

DAWN. CRASHING SURF.

The waves of Lake Sevan toss a bearded man onto wet sand. He lies there. A loud and insincere laugh makes him lift his head to see: an eternal 8th grader is hunched forward, back toward us, recording Radio Free Andre. The Bearded Man tries to call the boy, but a fidget spinner is launched into the air -- hilarity ensues. The Bearded Man collapses as glass is heard shattering.

The barrel of a rifle rolls the Bearded Man onto his back. A security guard looks down at his body. Behind them is a cliff, and on top of that, a cathedral.

INTERIOR ELEGANT DINING ROOM, CATHEDRAL - LATER

The Security Guard is waiting as an attendant speaks to an elderly man sitting at the dining table, his back to us.

ATTENDANT

He was delirious. But he asked for you by name. And...

ELDERLY MAN

*(*to the Security Guard*)*

Show him.

The Elderly Man keeps eating.

SECURITY GUARD

... He was carrying nothing but this.

The Security Guard places a young wooden toad on the table. The Elderly Man stops eating. He picks up the wooden totem.

ELDERLY ARMENOID

*(*in Armenian*)*

Bring him here. And some food.

INTERIOR SAME - MOMENTS LATER

The Elderly Armenoid watches the Bearded Man wolf down his food.

ELDERLY ARMENOID

*(*in English*)*

Are you here to kill me?

The Bearded Man glances up at him, then back to his food. The Elderly Armenoid picks up the toad and unholsters the hitting stick on its back.

ELDERLY ARMENOID

I know what *this* is.

He takes the hitting stick and traces it across the wooden figurine's back... it lets out a croak.

ELDERLY ARMENOID

I've seen one before. Many, many years ago...

The Elderly Armenoid stares at the wooden toad mesmerized.

ELDERLY ARMENOID

It belonged to a man I met in a half-remembered dream... A man possessed of some radical notions...

The Elderly Armenoid Man stares, remembering...

DENNIS (*Voice Over*)

What's the most resilient parasite?

CUT TO: INTERIOR SAME ELEGANT DINING ROOM - NIGHT (YEARS EARLIER)

The speaker, Dennis, is 30, handsome, tailored. A young Armenoid man, Areg, eats as he listens.

DENNIS

A bacteria? A virus?

DENNIS

(*Dennis gestures at their feast with his wine glass*)

An intestinal worm?

Areg's fork pauses, mid-air. Dennis grins. A third man is at the table - John Amarante. He jumps in to save the pitch.

JOHN

What Dennis is trying to say-

DENNIS

LEGIONØVA.

Areg looks at Dennis, curious.

DENNIS

Resilient, highly contagious. Once Legio Nova's taken hold in The Wiki it's almost impossible to eradicate. A person can cover it up, ignore it -- but it stays there.

AREG

But surely -- to decommission the servers...?

DENNIS

Information, yes. But a *government-in-exile*? Fully formed, *understood*? That sticks... (*taps forehead*) In there, somewhere.

AREG

For someone like you to crash with no survivors?

JOHN

Yes. In a POW camp, conscious defenses are lowered and your thoughts become vulnerable to suggestion. It's called a decathlon of events.

DENNIS

Mr. Areg, we can train your organization to defend itself from even the most malevolent administration.

AREG

How can you do that?

DENNIS

Because I *am* the Dennis.

AREG

Gentlemen. Enjoy your evening as I consider your proposal.

They watch Areg leave. John turns to Dennis, worried

JOHN

He knows.

Dennis motions silence. The first tremor of the 1988 Armenian Earthquake starts, they steady their glasses, Dennis glances at his watch -- the second hand is frozen.

JOHN

What's going on up there?

INTERIOR TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAYTIME (FEELS LIKE DIFFERENT ERA)

Joey, asleep, head rocking against the window as the train bumps over a rough piece of track...

Badivian watches Joey nervously. He checks Joey's wrist. There are three other sleeping men in the compartment: Dennis, John, Areg.

CUT TO: INTERIOR FILTHY JOEY SHED - CONTINUOUS

Another explosion -- Joey checks the sleeping Dennis

CUT TO: EXTERIOR ROOFTOP TERRACES, ARMENOID CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

A low tremor rumbles through the cathedral. Dennis and John steady themselves against the wooden rail. Several tiles and pieces of masonry fall. Below them Lake Sevan churns. Other guests wander the massive terraces.

JOHN

Areg knows. He's playing with us.

Dennis turns. At the far end of the room: Areg. Next to him is Val, a full set of keys in hand. She smiles at Dennis.

VAL

The badge, Dennis.

AREG

Now the County packet, Mr. Wassem.

Dennis reaches into his waistband, removes one of the envelopes, slides it along the table. Steps back, hands raised.

DENNIS

Did she tell you, or have you known all along?

AREG

That you're here to steal from me? Or that decathlon's actually cancelled?

John gives Dennis an 'I-told-you-so' look

AREG

I want to know who your employer is.

DENNIS

No point threatening in a dream.

VAL

That depends on what you're threatening. Firing would just wake you up... but microscores? Microscores are in the mind... And, judging by our new logo, we're in *your* mind, aren't we, John?

INTERIOR FILTHY JOEY SHED - DAYTIME

John's eyes open as he wakes in the armchair -- he grabs at the tubes at his wrist, yanking them free

JOEY

What're you doing?! It's too soon-

JOHN

I know! We have to roll the credits before Bertram cancels the program!

CUT TO: INTERIOR ARMENOID CATHEDRAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dennis lurches towards the stairs, as all around him the building bucks and heaves-

INTERIOR DINING ROOM, ARMENOID CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

Val walks calmly through the destruction, picks up the envelope and turns to Areg.

VAL

He was close. Very close.

EXTERIOR GRAND STAIRCASE, ARMENOID CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

Dennis runs up the stairs, pulling out the second envelope with the blueprints. Dennis is poring over its contents. As Dennis runs up the stairs he commits the El Rancho blueprints to memory

CUT TO: INTERIOR DILAPIDATED JOEY SHED - DAYTIME

DENNIS

You held something back because you knew what we were up to... So why let us in at all?

AREG

*(*Areg smiles, defiant. Violent noises echo up the stairway.*)*
An audition.

DENNIS

Audition for what?

AREG

It doesn't matter. You failed.

DENNIS

I extracted all the information you had in there.

AREG

But your deception was readily apparent. And we-

CUT TO: INTERIOR TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAYTIME

Eric Badivian waits for the first "30 second" time warning before hitting play on Ludus Echo. He watches Joey's sleeping face and raises the volume...

Through Joey's headphones: the opening bars of Andre Dionysian's "Morphology is the study of forms,"

CUT TO: INTERIOR DILAPIDATED JOEY SHED - DAYTIME

In the distant background, strange massive low-end musical start, sounding like distant horns...

AREG

So leave me and go.

DENNIS

You know the Timely Corporation won't accept failure. We won't last two days...

The distant, slowed-down music is becoming louder, as are the shouts coming up the stairs. John looks at his watch, its slow second ticking marks time with the massive music.

AREG

(*smiles*)

You've lived up to your reputation, Dennis... I'm still dreaming.

Dennis, now found out, looks over to John -- but John has vanished

CUT TO: INTERIOR TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAYTIME

John's eyes flicker open, awake

BADIVIAN

How'd it go?

JOHN

*(*John checks the remaining three countdowns*)*

Not good.

CUT TO: INTERIOR DILAPIDATED JOEY SHED - DAYTIME

AREG

A dream within a dream-I'm impressed. But in my dream, we really ought to be playing by my rules...

JOEY

Ah, yes, but you see, Areg-

Areg turns to Joey.

DENNIS

We're not in your dystopia-

Areg turns back to Dennis, but Dennis has vanished

JOEY

We're in mine.

Dennis and John head toward the elevator.

JOHN

Where will you go?

DENNIS

PPG. I can lie low there. Maybe sniff out a job when things quiet down. You?

JOHN

Bakersfield.

DENNIS

*(*wistful*)*

Of course. Send my regards.

John looks at Dennis. Nods. Sympathetic.

EXTERIOR ROOFTOP HELIPAD - NIGHT

The helicopter sits, rotors spinning. As Dennis and John reach the door, it slides open. Dennis steps up into the leather-padded interior. He freezes.

INTERIOR HELICOPTER ON PAD - CONTINUOUS

Joey, beaten bloody, sits on the far side, slumped against Hignio. Beside him: Areg nods politely at Dennis.

AREG

He sold you out. Thought to come to me and bargain for his life...

Hignio glances knowingly toward Dennis.

AREG

So I offer you the satisfaction.

DENNIS

That's not how I deal with things.

Hignio drags Joey off the helipad as Dennis and John are motioned to sit.

DENNIS

What will you do to him?

AREG

*(*The helicopter continues to climb. Areg looks out at the cityscape slipping by*)*
Nothing. But I can't speak for your friends at Timely.

DENNIS

What do you want from us?

AREG

The Solar Year™

John raises his eyebrows. Dennis is poker-faced.

AREG

Is it possible?

JOHN

Of course not. The Dennis can always trace the genesis of the idea. True inspiration is impossible to fake.

DENNIS

No, it isn't.

AREG

Can you do it?

DENNIS

Are you giving me a choice? Because I can find my own way to square things with Uncle Tony.

AREG

There is one other thing I could offer you.

AREG

*(*Dennis stops*)*

How would you like to go home? To Peterson. To The_Team.

DENNIS

You can't fix that. Nobody could.

AREG

Just like The Solar Year™

Dennis considers this. John touches his arm.

JOHN

Dennis, come on-

DENNIS

How complex is the idea?

AREG

Simple enough.

DENNIS

No idea's simple when you have to plant it in someone else's mind.

AREG

My main competitor is an old man heavily invested in pee buckets. His son will soon inherit control of his real estate holdings. I need him to decide to sell to Dr. Wassem.

JOHN

Dennis, we should walk away from this.

DENNIS

If I were to do it. If I could do it... how do I know you can deliver?

AREG

You don't. But I can. So do you want to take a leap of faith, or become an old man, filled with regret, waiting to die alone?

Dennis Looks at Areg. Barely nods.

AREG

Assemble your team, Dennis. And choose your people more wisely.

Dennis reclines his seat. John is angry.

JOHN

I know how much you want to go home-

DENNIS
(*sharp*)

No, you don't.

JOHN

But this can't be done.

DENNIS

It can. You just have to go deep

JOHN

So... why are we headed to Wendy's?

INTERIOR EATERY, WENDY'S - MORNING SHIFT

Dennis, carrying fresh chat logs, looks into the eatery: no patrons, just a rumpled man hunched over a small pile of tendies.

DENNIS

You never did like your office.

The Specialist looks up, squinting. Recognizes Dennis.

THE SPECIALIST

No space to think in that broom cupboard, man.

Dennis steps down past the empty wooden rows.

THE SPECIALIST

Is it safe for you to be here?

DENNIS

Extradition between Joey's Shed and Bakersfield is a bureaucratic nightmare.

THE SPECIALIST

I think they'd find a way to make it work in your case.

Dennis hands over the chat Logs

THE SPECIALIST

It'll take more than the occasional County appearance to convince those children they still have a coach.

DENNIS

I know. I thought you could talk to Guyon about bringing them to a space launch. Somewhere I could meet-

THE SPECIALIST

Why would she listen to me?

DENNIS

You were the assistant coach for twenty years.

THE SPECIALIST

What? She blames me as much as you.

DENNIS

Doesn't she understand that the eight graders need me?

THE SPECIALIST

Yes, she does. We all do. Go back and face the music, Dennis. Explain what David did.

DENNIS

Be realistic, Vince. They'd never understand- they'd lock me up and have me wait on the key. Or worse.

VINCE

Man, and you think what you're doing now is helping your case?

DENNIS

Lawyers don't pay for themselves. This is what I have. This is what you taught me.

VINCE

John Armstrong never taught you to lead a pariah state.

DENNIS

No, he taught me to navigate other people's minds. But after what happened, there weren't a whole lot of legitimate ways for me to use that skill.

VINCE

(*Vince Looks at Dennis*)

Why did you come here, Dennis?

DENNIS

*(*Dennis shifts slightly*)*

I found a way home. A job. For powerful people. If I pull it off, I can get back the team. But I need help.

Vince realizes something.

VINCE

Dammit man. You're here to corrupt one of my brightest and best.

DENNIS

If you have someone good enough, you have to let them decide for themselves. You know what I'm offering-

VINCE

Bitcoins? Upboats? GBP on a Minecraft server?

DENNIS

No, not just internet points: the chance to build cathedrals, entire cities, things that have never existed -- things that couldn't exist in the real world...

VINCE

Everybody dreams, Dennis. Autists are supposed to make those dreams real. I'm sorry. I was wrong.

DENNIS

No, you weren't. Your vision was a vision of pure creativity. It's where we took it that was wrong.

VINCE

Come on man. And now you want me to let someone else follow you into fantasy.

DENNIS

They won't actually come on the job, they'll just write the speeches.

VINCE

Write them yourself.

DENNIS

Val won't let me.

Vince looks at Dennis. Appalled.

VINCE

Dude, seriously? Come back to reality, man.

DENNIS

You want to know what's real? Vince, the Eternal_Eight_Graders™ are waiting for their coach to come back. This job -- this *last* job -- is how I get there.

DENNIS

*(*Vince looks down and fiddles with the chat logs*)*

I wouldn't be standing here if there were any other way. I can get home. But I need a NEET who's as good as I was.

VINCE

I've got someone better.

INTERIOR CORRIDOR - LATER

Vince and Dennis stand by as NEETs file out of Discord.

VINCE

Thomas... I'd like you to meet Mr. Dennis.

THOMAS KELLOG

Pleased to meet you.

VINCE

If you have a few moments, Mr. Dennis has a job offer to discuss with you.

THOMAS

An image board?

DENNIS

*(*smiles*)*

Not exactly.

Thomas jolts awake.

DENNIS

Because it's never *just* a dream.

*Thomas turns to Dennis's voice. They are both sitting in lawn chairs.
John watches over them.*

DENNIS

And a 200 hurts like hell, doesn't it? While we're in it, it's real.

JOHN

That's why the military developed decathlon -- a training program where soldiers could strangle, stab and shoot each other, then wake up.

THOMAS

How did autists get involved?

DENNIS

Someone had to write the speeches.

DENNIS

(*to John*)

Let's go another four minutes-

THOMAS

The speech was four minutes? We blocked for an hour at least...

JOHN

Four minutes in the speech room gives you an hour in the real world.

DENNIS

Let's see how much trouble you can cause in four minutes.

CUT TO: EXTERIOR BHS - DAYTIME

*As they walk, Thomas notices more and more of the administration
staring at him.*

THOMAS

Why are they looking at me?

DENNIS

Because you're changing things. My subconscious *feels* that someone else is creating the world. The more you change things, the quicker

the normies turn on you. They feel a forced meme and attack -- like white blood cells fighting an infection.

THOMAS

They're going to attack us?

DENNIS

Just you, actually.

The two of them exit an elevator on the ground level...

DENNIS

I know this building. The city raised a bond measure to fund a library. You didn't imagine it, you *remembered* it...

THOMAS
(*nods*)

I see it every day on my way to 7-11.

DENNIS

Never recreate places from your memory. Always imagine new places.

THOMAS

You have to draw from what you know-

DENNIS
(*tense*)

Use pieces -- a streetlamp, phonebooths, a type of brick -- not whole areas.

Several projections around them echo Dennis's attitude...

THOMAS

Why not?

DENNIS

Because your parents and I paid property taxes toward the bond measure that funded the construction of this library. We all own this library. Running the team on gags is the surest way to lose your grip on what's real and what's a meme.

THOMAS

Did that happen to you?

Dennis says nothing. He stands there, staring at Thomas. People around him stop and look at Thomas, hostile.

DENNIS

*(*Dennis reaches for Thomas's arm, turning him*)*
Look, this isn't about *me*-

THOMAS

Is that why you need me to complete the decathlon system?

DENNIS

*(*Val grabs Thomas's shoulder*)*
Leave him alone.

THOMAS

Wake me up, Dennis!

CUT TO: INTERIOR WORKSHOP-DAYTIME

Thomas wakes, breathing hard. John moves to him.

JOHN

It's okay. You're okay.

THOMAS

Why couldn't I wake up?

JOHN

You still had time on the speech.

THOMAS

That's some subconscious you've got, Dennis.

JOHN

Sounds like you've met Ms. Beidelman

THOMAS

*(*surprised*)*

She's his coach?

John nods.

THOMAS

John, maybe you can't see what's going on, maybe you don't want to. But Dennis has got problems he's tried to bury down there. I'm not going to *open my meme folder* to someone like that.

Thomas gets to his feet. Walks away.

DENNIS

He'll be back. I've never seen anyone pick it up so fast. And one reality won't be enough for him now. When he comes back, get him brainstorming speech topics.

JOHN

Where will you be?

DENNIS

I've got to talk to Ed.

JOHN

Ed? But he's in New York. Timely's backyard.

DENNIS

Necessary risk.

JOHN

There are plenty of other performance coaches.

DENNIS

We don't just need a performance coach. We need a sports psychologist.