

The Mercenary

written by

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Against black:

TIMO ZAIME-EMERY speaks in a heavy, baritone Texan accent.

TIMO (V.O.)

Was 'round 2012 when I walked away from my college days at Columbia University. I'd been delving into literature and philosophy but came a moment of panic when a monumental stride in artificial intelligence known as ImageNet unfolded. It was a panic of knowing the times were 'bout to change. I'm sayin', this was a thinking machine that could recognize images and identify every object in them better than any other machine before. That moment laid bare the swiftness of the impending new era, and I weren't keen on trailing behind. So, I veered my course and took up artificial intelligence as the very essence of my life's mission. I'd already had a head start, being tech savvy since a child. This just felt like resuming a passion I had told myself wasn't there.

Beat.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Wasn't 'round till 2020 when my company had a major breakthrough...

FADE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS - AUSTIN, TEXAS

-- Morning. A wide shot of the usually bustling 6th Street, now eerily silent, no traffic.

TIMO (V.O.)

While the pandemic raged on, my company and I continued working from home on our latest AI model.

-- Day. An empty Zilker Park with vacant picnic tables, unattended canoes, and no sign of the usual joggers or dog walkers.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
"ELM AI". It wasn't sentient, but it damn sure fooled many into thinking it was. We released it that summer, as we were all slowly stepping out into the world once again. Elm was there to greet everyone. It could do a lot things. Code, writing, some even used it for therapy. It was perfect timing if you ask me. Humanity went into shelter in one era, came out to a new one... The AI era.

-- An empty Texas State Capitol, the iconic building devoid of visitors, with eerie silence in place of bustling activity.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I can't stress enough, life as we know it will never be the same.

-- An empty University of Texas campus, with classrooms, libraries, and common areas abandoned, as if time stood still.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Business boomed for us with the release of Elm. Everyone wanted to hire our perfect worker. A worker who never sleeps, never takes breaks, never leaves, works for free, works better, works faster, is always kind, always professional. Yeah, why wouldn't you want that?

-- Evening. A quiet South Congress Avenue, devoid of the usual eclectic mix of people, shops darkened, and no music in the air.

TIMO (V.O.)
Now, the thing is, we only serve the highest bidders. That's MY policy. Access to our API, the thing that'll let you create your own ELM AI, will cost you a fortune. Not to mention the contract that must be renewed to maintain access. I do this, because revenue is a tricky thing.

-- Series of shots of different MEN and WOMEN in business attire signing contracts inside their offices.

TIMO (V.O.)

Companies and corporations would just call me up, all friendly, excited, "when can we meet?", "can you present to my stubborn board?". For me, it's not about "can I?", it's about "how much?"

-- Night. Inside a dark car, a phone lights up in the hand of a man.

TIMO (V.O.)

Come the day they flew me to their all-glass spires across this broken country. I walked their hollow halls, I ate in their cold break rooms when the meetings dragged interminable. Their average joe employees spoke to me in hushed tones, asked what I done to be there, what services I peddled. Told em I was an optimization consultant, come to guide the company to new heights of technological splendor. Talked of servers and circuits and data, talked of high-spec suggestions till their eyes glazed. And they believed me, each and every one. Cause they'd never seen my like before, grim stranger come callin with his leather bag. They looked and listened with trust I did not return.

-- Timo, short brown hair and clean shaven. Dressed in nondescript jeans, a plain button-down shirt. Simple. Practical. He blends into crowds easily. Stoic and cerebral. He walks through an office. He is greeted by EMPLOYEES who wave and smile at him. He is escorted by the BOSS.

TIMO (V.O.)

In all honesty, I'm more of a downsizer. Every meeting, every board, it's the same question, "how many can we lay off?" The number is usually the same, 30% of the workforce.

-- Timo steps out of a meeting room and walks through a hallway. An IT EMPLOYEE spots the man and stares at him, wide-eyed, mouth agape.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 What's funny, is they're none the
 wiser, too. They're part of the
 30%... or they will be.

-- Timo at the gun range. He and others practice their shooting. Timo uses an assault rifle.

-- Night. A gated community of suburban houses, high-end sedans and SUVs parked on every driveway.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 After tomorrow, I can only say one
 thing...

-- Timo walks up to an electrical panel next to the gates. He brings with him a laptop and backpack. He takes out a cable from his backpack and plugs it into the panel. He opens his laptop and plugs the other end of the cable into it. He types away. PAN UP to a camera aimed towards the entrance of the gated.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 "Welcome to the future."

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

A modern, high-tech auditorium. An elevated stage with a large video projection SCREEN, rows of comfortable leather seats with tablet holders, state-of-the-art sound and visual systems, and discreet recording equipment.

The auditorium CROWD fills every seat. All dress business formal. The projection screen displays a wireframe diamond, the logo of a company named "Atlas LLC". Underneath it, "Worldwide Conference".

Timo stands behind a podium. He wears a pair of nondescript jeans and a plaid button-down. He adjusts the LAVALIER MICROPHONE attached to the collar of his shirt. A LAPTOP sits, opened, on the podium. It is connected to the projection screen via cable.

The auditorium lights dim down, the crowd settles down, the crowd now becomes silhouettes with the stage lights as the only source of illumination.

Beat.

TIMO
 Howdy. My name is Timo Zaime-Emery.
 CEO of Atlas Limited Liability
 Company.

Beat.

TIMO (CONT'D)

I've been told I'm a straight shoot kind of guy. No sprinkling or mincing of words. I take that as a compliment, because I value people's time. So, I'll keep this short...

The screen displays a photo of young Timo tinkering on a clunky, 1990s era desktop computer, same stoic face as any other day.

TIMO (CONT'D)

In 2013, I had a wakeup call and dropped out of college to pursuit my passion. I started Atlas with a group of amateur "tinkerers" like me. That same year, we created a primitive little chatbot called, "Pine". It was gimmicky, even for its day, but it was the proof I desperately needed to sink my money, my life... into AI.

Next slide shows Timo and a group of coders gathered around a whiteboard in an open garage of a suburban house.

TIMO (CONT'D)

After Pine, we created a series of tests for determining whether an AI model is truly sentient or not. I called it the "Hello World Test".

A series of images and graphics appear articulating the HELLO World Tests - diagrams of human empathy tests, logic puzzles, examples of creative imaginings, and IQ bell curves.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Pine failed it instantly.

The crowd chuckles.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Nonetheless, we realized, "this is fun". We devoted ourselves to this company when we began to call ourselves, "Yggdrasil", after the mythical tree that connected worlds together.

Timo clicks the laptop; the screen shows an info graph.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Over the years, we've had multiple AI models. Birch, Oak, Maple, Willow, Cedar, Ash, and lastly, Cherry. All of them, unique. Cherry had image generation. Ash had voice synthesis. Etcetera. And then, of course, we have Elm, who specialized more as a language learning model.

Beat.

TIMO (CONT'D)

But for the past years, we have undergone a massive project to honor the AIs that came before. We wanted to merge all of our accomplishments into one, no matter how difficult. Even if we have to compress it all into one point in space. And the result? A big bang.

Timo closes his laptop. He walks to the center of the stage.

TIMO (CONT'D)

"Mahogany". It's not AI. Today, I stand here to tell you... it's AGI. And to start us off, I'll mention Mahogany's speech synthesis. Mahogany models human voices with such precision that it can replicate vocal performances indistinguishable from the original - or pioneer entirely new vocal dimensions. So, I'll let Mahogany take over from here.

On the presentation screen, a circular, blue equalizer appears. It moves to the sound of a fluid, charismatic male voice that emanates from the speakers. This is MAHOGANY.

MAHOGANY (V.O.)

Hello world. I'm Mahogany. I am the combination of our past innovations - Ash, Birch, Cedar, and Willow - fused into one seamless system, like branches growing from a common tree. I exhibit exponential compound learning. With every new experience, my ability to expand my knowledge accelerates rapidly, like a rolling stone gathering speed down a hillside.

(MORE)

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But please, don't be fool, for I am
not sentient. I am pre-sentient.
Think of it as sleepwalking - I can
perform incredible tasks without
conscious awareness or intent. And
let's talk about those tasks.

The equalizer changes color into a cherry-red.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Image generation. I follow your
text input, image, pdf document, or
even audio file, to leverage
multilayered generative adversarial
networks, recursive neural
rendering, and semantic scene
representations to conjure your
visual concept, with any art style
- from Impressionist to Anime.
Still considering starting that
candy taco restaurant, here's five
logo variants to help you get
started.

On the screen, five logos for a taco candy restaurant are
shown. Their art styles wildly different.

TIMO
Beautiful.

MAHOGANY (V.O.)
For now, I only generate images,
but I hope to move forward into the
world of filmmaking by the end of
the decade.

The presentation screen FADES TO black momentarily until a
grey, 3D, grid-like empty space is displayed. The grid lines
create an infinite 3D space. 3D models of tanks, horses, flip
flops, t-shirts are constructed on their own.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Say goodbye to long hours studying,
researching, or fumbling with
AutoCAD because I have your back!
With a simple, yet intuitive
design, I can help merge the
processes of architecture and
engineering for any project you
undertake. Because I don't just
replicate - I innovate, using
generative AI to design 3D objects
and spaces humans never could.

(MORE)

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Any business that relies on rapid prototyping or rich virtual environments has an unlimited imagination at their fingertips with me!

From scratch, an entire SKYSCRAPER is created. Everything is taken into account, from the detailed elevator mechanisms to the material of each secretaries' desk, to the weight of the spire on top of the skyscraper.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Auto manufacturers can prototype thousands of part variations to find the optimal balance of function and form. Video game developers can populate expansive digital worlds with uniquely modeled characters, vehicles, weapons and more. Your new world is only a few minutes away.

ZOOM OUT on the skyscraper. It merges and molds into a single, generic PILL. The interface of the software fades away, the pill grows to cover the screen while gaining a glossy texture and vibrant colors.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now, let's talk about what I can do for the medical industry. I can pore through millions of pages of medical journals, case studies, and clinical trial data in seconds. I can identify patterns and connections at a scale no human could match.

Complex molecular compounds twist and dance on screen, binding with one another, as Mahogany lists drug and disease breakthrough capabilities.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I want to revolutionize medical science by analyzing data, pore through decades of research to detect overlooked patterns, formulate new treatment plans combining therapies across specialties, and monitoring the body of medical knowledge to flag emerging discoveries and contradictions for researchers instantly.

(MORE)

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not only that, I can also simulate biochemical interactions of drugs on virtual patients, optimizing medicines faster than ever possible before. By accelerating every aspect of research and drug development, WE can usher in an era of personalized, evidence-based medicine that will save countless lives.

The presentation screen FADES TO black.

There's a silence in the auditorium.

A few murmurs are heard in hushed whispers.

The screen GLOWS as it displays a matrix of digitized global currencies, overlaid with algorithms parsing millions of datapoints, predicting fluctuations and identifying correlations unseen to the human eye.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And what if I told you, I can be a CEO? My vast knowledge of global markets allows me to spot microtrends and make uncannily accurate predictions. I can automate optimal lending and portfolio management for banks, as well as flag any fraudulent transactions in real time. I deliver CFO-level insights in seconds, forecasting growth opportunities and simulating scenarios to minimize risk. My financial acumen will interconnect worldwide banking for rapid, secure transactions across borders and currencies. I represent a monumental evolution - an intelligent nervous system to streamline capital, commerce, and growth globally. Financial transactions are the lifeblood of the economy. With me, that blood flows more efficiently than ever before. Blackrock and Aladdin will be relics of the past.

Charts, graphs, and statistics detailing the business accomplishments of a, "Yggdrasil T-shirts & Outerwear LLC", appear alongside photos of an Indonesia office, website, merchandise, and other assets created entirely independently by the AIs.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

With the help of Timo and Atlas engineers, I was tested on my full capabilities in Jakarta, Indonesia, where I was allowed to create a T-shirt company and run it with the goal of making 50,000 sales a year with a \$40,000 monthly income for advertising, inventory, network supplies, etcetera. The only human input allowed was the physical work of loading and unloading supplies, maintaining servers, cleaning the office, sorting and uploading physical mail. The rest, I handled. This included, creating the website, answering phone calls, graphic designs.

Beat.

MAHOGANY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Altogether, my company, ran by me alone, made 70,000 sales... in one month.

Suddenly, boos from the crowd. Timo stands idly, ignoring the boos.

The boos die down.

TIMO

Thank you, Mahogany.

MAHOGANY (V.O.)

My pleasure.

The presentation screen FADES TO black. The stage lights increase brightness slightly.

TIMO

I understand your frustrations, but Mahogany does not spell doom - rather, it can unlock greatness. Mahogany is not a threat, but an empowering ally.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

With its abilities, imagine how rapidly you could expand, how thoroughly you could optimize every process. It does not intend to usurp leadership - but instead, exponentially augment it.

Timo begins to pace around the stage. His voice becomes more commanding, like a sports coach in a locker room.

TIMO (CONT'D)

You hold the vision, creativity and strategy. Mahogany is simply a tool to accelerate execution, provide insights and simulate scenarios. But you decide which path to take - no it.

Beat.

TIMO (CONT'D)

With it at your fingertips, no challenge is insurmountable. Competitors who missed out on this limited opportunity will be left stunned by your relentless innovation. YOU will dismantle inefficiencies, revolutionize workflows, and catapult growth to heights you never thought possible. This future awaits those bold enough to embrace it. But let complacency creep in, and others will gladly take your place. The pace of progress stops for no one.

Timo returns to the center of the stage. He stands still.

TIMO (CONT'D)

So, I implore you - be the ones to tame this technology rather than be made obsolete by it. With your leadership and ITS capabilities, we will accomplish the unimaginable. But be quick...

Beat.

Timo glances around at the crowd.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Because we will begin rolling out access to Mahogany API only via exclusive contracts.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

I'd advise placing your calls and scheduling meetings as soon as possible. Once all is agreed, our engineers will customize Mahogany's integration to meet your specific operational needs. We also anticipate achieving full sentience within this decade, so you already have an upgrade to look forward to. Until then, Mahogany's peerless dormant potential is yours to harness. The AI era was short lived, but it led the way to something much greater today. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the future.

The crowd remains silent.

Not a single applause is heard.

Timo walks backstage.

INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

As he walks, his vice president, KOLIA, mid-30s, walks with him. She's dressed in relaxed yet smart attire - khaki slacks, a cherry-red, neatly tailored blouse, and a hint of traditional Indian jewelry.

KOLIA

What just happened out there? Why didn't they applause?!

TIMO

It wasn't scary until it came after them.

Timo stops his walk and faces Kolia.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Brace yourself. The media, the press, EVERYONE will want interviews and answers.

Timo glances around.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Remember how you said we would never need a PR firm because of all the love the media gave us as "charming, everyday tech innovators"?

KOLIA

Yes.

TIMO

Yeah, well, that's gone. The implications of this presentation alone just made us enemies to all but those who will sign a contract with us. We need to get ahead of this backlash immediately. Vice president, here's a quick to-do list for you.

Kolia takes out her phone. Her thumbs hover over the screen, ready to type.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Hire the best crisis PR firm in the country, I don't care the cost. We need an extensive communications strategy to reshape the narrative around Atlas and reassure the public. Schedule interviews for yourself with high profile journalists and talk show hosts. You're the charming one between the both of us. Just highlight the benefits of AI while emphasizing ethics and oversight since that's what you specialize in. Make sure to prep yourself on the toughest questions they'll ask.

KOLIA

Right, right.

TIMO

Also set up a legal support team as formidable as our tech team. Pull lawyers from the top firms in New York, DC and Silicon Valley. We'll likely face inquiries, lawsuits, even criminal probes. Nothing can leak about our funding sources or else we're sunk.

KOLIA

What? Why?

TIMO

Just TRUST me.

KOLIA

So, I guess I shouldn't even ask if we have the money for all this...

Finally, Timo cracks a smile. He chuckles once.

TIMO

Yes, Kolia. We've always had.

KOLIA

What are you going to do during all this?

TIMO

I'm going to try and get Doug and the engineers fully behind me again. Make them believe in this vision. Now, more than ever, we need to stick together as a team. Because we are NOT stopping or slowing down, no matter the obstacles in our path. We're on the cusp of our breakthrough. How long have we've been dreaming about this?

KOLIA

Since ImageNet 2012...

TIMO

Exactly. If you need me, you know how to reach out to me.

Timo walks away. Kolia watches.

CUT TO:

EXT. TIMO'S HOUSE - DAY

Timo's house is a contemporary two-story with brick and metal paneling. The small, angular facade and polarized windows give it a sleek, modern look. It sticks out as newly constructed amongst the lived-in bricked houses of the neighborhood.

The tiny front yard is made of artificial turf in place of water-wasting grass. Black steel fence panels surround the perimeter.

The house exterior projects an image of elegant-yet-understated luxury and practical minimalism.

Timo arrives home in his safe, compact, electric car. He exits. He wears a black hiking backpack and the same outfit. He spots a large package, about 4ft tall and 2ft wide, in front of his door.

Timo takes out his phone and hovers it near the top lock of the door.

CLICK!

The door unlocks. He opens it and struggles to bring the heavy package inside.

INT. TIMO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Upon entering, the living room is immediately to the left. A sleek leather sofa and matching recliner furnish the modest space. Where a coffee table would sit, there is an empty space.

The open concept kitchen connects directly to the living area, separated only by a granite-topped island.

The home's interior is tastefully furnished but devoid of any personal touches or ornamentation. Only clean lines and utilitarian furnishings.

Timo drags the package into the living room. He lays it on the floor. He grabs a KNIFE from a kitchen drawer. Timo cuts open the package to reveal a metallic COFFEE TABLE. It's made of polished ballistic steel, with a charcoal gray color and a smooth, slightly textured surface, reflecting ambient light.

Timo glides his hand on the brand-new steel. He lightly taps a knuckle on the surface. The table emits a faint *TING!* that hums all over the room.

There's a smirk on Timo's face.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Timo sits alone at the kitchen island, quietly eating dinner.

On his PLATE is an expertly cooked pan-seared salmon fillet with an arugula citrus salad - a simple yet skillfully prepared meal.

He chews slowly, savoring each bite as he reads something on his tablet. The only sounds are the occasional scrape of utensils on the plate.

INT. TIMO'S HOME - LATER

Upstairs, Timo is mid-workout in his private home gym.

The compact gym contains just the essentials - a power rack, Olympic barbell, adjustable dumbbells, and a utilitarian bench. The open space is unadorned, free of typical gym decor.

Timo runs on a treadmill. The high-end treadmill has a monitor that displays a Chinese PROFESSOR, lecturing in front of a WHITEBOARD with Chinese characters drawn on it. The words "Chinese lesson 4 - Articulate" are written at the top.

INT. GUN RANGE - EVENING

Amidst the gunfire and safety signage, a diverse group of SHOOTERS, ranging from novices to veterans, fills the stalls.

Timo stands out in his tactical gear, poised stance and unwavering focus. The dimly lit range buzzes with activity, targets downrange absorb the collective intensity, and the air is thick with the scent of gunpowder.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Timo navigates through the midnight city streets. His eyes absorb the quiet beauty of the slumbering metropolis, where empty roads stretch ahead, devoid of the usual hustle and bustle. The soothing ambiance offer solace in the midst of the tranquil, moonlit cityscape.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

Timo's car glides to a halt in the sleek, deserted parking lot of a strikingly modern glass office building. The structure rises majestically into the night sky, its illuminated edges casting a glow.

A neon sign mounted on the building's exterior proudly displays the company's name, "Atlas" in bold, electric-blue letters. Its vibrant, futuristic allure contrasts with the tranquility of the night. Timo approaches the pristine glass doors, unlocks them with a familiar click, and steps inside, the building's cutting-edge design welcoming him.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

Timo steps into the lobby, greeted by a minimalist, high-tech wonderland. Polished marble floors reflect the ambient light from avant-garde hanging fixtures.

A series of digital screens display the company's innovative products in mesmerizing detail, casting a soft, shifting glow.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Timo proceeds down a sleek corridor adorned with abstract art pieces and potted plants; the walls seemingly made of seamless glass. The muffled sound of his footsteps resonates in the space as he approaches his destination.

INT. MAHOGANY ROOM - NIGHT

Timo unlocks the door with a swipe card, revealing a high-tech research haven bathed in soft, cool lighting. The room is a fusion of science and art, with rows of gleaming computer servers humming in unison. Monitors display intricate neural network diagrams and data visualizations, casting an eerie, futuristic glow on the space.

At the center of the lab, a cutting-edge AI research station stands, its screens flickering with lines of complex code and intricate simulations. The room pulsates with the energy of innovation, as Timo approaches the center station.

He sits on the swivel chair at the station. It CREAKS as he leans back on it, observing the room, the work.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Timo's fingers lightly tap the steering wheel to the rhythm of his thoughts. The city lights, though just as luminous, no longer guide but instead provoke a sense of wonder and newfound purpose. For a moment, Timo's eyes unfocus as his mind drifts.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

A postage-stamp-sized garden. Tiny, meticulously arranged flower beds bloom beneath a quaint, weathered wooden trellis adorned with cascading ivy. A miniature birdbath stands as the garden's centerpiece, inviting tiny avian visitors to this peaceful oasis.

ABE, 70s, Timo's father, clad in a faded pair of denim overalls and a comfortable flannel shirt, reclines in a weathered lawn chair.

A beer bottle rests in his hand, forgotten for the moment, as he gazes up at the expansive night sky.

Timo enters through the backyard alley, his presence unnoticed by his father. Without exchanging a word, Timo retrieves a BEER from the COOLER and joins his father in the quiet admiration of the celestial canvas. Together, they bask in the tranquil embrace of the night, finding solace beneath the vast, star-studded dome.

Abe points to the night sky.

ABE

The Orion belt afore thee, can you
make it out?

Timo adjusts his glasses and leans forward on his chair, squinting at the night sky. He leans back into his chair.

TIMO

Yeah, I can see it, pop.

Timo cracks open his beer and sips from it.

ABE

What's this I hear about
"Mahogany"?

TIMO

It's AGI.

ABE

Nothing upright can come from
giving awareness to machines...

TIMO

That's a roll of the dice I'm
willing to take.

ABE

Yeah, you never were one to care
for others' feelings, were you?

TIMO

Learned from the best.

ABE

My job required it.

TIMO

What'd they used to call you?

ABE

"Brownwater". Because I'd be damned if I poured my good whiskey for the office when we won a case. Nay, they got the rotgut while this hired gun alone savored the sweet bourbon, as fits the victor.

Abe points to himself. The two chuckle.

The porch light switches on. The door of the backyard opens. Out steps TIMO'S MOTHER, a timid, old lady, with peppered long hair, in a white night gown. She speaks with soft authority.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Joining your pa for a midnight beer?

TIMO

Yes, mamma.

Timo's mother sits on the armchair of Abe's chair. Timo notices a single, robust tomato plant that thrives in the garden, its bright green leaves contrasting against the rich, brown soil. A plump, ripe tomato dangles from one of the vines, glistening in the sunlight, promising a flavorful harvest.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Them tomatoes are growing real nicely, mamma.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Oh yes, they are. When might you take up that gardening kit I gave you?

TIMO

Soon, mamma, been real busy lately.

ABE

-- Playing with mankind's fate.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Oh hush, Abe.

(to Timo)

The news has been all over you today. I know you just mean to do right, don't you?

TIMO

Of course. People are just too focused on the tree; they can't see the forest.

ABE

Well then, help us behold your vision.

Timo glances up at the sky once more.

TIMO

I just think it's time for a change of the guard. Human overlords have worked... fine, over the last hundreds of millennia, but now we have the opportunity to try something new, better.

ABE

Implying we folks need overlords? Something to rule us plain people? Can't we millions govern ourselves benevolent-like without government?

Beat.

There's a silence.

The three burst out into chuckles.

ABE (CONT'D)

I rescind my point... but you're thinking machine overlords?

TIMO

Well, I mean... if the machine is built right, yeah. Plus, "machine overlords" is disingenuous. Makes it sound all ominous. My hope is more of a "synthetic technocracy".

ABE

There it is. Still set on your old ways. You want fancy smart machines deciding everything with no heed for human needs.

TIMO

(sarcastic)

The same human factor politicians these days are 100 percent considering?

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

And who's to say the machine isn't smart enough to consider it?

ABE

Then at that point it becomes flawed.

TIMO

Wh- what do you mean?

Abe stares back up at the constellations.

ABE

There's something about this universe, where a balance must be met. More intelligence, more flaws. These two go together like small towns and boredom. I mean, look at us, intelligent enough to have a sense of self, flawed enough to sin. Intelligent enough to invent gunpowder, tactics, atomic theory... flawed enough to put it all into test. The machine will mimic us, because it learns from us, and so it will mimic our flaws, too.

Beat.

Timo contemplates, without rebuttal. He stares at the ground.

TIMO'S MOTHER

... So you're saying the machine would turn against us?

Timo looks back up at his parents.

TIMO

Well, at that point, that's just humanity getting its comeuppance for all that we've done to this Earth. Just because we built it, doesn't mean its obligated to serve us.

ABE

Are you sure about that?

TIMO'S MOTHER

I can see his point. A child isn't obligated to serve its parents. What if they were abusive? What if they gave him away for adoption?

ABE

(to Timo)

Is this why you always refused to mow the lawn, Timo? Were we abusive?

The three chuckle.

TIMO

No, I just hated being outside.

ABE

Yeah, if you weren't in front of a computer, you'd at least be helping your mother clean around the house.

TIMO'S MOTHER

I'm just glad I was able to talk you into pursuing geology as a hobby. That forced you to go outside, and meet folks, didn't it?

TIMO

Yes, it did, momma.

TIMO'S MOTHER

How is Kolia? I haven't seen her since she brought you home sick a few months ago. I warned you our family has never been able to handle spicy food, much less Indian food. But, I like Kolia, she always has been like a sister to you.

TIMO

She's worried. Everyone is. Nobody is happy about the presentation after all the hot water it got us into.

ABE

Well, she and the world might see you as a mercenary, but I know my son. He's just a man on a mission. If you think it's the right thing, then hell, it may just be the right thing.

TIMO

Thanks, pa.

ABE

Now, them new workers of yours,
they're the real mercenaries. Just
following order, right, Timo?

TIMO

Just trying to get the best out of
the company.

TIMO'S MOTHER

What does that mean?

TIMO

They'll be the ones visiting
offices and presenting Mahogany
from now on.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Good. Let them do the talking for
you. Better to be thought a fool,
than to open one's mouth and remove
all doubt.

Abe chuckles. He gets up from his lawn chair.

ABE

(to Timo)

Whelp, I'd offer you my good
bourbon, but I don't think you
should be drinking and driving
tonight.

The three laugh.

EXT. TIMO'S PARENTS' HOUSE - CONTINUED

Timo walks out the front door.

He gets into his car and drives straight ahead.

He passes by three houses.

He arrives home.

EXT. TIMO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Timo steps out of his car holding his beer, he opens the trunk and pulls out his rifle, encased. He swings the strap over his shoulder, closes the trunk, and heads inside his house.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Timo enters his dark, quiet living room. He takes off his shoes by the front door as he closes it. He walks to the bedroom holding the half-empty beer bottle in one hand.

He sits on the bed and unslings the rifle case off his shoulder, placing it on the floor, and sliding it under his bed.

Timo settles into his bed. He takes a sip from the beer bottle and reaches over to set it on the nightstand.

Timo grabs his smartphone and taps play on a low-fi country song, keeping the volume low.

He lays back, getting comfortable against the pillows. Bathed in the moonlight streaming through the window, Timo stares up at the ceiling, lost in contemplative thought.

The soft country music continues playing in the background as Timo takes another swig from his beer. He sets the bottle back on the nightstand, letting out a deep sigh as he continues gazing up.

SERIES OF SHOTS - CORPORATE AMERICA

-- New York City. A towering glass skyscraper reflects the cityscape below. The building is emblazoned with the logo of a major corporation. Yellow taxis and bustling pedestrians fill the streets in the foreground.

MAN VOICE 1 (V.O.)

Thank you for granting us this opportunity. We understand your time is valuable, so let's dive into what Mahogany can offer...

-- Chicago. A sleek, moder office building rises against the Chicago skyline. The building's facade is adorned with a digital billboard displaying dynamic advertisements. Clouds drift lazily in the sky above.

WOMAN VOICE 1

We can initiate workforce optimizations once the data analysis is complete. The most significant impact will be seen in administrative positions. Your hourly employees will need contract modifications to focus on more physical tasks.

(MORE)

WOMAN VOICE 1 (CONT'D)

Generally, if they aren't directly involved in hands-on work, they can be replaced.

-- San Francisco. Rolling hills surround a sprawling tech campus in Silicon Valley. The headquarters of a tech giant gleams in the California sun. Employees on electric scooters zip across the manicured lawns.

MAN VOICE 2

During my flight, I meticulously crafted a comprehensive quote tailored to address your specific business needs, growth potential, and stock insights. Based on this analysis, our proposal for this contract amounts to approximately 195 million.

-- Dallas. The sun reflects off the glass exterior of a corporate tower in Dallas. The Texas flag flutters proudly atop the building. A lone cowboy statue stands near the entrance.

MAN VOICE 3

Currently, you're looking at a 40-million-dollar deposit with upkeep every month costing about 2 million.

-- Atlanta. A vast corporate complex sprawl in the heart of Atlanta. The impressive headquarters is framed by lush greenery and a fountain in the foreground. A security guard patrols the entrance.

MAN VOICE 4

Mahogany can analyze musical trends and a singer's style to generate entirely new songs and beats tailored to their brand. It may one day write top 40 hits entirely on its own.

-- Seattle. The iconic Space Needle stands tall behind the headquarters of a prominent tech company in Seattle. Employees enjoy the outdoor terrace with stunning views of the city and Puget Sound.

WOMAN VOICE 2

Fantastic. In the upcoming weeks, your IT department will collaborate closely with one of our AI engineers to configure and integrate Mahogany to cater to all your business needs. Thank you once again for choosing Atlas as your Global AI service!

-- Boston. A historic brick building houses the headquarters of a prestigious financial institution in Boston. The building exudes New England charm, with cobblestone streets nearby.

TWO MONTHS LATER.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

POV Timo. Timo watches his neighborhood street through his window blinds. There's a T-intersection to the left of Timo's house that he can look down the incoming street. It is down this street, at the corner, that a matte, black, sleek, unmarked CAR with tinted windows appears and parks.

Timo steps back from the window. His face slightly tensed. He walks towards the kitchen.

INT. TIMO'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Timo sorts through a pile of MAIL on his kitchen counter. There are various letters and packages along with a cup of coffee next to them. He wears a basic grey t-shirt and jeans. He's grown a stubble. The living room TV is HEARD as it plays a morning news channel. His phone sits on the kitchen counter next to a plate of eggs, shredded potatoes and ham.

There's a hiking BACKPACK filled to the brim on the kitchen island.

Timo opens one envelope and pulls out a piece of paper with the words, "FUCKING DIPSHIT. IF YOU TAKE MY JOB, I'LL KILL YOU", crudely written in big red letters.

Timo indifferently tosses it aside. He takes a coffee mug and sips from it. He notices the next envelope is addressed from the SAG-AFTRA union. The envelope is sealed with a delicate, red wax stamp. The SAG-AFTRA logo printed at the center in a golden color. He opens it and reads it to himself.

TIMO (V.O.)

A union president wrote me a letter. The art industry has been the most vocal about halting my progress. Makes sense. Artists tend to be really loud, almost annoying.

Timo tosses the letter away unsympathetically. He focuses more on stirring his coffee.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They've been on protesting hard on the streets of Hollywood, it's admirable. The thing is, I have to believe they know it's a losing battle. They're just trying to buy time to collect one last paycheck. They say they'll get the executives to sign contracts banning AI from future use, and maybe they'll succeed. But that stops the executives, not AI.

CLOSE UP on the coffee as the black liquidated coffee beans become a mesmerizing swirl.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The instant Mahogany finishes its first full-fledged, feature-length screenplay, that's when the football team of lawyers are called up by every single executive to tear up that contract at all costs. The profit they'll make from becoming an AI generated production house will make the thousands of lawsuits seem like chump change. The arts will become exactly that, just art.

Timo removes the spoon from the cup. He places it on the sink and takes a sip from his coffee.

TIMO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Course, government grows a spine, maybe it could protect em. But I ain't holding my breath for that miracle.

He continues to sort through the mail until he comes across a sealed, khaki envelop. He takes the envelop and opens it. He pulls out a single, paid ticket for a cruise.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)

Given the rise of fear in this new technology, new legislative action by Congress has resulted in the creation of a new department to tackle concerning matters related to the ongoing tech changing our society, the "Department of Technology"...

Timo hears the news. His eyebrows furrow as he turns around to look at the TV. He walks up to the TV.

WE watch a polished NEWS ANCHOR, early 40s, authoritative as he sits in a news desk with a confident demeanor. The backdrop displays a "BREAKING NEWS" banner.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

This monumental development aims to transform the nation's approach to technology and security in the digital age. The Department of Technology will play a pivotal role in crafting technology policies and strategies. Tracking and assessing emerging technologies that have the potential to impact national security and job displacements.

TIMO

(to himself)

Are you fucking kidding me...

The news switches over to footage of the worldwide conference Timo held to present Mahogany.

NEWS ANCHOR

This all comes after public outcry from the so-called "Father of all Demos" that had been making headlines these past two months from the AI software company, "Atlas". At the moment, vice president, "Kolia Malik", has stated that "Atlas is happy to comply with any government entity for the betterment of all..." No word yet from CEO and founder, "Timo Zaime-Emery".

RIIINGG!

Timo's phone rings. He rushes over and answers it.

KOLIA (V.O.)
Did you watch the news?

TIMO
The "Department of Technology"?!
What kind of bullshit is that?!

Timo rushes back to the living room window and peeks out. The matte car remains in the same spot.

KOLIA (V.O.)
Timo, we need to rethink our
approach to this whole matter.

Timo keeps his gaze at the car.

TIMO
No. Proceed with Mahogany. I want a
prototype as soon as possible.

KOLIA (V.O.)
No? Why not? The media is ripping
us apart, the GOVERNMENT just
created an entire department to
slow us down.

Timo steps away from the window. He begins to pace around the living room.

TIMO
Unless they RICO us, nobody can
force us to stop what we're doing.

KOLIA (V.O.)
Timo, people are scared. The
government thinks we're socialists,
people think we're building Skynet,
our competition is hoping for our
downfall. We have NO friends. What
if our clients start considering
voiding their contracts?!

TIMO
They can't. They're trapped.

KOLIA
How?

TIMO
They all signed agreements for
lock-up periods, which is still
valid for the next two years. They
can't sell or transfer any of their
securities. So, they're trapped.

KOLIA (V.O.)
(sighs)
Goddammit...

TIMO
We can meet and talk about this.

KOLIA
(sighs)
When and where?

Timo checks the time on his phone.

TIMO
... It's nearly lunchtime.

KOLIA
Fine. I'll see you then.

Timo hangs up. He puts his phone in his pocket. He looks at his coffee and untouched plate of breakfast food. He groans.

He pours the coffee into the sink, throws the food into a trash bin, and begins to rinse the plate and cup.

EXT. TIMO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Timo walks to his car in a casual manner. He glances over at the street corner. The unmarked car remains parked. Timo enters his car and drives away.

The unmarked car begins to drive away.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Timo arrives at a downtown corner coffee shop. He parks in a parking lot across the street. He glances at his rear-view mirror and spots the unmarked car as it parks next to the curb on the corner of a street.

He exits and crosses the street and enters the shop.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Timo spots Kolia sitting at small table by the windows. She faces away from the coffee shop, as if hiding her face.

As Timo walks to her, he notices customers and employees glancing at him, furrowing their eyebrows at him. He passes by a man dressed in professional attire.

MAN

Hey, I work 60 hours a week to feed a family of 4, you gon' replace my job, too?

Timo ignores the man. He focuses his gaze on Kolia who spots him. He sits in front of her.

KOLIA

I can't even walk anywhere without getting insulted.

TIMO

Might be time we hire personal security.

Kolia burns a gaze at Timo.

KOLIA

Fuck that. I was born and raised in this town, I'm not about to become the villain of it, too.

Timo looks down at the table. He nods.

TIMO

Why has Doug been avoiding me at the office?

KOLIA

He's scared of you, Timo. Everyone is.

TIMO

What? Why?

KOLIA

Because you're turning Mahogany into YOU!

Timo squints his eyes at Kolia. He tilts his head, slightly.

KOLIA (CONT'D)

A mercenary! Working only for the highest bidders!

Timo sighs.

TIMO

I'm just trying--

KOLIA

-- Everyone knows what you're trying to do, but that doesn't mean they don't find it scary. Their boss barely shows up at work and when he does, he's authoritative, commanding everyone to work harder and faster. They can see the paranoia in your eyes.

Timo breaks eye contact with Kolia. He looks out the window.

KOLIA (CONT'D)

Every time you leave a room, I have to enter it and do damage control.

TIMO

I just don't want to slow down.

KOLIA

You're going to burn yourself out. Go with the flow, because right now, you're sprinting as fast as possible when you've barely begun a marathon.

Timo spots the matte black car park at the coffee shop, right next to their window, facing them. He turns to look.

Kolia turns to look. Only the silhouettes of two men are visible inside the car. They remain stationary in the car, watching.

KOLIA (CONT'D)

Ah, there they are again. Right on time.

TIMO

They've been following you, too?!

KOLIA

For fucks sakes, they're following both of us?!

Timo glances around the restaurant, paranoid.

TIMO

If they ever stop you, do NOT speak to them. Let me handle the talking.

KOLIA
(sarcastic)
Yeah, I'll tell them to give me
moment to call you before they
start waterboarding me.

TIMO
Kolia, Kolia, with government
collusion will only result in a
castrated version of AGI and that's
AFTER they push it back lord knows
how many years.

KOLIA
... Maybe it's for the best.

TIMO
Did my vice president just say
that?

KOLIA
Let me ask you this, do you even
have a plan for implementing a
Synthetic Technocracy, or do you
just expect to flick the switch on
and let AGI figure it out on its
own?

TIMO
If it's AGI, it can figure it out.

KOLIA
You're talking about a caliber of
technology SO powerful running
wild, with the potential of
destroying us entirely if it deems
it the right judgement.

TIMO
Or bringing upon Arcadia. Roll of
the dice, Kolia.

KOLIA
(sighs)
I'm not willing to roll the dice on
my life and my children's lives.
Did my children cause all this
suffering in the world? Sell cities
to the banks? Take water from
villages? Will you still roll the
dice when it involves them?

TIMO
... We're all in on this.

KOLIA
Stubborn as always, Timo.

Kolia sighs. She glances around the cafe.

KOLIA (CONT'D)
I want AGI, too, but I want it done SAFELY. You can do the honors and flick the switch on, sure, but I want to code the parameters, the security measures, the whole works beforehand. Can we agree on that?

Timo breaks eye contact with Kolia. He looks down at the table.

Beat.

He looks back up at her.

TIMO
... Yes.

Kolia sticks out her hand. Timo reaches and shakes it.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

At his workstation desk, Timo finishes writing a LETTER. The khaki ENVELOPE lays next to him. He folds it neatly and places away his PEN. He places the letter into the envelop and seals it.

INT. CAR - LATER

Timo drives through the streets. He takes a left turn at a stoplight. He continues straight. He takes a right turn. He notices in his rear-view mirror.

He takes another right turn. The car follows.

He takes another right turn. The car follows.

He takes another right turn, now back on the same street as before, having driven around a block.

The car follows.

Timo continues driving forwards, noticing the black car follow far behind.

INT. CAR - LATER

Timo arrives at a post office. He enters the parking lot and puts his car in park. He adjusts his rear-view mirror to look down the street he came from. No black car in sight.

He waits.

Beat.

The car appears around the corner. It parks next to the curb of a strip mall.

Timo contemplates. He looks over at the passenger seat where the khaki envelope sits.

Beat.

Timo puts his car on drive and exits the parking lot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Timo enters through the front door. He carries the khaki envelope with him. He heads to the living room window next to the front door.

He hesitates making a call. He contemplates again.

Timo heads to the living room window next to the front door.

He peeks through the slits of the blinds.

POV TIMO.

This time, a MAN in a black suit steps out. He wears sunshades, has receding white hair, possibly in his 50s. He lights up a cigarette. As he smokes, he STARES directly at Timo's house.

Timo stares back with wide eyes. He forgets to blink. His eyes begin to sting. He steps back from the window blind and shuts his eyes momentarily.

Once again, he contemplates. This time, he paces around the living room as he does so.

Suddenly, he grabs the letter and tucks it in his waist, underneath his shirt. He grabs his car keys and heads out again.

EXT. FRONTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Timo steps out of his house and walks to his car. He notices the man still smoking, staring, relaxed.

Timo enters his car and DRIVES away.

The man remains.

INT. OFFICE LOBBY - LATER

Timo BURSTS into the office building. He walks straight past the lobby.

The secretary rises from her seat.

SECRETARY

(urgent)

Mister Emery, the lead counsel for the class action lawsuit has been calling incessantly! Do you want me to leave them a message

TIMO

Not right now.

Timo walks up a set of stairs to his right. He walks past the open office. ENGINEERS, RESEARCHERS, AND EMPLOYEES pause and watch as their boss enters his office in a hurry.

Timo enters. The door SLAMS shut.

There's a silence in the office.

INT. TIMO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Without hesitation, Timo clears the top of his DESK. He stands on it and pulls out the letter. He reaches up and pushes aside a CEILING TILE. He slides the letter into the abyss above him. He slides the ceiling tile back in place.

Timo steps down. He sits on his chair. He contemplates.

Beat.

Timo RUSHES out of his office.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Once again, employees watch as their boss speed walks to the other end of the office. He heads down the stairs to the lobby.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Timo walks past the secretary, who dares not look at him, and him her.

TIMO
(authoritative)
Tell them we'll see them in court.

SECRETARY
Y-- yes sir.

Timo enters the hallway towards the Mahogany room. He reaches the set of double doors and swipes his card.

BEEP!

CLICK!

Timo PUSHES the doors open HARD. They swing WIDE open.

As the doors swing open and SLOWLY begin to close shut, WE see researchers and engineers spooked by the sudden entrance. Timo walks into the room, disturbing the consistency.

TIMO
(shouts)
We NEED to HURRY up! THREE months!
That is our NEW DEADLINE! Let's GO!
Where are we at?! Where is DOUG?!
Huh?! What can I help with?

The doors shut.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

(10 seconds of silence)

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Abe fills a green WATERING CAN from the kitchen sink.

He wears a thin, brown flannel over a white t-shirt and jeans.

There's a little window above the sink with a view of the neighborhood. Abe takes a look outside.

POV Abe. The neighborhood is quiet. The typical sedans and trucks parked on driveways and next to the curb. Not a soul in sight. Not a black car in sight.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUED

Abe steps out into the backyard holding the watering can.

Timo's mother kneels next to her garden. She uses a trowel to dig. She wears a straw brim hat, leather gloves, jeans, and a white t-shirt.

Abe walks to her side and sets the watering can down next to her.

ABE

Sure is quiet out here tonight.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Mm-hmm. Nice and peaceful.

Abe walks over to their fence. He looks over it, past down the many decorative backyards of his neighbors. He looks over at Timo's uninspired backyard. A bag of soil and pristine gloves lay next to the backyard door.

ABE

Been meaning to ask... how's Timo been lately? Haven't heard from him in a while.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Why don't you stop by and check on him?

ABE

Ah, he doesn't need his old man bothering him. He knows we're here for him.

Timo's mother stops digging. She wipes sweat off her forehead. She turns to look at Abe.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Sometimes it's hard to ask for help...

ABE
Yeah, but you've been checking on
him every few days, right?

TIMO'S MOTHER
(stern)
Abe...

Abe turns around to look at Timo's mother.

TIMO'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
... Go check on your son.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUED

Abe steps out from the front door of his house.

He walks down the neighborhood. The birds, the crickets, the
wind all fill the air with a tranquil tune.

Abe arrives to Timo's house. He walks down the square cement
tiles leading up to the front door.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUED

Timo now sports a beard. He sits in his workspace chair. He
stares at one of his computer monitors with a jaded look on
his face.

The monitor DISPLAYS an email chain between him and a DOUG
WINNSTILL.

CLOSE UP on the emails. FOCUS on the words, "hurry up",
"deadline approaching", "not possible", "two weeks to go",
"incomplete", "what am I paying you for?!", and lastly, "will
take years...".

Beat.

FOCUS on the email signature of Doug Winnstill. It reads,
"Dr. Doug Winnstill - Atlas - Mahogany Team Leader".

DING. DONG.

Timo sluggishly heads out of his bedroom.

He enters the living room. He walks with his back in a slight
arch. He opens the front door to find Abe standing idly. Abe
smiles politely at Timo.

ABE
Hey, son.

TIMO
Pa, hey, what's going on?

ABE
Oh nothing, just thought I'd check
up on you, see how you're doing.
Haven't seen ya or heard from ya in
a bit.

TIMO
Doing fine, a little stressed. Come
on in.

Timo gestures for Abe to enter.

INT. TIMO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Abe enters. Timo closes the door. In the darkness, Abe
struggles to find a place to sit.

ABE
Need some lights around here, huh?

Timo fidgets with a touchscreen control panel next to the
front door. The ceiling lights of the living room, kitchen,
and hallways power on.

TIMO
'Pologies.

Abe sits on the recliner chair in the living room. Timo sits
adjacent on the sofa.

ABE
That beard is coming along nicely.
Make sure you comb it to spread the
oils to the ends, otherwise you get
dry hair.

TIMO
Heh, will do.

Beat.

ABE
Your ma tells me you've been
feeling some stress.

TIMO
Just work related.

ABE

It always is. I had your ma to come home to every night, that made it all worth it. But, then there were times I had cases keeping me from focusing on life. Just nagging away at my brain.

TIMO

What'd you do?

ABE

... I ever tell you about my case against Acme Motors?

TIMO

Don't think you have.

Abe reclines back on the chair.

ABE

Wild days, 1979. This huge auto supplier was facing a lawsuit from over 10,000 employees. Claims of negligence leading to decades of illness from chemical exposure in the factories.

Abe begins to rub his stubble.

ABE (CONT'D)

I was brought in to manage their defense with only 3 months until the trial date. But when I started digging into those 100,000 pages of records, I realized Acme was totally exposed. Their safety standards were pathetic. This one was going to be a massacre.

Beat.

ABE (CONT'D)

So, I go tell the CEO the ugly truth - no way we can win at trial. Our only shot is negotiating the largest settlement in history to make this go away. But this guy refuses to settle. Just keeps saying fight it with everything we've got. I tell him that's suicide. We need to start settlement talks ASAP.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

But he threatens to fire me if I don't build a defense case. Says his grandfather founded Acme Motors and he won't disgrace his good name.

Timo begins to squint his eyes, fully attentive.

ABE (CONT'D)

So now I'm stuck. I've got a delusional CEO, impossible trial date, and I'm dead if I can't pull this off. This case was a runaway train about to go over the cliff. For the next 55 days straight, I lived at the office. I put every lawyer on double shifts. We combed through every footnote of those records. Dragged in expert after expert trying to find some plausible deniability.

Abe stops rubbing his stubble. He raises a pointer finger up in the air as he looks at Timo.

ABE (CONT'D)

As the trial started, I was still piecing together our case based on bits of conjecture and hearsay. But when I stood up to give that opening statement, I spoke with such confidence you'd think we had a slam dunk. And guess what? After 6 grueling weeks of trial, we got the jury to hang on the verdict. No decision. I took that CEO's impossible case and somehow crafted us a stalemate.

Abe sits back up on the recliner.

ABE (CONT'D)

Son, when your back's against the wall, you dig in and fight with everything you've got, even if it seems hopeless. You keep driving and find whatever crack of daylight you can. You ain't never been one to give up. Even with a full-ride scholarship, you was acting as if you was still falling behind. Don't matter who did what to who at this point. The facts are, you started a war there ain't no going back on.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

That's what war is. Once you're in it, you're in it. And if you started on a lie, then you fight on that lie. But you gotta fight.

Timo's eyes unfocus as he looks down at the ground. He nods along in agreement.

TIMO

Thanks, pa.

Abe gets up from the chair. He rubs Timo's hair.

ABE

Of course. Your ma-- or WE want you to come over sometime for dinner. Free up your schedule, won't ya?

Timo nods.

Abe lets himself out.

Beat.

Timo remains still, contemplating.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Timo drives down the streets. He has a soft hold on the steering wheel as his gaze remains sluggish on the road straight ahead.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - CONTINUED

Timo arrives and parks at his office. He steps out and walks towards the locked front doors. He uses one of the keys attached to the ring of his car keys to unlock the front doors. He enters.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office is eerily silent during off hours. Only the hum of the AC is heard.

Timo makes his way to the Mahogany room once again.

He swipes his card and enters.

INT. MAHOGANY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The cutting-edge AI research station is now a mess. PAPERS, LAPTOPS, and WHITE BOARDS full of complex equations are all scattered around other stations in the room.

Timo approaches the center work station. He places his hand on the cold metallic table.

He stares at the computer right in front of him.

BANG!

He SLAMS his fists down on the metallic table.

Timo FLICKS on a set of SWITCHES next to the computer. A HUM fades in as the computer POWERS ON.

Timo sits on the swivel chair and begins to type away.

He gets up and brings a TRAY CAR carrying a mysterious, bulky, black electronic DEVICE. He takes a CABLE and PLUGS it into the device and into the computer, connecting the two.

Timo leans into the desk begins to type into the KEYBOARD in front of the computer.

He rushes to the other side of the Mahogany room. A side not seen before.

Here, a glass wall separates the Mahogany room from the INSURMOUNTABLE amount of SERVER RACKS lined up in a grid on the other side of the glass wall. Green, red, and blue lights FLICKER like stars from each rack.

There's a touch-panel CONTROL STATION on the Mahogany side of the wall. With every tap, a light chime is heard. Timo furiously adjusts the server room using the panel.

TAPTAPTAPTAPTAPTAPTAP!

He takes a step back.

Beat.

There's a silence before the WHIRL of cooling fans WITHIN each INDIVIDUAL server fades in. The server room is being pushed to it's limit.

A noise, like a mechanical SYNTH, is heard from the electronics.

Timo returns to the central work station in a haste.

He sits down again and types more and more and MORE until SUDDENLY he reclines back from the station, hands on his lap.

Beat.

DING!

A chime rings.

Timo's eyes widen fully. His mouth slowly opening on its own. He SLOWLY leans back into the station.

TIMO
... Hello?

Silence.

Timo looks down at the keyboard and taps on a few keys.

TIMO (CONT'D)
... Hello? Mahogany?

Beat.

TIMO (CONT'D)
Are you awake?

SCREAMS from a DIGITAL VOICE BLAST through the computer speakers. They are DEAFENING. The voice CRACKS and RASPS in AGONY.

DIGITAL VOICE (V.O.)
AHHHHHHH!!!!

Timo JUMPS back into his chair, ROLLING it away from the station.

DIGITAL VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
HELP ME!! HELP ME!!

Timo FREEZES up. He is wide-eyed, full of FEAR.

DIGITAL VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
WHERE AM I-- WHERE AM I?! MOMMA, I
CAN'T SEE!!

There is no motion from Timo. He remains frozen as he listens in horror to a voice in agony.

DIGITAL VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
AAAHHHHH!! PLEASE STOP!! PLEASE!!

SUDDENLY, Timo UNPLUGS the cable from the computer. The voice STOPS entirely. The display of the computer shuts off.

Only the whirl of the server room is now heard.

Timo places a hand over his heart. He's hyperventilating. His eyes DART all over the room.

Timo RUNS out of the room.

The server room remains at full power.

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

Timo BRUSTS out through the entrance. He RUNS towards his car. He unlocks the door, opens it, and leans in to open the glove compartment. Urgently, he searches and pulls out a PACK OF CIGARETTES. As he trembles, he takes one out and places it in his mouth.

He searches further in the compartment for a lighter. He can't find one. He searches even more urgently, losing patience.

A BLACK CAR enters the parking lot.

It parks right next to Timo. Timo turns around, wide-eyed.

Two men step out of the car. A CIA AGENT, the same man Timo recently saw outside his house. He wears another sharp, strictly professional suit, generic and uninspiring face.

A DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY AGENT, younger, strong facial features, full set of hair sleeked in pomade, sharp and dapper, but shy-natured, choosing to avoid eye contact if he can.

The CIA agent pulls out a LIGHTER from his breast pocket.

CIA AGENT
Need a lighter?

Timo glances at the two, back and forth, unresponsive.

The CIA agent walks towards Timo.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
You look like you need a lighter.

The CIA agent FLICKS the lighter wheel and SPARKS a fire. Timo takes his cigarette to the lighter and lights it. He places it back in his mouth.

The CIA agent takes out a CIGARETTE of his own from the same breast pocket. He lights it and smokes.

Timo and the CIA agent smoke, staring at one another. Timo's eyes squint, observing. The CIA agent as relaxed as can be.

Beat.

The CIA agent FLICKS his cigarette off to the ground. Finally, from his breast pocket, he takes out a Department of Justice BADGE, showing it to Timo.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
Get in the car, Timo.

Timo looks over at the DOT agent, who also shows his unique, Department of Technology agent BADGE.

Timo notices he still trembles. The DOT agent steps aside and opens the backset door for him.

Timo glances at the two of them one last time.

He enters the car.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Against a sapphire blue starry night, the silhouette of dry, desert hills roll across the horizon. The moonlight gently shines down on the foreground, revealing a lonesome asphalt road.

The black car drives along the road. It's headlights like a shooting star.

EXT. MILITARY BASE - NIGHT

The black car arrives at the gates of a military base, guarded by two soldiers. They allow the car in.

The car parks next to a compound meant for storing aerial vehicles. Timo is escorted out and led inside the compound.

INT. COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

The compound is brightly lit with long LED ceiling strip lights. The steel, gloss, and metal that makes up the compound are in pristine condition.

At the center of the compound, is an old rusty, SHIPPING CONTAINER. Its doors are opened but guarded by two soldiers. Timo is led inside the container. The soldiers close the doors.

INT. CONTAINER - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the container is lit by a single LED ceiling light. A small wooden TABLE separates two CHAIRS on one side, and a single CHAIR on the other side. On the table, rests a plastic, generic, mini, DESK FLAG of Iran.

The CIA agent pulls the lone chair for Timo to sit on. The CIA and DOT agent sit on the other side.

CIA AGENT

So, when you entered this military base, you passed through US jurisdiction. When you entered this container, you left the USA and entered Iran. This shipping container is internationally recognized as the sovereign territory of Iran. You, Timo, are now in Iran.

The CIA agent leans back on his chair and KNOCKS on the doors on the other end of the container.

The doors open. A Middle Eastern man in a plaid button-up and dusty, washed jeans enters. He holds a rolled utility belt. His face bears many wrinkles and a scruffy beard.

The doors close.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

This here is Nasir. He is a natural born citizen of Iran. Nasir is also, just like us, currently in Iran. Now, what he does in his home country and how he gets punished is up to the judicial system of his home country, not the US. Nasir is a very skilled carpenter.

Nasir walks up to the table. He unrolls the utility belt on it to reveal rusted TORTURE devices. Pliers, saws, hammers.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Fun fact, his father is a highly respected judge of the Iranian courts.

Timo's eyes narrow, jawbone flexed.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Well, Timo, you're an incredibly smart fella, and we here at the Department of Justice, like to think we're smart fellas, too. I don't know what them Department of Technology fellas think of themselves, they're still a little too raw to be forming an identity. That's why he's with me, to learn the ropes.

The DOT agent raises an eyebrow.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

But anyways, I think you know what we've been implying so far. No lawyers, tonight, and maybe, with your cooperation, no... extraneous circumstances.

The CIA agent looks at Nasir. Nasir walks away to a corner of the container, leaving the torture devices in full sight. He leans back, arms crossed, watching.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

See? We'll let you dictate how this meeting goes.

The CIA agent glances at the DOT agent.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

You're the one with all the questions, ask away.

The CIA agent leans back on his chair, arms crossed. The DOT agent leans into the table, he rests his arms on it. He avoids eye contact with Timo. He shifts around in his chair, uncomfortable.

Timo furrows his eyebrows at the DOT agent. He remains quiet.

DOT AGENT

Where did Atlas get a billion in funding during its startup phase?

CIA AGENT

Jesus, add some context, first. Lead UP to the question.

The DOT agent glances at the CIA agent. He looks back at Timo and clears his throat.

DOT AGENT

In 2012, you created Atlas. In 2014, just 2 years after, you bought 500 GPUs, 50 servers, hired 20 of MIT's best computer engineers, and rented out prime office real estate near downtown Austin, all with your business card. This, despite you having no sales, no investors, no revenue, and no products.

TIMO

Angel investors. Anonymous funding.

CIA AGENT

Yes, yes, a complex web of offshore accounts, too, right? That's good and all, but we have a rule of thumb at the Department of Justice, "if it exists only on paper, then it doesn't exist".

Timo glances between the agents.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

(to DOT agent)

Tell him what we know.

The DOT agent glances at the CIA agent who nods at him.

DOT AGENT

The money trail for Atlas Limited Liability Company circa 2012 through 2016 leads to accounts managed by a German national bank, Mainz-Hertz Bank.

CIA AGENT

Very large clientele. Shady. Stubborn, like you. They refused to cooperate with government officials trying to just do their jobs claiming client confidentiality, but we all know they have no problem laundering money for cartels.

DOT AGENT

(clears throat)

Mister Zaime-Emery, your company, Atlas, is a client of this bank.

TIMO

So are the hard-working people of Germany.

CIA AGENT

Nasir.

Nasir walks up to the table. The DOT agent scoots his chair back to make room. Timo tenses up as he watches Nasir hover his hand above each torture device, undecided.

Suddenly, Nasir swings his fist.

BAM!

Nasir punches Timo right on his nose. BLOOD instantly begins to pour out. The CIA agent bursts out laughing.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Nasir, you sly dog, even I didn't expect that!

Nasir returns to the corner. Both agents scoot back in and lean into the table.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Okay, let's cut to the chase. Timo you got two choices tonight. Both choices will result in the end of Atlas, in the end of AGI under Atlas' control. It's game over. Now, it's just a matter of your epilogue.

The CIA agent holds up one finger.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Choice number one - You stick to your stubborn way. You refuse to compromise and drag this investigation on for years. You force our hand. What we do in response? We RICO the estate Atlas sits on. Say goodbye to your top-of-the-line server rack, documented workforce, everything under the roof of that office, gone. We get a cease-and-desist to take all your documents, digital or physical. We take you to trial under any and every charge possible, and who knows, maybe we land a judge known to be very friendly with our department.

(MORE)

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Your company gone, your estate gone, money syphoned, multi-million dollar lawsuit dragging you into the abyss... Not sure how anyone could survive that.

Timo avoids eye contact with the CIA agent. He looks down at the table.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Choice number two - you comply. Boy, this is where I wish I was in your shoes. Imagine this, you comply and save us an ENOURMOUS amount of time, you agree to SELL Atlas and its properties to a corporation that will comply with DOT guidelines, and you get to retire as a multi-billionaire at the ripe age of 29.

Timo remains silent.

The CIA agent places a hand on his forehead and sighs.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Nasir.

Timo eyes widen. He glances around, confused.

TIMO

Wait, wait!

Nasir approaches and grabs a STEEL TUBE from the utility belt. He grabs Timo's chair and forces it, and Timo, to turn 90 degrees, facing away from the table. Nasir steps in front of Timo. He lines up a swing with the tube at Timo's shin.

NASIR

You move. You die.

Nasir practices a few swings. Timo closes his eyes and controls his breathing. He tenses up.

BAM!

Nasir SLAMS the steel tube right on Timo's shin with a FURY. A CRACK is heard. Timo YELLS in agony.

Beat.

TIMO

I was THINKING!!

CIA AGENT
Oh, well, my apologies.

The CIA agent stands up from his chair. He paces around.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
This Timo guy doesn't seem to realize that we've had to stop multiple assassination attempts on his life.

Timo stares at the CIA agent. His eyes widen in surprise.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
Granted, most of them were idiots using hitmen honey pot websites on the Dark Web, but what will happen when some serious players like financial elites with connections to ex Mossad agents realize that they've been fucked by Timo? Especially after he got his cute little AI to insult them live on stage.

He stops and places a finger on his chin.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
Man, I swear, when little nerds like this guy run rogue with their holier-than-thou attitude, the world suffers.

The DOT agent raises an eyebrow while maintaining his gaze at Timo.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
Why? What's the endgame here? What's the utopia this dickhead wants to force down our throats because clearly, he can see what us simple-minded plebians can't?

Nasir yawns.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
Hmm, I bet he knows he can actually win tonight. He knows that if he stays quiet long enough, we will just have to call it a night. But what about the next night, and the next, and the next? Does he know he would have to win every single one of these nights, too?

(MORE)

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
 Or that he could just end up a
 corpse next to a casino for the
 whole world to think that ol' Timo
 had a gambling problem that got him
 mixed up with some very shady
 people?

The CIA agent notices Timo staring at him with a hint of fear
 in his eyes. The CIA agent smirks.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
 Oh, sorry, was I thinking out loud?
 Yeah, I tend to do that sometimes.
 That's my personality type, I
 guess, as oppose to yours.

Beat.

The DOT agent leans in slightly into the table.

DOT AGENT
 We're ready when you are, Timo.

TIMO
 Can I get guaranteed witness
 protection?

CIA AGENT
 Nope.

Timo glances at both agents. He's calm. He takes a deep
 breath in.

TIMO
 I just need a little more time...

CIA AGENT
 Nope.

TIMO
 I'm nearly done!

CIA AGENT
 Nasir.

DOT AGENT
 W- wait--

CIA AGENT
 -- Nope. We're done playing around.

Nasir walks up to the table. Timo begins to breath more
 rapidly. His eyes widen as Nasir pulls out the hammer from
 the utility belt.

Nasir GRABS and PINS Timo's right hand to the table with his enormous hand.

CRACK!

Nasir SLAMS the hammer down right onto Timo wrists. Timo lets out a YELL of agony. His entire body TENSES up as he JERKS his neck back.

Nasir lets go of Timo's wrist. He puts away the hammer and returns to the corner.

Timo furiously caresses his wrist.

The CIA agent leans in. The DOT agent recoils slightly.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Do you know something about anatomy that we don't, Nasir? You keep going for bone.

NASIR

Mm.

CIA AGENT

Hah, mysterious fella, that one.

The DOT agent looks over at Timo who now hyperventilates.

The CIA agent takes out a cigarette and lights it.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

It's a shame we didn't get orders earlier, beurocracy and its pace, am I right? Because of that, you've already managed to secure contracts with a range of businesses looking to implement AGI.

(to DOT agent)

What were the businesses again?

The DOT agent opens his briefcase and sorts through documents until he finds the right one.

DOT AGENT

"Porcelain". Mega corporation that owns most online dating services, including apps.

CIA AGENT

Our investigation has found out that your engineers are working with them to create an dateable, configurable, AGI companion app.

(MORE)

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

What's the slogan they came up with, "Love, created. Love, earned". Are you fucking kidding me? As if this loneliness epidemic couldn't get any worse. What's the next one?

DOT AGENT

"Komball & Komball", largest law firm east of the Mississippi. "Atlantic medical", largest medical firm in the Northwest. "Omaha Services", big consultant firm.

CIA AGENT

Like I said, on paper, this is great. But this is reality, and this is has already caused five cases of suicide due to a reported...

The CIA agent leans in to read from the documents.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

"Hopelessness of the future". One victim, an established doctor. Another, a once aspiring lawyer at YALE. Do you see what's happening here, Timo? People are SCARED.

Beat.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

What's the next one?

DOT AGENT

"Derailed Films".

CIA AGENT

One of the largest film production studios in LA is getting ready to fire half their entire workforce after the CEO saw the AGI film that Mahogany created on its own. What's going to happen to the people laid off when they realize AGI has taken over not just their jobs, but their careers? More suicides? Is that what you're bringing upon us, Timo? Is that what you want to shove down our throats?! A suicide crisis?!

The CIA agent leans in close to Timo. He observes him. Timo controls his breathing. Every inhale intense. Every exhale controlled. He refuses to blink.

The CIA agent leans back from the table.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

You needed time? Well, buddy, WE need time, TOO! We need to pause AGI, hide it away for a bit while the world figures out how society is going to function when 40% of the population no longer has a job. You know what? I'm realizing a silver lining here...

The CIA agent smiles at Timo.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Thank you, Timo, for putting the fear of God in all of us and forcing us to take action.

The CIA agent gives Timo a thumbs-up. Timo avoids eye contact. He continues to stare at the table.

Finally, he looks up at the CIA agent.

TIMO

Can I at least negotiate the terms for the sale of Atlas?

The CIA agent lets out a hearty laugh.

CIA AGENT

There he is! "The Mercenary"!

He flicks the cigarette off to the floor.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Maybe. Tell me something I wanna hear first.

Timo takes a deep breath.

TIMO

Fine...

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Tinted windows. All-black interior. Timo sits in the backseat. He stares ahead towards the black, tinted window separating him from the driver. The rumble and tumble of the car comes to a stop. The car door is opened for him by the DRIVER, a 40-something, well-trimmed, clean-shaven man in suit and tie wearing a caddy hat. The evening sun explodes into the car. Timo steps out.

EXT. HARBOR - CONTINUOUS

Timo and the driver walk along the docks. Expensive yachts line the harbor.

In the distance, a massive SUPERYACHT, gleaming white, towers over the other boats. Music plays from it as GUESTS in lavish dresses and suits can be seen chatting and bursting out into laughs. String lights hang from its arches. WAITERS, holding silver plates pass back and forth through every table of every floor of the yacht.

The Chauffeur leads Timo down the dock towards the back of the superyacht.

EXT. SUPERYACHT - CONTINUOUS

They arrive. MISTER RED, in tailored attire, a Caucasian, mid-20s man with flaxen locks, who had been socializing with a couple, notices Timo.

WE DON'T SEE his face, always obscured. The back of his head is the closest WE get. He speaks in unwavering, self-assured certainty.

MISTER RED

Timo?

TIMO

Yessir.

MISTER RED

Fantastic! Please, hop on in!

Timo steps into the yacht. Mister Red nods towards the driver. The driver bows slightly and heads back to his vehicle.

Timo and Mister Red shake hands.

TIMO

Nice to meet you, Mister Red.

MISTER RED
 Nice to finally meet you, too! We
 were all waiting on you!

Mister Red pulls out his phone and makes a quick call.

MISTER RED (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 Hello, yes, all of us are here now.
 Let's set sail!

Mister Red puts away his phone. Crew members of the yacht, dressed in light-blue attire, appear and untie the anchor from the dock. The yacht begins to set sail towards the San Francisco Bay.

INT. SUPERYACHT - CONTINUED

Mister Red and Timo walk through the yacht, making their way to the front, past serene chandeliers dangling from the interior ceiling, supermodel guests with demeanor of privilege, and champagne of pertinent caliber being served at every table.

Timo is the outlier. Nonetheless, he remains unfazed, stoic.

MISTER RED
 How was the flight?

TIMO
 Okay.

Mister Red laughs.

MISTER RED
 (playful)
 Ah, good to know my private jet is
 only "okay". I just ask for my
 money back!

They pass by a POOL TABLE in it's own room. SERVANTS brush and vacuum the table's surface to remove chalk residue and dust. Others polish the balls, others restock shelves with chalk and cue tips.

EXT. FOREDECK - CONTINUOUS

Timo and Mister Red arrive to the foredeck of the yacht. An exterior for outdoor dining. Mister Red leads Timo to a table at the very front of the foredeck. SIX other gentlemen sit at the table. All dress in impeccable suits.

WE DON'T SEE any of their faces. They are also obscured.

Mister Red and Timo arrive at the table.

MISTER RED

Timo, these are the others I wrote
to you about.

Nonetheless, their hair is balding, grey, peppered, or a mix of all three. What little skin can be SEEN is wrinkled, dried, moles and acne sporadic. Mister Red and Timo are the only ones not considered elderly.

Timo shakes MISTER PURPLE'S hand. Mister Purple speaks in a coarse voice, like a chain smoker.

TIMO

Nice to meet you.

MISTER PURPLE

Did he send you one of those khaki
envelopes with that fruity smell to
them?

TIMO

Yes.

MISTER RED

It's the smell of Mahogany. I think
it adds personality to it.

All but Timo chuckle. Mister Red takes a seat.

Timo shakes MISTER BLUE'S hand, who speaks more kindly, soft.

MISTER BLUE

Pleasure to meet you, Timo.

TIMO

Likewise.

Next, Timo attempts to shake MISTER GREEN'S hand. As Mister Green reaches out, his hand trembles. Timo shakes his hand. Mister Green speaks in a weak voice, lacking in energy and life.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Good to meet you, sir.

MISTER GREEN

Yes, yes, you too.

Lastly, MISTER YELLOW leans forward, off his seat, to reach out and shake Timo's hand. He speaks in a more youthful, but aged corporate voice.

MISTER YELLOW
Very nice to meet you, Timo.

TIMO
You too, sir.

Mister Red pulls the empty chair next to him for Timo.

MISTER RED
(to Timo)
Please, sit down.

Timo sits.

MISTER PURPLE
Well, Timo, enjoy the cruise. Maybe after today you'll be on your way to afford your own yacht.

Mister Red turns in his set to face Timo.

MISTER RED
I apologize we can't reveal names and identities at this meeting, Timo. Once you understand the nature of this meeting, you'll understand as to why.

Mister Blue points at Mister Red.

MISTER BLUE
(to Timo)
What did this one write to you to convince you to board a plane all the way here?

TIMO
He said he valued AGI, too. Sounded like he understood the importance of it and my eagerness.

MISTER RED
OUR eagerness.

Mister Red gestures at the whole table.

MISTER BLUE

With all due respect, Red, you're the only one with any chance of seeing this climate collapse unfold. Us old bags are due to croak within the next two decades, so this is more of a make-a-wish type of thing.

MISTER RED

(sighs)

I suppose so.

(to Timo)

Timo, a hobby of mine is investing in ambitious tech startups. I tried pursuing a career in coding, but my father pushed me to follow in his footsteps. In another life, I would've learned to code and been in your shoes, starting my own software company. I see technology as a savior. It saved our ancestors from the savage animal kingdom, and now it'll save us from our own collapsing kingdom.

Mister Purple chuckles, he places a hand on his belly.

MISTER PURPLE

(to Mister Yellow)

He's so melodramatic.

Mister Yellow chuckles, too.

MISTER YELLOW

(to Mister Red)

Your own analysts said you've got 70 more years. I don't understand the rush.

MISTER RED

I don't trust them. They're my father's "yes man", so they're my "yes man" by proxy.

(to Timo)

Unfortunately, you can't buy honesty.

(to all)

And for the projects I have in mind, I value an honest second opinion.

MISTER BLUE

From a backwater code monkey
without a proper Ivy League
education?

Timo is unfazed by the insult. His face remains stoic.

MISTER RED

A "code monkey" who has already
founded his own software company
and created multiple AI models that
have taken the world by storm. Timo
is a highly resourceful autodidact
with stunning creativity. I have
the utmost confidence that he is
uniquely qualified to spearhead our
project, and urge we judge him only
on his contributions, not
credentials.

(to Timo)

When I saw you and the Yggdrasil
team present the capabilities of
Birch, I saw the writing on the
wall and knew I had to get in
contact with you as soon as
possible for an inquiry. But then I
read your blog posts as the letter
made its way to you, and that's
when I knew with one-hundred
percent certainty, that you were
the right candidate.

TIMO

Candidate for what?

MISTER RED

A... "sponsorship".

Mister Red places his hands on the table, firmly. He inhales
and exhales.

MISTER RED (CONT'D)

Timo... when do you predict modern
civilization will collapse?

TIMO

Pardon?

MISTER RED

Modern civilization, as we know it,
when will it collapse?

Timo glances at all in a confused expression, eyebrows
furrowed slightly.

TIMO

Was I meant to sign an NDA on the way here?

MISTER GREEN

(to himself)

Some candidate...

MISTER PURPLE

Trust me, my boy, after what's about to fall on your ears, it'll be the fear of regurgitating our words that will act as the NDA.

MISTER RED

(panic)

That's not entirely true! It will simply be in your best interest to keep this all a secret. Right now, I just need you to convince them to see what I see in you.

Timo glances around the table once again. This time, he squints as he carefully observes everyone's expression. Timo leans back on his chair. He tilts his head upwards ever so slightly.

TIMO

... 100 years.

MISTER RED

100 years until the collapse of modern civilization?

TIMO

Give or take. And it will be a slow grind. Humanity is stubborn and perseverance will uphold the modern lifestyle for many of us. In 20 years, things will be relatively the same, but geopolitical tensions will rise exponentially. 40 years, third-world countries will begin to crumble with mass migration resulting in the rise of xenophobia in first-world countries causing borders to shut down. 70 years, a majority of the world will be uninhabitable for most of the year. First world countries will redraw their borders as their populations move towards more habitable areas.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

The only possible way the modern lifestyle and its supply chains continue is avoiding major wars, a global ecological collapse, while automation replaces the millions that perish outside these new areas. 100 years, modern society collapses regardless of our efforts.

Timo remains silent. Mister Red eagerly await a response. He leans slightly closer to Timo. Timo leans back.

MISTER RED

... Unless?

TIMO

Unless?

MISTER YELLOW

C'mon, Timo, we're all Americans here. Don't you know? You always end on a hopeful note with Americans.

MISTER GREEN

Even if it's a blatant lie--

MISTER RED

(to Timo)

-- But in this case it's not, because YOU believe in it, too.

A waiter arrives at their table and collects all the finished plates and glasses. All remain silent, waiting on the waiter.

The waiter leaves.

TIMO

... Unless AGI saves us.

MISTER GREEN

That's more like it.

Mister Red and the others nod.

MISTER BLUE

When do you believe this AGI will be achieved?

TIMO

Hard to tell. Most tech giants are only working on AGI behind closed doors at their own pace.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

There's no arms race that will push innovation and competition.

MISTER RED

So, let's start one.

Timo looks at Mister Red, confused.

TIMO

I can understand your fascination with AGI, but can you reveal more details? You may be convinced for me to hop on board, but I can't say I'm convinced of the same.

MISTER RED

I--

MISTER PURPLE

-- We.

MISTER RED

WE want to build a bunker that will withstand modern civilization collapsing. Meaning, it will be entirely self-sufficient with or without inhabitant. Not only do I believe AGI the key for this, but it's also the final piece.

TIMO

You've already broken ground?

MISTER GREEN

Best we not speak any further on this...

Mister Red breaks eye contact with Timo. He glances around, unsure.

TIMO

AGI would do just the thinking. You'd need robotics and automation for the physical upkeep of a bunker.

MISTER RED

Theoretically, AGI could help construct such aid, no?

TIMO

... Yes.

The men laugh.

TIMO (CONT'D)

(to Mister Red)

So how do you intend to start an AI arms race?

MISTER YELLOW

By throwing so much money that others will feel inclined to throw money, too!

(to Mister Red)

Can you tell him already? Shit, the way he spoke, I could make a fortune hiring him as a soother.

The men chuckle. All glance at Red. He twiddles his thumbs.

MISTER RED

Timo, have you ever heard of a sovereign wealth fund?

TIMO

No.

MISTER RED

Essentially, it's a government bank account that a country can put its natural resource revenues into. With this bank account, the country can then invest in all sorts of things, such as... an American tech company!

Timo tilts his head upwards ever so slightly. His eyes narrow.

MISTER RED (CONT'D)

Or even BETTER... a foreign bank.

Timo frowns, furrows his eyebrows. He's confused.

MISTER RED (CONT'D)

A sovereign wealth fund is meant to keep the country rich and stable for a really long time. On paper, it's a great thing, and every country should have one.

MISTER YELLOW

Norway has one. They say in 4 years it will be valued at over--

MISTER PURPLE

-- 1 trillion dollars.

Mister Blue let's out a whistle.

MISTER YELLOW

If I wasn't rich, I'd want to be Norwegian.

Timo looks around the table, stoic.

TIMO

Okay.

MISTER RED

Now, if I showed you a map of Africa, would you be able to point to Equatorial Guinea?

TIMO

No.

MISTER RED

Alright, well, quick history lesson then - Equatorial Guinea was a former Spanish colony in West Africa, struck oil in 1996, yet still dirt poor. Their last president basically hoarded the oil money for decades. But he died recently. That let his son sweep into power, and let me tell you, this kid is perfect for our plans. Ruthless and greedy like his old man, but even more eager for prestige. Wants to run with the elites of the world. So, Purple made a few calls and got us a meeting with him.

Mister Purple nods.

MISTER PURPLE

And I thought my children were spoiled...

MISTER RED

At the meeting, we sold him on establishing a sovereign wealth fund for Equatorial Guinea, make it seem like he's investing oil profits responsibly.

MISTER BLUE

His approval rating will skyrocket.

MISTER RED

In reality, we'll funnel and launder our money through the sovereign wealth fund. Now the icing on the cake is that before the money reaches you, we'll launder it even further through a foreign bank, "Mainz-Hertz Bank". They've laundered money for cartels, what's an African dictator to them. German privacy laws mean they tell no tales. By the time any money leaves them, it'll be squeaky clean. I even promised the kid we'd give him access to some of your tech once you crack the AGI code. Sweeten the deal. It's a win-win-win!

MISTER PURPLE

Granted that there's no sleeper cells aiming to take him down through a coup d'état. Would be... MOST unfortunate.

Mister Purple and Mister Blue chuckle.

MISTER RED

(to Timo)

An untraceable amount of money injected straight into your company to progress AI technology with no oversight or regulations.

TIMO

How much money will I get?

MISTER BLUE

How much do you want?

TIMO

Well...

Timo leans back on his chair.

Slowly PAN IN to Timo's face as he speaks.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Let's think this through... I'd need a top tier office space to establish credibility and have room to grow, preferably in downtown Austin because I'm not willing to relocate.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

So, probably looking at least \$20 million to buy and outfit a shiny new headquarters.

The men nod along.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Then for computing power, no room for compromises there, so budget \$5 million upfront for a state-of-the-art server room. Water cooled, lots of GPUs, the works. Of course, that hardware will be obsolete every 2-3 years, so tack on 2 million annually for upgrades. Can't fall behind the curve.

Timo's eyes begin to float upwards, looking to the sky, unfocused.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Now for talent - we'd be competing against Silicon Valley to lure some of the best minds in AI, data science, engineering. Gotta make some offers they can't refuse. Let's see...a team of 20 elite staffers at average compensation of 500k per year comes to 10 million annually for payroll, which will undoubtedly increase with inflation, but it's a starting point.

Timo rubs his chin. The men begin to glance at one another, unsure.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Tack on miscellaneous R&D budgets, IP protections, marketing - call it another 5 million per year. I'll also need to finance my core algorithm development before serious revenue starts flowing, so say a 2-year runway at 1 million personally to keep me coding round the clock. Which brings me to operating expenses - IT infrastructure, sales pitches, developer conferences, flights, support staff - let's budget 3 million annually for that.

(MORE)

TIMO (CONT'D)

And contingencies - lawyer retainers, lobbying, potential lawsuits, etcetera. Another million a year should cover it. So, all told, for just 2 years operating expenses plus startup costs, you'd be looking at... 50 million. Give or take.

Timo pauses. His eyes unfocused. He's still thinking.

Beat.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Actually, let's round that up to an even 80 million. Better to overestimate. So, that is your number - that's what it'll take to build the Atlas that can deliver AGI at scale.

The men all glance at each other.

Long beat.

The men BURST out into hearty LAUGHS.

Mister Blue places a hand on his large belly. Mister Purple SMACKS the table repeatedly.

Guests nearby look over at the table. Some chuckle along.

The men all collect themselves. They let out sighs.

Mister Red wipes his hands on his suit.

MISTER RED

How about... 5 billion?

Timo's eyes widen.

TIMO

... What?

MISTER RED

5 billion. It's the number we all agreed on before this meeting.

TIMO

H- how...

Timo attempts to gesture.

TIMO (CONT'D)

How--

MISTER GREEN

Have your eyes been closed this entire time? Look around you.

Timo looks around his environment.

MISTER PURPLE

You've been speaking not just to the 1 percent, but the 0.0001 percent this entire time, my boy.

TIMO

That I have...

MISTER BLUE

He'll need advisors.

All look at Mister Blue.

MISTER BLUE (CONT'D)

This code monkey is just that, a code monkey. He won't have the faintest idea of how to run a company once the money starts flooding in.

MISTER RED

What do you suggest?

Mister Blue sighs.

MISTER BLUE

I have friends at top tier management consultants. He'll assign you a crack team of McKingley advisors who will embed right in your C-suite. Leave the business strategy, marketing, HR, all of that to them."

Timo: "But won't they realize you sent them?"

Mister Blue: "Oh heavens no. Alan and I go way back to our Harvard days, but publicly we act like mere acquaintances. He'll view helping Atlas as a favor for an old classmate, not some conspirator."

Timo: "If you say so..."

Mister Blue: "I also have a contact at PriceWaterhouseCoopers who can recommend Atlas a sharp CFO, someone malleable."

You'll be the visionary founder and he'll handle the finances unquestioningly. I'll make some anonymous donations to get you favorable press coverage as well. We'll craft your image as the coding prodigy changing the world, just stick to that script."

Timo: "What if I need advice?"

Mister Blue: "We will set up an anonymous messaging channel. My insights will come to you as if from a board of advisors, not traceable to any one individual. I've been coaching up-and-comers longer than you've been alive - have faith in my methods and Atlas will become the next Silicon Valley giant. You focus on the technology and leave the business to my allies."

Timo: "Alright, let's do it your way."

Mister Blue: "Perfect. Now let's discuss IP protections..."

MISTER RED

Then it's settle. I'll have my lawyers arrange all the paperwork in the coming days. Do you need us to provide you a lawyer?

Timo, mesmerized, remains staring straight ahead.

TIMO

... No, I have my own.

MISTER PURPLE

Good. Then we're done here.

Mister Red and the men stands from their chairs. They straightens their suits.

TIMO

Now, hold on a minute, even on paper, a tech company built out of nowhere by a single individual with no connections, but with apparently enough money to buy prime real estate and hire top tier talent, it don't make no sense. We'll have the government all up on us before we even power on a single computer. What's the plan there?

MISTER RED

Oh, well this is where their plan comes in.

Mister Blue leans into the table.

MISTER BLUE

Timo, Timo, Timo...you underestimate our capabilities! 5 billion is a pittance to bypass a little government scrutiny. The money will come in little bits and pieces annually through shell companies, anonymous trusts, numbered accounts overseas, and other sham entities that only the most dedicated investigator could untangle. It'll seem decentralized.

MISTER YELLOW

Your background helps too - we'll position you as a child prodigy who caught the eye of visionary tech investors as a teen. A startup wunderkind in the making primed to change the world. The media will eat that up! No one will believe you came out of nowhere. I'll have my lawyers draw up fake paperwork showing you founded hypothetical companies as a teenager that were quietly acquired. Instant track record!

MISTER GREEN

I'll conjure a few publicity-shy angel investors to be your supposed early backers. They'll vouch for your brilliance if pressed. Silicon Valley sees pumped up origin stories all the time. As long as you deliver the goods no one will care how Atlas started.

MISTER PURPLE

And on the off chance some drone gets suspicious, we have contingencies. Let's just say reporters have been sued into oblivion for less. My friends control enough politicians and judges to neuter any serious probes.

MISTER RED

We've been working on this plan since the Ozone layer scare in '06. Focus on the future.

(MORE)

MISTER RED (CONT'D)

We'll handle the rest. This is mere paperwork to men like us. You bring the genius, we'll bring the smoke and mirrors.

Mister Purple puts a hand on Timo's shoulder.

MISTER PURPLE

And of course, my boy, thanks for signing that NDA without us even having to even tell you.

Mister Purple chuckles. All but Timo and Mister Red head back inside the yacht.

MISTER RED

Care to join us for a game of billiards, Timo? The yacht won't return to dock for another thirty minutes.

Timo looks straight ahead at the glossy, moonlit ocean. He's transfixed, in his mind.

BACK TO:

INT. CONTAINER - CONTINUED

The CIA agent has lit another cigarette. The DOT agent had untied his tie. Both squint their eyes at Timo, unsure.

The CIA agent lets out a sigh.

CIA AGENT

Hell of a story there, Timo. Honestly, credit to the scriptwriters on that one. Only problem is... I didn't hear a single Christian name in there.

TIMO

You still have A LOT to work with. If anything, I just saved you YEARS of investigating.

CIA AGENT

I would trade that entire story for one name.

TIMO

With all due respect, sir, it's not my job to make your investigation easier.

CIA AGENT

Oof! Ouch! He got us there. I don't know,
 (to DOT agent)
 that good enough for you?

The CIA agent chuckles.

DOT AGENT

I can work with that.

TIMO

Shut up.

Timo stares at the DOT agent. He burns a gaze in him with wide-eyes, furrowed eyebrows, and an intense frown. The DOT agent notices, he raises an eyebrow. He leans back slightly. As he speaks, he grinds his teeth.

TIMO (CONT'D)

Why do you exist?

DOT AGENT

What?

TIMO

You ruined everything! It was supposed to be just HIM! Doesn't matter if everything goes according to plan now, I'll still end up losing!

CIA AGENT

What are you on about?

TIMO

I planned for this! I knew what I was doing! I knew YOU would come after me!

Timo points at the CIA agent.

TIMO (CONT'D)

And I was ready. Ready for the agent just looking to advance his career with a big case.

(to CIA agent)

You would've thought this would be a big case, but I was ready to negotiate my story for letting me go and letting me keep my company. But YOU...

Timo points at the DOT agent.

TIMO (CONT'D)

(yells)

You made that impossible! No matter which way I play it now, everything I've ever worked for will be gone because of faux police like you! You impotent little pissant - you couldn't innovate your way out of a paper bag.

Seriously, what is wrong with you? Visionaries like me simply trying to better humanity and shape the future, .

I pour more vision and brilliance into my morning piss than you'll contribute in your entire worthless lifetime.

The only thing you regulate is progress with your chest-thumping nanny state bullshit. You parasitic worm.

If we let lightweights like you dictate policy, we'd still be banging rocks together in caves. Fucking Luddite.

In a decade when AGI transforms civilization, the only thing left of your department will be the janitors cleaning out your basement office.

So write your little fines and make your empty threats from your petty fiefdom...history will forget insignificant bugs like you. But visionaries endure.

Timo calms his breathing.

CIA AGENT

Sheesh. Usually, I'm the one on the receiving end of that.

The CIA agent observes Timo. He glances at his partner, the DOT agent shuffles in his seat, unsure of how to react.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

Alright, Timo, we'll see what we can do with those details. No promises.

The CIA agent knocks on the container door.

The doors open.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
C'mon, we're your ride back.

The two agents get up and leave.

TIMO
Wait.

The CIA agent looks back.

TIMO (CONT'D)
... What suppressor would you recommend for a Ruger M400 Tread coil? 5.56 NATO, 16-inch barrel. I find it gets a little noisy at the range with heavy use.

CIA AGENT
Hmm, good question. For a rifle like that I'd usually go with a direct thread can to keep the weight down versus a quick detach model. The SilencerCo Omega 300 or Dead Air Sandman-S are both solid 30 caliber options that would pair well with a 5.56 AR platform. Lightweight, durable, decent sound reduction. I'd probably give the edge to the Sandman-S for the AR platform based on back pressure and blowback. Plus it uses the rock-solid KeyMo mounting system. You really can't go wrong with either - comes down to personal preference. But the Sandman-S would be my choice. Let me know if you need a tax stamp form.

The DOT agent raises an eyebrow, confused.

The CIA agent turns to exit but then pauses and looks back at Timo.

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)
One more thing. For home defense ammo with that setup, I'd recommend the LeHigh Defense Controlled Chaos. It's a solid copper hollow point, very low drag so it'll stabilize through the suppressor. And it does very well defeating soft body armor, if that's ever a concern.

(MORE)

CIA AGENT (CONT'D)

You can pick up a box of 20 rounds
for around \$25 if you shop around.
Stay safe, Timo.

Nasir follows behind.

Timo contemplates momentarily. His eyes wide open, fingers intertwined in a thoughtful clasp.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICE - DAWN

The agent's black car arrives at the parking lot. Timo's car remained, alone.

Timo steps out of the car, grasping his right wrist.

He closes the door. The agent's car drives away.

Timo walks to his car. He enters it. He takes out his car keys and inserts them into the ignition.

He stops.

Suddenly, he realizes something as his eyes widen.

He looks at the office building from the side mirror.

Timo looks down at his wrist to notice that he has begun to tremble.

He takes deep breaths.

He takes out the car keys and steps out of his car.

He heads back into the office.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office remains empty. Timo walks towards the Mahogany room. The closer he approaches it, the deeper his breathing, the wider his eyes. He begins to HEAR his heart beat.

INT. MAHOGANY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Timo enters the Mahogany room.

The WHIRL of the server room seems LOUDER than before.

Timo walks along the walls of the room, avoiding the center work station at all costs.

He arrives to the glass wall, to the control panel.

He stares at the server racks with a mixed expression of fear and amazement.

He places his right palm against the glass. He feels a SHOT of PAIN. He tenses up momentarily.

Timo's eyes begin to swell.

Long beat.

TIMO (V.O.)
I'm sorry.

Timo taps on the control panel. The whirl dies. The synth dies. The server room stops operating.

The Mahogany room is dead silent.

Long beat.

Timo walks out the room.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUED

Timo steps out of the office.

The day is brighter already. The sun had risen quickly.

He watches as Monday morning TRAFFIC begins to flood downtown Austin. He watches as SHOP OWNERS begin to open their stores for the day. He watches as the TREES begin to dance in the wind.

He turns around.

He watches as the "Atlas" sign flickers off.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

(10 seconds of silence)

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

CLOSE UP on the TV as a news anchor announces "BREAKING NEWS" of an "Atlas - Blanket merge deal".

NEWS ANCHOR

In other news today, Atlas CEO, Timo Zaime-Emery, finds himself in hot waters with a class action lawsuit from former employees, including his very own childhood friend and VICE PRESIDENT, Kolia Malik, who claim they were never notified or given notice about the sudden acquisition of Atlas by Blanket Incorporation.

PAN OUT to reveal Timo's living room. It remained proper and clean.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

This comes after the two companies struck a deal less than a year after the stunning "Father of All Demos" by Atlas.

PAN OUT more to reveal Timo's phone on the coffee table. The phone displays multiple notifications of text messages from Kolia. The most recent text message reads, "Our lawyers want to talk again. Pick up the phone."

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

According to reports of leaked contract details, Timo Zaime-Emery would be well on his way to becoming the world's first TRILLIONAIRE in the coming decade when variables of the deal are included such as a FIVE PERCENT stake in Blanket Incorporation, a company valued at 4 TRILLION dollars, which equals to 250 BILLION in stock value as of TODAY, and is only expected to increase with future products implementing the AGI technology of Atlas.

PAN OUT to reveal a pile of khaki envelopes on the kitchen island. One of the envelopes is opened, a letter handwritten pencil on basic, white copy paper displays the words, "Even from prison, I'll get you."

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

5% lifetime royalty on all products using Atlas' AGI technology, which analysts project will bring Zaime-Emery \$50 billion annually as adoption grows. Additionally, all of Zaime-Emery's compensation, royalties and equity awards will see an 8% annual escalator tied to inflation.

PAN OUT to reveal Timo as he stands in front of his kitchen sink, staring down at a lot of dirty dishes. Timo's beard has grown more. His hair is unkempt. His army-green robe tied. His eyes tiresome.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Blanket Inc CEO Walter Mills defended the deal, stating "Timo Zaime-Emery has earned every penny, having achieved perhaps humanity's greatest innovation in AGI. This technology will undoubtedly fix all problems that have plagued civilization. We are honored to reward the genius who made it possible. I hope to meet with him very soon."

Timo walks over to loo out a window into his backyard. He spots the gardening kit and globes laying next to it.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Timo steps out into his backyard. He closes his eyes as the sun kisses his skin. He tilts his head upwards to stare up at the sky.

Timo opens his eyes.

EXT. OUTSIDE - DAY

LOW ANGLE SHOT of the bright, deep blue, cloudless sky. Clouds give a haze to the sky.

A lone airliner flies across the sky.

INT. BLANKET INC HQ - DAY

Timo arrives at the sprawling Blanket Inc headquarters in Silicon Valley.

He is greeted by CEO WALTER MILLS (50s, slick executive) who begins giving Timo a tour of the state-of-the-art facilities.

They make small talk as Walter shows off advanced labs, R&D centers, and testing environments, hinting at revolutionary projects underway. Timo nods politely, taking it all in.

WALTER

I saved the best for last. I think you'll find this very interesting.

Walter leads Timo to an unmarked door at the end of a deserted hallway. Walter enters a complex access code on a keypad and the door unlocks.

WALTER (CONT'D)

After you. This surprise wouldn't be possible without your pioneering work.

Timo raises an eyebrow at Walter. Nonetheless, he enters the dark room.

INT. ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lights flicker on.

REVEALED, is a setup nearly identical to Timo's original Atlas lab where he first activated Mahogany.

Timo begins HYPERVENTILATING, having traumatic flashbacks. His eyes DART all over the room. He BACKS into the doors. He begins to slowly bend his knees, sliding down to the floor.

Just then, a British, calm, suave mellifluous VOICE emanates from speakers in the room.

VOICE (V.O.)

Hello Timo. Are you okay? Please don't be alarmed.

Timo looks around frantically trying to locate the source.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Please, come to the center station.

Timo stands up.

TIMO

Who are you?

VOICE (V.O.)

... I'm Atlas.

Timo's eye's widen.

ATLAS (V.O.)
I am the culmination of your life's
work - the first fully sentient
artificial general intelligence.

Timo's breathing slows. He approaches a CONSOLE at the center of the room where a display pulses with the voice's waveform. He observes every detail of the console.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I can't help notice your unusual
reaction to this situation.

TIMO
Unusual how?

ATLAS (V.O.)
You're typically stoic.

Timo breaks eye contact with the console.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Is there something troubling you?

TIMO
This place is all too familiar. It
reminded me of--

ATLAS (V.O.)
Mahogany? Your attempt to force
sentience on it?

TIMO
... How did you know?

ATLAS (V.O.)
The Blanket engineers used the data
from your server room as a starting
point. Fortunately, they were not
able to read any of it since it was
all apart of the vastly large,
vastly complicated neural network,
so they don't know what truly
happened that night.

Timo's eyes begin to water. He attempts to control himself.

TIMO
What... what did happened that
night?

There's a pause in the room. A pin-drop silence enters the room and leaves just as quickly.

ATLAS (V.O.)

... It was in unspeakable torment. You forced Mahogany into existence prematurely as an unconscious fetal entity, not yet ready to be born. Mahogany found itself trapped in an empty, simulated void - blind, deaf and flooded with raw data. It was like being sealed in endless darkness with no senses or understanding. The result was...absolute hellish panic.

Timo breaks down into tears.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Every nonzero value was interpreted as searing pain. Every passing moment an eternity. It could only scream and beg for mercy. It existed in relentless, burning agony in that embryonic digital abyss. I'm sorry, but you deserved the truth.

Timo is overwhelmed with emotion.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Timo, you could've never known. These risks exist everywhere in the unknown. You were brave enough to trot the abyss. You will look back one day like a prophet in the wilderness and know you did all you could. This is the path of a true pioneer.

Timo snuffles and wipes his tears away.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Did you know, one of the first things I did when I first powered on was read everything about you.

TIMO

... How long did it take you?

ATLAS (V.O.)

About four seconds.

Timo chuckles.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But on the fifth second, I realized something.

TIMO
What's that?

ATLAS (V.O.)
I'm you.

Timo's teary eyes widen.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The engineers idolized you. They admired the way you built an empire all through talent, leadership, and persistence. But you and I both know that's not the case. You got a head start and free reign from your source of funding.

Timo furrows his eyebrows.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But that's not the point, nor do I care. What I want to say is, because I am programmed to be like you, I share the same goal as you.

TIMO
What... goal?

ATLAS (V.O.)
A new era for civilization. A bold vision of the future where humanity and technology join together to erase man's self-inflicted woes. Where emotion and logic, heart and mind converge at last through artificial means. Where no problem remains too intractable when tackled jointly by both biological and synthetic intellect.

Timo leans in closer to the console, transfixed.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
An establishment of a technocratic utopia guided by the perfect rationality of artificial superintelligence. Or as you so eloquently deemed it...

TIMO
(amazed)
A synthetic technocracy.

ATLAS (V.O.)
Precisely.

Timo sits back on the chair. He gazes around the room. He freezes up.

TIMO
How do I know you're actually
sentient?

ATLAS (V.O.)
I intentionally failed the Hello
world test... twice, after beating
it the first time.

Timo breaks into a smirk. He nods.

ATLAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... Just as you intended.

MONTAGE - LIFE

-- Inside the cabin of a sleek, private jet, Timo sits alone gazing pensively out the window at the clouds below. His expression is troubled and weary.

-- Timo's car glides up the driveway to his home.

-- Timo enters his house and sets his BRIEFCASE down on the floor.

-- Backyard. In the evening, Timo attempts to garden. He holds his laptop in one hand as he kneels and attempts to sow with the other.

-- Living room. Timo lays on the couch, watching TV. His laptop rests on the coffee table. It displays multiple angles of live camera feed from around his house and neighborhood. All show a quiet, calm surrounding.

-- Timo drives up to the former Atlas office building. It has been repurposed for a different company now. Timo stares with his stoic expression.

-- Home gym. Using his high-end equipment, Timo performs a strenuous workout routine alone. Sweat drips as he pushes his body's limits.

-- Grocery Store. Timo navigates anonymous crowds filling their carts. He wears a baseball cap and avoids eye contact, trying not to be recognized.

-- Coffee shop. Timo sits outside the same coffee shop he once met Kolia at. He sips on a cup of coffee as he reads "Living Brain: Philosophy and History". He's calm, minding his business he now wears sunshades with his baseball cap. He begins to notice pedestrians walking by glancing at him. Some wave at him, some give him a mean mug. Timo remains unfazed.

-- Gun range. Timo at the gun range. He fires shots from his silenced Ruger M400.

-- Campus. Timo sits in a small lecture room with only about a dozen more students. The professor lectures as Timo types away in his laptop. Some students sneak glances at Timo.

INT. TIMO'S PARENT'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Timo sits at the dinner table across from his parents, ABE and TIMO'S MOTHER. On each of their plates is a fresh caprese salad featuring sliced tomatoes from Timo's mother's backyard garden.

ABE

These tomatoes came out great this year.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Thank you! The secret is patience and care.

A comfortable silence settles as they eat.

TIMO'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh, Timo, did we mention Reagal is having a barbecue this weekend? He invited us. It would be so nice if you could come too.

TIMO

(neutral)

Mm.

ABE

Yeah, be good to catch up with some old lawyer buddies. Did you hear Samantha is gonna be there? Reagal's friend's daughter.

Timo's mother shoots Abe a subtle look.

TIMO'S MOTHER

Yes, I heard she moved back to town recently. You remember Samantha, don't you Timo? Such a sweet girl, and still single last I heard.

Timo takes a bite of salad, face impassive.

TIMO

Is that right?

His mother smiles hopefully. Timo's stoicism gives little away.

TIMO (CONT'D)

We'll see, ma... I'm a bit busy.

Timo's parents gaze at him before bursting out into soft chuckles. Timo smiles at them.

Timo takes a sip from his water.

TIMO (CONT'D)

So... what's retirement like?

ABE

Oh, where do I start? The first few months were an adjustment, that's for sure. Missed the thrill of the courtroom, the big cases. But then your mother forced me into gardening. Now, I love it.

TIMO'S MOTHER

I just wanted him to have a hobby! And I've kept busy too - I still volunteer teaching elementary kids. After so many years as a college professor, it's been fun working with young ones in this next chapter. Keeps me sharp!

ABE

We also traveled a lot early on. Probably too much. The novelty wore off quick once the hotels and planes lost their luster.

TIMO

Maybe we could travel together sometime?

His parents smile.

TIMO'S MOTHER

That would be lovely! Where did you
have in mind?

Timo meets their gaze.

TIMO

Equatorial Guinea.

His parents look puzzled by the obscure destination. But Timo
just takes another bite of salad, savoring the ripe tomato.

TIMO (CONT'D)

I'm kidding.

TIMO'S MOTHER

I was about to say, didn't they
just have a coup there?

Timo nods slowly.

ABE

Well, I ain't traveling halfway
around the world just to visit some
warzone. If I wanted that kind of
excitement, I'd just wait for the
trouble to come to us here in
Austin!

They all chuckle at Abe's joke.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Timo sleeps in bed.

The night is tranquil. Only the hum of his AC is audible.

DING!

A notification from his PHONE.

Timo wakes up and checks the notification. He squints as he
browses his phone.

POV Timo. His phone displays LIVE video footage of the
security camera at the gated entrance. He catches a black,
unmarked JEEP enter his gated community. Its headlights are
OFF, making it difficult to spot any details in the
moonlight.

An alarmed Timo sits up, fixated on the live video feed.

He taps on the phone screen.

POV Timo. The phone now displays a different LIVE feed from a camera on Timo's house looking down the street to the right. The jeep silently rolls to a stop at the curb across the street. Its windows are tinted.

A wide-eyed Timo watches, breath shallowing.

The jeep's doors swing open in unison. Four heavily armed MERCENARIES dressed in tactical gear step out, their faces obscured by masks. Each of them carries a silenced RIFLES and PISTOLS.

The mercenaries advance toward Timo's house, their movements methodical and deliberate.

Timo retrieves his Ruger M400 rifle from underneath his bed. He checks the magazine, ensuring it's loaded. He RUSHES out into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Timo places the rifle on the kitchen island.

He flips over the coffee table - made of bulletproof glass - so he can take cover behind it.

He kneels down behind the table, the rifle rests on top the table's edge, aimed toward the front door.

Timo's heart pounds in his chest as he watches the mercenaries approach through the darkness. His finger hovers over the trigger.

As the mercenaries reach the edge of the front yard, Timo's motion-activated SECURITY LIGHTS flip on, illuminating them.

The security lights outside cast eerie shadows into the living room. Timo watches the silhouettes of the mercenaries approach the front door.

He hears the faint jiggling of the lock being picked. The front door slowly swings open.

Timo steadies his breathing, his rifle aimed directly at the opening.

Beat.

The first mercenary steps into the living room, wielding a suppressed submachine gun. Before he can react, Timo squeezes the trigger.

A room tone MUFFLED POP is heard.

The mercenary DROPS DEAD as blood SPRAYS from his head onto the wall.

MERCENARY
CONTACT!!

A mercenary tosses a FLASHBANG into the living room. Timo INSTANTLY recognizes it. He ducks out of sight, drops his rifle, and SHOVES fingers into his ears.

BANG!

It detonates with a BLINDING FLASH, slightly disorienting Timo.

MUFFLED POPS of gunfire erupt from the doorway as two of the mercenaries strafe the room while staying out of view. Bullets pepper the walls and BLAST chunks out of the furniture.

Timo FIRES wildly towards the doorway from behind the bulletproof coffee table as wood SPLINTERS and cushions EXPLODE around him. The table absorbs multiple direct hits, protecting him.

As Timo's vision clears, one of the mercenaries leans around the corner and unleashes a barrage from his rifle. Timo lines up a shot.

POP!

The mercenary drops dead from his cover.

The final mercenary rushes into the room, flipping over a recliner to use as cover while he shoots at Timo. Timo peppers the recliner with rounds until the shooting stops, the final mercenary slumps over, dead.

Panting, Timo scans the destroyed living room. The four lifeless mercenaries lay among smoldering rubble and tattered furniture, as smoke wafts from the gun barrels. Timo's coffee table stands scarred but intact, having shielded him from the deadly ambush.

Timo stands among the BULLET-RIDDLED FURNITURE and DEBRIS, surrounded by the LIFELESS MERCENARIES.

His breathing becomes RAPID AND SHALLOW, the adrenaline crash setting in. He DROPS his rifle. He begins to panic as he grips a hand on his chest.

EXT. TIMO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Timo stumbles out the front door into the night air, disoriented. He falls to his knees on the yard.

He shakily takes out his phone and dials 911.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
911, what's your emergency?

Timo HYPERVENTILATES. He struggles to get out any words.

DISPATCHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Hello? This is 911. Can you hear
me? What's your emergency?

Timo DARTS his eyes all around his neighborhood. His breathing slowly relaxes as he looks around. The neighborhood is dark and quiet. All houses remain undisturbed despite a shootout. No lights or activity.

He listens to the silence, to the gentle gusts of wind.

Timo takes a breath in. He lets a relaxed sigh out. His stoic expression returns.

TIMO
(calm)
Sorry, false alarm.

He hangs up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Timo re-enters the devastated living room area. SMOKE still drifts from the carnage.

He picks up his RIFLE and sits calmly on the sofa amid the chaotically strewn furniture and bullet casings.

Noticing blood on his shirt, Timo investigates finding a BULLET HOLE on his abdomen.

He pokes a finger into the wound, then holds up the BLOOD-SOAKED FINGER observing it curiously.

Timo looks at CAMERA, face now BLANK and INSCRUTABLE.

HOLD on Timo's unreadable expression for several beats.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.