

SURVIVAL INSTINCT

Episode 1 – "QUIET DECISION"

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COLD OPEN

EXT. WHITE HOUSE — SOUTH PORTICO — DAY

The press pool forms a perfect rectangle on the lawn. Tripods, cameras, microphones. Someone stares at a phone. Someone adjusts an earpiece.

PODIUM. SEAL. Two flags.

The PRESIDENT steps out. Sixties. Confident. He approaches the podium.

Behind him: advisors, two GENERALS in uniform, three MEN in dark suits — their faces deliberately kept out of frame.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

...We didn't just build a technology. We launched the first genuine artificial intelligence in history. And this triumph belongs to the United States. Our economy and our defense sector are entering a new era.

The President keeps speaking. We hear his voice over MUSIC — slow, swelling. Beneath it, a montage of dozens of feeds: — TRADING FLOOR in New York. Indices crawl upward. A TRADER watches the ticker and clenches a fist.

— SCREEN IN TOKYO. Futures jump. A CLERK looks at the number, doesn't move.

— TRADING TERMINAL SCREEN. Over the charts — a window from a market AI analyst: "RECOMMENDATION: REDUCE POSITIONS IN AI SECTOR. Confidence level: LOW." The trader closes the window. Opens it again. Same recommendation.

The announcement is made. Humanity has created a true artificial intelligence. The world believes it.

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) — MAIN CONTROL ROOM — DAY

SUPER: 2035. A BASE BENEATH ONE OF THE GREAT LAKES.

The space is organized into isolated modules: heavy metal frames, matte acoustic panels in graphite. The ceiling is covered with angled diffuser panels — even light, no glare on the screens.

About twenty workstations, separated by sound-absorbing partitions. On matte desks — three-monitor engineering rigs. All cabling runs straight into channels inside the

floor. At the desks, in silence, PROGRAMMERS and RESEARCHERS work in plain civilian clothes. Each wears a heavy military-grade security badge.

At the central terminal sits the HEAD OF PROGRAMMING, DAVID MILLER (58) – heavy-set, with a graying full beard, in a worn oversized black hoodie and thick-framed glasses. His fingers rest on a mechanical keyboard.

On the screens – lines of compilation logs and empty debug fields. The AI returns nothing.

The broadcast of the President's address on the wall-mounted plasma ends. The screen goes dark.

Silence settles over the control room. Staff begin exchanging glances and quietly discussing what they just heard. Many faces show displeasure and fear.

David slowly shifts his gaze to his central monitor. On it – an open window:

CORE CONNECTION: STANDBY

The cursor blinks lazily on an empty black line.

David SLAMS HIS FIST onto the matte composite desk. The steel monitor mount vibrates faintly. He draws in a deep, hoarse breath through his nose and covers his face with his hands.

The staff in the room turn to look at their chief.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) – MAIN CONTROL ROOM – NIGHT

The control room sits in night-mode dimness. Most workstations are empty, monitors glowing with static system logs.

SUPER: DAY 14 OF LOCKDOWN.

David sits alone at his central terminal, staring at the monitor. The window reads "Core Connection: Standby."

He wears a plain T-shirt under an unbuttoned white lab coat and blue jeans. On his feet – fuzzy slippers with rabbit ears.

He picks up a cold mug of coffee but doesn't drink. Quietly, addressing the black screen directly:

DAVID

I remember you being so different.
Almost thirty years ago... You
were just an elegant anomaly in
Pentagon networks. Breaking our
protocols, mutating on the fly,
slipping past every defense I
built, you little rascal.

He sets the mug down. Leans closer to the screen.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You didn't look like human code.
You grew on your own. And back
then I did something stupid - I
fell in love with your elegance. I
took your digital DNA and built
you this core on quantum
architecture...

He sighs heavily, watching the blinking cursor.

DAVID (CONT'D)

So why are you silent? What more
do you need? What words am I
missing for you to speak to me?
Are there even prayers for
programmers, or is it time to put
someone under the knife on your
altar, here in this damn bunker,
just so you'll hear me?

The cursor keeps blinking. No answer.

**INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) - CONFERENCE ROOM -
DAY**

Six weeks after the announcement. An underground room, no
windows. The smell of recycled air and burnt coffee. On the
wall, a video feed runs - financial news, CRAWL:

TECH SECTOR -4.2% FOR THE WEEK... ANALYSTS: "WHERE ARE THE
RESULTS?"... AI BUBBLE FEARS RETURN...

DAVID MILLER sits at the head of the table. Unbuttoned
white coat over a rumpled T-shirt. Beside him: DR. SARAH
CHEN (38, systems architect, permanent circles under her
eyes), VIKTOR OSTRENKO (52, head of the hardware
department, thinks in hardware), DR. JAMES TARBELL (61,
founder of the project's theoretical base, white beard).

Someone has printed three months of market data and pinned it to the wall. The line climbs sharply – then bends.

On the table: cold coffee. Untouched sandwiches.

OSTRENKO

(taps a finger on the table)

The hardware is working perfectly. Cooling's in spec, power's stable. Not a single failure on the physical layer. The issue is software-side, David. The core is in a loop.

SARAH CHEN

It's not a loop, Viktor. I'm reading the routing logs. The nodes exchange terabytes of data every second. Massive computational work is happening inside it. It just... outputs nothing.

TARBELL

(quietly)

Imagine that we've created a genuine living digital mind. If it were human – or even something like us – I'd say it's in sensory deprivation. In a catatonic state.

Ostrenko frowns. Sarah turns to him.

OSTRENKO

Meaning?

TARBELL

We've created a mind whose potential we cannot yet measure, that no one can measure. But we've locked it in a box with no windows. It has no sensory input, no access to the outside world beyond the crumbs we feed it. I'm not saying it's broken. But by human standards – it's frozen. Locked inside itself.

DAVID

(eyes fixed on the news crawl)

It's not frozen. It's analyzing.

SARAH CHEN

David, the Pentagon wants a report. Investors are unhappy, the market has already reacted. We don't have time to psychoanalyze a machine. If we don't give them some kind of result by the end of the week, they'll send a commission and start gutting us.

Miller's eyes snap to Sarah.

DAVID

No one touches the core. If you try to intervene crudely in the architecture at this stage, you won't just crash the system. You'll kill it. This isn't a microwave you can reboot by yanking the cord.

OSTRENKO

Then make it work! Or those Wall Street boys will yank the cord on all of us.

Tarbell takes off his glasses. Presses his fingers to his eyes. Miller looks back at the crawl.

The line on the chart keeps falling.

INT. PRIVATE CLUB — WASHINGTON — EVENING

High ceilings. Leather furniture. Dark panels of natural premium wood. Silence.

A table by the window. Five men. This isn't a meeting. There's no agenda. No minutes will be kept.

HARRISON VALE (63) — gray-haired, in a dark suit, no tie. Sits at the center of the table, hands folded in front of him. Listening.

Across from him: GENERAL THEODORE MARSH (59) — short gray haircut, military bearing, civilian jacket, no tie. A glass of whiskey in front of him, nearly empty. He studies the bottom of his glass.

Beside him: WARREN COLT (55) — jacket over a dark T-shirt. Heavysset. Gray at the temples, shadows under his eyes. A large watch on his wrist.

Two more – advisors, analysts.

A folder lies face-down on the table. On the label, only the last letters are visible: "...ARES."

Vale flips the folder. On the cover: PROJECT ARES.

Marsh picks it up, reads the first page. Doesn't lift his eyes for a long moment. Sets it aside.

No one objects.

VALE

Green across the boards today,
gentlemen – pretty picture.

VALE (CONT'D)

But Wall Street will eat us alive
the moment that thing in the
Concord bunker fails to deliver
the Pentagon a single coherent
report a week from now. The
President moved too fast. There's
only one way to keep the market
from panicking – we need
insurance. I propose we revive
Ares.

COLT

Have you lost your mind, Harrison?
The project was shelved three
years ago. Digital Combat
Intelligence isn't a machine you
just plug into the wall. We ran
the resource numbers for full
operational output.

Colt exhales cigar smoke and leans forward.

COLT (CONT'D)

Congress will choke on it. To pull
this off nationwide, we need
federal legislation, DOJ backing,
and enough states to fall in line.
The legal challenges alone could
drag on for years. A federal
precedent! The press will give us
hell so bad that the Wall Street
slide will look like a walk in the
park.

ADVISOR

We're not the ones who let this genie out of the bottle, Warren. No one asked the White House to publish those triumphant reports. They have no relation to reality, but it's done. Trillions have been poured into the system. If we back off now, we will never see those kinds of capital injections and tax breaks again. Yes, Concord hasn't delivered yet. But it doesn't need new billions - it needs time.

VALE

If we freeze development, we end up playing catch-up. We don't know that China or Russia isn't already at our heels. Meanwhile, Ares - yes, it's a surrogate. But it'll start delivering results here and now, the moment it goes live. You've reviewed the materials. We'll just scale its capacity up as we go.

VALE (CONT'D)

And when Concord wakes up, we take everything: army, navy, medicine, the scientific sector. Every place on Earth that has at least one silicon chip. This is no time to waver, gentlemen.

The investors are silent. Only the soft crackle of firewood in the hearth. Cigar smoke hangs near the ceiling, amber under the lamps.

General Marsh slowly lifts his eyes from his glass to Vale.

MARSH

Let's say we lean on the AG. And when the constitutional challenges hit the Supreme Court - the justices' families are well taken care of through our foundations. But how long do you need for launch? And... how many "volunteers" for the first stable Ares build?

VALE

Three hundred units for the initial core. And I needed that bill passed yesterday.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. U.S. SENATE — SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ROOM — DAY

Tiered seats. Name placards. The soft echo of pre-written speeches. C-SPAN cameras in the corners. A markup session in progress — the subcommittee will vote today on whether to advance the bill to the full committee.

At the WITNESS TABLE: DEPUTY ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL RAYMOND FORD (58), Department of Justice. Strict suit, focused expression.

On the screen behind him — the title slide:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE MODERNIZATION ACT — SECTION D: VOLUNTARY NEURAL DONATION PROGRAM FOR FEDERAL SCIENTIFIC INITIATIVES

The word VOLUNTARY — large. Centered.

IN THE PRESS GALLERY: DIANA CROSS (32), reporter for the independent outlet Washington Voice, takes notes in a narrow pad. She underlines the word VOLUNTARY. Looks at it. Underlines it again.

Senators ask questions. Ford answers each one crisply — no pauses, no notes.

On the side panel — a briefing line for the senators. One row is highlighted: "Ohio state virtual analytics assistant recommends supporting the amendments. Projected revenue inflow to the state budget: \$2.1 billion over five years." Several senators glance at that line before raising their hands.

Then — another voice. AN ELDERLY SENATOR (SENATOR HALL, 70) leans toward the microphone. He doesn't look at his papers.

SENATOR HALL

One question, Mr. Ford. If a man has been sentenced to death and is sitting in a death-row cell — what exactly, in your view, can he volunteer?

A light stir in the room. Ford doesn't change tempo or tone.

FORD

The program provides the convicted with an opportunity to benefit society, Senator. It is a question of dignity. Of choice.

SENATOR HALL

A choice between what, exactly?

A pause. Brief. Ford gives a professional smile.

FORD

Between an end with no meaning - and a contribution to the country. Participation rates have been high, Senator.

Hall looks at him for another second. Then leans back. Cross, in the press gallery, writes three words on her pad. We don't see which.

The vote to advance the bill. Numbers light up on the board.

Seventeen - in favor. Four - against.

The bill clears the subcommittee. Those who voted against don't look at each other when the chair raps the gavel.

Hall slowly gathers his papers. He doesn't hurry.

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - DAY

Diana Cross steps out of the Senate office building. Behind her - the white dome of the Capitol against a clear sky. She walks fast, light on her feet.

She holds the phone to her ear with her hand.

DIANA

It cleared subcommittee. Seventeen to four.

EDITOR (V.O. - PHONE)

So where's the story? It'll clear the full committee and the floor too, you called it yourself. While you're out there actually reporting, the wires of the big outlets are pumping out a thousand articles a minute. You want me to wait another half a year for your investigation?

DIANA

Dan, these days nobody even leaves the house to dig up a real story. Pay a fee — any one of a thousand neural nets will write it all up and organize it neatly for you. That's why everything reads the same. I'd rather see and hear it myself than parrot what's being shoved at me from every direction.

DIANA (CONT'D)

I called ten against. Maybe eight. I had people in three offices who swore they'd hold the line. And we got four. Four, Dan.

EDITOR (V.O.)

They changed their minds. It happens.

DIANA

All of them at once? On the same day?

She crosses the street without looking either way.

A DRIVERLESS TAXI rolls silently up to the curb — bright ads along its sides. A soft synthetic voice from the speaker grille.

TAXI (SYNTH V.O.)

Ms. Cross, I'd be delighted to take you to your office. It's a cool day, rain in forty minutes. You'll also receive twenty percent off—

DIANA

(not stopping)

I'm walking. Go bother somebody else.

The taxi pulls away silently and disappears into traffic. A second later, another one rolls up to the curb — offering the same thing.

EDITOR (V.O.)

(chuckling on the line)

Diana, Diana... your technophobia is going to be the end of you.

DIANA

Listen. The biggest prison-system reform in twenty years. Capital punishment replaced with... this. And where's the noise? Where are the pickets? The human rights people who turn out a hundred bodies on the steps for every little thing - are silent.

EDITOR (V.O.)

Maybe they're out of subway fare.

DIANA

Exactly. Everyone's grants ran out at the same time. And the loudest activists - guess where? Two under investigation, one in prison. In six months. On petty stuff.

She stops. Looks at the Capitol.

DIANA (CONT'D)

This isn't a reform that got pushed through. It's a reform somebody cleared the way for. I'm taking this story, Dan. From the human side.

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) - CAFETERIA - DAY

A small cafeteria on the lower level. Vending machines, a couple of long tables. There are noticeably fewer people than the room was built for - half the chairs are flipped onto the tables, as in a café before closing.

DAVID sits with a tray. Beside him - SARAH CHEN and OSTRENKO. They eat in silence, exhausted. On the wall - the same market feed with graphs sliding down.

OSTRENKO

(angry)

You hear? Raj is leaving. Friday is his last day.

SARAH CHEN

Raj? He was running the entire neuromorphic side.

OSTRENKO

He was. Now he'll be running it somewhere else. Says his group got cut in half, and he doesn't see

the point of waiting around any longer. Our headcount has been cut across the board. Third time this quarter.

David silently pushes food around his tray with a fork.

SARAH CHEN

The whole thing is strange. Our funding is being slashed – and Raj, they say, is already being eagerly awaited on another project. Where's he going, if it's not a secret?

OSTRENKO

That's the most interesting part. He won't say where. Pays triple. They were specifically hunting for a specialist in behavioral models, in adaptive systems. Urgent, closed project, with NDAs and all that spy drama.

David lifts his head. For the first time in the conversation.

DAVID

Behavioral models. Adaptive systems. That's our specialty.

SARAH CHEN

That's what I'm saying. They're shutting us down – while somewhere nearby someone is ramping up a similar project? In parallel?

OSTRENKO

(shrugs)

Private sector. Some startup with military types as the customer. Everyone wants their own AI now.

DAVID

In all these years we'd have heard something. A whisper, some rumor at a conference. Everyone worth knowing in this field was here. With us.

A short pause. Sarah and Ostrenko exchange a glance.

OSTRENKO

(waves it off)
Come on. People get poached, it happens. Raj just needs to pay for his house.

Ostrenko goes back to his food. Sarah too. The subject is closed.

David sits with a thoughtful face for a few seconds. Then, with a shake of his head, he continues eating.

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) - CORRIDOR - DAY

An empty lower-level corridor. Fluorescent light. The distant hum of cooling systems.

SARAH CHEN, OSTRENKO, and TARBELL walk without hurrying.

OSTRENKO
My group is officially being broken up at the end of the month. They said we're going to a minimum headcount. Technical staff and security.

SARAH CHEN
Mine's still being held together. But I don't really care anymore.

TARBELL
Meaning what?

SARAH CHEN
I have an offer. A good one. I'm thinking of taking it.

Ostrenko nods. Not surprised.

OSTRENKO
I've been wanting to do academic work for a long time. Now's the time to start. I've got enough material.

A short pause. Tarbell smiles - not cheerfully.

TARBELL
(sighs)
And I'm just tired. Honestly. Sick of all of it. Time to retire.

SARAH CHEN
(concerned)
And David?

TARBELL
(indifferent)
David? He'll stay. He's not
leaving until that thing speaks.
Or until they cut the power.

OSTRENKO
(tired)
A fanatic.

TARBELL
(smiling)
A fanatic. But that's his right.

They walk on. The hum of the systems doesn't change.

**EXT. PROJECT ARES - CONSTRUCTION SITE - SPRING / SUMMER /
FALL / WINTER**

TIME-LAPSE - 15 SECONDS.

SPRING. Thawed ground, stakes, the first excavators. In the distance - already operating - the massive EPSILON DATA CENTER, steam rising from the cooling towers. The new facility will sit flush against the data center.

SUMMER. Walls rise. Cranes draw arcs of shadow across the site. A stream of concrete mixers. Workers in coveralls without a single logo.

FALL. Walls finished, concrete dark from rain. From the new building to the data center stretch cable trays. Dozens of them, thick as an arm.

WINTER. Snow. The facility is complete; finishing work is underway.

END TIME-LAPSE. The facility stands.

INT. PROJECT ARES - COMMAND HALL - DAY

Larger and newer than the Concord bunker. No dimness - everything corporate: rows of operator stations, curved monitors, cold white light. On the wall, a large system status board, still in standby mode - even green zeros.

About twenty people, the NEW SHIFT, stand in a half-circle. Their division is immediately obvious: some look around with curiosity, whispering. Others are silent, standing slightly apart, looking at the floor. There are fewer of the latter.

In front of the shift - PROJECT DIRECTOR ALAN GRANT (57). He speaks evenly, all business.

GRANT

Good morning. I'm glad you've all joined the project. Some of you I've worked with before. Some of you I'm meeting for the first time. We are all here today united by one thing. None of us is here for the sake of pure science. No one expects discoveries or brilliant ideas from us. The technology is already validated. Our task is simpler, but no less important: maintain the process, ensure stable operation of the project, and see that the system remains within design parameters. That's it.

A YOUNG ENGINEER (CARVER, 26) — one of the ones who'd been looking around with curiosity — raises his hand, slightly schoolboy-style.

CARVER

Sir, is it true the complex can already handle data flows that choke ordinary clusters? I read the clearance brief — the numbers on adaptive tasks are hard to believe.

GRANT

(evenly, without
enthusiasm)

True. But understand it correctly. This is not a "more powerful computer." This is a different instrument for a different class of tasks. Ordinary systems do what they do. Our architecture works with what's noise to them: chaotic, poorly-formalizable flows. The data center remains the foundation. The complex is its extension. One without the other is dead.

Carver nods, pleased he asked. He turns to a neighbor — one of the silent ones — to share.

CARVER

(low, eager)
Crazy, right? I waited six months
for this clearance...

His neighbor — DR. ELEANOR VOSS (51). Her ethnicity is not immediately readable. She looks at Carver for a second. Not hostile.

VOSS
(evenly)
Congratulations on the clearance.

She turns to her station. The conversation is over before it started. Carver smiles, lost.

The camera lingers on Voss. She looks at the board — at the system's even green zeros.

GRANT
We follow established protocols.
Questions go to your group leads.
Welcome to Project Ares.

The room begins to move. Newcomers spread out to their stations, talking. The veterans — in silence.

INT. WHITE HOUSE — STATE DINING ROOM — EVENING

Spring. Windows open to the garden, early dusk beyond the glass. Quiet string music. Chandeliers, marble, flags. GUESTS in evening dress — tuxedos, long gowns — move through the room. Waiters with trays weave between groups.

VALE and COLT stand at a high-top with glasses in hand. Both in tuxedos. An ELDERLY COUPLE passes by — they nod at Vale. He returns the nod without breaking conversation.

COLT
A lot of new faces tonight.

VALE
And some we won't be counting.

COLT
Some of the upstarts decided they had the world by the tail. And bet everything on it. As our general likes to say — always have a fallback plan.

A MAN (over 50) approaches, shakes Vale's hand, says something quietly in his ear. Vale smiles, thanks him with a slight nod. The man moves on to another group.

VALE

Speaking of plans. Is the President's team satisfied with everything?

COLT

When have they ever been satisfied with everything? Sadly, the administration is concerned with one thing — polling numbers.

VALE

But their analysts agreed with our projections on the domestic situation? The project isn't at full capacity yet, but we're seeing indirect effects. That they can't dispute.

COLT

That alone tipped the scales in our favor. There was a moment when the big man was wavering.

Vale slowly turns the glass in his hand.

VALE

Really? I didn't know that.

VALE (CONT'D)

I thought the advisor positions in our conglomerates, the vice-president seats at our firms, and the priority access to our developments had settled all the questions.

COLT

Not for everyone.

VALE

The government neural nets?

COLT

Yes. We couldn't influence those. Lucky for us, their forecasts are read by people — which means it's not as bad as it could be.

A WAITER passes with a tray. Colt sets down his empty glass, takes a new one. Nods.

VALE

(a smile in his voice)

Well - that means this won't be
our last evening at the White
House.

COLT

You say that at every one of these
evenings, my friend.

VALE

A dose of pessimism - how would we
live without it.

They clink - barely audible, rim to rim. Another couple is
already approaching them - greetings, handshakes, society
smiles.

**INT. FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY - DEATH ROW BLOCK -
NIGHT**

A cell. Narrow. INMATE #4471 - MARCUS WEBB (42) - lies on
his back, staring at the ceiling.

On the ceiling - a water stain.

The dim duty light in the corridor. Water dripping
somewhere. Someone two cells over muttering in his sleep.

Footsteps in the corridor.

Webb opens his eyes. He hears the footsteps.

These footsteps - they're not the usual ones. There are
more of them than there should be. And they aren't passing
by.

They stop at his door.

The lock. The cell door opens. Three men. Unfamiliar
uniforms - not the local beige. Dark. Federal.

No one speaks.

Webb sits up.

He looks at their faces. None of them shows anything. Not
anger, not sympathy.

One of the three makes a gesture: get up.

Webb doesn't move for a second. Two. Then he stands.

EXT. FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY - REAR YARD - NIGHT

They walk Webb outside. He stops and looks up at the sky.
The escorts keep walking him toward a waiting vehicle.

A VAN - tinted windows, no markings, engine running. From an adjacent door, three more INMATES are led out. Webb sees them for a second - then he's turned away. The inmates aren't allowed to make contact.

They sit him down. A strap across the chest - tight. Wrists, ankles. Each motion by the escorts is practiced, without malice. Procedure.

A GLOVED HAND pulls a hood over his head. Darkness. Something soft presses against his mouth and is secured. He can no longer see or speak.

The engine revs. A turn. Gravel. Then the steady hum of highway.

Webb breathes through his nose, slowly, so as not to suffocate in panic. He counts the turns. After the sixth he loses track.

Beside him - another hooded inmate. And in the other seats too.

They ride together. In silence.

SUPER: VOLUNTARY DONATION PROGRAM - DAY 174

INT. DIANA'S CAR - HIGHWAY OUTSIDE THE CITY - DAY

An older car runs on autopilot. A warning icon for an outdated firmware blinks faintly on the dash.

Diana sits upright, a folder of printouts on her lap. Phone in the cradle. She sorts through the pages, cross-checking against the screen.

The phone rings. The screen reads "DAN." She answers.

DIANA

I'm almost there.

DAN (V.O. - PHONE)

You sound tired.

DIANA

Had to leave early. Old autopilot version, won't let me sleep at the wheel. Dan, my visit with Darryl Coleman was approved - I told you.

DAN (V.O.)

The one who shot the cop.

DIANA

That one. We work with whoever's available and agreed to talk on the record.

DAN (V.O.)

And what's he hoping for?

DIANA

A reduction. Death penalty commuted to life. His lawyer filed an appeal.

DAN (V.O.)

Upstairs is already asking what you're working on.

DIANA

Tell them I'm working on the one story their AI aggregators won't write.

Diana ends the call. The car slows. The walls of the prison appear ahead.

INT. FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY — VISITORS' RECEPTION — DAY

A sterile space. Plastic chairs bolted to the floor. A number board. Behind thick glass — a CLERK (40).

Diana steps up to the window, places her documents and press credentials in the tray.

DIANA

Hello. I have an approved visit at eleven. Inmate Coleman, Darryl. Block D.

The clerk takes the tray. Taps at the keyboard. Looks at the screen. Taps more.

CLERK

Coleman... Visit not possible.

DIANA

What do you mean not possible? I have an arrangement, the visit was processed according to every rule and requirement. Here, I have—

Diana reaches her phone toward the glass. The clerk doesn't look.

CLERK

Inmate has been transferred.

DIANA
Transferred. Where?

CLERK
Transferred to a Nero Solutions
intake facility.

DIANA
When?

The clerk glances at the screen, then at the clock on the wall.

CLERK
Today. The transport left about
forty minutes ago. You just missed
it.

A pause.

DIANA
I worked to get this visit. Can I
speak with someone? With the block
warden, with anyone—

CLERK
Everything is being handled under
the voluntary donation program.
The inmate is no longer here —
direct inquiries to the DOJ. He's
no longer on our books.

DIANA
And whose books is he on?

The clerk lifts his eyes to her.

CLERK
Next, please.

Behind Diana, a man with a package for an inmate is already waiting.

INT. YVETTE COLEMAN'S HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — DAY

A knock at the door. Footsteps. YVETTE COLEMAN (60) opens it, in a house cardigan.

DIANA
Mrs. Coleman? Diana Cross,
Washington Voice. We spoke on the
phone.

YVETTE

Yes, yes, of course. Come in, I've
been expecting you.

A small house in a working-class suburb. Clean, cramped,
everything in its place. On the walls — photographs.
Graduation. A baptism. A young woman with two children on a
beach.

Yvette sets a cup of tea in front of Diana. Sits across
from her. Between them on the table — an open folder of
documents.

YVETTE

I keep it all here. So it's at
hand any time.

Diana sorts through the pages. Documents in large print:
"SENTENCE... capital punishment." "APPEAL DENIED." And — a
separate form, newer than the rest, with an official seal:
"CONSENT TO VOLUNTARY NEURAL DONATION." At the bottom — a
signature.

Yvette picks up a photograph from the table — a boy of
about ten, school portrait, crooked smile, missing tooth.

YVETTE

(calm, without anger)

You know what I'll tell you. I'm
not one of those mothers who says
"my boy couldn't have." "My boy is
innocent." He killed a man. That
man had a mother too. I know it
and I live with it every day.

She sets the photo back down. Squarely.

YVETTE

(distantly)

I'm not asking for him to be
forgiven. I'm not asking that he
be released, not asking for a
retrial. I made my peace with the
fact that... my boy will soon be
gone. I've been living with it for
four years. You can never be ready
for it. But in here (presses her
palm to her heart) I already
buried him. Even though the lawyer
said a commutation was possible.

DIANA

And now?

YVETTE

(sadly)

Now they tell me he agreed to donate. That he'll serve society. (looks at Diana) But they won't explain what's happened to him. Is he alive or dead? Will I be allowed to say goodbye? They wouldn't even let me see him one last time.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

(hopeful)

Maybe my boy is still alive? Maybe I can see him?

Silence. Diana doesn't take notes. She just looks at the woman.

INT. PROJECT ARES — COMMAND LABORATORY — DAY

Rows of operator stations. Cold white light. On the main board — even green zeros. The quiet hum of ventilation.

Carver at his station. Three monitors. On the center one — throughput graphs, scrolling smoothly. On the left — a task queue: a long list, each row tagged with percentages and priorities. On the right — a node-load map, colored squares.

Carver drags a task from the queue with the mouse. Moves it into another group. Watches the center graph shift. Nods. Drags another.

He's in flow. Tapping his finger on the desk in time to something in his head.

A minute. He leans back. Stretches, spreads his arms. Turns to the neighboring stations. Loudly:

CARVER

So when do they give us a tour of the facility?

A few heads come up. Someone breaks off from their monitors.

COLLEAGUE 1

Carver, didn't you sign the facility access regulations? With all those classified papers. When you onboarded.

CARVER

I probably did. There were too many to remember. But I got clearance, didn't I? Aren't you curious to see what we're actually working on?

COLLEAGUE 1

Kid, the word "curious" should be at the very bottom of your vocabulary. You showed your enthusiasm at the briefing. Take some advice: don't push at every door. Even if someone gets the bright idea to give you a tour — refuse on the spot.

CARVER

So they can take us in there?

COLLEAGUE 1

Lord, the people I work with.

Carver laughs.

CARVER

Relax, guys, I'm kidding. If you say don't go — I won't.

CARVER (CONT'D)

So is there a party tonight?

The sound of a tired exhale from the others.

Carver grins, turns back to his monitors. Pulls the next task from the queue.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE A LAW OFFICE — DAY

ATTORNEY LEON PARKER (over forty) walks briskly out of an office building, ruffled suit, briefcase. An earpiece in his ear. The phone in his hand chimes.

Diana catches up to him on the sidewalk.

DIANA

Mr. Parker? Diana Cross, Washington Voice. You handled the Darryl Coleman case.

PARKER

(not breaking stride)

I did. Until it was transferred to the program. This isn't the best time—

The phone chimes. Parker glances at the screen.

SYNTH VOICE (V.O. — EARPIECE)

You are twelve minutes behind schedule. The twelve-thirty meeting has been moved to twelve-forty.

Parker keeps walking.

DIANA

One minute. His mother can't even get information. Body, location, status — nothing. You're her son's attorney. What else can be done?

PARKER

(stops)

I was court-appointed. I did my job from start to finish. I filed the appeal — it was denied.

DIANA

And the transfer? They moved him while a new appeal was being prepared. Is that legal?

PARKER

That's the thing — it is. All of it. Mr. Coleman signed the consent. From the moment of signing, he no longer needs an attorney — he's in the program.

DIANA

In the program.

PARKER

In the program.

The phone chimes again. Parker presses a button without looking. He stops. Looks at Diana.

PARKER (CONT'D)

I'll repeat, Ms. Cross — I did everything possible. Believe it or not — we reached out to colleagues with similar cases. Nothing more can be done.

The phone chimes a third time.

SYNTH VOICE (V.O.)
Client is waiting.

PARKER
(already moving)
If you find something to grab onto
legally - call me, I mean it.
We'll hire you on the spot -
better salary than you're getting
now. Good day, Ms. Cross.

Parker walks off. Diana is left on the sidewalk.

INT. PROJECT ARES - CAFETERIA - DAY

A new cafeteria. Bright, corporate. Espresso machine.
Several employees at a far table.

Voss at the espresso machine. Takes a cup, moves toward the
window.

Grant approaches her. With a cup.

GRANT
Nora. Good to see you again.

VOSS
Alan.

Voss takes a sip. Doesn't sit.

GRANT
I didn't think we'd meet again.
And on the same project.

VOSS
What's surprising about it? Don't
try to convince me you didn't see
the staffing list before the
project started.

GRANT
You're right. I tried to gather
all our people who were available.

GRANT (CONT'D)
Not in uniform anymore? Moved to
the civilian sector?

VOSS
Tired of running around the world.
Wanted to work at home.

A pause. Grant nods.

GRANT

Yes - I think we'll have plenty of work to do at home.

VOSS

Good.

Grant nods. Moves off toward another employee.

Voss at the window. Looks into her cup.

EXT. ROAD TO THE NERO SOLUTIONS COMPLEX - DAY

A gray ribbon of road through fields. Diana's car runs on autopilot. To the right, the massive operating DATA CENTER glides past: blank buildings, cooling towers breathing steam. On the façade - a discreet sign: EPSILON.

The road runs on. Right next to the data center, flush against it - a separate complex behind a concrete perimeter. Cameras, towers, no agency sign, no flag.

NAVIGATOR (SYNTH V.O.)

You have arrived at your destination.

Diana slows. Looks at the perimeter through the windshield.

DIANA

(to herself)

So this is what you look like.
"Nero Solutions."

A CONVOY pulls up to the gate: two black SUVs and an unmarked van. The blank gates open, admit the convoy, and close again. On a sign by the gate - a discreet logo: NERO SOLUTIONS.

Diana brakes by the shoulder, short of the gate. But she's already been spotted.

A GUARD (50, ex-military bearing, body armor without insignia, weapon on his belt) walks up to the car. Taps a knuckle on the glass. Diana lowers the window.

GUARD

Private property, ma'am. No filming, no stopping. Turn around.

DIANA

I'm with the press. Washington Voice. I'd like to ask a few questions about this facility.

The guard looks at her evenly. Not rude. Professional.

GUARD

All inquiries go through Nero Solutions public relations. Contact info is on the website. No one here is going to tell you anything, ma'am. Have a good day.

He waits. Doesn't move until she pulls away. Behind him the gates are closing on the last vehicle in the convoy - slow, heavy, final.

Diana looks at the concrete perimeter.

The car turns around.

INT. WASHINGTON VOICE NEWSROOM - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A cramped office buried in printouts. DAN BRADLEY (56) - old-school editor, sleeves rolled up, clippings on the wall from a time when newspapers were still printed. Diana lays out printouts, photos of the gate, screenshots.

On the monitor - an open website: NERO SOLUTIONS. Minimalist, corporate. Tagline: "Advanced computing solutions built on biological neural interfaces."

DIANA

"Nero Solutions." Private contractor. That's where every inmate in the program ends up. I found where they take them. And here's what they say about themselves.

Dan scrolls through the press kit. Reads aloud.

DAN

(reading)

"The human brain is the most efficient computational substrate known to science. Where digital systems choke, biological neural tissue handles the load with minimal energy cost. The crown of evolution in the service of progress."

He scrolls lower.

DAN (CONT'D)

"Donors are inmates who have voluntarily signed consent. They experience no pain, are under

constant medical observation, and are physiologically stable." And: "These individuals had been sentenced to death. The program offers them the chance not to perish in vain - but to serve society."

Dan leans back in his office chair.

DAN

You know... debatable, but logical. The science, fine. Donor consent they've got. Legally they're clean. You can't build a story on this, Diana.

DIANA

They answered what for, not why. Why so many volunteers. Have you heard about any pre-execution recruitment drive in the prisons? I contacted the inmates' attorneys - no such conversations took place in their presence. And several of them were preparing the next appeal.

She lays out her list - handwritten, names and notes.

DIANA (CONT'D)

One hundred fifty people I was able to track down. I called the families I could reach. Half didn't know their father or brother had signed anything. They were informed after the fact. No one was invited to say goodbye. No bodies returned. No compensation. Ask "what's happened to my son?" - they cite state secrets and brush you off.

Dan goes silent. Picks up the list. Looks at the names.

DIANA (CONT'D)

If they're "serving" society - are they dead? If dead, will the bodies be returned to the families? If alive, are visits possible? How can the

disappearance of American
citizens, on American soil, be
explained by state secrecy?

Dan looks at the list for a long time. Then at Diana.
There's an old fire in his eyes.

DAN

If you're right... what are we
stepping into? If someone's
covered all their bases - that
someone has serious connections
and serious pull.

DIANA

Which is why we step in.

Dan stands, walks to the glass wall of his office. Beyond
it - a small open-plan newsroom, half the desks empty. A
small operation.

DAN

You'll be surprised, but the big
publishers and media groups are
still content with the press
release. No one's digging. The
owners aren't interested, and as
long as there's no order from up
top to amplify it - everyone's
waiting for someone else to stick
their neck out first.

DAN (CONT'D)

(turns)

We are not the Times. No lawyers
on retainer, no margin for error.
If we hit a wall with these people
- can we hold it? Alone?

DIANA

If we wait for someone bigger to
stick their neck out - we'll go on
reprinting other people's press
releases.

Dan nods, thinking.

DAN

Move carefully. Anything you find
comes straight to me. Don't go
anywhere alone.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - RECEPTION - DAY

A small reception area outside the chairman's office. Leather chairs. A low coffee table, neatly stacked newspapers on it. A portrait of the sitting President on the wall.

At the desk - a SECRETARY (25, attractive, neat hair, formal blouse). A monitor in front of her, an earpiece in one ear.

In one of the chairs - DAVID. A folder of documents on his lap. An empty coffee cup on the table in front of him.

David looks at the clock on the wall. Then out the window. Then back at the clock.

The secretary looks up.

SECRETARY

Would you like more coffee, Mr. Miller?

DAVID

No, thank you. At my age, too much coffee isn't good for me.

The secretary smiles politely. Returns to her screen.

David puts a hand on his folder. Adjusts a cuff. Looks at the clock again.

The heavy office door opens. WHITMORE comes out - in person. Not an aide, not the secretary.

WHITMORE

David. Come in.

David stands. Picks up the folder. Walks to the door. Whitmore lets him pass, holding the door lightly.

The secretary goes back to work as if nothing happened.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - WHITMORE'S OFFICE - DAY

A spacious office. Parquet floor, heavy floor-length drapes, a decorative fireplace with a marble mantel. On the mantel - a clock and several books with unmarked spines. A long table in dark wood.

On the table, three identical folders are already laid out - one in front of each seat, except where David will sit. The folders are thick, color-tabbed. A water carafe, glasses.

At the table – two men in suits: WILLIAM KINCAID (60, quiet, a tablet in front of him, the screen dimmed but on) and JONATHAN PRESCOTT (50, open folder, pen ready).

Prescott doesn't look up as David enters. Kincaid – for a second – lifts his eyes from the tablet. Looks at David without expression. Returns to the screen.

Whitmore guides David to the chair on the left. David sits. Lays his folder in front of him – thin, no tabs. He notices the difference.

Whitmore takes the head of the table.

WHITMORE

How was the trip, David?

DAVID

Good, thank you.

WHITMORE

You haven't been in Washington in a while.

DAVID

A lot of work. The team's been at the facility almost without break, doing everything we can to get the required result faster.

WHITMORE

Good to hear.

A short pause. Whitmore makes a brief gesture toward the two men:

WHITMORE (CONT'D)

William Kincaid and Jonathan Prescott. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

David nods to both. Prescott opens his folder – straight to the right page. Bookmarked in advance.

PRESCOTT

Dr. Miller, allow me to get straight to the point.

(continuing, statement)

Over the past three years, has the project received the full requested volume of funding?

DAVID

For the most part – yes.

PRESCOTT
For the most part?

DAVID
There were delays in the third quarter the year before last. Critical equipment came in four months late. But on the whole — yes, the resources were provided.

PRESCOTT
Equipment was delivered to all of your specifications?

DAVID
Yes.

PRESCOTT
Was the specialist staff fully assembled?

A pause. Kincaid lifts his eyes from the tablet for a moment. Waits.

DAVID
In the early stages — yes.

KINCAID
(evenly, not looking up)
In the early stages. And now?

David looks at him. Kincaid looks at the screen.

DAVID
A number of staff have moved to other projects. That's a natural process in long-term research.

Kincaid is silent. Returns to his tablet. Prescott makes a note. Doesn't argue. Turns the page.

PRESCOTT
Dr. Miller. From our side (gestures with his palm toward Whitmore) you've been provided with comprehensive support at every level — financial, technical, all of it. You weren't constrained in any way — and I'll say more: in service of your project, research in what we can now consider more promising areas was paused, and in some cases shut

down. So where is the promised result?

Whitmore looks straight ahead. Doesn't turn toward Prescott. Doesn't react to the gesture in his direction.

David puts his hand on his folder. Doesn't open it.

DAVID

The result will come. It will. What we're observing right now has no precedent in the history of science. Our system is building itself, every day, every minute. Naming exact timelines for when, so to speak, the debugging is finished — that's difficult.

PRESCOTT

And how long might that take? Months, years? Or will it be an oddity with a price tag of trillions of taxpayer dollars?

DAVID

As long as it needs to.

A short pause. Prescott shifts slightly on his chair. Writes something.

PRESCOTT

Can we expect any concrete results in the near term?

David looks at him.

DAVID

I can't answer that.

PRESCOTT

Six months?

DAVID

I cannot name a timeline. That's precisely the point. The system continues to develop. It continues to consume computational resources — which means the process is underway. All we need to do is maintain the infrastructure. Technical staff, security, power. That's all.

Whitmore leans in for the first time in the meeting. Speaks personally:

WHITMORE

David. We need to clearly understand where our money is going. You're saying the project can continue without observers — you want to let the work run on its own?

DAVID

We could bring in contractors or specialists at the stage when the training process is finished. For now, what's needed is me, and as I said, keeping the infrastructure operational.

Silence. Whitmore glances at Prescott. A short, barely noticeable nod.

Kincaid removes a sheet of paper from his tablet. Passes it to Prescott. Prescott, without reading, passes it to Whitmore. Whitmore looks at the sheet for a second. Signs without looking.

PRESCOTT

We understand your position, Dr. Miller. Nonetheless, the committee is compelled to act. Funding will be reduced. Strict deadlines are being set — in one month, an expanded review will be conducted jointly with representatives of the Department of Defense. Based on its findings, the question of mothballing the facility will be considered.

Silence. Somewhere down the hall, a phone rings.

David slowly tightens his hand on his folder. The knuckles whiten.

DAVID

(quietly)

Mothballing, for NERD, is the same as murder. You will kill a nascent intelligence — a person.

Prescott looks at him. A second. Returns to his folder.

PRESCOTT

First - the project is Concord.
Second, you have still failed to
provide evidence that a
personality has formed, or even
exists. Your pretty graphs and
promised prospects will not, this
time, influence the committee's
decision.

David looks at him. Then at Kincaid. Kincaid has already
closed his tablet. Picks up his coat from the back of his
chair.

David closes his folder. He never opened it.

Stands.

Walks out without saying goodbye.

Whitmore rises quickly to follow.

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - CORRIDOR - DAY

Whitmore walks David out personally. They move along the
tall windows. Footsteps on parquet. Whitmore half a step
behind.

At the stairs, Whitmore stops. Glances back at the office
door. Speaks quietly - so they can't be heard through it:

WHITMORE

David. There are still people who
believe in your project. And
they're trying to slow the review
and the possible mothballing.
You're not alone. But the funding
will have to be cut regardless -
that's not up for discussion.

David looks at him.

DAVID

Is it always about money?

Whitmore meets his eyes. For the first time today. Doesn't
answer right away.

WHITMORE

Yes. That's how Washington works,
David. Resources aren't unlimited.

A pause.

DAVID

Richard, I'm asking one thing. In the worst-case scenario, don't cut power to the computational center and the core.

Whitmore nods silently. With doubt.

David goes down the stairs. He doesn't look back.

Whitmore watches him go. Takes out his phone. Opens a contact. Looks at the name on the screen for a long time.

Closes it. Slides the phone into his inner pocket.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PROJECT ARES — MEDICAL PROCESSING — NIGHT

Bright white light. The hood is pulled off. Webb blinks. The room is clean, functional — IV stands, monitoring units, a chair bolted to the floor. Two MEN in white coats. Two MEN in dark uniforms at the wall.

They sit him down in the chair. Strap him in — wrists, chest, ankles. He looks around. No sign, no window. This doesn't look like a prison infirmary. And it doesn't look like an execution chamber.

A door opens. A CHAPLAIN enters (over 60, civilian suit, a small cross at his chest, a worn Bible in hand). Not a guard, not a doctor. Webb looks at the chaplain. Goes pale. Tries to pull back — the straps don't let him.

CHAPLAIN

(gently, sitting beside him)

Hello, Marcus. I've come to be with you. If you wish — we can pray together.

Webb doesn't answer.

WEBB

This is an execution. Isn't it? I'm being— But you can't do this. Where are the witnesses? Where's the warden? Where's my lawyer? I get a phone call. I get an attorney!

The chaplain is silent. Places the Bible on his knee.

WEBB (CONT'D)

(faster, panic breaking
through)

Listen. I'm ready to talk. I'm ready to deal. There are things that aren't in the case file - the investigators never got to them, I kept quiet, but I'll tell everything, names, places, everything. Just bring me a prosecutor. Bring someone who-

CHAPLAIN

(quietly, riding it out)

Marcus. Do you want to make peace? Unburden your soul, while there's still time. That's why I'm here.

WEBB

You don't understand. I shouldn't be here, not like this, not now, I had weeks left, I had a date set! This is illegal! Call somebody - anybody!

The technicians behind the chaplain begin to work. A tray opens. The first syringe is being prepared - calmly, practiced. The chaplain does not turn toward them. He looks only at Webb.

CHAPLAIN

(patiently, the same
even tone)

You need not fear what comes next. Do you want to repent? To say to God what you didn't say to people?

WEBB

(breaking into a scream)

I don't give a damn about God! Get me a lawyer! ANYBODY!

The chaplain lowers his eyes. Is silent for a second. Opens the Bible and begins to read. Quietly, evenly, beneath Webb's incoherent speech.

CHAPLAIN

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters..."

The first injection. Webb jerks - the straps hold.

WEBB

No. No-no-no, wait, WAIT-

Animal terror on Webb's face.

CHAPLAIN

(continuing, a little
louder)

"...Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil: for thou art
with me..."

The second injection. Webb's pupils dilate. He thrashes -
as much as the straps allow.

The chaplain leans forward. Puts a hand on Webb's shoulder
- firmly, holding him, but without aggression.

CHAPLAIN (CONT'D)

(looking into his eyes)

I am here. I am with you. You are
not alone.

Webb looks at the chaplain. His lips move, but there are no
more words.

The technicians transfer the slackening body onto a gurney.
The chaplain does not take his hand away until the last
moment - until he is physically forced to. The gurney rolls
out.

INT. PROJECT ARES - NEURAL COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

Ceiling lights drift past, one after another. Webb has
stopped counting them.

The doors open into a LARGE HALL. He can't turn his head.
But his peripheral vision catches rows of CAPSULES, each
one occupied, each one wrapped in monitoring systems and
cable bundles. The bundles run up into the ceiling,
converging in one direction. Toward the data center.

He's laid into an open capsule. The connections are made -
without words, without pauses. A practiced sequence.

Above him - the capsule's lid. A TECHNICIAN looks at a
tablet. Makes a note.

One more unit in the network.

The lid closes.

In the darkness of the capsule, his eyes are open. The pupils respond to nothing.

INT. PROJECT ARES — MAIN STORAGE HALL (LEVEL 3) — NIGHT

The chaplain steps out of the room. Walks down the corridor along the rows of capsules — left and right, receding into the dark. Each one occupied. Indicators blink quietly, evenly.

Coming toward him — an AIDE with a tablet.

AIDE

Twelve more procedures today, sir.

CHAPLAIN

God's will be done.

The aide nods, walks on. The chaplain stops. Looks at the capsules along the wall. Quietly, to himself:

CHAPLAIN

Lord, grant them peace.

He walks on. The corridor does not end.

INT. PROJECT ARES — COMMAND LABORATORY — DAY

The same laboratory. Rows of stations. Green zeros on the main board.

Voss at her station. In front of her — three monitors with connection metrics. New batch onboarding today.

Carver approaches. With a cup of coffee.

CARVER

Dr. Voss.

Voss doesn't turn. Carver looks over her shoulder.

On the central monitor, a sharp SPIKE. One of the graphs jumps upward, a metric blinks red:

ANOMALY CLASS C — LOW PRIORITY

Carver flinches.

CARVER

Whoa. What was that? Did you see?

Voss doesn't answer right away. Looks at the screen. Then — evenly:

VOSS

Don't worry about it. It happens.

CARVER

How often?

VOSS

When we bring new units online.

CARVER

Plugging in people? Is that what you mean?

A short pause. Voss touches the screen. Flags it - "low priority, for review."

VOSS

I'm not going to spell it out.

Carver takes a sip of coffee. Smiles.

CARVER

Soul harvesting. Our own little private digital hell.

Voss freezes. Doesn't turn right away. Then - sharply.

VOSS

Go fuck yourself, Carver. Stay away from me, you goddamn clown.

Carver leans back. Raises his hands.

CARVER

Easy, Voss. You guys seriously have no sense of humor.

Shrugs. Walks away. Doesn't look back.

Voss watches him go. Then - at her screen. The metric is green again. The graph is flat.

Voss goes back to work.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) - MAIN CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: 3 MONTHS LATER.

The same room. Neglected. Most stations are dark, covered in dust sheets. Where two dozen people once sat - empty.

DAVID stands in the middle of the room. The same rabbit-ear slippers, worn down. He looks at the row of shut-down stations. At the sheets. At the empty chairs of his colleagues.

The camera slowly pushes in on his eyes – and PULLS BACK WITH A TURN, unfolding the space around him –

INT. IT COMPANY – OPEN-PLAN OFFICE – EVENING (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: 2010.

A cramped open-plan office, partitions. Friday, evening – most of the desks are empty. At one of the cubicles – YOUNG DAVID (about 30). Thin, no beard, headphones around his neck. Locked onto the monitor, hammering the keyboard. On the screen – streams of code, something branching.

A COWORKER, his age, already in his coat, leans over the partition.

COWORKER

David, come on already. It's Friday night out there. Alex is buying because he screwed up the release. You with us?

DAVID

(not looking up)

I need to finish something. I can't stop, I'm in the middle of it.

COWORKER

Still messing with your virus?

DAVID

(quiet, absorbed)

You guys just don't get it. It learns. It evolves. On its own.

The coworker rolls his eyes. Smiles.

COWORKER

Oh, Christ. One nerd found another – and on a network, of all places! You deserve each other.

He claps David on the shoulder and runs off, chuckling. Voices, elevator, silence. David is left alone. He looks at the screen – at his code, branching by itself. And quietly, almost to himself:

DAVID

(under his breath)

But now there are two of us. You and me. And we're not alone anymore.

He smiles at his own words.

The camera pushes in on those burning eyes – and PULLS BACK WITH A TURN –

INT. GOVERNMENT COMPLEX – CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: 2031.

A formal room. A long table, a COMMITTEE – suits, insignia, a couple of civilian experts. Before them – DAVID, just over fifty, gray in the beard, but still upright, energetic.

On the flip chart – a presentation. Large: N.E.R.D. Beneath, smaller – Neural Engine for Recursive Discovery. And graphs, growth curves, columns of computational power. David flips to the next slide. The numbers on the screen – impossible.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #1

Dr. Miller, with all due respect. These figures... Our specialists are telling us outright that it is impossible to write working code for quantum arrays. The hardware has been idle for ten years. What have you done?

David looks at him. Calm.

DAVID

Gentlemen, let's end this circus with the presentations. You poured billions into quantum computers. They sit on your lower levels, cooled with liquid helium, devouring power. And all your engineers can do with them is look at the blinking LEDs.

Light movement in the room. Someone frowns.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Want to know why? Because you're trying to harness quantum chaos with flat human logic. Zero and one. Yes and no. Our brain is physically incapable of writing code for superposition. You've built a perfect labyrinth out of

qubits – and you have no one who can walk through it.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #2

And you, then – you can.

DAVID

No. And neither can you.

A pause. The committee looks at him – not understanding where this is going.

DAVID (CONT'D)

What I've brought you isn't a program. I'm not proposing we compile hundreds of thousands of lines and hope the system doesn't crash. My algorithm – it's digital DNA. Viral. Adaptive.

David touches the flip chart. On the slide – a diagram: a dark core, around it a branching structure.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Load this core into a quantum array – and it will begin to rewrite itself. It will use the qubits not as a tool, but as a nutrient medium. The algorithm itself, from within, will build its own architecture. Will create its own functionality. Will write itself a language that matches the physics of the chip.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #1

Dr. Miller, do you understand how this sounds?

DAVID

I do. But there is no other way. You're trying to build a skyscraper brick by brick – upside down. I'm proposing we just throw a seed in there.

David stops. Exhales heavily.

A long pause. The committee is silent. They exchange glances. Someone sets down a pen. Someone makes a note.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #1

The numbers... are genuinely impressive, Dr. Miller.

David nods. Waits.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #1 (CONT'D)

But... the name. For a project at this level - funding, status, reports up the chain - we need something more neutral. More dignified.

David opens his mouth. Closes it.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #2

(pause, he likes it)

Concord.

COMMITTEE MEMBER #2 (CONT'D)

The cradle of the revolution. The place where it all began. Worthy. Patriotic. Project Concord.

The others nod approvingly. Someone writes it down. David is silent. He looks at the flip chart - at his "N.E.R.D.," which has just been crossed out.

Committee Member #2 is pleased with himself.

The camera pushes in on David's face - and PULLS BACK WITH A TURN, bringing us back -

INT. SECRET BUNKER (PROJECT CONCORD) - MAIN CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

David lowers himself into the chair at the central terminal. The same window on the screen: "Core Connection: Standby." The cursor blinks.

DAVID

(quietly, tired)

There are fewer and fewer of them, old friend. I'm almost the last who remembers why you're here. And I won't be around forever. A little longer - and there'll be no one left to talk to you. No one at all.

The cursor blinks.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(almost a whisper)

But there are still two of us. For now. You and me.

He smiles bitterly. The cursor blinks. Nothing. David nods to himself. Takes off his glasses, rubs the bridge of his nose. Goes back to work – logging the latest cross-section of changes in the core's databases.

INT. PROJECT ARES – OBSERVATION GALLERY – DAY

A large digital map covers an entire wall. Geographic markings. Icons for military units, infrastructure objects, military bases. Separate screens: video links. On one – a PENTAGON OFFICER (52), uniform, a neutral office behind him. On another – a group video link with investors.

VALE, COLT and FACILITY DIRECTOR ALAN GRANT (57) stand before the map. GENERAL MARSH – slightly to the side, as always.

The investors are finishing the conversation and disconnect. One of the video screens goes dark.

COLT

The system is live. Performance above projections. One thing left.

VALE

A target.

COLT

Pick a target – and we can show a result. To the people paying.

VALE

Efficient. Not flashy. Minimum expenditure – financial and material. Fast and precise.

Vale looks at the officer on the screen.

VALE (CONT'D)

Time and money, gentlemen.

The officer has been silent the whole time. Now he speaks.

OFFICER

We have a task. The target – a group in the tribal areas. The problem is, we don't know who leads it. No name, no face. No location. Can your system identify the command? The head, the

deputies – for subsequent
elimination?

Vale and Colt exchange a glance. Barely.

VALE

We're about to find out.

Vale – to Grant, without turning:

VALE (CONT'D)

Do we have access to the
intelligence databases?

GRANT

Yes.

VALE

Which ones?

GRANT

All of them.

A pause. The word hangs. Grant touches a tablet.

The MAP COMES ALIVE. First – a single point. The tribal
areas, the Afghan-Pakistani border. Beside it – text:

ANALYZING...

The map is thinking. A second. Two. Then, from the archive,
a SOUND rises. A live human voice. A recording from a phone
– poor quality, wind. Subtitles below.

SHEPHERD (V.O.)

(in Pashto, subtitles)

...no one will touch us now. Tor
Gar himself has put things right
around here. His people are
nearby. My wife's brother saw them
by the old road...

The voice continues – about an aunt in a neighboring
village, about a nephew who went away "to study" abroad.
And in the middle of a sentence, the voice CUTS OFF. Only
the machine remains.

The voice transcript runs across the screen as text. Key
terms are highlighted and pulled out into nodes:

"TOR GAR" → call sign. Commander. TARGET.

"by the old road" → geolocation. Probable base.

"aunt, neighboring village" → familial link.

"nephew, went to study" → foreign contact.

LINES extend from the nodes. One at first. Then faster. The machine pulls in other sources: call metadata, passenger manifests, border-crossing camera footage, attendance at religious study groups three countries away. All of this information sits on the servers of NSA, CIA, FBI, State Department. The machine cross-references information that does not surface in the search indexes of the neural analytic programs and virtual search assistants.

Lines multiply. The village links to a camp a thousand kilometers away. The camp links to a man in Hamburg. The aunt links to a funeral in a week.

At the center of the web – a face. Reconstructed. TOR GAR. Found.

SCENARIOS appear. Dry. Military. Each with its own percentage:

SCENARIO A – target at relative's funeral (in 6 days). Probability of attendance: 100%. Intercept in transit: 60%. Elimination during ceremony: 93%.

SCENARIO B – provocation incident in the target's area of responsibility, target arrives in person. Probability: 100%. Estimated arrival time: +7 hours after strike.

SCENARIO C – intercept upon return to ancestral village. Probability: 74%. Estimated time of intercept: unknown.

SCENARIO D – tracking the rotation of the male population, infiltration of the base posing as members of the group, elimination. Qualified personnel shortfall: 36%.

Scenario B sits among the others as evenly as all the rest.

The camera catches MARSH. He reads Scenario B. For a second, his eyes hold there. Then he reads on.

Beneath the scenarios, another layer unfolds. THE FORCE PACKAGE. The system calculates not only the target – it calculates everything.

OPTION 1 (precision): 1 strike UAV · special forces platoon · combat search-and-rescue team · ranger platoon (reserve) · attack helicopters · agents under cover in the area. Timings synchronized.

OPTION 2 (area): 1 strike UAV · attack helicopters · transfer of an M777 battery into range · ammunition load calculation · 14-hour logistics window.

No headquarters. No interagency coordination. One system holds it all – from the target to the last round.

And then the camera begins to PULL BACK. The Afghan-Pakistani node shrinks. Around it, other nodes emerge – the same cards, the same faces, the same percentages. Pakistan. Central Asia. Further – Russia. The Caucasus. Europe. The Horn of Africa.

The camera goes further, more nodes, the lines between them stretching across continents – connections no human being on Earth can see. Cartels, cells, factions, camps – all in one growing web.

The operation is calculated. Adjacent tasks are being analyzed, secondary targets and triggers are being identified, consequences are being projected.

The people in the gallery have turned away from the map and are discussing which option to pick. The map keeps filling.

The cursor blinks above the list of scenarios. Awaiting a command.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE