

The 5-In-1

By

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CONTINUED:

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

MASON SHARPE (30s), clean cut, coiffed, buttoned down, perfect. He's focused on a man speaking off-screen but he could just as easily be looking into his bright and shiny future.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

The enemy. An impostor. A fraud. A caterpillar.

The words roll off him. Mason is a contrast to his fellow CLAIMS ADJUSTERS with their pasty faces, thinning hair and rumpled suits.

CLOSE ON A small caterpillar as it writhes, trapped within tweezers. It's held by a middle-aged man in a suit, ANSON.

ANSON

Hundreds of thousands of dollars of crop devastation claims are get filed because of it. Until a claims adjuster in the field had the smarts to capture one. It looked like this.

He raises another TWEEZERS with another CATERPILLAR in it. It looks identical to the other.

ANSON

This specimen grows into the fabled White Witch Moth. Look the same, don't they. Except, the white witch moth larva that Mason sampled is harmless to crops. In short, it's a fraud. Kudos to claims adjuster Mason Sharpe for spotting it. As always. We all owe Mason a big thank you.

The claim adjusters attempt to express gratitude as they shuffle past Mason who remains in his seat. There are a few wan "thank yous," a couple of breezy "thanks" and one sarcastic "thanks a million, Mason."

(CONTINUED)

The man next to him, CHIP (30s), shakes his head echoes the sentiment.

CHIP
(under his breath)
Yeah, Mason. Thanks for making us
look bad. Again.

CUT TO:

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Mason's DESK has the same feng shui of an old school TV dinner - everything in it's place. Until a sheaf of DOCUMENTS is tossed onto it. Mason is horrified and collects the papers.

CHIP
Try being human sometime, Mason.
You're making us look bad.

MASON
What's this?

CHIP
Wrongful death. It's all fucked up.
Wife's our policy holder, filed the
claim but the company denies the
guy's dead.

Mason thumbs through the papers.

MASON
There's no death certificate. No
missing persons report. How did it
even get this far?

CHIP
Wife kept pressing it. Claiming
cover up. The claim keeps coming
back.

MASON
Because...

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Due diligence situation. No one's gone in the field to prove it yet. That's why it's yours now. So you can go find a butterfly or whatever.

MASON

It was a moth.

CHIP

Just go there, prove she's lying and kill it.

MASON

What if she's not lying? What if there is a cover up?

CHIP

Not my problem. It's yours now. Also, the other insurer has a real Nazi on the case. And I mean real Nazi -- used to be a skinhead in San Pedro. Total dick. Had a swastika tattoo on his head. Now he just has swastika-shaped scar. Because he remove it himself.

INT. CAR - DAY

Mason is behind the wheel. Hands at ten and two until he spots smudge on the windshield and wipes it with a napkin. He's playing an AUDIOBOOK.

AUDIOBOOK

(filtered)

Meditation for Commuters. Episode One: Traffic Jam. I am Clover. That is my vision name. My totem animal is the skink. It's a kind of lizard that's vegetarian.

On the street we see ADVERTISING promising self-improvement and perfection -- from cosmetic surgery to speed-reading. The happy, smiling faces beaming back catch Mason's eye --

SCREECH! He brakes hard -- just in time to avoid rear-ending

(CONTINUED)

a TRUCK being loaded with MANNEQUINS by a couple of MOVERS, who react with catcalls and middle fingers.

AUDIOBOOK

(filtered)

What's your totem animal? Think about your animal and take a deep breath. Unless your animal is a fish. Then have a sip of water.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX, decaying palms and dead grass. An attempt at a community garden has only a crucified SCARECROW to prove someone once tried.

INT. SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX - SAME

Mason walks through a dank, dark hallway clutching his documents. The sounds of DAYTIME TV blaring through the thin walls and cracked doors of the tenants within.

Mason searches the doors for a number. He steps over heap of MAIL and NEWSPAPERS piled at one door.

Mason spots his number and checks it against his documents. He knocks. After a moment, the door opens. In it stands a man (20s) wearing a HOMEMADE SUIT OF ARMOR comprised mostly of aluminum foil. He's doughy and has the pallor of someone to whom the great outdoors represents an existential offense. As his apparel suggests, this KNIGHT errant is an otaku manchild, who, as his apparel suggests, is the human equivalent of leftovers.

MASON

I'm Mason Sharpe. I'm a claims adjuster.

A WOMAN'S VOICE calls from within the apartment. She speaks in Spanish.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(in Spanish English subtitle)

Don't open the door. I told you not to open the door.

(CONTINUED)

The woman, MARGA (40s), attractive, appears in the doorway. Her eyes are damp and her hair is stringy. She pushes the Knight aside.

MARGA

Si?

MASON

I'm Mason Sharpe. I'm a claims adjuster. Are you Marga Murgia? I have a claim about --

KNIGHT

She won't understand you.

MASON

You understand me?

KNIGHT

Yes.

MASON

Can you translate?

KNIGHT

I'm a Knight of Skeldaria, it is my duty.

CUT TO:

INT. MARGA'S APARTMENT - SAME

Inside Marga's apartment we see a FAMILY PHOTO that includes the KNIGHT, MARGA and a man, presumably the missing husband (MANUEL). Marga continues in Spanish and is subtitled.

MARGA

Manuel always came home late so at first I didn't worry. But then hours turned to days and days to weeks.

KNIGHT

He never came home. He used to come home but then he did not.

(CONTINUED)

MARGA

I called his work and the girl said he was dead and they're trying to cover it up and that she was running away. I called the police and they said that he simply ran out on me. I have his insurance policy and I have you.

KNIGHT

Do you play Knights of Skeldaria?

MASON

(confused)

Uh, sure. Sometimes.

KNIGHT

Do you know how to defeat the Willogen?

MASON

Dude, your Mom isn't talking about Knights of Skeldaria. And, no, man, I don't play -- I'm a grown up.

Marga looks plaintively at the Knight awaiting translation.

KNIGHT

(in Spanish to Marga)

He's an asshole. Just like the other assholes that come by with suits and papers.

Marga slaps the Knight.

MARGA

We do not swear in this house!

The Knight, at a loss with his frustration, pushes Mason who flies from his chair onto the floor.

MASON

What the fuck, man?

Marga runs over to Mason hand extended. Mason reaches for her from the floor but she slaps him instead.

MARGA

No swearing!

Marga sits back down. Mason climbs back into his seat. The Knight crosses his arms.

MASON

What was that all about?

KNIGHT

No swearing.

MASON

How does she know we're swearing?
She doesn't speak English.

MARGA

(to Mason)

First, the girl says his father was killed in an accident. Then a man says he's coming home as soon as he's improved. What does this mean?

Mason begrudgingly nods at the boy for a translation. Marga does the same.

KNIGHT

They say my dad is being upgraded.

Mason drums on his thigh. He's at capacity. Time to go.

MASON

I'm going back to the office. This claim, this whole situation doesn't make any sense. Your husband is dead but he's alive, he's insured for accidental death but he might accidentally be alive. And he's being upgraded whatever -- that means.

Mason gets through the door and into the hall. He gets about a pace before the Knight reaches the doorway.

KNIGHT

Hey...

MASON

What?

KNIGHT

When will my dad be back?

The question leaves Mason at a loss as he looks back at the tinfoil manchild.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR (OUTSIDE SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX) - SAME

Mason reads over the claim. CLOSE on the name: FMRL and an ADDRESS. He circles it with a PEN.

He starts the car and and pulls away from the curb. This reveals a previously hidden tall, lean man, in dark duds with icy blue eyes and Teutonic bearing. He drags deep on an E-CIG and scratches the gnarly SWASTIKA-SHAPED SCAR on his bald head.

EXT. MAIL BOX SERVICE - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Outside a Mail Box Service with all the busy signage advertising notary public and photocopying services in the windows.

The biz shares frontage with a TOBACCO STORE, which accounts for the CIGAR SHOP INDIAN statue in front that Mason nearly walks into while checking the address on the claim. When he realizes it's led him to a mail box, he wads the claim back into his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIL BOX SERVICE - SAME

Inside all the ticky-tacky shit of a business convenience store - greeting cards, packing materials, postage meters and a wall of anonymous MAILBOXES.

A woman, THEDA (20s), sits behind the counter behind a bulwark of COLLEGE TEXT BOOKS. She is punky, with the raccoon eyes that either come from let night grad studies or excessive partying. Her hair is the same color as the water used to clean artist's brushes. She has a small thyroidectomy SCAR on her throat.

(CONTINUED)

When the DING-DONG door chime announcing Mason's entrance goes off she doesn't stir. In fact, she might be asleep and doesn't snap to until Mason clears his throat at the counter.

THEDA

What?

MASON

Looking for a business that might have a box here --

THEDA

I can't tell you if they do or don't. What are you a cop... Or claims adjuster.

MASON

Claims adjuster. How did you know?

THEDA

It's uncanny, isn't it?

MASON

So, box or not?

THEDA

What's the business?

MASON

FMRL.

THEDA

Not. Telling you.

MASON

A legal thing?

THEDA

Sure. Or maybe I'm just a shitty employee. Or --

MASON

Or what?

THEDA

Maybe.

Mason fishes a TWENTY-DOLLAR-BILL from his coat pocket and puts it on the counter.

MASON

So?

Theda regards the twenty.

THEDA

So, my boss is a perv and has surveillance cameras installed to watch me work.

Theda turns in the presumed direction of a camera and looks as if she's about to pull her shirt over her boobs. But doesn't.

THEDA

Which means you're buying something with that twenty, right?

MASON

Copies.

THEDA

They're only two cents. That's a lot of copies.

MASON

(cheeky)

I lost my cat.

THEDA

It must have been a helluva cat. For a thousand fliers.

MASON

Once saved my life.

THEDA

I had a cat like that too.

Theda gives Mason a once-over, which she factors into some weird calculus in her mind. Something adds up.

(CONTINUED)

THEDA

What was the name of the --

MASON

FMRL.

Mason retrieves the wadded claim from his pocket and gives it to her.

THEDA

We forward their mail.

She moves over to a COPY MACHINE and opens the lid.

MASON

Don't make a copy of that, please.

Theda lifts her shirt and presses her breasts onto the glass. She hits the button. Green light flashes from the copier as murky COPIES of her breasts begin to fill the tray.

MASON

What are you --

THEDA

(yelling over the sound of the
copier)

You paid for them.

She points her chin at the SURVEILLANCE CAMERA. Mason gets it.

THEDA

For Big Brother.

MASON

Where do you forward the mail to?

THEDA

It's always changing. San
Francisco, San Jose, New York. It
was Singapore for a while. Now,
it's somewhere around here.

MASON

You're not gonna tell me where.

THEDA

I don't know where. I don't do the forwards, Big Brother does since we got celebrities and shit. I was just hired. I have no idea what I'm doing. You know what they told me to say to any question? No. Just say no. Like I'm Nancy Reagan. Is the sky blue? No. Is this where the wizard lives? No. Noodle cup --

MASON

No?

THEDA

They're free. Because they're past their sell-buy-date -- but they're still edible.

MASON

No.

THEDA

Fine. This shit better not give me breast cancer.

CUT TO:

INT. CUBICLE - LATER

Mason plonks down two BOXES of boob copies onto his desk. Chips sees this.

CHIP

What's in the copy boxes?

MASON

Research. You sent me on a real piece of shit claim, you know that? But mark my words I'm going to unravel it.

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Yeah, about that. Forget it. It's over.

MASON

What's over?

CHIP

The claim. I got a call from upstairs.

MASON

I'm on a streak.

CHIP

Streak's over, I gotta call from upstairs.

MASON

How far upstairs?

CHIP

Upstairs. Like the roof. You're off the claim. So go home and practice not being so perfect for a change.

MASON

This is bullshit. I'm going to crack that claim.

CHIP

The higher ups yanked it. It's over. It was a mistake.

MASON

I didn't make a mistake.

CHIP

No one said you did.

Something catches Chip's eye through the mini-blinds.

MASON

This because I'm on a streak and it makes you look bad, right? This is about you, not me.

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Yeah, sure sounds that way.
Anyway, your boyfriend's here to
pick you up.

MASON

What are you talking about?

CHIP

Look outside. That's another reason
this claim is over with. That guy.

Mason steps to the window and parts the blinds. Sure enough,
in the parking lot below is the skinhead Adjuster, sucking
his e-cig.

MASON

Just a bald guy.

CHIP

Nah, it's a skinhead, just hard to
tell these days. Look for the scar.

Mason peeks through the window again. Sure enough...

MASON

Holy shit.

CHIP

So, yeah. Just get in your car and
call it night.

A PHONE RINGS. Chips jogs to his desk and answers it. Mason
starts packing up his shit. He considers bringing the copy
boxes decides against it.

CHIP

(into phone)

Fraud Department - Cant' spell
liability without lie.

(while looking at Mason)

It's handled. Yes, he's our best
man, it'd be a shame, I agree. And
yes, thank you, I'd love to be
upgraded. Thank you.

Chip jots down a note as Mason flips him off and splits.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

As Mason waits in his car for the PARKING CONTROL BARRIER to rise he locks eyes with the Adjuster who is standing on the sidewalk.

Mason's audiobook from before provides a soundtrack to the stare-down.

AUDIOBOOK

Now, imagine a candle. Not in your car but outside your car, floating in space -- but not outer space. There's no air there and a flame needs air. But not too much air, otherwise you'd blow it out. Think about it.

The Adjuster draws on his e-cig and exhales blue smoke as Mason speeds away.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S BUILDING - FOYER - NIGHT

Mason's apartment building is an old school, early 20th century structure with a musty foyer and decaying furniture. It's the kind of place gentlemen callers once awaited their dates. Presiding over it is a replica of the VENUS DE MILO.

Mason stands in front of the MAILBOXES, he searches his KEYPING for the box key, finds it and opens his box. A single copy of GAMER TAMER MAGAZINE. He shuts the box and goes upstairs.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S BUILDING - HALL - SAME

In the hall, approaching his apartment door, Mason begins to scuttle past his neighbor's door. On it is posted a notice that reads in bold letters "EVICTION." To his chagrin it opens.

Standing in the door is a tall, woman or at least a man making a concerted effort to become a woman. She's dressed

(CONTINUED)

in a kimono robe and little else besides long lashes and a longer wig. She is Cydney.

CYDNEY

Mason. You never come over anymore.

MASON

I never did before.

CYDNEY

Oh, yes, you did.

MASON

That was an anomaly. I was drunk, I thought it was my apartment. And you charged me like a hundred bucks for passing out on your couch.

CYDNEY

And you liked it.

MASON

Sure. I liked it. It's Pleather.

CYDNEY

Damn straight it's Pleather. The best kind. Red. And you loooved it. You looove my couch. Say it -- Cydney's gotta sweeeet couch.

MASON

(anything to shut her up)
Cydney's gotta...

Mason has had enough and reaches into his pocket for his keys.

CYDNEY

What's a girl gotta do to make some money around here?

(glances at notice on her door)

Look at this shit --

Cydney rips the eviction notice off the door and crumples it in her long-nailed fist.

CYDNEY

So how about it, got any odd jobs
you need doin', honey? I need rent
and I need hormones.

She reaches for Mason but he steps just out of reach and
quickly unlocks his apartment door.

CYDNEY

I'm not really in the mood anyway.
These hormones make me cry about
everything. Especially TV. And your
TV, by the way, is way too
motherfuckin' loud.

MASON

Sorry, I'll make sure I --

CYDNEY

And what the fuck are you watching
anyway? All that chopping and
slaying and shit? And ye olde
English.

Mason steps through his door and closes it.

CYDNEY

You like that shit? I can talk like
that for you... Sire?

CUT TO:

INT. MASONS' APARTMENT

The interior of Mason's apartment is spartan and clean but
not from an aesthetic choice -- it's merely unfinished.
PLASTIC SHEETS cover much of the furniture. A perpetual
remodel is in progress. Nothing adorns the walls except some
empty frames hung where art might someday go.

Mason tosses his magazine on a TABLE. The cover reads "GAMER
TAMER Where is the Wizard?" with a smug looking sonofabitch
smiling back who we will later recognize as Cameron Block
(30s).

There is also a COUCH and a TV we never see though its sound
and projected light come to life when Mason flicks a REMOTE

(CONTINUED)

upon entering as routinely as one would a light switch.

TV ANCHOR (O.S .)

And in a related story, a spike in the population of the white witch moth could mean disaster for area nurseries and gardeners...

At a BAR, Mason mixes himself a MARTINI, which is to say Mason is using a BEAKER, an eye DROPPER and assorted chemistry paraphernalia to mix the "perfect" martini. Once it's poured, he inspects and passes on three OLIVES before he finds the right one.

TV ANCHOR (O.S .)

Moth could mean... Moth could mean.. Disaster for area --

Mason is so absorbed in his mixology that he doesn't notice the TV anchor is repeating himself. Then -- BEEEEEP! The sound of the broadcast cuts out. This is no matter for Mason who flops onto his couch and grabs a GAME CONTROLLER from the table.

He hit's a button. The beep stops and the blue light from the unseen screen reflects on his pale face.

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

You have returned to the Knights of Skeldaria. Welcome Brave Sir Knight...

(the voice becomes a recording of Mason's own)

"Mason?"

He takes a sip of his martini and begins to hack and slay -- at least that's what it sounds like as CLANKING BLADES and GUTTURAL GRUNTS compete with Mason's own whoops and hollers.

MASON

Hell yeah! Fuck off! Ack!
Shit! Pentacle charm. Pentacle charm!

Mason hits the game controller, desperate.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

Pentacle charm! Piece of shit!
Penta -- Noooo!

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

You are slain brave Sir Knight...
(again the voice is Mason's)
Mason? You have a single
regeneration remaining.

Mason takes a long sip of his martini.

CUT TO:

STOCK - CHRYSALIS

CLOSE, TIME-LAPSE footage of a CATERPILLAR splitting down
the middle to form a writhing membrane-like PUPA.

MATCH CUT:

INT. MASON'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Undulating on top of a of a bare MATTRESS covered in a
PLASTIC SHEET is a -- it's hard to tell in the dark -- a
cocoon? A sleeping bag. It spasms violently until Mason's
head, slicked with sweat, pops out of the top -- screaming!

The ALARM CLOCK is buzzing. Mason gets a hold of himself and
after a beat, clicks it off. This is a shitty way to start
the day.

CUT TO:

INT. DINER - MORNING

Mason is at the counter of a diner -- the kind of place
where the WAITRESS has a pencil in her bun and calls you
Hon'.

Mason is the last of a line of LONE DINERS. He gingerly sips
the hot coffee.

The waitress is as remote as she is efficient, topping off
cups of coffee from her CARAFE with nary a glance as she
strolls along the counter from DUDE 1 to DUDE 2 who are also
on autopilot, looking at their SMART PHONES.

(CONTINUED)

WAITRESS

Strange weather we're having. They
say wear layers, right?

DUDE 1

You got that right.

WAITRESS

(vacant smile)

Oh, hon', I'm always right.

(to the next guy)

Strange weather we're having. They
say wear layers, right?

DUDE 2

You got that right.

WAITRESS

(vacant smile)

Oh, hon', I'm always right.

This repetition catches Mason's ear. He steals himself
awaits his turn to engage.

(to Mason)

Strange weather we're having. They
say wear layers, right?

MASON

(testing)

You got that... Wrong?

WAITRESS

(especially vacant smile)

Oh, hon', I'm always right.

The waitress heads back to the top of the line like the
carriage return on a typewriter. Rinse, wash, repeat.

Mason abandons his breakfast, throws a couple bucks on the
counter and gets himself out of there. What's happening?

CUT TO:

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Mason is huddled at his COMPUTER.

ONSCREEN: He keys in a search: "FMRL" The result is a bunch

(CONTINUED)

of crap - mostly about video games. He scrolls through the page and finally spots "FMRL CONSPIRACY."

Mason looks toward Chip's desk where he sees him talking animatedly at the phone. He turns his screen toward him for a tad more privacy.

ONSCREEN: He clicks the link. The banner of the site reads "Konsspiracy Kronicles" and the headline of the page blares "FMRL MAKES ANDROID CHANGLINGS."

MASON

What the...? Who is this guy?

ONSCREEN: Mason clicks another link and brings up the BIO and MUGSHOT of a Dade Howell (40s), raffish, bespectacled ink-stained.

MASON

(to himself, reading)

Daedalus Howell is a former journalist at blah, blah, blah, who now researches the recherche and blah blah blah and everyone is out to get you. Hmm.

If this is the only card he can play, he'll play it.

ONSCREEN: He clicks the site's CONTACT BUTTON. There's an EMAIL address, a PHONE NUMBER and a physical ADDRESS. Mason clicks the email address. An EMAIL PROMPT pops up. He keys in an email: "I have an insurance claim that might interest you. Can we talk? - MS."

He leans back in his seat and drums on his desktop. Chip is twirling his phone cord in his fingers, feet up on the desk. Prick. Then DING!

ONSCREEN: "Email could not be sent. Address no longer active."

MASON

(to himself)

Okay, email bounced.

Mason picks up his PHONE and dials. After a couple of rings.

(CONTINUED)

ROBO-OPERATOR

(filtered)

We're sorry, the number you dialed
is no longer in --

Mason hangs up. He jots down the physical address from the screen onto a PAD. He shuts down his COMPUTER and leaps to his feet.

CHIP

Where you goin'?

MASON

I got a lead on FMRL, which doesn't seem to exist anywhere but this crackpot's blog.

CHIP

What the hell is FMRL?

MASON

From the claim. The bad claim you sent me on. To ruin my streak.

CHIP

Oh, yeah. That one. Mason, that claim is --

MASON

I got one more lead to tie up and then --

CHIP

I told you, that claim is dead.

MASON

It shouldn't be. There's something very wrong with it and I'm --

CHIP

It's Dead. Dead claim. Dead and buried. Burned. The claim has been cremated. I got a lot riding on this now. Sorry about your perfect record.

Mason makes for the exit.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

(over his shoulder)

I could give a shit about my
perfect record.

CHIP

Don't fuck with me, Mason. I've got
an upgrade riding on this! Mason.
Mason!

Mason is gone. Chip snarls. This means war.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

At an TRAFFIC LIGHT, Mason stewes in his car. Could he give a fuck about his perfect record? He pounds the steering wheel for an answer.

MASON

God! Damn! Perfect! Record!

Yep - he gives a fuck.

Mason takes a deep breath, exhales and turns on his audiobook. Through the car windows, the city seems to reveal itself to Mason in a manner he never noticed. On the sidewalks are smiling, happy PEOPLE. But something seems wrong.

AUDIOBOOK

I have a rubber Buddha on my
dashboard. Not because I believe in
false idols. But because it
contains my dog Kaba's ashes.

Mason cruises the city streets, deep breathing, trying to find his happy place. It seems to be working until... The light turns GREEN and Mason peels out into the intersection.

AUDIOBOOK

Kaba used to sit next to me in the
car but now he sits on the dash
because my girlfriend Persephone
won't sit next to him on the front
seat because she says it's creepy.

(CONTINUED)

Mason takes the note from his pocket with the address on it, makes a sudden turn. CAR HORNS blare.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Mason pulls his car to the CURB. He botches the parking job and runs a wheel over the curb, which nearly clips a GRAFFITI ARTIST spraying a STENCIL of the WILLOGEN from the Knights of Skeldaria game onto a NEWSPAPER BOX with drippy RED SPRAY PAINT that looks like blood.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

What the fuck, man?

Mason gets out of the car. Doesn't take the bait. He's got a PARKING METER to feed.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

You're not even going to apologize?

MASON

Sorry.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

Sorry for what, motherfucker?

Mason puts change into the meter. He doesn't have time for this shit.

MASON

Sorry that you're defacing private property. Sorry you're an asshole. You know how many property damage claims I have to deal with because of assholes like you?

He heads toward a shitty office building.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

The fuck I care? You don't know how to drive. That kills people. I'm just an artist. Ain't no artist ever killed a muthafucka with free speech.

(CONTINUED)

(to himself)
'Cept that one time. But that ain't
pertinent.

(calling after Mason)
Hey! You watch yourself. Some Free
Speech gonna come fuck you up!

CUT TO:

INT. SHITTY OFFICE - DAY

The office is part of a rent-a-desk operation with the same
squalor of a by-the-hour hotel.

The decor (a DESK, a couple of CHAIRS) looks like Ikea dry
humped a Goodwill and now things are awkward.

Fortune is a stranger here as the inkjet-printed SIGN
"KONSPIRACY KRONICLES" taped on the open door suggests.

As a fly-by-night operation it wouldn't get off the tarmac,
which is why its temporary inhabitant, DAEDALUS "DADE"
HOWELL (40s), indiscriminately tosses REPORTERS NOTEBOOKS,
PAPERBACKS and other office DETRITUS into MOVING BOXES,
obscured by his desk.

Mason hovers in the doorway. He knocks to no avail. Clears
his throat -- ditto. Finally, he introduced himself.

MASON

Hello, I'm Mason Sharpe, I'm an
insurance --

Dade emerges from behind the desk. With his rumpled coat and
almost fashionable eyeware, Dade could pass for a liberal
arts professor with a terrible hangover or a failing
journalist about to get one. In his way, he is both.

DADE

(irate)
Do I look I need insurance, man?
Don't answer that.

MASON

I'm an adjuster.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

Yeah, well, it's not my fault. The woman is crazy.

MASON

I'm working on wrongful death claim.

DADE

(stricken)

She... She's dead?

(just kidding)

How sad. How much do I get?

MASON

The claim was filed by a woman whose husband is being upgraded. That's the term she used.

DADE

Upgraded?

MASON

FMRL. Does that mean anything to you?

A chill descends upon the room. Dade takes a squint-eyed gander at Mason, sizes him up. Finally:

DADE

Shut the door.

CUT TO:

INT. DADE'S OFFICE - SAME

Dade sits at his desk, Mason on the other side.

DADE

How did you find me?

MASON

Google.

DADE

God, they're getting good. A little too good.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

I googled FMRL, which brought me to your blog. It's the only trace I could find.

DADE

They scrubbed the web. Trying to disappear.

A KETTLE WHISTLES. It's on a HOTPLATE atop the desk. Dude pulls a FRENCH PRESS from a drawer. It already has COFFEE GROUNDS in it, presumably used. Dade notices Mason noticing this as he grabs a pair of CUPS from the same drawer.

DADE

Coffee grounds have more life in them than people think. It's the coffee companies that want you to think otherwise.

Dade pours in water from the kettle, looks at this watch - it's been long enough -- and pushes the plunger down on the French press. He pours himself a cup, then pushes a cup to Mason.

MASON

I don't drink coffee. Anymore.

DADE

Tea?

Dade has a collection of used TEA BAGS in a JAR.

DADE

So, what do you know about FMRL?

MASON

I'm here to ask you.

DADE

First, I have to make sure you're not one of them.

MASON

Who?

DADE

Tricky. That's what the last one tried. Hold still.

DadeDADE steps from around the desks and pulls a PEN LIGHT from his pocket. He flashes it in Mason's eyes.

MASON

What the hell, man?

DADE

Your pupil response is slow but within human margins.

DadeDADE fishes through his pocket and presses a small round DISC onto Mason's forehead. It sticks.

MASON

What's that?

DADE

A magnet.

The disc fall off Mason's head. Dade nods.

DADE

You're a journalist, you see a young man poised to jump off a bridge. If he jumps and you write the story, you win a Pulitzer. If you talk him down whatever you said becomes his own prize-winning book and you're not even mentioned. What do you do?

MASON

I save him, then I sue him for copyright infringement.

DadeDADE stands back, impressed.

DADE

That's a new one. Good answer.

MASON

What are you trying to find out here? If I'm human or something?

(CONTINUED)

Dade squints at him. Attempts to produce optical illusions with his hands. He fails.

DADE

Or something. I used to do Turing tests, Voight-Kampff, even Rorschach but human behavior isn't so sophisticated in the end. We're predictable. Which makes us easy to...

MASON

What?

DADE

Upgrade. Have you noticed lately that people are different? Maybe not the people close to you -- yet -- but people, the regular people, the ones you nod a hello to on the street. The bus drivers, the waitresses, the guy who works down the hall. Have you noticed that some people are behaving like...

MASON

Like what?

DADE

(whispers)

Robots.

Mason purses his lips, considers this for a moment. Then stands up to leave.

MASON

Okay, thanks for your time.

Mason is out the door...

DADE

FMRL is a defense department shadow organization doing artificial intelligence research for combat purposes.

...And he's back.

MASON

I'm listening.

DADE

The best and the brightest working with A.I. come from the game industry but most are squeamish about working for government and warmongers. But like anyone, they've got a price. To make it easy, the government created a bullshit company and raided game startups for talent. And they got it. Most notably Cameron Block, otherwise known as --

MASON

The Wizard. He on the cover of Gamer Tamers.

DADE

Is he? I interviewed him when he was still a pimply teenage wiz kid. Anyway, the guy is scary smart. But he's also trusting. Too trusting. They got him to make an artificial intelligence that behaved, for all intents and purposes, like a human. The only difference was you could control it.

MASON

What was it, like a computer or something?

DADE

At first. Then it was a boxy piece of shit robot, then a more refined android and then they got really good and made them look like us. They talk like us, they walk like us. They even fuck like us. I hear.

MASON

So why are they out there? They escape or something?

(CONTINUED)

DADE

When they started field testing them they didn't go into battle fields. They went into cities. Could they pass? Are they credible? But the government didn't stop there. They upped the stakes and started replacing real people with exact duplicates. They started with the politicians, then news anchors, union leaders, captains of industry, teachers, anyone with any kind of authority. Even my favorite barista. That's why I have to make my own coffee.

MASON

Seems like a lot of trouble to just randomly put androids out there --

DADE

It's not random. It's far from random. Each upgrade -- and, yes, that's what they call it -- each upgrade is intended to have a strategic ripple effect.

Dade looks around the room to demonstrate. At a loss, he takes the hotplate, which is still aglow with heat, and burns an image of concentric circles into his desktop.

Mason isn't sure if he is alarmed or impressed.

MASON

I know what concentric circles are.

DADE

I'm a visual thinker.

Dade puts his finger in the middle of the newly branded circles.

DADE

If you can control the behavior of an influencer, you control ten people, a hundred people, thousands.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

I know what a ripple effect is, you didn't have to --

DADE

And if you get a troublemaker along the way simply upgrade them too. Then you do random people and get a little Butterfly Effect going.

DADE

Why wouldn't they want a world of robots who are docile, predictable, precise and never agitate anything or upset the status quo?

MASON

So, where's the Wizard.

DADE

He disappeared. And he needs our help.

MASON

I don't get it, how?

DADE

So, what do you do when you're up against a robot army? You make your own human army. How does he recruit? He does what he's good at -- he programs. He creates a bright light that all the moths flock to -- on the Internet, for free. It's a recruitment tool. It helps him find those with enough brains and heart to take on a robot army.

MASON

What is it?

DADE

You ever play Knights of Skeldaria?

Mason's jaw drops. He cannot believe his ears. Or, for that matter, DadeDADE.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MASON (cont'd)

MASON

For crissakes, dude. Really? I don't have time for this shit.

Mason is out the door. DadeDADE puts the kettle back on the hotplate and turns it on.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

A short, rotund parking enforcement officer stands next to Mason's car. He is OFFICER TIM and he's filling in a PARKING TICKET in a little white book.

Mason hits the sidewalk shouting.

MASON

Hey, hey, hey! I'm right here. I've got at least thirty minutes left on the meter, look at it.

OFFICER TIM

You parked in a red zone.

MASON

What?

OFFICER TIM

You're in a red zone.

Officer Tim points to the shiny RED CURB next to which Mason's car is parked.

MASON

It wasn't red when I parked here. I swear.

OFFICER TIM

So, someone just wandered up and painted it then?

That motherfucker.

MASON

Goddamn it. Yes, this asshole artist -- it looks like he painted while I was... You don't believe me

(CONTINUED)

do you?

OFFICER TIM

No. I don't.

Mason jumps to the curb and rubs his finger on it. It comes up red.

MASON

Look! See, fresh paint. The guy that was here -- he must've painted while I --

Officer Tim rips the ticket from his book and hands it to Mason who reluctantly takes it.

MASON

Ah, come on, man!

OFFICER TIM

You have forty-five days to contest the ticket.

Officer Tim walks away.

MASON

Hey, hey. Can I ask you something?

OFFICER TIM

Yes?

MASON

Are you fucking robot? I'm serious. Are you a fucking robot?

Officer Tim stews. He doesn't know what to say. He pouts, snuffles, clutches his little white book close to his chest.

OFFICER TIM

Why does everyone say that?!

Mason nods as if Officer Tim affirmed some kind of deeper truth (besides "Mason is a dick"). He gets in his car and slams the door, revs up and lurches away! The dripping, blood-red STENCIL OF THE WILLOGEN keeps watch.

After a beat -- the Adjuster enters the frame, regards the Willogen image for a moment, then snaps a CELL PHONE photo

(CONTINUED)

and exits.

CUT TO:

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Mason is back in his cube. Nothing is adding up. He's drawn a MIND MAP on a NOTEBOOK that features FMRL, KNIGHTS OF SKELDARIA, UPGRADE, WIZARD, DEATH CLAIM and lines between them. He draws a fat QUESTION MARK on the page.

Chip sidles up, looks over his shoulder.

CHIP

Hey, Picasso. Anson wants to talk to you.

MASON

Don't stand over me like that, it creeps me out.

CHIP

Let's go.

MASON

Anson want to see me not you. I'll get there.

CHIP

He wants to see both of us.

MASON

Shit. What did you do now?

CHIP

I'm supposed go with you.

MASON

Hurry along. I'll find it.

CHIP

I mean escort you.

Mason closes the notebook rolls back in his chair. WTF? He gets up, his limbs seem suddenly heavy.

He walks on down the hall. Chip tries to grasp Mason's upper arm, overselling his duty. Mason bats it away and barely

(CONTINUED)

resists a swing at Chip.

CUT TO:

INT. ANSON'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Anson's office would make one think that beige was the new black. Every iota of possible stimulus has been rendered down into a bland shade of blah.

ANSON

Mason. I understand that we've been having some insubordination issues in your department. From you. Given your perfect performance record I could let you slide. But there is another issue that puts me in a bit of a spot with our human resources policy.

MASON

If this about the bad claim that Chip intentional sent me on to ruin my streak -- it's over. Just a bunch of dead ends and whack jobs.

ANSON

Mason. That's not what I'm referring to. You're aware we have a strict policy about the presence of inappropriate material in the workplace.

Mason looks over to Chip -- WTF? Chip looks at his shoes.

MASON

Sure. I'm aware.

ANSON

So, it shouldn't be a surprise then that your position with us here has to be terminated --

MASON

(shocked)

What?

(CONTINUED)

ANSON

-- as a result of this.

The Suit opens a copy box -- one from Mason's desk -- and let's the some of the contents pour onto his desk. BOOB PHOTOCOPIES. Hundreds of pages of Theda's tits.

MASON

Those aren't mine.

ANSON

The tits? I'd say not.

MASON

The copies. I mean, they're mine but by accident. I didn't -- it's difficult to --

ANSON

Chip said you referred to them as research. Is that true?

MASON

Yes but --

ANSON

Just what kind of research are you doing on company time, Mason?

MASON

I was on a bad claim.

He shoots a glance at Chip.

ANSON

I don't know what you were on. But this is unacceptable. It violates our sexual harassment policy and it's a willful misuse of our office equipment. There must be a thousand of these.

CHIP

Two-thousand if your counting tits. Just saying.

Mason knows it's checkmate. He glowers at Chip, who quietly gloats.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Mason walks to his car carrying a BANKERS BOX of his office belongings -- FOLDERS, a PLANT.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CONTINUING

Mason sinks into his seat. Breaths deeply. Clicks on his car stereo.

AUDIOBOOK

I think it's creepy to disrespect the dead. But Persephone says that's what I did when I cremated my dog myself. It's not like we ever used the barbecue anyway because we're vegetarians. Well, now we are.

Mason screams! He kicks the dash which switches the car stereo from the audiobook to some loud INTENSE MUSIC.

CUT TO:

INT. DADEDADE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Dade appears passed out on the floor of his office. He's framed in a shaft of morning light. His eyes suddenly open.

DADE

Just in the neighborhood?

To whom is Dade speaking? Mason needn't bother knocking. The door is open.

MASON

So. Tell me about the Knights of Skeldaria.

DADE

Why should I?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MASON (cont'd)

MASON

Because I believe you.

DADE

No you don't. You just have nothing else to believe in.

MASON

I got fired.

DADE

Yep. That was just a matter of time when you're sniffing around FMRL. You could've ended up either dead or an android. Or both. Have a seat. I'll pour you some coffee.

MASON

No thanks.

Dade smiles, gets up and pours himself a cup.

DADE

It's not used coffee if that's what you're worried about. It's double brew. Ever had double brew? That's when you brew a pot then brew another pot using the first pot. It's heavy shit, man.

MASON

Is that healthy?

DADE

It's healthier than triple brew.
(serious)
Never, ever drink triple brew. That's a cupful of trouble. And by trouble I mean, transdimensional kamikaze trouble. It'll fuck up your shit.

Mason has deeper things in mind.

MASON

Man, just tell me -- how does the Knights of Skeldaria connect with

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

(cont'd)

FMRL?

DADE

You play?

MASON

Everyone plays it.

DADE

Okay, so what's the goal in Knights of Skeldaria?

MASON

Defeat the Willogen, save the imprisoned Wizard.

Dade shrugs. It's elementary. He's leading Mason there.

DADE

So...?

MASON

So, what? I don't get it.

DADE

You seem so smart but really you're just a smart ass, aren't you?

Dade whisks across the office and rolls a CART over on top of which is a VINTAGE GAME CONSOLE. He grabs a REMOTE and a TV comes to life (though, as before, we never see the screen). We hear the theme for KNIGHTS OF Skeldaria.

Dade throws a GAME PADDLE to Mason.

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

You have returned to the Knights of Skeldaria. Welcome Brave Sir Knight...

(the voice becomes a recording of Dade's own)

"You Don't Need to Know My Fucking Name."

DADE

(defensive)

It really doesn't need to know. I saved it at level six. It took me

(CONTINUED)

months to get here. Don't kill my
guy.

Mason begins to play, reflexively. We hear the in-game
HACKING and SLAYING. Dade observes, eyebrows raised.

DADE

Impressive.

MASON

Level six is where it actually gets
interesting. I've been here
hundreds of times now. I can even
get to level seven. But I've never
been able to get past the Willogen.

DADE

No one has. Some people think we're
not supposed to. Others in the
gaming community, I mean deep, down
under the rocks of the gaming
community, know for a fact that by
defeating the Willogen reveals
where the Wizard really is.

MASON

In the game? Well, you'd hope so.
Otherwise what's the point?

DADE

No, I mean the real Wizard.
Cameron Block. The guy who
programmed it. Designed the whole
world.

MASON

Why would you want a bunch of geeks
to know where you were?

DADE

Not a bunch of geeks. The one, the
one smart enough to solve the
puzzle, the one who can save him.
You read Gamer Tamer? He's missing.

Mason bobs and weaves as he maneuvers through the game. A
FANFARE plays.

(CONTINUED)

GAME VOICE (O.S.)
Congratulations Brave Sir Knight...
(again, the voice becomes a
recording of Dade's)
"You Don't Need to Know My Fucking
Name." Welcome to Level Seven.

Dade is blown away.

DADE
Holy shit, man! You might be the
best player I've ever seen. You
just whizzed through level six.
Shit. Save the game -- save the
game.

MASON
Not right now.

DADE
Just don't kill my guy.

Mason shrugs this off as he continues to play.

CUT TO:

INT. DADE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

SEVERAL HOURS LATER -- MASON continues to play Knights of
Skeldaria. Mason has five o'clock shadow and is bleary-eyed.
Dade is asleep. Mason has a revelation.

MASON
So, is the Wizard hiding or
missing?

Dade stirs, looks around. He raises his eyebrows and turns
on a LIGHT.

MASON
Well? Is the Wizard hiding or
missing?

DADE
Missing.

Dade gets up to make coffee.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

What makes you so sure? The guy is probably a bazillionaire on a private island.

DADE

Ever since he took a contract with FMRL. he's gone from public life. Used to go to Cons every year, used to do fan podcasts. Then he took the gig and disappeared. He knew the risk of working with a company like FMRL, I mean, they're a weapons contractor.

MASON

If they're so evil then why work with them in the first place?

DADE

Unlike the other game designers who make training games for drones and shit like that, Cameron could be a real life Trojan Horse. Taking them out from the inside. But what if they found out and locked him up so they could squeeze the genius out of him for their own purposes? Like an A.I. engine for a robot army...

MASON

(not buying it)

It's a cute analogy. Saving the wizard.

DADE

Kill the Willogen in the game and the Wizard's location will be revealed. Means you're the one -- the one clever enough to find FMRL and save the Wizard. The real Wizard.

Again, we hear the game FANFARE.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

Fuck, me. Did you save it?

MASON

I don't need to save it. I get to this level all the time. I just can't get past the Willogen.

DADE

Dude, don't kill my guy...

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

Congratulations Brave Sir Knight...

(again, the voice becomes a recording of Dade's)

"You Don't Need to Know My Fucking Name." Welcome to Level Eight.

Prepare to meet the Willogen.

We hear the ROAR of the Willogen, scary music. Dade can't watch.

MASON

Pentacle charm! Pentacle charm! Pentacle charm!

It sounds ugly. Like a spoon in a garbage disposal but with agonized screams mixed in. The Willogen roars, victoriously. Mason slumps in his chair.

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

You are slain, Brave Sir Knight...

(again, the voice becomes a recording of Dade's)

"You Don't Need to Know My Fucking Name."

DADE

Dude, you killed my guy. You killed my guy! Did you save it? Tell me you saved the game before I became slain.

MASON

Yeah, so, obviously, I'm not the chosen one.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

Ah. Fuck. You didn't. That was my best guy. You killed my guy, man.

MASON

Technically, I didn't kill him. The Willogen did. But I'll make it up to you somehow.

DADE

No need. It was a worthy sacrifice. He died a noble death. I can only hope to do the same someday.

Dade takes a reflective moment.

DADE

Okay. You're ready.

MASON

Ready for what?

Dade goes to his desk and opens drawers until he finds a cheap SUNGLASS SLIP CASE.

DADE

This.

He reaches into the case and, like a sword from a scabbard, pulls out a FIVE-IN-ONE tool.

DADE

It's a five-in-one.

It's clear that Dade is quite taken with the tool. Mason, not so much.

DADE

Painters use them.

Dade waves it through the air, reflecting the light in the room.

MASON

Uh, are we painting something?

DADE

No. This is the sacred weapon of the android killer. And it's yours. For five bucks.

MASON

What, wait...? You're selling it to me?

Dade can barely conceal his contempt -- after all, this is the shit!

MASON

Dude, this is from the Dollar Store.

DADE

What are you talking about?

MASON

It still has the dollar store price tag on it.

DADE

That. That's camouflage. Come on, your life is worth five bucks, isn't it?

Mason pull a wadded FIVER from his pants pocket and smacks it onto the table in front of him. He keeps his hand on it.

MASON

How does it work?

DADE

It's more than a tool. It's a friend. Not your best friend but a good friend. That's how you use these things. Close but not too close.

(off Mason's look)

You don't seem impressed.

MASON

I'm not. I expected something more, you know, Knights of Skeldaria style.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

This isn't a game man!

MASON

But how do you know this is what they use?

DADE

In Skeldaria what happens when you activate the pentacle charm?

MASON

The strength of your top five weapons merge into...
(it's dawning)
One super weapon. Shit.

DADE

The five-in-one. Get close to an android and you'll notice they have a thin line on their neck, about two inches, right above the collar bone. It's a slit. That's how you deactivate one - permanently.

Dade demonstrates with the five-in-one.

DADE

The five-in-one goes in. You turn the curve and yank. And -- click -- it's over.

Mason slides the five dollar bill across the table to Dade and takes the five-in-one in hand. He checks it out, weighs it in his palm, does a few exploratory jabs.

DADE

Your welcome.

MASON

You ever, uh, deactivate one?

DADE

(mulls this)
Let's just say I know how to use the Pentacle Charm.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CASE WORKER (cont'd)

MASON

You ever deactivate a human by accident?

DADE

Do I look like a psycho?

MASON

How should I answer that?

DADE

Only androids have the slit.
Remember -- in, turn the curve and
yank. It'll save your life. It'll
save humanity.

CUT TO:

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Fluorescent lights, a labyrinth of line markers and signage that reads "Please Wait Here." Mason, cleaned up, cues up, RESUME in hand ready for his dose of bureaucratized desperation.

At least there's air conditioning, or so says the RIBBON dancing from the GRILL set into the ceiling. Mason watches its dance for a moment.

CASE WORKER (O.S.)

Mason Shocke.

Mason snaps to. The CASE WORKER is all business but attractive in a pilly cardigan kind of way. She sits at COMPUTER and touch types as she speaks with Mason.

CASE WORKER

Is this your first time applying
for unemployment benefits?

MASON

Yes.

CASE WORKER

The law requires requires proof of
legal status and authorization to
work prior to receiving services.
Are you able to work legally in the

(CONTINUED)

state?

MASON

Yes.

CASE WORKER

Do you have a social security number and photo ID such as a driver's license or passport?

MASON

Yes.

Mason reaches into his pocket and pulls out his WALLET and slips out a LICENSE and SOCIAL SECURITY CARD. The Case Worker takes them, scrutinizes the photo and Mason, respectively.

CASE WORKER

You cut your hair.

MASON

For the job.

CASE WORKER

Claims adjuster, right? Your hair was cute. You thinking of growing it out again?

MASON

(flattered)

Well, maybe.

CASE WORKER

(crisp)

So, you're not serious about being a claims adjuster again?

MASON

Uh --

CASE WORKER

If the job requires short hair and you're growing it out, how seriously do you want to work as a claims adjuster?

Mason is at a loss for words.

(CONTINUED)

CASE WORKER

How long were you at your last employer?

MASON

Three years. And I'm going to cut my hair. When it needs it.

CASE WORKER

(coy)

That's too bad.

Mason is simmering.

MASON

You know, I don't see what my hair style has to do with my employment.

CASE WORKER

Your said you cut your hair for the job.

MASON

I did but I didn't know were were having a passive-aggressive chit chat about hair cuts.

CASE WORKER

You didn't? Do you have an updated resumé?

Mason slides it over. The Case Worker eyeballs it.

CASE WORKER

Are you presently employed?

MASON

(snarky)

Uh, no. Duh. That's why I'm here.

CASE WORKER

Then why does the latest entry on your resumé say have the date of employment as "present."

(CONTINUED)

MASON

Because it was present until...it
wasn't.

CASE WORKER

So, you don't have an updated
resumé.

MASON

Technically, no. But --

CASE WORKER

But technically you have a resumé.

Stare down. It's going on a very long time. Until --

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Fuuuuuckkk Yoouuuu!

Finally, someone said it. Mason is amused. The Case Worker
is displeased.

The woman who yelled, storms around the corner of the work
area toward where Mason is sitting. She kicks a CHAIR which
goes flying. It's Theda, the copy shop woman.

She and Mason lock eyes as her case worker, CASE WORKER 2,
essentially a clone of the other one, speeds after her.

THEDA

(to Mason)

You! I lost my job because of you.
And now these bitches won't cut me
a check because of the "nature of
my dismissal!"

Case Worker 2 grabs Theda's wrist as the first Case Worker
climbs over her desk to assist. Theda thrashes around.

CASE WORKER

We are removing you from the
premises.

THEDA

(to the Case Workers)

Let go of me, you're hurting me!

Now both the case workers are wresting Theda out of the

(CONTINUED)

building. Mason is dumbfounded.

THEDA
(to Mason)
So do something, dude! Help me!

Mason blanches. Then he mans up:

MASON
Let her go!

Theda and the Case Workers stop struggling and mutually experience a WTF? moment. That's when he realizes he's brandishing the five-in-one like a knife.

THEDA
What the fuck is that, man?

MASON
Run!

Theda and Mason make for the door, tipping a GARBAGE CAN in the process. They burst through the doors into the bright light of day.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - LATER

Theda and Mason turn the corner, running down the sidewalk. They eventually stop and catch their breath -- right where Mason's car is parked. Theda is laughing. Mason is shocked at himself. He realizes he's still carrying the five-in-one and ashamedly tucks it into his coat pocket.

THEDA
That was some crazy shit, man.
You're a fucking loon.

She pats him on the back. She approves? Mason straightens up. This could be interesting.

MASON
You're the one who started it --

(CONTINUED)

THEDA

Yeah, well, those fucking
bitches... I guess we're not
getting unemployment checks.

MASON

I'd say not.

THEDA

But thanks for saving my life. So
you got fired too.

MASON

Sure did.

THEDA

Put your boobs on the photocopier
too.

MASON

Pretty much. Worse.

THEDA

I can tell we're going to be
friends.

MASON

Can I ask you a question?

THEDA

Theda.

MASON

Mason. Can I ask you another
question? You're a journalist, you
see a young man poised to jump off
a bridge. If he jumps and you write
it up, you win the Noble Prize. If
you talk him down he uses that to
write his own prize-winning book.
Doesn't even mention you once. What
do you do?

THEDA

Is this a job interview? I didn't
know you were hiring, weirdo. Here,
have a resumé.

(CONTINUED)

She gives Mason a resumé on the back a boob photocopy. She notices.

MASON

I've already got like a thousand of these. I'm a collector.

THEDA

Yeah. I was high when I did that.

Mason clicks his KEY REMOTE. His car doors unlock.

THEDA

Oh, you're full of surprises. Can I get a ride?

CUT TO:

INT. THEDA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Theda's one-room studio apartment looks as if no one has been inside of it for days. The blinds are shut, MAIL has piled by the slot on the door. The BED in the middle of the room is unmade. The only sign of life are the BUGS in collected in dozens of JARS arrayed on every available surface.

MASON

Live here much?

Theda laughs.

THEDA

I go out a lot. It's too crowded, what with all the bugs and all.

Mason finally notices he's strolled into a homemade entymology exhibit. Uh-oh.

THEDA

You're cool, right?

MASON

(not sure)
Yeah, totally.

(CONTINUED)

THEDA

Good. A lot of guys, you know,
don't get it. The bug thing.

MASON

Weird. You always want to be an
entomologist?

Mason picks up a MAGNIFYING GLASS, looks through it at Theda. She moves close to him and her image grows and distorts in the glass.

THEDA

No, I wanted to be a real little
girl or at least that's what my
implanted memories tell me.

Theda parts her lips and fogs the magnifying glass. Mason smiles and puts it down.

THEDA

Actually, I was a
psychopharmacology major. Well,
still am but I'm too broke for
tuition. So, I'm doing my own sort
of lab work here. Mostly worms and
larvae. I'm trying to isolate the
hallucinogenic properties in some
species.

MASON

You mean like tequila worms?

THEDA

The worm world is much bigger than
than frat boy. Wait, you're not a
cop, right?

MASON

(kind of offended)

Uh, no?

THEDA

'Cuz you look kinda straight is
all. I've had some close calls.
Last thing I need is a bust.

(CONTINUED)

On the spot, Mason awkwardly tries to be nonchalant. He picks up a jar that appears to be empty, examines it.

THEDA

Oh, that one's empty. It's the killing jar.

Mason quickly puts it down.

THEDA

Don't worry. It won't hurt you. There's a hankkerchief in there soaked in bug juice. The vapors kill the worms, quick and painless. And I mean sooo painless.

Theda grabs the jar, twists off the lid and takes a deep whiff. She holds it, then exhales. Bliss washes across her face. She passes the killing jar to Mason.

THEDA

Go ahead. Live a little. It's not like it's triple brew or anything really crazy.

Mason takes the top of the jar and warily takes a puny sniff. Theda pushes the jar into his face. He takes a bigger whiff. Yeah, that's the shit. He looks like he just came.

THEDA

That's the shit, right?

MASON

I'm... I'm... That is the best jar ever.

THEDA

I fucking love huffing bug juice.

Theda nods. And unbuttons her shirt. Mason freezes a bit. Theda takes the killing jar from him and takes another hit, puts it down and takes off her jeans.

Mason has to loosen up: he reaches for a jar -- any JAR -- and takes the lid off one with a spiny CHRYSALIS in it and sticks his nose in. Theda, now in her bra and panties, glides over and takes it from him. She holds to his face to

show him the contents.

THEDA

Not that one, doll. That's a specimen. It's a knight butterfly. Or it will be. And it will fuck-you-up. That's it's chrysalis. See how it's armored like a knight? Clever, those entymologists.

She puts the jar down and pulls Mason's sports coat off and hangs it on a doorknob. Then she starts unbuttoning Mason's shirt. She put's his hands on his chest to takeover and steps behind a closet door.

THEDA (O.S.)

You know what happens when it takes off its armor?

Mason tries to catch up, pulling off his shirt and clumsily stepping out of his trousers. He's standing in his boxers.

MASON

What happens?

Theda emerges from the closet -- topless and wearing a costume pair of BUTTERFLY WINGS.

THEDA

It can fly.

She "flies" over to him. It clicks. He goes in for a kiss and she digs it. They "flutter" to the bed, kissing along the way. Still embracing, they fall atop the unmade bedding and get it on.

CUT TO:

INT. THEDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lying in bed next to sleeping Theda, Mason wakes with a start He takes a moment to orient himself. He takes a gander at the lovely Theda next to him, wrapped in wings like some kind of mythological creature.

All is well. Until he notices the small scar across the base of her throat. He goes in for a closer look, careful not to wake her. Something's wrong here. He lays back on the pillow

(CONTINUED)

and mulls a notion. He can't resist. He gets up, goes to his coat hanging on the doorknob and takes out the five-in-one.

Back in bed, Mason gently puts the five-in-one against Theda's throat, just at the scar. It's a fit. What does this mean?

Theda's eyes open. Mason is too shocked to react. She grabs his wrist.

THEDA
(eerily calm)
What. The. Fuck. Are you doing?

MASON
I'm just...uh...

Theda searches Mason's eyes. Silly boy.

THEDA
You're kinky.

She bares her throat to him -- taunting, seductive.

MASON
The scar...

THEDA
Thyroidectomy. I had
hyperthyroidism. Made me crazy. Had
it removed. But I'm still crazy.
You like it?

MASON
Yes.

Theda grasps Mason by the wrist and pulls the five-in-one closer to her mouth.

Seductively, she runs her tongue along its side, pricking it just at the last bit, resulting in a slight cut.

She then pulls Mason in for an aggressive kiss. When it ends, he looks like a vampire, BLOOD smeared across his lips. Theda sees this and smiles. Mason is well out of his depths and doesn't know the next move in this particular pas de deux.

Theda does. She takes Mason by the wrists and throws him on his back. She straddles him such that his wrists are now under her shins - he's pinned. She handily swipes the five-in-one from him.

Dark blood drips from the corner of Theda's mouth, which she smears away on the back of her hand, the same hand holding the five-in-one that glints in the narrow beam of light coming through her apartment window -- perhaps it's a street lamp, the feral moon, or a lightning bolt frozen in time -- the moment seems endless -- especially now that Theda has the blade at Mason's throat.

He's paralyzed to act and can do little more than watch as Theda gently draws the sharp edge down the length of his chest, across his abdomen and out of frame. This could either be really good or really, really bad.

JUMP TO: Worm's eye view from the floor -- the bed is vigorously rocking. The five-in-one falls to the floor and sticks, upright, in the floorboard like a knife as we hear the sounds of passion.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL ROOM

It's dark and dank. A single, dim ECO-BULB swings from the ceiling. The Adjuster steps from the darkness into a moving light. He raises his cell phone -- on its screen is the WILLOGEN IMAGE.

A MAN in a MEDICAL MASK also emerges from the dark and nods.

CLOSE ON the man's hands as he snaps on a SURGICAL GLOVE. He uses the gloved hand to guide the Adjuster to sit. We hear a BUZZING off-screen. Then the gloved hand brings a TATTOO GUN to the top of the Adjusters bald, swastika-scarred head.

The Adjuster brings his E-CIG to his lips as he grits his teeth against the pain.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING - ESTABLISHING

A behemoth, granite mausoleum for dead tree media. The monument style signage generically reads "TIMES."

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S CAR - LUNCHTIME

Mason and Dade are parked down the street from the newspaper building. A mess of FAST FOOD DETRITUS litters the dashboard. Dade squints at his former employer through BINOCULARS.

Mason, meanwhile, adjusts his tussled hair in the mirror -- he did not wake up at home this morning.

AUDIOBOOK

That's why I have a rubber Buddha on the dash. It's an urn and sometimes an incense holder, which is why his face is kind of melted.

DADE

What is this shit you listen to?

MASON

It's for my meditation.

DADE

You shouldn't meditate and drive, man.

Mason turns it off.

DADE'S P.O.V. - GLASS DOORS

Through the plate glass doors of the building, we see a GUARD idly reading a NEWSPAPER.

DADE (O.S.)

Look at all those drones, man. It's like those clocks with the mechanical people that pop out and shimmy around. All going to lunch.

MASON (O.S.)

I met a girl.

DADE (O.S.)

She human?

BACK TO SCENE

Dade takes a bite of a BURGER and slouches in his seat.

MASON

Well, that's what I'm trying to figure out. I'm pretty sure she is but she had a scar, like this...

(fingers a line on his)

I checked out while she was sleeping. Can androids, uh, heal?

DADE

Why? Did you hurt her?

MASON

What? No! The scar -- could it have been a slit at one point?

DADE

Doubt it. You seeing her again?

MASON

Date tonight.

DADE

This time don't use a condom and see if you get anything. Androids don't get bugs.

MASON

That's like the worst advice ever.

Dade shrugs and puts the binoculars back to his eyes.

DADE'S P.O.V. - GLASS DOORS

The guard, as before, reads his newspaper. Then he checks his WATCH, folds up the paper and grabs a LUNCHBOX.

DADE (O.S.)

Just like clockwork. You little automaton doing your noon-time jig.

(to Mason)

You ready?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DADE (cont'd)

BACK TO SCENE

MASON

Yes. Show no emotion. Speak as little and as vaguely as possible. No metaphors, no color. Just the facts ma'am.

DADE (O.S.)

Even if you walk into a doorknob and knock a ball back up in ya, you can't scream, or cry or be angry. Because androids don't. They just go get a new ball.

Mason fishes EARBUDS from his pocket and plugs them into a MOBILE PHONE.

MASON

So why did the newspaper can you?

Dade lets out a long sigh.

DADE

The editorial department prefers facts over the truth.

MASON

You made up stories.

DADE

The stories were true. I just made up facts to support them. Then they scrubbed everything I ever wrote from their website. An entire oeuvre gone with a keystroke. But there's still the morgue file.

MASON

You sure this story is in there? They frame it and hang it over the john?

DADE

The first and last interview with The Wizard. Wrote it during my prime, like fifteen years ago. If

(CONTINUED)

memory serves, he recounts the origin of Skeldaria. The past holds the key to the future. I'd go in there myself but, you know, I've got that restraining order bullshit.

MASON

I'm ready. Call me.

Mason gets out of the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING (SIDEWALK) - DAY

Mason stands outside the car, focused, determined -- earbuds in his ears. His phone RINGS. He pushes a button.

DADE (O.S.)

(filtered)

Don't say hello. Just walk to the doors.

Mason takes a deep breath and walks calmly to the newspaper building's revolving door and steps in.

Dade's aren't the only pair of eyes following Mason's adventure at the newspaper. Obscured behind a NEWSPAPER, the Adjuster lowers his reading and emits a plume of e-cig smoke. He steps out of frame.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

A large lobby, a security kiosk. Mason's footsteps echo loudly in the massive space but no one seems to mind, not least of which the guard who merely nods as he goes toward the ELEVATORS.

DADE (O.S.)

(filtered, as before)

Get in the elevator and go to the 19th floor.

The elevator doors open. Several PEOPLE are already inside. Only one exits, the rest stay. Mason enters and the doors

(CONTINUED)

close.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Mason stares forward, motionless and expressionless. So does everyone else. It's a long ride and the silence is especially awkward since Dade is monologing in his ear.

DADE (O.S.)

You know, instead of your meditation audiobook, maybe you should just stop being such a perfectionist.

This makes Mason's blood boil. But he can't do a damn thing about it.

The elevator DINGS.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

The elevator doors open on a newsroom, which is little more than a bunch of DESKS and PEOPLE sitting quietly at them.

DADE (O.S.)

I heard the elevator ding. You're on the newsroom floor. Hear how quiet it is. That's wrong. Totally wrong for a newsroom. Clearly, they're all robots now.

Indeed, the behavior of these alleged media professionals is awfully subdued. Mason tries to discretely get a gander.

DADE (O.S.)

Don't look at them. Robots are like animals. If you look them in the eye they think you want to engage them.

Too late. A REPORTER approaches Mason. She stands awkwardly close.

(CONTINUED)

REPORTER

What is your directive?

Mason hesitates.

DADE (O.S.)

Ask her where the Morgue File is.

MASON

Morgue File?

REPORTER

(flatly)

That way.

DADE (O.S.)

I didn't hear any carnage, so I
trust you're not dead.

Mason is a few paces away from the reporter. He looks back.
She's still watching him.

MASON

(whispering)

Not yet. Weird friends you got.

DADE (O.S.)

Just glad I got fired before I got
upgraded.

Mason has reached a door at the end of the newsroom floor
marked "MORGUE FILE."

Mason enters.

CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE FILE - CONTINUOUS

A dark room full of FILE CABINETS, scattered like
tombstones.

MASON

I'm in.

(CONTINUED)

DADE (V.O.)

Okay, it's organized by date. We're going back about fifteen years so got to far, northeast corner of the room.

MASON

Okay. I see some old wooden drawers and --

DADE (V.O.)

Shit --

MASON

What?

No reply.

MASON

Dade? Dade?

Mason checks his phone. The call has been disconnected.

MASON

(to himself)

No fucking reception.

Mason proceeds with his mission. He opens a DRAWER and starts pawing through the OLD NEWSPRINT. While doing so, something catches his eye -- a BOX marked "Daedalus Howell."

He goes over to it, opens it up and flits through some CLIPS -- all of them are STAMPED "FABRICATED." He puts the lid back on, shaking his head.

Mason prowls through the drawers until he finds the day and date of the edition he's seeking.

He dives in and flits through of a paper until TEENAGE Cameron Block beams back from the NEWSPAPER. He's seated at a computer terminal, wearing glasses and an 80s t-shirt. The headline reads "The New Wizard of Computer Games."

Mason gently tears the CLIP from the archive and folds it into his pocket.

The door opens. Mason ducks. The EMBER OF CIGARETTE bobs into the darkness, it's smoker unseen. The Adjuster?

(CONTINUED)

Mason reaches for his 5-in-1. It glints in the dim light. He tries to catch his breath before he hyperventilates -- he looks like his heart might explode.

A JANITOR grabs a GARBAGE CAN, tosses his cigarette butt in it and exits. The door closes, shrouding Mason back in the dim.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING - LATER

The elevator doors open and Mason steps out. He keeps a straight face but with a bit of a struggle. It's clear he's feeling alive.

LOBBY

As Mason strolls across the lobby the Guard from before B-lines toward him, toting his lunchbox. Mason stiffens but as the guard gets closer it's evident he's just on his way to his desk. Whew.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - SAME

Back on the sidewalk Mason sees Dade through the car window, sitting in the passenger staring ahead. His eyes move to Mason but he seems paralyzed and doesn't move.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S CAR - SAME

Mason gets in the car and triumphantly takes the clip from his coat pocket and plants it on the dash.

MASON

And, yes, I'm awesome.

DADE

(barely moving his lips,
whispering)

Pentacle charm.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

What?

Mason's eyes land on the rearview mirror -- framed within it is the skinhead Adjuster. He draws on his e-cig. On his scalp is GAUZE and TAPE. The Adjuster gestures "forward" with the GUN he's had on Dade. Mason pulls away from the curb.

MASON

Where do you want to go?

The Adjuster is silent. He nods his head -- again a cue to continue driving forward. As he does so, Mason notices the THIN LINE on his neck. He's an android.

Mason's brow furrows with resolve. Dade notices and shifts his arm slightly on the armrest. The handle of the five-in-one is just barely sticking out of Mason's right coat pocket.

As if reading his mind, the Adjuster leans the muzzle of the gun into the nape of Mason's neck. His back instinctively straightens.

DADE

If anyone's hungry there's a great
lunch place up here --

The Adjuster swipes Dade across the temple with the gun. Dade screams, which is just enough of a diversion for Dade to ram the car into a PARKED CAR along the street.

The Adjuster flies forward, between the seats such that his torso is lodged in the front part of the car. Dade struggles for the gun, which FIRES! the hole in the WINDSHIELD is surrounded by a tight spiderweb of cracks.

Dade can't get it out of the Adjuster's hand -- he keeps firing! bullet after bullet tearing up the car ever closer to Dade and Mason, who flinch and shield themselves.

DADE

Pentacle charm!

Mason snaps to and pulls the five-in-one from his pocket. He indiscriminately hacks at the Adjuster's neck, catching

(CONTINUED)

Dade's hand in the process. Dade howls!

MASON

Sorry!

DADE

Just fucking get it in!

EXT. SIDEWALK - SAME

A MAN walks by the car, which is rocking violently. He averts his eyes with disgust as Dade yells --

DADE (O.S.)

Put it in him! Get it in his
throat!

INT. MASON'S CAR - SAME

Dade is still trying to wrestle the gun away from the Adjuster's right hand -- both flailing and failing wildly. The Adjuster is elbowing Mason in the ribs and face as he keeps trying to get the five-in-one near the slit in the Adjuster's neck.

The Adjuster get his gun free from Dade, who freezes. The Adjuster presses the weapon onto his forehead and Dade winces just as Mason slots the five-in-one in the Adjuster's throat, turns on the curve and yanks!

It's both gruesome and effective as SPARKS fly from orifice, followed by an dark, oily liquid. The Adjuster, deactivated, slumps back into the rear seat.

DADE

Holy shit, it works!

MASON

What do you mean, it works?

CUT TO:

EXT. MANNEQUIN FACTORY - DAY

Mason's car is parked in a light industrial wasteland. There's a DUMPSTER brimming with what look like human body parts. They're rejects from the mannequin factory. A SIGN on the reads "NO DUMPING ALLOWED. PROPERTY OF LA MANNEQUIN CO."

(CONTINUED)

Mason is hacking the Adjuster apart with his five-in-one as Dade reads from the CLIP.

Mason gets an arm to loosen. He pulls it off, revealing WIRES and shit. He tosses it in the dumpster.

DADE

Perfect place to dump one of these guys, eh? Blends right in.

Mason is stewing.

MASON

I can't believe you never deactivated one of these guys before. I mean, what if you were wrong?

DADE

But I wasn't.

MASON

Or what if it was a real person? Then what? We'd be murderers.

DADE

You'd be a murderer. But it was self-defense.

MASON

Technically, this isn't a crime, right?

DADE

Could be vandalism, maybe. Destruction of property. I don't know, I'm not a robot attorney. Anyway, now you believe me, don't you? I can tell you doubted me before. Am I right?

MASON

I doubted you.

DADE

But now?

Mason severs the other arm from the Adjuster, again wires

(CONTINUED)

and oil spill out.

MASON

I'm covered in robot blood.

DADE

(looking at clip)

Okay, so check this out. This is what we were looking for. I remember this now. Cameron Block was a bullied teen. Used to hang out at the Lumaville Museum of Natural History. He'd go into the butterfly pavilion and dream up perfect worlds.

MASON

Or revenge.

DADE

And that's where he came up with the concept for Knights of Skeldaria. But why?

Mason examines the Adjuster's head. He pulls off the gauze and tape. Beneath it is a fresh TATTOO of THE WILLOGEN. He drops kicks the head into the dumpster.

MASON

I know why.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mason sets up shop on his couch game paddle in hand. Dade pokes around, appraising Mason's decor -- or lack of it.

DADE

What's with all the plastic?
Somekind of sex fetish?

Mason ignores Dade and activate the Knights of Skeldaria.

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

You have returned to the Knights of Skeldaria. Welcome Brave Sir Knight...

(CONTINUED)

(as before, the voice becomes
a recording of Mason's own)
"Mason?"

Dade is searching the CUPBOARDS in Mason's kitchen.

DADE
You got any coffee?

MASON
There's a cafe downstairs.

DADE
Can't trust baristas. I dated one.
If you knew what they do behind the
counter, you'd make your own coffee
too. They use caffeine as a sort of
mind control.

MASON
Everything comes down to mind
control for you.

Mason, eyes on the unseen game screen, pumps his face in the
air.

MASON
Yes!

GAME VOICE (O.S.)
Congratulations Brave Sir Knight...
(again, Mason's)
"Mason?" Welcome to Level Eight.
Prepare to meet the Willogen.

DADE
Mind control? Mind, body and soul
control. If someone fucks with your
cuppa joe, they're fucking with the
very fabric of your being. Coffee
is life.

MASON
And it makes you paranoid.

DADE

If by paranoid you mean having an increased faculty for pattern recognition, then hell yeah. And it will surely lead us heedless into a noble death as we save humanity.

MASON

Not into the noble death part.

DADE

Doesn't have to be noble

MASON

Or death.

DADE

Suit yourself. It's my noblesse oblige.

MASON

That's not what that means.

Dade sits next to Mason, watches.

We hear the ROAR of the Willogen, scary music. As always, Dade can't watch but he also can't resist.

DADE

Pentacle charm! Pentacle charm!
What are you doing?

MASON

I'm taking off my armor.

DADE

Are you crazy? The Willogen will kill you in a second without your armor. How do you plan to get past him naked? I can't watch.

MASON

It's just a game, man.

DADE

(stricken)
Is it?

(CONTINUED)

Mason maneuvers the paddle, then puts it down. Dade covers his eyes, then peeks through his fingers.

Mason smiles.

DADE

Omigod. What are those?

MASON

Wings.

DADE

Where did those come from?

MASON

There were always there.

(grabs paddle)

And now we fly...

The sound of FLAPPING WINGS emanate from the unseen screen, followed by the anguished ROARS of the Willogen.

DADE

Holy shit. You can fly?

MASON

Yes, right over the Willogen. Right to the soft spot in his skull.

DADE

Omigod. You're gonna beat the Willogen.

MASON

And... Pentacle charm.

The sound of bloody terror, SCREAMS and general mayhem.

GAME VOICE (O.S.)

Congratulations Brave Sir
Knight...Mason? You have conquered
the Willogen. Prepare to --

Mason and Dade's jaws drop in utter horror. The game has crashed. Mason leaps to the console and starts whacking it.

DADE

I can't believe this. We trusted the fate of humanity to your shitty game system.

MASON

It's newer than yours!

DADE

And that's the whole problem -- only the vintage shit actually works. The new boxes are stuffed full of NSA bullshit and --

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Hello.

The game is back on. For the first time we see the video game screen - it's an EIGHT-BIT extravaganza that looks resolutely stuck in the 80s. It's like the "Arecibo message" but with swords - if swords were made from six blocky pixels and looked like upside crosses.

The screen goes snowy and a HOMEMADE VIDEO of CAMERON BLOCK, a.k.a, the WIZARD, appears. He is a sandy-haired boyish dude (30s) who looks scrubbed and buffed within an inch of his life.

WIZARD

I'm the Wizard. I guess.
Congratulations, you destroyed the Willogen. Now, it's time to come to the castle and save the Wizard.
Here are the directions. Gotta pen?

Mason and Dade pat their pockets -- they don't have a pen. The tear up Mason's plastic covered apartment looking for one.

WIZARD

Wait. Nevermind. You're a registered user. We've got your name and number. Unless you're one of those dorks who do something stupid when signing up.

That would be Dade. The video cuts out.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

That's the Wizard? He's kind of a
dick.

Mason's phone RINGS.

DADE

That's him!

Again Mason pats his pockets.

MASON

I don't have it.

The phone keeps ringing as Mason and Dade tear up his
apartment again. Finally, Mason unearths the phone from
between the COUCH CUSHIONS.

MASON

(into phone)

Hello? Hello? ...Cydney?

Mason storms to his front door, opens it and peers into the
hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S BUILDING - HALL - CONTINUOUS

Cydney is in her own doorway, with a PHONE pressed to her
ear. Mason and Cydney remain on their phones even though
they're within spitting distance.

CYDNEY

(into phone)

Mason, I'm in dire straights. I
need a loan -- anything. You know I
can pay it back.

MASON

Cydney, I talk right now. I'm
expecting a --

CYDNEY

There's an orthodontics convention
downtown next week. Those guys love
me -- I could pay you back in half
an hour.

(CONTINUED)

Cydney spots another EVICTION NOTICE on her door. She points a long ARTIFICIAL NAIL to it.

CYDNEY

Look at this shit! Can you at least rip this off the door for me? I just painted my nails... Mason?

MASON

I'm hanging up now.

Mason hangs up. Glares at her. And slams the door.

BACK TO:

INT. MASON'S BUILDING - HALL - SAME

Dade is pacing around the apartment. He's been stewing on something.

DADE

So? What did the Wizard say?

MASON

Wasn't him. It was my next door neighbor.

DADE

I have a bad feeling about this.

MASON

Yeah, she's a psycho. And a dude.

DADE

I mean the Wizard.

MASON

He's a dick. But still. We gotta go.

DADE

How did you you know -- about the wings?

MASON

I'm smart that way. I know a chick into bugs. Added it up.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

It's a trap.

MASON

What are you saying? The girl --

DADE

It's beyond the girl. It's a reverse play. This whole game thing -- it's not about finding the one to save the Wizard and smite the robot army. It's about finding the one who poses the most threat and removing them from the equation. This is how you identify yourself. For an upgrade.

MASON

I don't believe it. Come on, this is it. This is what we've been working toward. Let's go -- you and me.

DADE

It's a trap. I'm not going on a suicide mission.

MASON

Dude, you're the one that got me into this shit. What about your noblesse oblige?

DADE

(angry)

What you're talking about isn't a noble death. It's just stupidity.

MASON

(wising up)

You're jealous. You're jealous that it's me who beat the Willogen and not you. I'm the guy who gets to save the Wizard.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

I'm not jealous. I just don't want to end up in a people zoo.

MASON

A people zoo?

DADE

They're going to put you in a cage, like the primate you are, and use you as a specimen for what humanity was, you know, before you unwittingly helped them destroy it.

MASON

You've got some serious problems, man. I read up on you in the morgue file. They gotta special area about you.

DADE

As well they should.

MASON

It's like they quarantined all your lies and weirdness so it wouldn't contaminate the rest of the clips.

DADE

Is that so?

MASON

And you tried to contaminate me.

DADE

I showed you the truth!

MASON

Except the part about you killing robots before. You almost got us killed by that skinhead robot!

DADE

But I was right.

(CONTINUED)

MASON

In theory. You're all theory --
conspiracy theories. And lies and
bullshit.

DADE

And you're so perfect Mason. So,
squeaky clean and refined. You know
what you are? You're a fucking
robot yourself!

MASON

Fuck you!

DADE

Fuck you! I hope the Wizard makes
you a real little boy someday!

Dade storms out of the apartment.

Mason collapses on the couch, covers his face with a pillow
and yells in anguish.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mason squirms restlessly in his sleeping bag atop the
plastic sheet on his bed -- one wiggle too many -- he slides
off despite his efforts not to.

He rises. He pulls some clothes back on, throws on his
jacket and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Mason speeds his car through the dark city -- a galaxy of
traffic lights, ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS and NEON SIGNS
flickering around him.

Throughout we hear a PHONE RINGING and finally an answer.

THEDA (O.S.)

Hello... This is Theda's phone. You
missed me. Do your thing.

(CONTINUED)

BEEP! Mason doesn't leave a message.

He turns on his audiobook.

AUDIOBOOK

Persephone says I shouldn't stick incense in its face but there's a perfect hole for incense sticks right in his mouth. She says it's for a toy bottle because my Buddha is just a baby doll I bought at Goodwill.

CUT TO:

INT. THEDA'S APARTMENT - DOOR - NIGHT

A giant "X" made from POLICE TAPE covers the door. Mason is taken aback.

At a loss, he knocks but as he does, the door creaks open an inch. He gently presses it open enough to call into the dark apartment.

MASON

Theda? Are you here?

He takes an exploratory step into the apartment -- a SHARD of glass snaps underfoot. Something definitely isn't right.

MASON

Theda? Are you okay?

She's not there. Nothing is there but police tape. Mason goes in anyway. The place is busted up. It's been tossed. All of Specimens gone.

Nothing but a sole butterfly flapping around. Mason watches it for a moment. It flutters to the bed He follows it. Ahh, the memories.

The bed has been stripped of blankets. The only thing on the bare mattress is Theda's pair of butterfly wings.

After a beat -- Mason's phone RINGS.

(CONTINUED)

MASON
(into phone)
Theda? Hello, Theda?

WIZARD (O.S.)
(filtered)
Hey, there. It's the Wizard.
There's a big to-do. Tonight. Gotta
pen?

Mason looks around Theda's apartment for a pen. Meanwhile, music blares from his phone. That's when he realizes --

MASON
(into phone)
Hey, Wizard? This a recording?

WIZARD (O.S.)
(filtered)
The address to the Pleasure Palace
is...

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S CAR - NIGHT

Mason is driving through the bustling streets. Through the window are shiny happy people and not so happy people.

His audiobook is playing.

AUDIOBOOK
I say the Buddha is all things
including my baby doll so what's
her point? She says it looks like
the baby is smoking.

Mason turns a corner down another seedy city street. This one is lined with HOOKERS like Christmas lights. Standing apart from the rest is Cydney. She's leaning to the passenger side of a car while Mason waits out a traffic light.

Whatever transaction Cydney was trying to broker with the driver of the car she was half inside of didn't go over well. The driver peels out away from the curb. Cydney flips him off and lights a smoke.

(CONTINUED)

AUDIOBOOK

And it's fake because Buddha wouldn't smoke. And I say "Well, Persephone isn't even your real name," so who's the real faker? You or Buddha?

Cydney spots Mason through the car window. She goes hysterical, tapping on the glass.

CYDNEY

Mason! Mason, baby! Thank goodness it's you!

He's trapped. Begrudgingly, he rolls down the window and she leans in.

CYDNEY

Holy shit am I glad to see you. It's been a shitty night, man. Can you just help a girl out. Just spot a little -- I'm good for it.

(cheeky)

And I can also be bad for it.

MASON

Cydney. I've got no job, everyone hates me, people are robots and I'm late to a party I don't want to go to...

(change of heart)

Okay, you can have what I got on me.

Mason reaches into his pocket, fishes out some CASH.

CYDNEY

Anything, baby, anything helps. Thank you, thank you.

As Mason is handing her the cash -- WOOP-WOOP! A POLICE SIREN goes off -- the CHERRY LIGHT reflects in Mason's review mirror. They're busted.

MASON

What?!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PRIEST (cont'd)

CYDNEY

Oh, shit. This doesn't look good,
Mason. Baby, I'm sorry.

MASON

What's happening?

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

A cage containing human detritus. Mason sits on a concrete bench between the Graffiti Artist from earlier and a PRIEST. A DRUNK is passed out on the floor.

MASON

(under breath)

Fucking people zoo.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

Oh, this shit is worse than a people zoo, man. Wait 'til they feed us breakfast. It's not fit for human consumption. We'd be lucky to be in a people zoo. This is the slaughterhouse.

PRIEST

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

And that motherfucker is doing last rites.

PRIEST

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

Every fucking time.

PRIEST

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has

(CONTINUED)

come...

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT - LATER

The priest is gone and the Graffiti Artist is etching the Willogen on the wall with his thumbnail.

The drunk, still passed out, is soaking in a puddle of his own urine.

Mason is asleep -- but fitfully.

CUT TO:

INT. THEDA'S APARTMENT - DREAM SEQUENCE

Theda, in her butterfly wings, kisses Mason. As she pulls away, a strand of some SUBSTANCE drizzling from her lips connects them. She moves her hands over his body and again, a syrupy substance drips from her and covers him.

Theda begins to play with the substance, spinning it around Mason like cotton Cydney. It soon forms a PUPA-like encasing that grows thicker as Theda continues to wrap in it, laughing maniacally as she does.

After a bit, it looks like Mason is almost completely encased in a pupa -- everything but his face, which Theda makes quick work of smearing with the substance until she's about to cover his mouth and he screams --

MASON

Willogen!

BACK TO:

INT. HOLDING CELL - EARLY MORNING

The Graffiti Artist is shaking Mason awake.

GRAFFITI ARTIST

Wake up, man! Wake up. They're calling your name.

Mason comes to, his eyes bugging out of his head.

(CONTINUED)

He and the Graffiti artist are the only two left in the holding cell. Mason gathers his wits.

A DEPUTY stands opens the cell door.

DEPUTY
Mason Sharpe.

MASON
That's me.

He gets up and turns to the graffiti artist.

MASON
Hey, man, sorry about before.

GRAFFITI ARTIST
(smiling)
Sorry about your car.

Mason is confused as the deputy escorts him out of the cell and down the hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - MORNING

Mason cruises through the city streets, blaring LOUD MUSIC. Stenciled on the driver side door is the WILLOGEN. Mason doesn't seem to mind.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Mason pulls up to the shitty apartment complex where he first investigated the bad claim. The scarecrow from the dead garden is gone, leaving a CROSS in its stead.

CUT TO:

INT. SHITTY APARTMENT COMPLEX - SAME

Mason walks through the dank, dark hallway toward Marga's apartment. The sounds of the EVENING NEWS blares through the hall.

He approaches Marga's door which is open. He crouches down

(CONTINUED)

along the wall and cranes his neck to see inside.

Marga brings a DISH to the table at which is seated a man - the same man from the family photos - MANUEL. He's eating, focused on his food. Marga sits and strokes his hair.

Mason is transfixed. Is it real or is it Memorex?

A SWORD BLADE is laid gently on Mason's shoulder. Someone has the drop on him. He freezes.

KNIGHT (O.S.)

You have performed bravely. Rise now as an honorable Knight of Skeldaria.

Mason turns to see the man-child Knight from earlier, still in his foil armor. Mason stands up.

KNIGHT

He came back. He doesn't remember anything. But that's okay. He came back.

The Knight goes into his home, then turns back to Mason.

KNIGHT

I knew you were a good guy.

With that, the Knight leaves Mason and joins his mother and putative android father at the table. Mason takes in the family scene, unsure if it's right or wrong.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLEASURE PALACE - MORNING

A BRONZE STATUE of the Greek mythological figure of TALOS stands guard outside a neoclassic architectural monstrosity. Someone wag has put a BRA on him.

Apparently, this is a leisure compound of some kind -- part mansion, part institutionalized gluttony.

Mason checks an address he has scrawled on a NOTE. Nothing makes sense anymore.

He approaches a large front DOOR with gaudy BRONZE KNOCKERS.

(CONTINUED)

He attempts to knock one but the door creaks open.

CUT TO:

INT. PLEASURE PALACE - CONTINUOUS

The large foyer is empty sans some broken LAWN FURNITURE and empty booze BOTTLES, one of which Mason inadvertently kicks upon entering. It rolls across the floor ending at a broad staircase.

Mason looks around. Clearly, he missed the party -- by the looks of it, a good one at that.

Mason goes up the stairs. At the top he nearly steps on a someone passed out at the top. It's Chip, Mason's former workmate.

MASON

Chip?

CHIP

Yes?

MASON

It's me, Mason. What are you doing here?

CHIP

Mason Sharpe.

MASON

Yeah. Are you alright?

Chip sits up. Mason leaps back. Chip is definitely not alright. His head is on backwards.

CHIP

Of course, I'm alright.

Chip gets to his feet, brushes himself off and takes a step. Unfortunately, his backward body goes in the opposite direction and he tumbles down the stairs as Mason watches in horror.

Once Chip is at the bottom, he's in several android pieces. His head, however, is still talking.

(CONTINUED)

CHIP

Mason? Mason?

Mason runs away.

CUT TO:

INT. LABYRINTH - SAME

Mason bursts through a door into what looks like the interior of a self-storage facility -- endless interlinking corridors and doors with padlocks. What is this place?

Mason trots down the hall. But every turn seems to get him nowhere. Now he's too far in to retrace his steps. This is unfortunate because --

The meter man, Officer Tim from before - or at least his android facsimile stands waiting at the far end of the hall. It's a showdown.

MASON

Shit. He IS a robot.

No sooner are the words out than Officer Tim starts running toward Mason.

Mason reaches into his pocket -- takes out the five-in-one -- grips it tightly -- holds out his arm stiffly and starts running toward the Officer Tim as if in a jousting match. In mere seconds they'll collide -- Mason closes his eyes -- but...?

He didn't connect. No one did. He opens his eyes -- Officer Tim is nowhere to be seen. Mason does a three-sixty -- no meter man. He walks a pace and BANG! Officer Tim knocks him on his ass. The five-in-one flies from his hand. This isn't good. Officer Tim kicks Mason down the hall -- great big thuds, landing in Mason's ribs and pushing him further down the hall.

Mason manages to look up only to see the bottom of Officer Tim's BOOT. He clenches his eyes closed, anticipating the stomp -- but it doesn't come.

Instead Officer Tim crumples to his knees, gripping his neck as brackish OIL flows from between his fingers. Dade is revealed standing behind him, 5-in-1 in his hand.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

I hate meter maids.

MASON

Dade! Thank god, man. I'm so sorry about what I said. I'm so fucking glad you're here. Everything you said is right.

MASON

I know. That's why I'm here.

(smiles)

To hear you say it.

Dade holds up a THERMOS on a STRAP like a bandoleer. He takes a swig.

MASON

What is that?

DADE

Triple brew.

MASON

Holy shit, we're doing this aren't we?

Dade tosses the thermos to Mason. He stokes himself and takes a slug. He shudders and shakes. We zoom into his eyes.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - LATE '90S

Mason is a teenager leaning back on his elbows, gazing into the canopy of stars in the night sky above. Cuddling up next to him is a teenage GIRL. She passes a bottle of WINE between to Mason, he takes a swig. He chokes a little, the girl giggles, then something catches her eye in the sky above.

GIRL

Look, Mason! A shooting star!

Sure enough -- a bright light rips across the sky.

(CONTINUED)

TEEN MASON

Whoa...

GIRL

Make a wish, Mason!

Mason keeps his eyes on the sky.

GIRL

Whudge you wish for?

Mason leans in and whispers in her ear. The girl looks at him, shocked and disappointed. Then THWACKKK! She slaps him really, really hard.

BACK TO SCENE

MASON

Whoa!

DADE

That's the shit, right?

Mason looks at Dade, astonishment in his now wild eyes.

MASON

Let's kill some fucking robots!

Mason and Dade both raise their five-in-ones in the air!
It's on!

On the heels of Mason's battle cry four ANDROIDS -- men in suits who look freshly sprung from their cubicles sans their tell-tale dead eyes. Yep, it's the guys from Mason's office - now upgraded into their android selves! They rush Mason and Dade, coats flapping like capes.

Mason and Dade charge into them, arms and elbow flailing -- it's a brawl. Dade takes a sock in the gut but ripostes with a dead-on jab to an android's throat with his five-in-one! Turn the curve and yanks! Sparks and oil fly -- the android goes down.

Dade pulls the blade out just in time to land it in another android's throat. Dade is good at this.

Mason, meanwhile is in hand-to-hand combat with two android's simultaneously - one in CORDUROY, the other in

(CONTINUED)

TWEED. Punch, kick, kapow -- it's a hot mess. Mason takes a fist to the nose, shakes it off and comes back hard -- he catches the punch of Tweed and pulls him by his own momentum into his five-in-one -- a clean insertion -- oily discharges splatters everywhere.

Mason yanks the blade out and is congratulated with a splash of sparks.

Dade leaps in and grabs Corduroy from behind -- by the eye sockets. He knees him hard in the spine. The Corduroy's back arches, exposing his throat and Mason swings his five-in-one for the kill.

Mason and Dade stand in a puddle of oily ooze, their clothes covered.

MASON

Fighting androids is sooo much
better in real life.

Mason and Dade run down the hall. After a few paces, Dade realizes something about the various DOORS with PADLOCKS they've been passing.

DADE

Wait, a second. You know what these
are?

Mason shrugs. Dade does a karate kick against padlock, which goes flying. Awesome.

CUT TO:

INT. TECHUBATOR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dade opens the door and enters, followed closely by Mason. In the dark, room they can just make out several large, rectangular forms.

Dade flicks a CIGARETTE LIGHTER. The additional light reveals --

MASON

Coffins?

(CONTINUED)

DADE

No... I think... I think they're cocoons.

MASON

Those are pretty big goddamn cocoons.

DADE

No, I mean they're techubators. A human goes in, an android comes out. I've seen them on the Internet.

MASON

What the... How does it work?

DADE

I don't know. Except that at some point, you're totally liquidated.

Dade prowls around the TECHUBATOR.

MASON

Is that true? What are you looking for?

DADE

I'll know it when I see it. There it is --

He moves the flame of the lighter close to what appears to be a SPIGOT. He gives it a crank -- LIQUID GROSSNESS gushes from it. Dade is soaked.

DADE

So, that part's true.

MASON

It's like human purée.

DADE

Come on, help me do the others.

MASON

Doesn't this kill them?

(CONTINUED)

DADE

Dude. They're already dead. And now they won't be robots.

Mason leaps to and turns another SPIGOT. More liquid grossness sprays on he and Dade. They do it again. And again, until each techubator is drained.

MONTAGE

Mason and Dade are a two-man android wrecking crew.

-- They stalk the corridors, dripping with unrecognizable stuff.

-- They stop at each door and bust off the lock.

-- They enter the room and emerge later, sopping in human remains. Rinse, wash, repeat.

-- Every few paces a Joe Schmo corporate ANDROID attacks and Mason and Dade hack and slay it tag team style. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's hard but it's always a mess.

-- They turn a corner and BLACK CAT leaps onto Mason's face. One hack from his Five-in-One reveals the CIRCUITRY beneath its fur. They royally fuck it up.

Mason and Dade lean against the walls of the corridor and take a breather. They are so covered with android residue and human effluence that they look like they just swam through an oil spill.

MASON

I'm not sure what I want more. A beer or a shower.

DADE

A beer shower. You can get that in Lumaville. Oh shit.

Dade's eyes grow big. Mason turns to see what he's looking at --

(CONTINUED)

MASON

Theda?

Theda, her hands coquettishly behind her back, gives Mason a once-over. She's wearing a shiny UNITARD and fearsome EYE-MAKEUP.

THEDA

You shouldn't have come here,
Mason.

DADE

You know her?

MASON

We've dated.

DADE

Dude, your girlfriend is a robot.

MASON

She's not a robot!

THEDA

I'm not his girlfriend!

DADE

Mason.

Dade draws an imaginary line on his throat where a slot would be. Theda covers her throat.

MASON

That's just a thyroid scar, Dade.
Don't make her self-conscious.

Mason moves toward Theda. Dade tenses.

MASON

I looked for you at your place but
it was empty.

THEDA

Of course, I wasn't there. This is
where I belong, Mason. You can
belong here too. With me.

She moves closer to Mason.

(CONTINUED)

DADE

Boys before droids, Mason.

MASON

I don't understand. You mean with the Wizard?

THEDA

The Wizard can help you, Mason. You could be so much more.

MASON

More what?

THEDA

More Mason.

MASON

I don't need anymore me.

Dade nods.

THEDA

Then you'll have to do with less!

Theda raises her hands -- the fingers of each are entwined through a pair of butterfly-shaped KNUCKLE KNIVES.

DADE

Mason!

Dade charges, shoulders Mason to the ground and lunges at Theda with his five-in-one. He crashes on top of her.

They roll through the crap on the floor, wailing on each other in close mortal combat. Sparks fly. Mason snaps to and pulls the Theda off of Dade and throws her hard against the wall. She's stunned.

Dade doesn't get up. His five-in-one handle protrudes from his chest.

MASON

No!

Mason unleashes unholy terror upon Theda. She fights back

(CONTINUED)

with overwhelming vigor and beats Mason down to the ground. There, in an increasing pool of Dade's BLOOD, is the thermos.

Mason grabs Dade's thermos and swings it like a bola, slamming it upside her head. Clang! She's unfazed and moves in for the kill -- just as Mason twists off the lid of the thermos and splashes TRIPLE BREW in her face.

She begins to shake uncontrollably -- her eyes roll back -- it's like a robot seizure. And it ain't pretty. Especially when her head EXPLODES.

Mason spits the blood filling his mouth onto the floor.

MASON

I really liked you, damn it.

He runs over to Dade, who's on the fade.

DADE

I'd say this is it, man.

Mason looks over the five-in-one lodged in Dade's chest, the tide pool of blood. Sadly, he can only agree.

MASON

It's your noblesse oblige, man.

DADE

Don't patronize me, I looked it up.

(groans in pain)

Listen, I gotta tell you something...

MASON

What is it, man?

DADE

Daedalus Howell... That isn't my real name...

Dade smiles but before Mason can ask... Daedalus Howell slips away.

MASON

(whispers)

You are slain, Brave Sir Knight You
Don't Need to Know My Fucking Name.

CUT TO:

INT. LABYRINTH - SAME

Mason winds his way through the ersatz labyrinth. Sometimes he turns a corner and sees the same wreckage he and Dade had made earlier -- turns another corner and comes across the same wreckage. He screams in frustration.

Throughout, he hears LOUD MUSIC, as if from a party, thudding through the walls. No matter where he turns, what corridor he runs down, he can't locate its source.

He does a switchback and the music grows louder and LOUDER. He's close. But close to what?

Finally a DOOR. It looks out of place in the sterile maze of locked doors and techubators. Mysteriously, the door has FROSTED GLASS and a MAIL SLOT. He approaches.

The music on the other side is so loud it's making the mail slot flap open with the BEAT. He turns the DOORKNOB.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION AREA - SAME

Mason stumbles into a clean, well-lighted place with CLUB CHAIRS, a COFFEE TABLE and a RECEPTION DESK at which sits an attractive young woman, the RECEPTIONIST, and the most thunderous, booming HEAVY METAL music blasting from a disproportionately TINY SPEAKER on her desk.

She smiles and greets Mason but we can only see her lips moving -- the music is so damn loud. Mason gestures to his ears. The receptionist gets it and turns off the tunes.

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry. It helps me concentrate.
Please have a seat.

Mason takes a seat. His eyes glide over the coffee table which is covered with copies of GAMER TAMER MAGAZINE with

(CONTINUED)

the Wizard on the cover.

MASON

What the fuck is this -- ?!

He's interrupted by a loud TELEPHONE, which the Receptionist answers.

RECEPTIONIST

FMRL. Oh, hey, Sandy!

The receptionist begins to gossip.

Mason is forced to wait.

On the coffee table is the same magazine he was reading at home with the Wizard on the cover. In fact, the same image is blown up and on the opposite wall. The receptionist wraps up her phone call.

Silence. She has clearly forgotten Mason who finally approaches her.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes?

MASON

I'm Mason --

RECEPTIONIST

I know. We've been expecting you.
Please have a seat. The Wizard will see you shortly.

MASON

The Wizard?

RECEPTIONIST

Who else? That's who you came to see isn't it? Don't worry. Everyone gets nervous.

MASON

He actually goes by the Wizard?

RECEPTIONIST

No. That's just what we call him.

A CHIME rings from her desk.

RECEPTIONIST

And there we go. He's ready for you now.

The Receptionist gestures toward the door. Mason hesitates but she shoos him along. As soon as he cracks the door, the loud music resumes.

CUT TO:

INT. WIZARD'S LAIR - SAME

A nicely-appointed workspace. Not too overstated, probably mid-century modern. A big window, some plants.

The receptionist's music is still audible in the office.

The Wizard sits hunched in a high-backed CHAIR. He doesn't seem to have noticed Mason's entrance.

MASON

(clears throat)

Um, hello?

Silence -- apart from the thudding of the music through the walls. After a moment, the chair turns to reveal Cameron Block a.k.a. The WIZARD, in casual clothes -- a black turtleneck and jeans. He reaches to his ears and plucks a pair of EARPLUGS.

WIZARD

Sorry, I didn't hear you come in. I gotta wear earplugs because of her goddamn music.

He gestures toward his door, then looks at a paper on his desk.

WIZARD

So... Monroe, Morone?

(CONTINUED)

MASON

Mason.

WIZARD

Right, right. Sorry -- she's got terrible handwriting. Anyway.

(big smile)

So, we missed you at the party last night. But looks like you had your own fun. She didn't offer you a towel or anything?

Mason is dumbfounded. Who is this guy?

WIZARD

A little confused aren't you? Never been on this level. Most haven't. Take a second to acclimate.

MASON

It's not that. It's just that... You're the... Wizard?

WIZARD

Wizard. Right, yeah, that. Don't let the title trip you out. It's just a word. You could be the wizard. You wanna be the wizard? No, seriously. Means nothing to me. I mean it's not even my real name -- duh. And it sucks as a nickname. Especially when it's like Wiz. Sounds like peeing, doesn't it? I'm going to take a wiz. So, yeah, have it.

MASON

I'm good, thanks.

WIZARD

So. You're probably asking yourself, why am I here?

MASON

I know why I'm here.

(CONTINUED)

WIZARD

You think you know why you're here. But you see, you're part of a program -- your every move has not only been anticipated, it's been motivated by me. I'm the programmer.

MASON

This isn't a game.

WIZARD

I'd laugh but it agitates my acid reflux. This is a game. It's a system that I created to produce you.

MASON

Me. Specifically?

WIZARD

You, generally. Someone like you at least. But here you are. You had the strategy, the persistence, the patience to beat the game. You won. Congrats.

MASON

Thanks...?

WIZARD

I made you. I made you to replace me. To be the new wizard.

MASON

What?

WIZARD

Yeah, you didn't think I was serious earlier did you?

MASON

You really don't know why I'm here.

WIZARD

We're more alike than you think. We think alike.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WIZARD (cont'd)

MASON

I never once considered replacing humanity with robots.

WIZARD

Not humanity - just the assholes. They're better people now.

MASON

They're robots.

WIZARD

They're technically androids.

Mason's eyes fix on something on the wall. It's a COAT OF ARMS.

WIZARD

You recognize it, don't you? It's the coat of arms of Skeldaria. A fan made it. Jesus, those people have a lot of time on their hands.

MASON

They believe. They find purpose in it.

WIZARD

Yeah, well, they're saving fake worlds, we're saving the real world. Perfecting people. Why be a worm when you can be a butterfly? Why be human when you can be perfect?

MASON

How could you do this?

WIZARD

How could I not? Assholes are ruining the world. When I was in that butterfly pavillon, that's when I realized, all those years ago -- people needed to change, metamorphosize, into something better, something perfect. That's when I started

(CONTINUED)

building the game. I knew in time,
I'd need to recruit another one,
someone like me. And here you are.

Mason can't be bought with platitudes.

MASON

The game's not over.

Mason pulls out his five-in-one, ready for a fight.

WIZARD

You know that's not really the
pentacle charm -- that's just some
internet bullshit. I didn't even
know pentacle meant five or
whatever until, like, last week or
something.

MASON

It still works pretty well.

The Wizard pulls a SWORD from the coat of arms.

WIZARD

Sure thing. But this -- this really
hurts. A lot. We lost a guy just
getting this hunk of shit to stay
on the wall.

CLOSE ON: A small PLAQUE that reads "In memory of Manuel"
with a small but soulful PORTRAIT of him.

The Wizard smiles. The office door suddenly opens and the
Receptionist stands there, her music blaring behind her. She
points to her watch.

WIZARD

Oh, is it time?

Mason looks at her, confused. She closes the door. Mason
looks back at the Wizard -- just as he's lunging at him with
the sword.

Mason just barely rolls out of the way as the Wizard pulls
the sword from the wall in which it was impaled.

Mason scurries to the coat of arms, grabs the other SWORD.

(CONTINUED)

Wizard swings hard -- CLINK! The blades connect -- hack, swing, ping! The Wizard proves an adept swordsman, Mason can hardly keep up, deflecting the blows. He's being pushed to the desk, each of the Wizard's swings driving closer to Mason's neck.

Finally the Wizard connects with something other than Mason's sword -- the blade is wedged in the desk. Mason has a split second to maneuver and pulls away with enough to velocity to bring his sword down on the Wizard's wrist!

Sparks fly! The Wizard's hand grips the sword handle but it's no longer attached to his wrist, which is a stump of wires with sparks flickering from it!

Mason shields his eyes from the sparks, dropping his sword in the process!

WIZARD

Yep. I'm an android. Got me.

The Wizard uses his remaining hand to pull the sword from the desk.

WIZARD

Now, this has to end.

MASON

You're right.

Mason rips his shirt open and throws it to the floor. He stands there bare chested. The Wizard is flummoxed, until he sees the wings emerge from Mason's back -- he's wearing Theda's butterfly wings! Mason pulls the five-in-one from his belt and begins a balletic leap while exclaiming --

MASON

Pentacle charm!!!

He flies across the room with the blade poised and lands it deep into the Wizard's throat like driving Excalibur into the stone!

A hail of sparks falls everywhere as the Wizard shakes in the throes of death. Mason's hair is on end as the electricity course through him -- it is horrible and majestic all at once.

Mason wins the game.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Mason is back at the office, clean cut, coiffed, buttoned down, perfect. He's looking into his bright and shiny future as Anson, off-screen, speaks to a crowd.

ANSON (O.S.)

Kudos to claims adjuster Mason Sharpe for a job well done. As always. We all owe Mason a big thank you.

There is slight applause. Mason nods, smiles, straightens his tie.

CLOSE ON THE KNOT.

Hovering right above the double Windsor is a faint thyroidectomy SCAR.

FADE TO BLACK.