

1. JUST FRIENDS - JF (**Everything EXCEPT Pink Highlighted areas**)
2. **ROMANTIC INTEREST** - (ENTIRE STORYLINE – NO CUTS)

GREEN HIGHLIGHTS – OPTIONS

BLUE HIGHLIGHTS – (Inner World music, meditations etc. that are part of the storyline. Once the music etc. has played it will then appear in the inner world.)

YELLOW HIGHLIGHTS – HELPFUL INFORMATION

IMAGES ARE INSERTED TO GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF WHERE THEY BELONG IN THE STORYLINE.

[NOTE: In the flowchart I quoted the book version so you can more easily find the part using a word search.]

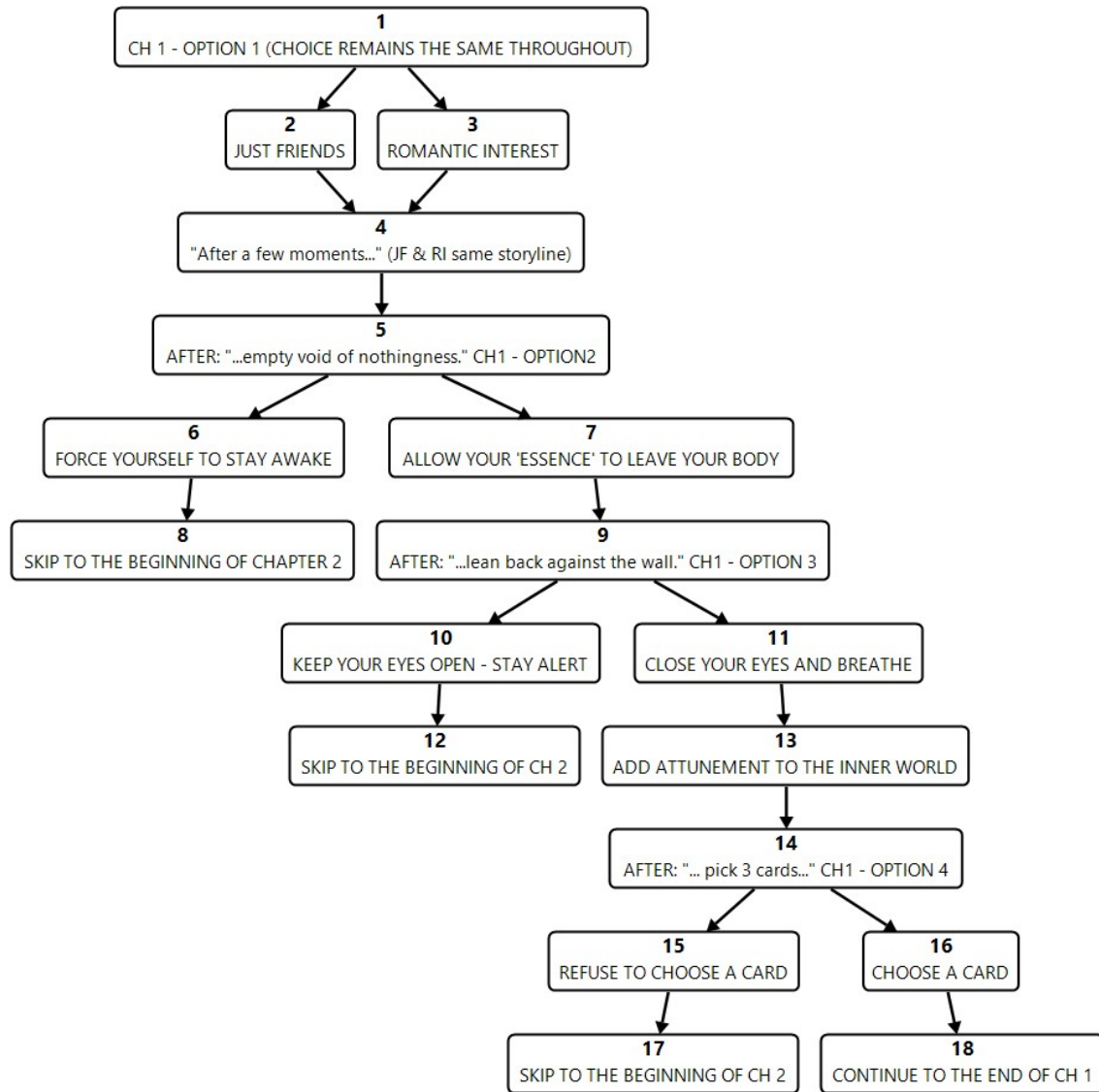
p.s. There are notes to myself here as well indicating cuts (red highlights) and things I need to record (dark blue highlights).

Don't worry about Red or Blue

IMAGE FOR INTRODUCTION



Chapter 1



CH1 – OPTION:1
YOUR PERCEPTION OF MATTHEW
JUST FRIENDS
OR
ROMANTIC INTEREST

(PLAYER’S CHOICE WILL LAST THROUGHOUT THE GAME).

Chapter 1

How strange it was to be seventeen and facing death. The tranquility of the desert night with its vast array of glittering stars and the merest crescent moon belied the imminent danger of hypothermia. There was little comfort in the fact Amelia wouldn't be dying alone. She barely knew the boy sitting by her side. Matthew had been chosen as her hiking partner by their geology teacher, but they'd never really spoken until that day.

It started as a weekend camping trip to Canyonlands National Park with eleven other high school seniors. They had left Friday at noon, and after three hours on paved roads and another bumpy hour down a dirt path, their old yellow school bus rumbled into their campsite spewing noxious black clouds of exhaust that quickly dissipated into the crystal clear evening sky of southern Utah.

Amelia never would have considered herself lucky to be the least experienced hiker in the group until the next morning when their geology teacher, Mrs. Caldwell said, “Amelia I understand this is your first time hiking in the desert. Matthew will be your hiking partner since he’s the most experienced and knows the terrain well.”

Though she didn't know Matthew, Amelia had noticed him at school on her first day. He was tall and athletic with dark hair, ruddy cheeks and grayish-blue eyes. Despite his obvious popularity he was a bit shy and unassuming as well – she thought that was the nicest thing about him. Amelia tried not to look overly thrilled, but inside she was jumping up and down. On principle, she typically ignored guys who were too good looking, and that went double for guys whose families had lots of money. But since he was her assigned partner, she considered it more of a *God's-will-type-of-thing*, so a small inner-celebration was in order.

Mrs. Caldwell then looked directly at Matthew and in a strong, authoritarian voice she added, “Be sure you’re back on time,” which seemed to imply that he had the tendency to

show up late and she would be holding him personally responsible for Amelia's well-being.

By mid-day it was seventy degrees, the sky was clear, deep blue and so incredibly immense. They hiked through fields of coarse grass, sage, and prickly pear, and along dried stream beds gathering rock samples for their class. They'd scrambled up and down over rugged outcrops that looked like megalithic statues; frozen waves, rising and subsiding in the vastness of the high desert – an indelible reminder that this had once been an ocean floor.



The trail wove through the desert disappearing into a jumble of cliffs and ravines then reappeared in the massive presence of red sandstone walls laddered with cool crevices and fissures. As they emerged from the dark interior of the canyon labyrinth and sat down just a few feet apart, Matthew took off his sunglasses as he slumped down onto the warm red rock surface to rest. It was the first time Amelia had seen him up close.

Though it made no sense at all (and she wouldn't admit it in a million years) when he looked at her she felt as if she had known him forever. Matthew smiled and not only did

Amelia suddenly realize she'd been staring, she was instantly mesmerized by the fact that he had dimples and, as if she had no will of her own, she stared a bit longer.

Blinking, she returned his smile a bit awkwardly, drew in a deep breath and looked up at the sky, "It's so beautiful," she said, hoping Matthew would follow her skyward gaze rather than watch her cheeks turn blazing red.

"Yeah I love it here," he said warmly.

Amelia pulled her knees close to her chest. Ironically, her backpack had the initials YOLO (You Only Live Once) displayed across the front but something about the last few minutes was bringing that concept into question. What if people actually live more than once? And if she was somehow remembering the *feeling* of Matthew - could he remember her as well?

FROM THIS POINT ON NARRATION IS FOR BOTH JF AND RI.

After a few moments of reflecting on the fact that her day just kept getting better and better, Amelia opened her eyes and turned her head to see Matthew smiling at her as he handed her a bottle of water.

"We need to get going," he said and though she nodded in agreement, and admittedly was an inexperienced hiker, it seemed unnecessary to rush. Matthew pointed to a trail in the canyon below and said, "That's a much nicer trail than the one we're supposed to be on. Do you want to take that one instead?"

"Sure," said Amelia, enjoying the fact that he had asked her opinion since she wouldn't have known the difference between one trail and another.

As they descended into a deep canyon labyrinth, time seemed to stand still. Surrounded by earthen walls, Amelia could only see the vibrant sapphire sky overhead with no indication of the sun's proximity to the horizon.

Emerging from the enclosed space, a profound and hypnotic beauty appeared before them, the sun falling slowly toward the horizon, washing deep oranges and fiery reds over the land.

They stood staring for a moment and then as if awakening from a trance Amelia said in a slight panic, "Matthew will we make it back on time?"

"Don't worry I know this trail really well. We'll make it!" Matthew sounded confident but Amelia noticed a certain urgency in his walk.

Wherever the land was fairly flat they ran instead of walking. They scrambled over boulder fields in their gradual ascent to the top of a high mesa where red rock canyons rose majestically above the desert floor. Slanted rays drenched blazing red rock walls with golden light and shadows lengthened across the canyon skating along the desert floor. The air was slightly cooler now, but didn't breathe what was yet to come.

As it grew darker Matthew stopped and said, "Hold on a sec," as he dug through his pack. "Shit! I forgot my glasses!"

“I can lead, do you have a flashlight?” said Amelia nervously.

A guilty look passed over Matthew’s face. “I don’t. I was thinking this would just be a day hike, I didn’t think to pack one.”

“It’s ok,” said Amelia, “let’s just keep going.”

Until this point Amelia felt confident that Matthew would take care of everything, and if there was an emergency he was a really fast runner and could have made it to the camp for help. But now it was up to her to get them safely back. Anxiety blooming in her chest and flowing into every cell of her body, she took the lead, running from one rock cairn to the next. With iron legs she climbed steep cliffs, the muscles in her thighs shaking with the effort. She tried jogging through the fields but could manage no more than a fast walk.

The sky was now dark purple, the evening clouds were brushed over with shimmering gold, but there was just enough light to see the cairns up ahead. Despite exhaustion Amelia tried to run as fast as she could from one cairn to the next. Then suddenly the horizon turned a soft sable bringing to light three glittering stars and a new moon dangling by an invisible thread at the edge of the horizon. In moments the sky and land had become one. It was too dark to safely go any further.

Amelia’s heart was frantically rushing in her chest and roaring in her ears as a roiling, swirling feeling made her too dizzy to walk. Sitting side by side, she and Matthew silently watched more and more stars float out of the velvety darkness. As the temperature quickly dropped, Amelia pulled on her sweater. It was oversized, warm and cozy, and though she knew the warmth wouldn’t last for long she immediately felt better.

Digging through her pack, she handed Matthew half of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

“Thanks. I’m starving,” he whispered gratefully.

Within minutes the soft evening breeze was edged with a hard chill.

“How cold do you think it’s going to get tonight?” said Amelia, as she emptied out her backpack then fumbled with different ways to fold it.

“It’ll probably drop below freezing.” Matthew paused then added slowly, “Do you know what that means?”

Amelia knew the answer but she was desperately hoping Matthew might have something in mind a little less drastic than *death-by-stupidity* – the leading cause of death between the ages of 14 and 24, a statistic regularly quoted to her by her father. Of course she had ignored him as he was just being her dad. But now she was beginning to realize how easy it was to become a statistic.

“We could die from hypothermia,” said Matthew his voice low and apologetic.

Amelia involuntarily gasped a stuttering breath as tears silently streamed down her cheeks. “Don’t you think they’ll look for us?”

Matthew moved closer and put his arm around her.

"I'm sure they will," Matthew said. "They'll drive into town or wherever they can get a cell connection and call my dad. He'll fly down in his helicopter and use the search light, but they'll be looking at Canyon Rim which is nowhere near here."

"Wow, your dad flies his own helicopter?" asked Amelia lightly, hoping to change the topic.

"Yep," said Matthew in an exhausted tone making it clear he didn't particularly like his father. "He learned to fly in Africa. I call him *the great white hunter* because he goes on safaris every year and now we have the heads of dead animals hanging all over the walls of his study."

"Oh," said Amelia, not really sure what else to say.

"Yeah," said Matthew with a slight laugh. Then he drew Amelia closer and said, "I'm sorry. It's my fault," his voice guilt-ridden. "I never should have taken you off the trail."

Amelia knew he must be as frightened as she was; feeling worse even, because he felt responsible for her.

"It's okay," she said squeezing his hand, "it was my choice too."



As the night grew colder the stars appeared razor sharp. Amelia's body, tingling and numb, began shaking uncontrollably as the freezing air penetrated her bones, a fierce,

constant pain drawing out the little warmth left in her body. And though Matthew moved to sit behind her, wrapping his arms tightly around her, she felt herself sinking into the blackness of the night sky, drowning in stars as numerous and cold as falling snow, her body encased in ice, eyes wide open staring. Nothing seemed to exist but infinite galaxies of light and color blooming in her mind, pulling her forward with greater and greater intensity into an empty void of nothingness.

CH1 – OPTION:2

FORCE YOURSELF TO STAY AWAKE

(SKIP to beginning of CH 2)

ALLOW YOUR ESSENCE TO LEAVE YOUR BODY

Suddenly, enveloped in darkness and with all the air squeezed out of her lungs, Amelia traveled at lightning speed down a long tube composed of dense grey light. With a whipping jolt she found herself sitting in a dimly lit room on a cold linoleum floor, gasping for breath.

As her vision cleared various shapes gradually began to emerge - a thin, flimsy mattress coupled with a faded, grey wool blanket, and a well-used pillow, all of which were lying in a neat pile on a cheap plastic bed frame screwed tightly into the floor. A piece of reflective metal was embedded in the wall above a small, rust-stained sink and next to it sat a toilet with no lid. A gloomy light was cast by a single bulb in the ceiling encased in a metal cage. High in a corner a solitary security camera swiveled slowly back and forth systematically scanning the room. That was it... there was nothing else. No pictures, no windows, just white-washed cement walls.

After frantically pulling on the handle and beating on the door, it was obvious no one was coming to help her. She tried yelling and waving her arms at the camera, and though she was certain she was being watched no one responded as she anxiously paced back and forth like a caged animal. Finally, Amelia gave up, sat down on the decrepit little bed, crossed her legs and slowly leaned back against the cold wall.

CH1 – OPTION:3

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN – FORCE YOURSELF TO STAY ALERT

(SKIP AHEAD TO CHAPTER 2)

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Taking a deep breath she closed her eyes and began to vividly imagine herself outside of this strange room. Instantly she felt her *essence* completely pull away from her body until she was floating close to the ceiling. From this vantage point she could see herself below sitting motionless on the bed wearing green scrubs.

Amelia floated along the ceiling, then through the wall and further on into a brightly lit hallway lined with doors that looked just like hers. She continued on and soon found herself in a large community room.

***** ADD ATTUNEMENT TO THE INNER WORLD**

The television seemed fairly new, but the couches, tables and chairs appeared to be at least twenty or thirty years old. As she drifted through the open doors leading to the Intensive Care Unit she immediately saw Matthew lying in a hospital bed, unconscious and on life-support. She gently floated in to see him, but quickly realized he was in a coma and unaware of her presence.

Unconcerned, she floated back out of the ICU and returned to the community room. This time she noticed a middle-aged woman with deep brown eyes and black, curly hair streaked with grey, dressed in green scrubs and fluffy, pink slippers. There was a deck of cards sitting on the table in front of her and as Amelia floated closer the woman looked directly at her.

“Sit down my dear, I’m Itzel. I’ve been expecting you,” she said hooking a chair with her foot and pushing it away from the table.

Amelia sat down. Without a word Itzel shuffled the deck and spread the cards out face down in a perfect arc on the table.

“Do you know you’re playing a game? Do you remember asking me to do this for you a long, long time ago before you were even born?”

Shaking her head Amelia said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s alright,” said Itzel, “Just remember it’s all a game. Now go ahead and pick three cards, one at a time.”

CH1 – OPTION:4

PICK A CARD

REFUSE TO PICK A CARD

(Skip to the beginning of CH 2)

Amelia obediently pointed to a card and Itzel flipped over the Death card. The picture showed Death himself portrayed as a skeleton wearing armor and holding a black flag with the Roman numerals XIII in white. His horse was carefully stepping over a dead man, woman and child, all lying on the ground in that order. Standing in front of the horse and rider was a bishop dressed in yellow paying homage to Death.

With an inexplicable, penetrating look Itzel said, “You cannot resist Death nor conquer it. The white horse is a symbol that Death is the ultimate purifier like the sun that dies at night and is reborn every morning. It means you can die and be reborn fresh and new.

“But notice this card is upside down so the meaning is also reversed. Sudden, unexpected change is coming and you must know that everything within you will resist that change. Death always includes transformation, but if you refuse to change you will be trapped, stuck in limbo. Do you understand?”

Amelia looked at her blankly. Some hazy, distant part of her did understand, but she said nothing.

“Pick another card, darling.”



Amelia pointed to The Hermit which was also turned upside down. The card depicted an old man with a flowing white beard and shoulder-length white hair dressed in a long, grey cloak standing alone on a snowy mountaintop with a dark, bluish-grey sky in the background. He carried a staff in his left hand and held aloft a lantern with a glowing six-pointed star in the center.

“As you can see this card is reversed, but in the upright position it is a symbol of wisdom and the sharing of knowledge with others. More than anything it represents a deep awareness of yourself – an awareness that can only be gained through isolation.

“But the meaning is reversed, which means you will not choose to be alone or go within, your isolation will be unwelcome, forced upon you. There will be a separation from someone you care for deeply and it will bring you overwhelming emptiness and pain if you resist. But notice The Hermit wears the grey cloak of invisibility and in this very moment you are invisible to everyone but me, so there is potential here IF you don’t resist what is now happening.”

Without being asked Amelia pointed to a third card and was immediately relieved to see that finally one of the cards was upright, until she saw it was The Devil. The card portrayed a Satyr, an unappealing creature part man, part goat with large horns sprouting out from his head and gigantic vampire bat wings emerging from his back. From his feet protruded bat claws rather than the typical toes or hooves and he was perched high above a man and woman – both naked with tiny goat horns sprouting from their heads and goat-like tails as well. They were chained to the podium where the Devil sat and also chained to each other.

“This doesn’t look good,” said Amelia shaking her head.

With a sigh Itzel said, “Yes, this one is challenging, no doubt.”

“This IS just a game, right?” said Amelia uncertainly.

“Yes, my dear, you are playing a game,” said Itzel reassuringly.

“Okay – go ahead and tell me what it means,” Amelia sighed.

“This card represents an actual person who, like a bat, sucks the life out of his prey. But in this case it’s not blood, but energy. He takes the life-force of others, believing that the end somehow justifies the means. There is something about him that is irresistible, almost hypnotic. He may actually use hypnosis to get what he wants and those that come near him are easily held within his power. The inverted pentagram above his head signifies dark intent and black magic.”

“Is there anything good about any of this?” asked Amelia doubtfully.

Itzel raised an eyebrow and said, “Well, look here at the man and woman. It appears they’re being held captive against their will, but if you look more closely you can see the chains around their necks are loose and could easily be removed. This means they’re voluntarily in bondage.”

“This is the good news?” said Amelia impatiently.

“It means you have a choice. This is actually the most important card for you to understand. On the one hand you’ll meet a man who embodies these things, but unlike

the repulsive picture on this card you may feel strangely drawn to him, he may be ultra-charismatic, he may have certain characteristics that are much like your own. In other words he won't look like a devil. But he will mirror to you all your hopes and fears.

“It will be easy to feel like his victim, easy to blame him for what happens to you. But if you believe that to be true, you *will* fall completely under his control. You'll transfer your energy over to him and he will become more powerful while your energy becomes more and more depleted.”

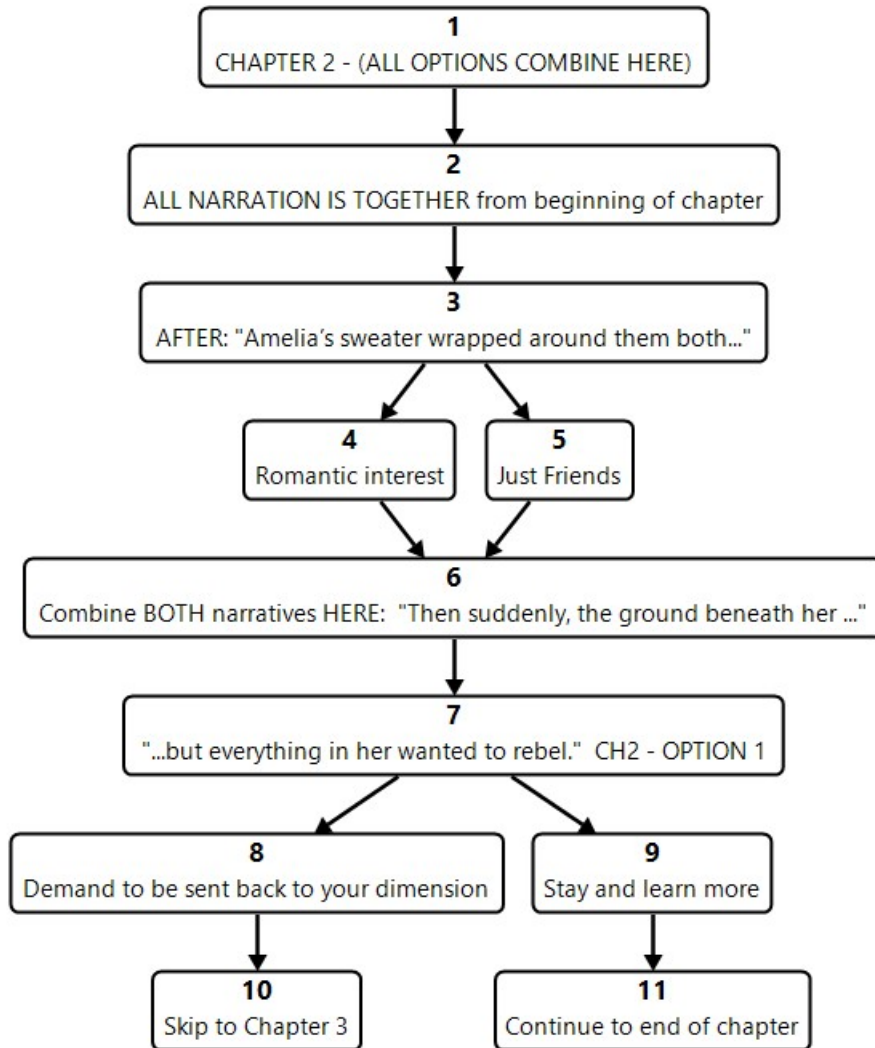
“But I thought you said we're playing a game,” said Amelia, feeling frightened and confused. “This doesn't sound like any fun at all.”

“The trick to this game is to remember it's all YOUR game. And you have a choice; you can play it according to someone else's rules or play by your own rules. You can get caught up in their *version of reality* or you can choose to remain in your own.”

“Have we done this before?” said Amelia blinking. “I've dreamt of you before haven't I?”

Amelia's body began shaking uncontrollably then suddenly, both Itzel and the room dissolved into complete darkness.

CHAPTER 2



Chapter 2

(ALL OPTIONS COMBINE HERE)

Startled back into awareness Amelia realized that Matthew was shaking her. Teeth chattering, his voice low and urgent he spoke in stuttering breaths. “Amelia our core temperatures are dropping, we have to find a way to make the most of our clothing and everything we have.”

Slowly Amelia began to process where she was and what was happening. She could no longer deny the facts. No one knew how to find them. No one would be coming to rescue them. They would either find a way to survive together or they would die.

This stark realization was accompanied by an electric jolt; suddenly Amelia’s mind was sharp, clear, and focused. A seemingly unrelated memory popped into her mind: Amelia was thirteen years old, giggling with her friends at her birthday slumber party on the subject of the *Siberian Survival Method*.

Amelia never knew whether it was just a joke or the truth, but it was the only thing she could think of, so setting aside any feelings of embarrassment and speaking as best she could despite her own chattering teeth, she said, “I think we need to be skin to skin. My sweater is huge – we can both fit into it. So you put it on, unbutton your shirt so my back will be against your chest and then wrap the sweater around me.”

“Okay,” said Matthew, “first let’s put our backpacks together so we can lie on our sides. It won’t be very comfortable, but it might help.”

They were so cold it was difficult to move let alone arrange their packs in the dark while trying to find a spot that was as level as possible. It felt like diving naked into an icy pond when Amelia took off her sweater. With completely numb fingers she unbuttoned her shirt and put it on backwards.

Matthew quickly put on her sweater, unbuttoned his own shirt and with a bit of awkward fumbling in the dark they managed to reposition themselves so they were skin-to-skin with Amelia’s sweater wrapped around them both.

PREVIOUS OPTIONS: RI OR JF

Had Amelia been on her own she would have felt the discomfort of the uneven, rocky ground, lumpy backpacks and the annoying zipper digging into her hip, but every ache and pain dissolved into the warmth of Matthew’s bare chest pressing solidly into her back, his strong arm wrapped tightly around her waist.

“Are you okay?” he whispered his voice deep, but shaky from the cold.

Amelia firmly placed her hand over his. “Yes,” she said nodding slightly.

Even with the needling cold pricking every part of her, Amelia was only aware of Matthew's warm skin, his chest rhythmically rising and falling with each breath; his heart beating all the way through her body. She wanted to dissolve into that moment and float forever along the waves of light passing silently between them.

Amelia's body began to feel a bit warmer, but it wasn't yet midnight. With at least six or seven hours left to go she knew survival was impossible. What was it about time? It was so inconsistent – badly behaved, even. In the late afternoon time had moved so quickly, zipping by when they desperately needed it to slow down; and now it was moving agonizingly slow – heavy as stone. Time seemed more like an obstinate child: whatever she wanted from time, and the more she wanted it, time would do just the opposite.

Tomorrow the sun would continue shining, the world would go on just as it did every other day – night dissolving into day and back into night, endlessly cycling, seasons irresistibly recurring, but all of it would exist without them. How was that even possible? They were only in high school. Weren't they allowed to make mistakes? How could life be so unfair?

With Matthew's arm still wrapped tightly around her, his heart beating steady and slow, time dissolved into that moment. In fact, the entire world was dissolving into that moment. No one and nothing else existed – just the two of them. Amelia gently took Matthew's hand from her waist, placed it over her heart and placed her hand over his.

BELOW COMBINE BOTH JUST FRIENDS & ROMANTIC INTEREST

Then suddenly, the ground beneath her disappeared as an electric charge pulsed through Amelia's body and a blazing beam of golden white light drew her up into the sky. The world was frantically spinning, breaking apart into countless shining pieces as if stars were being flung into the heavens. It was so beautiful! Amelia could hardly breathe. How had she missed this?

Everything was vibrating. Every cell in her body, every atom on Earth, every star and galaxy, everything seen and unseen was pulsating – singing a song as ancient as time itself. As if she contained the sun, light radiated out from Amelia's heart and from every cell in her body.

Matthew could feel it too and whispered, "What's happening? You feel so warm."

Electricity ran through Amelia's body as she shook her head unable to speak. Trying to make sense of what she was experiencing she opened her eyes.

"Matthew," she whispered urgently, "Look!"

Before them stood a golden-haired child; a little girl no more than ten years old with radiant skin, rosy cheeks, full red lips and vivid blue eyes. She was barefoot, wearing a simple white dress with a wreath of wildflowers in her hair. Though she carried no light, and certainly wasn't glowing from within, they could see her clearly while still unable to

see each other or anything else.



At that moment Amelia and Matthew both felt warm and comfortable as if the cold from only moments ago was nothing more than a dream. Though there was no apparent source

of light, everything around them was lit by a soft, gentle glow that seemed like a combination of late dusk, pre-dawn, and a full moon all rolled together as one.

The child smiled sweetly and said, "I'm Äsha." Then heading down the path she added, "Come on...this way!" as if she was about to lead them on some grand adventure.

Not only did she act as if nothing unusual had occurred she seemed completely oblivious to the fact that Matthew and Amelia were still lying on their sides cocooned together in Amelia's sweater.

Blinking and looking around trying to make sense of everything, Amelia quickly unbuttoned the sweater they'd been sharing, wriggled out of it, then sat up and tried to get her bearings. Matthew sat up as well, pulled off the sweater and handed it back to her. Though she was not the least bit cold, Amelia hurriedly put on the sweater rather than try to figure out a way to gracefully turn her shirt back around and button it. Hastily, they both jumped to their feet, grabbed their backpacks and rushed to catch up with the curious little girl.

Barely able to feel her feet touching the ground, a strange tingling current flowed through Amelia's body as if she was floating. And though she was bursting with questions nothing came out of her mouth as they followed the girl down the trail.

Finally Amelia found her voice. "Are you an angel?" But before the girl could answer she added breathlessly, "Are we dead?"

Äsha continued walking but turned her head to address Amelia. "I'm not an angel. And you're not dead," she said lightly.

"But it's not cold anymore... and it's still dark, but we can see. How's that possible?" said Matthew incredulously.

"You're both fine," said Äsha reassuringly. "You're just in another part of the program, what you might think of as a different dimension," she added as if they knew exactly what she was talking about.

"What other dimension? What program are you talking about... the geology class we're in?" Matthew asked, studying the girl intently as she turned to look at him.

"Oh my goodness," said Äsha in a sweet, sympathetic voice, "I'm afraid I've gotten way ahead of you. This may be difficult to understand... well actually it's not difficult to understand, it's just that you obviously don't remember anything and you wouldn't believe me if I told you." She stopped walking and then surveying them both, she said, "What I have to tell you might be a bit shocking, so maybe we should sit down for a moment."

"We don't have time to sit down," said Amelia urgently, "we have to get back to our camp. People are worried about us... they're out searching for us!"

Kindly, yet pragmatically Matthew said, "Whatever it is you have to tell us... maybe we could just keep walking back."

"Oh, I'm afraid you don't quite understand. Maybe it would help if you were to think of this as a parallel world," said the girl hopefully.

Matthew and Amelia looked at her blankly.

Asha thought for a moment. “In this parallel world that you’re now in it’s warm instead of cold... right? Well... your friends and the people searching for you are in the world where it’s cold,” she said, appearing rather pleased with herself.

“What are you saying?” said Matthew.

“I’m saying that if you went back to your campsite,” said Äsha slowly, “no one would be able to see you. No one would know you were there.”

They stared at her silently trying to assimilate the gravity of their situation.

“So we *are* dead,” said Matthew quietly.

“No!” said Äsha throwing her head back laughing. “Okay, I’m just going to say it! There....Is....NO....Death! There never has been death and there never will be death. You will never die. Death only exists in the eyes of the beholder.

“Oh dear, I wasn’t really planning to start there,” said Äsha sheepishly rolling her eyes, “I was thinking I would break you both in a bit more slowly to that idea.

“Okay, listen... what I’m about to tell you is...well...it’s something that’s known throughout the universe, but it’s the biggest secret on Earth. It explains absolutely everything about so-called life and death, and it answers all unanswered questions and scientific anomalies...every senseless thing, every terrible act, even the deepest sadness – all of it will make perfect sense.

“But first, repeat after me – *Imagination is more important than knowledge.*”

Silence.

“I don’t mean in your heads – say it out loud,” said the girl encouragingly.

Amelia and Matthew looked curiously at each other then back at Äsha.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge,” they repeated perfunctorily.

“Part two,” said Äsha. “No matter what I tell you...no matter how unbelievable it may seem, simply say to yourself, *This is a possibility*. You don’t have to believe what I am telling you, just give the idea some *breathing room*,” Äsha added taking a deep breath. “*This is a possibility*... Are you ready?”

Amelia nodded vigorously, hoping Äsha wouldn’t change her mind and suddenly decide it was time for breakfast, leaving them hanging.

“Here’s the big secret.”

Matthew and Amelia stared at her wide-eyed, mouths slightly open and breathless with anticipation.

“Earth and everything you experience here is a virtual reality.”

Äsha looked expectantly at the pair as they sat stunned, staring back at her blankly.

“In fact Earth was created to be the Ultimate Virtual Reality Game in the Universe, we just call it The Game,” said Äsha enthusiastically. “It’s the most challenging game ever created and it’s definitely not for the faint of heart!

“You’ve spent your entire life playing this game, but in reality, Earth isn’t your home. It’s simply a place where everyone goes to play and have experiences that they couldn’t have anywhere else in the Universe.

“Shall we sit down now?” said Āsha nodding.

In stunned silence Amelia and Matthew sat down next to each other facing Āsha.

Of all the things Amelia expected to hear in that moment, the idea that she was playing a game – that anyone could think of life on planet Earth as simply a *game* – was the most ludicrous thing she’d ever heard. It was one area where *this is a possibility* absolutely, positively did not apply. Not to mention the fact that something on the scale of planet Earth would be impossible, even for God. Well, maybe not for God, she thought, but why would God create a virtual reality game? Was it just to keep His creation entertained?

“There’s no way,” said Amelia skeptically, “if this was a computer program then everything in it, every blade of grass, every raindrop, snowflake, grain of sand, every sunrise and sunset, not to mention every human being and every event throughout history, would have to be programmed into the game.”

“Not only that,” said Āsha unflinchingly, “EVERY possibility... on every dimension, including parallel worlds and alternate realities, and things you’ve never even heard of before! And not only is EVERYTHING programmed, The Game has been around for billions of years and will continue for as long as people want to keep playing.

“Of course there are some cultures that understand your world better than others. For instance, in India they call life on Earth, The Maya... they see life as an illusion – which is true, but it’s not the whole picture. And the aborigines in Australia call it The Dreamtime, which is also on the right track. But very few people have ever guessed that Earth and everything happening here is a game.

“If you think about it neither of you could have ever comprehended the idea of a virtual reality game if we were having this conversation a hundred years ago. So an *illusion*, or a dream, would be about as close as you could get.”

“But how could we be playing a game without knowing it?” asked Amelia.

“You’re born into the game.



But before you're *born* you choose your parents, your name, your date of birth, and of course your physical body, it's your avatar," said Äsha. "You agree to *forget* who you are, where you came from, as well as any previous games you've played and most importantly, the fact that you're playing a game at all.

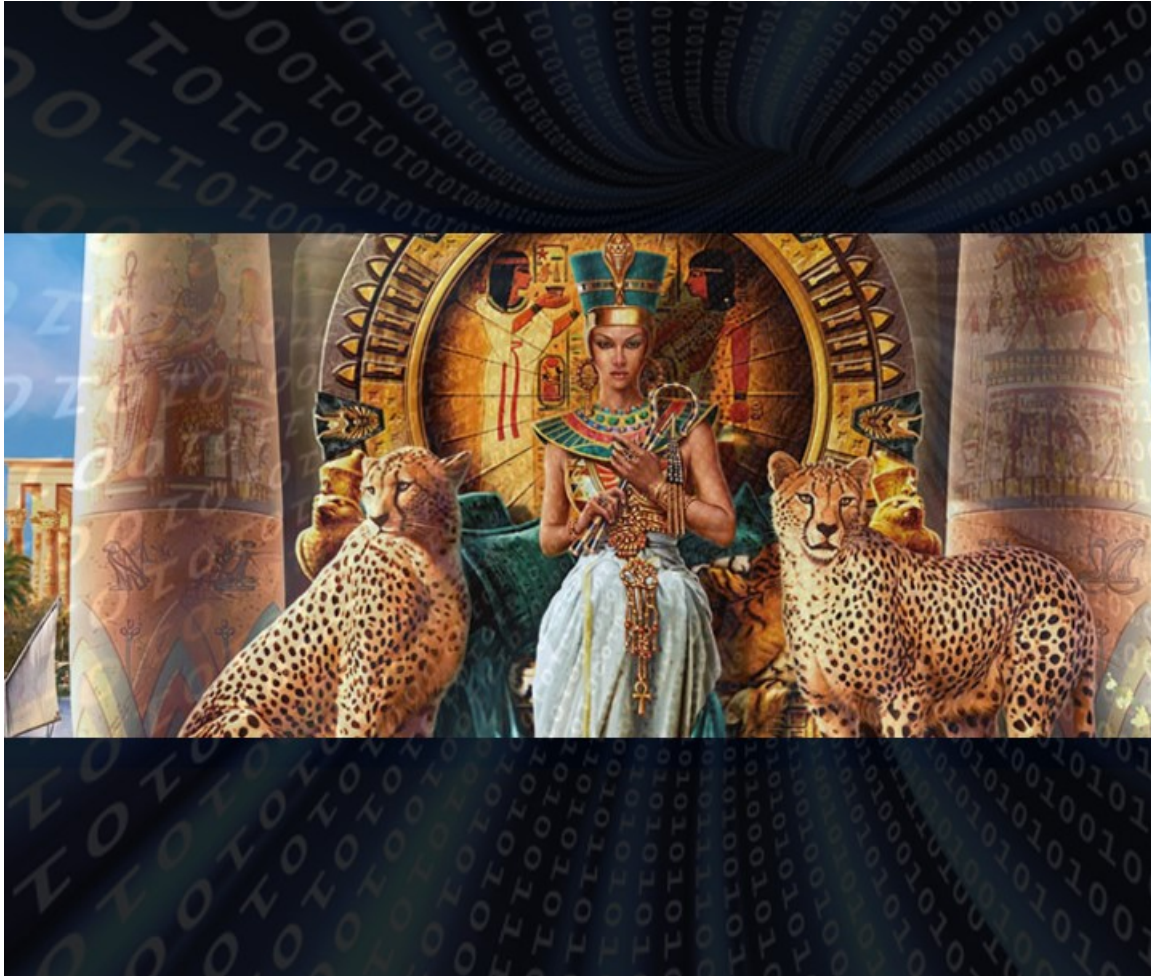
"Every game you've ever played is recorded and stored in your DNA, so occasionally people do remember portions of games they've played before... and I'm only telling you this because it can be a little confusing. Most people don't have a visual memory of past games, but sometimes they have feelings that come up that can't be explained."

Amelia had the feeling Äsha was trying to tell them something, but she couldn't begin to imagine what she was talking about. Despite that, Amelia decided to put logic aside and just play along, surely this was some kind of a made-up story typical of a ten year old.

"So just like with any game, I could decide to play anyone I choose and be *born* at any time in history," she said. "I mean, I could be Benjamin Franklin or Cleopatra but then so could countless other people, right? How would that work? We can't all be the same person?"

"Of course you can," said Äsha, her eyes sparkling. "Think of it this way – no matter how many times you play a computer game, you never play exactly the same way, right? So

every time you play it's a new and different experience. Or think of it like a dream. Millions of people could dream they were Cleopatra or Ben Franklin and every dream would be unique – people wouldn't be competing with each other to play the part.



“In the same way, each time you are *born* into The Game you create a new timeline. So there could be an infinite number of *parallel versions* of Cleopatra or Benjamin Franklin and each version creates its own unique history so to speak.

“Remember, EVERY possibility already exists. Every time someone plays they tap into a new *version of reality* that has never been played out before.”

“You’re talking about infinite parallel realities,” said Matthew, his scientific mind finally letting go of what was or was not possible. “But what about Amelia and I for instance – is there another *version* of us that went back to the campsite before dark or a version that died?”

“Yes of course,” said Äsha. “All possibilities already exist. You can’t think of anything or come up with a scenario that isn’t already part of the program.”

“So you’re saying that of all the fictional books that have ever been written or ever will be written – all the stories are actually true in some alternate or parallel reality – and the author just tapped into that reality when writing the book?” asked Matthew shaking his head doubtfully.

Äsha smiled and nodded her head yes, vigorously.

Over and over Amelia said to herself ‘*this is a possibility, you don’t have to believe any of it, it’s just a possibility,*’ but everything in her wanted to rebel.

CH2 - OPTION:1

[note: I don’t refer to JF or RI as “options” since they are chosen in the beginning]

STAY AND LEARN MORE

DEMAND TO BE RETURNED TO YOUR OWN DIMENSION

(GO TO CHAPTER 3)

“I know this should be mind-expanding and all,” said Amelia, sighing heavily, “but it’s just confusing. I mean, if it’s all programmed how does it work?”

“Prior to being *born*, you program your gifts into your DNA. These are gifts you’ve earned or developed in previous games,” said Äsha. “You also program your challenges and the people you want to *play* with during the course of your life. Some people will be your challengers and others will be your supporters, but usually you are playing with people you’ve played with before in previous games – or what you might think of as previous *lifetimes* – and that’s why you sometimes feel you already know someone you’ve just met, for better or worse! You program *everything* you want to experience... even a few *exit points* where you can *die* out of the game if it just gets to be too much.”

Amelia glanced at Matthew wondering if he had recognized her the way she had recognized him, but he was intently focused on Äsha and didn’t look in her direction.

“Another reason you may feel that you recognize or remember someone you’ve never met is because your *PFI*, personal frequency-ID, remains the same through every game, whether you are male or female, a child or an adult,” said Äsha matter-of-factly. So even though your conscious memory is wiped clean, much like reformatting a computer hard drive, all frequencies of every player remain unique, but you can only identify each other through an intuitive sense or feeling – there will be no logical reason for what you feel.”

“But without a computer where does the program exist?” asked Amelia thoughtfully.

“Your human body isn’t just your avatar, it’s a living bio-computer. The program runs very much like a binary code that turns on and off, but rather than a computer that’s plugged into electricity, your bio-computer is *plugged in* to your feelings,” said Äsha.

“But if this is a virtual reality and my body is my avatar then are you saying that I’m not real?” said Amelia reaching up to tap both of her shoulders with her fingertips.

“I’m saying,” said Äsha slowly, “that YOU are NOT your body. If you were your body, every time you cut your hair or trimmed your fingernails, a part of you would be lost.”

Deep in thought Matthew suddenly held up his hand like a guard at a cross-walk. “Wait! Wait a second,” he said firmly. “You’re right, none of this makes sense... and in a strange way it’s also the only thing that does make sense. But the idea that this is a virtual reality game is a little too perfect. It explains away every conceivable anomaly because anything and everything is possible.”

Äsha nodded. “Well, that’s how the truth works. In your world every scientific theory gives way to new theories. Theories you believe today will all change in time. Truth is simple and unchanging. Anything that *explains away every conceivable anomaly* is the nature of Truth.”

“I still don’t understand the part about your feelings and the binary code,” said Matthew, somewhat perplexed.

“Well it’s a little more complex than you might imagine because it’s an interactive program,” said Äsha, “but in the simplest terms think of it this way - instead of ones and zeros turning the computer on or off - your feelings are your navigation system. *On* corresponds with positive emotion. *Off* corresponds with what you might call negative emotion or fear. Think of it like the feeling of *yes* or *no* or the feeling that you are safe or unsafe.

“If you think back to your hike there was most likely a moment when you felt unsafe, a niggling feeling that you should head back, but you talked yourself out of it.”

Amelia knew immediately what Äsha meant as she thought back to the exact spot on the trail when she started feeling unsafe. It was just the smallest hint of a feeling and it didn’t make sense at the time. If she had been alone she might have acted on the feeling, but she didn’t want to say anything to Matthew since he was an experienced hiker and she was not.

“So you’re saying that when the binary code is switching on or off you feel safe or unsafe,” said Matthew deliberately. “And if you don’t act on that feeling of being unsafe it just gets stronger and stronger until you do something about it?”

“That’s it exactly!” said Äsha genuinely pleased. “But it can also happen over longer periods of time – days, weeks, even years – it just depends on how important it is for you to respond quickly and how long it takes for you to get the message and take action.

“Of course sometimes there’s no warning at all, not even a whisper. And when there’s no warning, no feeling that you’re unsafe, that’s because the event is an important part of what you have programmed for your lifetime experience.”

Amelia shook her head. How could any of this possibly be true? What was this child playing at? Äsha was so convincing, maybe she was a pathological liar.

“Even if this is all true,” said Amelia, fearful she was being deceived, but still trying to be polite, “there are a lot of people looking for us right now and we really don't have time to talk about this. We need to let someone know we're alright.”

Äsha was quiet.

Amelia looked at her skeptically and said, “That is, of course, unless we really are dead.”

“You're not dead,” said Äsha firmly, “you both programmed everything you're experiencing now before you were born. This is just an opportunity to learn how to navigate The Game at a more advanced level.”

“Well, I find it hard to believe that I would *program* myself to be here – wherever *here* is – and that I'd want to learn about some unbelievable game that no one else has ever heard of and no one would even believe rather than just going back to our friends,” said Amelia, shaking her head. “It just doesn't make sense.”

“It would make sense if you knew what was coming,” said Äsha knowingly.

“Well then tell us what's coming,” said Matthew pragmatically.

“That's not for me to say,” said Äsha quietly. “I'm only here to teach you how to navigate The Game more effectively. It's your choice whether you stay and learn, or go back to your own dimension.”

“You mean we can go back right now?” said Amelia hopefully. “And it doesn't matter that we supposedly programmed all of this?”

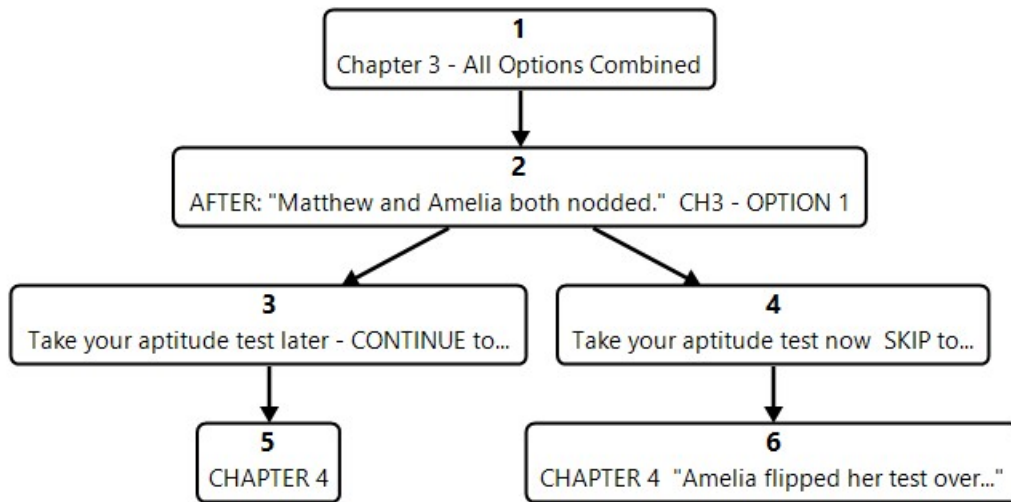
“You have free will, Amelia. No matter what you programmed prior to your birth, the prime directive of The Game is, *Thy will be done*,” said Äsha.

“Well then, it is my will to go back!” said Amelia with conviction.

“And so it is,” said Äsha softly.

Her body seemed to shimmer for a moment and then she disappeared.

Chapter 3



Created using the GameBook Authoring Tool
<http://www.crumblyheadgames.co.uk/the-gamebook-authoring-tool/>

Chapter 3

(ALL OPTIONS ARE COMBINED)

Instantly it was pitch dark and freezing cold again.

“Oh my God, what have I done?” said Amelia shaking and terrified.

“It’s okay,” said Matthew calmly. “Did you notice that Äsha led us down a trail that got us off of the plateau? We’re on level ground now. It will be slow going, but we can’t fall off a cliff, so we’ll make it. And even though it’s cold, my core temperature is warm now... is yours?” asked Matthew.

“Yes,” said Amelia, pulling her sweater tightly around herself.

“We’re really not that far away from our campsite, don’t worry,” said Matthew taking her hand. “Even if we don’t make it back before it’s light, at least this way we can keep moving. We’ll be alright... I promise.”

Matthew suddenly stopped and said, “Amelia, look!” He turned her slightly and she saw a bright white light appearing out of the darkness.

“Oh my God, it’s a helicopter!” said Amelia excitedly. “Is it your dad?”

“It must be,” said Matthew staring at the approaching lights.

“Do you think he’ll see us?” said Amelia breathlessly.

“Well, there are no trees nearby and my father knows how to do a sweep. We just have to stand here and wait,” said Matthew confidently.



As they stood patiently waiting the helicopter appeared brighter and sounded louder than Amelia would have expected, but then again she had never been rescued at night in the desert. Finally the light swept across them and a large helicopter landed on the flat, sandy ground about twenty feet from where they were standing. But instead of Matthew's father emerging, two soldiers jumped out of the doorway dressed in standard military flight suits and helmets with boom mics.

"Are you both okay?" yelled one soldier over the tumultuous sound of the chopper blades.

Matthew and Amelia nodded vigorously.

"Come with us!" he yelled.

Ducking down Matthew and Amelia ran with the two men and were both helped inside. They climbed in between two rows, four seats in each row facing one another. Amelia and Matthew sat facing forward with both soldiers directly facing them. One of the soldiers, a man in his fifties with a square jaw and intense, dark eyes, indicated that they should put on the headsets which were hanging above their heads on their seats.

"You're okay now," he said confidently as he nodded his head.

"How did you find us?" said Matthew, speaking through the attached microphone.

“We just kept looking,” he said.

The helicopter rose swiftly into the air and then spun around nearly 180 degrees and began flying in the opposite direction.

“Are you taking us back to our campsite?” asked Matthew apprehensively.

“No, we have other instructions,” said the soldier loudly.

“What do you mean... other instructions?” asked Matthew still somewhat concerned.

“We’re headed back to the hanger... that’s all I know.” Then with a slight smile he added, “We’re just the rescue team!”

Relieved, Matthew said, “Is this a Black Hawk?”

The soldier smiled and nodded. “Yep... it’s a UH60.”

Amelia looked at Matthew and he smiled at her.

“I know a bit about helicopters,” he said shrugging.

“I’d say so,” said Amelia returning his smile.

In silence they flew for half an hour or so, but Amelia wasn’t really sure about the time because there was nothing to see except the interior lights reflecting off of the windows. Finally the helicopter dropped straight down as if it was about to land, but instead, it seemed to be flying slightly above the ground. Amelia still couldn’t see anything, but she noticed the sound seemed to be echoing back to them as if there were walls on either side of them.

She wanted to ask Matthew if he knew what was going on, but she felt self-conscious knowing that the soldiers could hear her as well. A few minutes later her questions were answered when they landed. As she climbed out, Amelia saw that they had flown directly through a massive manmade tunnel and were now in an underground hangar surrounded by walls reaching up at least fifty feet high.

“This way,” said the dark-eyed soldier as he and a couple of others accompanied them to an electric humvee.

Amelia looked anxiously at Matthew.

“Where are you taking us?” said Matthew cautiously.

“I don’t know, kid, this is just a hangar,” said the man. “You’ll be taken to someone who will explain everything.”

He then held the humvee door open for Amelia. Cautiously, she climbed in and looked uncertainly over her shoulder as Matthew followed and sat next to her. A driver was waiting along with two armed soldiers in the seat behind them, all were dressed in black jumpsuits and wearing headsets with microphones. The moment the door closed there was a clicking sound as it locked automatically. Amelia had an uncomfortable, claustrophobic feeling knowing they were now locked inside with no way out.

The vehicle moved to the opposite end of the hangar and then sat silently idling in front of a pair of thick, wide metal doors spaced a few feet apart from each other. Hovering in

front of the doors was a bright yellow hologram that seemed almost like clear glass, displaying the word CAUTION in bold letters.

A moment later the yellow band of light disappeared as the doors raised slowly, revealing a deep, wide cavern enveloped in darkness. The vehicle plunged into the abyss, down a steep hill and past high rock walls. The exterior darkness only amplified the eerie sound of wheels droning against strangely smooth pavement and the air whooshing ominously by as the walls climbed higher on either side of them.

Amelia leaned against the window, stark, still and about to panic when she noticed the darkness above seemed to be changing. She couldn't quite make out what was happening but she saw ridges and strange shapes where it was smooth before. Points of light began to appear, multiplying by the moment, becoming brighter, as if they had just driven straight outdoors. She was astonished to realize she was seeing an azure sky filled with clouds overhead and the strange shapes were actually buildings at least four stories high.

The soldiers were communicating through their headsets, but Amelia couldn't make sense of what they were saying.

Leaning toward Matthew she whispered in his ear, "How is this possible? Where could we be?"

Matthew held her hand, shook his head and replied, "I have no idea, but we didn't fly for very long... we'd still have to be somewhere in the Utah desert."

"Could your dad have anything to do with this?" said Amelia nervously.

"No," said Matthew, "my father isn't involved with the military... at least not that I know of."

Needling points of anxiety pricked Amelia from within. As her body began to tremble she took long, deep breaths willing herself to stay calm. She wanted to talk to Matthew but the fact that the soldiers sitting behind her might overhear anything she said caused a feeling of panic to rise up from her chest and tighten around her throat, censoring anything she might say.

Uneasily she focused her attention outside of the vehicle as they traveled down a well-planned grid of wide streets that seemed to have been designed specifically for transporting large machinery and building materials. Suddenly the drab, grey buildings were bathed in what appeared to be real sunlight and she was stunned by the feeling of warm sunshine on her arm.

As they drove, weaving in and out through a quiet whirl of electric vehicles, Amelia was both frightened and fascinated. Without knowing why she tried to commit as much as possible to memory but soon everything was a jumble as they moved past large interior spaces, unbelievable in their size and complexity, and on into the center of the city.

They drove past a park where wildflowers dotted the grass with little bursts of color. Overcoming her fear, Amelia whispered to Matthew in astonishment, "Could this be a military base?"

Speechless, he could only shake his head.

Along the roadside trees swayed green and leafy with birds singing and flitting about in their branches. Rustic looking wooden foot-bridges spanned creeks and waterfalls. And then just as Amelia had decided there couldn't be anything more surprising than what she had already witnessed, they passed a wide opening where she saw a theatre towering thirty feet above a sports arena, as if the theatre was some type of strange giant peering over the top of the stadium intent on watching a game.

When they left the city everything seemed like an endless system of tunnels and security panels that flashed from red to green as they moved through computerized check-points displaying security cameras. Amelia couldn't fathom the size and scope of the facility, not to mention the fact that it had been built in secret.

They passed a freshly dug tunnel with a surface so smooth it appeared to be glazed. Inside the tunnel a boring machine moved at a snail's pace, like a huge, steel-encased worm with a team of 35 men sealed inside of its enormous belly. Next, they passed sealed tubes containing shuttles and passengers and a sign that read: "To Los Alamos: Connections: Area 51; Page, AZ; Creed, CO; Carlsbad, NM."

"Did you see that?" Amelia whispered as she glanced over her shoulder to see if the soldiers were listening - but as far as she could tell they weren't showing any interest.

"What?" said Matthew staring back at the signs.

"Those signs... are they military bases?" said Amelia puzzled.

"Not that I know of... except I have heard of Area 51," he said.

Matthew paused and then whispered into Amelia's ear, "Maybe they're secret underground bases."

"This can't be good," she whispered, shooting Matthew a fearful look as they drove along a large corridor covered with signs in universal symbols rather than words printed in plain English.

"I know," Matthew whispered tersely, "why would they need universal symbols rather than signs in English?"

A bright green light flashed above large elevator doors as they slowly opened. Their vehicle pulled inside and Amelia immediately noticed security cameras looming overhead. They descended two levels then their vehicle drove slowly down a passageway that stopped at a hospital entrance. Once inside they were quickly escorted down a large hallway that lead to a separate wing of the hospital and on into what appeared to be a common room. Amelia noticed several men and women sitting around the room in green scrubs as one of the soldiers walked up to the nurse's station and she pointed down the hall.

"This way," he said dogmatically as he led them to a conference room and opened the door. "Take a seat. Someone will be with you soon."

Matthew and Amelia walked hesitantly through the door and sat next to each other at a long, dark wooden table with matching, padded chairs.

Though they were alone Amelia whispered, "What are we doing here? This is obviously some kind of top secret facility, why would they bring us here?" Then grabbing

Matthew's arm she said, low and guarded, "I know this sounds like some kind of conspiracy theory... but what if they don't let us out?"

Before Matthew could answer a woman in her mid-thirties with dark, short-cropped hair and hazel eyes entered the room. Unlike most of the people in the facility she was wearing a business suit, a white shirt with a black jacket and pants rather than a military jumpsuit.

"My name is Trevor Tulney," she said briskly as she sat down across from them. "I'm a civilian, but I do live and work here. I'm sorry I wasn't able to meet with you sooner to explain what's been happening and why you're here."

"Last night at 22:00 a synchronized series of terrorist attacks took place. The immediate damage has been caused by nuclear weapons detonated on the San Andreas fault line in the San Francisco bay area, but two other areas were also targeted; Yellowstone National Park and a relatively unknown, but very vulnerable part of the Utah desert not too far from here," Trevor said bluntly without a hint of compassion.

Matthew and Amelia stared at each other in shocked disbelief as she continued.

"Your teacher and the students in your class were safely evacuated but by the time we found you two this facility was the closest and safest place we could bring you due to the threat of an imminent eruption. Just after your arrival this facility went into lockdown."

"I don't understand," said Matthew interrupting. "You're saying that terrorists targeted a national park and the desert? That makes no sense."

"Beneath Yellowstone Park and this desert are two active super-volcanoes," said Trevor with a hint of annoyance. "They're the result of magma in the mantle rising up from a hotspot and pooling beneath the crust unable to break through. Rather than having a single cone volcano, calderas exist below ground, like a cauldron, so you can't see it until it breaks through the surface of the land and erupts."

"We were able to detect and stop the attack on Yellowstone, but obviously, not the attack here," said Trevor.

"I've never heard of an active volcano in Utah," said Matthew looking at her skeptically.

"The Utah caldera has been dormant for over 600,000 years, but just like Yellowstone Park it's been an active hotspot for a while," said Trevor, the tone of her voice making it clear she didn't appreciate being questioned. "Until last night our geologists believed the Utah caldera wouldn't erupt anytime soon so no reports were published in an attempt to protect businesses that rely on tourism."

"However, after the underground detonations occurred we found asphalt melting for thirty miles along a road that runs directly across the caldera. Now, there's a chance that nothing will happen... that it will just remain a hotspot, but we need to wait until we're completely sure before we send you home."

"But we saw trains and signs for destinations that are far from here... couldn't we just take a train and get back home from there?" asked Matthew.

"Lockdown means no one goes in or out," said Trevor seeming much more like a hardened military officer reminding them about rules and regulations than the civilian she

claimed to be. “We can survive indefinitely in this facility, but we can’t handle the influx of the thousands of people who would want to take refuge here.”

“Does that mean our families are in danger?” said Amelia anxiously.

“At this time your families are fine. We’ll get word to them that you’re both here, and I’m sure they’ll be relieved to know that you’re in the safest facility in the world,” said Trevor in a failed attempt to lighten the heaviness in the room.

“But what if we could talk to someone in charge and convince them to let us leave... then could we go to another base?” said Amelia. “I mean, I saw a train leaving when we were coming here.”

“I’m sorry,” said Trevor in a tone that was slightly more human and less like an automaton, “it’s just protocol. There are no exceptions to the rule. The train you saw was just transporting people to other parts of this facility.”

“How big is this base?” asked Matthew.

“It’s big,” said Trevor, clearly unwilling to be more specific.

“Now, there’s no need to worry about anything just yet,” said Trevor with a strange intensity that belied her unspoken suggestion that they remain calm. “We can live here underground until the threat is fully assessed. In the meantime, we’ve already received an influx of personnel so I’m afraid this hospital psychiatric ward is the only place that can accommodate the two of you at the moment, but there’s no need to worry.”

“Don’t worry?” Matthew blurted out. “This place is massive! You’re telling us that the only two beds in this entire facility are in a psych ward? Seriously?”

“Due to current events and the massive influx of personnel... every bed has been taken and as you may well imagine,” she said shortly, looking directly at Matthew as if she was daring him to ask more questions, at his own peril, “your personal accommodations are not high priority at the moment.

“Our hospital beds are already filled with the sick or injured...” said Trevor in a tone that carried the underlying message they were lucky to have a place to stay at all. “No one in this ward has ever been violent. I promise you, everyone here is completely harmless, many are just here because there’s no one to care for them and this is all we have to offer.”

Trevor then continued on as if they were military recruits in boot camp rather than a couple of scared teenagers completely out of their element.

“You’re safe, but you’ll both be here for a while, so when we’re finished a nurse will give you a brief physical exam and then you’ll be given ID cards and scrubs. Tomorrow when we have your weight and measurements you’ll receive military issue clothing.

“You’ll each have your own room. You don’t have to worry about being in a psych ward at night,” she said, putting the word *psych* in finger quotations, “all doors are locked, but you have your own intercom and staff members who are always available in case of an emergency or if you need to go to the bathroom. Sleeping pills aren’t required, but if you have trouble sleeping you’ll be given non-prescription pills.

“In the meantime, both of you are now part of this community so you’ll take aptitude tests tomorrow morning. Then you’ll either be placed into job training, or you’ll be given further testing if it becomes clear that you have a specialized talent or ability.”

“Wait!” said Matthew impatiently, “you’re telling us that our country is in the midst of a massive, terrorist attack and you want us to take aptitude tests? Are you kidding?”

“Young man,” said Trevor flatly, “no one here is entitled enough to sit around watching events unfold on television - everyone is trained, everyone has a job and everyone works. And since neither of you showed up with a job application in hand... you are going to take aptitude tests so you can work. Now, have I been clear enough?”

Matthew and Amelia both nodded.

CH3 - OPTION:1

TAKE YOUR APTITUDE TEST LATER

TAKE YOUR APTITUDE TEST NOW

(SKIP TO

CH 4: “Amelia flipped her test over...”

Trevor’s beeper sounded and after checking her message she said, “I have to go now. When you exit this room turn left, you’ll see the common room on your right and the cafeteria at the far end of the hall. It’s only open for one hour at each meal so be there on time or you’ll miss out. In the common room all rules and regulations are posted and everything that applies to the patients applies to you as well.”

As she walked briskly toward the door she turned and added, “Wait here for the nurse. I’ll see you both tomorrow,” almost as if she was closing a business deal.

When the door closed behind Trevor Amelia said angrily, “I can’t believe how indifferent that woman is... she acted like this massive terrorist attack and potential super volcano was just another day at the office. I mean, thank God our families are okay... but still, doesn’t it seem weirdly calm here?”

“I know,” said Matthew confused, “you’d think everyone would be running around, freaking out, but no one seems upset.”

“So what do you think?” said Amelia breathlessly, “do you think there could be a super-volcano eruption right here in Utah?”

“The super-volcano doesn’t make sense,” said Matthew slowly, “I mean it’s a definite possibility in Yellowstone – there’s all kinds of evidence already... it’s just a matter of time. But I haven’t heard anything about an active caldera here in the desert.”

“Do you think it’s something the government would keep secret?” said Amelia, placing her hands on her knees, hoping Matthew wouldn’t notice her hands trembling.

Matthew took a deep breath and said, “Well, it’s possible. It wouldn’t be easy to see it coming until it’s too late.”

“How bad could it be?” said Amelia.



“A super-volcano is nothing like anything you’ve ever seen,” he said heavily. “The last eruption here in the Utah desert was 5,000 times larger than Mount St. Helens, and the lava covered 12,000 square miles and in some places it was 13,000 feet thick.”

“Do you think that could really happen again?” said Amelia anxiously.

“Well, you can’t rule it out,” said Matthew.

“How long do you think it will take before they decide that the volcano isn’t going to erupt? I mean, I know you couldn’t possibly know that for sure... but what do you think?” said Amelia hoping for even the smallest amount of good news.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Matthew, “my best guess is that if it hasn’t erupted, or gotten worse over the next two to three weeks, they’ll probably open things up and let us go home.”

Amelia nodded and smiled slightly. “Okay, I could live with that,” she said optimistically.

The door opened and a stocky male nurse in grey scrubs with freckles and curly, ginger hair appeared.

“Right this way,” he said as he held the door open for them.

As he ushered them to an adjoining hospital wing for their physical exams, Amelia said, “Excuse me, but is there any way we can contact our families? Or is there a way to get a message to them so they know we’re alright?”

He spoke politely and said, “I’m sorry, there’s no unofficial communication during lockdown, but I’m sure your parents have been notified.” Looking at her sympathetically he added, “I don’t make the rules. I know it seems unfair, but here we all have to live by them.”

Amelia and Matthew were shown into separate rooms for their exams. Their dirty clothes were taken and they were given green scrubs and security passes which they wore around their necks on long, black lanyards. The passes displayed their name, weight, and a specific barcode that allowed for different levels of security.

After her exam was complete, Amelia was sent to the common room where she sat anxiously waiting for Matthew. There were only a handful of patients present, most of them middle aged, but there was one man who immediately stood out. He was quite elderly, his hair was white and he shuffled around the room looking at the floor quietly muttering, “Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero.”

Amelia suddenly had a strange déjà vu feeling, but even that wasn’t quite it. It was more a feeling she couldn’t identify – familiar yet somehow the context was different. Then she noticed a woman sitting by herself at a table. Against all odds Amelia recognized her immediately when she saw the woman was wearing pink slippers. But even so she couldn’t remember how she knew her until Matthew entered the room and sat down next to her.

“Matthew,” Amelia whispered emphatically, “I dreamed this.” Then she stopped as she realized she had also dreamed that he was in a hospital bed unconscious.

“There are some things that still don’t make sense,” said Amelia taken aback, “but see that woman sitting over there by the television? I remember her.”

Matthew looked at the woman then back at Amelia and said, “How much of your dream do you remember?”

“Enough to tell you I don’t think I was dreaming. I think I was here,” she said, her mind racing.

“How’s that possible?” said Matthew earnestly. “Wait. Forget I said that. How would we explain anything that’s been happening to us?”

“I know! I feel like I’m in some kind of a weird reality show and there are hidden cameras and microphones all over the place.” Amelia suddenly stopped. “Oh shit!” she said as she flipped over her security pass looking for a small microphone, but nothing was there. “Oh my God, look at me, you’d think I *belonged* here.”

“It’s okay, Amelia...” said Matthew gently, “I think it’s safe to say we’re most likely in some level of shock.” Then looking at the woman again he whispered, “What do you remember about her – anything?”

“I know I sat with her at a table and talked to her. It’s weird... maybe it was a dream,” said Amelia confused.

“Well, somehow you must have been seeing the future,” said Matthew at a loss.

“But what does it mean?” said Amelia shaking her head.

A very masculine looking, young female nurse with short cropped blonde hair approached them and said, “Dinner will be served in just a few minutes. I’ll show you to your rooms and then we’ll go to the dining hall.” As they walked down the hall she added, “For your security, your bedrooms are locked at 22:00 hours and will automatically unlock at 06:30, breakfast is at 07:00. Everything you need is in your rooms – toothbrush, toothpaste, soap etc. You can sleep in your scrubs and you’ll receive fresh clothing tomorrow.”

“Amelia, your room is 102 and Matthew, yours is next to hers... 104,” she said, indicating their rooms with a wave of her hand as they passed by without stopping. “Showers are at the far end of the hall. Men and women alternate, so read the schedule to know when it’s your turn. Alright then, come this way for dinner,” she said in a businesslike, though not unkind manner.

Standing in line at the cafeteria Amelia whispered to Matthew, “This seems like a combination of our high school lunch room and what it’s probably like in prison.”

“Good thing the food’s labeled, otherwise you’d never know what you’re eating,” Matthew shot back under his breath as Amelia suppressed a laugh.

No one was particularly friendly. Women with hairnets and white uniforms served the most unappealing, overcooked food. There was nothing fresh, and nothing looked particularly edible, but Amelia wasn’t hungry nonetheless.

After being handed their trays of mystery food, Matthew and Amelia sat down at a table next to a wall and picked at their plates. Everyone in the cafeteria was fairly quiet and subdued except the old man who was still muttering, “Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero,” as he shuffled along with an attendant carrying his meal tray.

When the man reached Amelia’s table he stopped and glared at her. The attendant tried to grab his elbow and redirect him to another table, saying soothingly, “Come, come, Admiral Byrdie, someone is already sitting there, you can sit over here.”

The old man refused to budge and stared angrily down at Amelia, raising his voice as he said furiously, “Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero.”

Matthew moved toward the wall and Amelia scooted down the bench next to him and then said to the old man, “It’s okay, you can sit here. I’m sorry, I didn’t know this was your seat.”

With that Admiral Byrdie sat down and said sweetly, “Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero,” as if he was politely thanking her.

Amelia was filled with questions and suppositions to share with Matthew, but she felt self-conscious without knowing why. The old man was clearly harmless, and she really didn't have anything to say that would get her into trouble, at least that's what she hoped, but still she was more comfortable sitting quietly and just observing the others in the room.

During the course of the meal Amelia noticed that the old man needed help from time to time. He reminded her of her grandfather who'd had a stroke, and she found herself automatically helping him to reach his glass of water, or she would pick up a piece of silverware as it clattered to the floor, but she quickly learned to wipe it off with her napkin before giving it to him, otherwise he would insist on eating from the dirty silverware. Other than that he paid no more attention to Amelia than if she had been one of the attendants.

After dinner, *It's a Wonderful Life* was playing in the common room and seemed like a strange choice to Amelia given the recent traumatic events. But maybe no one in the ward knew what was happening. Sitting next to Matthew on a well-worn couch she watched the movie and quickly gathered that it must have been Admiral Byrdie's turn to choose as he took it all in with glowing eyes and in complete silence, as if he'd never seen it before and was trying to take in every word.

It was popcorn night but the old man paid no attention. He was glued to the screen, his lips mouthing the words of each and every character. Amelia brought him a bowl of popcorn and set it on the table next to him.

"This is for you if you want it," she said kindly.

To her surprise he looked into her eyes with perfect clarity and whispered so softly she had to bend down to hear him. "I'm not crazy," he said genuinely. "When you get inside go to the library."

"What do you mean inside? Inside where? What library?" Amelia whispered, confused and completely surprised that he suddenly seemed so lucid.

But the old man had already turned his attention back to the movie and was mouthing the words of one of the characters as if he had not said a word. Amelia quietly puzzled over what the old man had said to her. Was he just crazy, or was there something he was trying to tell her? Finally, she gave up trying to figure it out and focused upon the movie. This was a favorite Christmas film she watched each year with her parents, she always cried, but it was even worse this time because she didn't know if she would ever see them again.

When the movie ended Admiral Byrdie was once again muttering his favorite sequence as Amelia took his bowl, put it in the tub and then returned to him.

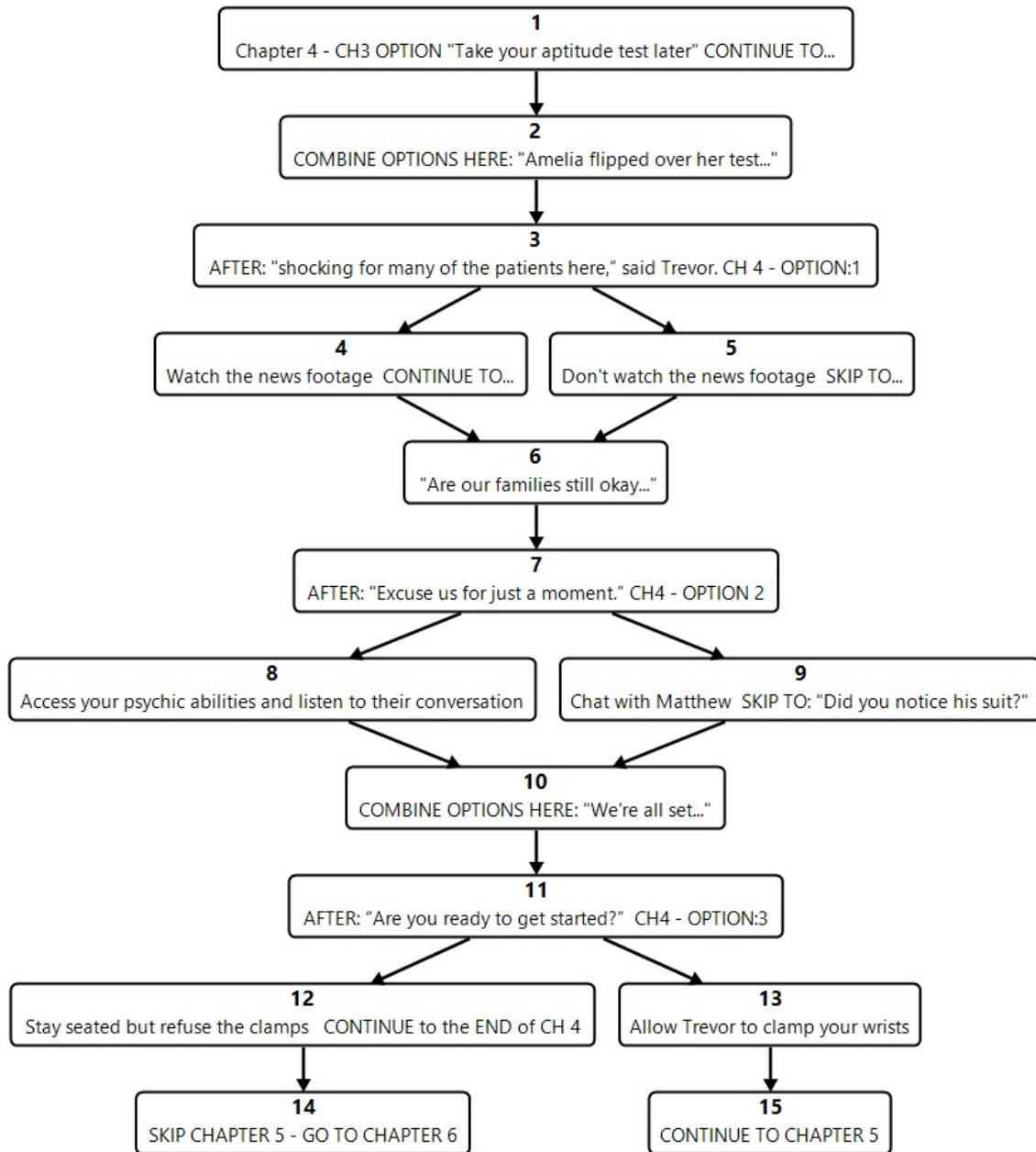
"Can I help you up?" she said, waiting for his permission.

He looked at her with perfect clarity and nodded. Once he was standing Amelia tried to release his arm, but he put his hand over her hand making it clear he wanted her to walk with him.

As they walked down the hall, Matthew on one side of her and Admiral Byrdie on the other, the old man dropped his head downward and said quietly so that only Amelia could

hear, “You’ll be going inside. You’ll know you’re there when you get there. You must go to the library or all will be lost.”

Chapter 4



Chapter 4

Just before Amelia arrived at her room a sudden wave of panic washed over her as she remembered the bedroom from her dream. Thankfully her room was nothing like the vision. It was white, simple and quite ordinary with sterile, linoleum floors. It could have been a small college dorm room, except for that it had no windows. The little room was less prison-like than she'd expected, but the bed frame was plastic and screwed into the floor just as she remembered from her dream. There was something mirror-like embedded into the wall, but there was no sign of either a toilet nor a sink, and this brought some relief knowing they'd have to let her out sooner or later.

At 10 p.m. the doors automatically clicked shut. She heard the lock sliding quietly into place and ending with a slight click as the overhead light faded into a soft nightlight. Amelia sat on her bed unable to sleep, her body exhausted but her mind racing. Finally, she got up and paced around the room thinking about everything the old man had said to her. Try as she might, she couldn't come to a single successful conclusion. Even when she thought about Āsha and the idea that all of this might actually be a virtual reality game, it still made no sense. Āsha said that feelings navigate the game, but what could she possibly feel that would change what was happening? The idea was crazy. Still, there was a part of her that wished she had stayed longer to listen to what Āsha had to say.

At last she flopped down on her bed, closed her eyes and in the silence of the still room suddenly became aware of every sound around her. Amelia could hear the footsteps of someone walking slowly up and down the hall, most likely one of the nurses or an attendant, perhaps, making their nightly rounds; briefly stopping to listen at each doorway.

Though Amelia shifted back and forth between dream state and reality, she never realized that she had fallen asleep until she suddenly woke to her room literally shaking beneath her. Jumping out of bed, convinced it was an earthquake, she pounded on the door to be let out. But no one came. No one was in the hall making rounds and she couldn't hear a sound. She rushed back to her bed and slid underneath it breathing heavily. Then she heard a voice.

"Amelia, is that you?" said Matthew quietly from the other side of the vent.

"Did you feel that?" she said anxiously.

"The earthquake?" said Matthew. "Yeah I couldn't get anyone to let me out so I got under my bed."

"Oh my God, so did I," said Amelia panicked. "I couldn't get out either."

Another tremor shook the floor, but it wasn't as severe this time.

"Matthew?"

"Yeah."

“Do you think it’s safe to talk here?”

“I think so. I doubt they have microphones under our beds,” said Matthew lightly. Then more seriously he added, “Is there some reason you’re afraid?”

“I just don’t know. I mean, everything Trevor said made sense... but why would they bring us here. We’re not special or important,” said Amelia puzzled.

“We are a bit *different* if you think about it,” said Matthew thoughtfully.

“What do you mean?” said Amelia as she reached for her pillow and tucked it under her head.

“Well, I’ve been thinking about this... and I agree, why would they bring us to a place that is so top secret there’s not even a rumor about something like this existing? And, like you, I was thinking that we’re just a couple of high school kids, why would the military even get involved in finding us? What makes us different?”

“I don’t know what makes us different” said Amelia trembling slightly.

“Don’t you think the timing is a bit odd?” said Matthew pensively. “I mean, we’re not really sure what happened to us. Did we die and come back to life? Were we really in another dimension? If so, where did we go... and how did we get there? And even more importantly... how did we get back?”

“But if they didn’t know we were lost, then how did they even know where to come look for us?” said Amelia.

“That’s my point... this place must be *beyond* top secret,” he said concerned.

“That’s what I was thinking too,” said Amelia uncomfortably, “the question of why they brought us here isn’t nearly as important as... why would they let us leave?”

“I know,” said Matthew, “that’s all I’ve been thinking about.”

“How do we even know they’re telling us the truth about the terrorist attacks,” said Amelia. “I never felt anything last night, did you?”

“No, I didn’t feel anything either,” said Matthew. “But it is possible, given the fact that the caldera could be over fifty miles in diameter that the detonations were too far away for us to feel.”

“Maybe,” said Amelia, “but I think if it’s real they’ll show some footage.”

“And if they don’t?” said Matthew.

“Well, I just won’t believe it until I see it,” said Amelia definitively.

“I’m with you,” said Matthew. “But even if we see the footage, there are still a lot of unanswered questions.”

“I know,” said Amelia, “and I think we need to be careful... especially with what we say to each other.”

“Yeah, I agree,” said Matthew.

“I wish we could stay and talk, but I don’t want anyone to get suspicious,” said Amelia.

“You’re right,” said Matthew, “how about we just meet here quickly if we ever have an emergency.”

“Okay,” said Amelia, “goodnight, Matthew.”

“Goodnight, Amelia,” Matthew said in his low, musical voice that made her want to throw her arms around him and kiss him.

Amelia climbed back into bed, but all she could think of was Matthew only a few inches away. And then quite suddenly Amelia found herself in a familiar dream. She saw the psychic woman with her cards spread out on a table, but it was as if she was trying to see her way through a dense, grey mist.

At last she fell into a deep sleep only to wake up moments later with the bedroom light shining painfully in her eyes. Blinking and feeling as if she’d been drugged, Amelia slowly sat up as she heard the door automatically unlock. She wanted nothing more than to stay in bed, but clearly, that wasn’t going to be an option.

Outside her bedroom door she found a duffel bag with army boots, a few t-shirts, a light jacket and cargo pants, among several other things. Amelia dressed quickly, but from the moment she walked out of the bedroom everything seemed surreal. Artificial lights, artificial people, and artificial food – nothing was real.

Matthew sat down next to her at breakfast and though they were both careful with their words he reached out and held her hand reassuringly for a few moments.

After breakfast, a nurse escorted them into the conference room. “Your tests have your names on them,” she said as she stood waiting for them to take their seats. Amelia sat down across from Matthew.

“You may begin,” said the nurse as she sat down.

CH3 - OPTION:1 – SKIP TO HERE

Amelia flipped her test over expecting to see a straightforward series of questions, but this test was like nothing she would ever have imagined.

The top of the test page read:

1. Your target’s identifier is: TABF.
2. Close your eyes, relax, breathe deeply, and empty your mind. Relax into the emptiness for a few moments. Imagine the window of your mind is black and continue holding this image.
3. Think of the target's identifier: TABF. Say the letters over to yourself. Empty your mind. Now write down any colors, shapes, temperatures, textures, movement, or other characteristics that come into your mind. Sketch what you see, do not try to identify it.
4. Close your eyes and quiet your mind again. Write down anything you sense or see beyond the physical description or image you have drawn.

Amelia looked up from her test to see how Matthew was reacting, but from what she could tell without staring or asking him directly, it appeared he was answering some very complex science or math questions.

At first Amelia was inclined to raise her hand and ask if she'd been given the wrong test, but then she wondered if that was part of the testing process – would she raise her hand or not? She decided to answer the questions and see how it all played out. She looked down at the test again. Your target's identifier is: TABF.

Amelia had no idea what that meant, so she took a deep breath and thought TABF, TABF, TABF while trying to keep her mind as blank as possible.

Immediately she saw an image of an icy, flat plane that dipped in at the center. Amelia was glad she had the option of drawing what came to mind because she didn't know how to describe what she was seeing. After drawing what she saw, she closed her eyes and waited to see if anything else would come to her.

Instantly she had the *feeling* of an ocean, but not an ocean with gentle waves on a sandy, tropical beach, which is what she would normally have imagined. Instead this feeling was of a desolate and frigid ocean filled with towering icebergs splitting off and collapsing into the sea. But then, just as if she had ascended to the top of a mountain peak and was now heading down the other side, the feeling shifted. The cold disappeared and she was surrounded by lush green grass and trees, something utterly impossible if she were actually viewing the North Pole or Antarctica.

Amelia remembered she was simply supposed to describe feelings and visual images. She hadn't been directed to make sense of what she saw so she wrote down her perceptions to the best of her ability and then waited for Matthew to complete his own task.

A few minutes after they had completed their tests, Trevor entered the room. She casually sat close to them and said, "Thank you for taking these tests, I know this may seem like we're rushing to get you both involved, but you'll find it far easier to adjust if you have something to do that will keep you busy. You'll have your results at dinner and your temporary job assignments will begin tomorrow. Ultimately you'll have the opportunity to try other jobs and you can also volunteer for research projects.

"Do either of you have any questions?" said Trevor.

"I do," said Matthew. "We haven't seen any news about what's happening."

"Well, that's because it would be too shocking for many of the patients here," said Trevor.

CH4 - OPTION: 1

WATCH THE NEWS FOOTAGE

DON'T WATCH THE NEWS FOOTAGE

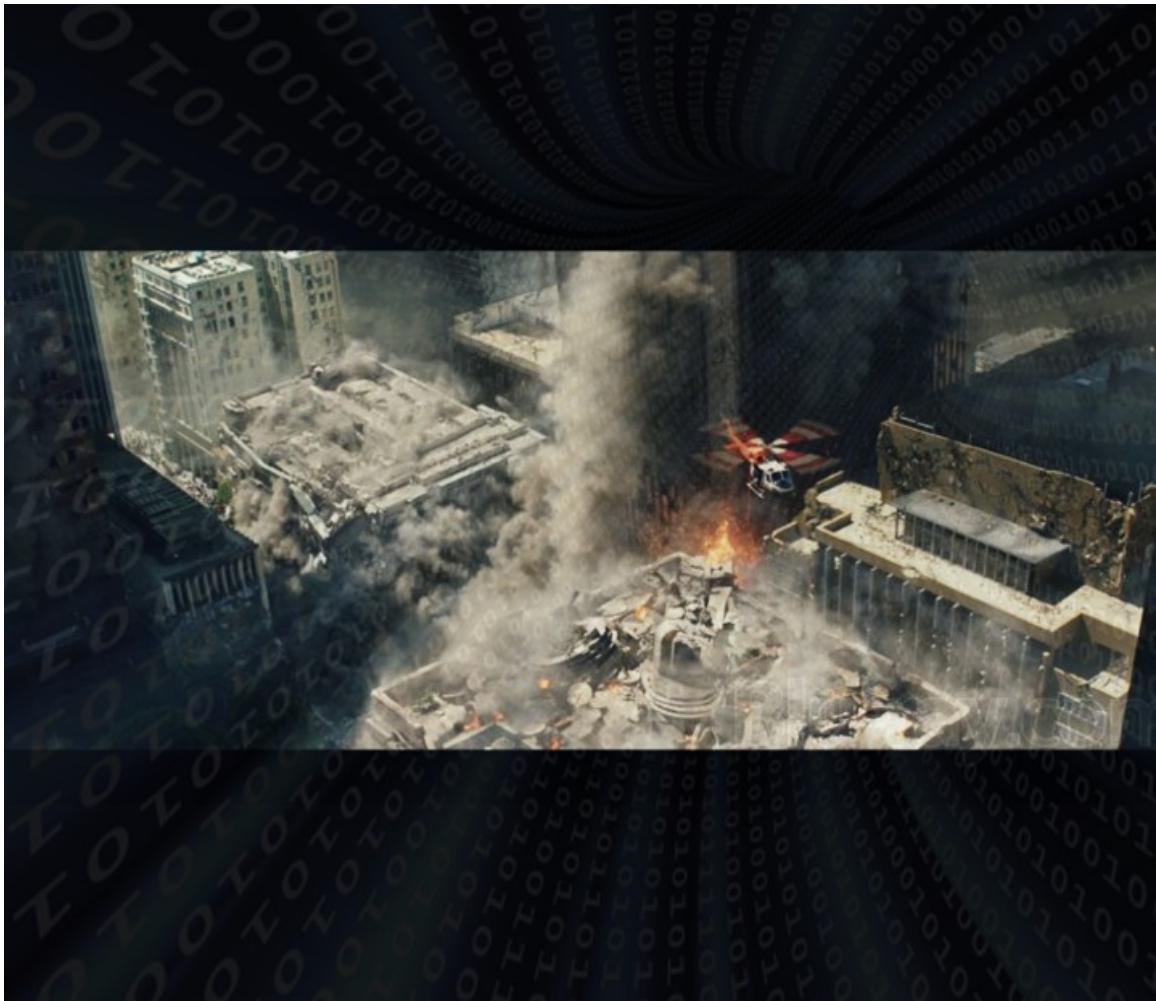
(SKIP TO "Are our families still okay...")

“But we’re not patients,” said Amelia, “and we’d like to see what’s going on.”

“Yes, of course,” said Trevor understandingly as she stood up and walked over to a large flat screen television on the wall. She grabbed a remote control and said, “I want to caution both of you that this might be very upsetting, are you sure you want to see it?”

They both nodded.

Trevor turned on the television and dimmed the lights as Matthew moved around the table and sat next to Amelia. A moment later a newscast flickered onto the screen. The images were horrific.



Some of the clips were filmed on personal, handheld cameras, some were filmed by news crews or from high above in a helicopter. What they saw was inconceivable. Mass hysteria was sweeping through San Francisco. No one could leave the city. Cars crashed into each other. The Golden Gate and other major bridges in the bay area dangled lifelessly above the water they were meant to traverse. Traffic was wedged together in city streets, gas pumps were empty, highways were totally blocked with people desperate

to leave as buildings exploded into flames in the background. There were clips of massive earthquakes tearing apart the San Andreas fault line, collapsing everything in its wake.

Fighting back tears, Amelia closed her eyes unable to take in anymore of what was on the screen. A deep aching in her throat and chest threatened to overwhelm her at any moment.

(OPTION – CH4:1)

“Are our families still okay?” said Amelia, feeling it was a bit selfish to even ask under the circumstances, but she needed to know.

Sympathetically, Trevor said, “This is all happening in California. As long as there’s not an eruption here in the desert your families should be fine.”

Amelia sighed in relief as Matthew moved closer and wrapped his arm around her. She buried her face in his chest and cried, barely able to breathe as the weight of all she had seen clutched at her throat like a noose around her neck.

“Why don’t you two spend the day doing whatever you want... I know this is a lot to take in,” said Trevor understandingly. “Rest up and get a good night’s sleep. I’ll meet you at the nurse’s station in the morning.”

Matthew nodded silently as Amelia sniffled, “Okay.”

After Trevor left Amelia looked up at Matthew teary-eyed and said, “I was totally wrong,” shaking her head. “It’s all happening... I saw the time-stamps and everything.”

“I know,” said Matthew helping her stand up and walk to the door.

As they walked down the hall Amelia mustered a weak smile and said, “I think I need to have a meltdown by myself... okay?”

“Of course,” said Matthew gently. “I’ll see you at lunch.”

“Okay,” she said ducking into her room and closing the door tightly.

Curling up on her bed Amelia cried herself to sleep. She slept through lunch and would have slept on through dinner, but a nurse gently woke her.

“Even if you’re not hungry, sweetheart, you’ll need to get your work assignment for tomorrow.”

Amelia nodded, sighed and struggled her way out of bed. She didn’t wash her face, brush her hair or even glance at a mirror, she just stumbled down the hall to the cafeteria feeling dazed and more lost than she ever thought possible. If everything Trevor had told them was true, what was next? What would become of them?

After dinner, an attendant handed Matthew and Amelia the results of their aptitude tests. Both results concluded with ‘*Further Testing: Level 4.*’

In a low voice Matthew said, “What do you think this means – *Further Testing*? What was your test like?”

“My test?” said Amelia. “It was strange... I was supposed to empty my mind and imagine something...”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know exactly, there were these letters – TABF. The test said the letters were the *target identifier* – whatever that means. I was supposed to think about the letters, empty my mind and see what came into my imagination. What about you? What was your test like?”

“Nothing like yours, that’s for sure,” said Matthew shaking his head. “Mine was just one sentence. It said, *Using quantum mechanics, proves that things are thoughts.*”

“Seriously?” said Amelia incredulously. “What did you write?”

“Lights out in fifteen minutes,” said a voice over an intercom.

“I’ll tell you later when we have more time,” said Matthew hastily standing up, “it’s the last chance for me to take a shower.” Amelia stood up, he gave her a hug and whispered, “If you need to talk, just climb under your bed, tap on the vent and we can talk.”

Amelia smiled and nodded, and as she watched him walk down the hall she felt eternally grateful that she had somehow managed, under the strangest of circumstances, to find a true friend. They barely knew each other and yet she felt comfortable with him, exactly as she had felt when she saw his eyes for the first time. It wasn’t some odd coincidence. No matter where they were or what was happening he made her feel better. Even through a wall vent, he was a great listener and he always had something intelligent to say, or he would quickly admit anything he didn’t know. And he laughed so easily Amelia couldn’t help but laugh with him, and somehow, even in this strange place she felt at home with him, as if nothing could go wrong as long as he was there.

Women only had use of the showers in the mornings so Amelia washed her face, brushed her teeth and went to bed. Every part of her was exhausted, yet somehow her mind just wouldn’t shut down. She tried jumping-jacks, pushups, sit-ups, and finally ended up just pacing around her room. When none of that worked she sat on her bed with her back up against the wall and tried deep breathing.

She wanted to talk to Matthew through the vent, but she didn’t have anything that actually qualified as an emergency. In truth she just wanted to hear his voice, but she didn’t want to bother him. Amelia knew a bit about meditation so she practiced focusing on her breath moving in and out of her body. Gradually she felt a bit calmer and then without trying she found herself somehow *floating* outside of her body and looking down at herself from the ceiling.

It felt so familiar, as if she had done this before, but that wasn’t possible. Yet she had a clear memory that she had once floated through the wall and out into the hall. The moment the thought occurred to her, Amelia found herself doing just that, floating down the hall and into the common room where she saw a woman sitting alone at one of the tables.

“Come, my dear, no one will hear us talking,” said the woman quietly.

Amelia looked at the nursing station, but no one seemed to notice their presence. “Are you outside of your body like me?” Amelia asked.

“Things are seldom what they seem,” said the woman. “The Devil is getting closer. In this you have no choice. He has NO MORE POWER than you. He cannot take your power, but you will give it to him willingly. In fact, you will insist on it.”

Bright lights awakened Amelia, but this time the dream was clear in her mind. She hurried to the cafeteria to try to talk to Itzel, but the woman didn’t show the slightest bit of recognition and seemed unwilling or unable to speak.

Disappointed, but not totally surprised, Amelia got in line for breakfast and found herself standing behind Admiral Byrdie as he struggled with his tray. The attendants were all busy with other patients so she carried his tray and helped him get coffee, cream no sugar and then set the tray down in his usual spot. Matthew was nowhere to be seen so she sat down next to him at the table and the old man mumbled the sequence that Amelia had now practically memorized.

Then quite unexpectedly he put a napkin over his mouth and said quietly, “There’s a place you’ll be safe, remember this... Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero. Testing. Testing. Don’t forget. News. No, no, no... not happening, not real, no, no, no. Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero. ... you’ll be safe... go to the library.”

He then looked around cautiously and underneath the table he handed Amelia something that felt like a rather bulky pocket watch.

“Don’t look now,” he whispered into his napkin. “Don’t let anyone know you have this. Watch out for cameras. Keep it with you always. Go to the library.”

Then he stood up leaving his coffee and uneaten breakfast and tottered away muttering, “Minus 74 point 85 16 16... Minus 102 point 59 zero 33 zero.”

Matthew never came to breakfast but showed up in the common room just as Trevor arrived. He and Amelia exchanged glances, but they didn’t speak as Trevor motioned to them from the doorway to join her.

“Your ID tags have been programmed to give you clearance for Level 4. However, you’ll always need to be accompanied by myself or someone else that I appoint. You’re both coming with me today. Right this way,” she added as she pulled open one of the swinging glass doors and then followed behind them.

Trevor ushered them to a small electric transport vehicle somewhat like the type of large golf cart used inside airports, one with no doors and enough seating for several people. As they whisked down the hallway, the object Admiral Byrdie had given Amelia was burning a hole in her pocket. She was sitting behind Trevor so she stuck her fingertips into her pocket and tried to figure out what he could possibly have given her.

It seemed to be the size and shape of a pocket watch, but much thicker, as if something was contained inside. As she felt the surface one side was smooth and the other seemed to have something inlaid around the outer edge and in the center, and also some type of engraving, but it wasn’t deep enough for her fingertips to get a sense of what it might look like.

All the while they were being automatically scanned as they zipped past checkpoints, quietly moving from hallways to stone passageways and finally onto a massive elevator.

At Level 4 they disembarked from their vehicle, their IDs were scanned and they were weighed, then they walked down a wide hallway lined with metallic double-doors. Trevor stopped at a large, highly polished wooden door, stepped out of the vehicle and knocked three times.

“Enter,” said a man’s voice.

Trevor opened the door and said succinctly, “They’re here.”

“Good, I’ll be right there.”

To Amelia’s surprise, a tall, elegantly dressed man in a tailored grey suit stepped through the door. He appeared to be in his late forties with short cropped, thick, ginger hair, light skin, full lips and striking green eyes. She thought he looked more like a model or an actor than a military man.

“Hello Matthew and Amelia, I’m Thomas,” he said informally. “Matthew, you’re coming with me, and Amelia you’ll go with Trevor.”

Then, Thomas turned to Trevor and said quietly, “Use the Montauk Chair for her test.”

Nodding toward Amelia and Matthew, Trevor said tersely, “Excuse us for just a moment.”

CH4 - OPTION:2

ACCESS YOUR PSYCHIC ABILITY AND LISTEN TO THEIR CONVERSATION

STAY WITH MATTHEW

(GO TO: “Did you notice his suit?”)

Then stepping aside with Thomas she said under her breath, “Sir, it’s impossible to know how she’ll respond to the chair,” her voice low and insistent, “you can’t put someone untrained in a device like that, there’s no way of knowing what could happen.”

Taking her arm and walking slowly away from Matthew and Amelia, as if it was nothing more than a stroll and an informal chat, Thomas said quietly, but firmly, “I want her in that chair. Tell her you’re testing her abilities in regard to remote viewing. Do not tell her anything about the history of the chair, just that she needs to focus only on your instructions.”

“But sir, you don’t know what she might do accidentally,” said Trevor with genuine concern.

“If you tell her what to think that’s what she’ll be thinking about,” said Thomas calmly. “She’s a teenager. She’s not calculating. She doesn’t have the mentality or the intent of those who’ve tried to destroy the chair in the past.”

“I understand that sir, but if she’s as psychic as you think she is,” she said glancing nervously at Amelia, “you don’t know what she’ll pick up on. There are parts of this chair that came from the original one. How do you know what she’ll see or feel?”

“Placing her focus on remote viewing is the safest way for us to find out. No more discussion. Just report the results,” said Thomas briskly as he turned in the opposite direction and proceeded to walk back.

Though Thomas and Trevor were walking toward Matthew and Amelia they were out of earshot so Amelia whispered to Matthew,

(OPTION 4:2)

(CUT THIS PORTION FOR AMELIA GOES OUT OF BODY –

SKIP TO “WE’RE ALL SET)

“Did you notice his suit?”

Matthew nodded, “My father has hand tailored suits like that from Italy. The shoes are Italian leather too.”

“What do you think it cost?” said Amelia.

“Everything altogether? Probably around fifteen thousand dollars... maybe more,” said Matthew.

“Doesn’t that seem odd for a man working in a military facility?” said Amelia, unable to overlook the disparity between Thomas’ clothing and the various uniforms worn by everyone else.

Matthew looked at her and nodded, but said nothing as Trevor and Thomas approached.

“We’re all set,” said Thomas amiably, “right this way, Matthew,” he added with a sweeping gesture.

“You’re with me,” Trevor said with a slight smile and a cordial nod in Amelia’s direction.

As they walked quietly down the hall Amelia puzzled over what was happening. Trevor’s voice had sounded a bit strained, as if she was unhappy about something but was still trying to appear as if nothing was wrong. That in itself wasn’t unusual, what bothered Amelia was the feeling that their argument had something to do with her and the test she was about to take.

Amelia tried not to worry as she followed Trevor into a laboratory with thirty foot ceilings, a glass observation booth containing high tech instruments, and what appeared to be a very intricate looking control panel. Outside of the booth in the center of the room was nothing but a large metallic, golden armchair with a square base and no legs sitting

flat on the floor. There were footrests for her feet and the seat, back and arms of the chair were padded except for a space where it seemed her hands were meant to rest.

“This is the Montauk Chair,” said Trevor, her voice a bit strained. “Have a seat.”

Unsure of what was about to happen Amelia’s heart beat in anxious anticipation as she tentatively sat down on the chair which turned out to be surprisingly comfortable and cool beneath her touch, its large arms reaching out in front of her.

“Is this chair painted with real gold?” asked Amelia trying to relieve her nervousness.

“No... the chair is made out of gold,” said Trevor. “Of course there are many other components, but everything you see is solid gold.”

An unidentifiable energy flowed through Amelia’s body causing her to feel a bit lightheaded.

Standing next to her, observing her reactions Trevor said, “At the end of the chair arms you’ll see indentations for your fingers. Your fingers need to be spread out slightly and held consistently in that position. For this reason I’m going to connect these clamps just above your wrists so you don’t accidentally move your arms.” Noticing Amelia’s discomfort she added, “Don’t worry, you won’t be trapped... this is for your protection.”

“My protection from what?” said Amelia, feeling frightened and confused while keeping her hands in her lap.

“You’re here because your test revealed that you have remote viewing capabilities,” said Trevor patiently. “We gave you four letters which corresponded to an image that you would not normally recognize or consciously understand. You described it more accurately than our trained viewers,” she said with a hint of admiration in her voice. “So we’re going to skip some of the initial training, and we’re just going to see if we can identify your capabilities.

“The chair will enhance those capabilities and information will come to me directly through your contact with the chair.”

“I don’t understand,” said Amelia, still feeling a bit apprehensive, “how does it work?”

“Well... if you were an aerospace engineer with a background in cognitive neuroscience I could just barely scratch the surface on how the chair works,” said Trevor with a smile. “But what I can tell you is that the chair is experiential. So even though you won’t understand how it works... you’ll have your own experience and then we can talk about it if you have any questions,” she said lightly. “Are you ready to get started?”

CH4 - OPTION:3

STAY SEATED BUT REFUSE THE CLAMPS

(CONTINUE TO THE END OF CHAPTER 4 THEN
SKIP CHAPTER 5 AND GO TO THE BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 6)

ALLOW TREVOR TO CLAMP YOUR WRISTS

Amelia nodded. She was still a bit anxious, but now she was also intrigued about what kind of experience she would have.

CUT

As she pressed a button the clamps automatically connected securely just above Amelia's wrists.

"I'm going to ask you to focus on three different scenarios; one now, one later today, and one tomorrow morning," said Trevor. "But unlike your first test, this will be experiential. It won't appear to be in your imagination in fact it may feel quite real to you. You may feel as if you've actually moved through time and space and it's most likely you'll feel as if you're physically present in each separate scenario.

"If none of that happens, don't worry. I just don't want you to be frightened if you find yourself *someplace else*," said Trevor in finger-quotes. "You'll still be sitting right here, but the technology embedded in this chair will cause you to think differently.

"Now... because we want to see your capabilities, I'm not going to give you any training or explain very much about each scenario. I'll give you only what you absolutely need to know and you must use your own intuition to guide you through the rest. One thing I can tell you is that we want you to report exactly what you see. Don't try to understand what you're seeing because much of it won't make sense.

"Are you feeling relaxed and ready to go?" said Trevor encouragingly.

Amelia shrugged and nodded slightly.

"All right. This test is to find out whether or not you have remote viewing capabilities beyond what you showed us in your first test. As I said, the chair will amplify your abilities and you may actually feel as if you are physically in another place. So don't be frightened. No matter where you seem to be or how real everything appears, you will be unseen and untouchable. Also time will be different. You may feel that you are in a scenario for quite some time, but just like a dream, you'll only be gone for a short period of time. Do you understand?"

Amelia nodded.

"The program will bring you back automatically, but if something goes wrong simply think or say, *Go Back* and you'll find yourself here in the chair." With a nod of encouragement she said, "Okay, I'll be in the booth."

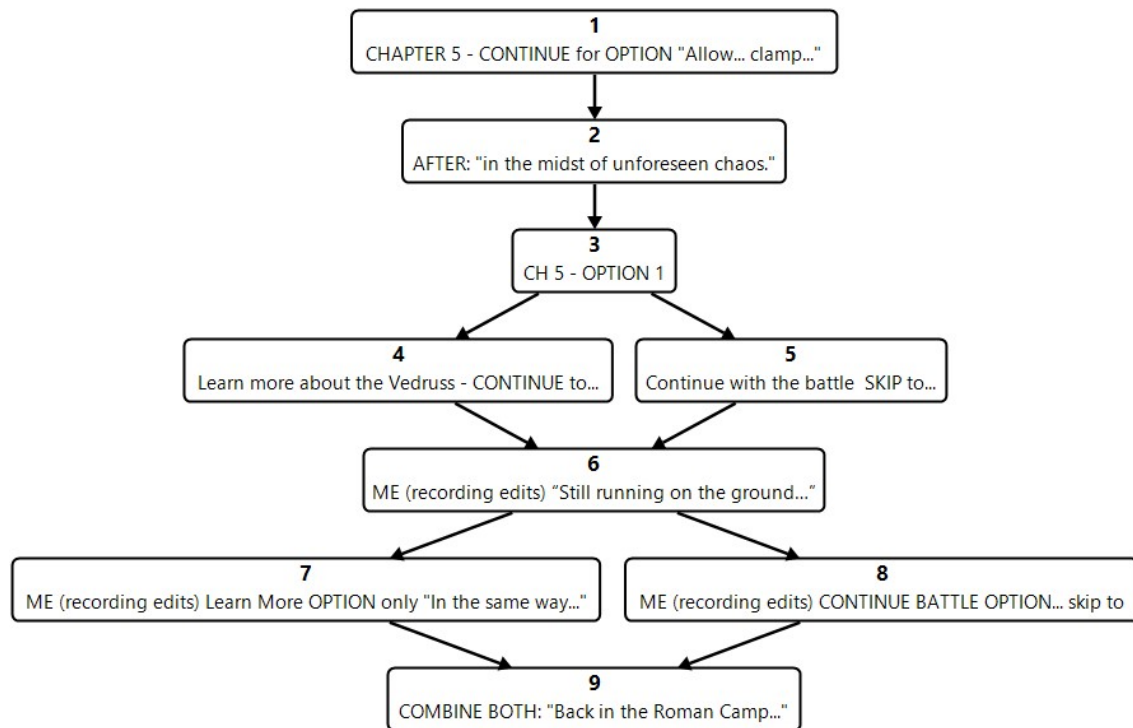
Trevor closed the door, sat down in a chair in front of a panel of lights and then the lights around Amelia dimmed and something about the glass seemed to change because Amelia could no longer see into the booth. At first she felt uncomfortable sitting in the dark, but

gradually her eyes adjusted and she realized there was a dim, golden glow emanating from the Montauk Chair.



Amelia thought nothing was happening, but then she saw a slight golden shimmer in the air, and in the next moment it was as if room had been swallowed in darkness and her body was no longer seated in the chair.

Chapter 5



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<http://www.crumblyheadgames.co.uk/the-gamebook-authoring-tool/>

Chapter 5

Instantly, Amelia became aware of the scent of pine and though she had never smelled this particular fragrance in her current lifetime – she knew she was in a Siberian cedar forest. Her eyes slowly opened to a steel-grey sky marked with the waning light of last night's stars like softly glowing pin-pricks in a domed carnival tent.

Cotton-candy clouds, pink in the reflected light of the predawn sun, infused the forest glade with a tender glow. Amelia was lying on a soft, fragrant cushion of pine needles,

beneath massive ancient trees that towered over her, but she wasn't alone. All around her young men were sleeping in this woodland world wrapped in capes to ward off the crisp night air.

As she reached up to push her hair away from her eyes she realized her hair was cropped short and she knew she was a woman pretending to be a man. Amelia realized she wasn't just seeing all of this remotely, she was actually there seeing the world through the eyes of her previous avatar, Sasha. Amelia was amazed by the strength and energy in her avatar-body and how alert and quick her mind felt.

As Sasha, Amelia found herself experiencing everything from emotions to physical sensations exactly as it was playing out for Sasha. And though Amelia was aware of everything happening, she wasn't emotionally involved, it was more like being a silent observer watching events as they occurred.

Sasha heard a whistle. It sounded like the early morning trill of a songbird, but all the men instantly and silently leapt to their feet. In moments horses appeared and stood patiently in front of their riders. Sasha scrambled to her feet as her horse, a sturdy buckskin with a long, black mane and tail appeared before her bobbing its head up and down while eyeing an apple on the ground.

Two swords lay on the ground next to her. Sasha placed the swords in the belt around her waist, one sword on each hip, then held out the apple for her horse. The horse dropped its head to take the apple from her hand and in one fluid motion she swung her leg over the horse's neck – and as it raised its head Sasha slid effortlessly onto its back.

Riding bareback the men and Sasha left the campsite without a word. The majority of the men were in their twenties but a few were in their teens so her lack of facial hair wasn't noticeable. All of the men knew Sasha was a woman and respected her, she was simply hiding this fact because she didn't want to stand out in battle.

For generations the Vedruss had lived in peace, but war had been thrust upon them. Less than a hundred men had spent the night on the outskirts of a small village and though the sun had not yet risen children ran out to greet them with wreaths woven from a variety of fresh herbs.

A little girl running alongside Sasha reached up to hand her a wreath. Sasha smiled warmly and thanked the girl as she slipped the wreath over her forehead in the same fashion as the rest of the soldiers.

A few minutes after leaving the village they came to the edge of a flat rock plateau. Below was a broad expanse with a river running languidly through it. A gentle breeze sprang up out of nowhere blowing the softening night sky into a softer blue. The pink clouds had turned into vanilla cream and hovered high in the firmament reflecting the golden tones of the morning sun shimmering at the edge of the horizon. This time of year the meadows were speckled with colorful fragrant wildflowers, but instead of the wind-swept scent of grass and flowers a sickening burnt odor overwhelmed Sasha's senses.

The soldiers all dismounted and crept to the edge of the precipice then lay on their stomachs to observe the view below. Horror seized Sasha and took her breath away. A deep unimaginable sorrow overwhelmed her as she looked down at a small village

freshly torched to the ground with smoke spiraling from ashen heaps that had once been homes and gardens.

Just beyond the wreckage extending as far as the eye could see the landscape was dotted, not with wildflowers, but with tents and battle equipment crushing the delicate beauty of the once pristine land.

Over a thousand horses were in the cavalry and hundreds more were there for pulling the heavy equipment. Campfires were burning and thousands of soldiers were milling about, but they didn't seem to be preparing for battle.

The Vedruss people had no cities, but they had a vast number of settlements that extended throughout what is now known as Russia. Mystical accounts of a lost civilization, a Shangri-la of sorts, referring to the Vedruss' remarkable health and longevity and the extraordinary flavor, size and color of their produce had gained the ear of the Caesar himself.

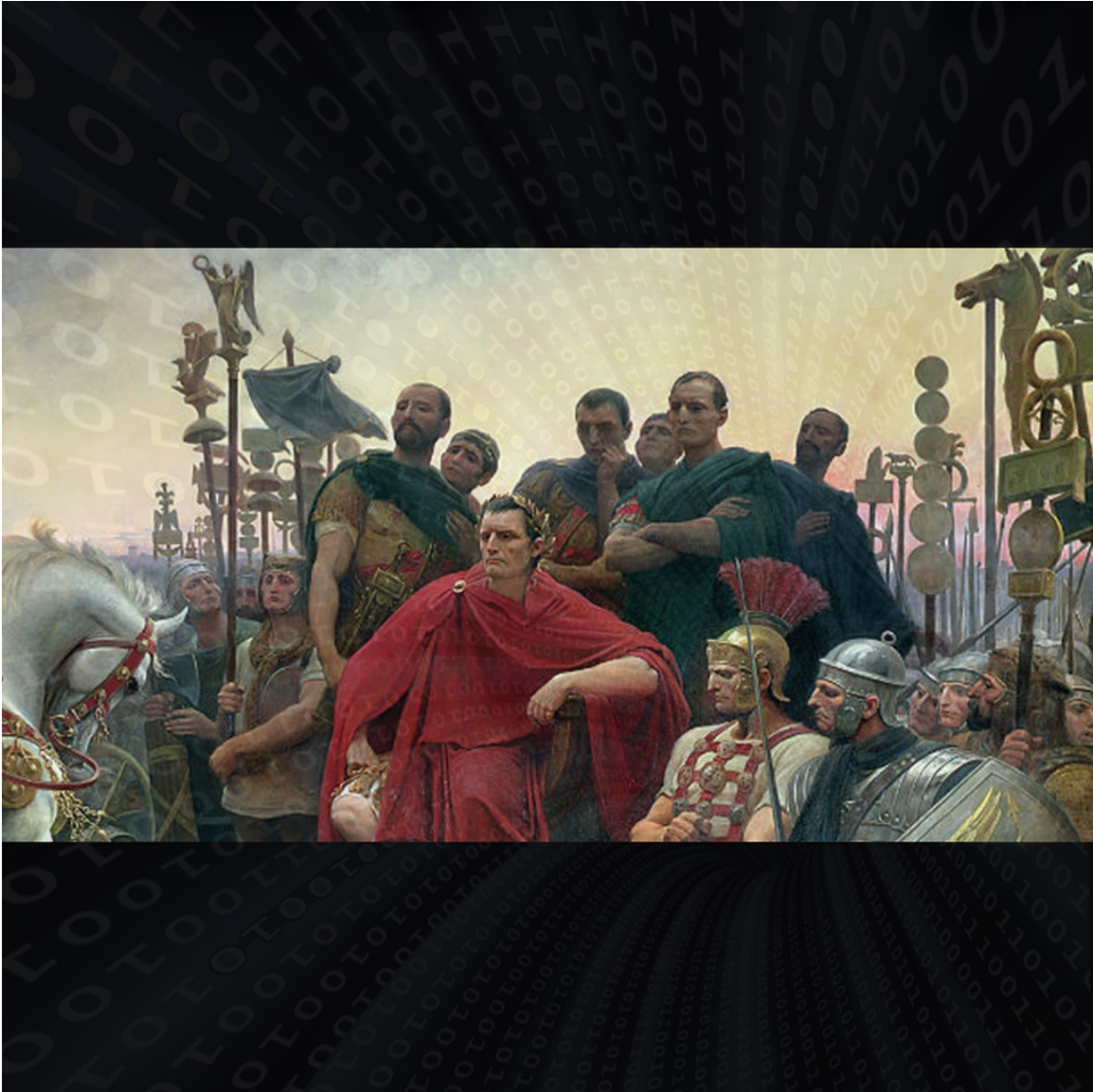
Hoping to avail himself of this acclaimed fountain of youth and expand his empire in the process, Caesar sent an elite Roman legion of five thousand highly trained warriors to Russia. They set up their camp a mere stone's throw from the first small settlement they came to.

A homing pigeon had delivered the news to Sasha's village -- the Imperial Roman Army had burned down the nearby settlement. The village elder had been locked in a cage and the villagers had been shackled as slaves for their fearless refusal to feed the dark forces of Rome with food from their gardens. Shortly thereafter Roman military runners arrived with a message stating that each village was to send representatives to pay tribute to the most powerful country of all. Those unable to pay would be taken into slavery or die.

On the appointed day when all the elders were expected to gather at the camp the last thing the commander-in-chief expected was ninety young men, including Sasha in disguise, walking into camp at dawn leading their horses. Though they had no armor, helmets or shields it was obvious from the swords at their sides that these men were prepared to fight.

The young warriors all stood quietly in front of a large carpeted podium adorned with red silk fabric trimmed in gold. On the dais stood a throne and a massive metal cage where Rasa, the Vedruss elder, was imprisoned like a giant bird with nothing more than a bowl of water.

Duty-bound, the commander, well dressed but completely disheveled with his black hair at odds with his head, climbed the steps and wearily flopped on the throne with a cluster of red grapes in his hand.



One foot was propped on the velvet cushioned pedestal while his other sprawled out as one who had indulged his senses excessively the night before and had no business seeing the sun prior to noon. With a yawn and a loud belch he surveyed the men apathetically.

Much like a fat cat toying with a mouse the commander tossed grape after grape at Rasa through the bars of the cage while indulging in his egocentric discourse. “Rasa, I’ve ordered the elders of your settlements to pay tribute and hear the decrees of our Emperor. Where are they? And why are these lads here?” he added throwing another grape through bars. “Stand up when I speak to you!” he commanded.

White haired Rasa appeared to be no more than forty, but in fact he was well over one-hundred years old. When he stood up in his cage, he was impressively tall, even amidst the elite warriors standing on the platform. Though pitifully thin, he was nothing like a

man starved and mentally beaten into submission: Rasa's blue eyes were blazing and his passion was palpable.

With calm certainty belying the apparent hopelessness of his situation Rasa responded in a surprisingly relaxed manner as if he already knew the outcome. "The elders know what you want. They don't like you and they've decided not to meet someone they don't like. You are here to do battle. These lads look ready to fight." Then looking directly at the young men he added, "Is that so?" The young man leading the group gravely nodded in agreement.

"This is absurd!" bellowed the commander – thinking of what a waste it would be to end up with a bunch of dead bodies instead of slaves for the emperor. "Old man, these lads will listen to you, tell them to surrender now and I'll spare their lives. They will become slaves, but at least they won't die senselessly."

Rasa addressed the men. "As you know, these forces are unequal to your own."

The commander relaxed a bit in the knowledge that Rasa would talk some sense into these impetuous young men and whispered to a guard to prepare for the prisoners.

The elder continued, "My sons, your thoughts move swiftly – I ask that you spare the lives of these men. Do not kill them all. Teach them to put down their weapons and forever turn away from the games of war."

Exasperated, the commander barked, "You have just ordered the death of all these men! I'll give the orders now!"

"It's too late. They understand what I've asked... and they won't kill you."

Before the commander could respond the young warriors leapt onto their horses and galloped at full speed toward the main camp. The commander ordered a detachment of archers to shoot and though they were ill prepared for the moment they finally dispatched a round of arrows. But just as the arrows came within range the warriors jumped off of their horses and ran beside them as the arrows shot past, a hissing blur just above their heads.

As soon as they got close to the Roman troops the Vedruss soldiers split into two groups. One group circled around the troops that had gathered together and the other group, which Sasha was in, began cutting through the troops that were still hastily trying to come together in the midst of unforeseen chaos.

CH 5 - OPTION: 1

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE VEDRUSS

CONTINUE WITH THE BATTLE - SKIP to...

("Still running on the ground...")

From childhood all Vedruss children played games and created artwork with both hands. They were not only equally adept on both sides of their bodies, but this also developed both hemispheres of the brain equally causing their minds to be lightning fast. There was nothing considered more important in the world of the Vedruss than the ability to

accelerate their thinking. They knew that no opponent, no matter how powerful, could outmaneuver one who could think more quickly.

Unlike their Roman counterparts who used ten percent of their mental capacity at best, the Vedruss accessed one hundred percent of their intellectual abilities. In so doing they could send and receive information telepathically: This was as natural to them as it would be for someone to speak their own native language.

To understand the speed of the Vedruss thought imagine a bullet coming toward you. To a slow moving mind the bullet moves with invisible speed. But if your mind moves more quickly than a bullet then from your perspective the bullet would appear to be in slow motion. This is why people often describe an accident as happening in slow motion – their mind has departed the confines of the body and is observing the event from an unencumbered mental perspective; hence, the appearance of the event taking place slowly.

BOTH OPTIONS

Still running on the ground with a sword in each hand and without armor to slow her down, Sasha was able to disarm or wound her opponents without so much as a scratch on her body. Yet she wasn't a trained warrior. None of them were. But as children they grew up playing sword games followed by the more complex versions they played as adults where they relied on telepathy to outmaneuver their opponents.

While the Romans were hearing words, *your thoughts move swiftly... I ask that you spare the lives of these men*, the Vedruss elder was simultaneously projecting mental images which were seen clearly by all the young warriors. For the warriors it was much like viewing a mind-movie and being shown exactly how the entire battle would play out. Every Vedruss warrior saw himself and the other soldiers in this mental movie and instantly knew exactly what to do.

Even before she began fighting Sasha knew they didn't need to kill anyone. The images in her mind sent by the elder showed disarmed and wounded troops littering the battlefield and subsequently stopping the reserve soldiers from making any headway or taking over for the original troops.

In her mind's eye Sasha saw her group cutting its way back to the tent of the commander-in-chief and taking him hostage. This was exactly what they did. They put a gunnysack over the commander's head, tied it at his waist and threw him over the rump of a horse. In the meantime Sasha released Rasa the elder from his cage and gave him a horse.

Communicating to his troops through mental imagery, the young commander of the Vedruss showed his warriors how they would get the commander out of the camp. Following the projected images they created a protective oval with the commander-in-chief at the center. But rather than return the way they had come they pushed forward until they'd passed through the throng of soldiers. Sasha paid no attention to the fact that she was surrounded by seasoned soldiers twice her size. She focused on each one as if she was playing a game.

ONLY FOR “LEARN MORE” OPTION

In the same way that modern day children and adults play baseball or soccer, Vedruss children and adults played a game with a sword in each hand. The sword tips were dipped in vegetable dye and the point of the game was to tag your opponents with the dye without harming them. The highest points were awarded not for tagging spots that were fatal, such as the heart or throat, but places that were the most difficult to access, such as fingertips or toes. As children they learned to play one-on-one, but as adults they played all at once – sometimes one against many and sometimes in teams.

Having practiced this game her entire life Sasha’s mental focus caused her to be flawlessly accurate and utterly unafraid. From the point of view of an observer it would appear that all of the Vedruss had eyes in the back of their heads, but in fact they knew how to go out of body while fighting.

Imagine sitting in a class and listening to a teacher while daydreaming at the same time – it’s like being two places at once. In a similar way the Vedruss were fighting while *daydreaming* that they were high above the battleground observing everything that was happening – except in their case they were seeing exactly what was occurring. And they were capable of seeing what was coming as if it was a battle scene playing out in slow motion.

Each one also held the mental image of themselves and all the other Vedruss warriors safely on the other side of the battlefield galloping away. Exactly as they’d envisioned it they all jumped on their horses and galloped to the top of a nearby hill. All of the young warriors, except two watchmen then jumped off their horses and lay in the grass with their arms outstretched falling immediately asleep while their horses grazed nearby.

This may seem like something that could never happen in real life – because most people rarely experience anything in the way they pictured it in their minds – but in fact, this is part of Russian history that has been maintained in such strict secrecy that there are only a handful of people alive who know this is true. The Vedruss practiced a form of white magic that disappeared from the Earth thousands of years ago.

True white magic is harmless – this form of magic cannot be tainted or used selfishly, it simply won’t work unless the intention of those performing the magic is for the highest good of all. This is why Rasa the elder said, *‘I ask that you spare the lives of these men. Teach them to put down their weapons and forever turn away from the games of war.’*

By asking all of the Vedruss warriors to intend the highest good for all, knowing that the Roman soldiers were simply doing their job and following orders, Rasa was activating ancient white magic, which allowed the direct transmission of assistance from the unseen realms.

But the battle wasn’t over yet.

BOTH OPTIONS COMBINED

Back in the Roman camp the officers were blaming each other for the colossal fiasco that now ensued. Without their commander-in-chief they argued about who should take

charge and what should be done next. At long last after much arguing and deliberation it was decided they would send the majority of their cavalry – nearly a thousand troops – after the Vedruss with a few hundred in reserve following at a distance.

The moment the troops began leaving the camp a Vedruss watchman blew his horn waking the men and Sasha. Now well rested, thanks to the time wasted with all the internal chaos at the Roman camp, they immediately jumped up and began running alongside their horses.

It took some time, but the cavalry gradually began to catch up. When the Romans were nearly upon the Vedruss they sounded their battle horn. The Roman soldiers whipped and spurred their horses—already frothing at the mouth from the strain of the riders and all the armor being carried—into a full gallop. But at the same moment the Vedruss stopped running, jumped on their horses and galloped easily ahead.

The Roman soldiers, fully ignited by their close proximity to the Vedruss, kept whipping their horses onward trying to close the ever expanding gap between them. Finally they slowed down as their commander realized there was now an impossible distance between them.

The Vedruss stopped and gave the Roman commander and Rasa fresh horses. Once again they dismounted and rested while the horses grazed. During this time the Roman cavalry pressed on without a break or water for their horses. At last the Romans spotted the Vedruss not too far ahead. Again their battle horn blasted and the cavalry whipped their horses into a gallop.

Springing into action the Vedruss ran alongside their horses, only jumping on to gallop away when the Romans were a little more than an arrow's shot behind them.

At this point the frothing cavalry horses, beaten to exhaustion, began falling to their knees; some horses fell over dead, pinning their riders underneath them.

At last, the Roman cavalry commander called, *All Rest!*

But it was too late. Horses were lying all over the field, and those that had not succumbed to fatigue were shaking from the energy expended.

The Vedruss warriors suddenly spun around and bore down on the fatigued cavalry. The Roman soldiers had no horses and though they tried to retreat back to the reserve cavalry it was hopeless. Many fell to the ground in exhaustion after a vain attempt to run in their armor. The few that were able to fight were wounded or disarmed by the Vedruss, but the Vedruss didn't touch the soldiers who had fallen.

Finally, seeing all the Vedruss fresh and well rested with a sword in each hand, the Roman cavalry dropped to their knees, placed their swords on the ground in front of them and surrendered.

The Romans anticipated the wrath of the Vedruss, but instead the Vedruss dismounted, removed the wreaths from their heads and applied the grass and herbs to stop the blood flow from the wounded soldiers. Attending to their wounds the Vedruss spoke to the Roman soldiers about a way of life in harmony with man and nature, and without war.

On the battlefield, the commander-in-chief was safely returned to his regiment.

At the same time, Sasha was applying some of the herbs from her wreath to stop the blood flow from a gash on a young Roman soldier's head. Without a word he looked at her as she spoke soothingly to him and dressed his wounds.

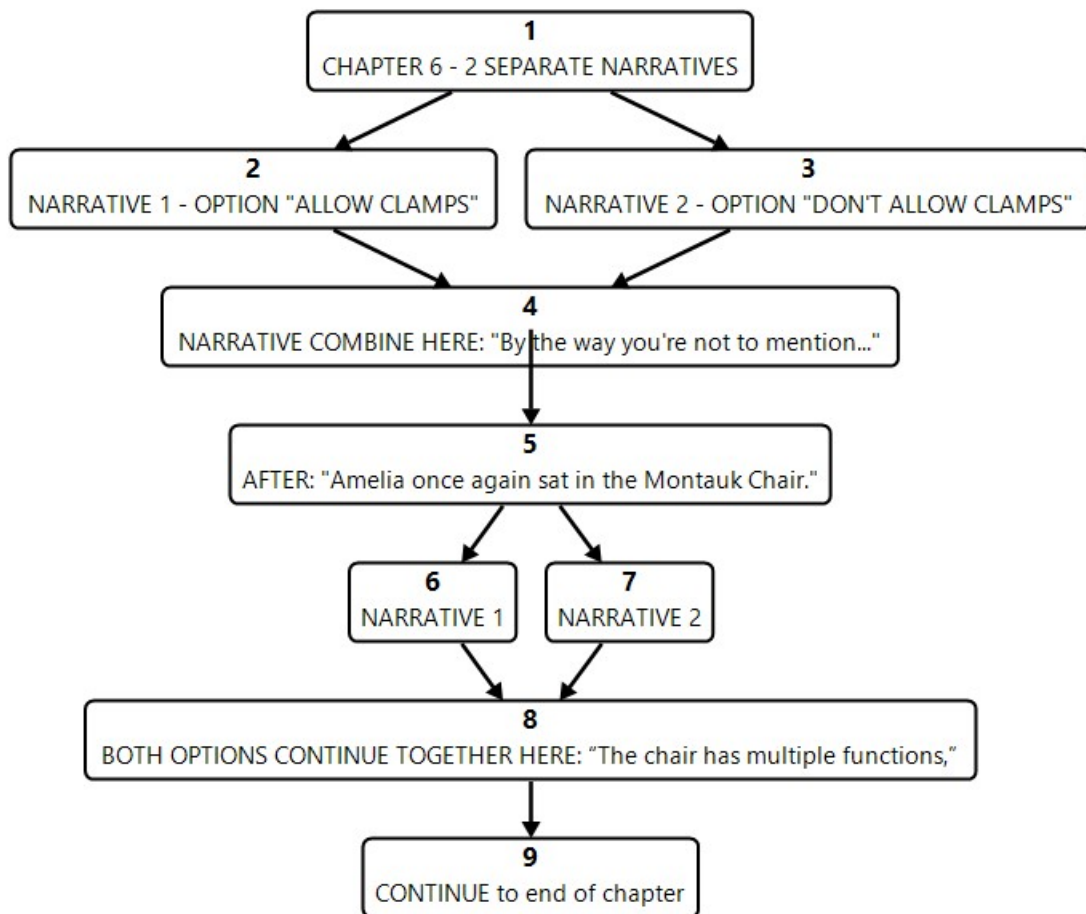
He was tall, deeply tanned, and very rugged looking for one who was barely twenty, but his eyes were deep, liquid brown. It seemed to Sasha as if he could see right through her; and she felt strangely weak, though she wasn't tired.

There was a deep familiarity about him which made no sense. Sasha knew she'd never met him before, yet when it was time to move on to the next soldier she felt a gripping feeling in her heart about leaving him, as if she was somehow meant to know him. She hesitated and looked into his eyes searchingly as he returned her gaze.

Finally the Vedruss' horn blew calling all of them together. Sasha gathered with the other Vedruss warriors, but she couldn't help looking back to see the Roman soldier. Much to her surprise he had removed all of his armor and was walking away from the battlefield, following the Vedruss at a distance.

That night as the Vedruss camped out under the stars Sasha wondered about the soldier. She fell asleep staring up at the stars wondering who he was and why he seemed so familiar.

Chapter 6



Chapter 6

(CH 4 - OPTION:3) [NOTE TO SELF – USE ONLY THE GREEN PORTIONS]

In the next moment Amelia was aware of herself sitting in the Montauk chair as if she had never left it. According to the clock on the wall only a minute or two had passed, or was it the next day?

“Very good. That’s enough for now,” said Trevor, her voice impassive, as if she was a school teacher telling the students to put down their pencils at the end of a test. “Before we break for lunch I’d like you to record everything you can remember. Are you feeling a bit dizzy?”

Amelia nodded.

“Don’t worry... that’s perfectly normal,” said Trevor casually. “Just take a few deep breaths, stay where you are and when you’re ready just start talking. Everything you say will be recorded and by the time you’re done you’ll feel back to normal. Later on you can let me know if you have any questions.”

RECORD FOR CH4 – OPTION:3

You have a dreamlike memory that you were playing in a game lifetime that took place thousands of years ago in Russia. You were a young woman named Sasha, your people were known as the Vedruss, and you remember battling 5,000 elite Roman troops with only 90 young warriors. Though you can’t remember the details, somehow the Romans surrendered – but that makes no sense. However, part of remote viewing is not to judge what you see, so you describe everything you can remember, except one event.

You remember a Roman soldier leaving his troops and following you and the other Vedruss to your campsite. Something about him is hauntingly familiar, and the experience seems so personal you decide not to share anything about it.

Amelia had total recall of everything that had happened to her as Sasha, down to the smallest detail, and though she dutifully recorded her experience she had the feeling in the pit of her stomach to not fully reveal how much she actually knew. Instead, she described her experience as if she was a detached observer doing her best to recall a dream. But a part of her was quite sure she had just re-experienced a game she had once played.

“Okay, that’s fine,” said Trevor when Amelia told her she couldn’t remember anything else. “We’ll break for lunch. You’ll be eating here on Level 4 with Matthew and we’ll resume afterward.”

Trevor pushed a button and the clamps around Amelia’s arms released.

[ALL OPTIONS CONTINUE TOGETHER FROM HERE ON]

“By the way, you’re not to mention anything you see or experience here to anyone else, including Matthew. Understood?”

Still feeling slightly dizzy Amelia stood up carefully as Trevor took her arm and helped her out of the chair.

The Level 4 dining hall seemed more like a restaurant than a cafeteria. There were stained glass windows that appeared to be lit by real sunlight. Of course, Amelia knew that was impossible since they were deep underground, but even so, just the idea that it looked like sunshine made her feel a little better.

Waiting at a table, Matthew smiled and waved to Amelia as she walked through the door. She quickly joined him and found a large salad was waiting for her.

“How’d it go?” asked Matthew.

“I can’t begin to describe what happened, but even if I could, I’m not allowed to talk about it. Sorry,” said Amelia wishing more than anything that she could talk to Matthew and tell him everything.

“What kind of tests are they doing with you?” asked Amelia quietly as she leaned in toward Matthew. “Are you allowed to talk to me?”

“Well, no one said I can’t talk,” said Matthew in a low voice, “Thomas just sat there talking to me. He asked me questions about quantum physics and then out of nowhere asked if I’d been in an alternate reality or if I’d had a past experience that I couldn’t explain.”

“Really? That’s weird,” said Amelia as she took a bite of her salad.

Matthew nodded, “And then he asked if I knew that Earth is actually a virtual reality.”

“What did you tell him?” asked Amelia, completely stunned.

“Well, I told him that I was pretty sure that you and I had been in an alternate reality or a different dimension... definitely something we couldn’t explain. But here’s the strange thing, when I said that I’d *heard* that Earth is a virtual reality, guess what he said?”

Amelia shook her head.

“He said, ‘*Prove it!*’ Not like he didn’t believe it. In fact, I think he believes that it’s true. I don’t know. Maybe he wants me to prove it to myself,” said Matthew shaking his head.

“That’s crazy! Why would he ask you to explain something that’s clearly impossible?” said Amelia, puzzled.

“Well that’s just it... I’ve been thinking about all this stuff and I believe there’s more *proof* that this IS a game than there is proving that it’s not.”



“I don’t understand,” said Amelia, “how could you possibly prove this is all a game?”

“Well, to explain that I’ll have to give you a quick lesson in physics.”

“You mean, like, before I’ve finished my salad?” she said laughing.

“I’m up for the challenge,” said Matthew grinning. “Okay... first I have a question for you. Can you tell me what *visually obvious facts* people believed a few hundred years ago that are now known to be untrue?”

“Uh, well, people believed the Earth was flat... and stationary. Oh, and that the earth was the center of the universe with the sun, stars and planets orbiting around it,” Amelia added, pleased with herself.

“Right. But even though we know the truth today, isn’t it still hard to conceive of the fact that the Earth rotates at 1,000 miles per hour and we’re moving through space at 66,000 miles an hour?”

Amelia nodded. She never could remember those statistics and they boggled her mind every time she heard them.

“I’m just pointing out how crazy the world is because you’re going to need an open mind for this next part.”

Amelia did an informal salute and said, “Okay! Mind open and ready.”

Matthew smiled and said, “Everything you see around you seems real and solid, right?”

Amelia nodded.

“But if you go down to the atomic level, the nucleus is the only solid part of the atom. Now get this. If you took all the nuclei of every person on the planet and put them together it’s the size of a single grain of rice. And if you put together the nuclei of the entire planet it’s about the size of a sugar cube!

“And the distance from the nucleus to the electrons is proportionately the same distance as from Earth to the stars. So everything that seems to be solid is actually 99.999% empty space.”

“Wow!” said Amelia, genuinely impressed.

“You’re not even finished with your salad yet and it’s already starting to sound like a virtual reality right?” said Matthew laughing. “And here’s what Einstein said. *Matter is energy whose vibration has been so lowered as to be perceptible to the senses. There is no matter.*”

“Einstein said there is no matter?” said Amelia, finding it difficult to get her head wrapped around the idea.

“Yeah,” said Matthew nodding. “But wait, it gets better!” he added, sounding like a salesman on an infomercial. “There was this experiment where scientists set up a camera to observe electrons, and they acted like particles. But when no equipment was used to observe the electrons, they acted like waves and particles simultaneously. And the only logical explanation the scientists could come up with was that the electrons somehow *know* when they’re being watched.”

“Okay, that’s really weird! How is that even possible? It’s not like an electron can think. I mean, electrons are just pretty much pure energy, right?” Amelia narrowed her eyes and said, “Oh, I bet I know what’s coming,” as if Matthew had been pulling her leg.

“Really?”

“Yes!” said Amelia goofing around. “I bet you’re going to tell me that not only are electrons smart enough to *know* they’re being observed – they even know what you’re thinking!”

To her surprise Matthew pondered this for a moment. “Amelia, for someone who has trouble understanding quantum mechanics, that’s an excellent point.”

“Really? I was just kidding,” she said giggling.

“I know,” said Matthew nodding vigorously. “But you’re right! If electrons have the *intelligence* to know they’re being observed – why wouldn’t they know what you’re thinking? I never thought about it that way. My mind just stopped where the experiment stopped. But what you just said ties in perfectly with what Äsha told us about how our thoughts and feelings create our experiences.

“But here’s the thing... I thought she meant that our thoughts and feelings affect how we see things. Like the way people perceive things differently. You know, like a farmer being happy when it rains, while at the same time someone on a picnic is annoyed – same event, different perception.

“But what if that isn’t what Äsha was talking about? What if she was talking about cause and effect? Physics has proven that energy has consciousness, and that *that* consciousness is linked to *our* consciousness and then it somehow responds to human intentions.”

“Wait a second, you said the electrons responded to intentions. I’m confused,” said Amelia, unconsciously chewing on her lower lip.

“Oh, sorry, the intention part came up in a later experiment. You see, once the scientists knew that electrons were simultaneously acting as waves and particles they discovered that whenever the electrons were being observed they would show up according to the intentions of the person setting up the experiment. If the intention of the scientist was to see electrons as particles, the electrons would show up as particles, but if the intention was to see the electrons as waves, they showed up as waves.”

“So the electrons do know how to read your mind!” said Amelia amazed. “Do you think maybe the electrons are trying to communicate?”

“I don’t know. But here’s what I’m thinking, Amelia,” said Matthew as if he had just discovered a new planet. “What if thoughts and feelings actually cause energy to slow down to the point that you can instantly see matter – you know, like the things and people you see every day?”

“But what if some energy moves slowly and other energy moves fast and that’s just how it’s always been?” asked Amelia.

“You’ve heard of Einstein’s theory of relativity... E equals $M C$ squared?” said Matthew. Amelia nodded.

“Well that equation is saying that when matter moves at the speed of light... squared... it turns into pure energy. So if you think about it, the opposite must also be true. When energy slows down enough it *appears* as solid matter. And I think that energy has to be... well... not just intelligent, but what if energy is Intelligence itself?”

“You mean like some big, cosmic Universal Intelligence?” asked Amelia incredulously.

Matthew looked at Amelia a bit sheepishly and said with a quirky smile, “That’s really weird isn’t it?”

“Well it’s a lot to get your head around, that’s for sure,” said Amelia, trying to be supportive.

“I know it sounds totally crazy! But think about it, ‘*Matter is energy, whose vibration has been so lowered as to be perceptible to the senses.*’ But Einstein never tells you what causes the energy to be lowered. What would cause energy to slow down? For there to be an effect there has to be a cause. And remember how Āsha said that every possibility already exists?”

Amelia nodded, hoping she would be able to keep up with wherever Matthew was headed.

“Well, it doesn’t make sense if you’re thinking about a game that has to be programmed in advance with every detail down to a grain of sand and you can play the game at any point in time throughout millions or billions of years. But if your thoughts and feelings cause energy to slow down and *show* you a world that matches your own beliefs and perceptions...”

“You mean like The Game’s prime directive, *Thy will be done.*”

“Yes. And that’s how the game-world could materialize while you’re playing The Game! And it’s totally customized to you. It’s your game,” said Matthew with subdued enthusiasm.

“Okay... let me make sure I get what you’re saying... so there’s this *Universal Intelligence* that’s everywhere... connects everything... and IS everything... and because energy responds intelligently to your thoughts and feelings – whatever you believe causes energy to slow down and the effect is that you see what you believe. Is that right?”

“Basically... yes,” said Matthew concisely. “Amelia, I think quantum physics has actually tapped into The Game program itself without realizing it. Of course the scientists don’t know it because they’re all about proof. But really, think of how phenomenal that is!

“It would be like you playing a computer game and then you discover your avatar can drill down through the Earth, right into the level of the program itself. And if you happen to understand programming, you could have your avatar go in and change the program itself – then you could create and play any game you choose.”

Slowly Amelia said, “Okay... but how do you know what’s real?”

“Remember when you were talking to Āsha about your avatar body and you asked, ‘*Are you saying I’m not real?*’ Do you remember what she said?”

“Yeah,” said Amelia, “she said *you are not your body...*”

“Exactly. You are the player, you’re not the avatar on the screen. The avatar does what you tell it to. But think about it in terms of The Game. If you are not your body, then your thoughts can’t come from your brain.”

“But where do my thoughts come from if it’s not from my brain?”

“Are you the thought or the thinker?” said Matthew slowly.

“Well, I guess I’m the thinker,” said Amelia, feeling a bit lost.

“If you are not your body or your mind then you must be the one who has the body, the one who has the mind. Doesn’t that imply consciousness? Remember Āsha telling us that

we are born into The Game? If we're not bodies that have learned how to think and be intelligent, there's only one other choice. We would have to be consciousness, thought-force, Universal Intelligence that has created a body."

As if he'd been part of their conversation all along, Thomas walked up to their table and said, "The 99.999% space you mentioned earlier is known as the unified field. Unified means coming together which implies form; field means interest... thought. Unified field, then, is thought taking form and this *thought-form* shows up as your body and the world around you, otherwise known as The Game.

"This so-called *empty space* is actually full of intelligence and because it isn't in a physical form, it's also full of potential." With a smile, Thomas said, "Well done, Matthew." Then looking at Amelia he said congenially, "I'll leave you to finish that salad."

As soon as Thomas was out of earshot Amelia leaned toward Matthew and said, "How did he know what we were talking about?"

Matthew shrugged and shook his head.

"Does he talk like that all the time?"

Matthew whispered, "Well, yes... he's a scientist, but he also says some really bizarre stuff."

"Like what?"

"Well, today we were talking about quantum physics and proving that Earth is a virtual reality and suddenly he was rambling on about diamonds being the hardest substance in the world and perfectly clear, and that if you had a glass wall, ten inches thick, it would have a green tone to it. But if you had a diamond wall ten inches thick, and no light reflecting off of it, it would be completely invisible – and then he said that the program is everywhere, and just like a diamond it's invisible too, so you see right through it."

Amelia laughed, "What does that mean?"

"I have no idea," said Matthew. "He just rambled on saying he knows the secret to how the program works, and that nothing is good or bad from its own side... everything is simply empty."

"Everything is empty? Do you think he's depressed?"

"No. He just talks like that," said Matthew shrugging. "I mean he looks at me as if I'm supposed to understand but I really don't."

Amelia laughed, and then looking past Matthew to the entrance of the restaurant she waved her hand and said, "Trevor's waiting for me... I've gotta go." Amelia stood up and said, "Let me know if you hear anymore Thomas-isms."

"I will," said Matthew laughing. Then taking her hand and pulling her toward him he said, "Maybe we can *vent* tonight and you can talk too."

Amelia smiled and nodded.

Returning with Trevor to the lab, Amelia once again sat in the Montauk Chair.

ME ... CUT Though it was beyond strange, it was also quite thrilling.

“Can I ask a question?”

said Amelia thoughtfully as Trevor pushed the button for the clamps.

“Of course,” said Trevor quickly.

[NOTE TO SELF: RECORD NEW
PARAGRAPH]

I’M STARTING TO REMEMBER SOME
MORE THINGS. IT FEELS KIND OF
DREAMLIKE, BUT...

“How did I end up viewing that one particular woman, Sasha, at that specific time? I wasn’t imaging anything... the chair just seemed to deliver me to that spot.”

OR MAYBE IT WAS JUST MY MIND...

BOTH OPTIONS CONTINUE TOGETHER HERE: “The chair has multiple functions,” said Trevor, as if she was required to answer Amelia’s questions, but had no desire to discuss the matter. “It can function according to your ability to image events or timelines, but it can also be programmed to recognize a specific frequency that you might think of as a specific time, day and place.”

“So you chose the place I went to?” said Amelia, trying to come up with the best possible questions so Trevor would continue giving her answers.

“Not exactly,” said Trevor. “You have your own frequency and the Chair can search out your frequency at different times in history.”

“What do you mean, different times in history?” said Amelia at a loss. “Are you saying you believe in past lifetimes... and that I was seeing myself thousands of years ago?”

Trevor looked at Amelia for a moment as if measuring her capacity for mental comprehension. Then something in her face changed and she said, “Do you know you’re playing a game?”