

A L P H A

Written by
Pat Hartonian

Contact:

Pat Hartonian
(818) 279-5901
pathart777@gmail.com
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Reg. WGAw

DARKNESS

A muffled GUNSHOT, faint like a whisper.

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

The ambiance of nature permeates the air, alluding to the density of wildlife around us.

MARCUS' POV: He moves forward, each step slower than the last, until he finally comes to a stop at the foot of a small clearing. On the ground at his feet lays...

A DYING CROW. We hear its fading HEARTBEAT.

EXTREME CLOSE UP OF CROW'S EYE: The reflection of the young boy as he approaches.

YOUNG MARCUS stands there holding a BB rifle, his face riddled with regret, as the bird lays at his feet, its tiny lungs breathing their last breaths.

The HEARTBEAT slows further.

EXTREME CLOSE UP OF THE CROW'S EYE as it dies. A long beat.

CUT TO BLACK:

The familiar sound of CHILD'S LAUGH is barely audible.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

An ideal fifties style home sits in the middle of a picturesque suburban neighborhood. An American flag waves in the breeze, capturing the sentiment of a Norman Rockwell painting.

MARCUS' POV: LISA, thirties, stands on the front lawn with her seven year old son, JASON. Behind them in the distance, her husband MAX, mid-thirties, sits on the front porch with a sullen expression.

Lisa forces a smile, in a weak attempt to disguise her angst and uneasiness. Jason looks up at Marcus and salutes. No need to fake his enthusiasm.

CUT TO BLACK:

The faint sound of the OCEAN.

EXT. BEACH - LATE AFTERNOON

Waves CRASH against the shore. The coastline extends for miles.

MARCUS' POV: JULIE, mid-twenties and beautiful, sits on a rock as the waves crash at her feet. She looks out towards the horizon, lost in her thoughts.

As Marcus approaches, she turns and spots him. A faint smile forms on her lips.

THEN, A SUDDEN JOLT...

CUT TO BLACK:

DARKNESS

CLARK (V.O.)
Hit him again.

DIMITRI (V.O.)
He's up.

CLARK (V.O.)
(dismissive)
Hit him again.

An ELECTRIC CURRENT rips through the air, followed by a SCREAM that fills the void with dread.

CLARK (V.O.)
Welcome...

A SWOOSH as the bag is pulled off his head to reveal...

INT. CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

MARCUS' POV: Instantly blinded by the daylight, his eyes fight to adjust to the brightness. TWO FIGURES stand before him like angels of death, black silhouettes against a milky white backdrop.

CLARK
(out of focus)
...to the land of the living
Marcus.

Slowly the figures come into focus...

CLARK (CONT'D)
Having trouble processing
everything?

His vision finally clears to reveal CLARK, forties, who stands before him, holding a black bag in one hand. Next to Clark sits DIMITRI, late twenties. They are flanked on both sides by a pair of burly GUARDS.

He looks around the room: concrete walls, a metallic table scattered with odd instrumentation.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(sits down)
I understand you're confused.
Everything is a little fuzzy.

INT. HALLWAY - RUNDOWN APARTMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

Flashes of images: Half a dozen MERCENARIES in black assault gear, raid an apartment. They rush a pair of CIVILIANS towards the exit, into the daylight.

INT. CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

Clark sits with a curious expression.

CLARK
Wondering who we are? How long
you've been here? None of that
matters.

Reverse angle to reveal MARCUS, late twenties, fit and ruggedly handsome, aside from the fresh cuts and bruises on his face.

MARCUS
You're American?

CLARK
(chuckles)
What were you expecting? Arab
extremists? Yes Marcus, I'm
American... or maybe I'm not. You
can never know for certain.

Marcus looks around uncomfortably.

MARCUS
Where am I?

CLARK
(sighs)
There's only one question you
should be asking, and that's not
it.

MARCUS
(after a beat)
What do you want from me?

CLARK
(grins)
Now that's better...

Clark's smirk fades to stone.

CLARK (CONT'D)
I need to unlock the encryption on that flash-drive. Two failed attempts and the drive wipes the data, so we can't crack it. We need the password.

Marcus stares at him with a blank expression.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Don't make this harder than it has to be.

MARCUS
(confused)
You're wasting your time. I'm just a courier. They don't tell us anything.

CLARK
Really hard-wired that into you, didn't they? Deny, deny, deny.
(a sarcastic grin)
You're training is designed to merely stall the inevitable. The longer you don't break, the less valuable the data becomes.

Clark inches closer to Marcus.

CLARK (CONT'D)
But there are limits to everything.
(smiles)
Everyone's got a breaking point
Marcus, and today we'll find yours.

Clark looks over to Dimitri and nods. A moment later a surge of electricity rips through Marcus. Every muscle in this body tenses up, as he goes into convulsions. Marcus SCREAMS, as he spasms in pain. After a beat, Dimitri cuts off the current, and Marcus collapses back in the chair.

MARCUS

(regains his composure)
They don't tell us anything, so we
can't be compromised.

(beat)

I never know what's on the drives.

CLARK

Convincing... and under normal
circumstances that would be
standard operating procedure, but
in this case it's not true.

Marcus stares him down for a moment, before looking away in
defiant silence.

CLARK (CONT'D)

I have first hand knowledge you
know exactly what was on that
drive. And after what happened to
the apartment...

EXT. RUNDOWN STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

The Mercenaries lead the civilians outside of the building,
and rush them towards a waiting van.

Suddenly an EXPLOSION behind them rocks the building, as a
cloud of smoke and debris bursts out of an apartment window
in the distance.

CLARK (V.O.)

You and your partner Braddock...

INT. CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

Clark studies Marcus as he speaks.

CLARK

...are all I've got.

MARCUS

Well then you don't have shit.

CLARK

Interesting choice of words,
Marcus.

Clark studies Marcus silently as the tension builds. Marcus'
armor cracks a bit, and we see a bit of worry in his eyes.

CLARK (CONT'D)

(nods in respect)

Look, I admire your defiance, but the problem is... ..today is an important day for me, and I don't have a lot of time. You can say I'm under the microscope.

Clark draws near.

CLARK (CONT'D)

(sincere)

If you help me do my job, I can guarantee you that I will save lives. American lives.

(beat)

I know it doesn't seem like it now, but we're both playing for the same side. I'm one of the good guys...

(smiles)

...but I will do anything it takes to find out what I need to know. Don't make me become the bad guy.

MARCUS

I told you, I don't know anything.

CLARK

(aggravated)

You've forced my hand.

Clark moves back over to Dimitri.

CLARK (CONT'D)

We can move past the shock therapy.

(to Dimitri)

Give him the D6.

DIMITRI

But... we haven't tested this scenario for-

CLARK

(dismissive)

I didn't ask your opinion.

Dimitri reluctantly retrieves a case from the table. He opens it reveal a syringe.

CLARK (CONT'D)

This is something new we've cooked up. Last chance to cooperate.

MARCUS
I can't tell you something I don't know.

CLARK
Have you ever heard of a Stone Fish before? It's victims, those poor souls who have been unfortunate enough to step on them, have been known to ask for immediate amputation.

Clark gives Dimitri the go ahead, who walks over to Marcus and reluctantly injects him in his biceps.

CLARK (CONT'D)
You'll feel a slight burning sensation in your arm...

Marcus stares at his right arm, obviously feeling the effects of the drug.

CLARK (CONT'D)
...a sensation that will intensify, slowly at first...

Marcus looks up at Clark with fear in his eyes.

MARCUS
What the fuck did you give me?

CLARK
Tell me what I need to know and it stops.

Marcus' arm begins to spasm, as he grits his teeth, the pain becoming unbearable.

CLARK (CONT'D)
The pain will spread, until every inch of your body is on fire.

MARCUS
(in agony)
I told you! I don't know! I don't...

Marcus suddenly SCREAMS wildly in pain.

CLARK
Tell me and I'll give you the antidote!

MARCUS
I don't know!

Clark is unimpressed.

CLARK
It's only gets worse.

MARCUS
Oh God! I don't know! Make it stop!

Dimitri stands up, with the antidote syringe in hand.

DIMITRI
He can't handle much more of this.
I need to give him the antedo-

CLARK
No! Not until he tells me what I
want to know!

MARCUS
(screams)
What the fuck do you want from me
you son of a bitch?!

CLARK
(screams)
What's the password?

MARCUS
(losing conscience)
I don't...

Marcus begins to spasm, his mouth foams as he eyes roll into his head.

DIMITRI
We're losing him! He's not pro-

CLARK
(aggravated)
Fine, give him the injection!

Dimitri rushes over and injects Marcus with the antidote. Its effects are instantaneous as the spasms settle down.

MARCUS
(fading fast)
Max...

CLARK
God damn it! He's losing
consciousness.

DIMITRI
We're pushing too fa-

CLARK
(corrects him)
We're pushing his limits.

Marcus' eyes roll up as he passes out.

CLARK (CONT'D)
What's my time?

FADE TO BLACK:

DIMITRI (V.O.)
Seven minutes, twenty-two seconds.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Marcus, in full dress uniform, stands outside on the front lawn next to his sister-in-law Lisa, and his nephew Jason.

LISA
Take care of yourself Marcus.

They hug briefly.

MARCUS
You know I will.

He looks down at Jason.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
And you little man.
(ruffles Jason's hair)
You need to hold down the fort and look after your mom and dad until I back from duty. Can you handle that for me?

Jason salutes, happy to accept his orders.

JASON
Yes sir!

MARCUS
(smiles)
Good man.

Marcus looks over to Max, who remains seated on the porch.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(to Lisa)

He's really not going to talk to me? Even now?

LISA

You know Max is. You know he loves you. It's just hard for him to accept you following your father's footsteps, considering what happened to him and all.

Max stands up on the porch. He and Marcus lock eyes for a moment. Something unspoken is exchanged between them, yet it is not enough. There is no resolution.

Marcus is about to step forward but stops short as Max turns his back and enters the house. Marcus stands there, broken.

A BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT!

INT. CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

MARCUS' POV: A figure slowly comes into focus revealing Dimitri, who uses a flashlight to check Marcus' eyes.

DIMITRI

He's conscious.

CLARK

Good of you to join us, Marcus.
Your friend's already here.

Marcus looks up to see the two Guards tie BRADDOCK, late twenties, by his wrists to an overhead steel pipe.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Seems you do have a high tolerance
for pain...

Clark walks over to the table and picks up a long, metallic ICE PICK.

CLARK (CONT'D)

It appears Mr. Braddock here is
nearly immune to it.

Clark walks over to Braddock, who eyes him coldly.

BRADDOCK

You're wasting your time.

CLARK
 (to Marcus)
 See what I mean?

BRADDOCK
 If I don't know, you can't break
 me.

CLARK
 I'm not trying to break you.

Clark plunges the ice pick through Braddock's rib cage,
 piercing his lung. Braddock gasps.

CLARK (CONT'D)
 What's the matter Mr. Braddock? At
 a loss for words?

BRADDOCK
 (wheezes heavily)
 I'm... just a courier. They don't
 tell us... anything.

CLARK
 Commendable...
 (to Dimitri)
 What's my time?

DIMITRI
 Ten minutes, forty nine seconds.

Clark turns his attention to Marcus, who shakes his head in
 disgust.

CLARK
 He doesn't have to die Marcus. We
 have a medical unit nearby that can
 save him. They can put him on a
 ventilator, drain his lung.
 (beat)
 But I'm afraid that decision is no
 longer mine to make. It's yours.

Marcus looks over to Braddock, who is starting to cough up
 blood in between his labored breathes.

MARCUS
 You don't need to do this. Please.
 If I knew anything, I would tell
 you.

CLARK
 The flash-drive, Marcus. What's the
 password?

MARCUS
They don't tell me anything...

CLARK
You selected the password Marcus.
You encrypted the file. You are
"they".

Clark checks the time on his watch and looks over at Braddock, who is wheezing heavily as he struggles to breathe.

CLARK (CONT'D)
He's only got a few minutes before
his lung fills with blood, and he
chokes to death.

BRADDOCK
(wheezes)
Don't... Don't tell him nothing...

Braddock coughs up blood.

MARCUS
If he dies, you better kill me too
because I won't say another word. I
swear to God.

CLARK
We'll see about that, Marcus. Here,
I am God.

Marcus looks over to Braddock, who's fading fast. Marcus' eyes fill with shame, as the feeling of guilt and helplessness overwhelm him.

DIMITRI
(eyes on Braddock)
We're losing him...

MARCUS
(to Clark)
I don't know what you want.

CLARK
How about the truth Marcus? Give me
the password.

Marcus looks away and locks makes eye contact with Braddock.

MARCUS
I can't...

BRADDOCK
(spits blood)
It's...
(coughs)
It's okay... Marcus...

Braddock struggles to speak, as he chokes on his blood.

MARCUS
(to Braddock, choked up)
I'm sorry Johnnie.

CLARK
It's now or never. He's doesn't
have long...

Marcus squirms in his chair, struggling to get free of his constraints.

MARCUS
(angry)
You son a bitch! I'll kill you!

CLARK
Calm down!

Marcus is enraged, trying to break free with every fiber in his body, as Braddock goes into convulsions.

DIMITRI
(eyes on Braddock)
He's shutting down...

MARCUS
I'm going to fucking kill you!

CLARK
(to guard)
Restrain him.

One of the Guards grabs Marcus by the shoulder. Marcus fiercely bites down on the Guard's hand, causing him to retract in pain.

The other Guard steps in and hits Marcus across the face, knocking him over. Marcus, still tied to the chair, hits the concrete floor, cracking the chair's frame with a loud THUD.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE UP OF CROW'S EYE: The reflection of the young boy as he approaches.

YOUNG MARCUS stands there holding a BB rifle, his face riddled with regret, as the bird lays at his feet, its tiny lungs breathing their last breaths.

The HEARTBEAT slows further.

EXTREME CLOSE UP OF THE CROW'S EYE as it dies. A long beat.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Julie sits on the rocks as Marcus approaches, and sits next to her. She hugs his arm tightly, as she rests her head on his shoulder.

They remain there for a long while in silence. She looks up at him and tries to smile, as a single tear runs down her cheek. Marcus wipes it with his finger.

MARCUS

(smiles)

I'll be back before you know it.

JULIE

I hope so.

INT. CONCRETE ROOM - DAY

MARCUS' POV: The room slowly comes into focus as Marcus regains consciousness.

Dimitri notices Marcus is awake. He hesitates a moment, then calls out to Clark.

DIMITRI

He's up.

Behind Dimitri, the Guards drag Braddock's corpse out of the room. Marcus' eyes follow them until Clark steps into frame, blocking his view.

CLARK

His blood is on your hands Marcus,
and yours alone.

Clark sits down, across from Marcus. A closed laptop sits on the table between them.

CLARK (CONT'D)
You're out of time.

MARCUS
Get it over with.

CLARK
Looks like stubbornness is coded in your DNA...

Clark flips the laptop open and spins it around for Marcus to see. Marcus' eyes go wide as realizes what's on the screen.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Look familiar?
(grins)
Home is where the heart is.

ON SCREEN: A live feed from a head-mounted camera. We catch a glimpse of its OPERATOR in a rearview mirror as he tilts his head to reveal... He is parked across the street from Max and Lisa's house.

MARCUS
I'm begging you...

CLARK
Like I said Marcus, you're out of time. And quite frankly, you've tested my patience.

MARCUS
Please... Don't hurt my family.

CLARK
That's not up to me. Just like your friend Braddock, their fate depends on your choices.

Clark picks up a radio off of the desk and hits the "talk" button.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Predator, this is Control, do you read me?

PREDATOR (V.O.)
(through radio)
Copy Control. Ready to execute.

CLARK
(into radio)
Stand by.

ON SCREEN: The Operator screws a silencer on his Beretta pistol and turns his attention toward Max and Lisa's house. In the window, Jason can be seen playing with his toys.

Marcus studies the screen in horror, a thousand thoughts race through his head. His eyes start to well up as he is overcome with emotion.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(looks at his watch)
You have one minute Marcus.

Marcus looks up from the screen and locks eyes with Clark. One thing is clear from his expression, he is broken.

MARCUS
How do I know you won't kill them
even if I give you what you want?

CLARK
You don't.
(checks his watch)
Forty-nine seconds.

A lot beat. Clark checks his watch again.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Thirty seconds. The name, Marcus?
What's the password?

Marcus hesitates a moment...

CLARK (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Predator, you are go for execute.

PREDATOR (V.O.)
Copy Control. On the move.

ON SCREEN: Through his head-mounted camera, we see the Operator exit the car and head across the street towards the house.

Marcus can't believe what he is seeing.

MARCUS
The password is Project Veritas!

CLARK
 (excited)
 That's it.
 (to Dimitri)
 What's my time?

MARCUS
 (frantic)
 I gave you the password... Call him
 off!

Marcus struggles to get free, frantic to do something to stop this from happening.

DIMITRI
 Twenty-three minutes, twenty
 seconds.

CLARK
 Alright everyone, good work.

ON SCREEN: The Operator approaches the door, silenced pistol tucked under his jacket.

MARCUS
 Hey can you fucking hear me?! Stop
 him God damn it!

Clark ignores Marcus.

CLARK
 (to Dimitri)
 Shut him down. We're done here.

ON SCREEN: Max opens the front door. The Operator's hand comes up in a blur, and fires a single shot through Max's forehead, killing him instantly.

Marcus looks on in shock, his mouth agape, as tears roll down his cheeks. Every muscle on his face tense up, yet he is unable to make a sound.

CLARK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Not in record time by any means,
 but we're still early in
 development.

ON SCREEN: The Operator moves through the house and into the kitchen, to find Lisa washing dishes. She looks at him in confusion. Her expression changes as his gun comes up and fires two shots. She drops to the floor dead. Then, a sudden sound behind him causes the Operator to spin around, to reveal... Jason, standing in the hallway, frozen in fear.

CLARK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
But I'm sure you can see its
potential.

From the pain on Marcus face, it is clear the Operator has claimed his final victim.

ON SCREEN: The Operator walks over Jason's corpse, heading for the front door.

Suddenly, Marcus' expression changes from shock to anger, then rage. He squirms frantically, working to free himself from the chair.

CLOSE UP ON CHAIR: The cracked frame begins to splinter, under Marcus' shifting weight.

The Guards head over to restrain Marcus just as...

Marcus breaks off his restraints, as the chair's leg snaps off. He intercepts the first Guard, and delivers a vicious blow to his knee, dislocating his kneecap. The Guard goes down hard.

Clark and Dimitri realize Marcus is free just as...

Marcus slams the Guard's head down hard on the tabletop, ramming his nose through his brain. He hits the ground dead....

The second Guard approaches, drawing his Glock pistol from his holster, but Marcus is already on him. He disarms the guard, breaks his wrist then snaps his neck in a fluid move.

Clark and Dimitri stand there in shock, as Marcus stands before them, pistol in hand.

A tense beat, before Marcus fires two shots, double tapping Dimitri in the chest, killing him instantly. At the sight of this, a hint of a smile appears on Clark's lips...

Marcus pistol whips Clark, smacking the grin off his face, and breaking his nose.

CLARK (CONT'D)
I'm impressed.

Marcus slams him against the wall, then hits Clark in the gut so hard we hear ribs crack. Clark gasps. Marcus drags him over to the door. He tries to open it, but it's locked.

MARCUS
Open it.

CLARK
(catches his breath)
You heard the man.
(spits up blood)
Open the door.

A BUZZ as the door unlocks. Marcus grabs Clark by the collar, and leads him out into...

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Light floods the room from a series of large windows on the left side of the hall. Grungy and covered with dirt, they obscure the outside view.

Marcus drags Clark towards an exit at the end of the hallway. As they approach, Marcus slams Clark against the wall hard.

MARCUS
This one too.

CLARK
I can't tell you, how proud of you
I am right now. This is more than I
could have ever hoped fo-

Marcus hits him square in the face, cutting him off.

MARCUS
Tell them to open the door.

CLARK
(a smug grin)
Open it.

DIMITRI (V.O.)
Are you sure? We ha-

CLARK
I said do it!

A BUZZ as the door unlocks. Marcus holds the door open with his foot, as he continues to pin Clark against the wall. Through the crack, he can see daylight.

Marcus turns his sights back on Clark. He stares at him for a long moment, then finally, fires one shot through his forehead at point-blank range. Blood splatters on the wall behind Clark, as he drops out of frame, leaving only a pink mist in the air.

Marcus pauses for a second, looking down at Clark. After a moment, he opens the door and heads outside into...

EXT. DESERT - DAY

MARCUS' POV: He steps into the daylight, his eyes trying to adjust to the brightness.

The expression on Marcus' face changes to confusion as he surveys his surroundings. DOLLY around Marcus to reveal...

Nothing but sand in all directions. A lone structure in the middle of nowhere.

DOLLY continues, bringing us back full-circle to reveal...

CLARK, with not a scratch on him, standing there with a smug grin. Marcus stares at him in confusion, unable to process what he sees.

CLARK

Well done Marcus. You were never meant to see this. We never foresaw any of you getting this far.

(smiles)

Pretty impressive for an Alpha.

MARCUS

I don't... understand.

CLARK

I don't expect you do. Nonetheless, you've provided a perfect demonstration of the potential of this program.

Marcus looks at him, perplexed.

MARCUS

How are you alive?

CLARK

(a wicked smile)

I told you. Here, I am God.

MARCUS

Am I in hell?

CLARK

No, you're in development.

MARCUS

What?

CLARK

You're an intricate binary construct, third generation.

(MORE)

CLARK (CONT'D)
 The most complex we've created.
 Self actualizing logic algorithms.
 Independent reasoning. In short,
 we've given you free will.
 (beat)
 Do you know why that's so
 impressive Marcus?

Marcus looks at him, too confused to speak.

CLARK (CONT'D)
 Because you are not real. None of
 this is.

Marcus stands there in disbelief.

CLARK (CONT'D)
 (looks away from Marcus)
 What you have just witnessed...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

Clark gets up from his seat, removing his VR headset. Dimitri and a TECH are seated on either side of him.

On the wall, Marcus can be seen on a large LCD DISPLAY, as he stands in the middle of the desert, alone.

CLARK
 ...is nothing but an elaborate
 computer simulation. Here at
 Synaptic we call it Veritas
 Technology. It's the ability to
 create truth...
 (beat)
 A merger of virtual reality and
 free thinking, AI, artificial
 intelligence.

Clark addresses a small AUDIENCE in a large oval shaped
 auditorium.

CLARK (CONT'D)
 Imagine the possibilities if we can
 accomplish this at the Alpha level.
 Once we move past Beta, we can
 begin integrating real world
 applications.
 (beat)
 A perfect one-to-one simulation of
 the human psyche.
 (MORE)

CLARK (CONT'D)

Using virtual test subjects such as Marcus and the thousands of other unique personalities we can customize, we can generate real-time response models and contingencies for a number of high-risk national security scenarios.

(smiles)

Scenarios which human beings can fully interact with and gain experience that would be otherwise impossible. Experiences that will help save the lives of real people.

The audience, comprised of several men and women, look on as Clark speaks.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Everything from hostage negotiations to interrogation techniques, as you saw today, can be modeled to factor the most expedient methods in time-sensitive situations. Free from the Geneva Convention, fear of Human Rights violations...

(smiles)

...you can think of it as the ultimate video game, where you literally play God in any sandbox of your choosing. Any environment, any situation.

(sincere)

For those of you who were disturbed by the graphic nature of today's presentation, we'd like to remind you that none of what you saw was real. No humans were hurt, no lives were lost.

Clark takes a step forward.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Two decades ago, the concept of this, the smart phone, was unimaginable.

(beat)

Three years ago, the mere idea of Veritas technology was considered impossible in our lifetimes. As you've just seen, we are there now.

(serious)

(MORE)

CLARK (CONT'D)

A partnership with Synaptic allows America to remain on the forefront of human technological evolution. Without it, you run the risk of falling behind... forever.

(smiles)

Thank you for joining us today. That concludes our presentation. Now I'll turn it over to our public relations executive, Melissa Fox.

MELISSA FOX, business chic, takes center stage.

FOX

(nods to Clark)

Thank you Doctor.

(to audience)

We at Synaptic are very proud of what Dr. Clark and his team have accomplished here. Veritas will not only save lives, it will save billions in defense spending.

(smiles, engages crowd)

In fact, this technology was designed to spare real people, real families, needless pain and suffering. Once its potential is realized, Veritas will be an invaluable tool for everything from aiding our troops on the front lines, to keeping us safe from attack back home.

(pleasant)

And on that note, I'd like to thank you all for attending our presentation. Our executive chef has prepared a delightful lunch in our corporate dining room, so if we could please make our way there. I'm sure everyone's hungry.

The audience members get up and begin filing out of the room. SENATOR BAXTER, late fifties, walks by Clark and gives him a dirty look. Her aid, CARRIE, follows but Clark stops her.

CLARK

The Senator is staying for lunch, isn't she?

CARRIE

I think she lost her appetite.

CLARK

Look, I know it was graphic, but how else can we demonstrate how human they can be? You do understand, none of it was real. Think of it as one big video game.

CARRIE

(gives him a look)
Real or not, it feels wrong.

She leaves Clark, who stands there, unable to think of a response.

GENERAL (O.S.)

I think we'd be interested in finding out more about this.

Clark turns to see a GENERAL, late fifties. He hands Clark a card: the logo on it reads "DARPA".

CLARK

Of course.
(shakes hands)
We will arrange a more personal demonstration.

They head out after the others. Their trail off into the distance.

GENERAL

(fading)
So you can do any environment, any era?

CLARK (O.S.)

(fading)
Anything you'd like General. Any personal requests?

Dimitri and the Tech work at their stations, shutting down the simulation.

TECH

(turns to Dimitri)
What should I do, dump the simulation?

Dimitri thinks it over for a long beat.

DIMITRI

This one was interesting. Save him.

Behind them, on the TV, Marcus sits down on the sand in defeat.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Marcus looks down at the pistol in his lap, alluding to his thoughts. After a tense beat, he suddenly remembers something as his expression changes. He reaches into his boot and pulls out a ragged PHOTO.

CLOSE UP ON PHOTO: It is a portrait of Julie, wrinkled and dirty.

EXT. BEACH - FLASHBACK

Julie sits on a rock as the waves crash at her feet. She looks out towards the horizon, lost in her thoughts. As Marcus approaches, she turns and spots him. A faint smile forms on her lips.

Behind her, the SUN bathes her in an angelic glow.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Marcus stares at the photo, then looks up and finds the sun in the sky. With a slight hint of hope on his face, Marcus gets up and heads towards the horizon, in the direction of the setting sun.

FADE OUT.