 178

At the end of a long pier stretching across a beach and into the ocean, The Captain sits contentedly, fishing with a FISHING POLE.

Suddenly the Captain's pole jerks. Excited, he begins to reel in his catch.

It is an orange fish. After reeling it in, he grabs it and holds it in his hands. For a moment it glows. The Captain's eyes widen.

Maria and Kaja walk down the pier, approaching the Captain.

MARIA

Everything went okay with Pax?

KAJA

I showed her the Tower. She thinks
she can get in.

MARIA

Well, we're both pretty good at getting in to places we're not supposed to be.

They approach the Captain. He turns to face them, holding his fish.

THE CAPTAIN

The wind is up!

EXT. VR SAILBOAT - SCENE 179

On a small SAILBOAT, the Captain unfurls a sail. Kaja and Maria stand on either side of the deck.

On the open sea, the Captain steers the vessel as Kaja and Maria stand on deck, near the bow.

The sailboat steers toward an island in the distance.

They approach the island.

MARIA

(to Kaja)

Here's where you get off. I'll be here, but you have to explore on your own.

EXT. VR ISLAND BEACH - SCENE A179

Kaja steps out of the surf, onto the craggy beach of the island. She continues inland, climbing upward toward a forest.

EXT. VR SAILBOAT - SCENE B179

From the boat, now at anchor, Maria watches Kaja disappear into the forest.

EXT. VR ROADBLOCK DAY - SCENE X9-1

Kaja crests a ridge and looks down at the sight before her: It is the roadblock entrance to the Zone that she encountered in the real world when first arriving. It is exactly the same, but virtual.

INT. CHARLIE'S LAB DAY - SCENE A181

Charlie is alone in his lab. He goes to a glass block panel and places his hand up to it. It glow brightly.

CHARLIE

Maria, are you there?

MARIA (O.S.)

Yes. You're linked to Kaja. Can you see?

CHARLIE

(confused)

Yes. But it looks like... Where are we?

KAJA (O.S.)

I'm on the Island. Nanscop's private space.

Charlie watches in wonder.

EXT. VR SAILBOAT - SCENE B181

Maria stands on the deck of the boat, listening.

KAJA (O.S.)

It's P-Town. Just like Under. Everything's the same.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Everything?

KAJA (O.S.)

I think so.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Yes...

EXT. VR FIELDS - DAY

Kaja passes the rusty water tower that she encountered upon her initial trek into the Zone.

EXT. VR P-TOWN DAY - SCENE 180

Kaja, in the virtual world, approaches the center of P-Town. It is exactly as it is in the physical world.

KAJA
(speaking to Charlie,
unseen)
It's P-Town. Just like Under.
Everything's the same.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Everything?

KAJA
I think so.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Send me the data.

Walking through the center of P-Town, Kaja holds her arms out wide, her fingers spread, as if feeling a breeze.

INT. VR CHARLIE'S LAB DAY - SCENE 181

Charlie frantically re-patches tubes at his patch-bay. The windows behind him change to reflect different images of the Zone, changing as he changes the connections.

He reaches up and touches one of his glass cubes, which glows in response. The jars light up. The perspective of the image in the window behind him begins to change so that his entire lab has the appearance of floating through the Zone.

CHARLIE
(in wonder)
I think it's a giant simulation.

MARIA (O.S.)
What do you mean?

CHARLIE
The whole Zone, simulated from
inside the Zone. The ultimate
recursion.

He re-patches more cables, traces an elaborate design on the glass panel. The window display now shows a rendering of Adelle's sunflower design.

CHARLIE

There's a nodal point, at the exact center of the Zone. That's the greatest point of flux, the center of the feedback loop.

KAJA (O.S.)

Okay. Where should I go?

CHARLIE

You should see a Tower...

EXT. VR TOWER CONTINUOUS - SCENE 182

Kaja approaches the base of the Tower.

EXT. P-TOWN DAY - SCENE 183

Pax surveys the center of P-Town, an industrial bramble of rusted pipes, oil tanks, and lattice-work. Running at a crouch, she enters the thick of it.

She doubles over in pain. Hiding behind a large pipe, she removes Samm's Virus Injector from her pack and gives herself a quick injection. She takes a deep breath, peers out from behind her hiding place. The Tower is ahead of her.

To one side, at a distance, several Tammies appear. Behind her, from where she came, several more. They seem to be on her trail, stalking her.

From a third direction, another group appears. They are lead by Vector Bruno.

She takes a deep breath, then runs out in the open, toward the Tower. The Tammies follow.

INT. P-TOWN TOWER CONTINUOUS - SCENE 184

Benjamin stands inside the Tower, looking out over P-Town with miniature BINOCULARS. Below, he sees Pax run forward. The Tammies are converging on her.

At other levels of the Tower, below him, two Corps stand guard.

Next to him is mounted an old-fashioned, wired INTERCOM. The wire disappears into a CENTRAL CHAMBER. He touches the intercom button and speaks into it:

BENJAMIN

Looks like some kind of agitation.

Alsa's tinny voice comes through the Intercom:

ALSA (O.S.)

Agitation? What kind of agitation?

BENJAMIN

It's one of the assassins. And a bunch of Tammies. I think they're chasing her.

INT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE A184

Adelle sits, head bowed. Alsa sits next to her, her hand on Adelle's shoulder.

ALSA

They're waiting for you. Waiting for you to go Over.

(pause)

You can go where other's can't.

You can go-

Suddenly the intercom on the wall comes to life with a sharp, static-filled message:

BENJAMIN (O.S.)

Alsa, are you there? Looks like some kind of agitation.

Alsa presses the intercom button.

ALSA

Agitation? What kind of agitation?

BENJAMIN (O.S.)

It's one of the assassins. And a bunch of Tammies. They're chasing her.

Adelle stands up.

ADELLE

Nanscop can't control everything!
You think they can, you think they
can help your son, but they can't
control anything except their
customers!

Alsa turns back to the intercom, flustered.

ALSA

I'm trying to work with Adelle.
Just keep 'em out of here!

BENJAMIN (O.S.)

(sardonically)
You shall not be disturbed, my
Queen.

Annoyed, Alsa switches off the intercom.

EXT. VR TOWER CONTINUOUS - SCENE 185

Kaja stands on top of the Tower.

EXT. VR TOWER EXT. VR BOAT CONTINUOUS - SCENE 185

MARIA

It's a control interface. You
should be able to find a way to
make it work.

KAJA

(as if in a trance)
No. It's missing it's 'handler'.
There's no input interface... Only
output... The entire Zone...
(pause)
Adelle wants me to destroy it... I
have to find a way to destroy it...

MARIA

It's a Sim. You should be able to
find a way to make it work.

KAJA

(as if in a trance)

No. It's missing it's 'handler'.
There's no input interface... Only
output... The entire Zone...

(pause)

Adelle wants me to destroy it... I
have to find a way to destroy it...

INT. VR CHARLIE LAB - CONTINUOUS

CHARLIE

No! This interface is for creating
things! It's linked to a device
Under, a chamber.

EXT. P-TOWN TOWER CONTINUOUS

Benjamin steps away from the intercom. Below, Pax has
reached the foot of the Tower and is being held at bay by the
Corp on guard, who holds a STRANGE HAND-HELD WEAPON.

Benjamin unbuttons the holster on his own weapon, a REVOLVER.

Pax calls up to him, from below:

PAX

Benjamin!

BENJAMIN

Yes? Where have you been? I've
been very concerned about you.

PAX

We got your data! Vector Bruno's
been sabotaging us all along!

A rock, thrown by a Tammie, clatters off the side of the
Tower, near Pax and the Corp.

Benjamin appears agitated.

BENJAMIN

What does Bruno want in this?

She doesn't have time to answer before another rock careens
off the metal structure.

BENJAMIN
 (calling to Corp)
 Let her up!

Pax pushes past the Corp and begins climbing the stairs. The Tammies converge on the Tower.

(break in scene)

BENJAMIN
 (calling out to the
 Tammie's below)
 You all go home now! This is
 Company Business! You don't want
 to mess with the Company!

They begin to throw rocks and other debris at the Tower. The Corp at the bottom retreats up a level.

BENJAMIN
 (to himself)
 Son of a bitch!
 (to the Tammies, below)
 Go on back to your goddamn caves,
 for Christsake!

Pax reaches his level. She is sweating profusely and obviously in pain. He turns to her.

BENJAMIN
 What the hell's going on? Why did
 you leave your shack? I thought
 you ran away.

PAX
 Why would I run away?

BENJAMIN
 The Zone is no place for ladies. I
 thought you'd had enough.

Pause.

PAX
 I have.

With a flick of her finger, a blast of powder erupts from her Cyberglove and Benjamin reels backwards into the rail of the Tower, then falls with a clatter to the grated floor.

He struggles to breathe. With his hand, he halfheartedly reaches for his revolver. Pax stands on his hand, regards him coldly.

PAX
 Maybe this is no place for
 jackasses either.

She indicates the sealed inner chamber.

PAX
 How do I get in?

He struggles to breathe. Below, the Tammies overpower the Corps.

PAX
 (forcefully)
 Show me how to get in!

INT. VR CHARLIE LAB - CONTINUOUS

CHARLIE
 It controls matter, molecule by
 molecule! Think of the
 potential... New life...

MARIA (O.S.)
 Do you think that's what Nanscop
 will use it for? Creating things?
 Or destroying things?

CHARLIE
 Don't destroy it. Use it.

EXT. VR SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

MARIA
 Even if you want to destroy it, the
 only way is to use it against
 itself.

EXT. VR TOWER CONTINUOUS

Kaja presses her hands against the inner chamber.

She steps inside the inner chamber.

INT. TOWER CONTINUOUS

Pax opens the door to the inner chamber and steps inside. She begins to descend down a metal ladder.

INT. VR CHARLIE LAB

Charlie is concerned, but helpless.

INT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE 186

The top hatch opens, illuminating Alsa and Adelle with a bright shaft of light.

Pax climbs down the ladder.

Alsa backs away from the ladder, presses up against the instrument panel.

Pax drops to the floor. Adelle regards her suspiciously.

ADELLE

Who are you?

PAX

Nanscop hired me to get access to you. Now I'm revoking their access.

ALSA

She's a killer.

Pax grabs the rope that had held Adelle and approaches Alsa. She grabs Alsa's hands and begins to tie them.

ADELLE

You don't have to do that. She's harmless.

PAX

Okay.

(to Adelle)

Listen. You were supposed to meet Samm--Maria--at 4pm.

ADELLE

I know. Is it too late? To get to the Island?

PAX

Kaja went in your place.

Pause. Adelle softens.

ADELLE

She did?

Pax nods.

PAX

Samm wasn't sure if this would work or not, but if you go Over here, you might be able to connect with Kaja. This should take you right into the Island. But through the front door--maybe right into their arms.

As Pax has talked, Alsa has pressed a button on the control panel. Now, a portion of the wall flickers, lights up. A video feed of Adelle's Uncle comes to life.

UNCLE (O.S.)

Someone is trying to use Ab Three. And I know it isn't you, Adelle.

Adelle is startled to hear his voice. As she stares at him, her face hardens.

ADELLE

I don't work for you anymore! I'm not part of your family, I'm not part of your company- My data, my brain, *belongs to me now!*

Pause. He smiles, slightly.

UNCLE

I know that, Adelle. You never took shit from anybody.

ADELLE

I thought it wasn't possible to get transmissions into or out of the Zone.

He laughs.

ADELLE

I thought it was the one place I could get away from *you*.

UNCLE

Who's accessing the Fabricator, Adelle? Is it your friend Kaja?

ADELLE

So what if it is?

He shrugs.

UNCLE

This machine never works. We can move one atom at a time. We've built some amazing things that way, one brick at a time...

ADELLE

Yeah, some really beautiful weapons.

UNCLE

Not just weapons. Medicine, basic materials, viral transducers. The Grid, the whole world outside the Zone, is only possible because of nanotech. But here, this project, this is the real dream, Adelle. Not one atom at a time, but entire worlds at once! Creation. Completely reprogramming matter. That was the fire that Prometheus stole from the gods. The ability to make new things!

ADELLE

You can lose the mythology. You're not fooling anybody.

He shrugs.

UNCLE

Fine. I'm not a scholar. I'm not a scientist, either. I've got a bigger mission, Adelle. I'm a business man. I need new things to sell. Gotta keep the planet spinning.

ADELLE

You've already killed the planet.

UNCLE

And from the ashes rises the Phoenix. Do you like that one better? You have to destroy to create. Pave the way for new markets. Better technology. It's progress.

Alsa watches him intently. She becomes increasingly disturbed by him.

PAX

Better technology? Better for who? Who decides what's progress? When do we get to choose our own future?

UNCLE

Adelle is the future.

(to Adelle)

It's your destiny. Just plug the little cable into your skinport. Help me.

He breaks into a smile.

Adelle steps over to the terminal. She reaches up and takes the TERMINAL CABLE in her hand. It is a strange orange color.

Alsa grasps her arm.

ALSA

(quietly)

Make sure you know what you're doing.

ADELLE

(quietly)

Thank you. I do know what I'm doing.

(louder, facing Uncle)

Pax is right. You can't just create for profit. You have to create a future. You have to imagine the world you want to live in, and what you should be to that world.

(pause)

I don't work for you anymore. I'm free.

UNCLE

(all joviality gone)

You're not free. You can never be free.

She twists the cable into her skinport.

ADELLE

I'm gonna see what my friend is up to.

She mashes a button on the terminal with her palm, sits down hard, and almost immediately goes Over.

INT. VR BLACK SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 187

Kaja stands alone in a pure black space. She turns and extends her arm.

Adelle appears, steps up to her.

KAJA

You made it.

ADELLE

You didn't leave the Zone.

KAJA

I tried.

Adelle gestures around them.

ADELLE

Somehow I expected this to be a little more spectacular.

KAJA

Well, your brain hasn't joined the party yet.

She steps behind Adelle, places her hands on either side of Adelle's head. Adelle closes her eyes.

Colored lights begin to flicker, shining on their faces. Images flicker around them.

An orchid lighting up.

The orchid farm: rows upon rows of orchids.

The pier.

The air around them begins to shimmer, vibrate in rainbow colors like a prism.

Adelle opens her eyes.

ADELLE

I can do it.

KAJA

(softly)

Do what?

ADELLE

Anything you want me to.

KAJA

I thought we were going to destroy this.

Pause.

ADELLE

I'm hungry, Kaja.

KAJA

(concerned)

Hungry?

ADELLE

Yes, hungry...

INT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE 188

UNCLE

(onscreen)

We're sending everyone we have in there. You can't get away. You'll have to-

PAX

We'll have to stop wasting your time.

She snaps a switch on the panel and the display flickers off. She points toward the hatch in the floor.

PAX

(to the empty screen)

You and the Vector Bruno can fight over the future.

ALSA

You can't create the future by looking backward.

PAX

(slightly surprised)

I think you're right about that. But both of them are looking backwards.

(pointing at the floor hatch)

What's down below?

ALSA

Nothing. That's where the raw material goes. When they do experiments.

Pax places her hand against a PAD on the instrument panel and speaks into the instruments.

PAX

Adelle, can you hear me? What's going on?

KAJA (O.S.)

We're going to destroy it.

INT. VR CHARLIE LAB

Charlie cries out passionately:

CHARLIE
 Don't destroy it! Please! Use it!
 Use it!

He sinks down to the floor in the middle of his lab. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

INT. VR BLACK SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 189

Kaja stands behind Adelle. Adelle is deeply concentrating.

ADELLE
 Something else can control this
 better than I can.

KAJA
 What do you mean? Nanscop couldn't
 get it to work.

ADELLE
 Not Nanscop. Not any human being.
 Something different. Something
 new.

Kaja looks concerned.

EXT. VR SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

MARIA
 A body. You need a body.

The wind picks up. She closes her eyes.

INT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE 190

Pax is listening at the panel. She nods.

PAX
 You need a living body.

Pause. Alsa stands up.

ALSA
You wanna make something new. Make
it out of me.

Pax stares at her.

PAX
Are you crazy? You'll die in
there.

Alsa opens the hatch in the floor.

INT. VR CHARLIE'S LAB CONTINUOUS - SCENE 191

Charlie pulls himself up off the floor, stares at his jar of liquid.

CHARLIE
No, you'll live. You'll begin to
live...

INT. INNER CHAMBER - SCENE 192

Alsa descends down a dark ladder into a pitch-black chamber below.

Pax closes the hatch above her. She keeps her hand on the hatch, deeply thinking.

INT. VR BLACK SPACE CONTINUOUS - SCENE 193

Adelle and Kaja stand side by side, facing away from camera.

KAJA
Are you ready to do this?

Pause.

Adelle reaches out and holds Kaja's hand. They face the same direction, looking into the distance. Lights burst around them.

INT. LOWER CHAMBER - SCENE 194

Alsa crawls slowly along a metal grating, in almost pitch darkness.

Slowly she turns her body until she is facing the camera. Her arms out in front of her, supporting her, she looks upward, stretching her body as if straining toward something above.

She shimmers. Yellow glowing particles start to rise from below her. They dance in zig-zags around her. Her body begins to glow and dissolve. The upward rain of particles intensifies, engulfing her.

FADE TO WHITE,
CUT TO BLACK.

A faint voice can be heard:

VOICE
(whispering)
Hello?

Pause.

VOICE
(slightly louder)
Hello? World?

END CREDITS.