

G A I A

by

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GAIA
"EPISODE 1: THE CALL"

MAYAN MYSTERY TITLE CARD #1:

A blue-green sphere forms in the center of the screen. It is being circled by what resembles a twisting strand of DNA. One end of the simplified, geometric strand morphs into the head of an open-mouthed snake, The Uroboros. The head of the snake chases its tail clockwise and as it approaches the top of the sphere, which is now a stylized graphic of our Mother Earth, the entire image cracks.

The first link in the fateful DNA strand lights up.

TEASER

BLACK.

The sound of heavy rain.

CUT TO:

EXT. INNER-CITY COBBLESTONE PATHWAY - NIGHT

At some distance a cloaked man, SAMUEL HUNTER, stands tall and motionless. His thin form is as vertical as the rain and a glaring copper street lamp paints him in shadow. Beyond an incessant pitter-patter, the faint rattling of a shopping cart heralds the approach of a weathered BAG LADY.

The woman sports a garbage bag raincoat and finger-less gloves embroidered with FLOWERS. She notices the man with a start and aims to steer around him.

The man remains fixed as the lamp posts.

His greyish and heavily lined features channel rainwater down to his chin and the dull whites of his seemingly lifeless, cataract eyes are shadowed beneath a dripping tweed hat.

The woman offers him a weary smile.

BAG LADY
Nice walking in the rain. Nobody
sees ya' cryin'.

The elderly man gives no response.

She inspects him briefly from behind the safety of her mobile trove. He seems blind to her presence. She moves on.

The man's mouth opens abruptly and his pale lips part in a long and hollow breath. His loose jaw and gaping mouth work almost silently amid the deafening rain.

The Bag Lady halts to listen, clinging to her treasures.

SAMUEL HUNTER

(whispered)

When darkness falls across the
Earth, souls become cold and
bitter. When life is lacking in its
mirth, the devil spawns a litter...

Although it is hard to distinguish through the wind and rain, the old man's poem begins to sound as if it is being recited by a young woman's voice.

SAMUEL HUNTER / GAIA

(whispered)

...Moonlight fades like the
serpent's eye, while mortals weep
and angels cry...

A long and distant moment passes as the frail man's piece finally comes to an end. A great bout of thunder rolls.

The man drops dead.

CUT TO BLACK:

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

A muffled yet cheerful ring-tone ascends with the sunrise.

The pinkish dawn light plays among the reflections of dirty silverware and coffee mugs. Caustic curls surround broken wineglasses and a leaky faucet drips onto stacks of dishes smattered with mould and dried cereal. Dust particles dance in the air.

The ringing continues, unanswered.

Upon the refrigerator door there is a photograph of a dark-haired woman: ARALEE EBSWORTH. Her smile is old Hollywood, radiant and classic. And to further articulate her nostalgic beauty, the image has dulled and yellowed in the sun. A fond memory, slowly faded.

The musical midi ring-tone finally reaches its maximum volume and a long, barely audible, curse word choir in.

JACOB (O.S.)
(all breath)
Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck.

The cell phone is answered.

JACOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)
My life hurts.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
(filtered)
So does my prostate, what else is new? Get to work. I have a bone for you to chew.

Amid the heavy decay and disgust, some small signs of life struggle to greet the day. A short, bulbous cactus, an aloe plant, and several odd, tall, and colorful things sit coddled in shot glasses and coffee mugs all along the window sill.

JACOB (O.S.)
Does it squeak?

The mouth of a wine bottle showers these plants with care. Then, having satisfied the greenery, JACOB, a heavy-lidded thirty-something sporting a days-old beard, refills the bottle at the sink.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Does it matter?

JACOB
(into phone)
I nearly gagged on the last one.

He takes a swig.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
You tell me you're hungry. But if
you actually wanna eat, you better
just show up and do your damn job,
along with the rest of the world.

JACOB
(into phone)
What if the world doesn't like me?

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Be here in fifteen, or I'm sending
you packing with the Girl Scouts.

The signal cuts short.

JACOB
(to self)
Good morning to you too.

Jacob closes his obviously dated flip-phone and rests it on the window sill. He crouches low to admire a few of his well-rooted little friends. The portly cactus pot wears a piece of masking tape with the name "Bob" scrawled across it.

JACOB
(to plant)
Didn't have a lot of friends back
in school, did you Bob?

Jacob's entire family of potted pals wear name tags, except for one long-dead plant set slightly apart from the rest. He puts a finger to the cactus, applying slow pressure to the end of one of its quills. His fingertip bleeds.

Inspecting the tiny wound in the soft morning light, Jacob lets a blood drop drip into the soil, making kissing noises.

JACOB (CONT'D)
(to plant, musically)
Feed me Seymour, feed me.

EXT. DOWNTOWN (MONTAGE) - DAY

"Envy" - A boy abandons his broken car. He keys another.

"Wrath" - A cab nearly hits a man. The man throws hot coffee.

"Lust" - A teenage schoolgirl teases. A father smiles.

"Pride" - Girls line up at a club. They touch-up in unison.

"Gluttony" - A man devours junkfood. His dog helps.

"Sloth" - People crowd on an escalator. The stairs are empty.

"Greed" - A woman avoids a homeless man. She window-shops.

INT. NEWS STATION HALLWAY / LOBBY - DAY

Jacob and MR. ROBERTS, bald-ish and stern looking behind his horn-rimmed glasses and a sharp goatee, match pace as they navigate the busy hallway.

MR. ROBERTS

Elle is driving me mad and you're dangerously close to shifting my temper into overdrive.

JACOB

But everyone loves Zombies!

MR. ROBERTS

I said no.

JACOB

He just up and left, Bob. Not sure why he didn't head straight for the country club, but think about it. If every *body* did that, imagine the real estate prices in Heaven.

MR. ROBERTS

Holy hell, Jacob.

JACOB

There too!

They Stop. Mr. Roberts turns sharply on his heel and faces his infuriating friend; who also happens to be an employee.

MR. ROBERTS

NO!

He dangles a set of keys in front of Jacob's nose.

MR. ROBERTS
To Cambridge. Go. Now.

The keys fall into Jacob's open palm.

MR. ROBERTS (CONT'D)
'Zombie Man' is getting covered.
You just focus on some warm and
fuzzy feeling advancements in
technology for now, alright?

The two men continue on to the News Station's front lobby desk. A friendly secretary named DEBBIE greets them.

JACOB
How do cute and cuddly robots
differ from Girl Scouts exactly?

MR. ROBERTS
(to Debbie)
Debbie, have Elle come straight to
my office when she gets in please.

DEBBIE
Sure thing, Mr. Roberts.

MR. ROBERTS
(to Jacob)
They are less stressful. And what
you and I BOTH need right now, more
than anything, is less stress.
Consider it a working holiday.

Mr. Roberts leaves Jacob at the desk.

MR. ROBERTS (O.S.)
A *short* holiday!

Jacob places the vehicle keys on the lobby counter and motions for a sign-out sheet. As Debbie hands him a pen, ETHAN, a very professionally dressed yet slimy looking forty-something, slides in beside them.

ETHAN
Today's Bob-cast?

JACOB
A bit gloomy. Definite chance of
thunder storms.

ETHAN
Shit.

Jacob hands the sign-out sheet back to Debbie and keeps the pen. He places it unconsciously in his own shirt pocket.

Ethan examines him. Jacob knows it means nothing good.

JACOB

Well, I'll catcha' later champ. I'm on my way to Tomorrowland.

Ethan follows Jacob through the revolving doors.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWS STATION - DAY

Ethan follows Jacob too closely. Jacob stops with a smile the moment they step outside.

JACOB

I'm sorry, I'm not looking right now. But I'm flattered.

ETHAN

Cute... Real cute.

Ethan pulls Jacob to the side; which is pointless as there is no side to pull him to. Jacob smirks.

The two stand beneath an oversized poster of Ethan (polished and pointing toward the camera) and his co-anchor companion AUTUMN GRACE, who smiles like the Cheshire Cat. She is a young, attractive, and clearly over-caffeinated brunette.

The poster reads: **Award Winning Journalists**

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Listen, Jacob. Its no secret that Bob's keeping you afloat on the fluffy stuff. And I'm sure he's doing it with noble intent... to protect you, or the station, or his own reputation, whatever. But let's face it, it's just not real journalism.

JACOB

Awe shit, Ethan. Who did you fuck?

Ethan glances around, his impenetrable confidence temporarily shattered. He forces Jacob to huddle in a little closer.

ETHAN
 (swallows)
 Elle.

JACOB
 Holy Mary Mother of God.
 (beat)
 He knows?

ETHAN
 Not everything. She told him we had dinner. And now, suddenly, we've got a private meeting scheduled with Daddy... which happens in about five minutes. She's riddled with guilt. Which means things aren't likely to go well for me.

JACOB
 I feel for you, man. But as long as your wife's cool with it, things should turn out fine.

Ethan raises his chin and adjusts his tie.

ETHAN
 (venomous)
 I don't need to do you any favors, you little shit.
 (breathes)
 But seeing as I may, temporarily, lose a little respect around here, I need to ensure that our *beloved* Miss Grace doesn't take the gold on top of it all. I just don't have the stomach for it.

Ethan slips a bent business card into Jacob's shirt pocket and pats his chest.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 It was *my* story, Jake. But I admire how deeply you delve into the dark stuff... So I'm giving it to you.

ELLE, Mr. Roberts' tall and fashionable daughter, walks past.

Sparing a sharp glance at the men, she bites her guilty lips and hurries inside.

Ethan follows.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 (hastily)
 Bring that bitch down in a blaze of
 burning glory for me.

Ethan points at Jacob, mimicking his poster.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 I believe in you.

Jacob watches as Ethan and his young mistress enter the lobby. They bicker immediately.

JACOB
 (to self)
 I hate humans.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWS STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

A white news van, parked in a row of identically branded duplicates, flicks on its headlights and pulls out of its stall.

An office window frames three agitated figures. The van wipes past as a semi-silhouetted Mr. Roberts puts a hand to his forehead and explodes in a flurry of full-body expressions. His fists pound the surface of a desk.

The sound of thunder rolls.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rain courses down a pane of glass. Jacob's thin form is reflected in it. He packs an open suitcase.

The radio is on in the background.

RADIO (V.O.)
 ...Despite the raging controversy
 many scientists do agree that if
 the trend of rising temperatures
 and melting polar caps continues...

Jacob sniffs the armpit of his shirt, checks it for stains, then takes it off and packs it along with his other clothes. The edge of a business card sticks out of the front pocket.

Jacob turns the card over in one hand.

It reads: **Dr. Kim Wecht - Pathologist**

Jacob checks his watch. He contemplates. His stomach growls.

RADIO (V.O.)
 ...in as little as one hundred
 years the earth itself could
 overheat...

He digs through his blue jeans and pulls out a tether of lint and a ratty kleenex. Then, after a quick search among the folds of his bed covers, he looks again in his suitcase for a pair of slacks. Spare change and his cell phone shake loose from the back pocket of the pants. Transferring both to his jeans, he heads for the door.

RADIO
 ...and that would mean the end of
 human civilization as we know it.

EXT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A violent storm illuminates the multi-story structure with severe flashes of lightning. A large and red neon cross is perched above the windows of the topmost floor. It flickers.

INT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - AUTOPSY ROOM - NIGHT

The overhead fluorescents flicker.

A red drop falls on a white shirt. It stains like blood.

Jacob's cheeks are full of hotdog as he casts a downward glance at the ketchup drip. With a swig of Diet Coke, he wipes his mouth, swallows, then looks up.

JACOB
 ...I suppose this kind of thing
 hasn't really happened in a while?

A lean and curly haired woman, DR. KIM WECHT, runs nervous and knobby fingers through her scalp. She sits on a stool next to Samuel Hunter's grey and lanky corpse.

DR. WECHT
 (to self)
 Jesus.

JACOB
 Oh yeah, good call... and The King?
 Puts him right up there in some
 high class company, hey?

The agitated doctor stands and paces the length of the small autopsy room.

DR. WECHT

I still- I just don't see- How could this possibly be?

JACOB

Well, I was kind of hoping you'd tell me. You're the doc, doc.

Dr. Wecht maneuvers around the examination table, covering Jacob in her long shadow.

DR. WECHT

It *can't* be. Christ.

(beat)

I-- I knew him. Samuel. My Ex's father. Can you believe that, Mr. Michaels? What does that mean?

JACOB

That he really didn't like you?

DR. WECHT

(beat)

Are you religious?

JACOB

Used to be. I gave it up a little while back. I found it blurred my judgement and made me hurt people.

Again Kim steps into the light, backlit and ominous.

DR. WECHT

You may re-assess that decision. The dead are rising from the grave.

Jacob assesses her sanity level. She seems slightly unhinged.

JACOB

(beat)

You know what?

Jacob devours the last of his hot dog, stands, and puts his can of Coke in the doctor's hand.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Have a sip. And let's just drop the boogeyman vibe. Get you talking like a professional. What's the real deal here? As a doctor.

Dr. Wecht chugs the coke and belches softly.

DR. WECHT

My ex-boyfriend's father died. I skipped the funeral. A day later he decides to get up and take a walk in the park a block past my house.

Her heavily bagged eyes fixate on the body.

DR. WECHT (CONT'D)

The arteries were swollen and the ventricles crushed. His brain was ding-dong-dead. Zero activity.

She hovers low and almost intimately over the cold body.

DR. WECHT

(to self)

Done. Rigamortis. You don't come back. But somehow... it's like... something forced the dry blood in his veins to push along anyway. As if someone was puppeteering him like a bad B-movie robot.

The doctor buries her knuckles in her hair.

Jacob waits, but the woman is in a prolonged state of shock.

He turns away.

A small SLR camera emerges from Jacob's jacket pocket. He frames up the body and takes a snap shot of Samuel Hunter's recently re-deceased corpse.

JACOB

Just snapping one for the yearbook.

Dr. Wecht doesn't even flinch.

Jacob retrieves his Coke can.

Slightly disappointed at finding it empty, he tosses it in a recycling bin as he heads for the exit door.

DR. WECHT

Jacob? Who did you pray to? When you still had faith?

Jacob's reply comes as he is consumed by the shadows of the outside morgue.

JACOB (O.S.)
Saint James.

INT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Channel 9 News runs a story about a new museum exhibit.
Autumn Grace chatters through a flawless smile.

T.V.

...Ethan Andrews is off tonight.
(beat)

This week a new exhibit opens at
The Greater New York Art Gallery,
featuring the work of Poet, Artist,
and arguably the world's first Eco-
terrorist, Madame Daniela Tristan
Chane. Countless twentieth century
artisans have written of her that
she was the very embodiment of
Nature's soul, and...

A flower-stitched and finger-less gloved hand picks up an old
fashioned telephone receiver. The telephone cord sways as a
mousy voice begins to whisper something in rhyme.

T.V.

...Much of her work will be
featured in the main showing
gallery at the N.Y.A. throughout
the month of September...

The phone raises up to the ear of LEAH, the Bag Lady, who
seems a little less worse for wear with dry hair and clean
features, but there is a strange look in her wild, blue eyes.

T.V.

...In ongoing news, this year marks
the One-Hundred Year Anniversary
Celebration of the Girl Scouts of
America. Channel Nine is proud to
be bringing you highlights of all
the outdoor adventures and
events...

Wrapped in a pale colored hospital dressing gown, she sits
alone and stares into the dull light of the TV screen. Her
lips quiver with something indistinguishable, spoken quickly
and sounding only of exhale.

LEAH

(into phone)

Moo.li.ht-fa.es-lik.-th.-serp..ts-
eye, whi..-mort.ls-sl.ep-.nd-angels-
cry-. At-wha.-.ercy-will-.our-world-
die-w.en-y..-watch-.t-writhe-.nd-
W.th.rrrrrr.

The woman pauses, suddenly stricken, as a television image of the earth is reflected in her eyes.

She screams.

CUT TO BLACK:

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

BLACK.

The sound of crickets.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD (DREAM) - DAY

A pair of dark, young eyes stare downward.

Barred teeth and a wet-nosed muzzle drive a black garter snake into the earth.

YOUNG JACOB, thin and dirty, watches as his small dog NIPPER toys with the snake. They stand amid a cloud of dust in the center of the gravel road.

Nipper tosses the snake into the air.

It lands then slithers around Jacob's feet. His toes retreat.

Nipper gets a hold of the snake again.

This time the snake is tossed high and it lands, impaled, on a barbed wire fence. The snake makes an unusual sound as it wriggles and bleeds. Jacob watches, stricken.

A second and third snake emerge from the grass. Nipper snaps at them with his mangy jaws and several more follow.

Snakes soon crowd the dusty road by the dozen.

Jacob steps back as the sinewy creatures surround his dog in a large, undulating mass. Nipper yelps and begins to bark.

Viewed from high above, the surge of countless black and slithering lines circle inward.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEWS VAN - M.I.T. PARKING LOT - DAY

A large and circular snake-like Uroboros symbol is painted on the side of a white loading truck. It fills the view from Jacob's driver's side window.

A man in a white coveralls suddenly appears in the window frame, knocking on the glass.

MAN
Morning sir.

Jacob is startled awake from beneath his makeshift jacket blanket. Styrofoam cups and fast food containers litter the cab floor.

MAN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but I;m gonna have to ask you to move.

CUT TO:

EXT. M.I.T PARKING LOT - DAY

Jacob's news van is awkwardly parked. It blocks three lanes of the Institutes' loading area doors.

INT. M.I.T. HALLWAY - DAY

Jacob follows CELIA BEREZAN, an attractive, quick-paced woman through the Institutes' labyrinth of labs and long hallways.

CELIA BEREZAN
I heard you slept in your van?

JACOB
The late night drive turned into a morning one, so I took a snooze.

CELIA BEREZAN
Well, thank you for coming.
We appreciate the exposure.

JACOB
Don't thank me, thank the Girl Scouts of America.

CELIA BEREZAN
I don't get your meaning.

JACOB
I'm not a fan of their cookies.

They arrive at Celia's research lab and a focused yet punk-ish looking student, HAILEY PAIGE, grabs her by the arm.

HAILEY
Celia, Doctor Ohm is on hold.

CELIA BEREZAN
Oh, thank you Hailey.

Jacob notices Hailey's printed T-shirt. It displays large circuitry-like thought-webs that make up the limbs and branches of a tree that extend up from realistically painted roots. The image is underlined with the caption: **STAY ROOTED**

CELIA BEREZAN

Would you mind showing Mr. Michaels
the rest of the way?

(to Jacob)

I'm sorry. Feel free to do a little
pre-interview with him if you like.
I'll try to be quick.

Celia takes a seat at her computer desk. As she picks up the phone a slight shift in confidence treads on her otherwise perfect composure.

Hailey scans her pass-card and opens a security door.

HAILEY

Right this way.

CUT TO:

INT. M.I.T. - KARMA'S LAB - DAY

Jacob is escorted into a small computer room and is greeted by something that looks like an aluminum Furby skull. KARMA is just a head bolted to a table at the base of its neck and tethered to a vending machine sized stack of computer towers. Hundreds of colorfully wrapped cables are tethered together and run across the lab room floor. They connect to Karma's main station and resemble an oversized umbilical cord.

HAILEY

This is Karma. The world's first
emotionally expressive robot.

KARMA

(filtered)

Hi, I'm Karma!

The robot's attention wanders mindlessly around the room.

Hailey tosses a stick of gum in her mouth. She offers one to Jacob. He refuses.

HAILEY (CONT'D)

(chewing loudly)

I know he's a little old school,
but he's still pretty cool. We gave
him a bit of an upgrade to test out
a DNA logic stack on a MAYA-5 box.

(MORE)

HAILEY (CONT'D)
Nothing like what USC's got. But WE
are hosting the unveiling of the U-
9 tonight, the new Uroboros model!

Karma frowns.

There is a poster for the event tacked to a cluttered
corkboard on the wall. The poster outlines the shape of a
humanoid but clearly robotic figure with a large question
mark in the center of its head.

HAILEY
...Which is probably why you're
here, hunh? And that's why things
are a little nuts. But have no
fear, the U-9 is gonna whoop
Honda's Ass-imo!

Jacob's expression is empty.

Karma smiles.

The joke falls flat and her bubblegum bubble pops.

HAILEY (CONT'D)
Bad robot joke. Sorry.

Jacob seems more interested in adjusting his shirt collar
than anything she has to say.

Hailey is not a fan.

HAILEY
Anyway, good *chatting*, but I gotta
run. Cecilia shouldn't be long.

KARMA
(filtered)
Have a nice day.

Hailey shuffles her way out of the computer room and is about
to close the door when Jacob catches her off guard.

JACOB
Nice shirt.

Looking back through the door crack, she is uncertain whether
the comment is a compliment or not. The door shuts.

JACOB
(to self)
...Thanks.

INT. M.I.T. - MAIN THEATRE - DAY

A small man paces the empty theatre stage like a wild animal in the dark. He recites something to himself repeatedly, testing out every imaginable variation.

The intense build-up is not unlike someone preparing themselves for a marriage proposal.

CELIA BEREZAN (O.S.)
Doctor Ohm?

STANLEY OHM, a bespeckled and typically introverted little man (with an overcompensating personality disorder), freezes.

Celia steps into the amber light of a doorway. It catches the edge of the stage.

CELIA BEREZAN
The U-9 has arrived.

Doctor Ohm jumps with joy and races down to the theatre floor. He takes Celia's hand in his.

STANLEY OHM
Is he safe? Remember, he must be kept in a Cleanroom until thirty-five minutes before the exhibition.

Celia takes her hand back politely.

CELIA BEREZAN
Don't worry Stanley, some of our best grad students are helping your tech-team move him in there now.

The oddly emphatic man lets out a huge and over-exaggerated sigh of relief. He rests a hand on Celia's shoulder.

STANLEY OHM
I love when you call me Stanley. It makes me calm.

Celia glances at the placement of his palm and gives her colleague a meaningful raise of the eyebrows.

He lets his hand drop.

STANLEY OHM
Oh. I'm Sorry. Proxemics. We all have our bubble. And what an excellent segue, to be speaking of bubbles-- as uh, I was going to ask you-- tonight after the unveiling--

Celia picks up on the vibe and immediately checks her phone.

CELIA BEREZAN

Oh, Doctor Ohm, I really need to head back to the lab...

STANLEY OHM

Of course, it is a big evening after all. But that's why I wanted to ask you-- It's just that-- I like your bubble. And I think--

Celia is halfway out of the room, politely looking back over her shoulder as she leaves.

CELIA BEREZAN

I'll see you later tonight?

STANLEY OHM

Yes! It is going to be spectacular.

Celia exits through the main theatre doors disappears around the corner, but not before leaving Stanley with an appeasing smile. But it is of little comfort.

He is still alone in the dark.

STANLEY OHM

(mocking himself)

Maybe our bubbles could share a volume of bubbly together.

(beat)

Idiot.

INT. KARMA'S LAB - DAY

Left alone, Jacob leads himself on a personal tour around the room. He entirely ignores the robot.

KARMA

(filtered)

My name is Karma. Would you like to play a game?

Jacob inhales the plastic scent of a fake plant and inspects what looks like a seismic read-out printer. It pulses and twitches in time with Karma's movements.

Jacob finally takes a seat and puts himself nose to nose-sensor with his unusual interview subject.

Karma buzzes and moves by the powered automation of numerous servo motors.

Somewhat disturbing to look at, the supposedly life-like machine is also as cognitively inept as one might expect any severed head to be.

JACOB

*Real artificial intelligence, hey?
How fascinating. All that number
crunching just to make you twitch
and smile when you could be doing
something much more productive...
Like my taxes.*

Jacob spins himself on the rotating stool next to Karma and pads through his jacket pockets to find his cell phone. He takes one snapshot of the unimpressive automaton, and the phone beeps.

It flashes: **LOW BATTERY**

JACOB (CONT'D)

*Ah, just charged it. Well, you get
what you pay for, right? But with
only a ten year plan, it was free!*

Karma looks away.

JACOB (CONT'D)

*No loss if you're gonna be all
camera shy.*

Jacob retrieves a tape recorder from another of his many pockets and places it on the counter.

JACOB (CONT'D)

*Note to self: The movies lie.
Terminators are absolutely *no*
threat to the future of humanity.*

Karma's ears perk up and he smiles absently.

JACOB (CONT'D)

*So, cam-shaft, let's cut the crap.
It's obvious that Hailey chick digs
ya' big time. I think you've got a
shot with her. Go on, take her out.
Have a wild night on the town. You
gotta be worth a few bucks, right?*

Karma rotates through a random series of pre-programmed expressions. One of them resembles a frown.

JACOB (CONT'D)

*...Not your type?
(beat)*

(MORE)

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Yeah. You're a bit of a nerd, I get
 it. Oh, the artsy bookworms do it
 for ya, hey?

Jacob picks up the recorder and turns it over in his hand.

There is a long series of letters inscribed on the back that
 in fact form a single, meaningful Peruvian word. It reads:

M A M I H L A P I N A T A P A I

JACOB (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Me too.

Jacob's distorted reflection stares back at him from the
 brass-plated inscription.

The hum of computer fans and Karma's moving parts fill the
 room with sound. Jacob only listens to some distant memory in
 his mind while chewing on the edge of his cell phone.

A moment later the polygraph printer needle spikes.

Jacob snaps back from his brief reverie and glances at the
 machine. The needle lurches into a frenzy of activity.

The hairs on the back of his neck suddenly stand on end.

Jacob lets the cell phone slip from his bottom lip as he
 leans back and turns to find Karma staring hard and focused
 into his soul. It watches him with disturbing intelligence.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Hello?

Karma cocks his head slightly. Then, leaning inward from the
 fixed position of his jointed neck, he emits a piercing
 reverberation. The sound is wrapped in a million haunting and
 disembodied whispers that somehow leave his plastic lips and
 mechanical features frozen. With true awareness, it is simply
 through his eyes that Karma speaks.

KARMA / GAIA
 (filtered)
 Wwwww.Hhhhh.Yyyyyy...?

The digital voice evolves into something organically female.

Jacob is gagged by awe.

CELIA BEREZAN (O.S.)
 Mr. Michaels?

Jacob jumps, startled. Celia is standing right behind him.

The door is open.

Hailey is also in the room and she holds up long sheets of needle-torn paper. She looks to Celia, stunned.

CELIA BEREZAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

What did you do?

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. CAMBRIDGE MOTEL - NIGHT

Dirty keys fit roughly into a lock. Jacob has to force the weathered door open to escape the rain.

The motel door closes and the room number rests crooked.

It reads: **111**

CUT TO:

INT. CAMBRIDGE MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Jacob dumps his suitcase on the bed and hurriedly plugs in his cell phone, then beelines for the bathroom. With mounting impatience he fights to drag the motel room's corded phone all the way to the toilet with him.

Beyond the light of the open bathroom door Jacob's voice echoes. His cell phone rests on a table in the foreground and begins flashing as he orders room service.

The LCD display reads: **5 MESSAGES**

JACOB (O.S.)

Hi, uh-- yeah. Could I get the lasagna? Room one-eleven.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT (V.O.)

(over phone, filtered)

Ah, sorry sir. I think we're out.

(beat)

Are-- Are you peeing?

JACOB (O.S.)

No. I-- I'm washing my hands. Just give me whatever you've got on special.

Jacob hangs up and a toilet flush heralds his return to his cell phone. He picks it up.

Sitting on the edge of the bed with one lazy hand to his ear and the other fumbling with his suitcase, Jacob yawns.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
You have five new messages. You have one saved messages. To hear new messages, press one...

BEEP.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (over phone, filtered)
First new message...

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Why, Jacob? Are you trying to kill me? Is that it? Berezan has revoked our invitation to the unveiling. Well done. She thinks you're a spy or some kind of genius saboteur. What the shit are you doing down there???
 (beat)
 Pack your ass up and get back here. I've got enough bullshit going on to be worrying about you right now.
 (beat)
 Ethan's doing the Girl Scouts-- Fuck! And. Christ. My daughter. My daughter's a slut! ...So you're back on Zombie-Man. Congrats.

CLICK.

Jacob lies back on the bed, his features scrunched up tight. He rubs his forehead.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Next new message...

ETHAN (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Hello Jacob, its Ethan. I'm calling so you wouldn't worry. The good news is, I haven't been fired. The bad news is-- Well, I may have to do a bit of damage control on my illustrious career.

(MORE)

ETHAN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 In any case, Autumn has not exactly been discreet about her amusement at this very sensitive situation. So I'd like to make certain that you're still on board to beat out the bitch? My voicemail number is one-one, and you may check for messages as you wish. But I hope you realize that I am generously opening up my sources to you. This is real trust, my friend. In return I expect that you will keep the details of my recent entanglement to yourself.

(suddenly perky)
 But all is well. I've forwarded what messages there were to your inbox. See you Monday.

CLICK.

JACOB
 (to self)
 What a prick.

Jacob busies himself by emptying his pockets. His hand is filled with ketchup packets and other miscellaneous oddities.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Next new message, forwarded from:
 (Ethan, Recording)
 GQ's catch of the coast, Ethan
 Andrews!

BEEP.

He places the items on a night stand while the rain splatters against the room's thinly curtained windows.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Wh...ness-.alls-...oss-...-...rth-
 , so..s-be..c...-c....-nd-b..t.r-

CLICK.

Jacob picks at his teeth and dismisses the message as noise.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Next new message, forwarded from:
 (Ethan, Recording)
 GQ's catch of the-

BEEP.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Wh..-l.f.-...-lac.....-n...s-m..th-
 the..vil-sp..ns--l..ter-

CLICK.

Jacob observes his phone, pensive. The lights flicker.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Next new message, forwarded from:
 (Ethan, Recording)
 GQ's ca-

BEEP.

As the final message plays, Jacob raises the volume.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Mo..l..ht-f..es-lik.-th.-ser...ts-
 eye, whi...mort..s-..ep-and-**angels-**
cry-

His attention caught, Jacob listens carefully and cranks the volume to its maximum. The sound of heavy static in the recording overwhelms the rain.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (over phone, filtered)
 At-wha--ercy-.ill-yo..-**world-die-**
 ..en-y...atch-i...ithe-.nd-
 (loud whisper)
 WITHERrrrr...

Static silence.

A sudden and loud knock on the motel room door sends Jacob tumbling off the bed.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT (O.S.)
 Room service!

JACOB
 (to self)
 Fuck me, I need sleep.

Jacob opens the door and lets a young man enter with his rickety snack cart and a covered meatloaf dinner. As the cart rolls in, a row of liquor bottles clink together beneath.

Jacob notices immediately and licks his dry lips.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
Really coming down out there. God must be taking a leak. They're calling it acid rain, did ya hear that? It's pissin' like my Grandma with a bladder infection.

Jacob hands the kid a twenty.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
They just charge it to the room.

JACOB
You gotta make a living somehow.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT
Serious? Nice. Have a bottle of our motel's finest, on the house.

The attendant presents Jacob with a dusty bottle of rum.

The label reads: **SAINT JAMES**

Jacob absorbs the sight of the amber liquid like a powerful, bitter-sweet memory.

Soft thunder rolls.

JACOB
(beat)
No thanks, I'm staying dry tonight.

ROOM SERVICE ATTENDANT
Suit yourself. Ya mind if I? Uh...

Jacob ushers the kid toward the door.

JACOB
Enjoy it.

The door shuts and Jacob sits on the end of the bed. His dinner steams, staring back at him unpleasantly.

His attention returns to the phone.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Delete new messages.

BEEP.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
*Messages deleted. One saved
 messages. To hear saved messages,
 press two...*

Jacob lies back slowly...

BEEP.

ARALEE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Hi Jacob! So, listen, I'm thinking
 a little wine and dine; maybe dress
 up in something fine...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMBRIDGE MOTEL - NIGHT

The rain continues to come down hard as the small roadside motel and empty parking lot suffer quietly through the night's storm.

INT. M.I.T. - MAIN THEATRE - NIGHT

Reveal of many Uroboros U1U9 unveiling banners and signage.

STANLEY OHM (O.S.)
 We are so privileged to be here
 tonight, in honor of a year-long
 collaboration with the fine minds
 at M.I.T., to unveil our much
 anticipated masterpiece!

A floor-to-ceiling banner reads: **M.I.T. is honored to present
 Dr. Stanley Ohm - Father of the Uroboros Series Robots.**

Stanley Ohm may be a small man, but he stands proudly on the well-lit stage and dazzles an excited audience of engineers, scientists and students with an explanation of the U1U9's revolutionary quantum-processing DNA technology. His words are supported by energetic hand movements and almost cartoonish body postures.

Dr. Ohm is then joined by Celia Berezan, who stands next to a tall and circular white sheet suspended from the ceiling. A large Uroboros logo is emblazoned on it.

STANLEY OHM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 ...So, without further ado, ladies
 and gentleman, I proudly present...
 (MORE)

STANLEY OHM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(with gusto)
The Uroboros One, Unit NINE!

The white sheet drops. Within it, stands nothing but a pile of disconnected cables.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMBRIDGE BACKROAD - NIGHT

Blowing grass gives way to wet pavement. The obscured backside of a child-like but robotic form moves away in the distance. A halo of street light envelopes the figure only briefly as it paces calmly among the rain and trees. In another moment's passing, it vanishes into the night.

CUT TO BLACK:

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

BLACK.

The sound of quick footsteps.

CUT TO:

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

From a stairwell exit at the end of the hall, Jacob rounds a corner with his suitcase in hand. He reaches his apartment door and fumbles with a set of keys in the lock. None work.

There is an eviction notice. Jacob snatches the paper and skims it over. His head thumps against the door.

Seemingly defeated, Jacob makes his way back down the hall. Halfway along he sets down his suitcase, turns, and charges back to shoulder the door in.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACOB'S APARTMENT BUILDING PARKING LOT - DAY

An elderly LANDLORD sweeps out the open basement entrance with his trusty broom. Jacob darts past him toting bits of loose clothing, his suitcase, a knapsack, and a cardboard box lid that balances a number of well-named plants.

He races for the news van.

LANDLORD
Hey! You! I want rent!

Through the view of the front windshield the elderly man approaches, infuriated. Jacob quickly, yet carefully, lines his plants along the dash and starts the vehicle.

The white van speeds away as a broom is thrown after it.

EXT. NEWS STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

Bright whiteness. A heavy engine runs. Vehicle headlights flash off and the engine sound follows.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWS VAN (NEWS STATION PARKING LOT) - DAY

Jacob yawns wide and puts a french fry in his mouth to fill the hole. Mid-stretch he glances in the side-view mirror.

Ethan's reflection stands in the parking lot. His hands are in his pockets and his head is low. Elle is there and she pleads to him. Ethan steps away and pushes her off as she reaches out. Elle looks lost.

Jacob stuffs a few ketchup packets into his coat pocket and gathers up his things. Ethan's BMW wipes the foreground.

Briefly visible through the windshield as the vehicle passes, Ethan wears an incredibly unfamiliar expression. Tear-filled eyes find Jacob.

Jacob stares back.

INT. MR. ROBERTS' OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Roberts sits behind a cluttered desk with a pen tapping against his heavily furrowed brow. His office phone is glued to his ear.

MR. ROBERTS

(into phone)

No. Just go. No, I can't. But I will as soon as I-- No, I don't want you driving all that way. Elle's coming to get you.

Jacob enters and sets a greasily wrapped breakfast burger on Mr. Roberts' desk.

MR. ROBERTS (CONT'D)

(into phone)

You can miss one bingo night, this is important! Do it, alright!?

(quiet)

Yes. Bye mom.

Mr. Roberts hangs up. His ear is bright red.

JACOB

Got your message. Thought I'd grab a snack to thank you for feeding me something tastier than tin toys.

Jacob's presence is barely acknowledged. Mr. Roberts slides the burger aside and busies himself with a pile of paper.

MR. ROBERTS
That's off. You're going camping.

JACOB
Oh? Well, then I'm still hungry.

Jacob snatches the gift back.

JACOB (CONT'D)
(mouth full)
You know, we discussed this. I'm not setting foot out there without a can of snake repellent, Bob.

MR. ROBERTS
(snaps)
I told you not to call me that, God Dammit! I could fire you, you know that, right? This whole M.I.T. thing would've left your ass on the street at any other news station!
(suddenly somber)
You have no idea how lucky you are.

JACOB
If by luck you mean shit-out-of-it. I know you're all bubbling over the whole Elle thing, but at least the Zombie story is- Oh shit.

Jacob is cut off by Robert's sharp and wounded look.

MR. ROBERTS
You knew about them?

Roberts attempts to wipe a full-faced sadness from his eyes. His daughter's escapades are distressing, but something more gnaws at him beneath his usual crusty surface.

MR. ROBERTS
(quick & impatient)
My daughter's tramp-judgement aside, I looked into the Zombie-Man case. It's called the Lazarus Effect. Recorded some forty times in modern medical journals. Spooky but explainable. We'll resurrect it at Halloween, okay?

JACOB
Poetic.

MR. ROBERTS
I'm serious Jacob.

JACOB

So am I. It's one thing to have a misdiagnosis of death and another to have people claiming that gramps took a little stroll a day after he was deceased. It's not possible!

MR. ROBERTS

No, it's not. And that's why it's done. Despite his spooky relation to the lovely Miss Berezan, who you so effectively pissed off for life, there's no story there. And even if there was, she doesn't want it. We are a press company that can't handle any more bad press, so we're gonna walk away, do you understand?

JACOB

Wait-- Samuel Hunter is-- what? Berezan's father?

Roberts slaps the case dossier against Jacob's chest. Jacob's snapshot of Samuel Hunter's cold corpse falls out.

MR. ROBERTS

Hers, and apparently the father of Biomolecular Computing. Previously a Tenure Professor at M.I.T. It actually could've been something before you so effectively went and shit the bed.

(beat)

But now we've got bigger problems, which equal bigger stories.

JACOB

Of course, how could I forget? The Girl Scouts of America need our support. One hundred years of selling cookies door to door can not go under appreciated.

(thick sarcasm)

You think our lately re-deceased friend would remember that far back? Next time he's out stretching his legs maybe I'll ask him.

Mr. Roberts faces away, eyes wandering out the window.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Cuz that's a whole lot of cookies!

MR. ROBERTS

Jacob. Look around. Have you noticed? The station is *dead*.

Mr. Roberts tastes the bite of his own words.

Jacob joins his friend and mentor at the window. He peers through a set of inner-office blinds, spreading the slats apart with two fingers.

A skeleton crew operates very quietly in a never-quiet newsroom. Jacob finds it a bit unnerving.

MR. ROBERTS (O.S.)

Over a thousand people died today. The outskirts of Cambridge are a graveyard. Mostly between Milton and Dorchester. It's our very own *Nine-Eleven*.

Images of piled bodies clearly articulate that message on overhead video screens.

Mr. Roberts' tone turns uncharacteristically grim.

MR. ROBERTS

Ethan just left. His wife and brother live there, but he won't get through the quarantine.

Jacob turns back, mildly stunned.

The sudden topic shift is intensely sobering. Jacob sits.

MR. ROBERTS

I almost called the CDC on you. But from the sounds of it, you wouldn't even be here if you were affected. You are one lucky fuck, Jacob.

JACOB

(beat)

How? ...Chemical? A gas plant?

Mr. Roberts tosses his protege a manila envelope.

MR. ROBERTS

We don't know. It happened over the last twelve hours in what seems like random locations. One minute there's a parking lot full of shoppers, the next... everyone within a quarter mile is dead.

In the envelope is a collection of victim's faces. The photos reveal frozen expressions with dull eyes and swollen veins.

MR. ROBERTS

We're covering this carefully with a satellite team and sending anyone I can spare home to grieve.

JACOB

(expectant)

Autumn?

MR. ROBERTS

Proud as a pussy-cat, what else? She's relentless, it's her story.

Jacob stands again, a head taller than his boss. He paces.

JACOB

I'm not a fucking foot stool, Bob!

MR. ROBERTS

I need you to stay away from this, Jacob. *I* need you to get out of town, alright? I'm not dragging your ass out of another ditch.

JACOB

C'mon. I can handle more than the powder-puff stories you've been sending me on. I'm fine. I'm ready.

Mr. Robert's expression turns cold.

MR. ROBERTS

Well. I'm not.

They share an intense and unspoken exchange.

MR. ROBERTS

I can't trust you with this. It's too much. And I can't do my job if you're not doing *yours*. So, please.
(desperate)
Just- join the Girl Scouts.

Mr. Roberts extends another folder and a crumpled map. His suffering is palpable.

JACOB

Well, when you put it like that.

Jacob reluctantly accepts the papers.

JACOB
 You don't have to worry about me.
 It was one time. The only time.

Mr. Roberts nods and relaxes slightly.

MR. ROBERTS
 (in exhale)
 Thank you.

Jacob puts a hand on Roberts' shoulder. He pats it awkwardly.

With the brief and obligatory show of sympathy out of the way, Jacob is out the door.

INT. NEWS STATION LOBBY - DAY

At the abandoned lobby desk Jacob renews his van rental while checking messages. When prompted, he dials one-one.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Channel Nine mailbox of...
 (Ethan, Recording)
 Five-time *Goldies* winner, Ethan
 Andrews!

Jacob rubs his temple.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
*You have no new messages. You have
 no saved messages.*

Jacob frowns at the phone as a slender figure glides by.

AUTUMN GRACE
 Checking messages?

He looks up.

AUTUMN GRACE
 I heard you might be covering for
 Ethan, so I tried to leave you a
 friendly welcome note.

With big eyes and a pouty expression, Autumn Grace conjures up her most genuine fake apology.

AUTUMN GRACE
 And somehow I must have pushed the
 wrong button and deleted them all.
 TSK. I'm so sorry, Jacob.
 (MORE)

AUTUMN GRACE (cont'd)

(beat)

But if anyone could forgive button
pushing, I'm sure it's you.

Jacob clenches his jaw.

AUTUMN GRACE

(feigned surprise)

Aw, you think I'm a bitch!

Autumn leans in close. She's just as likely to kiss him as
bite his nose off. It's hard to be sure.

Jacob stands his ground.

AUTUMN GRACE

(seductively)

You're right. I'm a *rich* bitch. And
I've earned it. So I hope you're
not *too* envious... Though I have to
admit, green's a nice color on you.

She smiles coyly and slides into his peripheral vision while
placing an icy hand on his chest. There is a PAMPHLET woven
between her fingers.

AUTUMN GRACE (O.S.)

Roberts wants me to hand these out.
A little distraction from today's
tragic events. But I'm sure you'll
find a more *fluid* way to cope.

With one final prod, the dark cloud evaporates.

AUTUMN GRACE (O.S.)

Have fun at the kiddie-camp!

EXT. CAMPING SUPPLY STORE - NIGHT

A bait & tackle sign fills a window. It advertises the sale
of fishing licenses and the slogan reads: **GET BACK TO NATURE!**

INT. CAMPING SUPPLY STORE - NIGHT

A packaged tent, rain poncho and a canteen slide across the
check-out counter. The barcode scanner flashes: **\$010.00**

Jacob stands in line behind three customers. He holds a
sleeping bag under one arm. The first customer clears the
checkout and the line moves forward.

Jacob pulls out his wallet as Autumn's pamphlet drops loose from his back pocket. He picks it up off the floor.

A three-year-old BOY in a stroller watches as his MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER argues with the CASHIER over the price of chewing gum.

The cover of the pamphlet depicts an angelic looking child with tears streaming down its cheeks. It reads:

**The Greater New York Art Gallery - Special Exhibit
Presenting: *The Works of Daniela Tristan Chane*
(Sponsored in part by Channel 9 NEWS)**

Jacob flips it open and finds one free admission.

Behind the ticket is the half-covered face of a dark-haired young woman. Jacob's thumb slides the ticket aside.

It is his ex-wife that smiles pleasantly back at him. A caption below her photo reads: **Aralee Ebsworth - Curator**

Jacob's lips part in soft surprise.

The store's busy sounds recede as he is lost in thought.

A stuffed bear falls to the camping shop's linoleum floor. The boy in the stroller reaches for it, desperate. He attempts to verbalize his distress to his mother. She ignores him while challenging the cashier.

Jacob caresses the photographic image of Aralee's cheek.

The irate woman finally slams some change on the cashier's counter and shoves the stroller ahead, running a dirty wheel over the stuffed animal's neck. The child bursts into tears.

MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER

Shut up! I told you not to make a
fuss! Don't you start this again!

A very TALL MAN, the real-life action hero type, stands between Jacob and the angry mother. He intervenes.

TALL MAN

Ma'am. You need to calm down.

Jacob gradually returns to the present and looks up.

MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER

No, you need to back off. I know
how to deal with my kid.

The cashier asks if she can help the next person in line.

The tall fellow turns his attention away, reluctantly.

The child's mother kneels to snatch up the bear and she stuffs it in her purse. The boy is absolutely distraught.

MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER

I told you to shut up! You want me to throw Puddles away? Hmm? Then keep quiet, you little asshole!

TALL MAN

Oh, this is bullshit.

The angry mother is stunned as she is shoved aside and her child is lifted onto the end of the cashier's counter.

TALL MAN

(to cashier)

Call Child Services please.

The woman explodes into a cursing rage and her son sits in quiet shock. She rants venomously for a moment or two, then spits in no particular direction and walks out the door.

Everyone's attention is on the check-out counter.

The store manager appears and makes the call as the cashier attempts to keep things moving. Jacob is next in line.

He has his items rung through and gives the good Samaritan an awkward half-smile when they briefly make eye contact.

TALL MAN

Shit parents, hey?

(beat)

You got kids?

JACOB

Nope. There's plenty running around out there already, without my help. Why add to the poo-pile?

TALL MAN

Yeah. Seems stupid people are breeding a lot faster than the smart ones these days, that's for sure. But we gotta help keep the balance, my man.

JACOB

The world's so over-populated, it won't make a difference.

(MORE)

JACOB (cont'd)
 I tried to help once, by removing
myself from the equation... But
 apparently that's frowned upon.

Jacob is distracted by the cute cashier as he signs a receipt
 and gathers up his purchase.

JACOB
 Human reproduction is probably the
 single most selfish act imaginable.
 But people get bored and they fuck.

He winks at the counter girl. Her reaction is priceless.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Take an honest look at the world.
 Everything we do is just one great
 exercise in futility. The planet
 doesn't need another human.

TALL MAN
 (somber)
 I'm a father of four.

Jacob's eyebrows climb all the way to his hairline.

JACOB
 Ah.

He throws the sleeping bag back under his arm, and with the
 pamphlet still in hand he makes his way for the exit door.

JACOB
 Well, congrats on the litter then!
 Best of luck!

As Jacob leaves he spares a glance back for the man standing
 beside the boy on the counter:

An angelic child with tears streaming down his cheeks.

INT. NEWS VAN - CAMPING SUPPLY STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The event pamphlet rests on the news van's steering wheel.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
*You have no new messages. You have
 one saved messages. To hear saved
 messages, press two...*

BEEP.

ARALEE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Hi Jacob! So, listen, I'm thinking
 a little wine and dine; maybe dress
 up in something fine...

The pamphlet opens to reveal his Ex-wife's photo.

ARALEE (V.O.)
 ...We haven't had a real date night
 in a while and I thought it'd be
 fun to tear up the town.

Jacob lowers his head and rests it on the steering wheel. He
 is nose to nose with Aralee's photograph.

ARALEE (V.O.)
 I know you're busy, but you gotta
 let some of the goodness in, enjoy
 life once and a while. Hope to see
 you soon. Waiting for your call.
 (beat)
 Love you.

He closes his phone.

Jacob ponders the Art Exhibit Admission Ticket.

BEEP!

A sudden message alert startles him. He checks it half-
 expectantly.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
*You have one new messages. You have
 one saved messages. To hear new
 messages, press one...*

BEEP.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
New message...

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Moo.li.ht-fa.es-lik.-th.-serp..ts-
 eye, whi..-mort.ls-slep-.nd-angels-
 cry-

The female voice barely breaks through the heavy static.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 At-wha.-.ercy-will-.our-world-die-
 w.en-y.-watch-.t-writhe-.nd-
 W.th.rrr.

CLICK.

The message is identical to the one Ethan had forwarded him.

Jacob thinks for a moment, then starts the van.

BEEP.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
Message saved.

The van pulls away and reveals a bus stop shelter with an advertisement that displays the Uroboros Robotics company logo in solid white on black. It reads: **THE HUMAN SOLUTION**

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - OPEN PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Several vehicles sit abandoned.

Blood-speckled asphalt slides past as dark lumps, lying all about, come into view. They are bodies. The approaching sound of mechanical footsteps drifts along the cement and a broken, robotic voice echoes.

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 Wh.-...ness-.alls-...oss-...-Earth-
 , so..s-be..c.-c...-nd-bitter-
 Wh.-l.f.-...lac....-in-its-m..th-,
 the-..vil-spawns--l..ter-

The monotonous and metallic pace of an unseen figure reaches a woman's corpse. She stares out, dead-eyed. A heavy, backlit metal foot steps deliberately past.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL - HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A shadow moves across the wall as a telephone cord stretches to its limit. The same poem is being recited, uttered rhythmically and repetitively in a woman's whispered voice.

LEAH (O.S.)
(hastily)
...Moonlight fades like the
serpent's eye, while mortals weep
and angels cry...

The phone drops to the floor with a crack and is sprung
across the linoleum floor.

LEAH (O.S.)
...At what mercy shall your world
die...

Leah, in her billowing hospital gown, climbs onto a window
sill. Her thin frame is silhouetted by moonlight.

She looks back.

LEAH (O.S.)
...When you watch it writhe and
wither.

The TV is on and Autumn Grace relays what information there
is about the day's horrific events. Next to the TV, drawn
large and ominous across the hospital room wall, Leah's
shadow turns and she plummets to her death.

CUT TO BLACK:

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

BLACK.

The sound of birds chirping.

FADE IN:

EXT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Kim Wecht hurriedly approaches the rear entrance of the building with a backpack slung over one shoulder.

The morning is calm. Dew drops bead on the window glass and rose-colored light bathes the walls in morning.

In stark contrast, the doctor sorts impatiently through a mess of keys while awkwardly balancing a phone to her ear in a state of caffeine-deprived frustration.

DR. WECHT
(into phone)
...Why?... No, I'm leaving today...
Probably safer than anywhere else.
Lightning never strikes twice...
Why to me???

Kim opens the back door and enters.

CUT TO:

INT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

The back office is dusty and quiet.

DR. WECHT
(into phone)
Next of kin? ...None whatsoever?

Dr. Wecht travels down a short and narrow hallway, then pushes open a swinging door that leads into a cold and sterile room.

CUT TO:

INT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - AUTOPSY ROOM - DAY

She finds the light switch and cringes.

DR. WECHT
 (to self)
 Son of St. Peter.

On a wheeled table in the center of the room lies the cold and cracked skull of the shortly deceased bag lady, Leah.

DR. WECHT
 (into phone)
 ...You could have at least tidied up before you left. Jesus Christ.

She pulls a pale sheet over the dead woman's face.

DR. WECHT
 (into phone)
 ...Don't tell me to calm down! I'm having a hell of a week here, okay?

Tugging at the blanket reveals a fingerless-gloved hand with flower embroidery.

DR. WECHT
 (into phone)
 ...Alright. Fine. I'll check and make some calls... Thank you.

Between Leah's bloodless fingertips hangs a newspaper clipping that goes unnoticed by the coroner. It reads:

**THE GREATER NEW YORK ART GALLERY
 featuring the works of Daniela Tristan Chane**

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GREATER NEW YORK ART GALLERY - DAY

A sign showcasing some beautifully painted watercolor trees and the name *Daniela Tristan Chane* greets spectators on the Gallery's front steps.

INT. GREATER NEW YORK ART GALLERY - EXHIBITION ROOM - DAY

Another large print of watercolor art is propped up next to a podium where a stunningly beautiful and raven-haired woman, ARALEE EBSWORTH, speaks to a modest crowd.

ARALEE

...“No more shall mankind revel in the splendor of being alive, for living will become toil, and love will be lost on those who seek it with unfortunate hearts. The world is already dying in all the ways that death might take it; but alas, humanity is its final curse.”

(to audience)

This cheerful excerpt is a small example of some of her later diary entries, when an unfortunate illness had left her somewhat incapacitated and understandably bitter. But it is generally agreed that her sharp cynicism was her personal trademark.

Aralee flips through a series of projected images in a power-point presentation. All of the artwork is of nature, or the destruction of it, presented in countless styles and mediums.

Semi-curious spectators flow in and out of the informal talk as she continues on. The back of Jacob's head is one among a few of more permanently seated listeners in the back row.

He absorbs his ex-wife's talk covertly, half covering his face with a frayed scarf that tickles the end of his nose.

ARALEE

Daniela Tristan Chane was a lone voice at a time in history when the concepts of industrial progress and capital growth were being newly enjoyed by the masses. And just as it is today, most believed then that technology would make a life of unparalleled convenience the norm for everyone. But where opportunists envisioned an endless highway paved in gold, Daniela saw only the darkest of roads ahead.

(beat)

In nineteen-eleven Daniela Chane published a pocketbook collection of her favorite poems, artwork and anecdotes, which she'd compiled at the height of The Industrial Revolution, and called it Gaia's Diary.

(MORE)

ARALEE (cont'd)
 Many of the ecological warnings in this book are still quoted by environmentalists and in related literature for their sheer relevance today. She was, quite arguably, the world's first Eco-Terrorist.

Aralee hold up a plastic cover copy of the small diary.

ARALEE
 And it was because of *this* tiny book that she was infamously marked for exile. Long deemed as a political threat and dangerous fanatic, she was eventually tried as a Communist supporter in 1949 for her anticapitalist views... at the ripe young age of *eighty*. And at that moment in her life she wrote: "Unlike most, I have very little to fear of a *life sentence* in prison."

The audience chuckles.

ARALEE
 Luckily, she was acquitted and the tenacious old woman went on to live another thirty one years. Incredibly, Daniela Tristan Chane died on her one hundred and eleventh birthday. Fans, friends and collaborators from around the world attended her memorable forest wake in Montana, and to a crowd of thousands, one of her very first poems was read.

(beat)

This next piece celebrates the life of a great writer, artist, teacher and humanitarian, while relaying the sadness through which she observed her fellow man. It is the first entry in her pocket book diary, found on the inside cover page, and written at the tender age of only fourteen.

Aralee takes in the audience.

Jacob shrinks a little in his seat.

ARALEE

"When darkness falls across the earth and souls become cold and bitter; when life is lacking in its mirth, the devil spawns a litter..."

Jacob frowns with gradual recognition.

ARALEE

...Moonlight fades like the serpent's eye while mortals weep and angels cry: At what mercy shall your world die when you watch it writhe and wither?"

The suddenly familiar image of 'the crying child' splashed on a poster near the auditorium entrance immediately haunts him.

ARALEE

A bit dark for a fourteen year old.

From her view of the audience, standing high at the podium, Aralee watches a man get up and seem to rush for the exit.

ARALEE

Historically, Daniela was not a religious woman. But she often used Christian imagery to relay messages through Caravaggio-like metaphor...

In his hurry Jacob trips over a metal folding chair, causing a loud and lonely echo. He glances back once and disappears.

ARALEE

(to self)
Jacob?

CUT TO:

EXT. GREATER NEW YORK ART GALLERY - DAY

Jacob races down the gallery steps and makes his way up the nearest street.

He strains to hear his phone's message service. Halfway through a crosswalk, he stops in his tracks. A CABBIE honks.

VOICE MAIL (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Saved message...

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Moo.li.ht-fa.es-lik.-th.-serp..ts-
 eye, whi..-mort.ls-sl.ep-.nd-angels-
 cry-

CLICK.

Jacob ponders.

As the cab driver rolls down his window to fire off a series of clever profanities, Jacob finally steps up onto the curb and out of the street.

CABBIE (O.S.)
 You God-damned cock-sucking mother-
 fucking piece o'shit son of a bitch
 hell-born bastard!

JACOB
 (to self)
 Nailed five out of seven. Not bad.

Jacob dials: ***69**

AUTOMATED VOICE SERVICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 The last number to call your line
 was five-five-five-three-two-one-
 two-zero-one-two. To connect
 directly, press pound.

BEEP BEEP.

Jacob wanders over to a bus stop bench as the phone rings. A woman's tired and slightly agitated voice answers.

NURSE'S VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Saint Francis Hospital, you've got
 psychiatric.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 ...Someone called from this line.

NURSE'S VOICE (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 This line is for R-S four-two-two.
 There's no one currently admitted.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Someone left a message. Yesterday.

Silence.

JACOB
(into phone)
Hello?

NURSE'S VOICE (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
I-- I'm sorry. If it was the same woman that called you, she passed away last night. She was an older lady? A homeless woman. We don't have a name for her in our records unfortunately. Did you know her?

JACOB
(into phone)
Uh... No. Thanks though.

CLICK.

Jacob sits. He ponders over his slightly cracked cell phone a moment then looks back toward the art gallery.

The day is bright and the clouds lofty. Birds sing their clear songs even above the noisy flow of traffic. The early fall sunshine warms Jacob's pale face. He stands up with a long and healthy inhale and prepares himself to go back.

An appropriately cheerful ring-tone stops him.

JACOB
(into phone)
Hello?

DR. WECHT (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Hello. May I ask who's speaking?

JACOB
(into phone)
No. May I ask who's speaking?

DR. WECHT (V.O.)
(over phone, filtered)
Oh, I'm sorry, my name is Dr. Kim Wecht, from the Greater New York Coroner's Office at Saint Francis. I don't mean to alarm you sir, but I'm looking for the family members of a woman who recently may have dialed your number.

Jacob sits again. Hard.

DR. WECHT (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Hello? ...Sir?

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Is this the same Dr. Wecht that
 happens to believe in zombies?

There is a distinct pause on the other end of the line.

DR. WECHT (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Jesus.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Yeah. Him. Exactly.

INT. SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL - AUTOPSY ROOM - DAY

Leah's cold yet peaceful face lies still under the glaring
 light of a surgical lamp.

JACOB (O.S.)
 Consuming flesh, drinking blood...
 How do you deny the similarities?

Surgical tools tumble onto an autopsy table with a clang.

DR. WECHT
 I really wish you'd please stop
 referring to HIM that way. Christ
 Our Savior was *not* a *zombie*.

Dr. Wecht is in a familiar and seemingly endless state of
 distress. Jacob cracks a fresh can of coke.

JACOB
 But Mr. Hunter was, right?
 (sips)
 How long do you think you've got
 before this one gets up and tries
 to eat your brains? Or *brain* I
 suppose, as I assume you only have
 one. I'd watch yourself, she's
 definitely gonna go for your brain
 first. I'm told on a fairly regular
 basis that I only have half of one.

DR. WECHT

I'm not hanging around long enough to find out whose brain is going to get eaten, Mr. Michaels. I'm out of here in a few minutes.

JACOB

Road trip?

DR. WECHT

They need my help in Milton. There are a lot of bodies.

(beat)

Feels like End Times.

JACOB

Really? You been there before?

The doctor packs her leather bags with miscellaneous medical supplies and an assembly of related devices.

DR. WECHT

One of the nurses who brought her down this afternoon said he had recognized her. Apparently she came in for a blood test or something a few years back.

Jacob moves to stand by Leah's body. He looks down at her with curious and somewhat dispassionate eyes.

JACOB

(vacant)

Ever heard of The Lazarus Effect?

DR. WECHT

Death is my day-job, Mr. Michaels. I know the case studies. But what happened to Samuel Hunter was no medical fluke. Nor was it some made-up story to secure special interest grants, as it's been suggested. This was nothing short of a miracle.

Jacob is lost in Leah's unfamiliar dead features.

Dr. Wecht's hardened glance dissects Jacob's ponderous expression. She fixates on the journalist with new intent.

DR. WECHT

You knew her?

JACOB

No.

DR. WECHT

Are you sure?

JACOB

Yes.

DR. WECHT

Then, maybe she knew you. Do you know the story of *Jacob's Ladder*?

Jacob catches a hint of evangelism in the woman's voice and immediately scans the room for an exit. Dr. Wecht closes in.

JACOB

(to self)

Oh no.

DR. WECHT (CONT'D)

It is said that the biblical Jacob had a vision of a ladder that was but twelve great steps unto heaven.

(beat)

Direct communication with God.

JACOB

Trust me, if there was a ladder, train or a lame-legged pony ride off this planet, I'd be on it.

DR. WECHT

Maybe you haven't been looking in the right place. Maybe *Leah* called you for a reason. *Maybe* she had a message. Something important that you needed to know.

JACOB

One fell out of the coo-coo's nest has a name now?

DR. WECHT

It's what the nurse said people in her neighborhood knew her by.

JACOB

I know I'm being a bit skeptical here, but there's probably a big difference between messages from God and the whispers of a crazy lady making prank calls for kicks just before *she* ends up in the bucket.

Jacob nods in Leah's dead direction.

DR. WECHT

Maybe not. She knew Samuel Hunter. According to the report, she was the last person he spoke to. They met, he serenaded her with a poem, and then he died. The second time.

The hairs on Jacob's neck stand on end.

DR. WECHT (CONT'D)

See? I read the police report this morning and couldn't believe it myself. Then I started making my way through her hospital calls and what do you know... suddenly Mister Jacob Michaels is right back here in my autopsy room.

Jacob licks his parched lips and chugs his can of Coke to avoid too much eye contact.

DR. WECHT (CONT'D)

Coincidence? Random happenstance?

Jacob wipes a sleeve across his sticky face.

JACOB

Odd.

He glances at the paper pile Dr. Wecht has gathered.

JACOB

Let's see that phone list.

The doctor hands him a sparse folder. Jacob walks aimlessly about the room, skimming the typed contents of its pages.

JACOB

These are all media outlets. Local stations. She was making a final plea. Just a call for help or vying for attention.

(MORE)

JACOB (cont'd)
 I hate to poop on your pathology
 doc, but it looks like its just one
 big, creepy coincidence.
 (thick sarcasm)
 You almost had me going there.

Dr. Wecht's expression turns incredulous. She shakes her head
 and quickly becomes dismissive, even condescending.

DR. WECHT
 A lack of faith or understanding
 doesn't make his mysteries untrue.
 (beat)
 But if you're finished here, I'd
 like to lock up. I'll walk you out.

Dr. Wecht disappears through an adjoining door.

Jacob stands alone. The wide room is steely cold and quiet.

He looks again at the body lying equally cold and thankfully
 quiet beneath a bleached white sheet.

He leans in slightly, as if to share a secret.

JACOB
 (whispered)
 Stay dead. You're better off.

RING!

Jacob leaps out of his skin.

He catches himself, embarrassed, then crushes the Coke
 between his palms in self-reprimand. He answers the phone.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 I'm still breathing.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Maybe you'll be the last.
 (beat)
 Where are you?

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Prancing through a meadow full of
 unicorns singing camp songs about
 butterflies, rainbows and sunshine,
 where else?

For emphasis Jacob tosses his crushed can into a waste bin that sends an echo ringing through the artificial space.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Oh good, sounds like you're all
 settled in then.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Snug as a bug.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Well, when you *actually* get your
 ass out there, I thought you might
 like to know where you're going.
 Debbie forgot the to put the camp
 name on your travel info. Watch for
 Eagle's Crossing, just off number
 eleven. Your troop leader is Miss
 Paige. She'll be expecting you
 before dark. Please don't
 disappoint the lady.

Jacob leans against the autopsy table and bumps Leah's hand.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 But it's what I do best.

A torn newspaper clipping flitters to the floor.

MR. ROBERTS (V.O.)
 (over phone, filtered)
 Don't get lost out there. And
 Jacob... Thanks.

Jacob picks up the paper.

JACOB
 (into phone)
 Yeah, well, I'll need a raise.

The line goes dead.

Jacob holds an ad for Aralee's art gallery exhibit up to the light. Her name stands out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARALEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Aralee stumbles through her front door, arms filled with boxes, bags, pamphlets and poster rolls from the art gallery show. She is greeted by two small cats.

ARALEE

Hello there, Eggs and Bakey! Did you have a good day? You miss me?

One of the cats sits proudly on the edge of a stairway banister, meowing. Aralee sets her boxes on the floor, slips off her shoes and meets the cat's demand for affection.

A picture frame falls from a shelf and smashes behind her.

ARALEE

(reprimanding)

Bakon! Dammit. After the day I've had, I don't need this from you.

Aralee picks up the broken picture frame. A crack in the glass splits the face of her college photo.

She carries it to the living room table and switches on the television while removing her jacket. She flops heavily on a pillow-covered couch.

T.V.

...there have been over fifteen-hundred deaths reported. No word yet on the exact cause of this event, and only speculation as to whether there is danger of further fatalities. Understandably, most living in and around the Cambridge area are too fearful to step outdoors, until they have more information as to what may have caused this tragedy.

EGGS jumps onto the coffee table and threatens to stand on the broken picture.

T.V.

At present, a city-wide quarantine has been put in place and military personnel have blocked off all major traffic routes into the city.

Aralee shoo's the cat aside and turns the picture frame over. She carefully removes the shards of glass. Behind the photo of her younger self she discovers another picture, face down.

T.V. (O.S.)

With the little information
available at this time, all we can
do is hope that this is an isolated
incident and that those affected
will soon have access to their
families and be allowed to grieve.

Aralee turns the photo over. It depicts the image of a much
happier and brighter looking Jacob touching foreheads with
Aralee. It is Christmas and they wear eggnog-induced smiles.

She lowers the picture from view and gradually turns her
attention toward the woeful television.

TV

From the Massachusetts Turnpike
near Cambridge, this is Autumn
Grace reporting for Channel-Nine.

Amid the radiating bands of interlaced light that create the
images on Aralee's picture-tube TV screen, Autumn lets slip
the tiniest of a half-smiles.

END ACT FOUR

TAG

EXT. HIGHWAY ELEVEN - NIGHT

Flaring headlights chase away the darkness as Jacob's news van approaches the campground turn-off.

High beams splash across a large hand-carved sign as the vehicle makes its turn. It reads:

EAGLE CROSSING - Douglas State Forest

As the van disappears up a narrow path in the thickening woods the night once again overtakes the scene.

The outline of an endlessly jagged treeline is visible against the pale and heavily clouded sky.

Breaking free from the cloud layer for just a moment, the moon delivers a sliver of light. It hangs sharp and watchful above the earth like a piercing serpent's eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODED ROAD - NIGHT

The moist and cracked pavement is painted with faded road lines that stretch over an undulating path of hills ahead. At the crest of the most distant rise, in the exact center of the symmetrical scene, a small and child-like figure appears. It follows the lonely road toward us, steady and tireless.

Its cold and unblinking batter-powered eyes stare directly into the soul of all of humanity.

THE END