

ARCADE DEATH ZONE

by

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TITLE CARD: Based on a true urban myth.

From the blackness a computer graphics landscape appears, like Tron's computer world - layers of grids in a black void, with little blips of energy traveling around.

The camera travels through the layers as the theme plays: A rhythmic synthesizer element with violins playing a mysterious and thrilling melody.

The title flies slowly towards and through the camera one word at a time. ARCADE. DEATH. ZONE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

The computer world from the title sequence dissolves to a wall of 9 big TVs (old tube TVs), all hooked together to tile the image of a video game.

A dirty HOMELESS MAN is strapped into a dentist's chair facing the screens, electrodes suction-cupped to his temples and to shaved patches on his head. His eyes are held open by metal devices à la A Clockwork Orange. He's terrified, staring into the screens.

The room is dark and filled with early 1980s computers and medical devices, with white-lab-coated technicians watching the man from their stations.

The graphics on the bank of TV screens are a continuation of the graphics we saw in the opening titles, but now the perspective moves into a vector-graphics tunnel of red light. The red glow bathes the room. Glowing energy spheres fly through the tunnel and laser blasts fly.

As the game gets more and more intense the Homeless Man starts to freak out - shaking and struggling against the restraints.

INSERT: The computer monitors show the poor man's nervous system is overloading.

The technicians react to the readouts with concern, whispering to each other. They sneak looks at their boss...

MR BLACK (40), a stern man with slicked-back hair and a black business suit, stands off to the side, staring at the Homeless Man. He doesn't like what he sees.

The Homeless Man starts moaning through his clenched teeth.

One of the technicians, FEMALE TECH (40) can't take it anymore. She runs up to Mr Black.

FEMALE TECH
It's killing him! Can't we stop
it?

Mr Black ignores her, continuing to stare at the Homeless Man.

FEMALE TECH
Haven't you seen enough? How
many---

Mr Black turns sharply toward her.

MR BLACK
Back to your station or I will
have you removed.

The Female Tech flinches, stepping back, but not returning to her station.

The Homeless Man SCREAMS. Mr Black and the Female Tech snap their eyes to him. The man is foaming at the mouth now. Warning ALARMS are sounding.

The Homeless Man, veins bulging in his neck and forehead, strains forward, eyes bulging wide...

With a final grunt, the Homeless Man's EYES POP RIGHT OUT OF THEIR SOCKETS. Hanging by their optic nerves, they slap against his cheeks. Blood trickles from the sockets.

The Female Tech gasps and runs back to her station.

Mr Black takes a couple of slow steps toward the Homeless Man, who is getting quieter now. With a final wheezing sigh, the Homeless Man dies, slumping against the restraints.

The technicians are all standing now, silently watching. Someone shuts off the alarms. A moment of silence.

Mr Black breaks the silence. Howling with rage, he grabs one of the computer monitors, picks it up over his head, and throws it towards the technicians. They dodge out of the way as the monitor smashes into the other computers, shooting out sparks.

The technicians run off, retreating to the back of the room. As they scramble through the exit door, Mr Black yells to no one in particular.

MR BLACK

You give me garbage to work with!
Homeless bums, drug addicts! Of
course this happens!

The room seems empty now as Mr Black calms down, hanging his head and breathing heavily.

VOICE

Um, sir?

Mr Black jerks his head toward the voice. One of the technicians has stayed behind.

MR BLACK

What?

The TECH (25), a nerdy young man with thick glasses, half-crouches next to his computer station, protectively shielding himself with computer paper and binders clutched to his chest.

TECH

I, uh, I think you're right.

MR BLACK

Of course I'm right! (A pause, his tone softens slightly) About what?

Gaining courage, the Tech straightens and steps toward Mr Black.

TECH

About the test subjects. I mean you can't expect people like this to be able to handle... Well anyway, I have an idea to fix that.

MR BLACK

Yeah?

The Tech is starting to get excited now.

TECH

Well you see, in arcades across the country, there are teenagers playing games that look a lot like this.

He points at the bank of TV screens and Mr Black looks at them, staring off. Thinking.

MR BLACK

Yessss. A willing pool of test subjects. Fit, healthy, with trained reflexes... this could be very good.

CUT TO BLACK.

Title card: THREE YEARS LATER. 1985.

The soft opening of the Bryan Adams / Tina Turner hit "It's Only Love" plays. When the hard-rocking begins...

CUT TO:

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

The rest of the opening credits play over a montage of a typical busy night at the arcade.

We'll see all the teenage characters we'll be meeting later.

There are about 10 video games and three pinball machines. The arcade is packed with teens, some younger, mostly older. This is clearly a social scene. Everyone's wearing their coolest clothes, the girls have their hair and makeup done.

Plenty of close-ups of the graphics and controls of the 70s and 80s arcade games being played.

A boy and girl are making out in the corner.

Three of the games have handwritten "Out of Order" signs taped to the screens. The rest are constantly being played, teens arguing good-naturedly about who's next.

Some teens pass around a flask of liquor which they sneakily pour into their cans of pop.

The arcade owner, a big black man, catches an older boy starting to light a cigarette inside - the boy puts up his hands in surrender and lets the man lead him outside.

A group of three younger boys about 13 years old - they have a Playboy magazine they're passing around and hiding from view.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The back door of a cube van rolls up. A large man with a shaved head, wearing blue coveralls, the THUG (35) pulls the ramp out and climbs up into the truck.

He unstraps a tall crate, the size of an arcade game, and gets a dolly in position to move it.

Slowly, carefully, he wheels the crate down the ramp, revealing the stenciling on the side: PROTOTYPE.

He wheels the crate to the front door of the arcade, where the Tech, also in blue coveralls, holds the door for him. The Tech frowns nervously.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Nighttime, the main street of a small town. Mostly deserted at this hour. Just a couple of cars drive by in the distance. This is what they call a one-stoplight town.

The grocery store parking lot is almost empty, except for a white Trans-Am with a gold eagle on the hood. Inside the car are two people.

INT. JUSTIN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

SARAH (18), blonde, pretty, dressed up for a night out, is making out with JUSTIN (20), a good-looking guy in a Letterman jacket. A love song is on the radio.

TAP TAP - someone knocks on the driver's-side window. The two lovebirds caught in the act separate rapidly and straighten their clothes. Sarah turns off the radio.

Justin, in the drivers' seat, looks up at the SHERIFF (55) in a brown uniform standing there. Justin uses his foot to push an empty beer bottle under his seat, and rolls down the window.

SHERIFF

Alright, kids, better move it along. Say, aren't you... What's your name? The football player.

Justin relaxes, smiles. It feels good to be recognized as a local hero.

JUSTIN

Yeah, that's me, Justin Kirby.

SHERIFF

Say, that was one hell of a season
you gave us, what, two years ago?

JUSTIN

Yeah, thanks.

SHERIFF

What about college football? With
that arm...

The Sheriff mimicks a throwing movement. Justin is
uncomfortable now.

JUSTIN

Nah, I guess that wasn't in the
cards.

SHERIFF

Oh, well.

The Sheriff leans down to look across at Sarah.
Embarrassed, Sarah looks back shyly.

SARAH

Hi, Sheriff.

The Sheriff is embarrassed now.

SHERIFF

Oh, evening, Sarah. Uh, so...
You're all finished high school
too now, are you?

SARAH

Yes, just graduated.

SHERIFF

Good, good. Well, I'll see you two
later.

The Sheriff walks off, back to the street where his car is
parked.

JUSTIN

You know him? (Joking voice)
Sarah, were you in trouble with
the law?

SARAH

No! (Pause, very embarrassed) I
used to be in the Junior Deputies.

JUSTIN

What?

SARAH

The Junior Deputies.

JUSTIN

Oh, the Nerd Patrol!

Sarah shakes her head and looks away. Justin smiles, starting the car. He drives off for the exit of the parking lot. The Sheriff, in his car now, gives them a nod as they go.

Justin turns the radio back on - a rock song is playing now.

SARAH

So are we going to the arcade---

JUSTIN

Shut up! Sh--- I love this part.

Sarah, hurt, turns to face front while Justin rocks out, nodding to the music and singing along.

He looks over at Sarah, gently punching her in the shoulder and smiling at her.

JUSTIN

Come on.

Sarah smiles back and starts getting in the spirit of the song.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

Two of the young boys who had the Playboy magazine are now standing in the row of games.

BILLY (13), a blond boy, is playing one of the games. His friend KYLE (13), stands waiting and talking to him while drinking a can of pop. Kyle is Asian and has the same generic North-American accent as Billy.

KYLE

Hey, Billy, what do you want to be when you grow up?

BILLY

I told you already.

KYLE

What?

BILLY

A video game designer.

KYLE

I thought those guys were all Japanese.

BILLY

Yeah, but you don't have to be.

KYLE

Well?

BILLY

Well what?

KYLE

Aren't you gonna ask me what I'm gonna be when I grow up?

BILLY

(sighs)

What are you gonna be when you grow up?

KYLE

When I grow up I'm gonna be a gynocologist. You know what that is? It's a guy who gets paid to look at pussies, all... day... long. Paradise, right?

BILLY

Yeah right, look but don't touch.

Billy starts walking off as Kyle takes his place, putting in a quarter.

KYLE

Oh they can touch. They have tools for that. (Pause) What, I say something?

Billy walks to the end of the row of games, where a new game is being installed.

The game looks slicker and more high-tech than all the other games. It's black and red. The name-plate, not yet illuminated, reads ZARGON.

There's a man in blue coveralls working on the game. He has the back panel open and is tinkering in there.

BILLY

Hey, cool game. Who makes it?

The man looks up. It's the Tech.

TECH

Uh, the company? Um. Komatsu.

BILLY

Never heard of 'em.

TECH

We're pretty new. Excuse me.

The Tech leans inside the machine. Billy looks at the machine, thinking.

INT. JUSTIN'S CAR - NIGHT

While stopped at a red light, Justin snoops into Sarah's purse.

SARAH

Hey, stop that!

Justin finds a pair of glasses.

JUSTIN

Oooh, what's this, you wear glasses? I didn't know you wore glasses.

He puts them on.

JUSTIN

(nerdy voice)

Look at me, I'm Sarah.

SARAH

Oh god, stop it, give me those.

JUSTIN

(nerdy voice)

What? I'm Sarah, I'm a big Nerd from the planet Nerdotron.

SARAH

I am not.

JUSTIN
You're a nerd, why don't you admit
it and be proud?

SARAH
I'm not a nerd.

JUSTIN
You are!

SARAH
I'm not!

JUSTIN
Oh yeah, what did you get on your
report card?

SARAH
Shut up.

JUSTIN
See? God, I can barely see with
these, how can you see without
them?

He takes the glasses off. Up ahead is the Arcade - Justin spots one of his friends out front.

JUSTIN
Here, take these, I don't want
anyone thinking I'm a nerd.

He hands the glasses back to Sarah, who scoffs and puts them in her purse.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Justin's car pulls into the lot and parks. The lot is mostly full, with some teens hanging out near the entrance or by their cars as they arrive or leave. One teen is shotgunning a beer.

Justin's friend WILCOX (24), a big galoot, is standing near the arcade entrance smoking.

Justin gets out and walks over to him. Sarah follows behind.

JUSTIN
Wilcox!

Justin and Wilcox do a "secret handshake" and start talking. Justin bums a cigarette off Wilcox and leans next to him on the wall.

Sarah, feeling awkward that Justin isn't introducing her, stands near them.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Billy, Kyle, and their friend JOSH (13), a chubby white kid, stand off to the side of the games, eating chips and drinking pop from the nearby vending machines.

JOSH

Hey Billy, you must be bummed that school's out for summer - what are you gonna do without all those teacher's asses to kiss?

BILLY

Shut up, Dickweed.

KYLE

I'm gonna spend all summer chasing tail at the lake. Or here.

BILLY

Yeah, well I'm gonna ask Cliff for a job.

KYLE

There are no jobs at the arcade, Lame-Brain, there's just Cliff, he runs it all by himself.

Billy starts to move off.

BILLY

Yeah, and half the games don't work half the time. I can fix 'em.

He walks off.

KYLE

Man, it's summer vacation, margaritas and senioritas, why do you wanna spoil that with a job?

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Sarah is still standing there awkwardly, in between Justin and the front door of the arcade.

She looks at Justin, who is still leaning on the wall with Wilcox. Justin frowns back at her, mouthing "What?" and making an angry exaggerated shrugging motion.

JUSTIN

Don't just stand there staring at us, you're such a weirdo.

SARAH

What, I---

JUSTIN

Why don't you go inside?

Justin has changed gears from mean to sweet-talking. Sarah sighs.

JUSTIN

I haven't seen this guy in ages, gimme a break, k, baby?

Sarah nods and starts turning toward the front door of the arcade.

JUSTIN

Thanks, baby, you're the best.

Then he leans back against the wall next to Wilcox and ignores her again.

Confused, Sarah shakes her head and goes inside.

INT. ARCADE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy sees CLIFF (40) making change for one of the boys. Cliff is black, wearing an apron to hold money and quarters. Mustached, he looks like a young Carl Weathers.

BILLY

Hey Cliff, can I talk to you?

CLIFF

Hey Billy, what's up?

BILLY

(screwing up his courage)

Well, I was thinking maybe...
Could I have a job?

Cliff is surprised. His first reaction is to say no but he doesn't want to hurt Billy's feelings.

CLIFF

Aw, Billy, I... I'd love to, but you know, times are tough, I'm behind on the mortgage...

BILLY

But you just bought that new game!

He points to Zargon.

CLIFF

I didn't buy it. It's a prototype, the video game company is testing it. The deal is, I get to use it for free, and keep all the quarters.

BILLY

So you'll be able to afford---

Sarah pops in behind him.

SARAH

Billy! What are you doing out so late? Does Mom know you're here?

BILLY

None of your beeswax! Jeez, I'm going home in a minute, okay?

SARAH

Fine, just---

PATTY

Sarah!

Sarah's friend PATTY (18), beautiful brunette, grabs her and whispers in her ear.

PATTY

I gotta tell you something, come on.

SARAH

Okay.

The two girls move off into the arcade. Billy and Cliff look at each other, puzzled, and both shrug.

INT. ARCADE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Patty hustles Sarah into the bathroom, and checks that the stalls are empty. There's one girl washing her hands.

Sarah stands there awkwardly while Patty stares at the girl, waiting for her to leave. Finally she does.

SARAH

Okay, what?

PATTY

Okay. I saw Justin and that slut Tina Feretti in the mall parking lot... Like...

SARAH

Like what?

PATTY

They were... Kissing.

SARAH

What? Like what?

PATTY

Like they were making out, Sarah. Full-on making out. Like, full-on.

SARAH

How could he do that to me? In public? Oh my god, everybody knows, don't they? Does everybody know???

I have to get out of here.

Sarah heads out the door, Patty following.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Sarah emerges from the bathroom, Patty following. They start to make their way through the crowd towards the front.

Patty sees TINA (18), a sexy girl with her blonde hair in a frizzed-out style, dressed slutty, snapping her gum.

PATTY

(panicked whisper)

Oh my god, she's right there.

SARAH

What?

PATTY

Shhh! Tina!

Sarah looks over at Tina, who is standing with friends. For a second they lock eyes - then Tina looks away guiltily.

Sarah shoves through the crowd with renewed vigour - away from Tina, towards the front exit.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah bursts out of the front door into the parking lot, looking around for Justin. There are a few teens hanging around smoking near the door.

She spots Justin out in the parking lot saying goodbye to Wilcox, who drives off with a squeal of tires.

Sarah strides out into the parking lot towards him.

Justin turns. He's holding a flask of booze and is now noticeably drunk.

SARAH
(keeping her voice down)
I heard about you and Tina
Feretti.

JUSTIN
Who told you that?

SARAH
Never mind, how could you?

JUSTIN
Hey, look, Sarah, just because I
went to the Prom with you doesn't
mean I'm your boyfriend, okay?
I've been to the Prom twice since
I graduated, "The Prom" is not a
big deal to me!

SARAH
Yeah, well what about after the
prom, was that a big deal to you?
I let you have sex with me!

JUSTIN
Let me? You let me? You were on
top!

SARAH
I lost my virginity to you!

JUSTIN

Hey listen, it's your viginity, if
you can't find it, it's not my
problem.

Sarah tries to slap him but he blocks it and dodges back.
He's used to this.

JUSTIN

Hey, cool it!

Angrily, he hustles to the door of the arcade where Patty
is standing, glaring at him. He scowls back at her and goes
inside the arcade.

Sarah, devastated, stands alone at the edge of the parking
lot.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

The Tech closes up the front access panel and stands up. He
clears his throat and turns the key by the coin slot.

The game makes a deep POWERING-UP sound. All the teenagers'
heads turn and the hubbub gets quieter. A few teens "shush"
others.

The Tech nods and smiles at Cliff, who turns and smiles at
Billy.

The game's lights come on. ZARGON lights up in red. The
screen comes on - also red, showing the title with glowing
streaks emanating from it. The red glow bathes the
spectators.

Cliff smiles. This is gonna be a popular game.

BILLY

(to Cliff)

See, this thing'll make tons of
money! What do you say?

CLIFF

Oh, hell. If I give you a try,
like a probationary period---

BILLY

Yes!

CLIFF

---Will you shut up and leave me
alone?

BILLY
You got a deal.

He puts his hand out for Cliff to shake. Cliff starts to shake it but then is distracted, as---

The game speaks.

ZARGON
Greetings, space pilot! The fate
of the universe rests on you! Do
you have what it takes?

Some of the teens clap and a few "Wooo"s are heard. The Tech looks at Billy and smiles.

TECH
Alright, who wants to go first?

Billy is raring to go. As the Tech steps out of the way, Billy starts to take his place...

Until he's rudely shoved aside by Justin, who pushes the start button. Billy, stunned, looks over at the Tech, but neither of them wants to mess with Justin.

JUSTIN
Let's see if this thing's all it's
cracked up to be.

He reaches for the joysticks but CRACK! A shock of static electricity. He pulls his hands back quickly and grabs the joysticks again.

The teens crowd in behind Justin as the game begins. They've never seen graphics like this... Plenty of "Oooooo"s and "Ahhhs" from the crowd.

A three-dimensional vector-graphics tunnel, which the viewer seems to be flying into. The graphics are glowing red.

Justin steers with the joysticks.

Suddenly on the screen, a glowing orb emerges from the end of the tunnel, slowly approaching.

Justin fires with the joystick triggers. On the screen, laser beams fire. They miss, but Justin has time to try again. He misses again and the orb impacts at the front of the tunnel, causing a flash of light.

The crowd makes a disappointed noise as Justin winces in frustration. Billy makes a small noise of derision.

Onscreen, another orb emerges, slightly quicker now. Justin fires, hitting the target this time. A circle of light flashes and the orb vanishes.

Justin breaths a quick sigh of relief and smiles as the crowd makes a small cheer. Billy claps sarcastically.

Another orb. Faster. He hits it again. And another. He hits it again. The crowd starts to get more worked up.

But Justin seems to be zoning out... He stares intensely into the screen. The tunnel is accelerating. The orbs flying out with less time in between, faster and faster.

Justin's hands work the joysticks furiously, targeting and firing, targeting and firing - while his face stares motionless - his eyes glaring into the tunnel.

Too fast! The orbs start impacting now - Justin is missing too many of them. He loses concentration. Shaking his head, he loses control and crashes into the tunnel wall.

The game emits the sounds of an ELECTRONIC CRASH and a depressing MUSIC CUE.

ZARGON

You've lost the battle, but the war isn't over! Insert coin.

JUSTIN

God-damnit!

He kicks the game in the access panel.

CLIFF

Hey, you watch it, kid!

Cliff charges up, the teens parting to let him through.

JUSTIN

Or what, asshole?

Cliff grabs Justin by the arm, pulling him away from the machine.

CLIFF

Or I'll kick your ass to the curb!

Justin pulls his arm loose and moves away.

JUSTIN

Hey back off, I'm going!

Justin charges for the front of the arcade. Cliff stops and lets him go.

Tina emerges from the crowd and runs after Justin.

Justin yells without looking back.

JUSTIN
Game's a ripoff anyway!

He slams his hands into the front door and charges through, Tina following after him.

EXT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Justin slams the front door open and charges into the parking lot.

Sarah, who is sitting next to Patty on one of the concrete barriers at the end of the parking lot, jumps in surprise. She looks over.

Tina runs out the door, chasing after Justin.

Justin strides to his car, jams the key in the door, opens it violently.

TINA
Justin! Wait!

Justin jerks his head over to her and pauses a second, then sits down and slams his door. He starts the car as Tina starts banging on the passenger window.

TINA
Justin!

Angrily, Justin leans over and opens the passenger door. Tina is barely in when he jams the car into reverse and hits the gas.

Tires squealing, the car roars backward into the parking lot, turning to the side and stopping. Justin puts it in forward and roars off, tires squealing again, onto the road.

The car speeds off into the night.

SARAH
Asshole! (to Patty) How am I supposed to get home?

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT (SOME TIME LATER)

The teens are still clustered around, including Billy, watching the Zargon game as another Teen Boy (17) plays it. The boy is zoned out the same as Justin was.

When he crashes the crowd sighs in disappointment, and the boy shakes his head, bringing himself out of the daze. He pinches the bridge of his nose, then starts rubbing his eyes.

TEEN BOY

Dammit!

Other older teens start trying to muscle in for the next turn, but Cliff intercedes, stepping in front of the game.

CLIFF

Whoa, whoa, hold on. Billy, you want a turn?

IMPATIENT TEEN BOY

C'mon, man!

Billy isn't sure he wants to piss off the older boys, but he really doesn't want to miss this chance.

BILLY

Um, sure.

Cliff steps aside and Billy puts his quarter in. The game begins.

Billy reaches his hands for the joysticks, feeling the slight buzz of electricity as he grabs them.

INT. JUSTIN'S CAR - NIGHT

In Justin's car, Justin is driving angry. Scowling as he stares out the windshield, driving too fast. They're on the outskirts of town now.

Tina sits in the passenger seat watching Justin.

TINA

C'mon, baby, settle down. It's just a game.

Justin ignores her. Tina scoots over closer to him and starts feeling his chest.

TINA

Why don't we go up to Logger's Lane and I'll play with your joystick.

Justin squirms his shoulders - a clear signal to leave him alone.

TINA

What are you, a fag or something? C'mon, you can tickle my tonsils.

Justin sighs and glances her way. He makes an effort to calm down. Tina sees this and smiles, glomming onto him again. She looks out the windshield.

TINA

The turnoff's just up there.

JUSTIN

I know where it is.

Up ahead is a turnoff to a dirt road. Justin takes it at top speed, kicking up dust. The dirt road rises up a hill into the woods.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT / INT. JUSTIN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Intercutting between Billy playing the game and Justin's car.

Billy is raring to go as the game begins. The first orb emerges and Billy shoots it, hitting it on the first try.

In the car, Justin speeds along the dirt road, swerving dangerously close to the edge. As they ascend, the edge of the road becomes a cliff.

TINA

Hey, slow down, we got all night!

Billy is a natural. The game accelerates, more orbs flying out. He doesn't miss one.

And Billy doesn't seem to be zoning out the same as the other boys did. He continues smiling, frowning, smiling again - reacting to the action onscreen.

As he barrels down the dirt road, Justin starts zoning out the same way he did for the game. The same staring eyes.

TINA

Justin!

Billy keeps playing the game, faster and faster. The crowd is really getting into it.

RANDOM GIRL

Man, this kid's a natural!

Back in the car, Justin's head begins to vibrate. He starts to foam at the mouth.

Tina looks up at him, her eyes opening wide in fear.

TINA

Justin! Justin, what's wrong???

She looks out the front window - there's a sharp bend ahead.

Tina grabs the wheel, struggling to turn it. But Justin has it in a vicelike grip, his arms locked straight.

Tina screams as the car launches off the cliff.

Billy hits the end of the level. Digital fireworks flash onscreen and triumphant synthesizer music plays from the game's speakers.

Billy, smiling, leans back and lets go of the joysticks.

The car flies through the air, smacking treebranches. The car CRASHES into a tree trunk.

The bodies of Justin and Tina SMASH through the windshield, flying out of the car into the woods.

Justin is impaled on a branch. Tina slams her head into a stump. No doubt about it; these two are dead.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Billy turns away from the game, happily absorbing the accolades of the other teens. Someone pats him on the back, a few kids are clapping.

ZARGON

Congratulations, space pilot! You
have ascended to the next level!
Are you ready?

RANDOM BOY

Hey man, it's starting again!

Billy snaps out of it - shit! The next level's starting! He spins back to the game and grabs the joysticks.

As the game begins again, we see a figure in the darkness in the far corner of the arcade, watching Billy play... It's Mr Black. He looks pleased.

FADE OUT.

INT. LAB - DAY

The Lab contains a bunch of the gear from the scene at the start of the movie, but in more of an ad hoc situation - the room is smaller and there are metal mesh shelves along the walls to hold much of the computer equipment. The walls and floor are wooden.

The Tech is sitting in front of a computer, looking at numbers and chart graphics. He has a bunch of dot-matrix paper printouts as well, the continuous paper with the sprocketholes down the sides.

Mr Black peers over his shoulder but doesn't actually know what he's looking at.

TECH

First of all, the data link through the phone lines is working perfectly, we've got continuous reading starting from when we first powered up the game last night.

MR BLACK

Excellent. What are we looking at here?

TECH

Well, the response curves are incredible... These kids are way better than our old test subjects. And of course the game is an improvement on the old simulation. Fantastic.

Mr Black claps and slams his hands onto the Tech's shoulders, shaking him enthusiastically.

MR BLACK

Fantastic! I knew it. I knew it!

He starts pacing the room.

MR BLACK

We're on our way now.

TECH

Except...

MR BLACK

This is my ticket. Yours too. They've kept me out with their cronyism and their nepotism, but they can't argue with results like these.

TECH

Well, speaking of these results, sir, I find some of these spikes here a bit troubling.

Mr Black glances over, looks at the squiggles on the paper that the Tech is showing him. He squints.

MR BLACK

Nah, I'm sure that'll even out.

TECH

Even out? Sir, it's---

MR BLACK

It'll be fine, don't worry about it! We're not gonna let a few little spikes ruin this project. We've got too much riding on it. I've got too much riding on it! So don't bother me with things like that, okay?

The Tech is taken aback - Mr Black is shouting at him now.

MR BLACK

Okay?

TECH

S-sure...

MR BLACK

Okay.

Settling down, Mr Black adjusts his tie and heads for the door.

MR BLACK

Now I have to deal with the political side of things. The stuff I'm protecting you from.

Mr Black strides out the door.

INT. BASE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black enters the hallway. There's a crudely made hole in the wall next to the lab door so a bunch of heavy power cables can run from that room into the hallway.

Mr Black walks down the hall, the power cables running the length of the hall. Sunlight comes in a window at the end. It's more noticeable now that this is a makeshift base set up in an old house.

The Thug sits at the end of the hall in a semi-enclosed porch area. He's not wearing his coveralls anymore - he's in black pants and a white dress shirt, with a shoulder holster. He's flipping through a porno mag.

Mr Black and the Thug exchange nods.

Mr Black continues on, opening a door and entering his makeshift office.

INT. BASE, OFFICE - CONTINUOUS / HARDCASTLE'S CAR

Mr Black enters his makeshift office - in a corner sitting room of the house. A desk and chair with a phone and some papers, that's about it.

He goes straight to the phone, picks it up and dials.

Intercut with: Mr HARDCASTLE (65) answers the call on his carphone, in the back of a limo. Hardcastle is tough as nails, has a military feel to him but is dressed in a black suit.

HARDCASTLE

Hardcastle.

MR BLACK

Sir, step one is complete, the game has been placed.

HARDCASTLE

Alright. How's the response?

MR BLACK

The kids love it, sir, it's in constant use and---

HARDCASTLE

The response, Black, the physiological response. Of the test subjects.

MR BLACK

Well I've just come from talking to our Tech guy and he says the numbers are looking good.

HARDCASTLE

Alright, Black, keep your eye on the arcade and those kids, and if anything starts to change; if anything weird starts to happen...

MR BLACK

Yes sir, I'm sure nothing will---

HARDCASTLE

This test is far too dangerous, Black. I only authorized it because the Soviets are way ahead of us in this area and we have to catch up. But if anything happens, if anything even smells funny, you call me right away.

MR BLACK

Yes, sir, of course.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - DAY

Billy rides up on his BMX, into the almost-empty arcade parking lot. Only Cliff's car is there. He hops off and locks his bike to the bike rack next to a couple of others, at the side of the parking lot.

INT. ARCADE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy is wearing a giant red "Cliff's Videodrome" t-shirt. Obviously one of Cliff's own shirts, it's super baggy, and Billy has it tucked into his shorts.

He's up on a stepladder behind one of the rows of machines, wiping dust off the machine with a damp rag. Cliff stands behind him.

BILLY

I thought I was going to be fixing the games.

CLIFF

You are. This is an important part of game maintenance. Now keep dusting.

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

It's like my Sergeant told me in Nam: Half the battle is keeping the equipment clean.

BILLY

You were in Vietnam?

CLIFF

Yep. I did two tours of duty.

BILLY

Cool!

CLIFF

(chuckles)

Sure, kid. That was a real war, not like your Star Wars.

Kyle interrupts.

KYLE

Hey Cliff, that new game Zargon is a total ripoff. It makes you all dizzy and headachey.

CLIFF

Hey, no refunds, you whiner. Now git. (To Billy) Now never mind the war, the best thing about Vietnam is the women. I could tell you some stories, but I'd better not!
(Laughs)

Meanwhile Billy's other friend Josh is playing Zargon. He finishes by crashing, and the game makes its familiar sounds and dialogue.

Josh staggers away from the game.

JOSH

Whoa... Don't feel so good.

KYLE

What's going on, man?

Josh clutches his stomach, starts bending over...

Billy and Cliff react as we hear the sound of Josh barfing - bigtime hurling.

CLIFF

Hey, man, couldn't you at least do that in the bathroom?

JOSH

Euuuuuugh.

KYLE

Hey, it's not his fault, it's this stupid game.

CLIFF

If it's so stupid, then how come you keep putting quarters in it?

JOSH

I'm sorry, Cliff. I'm not gonna play that game ever again.

Kyle shrugs. Josh staggers off toward the bathroom.

CLIFF

Alright Billy, get the mop and bucket. You got work to do.

BILLY

Aw, mannnnn. Josh!!!

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

Sarah and Patty sit at a table near the games, eating chips and drinking pop from the vending machines. With them is another friend, DANNY (18), a pimply-faced guy.

SARAH

Look, I came out cuz you said it'd take my mind off Justin, and now all we're doing is talking about him.

PATTY

Alright... Well...

DANNY

That new game Zargon is something else. I mean those graphics, it's like you're really there... And there's something, I dunno, makes you feel weird...

SARAH

(sighs)

Alright, let's talk about Justin.

They laugh wryly.

PATTY

Well I heard he's still not back home, nobody's seen him or his car all day, and guess what - Tina's missing too.

DANNY

They must be shackled up somewhere out of town.

PATTY

That's what I said. Anyway, I hope he gets V.D. from that slut.

DANNY

Well, I guess we know his type.

Both girls stare at him in shock.

SARAH

What type?

DANNY

Blondes.

SARAH

Hey, I may have blonde hair but I am not a blonde!

Her voice drips with hatred on the word "blonde."

DANNY

OK, point taken. Look, why don't you just try the new game. Come on, everyone else has tried it, even Patty.

SARAH

No thanks. That game gives me the creeps.

DANNY

Well, suit yourself. I'm going back for another round.

He gets up from his chair.

SARAH

If it makes you feel weird, why do you keep playing it?

DANNY

Nobody who's played the game would say that. It's a good kind of weird.

He walks off. Sarah looks at Patty.

PATTY

It kinda is, though.

EXT. RURAL ROAD/FOREST, MORNING

A woman JOGGER (40) is jogging down a long stretch of road outside of town. There are no cars passing. She has a dog with her, running ahead.

The dog runs off the road and into the forest. The Jogger turns her head and yells as she continues running.

JOGGER

(friendly yell)

Skipper!

The dog doesn't come back out. The Jogger slows down as she approaches the spot where he went into the woods.

JOGGER

Skipper, c'mon back! (Whistles)

Jogging in place, she waits for him to come out.

Skipper appears, looks at her - then turns and runs back into the woods.

JOGGER

(sighs)

Skipper, come on!

She gives up and goes into the woods after him.

JOGGER

Where are you, boy?

She looks around. She hears a woof up ahead and follows it.

Ducking under branches, she moves through the trees.

She smells something... Something gross. Pushing some branches aside, she emerges into a clearing.

It's Justin's car, smashed up against a tree. The Jogger is shocked, taking a moment to process this. She looks up and sees Justin's body, still impaled on a tree branch.

JOGGER

Oh, god...

She hears a licking sound and looks down to where Skipper has found the body of Tina against a stump.

JOGGER

Skipper, no! Get away from there!
That's not for you!

EXT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE - MORNING

Nice suburban neighbourhood. The Sheriff and a YOUNGER OFFICER (30) walk up to the front door and ring the doorbell.

After a few moments, Sarah opens the door.

SARAH

Oh, hi, officers.

SHERIFF

Hi, Sarah. Are your parents home?

SARAH

My mom's at work. And my dad doesn't live here anymore.

SHERIFF

Ah. Could we come in for a minute?

SARAH

What's this about?

SHERIFF

I think it's best if you sit down for this.

INT. KITCHEN (SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE) - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah sits at the kitchen table with the Sheriff. The Younger Officer stands. Sarah is visibly shellshocked - she's heard the news of Justin's death.

SHERIFF

I'm awfully sorry, honey.

Sarah nods slowly, staring off.

SHERIFF

There was someone else in the car.
We're not supposed to tell you who
it was until the next of kin are
notified, but...

SARAH

Tina Ferretti.

SHERIFF

Yeah.

The Younger Officer looks around nervously. Behind him,
Billy peeks into the kitchen. Nobody sees him.

SHERIFF

Were you at the arcade the night
before last?

Sarah nods.

SHERIFF

I'm sorry to have to ask, but did
you see Justin drinking any
alcohol that night?

Sarah nods slightly. She trembles, holding back tears.

SHERIFF

Anything else?

SARAH

I don't know.

SHERIFF

Have you heard about any drugs
being sold or exchanged at the
video arcade?

Suddenly Sarah gets up, bumping the table, and darts out of
the room. She heads quickly to the front door and goes
outside, slamming it.

The two cops look at each other. The Sheriff sees Billy
standing there in the kitchen.

BILLY

Well, I'd love to stay and chat,
but I have to go to work.

Billy heads for the door. The Sheriff sighs and shrugs to
the Younger Officer. The two cops follow Billy.

EXT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy rides off on his BMX. The cops drive off in their police car.

Sarah watches from behind some bushes, then when the cops are out of sight, she goes back to the house.

INT. BASE, OFFICE - EVENING

Mr Black is reading a self-help book about how to hurt others to advance your career when there is a knock on the door.

MR BLACK

What?

The Tech opens the door and comes partway in, carrying a small local newspaper.

TECH

Uh, sir, I thought you should see this.

He hands the newspaper to Mr Black, who looks at the front page headline.

INSERT on newspaper: LOCAL YOUTHS KILLED IN CRASH. Below are school photos of Justin and Tina.

MR BLACK

So?

TECH

Look, this is the first kid who played the game, and the crash happened that same night.

Mr Black scoffs.

MR BLACK

It's a co-incidence. I'm sure he was just drunk.

TECH

Maybe we should tell Mr Hardcastle.

Mr Black freezes, making eye contact with the Tech.

MR BLACK

Don't get any ideas. I decide what Hardcastle hears. And if you dare go over my head on this, I'll get your top-secret clearance revoked and you'll end up behind the counter of a Radio Shack for the rest of your days.

TECH

I wasn't going to---

MR BLACK

That'll be all.

The Tech retreats and shuts the door. Mr Black looks down to read the rest of the newspaper story.

INT. KITCHEN (SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE) - EVENING

Mom (40) and Billy are eating dinner at the kitchen table. Billy is wolfing his down.

MOM

Whoa, slow down!

BILLY

I'm working tonight, I don't wanna be late.

Mom pauses.

MOM

Billy, I don't think you should be working there anymore. Especially after what happened to Justin. Obviously there's a lot of underage drinking going on there, and---

BILLY

You're the one who wanted me to get a summer job!

MOM

Yeah, because I thought a job would keep you from wasting your entire summer in that sleazy arcade. You outsmarted me on that one; point to you.

BILLY

Mom, I can't just not go tonight.
Cliff is counting on me! What kind
of a lesson are you teaching me if
you tell me I should let him down?

Mom sighs and smiles at Billy's manipulation.

MOM

I'm not saying you should just not
go. But Cliff got along fine
before he hired you.

Billy gets up from the table, putting on his light summer
windbreaker that was hanging on the back of the chair.

BILLY

I gotta go, let's talk about this
tomorrow, ok?

MOM

Okay, get going.

Mom gets up as Billy heads out the front door. She picks up
another plate of dinner and walks out of the kitchen into
the house.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah is lying on her bed staring at the ceiling. She's
been crying but she's all cried out now.

Knock knock knock.

MOM (O.S.)

Sarah honey?

SARAH

Yeah, come in.

Mom opens the door. Sarah keeps staring at the ceiling.

MOM

I've got some dinner for you. At
least eat a bit, ok?

SARAH

Okay.

MOM

I don't want to over-mother you if
you need time alone. I know you're
not a little girl anymore...

SARAH

It's okay. I guess I knew the relationship wasn't going to last, but I never expected this.

INT. ARCADE - NIGHT

It's a typical busy night at the arcade again. Billy is on duty in his oversized red t-shirt, talking to Cliff, who is making change as usual. Sarah, Patty and Danny are not there.

CLIFF

That boy that flipped out on the new game two nights ago, he's the boy who got himself killed crashing his car?

BILLY

Yeah, that was him, Justin.

CLIFF

Shit - so this is the last place anyone saw him before he died.

BILLY

He was my sister's boyfriend.

CLIFF

Oh, no. How's she doing?

BILLY

I dunno, she's just staying in her bedroom mostly.

People start whispering to each other and looking toward the entrance.

The two cops, the Sheriff and the Younger Officer who talked to Sarah, have entered the arcade. They make their way slowly toward the games, looking around, keeping their expressions neutral. They want to make their presence felt.

Some teenagers watch the cops, others make a show of going about their business. Billy watches as the Sheriff locks his eyes onto Cliff.

Cliff steps toward the Sheriff, talking in a slightly higher voice and making sure to act subservient so the Sheriff won't get mad. Billy watches.

CLIFF

What can I do for you, Officer?

SHERIFF
You're Cliff Jackson?

CLIFF
Yes sir, this is my arcade.

SHERIFF
Just yours?

CLIFF
Sir?

SHERIFF
Have any partners?

CLIFF
No sir, it's just mine.

SHERIFF
Successful?

CLIFF
It pays the bills, but not by
much.

SHERIFF
Any other sources of income?

CLIFF
No, sir, just the arcade.

SHERIFF
You're not selling anything?

CLIFF
No, sir.

SHERIFF
Is anyone else?

CLIFF
Sir?

SHERIFF
Is anyone selling anything in
here?

Cliff starts raising his voice a bit to stand up for
himself.

CLIFF

Sir, I know what you're getting at, but I run a clean operation here. I watch these kids like a hawk. There's nothing illegal going on here, not on my watch.

SHERIFF

What about in the parking lot?

CLIFF

Well I move around, I keep an eye on things---

SHERIFF

Because if there's any drug dealing going on here, I'll get this place shut down, so help me god. Things might have been different for you in the city, but we're not gonna tolerate that kind of thing in our town. You dig?

CLIFF

Yeah, I dig.

The two men stare each other down. The Sheriff nods and walks off. He looks at the other officer, who follows him.

The two cops walk past all the now-silent teenagers and leave the arcade.

Billy walks up to Cliff.

BILLY

Why'd you let him push you around like that?

CLIFF

(sighs)

Billy, there's some things you don't understand.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM / PATTY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Intercut between Sarah and Patty's bedrooms as they talk on the phone.

Patty lies on her bed, looking nauseous, a wet cloth on her forehead. Sarah sits on her bed, looking less teary now. She's talking on a big pink plastic phone.

SARAH

People expect me to be in mourning. I was going to break up with him... But now he'll always be my dead boyfriend. Never my ex-boyfriend. I'm like a widow.

Patty picks up a bucket from beside her bed, looking like she's going to throw up.

PATTY

Uh-huh... Listen, Sarah, I'm just too sick to talk right now.

SARAH

I'm sorry.

PATTY

I'll talk to you tomorrow, okay?

SARAH

Okay.

They hang up.

Sarah sits for a moment, then picks up the phone again and dials.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Danny stands at his open bedroom door, calling out to his mom.

DANNY

Okay, I got it!

He closes the bedroom door, goes to his bed and picks up the phone.

DANNY

K, Mom, I got it.

There's a click as his mom hangs up the other phone. Intercut with Sarah in her room.

DANNY

Hi, Sarah. How are you holding up?

SARAH

Well, you know. I find out he's cheating on me and then he dies, along with the other woman.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

I don't know whether to cry or stand up and cheer. I know that sounds horrible.

DANNY

No, that's understandable. Hey, I heard that, well, since the funerals won't be til next week, a bunch of teenagers and grads are gonna have our own get-together down at the river. Kind of like a wake. Everyone'll get hosed and talk about their memories of Justin and Tina.

SARAH

Sounds like something Justin would appreciate. When is this?

DANNY

Tomorrow night. You want to go?

SARAH

Sure.

DANNY

Well be careful who you tell, we don't want the cops to shut it down.

SARAH

Don't worry about me. Well it's been good to hear your voice, Danny. But I think I'm gonna get some sleep now.

DANNY

Sure, I'll see you tomorrow.

Danny hangs up. He gets up and walks out of the bedroom.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Danny walks down the hall and into the bathroom.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE - BATHROOM

Danny enters the bathroom, closing the door. He checks himself out in the mirror, pushing his hair back a bit.

He looks at his pimples. Leaning in closer to the mirror, he squeezes one.

He starts chuckling a bit. Starts squeezing another zit. He digs his fingers in really deep.

He laughs louder. One hand on each cheek, he jabs his fingers deeper, his nails puncture the skin of his cheeks. Blood runs down his fingers.

Danny is laughing maniacally now. He pulls his hands down, his fingernails raking down his cheeks, ripping the flesh right off his face.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

DANNY'S MOM (40) looks up at the ceiling. She hears Danny's crazed laughter turn to SCREAMS.

DANNY'S MOM

Oh my god!

The screams abruptly stop. Danny's Mom runs from the kitchen.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Danny's Mom comes running up the stairs.

DANNY'S MOM

Danny! What's going on?

Suddenly she stops - staring in shock at what she sees.

The door to the bathroom is open. Danny stands in the doorway staring silently back at her.

The bottom half his face is ripped off - his cheeks and all the skin around his mouth and chin, leaving a glistening red skull with muscle and red goo all over. His exposed, lipless teeth seem to smile. He stares into his Mom's eyes.

He's holding something cupped in his two hands together. He reaches out, holding it out to his mother like an offering.

In his hands are the ripped-off remains of his face.

Danny's Mom sobs.

INT. WORKOUT ROOM - NIGHT

It's a garage that has been set up as a workout room - there's a treadmill and a weightlifting machine for doing various weightlifting exercises.

Cheesy '80s pop music, high-tempo for energy, is playing on a boombox. There are motivational workout posters on the walls, showing girls with puffy hair and colourful leotards.

The WORKOUT GIRL (18) running on the treadmill is dressed the same way - very cheesy '80s workout style. Leotard and legwarmers. She's running like a maniac, sweating like crazy, pushing herself to the limit.

She stops the treadmill, gulping down some water as she moves to the weightlifting machine. She sits down in the chair and starts pushing the handles out, lifting weights. She GROANS and GRUNTS loudly as she pushes, every muscle in her body and every vein in her head standing out.

The cables and chains of the machine squeak and vibrate. Will something give out?

She looks like she's going to have an aneurism. Finally she stops, panting, collapsing forward to rest her arms on her knees.

She picks up the water bottle, has a swig, and splashes some on her head. Still panting, gasping. She gets up, switches off the music and walks out of the garage.

INT. WORKOUT GIRL'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Workout Girl strips off her gear and gets into the shower, the water running down her toned, naked, glistening body. Sexy!

INT. WORKOUT GIRL'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Workout Girl enters the kitchen, still wet, in a bathrobe with her hair up in a towel. She walks past a knife-holder full of big sharp knives.

On the counter is a blender. Workout Girl opens the fridge and pulls out various fruits and berries, putting them on the counter.

She gets a carton of orange juice and, opening the top of the blender, pours some in. She starts putting berries into the blender.

Workout Girl starts the blender. RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!

She peels a banana and puts it in. She gets a funny look on her face.

Workout Girl puts her hand right into the blender, pushing it right into the bottom. GRINDING noises begin - and red blood fills the blender, mixing into the fruit blend.

She pushes her arm further and further in. The GRINDING sound becomes more violent as blood sprays from the top of the blender, spraying her in the face.

INT. KITCHEN (SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE)/HOSPITAL - MORNING

Sarah is putting jam on toast when the phone rings. It's a wall phone with a really long curly-cord. She picks it up.

SARAH

Hello?

PATTY (O.S.)

Sarah, it's Patty.

Patty's voice is so weak Sarah almost doesn't recognize it.

SARAH

Patty, are you ok?

PATTY (O.S.)

Pretty much. I'm at the hospital, my mom dropped me off on the way to work because she was worried about me. They're gonna do some tests and she'll bring me home again on her lunch break --- but never mind, that's not what I'm calling about.

SARAH

What is it?

Patty is standing in the waiting room of the hospital, calling from a payphone there. She's sweaty and shaky.

PATTY

Danny is here, they brought him in last night, he had some kind of an accident or something, I don't know. He's in intensive care.

SARAH

Oh my god... I was just talking to him last night. Shit, my mom's at work, she's got the car. I'll ride my bike over, I'll be there as soon as I can.

Sarah hangs up. She calls out to Billy.

SARAH

Billy, I'm going to the hospital, Danny had some kind of accident!

BILLY (O.S.)

What???

SARAH

I don't know, I'll see you later!

Sarah heads out the front door.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Sarah rides up on her bike and starts locking it to a signpost. The hospital is fairly small. Sarah goes in.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah looks around but can't see Patty in the waiting room. She goes to the counter to ask the receptionist, MRS LEWIS (50).

SARAH

Hi Mrs. Lewis---

MRS LEWIS

Oh hi, Sarah.

SARAH

You know my friend Patty? She called me and said---

MRS LEWIS

She's with one of the doctors right now.

SARAH

Ok. Well I heard about Danny... Danny Tucker?

Mrs Lewis nods sympathetically.

MRS LEWIS
Oh, yes, that poor boy. Is he a
friend of yours?

SARAH
Yes, is he alright? What happened?
Can I talk to him?

MRS LEWIS
He's stabilized, but he's in
intensive care. I'm sorry, he
can't have any visitors yet. You
wouldn't be able to talk to him
anyway, he's under sedation.

SARAH
What happened?

MRS LEWIS
Well, I'm not sure, I heard it was
some sort of episode... He... Cut
himself, I think. Quite badly.
There's a specialist coming in to
operate on him tomorrow.

SARAH
Oh my god.

A doctor walks past the reception desk. Mrs Lewis notices
him.

MRS LEWIS
Oh, the doctor is done with Patty
now. You can see her now.
Upstairs, room... (Looks on
clipboard) Room 11.

SARAH
Thanks.

Sarah leaves the reception area.

INT. HOSPITAL, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah walks down the hallway and finds Room 11. She knocks
and opens the door.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATTY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sarah sees Patty, now wearing a hospital gown, lying in
bed.

SARAH

Patty!

Patty smiles weakly.

PATTY

Hey, Sarah.

SARAH

Patty, are you alright?

PATTY

Yeah, I'm sure it's just a flu. They're really over-reacting though. They want to do more tests - they say I have to stay overnight. Listen, I heard the doctor and nurses talking about Danny...

SARAH

Poor Danny... What could have happened?

PATTY

They think he was on acid or PCP or something, he was laughing like a maniac when they brought him in. Sarah, he ripped off his own face.

SARAH

Oh my god. Patty, Danny does not do drugs. You know him as well as I do.

PATTY

I know.

SARAH

There's something going on here. Something... Something made him do this.

PATTY

Like what?

SARAH

I don't know...

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Sarah is sitting on her bed, talking to a friend, COLLEEN (18) on the phone.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Did you hear about Nadine last night? She stuck her hand in a blender and bled to death - people are saying she committed suicide because she was so upset over Justin, because they used to... I mean... Sorry.

SARAH

That's okay, I'm used to it.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

So the wake tonight, down at the river, it was going to be for Justin and Tina, but now it's for Nadine too. And to pray for Danny, or show support... Do you want to go?

SARAH

If I don't, I'm just going to be pacing this bedroom anyway.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

What about Patty, is she going?

SARAH

No, she's in the hospital, they're actually keeping her there overnight.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

What? Is she okay?

SARAH

She says they're overreacting, it's just a flu.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Yeah, there's a lot of that going around. Well I'll call Dave Harker and see if he can give us a ride. Pick you up at 11?

SARAH

Sure, but tell him not to come down our street - I'll sneak out and meet you at the corner, ok?

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Sure, sounds good.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Billy listens in on this conversation on the phone in his bedroom.

EXT. BASE - EVENING

The sun is setting. Mr Black stands outside the farmhouse. There's a barn and the black sedan and the truck that delivered the game. Beyond a fence is farmland and forest.

Mr Black is firing his pistol at a target on a post.

The Tech comes out of the farmhouse holding another newspaper.

TECH

Uh, sir?

Mr Black ignores him and fires another shot.

TECH

You're not going to like this...
Could you put down the gun for a
minute?

Mr Black charges over and grabs the newspaper from the Tech.

INSERT: The local newspaper again - this time the headline is DEATH AND MUTILATION IN ONE NIGHT: COINCIDENCE OR NOT? There are grad photos of Workout Girl and Danny.

Mr Black stares off, thinking.

TECH

Now don't you think there's a
connection?

MR BLACK

So what if there is a connection?
We knew this was likely to happen.
So a few kids die. It'll take the
police months to figure out the
connection and even if they do,
we're above the law.

TECH

But it's not worth killing these
kids!

Mr Black waves the gun in the Tech's direction.

MR BLACK

Do I have to remind you that this was your idea? You keep your mouth shut or I'll pin this whole thing on you, and I have plenty of proof to make it stick.

The Tech, hands up, retreats. Mr Black spins and fires at the target.

EXT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah climbs out the window and onto the roof of the garage, then down from there onto a woodpile. It wobbles but she makes it down.

Looking back to make sure her Mom isn't looking out the window, Sarah sneaks to the sidewalk.

Then she walks quickly down to the intersection at the end of the street.

A car is waiting there. One of the doors opens and Sarah gets in.

The car revs loudly and the tires squeal a bit as it drives off.

INT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sarah's Mom, startled by the sound of the car, looks out the window and sees it speed away.

Her angry look changes to suspicion. She heads out of the kitchen.

INT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mom comes up the stairs and goes straight to Sarah's bedroom door. She knocks on the door.

MOM

Sarah?

She knocks louder.

MOM

Sarah, are you in there?

She pauses, then opens the door. Looks around. No Sarah.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Billy looks up at the sound of his Mom's knock on the door. He's in bed reading an issue of Popular Mechanics magazine.

BILLY

Yeah?

Mom opens the door and peeks in.

MOM

Billy... Would you happen to know anything about where Sarah has snuck off to?

Billy looks like the cat that ate the canary.

EXT. DOWN BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Sarah and Colleen and two guys arrive at the wake. They emerge from a trail through the woods, onto a pebbly beach by the river. There's no sign of civilization, just trees on both sides of the river.

On the pebbly beach there are about 35 teenagers and recent grads, standing and sitting on driftwood in small groups not too far apart. There are three campfires. The people are drinking beers and there are a few bottles of whisky or vodka. But the crowd is pretty subdued - not "partying". They're talking about their dead friends.

Sarah and her friends are greeted by various people as they walk among them. Her group ends up sitting down by the middle campfire, which is a big one - you could call it a bonfire. Justin's friend Wilcox is sitting across from them.

WILCOX

Hey guys. You want some beers?

Sarah's group accepts. Wilcox staggers drunkenly around the bonfire and passes them a beer each. As he hands Sarah a beer, he recognizes her.

WILCOX

You're Justin's girlfriend, aren't you?

Sarah nods.

WILCOX

I'm sorry, we were never properly introduced. I'm Wilcox. Andy, but they call me Wilcox.

SARAH

Thanks, Wilcox.

Wilcox nods. A pause. Then, still standing next to Sarah, he raises his beer and addresses the whole group.

WILCOX

To Justin, a good friend. And I wish I'd seen him more over the last couple of years. To a good athlete, and to a great friend.

The others repeat the words "A great friend" and they all drink.

WILCOX

And to Tina, and the girl who died last night, I don't know them, but... Here's to 'em.

They drink again.

Wilcox sits down next to Sarah. A bit uncomfortably close to her.

WILCOX

Man, that's some crazy shit, what happened last night. You hear? Girl sticks her hand in a blender, and bleeds to death.

COLLEEN

And Danny, he's in the hospital, he had some kind of freak-out. Cut his face off.

WILCOX

Holy shit, man. I don't know what's going on in this town. Accidents or suicides or people just going crazy or what. Let's just hope it was a freak coincidence what happened last night, let's just hope that's the end of it.

They all nod and mumble their agreement.

After a moment, Wilcox turns to Sarah again.

WILCOX

How ya holdin' up? You know if you need anything, I'm here for you.

He puts his arm around Sarah's shoulders. She flinches.

WILCOX

Did Justin tell you you're pretty? I know he was an asshole, wasn't he? Well you are. You're beautiful, and you deserve a boyfriend who'll tell you that every day. Every day.

Sarah nervously looks over at Colleen for help. Colleen doesn't know what to do.

COLLEEN

Heyyyyy, Wilcox, um...

Wilcox starts stroking Sarah's hair and chuckling softly.

WILCOX

You got real sexy lips. Yeah. I bet you know how to use 'em, too.

Colleen elbows one of the guys who came with them, DAVE (19).

DAVE

Hey Wilcox, why don't you ease off, man.

WILCOX

(to Sarah)

You could suck a golfball through a garden hose, eh?

DAVE

Wilcox! Back off!

Wilcox licks Sarah's ear, a big wet lick all over it. Sarah screams.

Dave jumps up and grabs Wilcox by the shoulders, pulling him away from Sarah.

DAVE

Leave her alone, alright?

He shoves Wilcox away from their group. Wilcox falls to the ground, then starts to get up.

Wilcox doesn't seem angered. His slurred speech gives way to pure gibberish as he staggers to his feet.

A mixture of gibberish and idiotic laughter emanates from him as he staggers drunkenly around in a circle, first away from the group, splashing through the water at the river's edge, then back toward them and the bonfire.

His gibberish gets louder, his arms flailing wildly.

DAVE

Hey man, settle down, Wilcox!

Wilcox stops. He stands still and silent. He stares into the fire.

Everyone sighs a breath of relief. But then Wilcox reaches out his arms and, walks straight into the bonfire. He leans down, putting his arms and his whole torso into the flames.

The people around the bonfire scream and jump up. Wilcox catches on fire - the flames swiftly spreading all over his clothes.

Everyone runs away, then watches from a safe distance.

Wilcox staggers around, blazing like a torch, his whole body on fire.

Suddenly someone runs toward Wilcox - a dark blur that launches at him, tackling him into the river. The splash of water douses him, putting out the flames.

The person who tackled him gets up. He's a thin, intense-looking guy wearing a leather jacket. CURTIS (20). He looks around at the others.

CURTIS

Come on, help me get him out of the water!

Dave runs out to him and, each taking an arm, they drag Wilcox onto the beach. Wilcox is burned all over. Some of the other guys are approaching. Dave puts his ear next to Wilcox's mouth to listen for breathing.

DAVE

He's still breathing. We gotta get this guy to the hospital. Come on guys, help me carry him back to the road!

A couple of flashlight beams shine across the beach from the trailhead. The teenagers start to call out to one another.

TEENS (VARIOUS)
Shit! It's the cops, man! Get rid
of the booze!

Some of the teens scatter and run into the woods. Some throw their beers into the river. Sarah throws hers under a log.

SHERIFF
(yelling)
Alright, everyone settle down!
Don't run or you'll hurt
yourselves!

CURTIS
(to Dave)
I gotta get out of here, man. The
cops aren't exactly my friends.

DAVE
No problem.

Curtis runs off, away from the flashlights. There's another trail where a couple of teens are running away. Next to it is parked a dirtbike.

As one of the flashlights catches him like a spotlight, Curtis jumps onto the dirtbike and fires it up.

SHERIFF
I see you there, Curtis Jeffries!

Curtis revs the motor and roars off down the trail, into the forest.

The Sheriff and the Younger Officer approach the group of teens surrounding Wilcox. Sarah approaches the Sheriff.

SARAH
Wilcox got burned, we have to get
him to the hospital!

The Sheriff is, again, surprised to see Sarah - especially mixed up with the "bad crowd" like this. The two cops turn their flashlights to illuminate Wilcox. They are shocked by what they see.

INT. PATTY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Patty tosses and turns in the hospital bed. Finally she throws the blanket off and gets up.

Her bare feet make contact with the cold floor and she pads across the room, as if sleepwalking. She opens the door and goes out into the hall.

INT. HOSPITAL, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Patty emerges in the hallway. She's all alone.

She sees the window at the end of the hall. It fills almost the whole wall, almost down to the floor. The moonlight refracting through the panes of glass is beautiful.

Patty tilts her head, looking at it. She starts to walk toward it.

Faster now. Running.

As she approaches the end of the hall, she smiles, closing her eyes, raising her face to the heavens.

She lifts her arms as if to fly.

SMASH!!! Patty crashes through the window.

EXT. HOSPITAL (BACK) - MOMENTS LATER

A SECURITY GUARD (60) comes running out the back door to find Patty's body, twisted with a broken spine, lying among shards of glass and bloodspatters.

He slows, stunned by what he sees. Then he walks back inside.

INT. KYLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A few pens and pencils lie strewn around on the carpet, along with a trail of blood droplets.

Kyle lies on his bed. His eye sockets are full of pencils, pens, and pencil crayons, jammed deep into his skull. The ends protrude. Blood streams down the sides of his face and soaks the bed.

EXT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The police car parks in front of the house, and Mom, who has been waiting in the kitchen, looking out the window, comes to the front door. She opens it angrily as Sarah approaches, followed closely by the Sheriff.

MOM

Sarah!

SHERIFF

Now don't be too hard on her. She and her friends were out at the party at the river, but when the other kids ran away from us, Sarah and her friends stayed to help out a young man who'd fallen in the campfire and gotten badly burned.

MOM

Oh my god!

SHERIFF

Sarah and her friends Dave and Colleen saved him, and he's on his way to the hospital now.

SARAH

Curtis is the one who saved him.

MOM

Who's Curtis?

SHERIFF

(negatively)

Curtis Jeffries.

MOM

(scoffs)

See, that's why I don't want you out at these sorts of things, you get mixed up with a bad crowd, kids like that Curtis Jeffries, that little thief.

SARAH

Oh, but you approved of Justin?

MOM

Justin was a good kid, from a good---

SARAH

You didn't know him!

She barges past her Mom, into the house, and walks for the stairs.

SARAH
Neither did I.

She storms up the stairs as Mom turns back to the Sheriff, shrugging and murmuring apologetically.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Sarah rides her bike to the hospital. The signpost where she put her bike the first time has a dirtbike leaning on it now - Curtis's dirtbike.

She leans her bike against a nearby tree and goes into the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sarah enters the waiting room. She's about to go to the counter but she stops when she sees Curtis coming towards her. He looks angry.

CURTIS
Oh hey. You were there last night,
weren't you?

Sarah nods.

CURTIS
They won't tell me anything. I
just came in to find out how
Wilcox is doing - the guy who got
burned last night?

SARAH
Yeah. I'm here to see if my friend
Danny is awake yet, he's the guy
who...

CURTIS
Yeah. Well maybe she'll tell you
about both of them. People freeze
up when they see me. Everyone
thinks... Whatever they think
about me. Anyway...

SARAH
I'll go ask.

Curtis waits near the door while Sarah walks over to the counter, behind which is Mrs Lewis again. Mrs Lewis looks up and sees Sarah approaching - and an expression of sadness creeps across her face.

MRS LEWIS

Oh, Sarah... Sarah honey, I'm so sorry. She didn't make it.

Sarah is confused but worried as she starts to guess...

SARAH

Who?

Mrs Lewis realizes that Sarah didn't know.

MRS LEWIS

Oh... Patty. She jumped from a second floor window last night, and broke her neck---

SARAH

No!!!

Sarah can't take this --- she turns and runs away toward the door. Straight into Curtis.

CURTIS

Whoa! Whoa, you okay?

Sarah takes a few breaths, calming herself down as best she can. She nods.

CURTIS

What's going on, is something else wrong?

SARAH

Everything.

Curtis gestures to a couple of seats. He and Sarah sit down. Curtis doesn't rush her.

SARAH

Everyone I know is dying or ending up in the hospital... I just found out my best friend Patty is dead...

CURTIS

Oh, jeez... I'm sorry.

INT. ARCADE - DAY

Billy is at the arcade, wearing the oversized red shirt, but he's taking a break. He puts a quarter in Zargon and starts playing.

As before, he's playing it perfectly. Flying through the tunnel, blasting the energy spheres. As before, the game doesn't affect him negatively - he doesn't zone out, he stays in control.

A couple of other kids cheer him on.

INT. LAB - DAY

The Tech watches the data streaming on the computer monitor and printing out on the paper spool. He's excited by what he sees.

He gets up and runs to the door, opening it and yelling down the hall.

TECH

It's him, he's playing again!

The Tech goes back to the computer, and after a few moments Mr Black comes running in.

MR BLACK

What do you have?

TECH

It's this kid, playing the game right now. He's the only one that doesn't show that freaky brainwave spike.

MR BLACK

Who is he?

TECH

Well, all I know is every time he plays, he gets a high score, and he enters his initials as B.L.Y.

MR BLACK

B.L.Y.

The two men look at each other.

MR BLACK

Billy?

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Curtis and Sarah stand outside the hospital entrance.

CURTIS

Hey listen, if you ever want to talk, I know what it's like to need a friend. I could use one... I mean I wasn't even invited to that party down at the river, I was just there 'cuz that's where I like to hang out. Especially when times are tough at home.

SARAH

(shy)

Yeah, maybe I'll... See you around sometime.

CURTIS

You're sure you're gonna be okay?

SARAH

Yeah, I'm gonna stay for a while, there's something I have to do.

CURTIS

Okay.

They hug. Curtis goes to his bike, gets on, revs it. Nodding to Sarah, he rides off.

Sarah walks back into the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Sarah enters, going to the side where the stairwell door is.

She looks back to make sure no-one's looking, then opens the door and enters the stairwell.

INT. HOSPITAL, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah jogs up the stairs and peeks through the window to make sure no-one's watching before she emerges in the upstairs hallway, quietly opening and closing the door.

She moves along the hall, checking the clipboard hanging on each door. Reading the patients' names.

She finds the one with Danny's name. She opens the door, goes in and shuts the door quietly.

INT. HOSPITAL, DANNY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There's a curtain blocking Sarah's view of the bed. A machine beeps slowly.

Sarah goes around the curtain, revealing the bed. Danny is lying on it, connected to the machine and with an IV drip going into his arm.

Sarah gasps as she sees his head, all wrapped in bandages like a mummy, with an oxygen hose attached to his nose. There's blood soaking through the bandages in places. His eyes are closed.

Sarah steps over to the side of the bed, bringing a chair closer and sitting down.

SARAH
(whispering)
Danny?

No movement. She leans in closer.

SARAH
Danny, can you hear me?

Within the gaps in his head-bandages, Danny's eyelids flicker.

His eyes open and turn to Sarah. He groans.

SARAH
Danny, it's me, Sarah.

DANNY
Sarahhhh...

His voice hisses through lipless teeth. He can't smile but the sound of his voice shows that he's happy to see her, although still groggy from the sedative.

He puts his hand out, off the edge of the bed, and Sarah takes it in hers. His nails are chipped from what he did to his face, but cleaned.

SARAH
It's good to see you, Danny.
You're gonna be okay.

DANNY
Wha' ha'ened?

SARAH
What happened? I don't know...

Danny squeezes Sarah's hand tightly.

DANNY
De tunnah...

SARAH
What is it, Danny?

Danny releases her hand, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her closer.

DANNY
Zarrrrrrgahhhhhhhh...

Sarah is frightened. She wants to pull away but can't.

DANNY
Zargahhhh...

SARAH
What---Danny---

She struggles.

DANNY
Zargon.

Sarah freezes. She locks eyes with Danny.

SARAH
Zargon. The game?

Danny relaxes, letting go of her arm and lying back on his pillow.

SARAH
Is that what you're telling me?
That video game did this?

Danny closes his eyes and breathes heavily, apparently passed out again.

SARAH
Oh my god.

Sarah gets up quickly and runs from the room.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - DAY

Sarah rides her bike into the almost-empty parking lot at top speed. She dumps the bike in front of the door, and without locking it she rushes inside.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

The arcade doesn't have many people in it during the afternoons, mostly younger kids. A random teen guy is playing Zargon.

Sarah, a little sweaty and out of breath, strides to the games area, calling out to the guy.

SARAH
Don't play that game!

Billy, in his oversized red shirt, comes out from behind the machines.

BILLY
Sarah? What's going on?

SARAH
Get away from it!

In a panic, she tries to pull the guy away from the game, but he shoves her away from him.

RANDOM TEEN GUY
Watch it, freak! What's wrong with you?

SARAH
You're gonna die, you have to listen to me!

Cliff comes running up behind her.

CLIFF
Billy, what's going on?

SARAH
(to Cliff)
This game is killing everyone, you can't let them play it!

CLIFF
Look, just calm down, let's go outside and talk about this.

SARAH

Look, I know I sound crazy, but
listen to me!

Cliff starts to put his hands on her arms to guide her to
the front.

SARAH

Get your hands off me!

Cliff puts his hands up halfway to show he's not touching
her.

CLIFF

Alright, it's okay. I'm not gonna
touch you. But please just go
outside for a minute and cool
down, okay?

SARAH

Alright, I'm going! Billy, come
here, I gotta talk to you!

Sarah runs to the front of the arcade. Billy looks at
Cliff, who nods and jerks his head towards the front of the
arcade.

Billy runs after Sarah and the two of them go out the front
door.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Sarah and Billy come out the front door. Sarah paces
restlessly while she talks.

BILLY

What is going on???

Sarah takes some deep breaths to try and calm down.

SARAH

Alright. I just came from the
hospital. Patty's dead.

BILLY

Oh my god.

SARAH

And I talked to Danny. And he said
the game made him... (Gestures to
her face) You know.

BILLY

What?

SARAH

I think the game is making people go crazy.

BILLY

Sarah, you sound like Mom. Games don't really rot your brains, okay? It's just an old wives' tale.

SARAH

Not this game, this one is different! Can't you see that?

Billy's friend Josh has been walking up behind Sarah, keeping his distance because he thinks she's acting weird. Sarah notices him, turns and stops talking.

BILLY

Hey, Josh. What's up, come on in.

JOSH

No thanks, I just came to tell you. I just found out... Kyle is dead.

BILLY

What? When?

JOSH

They took him to the hospital last night. He stabbed himself or something, bled to death. He was dead on arrival.

BILLY

Oh my...

Sarah and Billy share a look.

BILLY

(to Sarah)

Lemme just check something, okay? Come on, Josh.

Billy and Josh go inside.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Billy leads Josh toward the games. Cliff stands in the way with his arms folded.

BILLY
She just got a little too much
sun, she'll be okay.

Billy and Josh step around Cliff and head towards Zargon. Cliff watches them for a second, then looks out the front window, where Sarah is pacing and looking in.

Cliff walks toward the front.

Billy steps up to the random teen guy. He has just lost and is fishing in his pocket for quarters.

BILLY
Hey man, can I just take a look at
this for a second? I'm not gonna
play, just gotta check something.

The teen guy nods and steps to the side, motioning Billy to go ahead.

Billy and Josh step in front of the machine. Billy pushes a button and the HIGH-SCORES screen comes up. A list of three-letter nicknames.

Billy and Josh look at it, their expressions reflecting a dawning realization.

JOSH
Oh, shit...

BILLY
Yeah. Those are my high-scores,
and the rest of them are... That's
Danny, that's Kyle... These people
are all dead or in hospital.

Billy looks toward the front windows.

BILLY
Hey man, listen...

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Cliff opens the front door. Sarah starts running away across the parking lot.

CLIFF

Hey, wait! I'm not gonna hurt you!
I just wanna talk! Hey!

Sarah keeps running onto the sidewalk and disappears behind some shrubs at the corner of the parking lot.

Cliff shakes his head. He stands for a moment, thinking. Then he turns to open the door. Josh comes bursting out the door and bumps into him.

CLIFF

Whoa!

JOSH

Hey Cliff. Hey you know, I was wondering if you might, you know, have a job for me too?

Cliff sighs.

INT. ARCADE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy has the back plate off the Zargon machine. He hurriedly pulls some cords apart and removes a component, a small black box with some wires coming off it, out of the machine.

The game's lights dim to nothing and the machine makes a "Powering down" sound. Bewwwwwwwwwwwww...

He puts the component under his shirt and tucks it into the waistband of his shorts. Putting his oversized shirt back down, the component is completely hidden.

Billy turns to the kids watching him. He pulls the game key, a little cylindrical key, from his pocket and shows the kids.

BILLY

If you all keep your mouths shut,
I'll give you five free plays on
the other machines with this.
Okay?

The kids are not convinced.

BILLY

Okay, ten free plays.

The kids all nod and smile. Then, seeing Cliff coming back in, they all turn back to their games and act natural. Billy puts the key back in his pocket.

Cliff sees that Zargon is powered down, the lights and screen all black.

He looks at the back - the cord is still plugged in.

CLIFF
Billy, what'd you do to this thing?

BILLY
Nothing.

Cliff pushes the on button repeatedly but nothing happens.

CLIFF
(turning to the kids)
Kids, did you see him do anything?

KIDS
No, nothing, we didn't see anything.

JOSH
I was playing and it just went dead.

A whole lot of shrugging. Cliff knows this is bullshit.

CLIFF
Alright, Billy, joke's over. Make it work.

BILLY
I didn't do it!

CLIFF
Then fix it. That's why you're here, ain't it?

Billy is stymied.

CLIFF
My momma didn't raise no fools, Billy. You're fired, get out.

BILLY
Cliff!

CLIFF
I said you're fired! Go on, get outta my sight.

Billy nods and wanders off towards the front of the arcade.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Billy comes out the front door and looks around. Sarah's gone but her bike is still here. He jogs across the parking lot.

BILLY

Sarah?

He goes around the shrub onto the sidewalk and just about bumps into Sarah, who is hiding there.

SARAH

Well, what happened, did you tell Cliff?

BILLY

Cliff's not gonna listen, he doesn't want to lose his star attraction.

SARAH

Shit!

BILLY

But nobody's gonna be playing Zargon without this.

He pulls the component out from under his shirt and hands it to Sarah.

SARAH

What is it?

BILLY

It's uh, I think it's a... I'm not sure. But it seemed to do the trick.

Sarah laughs. She slaps Billy on the shoulder as if to say "good work." Billy smiles.

INT. ARCADE - MOMENTS LATER

At the counter in front, Cliff dials the phone.

Someone answers.

MR BLACK (O.S.)

Komatsu Electronics.

CLIFF

Hi, this is Cliff at Cliff's Videodrome. Hey, the Zargon game just blanked out, seems to be broken. Would you mind coming to take a look at it?

MR BLACK (O.S.)

Sure, how 'bout tonight after closing time?

CLIFF

Tonight'll be fine, thanks very much.

Click! Mr Black has hung up. Cliff is a bit taken aback by the abruptness, but he shrugs. Whatever.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah and Billy are riding their bikes home. Sarah is frowning.

BILLY

What's wrong?

SARAH

Well, Cliff's going to fix the game eventually. What are we gonna do, keep on sabotaging it?

BILLY

Cliff's got a couple of games out of order, he can't afford to fix them... Oh, wait a minute.

Billy comes to a stop. So does Sarah.

SARAH

What?

BILLY

Cliff doesn't own Zargon, it belongs to this company, Komatsu. Their tech guy set it up. He'll come in and fix it for free.

SARAH

Komatsu? We need to tell them about this, make sure they recall all these Zargon games if there are any more of them.

BILLY

Well, I don't know, there's something fishy about them. I called the editor at Joysticks, the video game magazine - they published some of my letters - and anyway, he said there is no Komatsu.

Sarah thinks about this.

SARAH

This could be our chance to find out more about them. I'm gonna go back and wait, see if these guys come to fix it. I'll get their licence plate, then maybe we can find out who they are.

BILLY

I'm coming with you!

SARAH

No you're not, I need you to tell Mom I'm at Colleen's house and I'll be home late.

BILLY

Come on, I---

SARAH

No! Get going!

BILLY

Alright, but you owe me.

Billy nods and rides off. Sarah turns around and rides back toward the arcade.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

The Tech picks up the evening newspaper from the box next to the mailbox. It's out at the end of the dirt road leading to the farm. The barn can be seen in the far background.

The Tech looks at the front page.

INSERT: The headline is RASH OF DEATH AND DISMEMBERMENT. There are pictures of Wilcox, Patty and Kyle beside a subheader reading 2 DEAD, 1 INJURED LAST NIGHT and then below that, smaller pictures of Danny, Workout Girl, Justin and Tina beside the subheader WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR TOWN?

The Tech, deeply troubled, heads back to the base.

EXT. BASE - MOMENTS LATER

The Tech walks back into the farmyard holding the newspaper folded under his arm. Mr Black is practicing shooting again.

The Tech takes the newspaper from under his arm and looks at it. Pauses, thinking. Looks at Mr Black.

He shakes his head. Not worth it. He goes inside.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cliff is waiting in front of the arcade, which is closed now, with the sign lights off but the interior lights still on.

Mr Black's sedan pulls into the lot and parks. Mr Black and the Tech get out. They walk over to Cliff. Mr Black shakes his hand and they say a few unintelligible things.

Sarah watches them from behind the bushes at the other side of the street. Her bike is with her.

The three men go inside the arcade. Sarah dashes across the street, hiding now behind the shrubs at the corner of the parking lot.

Sarah looks at the licence plate of the sedan and starts writing it down on a small notepad with a ballpoint pen.

INT. ARCADE - MOMENTS LATER

With Mr Black and Cliff watching, the Tech tries turning on the Zargon machine. Nothing happens. He goes to the back and opens the panel there.

The Tech lifts some wires and pulls them from the back of the machine. He exchanges a knowing glance with Mr Black.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The three men come out the front door.

MR BLACK

...so we'll be back with that
replacement part tomorrow morning.

CLIFF

Okay, sounds good. Thanks very much.

Mr Black and the Tech nod their goodbyes to Cliff, who starts locking the front door.

Black unlocks his door and gets in, noticing that the Tech doesn't have to wait for him to unlock his side.

INT. SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Black and the Tech close the doors and put on their seatbelts.

MR BLACK

You did it again, leaving your door unlocked.

The Tech nods sheepishly. Mr Black makes a scoffing sound. He starts the car and backs out of the parking lot. Sarah crouches deeper into the bushes to stay hidden.

INT. SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black drives onto the street and away from the arcade.

MR BLACK

So somebody sabotaged it.

TECH

Yeah.

MR BLACK

Probably just vandalism. Some kid's idea of a prank.

EXT. BASE - NIGHT

The sedan drives along a dirt road leading into the base compound. There are a few lights on the outsides of the farmhouse and barn so it's not completely dark.

The Thug is standing on the front porch of the farmhouse, waiting as Mr Black parks the sedan. Black and the Tech get out.

THUG

Phone call, sir. Mr Hardcastle. I told him you'd call back. He sounded pretty pissed off.

MR BLACK
Shit! How long ago?

THUG
About half an hour.

MR BLACK
Shit!

Mr Black hustles up the steps and inside, followed by the Thug and Tech.

INT. BASE, OFFICE / HARDCASTLE'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Mr Black is listening to Mr Hardcastle yell at him on the phone. Intercut with Hardcastle at his home, in the livingroom with the TV on in the background.

HARDCASTLE
Why didn't you call me earlier?
Have you seen the news?

MR BLACK
Wh- what? Sir?

HARDCASTLE
You've got teenagers dying in droves there, Black. Don't pretend you don't know about it. National news is even starting to pick it up. Thank god nobody's figured out what's behind it, yet.

MR BLACK
Sir, I think it's not clear yet that---

HARDCASTLE
I'm shutting down the project, Black. Effective immediately.

Mr Black is silent. Shellshocked.

HARDCASTLE
Get the game back. And make sure there are no loose ends.

MR BLACK
Yes, sir.

HARDCASTLE
I'll expect an update tomorrow morning.

MR BLACK
Yes, sir. I'll call you first
thing.

The two men hang up. Mr Black leaves the office.

INT. BASE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black enters the hallway, where the Thug and Tech are waiting to hear the news.

MR BLACK
We're shut down. Some more kids
are dead.

THUG
What happened? How did---

MR BLACK
Look, it's over! Day after
tomorrow we clear out of this base
of operations. (To Tech) You stay
here, you can start packing your
shit, or whatever. (To Thug) You
come with me, we have to get the
game back tonight.

The Thug nods and follows Black out of the building.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black and the Thug come down the stairs and walk to the truck. They get in and shut the doors. The truck starts its engine and drives off through the gate onto the dirt road.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Sarah is in bed in her pyjamas, eyes closed. There's a quiet knock at the door. She wakes up.

SARAH
Yeah?

The door opens and Billy peeks in.

BILLY
What happened?

Sarah sits up, picking up a notepad from her bedside table, with the license plate number written on it. She holds up her hand with the same number written on it.

SARAH
Got the license plate.

Billy comes in, closes the door and rushes to Sarah as he hands him the notepad.

BILLY
This is a government plate! I knew it! These guys are no video game company. They're some kind of covert government agents.

SARAH
Holy shit. I'd better call the Sheriff.

BILLY
I need to warn Cliff about this. What time is it?

She looks at her watch.

SARAH
9:30.

BILLY
I gotta go, Cliff's on his way to the arcade right about now.

Knock knock knock on the door.

MOM (O.S.)
Billy?

Billy and Sarah both look guiltily to the door.

BILLY
Yes?

Mom opens the door.

MOM
(suspiciously)
What are you two up to?

Billy and Sarah look at each other, trying to come up with a cover story.

BILLY
Look, Mom, I gotta go.

MOM
Not back to the arcade again!?!

Billy barges past her into the hall.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY / STAIRS / LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

Billy darts off down the stairs, leaving Mom behind.

BILLY

Sorry, Mom, Cliff needs me!

MOM

I have had it up to here with that
goddamn Cliff! You are quitting
that job!

BILLY

Cliff already fired me!

Mom is speechless as Billy runs out the door.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mom turns back to Sarah, who is still sitting on her bed.

MOM

I knew I never spanked him enough.
Spare the reed, spoil the child.

Sarah shrugs.

MOM

I gotta go to work. I'm late
already. Oh, I'll be home late
tonight.

Sarah nods and Mom heads off down the stairs.

INT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Now dressed, Sarah comes into the kitchen and picks up the phone. She gets out the phone book and looks up the number, then dials it.

The phone rings several times. Sarah paces. A female POLICE SECRETARY answers.

POLICE SECRETARY

Sheriff's Office, how may I help
you?

SARAH
 Could I talk to the Sheriff
 please?

POLICE SECRETARY
 What is it about?

SARAH
 Well, I think it's just better if
 I talk to him...

POLICE SECRETARY
 Honey, the Sheriff is a busy man,
 he has to prioritize---

SARAH
 Okay, okay. Listen, I think I know
 why all these teenagers are dying.
 Did that get your attention???

POLICE SECRETARY
 Young lady, I don't think I
 appreciate your tone of voice. If
 you want people to take you
 seriously, you're going to have to
 learn---

SARAH
 It's the video game, it's making
 them go crazy and kill themselves!

POLICE SECRETARY
 Killer video game? I don't have
 time for crank calls today.
 Goodbye.

The secretary hangs up. Sarah slams the phone down.

SARAH
 Dammit!

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - DAY

Billy rides up the street, stopping in front of the arcade.
 He looks into the parking lot. Cliff's car is parked there,
 but it's the only vehicle. He looks around - no sign of the
 big truck.

He rides into the parking lot, puts down his bike outside
 the door and tries the door. It's unlocked. Cautiously, he
 opens it and goes in.

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Billy comes into the arcade. The lights are off but there's enough light from the bright daylight out the front windows to see by.

Billy cautiously proceeds towards the games area.

BILLY
(whispering)
Cliff?

No answer. He keeps going.

He sees that the Zargon game is gone. He turns to go up the stairs to the raised area. But he stops. At the top of the stairs is...

Oh no. The severed head of Cliff lies on the floor in a pool of blood.

Billy gasps, backing away. He backs right into the waiting arms of the Thug. He struggles, but the Thug presses a wet rag over his mouth. Billy inhales involuntarily.

Getting woozy now... Billy starts to pass out. The last thing he sees as his vision goes blurry and fades out is the face of Mr Black peering down at him.

The Thug lays Billy down on the floor, removing the chloroform-soaked rag from his face. Mr Black stares at Billy's face.

MR BLACK
Wait a minute - I know him. He played the game the first night. He's that high-score kid - B.L.Y. Billy. If he can do what I think he can with that game, then maybe we can salvage something from this mess after all.

INT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Sarah paces in the kitchen.

She picks up the phone book, put it on the counter and looks through it.

She finds the listing: Cliff's Videodrome.

She picks up the phone from the wall and dials. It rings. And rings. No answer.

She hangs up, thinking. She heads out the front door.

EXT. ARCADE PARKING LOT - DAY

Sarah arrives at the Arcade on her bike. There's a police car in the parking lot along with Cliff's car.

Crime scene tape is blocking off the entrance to the parking lot. At the front of the building, near the entrance, the Sheriff and the Younger Officer are talking to a random boy (13), who looks traumatized.

Sarah drops her bike and ducks under the tape, running toward the entrance. The police officers look her way.

SHERIFF

Hold on! Sarah!

SARAH

My brother's in there!

SHERIFF

Whoa, hold on. You don't want to go in there.

Sarah stops.

SHERIFF

Sarah, it's okay, we've checked the whole place. Your brother's not here. There's nobody else here.

SARAH

My brother works here, he came in this morning.

The Sheriff stops and looks at the Younger Officer, then back to Sarah.

SHERIFF

Alright. I'll need to take a statement. Just wait over here, please.

INT. LAB - DAY

A hand slaps Billy's face gently.

TECH (O.S.)

(whispering)

Wake up!

Billy starts to wake up. Groggily, he opens his eyes.

He's strapped into the experiment chair like the homeless guy was at the start of the movie, with the wall of TVs in front of him. The TVs are turned off and the eyelid-holders aren't engaged, but the electrodes are stuck to his forehead.

Billy struggles against the straps.

BILLY

Where am I? What's going on? What are you doing to me?

TECH

(whispering)

Shhhh! Quiet, they'll hear you!

The Tech starts pulling the electrodes off Billy's forehead and undoing the straps as he talks.

TECH

(whispering)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean for this... Well, I'm just sorry. This is all my fault but I'm going to get you out of here while I have the chance.

Billy is settled down now. His fear starts to be overcome by his scientific curiosity.

BILLY

(whispering)

What is all this?

TECH

This is the original version of what you know as the Zargon game. It's a new technology that we were testing on you and your friends at the arcade. But it turns out that most brains can't handle it.

BILLY

Yeah, I know what happened to them. But what's it for?

TECH

Well, the army wanted to develop a system to remotely pilot planes and missiles, but the transmission delay was an insurmountable problem - even just a few seconds of lag time can be disastrous.

He gestures around the room at the equipment, clearly proud of it.

TECH

This is an entirely new system for remote control without transmission delay. The joysticks on the arcade game do nothing - the game interfaces directly with the subject's brain.

He finishes with the straps, and Billy climbs down from the chair.

BILLY

That's amazing... How does this interface work?

TECH

Well, we don't fully understand the physics behind it. But it takes advantage of an effect that had been noticed in experiments where test subjects can affect the outcomes of random number generators, even over long distances.

While he talks, The Tech pulls a shelf of equipment away from the wall, revealing a window. It's daytime outside. The Tech opens the window.

TECH

Go on, hide behind those barrels, and I'll get the car.

Billy nods and climbs out the window. The Tech pushes the shelf back into place.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Billy, crouching, rushes over to the barrels at the corner of the farmhouse. He hides behind them. The sedan is parked nearby, in the middle of the farmyard next to the big truck.

Billy looks around, waiting. He notices an old windmill by the gate - a windmill with a few of its blades missing.

INT. LAB - CONTINUOUS

The Tech is heading for the door when Mr Black opens it and stops abruptly, looking at the empty chair. The Tech freezes.

Mr Black steps into the room, his shocked expression giving way to anger.

MR BLACK
Where is he?

The Tech backs away from him. Mr Black draws his pistol.

TECH
I'm not gonna tell.

MR BLACK
WHERE IS HE!!!!

TECH
I---I---

MR BLACK
There's no I in team!!!

Mr Black empties the pistol into the Tech as fast as he can. The Tech is torn to shreds, blood spraying all over. The Tech collapses to the floor.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Billy hears the gunfire. Gasping, he turns his head toward the farmhouse.

INT. LAB - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black stares at the corpse of the Tech. He starts backing away from the corpse, toward the door.

The Thug comes running into the room with his pistol drawn. He stops, seeing the empty chair and the Tech blown to bits on the floor.

Mr Black snaps out of his daze.

MR BLACK
Come on, the kid's out there
somewhere.

The two men dash out of the lab.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Billy doesn't know where to go... He's running away from the farmhouse, looking around.

He runs to the barn, opens the door just enough to squeeze through, and closes it after him.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Billy enters the barn, looking around. The barn is full of crates like the one the Zargon game came in. Crates with "Prototype" stenciled on them.

Billy hears the front door of the farmhouse slam open and the two men's footsteps run out into the farmyard. Billy quietly jogs into the barn, hiding behind some of the crates.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black finishes reloading his handgun. He gestures to the Thug and they split up.

Mr Black heads toward the barn, while the Thug heads off into the fields. Mr Black opens the barn door and enters.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black enters, pointing his gun ahead of him. Billy cringes, behind a crate, holding as still as he can. Barely breathing.

Mr Black stalks slowly through the barn, through the rows of crates.

Billy sees a missing board on one corner of the barn. He inches toward it. Mr Black comes around a corner. No one there.

Billy squeezes through the gap in the wall, leaving the barn.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Billy carefully sneaks across the farmyard toward the farmhouse, opens the door as quietly as possible, and goes inside.

INT. BASE, OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy opens the door to Mr Black's office. Perfect! He closes the door, hurrying to the phone.

He picks it up, dials and waits, nervously looking at the curtained windows. The answering machine picks up.

MOM (O.S.)

We can't take your call right now,
please leave a message.

BILLY

(whispering)

Sarah! Mom! Are you there? Listen,
I'm on a farm, I'm gonna try and
get away. But if I don't, it's
that farm that's out past the
dump, you know where that windmill
is with the missing blades?

He tries to think of anything else to say.

BILLY

Well, I'd better go.

He hangs up, and heads out the door.

EXT. BASE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy emerges from the farmhouse, looking around. No idea where Mr Black and the Thug are now. He runs quietly to the sedan and tries the door. Locked, no keys in the ignition.

He starts running toward the gate.

BLAM! A puff of dust appears in front of him on the ground. He freezes.

MR BLACK

Don't move!

Mr Black approaches, keeping the gun trained on Billy, who raises his hands in surrender.

INT. LAB - SOME TIME LATER

Billy is back in the chair, strapped in. Mr Black applies the electrodes to his forehead.

MR BLACK

This can't be that hard. I've seen him do this a few times. I don't need him.

The Thug drags the bloody remains of the Tech out the door into the hallway.

Mr Black starts flipping on switches, turning on monitors. Billy shivers with fear.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

It's a small police station, nothing fancy. A few desks and a counter separating the waiting area from the office space.

Sarah is sitting next to the Sheriff's desk.

SARAH

Aren't you going to do something?

SHERIFF

I'm sorry, Sarah, but government conspiracies, brain-melting rays, you see how this all sounds? What am I supposed to do?

SARAH

Look up this license plate! Find out what department or agency it's from---

She waves the notepad around and puts it down on the desk.

SHERIFF

(sighs)

Look, we've got our hands full here investigating Cliff's murder and what it has to do with his drug gang connections back in the city. I have to finish questioning all these kids about the arcade and about Cliff and his associates. I'll take the license number, we'll check it tomorrow. But for right now---

SARAH

Right now you're gonna do nothing.

SHERIFF

Look, we'll file a Missing Persons Report on Billy, but we can't do that until 24 hours have passed, which will be tomorrow morning. I'm sure Billy will be back by then, he's most likely just playing somewhere and he'll come home tonight.

Sarah gets up and walks out to the waiting area, which is full of teenagers from the arcade. The Sheriff shrugs.

SHERIFF

Next! You there!

INT. LAB - EVENING

Billy is fully set up for testing - the eyelid-holders are in place and all the equipment is on. A test is in progress.

Billy is not distressed at all, unlike the Homeless Bum at the start of the movie. He's doing fine.

On the screen, the red tunnel is flying by and Billy is zapping those energy spheres at a rapid pace. The tunnel ends. Blackness onscreen is then replaced with various data.

Mr Black is watching the readouts with glee and amazement.

MR BLACK

Ha! Fantastic! No negative effects at all. Not a twitch.

He starts switching off various switches, powering down the equipment.

MR BLACK

Well, my little man, I see you are something special.

Billy smiles a little, proud of himself. Mr Black tears off some paper printouts and heads toward the door.

MR BLACK

Or your brain is anyway. We'll have to do further experiments to figure out what makes your brain different.

Billy doesn't like the sound of that. Mr Black leaves the room.

INT. BASE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black walks down the hall. There is now a trail of blood from the Tech's body scuffed down the whole length of the hall, leading outside.

The Thug comes in the door from outside.

THUG

All done. Buried him out in the field.

MR BLACK

Good work. You can start to pack up the gear, I'll join you in a minute.

The Thug nods and Mr Black enters his office.

INT. BASE, OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black starts grabbing papers and stuffing them into a suitcase.

The phone rings. Intercut with Hardcastle in his limo.

MR BLACK

Komatsu Electronics.

HARDCASTLE

Black! What the fuck is going on out there!

MR BLACK

Sir? What---

HARDCASTLE

You've blown the whole thing wide open! I'm looking at the evening news and I'm seeing your arcade! You chopped his head off and left it for the police to find???

MR BLACK

You told me to take care of the
loose ends!

HARDCASTLE

When you're taking care of loose
ends you make it look like a
suicide, not a gangland execution!

Mr Black waits.

HARDCASTLE

Alright, I'm coming to personally
take over the shut-down of the
operation, so we can get all our
equipment out of the area without
the police coming by, and to make
sure you don't continue to fuck it
up any worse than you already
have!

MR BLACK

Alright, sir. I'll see you
tomorrow, then?

HARDCASTLE

I'll be there tonight. I'm getting
on my plane right now.

Hardcastle slams down the phone and gets out of the limo.
He's on the tarmac at a small airport.

Black squints his eyes shut. He knows he's in big, big
trouble.

EXT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE, DAY

Sarah rides up to the house on her bike, leaves it by the
door, and goes inside.

INT. SARAH & BILLY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah enters the kitchen and is walking past the answering
machine when she notices the red light blinking.

She stops and pushes the rewind button - it's the old kind
with an actual tape in it. She pushes play. Her eyes go
wide as she hears Billy's voice.

BILLY (O.S.)

(whispering)

Sarah! Mom! Are you there? Listen, I'm on a farm, I'm gonna try and get away. But if I don't, it's that farm that's out past the dump, you know where that windmill is with the missing blades?
(Pause) Well, I'd better go.

The machine beeps twice and stops playback. Sarah lunges for the phone, picks it up and starts dialing.

Colleen answers.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Hello?

SARAH

Colleen! You have to help me. Billy's been taken captive, and these stupid cops aren't gonna do anything about it, they're so focused on their stupid drug gang theory... I have to get out to this farm out in the countryside.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Wh---what are are you taking about?

SARAH

I need a car! Please call Dave and see if he can drive me out there!

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Well Dave's really sick, he's got that flu that's going around---

SARAH

It's not a flu, it's that goddamn game! Never mind, I can drive, I just need a car.

COLLEEN (O.S.)

Dave doesn't have one, he just borrows his Mom's, she's at work.

SARAH

Yeah, mine too. Where am I gonna get a car? It's too far to ride my bike.

She thinks... Then realizes.

SARAH
I don't need a car.

COLLEEN (O.S.)
What?

Sarah hangs up and runs out the door.

EXT. DOWN BY THE RIVER - DUSK

The sun is setting as Sarah parks her bike at the trailhead and dashes quickly down the trail.

She emerges on the pebbly beach. Looks around.

SARAH
Curtis? Curtis!

She stumbles along over the pebbles, beginning to break down. If he isn't here, there's nothing left to do.

SARAH
Curtis, please! Oh, god.

She sits down on a log, about to give up and cry. Then she hears it... A motorcycle approaching. She gets up and heads towards the other trailhead, the one where Curtis left before.

Curtis appears, rides his dirtbike to the end of the trail and, seeing Sarah, stops.

CURTIS
Sarah! What's wrong?

Sarah comes toward him.

SARAH
God, where do I start? The game,
that's why everyone's been killing
and maiming themselves.

CURTIS
What game?

SARAH
(sighs)
Look, it doesn't matter- My
brother Billy's been kidnapped and
the police won't listen to me. By
the time they get around to doing
anything the kidnappers will be
long gone.

CURTIS

Who are these guys? What do they want with your brother?

SARAH

I don't know. Look, I've been through a lot, and there's no-one else who can help. I know it sounds crazy but I just need you to trust me.

Curtis thinks about it and decides.

CURTIS

Alright, I'm used to trouble. Where are we going?

SARAH

It's out past the dump, I'll show you when we get out there.

Curtis starts walking his bike across the pebbles to the other trail, Sarah walking alongside him.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah sits on the back of Curtis's dirtbike. They roar off down the road, out into the countryside as the sun sets.

EXT. MUNICIPAL AIRPORT - NIGHT

A small airplane lands on the runway.

EXT. MUNICIPAL AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

Mr Hardcastle, carrying a briefcase, walks toward a black Lincoln sedan parked on the tarmac. The DRIVER (20), military crewcut but dressed in a black suit, holds the back door open for him.

Hardcastle walks past him and around to the driver's side door, opening it and throwing the briefcase onto the passenger's seat.

HARDCASTLE

I won't be needing you.

Hardcastle gets in. The Driver, stunned, closes the back door.

Hardcastle starts the car and drives off.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Curtis and Sarah ride along the dirt road. Sarah sees lights up ahead.

SARAH
Stop! Stop here.

Curtis slows down and stops.

SARAH
Don't want them to hear us coming.

Curtis nods. Sarah gets off and Curtis pulls the dirtbike to the side of the road, leaning it against a fence.

Sarah is already walking ahead. Curtis jogs to catch up.

EXT. BASE - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah and Curtis approach the base along the dirt road, crouching a bit to stay hidden behind the fence and tall grass. They see the farmhouse, the sedan, the truck and the barn. No-one is around.

They exchange glances and nods, then move into the farmyard, heading towards the house. They hear someone coming out the door of the farmhouse and quickly duck behind some barrels.

Mr Black comes out of the building, carrying a box, followed by the Thug also carrying a couple of boxes. They walk to the truck and talk as they load the boxes into the back.

MR BLACK
We don't need all the gear, we can replace it. But that boy's brain is the golden goose. First we'll take out Hardcastle when he gets here tonight. Then we'll get the kid to a safehouse, and we can start up again and get to the bottom of that brain.

Sarah and Curtis exchange a look. Mr Black and the Thug go back into the house again.

SARAH
They're going to cut Billy's head open and dissect his brain! Come on!

She leads Curtis to the house, where they hide again, in the semi-darkness at the side of the building. Curtis looks up at a window that's partway open. There's no light on in that room. He climbs up on some crates and looks in.

CURTIS

Looks like the bathroom.

Curtis pulls the window open further and climbs up, wriggling through the window.

Finally Mr Black and the Thug go back in again. Curtis reaches his arm back out to help Sarah up.

She takes his hand and starts climbing up and into the window.

INT. BASE, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mr Black and the Thug, carrying another load, go back out the door to the outside.

A second later another door in the hallway opens and Curtis peeks out. He sees that they're alone. He opens the door the rest of the way and he and Sarah step quietly into the hallway.

They see the streaks of blood leading along the hallway, coming out of the door at the end.

CURTIS

Wow.

SARAH

Come on.

Sarah leads him down the hallway. She opens the door and the two of them go into the Lab.

INT. LAB - CONTINUOUS

Sarah and Curtis enter. Sarah gasps as she sees Billy strapped to the experiment chair.

BILLY

(whispering)

Sarah! Hurry up, they'll be back!

Sarah and Curtis hurry to the chair and start undoing the straps. Billy looks at Curtis.

BILLY
Who the hell is he?

CURTIS
Curtis.

BILLY
Okay.

They finish with the straps. Billy gets off the chair and hugs Sarah.

Mr Black and the Thug enter with guns drawn.

MR BLACK
Cute. (to Thug) Alright, grab them!

Curtis pushes over a shelving unit full of gear, slowing down the Thug and Mr Black, and revealing a window behind it. Curtis opens the window.

SARAH
Billy, get out there, quick!

Billy starts climbing out the window.

Mr Black grabs Sarah and the Thug grabs Curtis. Billy lands on the ground outside.

SARAH
Run, Billy!

MR BLACK
(to the Thug)
Forget about that one, go after the boy and don't let him get away!

The Thug shoves Curtis over the shelf to the floor, and climbs out the window to chase Billy.

Mr Black is about to shoot Curtis but Sarah struggles, biting his hand and making him miss the shot as Curtis jumps out the window.

EXT. BASE - CONTINUOUS

Billy runs away from the Thug as Curtis runs after them.

As Billy starts climbing the fence, The Thug takes aim with his pistol. But Curtis catches up and pounces on the Thug from behind, getting him in a chokehold.

The Thug struggles, dropping the gun and beating on Curtis, who clings for dear life.

Billy jumps down from the fence, runs over and picks up the dropped gun. Can he get a clear shot while the Thug and Curtis are struggling?

CURTIS

Shoot him! Shoot!

BLAM! Billy shoots the Thug. The Thug goes down. Curtis scrambles away and Billy pops the Thug one good shot right in the head. BLAM!

INT. LAB - SIMULTANEOUS

To intercut with the previous scene.

After Curtis jumps out the window, Sarah manages to make Black drop the gun, which falls into the toppled shelf. He feels around for it but can't find it in all the wiring and equipment.

Sarah runs for the hall. Mr Black grabs her leg, she falls down and starts kicking at him. She breaks free and scrambles to the hall.

INT. BASE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mr Black smashes a glass case with his fist and grabs the fire axe inside. He chases after Sarah, slashing wildly with the axe.

Halfway down the hall, she falls down, crawling on her back away from him. He chops downward - she scrambles back just in time, the axe chopping one of the heavy power cables leading to the lab.

As he raises the axe for a final chop, she grabs the live end of the chopped cable and jams it into his stomach.
ZZZZZZZZAAAAAPPPPPPPPOWWWWWWW!

Sparks fly and bolts of electricity jump from Mr Black's body. He is thoroughly fried. Finally the lights go out and the electricity stops jolting through him. His body smoking, Mr Black tips over and slams into the floor like a side of beef.

Sarah, breathing a sigh of relief, gets to her feet. Curtis and Billy pop in the front door - everyone scares each other before realizing who they are. Curtis looks down at the smoking body of Mr Black.

SARAH

Let's get out of here.

BILLY

Wait, there's one more thing we have to do.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER (MONTAGE)

Billy opens the barn door, revealing all the game crates to Sarah and Curtis. The Zargon machine from the arcade is visible in a crate at the front that hasn't been closed yet.

Sarah, Billy and Curtis put all the boxes of files and computer disks from the van into the barn.

BILLY (V.O.)

We have to get rid of all this stuff so no-one can ever try this experiment again.

They start splashing gasoline around and getting ready to burn the barn down.

Sarah rummages around in the truck and finds a metal case. Opening it, she finds first aid supplies and a flare gun.

EXT. BASE - MOMENTS LATER

The three good guys leave the barn, walking across the farmyard to a safe distance. Sarah loads the flare gun.

BILLY

Hey, how come you get a flare gun?

SARAH

'Cuz I'm the big sister. I've always wanted to do this.

She raises the flare gun, aiming it at the open barn door.

MR BLACK (O.S.)

Put that gun down! Don't move!

Sarah, Billy and Curtis spin around. Mr Black is walking away from the farmhouse. He's badly burned, his face and hands a scorched, cracked mess of charred black skin and gooey red exposed flesh. A bit of smoke still emanates from his burned suit.

He points his pistol at the good guys, circling them to get in between them and the barn. He's unsteady on his feet, the gun weaving back and forth.

MR BLACK

Put it down now!

SARAH

If you don't take me out with the first shot, I'm firing this flare. Are you sure in your messed-up state you can do it?

MR BLACK

If you fire that flare I'm gonna empty this gun in your direction and I bet I hit at least one of you a few times.

It's a Mexican stand-off.

They hear a car approaching. The black Lincoln drives through the gate into the farmyard. Mr Hardcastle is here.

MR BLACK

Now you kids are really screwed. If you thought I was bad...

The car accelerates, coming straight for Mr Black.

MR BLACK

What the...?

In the car, Mr Hardcastle grins. The car hits Mr Black, who splays across the hood, his face hitting the windshield in front of Hardcastle.

MR BLACK

What are you doing??? Stop!

HARDCASTLE

Mr Black! You look like shit.

Hardcastle slams on the brakes in front of the barn door. Mr Black launches off the hood and goes hurtling into the barn like a missile, slamming into the game that wasn't crated up, tipping it partway back. He tumbles to the ground in front of the machine, which tips forward... And then tips over, slamming right down on top of him.

Hardcastle reacts with an "ouch" face.

Sarah aims the flare-gun.

SARAH
Game over, asshole.

She fires it. The flare flies across the farmyard, over top of the car, into the barn door. The gasoline catches on fire. The crates start exploding one by one.

CURTIS
Game over?

SARAH
I had to.

WHAM!!!!!!

Suddenly the whole barn explodes in a massive fireball, shattering the boards and sending splinters of wood all over the farmyard. Sarah, Curtis and Billy hit the deck.

Hardcastle puts the car in reverse and backs away from the barn. Sarah, Curtis and Billy scramble to their feet and run away, along the side of the farmhouse.

Hardcastle stops the car, opens the door and gets out. The three kids jump over the fence and run through the forest.

Hardcastle takes his gun out, but it's too late. He shakes his head and chuckles to himself, putting the gun away. He turns toward the burning remains of the barn.

He puts on his sunglasses. The fire reflects in their lenses as Hardcastle leans against the car.

HARDCASTLE
Well, Mr Black, when you fuck up,
you don't do it halfway.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah and Curtis emerge from the trees and run back to the dirtbike. Curtis pulls the bike onto the road and climbs on.

SARAH
Wait. Where's Billy?

CURTIS
Shit, he was right behind us. Give
him a minute.

Sarah turns back to Curtis.

SARAH
Thanks for doing this.

CURTIS
Doing what? This?

He leans in for a kiss, and Sarah goes for it.

BILLY (O.S.)
Ew, pukatronic!

Sarah and Curtis, embarrassed, pull apart as Billy approaches.

SARAH
Don't tell Mom that part.

BILLY
I'm not telling Mom anything about
all this, she couldn't handle it.

Sarah gets on the bike behind Curtis and Billy crams on the back.

Curtis starts the engine. They ride off into the night, the burning barn and column of smoke lighting the way.

CU: TV screen. A TV commercial is playing. It's for a home version of Zargon.

A young BROTHER (8) and SISTER (6) play the game on the TV in their living room. It includes a pair of Power-Glove-like gloves to control the gameplay.

ANNOUNCER
Zargon. It takes your TV to a
whole new dimension.

BROTHER
Totally radical!

The girl raises her arms to cheer.

SISTER
I win!

The commercial ends and the TV turns off.

TITLE CARD: 7 YEARS LATER.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr Hardcastle puts down the TV remote and walks around a long boardroom table. Around the table are seated a group of other sinister old men in dark suits.

HARDCASTLE

It took us seven years to rebuild this project from scratch. Now we're ready to conduct large-scale tests to find children who can withstand the interface. These children will be the next generation of military pilots, guiding our jets and missiles by remote control.

OLD MAN #1

But what about the children who can't withstand the interface?

HARDCASTLE

We've agreed that there will be acceptable casualties.

OLD MAN #2

And what if the press figures out it's the game affecting them?

HARDCASTLE

This won't be like last time. The problem with Mr Black's plan was that when the teenagers started dying, it was too easy to trace back to the arcade and even to its newest game. But as you know, the next step is home games. With just a few hundred "special" cartridges among the million going out to the public, no one will be able to make the connection.

The old man at the end of the table, the BIG BOSS (75) clears his throat.

BIG BOSS

How soon will these games be ready?

Mr Hardcastle smiles smugly, stepping over to a large window. He opens the blinds behind him, revealing a vast warehouse full of crates.

HARDCASTLE

Sir, give the word, we can ship
'em today.

The Big Boss smiles.

BIG BOSS

Good. I want 'em in stores by
Christmas.

He laughs. Mr Hardcastle join him in his evil laughter.

Final shot: the warehouse, with forklifts loading crates of the game onto trucks.