

ESCAPIST

by

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BLACK SCREEN

SUPER:

"Escapism [ih-skey-piz-uhm]:
The avoidance of reality by
absorption of the mind in
entertainment or in an imaginative
situation, activity, etc."

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

A city in chaos. Out of control drivers thread wrecked cars through debris in the streets. The drivers holler and wail like drunken frats as they speed by.

There's an artificiality to the world that's uncanny and difficult to miss.

A man sprints through the streets, nimbly dodging speeding cars and other pedestrians. This is EMERSON, 20's. He has a kind face that has had too much practice looking sad. Right now, he's working with focused determination.

EMERSON (V.O.)

You're leaving? But why? Why now?

Emerson leaps over a toppled flaming trash can.

JESSICA (V.O.)

Oh god, please don't tell me you
don't know.

He reaches the front entrance to a looming skyscraper. He looks up, then rushes in.

INT. OFFICE SKYSCRAPER STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Emerson takes the steps two at a time.

EMERSON (V.O.)

What, so we fight a bit! Who
doesn't? Is that enough to call
off the last two years?

JESSICA (V.O.)

It's not just that!

EXT. SKYSCRAPER ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Emerson bursts through the door and out onto the rooftop. His pace slows as he walks to the edge of the roof.

EMERSON (V.O.)

Then what? What is it? I want to
know!

Emerson stops just before the floor ends and toes the edge. He inhales...and exhales slowly.

JESSICA (V.O.)

You wanna know why, Emerson? You embarrass me. It embarrasses me to be around you. Do whatever the hell you want, just make sure it's not with me.

EMERSON

I just don't get it.

Emerson extends his leg and walks off the edge of the building.

As he plummets past window after window, he seems relaxed. His eyes close as he nears the end of his very quick journey.

Emerson meets the ground just outside the building's front doors, impacting the sidewalk with a sickening SPLAT. For a moment, there's silence.

The next moment, Emerson walks out of the building's front door without a scratch on him. He carefully steps around the mess left by his previous self and jogs down the sidewalk to the next building.

EXT. CITY BUILDING ROOFTOP - DAY

Emerson shoves the door to the roof open and walks to the edge once again. Taking even less time this round, he hops off the roof and quickly meets the ground again.

And once again, he exits the building's front door and steps around the mess. But before he can continue to the next building, he's distracted by a disembodied voice. It sounds close, like somebody speaking directly into his ear.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Emerson, log the hell out.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Emerson is sitting in a small annex of a much larger office. The studio is bustling with over a hundred and fifty employees, each toiling away in front of a computer workstation. Posters and awards for previously released titles adorn the wall. A large banner poster towers over the rest. It reads:

"LUCID LIFE: A NEW ERA OF VIRTUAL
REALITY GAMING"

Emerson isn't sitting at a normal workstation, however. Like many others around him, he is laying in a zero-gravity recliner. He's wearing an apparatus: a Virtual Reality headset connected with wires to gloves and form-fitting slippers.

The back support of his chair is in dire need of repair: it's been jerry-rigged with duct tape to keep from breaking.

Sitting in a desk chair next to Emerson is ROBERT, 30's. His casual attire implies he's an easygoing boss. The daggers he's staring at Emerson implies the opposite.

Emerson labors to remove the clunky headset.

EMERSON

What's up?

ROBERT

What are you doing?

EMERSON

Huh?

ROBERT

That's the sixth building you've thrown yourself off of in the past half hour.

EMERSON

I needed to check --

ROBERT

Check what? That ground is hard?

EMERSON

(irritated)

No, there's a glitch.

ROBERT

Reporting a glitch? That'd be a change.

EMERSON

What's that supposed to mean?

ROBERT

You haven't been able to successfully recreate and document a glitch in days.

EMERSON

Couldn't that be credited to the extraordinary job of our programmers?

ROBERT

No.

(beat)

I don't know what you're dealing with right now, and honestly I don't care. I only want you here if you can do your job and do it right. Have I made myself clear?

Emerson doesn't know what else to say.

EMERSON

Yeah.

ROBERT

Alright. You're a good kid, Emerson, you just need to apply yourself more. Now go home, you're done for the day.

EMERSON

What?!

ROBERT

Did I stutter? You're no good to me right now. Go home, and get sorted out. Come back tomorrow good to go. We're launching version 2.0 tomorrow and I need you ready.

Emerson glowers, but lacks the balls to talk back. He passive-aggressively strips his apparatus, grabs his coat and leaves.

As he exits, he passes a woman's desk. This is JOY, 25. An antisocial workaholic, everybody wonders if her parents chose her name as a joke. She stops her intense working pace to stare in disbelief at Emerson's leaving.

JOY

Where're you going? We're launching 2.0 tomorrow and we're not even close to being ready!

EMERSON

Don't wanna hear it, Joy. Ask Robert.

Joy's hostility quickly turns to Robert, unaware of the shit-storm he just invited. Emerson leaves the studio.

INT. BURGER SHACK - DAY

Lunchtime at the local Burger Shack is a time of insanity. Meat sizzles and spits on the grill; a basket of fries boils in oil; an air conditioner previously repaired with masking tape chokes and spurts its last gasp as it dies...again.

One man is currently running the sweltering restaurant, wearing an "Assistant Manager" badge. This is NOAH, 20's. He is fit and on-edge, as if he's been preparing for a fight that hasn't happened yet. He directs his team with the caring and confidence of a leader.

EMERSON enters, still dejected. He moseys to the counter.

EMERSON

Noah, I'm going home. I need the car.

Otherwise occupied, Noah doesn't hear Emerson at first. As he rushes by the counter, he catches sight of Emerson before doing a double-take.

NOAH

(still working)

What're you doing here?

EMERSON

Robert kicked me outta the studio.

Noah blanches, assuming the worst. He's listening now.

NOAH

You mean he...?

EMERSON

Said I wasn't doing my job -- which is bullshit, by the way -- and told me to come back tomorrow.

Noah sighs in relief.

EMERSON

What'd you think--?

NOAH

Nothing, doesn't matter. Gimme a sec....

Breaking away from the bustle, Noah reaches under the counter and pulls out a messenger bag. It's adorned by a couple of pins and patches, but one PIN shines brighter than the rest:

UCLA GRADUATING CLASS OF 2012

Noah pulls out his car keys and tosses them to Emerson.

NOAH

Don't forget to come get me at nine.

EMERSON

He says I'm bringing my problems to work.

Not having the time, Noah goes back to work. He talks without keeping eye contact.

NOAH

(already knowing)

And what problems do you have?

EMERSON

Probably something to do with Jess.

NOAH

Oh, Jesus....

EMERSON

No, Jess.

NOAH

I know what you said! Seriously
dude, you have to drop that.

A CUSTOMER approaches the counter with a half-eaten
cheeseburger.

CUSTOMER

Sir?

EMERSON

What? We were together for two
years! That kind of attachment
doesn't just disappear overnight!

NOAH

Overnight? Try three years!

Not being noticed, the Customer is becoming visibly
frustrated.

CUSTOMER

Sir?!

EMERSON

If I could just find someone
new....

NOAH

Or you could work on living with
yourself.

EMERSON

I'm fine with myself, I just need
someone else too.

NOAH

This is ridiculous....

The Customer is fuming now.

CUSTOMER

Hey, Burger Boy!

NOAH

What?!

Noah realizes what he's just done, and switches back to
customer mode.

NOAH
I'm sorry, wha--

CUSTOMER
I told your guy at the register I
didn't want pickles, and look!

He pulls apart the burger to expose the pickles in the sandwich before putting it back together. Emerson eyes the sandwich hungrily.

NOAH
I'm so sorry about that, I'll make
you another right away.

CUSTOMER
Now that's more like it!

EMERSON
(to Customer)
Are you going to...

Emerson cautiously reaches for the burger.

EMERSON
Since you don't like pickles...

He plucks the burger from the Customer's hand, and takes a bite from it.

EMERSON
(mouth full)
I love pickles.

Emerson leaves with the burger, the Customer looking after him in shock.

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emerson enters, and moves to the living room as if the sofa is having a gravitational pull on him.

He passes NOAH'S PHONE on the table. Its screen flashes with missed call notifications, calling for attention and receiving none.

Emerson gratefully plops down on the sofa and surveys the living room. There are posters for movies and games, as well as family pictures. However, all of the family pictures are of Noah and his family. In fact, there are no pictures of Emerson at all.

He turns to his right and sees a pair of eyes peering at him from behind the other side of the sofa. He jumps up in alarm.

EMERSON
Jesus Christ, Cameron!

CAMERON

Sorry! Sorry, Em!

CAMERON, 17, moves out from behind the sofa, hands up in surrender. He's roughed up and scrappy, but he'd fight anybody with the nerve to call him lower-class.

EMERSON

What the hell are you doing here?

CAMERON

I called, but ya didn't answer. I left a message.

EMERSON

So you snuck into our house? Cam, you can't do that!

CAMERON

Where's the pictures of you? I just see stuff of Noah.

EMERSON

I don't have any pictures of me. But don't change the subject! Why'd you sneak into my place?

CAMERON

Look Em, my dad--

As if on cue, he is interrupted by a KNOCK on the door. Cameron silently pleads for help. Emerson eyes him with trepidation as he moves to the front door.

Emerson eases open the door to see HERBERT, 48. Herbert is an unkempt man who looks like he does more roughing than he gets roughed. Right now, he's fuming.

EMERSON

Hey, Mr. Portnoy. What's up?

HERBERT

You seen Cameron round?

Emerson hesitates.

EMERSON

...Nope, haven't seen him.

Herbert doesn't believe him. He fails to be discreet as he looks around Emerson into his apartment.

HERBERT

Well if you see him, tell 'im to get his ass home.

EMERSON

I'll be sure to relay the message.

Herbert's aggravated by Emerson shining him on, but turns to leave anyway. Emerson closes the door, and Cameron comes back out from his hiding place.

CAMERON
Thanks, dude.

EMERSON
What's goin on?

Cameron shrugs.

CAMERON
What's always going on?

Emerson nods, knowing. Cameron brightens.

CAMERON
Can we play your Playstation?

EMERSON
(smiling)
You sure? I won't take it easy on you.

Cameron turns startlingly serious.

CAMERON
I don' need you to "take it easy" on me. I can take you!

EMERSON
Hmmmokay.

Cameron pumps his fist and bounds to the couch.

CAMERON
Game on!

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's quiet, and dark. Down the hall are two bedroom doors, each slightly open. Inside the first is...

EMERSON'S ROOM

Emerson's room is spartan, with all of the items that would give it personality stuffed in a box on his desk. Emerson is reclining, wearing a home version of the same Virtual Reality kit from work.

Emerson's fingers subtly twitch, as if in a dream. The faint sound of gunfire can be heard through his VR headset.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Noah are in the middle of a harrowing firefight in a Japanese-style night club. Bullet-riddled furniture and bodies litter the floor; techno music thumps and a

kaleidoscope of colors pierces the air.

Emerson fires off a volley of bullets from his SMG and ducks behind an overturned table as three sharply dressed cronies return fire.

The cronies are guarding a shiny metal briefcase -- it sits at their feet.

Emerson looks to his right to see Noah sprinting across the open dance floor and leaping over the bar counter. Bullets follow him, shattering an elaborate booze display and showering him with liquor and glass.

Emerson blind-fires his SMG over the table, but hits nothing. The gun CLICKS dry.

Thinking quickly, Emerson pulls a grenade from his pocket.

EMERSON

Try this on for size!

Noah stands up behind the counter to see Emerson throw the grenade. The grenade bounces off a low-hanging fixture and lands back at Emerson's feet.

EMERSON

Huh.

The grenade EXPLODES, obliterating Emerson. A table leg flies directly at Noah, hitting him in the head and knocking him off his feet.

The three cronies move out from behind cover, celebrating their victory and laughing.

A moment later, Emerson emerges from a bathroom to the left with gun in hand. The cronies turn to face him, off their guard.

EMERSON

What up!

Emerson shoots down the remaining cronies. They're cut down in dramatic fashion, knocking over furniture as they tumble to the ground.

Noah emerges again, disoriented. Emerson leans over and picks up the briefcase from among the bodies.

NOAH (V.O.)

It's bullshit.

EXT. GHETTO STREETS - NIGHT (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Noah walk through a bad part of town. Neon-colored graffiti punctuates the cragged brick walls, and the sidewalks are bustling with other players going about their business. Noah is holding the silver briefcase.

EMERSON

Yeah....

NOAH

A degree's supposed to help you get a good job, isn't it?

EMERSON

That's the idea.

NOAH

What a load...Five years and a Bachelor's in law later and look where it's got me.

EMERSON

It'll come around.

NOAH

In this town? Don't be so sure. I think I'm cursed.

Two other players engage in a fist-fight on the sidewalk. Noah and Emerson gingerly step around them as they fall into a group of trash cans.

NOAH

Yeah, that's what it is! Cursed.

EMERSON

You're not cursed.

NOAH

Ever since Stillman & Clarke, I haven't gotten a single bite. I feel like I'm competing against the world for even an internship.

Emerson hears the faint sound of a cell phone's ringtone.

EMERSON

And you tell ME I have issues letting go.

NOAH

Hey, that wound's still fresh.

Across the street, a player is being mauled by an overzealous stray cat.

EMERSON

(pointing)

Hey, check that out!

NOAH

(not listening)

It was going so well, too! I knew...I knew it was in the BAG.

The ringing's getting louder, closer. Emerson looks tense.

EMERSON

So, Cameron snuck into the house today....

NOAH

Four good interviews and then nothing? What sense does that make?

The ringing is very close now.

EMERSON

Can we talk about -- can you hear that?

NOAH

Hear what?

The sidewalk and streets are particularly full of other players. Emerson breaks away from Noah and moves into the crowd, searching for the source of the ringing phone.

NOAH

Where're you going?

Emerson pushes through the people, many of whom don't even notice him. The crowd gets increasingly thick as Emerson struggles forward.

Soon, Emerson reaches a clearing. The crowd has created a perfect circle around a cellphone placed precisely in the center. It's NOAH'S PHONE, and it's still ringing.

The world seems still, quiet. Emerson is uneasy. Every body's back is turned to the circle. All of these people, and Emerson feels completely alone.

He steps toward the phone with trepidation. He kneels down to pick it up and examines the phone. The screen reads:

"CALLER UNKNOWN"

Emerson answers the call, and cautiously puts the handset to his ear.

EMERSON

...Hello?

UNKNOWN WOMAN'S VOICE

Hello, is Noah Dannen available?

Emerson looks up. All of the bodies that had their back turned are looking directly at him. It is still silent. Emerson's pulse quickens; his lower lip trembles as he slowly lowers the phone from his ear.

NOAH (O.S.)
Emerson, what's going on?

Emerson nearly jumps out of his own skin. He whips around to see him, and in an instant all of the extra bodies have disappeared. The phone is gone, too.

NOAH
(concerned)
What're you doing?

Emerson has no idea what to say. He starts to step back.

EMERSON
Uh...nothing, nothing. Let's
go--AAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!

Emerson steps into an empty manhole. His scream ends with a splat.

Noah peers into the manhole, but there's only darkness. He turns to see Emerson emerge from a storefront door.

EMERSON
Let's go.

INT. RESISTANCE HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Noah are being escorted through a repurposed derelict building by a guerilla resistance fighter in ragged uniform. This is the RESISTANCE ESCORT. Groups of people huddle around trash can fires to keep warm, others clean guns and furnish supplies.

The Resistance Escort's eyes are inhuman black pools ringed in white: fully dilated pupils with no irises. Emerson's and Noah's eyes are normal.

They climb a rickety flight of stairs, minding their step as they go. Taking up the rear, Emerson's foot FALLS through a step in the stairs. It makes a racket as he awkwardly pries the limb free.

EMERSON
Sorry...I made a hole in
your...yeah.

The Resistance Escort says nothing, and turns to continue up the stairs. Emerson shrugs and follows.

Walking into the next room, they see a workbench with a PROPANE TANK beneath a rack of guns and ammunition.

Inside the room is a large table surrounded by men poring over a map. Above them is a collage of signs with faces of other players. Each poster reads:

"WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE
RESISTANCE: \$50,000 REWARD"

A man with is back turned to them seems better dressed than the others.

RESISTANCE ESCORT
Sir, the men you sent for have arrived.

The well-dressed man turns to see the trio. This is the RESISTANCE LEADER. Handsome and charismatic, he greets Emerson and Noah with open arms. Like the Escort and every other Resistance member, he too has no irises.

RESISTANCE LEADER
So there are my two favorite mercenaries! You have my briefcase, yes?

EMERSON
Yeah-huh.

Emerson hands the briefcase to the resistance leader. He briefly opens the case to confirm its contents.

RESISTANCE LEADER
Thank you. With this, we shall strengthen our noble battle against the tyrannical Enforcers! You shall be remembered as--

EMERSON
Bored now!

In a completely unprovoked act, Emerson whips out his gun and shoots the Leader directly in the head.

In the collage of wanted posters, multiple posters of Emerson's and Noah's faces appear. Every single resistance member in the area turns toward Emerson and Noah and pulls their guns.

EMERSON
(to Noah)
Okay, let's go!

NOAH
What?!

Thinking quickly, Emerson shoots the propane tank and the room ERUPTS in flame and bullets. Emerson shoves Noah toward the nearest window, ducking low and taking wild shots at whoever is closest.

The Resistance Escort dives out of the room, narrowly dodging flame and errant bullets.

Emerson is stopped when his foot FALLS through the floor again. Not noticing, Noah continues forward and JUMPS through the window to the street below.

EMERSON

Well, sh--

EXT. GHETTO STREETS - NIGHT (VIRTUAL)

Landing outside, Noah turns around to see the building's top floor EXPLODE. Flames burst from the windows and the street is showered in glass.

He turns to the nearest door on the street, expectantly. Like clockwork, Emerson pops out unscathed.

EMERSON

That was awesome!

NOAH

Why'd you do that? The whole Resistance is gonna be on our ass now!

EMERSON

Ahh, only for two days, then they'll reset and forget all about it. I always wanted to do that!

Just then, Resistance militia pours out of the building's bottom floor, armed to the teeth. They are led by the Resistance Escort, who points out Emerson & Noah.

EMERSON

Oh, hey!

Emerson and Noah make like Olympians and dash. The Resistance gives chase, firing after them.

FADE OUT

MONTAGE - EMERSON'S DREAM

Emerson moves through a flurry of images. Jessica turns to see him and smiles as they walk along a beach. They share an intimate moment in bed. She draws in her notebook in their living room.

And then she's gone. We revisit the same places: the beach, the bed, etc., but this time she's missing. Each location is cold and empty without her.

INT. EMERSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (REALITY)

Emerson's eyes flit open. For a moment he lays there, reflecting.

He checks his phone: 3:30AM. Not willing to attempt sleep again, he drags himself out of bed and shuffles to a heaping

BOX OF MEMORABILIA on his desk.

He rests in his chair, flicks on his desk lamp and rummages through the box. A cheap medal from a 1st-grade Tae Kwon Do class; a childhood drawing; a stack of pictures.

Emerson flips through the photographs. They are family pictures, and seem to be in chronological order. The first pictures are of his family: Mother, Father, and him. As Emerson flips, his father becomes conspicuously absent.

The stack of pictures ends with an in-bed selfie of Emerson and Jessica.

This is what he was looking for. He singles out the print and studies it: Him and Jessica, laying in bed, happy.

He begins to tear the picture down the middle, separating him and Jessica, but stops halfway through. He can't. He delicately tries to mend the rip, and places the picture back in the box.

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emerson and Cameron are sitting on the sofa, playing a competitive fighting video game. Emerson wins, and Cameron isn't happy.

CAMERON

Rematch.

EMERSON

You sure? We could try something else.

CAMERON

I wanna go again.

EMERSON

Okay....

They play again, Emerson wins again.

EMERSON

You almost had me that time!

CAMERON

(snaps)

Don't talk to me like a little kid! This game is stupid. I could take you in a fight any day.

Emerson is surprised -- Cameron hasn't been this angry before.

EMERSON

Which is why we're playing a GAME.

CAMERON
C'mon, let's go again.

EMERSON
No, I think we should do something else.

CAMERON
NO!

Cameron hits Emerson HARD, right in the arm. He quickly realizes he crossed a line.

EMERSON
Ow! What the hell, Cam?!

Cameron doesn't stay to answer, instead fleeing the apartment. Noah emerges from his room, dressed in his Burger Shack uniform and drawn by the ruckus.

NOAH
What's that all about?

EMERSON
I have no idea.

EXT. FOUNDATION STUDIOS - DAY

Noah drives Emerson up to the front of the office building and stops at the curb.

NOAH
So you gonna be okay?

Emerson bristles at the question.

EMERSON
Yeah, I'll be fine.

NOAH
No jumping off of buildings?

EMERSON
That was a real thing, you know.

NOAH
Good. I'm only doing a half day, so I'll see you in the game later.

EMERSON
Right.

Noah catches sight of Joy, briskly walking to the front door and holding a bag of to-go fast food. Noah is immediately interested.

NOAH
Who's that?

EMERSON

That...is Joy, and you want nothing to do with her.

NOAH

I'll be the judge of that.

Noah gazes.

NOAH

She looks like she doesn't take any shit.

EMERSON

How can she when she spends so much time dishing it out?

NOAH

Well, you CAN bring that out in people.

EMERSON

...Thanks, dick.

Emerson exits the car, and Noah calls after him.

NOAH

Don't kill the messenger!

Joy hears this and looks. Noah makes eye contact and waves. Joy disregards him and continues inside. Emerson waves Noah off and follows Joy into the building.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING ELEVATOR - DAY

Emerson and Joy enter the elevator and stand in awkward silence. Joy looks tired as hell, as if she wouldn't be standing without a steady stream of caffeine.

EMERSON

Good morning.

JOY

No it isn't.

EMERSON

Didn't sleep well?

JOY

What's sleep?

EMERSON

...Last I checked it's what you do at home, in bed. At night.

JOY

Oh, that's why. I'd have to go home for that.

EMERSON
Where were you then?

JOY
Here.

Emerson pauses, weighing whether to pursue this line of inquiry.

EMERSON
Why didn't you go home?

JOY
Because I actually DO my job.

Another long, awkward silence.

EMERSON
Hey, something really weird
happened to me in the game last---

JOY
You know, Emerson, I would really
appreciate it if you stopped
talking now.

The doors open, and Joy leaves Emerson in the elevator.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY

Emerson enters the office, which is even more chaotic than the day before as people work to prepare for the new update. The large banner poster for Lucid Life has a sloppy "2.0" sign taped in front of the title.

As Emerson makes his way to his desk, he's intercepted by an unnaturally energetic man. This is DAX: 20's and happy to be here.

DAX
Emerson!

EMERSON
Dax!

Dax cracks open an energy drink and slaps Emerson on the back. Emerson's glad to see a kind face. Dax speaks so quickly it's hard to keep up.

DAX
So, ya ready for fun?

EMERSON
Yeah, I guess. How was your night?

DAX
Terrible! Incredibly awful! I was
here. All. Night.

Already done with his drink, Dax blindly throws the empty can behind him. Miraculously, it lands in a wastebasket. He pulls another can from his back pocket.

EMERSON

I think Joy's angry at me.

DAX

Well I'm pissed at you too, but you see the difference between me and Joy is I'd never say that to your face. Want one?

Dax pulls out another energy drink like a magician.

EMERSON

No thanks.

DAX

Ahh, sucks to be you! I've had like three or twelve of these already today. I feel great, and it'll probably kill me within the month! It's been great knowing you, Em.

Dax breaks away, leaving Emerson to try and catch up. Before he can, Dax darts back in close.

DAX

By the way, Robert wants you to train the new guy. Have fun!

Dax exits, for real this time. Just like Dax said, Robert and WALTER, 19, are standing by Emerson's desk and talking. Walter is starry-eyed, having just landed his perceived dream job. Robert catches sight of Emerson's approach.

ROBERT

Hey, Em! Glad you're here. This is--

EMERSON

Walter, I've heard. You want me to show him the ropes?

ROBERT

News travels fast! Well, makes my job easier.

Robert moves away from Walter, beckoning Emerson.

ROBERT

(hushed)

I wanna give you a heads up because you're training the new guy and I need you on top of things. You know the upgrade we just made to the game, right?

EMERSON

Yeah, two-point-oh. It's a pretty big deal.

ROBERT

Huge. But the tech team and I've been working on a little...something. A tweak to the game's visuals. We're applying it now, but wait till you see it. It's never been done like this before.

EMERSON

Why wasn't it tested?

ROBERT

I didn't want the news to leak out before we could put it in-game. You know how hard it is to keep a secret around here. If anybody beat us to the punch....

EMERSON

Hey Robert, there's something I need to talk about, too. Last night, something...really weird happened in the game.

ROBERT

Well, document and reproduce it so we can get it fixed.

EMERSON

I don't think it was like that. It was weird, like I was dreaming or imagin--

Another employee taps Robert on the shoulder.

ROBERT

Hold that thought. Oh, and be ready to supervise the Resistance attack on city hall at twelve.

(pats Walter on the back)

Work hard, Walter. And remember what I said.

Robert turns and leaves, leaving no hope of him returning any time soon. Emerson throws his hands up in frustration. Walter tries to break the ice and extends a hand.

WALTER

Hi, it's nice to meet you.

Emerson turns to Walter. He's really not feeling this right now, but shakes his hand anyway.

WALTER

This is so exciting! I've always wanted to work in--

EMERSON

That's great. What'd he want you to remember?

WALTER

Uh... He said to pay attention to Emerson's expertise, not his bad habits. What was your name again?

EMERSON

Emerson.

WALTER

Oh....

Emerson hands him the Lucid Life virtual reality apparatus.

EMERSON

Take off your shoes, put this on, and hop in the chair. I'll meet you in-game.

WALTER

Okay!

Walter hops on one foot as he tries to wrestle his shoes off. Emerson walks back to...

EMERSON'S WORKSTATION

Emerson sits in his recliner -- it groans in protest.

EMERSON

Oh shut up, I'm not that heavy.

Emerson wearily dons the VR kit, a routine he's completed countless times.

The VR mask is pulled over Emerson's view, and it's like he has instantly been transported out of the studio. He's looking at the game, but wouldn't be able to tell if he didn't know better.

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is standing on a small grassy field next to what looks like a high school building. A large parking lot spans outward from the school. Countryside surrounds the lot, with a small forest separating the school from the city in the distance.

So this is the upgrade Robert was talking about. No longer are the colors unnaturally vibrant, the world uncannily picturesque. The virtual world looks identical to the real

thing.

EMERSON

Holy shit.

WALTER (O.S.)

Hello? Hello?!

Emerson turns to place the sound. Walter is standing alone on a small hill, unsure of where he is or what to do. He stands, but hasn't figured out how to do much else.

WALTER

Where am I? What happened?

Walter's eyes widen: this reaction is new.

EMERSON

You're... ..in Foundation Studios.
You're sitting in a chair at your
desk. ...you're playing Lucid
Life.

WALTER

This...is a game?

Emerson nods. Walter takes a moment to process this.

WALTER

What do I do? How do I move?

EMERSON

Just imagine you can move like you
always have.

Walter tries to wrap his head around the idea, then slowly moves his arm. It doesn't take long for the rest to come naturally.

EMERSON

Okay, let's go.

Emerson moves on to pick a car from the many abandoned vehicles in the parking lot. Walter, however, is captivated by the simple act of moving his arm up and down. He points to it, excited.

WALTER

Are you seeing this?!

Emerson returns to drag Walter away.

INT. CAR - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is driving, Walter is pawing at the windows like he's discovering touch for the first time. A rock song plays on the radio.

The car pulls out of the parking lot and travels down a windy two-lane road. As they drive, they pass signs that read:

"BEWARE -- LEAVING SAFE ZONE"

WALTER

Safe zone?

EMERSON

Just what it sounds like. When you're in the zone you can't get hurt or be hurt.

Immediately thereafter they pass a new series of signs: they are the same "WANTED" signs from the Resistance headquarters, and display Emerson's and Noah's faces.

WALTER

(pointing)

Is that you?

EMERSON

For now.

WALTER

What'd you do?

EMERSON

What do you normally do when there's no consequences to your actions?

Walter thinks on this for a moment. They cross a bridge over a large river and enter the city.

EMERSON

...wreak havoc.

EMERSON

Exactly. Welcome to Lucid Life.

A large truck SCREAMS by the car, passing on the sidewalk. It veers through a park and launches off a makeshift ramp. The truck gains impressive air before crashing directly into a busy intersection.

The truck is not the craziest one in the scene. The city is a madhouse: speeding cars, fighting players and fires pepper the roads.

EMERSON

One rule of thumb through driving in the city: when in Rome....

Emerson stomps on the accelerator and the car lunges forward into the fray.

EXT. CAMERON'S APARTMENT - DAY (REALITY)

The muffled yells from a domestic dispute can be heard from outside. Three voices can be heard. As the yelling comes to a head, Cameron BURSTS out of the front door. His father Herbert can be heard yelling after him.

HERBERT

Don't you walk away from --

He's cut off by Cameron slamming the door.

Cameron is close to tears. He wipes his face with his forearm as he stomps away from his home. He quickly arrives at...

EXT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

...the front door of Emerson's apartment. He knocks on the door -- no answer. In the distance, Herbert's voice can be heard growing closer.

Cameron needs somewhere to hide. Looking for options, he runs around to the side of the apartment.

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

The apartment is still. A window sliding open breaks the silence. Cameron, like a ninja, climbs through the window without a sound and closes it behind him.

CAMERON

(quietly)

Emerson? ...Noah?

Cameron inches through the living room and peers down the hallway.

CAMERON

Anyone here?

As he moves down the hallway, he notices Emerson's bedroom door is open a crack. He eases open the door to reveal Emerson's recliner with his home Virtual Reality kit.

Cameron looks like he just found the lost treasure of Montezuma. He checks to make sure he's alone again, then steps inside Emerson's room.

INT. CAR - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Walter barrel through the city streets at the speed of traffic -- 90 miles per hour. Walter holds onto the oh shit bar with one hand and onto his stomach with the other.

WALTER

I think I'm gonna be sick....

EMERSON

No, don't you dare! Not with you mask on. If you gotta, take it off first.

Emerson SWERVES to avoid an oncoming car.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Just--keep calm and focus on the horizon, okay? Focus on the horizon.

WALTER

So...

(suppressing vomiting)

What's the Resistance, anyway?

EMERSON

Here, check this out.

Maintaining his grip on the steering wheel with one hand, Emerson makes some gestures with his other hand to conjure a web browser out of thin air. It floats before Walter.

WALTER

Woah!

Emerson narrowly avoids plowing into a car wreck by driving up on the sidewalk. Players dive out of the way. With a couple more quick gestures, he has navigated to a video on the internet.

The video that plays is pure marketing jabber: in your face and loud. An overenthusiastic announcer prattles on over edgy rock music playing in the background.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

For generations, a battle has raged in Viricom City between The Resistance and the Enforcers.

As the announcer speaks, explosions serve as transitions between images of key Resistance and Enforcer members: engaging in battle; firing at nondescript enemies; posing heroically.

The Enforcers's SWAT uniforms and high-tech military gear contrast the scrappy equipment of the Resistance.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Enforcers will do anything to keep the people safe and the city in order. The Resistance will sacrifice everything to make the people free. Which side will you choose? The choice is yours.

The Resistance and Enforcer members alike have the same dark eyes that were seen before. Walter notices.

WALTER
What's with their eyes?

EMERSON
That's how you tell the real
players from the bots.

Emerson turns a corner at breakneck speed, working hard to keep the car from flipping.

WALTER
Bots?

EMERSON
Computer-controlled characters.
It's good to always keep your gun
close.

Walter didn't know he had a gun. He checks himself to see if he's been carrying it all along. He has, on a left-leg holster.

EMERSON
Everybody gets a pistol to start.
We're here.

Emerson slams on the brakes and the car SCREECHES to a halt. Not wearing a seatbelt, Walter is THROWN straight through the windshield.

WALTER
Aaaaaaaaaa!

He lands twenty feet ahead of the car.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson's car is stopped outside a large, nondescript brick building. Emerson emerges from the car. He shakes his head at Walter, sprawled out across the pavement.

Emerson steps over to Walter and nudges him with his foot.

EMERSON
Hey, let's go.

WALTER
(not moving)
Am I dead?

EMERSON
It'll take more than that to kill
you. Come on, get up.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Robert paces around the studio, checking in on the employees. He give a couple of the workers an encouraging pat on the back as he makes his rounds.

He passes by a group of desks signposted

"COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT / CUSTOMER
SUPPORT"

and quickens his pace. Too late, he's made eye contact with STEVEN, 27, overworked and underslept. Steven homes in on Robert and approaches.

STEVEN

Hey, Robert.

ROBERT

Oh hey, Steven!

(bracing)

How're thi--

STEVEN

When are we getting more people.

ROBERT

I told you, I can't just go hiring more hands while other employees are out sick. Amanda and Rachel--

STEVEN

Amanda and Rachel have been out for over a week, and we just launched version 2.0!

ROBERT

They have the flu!

One of the terminals makes a BING noise.

STEVEN

You hear that? That signals another customer complaint.

Another BING noise.

STEVEN

And there's another. We have enough on our hands just sifting through the prank messages about the game killing players before we even get into the real stuff.

Yet another BING noise.

STEVEN

I'm telling you, I need more bodies.

ROBERT

And I'm telling you we can't replace people while they're still

(MORE)

ROBERT (cont'd)
employed. They'll be back this
week. In the mean time, make it
work.

STEVEN
Robert, I--

Just down the aisle, a terminal at ROBERT'S DESK rings.

ROBERT
Hold that thought.

Robert vanishes back to his desk, leaving Steven to throw
his hands up in impotent frustration.

ROBERT'S DESK

Robert sits down in his chair. The terminal on his desk
reads:

INCOMING CALL FROM EMERSON P.

Robert puts on an earpiece and accepts the call.

ROBERT
What's up, Em?

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is standing on the sidewalk, talking to air while
holding a finger to his ear F.B.I. style. Behind him sits
Walter on the sidewalk edge, holding his knees and rocking
anxiously. Storefronts line their side of the street:
bakeries and gift shops.

INTERCUT PHONE: EMERSON/ROBERT

EMERSON
Something's seriously wrong with
Walter. I don't know if it's the
upgrade or what, but he's freaking
out! He's been sitting in a fetal
position ever since he got thrown
through a windshield.

ROBERT
In the fetal-- doesn't anybody have
any GOOD news for once? What about
the visual upgrade?

EMERSON
Yeah! The visual upgrade is
amazing! It's so damn real it's
making your employees freak out.

Walter begins looking around in fear, like he's seeing or
hearing something Emerson cannot.

ROBERT

What are you talking about?

EMERSON

It's like-- wait, hold on.

Emerson pulls Walter up by the armpits and moves him over to a bench further from the street. A truck RUSHES over the part of sidewalk where Walter was just sitting. Walter is still freaking out.

WALTER

(pointing at nothing)

Did you hear that? Did you see it?

EMERSON

(to Walter)

Stay.

(to Robert)

He's losing his shit, Robert. It's like what I tol-- what I TRIED to tell you this morning.

ROBERT

What? What'd you tell me?

EMERSON

Something's going on, Rob. Last night I saw something that wasn't supposed to be there. Some weird stuff happened, and I... ..I don't think it came from the game. I think... ..it came from me.

ROBERT

What, like hallucinations? That's crazy.

EMERSON

Yeah, it's crazy! But you said it yourself: we're doing shit nobody's done before. Who knows how people are supposed to react.

ROBERT

Well, what do you want ME to do about it?

EMERSON

I don't know! But let's get Walter out of here before anything-- wait a minute.

END OF INTERCUT

Emerson hears a roaring engine approaching at alarming speed.

CAMERON (O.S.)

Hey, Emerson!

The odd car veers across traffic, directly toward Emerson. Cameron leans his head out the driver-side window.

CAMERON

Game on!

EMERSON

(to Robert)

I'll call you back.

Cameron is gunning directly for Emerson. Emerson attempts to dive out of the way, and almost makes it. Cameron's car hits Emerson's leg in mid-air, sending him spinning into the air before SLAMMING into a wall.

Cameron's car SMASHES through a bakery window, sending bear claws and bread loaves flying. Shattered glass and rubble coat the car, but Cameron is unharmed.

Not missing a beat, Cameron pushes himself out of the car and bum rushes Emerson who is still regaining his composure.

Cameron tackles Emerson, taking him to the ground. Emerson's able to throw him off, and quickly regains his footing. Cameron is eager, like he's been waiting for this for ages. Grinning, he continues the attack.

Cameron rushes in and throws punch after punch. Left, right, left, right. Emerson bobs and sways, keeping on the defensive and waiting for an opening. He finds it. Cameron throws a reckless punch -- Emerson grabs it, using Cameron's momentum against him and throwing him to the ground.

EMERSON

What're you doing?!

CAMERON

Shut up and fight!

WALTER (O.S.)

Hey, guys?

Walter's anxiousness is getting worse. He shakes his head and rubs his eyes, trying to get something out of his mind.

Cameron will wait for no one. He kicks Emerson in the shin, and takes the opportunity to jump back on his feet.

Cameron rushes again, but this time Emerson's ready. He stops Cameron in his tracks with a kick to the leg, and follows up with strikes of his own.

The fight continues back and forth: each dealing and receiving damage in equal measure. Emerson has more experience with the game, but Cameron's simply a better fighter.

Landing a few solid attacks, Cameron gets Emerson open long enough to connect a straight kick. Emerson gets knocked backward, and has to stop himself before falling into traffic. A speeding car brushes his clothes as it barrels past.

Emerson is off balance. Cameron notices and rushes in to knock him the rest of the way into traffic. Before he can, he's grabbed from behind by Noah.

NOAH

Nope!

Noah spins him around, sending him back toward the brick wall.

Noah grabs Emerson's hand, pulling him back from the rushing cars and back onto the sidewalk.

NOAH

Gotcha.

Cameron's not done: he gets up and goes straight after Emerson again. Noah spins around and grabs him, pinning both arms to his chest and pushing him backward until they're up against the wall.

NOAH

(gestures toward Cameron)

What's goin on?

CAMERON

Let go of me!

NOAH

No.

EMERSON

How'd you get in the game, Cam?

CAMERON

I just wanted to come by to say sorry about yesterday.

NOAH

Waitaminute -- you're in the HOUSE?

CAMERON

Why didn't you ever show me this before? This is amazing!

EMERSON

So your way of saying sorry was to attack me?

CAMERON

No! This is different! We can see who'd win in a fight like we always wanted!

EMERSON

Like YOU always wanted. I don't
wanna fight you.

NOAH

(to Emerson)
Stop changing the subject!
(to Cameron)
Why are you in our house?

CAMERON

Your window was unlocked again!

NOAH

That's not what I meant!

They are all interrupted when Walter starts screaming at
nothing in particular.

WALTER

Wha...? What are they?!

Walter's face is contorted in horror, eyes following
movement no one else can see.

EMERSON

Walter...there's nothi--

WALTER

No....NO!!

Walter pulls out his pistol and starts shooting in seemingly
random directions. Emerson and Noah duck to avoid the
incoming fire. Cameron, noticing eyes aren't on him
anymore, sneaks away.

WALTER

Get back! Get back!

EMERSON

Walter, what the hell're you doi--

Walter isn't listening. He screams again and runs away from
whatever is chasing him, right into traffic. A speeding bus
SMASHES into him, painting the pavement with Walter parts.

Walter and Noah stare, stunned. Reflexively, they look to
the nearest door. They wait, but Walter doesn't emerge.
They keep waiting.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Walter, reclining in his chair with his VR kit, is shaking.
His breathing is rapid and shallow. Robert, walking by to
check on him, notices.

ROBERT

Walter? ...You okay, buddy?

Robert ventures closer: something is not right. He quickly removes Walter's headset to reveal Walter in shock. His eyes are wide, his face pale. He struggles to breathe even the shallow gulps he's getting.

ROBERT

Oh, no...
 (to anyone in earshot)
 Somebody call 9-1-1!

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Noah are still waiting.

EMERSON

It doesn't normally take this
 long....

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Robert is tending to Walter. PHIL, another tester one desk over, hears Robert and pulls off his headset.

PHIL

What's going o--

Phil stops, and stiffens. He gasps for air as if his body has lost connection with his mind.

ROBERT

Ah, hell...Everybody, stay in the
 game and DON'T take off your mask!

Steven hurries in.

STEVEN

I called an ambulance. What's
 going on?

ROBERT

I have no idea, but it happened to
 Walter, and then to Phil.

An expression of horrified realization shoots across Steven's face.

STEVEN

Oh god, it's what they've been
 saying.

ROBERT

What?

STEVEN

The prank messages -- It's what
 they've been saying.

ROBERT
 We don't know what it is yet.
 (gestures to Walter)
 Watch him.

Robert rushes to his desk.

EXT. CITY STREET/STOREFRONT - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Confused, Emerson and Noah move toward the closed storefront. He eases the door open to see WALTER, still in shock and collapsed on the floor. He's not responding.

EMERSON
 What the....

ROBERT (V.O.)
 Talk to me Emerson, what's happening?

EMERSON
 Walter went insane and got hit by a truck, and now he's comatose on the floor. How are you?

ROBERT (V.O.)
 We'll have to see what the paramedics say. In the meantime, be--

EMERSON
 Waaayyy-way-way-way-wait a minute. Did you say paramedics? What's going on out there?

ROBERT (V.O.)
 I don't know. Walter's in some sort of shock. Phil too. Just don't die in-game okay?

EMERSON
 Screw that! I'm logging out and seeing what's up.

ROBERT (V.O.)
 NO! No, don't do that either. Just...don't die, and don't log out. Not until we figure out what's going on.

EMERSON
 Son of a....

NOAH
 Em, what's going on?

Emerson shakes his head.

EMERSON
We can't log out or die.

NOAH
What? Why?

Emerson points at Walter's body. Noah is gobsmacked.

NOAH
But that's--

EMERSON
Ridiculous, I know. I don't know
why yet. We just have to stay safe
until...
(looks at watch)
Oh no.

NOAH
What?

EMERSON
The Resistance is going to attack
City Hall here at twelve. That's
seven minutes from now.

Emerson puts his finger to his ear.

EMERSON
Robert, we have to stop the
Resistance attacks. Can you call
it off?

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Robert turns from a conversation with Steven to talk.
Steven throws his hands up again, storming away and ranting.

ROBERT
Those aren't built to be switched
on or off, Em. Stopping them
would require hours of recoding.
Just do what you can from in there
while we figure this out.

EMERSON
But--

ROBERT
I'll send Joy your way to give you
a hand.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson lowers his hand from his ear.

EMERSON

Son of a bitch...with the
Resistance coming, it's going to be
a war zone here.

NOAH

We should go.

EMERSON

My thoughts exactly.

They turn to leave, and it takes a moment for Emerson to
realize they've left in opposite directions. Emerson stops.

EMERSON

Where're you going?

NOAH

To city hall, where are you going?

EMERSON

To the safe zone!

NOAH AND EMERSON

(together)

Why the hell are you going there?

EMERSON

Wha? We've just been told that
dying in the game can mess us up in
real life, and your plan is to go
straight to the one place most
likely to get us killed?

NOAH

If this is true, then the other
players have no idea what they're
walking into. We have to go and
tell them before the attack
happens!

Emerson grabs a "Wanted" poster from one of the walls. His
and Noah's faces are still plastered on it.

EMERSON

I shouldn't have to remind you that
The Resistance isn't to fond of us
right now. And I don't get paid
nearly enough to do that.

NOAH

We're not doing it to get paid,
we're doing it because it's the
right thing to do!

EMERSON

No! You've seen it -- I die
really, REALLY easily! And I can't
let you get hurt like that.

NOAH

Excuse me? You don't LET me do anything. I'm going, and you can either come with or run on back to the safe zone.

Noah turns to continue. Emerson stirs, ponders, then follows after him. While he runs, he puts his hand back up to his ear.

EMERSON

Robert! Send out a global message to all players telling them to get to a safe zone.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Got it.

EMERSON

(to Noah)

Alright, I'll come, but we're taking the back way in. Unlike you, I don't have a death wish.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY (VIRTUAL)

A large, old-fashioned clock hangs above the entrance of the City Hall. It reads 11:56. A large park expands outward from the front of the building, with a large stone fountain in the middle. The park is currently bustling with people.

An empty pedestal fitted with a bevy of microphones stands at the top of the steps of the City Call, waiting.

The people in the park are players, normal eyes signaling their humanity. Their normal chaotic nature is temporarily repressed as they mingle and chat with one another.

Emerson and Noah quietly step through a fence at the back of the park. Emerson eyes the crowd cautiously.

EMERSON

Robert should have that message up any second now....

On cue, giant red letters appear in the sky like fascist skywriting. They read:

"ATTENTION: PLAYER ALERT"

Accompanying the text is an omnipresent voice, calling down as if from the heavens. It's a processed version of Robert's voice.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Attention all players. There have been reports of players displaying adverse physical reactions to their avatar dying in-game or logging

(MORE)

ROBERT (V.O.) (cont'd)
 out. All players must travel to
 their nearest safe zone
 immediately. Thank you.

Emerson and Noah look down from the skies back to the crowd. Just like Noah did before, the entire park bursts into laughter. On the sidelines, three or four players leave the scene. The rest stay, blowing off what was obviously a joke.

EMERSON
 Figures.

Emerson gives Noah a "what's the point?" look and shrug, but they wade into the crowd anyway. Emerson approaches the closest group.

EMERSON
 Come on guys, you gotta get back to
 the safe zone.

PLAYER #1
 Piss off, okay?

Noah splits off, trying to convince other players.

NOAH
 This isn't a joke, it's not safe
 here.

PLAYER #2
 You're the joke! Get lost.

NOAH
 God dammit....

Emerson hears the conversation and shakes his head.

Out of the corner of his eye, Emerson sees somebody in the crowd: It's Jessica. He catches a glimpse of her face and a flash of her hair as she disappears into the crowd.

EMERSON
 ...Jessica?

Shocked, confused and now very motivated, Emerson dives forth into the crowd to pursue her. He pushes people out of the way.

EMERSON
 Jessica!

He shoves another player aside as he turns a corner.

PLAYER #3
 Hey, watch it!

Emerson isn't listening, because he just saw Jessica again. She's consistently just out of reach, one step ahead. If he didn't know better, Emerson would think she was evading him.

He's catching up to her, getting closer. She darts out of sight to her left, and Emerson turns the corner to follow her.

When he rounds the turn, Jessica is nowhere to be seen. What just happened? Bewildered, Emerson tries to shake the crazy from his head. The City Hall bells RING, and Emerson realizes he's out of time.

INTERCUT: FOUNDATION STUDIOS (REALITY) / CITY HALL (VIRTUAL)

FOUNDATION STUDIOS

Robert stands up from his desk when he sees three paramedics arrive. They push a gurney through the front door and rush into the scene. Robert points them in the direction of Walter and Phil.

CITY HALL

The bells stop, and the front doors of the City Hall open.

All eyes on the opening as Enforcer soldiers flood down the steps. They look the same as they did in the video, decked out in SWAT gear and sporting expensive weaponry.

Emerson is quick to get out of their way. He moves against the crowd, trying to find Noah.

The crowd's attention is diverted to the other side of the park, toward the street. Up the street comes a ragtag armada of pickup trucks and station wagons.

Riding in the vehicles are Resistance members, armed with weaponry as slipshod as their cars. What they lack in hardware they make up for in numbers.

They stop at the park entrance. Doors open; boots on the ground; guns cocked and at the ready.

FOUNDATION STUDIOS

Robert paces anxiously as one paramedic works to treat Walter. The other two paramedics lift Phil onto the gurney and wheel him out of the room.

CITY HALL

At the park entrance, JOY enters. She sizes up the crowd and begins searching for Emerson.

A Resistance fighter climbs into the bed of a pickup truck that's fitted with a PA system. It's the RESISTANCE ESCORT from the previous night. He reveals a microphone and speaks passionately to the crowd.

RESISTANCE ESCORT
People, hear me!

FOUNDATION STUDIOS

The paramedic treating Walter checks his pulse.

RESISTANCE ESCORT (CONT'D) (V.O.)
The government as enslaved us in
tyranny for too long! Join us, and
take up arms against The Enforcers!
Fight for freedom!

He looks at his watch, then shakes his head. Standing up,
he approaches Robert.

END OF INTERCUT

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson hurries through the crowd and catches up with Noah,
in the center of everything. Failing to convince another
group, he throws up his hands in resignation.

NOAH
What's with these people?

EMERSON
It's no use! They're not listening
to us.

A decorated ENFORCER GENERAL steps up to the podium and
clears his throat.

ENFORCER GENERAL
These people are not freedom
fighters, they are terrorists!
They have attacked your homes and
businesses! Join us, fight for
safety and order!

ROBERT (V.O.)
Emerson, are you there?

EMERSON
Not a good time, Robert!

ROBERT (V.O.)
I just talked to the paramedics.

EMERSON
(paying closer attention)
What'd they say?

ROBERT (V.O.)
...Walter's dead, Em.

The players in the crowd make their decision, and split.
Half walk to the Resistance's side, half to The Enforcers.

Noah and Emerson are left in the middle. Emerson is dumbstruck.

Ready and eager, the players are lined up like kids at a dodge ball game. They prep their weapons.

From the outskirts of the park, Joy sees the split happen.

EMERSON

Screw it....

He breaks from the middle and pushes through the players.

He bounds up the stairs to the podium and pushes the Enforcer General from his perch.

ENFORCER GENERAL

Hey!

Standing at the podium, Emerson speaks into the microphone.

EMERSON

Hey, idiots! If you get yourself killed, you're going to go into shock and be stuck having seizures and shit and then you'll die! Seriously, get out of here and get to the safe zone!

Emerson and the Resistance Escort make eye contact. The Escort recognizes him. Black eyes wide, he points emphatically.

RESISTANCE ESCORT

You!

EMERSON

Oh, shit.

ENFORCER GENERAL

Attack!

Emerson sees Noah DIVE into the nearby fountain before the entire park ERUPTS in gunfire. The air is thick with hot lead. In the first moment, a few dozen players are immediately cut down. The smarter ones quickly find cover.

Joy stumbles back when she sees the firefight start. She pulls out her gun and gets behind a planter.

The stone fountain SHATTERS, torn to pieces by the bullets. Noah, submerged in water, becomes covered in the rubble. He struggles to stay under the water, behind cover.

Emerson descends to the park, taking the steps three at a time.

It isn't long before the players run out of ammunition. As their guns begin to click dry, they pull out whatever melee

weapons they have on hand.

A quickly increasing number of players break from cover, weapons in hand, to charge the other side. Bats, machetes, clubs, knives are all among the wielded weapons.

Noticing the drop off in gun fire, Noah emerges from the water. He stands, brushing the debris off his jacket.

Emerson runs with the players, but detours to the fountain before the clash. He jumps into the fountain with Noah.

The players collide in the center of the park and begin brutally killing one another. One player is held up by two others while a third swings a machete into his head. Two women engage in a knife fight that quickly kills both of them.

Emerson grabs Noah's shoulder.

EMERSON

We're gone!

NOAH

You got it.

EMERSON

We're gonna make a break for the exit. Don't kill any players!

NOAH

I can't quite check their eyes, can I?

EMERSON

Then don't kill anyone!

Noah nods. They clap each other on the shoulder, psyching each other up. Ready, they stand to make a break for it.

Emerson and Noah vault over the fountain wall and quickly place the exit on the other side of the park.

They break into a run, stumbling through the chaos.

As they move, players try to fight them. Noah and Emerson work as a clumsy team, watching each other's back and doing whatever they can to non-lethally disarm or disable their assailants.

The machete trio from before catch Emerson off-guard. Two grab him from behind, and the third charges in with the machete held high.

Noah takes the opportunity and grabs the machete straight from the player's hand. He hurls it as far away as possible before punching him right onto his ass.

Emerson jerks his head back, hitting one player in the nose. He breaks free, and sees the second player winding up a punch.

Emerson whips around and hides behind the first player. The second player accidentally hits the first, knocking him down.

Losing his human shield, Emerson psyches for a fight. Noah intervenes, tackling the second player like a linebacker. He gets up and grabs Emerson. They continue forward.

The Resistance Escort appears. He pushes his way through the bodies, making a bee-line toward Emerson and Noah.

EMERSON

Come on, let's go!

The two speed up their escape. The Resistance Escort puts on the gas and breaks into a sprint as he gives chase.

Joy has emerged from her place of cover and is wading into the chaos to search for the others. Players try attacking her, but have little luck as she quickly dispatches them.

Emerson and Noah almost crash right into her as they make their escape.

JOY

Emerson!

EMERSON

Joy!

JOY

What the hell happened to protecting the players?

EMERSON

You wanna talk them down? Be my guest! We're leaving!

Joy gets his point.

EMERSON

You coming?

Joy nods, and the three of them exit the park. The Resistance Escort isn't very far behind them.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Robert watches, disheartened as the paramedics wheel Walter's body out of the studio. Behind him is Steven's desk.

Steven's computer lights up with activity. A RING signals a new message. RING.....RING.....RING....RING...RING..RING RING.RING.RING.RING.

Robert slowly turns around toward the noise: Steven's inbox is flooding with new messages.

Steven looks to Robert, at a loss and panicking. Robert's no better off -- he's just slightly better at hiding it.

ROBERT

Tell everybody we're aware of the issue and are currently working on a solution. Recommend that they stay in the game and in a safe zone.

Robert strides to another row of desks. He moves with a purpose, refusing to lose control of the situation.

A PROGRAMMER hunches over a desk, poring over a screen full of code. Robert places his hand on the desk to get his attention.

ROBERT

I want you to go over all the code for character death. See if you can find a connection between it and what's happening to the players.

PROGRAMMER

Got it.

Robert steps away and surveys the studio, thinking.

ROBERT

(under his breath)
God help us....

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Noah, Emerson and Joy emerge from the park and onto a city street. Parked cars line the sidewalk. The sounds of rampant carnage can be heard in the distance, but the streets themselves are fairly calm.

EMERSON

I guess some of the people are getting the message....

JOY

Where're we going next?

EMERSON

We gotta get back to the safe zone before--

Emerson is interrupted by a hole being BLOWN in the wall next to his head. They turn to see the Resistance Escort continuing his chase.

NOAH
What the hell!

EMERSON
Get in!

Emerson races to the nearest car and throws himself in. Joy and Noah follow suit, with Noah taking the back seat.

The Escort is sprinting their way now, firing after them. Bullets shatter the passenger-side windows as Joy and Noah duck for cover.

Emerson fumbles with the ignition, but quickly gets the car started. The radio comes on with the engine, blasting a classic rock song. He punches the gas and the car burns rubber, speeding into traffic and down the street.

The Escort reaches the street, too late. He fires after the car, but it's too far away. He looks for a way to continue the chase, then pulls out a walky-talky.

RESISTANCE ESCORT
Bring the truck around to the front!

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Emerson drives as as fast as he can. The radio continues to blare.

NOAH
Can somebody kill the radio? I can't stand that song.

Emerson smacks the radio and it turns off.

EMERSON
Buckle up.

NOAH
In the game?

EMERSON
I'm not dying in a car crash. You've seen how people drive.

NOAH
Point.

Emerson checks the mirrors repeatedly for any signs of their pursuer.

EMERSON
I think we lost him for now.

JOY

What was that about, anyway?
Resistance doesn't target us like
that unless....

NOAH

Yeah, unless....

JOY

(realizing)

Oh god, you idiot.

EMERSON

I wasn't counting on the game going
all Lawnmower Man on us, okay?

JOY

Yeah, about that. What'd you do to
Walter, and why didn't you stop the
fight back there?

EMERSON

Hey, last time I checked I've been
working here twice as long as you,
so I'd appreciate it if you stopped
acting like this is all my fault.
Secondly, I didn't DO anything to
Walter. Something about the
upgrade made him flip out and he
got himself killed.

JOY

Wait, you knew about the upgrade?

EMERSON

No, I-- I didn't KNOW about it,
Robert told me right before I
logged on. Was supposed to be some
BIG secret or some bullshit.

JOY

I can't believe it. I can't
believe he would throw that in
there without even testing it!

EMERSON

You're telling me.

JOY

God... ...if Walter's dead, his
family's gonna sue.

NOAH

Most likely.

Checking the rear-view mirror again, Emerson sees a
Resistance-marked pickup truck speed through a crossing
intersection behind them. It doesn't turn after them.
Emerson sighs in relief.

JOY

We could even go to jail!

NOAH

Not really.

JOY

Why not?

NOAH

The courts would first have to determine whether there was knowledge of the problem prior to the incident.

Emerson's relief is short-lived. The same truck has turned around, and makes a wild turn onto their street. It picks up speed.

EMERSON

Hey, guys....

NOAH (CONT'D)

If there was prior evidence of the issue and it was ignored, it would be those directly in charge that could be held criminally responsible.

The truck speeds toward them, looming in the background. As they cross the intersection, it is delayed by nearly crashing into cross traffic. It slows, trying to maneuver around the few cars in the way.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Even then, it's not always consistent whether individuals or the company as a whole are prosecuted. I'm Noah, by the way.

JOY

Joy.

Joy leans back to shake Noah's hand.

JOY

How do you know all that?

NOAH

Law graduate.

JOY

(interested)

Hmm! Defense or prosecution?

NOAH

Defense.

JOY

Where do you practice?

NOAH

Burger shack.

Emerson isn't focusing on the conversation, and the conversation becomes muffled to him. He's looking at the sidewalk. Where there was nobody before, he now sees crowds of people. They stand facing the road, unblinking eyes following Emerson as he drives.

Emerson turns his focus back on the road just in time to see someone standing in the middle of the street. He slams on the brakes and the car SCREECHES to a halt.

NOAH

Whoa!

Just before the car stops, Emerson makes out the face of the bystander: it's himself.

JOY

What're you doing?

EMERSON

There's somebody....

Emerson turns to gesture at the jay walker, but he's disappeared. So has everybody else by the side of the road. Baffled, Emerson doesn't know what to say.

JOY

Somebody where?!

As Noah and Joy eye him expectantly, the pursuing truck is catching up alarmingly fast.

And catch up it does. The Resistance Truck CRASHES into their rear end. The car lurches forward and spins, glass from the shattered back window flying through the cab.

A rattled Emerson's playing catch-up, trying to get his bearings on the situation. The Resistance Escort is driving, and their situation becomes very clear as two passengers reveal AK-47s.

EMERSON

Get down!

Emerson stomps on the accelerator as all three shrink down and cover their heads. The Resistance Fighters open fire from the truck, decimating the windows and upper frame of the car.

Taking quick peeks to see where he's going, Emerson tries to right the spun-out car and get back on the road. He skids around in circles, and the truck moves with it.

The two vehicles clumsily dance around each other as the truck passengers continue filling Emerson's car with bullets.

Emerson drives up onto the sidewalk, knocking debris and fixtures aside as he struggles to get the car out of the line of fire.

Back on the road, Emerson doesn't care in which direction. He guns it, which doesn't do much: the tires are shot out and the body has more holes than steel.

The car skids down the road, sending sparks flying in its wake.

Joy peeks out of the passenger window to see the tires -- or where there would be tires. Now it's just steel on asphalt making a terrible sound.

JOY

(to Emerson)

Can this thing go any faster?

EMERSON

No! Why don't you do something about it?

Joy concedes and climbs into the back seat. She pulls out her pistol and aims at the incoming truck. Noah follows her lead and does the same.

The truck is bearing down on them again. Passengers #1 & #2 reload their guns.

Joy and Noah don't give them a chance. They fire on Passenger #2, taking him down. Resistance Escort pulls out his handgun and hides behind the steering wheel as he continues his pursuit.

The truck catches up quickly, and RAMS into their rear again. It's now pushing the car more than chasing it.

Emerson tries to steer out from in front of the truck, but he's lost control of the vehicle.

The driver exchanges potshots with Noah and Joy while Emerson tries to keep his head down.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Cameron is strolling down the virtually empty sidewalk, looking for something to do. An occasional car trundles by.

A sound draws his attention: the scraping of steel against road and gunfire.

He stops and turns to see an odd sight: The Resistance-driven truck nearly pushing Emerson's car down the street at great speed, with Noah and Joy shooting from

the back seat.

Cameron spots Emerson and Noah in the car and watches as they tear past. He scratches his head. What on earth are they doing?

Cameron shrugs, then looks around: no parked cars. A driven car approaches.

Cameron steps into the street at waves for the car to stop -- it ignores him, knocking him to the side as it speeds past. Irked, he flips the driver the bird.

Another car approaches. Cameron tries again, waving his arms emphatically. This player notices, and stops. Cameron bounds over to the driver's door.

The DRIVER rolls down the window: his eyes are normal.

DRIVER

Hey! Headed to the safe zone?

Cameron pulls out his gun and points it at the driver.

CAMERON

No, but there weren't any parked cars so--

The Driver doesn't stop to hear the rest of the story. He stomps on the gas. The car burns rubber, and Cameron is able to hook his free arm through the window just in time to be dragged along.

Cameron's legs scramble over the road speeding under him, and he tries to brace himself against the side of the car.

CAMERON

I -- just -- need -- your -- car!

The car swerves to the left, into the wrong lane. It runs up close to the sidewalk, putting Cameron directly into the path of sidewalk garbage cans. CRASH! Cameron is repeatedly bombarded with debris.

Here comes an oncoming car! The Driver swerves back into the right lane -- the other car brushes past Cameron.

The Driver tries rolling up his window, which catches Cameron's arm. He can't wrench it free. He winds his gun-hand back and SMASHES the butt of his gun against the window. It shatters, freeing Cameron's arm.

CAMERON

Ha! Whatcha gonna roll up now?

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The pursuit continues through the city streets, gunfire being thrown back and forth. Nobody can get off a good

shot.

NOAH
(to Emerson)
Can you hold it steady?

EMERSON
Do you want to drive?

NOAH
What, for you? Or for the guy
pushing us?

Joy runs out of ammunition, then Noah, then Passenger #1.

Frustrated, Joy throws her gun at the truck. Passenger #1 does the same. Noah throws his gun, which manages to hit Passenger #1 in the nose.

Passenger #1 recoils, holding his nose. Fed up, he climbs out onto the hood of the truck and tries to make it across to Emerson's car.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Cameron shoves his gun in his pants and tries to open the door. The Driver hits his arm repeatedly, and re-locks the door.

Irritated now, Cameron lands two good punches on the Driver. This buys him enough time to open the door. He plants one leg in the car and grabs the Driver, trying to pull him out. It's then that he notices the seat belt.

CAMERON
Who uses a seat belt in a video
game?

The Driver swings a wild punch at Cameron and connects. Cameron falls back, but catches himself in time to miss getting hit by passing traffic.

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Passenger #1 is almost to the car. Noah and Joy brace in anticipation. In range now, Passenger #1 tries to kick Noah. The kick is dodged, giving Noah time to grab his foot and knock him back.

Passenger #1 falls, and barely keeps himself from going over. Noah wastes no time, and goes out to meet him on the hood. They tussle, wrestling and rolling on the hood of the truck.

Resistance Escort, still driving, tries to get a shot off at Noah. They drive over a bump -- he misses.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Cameron grabs the gun back from his pants and puts it to the Driver's head. The Driver frees a hand and tries to push it away. The two struggle -- the Driver's scared.

Cameron's winning. The gun inches into range and Cameron pulls the trigger. BLAM! No more Driver. The car slows to a stop.

Cameron unhooks the seat belt and pulls the corpse from the car.

CAMERON

Jesus, it's just a car! Get another one when you come back.

He gets into the driver's seat and speeds off toward the sound of gunfire in the distance.

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Noah and Passenger #1 are still going at it, with Resistance Escort still trying to take shots at Noah.

Joy leans to the front of the car and reaches into Emerson's holster, taking his gun.

JOY

'Scuse me.

EMERSON

Hey!

Joy turns around and starts shooting back at Resistance Escort. Emerson tries to wrench control of the car back from the truck.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Emerson twitches in his chair, which is starting to give. The jerry-rigged duct tape repair quakes under his weight.

EXT. CAMERON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Cameron's catching up, but he's one block over. As they race down the streets, he sees Emerson's car on the next street to his left.

Cameron punches the gas and speeds ahead of them, then takes a left turn at 50 mph -- the car nearly flips.

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Passenger #1 shoves Noah off of him and rises to a squatting position. Taking the opportunity, he pulls out a knife.

Emerson sees the knife in his rear-view mirror.

EMERSON

That's it!

Emerson SLAMS on the brakes and the car. While there isn't tire traction to stop the chase, it does slow it.

The inertia throws Passenger #1 off of the car and under the tires of the Resistance Truck. Noah slides back into the car's back seat.

As they slow, they cross an intersection. Cameron's car is flying down the crossing road at crazy speed -- he doesn't expect the cars to slow.

Cameron sees the cars are stopping. His eyes widen, and he reflexively buckles his seat belt.

Emerson looks to his right just in time to see Cameron's car barreling toward them.

EMERSON

...Oh.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

The duct tape splits.

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Cameron T-BONES the truck, knocking it free from Emerson's car and knocking everyone with the impact. Metal and glass fly everywhere.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Emerson's chair breaks. The back of the chair drops quickly, stopping in a flat position.

Emerson naturally catches himself, like when falling in a dream. He moves normally, sitting upright and pausing. Slowly, his lifts off his headset.

He's out, and he's not in shock. He examines the chair, putting two and two together: the drop of the chair and the impact of the car crash.

He feels himself, to make sure he's real.

EMERSON

I'm okay....

He looks around: nobody has noticed yet. He thinks, but not for long.

EMERSON

...Noah.

He puts the headset back on and returns to the game.

Robert turns around just a hair too late and misses Emerson. He could have sworn he saw somebody moving. Oh, well.

Inside his headset, Emerson's eyes are closed. His eyes flit left and right under his eyelids as images are projected across his field of view. His eyes open and he is once again mentally absorbed into the game world.

EXT. EMERSON'S CAR - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is lying in the smoking wreckage of the car crash. His eyes open, and he works to get his bearings.

Through the windshield he sees Resistance Escort climbing onto the hood of the car, bloodied and bruised.

Escort aims (with great effort) his gun at Emerson.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Three bullets hit Escort in the chest and he's down.

Cameron hops onto the hood of the car and offers a hand to Emerson. Emerson takes it, and with Cameron's help climbs out of the car.

CAMERON

Well, look who's ass I'm saving!

EMERSON

Where's Noah?

A backseat door is kicked open, and Joy and Noah emerge from the car.

JOY

That wasn't fun.

CAMERON

(to Emerson)

Let me guess: you're going to the safe zone.

JOY

We are?

EMERSON

You too?

CAMERON

I wasn't, but I'll take you there.

EMERSON

(to Joy)

You saw what it was like back there. The people aren't listening to us!

JOY

Not listening to YOU.

EMERSON

To any of us! We need to get to safety and get our bearings.

NOAH

(to Cameron)

Didn't you see the announcement?

CAMERON

Yeah, but I'm not an idiot. Killer game? Give me a break. This whole thing's really fun, though.

EMERSON

Okay, you got a car?

Noah gives him a "what are you doing?" look.

Cameron looks to his car: nose buried in the Resistance truck and wrecked, but maybe still driveable.

CAMERON

...sure! Hop in.

JOY

Hey, I haven't agreed to anything yet.

EMERSON

For god's sa-- let's fight about it later, okay? Can we both agree that we're not safe right now?

Joy gives up and moves to open the backseat passenger door, which falls right off the hinges and onto the floor. She gives Emerson an "are you kidding?" look. Emerson shrugs.

Cameron gets in the driver's seat. Noah waits up to have a word with Emerson.

NOAH

(hushed)

He still thinks it's a game.

EMERSON

I know, but if we get him to the safe zone it won't matter.

NOAH

Gotcha.

Noah and Emerson enter the car and Cameron tries to start it. With much trouble, it groans and grinds to life.

Cameron shifts into reverse and manages to drag the car from the body of the truck. A hubcap drops off and rolls away.

Shift to drive -- Cameron presses the gas and the car begins hobbling down the street.

INT. CAMERON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car is quiet, the passengers crossing their arms in silence. Cameron notices.

CAMERON
Jeez guys, who died?

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

Robert is speaking to Steven at Robert's desk.

ROBERT
Walter?

STEVEN
His Mom's here to talk to you.

ROBERT
What about HR?

STEVEN
She wants to talk to YOU.

Already on edge, Robert steps lightly into the front lobby. There he sees LANA TREJO, Walter's mother. Red-faced and puffy-eyed, she's a wreck.

Robert has clearly never been in this position before, and is unsure of how to carry himself. He offers his hand.

ROBERT
Mrs. Trejo, I'm so sorry about Walter. What can I do for you?

LANA
So, this is where my son died?

ROBERT
Um...Yes, in our QA department.

LANA
QA?

ROBERT
Quality Assurance.

LANA
They say he was playing a video game...and then he died.

ROBERT
That's right, he was helping test one of our games.

LANA
Your game killed him. Your game killed my son....

ROBERT

We haven't been able to find out why Walter--

LANA

(angry)

Your game killed him! Walter was a young, healthy boy! I remember he told me, he was so excited...he told me he finally got work.

Lana moves into Robert's personal space, aggressive.

LANA

And on his first day he dies?! He dies, and you say you don't know how? And look!

(gestures to studio)

You're all carrying on like nothing happened?

ROBERT

Maam, I assure you we are no--

LANA

Don't you "Maam" me! If the game killed him, you have to turn it off!

ROBERT

We can't turn off the game, there are still oth--

LANA

Turn off the game! Your game killed my son! Hijo de puta!

Lana SLAPS Robert, who turns back gobsmacked.

LANA

You wait, I'll be back. I will make sure this whole operation is shut down!

Lana storms off. Robert stands for a moment, shocked at what just transpired. Feeling weak in the knees, he sits down with his head in his hand.

EXT. ROAD TO SAFE ZONE - DAY

The winding two-lane road cuts across hills of grass. In the distance, the road can be seen disappearing into a small forest.

Cameron's car chokes and gasps before finally dying. Wisps of smoke emanate from under the hood.

The party exits the car.

CAMERON

Piece of junk!

Cameron SLAMS the door, but something odd happens: the car begins to move. In the direction that Cameron applied force, the car slides across the road.

NOAH

Umm....

Noah and Emerson step out of the way as the car slowly moves across the street. Cameron and Joy stop and stare, confused.

The car drops off the road, crushes a fence, and continues across the grassy hills.

NOAH

(to Emerson)

Shouldn't that glitch be reported?

Emerson rolls his eyes.

EMERSON

Let's get to the safe zone.

CAMERON

Have fun, I'm out.

EMERSON

No, you're coming with us.

CAMERON

What, so I can sit around and wait to get rescued from the evil killer video game? No thanks, I'm not a pussy.

NOAH

Cameron, you don't under--

CAMERON

Yeah, I do. Some nerds wanted people to like their game more so they make some shit up. The fact that you guys believe it is really sad.

EMERSON

It's not safe, Cam, and I have to keep you from getting hurt.

CAMERON

Like hell you do! Em, look. I'm sorry I hit you. I like you. But if you try acting like my Dad one more time I'm gonna deck you.

EMERSON

You're being childish.

CAMERON

See? There you go.

Cameron lunges at Emerson, arm in mid-swing. Noah steps in, but Cameron's ready for him. He continues his swing right into Noah's face, knocking him on his back.

Cameron then turns to Emerson, who knows he can't match him. Emerson fights as defensively as he can, but Cameron easily gets a couple of solid hits in.

JOY (O.S.)

Hey!

Cameron turns around to see Joy's fist as it connects with his nose. He stumbles back a couple steps, and goes after her. Joy effortlessly sways out of his reach as Cameron swings at nothing but air.

Joy sidesteps and kicks Cameron's legs out from under.

Shaking away the daze, Cameron scrambles back to his feet. Joy and Noah are standing at Emerson's side, ready to throw down.

CAMERON

Alright, I get it. You got a posse...?

Cameron grabs one of the many Wanted posters littering the ground. He holds the picture of Emerson's face up.

CAMERON

...then I'LL get a posse.

Cameron turns and storms off, crumpling the Wanted poster and throwing it away.

Noah starts to go after him, but Emerson stops him.

EMERSON

Don't.

NOAH

There's no telling what damage he can do! To us, to others....

JOY

Who is that guy, anyway?

NOAH

He's our neighbor.

EMERSON

Well, we can't just tie him up until this is fixed.

NOAH

Can't we?

Emerson considers the prospect.

NOAH

He'll be back, and he'll bring The Resistance.

EMERSON

And we'll be in the safe zone. It won't matter.

Noah stews for a moment.

NOAH

Alright, you win.

The trio start the trek up the winding road toward the safe zone.

EXT. ROAD TO SAFE ZONE - LATER

Joy, Emerson and Noah continue their hike up the winding road. They've reached the patch of forest. Trees and shrubbery line the sides of the road, isolating them. For now, things are quiet.

JOY

Just for the record, I don't think we should be going back to the safe zone.

NOAH

Yeah, we should be helping the other players out there.

EMERSON

How much good are we gonna do with just the three of us? When we're back at the safe zone we can meet up with the other testers and make a plan.

JOY

Well I don't like it. Makes me feel useless.

NOAH

Like we're running with our tail between our legs.

JOY

Yeah.

EMERSON

I don't know about you, but I'd rather be smart and alive than brave and dead.

JOY

There's a fine line between smart
and cowardly.

EMERSON

(irritated)

And there's an even finer line
between courageous and stupid.

JOY

Oh, go to hell Emerson.

NOAH

Hey, now....

EMERSON

Okay, what the hell is your
problem, anyway? What did I do to
make you hate me so much?

JOY

Nothing! Because that's what you
do. You say you've been here twice
as long as me, but all I've ever
seen in you is someone skating by
on the bare minimum. And the fact
that Robert keeps giving you
special treatment just makes it
worse.

EMERSON

Robert doesn't give me special
treatment!

JOY

Are you kidding? He let you go
home to deal with whatever bullshit
you're dealing with on the DAY
BEFORE PATCH 2.0! And when you get
back, he gives you the new kid to
train and tells you the BIG SECRET
that no one else was supposed to
know.

EMERSON

Robert treats me like shit.

JOY

Yeah, right. And the whole time
I'm working my ass off and getting
nothing, NOTHING, for it.

EMERSON

Come on, Noah, back me up here.

NOAH

Joy, I think you're only getting
part of the story here. I'll vouch
(MORE)

NOAH (cont'd)
for Emerson -- he does care about
his job and that studio.

JOY
Well, he sure has a bass-ackwards
way of showing it.

The next couple of steps are silent, with Joy and Emerson
fuming.

NOAH
So, Joy... ... what do you do
outside of work?

JOY
I go home, feed my cats, watch some
Netflix and go to bed.

NOAH
Come on, there must be more than
that. Anybody special in your
life?

JOY
Not really. Look, guys -- don't
take this personally, it's really
not you.
(to Emerson)
Okay, maybe it's you.

Emerson flips off Joy.

JOY (CONT'D)
You seem like a nice guy, Noah.
But in general, life's easier when
there's less... ...people. And I
like to keep it that way.

NOAH
What about family?

JOY/EMERSON
(together)
What a crock of shit.

Noah looks at the two of them, surprised. Joy and Emerson
don't really seem to notice.

NOAH
Well, I happen to think family is
NOT a crock of shit. Hell, if you
don't have that, what do you have?

JOY
Tell that to my mother.

EMERSON
 (overlapping)
 You have friends.

JOY
 Let's change the subject. Why is a
 law grad still working at a Burger
 Shack?

NOAH
 Let's just say there aren't a lot
 of openings.

JOY
 Really.

NOAH
 Not in this town. I had landed an
 internship way up north... ..or at
 least I thought I had. But that
 fell through.

Out of the corner of his eye, Emerson sees a dark figure
 rustle some bushes just off the road. He looks closer at
 the disturbance -- nothing's there.

NOAH (CONT'D)
 It was at this firm called Stillman
 & Clarke. We did a lot of phone
 interviews, one Skype call...

More rustling. Emerson is focusing on the bushes now. He
 sees more dark figures darting in and out of the bushes,
 just out of sight. He can't make them out. Flickers of
 bright eyes flash from within their silhouettes.

EMERSON
 Hey, guys....

NOAH (CONT'D)
 ...and it seemed to be going really
 well. I had met with a lot of the
 top guys in the firm, and it seemed
 like a sure thing.

Emerson is seeing the figures more clearly, but that doesn't
 help. It's almost as if the figures are simply creatures of
 darkness: shapes without any real definition other than
 their bright, watching eyes. They see Emerson in a way that
 frightens him.

NOAH (CONT'D)
 But then for no reason they just
 cut off contact. I called them
 after a while, but they said the
 internship had already been filled.
 No idea why, or what happened.

EMERSON

Oh come on guys, tell me you're
seeing this!

Emerson gestures to the creatures, but Joy and Noah just
stop and stare at him blankly.

NOAH

Seeing what?

Emerson looks at him in disbelief, then back to the bushes.
The creatures are gone.

EMERSON

I just, I....

Emerson shakes his head, rubs his eyes, frightened at what
his mind is showing him.

He turns back to face Noah, but his expression has changed.
It's icy, emotionless. He stares unblinkingly at Emerson.
Without warning, Noah's voice can be heard -- but his mouth
isn't moving. The voice is dark, different.

NOAH (V.O.)

I SAY I'M YOUR FRIEND, BUT WE BOTH
KNOW I'D BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT YOU.

EMERSON

(shocked)

What? Wha....

Joy's head unnaturally whips around to face Emerson. She
two vocalizes without speaking.

JOY (V.O.)

FACE IT EMERSON, YOU'RE AN ANCHOR!
A WEIGHT HOLDING HIM DOWN! JUST
LIKE YOU WERE TO YOUR DAD! HE LEFT
BECAUSE OF YOU!

Emerson becomes upset, choking on his own words as he
sputters them out.

EMERSON

Shut up! Just shut up! You don't
know! You don't know shit!!

Emerson blinks, and suddenly Noah and Joy are gone.

EMERSON

Wait... Where'd you go? I'm sorry!
Come back!

Emerson hears rustling in the bushes. He turns to see Noah
and Joy just before they turn a corner and out of sight.

EMERSON

Wait! Come back!

Not even thinking, Emerson sprints off after them. Pushing leaves and branches out of his way, she chases Noah and Joy. They continue to be just one step ahead of him, just like Jessica at the city hall. In the distance, the faint sound of a ringing phone can be heard.

One more turn and Emerson arrives in a....

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

The trees give way to a large clearing. The ringing phone is louder now. Emerson can see it in the center of the clearing. It's the same he saw before in the city streets.

Cautiously, Emerson inches toward the phone. He looks around: nobody is in sight.

Reaching the phone, Emerson picks it up and answers the call.

UNKNOWN WOMAN (V.O.)

Tell them what you did.

EMERSON

Huh?

UNKNOWN WOMAN (V.O.)

(identically)

Tell them what you did.

Confused and afraid, Emerson drops the phone and steps backward away from it. He JUMPS when he walks into someone behind him.

EMERSON

Gahhhh!

Emerson spins around to see Noah.

NOAH

Emerson, calm down! What the hell is going on?

Emerson looks around Noah: Joy is standing behind, arms folded and looking concerned.

EMERSON

(to Joy)

You... Who the hell do you think you are?! You don't know me! You don't know anything about me!

Noah grabs Emerson by the shoulders.

NOAH

HEY! SNAP OUT OF IT, EM!

EMERSON

Noah, you don't -- you don't understand....

NOAH

(keeping cool)

No, YOU don't understand. You're freaking out, and you need to calm your ass down.

Emerson begins to come down. His breath slows.

EMERSON

Noah, I... I don't know what's going on....

NOAH

C'mere.

Noah hugs Emerson, which seems to calm him down. Noah breaks away.

NOAH

Joy and I are gonna keep going to the safe zone. You take your time, and come meet us there when you're ready. Okay?

Not okay, Emerson nods anyway.

NOAH

Okay.

Noah turns to leave. Joy lingers a bit, then follows.

EXT. ROAD TO SAFE ZONE - CONTINUOUS

Joy hurries to catch up to Noah. Noah is pushing ahead, irritated. They're heading up a hill now toward the safe zone.

JOY

Is he gonna be okay?

Noah doesn't stop or turn to reply. He keeps walking. Joy works to keep up.

NOAH

What do you care?

JOY

Hey, just because I don't like him doesn't mean I want him hurt.

NOAH

He'll be fine. It's just like him to flip out like this.

Joy gestures back in Emerson's direction.

JOY
THAT was normal?

NOAH
No, not like -- it hasn't been that... He just has a way. It's never about anybody else.

JOY
That's not how friends should be.

NOAH
That's not what I -- he's a good friend, okay? He always has been.

JOY
How long've you known each other?

NOAH
God, forever. His dad was an asshole, too. Emerson... He's a lifer. Doesn't have a lot of friends, but he'll stick by you till the end. I guess it's just when you're like that, you get to expect a lot in return. And...

JOY
...sometimes it's more than you can give?

NOAH
Yeah, I guess.

JOY
You wanna know why I give Emerson so much crap?

Noah doesn't answer right away. He slows his pace and finally makes eye contact with Joy.

NOAH
Sure.

JOY
I've known a lot of Emersons... A lot. People like that, they don't do what they do for you. They do it for them. I think you're a good guy, Noah, so please don't take this the wrong way. People like that'll latch on if you give them an inch. They're like...parasites. Emotional parasites. They hold you down, suck you into whatever self-pitying negativity they've made for themselves.

Noah shakes his head.

NOAH
Emerson's not like that.

JOY
Whether he is or not, I have to
keep people like that at a
distance.

NOAH
People like that? Or just people?

JOY
It depends....

NOAH
And how's that working out for you?

Noah and Joy finally reach the crest of the hill, and emerge from the surrounding trees to see the safe zone.

The high school building and parking lot comprising the safe zone is now packed with players, bored and exhausted. Groups are hanging out in between and on top of the parked cars. Bodies overflow from the high school building. Worn out and tired players are passed out on the grassy areas.

NOAH
Well, we're here.

JOY
What now?

Noah shakes his head without an answer. A piece of paper is carried on the wind in their direction. Noah picks it out of the air: it's the Resistance Wanted poster, featuring his and Emerson's faces.

EXT. RESISTANCE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Cameron holds the same flyer in his hands. He looks up at the Resistance Headquarters, which is still sporting the damage from Noah and Emerson's last visit. Self-assured, he strides into the derelict building.

INT. RESISTANCE HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Three resistance members huddle around a table, poring over battle plans just like when Emerson was there. Others mill around in the background, preparing for something.

Unlike last time, this room is charred black and wrecked. The windows are shattered, and the ceiling is letting sunlight in through holes.

The Resistance members speak in urgent voices.

CAMERON

Hey.

They don't notice him.

CAMERON

HEY!

The members stop and look in his direction. Cameron holds up the wanted poster. He points to the pictures of Noah and Emerson.

CAMERON

I know where they are.

The members suddenly switch to a much more welcoming attitude.

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1

Good, good! Thank you. With your help, we shall deal a great blow to those who would take our freedom.

Cameron shows no comprehension as to what this guy is babbling about. He's trying, though.

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1 (CONT'D)

All we need you to do is lead us to him, and help us in dealing swift justice for all he has done to wrong our people.

CAMERON

Okay, follow me. He's r--

An ALERT sounds, and all the Resistance members perk up like squirrels. Resistance Member #1 seems to have shifted to an entirely different train of thought.

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1

Our enemies gather in the center of town! We must prepare an attack while the opportunity is present! Will you help us?

CAMERON

Uhhh, what? What about--

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1

There is no time! Will you help us?

CAMERON

(points at wanted flyer)
What about him?

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1
His time will come soon, and you
will help us after we fight The
Enforcers.

CAMERON
Have fun with that, I'm out.

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1
You abandon our plight so easily?

Everybody in the room stops and turns to Cameron. The tone
has shifted to a very grim state.

CAMERON
...No, I don't abandon...your
plight....

Everybody goes back to their business, and Member #1 smiles.

RESISTANCE MEMBER #1
Good! Come with me, you will need
weapons.

CAMERON
NOW we're talkin'!

EXT. ROAD TO SAFE ZONE - DAY

Emerson is plodding toward the safe zone, dejected and
unsure. As he climbs the final hill, his communicator
rings. Emerson puts his finger to his ear.

EMERSON
What's up.

INTERCUT FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO / ROAD TO SAFE ZONE

Robert is viewing a computer screen over an employee's
shoulder. It depicts red and blue dots converging at a
location on a city map.

ROBERT
Bad news, Em. The next Enforcer
vs. Resistance event is Downtown in
twenty minutes, but there's still a
bunch of players stuck in that
area.

EMERSON
How much is a bunch?

ROBERT
About three dozen. They're holed
up in a few different buildings,
hiding from patrols.

EMERSON
Okay, so what's the plan?

ROBERT
We gotta go get em.

Emerson scoffs.

EMERSON
You mean I gotta go get em.

ROBERT
Still has to be done.

EMERSON
I'm sorry, did you miss what happened last time? We got laughed out, and everybody killed each other! Why should this be any different?

ROBERT
The cat's out of the bag, Em! Word's out, and people believe us now. Now I'm not gonna waste any more time arguing. Find a way, and get it done. You have eighteen minutes now.

EMERSON
Where's Dax?

ROBERT
Checking now... He's at the safe zone.

EMERSON
Got it.

ROBERT
Emerson, you gotta--

Emerson taps his ear, ending the conversation.

END OF INTERCUT

Emerson reaches the top of the hill to find Joy and Noah, waiting. Noah seems standoffish.

NOAH
You good?

EMERSON
Something's going down.
(to Joy)
We gotta find Dax.

EXT. SAFE ZONE PARKING LOT - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson wades through the throngs of people in the safe zone parking lot, searching for familiar faces. Noah and Joy are close behind. It isn't long before DAX can be spotted in

the crowd.

EMERSON

Dax!

Dax turns around and catches sight of Emerson.

DAX

Yo, Emerson! What it is?

They approach each other and shake hands, clapping each other on the shoulder. Dax is his usual over-energized self.

DAX

I'm glad you're not dead!

EMERSON

(beat)

Me too!

Dax and Joy hug in greeting.

EMERSON

You doin okay?

DAX

Never better! We've inadvertently murdered a substantial portion of our customer base, we've firmly established that we have no idea what we're doing, and now we're sitting on our asses waiting for the problem to fix itself. But god damn if we don't look great while we're doing it! I mean come on, look at that sky!

Dax takes an awkwardly long moment to gaze into the horizon with determined optimism. After getting over that, he turns back to Emerson.

DAX

...How are you?

EMERSON

Never better.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Cameron's old car continues slipping and sliding across the pavement, entirely of its own accord. Its tires are completely worn through, and the rims have begun scraping against the hard asphalt.

It approaches another car, and the two connect. As if transmitting a virus, the other car begins to move as well. Both their speeds increase exponentially.

From there begins a chain reaction. Each car that touches another keeps it going. Before long, two dozen cars are moving down the streets at an alarming rate.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1 is watching the cars move on his computer display. He sees Robert hurrying past and beckons him.

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1
Hey Robert, check this out.

ROBERT
Hmm?

Robert checks the screen.

ROBERT
What is this?

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1
I've seen it before: a car takes damage in the wrong way and it starts to move on its own. It passes along its properties to every car it hits, like a virus.

ROBERT
Why wasn't this reported?

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1
It was, but we didn't do anything about it. The cars reset every hour so players don't run out of things to drive. It'll fix itself.

ROBERT
When's the next reset?

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1
About forty minutes.

ROBERT
Well...let's hope it doesn't get any worse.

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson, Noah, Dax, and Joy are gathered together on the outskirts of the safe zone.

Emerson is doing his best to draw a diagram in the dirt with a stick. It isn't working very well. He gestures with the stick as he speaks.

EMERSON

So from what Robert said, there are three groups of players holed up here, here, and here.

DAX

Where?

EMERSON

What?

DAX

I have no idea what you just drew.

EMERSON

It's a map of downtown!

DAX

It looks like Elvis.

JOY

How do you get Elvis from that?

DAX

(gesturing)

You see the hair...?

JOY

Ohhh, okay.

EMERSON

It's downtown! Look -- this is Jefferson road, this is the old bank, and this is where the players are hiding. Can we at least see what we're doing here?

DAX

Sure. ...No wait, the opposite of that.

Joy seems distracted, like she's repeatedly catching something out of the corner of her eye.

EMERSON

There's four of us. So we take four vans across the bridge here and go pick them up. Then we get out before the Resistance and Enforcers show up.

Joy puts extra effort into focusing on the discussion.

JOY

That's it? Just go pick 'em up?

EMERSON

What's wrong with that? What are we, Seal Team Six?

DAX
More like Seal Team Sux.

EMERSON
Look, we've already wasted too much
time. Let's get some vans and go.

EXT. SAFE ZONE PARKING LOT - LATER

Emerson is back wading through the parking lot, looking for an appropriate vehicle. He sees it: a few players are napping on top of a large commercial van.

Emerson opens the cab door: no driver. He hops in and starts the engine. The players on top stir.

He taps the horn and accelerates -- the players on top are thrown off the top of the van and land on the pavement behind.

NAPPING PLAYERS
Hey!!

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Noah and Joy search for vans as well. Joy looks distracted again, and rubs her head in discomfort.

NOAH
You okay?

JOY
I'm fine. I'm gonna check closer
to the building.

NOAH
Okay.

Joy breaks away and moves toward the high school building. Getting closer, she spots a garage. The car port is closed, but there's an adjacent (but closed) door. Joy moves to enter.

Reaching the door, she stops. In her head, she hears whispers. What they're saying is unintelligible, but they're growing louder. She groans, shaking her head and bracing against the wall.

When she raises her head, the closed door is now ajar. A light emanates from within.

INT. UNKNOWN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joy pushes open the door and peers inward: at first, the room seems empty. She steps inside. As soon as she enters, she realizes something. The room isn't empty -- she's on the ceiling.

She turns around, but the door she entered through has disappeared. She looks up to see what appears to be a hospital room. The persistent beep of a life support monitor is the only sound that can be heard. Several medical apparatuses surround a lone bed positioned in the center of the room. An older woman is lying in the bed.

From Joy's perspective, it seems as if the contents of the room are suspended from the ceiling. She stares in disbelief at who is in the bed.

JOY

...Mom?

EXT. SAFE ZONE OUTSKIRTS - LATER

Emerson pulls open the back doors of the commercial van he has just acquired. The back is spacious: empty with two benches on either side.

EMERSON

This is perfect.

He closes the doors. Noah and Dax have parked their vans next to his, right near the entrance to the safe zone.

NOAH

Have you guys seen Joy?

Emerson and Dax shake their heads.

INT. UNKNOWN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joy is staring up at her mother in the hospital bed. Suddenly, she feels light. Her gravity reverses, lifting her from the ceiling to the floor above. She slowly rotates and lands, feet first, upside down.

A pained smile crosses Joy's face as she steps toward the bed. Her hand rests on the side bar, and her Mother's eyes groggily open.

JOY'S MOTHER

Sasha?

Joy's smile disappears.

JOY

No, Mom, it's me...Joy.

JOY'S MOTHER

Oh... Where's your sister?

JOY

She's gone, Mom. She left a long time ago.

JOY'S MOTHER

Why didn't you ever find her?

JOY

Doesn't matter now. I'm here.

JOY'S MOTHER

I wish Sasha was here.

It's more than Joy can handle. Scared, confused, upset, her eyes well up and she chokes on her breath. She trembles as her hands clench the side rail.

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Noah is searching outside, getting increasingly worried. He reaches the same garage door, and hears muffled screaming from inside. It's Joy's voice.

NOAH

Joy?

Noah runs to the door, but it's locked.

NOAH

Joy!

Joy continues screaming something, but he can't make it out what she's saying. He takes a step back and kicks the door down. Joy is standing in the middle of the room, but it's not a hospital. It's the school garage. Another van sits parked to the left. Joy is clenching the side of a work bench, seemingly screaming at nothing.

JOY

WHY WASN'T I EVER GOOD ENOUGH?! I
HATE YOU!

Noah rushes to Joy's side.

NOAH

Joy!

He touches her arm. She spins around, a wreck. She's crying, breathing shakily. Without thinking, she throws herself at Noah in a hug. Baffled, Noah soon holds her back.

NOAH

It's okay, it's okay.

In a moment, Joy becomes cognizant of her surroundings. She then realizes what she's doing, and who she's hugging. Furious at herself, she breaks away and tries to wipe her tears away.

NOAH

What the hell's going on?

JOY

I... There was...

Joy spots the van.

JOY
I found the van.

Noah is at a loss.

NOAH
Joy...what did you see?

JOY
I don't know. I saw....

Noah nods expectantly.

JOY
Something's really wrong with this
game, Noah. This is new. It
shouldn't have happened. It just
-- shouldn't have happened.

NOAH
Okay.

EXT. SAFE ZONE OUTSKIRTS - LATER

Noah and Joy pull up to the rest of the vans. Noah exits
the passenger seat, Joy stays in the driver's seat.
Emerson's anxious.

EMERSON
Where've you guys been?

NOAH
Sorry, it took a while to find a
van.

EMERSON
We gotta go, they'll be there any
second!

Noah nods. He turns to head to his van, but Emerson has a
second thought.

EMERSON
Hey, Noah.

NOAH
Yeah?

EMERSON
Be careful, okay? Don't go
anywhere.

NOAH
Where else can I go?

Noah gets into his van, and Emerson does the same.

INT. EMERSON'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Emerson pulls out his communicator and presses a few buttons. He then puts his finger up to his ear.

EMERSON

Alright, can everyone hear me?

NOAH (V.O.)

Yup.

JOY (V.O.)

Uh-huh.

DAX (V.O.)

I like cheese!

EMERSON

Okay...this is where the fun begins.

INT. RESISTANCE TRUCK - DAY

Cameron sits among a group of resistance fighters, all decked to the rims with makeshift military weaponry and gear.

Among the computer-controlled players, Cameron's eyes and mannerisms make him stick out like a sore thumb.

The truck hits a bump. Cameron fidgets in his seat. He crosses his legs. Another passenger notices.

RESISTANCE SOLDIER #1

Is there something wrong?

CAMERON

(sheepishly)

I really gotta take a piss.

Another soldier turns to Cameron, and speaks as if him and the previous soldier are using the same mind.

RESISTANCE SOLDIER #2

Why don't you take a break? Don't forget: Lucid Life is fun, but regular breaks for food, sleep and exercise are essential to healthy living.

A third soldier joins.

RESISTANCE SOLDIER #3

Don't worry, we'll still be here when you get back.

CAMERON

Yeah....

Cameron is pensive; worried.

INT. EMERSON'S BEDROOM - DAY (REALITY)

Like in the game, the sun is beginning to set outside. Cameron is laying in Emerson's chair, wearing his gear, completely still but for a slight leg twitch.

INT. RESISTANCE TRUCK - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Cameron stews. He remembers the announcement made earlier:

ROBERT (V.O.)

...There have been reports of players displaying adverse physical reactions to their avatar dying in-game or logging out....

CAMERON

It's okay, I don't really need to.

The soldiers nod.

INT. EMERSON'S BEDROOM - DAY (REALITY)

Cameron's legs tremble. A stream of piss dribbles out his pant leg.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - DAY (VIRTUAL)

The rescue vans cross the same bridge over the river from before.

The city is eerily quiet, with many unattended cars lining the sides of the street.

EMERSON'S VAN

Emerson leads the caravan, scanning the streets for signs of life.

EMERSON

No sign of the Resistance or Enforcers yet. All right, make your pickups quick and let's get outta here.

NOAH (V.O.)

Roger.

EMERSON

And be sure to avoid any Enforcers or Resistance, yeah? The less we're on their radar, the better.

DAX (V.O.)

I'll Enforce YOUR Resistance! ...Wait, that didn't make any sense.

EMERSON

Just be careful, okay?

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Noah's van pulls ahead and turns out of sight.

Emerson drives a bit further, then notices a truck coming down a crossing street. He quickly pulls over, cuts the engine. The truck doesn't stop.

Once the truck passes, Emerson pulls up to a...

INTERSECTION

Emerson parks his van and gets out. Gun drawn, he surveys his surroundings. No danger yet.

He glances up: in the second floor of a corner building, a dozen players peer out the window. Emerson gestures, beckoning them down. They rush from the window, eager for escape.

The players pour out of the corner building while Emerson flings open the back doors of the van.

Emerson waves the dozen or so players onward and they all pile in the van.

NOAH'S VAN

Noah pulls over to the sidewalk -- players can be seen peering out from their hiding places inside the nearby buildings.

Noah taps the horn and waves for the players to come. They emerge from their buildings and move to the van.

Suddenly and without provocation, Noah's RADIO starts playing. It's playing that same classic-rock song he complained about earlier. Confused, Noah tries to turn off the radio. Nothing happens. In fact, it gets louder.

NOAH'S DAD (V.O.)

You can't save these people.

Noah reacts to the voice. Who was that? The music continues. He starts hitting the radio. He kicks it; breaks it; smashes the faceplate into pieces. As he's desperately trying to turn off the music, the voice speaks.

NOAH'S DAD (V.O.)

How could you help them? You're worthless. You couldn't help your Mother, you can't even help yourself!

Noah covers his ears, but can't block out the voice or the music.

NOAH
Shut up! Shut up shut up --

EMERSON'S VAN

Emerson closes the back doors to the van, the players huddling inside. As he does, he hears Noah over his communicator.

NOAH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-- shut up!

EMERSON
...Noah?

NOAH (V.O.)
Shut the hell up!

EMERSON
Noah, what's happening?

A light bulb flicks on in Emerson's head. He knows what's happening.

EMERSON
Hold on, I'll be right there!

Emerson books it to his driver's seat, throws on his seat belt, and nearly crushes the gas pedal.

BACK OF EMERSON'S VAN

The sudden acceleration throws the passengers to the back of the van.

NOAH'S VAN

Noah stumbles out of the van, clutching his ears and screaming. The music POUNDS in his head, and the voice is hollering now.

NOAH'S DAD (V.O.)
Look at you! You're worthless! I
always said you wouldn't amount to
anything!

NOAH
SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

Cameron's Resistance truck slows to a halt to investigate the commotion. Cameron looks out the window to see Noah, acting like a mad man and screaming at nothing. He doesn't hear the music or the voice.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

The driver refers to the wanted poster featuring Emerson and Noah's faces.

RESISTANCE DRIVER

That's him.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

The Resistance Soldiers pile out of the truck and into line. Noah doesn't notice. The soldiers take aim.

BACK OF NOAH'S VAN

The players wait, anxious and unaware of what's happening outside.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

The soldiers steady their aim, prepare to squeeze the triggers....

A horn HONKS from left field. The soldiers turn to look. Cameron peers out the back window -- his eyes widen.

Emerson is speeding toward the Resistance Truck like a bat out of hell. He grips the steering wheel with fierce determination.

Emerson and Cameron make eye contact. Time slows as Emerson processes the betrayal. He doesn't have long.

Sensing the impending impact, Cameron quickly turns around and braces against the seat.

Emerson doesn't have time to correct his course. He RAMS the back of the truck and crushes the on-foot Resistance Soldiers in one move.

The Resistance Soldiers let bullets fly as they are run over. They miss Noah by a mile, but tear up his van.

BACK OF NOAH'S VAN

The players are riddled with bullets as the gunfire rips through the van.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert is staring at his display of the events in-game, mortified. Steven approaches.

STEVEN

We just lost a group of players!

Robert shakes his head.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - EMERSON'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Cameron's truck flies forward, with Cameron still inside. Emerson stumbles out of his van and runs to Noah's aid.

Noah's still covering his ears, tears punctuating stammers. Emerson grabs him by the shoulders.

EMERSON

Noah! Come on, Noah, snap out of it!

Noah is unresponsive. Desperate, Emerson SLAPS Noah across the face. Noah opens his eyes, and sees Emerson. He looks relieved to see a familiar face.

NOAH

Em, I can't turn off the music!

EMERSON

Don't worry, it'll pass.

NOAH

What?!

EMERSON

It'll -- never mind. Come on!

Emerson guides Noah to Emerson's van, which is beat up but still running. Once Noah's safely in the passenger seat, Emerson darts back over to Noah's truck.

He throws open the doors and starts to motion for the players to exit, but nobody is left alive.

Cameron struggles to climb out of the twisted wreckage of the Resistance Truck.

His head pokes out through a window: he sees Emerson observing Noah's van. Behind Emerson, he sees more Resistance trucks incoming.

Emerson turns around. He sees them too. Not wasting any time, he sprints back to his van and throws himself into the driver's seat.

EMERSON

Time to go!

He stomps the accelerator. The van burns rubber.

BACK OF EMERSON'S VAN

The players, finally regaining their composure, are thrown against the back of the van yet again.

EMERSON'S VAN

The van tears down the city streets. The Resistance fighters are coming out of the woodwork from all directions.

As they pass through an intersection, they see even more trucks converging on their position.

RESISTANCE TRUCK (CRASHED)

Cameron manages to pull himself the rest of the way out of a window. He flags down an incoming Resistance Truck, which slows down just long enough for him to hob on board.

CAMERON
(climbing in)
Go, get after 'em!

EMERSON'S VAN

Emerson puts his finger to his ear.

EMERSON
Where is everybody?

JOY'S VAN

Joy wrenches her steering wheel back and forth as the van swerves to avoid abandoned cars.

JOY
I picked up what I could carry, I
can see the bridge from here!

EMERSON'S VAN

Noah seems to be slowly regaining his senses.

EMERSON
Good! Keep going -- we'll catch
up.

JOY
Catch up? Emerson if you screw
this up, I'm NOT coming back for
your ass.

EMERSON
I got it, Joy. Dax, where you at?

NOAH
(overlapping)
I think it's getting better....

DAX (V.O.)
Comin' at ya!

DAX'S VAN

Dax pulls a wild turn through an intersection as he catches up with Emerson's van. Behind him trail three Resistance trucks.

Together now, Dax and Emerson have collected a small army of Resistance Trucks hot in pursuit.

Dax looks worried. He anxiously checks his rear-view mirrors: they're filled with pursuing trucks.

DAX
Jesus, they're everywhere!

EXT. CITY BRIDGE ENTRANCE

Joy's van ROARS across the bridge, sending sparks flying as the van's undercarriage collides with the sharp incline. She catches a moment of air at the apex... ..and she's clear!

JOY'S VAN

Joy smiles in relief.

JOY
I'm out!

The smile quickly fades when she sees a caravan of armored Enforcer Trucks cresting the hill in front of her.

The caravan passes her, but stops on the bridge.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - EMERSON'S VAN

JOY (V.O.)
The Enforcers are here! They're setting up a blockade on the bridge.

EMERSON
Shit... ..that's still our best way out -- we'll have to try anyway.

DAX AND EMERSON'S VANS

The two vans drive side-by-side, with Dax's van trailing just slightly behind. The Resistance Trucks behind them swerve back and forth, trying to overtake them.

DAX'S VAN

DAX
(panicked)
Well let's get there fast, 'kay?

One Resistance Truck manages to catch up to Dax, and pulls up to his right. A Resistance Soldier climbs halfway out the backseat window, AK-47 in hand.

The Soldier opens fire on the cab of the van.

Dax shields his face from the shattered glass and shrapnel while trying to keep hold of the van.

The van swerves, sideswiping Emerson's van. The Soldier takes aim again, this time at Dax's tires.

He peppers the wheel well with bullets, and the front right tire is torn to shreds.

The van skids to the left, crossing lanes and just barely missing the tail of Emerson's van.

It hits a median and, like a stampeding buffalo taking an arrow to the haunch, flips and skids to a halt.

EMERSON'S VAN

Emerson checks his mirror just in time to see Dax wipe out. Smoke and sparks spray wildly from the crashed van.

EMERSON

Oh no, no....

DAX'S VAN

The van lies on its side, damaged beyond repair. Licks of flame skitter out from the engine. The passenger-side cab door is kicked out from below, and Dax emerges from the steel carcass.

Unfortunately, he isn't alone. As three trucks continue their pursuit of Emerson, the others have stopped to take care of Dax. They surround the van, guns ready.

Dax knows he doesn't stand a chance.

DAX

...Shit.

The Resistance Soldiers all open fire simultaneously, executing Dax and everybody unlucky enough to be in the back of his van.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert looks to another display: another group of players lost.

ROBERT

Dammit Em, what're you doing?

EXT. DOWNTOWN - EMERSON'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Emerson stares in disbelief at the carnage occurring in his rear-view mirror. He doesn't have long, however, as his remaining pursuers fill his view. He turns to Noah, who is finally coming to. Noah rubs his ears in discomfort.

EMERSON

HEY!

Noah faces him, attentive.

EMERSON

You snapped out of it yet?

Noah nods.

EMERSON

Then get your gun and fire back!

NOAH

Got it!

Noah slaps his own face; psyches himself up.

He pulls his handgun from his holster and smashes his window open with the butt of his gun. Emerson recoils.

EMERSON

It rolls down!

NOAH

My way's faster.

EMERSON'S VAN

Noah climbs halfway out of the passenger window, sitting on the car door. He aims, shoots. A Soldier riding shotgun in the closest truck is taken out through the windshield.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

Blood from the Soldier riding shotgun spatters on Cameron. Pissed off now, he wipes it away and pulls his own gun from its holster.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

Cameron climbs out a passenger window, pushing Resistance Soldiers out of the way in the process. He mirrors Noah's position as he returns fire.

EMERSON'S VAN

Noah returns to his seat, bullets narrowly missing his head.

NOAH

Cameron's with them.

EMERSON

Yeah, I know.

NOAH

(surprised)

You know?

EMERSON

Don't shoot him!

NOAH

Are you kidding?!

EMERSON

Do I look it? Don't. Shoot. Him.

NOAH

He shoots at me, I'm shooting back.
That's all I'm sayin'.

Noah moves to climb out the window again. Nope, more bullets. Not safe yet.

NOAH

He's shootin!

EMERSON

Dammit Cam, what're you doing?

EMERSON'S VAN

The van drives over a piece of debris and his a nasty bump.

BACK OF EMERSON'S VAN

The players bump with the van, but mostly catch themselves.

A player rubs her stomach uncomfortably.

PLAYER #1

I think I'm gonna be sick....

Another player looks more distraught than the others, and strains as if he's attempting to wrestle something from his mind.

The distraught PLAYER #2 sees the other people in the van, but not as human. To him, the players are slowly changing into hideous creatures. Their faces contort and twist into inhuman forms.

The perfectly normal players watch as this one player begins to panic.

PLAYER #2

Oh my god....

PLAYER #3

You okay, buddy?

Player #2's eyes widen in horror. In his eyes, PLAYER #3 is a horned demon. Its tongue licks its menacing teeth with every word.

PLAYER #3

(growling)

...You okay?

Player #2 screams in primal fear and attacks Player #3 like a frenzied animal. Another player begins showing the same

panic as Player #2.

PLAYER #4

Get away from me! What's happened
to all of you?!

Player #1 sounds like she's vomiting, but nothing visibly comes out. She's vomited inside her mask, and now she's choking on it.

The back of the van is quickly engulfed in chaos.

EMERSON'S VAN

A ruckus can be heard in the back.

EMERSON

What's going on back there?

Noah doesn't hear him as he moves out the window again to fire on the pursuing trucks.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

Cameron ducks back into the truck and into his seat to avoid the gunfire and reload.

Emerson's van rounds a corner and the bridge comes into view.

EMERSON

I can see the bridge! ...Oh, wait.

The Enforcers have set up a full road-block. Armored trucks are parked, blocking the bridge entirely. There's at least a dozen Enforcer Gunmen manning the blockade.

EMERSON

Okay, bad idea! Hold on!

Emerson pulls a hard U-Turn. The van loses traction and skids, almost overturning. Emerson reaches out and grabs Noah by the shirt to keep him from being thrown from the vehicle.

EMERSON'S VAN

The van slides over a manhole, knocking the cover loose. Regaining control, Emerson guns it in the opposite direction.

The Resistance trucks aren't as quick to react, and lag behind Emerson in turning around.

A commanding Enforcer Gunman raises his hand.

ENFORCER COMMANDER

Open fire!

And they do. The Resistance trucks are perforated with lead.

RESISTANCE TRUCK

Cameron ducks and covers his head as two of the Resistance Soldiers around him are shot. The driver survives, and manages to pull the truck away from the incoming gunfire.

EXT. CITY BRIDGE ENTRANCE

Two of the three Resistance trucks manage to correct course and continue the chase after Emerson. The third car is destroyed: its gas tank is pierced and it erupts in flame.

The Enforcer Commander yells into a radio.

ENFORCER COMMANDER

Alpha team! Resistance fighters
are on 12th street! Don't let them
get away!

EXT. DOWNTOWN - EMERSON'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

The ruckus from the back is growing louder. Bangs and thuds echo through the back wall.

EMERSON

What the hell are they doing?

Suddenly, a player throws the back doors open.

Half the players inside are already dead, beaten to death. The others are locked in combat.

The player that opened the door loses her footing, and with a scream falls from the van.

The driver of the Resistance Trucks makes no attempt to avoid running her over. A sickening THUD is heard as the truck runs over the human speed-bump.

From his perch in the window, Noah sees the player fall from the van.

EMERSON'S VAN

Noah climbs back inside the cab.

NOAH

We gotta stop!

EMERSON

Can't really do that right now....

NOAH

The back doors are opened!

EMERSON

What?! Oh, hey --

In front of them, the Resistance trucks that stopped to execute Dax round a corner and head directly toward them.

Thinking quickly, Emerson turns a sharp corner into an alley.

Player corpses are thrown from the van by the inertia as Emerson's Van darts into the alley.

Emerson is speeding down the narrow path when he suddenly sees the street open downward into a HELLMOUTH. Asphalt and concrete collapse into the new chasm.

Emerson SLAMS on the brakes, and the van screeches to a halt.

NOAH

What're you doing?!

Emerson shifts into reverse and tries to back out, but it's too late. The Resistance Trucks have already pulled in -- they're trapped.

EMERSON

C'mon, let's go!

NOAH

Go where?

Emerson unbuckles his seat belt and exits the van. Noah follows in kind.

BACK ALLEY

The alley is dotted by the occasional door leading into the back of the buildings.

Emerson rounds the van to check on the players: only one is left alive, shaking from trauma and surrounded by dead.

EMERSON

God damn....

Cameron emerges from the front-most resistance truck.

CAMERON

I told you I'd get a posse!

His "posse" of Resistance Fighters all climb out of their trucks. They ready their guns and take aim.

Noah turns around to where the hellmouth was.

NOAH

Oh, that's not good.

EMERSON
 (to Noah)
 You see it too?

NOAH
 The army of Enforcers? Yeah, I see
 'em.

EMERSON
 Huh?

Emerson turns around as well. The Lurker is gone, and in its place is a small army of Enforcer Soldiers. They roll up in armored trucks and on foot, ready to throw down.

RESISTANCE DRIVER
 It's the Enforcers! Attack!

CAMERON
 (panicking)
 No, them! Attack them!

Emerson points to a back door in the alley and shoves Noah toward it.

EMERSON
 In there!

The Enforcers and Resistance Fighters open fire on each other, engulfing the alley in bullets and carnage. Cameron ducks toward the door after Emerson and Noah.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Emerson and Noah sprint through the ornate lobby of an apartment building, with Cameron close behind them.

CAMERON
 Hey, come back!

They round a corner and take the stairs two steps at a time.

CAMERON
 Come on, Em! It's just a game!
 Stop being such a pussy!

STAIRWELL

Noah and Emerson tirelessly climb a claustrophobic spiral staircase, ignoring the doors they pass. Cameron chases after, one floor behind.

NOAH
 Wait, why're we running?

EMERSON
 I don't want to kill him!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ROOF

Emerson bursts through the rooftop door, followed closely by Noah. The setting sun casts the city in an orange haze. They must be over half a dozen stories up.

Emerson turns on the door, gun drawn and with his back to the edge of the roof.

Cameron emerges from the rooftop door, gun drawn as well.

EMERSON

STOP, Cam! Just stop!

CAMERON

What? What's the big freaking deal?

EMERSON

What are you doing? All these people?

CAMERON

Hey, this whole thing wasn't my idea! I just wanted to go after you!

EMERSON

But why?

CAMERON

BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT BETTER THAN ME!

Emerson pauses, finally getting it.

EMERSON

I never said I was.

CAMERON

You didn't have to! Oh, poor kid lives in a shitty house with a shitty family! I wanted to hang out with you, I wanted to be your friend!

EMERSON

But you are!

CAMERON

No I'm not! Friends are equal! You keep trying to take care of me, to go easy on me.

EMERSON

I just wanted to help....

CAMERON

I don't need your help! Haven't you seen this whole time? I can take care of myself!

NOAH

By what? Killing innocent people?

CAMERON

Killing? Get a grip, why don'tcha? Video games don't kill people! That's the whole point!

EMERSON

But what if they could, Cam? What then?

CAMERON

Then that would be messed up, but I'd be able to tell. You can tell! I don't believe the people I've...
...I'll show you!

EMERSON

Cam, don't do it....

CAMERON

STOP CALLING ME THAT! My Dad calls me Cam!

Cameron pulls the hammer back on his gun, but Emerson's faster. He throws his gun at Cameron, and it connects! Right in the kisser.

With Cameron staggered, Emerson takes the opportunity. He grabs hold of Noah.

EMERSON

Trust me!

NOAH

What?!

Emerson leaps off the roof, taking Noah with him. They plummet, the rushing air deafening them.

Clutching his shoulder, Cameron dashes to the edge of the roof to look over.

Passing Enforcer soldiers look up to see the two free falling, grasping each other as they spin and tumble.

Panicked and scared, Noah tries to struggle free. Emerson keeps his hold tight, though, and the ground rushes up to meet them.

But it doesn't meet them. Emerson and Noah pass straight through the ground into nothingness. Their fall is slowed, as if they're on a cushion of air. They slowly drift

downward.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert leans back in his chair, dumbfounded.

ROBERT

Huh... So there really was a glitch.

EXT. CITY BUILDING ROOFTOP - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Cameron sees them disappear. Confused, he rushes from the edge and back through the door off the roof.

INT. UNDERGROUND SEWERS

Like ghosts, Noah and Emerson phase through the ceiling and gravity takes hold once again. They drop 6 feet into ankle-deep water, unharmed.

Noah stands up, shaking.

NOAH

What just happened?

EMERSON

A glitch.

NOAH

How'd you know it would happen?

EMERSON

I had a fifty-fifty chance.

Noah looks at Emerson in disbelief. Their communicators spring to life.

JOY (V.O.)

Where are you guys?

Noah touches his ear to reply.

NOAH

We're in the sewers under the city.

INTERCUT - JOY'S VAN / SEWERS

JOY

What are you doing in the sewers?
Where are the players?!

NOAH

They didn't make it, Joy. It was a disaster.

JOY

What do you mean, they didn't make it?!

EMERSON

The Resistance beat us to the punch! The vans are wrecked. We're gonna try to get back to the bridge.

JOY

(beat)

...Where's Dax.

EMERSON

His van crashed...I think they got him.

Joy covers her mouth in shock.

JOY

Oh god....

Joy goes silent.

NOAH

Joy? Joy!

(to Emerson)

Dammit! We gotta get to the bridge.

EMERSON

Okay.

EXT. SAFE ZONE OUTSKIRTS - CONTINUOUS

Joy swings her van's back doors open and waves her passengers out.

JOY

Come on, get out! Let's go!

The players do as they're told.

EXITING PLAYER

Thank you!

Joy doesn't respond. Once the players have all evacuated, she looks back to the city. Smoke rises from Downtown.

JOY

God dammit....

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY (REALITY)

More paramedics hustle around the tester's room, evacuating in-shock players and treating those they can.

Robert stands, anxious, observing the spectacle. His hand covers his mouth as if to keep himself from vomiting from stress.

Steven rushes to Robert, beckoning him with urgency.

STEVEN

Robert? You should see this.

EXT. FOUNDATION STUDIOS - DAY

Steven and Robert look out of their second-story window down to the sidewalk below. In front of their building stands a large group of protesters. The group is led by Lana, Walter's mother from before.

The group waves signs and yells at passerby.

LANA

Foundation studio killed my son!

PROTESTER #1

Protect your children! Shut them down!

"Shut them down" quickly becomes a chant the entire group partakes in.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - DAY

Robert stares in disbelief.

ROBERT

Ah, great.

STEVEN

Apparently the police didn't believe her. ...aaaand here comes the news truck.

ROBERT

Son of a bitch....

Robert storms away from the window and heads straight to the programmer's desk. The Programmer is hard at work digging through a wall of code on his computer screen.

ROBERT

What've you got for me?

PROGRAMMER

Nothin' yet. I can't find any link between the programming for player death and what's happening.

ROBERT

Well keep looking. If Lana and her crew get their way before we fix this, every player in the game is gonna be toast.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

A manhole cover sits askew over its assigned hole in the road. It's nudged into motion by the Emerson's hands as he

pushes it out of the way.

EMERSON (O.S.)
Lost, hah! I knew exactly where I
was going!

With more than a little effort, Emerson ascends from the manhole enough to poke his head out.

EMERSON (CONT'D)
See? We're right ne--

Emerson turns to see the barrel of an automatic rifle shoved in his face.

EMERSON
Oh, hi!

The gun is being wielded by an Enforcer soldier. As Emerson gets his bearings, he sees that he is right next to the Enforcer bridge blockade! The Enforcer Soldier is in full intimidation mode.

ENFORCER SOLDIER
Hands up!

EMERSON
I can't, I'm on a ladder!

ENFORCER SOLDIER
I said hands up!

EMERSON
Can I get out first?

The Soldier pauses to compute the request, with no change in his expression.

ENFORCER SOLDIER
Yes!

Emerson climbs the rest of the way out, then puts his hands up. Noah does the same.

ENFORCER GENERAL (O.S.)
What have you found, soldier?

The Enforcer General from the City Hall shootout emerges from the crowd of soldiers.

ENFORCER SOLDIER
They're Resistance, sir!

NOAH
No we're not!

ENFORCER SOLDIER

They were seen fleeing the blockade
with a Resistance caravan, sir!

EMERSON

Aww, Jesus....

ENFORCER GENERAL

The Resistance... ..is a plague on
this great city.

As the General talks, Emerson rolls his eyes and mouths
along the words like he's heard it a million times...which
he has. The distant sound of a roaring engine can be heard.

ENFORCER GENERAL (CONT'D)

And every man that commits himself
to treachery against this city and
its people will--

EMERSON

Meet the cold iron hand of justice
-- I HATE THIS GAME!

At that moment, Joy's van RAMS through the bridge blockade.
Glass and steel spray the road as Enforcer trucks are
knocked out of the way.

The Enforcer soldiers recoil. Emerson takes the
opportunity, grabbing the nearby soldier's gun and using it
to shoot the General and the other soldier. He wrestles the
gun away and shoots its previous owner as well.

EXT. CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Cameron, now walking on his own, hears the commotion coming
from a few blocks away. Acting on a hunch, he runs toward
the sound.

EXT. CITY BRIDGE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Emerson and Noah exchange fire with the Enforcer soldiers as
the bridge blockade spirals into chaos. Joy's van skids to
a halt in front of Emerson and Noah just in time to shield
them from a volley of bullets.

Joy ducks the gunfire as the side of the van is perforated.
The fire stops for a second, and she pops her head back up.

JOY

Get in!

Emerson and Noah are about to board the van when they hear
something behind them. The sound of crushing metal and
unbridled destruction. They turn to place the sound.

Cameron's abandoned car from before has amassed a massive
following of other cars. They skid and bounce in every
direction, infecting the other parked cars with their

insanity.

The horde of cars is an inescapable mass, and it's heading straight toward them. Emerson, Noah, and the remaining Enforcer soldiers have all stopped to look.

NOAH

What...is that?

Emerson shakes his head, speechless.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert is conversing with one of the programmers when Foundation Employee #1 approaches him.

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

Robert, there's something you should see.

Robert nods, and they head back to the employee's workstation. Foundation Employee #1 points at his computer monitor. On it, Robert sees the rampaging cars in the city.

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

It's gotten worse... ..and it looks like it's heading straight for our guys.

ROBERT

Oh, no... ..how much longer before the cars reset?

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

About five minutes.

ROBERT

They don't have five minutes....

EXT. CITY BRIDGE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Everybody is still watching the mess of cars.

JOY

HEY! I know that looks cool, but why don't we go now?!

Emerson and Noah nod, then rush to the back of the van.

Cameron rounds a corner and sees the bridge, along with Emerson and Noah boarding Joy's van. His eyes narrow and he breaks into a sprint toward the van.

As Cameron runs, he glances to his left. He does a double-take at the flying and bouncing cars. What in the world is that?

Noah and Emerson are in the van. They don't get a chance to close the back doors before Joy has stomped on the gas and

peeled away from the scene. Emerson and Noah grab hold to keep from being thrown from the van.

The Enforcer soldiers catch wise, and raise their guns to fire on the van again.

Cameron, seeing the van take off in his direction, stops in his tracks and begins running the other way. As the van passes him, he veers toward it and jumps on, grabbing hold of one of the open back doors.

The mass of cars reaches the bridge, OBLITERATING the entire blockade in its path with unrelenting force. Armored Enforcer trucks join the horde, and the chaos spreads in the van's direction.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

Emerson and Noah are about to take a breather when they're interrupted by Cameron climbing aboard.

EMERSON

REALLY?!

Cameron screams as he lunges toward Emerson. They tussle in the claustrophobic interior of the van. Emerson lands a punch to Cameron's gut, then ducks a retaliatory swing that then BANGS against the wall.

Noah grabs Cameron from behind and throws him toward the front of the van.

JOY'S VAN

The flying cars have caught up to them. Like she's driving in the eye of a tornado, Joy swerves to avoid the spiralling hunks of steel.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

As the van takes a hard turn, Noah trips and stumbles backward toward the opening. Emerson grabs his hand just in time to keep him from falling out.

Cameron stands, bracing himself against the front wall of the van.

CAMERON

You think you're better than me...
...but you won't fight me alone!

EMERSON

Cameron, stop! Just -- stop!

CAMERON

No! Not until you admit I'm right!

EMERSON

About what?

CAMERON
About people dying! I know it's
bullshit!

EMERSON
Cameron, I --

JOY'S VAN

An errant flying car hurtles toward the van.

JOY'S VAN

Joy looks to her right just in time to see the car SMASH into the car's side. She loses control, turning the steering wheel with no effect as the tires lift off the ground.

The van begins to spin, and all Joy can do is hold on for dear life as it CRASHES into the side of a building.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

Everybody is thrown to the side of the van by the impact. Cameron struggles to his feet only to fall again as the van changes direction.

JOY'S VAN

The van bounces away from the building, sailing across the street before getting knocked in another direction by a passing sedan.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

Cameron charges back toward Emerson, but Noah intercepts by tackling Cameron to the floor.

Emerson grabs hold of the nearest outcropping.

EMERSON
That's it.

He calls up his web browser and quickly throws his hands around in commanding gestures. A local news web page loads; a link is clicked; a video launches. He shoves the image in front of Cameron's face.

EMERSON
LOOK!

The video playing is Lana, wailing and screaming on the 6 o'clock news. The subtitle reads:

"VIDEO GAME KILLS! DOZENS ALREADY
PERISHED"

EMERSON

There it is! On the god damn six
o'clock news! KILLER! VIDEO!
GAME! Does that get the message
through your thick skull?!

Cameron stops, dumbstruck. He opens his mouth to retort, but nothing comes out. He doesn't get a chance to speak, however, as inertia from another collision sends all three passengers up into the air and into the ceiling.

JOY'S VAN

The van is making a fast descent off a short bridge. It hits the ground and bounces up at an angle like a ping-pong ball.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

The trio of passengers land hard on the floor of the van. Ouch.

JOY'S VAN

The van's new trajectory is toward a high-rise building, and damn if it isn't moving fast.

The van collides with the building at an angle where it doesn't bounce off, but instead rolls up the side. Tumbling, rolling, nothing can stop it.

JOY'S VAN

Joy's view is spinning, her seat belt the only thing holding her in the cab. The wind rushes through where the windshield used to be, buffeting her hair.

BACK OF JOY'S VAN

Emerson and Noah have managed to grab hold of something, but Cameron has not been so lucky. He's thrown around the inside of the van like a rag doll, being beaten to a bloody mess. He's crying as he flies.

EMERSON

Cam, grab hold!

Emerson reaches out his hand, and Cameron flails to grab it with no success.

JOY'S VAN

The van is about to reach the roof of the building when it hits a stone gargoyle. This knocks the van back down toward earth, spinning laterally at incredible (and increasing) speed.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert SLAMS his fist down on the counter.

ROBERT

For god's sake, we're gonna lose
'em! How much longer?!

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

Fifteen seconds!

INT. BACK OF JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

The force of the spinning sends Cameron flying across the interior of the van. An outstretched arm is in reach -- Emerson grabs it.

Cameron holds onto Emerson's wrist with both hands. The van is spinning so fast now the view outside is a blur. The wind blows Cameron's tears back across his face.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

Ten seconds....

INT. BACK OF JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

CAMERON

I didn't mean it! I didn't mean to
kill them.

EMERSON

I know, Cam! Just hold on!

CAMERON

(blubbing)

I didn't mean it... ..I didn't
mean it....

Cameron's grip is loosening.

EMERSON

Cam, you're slipping!

Cameron can't hear anything. He slips from Emerson's grasp and flies out into the open space from a fatal height.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

FOUNDATION EMPLOYEE #1

Three...two...one....

EXT. JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

In an instant, the van resets. It looks brand new. The back doors are shut, the windshield is sparkling clean. That's the good news. The bad news is the van's still 40 feet off the ground.

As if learning what gravity is all over again, the van takes a stomach churning dive toward the pavement below.

INT. BACK OF JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Emerson and Noah feel the change in direction and brace themselves against the front of the van.

INT. JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Joy employs an airplane crash position, covering her head and bracing for impact. The van rushes toward the ground at alarming speed.

EXT. JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

The van touches down, bottoming out and crushing the suspension. Sparks and smoke fly out from under the vehicle. It bounces once and slowly grinds to a stop.

INT. BACK OF JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

No more motion. Noah and Emerson look at each other, amazed they survived.

EXT. JOY'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Joy slowly peeks her head up from her crash position.

The van, pristine only moments before, is once again a crumpled wreck. Emerson tries to open the back door -- the warped metal is holding it in place.

The sound of Emerson struggling with the door can be heard from inside. Soon after, Emerson KICKS the door open and the two emerge into the open.

Joy climbs out of the van's cab, joining Noah and Emerson.

They stop to observe their surroundings.

The destructive force of cars has subsided, and all of the cars have reset to their original state. What hasn't reset are the dead bodies of players. They punctuate the otherwise empty streets, an exclamation point to the spectacular failure of the rescue venture.

Even though they survived the ordeal, Noah and Emerson don't smile. Noah places a hand on Emerson's shoulder.

NOAH

We should get back to the safe zone.

Emerson nods. They look at the cars parked around them.

EMERSON

You know, I feel like walking.

Noah cracks a small smile, and the three turn to leave.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Noah, Emerson and Joy walk in silence. Noah and Joy are walking as a pair, slightly ahead of Emerson. As they walk, they pass a building's large white wall.

Emerson stops to take a moment, and leans against the wall with an outstretched hand.

He takes a breath.

Noah's hand leans against the wall next to his. Emerson looks up to see him: Noah looks concerned, attentive in a way unlike how he's behaved before.

NOAH

Hey, you okay?

EMERSON

Yeah, I think I'm fine.

NOAH

Emerson...I forgive you.

Emerson is confused.

EMERSON

Huh? Forgive me for what?

NOAH

For what you did. I forgive you.

EMERSON

How did you...?

NOAH

It doesn't matter.

Noah rests a hand on Emerson's shoulder. Emerson lowers his head in shame.

EMERSON

I just didn't want you to go away. They called, but I lied to them. I shouldn't have done it.

NOAH

It's okay.

NOAH (O.S.)

What are you talking about.

Emerson looks up again: Noah isn't standing with his hand on his shoulder -- he's standing to his left with anything but forgiveness. His arms are crossed: it almost looks like he would explode if they weren't. Emerson's completely lost. What just happened?

EMERSON

What? Who --

NOAH

Emerson, what. The hell. Are you talking. About.

Emerson's eyes widen, having realized what just happened.

NOAH

Who did you lie to?

EMERSON

You left your phone at home....

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Emerson and Noah are playing a game together on the couch. Noah checks his phone.

EMERSON

Seventeen....

NOAH

Huh?

EMERSON

I'm counting how many times you check your phone in an hour.

NOAH

Just gotta be sure... ...smart ass.

EMERSON

You're just getting your hopes up, you know.

NOAH

They'll call.

EMERSON

What's the big deal about this anyway? It's just an internship.

NOAH

Are you kidding? It's at Stillman & Clarke! This is my way out of this shithole town. If I get this, I'll finally be doing something worthwhile.

EMERSON

You're not doing anything worthwhile here?

NOAH

Flipping burgers and playing video games? Gimme a break.

Emerson starts like he's about to retort, but instead decides to keep quiet. He stewes a bit.

Noah's phone alarm goes off.

NOAH
Speaking of flipping burgers....

Noah puts his controller down and leaves the couch. As he leaves, his phone slips out of his pocket and is left on the couch.

A moment later, Noah has changed into his Burger Shack duds and leaves. Emerson goes back to playing his game.

INT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - LATER (FLASHBACK)

Emerson has not moved, and is still playing his game. Noah's phone rings, the ringing muffled by couch cushions. Emerson stops and looks around for where the sound is coming from.

He quickly places the sound and reaches between the sofa cushions before pulling out Noah's phone. The caller ID reads:

"STILLMAN & CLARKE"

Emerson pauses, contemplating something as the phone rings. After the fifth ring, he answers.

EMERSON
Noah's phone.

INTERN RECRUITER
Hello, is Noah Dannen available?

EMERSON
He's at work right now....

For a moment, Emerson struggles with himself.

EMERSON
...But he asked me to deliver a message in case you called while he was away.

INTERN RECRUITER
Okay... (rustles papers) ...what's the message?

EMERSON
Noah accepted an internship at another firm closer to home. He
(MORE)

EMERSON (cont'd)
appreciates your time.

INTERN RECRUITER
He never mentioned anything
about... ..did he say which firm
he's joined?

EMERSON
Not sure, he didn't tell me.

INTERN RECRUITER
Oh... ..well okay, thank you.

EMERSON
No problem.

Emerson hangs up the phone, and places it back on the couch.
He stops, shocked at himself.

He reaches for the phone again. Picks it up, puts it down.

He struggles with himself for a moment before picking the
phone back up and navigating the menus to the phone's call
log.

He presses a button. The phone reads:

"DELETE CALL HISTORY? YES/NO"

Emerson pauses, thinks. Like tearing off a band-aid, he
quickly hits yes, closes the phone, and places it back in
the couch.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY (VIRTUAL)

There's a painful silence as Emerson and Noah simply stare
at each other. Emerson is bracing for a reaction, Noah is
dumbstruck.

NOAH
When I got home...you said nobody
had called.

Emerson nods.

Noah is silent for another moment. Then, he can't contain
himself any longer. He sees red, and throws Emerson hard to
the pavement.

NOAH
YOU RUINED MY LIFE!

Noah mounts Emerson and starts punching him.

NOAH
 YOU RUINED IT! I'VE BEEN STUCK
 HERE IN THIS SHITHOLE TOWN, ALL
 BECAUSE OF YOU! WHY? WHY?!

Emerson's face is bloody. He knocks Noah's hand aside mid-punch and counters with his own, connecting directly with Noah's face and knocking him off.

Emerson scrambles to a standing position.

EMERSON
 What about me, Noah?! What about me? That whole time you wouldn't shut up about leaving! You went on and on about the firm, and getting away, and not ONCE did you ask how I felt!

Noah's righted himself, and isn't backing down. He charges Emerson, but Emerson's ready. They collide, and lock arms. They exchange punches, each refusing to back down to the other.

NOAH
 (as they fight)
 That wasn't your choice to make!

EMERSON
 What was I supposed to do, huh? Dad left, Jessica left, but not you, Noah! You couldn't!

NOAH
 The hell I couldn't!

They continue fighting. Noah grabs Emerson and throws him against a city mailbox. He follows up with a haymaker, which Emerson dodges at the last second. A large dent is made in the metal fixture.

Emerson counters by tackling Noah to the ground. They tussle on the ground.

Joy's had enough. She grabs Emerson from behind and throws him off of Noah. Noah gets up and is about to continue the attack when Joy slugs him right in the face.

JOY
 KNOCK IT OFF! BOTH OF YOU!

Noah steams and paces. Emerson recovers.

EMERSON
 I was out of the game, Noah! When we got in the car accident, I got knocked out of the game.

Emerson spits blood.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

But I came back. I came back in.
I did it for you.

NOAH

Bullshit! Get your head out of
your ass and wake up! You didn't
do all of this for me, you did it
because you don't have the balls to
help yourself. I'm not your
friend, I'm your crutch. Not
anymore, Em. Go fuck yourself.

Noah storms off. Joy hesitates, then follows Noah. Emerson slumps to the curb in defeat.

Emerson observes the city around him. The crashed van is the centerpiece amidst the bodies of fallen players. Now, after the chaos, the silence is almost painful.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Emerson? You there, Emerson?

Emerson wearily presses his finger to his ear.

EMERSON

Yeah, I'm here.

INTERCUT: FOUNDATION STUDIOS (REALITY) / CITY STREETS
(VIRTUAL)

Robert is sitting on the floor, leaning against the window that overlooks the growing picket line outside the building. The ruckus can be faintly heard through the glass.

For a moment, neither Emerson or Robert say anything.

ROBERT

Glad to hear you're still around.

EMERSON

Heh, right?

ROBERT

Emerson, I know you don't like me.

EMERSON

Naw, it's not that.

ROBERT

Yes, it's that. You think I'm an asshole that didn't deserve to get the producer position. Don't worry, that's what everybody thinks.

Emerson doesn't say anything, which is confirmation enough for Robert.

ROBERT

You have to keep your standards up, though... ..to protect the staff. I love this studio, and everybody in it. If I wasn't a hard-ass, we wouldn't be where we are today.

EMERSON

Killing our fans with our video game?

ROBERT

Well, before that part.

The two share a laugh -- it's fleeting.

EMERSON

But we made some pretty fun games, didn't we?

ROBERT

Yeah, we did. We made some pretty bad ones too. Remember Centauran Prime?

EMERSON

You know, I always liked that one.

ROBERT

Oh, it was terrible!

EMERSON

I know, but still....

ROBERT

(beat)

It sucks.

EMERSON

What does?

ROBERT

For everything we've made, all the work we've done, this is what we'll be remembered for.

EMERSON

Yeah... ..god, this whole thing's been like a bad dream.

Robert does a double-take.

ROBERT

What'd you say?

EMERSON

This seems like a bad dream.

ROBERT

Holy shit... ..holy shit that's
it!

Emerson perks up.

EMERSON

What's it?

Robert stands up and begins pacing, his mind racing at a million miles an hour.

ROBERT

The visions you had, the shock of coming out of the game, the game isn't doing it, people are!

EMERSON

What're you talking about?

ROBERT

Think about it! If the mind can't tell the game from reality... ..or the game from a dream... ..or maybe all three are getting mixed up!

EMERSON

So what does that mean for us?

ROBERT

(beat)

...We gotta wake them up.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert throws off his headset and runs to the Programmer.

ROBERT

Write a script that logs out any player who is inactive for longer than thirty minutes -- and I mean completely inactive. They should be asleep.

PROGRAMMER

...Okay, whatever you say.

ROBERT

Damn right!

Robert speeds away from the Programmer's desk to Steven's.

ROBERT

Steven! Get a message out and tell them we've found a solution. All players need to go to sleep.

STEVEN

Go to sleep?

ROBERT

You heard me. When they wake up,
they'll be out of the game.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is back to sitting on the curb.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Emerson!

EMERSON

Yeah?

ROBERT (V.O.)

Get back to the safe zone and go to
sleep! We're logging people out
while they're unconscious.

EMERSON

Sounds ridiculous enough to work!

ROBERT (V.O.)

It's about as ridiculous as
everything that's happened up to
this point!

EMERSON

Ain't that the truth.

Emerson moves toward the nearest parked car, but stops --
hesitant. He slowly extends a hand and, like waking a
sleeping tiger, prods the car before prematurely recoiling.

Nothing happens. Satisfied, he hops into the driver's seat.

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - LATER

Like before, the safe zone is bustling with people. Emerson
wades his way into the crowd and finds a break in the bodies
wide enough to lay down in. Many other players are doing
the same.

Exhausted, Emerson lowers himself onto a bed of grass. His
heart beats at a rapid pace. He rests his head... ..and
closes his eyes.

BLACK SCREEN

Emerson's heartbeat slows, relaxing.

Beat.

Beat.

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - LATER

Emerson's eyes open. It's quiet. He's still on the grass. Why is he still on the grass? He raises his head: the safe zone is empty.

Emerson rises to a standing position and looks for somebody, anybody. There's no one, just empty cars littering the parking lot. Emerson presses his finger to his ear.

EMERSON

...Robert.

EMERSON

(panicking)

Robert!

EMERSON

ROOBERRT! HEEY!

Emerson jumps and waves his hands in the air like he's vying for the attention of an unseen god.

EMERSON

Shit shit shit shit shit!

An errant piece of paper flies on the cushion of a breeze and clings to Emerson's foot. He picks it up: it's the Wanted poster from the Resistance. It still sports Emerson's face.

RESISTANCE FIGHTER (O.S.)

There he is!

Emerson turns to place the voice. The entirety of the Resistance force is parked at the entrance to the safe zone, guns drawn with blood lust in their eyes. They stand, halted by the invisible barrier of the safe zone.

Emerson stares in disbelief, shocked at his own terrible luck.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Emerson, I hear you! What's going on?

EMERSON

You tell me! Where is everybody?

ROBERT (V.O.)

They got out! The plan worked!

EMERSON

That's great and all, but why am I still here?

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert's looking at a computer workstation: it's displaying a red flashing message:

"CONNECTION ERROR: PLEASE RETRY"

ROBERT

Something's wrong -- we can't log you out. Dammit Emerson, I told you to get that connection problem fixed!

EXT. SAFE ZONE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Emerson is on the brink of giving up. His legs shake. He leans against a parked car for support.

ROBERT (V.O.)

I'll look into it. See what I can do.

Emerson nods, completely at a loss. He remembers....

NOAH (V.O.)

...you did it because you don't have the balls to help yourself!

Suddenly, a light bulb goes off in Emerson's head. He observes the car he's leaning against. It's a classic muscle car, and it aches to go fast. Emerson's expression turns from defeated to resolved.

EMERSON

No, Robert, I know what I have to do.

ROBERT (V.O.)

What d'you mean?

Emerson gets in the car and revs the engine.

ROBERT (V.O.)

What're you doing, Em?

EMERSON

I'm gonna help myself....

Emerson STOMPS the gas and the car bursts forth like a race horse out the gate.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO SAFE ZONE - CONTINUOUS

The Resistance fighters stand at the ready, watching Emerson's car as it tears around the parking lot. A few of them fiddle with their guns impatiently.

The car seems to be coming toward them. They prepare.

At the last moment, the car veers off course and hops a curb. It CRASHES through a barrier and takes off across the rolling fields.

RESISTANCE FIGHTER

After him!

Scrambling to catch up, the Resistance fighters bumble and rush to their trucks and give chase.

EXT. ROLLING HILLS - CONTINUOUS

Emerson's car drives over the terrain it was obviously not built for. It slips and slides and struggles to maintain traction as it leaves torn grass and mud in its wake.

Emerson sees a small road in the distance and guns for it.

INT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Emerson focuses on the road in front of him with razor-sharp intensity.

EMERSON

Robert! You still there?

ROBERT (V.O.)

I'm here! What's the plan?

EMERSON

This is going to sound really weird, but when I give you the word, I want you to push me off my chair.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Push you...?

EMERSON

Just do it when I say!

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

ROBERT

I'm on it.

Robert races to Emerson's side, and awkwardly prepares himself for the imminent shoving.

EXT. ROLLING HILLS - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

Emerson blazes down the narrow winding road at nearly a hundred miles an hour. Behind him, he can see the Resistance trucks giving chase.

EMERSON

Try and catch me.

The Resistance trucks try, but they can't keep up with Emerson's car. The car leaves the rolling hills, and the ocean can be seen in the distance.

EXT. OCEAN CLIFFS - CONTINUOUS

Emerson's car threads the twists and turns as the road ascends to rocky cliffs overlooking the ocean.

INT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Emerson's expression is unchanged: resolved and determined.

EMERSON

Come on... ..you can do this. You don't need a crutch! Robert! You ready?

ROBERT (V.O.)

Yeah!

Emerson steers the car off the road and straight toward the cliffs. He slaps his head, psyching himself up.

EMERSON

Come on! COME ON!

The cliff's edge rushes toward Emerson.

EMERSON

Do it NOW, Robert!

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Robert shoves Emerson off the chair.

INT. EMERSON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS (VIRTUAL)

The car flies off the cliff, and time slows.

The setting sun still shines bright across the ocean, and as Emerson sails through the air, he seems to have released his burden.

He looks free, at ease.

A small smile flickers across his face.

The car collides with the rocks below. The hood crumples. The glass shatters.

Emerson's head is knocked forward. His nose is crushed against the steering wheel, spattering blood across the dashboard.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Emerson lands on the ground with a THUD, and responds! His body moves; his head turns. Realizing his own cognizance,

Emerson bolts upright and tears off his apparatus like it's on fire.

Robert's shocked.

ROBERT

Holy shit.

Emerson shakes, but not from shock. Adrenaline courses through his body, and he smiles.

EMERSON

Ha-haaaaa!

He embraces the closest thing to him, which happens to be Robert. They both smile and clap each other on the shoulder.

ROBERT

I can't believe that actually worked!

The smile quickly fades from Emerson's face.

EMERSON

Cameron....

EXT. EMERSON & NOAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An ambulance is parked outside the apartment, colored lights illuminating the front of the building.

INT. EMERSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (REALITY)

Cameron is laying in Emerson's chair, dead. His parents wail in mourning over him, holding him like they never did when he was alive.

The paramedics dejectedly prepare to move him to the gurney.

Emerson stands in the corner, somberly watching.

INT. FOUNDATION GAMING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS (REALITY)

Emerson enters. He looks around: the studio is nearly empty now.

A handful of people are working to clean up the studio, and a couple of others are still working at their computers. Overall, the show is packing up. Desks are empty, and the walls are nearly bare. The large banner poster still hangs above it all, but the 2.0 addition has been corrected to read "1.5".

Robert is standing among them. He affectionately runs his hand across an empty desk and sighs. Emerson approaches.

EMERSON

Hey.

Robert looks up.

ROBERT

Hey.

EMERSON

Just picking up a few more of my things.

ROBERT

I don't even know what of this is mine anymore.

They both pause to reflect.

EMERSON

So, what're you gonna do now?

ROBERT

I've seen some openings in office management here and there. Though... I think I'm done with making games.

Emerson nods. He moves to leave, but stops to shake Robert's hand.

EMERSON

Thanks, Robert... for everything.

ROBERT

Sure thing, Em.

Emerson walks through the studio, passing through the abandoned desks. One desk isn't abandoned: Steven is still sitting at his computer, sifting through new community messages. The all-too-familiar RING of a new message sounds.

STEVEN

Don't care...(RING) Don't care...
(RING) Don't care....

Emerson reaches his desk. He pulls open a drawer and pulls out a handful of mementos and miscellaneous doodads.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

With a BING, the doors slide open and Emerson enters. He leans against the back wall and sighs. The doors are closing when footsteps can be heard.

JOY

Hold that elevator!

Joy's hand stops the door, and she joins Emerson in the elevator. She leans against the wall next to him, and there's a moment of awkward silence.

JOY/EMERSON

(at once)

Hey, I --

They interrupt each other. Another pause.

EMERSON

So... How're you doing?

JOY

Okay, I guess. As okay as I can be.

Emerson nods.

EMERSON

How's Noah?

Joy's about to respond, but Emerson thinks better of it.

EMERSON

You know what? Don't tell me.

(beat)

You know Joy, the whole time we were stuck in there, you were the only one who managed to do anything right.

JOY

Thanks, I appreciate that. ...And you're right. I was.

They both smile.

JOY

But you know, Emerson, you did try. That's more than most people would have done.

EMERSON

Hell, it's more than I thought I would've done.

JOY

Yeah.

(beat)

So what's next for Emerson Pritchard?

EMERSON

I have no idea. But it's up to me to find out, right?

Joy nods. The doors open, and she exits before Emerson. Pausing, she turns back.

JOY

Goodbye, Emerson.

Emerson says nothing, but raises his hand in farewell. Joy leaves, and the doors close. For a moment, Emerson stands in the elevator. Then he realizes he's on his floor.

EMERSON

Oh, yeah --

Emerson smacks the "OPEN" button.

INT. EMERSON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emerson enters the apartment. It's quiet, and a lot is missing. As he enters, he passes the table. Noah's phone is nowhere to be seen. The walls are bare -- no pictures are left hanging.

Emerson steps into the living room and surveys his surroundings, hands on his hips.

INT. EMERSON'S LIVING ROOM - SHORTLY LATER

Emerson empties his box full of memorabilia on the table and pulls out the pictures. He sees the half-torn picture of him and Jessica, and finishes tearing it in half. Into the trash can goes Jessica.

He gathers up a handful of pictures from various points in his life, and moves to the wall. Methodically, he hangs them with thumbtacks. One, two, three, and more. Before long, he has a large collage going.

Emerson steps back, accepting the old to start anew.

THE END