

UTOPIA

written by

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TEASER

EXT. TREE-LINED COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A picturesque country road, the trees dropping fall colors.  
A WHITE SEDAN, a rental, BREAKS FRAME.

WOMAN (V.O.)

America was founded on the belief  
that through hard work, courage and  
determination, one could achieve  
prosperity.

The sedan rounds a curve, passing a SIGN that reads: Now  
entering Macon Heights. Have a nice day!

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

The sedan cruises down the main street of Macon Heights,  
USA. This is the small town that exists in the minds of all  
Americans, whether we've been there or not. Main Street is  
warm and inviting and the storefronts are similar, but not  
identical.

It's small enough that people know their neighbors, but large  
enough that it's possible to meet new people.

WOMAN (V.O.)

We were promised financial security  
and constitutional freedom in America.  
The American dream.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

The car pulls up to a parking spot, and parks in front of  
the MACON HEIGHTS SENTINEL building.

WOMAN (V.O.)

But ever since we were so viciously  
attacked, that way of life has been  
threatened. Now, Americans aren't so  
certain that they'll achieve that  
dream.

Out of the car steps

JASON TAVERNER

Early 20s, one of those rakishly handsome guys who's only  
going to get more interesting as he gets older. He's dressed  
nicely, like he's going for a job interview. Which he is.

CUT TO:

INT. SENTINEL - SUE'S OFFICE

A plush, gorgeously minimalist office. SUE FROST (30s), the Sentinel's editor, stands up. She and Jason shake hands. He seems stunned by his good fortune.

WOMAN (V.O.)

But what if it were handed to you?  
What if you were given, on your  
merits, your ideal job?

CUT TO:

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MAPLE STREET - DAY

Jason's standing on the porch of a perfect little HOUSE, shaking hands with a REAL ESTATE AGENT in a maroon jacket.

WOMAN (V.O.)

What if you were able to buy the  
house you've always dreamed of?

The real estate agent hands Jason the keys to his new house.

CUT TO:

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

Jason, now a Macon Heights resident, is walking down the street. He stops to pet a dog, smiles at a WOMAN and her SMALL CHILD.

WOMAN (V.O.)

What if you lived in the perfect  
American town? What if you achieved  
the American dream?

CUT TO:

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jason's sitting on the sofa, his feet up. He turns - there's a knock at the door. He goes to the door, opens it. There, on the stoop is a WELCOME BASKET. He brings it inside.

WELCOME BASKET

A CARD that welcomes him to the neighborhood... a BOX OF COOKIES from the local bakery... COUPONS for the restaurants... a COFFEE CARD to the coffee place... a copy of MACON HEIGHTS WEEKLY, the local magazine... and an ENVELOPE.

Jason takes out the envelope, opens it. Inside, a white CARD.

CLOSE ON CARD

Which reads, in BOLD BLOCK LETTERING, "Get out while you have the chance."

JASON

Staring at the card, stopped for a moment... is this a joke, or is it real? He looks out the window.

JASON'S POV - HIS NEIGHBORHOOD

KIDS ride Razor scooters in the street... a NEIGHBOR trims his hedge... a WOMAN comes home with groceries. Totally normal.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Would you question it? Or would you just accept your good fortune and turn a blind eye to the possibility that your American dream come true is actually your nightmare?

JASON

Looks down at the card in his hand. He hesitates, then drops it onto the counter. He turns and opens the door, going outside, ready to enjoy a perfect afternoon in the perfect town.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - MORNING

On Jason, sound asleep. Peaceful. The sun gently bathes his face. He yawns, stretches, opens his eyes. For a moment, he doesn't know where he is. Then he remembers. He smiles and gets out of bed.

Jason goes into the living room, which is furnished, as is the rest of the house, in a tasteful yet funky bachelor pad style. Jason picks up his CEL PHONE. He dials, waits.

JASON

(into phone)

Hi, I need to leave a message. For Dorothy... Right. Sorry. D.O.T. The number is twelve, four, eight, three. Tell her I have news. And... that this is really stupid. And paranoid.

He hangs up, shakes his head. He goes into the kitchen and SEES the CARD from the welcome basket. He picks it up.

EXT. MAPLE STREET - MORNING

Jason opens his front door. The Sentinel's on the stoop. He bends down to pick up the paper.

ROSEMARY (O.S.)

Hi, number six.

Jason jumps. Standing at the porch railing about ten inches away is ROSEMARY MALPARTO (14, budding smartass).

JASON

Gah!! You scared the crap out of me!

ROSEMARY

That's me, silent but deadly.

JASON

Why did you call me number six?

ROSEMARY

Your address. Number six Maple Street.

(beat)

I'm number two.

JASON

Who is number one?

ROSEMARY

The Andersons.

(beat)

I AM NOT A NUMBER! I AM A FREE MAN!

JASON

Nice to know someone else in town  
knows the classics.

ROSEMARY

You just moved in, right?

JASON

Yesterday. I'm Jason.

ROSEMARY

Rosemary. I moved in a few months  
ago with my stupid mom and her  
husband. The husband's president of  
the neighborhood watch. *Lame.*

(beat)

My dad died.

JASON

I'm sorry.

ROSEMARY

No big deal. It's just information.

(beat)

Did you get a big old welcome basket?  
The husband likes to do crap like  
that.

JASON

As a matter of fact, I did. This was  
in it.

Jason shows her the card from the basket.

ROSEMARY

Wow. The husband has a weird sense  
of humor.

(beat)

So what's your deal here?

JASON

I just got a job, with the paper.  
I'm a reporter.

ROSEMARY

What are you going to report on? The  
garbage strike?

JASON

There's a garbage strike?

ROSEMARY

Of course not. Nobody ever strikes  
here. Nothing ever happens here.

JASON

You know, there's something to be said for a nice, quiet little town.

ROSEMARY

Live here for awhile and get back to me.

JASON

Now why don't I think the husband put that note in my welcome basket?

Rosemary grins.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Rosemary! You're going to be late!

Rosemary rolls her eyes.

ROSEMARY

The husband.

(beat)

Gotta go.

JASON

Nice meeting you.

ROSEMARY

Likewise. See you around, number six.

Rosemary's gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. SENTINEL - MORNING

Jason stands on the sidewalk, getting ready to go in for his first day. He clutches his new briefcase, takes a deep breath, and opens the door...

INT. SENTINEL - MORNING

...into CHAOS. EMPLOYEES rush from one end of the building to the next. People shout on the phone. Jason tries to get out of someone's way.

LEO (O.S.)

Look out!

Jason turns and just avoids being run into by a WOMAN and her cup of COFFEE. LEO BULERO (40s, energetic Clark Kent type) stands with editor SUE FROST (30s).

SUE

Close call.

JASON

I hope I'm not late --

SUE

You're right on time. Jason Taverner,  
Leo Bulero.

LEO

Good to know you. We're gonna be  
shacking up for your first story.

SUE

Take it easy with him, Leo. Don't  
ruin another one.

LEO

Yeah, yeah. Come on, kid, time's a  
wasting.

Leo hustles a bewildered Jason out the front door.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MORNING

Jason hurries to keep up with Leo.

LEO

First newspaper job?

JASON

If you count the college paper --

LEO

Won the student Pulitzer, right?

JASON

The opposite. My story was kind of  
scandalous.

LEO

The administration freak about the  
cafeteria expose?

JASON

We had a... well, I guess you could  
call him a mad scientist. He was  
doing experiments, with drugs. People  
wanted to cover it up. The  
administration, the CDC...

LEO

They publish it?

JASON

They butchered it. A story on wheat  
farming won instead.

LEO

It's always the fluff pieces. Guy probably writes for Time now.

JASON

Entertainment Weekly.

(beat)

But at least I found out the truth. About the scientist.

LEO

Truth ain't all it's cracked up to be. Sometimes you gotta know when not to cross the line.

Jason looks at Leo for a long moment. A light dawns.

JASON

Leo Bulero... you worked for the Times, didn't you? The shady source article --

LEO

Invented him out of whole cloth was how the editor put it. I knew the story was true but I couldn't prove it. I paid for it. Sue took a chance on me. I owe her big.

(beat)

You're lucky, to get this shot when you're just starting out. Maybe you can avoid the mistakes I've made.

They move off of Main Street.

LEO (CONT'D)

The residential areas of Macon Heights are all within walking distance of the business district. You don't need a car here unless you want one.

They pass a CHURCH. The board in front of the church reads, "Million bright ambassadors of morning."

JASON

What does that mean?

LEO

Gibberish. Pastor Bob likes to make fun of those inspirational sayings. He's a little... strange.

JASON

TV small towns are notoriously quirky. "Picket Fences," "Northern Exposure," "Gilmore Girls..."

LEO  
I don't own a television.

JASON  
At all?

LEO  
I'm not of the TV generation.

JASON  
Actually, I think you are.

LEO  
I remember LPs, eight-tracks --

JASON  
You're not that old, Leo.

LEO  
I will admit to remembering the early days of MTV.

JASON  
So all I can use on you are Dire Straits references?

LEO  
Duran Duran references work, too.

As they turn a corner, Jason begins to notice a series of colorful POSTERS on fences, walls, doors. They advertise an upcoming FILM FESTIVAL -- The Macon Heights Noir Festival.

JASON  
Macon Heights has a noir festival?

LEO  
Yep. One thing the town council's always on about is civic pride. So they got the idea years ago to do stuff to get us excited about Macon Heights. We do these festivals, four times a year. They appoint an M.C., master of ceremonies, for each festival.

(beat)  
You've got a feel for this town already. We're gonna go talk to the festival M.C.

JASON  
That's our story?

LEO  
People in this town like to know their neighbors.

(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)

Good thing is, they like to yap about themselves so it's easy to get quotes for your articles.

Leo's cell phone rings and he answers it. Jason wanders off, giving Leo privacy. Ahead, he SEES a PARK. A TELEPHONE POLE has several festival posters wrapped around it. Jason looks at a flyer for a lost Papillon. It's a cute little dog. He accidentally pulls the flyer off, revealing another FESTIVAL POSTER underneath it.

JASON

Dammit...

He tries to use an old staple to re-fasten the lost dog flyer. But he freezes when he sees the festival poster. Because this one's different... rather than announcing the upcoming film festival, this poster -- which is designed exactly the same way as the festival posters -- has a QUOTE on it: "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." If you aren't looking directly at it, you wouldn't necessarily notice. Jason blinks.

LEO (O.S.)

Sorry 'bout that. Let's go meet Tom.

Jason turns. He starts to say something about the posters, but Leo's already walking. Jason hesitates, then follows him through the park.

They arrive at a darling storefront which reads "Festival Headquarters." There are more of the festival posters, but none with the strange quote. They enter.

INT. FESTIVAL H.Q. - DAY

The place is packed full of posters, t-shirts, mugs, all kinds of stuff that's going to be sold. CLARA, an energetic young woman in a festival shirt, is nodding as THOMAS ASHBLESS (30s, distinguished writerly type) talks.

ASHBLESS

Last time Dean did the signs, he spelled everything wrong. Nothing gets spelled wrong on my watch.

CLARA

Gotcha, boss.

LEO

Hey, Tom.

Ashbless grins.

ASHBLESS

Hey, Leo! We're coming right along here.

LEO

Swell. Look, I want to introduce you to the new guy. Jason Taverner, this is Tom Ashbless, the film festival emcee and professional book writer.

ASHBLESS

Good to know you, Jason.

JASON

Nice to be known.

LEO

We're gearing up for festival coverage at the paper. I thought you could indoctrinate young Jason here.

ASHBLESS

Glad to!

JASON

You're letting me do the story?

LEO

I think you can handle it. You'll learn something about the town, too.  
(beat)  
Just get whatever interests you and we'll work on it tomorrow.

Jason's clearly excited to be left on his own.

JASON

Okay. Great.

Leo leaves. Ashbless turns to Jason.

ASHBLESS

I think we should start at the beginning.

(beat)

The first Macon Heights festival took place in 1958. It was the mayor's idea. Ed Fletcher was a free-thinker for 1958. You going to write any of this down?

Off Jason, realizing what he's gotten himself into...

CUT TO:

INT. FESTIVAL H.Q. - LATER

Ashbless is sitting now, perched on a stool, still as energetic as before. Jason, his eyes a little glazed over, is scribbling in a notebook.

ASHBLESS

-- and then came 1987. THAT was a revolutionary year! The town council decided --

Ashbless's phone rings. He picks it up.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hel-lo! Oh, dammit. What time is it?

Ashbless looks outside. It's getting dark.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

Ten minutes, okay?

He hangs up, looks sheepishly at Jason.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

I got carried away.

JASON

That's okay. It was interesting.

ASHBLESS

Even I know it isn't, but thanks for being polite. Hey, I'm meeting Leo and some friends for dinner. Want to come?

JASON

Yeah, if it's okay...

ASHBLESS

It's always okay in Macon Heights.

EXT. FESTIVAL H.Q.

Ashbless and Jason walk down the street.

JASON

So what kind of books do you write?

Ashbless shrugs.

ASHBLESS

Someone kills a guy. Another guy solves it. It's not Tolstoy.

JASON

I like mysteries.

They cut through the park. Even though it's getting dark, the park is serene. Up ahead is the telephone pole with the strange poster.

Jason stops, perplexed. All the POSTERS are festival posters. None of them has the strange quote. Jason frowns.

JASON (CONT'D)

There was another poster here... it had an Orwell quote on it.

(beat)

"War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." But it isn't here anymore.

Jason pulls at a few of the posters, trying to find it.

ASHBLESS

Don't bother. They come down as quickly as they go up.

JASON

What are you talking about?

Ashbless looks around, almost furtive. Satisfied nobody's paying any attention to them...

ASHBLESS

Ever since the first festival, there have been these... anomalies. Posters that look exactly like festival posters, only they have quotes on them. Idealism is the noble toga that political gentlemen drape over their will to power. Before that, we had Paranoia is when you know all the facts. That kind of thing.

JASON

What do they mean?

ASHBLESS

No idea. There aren't very many. And not everyone knows about 'em. There's a hardy group of us, we try and collect 'em when we see 'em. I barely snagged one before it was taken down.

JASON

Who takes them down?

ASHBLESS

Nobody knows who puts them up or who takes them down. It's a total mystery. Some people think there's a message, others think it's just a prank.

JASON

There was this thing in Arizona... the May Day Mystery.

ASHBLESS

Right! The coded message that shows up every May Day in the college paper. I personally do not think it's a joke.

JASON

What about these posters?

ASHBLESS

I have yet to formulate an opinion.

He gives Jason a long, measured look... weighing something in his mind.

ASHBLESS (cont'd) (CONT'D)

I've got an almost complete collection at home. You interested in getting into the game?

JASON

It is kind of up my alley...

ASHBLESS

Then you're coming over tomorrow. End of story.

(beat)

And here we are. Best Mexican food in town.

They enter the Capitan Restaurant.

INT. CAPITAN RESTAURANT - EVENING

Sitting at a table consuming a gigantic margarita is Leo, with two pretty GIRLS. He waves. Jason and Ashbless sit.

ASHBLESS

Hola!

LEO

Hey, guys.

(to Jason)

How's the story coming?

JASON

Tom's a font of information.

LEO

Yeah... sorry about that.

ASHBLESS

He meant a good font, Leo.

One of the girls, SHELLEY LATHAM (20s, blonde and captivating) smiles at Jason.

SHELLEY

Hey Tom, introduce us.

Jason glances at her, and then he looks at her. He can't take his eyes off of her.

ASHBLESS

Jason Taverner, Linda Fox and Shelley Latham. Our resident library geniuses.

Jason half-glances at LINDA FOX (20s, dark and sultry), but then his gaze slides back to Shelley. Before he can stop himself..

JASON

You're librarians?

Linda bristles.

LINDA

I suppose we're all supposed to be spinsters, right?

SHELLEY

Like in "It's A Wonderful Life," when Jimmy Stewart sees what would happen to Donna Reed if he didn't exist. She's all matronly and pinched and has to wear glasses, which she doesn't have to wear when she's had four children.

JASON

That's my favorite movie!

SHELLEY

Mine too, even though it made me deathly afraid of not being married.

They keep looking at each other. Ashbless nudges Jason.

ASHBLESS

She's not, by the way.

JASON

Not what?

ASHBLESS

Not married.

LEO

For God's sake, Tom.

LINDA

Honestly.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - LATER

Jason and his new friends are strolling down Main Street. Jason and Shelley are walking together, very aware of each other. Shelley's telling Jason about her life.

SHELLEY

...we were together about two years. I thought I loved him, but... I was just afraid of him.

JASON

So what happened?

SHELLEY

Well, I was going to break up with him. I had the speech all planned. And then I get a call from him. He's totally been arrested and, I kid you not, sent to Gitmo.

JASON

Guantanamo Bay? Seriously?

SHELLEY

I pretended I didn't know who he was. Is that awful?

JASON

Depends on why he was arrested.

SHELLEY

I never found out. I was just frantic to get away, and there was an opening here, so I grabbed it. I haven't heard from him since. It felt good... to stop running.

JASON

I know exactly what you mean.

SHELLEY

You do?

JASON

Yeah.

The POSTERS almost completely cover a brick wall. Jason peers at them, peels one back from the wall.

LEO

What are you doing?

JASON

Looking for the Orwell poster.

LEO

The Orwell...?

(beat)

Tom, you did NOT suck Jason into your paranoid little world.

ASHBLESS

I didn't do anything. He saw one on his own. And it's not paranoia. I've got evidence.

LINDA

(to Jason)

Ask Tom about the other evidence he has. The Bermuda Triangle, the Holy Grail... he's got theories on every ounce of esoterica.

ASHBLESS

Well, those are easy.

(beat)

It's Nazis.

JASON

What?

LEO

That's his answer for everything.

ASHBLESS

Not my fault they had their hands in so many pies.

JASON

Look, I saw one. With my own two eyes. It said War in peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.

ASHBLESS

Mr. George Orwell. Interesting choice, don't you think?

LEO

Not really.

LINDA

Not interested.

ASHBLESS

Ah, come on. Leo, you're a journalist. You don't even have an opinion? Don't you think there are people who believe that ignorance is strength, and war is peace?

LEO

Well... yeah. Dictators, fascists, people who want to control others.

ASHBLESS

What about the people they control? Do they believe it?

JASON

If they know they're being controlled, then no.

ASHBLESS

Do *you* believe it?

JASON

Of course not.

ASHBLESS

Then aren't you being controlled?

JASON

No.

ASHBLESS

How can you *know* that?

JASON

Huh. I guess I can't.

(beat)

How do you think they'd do it? Control people.

ASHBLESS

If you control information, you control how people believe.

LEO

Here we go... big lecture on the evils of a free press.

JASON

But in order to control information, you have to create it.

SHELLEY

(suddenly)

You use information to create a new reality. You manufacture it right to the population. It becomes their reality, and they'll do anything they can to protect it.

(beat)

Information is power.

It's said with such knowing conviction that everybody stares at Shelley.

ASHBLESS

It's certainly something to think about --

PETE (O.S.)

What's something to think about?

PETE DOWLAND

(20s, dark and serious), wearing a dark blue jacket with an EMBLEM on it, is standing there.

LINDA

Hey, Pete.

ASHBLESS

(to Jason)

Boyfriend.

Pete glances at Jason, sticks out a hand.

PETE

Pete Dowland, Runciter Security.  
Good to know you.

JASON

Jason Taverner.

PETE

(to Linda)

I got my shift changed for Friday.  
Can we do Saturday?

LINDA

Sure.

Pete's radio buzzes.

PETE

Gotta rabbit.

Pete kisses Linda and moves off.

JASON  
What's Runciter Security?

LEO  
They're the law in Macon Heights.  
(beat)  
Macon Heights is a private community.

JASON  
I got that from my research. It was kind of a selling point. But it didn't say anything about police. I guess I just never thought about it.

SHELLEY  
We're safer here than we would be in a city. Here, people care. They keep us safe. Really safe. You can walk around here, no problem.

Jason smiles at her, suddenly totally in love with her.

JASON  
Even though it's really safe, can I walk you home?

Shelley grins at him. Leo rolls his eyes.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS STREET - LATER

Jason's walking Shelley home. They're both quiet. Jason looks at her. Shelley looks young and innocent and vulnerable. On impulse, he takes her hand. She smiles at him. They hear the distant sound of someone hammering.

JASON  
What on Earth...?

They get closer and see WORKMEN repairing a roof.

JASON (CONT'D)  
Weird time to do repair work.

SHELLEY  
Oh, they only do repairs at night here. So everything's magically repaired by the morning.

JASON  
Is that some kind of town ordinance or something?

SHELLEY  
Yes, it is.  
(beat)  
I'm just up here.

They turn up a walk to a lovely little house. Jason walks her to the door. Shelley turns to look at him.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

I had an unexpectedly good time tonight.

JASON

I'm not sure how to take that.

SHELLEY

Well... I didn't expect to meet you. But I did. And... I think you're perfect.

JASON

I think you're perfect, too.

Jason leans down and kisses her, a nice chaste kiss... with potential. They break apart, breathless.

SHELLEY

Well. Goodnight.

JASON

Hey, would you -- can I cook dinner for you? Tomorrow?

SHELLEY

That would be... yes. Absolutely.

JASON

Tomorrow, then.

Shelley goes inside, closes the door.

INT. SHELLEY'S HOUSE

Shelley turns on a light and goes into the living room, towards a COMPUTER that's on a cute little desk.

POOLE (O.S.)

Did he ask you on a date?

Shelley spins, startled. Sitting in an armchair, in the dark, is GARSON POOLE (early 40s, imposing, with a cruel streak). But Shelley's not scared.

SHELLEY

You could just call, you know.

Poole gives her a long, probing look, then smiles.

POOLE

You really like him. Don't you?

SHELLEY

Of course not.

POOLE

Shelley, Shelley, Shelley...

Poole stands, walks over to her. Poole brushes a strand of hair out of her eyes. She flinches.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Just do your job. Don't get too attached.

He smiles, then leaves, shutting the door behind him. Shelley sinks into a chair, turns to the computer. The screensaver is an adorable slide show of adorable kittens. Shelley sits, moves the mouse. She goes to her E-MAIL PROGRAM, types in a series of PASSWORDS. She downloads a FILE, opens it: It's a DOSSIER, with a photo -- JASON'S PHOTO. Shelley gets to work reading about Jason...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jason's in his kitchen, standing in front of the refrigerator. There is nothing inside. Not even an egg. He closes the door, thinks for a minute.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MAIN STREET - LATER

Jason's walking down Main Street. The street is filled with residents shopping, eating, hanging out. A good number of people are literally dressed in their Sunday best. Jason's CEL rings. He answers it.

JASON  
(into phone)  
Go for Jason.

Jason sighs.

JASON (CONT'D)  
I already gave you the number. Twelve.  
Four. Eight. Three.  
(beat)  
Can't you just tell her -- no, I  
understand. Just... I need to talk  
to her, okay?

Jason hangs up, frustrated. He stops when he sees Happy's, the local diner. The place is packed. He opens the door.

INT. HAPPY'S

Jason enters. This is a familiar, comfortable diner. The WAITER, a harried-looking kid with blue streaks in his hair, spots Jason.

WAITER  
Table for...?

JASON  
One.

WAITER  
*One?*

Jason nods, then notices that everyone in here is also dressed in church clothes. EVERYONE. Except for him.

WAITER (CONT'D)  
You'll have to wait.

Jason sees Linda Fox and Pete Dowland, sitting with a striking older WOMAN, VALERIE DOWLAND (late 40s, gorgeous but motherly) at a corner table. These three are whispering, secretive. Linda spots Jason. He waves, and she finally waves, too.

WAITER (CONT'D)

You know them?

JASON

Sort of.

WAITER

Hey Linda, can this guy sit with you? He came by *himself*.

Linda hesitates but Valerie nods. Jason awkwardly joins them at their table. He's immediately put at ease by Valerie.

VALERIE

You must be the new reporter. Jason, right? Pete told me about you. I'm Valerie. Pete's mom. Good to know you.

JASON

Same here. Thanks for letting me barge in.

(beat)

Sorry I just showed up in jeans. I didn't know.

VALERIE

What nice manners! Your mother must be proud of you.

JASON

Intermittently.

VALERIE

This is the traditional after church place. There's no dress code. We're not freaks.

(beat)

Do you go to church?

JASON

Not really.

VALERIE

You'll have to try our church. Pastor Bob is a riot.

JASON

I will. Thanks.

VALERIE

So what are you up to today, Jason?

JASON

Well --

VALERIE

Because if you're not busy, or if you'd like something fun to do, I own a craft store and we're doing a decoupage class today.

JASON

I'm... not sure I know what that is.

VALERIE

You don't craft?

PETE

Mom, he's a *guy*. Obviously not.

JASON

Actually, I'm going to Tom Ashbless's after breakfast.

VALERIE

Tom Ashbless?

JASON

He's really interested in the posters, so I --

VALERIE

The posters? You mean Tom and his conspiracy theorists?

JASON

I suppose. I saw one yesterday. A poster.

LINDA

It's just a joke.

VALERIE

Only Tom and his friends think otherwise, Jason. Really. Don't become associated with someone like Tom Ashbless.

JASON

He's not a crackpot. Leo, Shelley and Linda are friends with him.

Valerie gives Linda a long, measured look. Linda looks back coolly, with no reaction. Jason begins to feel uneasy. Valerie turns back to Jason, suddenly all smiles again.

VALERIE

I'm not saying you should be unfriendly, but... this is a small town, and you have to be careful who you align yourself with.

(MORE)

VALERIE (CONT'D)

(beat)

But enough small-town politics.  
Tell me about yourself, Jason. Where  
are you from?

Off an uncertain Jason, we

CUT TO:

EXT. ASHBLESS'S HOUSE

The house is completely overgrown, at odds with its neighbors.  
As Jason raises a hand to knock, Ashbless opens the door.

ASHBLESS

Glad you could make it, Jason! Come  
on in. I'll show you what I've got  
so far.

INT. ASHBLESS'S HOUSE

They enter Ashbless's house and Jason stops. The walls are  
COVERED with the posters. BOOKS obscure every surface.  
Ashbless takes a pile of books off of a TABLE.

ASHBLESS

Sorry. Research.

Ashbless opens an artist's portfolio and takes out a  
collection of POSTERS, which he lays on the table.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

I'm the only person in town with  
this complete a collection. I got  
microscopes, infra-red, UV, the works.  
Examine 'em to your heart's content.

JASON

Thanks. I will.

Jason sits down and Ashbless leaves. Jason looks at the first  
poster, which is the latest one. The artwork is intricate  
and colorful, almost like the Fillmore posters of the 60s.  
Jason handles the posters carefully. The second one is also  
intricate and colorful, clearly done by the same artist. The  
phrase here is We have colluded in our own doom. It's  
chilling, especially the way the tendrils of the art entwine  
through the letters... Almost as if it's on purpose.

Jason turns on a powerful desk LAMP and pulls it closer,  
already engrossed.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. ASHBLESS'S HOUSE - A PATCH OF GREEN

Under a microscope. The green is hit with a UV light, turning it black.

ASHBLESS (O.S.)

Hey, Jason...

We PULL BACK TO SEE Jason, hunched over a poster. He looks up, startled. Ashbless is standing there, holding his jacket.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

You want to grab some dinner?

JASON

What time is it?

ASHBLESS

Seven.

JASON

Shelley's coming over for dinner at eight. Oh God. I have to cook a chicken!

Jason stands. Ashbless collects the posters, puts them back into the portfolio.

ASHBLESS

Take these with you, to study.

JASON

Are you sure?

ASHBLESS

Absolutely.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jason opens the oven door, checks a baking CHICKEN, then close the door. CAMERA FOLLOWS him through the house to the living room. He's spread out Ashbless's posters on the coffee table. He sits, looking at the row of posters.

JASON'S POV - THE POSTERS

The design of each poster is similar... strikingly similar. The posters are crowded with designs, the words only standing out because they're brightly colored; so brightly colored that your eye is drawn away from the background.

Jason leans forward, frowning... noticing something.

JASON'S POV - ONE POSTER

The CAMERA MOVES IN on one poster now, racking past the bold phrases into the background where, almost unseen, is a dense

collection of darkly colored DOTS that doesn't really seem to fit with the rest of the design.

The CAMERA MOVES from one poster to the next, racking into each background until a COLLECTION OF DOTS is revealed.

Jason is perplexed, puzzled. He sits, gazes at one poster. Then... his expression changes.

JASON'S POV - THE POSTER

As he looks at it, the collection of DOTS changes, morphs... revealing a DRAWING -- a DIAMOND, with a STRAIGHT LINE attached to its bottom -- that floats above the background.

Jason stares at it. Gets it.

JASON  
It's a stereogram.

He grabs a piece of paper and a pen, quickly sketching the symbol. Then he stares at the next poster.

JASON'S POV - POSTER

This collection of DOTS morphs, revealing a CIRCLE with two ARROWS coming out of it.

Jason draws it. The doorbell RINGS. Startled, he gets up, goes to the door. Shelley stands on the doorstep, looking lovely.

SHELLEY  
Hi! Am I early?

JASON  
Right on time. Come on in.

There's a slightly awkward kiss as Shelley enters the house.

SHELLEY  
Hey, this is nice.

The oven DINGS. Shelley looks surprised.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)  
You actually cooked?

JASON  
I told you I would. I made chicken.

SHELLEY  
I didn't think you'd go through with it. Well, the least I can do is set the table.  
(beat)  
Silverware?

JASON  
I knew I forgot something.

CUT TO:

INT. JASON'S HOUSE - LATER

Jason and Shelley are sitting at the empty kitchen table, eating chicken with their fingers and drinking wine out of the bottle.

JASON  
I'm really sorry about this. I never had to buy my own dishes before, so...

SHELLEY  
No, this is nice. Messy, but nice.

JASON  
You want to go out in the living room?

SHELLEY  
Sure.

Shelley grabs the wine bottle, grins, and goes into the

INT. LIVING ROOM

Where she sits on the sofa. Next to the sofa, on a side table, is a PHOTO ALBUM. Shelley picks it up as Jason comes into the living room.

SHELLEY  
Okay if I look?

JASON  
Sure.

He sits beside her as she opens the photo album.

PHOTO ALBUM - AS SHELLEY TURNS THE PAGES

JASON as a baby... Jason's MOM holding him and smiling into the camera... Jason as a toddler, at Christmas, opening his presents... all very normal pictures, until we SEE Jason at about six, standing proudly besides a large BLACK BOX that has gears and levers on it.

Shelley looks at it, perplexed.

SHELLEY  
What the hell is that?

JASON  
It's an Enigma machine.

SHELLEY

A what?

JASON

Enigma machine? It's what the Germans used during World War II to encode their messages.

SHELLEY

Okay...

JASON

I was home-schooled, by my mom. She taught me was how to break Enigma and Lorenz ciphers.

SHELLEY

That's... unique.

(beat)

What about your dad? Did he approve?

JASON

I never knew my dad.

SHELLEY

Why not?

JASON

(uncomfortable)

I just didn't.

Shelley closes the photo album and goes to set it down on the coffee table. She stops when she sees the POSTERS. She looks shocked.

SHELLEY

Where did you get those?

JASON

Oh. Tom Ashbless lent them to me.

(beat)

Speaking of codes, there's a code on those posters.

SHELLEY

Really.

JASON

It's a stereogram. A --

SHELLEY

Magic eye picture.

(thoughtfully)

You've heard of the Rosenbergs, right? Julius and Ethel?

JASON

Sure. They're the only spies in this country who've ever been executed.

SHELLEY

You know why?

JASON

Because they sold atomic secrets to the Russians.

SHELLEY

Because they didn't make a deal. If they'd made a deal, they wouldn't have died.

Now Shelley looks at Jason.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

If you make a deal, you'll be safe.

Shelley isn't dreamy and adorable anymore. Now, she's serious. Jason's romantic evening has collapsed.

JASON

A deal for what? Shelley --

Shelley touches Jason's face, smiles at him... almost sadly.

SHELLEY

Jason, I like you. I really do.

JASON

Well, I like you, too.

She stands up.

SHELLEY

So I have to go.

JASON

What? But we just had dinner. I thought we could --

Shelley starts towards the door, Jason on her heels.

SHELLEY

I'm sorry. But there's something I need to do.

She opens the door, then turns towards him.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

Would you come over tomorrow morning?  
For breakfast?

JASON

Will you tell me what's going on?

Shelley locks eyes with him, then nods.

SHELLEY

I will.

She leans in and kisses him. It's a pretty good kiss that leaves both of them breathless. She smiles at him.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

Dinner was wonderful. I'll see you tomorrow.

Jason watches Shelley leave. He closes the door, lost in thought.

EXT. JASON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shelley pulls out her cellphone as she walks. She punches in a number.

SHELLEY

(into phone)

Elias, it's Shelley. Pick up.

(beat)

Okay. Look... this guy, Jason, I think he's another one, but he doesn't know it yet. What's going on? I need to talk to you about this. Meet me at my house.

She hangs up and walks down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHELLEY'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jason goes up the walk... then stops. SHELLEY'S FRONT DOOR stands open. Jason stares at it for a moment, then he runs up the walk and into the house.

INT. SHELLEY'S HOUSE

The place has been completely TRASHED. Jason, heart in his throat, makes his way through the mess.

JASON

Shelley?

Wary, Jason comes into the LIVING ROOM, which is in complete disarray.

JASON (CONT'D)

Shell --

And there, on the floor, dead eyes staring sightlessly, is SHELLEY. She's covered in blood. Jason stares, not processing what he's seeing. He drops to his knees, as we GO TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. SHELLEY'S HOUSE - LATER

A shell-shocked Jason sits at the kitchen table, trying to avert his gaze from the destruction. Runciter Security MEN, in their capable blue coats, process the scene.

POOLE (O.S.)

Jason Taverner? You found the body?

Jason looks up to see GARSON POOLE, who we recognize as the man who'd menaced Shelley. He's wearing a blue jacket.

JASON

Yes. I...

POOLE

I'm Garson Poole, head of Runciter Security.

(beat)

I understand you and Shelley were together last night?

JASON

We met Saturday. I just moved here.

(beat)

I bought a house. And I think I'm late for work.

Jason's obviously in shock. Poole levels a gaze at him.

POOLE

Tell me what happened, Jason.

JASON

I cooked dinner last night. She... left. Around nine. She wanted me to come over for breakfast, so I did. And then I... found her.

POOLE

When you saw her... did she seem all right? Did she seem like she was afraid of anyone? Worried?

Jason shakes his head.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Did you touch anything when you came in here?

JASON

I don't know. I might have. I wasn't thinking --

Poole pulls a BIOMETRIC SCANNER out, sets it on the table.

POOLE

I'll take fingerprints so we can exclude you if we find any.

Pete Dowland enters, officious in his blue jacket.

PETE

We got a witness. Neighbor saw someone hanging around.

POOLE

Bring him in. Get a sketch and a detailed description.

Pete nods, then leaves. Poole looks at Jason.

POOLE (CONT'D)

My best guess -- home invasion. Guy gets pissed off that there's nothing to steal and goes ape. She surprises him, he kills her.

JASON

Then why did you want to know if she was afraid?

POOLE

You said she wasn't. I revised my theory.

JASON

Your witness says someone was hanging around. Home invaders are generally more impulsive. He wouldn't have cased the place.

POOLE

He would wait to see if anyone was home.

JASON

But he's just standing there. He'd be more proactive than that. And why didn't anyone hear anything?

POOLE

I know you're a reporter, Jason, but you're not conducting an interview. *I am.*

Poole stands.

POOLE (CONT'D)

I'll let you know if I have anything further.

JASON

But --

POOLE

Good to know you, Jason.

Poole turns away. Jason stands there a moment, then leaves.

INT. SENTINEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Sue and Leo and the STAFF (curmudgeonly HERB ASHER, nerdy ED FLETCHER, sports guy CHUCK RITTERSDORF, thin and excitable A.J. SPECTOWSKY and former pageant queen NIKKI THIBODEAUX) are watching Garson Poole on the TV MONITOR. Poole's giving a press conference and everyone's riveted. Jason enters, stands at the back.

ON MONITOR - GARSON POOLE

Is sitting in what looks like the biggest, plushest office ever. He sits, casual, hands folded, the perfect commander in chief.

POOLE

-- the murder. We're doing everything we can to find the person responsible. If anybody has any information about this man --

Poole's face is replaced by a SKETCH -- a thin, dark MAN. It's a strikingly detailed sketch and looks computer rendered. Poole comes back on screen.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Please contact us. Because we have a criminal at large, we will be enforcing a level two curfew tonight. We --

A MAN in a blue coat leans in, whispers to Poole. Poole nods, then looks back at the camera.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Citizens of Macon Heights. We have identified the man responsible for this crime. His name is Elias Tate.

The SKETCH appears on the screen again, next to a strikingly identical BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.

POOLE (CONT'D)

If you have any information about this man, or his acquaintances, get in touch with us ASAP.

Poole's back. He smiles, a fatherly "I will protect you" smile.

POOLE (CONT'D)

With your help, we'll catch this man.

Sue turns off the TV and turns, surprised to see Jason standing at the back of the room. She gives Jason a "You okay?" look, and he nods.

SUE

This story is our new priority. Leo, you and Jason get down to Runciter. Talk to Poole. Get whatever you can on this Tate guy.

Leo nods, gets up. He and Jason leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

It's sleek, efficient, state-of-the-art, and it means business. Outside is a bronze STATUE of a man.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

It's like the Pentagon, only sleeker and more efficient. It's also dead quiet; BLUE-COATED SECURITY MEN and WOMEN glide through the building in crepe-soled shoes. At the entrance is an imposing DESK, at which sits a beefy GUARD.

SECURITY CAMERAS click and whirr as they record every square inch of the polished building.

Jason and Leo enter. Jason's a little awed. He SEES a BANK of SECURITY MONITORS -- digital and in color. The monitors cover every floor, every office, and every bathroom in the building.

Jason and Leo go to the ELEVATOR. Another GUARD ushers them on and presses his THUMB against a BIOMETRIC SCANNER. He punches Floor 4. The doors glide closed.

Jason looks up to see the SECURITY CAMERA, which is focused on him. He shifts, nervous. The elevator dings softly. The doors glide open.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - TOP FLOOR

Jason and Leo exit into a plush LOBBY. Several local TV REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN crowd into the lobby, all wanting a piece of Poole. His assistant, DIANE, is trying in vain to keep them calm.

DIANE

Come on, you vultures --

Diane spots Leo and Jason. Her eyes widen.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Don't you dare, Bulero --

Leo dashes past her, Jason on his heels. Leo grins at Jason, pushes open the door to reveal

GARSON POOLE

Standing, arms clasped behind him.

The office wood-paneled, like a stark study rather than an office. There are security cameras in here, too, and one wall is entirely composed of a BANK OF SECURITY MONITORS, which seem to be trained on various parts of Macon Heights. But as he turns, the pictures on the monitors change -- now they mirror the monitors from the lobby.

POOLE

How'd you get past Diane?

LEO

Wind sprints.

POOLE

I gather you're here about Tate.

LEO

Yes, Sir.

JASON

How did you identify him?

POOLE

We thought we'd have something from casts of footprints in the begonia bed but then we got our big break. He was smoking and dropped several butts. DNA.

JASON

How did you get a PCR done so quickly?

POOLE

Glen Runciter, rest his soul, was a genius. He believed that technology could mimic human nature enough that it could aid us in solving crimes. That extends to forensics.

JASON

So you use a computer to solve crimes here?

POOLE

I won't bore you with the technical details, but our Turing program can  
(MORE)

POOLE (CONT'D)

extrapolate motive, examine alibi, define the personality of the killer... all of these elements work together to help us identify suspects and solve crimes.

(beat)

Guys, look... I'm sorry to rush you out of here, but I've got a lot of work to do.

LEO

Thanks, Mr. Poole. We really appreciate it.

Poole watches, enigmatic, as Jason and Leo leave the office.

EXT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

Jason looks at Leo.

JASON

Do you think Poole can find this Elias Tate?

LEO

Poole always finds them.

(beat)

So here's what we're gonna do. You go to the library, dig up what you can on this Tate guy. I'm going back to the office to get a head start on this story.

JASON

Don't we have better resources at the Sentinel?

LEO

You haven't seen the library yet.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS LIBRARY - DAY

This is the library version of the House of Usher -- it's big, solid, grand. A brick building, requisite vines creeping perfectly up the front. A town this size has no business having such a gigantic library.

Jason stands on the steps, awed.

ROSEMARY (O.S.)

Hey, Number Six.

Jason turns to see Rosemary clomping up the steps.

JASON

Number Two.

(MORE)

JASON (CONT'D)

(beat)  
Shouldn't you be in school?

ROSEMARY

It's progressive so it's flexible. I work here in the afternoons. iPod money.

Rosemary pushes open the double glass doors and Jason enters the library.

INT. MACON HEIGHTS LIBRARY

The SHELVES are floor to ceiling and every shelf is crammed with books. The DESK is more like a situation room, where dark-suited LIBRARIANS help CUSTOMERS, shelve books, type on the computer. It all seems very efficient.

Rosemary leads Jason to the desk. Linda Fox, working the computer, looks up. She looks different today, in her dark suit. Very serious and smart and capable.

LINDA

(to Rosemary)  
Shelving, doll. Juvenile fiction.

ROSEMARY

Yuck.

Rosemary moves off.

LINDA

I saw the news conference. Looks like Poole's found his man.

JASON

I'm sorry about Shelley...

Linda softens a bit. Nods.

LINDA

Thanks. What can I do for you?

JASON

I need to find anything I can on Elias Tate. For the paper.

LINDA

Follow me back to Reference.

Jason follows Linda through the library.

JASON

This is the most impressive library I've ever seen.

LINDA

The entire history of the town is contained in this library. The founder, Alexander Macon, wanted to make sure the town would be remembered. There isn't a year, a month, a day that hasn't been recorded.

Linda leads Jason to

THE REFERENCE ROOM

Which is an open area, softly lit. Wooden CARELS, all stocked with computers, are in the center of the stacks.

LINDA (CONT'D)

All the back issues of the Sentinel are accessible on any terminal... any book pertaining to the history of Macon Heights... school yearbooks... if Elias Tate is in this town, he's in this room. Figuratively, of course.

(beat)

We take information very seriously.

JASON

Information is power. Shelley was right.

LINDA

Yeah, about that... Shelley gets -- got -- kind of weird about things. She didn't have the easiest life before she came here. And even though she found a home here, she was still afraid. Not of anyone specifically, but... of being hurt.

(beat)

God, it's weird talking about her that way.

JASON

I know.

LINDA

Let me know if you need anything.

JASON

I will. Thanks.

Linda leaves. Jason looks around and gets to work. He boots up a computer and starts looking at Sentinel back issues.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Jason doing research. He flips through back issues of the paper on the computer... stacks BOOKS on the desk... goes through YEARBOOKS...

It gets later and later. Finally, Jason closes his last yearbook and sits, perplexed.

JASON (CONT'D)

Who *is* this guy?

Jason walks through the library, towards the desk. But when he turns a corner, he discovers that he's found the RESTROOMS.

He frowns, confused. He turns back, walks down the stacks. He hears something shuffling in the next aisle.

He hurries around the corner and hears THUMP as a book is dropped. Jason jumps, spins and sees that a BOOK has fallen to the floor. He bends down and picks it up, hunts for the right place.

He finds a hole in the shelf and as he's putting the book back

A FACE

Stares through the empty spot at him.

Jason jumps back, still holding the book. He looks back. The face is gone. Jason stands, heart pumping, not really knowing why he's so unnerved.

And then he gets it.

JASON (CONT'D)

*Tate.*

Jason SEES a SHADOW duck around the end of the stack. He sprints forward then stops, looking around the corner.

JASON'S POV - THE AISLE

Is empty.

Jason darts from one stack to the other. Each aisle is empty. He hears another THUMP and is suddenly face-to-face with

ELIAS TATE

His wide, haunted eyes are boring into Jason's.

Tate lifts a bony finger to his lips. Shushing Jason. Jason, heart in his throat, stares at Tate.

TATE

I didn't do it. I didn't kill her.

Jason just keeps backing away from Tate and Tate follows him.

JASON  
A witness saw you.

TATE  
There's always a witness in Macon Heights.  
(beat)  
Look, I don't have too much time. Shelley tried to warn you. Okay?

JASON  
Warn me about what?

TATE  
You found something, right? The hobo signs.

JASON  
What are you talking about?

TATE  
Christ on a pony, son! You gotta get out of here before it's too late.

JASON  
Get out of where?

TATE  
It's too late for me. But you... maybe you could make it. Poole's gonna get me, sooner than later.  
(beat)  
I showed you where to look. Now you look there. Got it?

JASON  
I --

Tate gets intense again, focused, furious.

TATE  
*You look there.* Shelley said you were another one. Like Ashbless, and the girl. So you --

Tate suddenly stops, sways, like he's dizzy. Staring at something. Jason turns. Standing at the end of the aisle is Rosemary... like she beamed in. She looks from Jason to Tate, her eyes wide. Then she turns and runs.

Jason turns back to see Tate, no longer frozen in his tracks, disappear around the corner.

JASON

Dammit!

Jason takes off after him, winding through the stacks, but Tate seems to have disappeared. Jason stops, winded. He looks up to see Linda staring at him, incredulous.

LINDA

Do I really have to tell you not to run in a library?

EXT. SENTINEL - LATER

Jason's on his cel, pulling open the door.

JASON

(into phone)

Look, can we just cut through the twelve layers of security here? I just want to talk to my -- I need to talk to her.

INT. SENTINEL - CONTINUOUS

Jason's in the building, going towards his office.

JASON

(into phone)

If you could rush this --

He frowns, looks at the phone. NO SIGNAL. Leo comes around the corner, sees Jason.

LEO

There you are. Linda called, said you looked weird when you left. Did you find anything on Tate?

JASON

Not any information.

LEO

But you found something?

Leo looks hopeful, and completely guileless. Jason trusts him... and he has to tell somebody.

JASON

At the library... I saw Tate. He approached me. Accosted me.

Leo's stunned.

LEO

Jesus. Are you okay?

Jason nods.

LEO (CONT'D)

So what happened? What did he want?

JASON

He took off. I chased him... but I lost him.

(beat)

He wanted to show me something that would clear him.

LEO

But you didn't... believe him.

JASON

He said he wasn't even there. The sketch of him that Poole had? It looked exactly like Tate. How could the witness see him out the window at night, skulking in the bushes, and give a description that accurate? If Tate's being set up --

LEO

Jesus. You're a crime-solver, aren't you?

(beat)

Look, Poole's a methodical guy. If he says the guy did it, the guy did it.

JASON

But--

LEO

What this town, and this newspaper, have given me... they could give to you. If you don't mess that up.

JASON

But things are different now. Tate sought me out.

LEO

The reporter cannot become a part of the story. What you're proposing here... we do not do investigative reportage of this nature. Your obligation is to file the story, Jason. Leave the police work to Poole.

Sue catches up with them, excited.

SUE

They caught him. They caught Tate.

LEO  
 (to Jason)  
 See? Poole doing his job. You stay  
 here until we get back.

Leo and Sue leave. Jason stands there, frustrated.

INT. SENTINEL - JASON'S OFFICE - EVENING

Jason's on his computer. He reaches for a cup of coffee and accidentally knocks a BOOK off his desk -- it's the book that had fallen on the floor in the library. He forgot he had it.

JASON  
 I've stolen a book from the library.  
 I'm going to library jail.

He glances at the cover. It's a book about Glen Runciter. written by "Anonymous." Jason flips through it. In the center of the book are PHOTOGRAPHS from the 60s. Photos of a young Glen Runciter unveiling his statue in front of the brand-new security building. Runciter with a group of FRIENDS.

Runciter with ELIAS TATE.

Glen Runciter, in his early 20s, is standing with his arm slung around the shoulder of a man who is unmistakably Elias Tate, looking exactly as he looks now. The caption reads, "Runciter and a co-worker." The date: 1965.

LEO (O.S.)  
 You still here?

Startled, Jason looks up. Leo stands in the doorway. Jason covers up what he's doing.

JASON  
 Did you talk to Tate?

LEO  
 No. To Poole. They caught him, he  
 confessed, end of story.

Jason nods, not believing a word.

LEO (CONT'D)  
 Well. You should go home. We'll work  
 on this tomorrow, right?

JASON  
 Right.

Leo leaves. Jason waits a moment, then stands up, grabbing his jacket and the book.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - LATER

Jason enters. He's carrying the book. The guard looks up.

JASON

Jason Taverner, from the Sentinel.  
I need to see Poole.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - HALLWAY

Jason's talking to Poole.

POOLE

He confessed, Jason.

JASON

That doesn't mean he did it.

POOLE

*He confessed.* Beyond, that, every  
single bit of evidence points to  
him.

JASON

Why wouldn't you let Leo and Sue  
talk to Tate?

POOLE

Simple. They didn't ask.

JASON

I want to talk to him.

POOLE

Fine. I'll take you back.

Surprised it's that easy, Jason follows Poole down a long,  
plush hallway. Poole stops, presses his thumb on the scanner.  
DOUBLE DOORS hiss open. Jason follows Poole into

A CELL BLOCK

That is different from any other cell block. It looks like a  
hospital corridor and the cells are glassed in, not barred.

PRISONERS glance up as Poole leads Jason down the row. One  
PRISONER, an elderly MAN, is lying on his bed, staring  
vacantly into space. When he sees Jason and Poole, he raises  
his head and begins screaming. Poole ignores him.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Here we are.

Poole stops and for the first time, we see him disconcerted.  
He slaps a BUTTON on the wall, next to an INTERCOM.

POOLE (CONT'D)

Poole in 6A. Send a medic. Now.

Jason comes around to see

ELIAS TATE

Hanging by a bedsheet rope from his cell. His sightless eyes stare at Jason. Poole uses his security card, opens the door. It sniks opens. Jason steps inside, staring at Tate. His eye travels to the WALL, where

A SYMBOL

Like the ones Jason found on the posters. The reverse of the line-and-diamond -- a DIAMOND with a STRAIGHT LINE attached, only this line is attached at the top of the diamond -- is hastily carved into the wall.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. JASON'S OFFICE - A COMPUTER SCREEN

A home-made web page. The title at the top reads "Hobo Signs." Covering the page are many of the symbols Jason had found on the posters, and their meanings.

THE REVERSE LINE-AND-DIAMOND

From Tate's cell. It reads "here we have to take revenge."

THE LINE-AND-DIAMOND SYMBOL

From one of the posters: "be ready to defend yourself."

A CIRCLE, WITH TWO ARROWS COMING OUT OF IT

Reads "get out fast."

JASON

Grabs the photos from the posters and jumps up.

EXT. ASHBLESS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jason knocks. After a moment, Tom Ashbless opens the door. Jason, excited, launches into his discovery.

JASON

I found it, Tom. The code. On the posters. They're hobo signs.

Jason shows him the symbols.

JASON (CONT'D)

Gypsies used them as warning signs, and I think someone's using them to communicate. But there's more to it. Shelley was at my house and saw your posters, then she got really weird and left.

(beat)

I think she was killed because of something she knew. And Tate was set up for her murder.

He shows the startled Ashbless the photo of Tate.

JASON (CONT'D)

This is a picture of Elias Tate, taken in the sixties.

(beat)

When I saw him, he looked exactly the same. I --

ASHBLESS  
Hang on a minute.

JASON  
I just needed to tell someone --

ASHBLESS  
And you chose me because...

JASON  
Because of the posters. I thought...  
you'd be intrigued.

Ashbless shakes his head, totally at sea.

ASHBLESS  
I'm sorry, but... have we met?

Jason stares at him.

JASON  
What?

ASHBLESS  
I really don't have the slightest  
idea who you are --

JASON  
Jason. Jason Taverner.

ASHBLESS  
Well, I don't know what you're talking  
about, Mr. Taverner. I'm going to  
close the door now.

Jason can see that Ashbless is a little frightened of him.

JASON  
Tom, I --

ASHBLESS  
Good to know you.

Ashbless firmly closes the door in Jason's face.

INT. JASON'S OFFICE - EVENING

Jason's back in his office. He picks up the Runciter book, flips it open. He tosses it to the ground, frustrated and angry. The book splays, face-first, on the carpet. He bends down to pick it up, but freezes.

CLOSE ON BOOK - THE PUBLISHER

Is Ubik Publishing, but the logo underneath is a BOX with two circles and an X.

Jason turns to the WEBPAGE with the hobo signs. He scrolls down until he finds what he's looking for

A BOX, WITH TWO CIRCLES AND AN X

Which reads "all the doors." Jason holds up the Runciter book. The SYMBOLS are EXACTLY THE SAME. He picks up the phone.

JASON

(into phone)

Hi, information for New York City...  
Ubik Publishing.

Jason puts the phone on speaker and waits as it rings. Then a RECORDING comes on. It's a woman's voice.

RECORDING

(on speaker)

You have reached the Ubik Corporation.  
Please listen carefully, as our menu  
has changed. For Billing, press one.  
For the Ubik Group, press two. For  
Ubik Publishing, press three --

Jason presses three.

RECORDING (cont'd) (CONT'D)

(on speaker)

You have reached Ubik Publishing.  
Please listen carefully, as our menu  
has changed. For Editorial, press  
one --

Jason presses one.

RECORDING (CONT'D)

(on phone)

For Fiction, press one. For Non-  
fiction, press two --

Jason presses two.

RECORDING (CONT'D)

(on speaker)

Your hold time is about three minutes.

A scratchy version of "Love Is Blue" emanates from the speaker as Jason waits.

WOMAN

(on speaker)

Editorial. How may I direct your  
call?

JASON

Hi. I'm trying to find some  
information --

WOMAN  
 (on speaker)  
 Please hold.

"Love Is Blue." Then --

RECORDING  
 (on speaker)  
 You have reached Ubik Publishing.  
 Please listen carefully, as our menu  
 has changed.

JASON  
 The hell?

RECORDING  
 (on speaker)  
 For Editorial, press one.

Jason presses one, then two.

RECORDING (CONT'D)  
 (on speaker)  
 Your hold time is about three minutes.

"Love Is Blue." Then --

WOMAN  
 (on speaker)  
 Editorial. How may I direct your  
 call?

JASON  
 Hi, I just called and you transferred  
 me back to the menu.

WOMAN  
 (on speaker)  
 So sorry, sir. How may I direct your  
 call?

JASON  
 I need to get some information about  
 a book that was published.

WOMAN  
 (on speaker)  
 What's the name of the book?

JASON  
 "Runciter, The Man." I need to find  
 out who the author --

WOMAN  
 (on speaker)  
 Please hold.

"Love Is Blue."

WOMAN (cont'd) (CONT'D)

(on speaker)

The rights for that book now belong to our subsidiary, Ubik Press. Please hold.

"Love Is Blue."

RECORDING

(on speaker)

Welcome to Ubik Press. If you know the extension of the party you're trying to reach, enter it now.

Jason sits there, frozen. He waits. Nothing. He presses a button. There's a DIAL TONE. It hung up on him.

JASON

Dammit!

He dials again.

DIFFERENT RECORDING

(on speaker)

The number you are trying to reach is no longer in service --

Jason slams the phone down and gets up.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

A medium-sized airport. Jason's rental car pulls into the lot. Parks. Jason gets out. He's on his cel, frustrated.

JASON

(into phone)

Look, I don't care if you have to put it in code. Just tell her I have to go to New York for a few days. Can you at least do that?

Jason enters the terminal.

INT. AIRPORT

Jason gets to the counter.

CLERK

We've got a non-stop flight to New York in two hours.

JASON

That's perfect.

CLERK  
Driver's license?

Jason hands it over. The clerk works at the computer. She frowns, looks at his driver's license, then types again. She waits. Then she slides a glance towards Jason.

CLERK (CONT'D)  
It'll be just a moment, Sir.

Jason nods. The clerk leaves the desk. As Jason watches, she talks to a MAN in a DARK SUIT - obviously some kind of a security guy. She talks. The man comes over to Jason.

SECURITY MAN  
Sir, do you possess a United States  
passport?

Jason's startled. Nods.

SECURITY MAN (CONT'D)  
Do you have it with you?

JASON  
Well, yeah.

Jason digs through his backpack and finds his passport. He hands it over. The man examines it.

JASON (CONT'D)  
I'm just going to New York, though.

SECURITY MAN  
Please come with me, Sir.

JASON  
Why? What's wrong?

SECURITY MAN  
I just need you to come with me.

Jason starts to protest again but out of the corner of his eye, he sees several SECURITY MEN inching towards him.

JASON  
Okay, okay. Geez.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Jason's in a bare room that contains only a table and a chair. He's been here for awhile. The door opens. A different MAN enters -- the SUPERIOR.

JASON  
I've been here for hours --

The man slams Jason's passport down on the table.

SUPERIOR  
How far did you think this would get you?

JASON  
It got me to France once --

SUPERIOR  
It's not a very good fake.

JASON  
It's not a fake. It's my passport.

SUPERIOR  
And is this your driver's license?

He slaps that down, too.

JASON  
Yeah. What's going on?

The man unfolds a piece of PAPER and lays it on the table.

Jason looks at it -- it's a rough photo of Jason but underneath it is a different NAME -- JAMES BRISKIN.

JASON (CONT'D)  
That's not me!

SUPERIOR  
It's obviously you.

JASON  
But I'm not James Briskin. I'm Jason Taverner. There's some kind of a mix-up here.  
(beat)  
I can call people who will vouch for me.

SUPERIOR  
We know this maneuver. You have agents planted --

The door opens and another security man motions to the superior. He turns back to Jason and levels a gaze at him.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)  
You're in a lot of trouble.

He leaves. Jason sits there, in total disbelief. The door opens again. The superior enters. He glares at Jason.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)  
If you ever try and enter my airport again, I'll do more than just sit  
(MORE)

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)  
 you in a room for a few hours. Is  
 that clear?

Jason's bewildered.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)  
 Clear?!?

JASON  
 Yes. Yes. It's clear.

The man jerks his head.

SUPERIOR  
 Out.

Jason walks out to find Garson Poole in the hallway.

POOLE  
 Let's go, Son.

Poole puts a hand on Jason's shoulder and guides him past  
 the security men and out of the airport.

EXT. AIRPORT

They walk in silence for a moment.

POOLE  
 I pulled a lot of strings to get you  
 out of there.

JASON  
 But I didn't do anything!

POOLE  
 Does it really matter?

JASON  
 Where are you taking me?

POOLE  
 Macon Heights. Where you belong.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MORNING

Another beautiful day in paradise. Birds are singing, a guy  
 mows his lawn, kids are playing.

INT. JASON'S HOUSE

Jason wakes up, rolls over, groggy. He hears his coffeemaker  
 DING. He goes into the kitchen and pours a cup of coffee. He  
 looks around his house. It's peaceful. Orderly. He goes to  
 the front door and opens it. The paper's on the stoop.

Rosemary, helping her mom with the gardening, waves. Jason waves back, opens the paper. There, above the fold, is the story about Shelley's murder, Tate's arrest and suicide... and the byline says Leo Bulero and Jason Taverner. Jason reads it, perplexed.

INT. LEO'S OFFICE - MORNING

Leo looks up as Jason knocks.

LEO

Hey, kid. You see the story?

JASON

Yes, I did, but... where did all that information on Tate come from? I looked through the entire library and couldn't find a thing.

Leo rummages through the mess on his desk and tosses Jason a thick MANILA ENVELOPE.

LEO

You just had to know where to look.

Jason doesn't seem convinced.

LEO (CONT'D)

Was the story okay? I had to change some of your stuff, you know, to make it mesh.

JASON

No, Leo, it's okay. It's fine. I'm... glad to see my name in print.

LEO

I know you were stressed about this, and that's too bad. But you did a good job. I told Sue that. And I hope you know, Jason... if you ever need anyone to talk to, I'm here.

JASON

Well. Thanks. I appreciate that.

Jason holds up the envelope.

JASON (CONT'D)

Okay if I keep this?

LEO

Sure.

EXT. SENTINEL - DAY

Jason sits down on a bench, takes out a pen. On the envelope, he writes "D.O.T., PO Box 4532, 93618." He pulls STAMPS out of his pocket, puts them on the envelope, then gets up and drops the envelope into a MAILBOX.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS COMMUNITY PARK - LATER

A really nice park. Kids, playing, the whole nine yards. Jason sits on a bench, just watching.

POOLE (O.S.)

I liked your story.

Garson Poole sits down next to Jason.

JASON

There's a more intriguing version out there.

POOLE

Ah. You're still interested in Elias Tate.

JASON

Just satisfying my curiosity.

POOLE

And you're willing to sacrifice everything for that? A good job, a nice house, a life in this town?

JASON

How am I sacrificing anything by looking into a story?

POOLE

There are powerful people who may not look at it that way.

Jason stares at Poole, realizes:

JASON

People like you.

POOLE

There are things about this town that you don't understand. Things you'll never understand.

JASON

Things you don't want anyone to know. You set Tate up, didn't you?

POOLE

Based on your story, Tate's background is explained.

JASON

Nobody's going to believe that.

POOLE

Are you kidding? Everybody believes it.

JASON

Because you made it all up and planted information for Leo to find. Why? What did Tate know?

(beat)

And what about Shelley?

POOLE

HEY. I liked that girl. You think you knew her, but you didn't.

(beat)

I won't allow you to cause trouble in my town.

JASON

What do you want from me?

POOLE

I want you to be a good citizen. I want to have a cordial relationship with you, Jason. I regret having to initiate this discussion.

JASON

Did you also regret making sure I got stopped at the airport?

Poole smiles, noncommittal.

POOLE

I'm giving you an opportunity to become a productive member of the community. If you'd prefer to test me, Jason, you'll regret it.

Poole stands.

POOLE (CONT'D)

I've told you what you need to do to live a good life in Macon Heights. I will protect this town at all costs. From anything or anyone I deem a threat. Don't become a threat, Jason. Do we have a deal here?

Jason stares at Poole as he echoes what Shelley said to him.

JASON

A deal.

POOLE

Good.

Poole holds out his hand. Jason hesitates, then stands.

He shakes Poole's hand and doesn't look at him as he walks off, through the park, where kids play innocently, a COUPLE laughs together as they eat ice cream, and a MAN jogs with his dog. Poole watches Jason go.

VALERIE (O.S.)

You catch more flies with honey.

Poole turns. Valerie Dowland joins Poole.

POOLE

He can be controlled, Val. He just doesn't know it yet.

VALERIE

When are we going to tell him?

POOLE

When it suits us. Not before.

Valerie surreptitiously brushes Poole's hand, and we

CUT TO:

INT. JASON'S HOUSE

Jason, still numb, enters. He drops his keys on the counter and then he goes into the living room where he can finally collapse onto the sofa. He buries his head in his hands, drained. He hears something SCRATCHING at the back door. He goes to the door, opens it.

There, on the stoop, is a PACKAGE. Jason opens it. Inside is an unmarked VIDEOTAPE, and a white sheet of paper. On the paper, the "all the doors" symbol.

Jason puts the videotape into the VCR, hits "play." The tape flutters, grainy. A BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE appears -- it's a YOUNG WOMAN in her 20s, dressed in a nice dark SUIT from the fifties. She's standing in front of a huge MAP OF AMERICA. And when she speaks, we recognize her voice -- she's the voice-over from the teaser. The tape is in the middle:

WOMAN

Would you question it? Or would you just accept your good fortune and turn a blind eye to the possibility that your American dream come true is actually your prison?

She folds her hands, staring directly into the camera.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

As everybody knows, the key is not in getting the American dream. It's in holding onto it. That is the central point of our presentation. In order to control the minds of people, you must control their perceptions, get them to see the world as you do.

JASON

What the hell is this?

WOMAN

We will create a reality that you can manipulate, a people who will participate in the creation of that reality. They will feed it to their own children, and they will fight to protect it. Now... in order to proceed --

The VCR makes a squealing noise. The tape BREAKS.

JASON

No...

He jumps as his CELPHONE rings. He ignores it as he tries to get the videotape out of the VCR, but it's stuck, broken. He finally grabs his cel.

JASON (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Jason.

(beat; incredulous)

Mom?? What are you doing calling me? It's not safe --

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - A WOMAN

In her mid-forties, clutching a telephone. This is Jason's MOTHER, DOROTHY.

DOROTHY

Jason, I just got your message --

JASON

Mom, you have to hang up.

DOROTHY

It's okay. I'm covered.

JASON

No, you're not. You're not covered.  
Look, I'm in some kind of trouble.  
I'm in this town, and I think they're  
trying to keep me here.

Dorothy frowns.

DOROTHY

Jace, where are you?

JASON

Macon Heights. But don't worry,  
because I'm going to figure out what's  
going on. I'll get to the bottom of  
this --

Dorothy closes her eyes, sick.

DOROTHY

Oh, God, Jason...

JASON

Mom, what is it?

DOROTHY

I never told you. All these years...  
of trying to keep you safe. All the  
running...

(beat)

That's where we were running from,  
Jason. We were running from *Macon  
Heights*.

Jason sits, stunned, frozen, in his perfect house... in his  
prison.

The CAMERA PULLS UP and out of Jason's house, flying over  
other backyards as people go about their lives in the perfect  
town of Macon Heights.

FADE TO BLACK.