

Professional Writer's Portfolio

Samuel Cohen Burke
sam.burke0425@gmail.com
(781) 654-6544

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(781) 264-6544

sam.burke0425@gmail.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/samuel-burke-0596a9319/>

SUMMARY

Highly tech-savvy, talented in multimedia editing, and efficient in both team-oriented and solitary work. Hopeful to apply teamwork, leadership, social, creative, technical, and organizational skills in administrative positions, public services, and the publishing world.

WORK EXPERIENCE**Best Buy (Plymouth, MA)**

Sales associate _ Sep. 2019 - Feb. 2020

- Processing transactions at checkout
- Promoting Best Buy Rewards at checkout
- Handling orders and repairs at customer service

VOLUNTEERING**Hanson Public Library (Hanson, MA)**

Organizer _ Aug. 2023 - Present

- Organize books in alphabetical order
- Address sorting and labeling errors

EDUCATION**Pilgrim Academy (Plymouth, MA)**

High school diploma _ Graduated in June, 2018

University of Massachusetts Boston (Boston, MA)

BA program _ Attended from 2020-2023

Credits: 58

GPA: 3.3

CERTIFICATION**Video Editing and Motion Graphics - Certificates of Completion**

Six certificates acquired at Noble Desktop, July 2025 - November 2025

SKILLS

- Grammar and proofreading
- Attention to detail
- Microsoft Office
- Google Suite
- Adobe CC

NOTE: References, certificates, and portfolio available upon request.

Samuel Burke

3-12-2022

SOCIOL 101 09

Professor Riffle

Discussing Americans' access to affordable housing and whether or not it's a natural human right in this country requires seeing it from both an ethical and a bureaucratic standpoint. When it comes to America being driven by capitalism, competition between economic classes seems almost inevitable—it should naturally be harder for less prestigious citizens to lag behind and, thus, struggle financially. Granted, one still has to wonder about the contradiction of living in a structured functionalist system, which comes with the common notion inspired by Émile Durkheim that economic inequality allows the most skilled and talented individuals to get ahead. Throughout American history, this has not always been the case, from Theodore Roosevelt's regretful decision to help William Howard Taft—the same man he would later call a "fathead with the mind of a guinea pig"—win the 1909 election to the first responders who barely moved or sat idle during the Sandy Hook shooting of 2012 to Donald Trump's appointment of staunch anti-conservation climate change denier Scott Pruitt as the administrator of the EPA in 2017. Now, compare such instances as these with the folk punk band Violent Femmes rising to popularity after being discovered performing on a street corner in 1981; homeless man David Casarez receiving an avalanche of job offers in Silicon Valley in 2018; and homeless former actor Drew Goodall acquiring wealth from his shoe-shining business for the evicted and mentally handicapped, and at least a few eyebrows are bound raise in response to this generalization. Is

decent housing and financial prosperity really accessible to the Americans who need and deserve it the most? Desmond suggests the contrary, as does this essay.

I've already offered instances of Americans with very clear talent and potential, so why are these people still unable to make a decent living and afford housing? Another individual human story that's been covered in the course before represents a similar hole in structured functionalism and the real reasons behind evictions and homelessness. In Desmond's fieldwork with trailer park residents, he describes the living situation of a resident under the name of Arleen, who was constantly switching from home to home. Eventually, when she and her children thought they'd finally found their big break and began settling in like any everyday family, her son naturally struggled in school before kicking one of his teachers, and after the police were called, the landlord told the family to move out. What this story suggests is that Arleen wasn't unfit for finding a suitable home that she could afford—according to Desmond, she was extremely neat and barely had any preference when it came to the size and condition of her home, saying "a home is a home." Two of the factors that stood in her way weren't in relation to her intelligence or skill level: her eviction records were publicly available online for landlords to see and reject her for them, and her ninetieth landlord kicked her out just because her fourteen-year-old's teacher essentially turned him into a criminal when it wasn't truly deserved. In this case, plus all of the aforementioned examples, how can these Americans be denied housing when they're clearly competent, orderly, talented, and resilient, especially when, say, Taft mainly became president thanks to Teddy Roosevelt's support and Pruitt took control of the EPA simply for agreeing with Trump on environmental matters? If these fortunate individuals are deserving of financial prosperity and successful careers—let alone livable housing—then Arleen, Goodall, Casarez, and the Violent Femmes do, too, as well as Americans in general.

Samuel Burke

5-12-2022

SOCIOL 101 09

Professor Riffle

First off, neoliberalism is a primarily economic system, but one that demands political action. According to David Harvey, the concept behind this system states that free-market capitalism is the natural next step in bettering the lives and careers of citizens and individuals in top-level positions. Such an emphasis is placed on the maintenance of the free market that political and police force may be necessary, and it cannot be a matter that individual states are allowed to make their own decisions on—it has to be treated as a national priority and nothing less than that. Despite its clear ties to capitalism, neoliberalism is not capitalism in and of itself, but rather a system designed to keep its core functions in place. Aside from supporting free trade and free internal markets, neoliberalism is centered around providing plenty of freedoms and opportunities in entrepreneurship, although each individual must be held accountable for any personal failings in trade, education, welfare, health care, and so on, creating a rigid framework of moral and professional responsibility. Now, when bringing the topic of feminism into the mix, liberal feminism perfectly fits into the model of neoliberalism. Naturally, as a capitalist-driven system, neoliberalism favors those who are most successful in the market and/or help maintain the free-market system, sometimes through the use of force such as, say, legal action. Liberal feminism, in this sense, specifically seeks to support and defend the rights and equal opportunities of women who break the glass ceiling, so to speak, by proving unbound by gender roles, stereotypes, and restrictions in male-dominated markets and offices. These powerful

women are the kinds of individuals that would, in theory, keep the neoliberalist reality afloat, so they're especially favored in this one strict subcategory of feminism.

Now, from a strictly capitalist mindset, liberal feminism seems to be exactly what this and other capitalist countries need. From the "feminism for the 99%" mindset, on the other hand, it's all contradictory, oppressive nonsense. The central reason for this is that feminism, the notion that women are created equal to men, is being repurposed to champion women at a particular advantage in patriarchal society—mainly white, higher-income women in more favorable job positions—while keeping women at a severe disadvantage in their place, such as lower-income Black, Asian, and Hispanic women. One of the most significant qualities of feminism for the 99% in how greatly it differs from liberal feminism is the neoliberalist encouragement of quick, severe political action to keep a predetermined economic system in place, whereas feminism for the 99% is all about action being taken *by the people* to alter the predetermined system. This is why this movement's official manifesto makes the subtle claim that "solidarity is our weapon"—when the disadvantaged women who are still stuck beneath the glass ceiling come together, no use of force rooted in neoliberalism can keep them from making it through themselves. At this point, the intent behind the bold statement that "we have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority to pick up the shards" becomes clear, which is that breaking the glass ceiling isn't worth it when a mere 1% of the population is being favored over the rest. The inability of virtually all women in society to share the same socioeconomic statuses and/or job positions as the 1% contradicts the very core beliefs of feminism in general, according to followers of this movement.

ElectroNuke

Issue #1: Strangers in a Strange Land

The point of view is positioned in the passenger's side window of a black arched LAPD cruiser with a rounded futurist front end. Painted on the side of the black van up ahead is a white minimalist logo depicting a skull over double angel wings above two crossed AK rifles, below which is the Chinese symbol "折." An officer wearing a black kevlar vest, white under-padding, and a matching "gasmask" with circular red lenses fires a Glock .22...

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

...as sticking out from that window is an emaciated crook sporting a spiked mohawk with white tips, a black leather vest with ripped arm holes, and a stained dark red wifebeater. Seeing through red-tinted sniper goggles, he lets loose on the police cruiser with an AK assault rifle lacking wooden components and plastered with a black and gray digital paint job. The road they speed down segregates two rows of dark glass megatall skyscrapers, one on each side supported by a base of rectangular pillars wrapped in snug bundles of vines. Dark turquoise glass balconies and neon business signs form the outlines of elevated catwalks between the buildings, all of which fade into a black mist several stories up that blurs seamlessly into the sky. The rain puddles coating the pavement reflects the lights of the buildings, cars, and lampposts, including the foggy gradient from indigo toward street level to the hot pink toward the highest levels.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

7th Street, Los Angeles, CA. 11:32 PM, in the year 5030.

At rock bottom, I followed the lights here. Across the nation. For some self-improvement. And maybe a vacation.

I was in need of both.

The chase is viewed from an overhead view toward the east. It's tinted mildly in neon yellow and somewhat distorted by a fisheye effect. Meanwhile, a vertical bar dotted with parallel pegs along its sides like a thermometer runs up the far right side of the view, and a Google Maps marker-style dial arrow points close to the top of its left side.

THE ELECTRONUKE

sigh Hitchcock said it himself. Tension's when those on the outside know there's a bomb...

In an over-the-shoulder view from behind on the ledge he's perched on, The ElectroNuke runs his index finger along a touchscreen panel fitted into his right wrist, from which cyan light emanates. His crystalline suit of armor plating starts at the head with an all-concealing helmet.

THE ELECTRONUKE

...but those on the inside are **clueless**.

Now pictured from the rim of the ledge, The ElectroNuke stands tall with two fists balled up. His helmet's fitted with yellow cheekbone plates, three vertical yellow strips over the mouth, and an opaque yellow visor resembling safety goggles. Each yellow feature emits a soft glow of the same color. Between the loosely joined chest plates of the metallic deep blue bodysuit is a white three-dimensional circle layered over with a yellow lightning bolt symbol that glows and zig-zags at a single acute angle. The ledge is revealed to be polished white art deco with a curved brim like angel wings.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Stay clueless, insiders. Here comes the bomb.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Even now, I keep my better half talking.

Centered in the panel from behind in a shot right out of the Spider-Verse, he leaps off the ledge with his arms and legs spread behind him, leaving behind cyan light trails from the open circular ducts on the backs of his shoulders, elbows, and knees.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"You could use a change in setting."

Fists clenched and eyes aimed down in a profile positioned to his left, he leaves the same trails behind from the same ducts, and the point where the gradient of light disappears is aligned with his abdomen.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"Step outside. Enjoy the breeze."

In the middle of a wall run along the building face to his right – it's a combination of pale beige rectangles with thick maroon borders – he grips the opaque steel brim of a glass railing. On the other side lies a tranquil rooftop garden with a red Shinto arch, a short gray stone bridge over a stream, and sakura trees that shimmer without a clear light source.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"Go clear that head of yours."

From the looping upper brim polished periwinkle building that combines googie with art deco hangs a thick web of ivies. The ElectroNuke monkey-crawls along them in the same direction of the van. The LED billboard beneath it displays a black leather pattern with a purple globe, red outline, and tilted red minimalist diamond logo printed onto the far right, as well as white cursive text along the left half reading...

"ElectroNuke leaves gaps in certain issues.

Richmond's set on filling them."

– Ross Harkins, founder and chairman.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"The grass is greener out there. So, get out there..."

The front of the van begins in the right half of the panel while, much like a gecko's, his magnetic fingers and soles cling to the reflective surface of the roof. A small transparent wave spreads outward to signify the link. From behind the windshield, the driver barks an order.

SHLIFT!

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"...and yank out the weeds."

DRIVER

Hey, Keys! Keep an eye on the cash back there!

After a temporary gaze into his reflection from an over-the-shoulder perspective...

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

"Voices can't stop you if you don't listen."

...he swaps his gecko comparison for a crocodile, initiating an all-fours sprint with scoliotic s-motions. The perspective then shifts to the driver's seat, where the getaway driver sees through his white doll mask with red tears streaming from the eyeholes, the rest of his cranium covered by the hood of a black sleeveless sweatshirt vest. Even as his fingerless batting gloves grip the steering wheel, he reels back in his seat to find The ElectroNuke hanging upside down and face-first in front of the windshield.

DRIVER

HOLY-!

THE ELECTRONUKE

You coulda just asked the Republic for a loan, gentlemen. You're the only bank robbers in, like, five or six years.

In a view from just outside the window, the driver lunges his head over his shoulder at the rear seat where the gunman unloads his AK. The gunman gives the driver his attention.

DRIVER

Get this douche off the glass, Benji!

As framed from his shoulder, The ElectroNuke stops the gunman from firing on him by unsheathing a goldenrod handgun with two rods holding the otherwise separate halves of the barrels together. He pumps a round into the hand of the gunman, who drops his rifle despite no blood being drawn.

BLAM!

DRIVER

AUGH-!

The gunman clutches his wrist and stares down at his now-empty hand, which lacks any sign of trauma beyond a shiny silver peg in a dent beside his thumb.

DRIVER

Wha...?

The ElectroNuke shakes his pistol downwards, sliding the clip out halfway. This reveals bullets with unusual shell casings within the rectangular chamber. Each shell is rounded at the tip and made of half silver, half blued metal.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Y'know, it might not be a raging bull, but it ain't a pellet gun, either. Now, would you pull this piece 'a crap over already? It's like I'm crawling through an oil slick up here.

The driver barks another order behind him.

DRIVER

Aim for their front wheels, Josh!

There, a second gunman clutching a bloody red paint-splattered AK rifle leans his upper half out the opposite window. Shirtless aside from the black wraps around his wrists and right bicep, the gunman is burly, dark-skinned, and inked up all over with tribal tattoos, even across half of his bony face beneath a web of deep blond cornrows. He grits his rainbow grills and unloads into the police cruiser's front left tire.

TCH-TCH-TCH-TCH-TCH

A bullet-sized hole is ripped into the tire, which releases a straight jet of air.

PWOOOOOFT!

As the cruiser swerves and collides with a lamppost, the van takes a sharp right turn, its driver and passengers hollering.

ROBBERS

HA, HA! WOO!

DRIVER

You're outta road, jerkoffs!

A miniature insert shot depicts a chrome throwing knife with a black-wrapped hilt and diamond-shaped pommel, the latter component studded with a luminescent sea green gemstone built into the center. It impales the front right tire of the van and releases its own burst of air...

SH-WHITCH!

PWOOOOOFT!

...thus generating an exclamation point above The ElectroNuke's head in a circular inset panel. The van then skids sideways, tossing the hero off the hood. Once the van has stopped, all four robbers climb out and approach his body, including a fourth member wearing a black equivalent of the hero's mask with red X's over the eyes; a red and black-striped tee under his black denim vest and spiked shoulder pads; a shaved head with screws piercing the ears; and a dark gray lower face shield resembling the bottom half of a gasmask. Belly-down, The ElectroNuke pretends to struggle with lifting himself up with both arms.

ROBBER

**whistle* Let's face it, Mr. Chairman: you don't belong in that suit. You belong in a halfway house.*

They all gather around him in a circle only to freeze upon noticing his armor rumbling and waves of turquoise light pulsating around the surface like the skin of a cuttlefish.

VVVVVVVVVVVVVVVV...

ROBBER

Hell is he doing...?

An inset panel reveals a warning message on his wrist monitor: a red emergency triangle sign above matching text that reads "OVERSTIMULATED" over a glass-like periwinkle backdrop. Then, with his digits spread across the asphalt from an angle facing him, The ElectroNuke stares down the reader, hunches his back, and generates two outward shockwaves that propel all four robbers off their feet. The eyebrow-like curvature of his visor adds to the sense of menace he elicits in the moment.

VVV-SSHAAAAAAAAAAFFFTTT!!!

Back still hunched in a hip-level shot, he rises before his assailants can do the same...

THE ELECTRONUKE

Check your privilege there, fellas.

...and raises his fists in a view from the front. At this point, the Shazam-magnitude voltage from his shock gloves has begun to extend past his elbows. The same ring-shaped pulses run up his body all the while.

THE ELECTRONUKE

You won't like me when I'm all charged up.

While The ElectroNuke rises onto his knee, the driver in the doll mask gets on one knee and pulls a shanking blade from the straps on his black leather metalhead boot. In the first closeup of three, The ElectroNuke shatters the left cheek of the driver's mask into fragments with a jumping knee strike.

FWOOO-ACK!

The first gunman with the mohawk is surprised by a jumping roundhouse kick despite his assault rifle being raised.

SH-WHAAACK!

The ElectroNuke uses a voltage-packed fist to sock the burly second gunman across the face. This dislocates his jaw, shatters his teeth, and emits a streak of blood from his lips.

SHOOOLT!

The ElectroNuke manages to catch the leg of another, flip him back-first into the pavement, and drive a downward sock his way.

SHOOOFT!

An uppercut catches The ElectroNuke by surprise.

PWAAACK!

With The ElectroNuke on his knee, the robber presses the tip of a chrome desert eagle against his temple.

ROBBER

That voice changer just lost its effect. Guess that's what happens when you give a sped superpowers.

The ElectroNuke stares down the reader as he rubs his point of impact.

THE ELECTRONUKE

You're not the only reaper on **this** street.

A thick metallic carbon wire has just latched onto the robber's back with a three-appendage steel winch, which proceeds to yank him backwards.

FFWWIIIPP!!!

A segmented black iron metalhead boot with a rounded toe greets him with a high kick to the side of the neck.

FWOOOP!

The knee of the same leg crushes his skull against the cement on the right side of the foreground, which The ElectroNuke witnesses from the left side of the background. The flat steel plates shaped like the side paneling on a house's walls fold in on one another along the leg.

KRAAAAAAK!!!

Standing over The ElectroNuke (and, to that effect, the reader) is a short woman of average weight. Her jumpsuit consists of the same steel plates; the top half of her face is shielded by a smooth chrome helmet layered beneath a black screen-like visor that projects a vertical arrangement of two wide sea green crescents; her pale face is darkened by black cheek and lip makeup; a tattered dull brown cloak hangs off her back and shoulders, complete with a monk-like hood; a titanium sword with some bubbling sea green fluid streaming down the center – as well as a thin chain hanging off the diamond-shaped and green-jeweled pommel – is slung against her back in a tilted rectangular sheath; and a smörgåsbord of assorted energy firearms and miniature blades are clung to her belt. In each of the black holsters strapped to either of her thighs is a chrome pistol resembling an ordinary handgun with an integrated silencer and cylindrical energy canister on the side of the barrel above the grip. Meanwhile, hanging from every inch of her belt's outer edge are pairs of polished black Japanese tanto knives with the same diamond-shaped pommels. Frowning down at him, she reaches out with a black gauntlet weaponized with several-inch-long silver claws of varying lengths.

PHANTOM BLADE

I still don't like you getting whacked in the head.

The ElectroNuke lets her lift him up by the hand.

THE ELECTRONUKE

I wasn't scared, I knew you'd step in! Didn't... shit myself picturing that same boot crushing *my* head at all.

From the left side of the panel, she sets a claw down on his shoulder. Reserved, he angles his chest and chin down.

PHANTOM BLADE

Ellie? You don't have to pretend with me. The quips aren't fooling anyone.

THE ELECTRONUKE

sigh Just... trying to fit the archetypes.

Red ambulance lights flash all around the corner where the police cruiser made its collision. The ElectroNuke and Phantom Blade follow a pair of stretchers carrying the two officers, both of whom are hooked up to oxygen tanks and being wheeled away by paramedics.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Apologies for the accident, boys. Hope that wrestling match eased the pain.

He points one finger at himself and his thumb at Phantom Blade.

THE ELECTRONUKE

I'm The ElectroNuke. This here's Phantom Blade. We're from the Killer Watts.

As the officer rolls his eyes, The ElectroNuke rubs the back of his neck.

OFFICER #1

Well, fantastic. Same snowflake and street urchin the Republic thought were ready for office. For your sake, those nutjobs better not be dead.

THE ELECTRONUKE

I mean, they're... most likely not. The rounds I carry aren't lethal.

OFFICER #1

Fascinating. Tell you what: prove you're ready for office and we might be willing to chat once our backaches are over.

The two heroes are left to hobble away as the officers are lifted into the back of an ambulance. Whereas Phantom Blade stays tall, the

streaks on her visor turning with her eyes to face him, The ElectroNuke slumps forward.

THE ELECTRONUKE

sigh Why do we even **bother** with the flair?

PHANTOM BLADE

Don't mind him, Ellie. Probably on Ross's payroll. You know, I saw a winged skull and crossed rifles on the lemon back there. Asian symbol, too. Looked more Chinese than anything.

They both stop in front of each other, The ElectroNuke raising a palm to his helmet's oral region.

THE ELECTRONUKE

I wouldn't know. Clothes and body art seemed to match. I say we leave this one open for now. **yawn** Can we go home now? I'd like to sleep this guilt trip off.

PHANTOM BLADE

Why would **I** stop you? Guess I'll see you back home.

The ElectroNuke jabs his index fingers at the ground, twisting his arms over each other all the while. Meanwhile, she turns her head away out of disinterest.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Soooooo, we're going home **separately?** I mean, it's not like I'm... you know... the jealous type. I'd never suspect **you** of anything, it just sounds impractic-

PHANTOM BLADE

I'm outta here.

She uses her grappling hook to zip up and out of the panel. The ElectroNuke watches this happen helplessly.

PPP-TEEEWWW!

In an awkward flat shot, he's left to shrug both arms.

THE ELECTRONUKE

See you at the halfway house.

On the left half of the panel, the silhouettes of both heroes chase each other between the red and magenta haze from the neon building signs along a staircase-like stretch of rooftops – right towards a vertical rectangular tower of dark blue glass panels and a white concrete exoskeleton in the far distance. All the while, they emit their own separate light trails: cyan trails from The ElectroNuke's rocket ducts and sea green trails from Phantom Blade's sword. With the start of the next scene, a wide glass window makes up the west wall of an elegant bedroom with minimal furniture and no TV – just a thick red cover over a rounded mattress and pillows on a bed frame, two polished dark oak end tables, and two wide dressers of the same polished wood against the wall across from the bed. The whole room is left in a deep navy darkness, including the woman with pale skin and black hair asleep on the opposite side from the window, covered in blankets and sheets from her feet to her ears. From the view outside, it's the middle of the night, and the miles of sleek glass towers surrounding the bedroom strike the clouds above, fading away towards the top. Like the bedroom, a dim navy has overtaken the district.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

The penthouse of the Azure Building, the ElectroNuke Republic's ninety-story international headquarters. One hour later.

The scene switches to a bathroom in equally pleasant condition, but a couple of dim gold lights are on, and a man centered in the panel hunches his chest over the sink embedded in a cream granite countertop. His pajamas consist of a gray tee and black boxers.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Thank god my suit's insulated. Most nights, I take the role of a sapphire cactus. Light as a sapling. Built like an oak. Engineered to trap moisture. Come daylight, though?

Together in one panel, his bruised hands violently wash each other; at the same time, an inset panel provides a closeup of his greenish-gray iris and dilated pupil.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

My skin is **sandpaper**. It flakes, it cracks, it scratches your fingers... the rot above has traveled down the trunk. I've lived without my old pleasantries longer than I had them.

The first full view of him from head to hip displays his heavy bags and subtle pink rings under and around his eye sockets. He's fit but lanky, his skin is a fair beige, and his black bangs stick out and

hang far in front of his forehead. Underneath them is a boyish, clean-shaven face with glassy grayish-green eyes and a round nose. His eyes bulge, his nose is busted, and his brows are bent in an insecure manner.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

A fresh start was my last hope standing...

He stumbles back in terror as life is breathed into the water filling the sink, which bends and rises into an increasingly humanoid form between panels. A profile aligns his face with the one in front of him, which fades upwards into a twin of himself from the waist up like a genie. He wears black on top of gray – a hoodie and tee, respectively – and the hair above his thick white glasses is piled even heavier than that of his corporeal self. Even more torqued is his slack posture and smug leer, the contrast of which is more than evident.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

...and even *that* was on crutches.

TEENAGE ELIAS

Good day's work, Mr. Chairman. What loopholes got you *that* title?

Elias looks down at his hands as he rubs them together like a random cold snap had just kicked in.

ELIAS

I don't know, probably all of them.

TEENAGE ELIAS

You're acting like you don't remember me.

ELIAS

No, I do, I just don't like what I see.

The perspective now faces the younger reflection as he taunts the current Elias.

TEENAGE ELIAS

scoff Chairman of self-pity himself. You're an original, aren't you?

ELIAS

Yeah. What has that got to do with anything?

TEENAGE ELIAS

You belong to man's oldest genetic breed. That gives you privilege. Sure as hell aren't marginalized like your girl out there.

The reflection turns his head left with a raised brow and puckered lips.

TEENAGE ELIAS

whistle You **are** open-minded. I like my Asian girls cuter. Better rack, if possible.

This hits a raw nerve with Elias, who jerks his head up with resentment.

ELIAS

Leave her out of this.

TEENAGE ELIAS

Why **are** you washing yourself? Is there blood in your eye, or are you stalling from getting into bed with her? Hm? What's going on there?

Elias bats his head away but maintains his bitterness.

TEENAGE ELIAS

Look. New girl ain't terrible, but she's no Maddie, is she? 'Member her?

His reflection condescendingly smiles, shuts his eyes, and raises his clasped hands to his cheek.

TEENAGE ELIAS

inhale Oh, that crisp autumn after-school walk... wasn't that something? Felt like she'd put a ring on it when she was only sharing her info...

In a profile, he lowers his hands and opens his eyes on the right side of the panel. Elias stares him down from the left.

TEENAGE ELIAS

exhale ...and then, her man flattened your nose. No wonder you quit love for so long.

ELIAS

She opened up to me when no one else would.

TEENAGE ELIAS

And then, she let you go. You were never gonna get outta Delaware without me. No, you **needed** the invitation.

The scene switches to a bustling high school corridor. Just beside two lovers making out – a slender valley girl with a blonde updo and pale blue jeans and a fit sports nut in a white and red jersey and gold crew cut – is Elias at his locker, somewhere between the ages of his reflection and his modern-day self. As shown in a profile from his right, he wears his reflection's white hipster glasses, as well as a gray hoodie and dark blue jeans but the lack of a black beanie. Dark bags hang under his disturbed eyes, over which his thick brows furrow his phone screen in front of him. The phone screen is revealed from his perspective to be displaying an email as follows:

Sender: Angel Republic Administrative Council admin@angelrepublic.gov
Subject: Trial invitation

Dear Mr. Elias Murphy,

This is a most urgent time for the whole of the Angel Republic, as teenagers and young adults just like you may define the future of this alliance as we know it. You, along with millions of others across the country, will be allowed registration for Dr. Alan Hawthorne PhD's Humanitarian Trials, should you be willing to fly to Los Angeles, California and take part in age-specific humanitarian services this year.

Your services to us would be considered with the utmost appreciation, as the most persistent and professional of you will be set to take the office of chairman after Dr. Hawthorne's passing. You may stay in your home state to finish your education first if necessary.

Warm regards,

The Angel "ElectroNuke" Republic Administrative Council.

NARRATOR (DARK BLUE BOX)

Fancy that: the same alliance the United Nations was integrated into, asking **you** to contribute. Not a bad joke in hindsight. 'Course, let's not pretend rural Delaware was offering much of **anything**. Not like **they** were.

At around noon on a cloudless day – the sky is a borderline monochromatic blue backdrop – an aerial view captures a helicopter

descending between the Hall of Records and Law Library in the Civic Center in Los Angeles. It's painted mostly black except for The ElectroNuke's chest logo printed on each side of the main body and beneath the tail rotor. The landing zone is a white concrete path leading directly to the front steps of L.A. City Hall on the other side of the Gloria Molina Playground, as centered in the panel. Palms, spiked ferns, and fluffy green shrubs populate every conceivable corner.

NARRATOR (DARK BLUE BOX)

Civic Center, Los Angeles, CA. 11:53 AM, in the year 5017. Named the city of the future when it needed that the most. More than San Francisco.

You had three years to follow your tasks. By the look of it? Hawthorne had a month or two left in him.

The scene sets its sights on an old man hobbling out and away from the chopper. His face and head are covered in wrinkles and liver spots, his eyes are red and sickly, and he can only move with the help of a walker. He wears a navy three-piece suit and a neon yellow satin tie, and his dress shirt beneath matches his balding white hair and trimmed mustache, like a cross between Albert Einstein and Vladimir Lenin. Walking beside him and flipping through a paper-thin electronic tablet is a womanly figure with rough, wrinkly dull brown skin that appears to be imperfectly molded out of clay. Her gray hair with a receded hairline hangs down her back in thick, tendril-like strands, and her eyes are all-black save for white irises with a subtle glow. Her bony figure is dressed up in a dull navy suit jacket and long pencil skirt.

ELEANORA

...and then, of course, you have a twelve-percent drop in steel and concrete usage this month. Iron's still growing obsolete; meanwhile, state parks and roof gardens will account for a quarter of all urban projects.

HAWTHORNE

Nowhere but up, Eleanora. Nowhere but up. Find a middle ground for the deregulation standards our friends on the right requested. I'll see bipartisanship win out if it kills me... and it probably will.

The perspective faces Eleanora's back on the left side of the panel as Hawthorne turns his head towards her on the right. In front of them lies a team of six teenagers sitting in the middle of a short white tile staircase at the bottom of a white concrete path, centered in the

panel. There are three boys and three girls, but out of them all, three in particular stand out: one is a blonde girl with oversized dark blue eyes and an inch-long lump for a nose, as well as thick black-rimmed glasses, dark eye and lip makeup, and a baggy gray sweatshirt. There also stands a seemingly robotic boy with metallic yellow skin and a polygonal face, who wears a white dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a black and white pinstripe suit vest, light blue jeans, and a black fedora. His eyes are black voids save for glowing cyan discs for irises and darker cyan pupils, the former of which are studded with a ring of dot-like "servos." They're accompanied by the same iteration of teenage Elias with the same white glasses, as well as a red t-shirt themed with a facially scarred biker on a dark red Harley with a red-eyed chrome skull for a front fender. Behind the biker is a minimalist symbol depicting a red fist on fire. Elias babbles away while the machina boy tries his damndest to follow along, and the blonde girl seems to simply not want to be there.

ELEANORA

Should I go on?

HAWTHORNE

Later. I want to hear from our participants.

The teens' heads turn to face Hawthorne upon his arrival.

NARRATOR (DARK BLUE BOX)

Lord knows you got lucky running into a machina like Rich. His breed is revered for their class and efficiency, and lord, did he **ever** fit the bill?

HAWTHORNE

Upholding our values, friends?

RICHARD

Matter of fact, sir, we're analyzing these neighborhoods between L.A. and Oxnard. Homeless shelters are scarce over there, but we just contacted the agents stationed nearby. They're in lower demand than ever.

HAWTHORNE

That demonstrates initiative, errr...

The same boy smirks and tips his hat. At the same time, Elias crosses his hands behind his back and maintains a light smile.

RICHARD

Richard Cyrus, sir.

ELIAS

Elias Murphy. We'll be collecting data from agents in Burbank tomorrow.

The blonde girl's only willing to offer a sideways glance. Her voice and facial expression are equally monotone.

HAWTHORNE

Then, I encourage you to do so. **Your** name, miss?

MISSY

Missy Rosebud. If you're gonna laugh, get it over with.

HAWTHORNE

Sweet name.

As Hawthorne questions them further with a fist to his lips, Elias gesticulates with his open left hand in the direction of L.A. City Hall to the east.

HAWTHORNE

Will you, errr... **ahem**... be expanding **past** California?

ELIAS

Yes, sir, we'll be moving eastward in the coming weeks. Three of us to Nevada and Utah, three of us to Arizona and New Mexico. We'll follow up with agents up north, but we're set on curbing inflation toward the east. We can cover greater distance that way.

HAWTHORNE

I like the way you think. If you wish to tell your stories, the administrative council is hosting a private conference each week.

RICHARD

You know... we might just take you up on that, sir.

The teens continue their work in the background while Hawthorne faces the reader, purses his lips, and pinch-folds an unspecified document in half. Elias is then centered in a scene flooded by the golden evening sun outside. His surroundings and the view behind the glass in front of him could easily be part of his home in the modern day based

on the skyline beyond, and beside him is a wheelchair that barely conceals a white hairline receding past liver spots.

HAWTHORNE

You know, you wouldn't just be watching the world through **glass**, Eli. This office doesn't close you in, it opens you up. To people, to mindsets, to... what's deserving of change in this world.

ELIAS

Then, why do you want **me** for it?

Now in khakis and a clean white leather jacket, Elias stuffs his hands into his pockets in front of the cloudless baby blue sky and gazes off to the west, his back facing the reader. The glass citadels centered in the distance include the 777 Tower and the U.S. Bank Tower, but the overall skyline stretches on at megatall heights for distances closer to Shanghai or Hong Kong than the thin real-world L.A. skyline. It even continues all the way past Santa Monica toward the east. Elias is framed off to the right, thought bubbles float off to the left, and the straight flat shot crops out the roofs beneath him other than a few clean white houses comparable to Mexican pueblos.

HAWTHORNE (THOUGHT)

Because you're stronger than you give yourself credit for. Regrets, Eli, they're the Achilles' heels of a successful life. Lord knows I've had my **own** to let go.

Elias is framed from behind the shoulder up. His solemn eyes just pass the reader when Richard speaks up out of frame.

RICHARD

Al's been stuck on you, hasn't he?

The view's aimed up at them from the brim of the roof, revealing the blue tee under Elias's jacket to be branded with The ElectroNuke's chest logo; Richard lights up a copper pipe with a polished silver lighter.

NARRATOR (DARK BLUE BOX)

On Figueroa Terrace at 1:45 PM the same year.

ELIAS

This is coming from the first nineteen-year-old to smoke from a pipe.

RICHARD

I'm an old soul, what can I say? 'Course, you plan on telling **him**, but... answer this for me. What **really** brought you here?

Mid-exhale, he swivels further in Elias's direction with a doubtful glimmer in his eye.

RICHARD

'Cause, uh... if you ask me... I don't buy that it was just out of boredom.

ELIAS

That's... quite the foresight, Rich.

RICHARD

Well, you can't become an economist without **foresight**, Eli. You got to know a trend when you see one.

ELIAS

Yeah, tell that to Wall Street in '29.

RICHARD

Ha!

Elias gets his own closeup as he wrings his fingers and Richard faces the skyline.

ELIAS

Well... anyway, I'm sure it showed, but... I-I'm on the spectrum. **High** on it, but... you know which one I'm talking about.

RICHARD

Sure. That tracks.

Elias, now in an unbranded tee and cargo shorts, observes the rest of the hill beneath him from the great oak to the far left. It breaks off into a sea of mansion roofs, tree-dotted hills, and the early evening sun.

ELIAS

I didn't **always** live in Delaware. Moved out there from Ohio. My old town had it all. Farms, woods... small parks, shopping malls... my neighborhood was rolling hills and mansions. I'd chase the sunsets past nightfall, pretending I was after tax dodgers or something.

The same panel is mirrored, but Elias has the hood of his sweatshirt up, the oak is now a pine on the far right, and the road winds around a left turn through the dense mist, rain, and pines.

ELIAS

Then... one day, it was just... **trees**. Trees, McMansions, and liquor stores. Just that. Think about it, mile after mile. Step outside the neighborhood at night and the whole world goes black, right in front of you. Anyhow, my anger issues got worse, and... after my parents split, they saw daggers in my eyes. Their blood was on 'em.

RICHARD

Was it, though?

ELIAS

Might as well have been. They sent me off to this, uh... "institute" called Shadowland, and... **scoff** ...let's not start down **that** road. I **tried** to move on, but... no one sticks around anymore. No one has the time.

Both parties aim their gazes first, albeit with pursed lips from Richard and sorrowful reflection from Elias.

ELIAS

You know, I never really felt like... someone born and raised on this planet. Never thought like one, never talked like one. Never really **learned** like one. The constant loss of relationships just... **sigh** ...it burns you out. It really burns you out. So much so, you get comfortable with it. You're not sure you even **want** a friend.

RICHARD

sigh I would imagine.

ELIAS

I just had to get out of there, I just... I had to break the cycle. Maybe, someday, I'll... get to feel like a **hero** instead of... feeling like a **villain** all the time. Hope you can... at least **somewhat** find a kernel in there.

As seen from behind them, Richard points to himself while leaning against the railing.

RICHARD

You know, I... came down from Sacramento with one dream in mind: becoming the chairman's financial advisor. Yeah. At age nineteen.

Wrap your head around **that**. I might walk the walk, but that hasn't impressed my folks, and it sure hasn't done my social life favors. I'm lost among the worst bad apples my field can spawn.

With the skyline filling the left half of the panel, Richard swivels around to face Eli and point his way.

RICHARD

You're not one of 'em, Eli. Whoever you used to be, you still came here. No point dwelling on how you fell off the bike once you're on it again.

ELIAS

sigh You sure make it easier to believe that way.

RICHARD

Yeah, well... I hope you **do** believe it.

NARRATOR (DARK BLUE BOX)

Somber as Al's death was, you took office with his blessing. Then, when Eleanora Smit fell like a domino? You had your vice chairman right in front of you. Guess you found your paradise after all.

We return to modern-day Elias in his pajamas and sneering at the reflection in front of him.

ELIAS

What are you trying to tell me?

TEENAGE ELIAS

Well, answer **this** for me: what ever happened to your approval ratings?

Elias swaps his sneer out for uncertainty.

ELIAS

They've seen a hike, haven't they?

TEENAGE ELIAS

Yeah, by what, a person per year? They say you were never emotionally prepared for office. That's why the recession hit post-inauguration. That's why the cop gave you shit back there.

In a profile, the reflection relaxes his bent arm over the counter and leans in closer to Elias from the right side. Elias lurches back with discomfort in his eye on the left.

TEENAGE ELIAS

Trust your wingman here. Don't bother running from your shadow. The ghost train's close to the station. Its passengers wanna see you.

A female voice to Elias's right grabs his attention. The water in the sink has flattened back to normal.

YOKO

Ellie?

He steps out of the bathroom and into the bedroom through a door to the east, where the black-haired girl now sits up in her jade silk nightie, the light on her end table having brightened up the room with an ice-white glow. Like Missy, her eyes are pale blue and abnormally large which, along with her speck of a nose, indicates her as a member of a separate breed from Elias's. Her wide, pronounced lips lack Phantom Blade's dark lipstick, and beneath a single boomerang-curved strand of hair hanging over her forehead are thin, red-framed glasses. Under those, her brows are furrowed in confusion.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Chief of Staff Yoko Teshima. She's an expressionist, the most objectified breed next to machinas. Given her old life, it's a miracle she hasn't suffered **more**.

YOKO

Shouldn't you be asleep right now?

Elias rubs his forearms like a draft had just come in as he hunches his back and wanders toward the opposite side of the bed.

ELIAS

What? I mean, no, I won't be in the office too long. It's just...
sigh ...I don't know what to do with this text.

YOKO

Who's the sender?

Elias sits on his bedside with one hand on his phone and the other propping his chin up, the latter elbow pressed against his thigh. He

slumps his back and sighs while Yoko listens to his left, her muscular legs slung over the side next to his.

ELIAS

Brock Castilla. Same Brock from Shadowland. Don't know how a kid who punched so many holes in walls had a hand left to use. First couple years, we got along okay... and then, the tough guys took him in.

YOKO

And by "tough," you mean, "been to prison."

ELIAS

Some more than once. He lives in L.A. now. Wants to meet in person.

With the perspective tilted mildly from Elias's left, he hangs his head low while Yoko stays brutally honest with him, her fist supporting her chin.

ELIAS

Do you ever talk to yourself?

YOKO

That's on my daily agenda, Ellie.

ELIAS

No, to the person you **used** to be. 'Cause I do. He's **incessant**.

Now viewed from Elias's right, he keeps his head hanging low, all while pinching the bridge of his nose.

ELIAS

Why make the time for me?

YOKO

I don't have to say it for you.

ELIAS

But think of all the others who could've picked you off the street.

YOKO

Yeah. I do. The **cops** could've done it. Where do you think I'd be if they had?

Yoko presses her hand on Elias's left cheek and pulls his head away, aiming his face at hers.

YOKO

Ellie. Look at me. Stop hypothesizing. **You** did it. And I'm **glad** it was you.

Yoko kisses Elias square on the lips without removing her hand. In a view from beside Yoko's cheek, Elias does as he's told and instead makes a hard decision, even through his uncertainty. This visibly pleases her.

ELIAS

You know, I, uh... I think I **will** text him back. We could spend the **week** catching up if we wanted to.

YOKO

You might be right. Now... get your ass to sleep, Over-Analyzer. It's past midnight.

The room has gone dark once again, and the perspective has shifted to the other side of the bed where Yoko now sleeps. It faces Elias's back as he sits up and gazes out the window, the building lights shimmering behind the glass. Then, in front of a bluer and clearer sky than even that seen in the Civic Center flashback, the view shifts down to street level in a similar district to 7th Street, where most of the towers are connected by crowded elevated catwalks. The majority of these towers, more and more of which match the previous modernist styles, are spacious enough to form complex shopping malls and tropical vegetation-riddled public parks suspended hundreds of feet and tens of stories above ground level while topped off with glass and white marble canopies. Drooping from each layer of the white modernist cakes are bundles upon bundles of vines and ivies, which have gone from being bathed in navy shadow to blossoming with color thanks to the cranked-up saturation. Meanwhile, the surface of each ledge and story is capped off with fresh-mowed green. Elias is pictured from behind on the left side, wearing a navy suit with a neon yellow tie – the same previously worn by Al – and carrying a black briefcase as the traffic rushes in front of him, grassy stretches supporting thick green oaks along the sloping sidewalks on either side. He's texting Brock, each message enlarged and displayed in the air beside him: his in blue and Brock's in white.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

I had the fortune of working in the city at noon the next day without the feeling of my stomach eating itself. Shame it had to get brewing again. It always does.

Brock

Wanna meet up for coffee this pm

Elias

Oh. I have a video call with Israel, but sure. When were you thinking?

Brock

Im actually on my way there so maybe in an hour???

Elias

That soon? Wow. I'm free right now, but not for long.

Brock

Cool see you at 12 or so

Once again, the scene switches, this time to Elias inside a stainless steel hallway, the rush of traffic just outside. To the right of a green ATM machine and rectangular LED billboard are two cylindrical glass elevators like drop-off tubes on beverage vending machines. Elias steps up and taps the up arrow button beside the leftmost door, swiveling it open and further hammering in the analogy. The billboard showcases the sloping space between two vibrant green hills under a blue sky, matching the Windows XP "Bliss" background. Elias is depicted as wandering between them and away from the viewer in his current suit, both hands stuffed in his pockets. Miles ahead of him is a clean white cityscape, and water bubbles fill the air overhead alongside text in a thin white font reading...

The future has boundless promise.

We never break ours.

Welcome to the Republic.

He stops passing by shops, restaurants, and patches of rich greenery like ferns and ivies on an elevated shopping center and enters a small but clean and modern coffee shop. The logo above the front entrance consists of a pitch-black coffee mug with rippling waves of matching coffee splashing out. The 3D title in thin italicized cursive lettering, "Black Flash Espresso," is scarlet in color and separates the logo and the entrance. He steps inside the cozy interior with cream and brown checkerboard floors when, behind all the black-cushioned booths and bar stools, he hears a vaguely familiar voice.

BROCK

Pssst! Eli!

With a welcoming grin, Elias approaches a man at his booth in the far left corner. Said man is thinner than Elias and boasts a darker skin tone, uneven stubble, and rectangular thin-framed glasses. He's sporting a black crew cut, and dark blue tribal tattoos stretch from his neck and down under his wrinkled red t-shirt and gray zip-up hoodie.

ELIAS

Have you ever even changed your **shirt** since Shadowland?

Both parties light up as they shake hands.

ELIAS

Don't **you** look well?

BROCK

Don't look half bad yourself, man!

Doubtful, Elias shrugs his left shoulder.

ELIAS

Eh... better than can be expected.

They take a seat across from each other.

ELIAS

So... what brought you here?

BROCK

Same as you, man. Just... got sick 'a the podunk life, y'know. I know Donny's the vice chairman 'a Richmond now. Don't tell me you saw **that** comin'.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Not sure how I feel about Ross Harkin's Richmond Republic being our right-wing equals, but it is a free world. As for VP Denver, he managed to make a fresher hell out of Shadowland for me, so I guess there was more to his choice to fly over than his time on Wall Street — what little info exists on that.

Elias spreads a bent arm over the table in front of him, his smile having faded.

ELIAS

sigh I'm aware. Still acts like a kid, but at least he's consistent.

BROCK

Just spoke with him for the first time in ages. Said I should enlist in Richmond's army. I mean... we all need our asses kicked sometimes, y'know?

Elias probes Brock, one brow raised in confusion.

ELIAS

'Kay, well... what's wrong with **our** army?

BROCK

scoff No offense, man, but... I **was** tighter with him, you know that. 'Sides, let's not pretend the States wouldn't be a Richmond ally if it weren't for the **last** chairman. Some say he had a... "leftist agenda," apparently.

With his eyes shut and his elbow pressed against the table, Elias spreads his fingers along the side of his face.

ELIAS

groan So, nothing mattered more to Al than bipartisanship, and they call him anti-conservative. I was starting to miss persecution complexes.

Elias gesticulates his hand forward, his tone now sharp. Brock leans back with his arm spread over the back of his seat.

ELIAS

For God's sake, Brock, have you **heard** what Donny's said about Yoko and I? Or, I don't know, how **spineless** Ross has been with him given the fact? There'd be no bigger smack in the face to Al's legacy than letting them take over America!

BROCK

chuckle Hawthorne's been dust for, like, nine years, man. You still care what he had to say?

ELIAS

He founded the **Republic**, Brock! The republic **I'm** in charge of!

BROCK

And his impact? What'd he do that the rest 'a the world couldn't do on its own?

As Elias answers with a noticeable attitude, he counts down his examples finger by finger.

ELIAS

Well, let's break 'em all down, shall we? You have his world-saving CO² regulations; he weeded out violations of trust like MK Ultra, Y2K, and Watergate before they got off the ground; the country's life expectancy would've barely reached a hundred; diplomacy wouldn't have been chosen over genocide in Rwanda; he worked with JFK to keep the Soviets from lending an electronuclear arsenal to Cuba; should I go on?!

BROCK

But he couldn't live to see the recession bring new meaning to "Murphy's Law", could he?

A now-deflated Elias slumps against the back of his seat, his eyes aimed down at his lap.

ELIAS

sigh I knew this was a mistake.

Once he's back on his feet, Elias rubs his eyes with one hand and lifts up his briefcase with the other. Brock shrugs both arms in displeasure.

BROCK

I'm just roastin' you here! You know how it is!

ELIAS

Yeah, no. That's not a **roast**, Brock. It's proof the same bigot you were pressured to follow still has you by the throat. You haven't changed. Not you and **certainly** not him.

BROCK

Shit, all I said was-

ELIAS

No. Just... just stop, okay?

Elias looks up from his watch as he prepares to shuffle out.

ELIAS

I've got places to be. Good luck with your favorite manchild.

As Elias storms off, Brock slouches back down in his booth, pulls out his phone, and starts a call.

BROCK

Yeah, hey. You were right about him. Now, it's **your** call.

End scene.

In The ElectroNuke's sunbathed closeup, he's currently answering a call through his helmet, two of his fingers pressed against the side.

RICHARD

Where are you at now?

THE ELECTRONUKE

Uhhhhhh...

The ElectroNuke clutches a piña colada with a slice of lime on the edge and dangles both legs off a cliff overlooking the Caribbean Sea. The beach is at least a hundred feet down, and nested between the tropical brush behind him are small Mayan pillars, pyramids, and other structures.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

The Tulum coastline in the Yucatán, 4:42 PM a day later.

THE ELECTRONUKE

...looking into, uh... tax fraud. In Dubai. Why do you ask?

Just after he and Richard stiffen up in near-unison...

RICHARD

Right... 'bout that... see, you're gonna have to meet me back in Long Beach, near the Queen Mary. No weapons, please.

...the call meets an abrupt end.

BLIP!

With his glass left to tumble off the edge of the cliff in the foreground, The ElectroNuke darts off toward the southwest in the background, the cyan light trailing off from his rocket ducts.

SHLOOOOOOOOOO...

End scene.

Richard is back on the phone with The ElectroNuke, now missing his black suit jacket and exposing the gray v-neck sweater underneath. His fedora is tilted lazily, on the verge of falling off his head, and bashed into his left temple is a deep black bruise like a burn mark. He's facing the Pacific Ocean on a small wooden pier branching off from the harbor, although not much of his surroundings populate this closeup aside from stacks of multicolored shipping containers and gargantuan cargo ships in the distance. He aims his head toward the upper right corner of the panel.

RICHARD

Okay, so, we're across from... from the, uh... across from the freeway and Long Beach Power, by the West Basin.

THE ELECTRONUKE (COMMS)

Alright, I'm passing the plant.

The view switches to The ElectroNuke touching down with the long rows of shipping containers and loading cranes littered across the harbor behind him. He does so on the same pier where Richard rests on his knees with his hands behind his head and Brock stands beside him with the sights of his handgun locked on him.

RICHARD

Evening, Eli! Weren't lying about the folks at Shadowland, were you?

BROCK

This ain't your time to talk, three-piece!

Brock's back has turned on The ElectroNuke so he can face the water with both arms stretched out to his sides.

BROCK

Nice night, ain't it, Eli? The **breeze**, man! The walks I've taken out here... no wonder you came all this way!

With due caution, The ElectroNuke steps forward and reaches out with an open hand.

THE ELECTRONUKE

You can... you can set the gun down, Brock. No need to drag **him** in-

BROCK

Oh, no no no no no no. First off, throw away your guns.

The ElectroNuke slips his pistols out of his holsters and tosses them to either side without breaking eye contact.

BROCK

Now, get that helmet off. I wanna see you as you are, you got me?

In an extreme closeup, The ElectroNuke smacks a button on the side of his neck.

THE ELECTRONUKE

I got you.

FWAP!

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

The question they keep on asking. "Why even **wear** a mask?" It's for the subversion of who lies beneath. He's not in a halfway house. He's not in a psych ward. He breathes the same air as the other heroes... and it's time they get used to it.

An extreme closeup of his neck displays a pair of winch-like clasps detaching themselves from his helmet and folding back onto the neck piece of his suit. Meanwhile, he sets his hands on either side of the headpiece.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Maybe, Yoko's right, though. Maybe, I **am** just masking... far more than is worth...

WEEEEEEEEEE... CLITCH!

He lifts his helmet from the neck piece to reveal his pale head and frizzled hair underneath.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

...but at least I'm not hiding from the world anymore.

ELIAS

Brock. What's going on?

Elias and Brock stand across from each other: the former on the far left and Brock on the far right.

BROCK

Donny ain't too happy with you lately. Jealous as **all** the boys back home.

ELIAS

Go on.

BROCK

Figured if **anyone** can make you leave the States open... might as well be one of us. If I do it, if I enlist... he said he'll up my service payment, startin' in the first three weeks. Best offer **I've** gotten in a while.

For the first time, the full extent of Brock's defeat is captured, framed from the chest up.

BROCK

I tried to follow you, Eli. I don't know how you did it. Most 'a Shadowland, I could handle, but... man. We were lucky to be guys there, weren't we? Given what we saw, I can't even hold **down** a girl lately. What does that tell you?

Elias shows some rare determination in a view facing him from the chest up, like a reverse angle of the last panel.

ELIAS

You're not alone in that. You might not know it, but inside, I'm **still** running.

BROCK

Naw! For real?! Livin' the way you do?! Naw, see, I don't think you are.

ELIAS

Oh, no, I **am**, and don't you tell me otherwise. I want to help you, Brock, but my republic's on the line here. You know they're the only reason I'm living this way. Besides... if it's no use running... I suggest you quit the marathon. It's all **I** can do.

Brock stands his ground and keeps Richard at gunpoint.

BROCK

Well... like it or not, your golden boy's life is still in my hands here, so... y'know. Think carefully.

Richard commences a distraction with a carefree smirk.

RICHARD

Say, pal... you ever watch the, uh... bizarre action series Manpuncher?

BROCK

Man-who?

RICHARD

Manpuncher? Pyrotechnician? Gets scarred by a lava lamp? Becomes a mad biker anarchist? Blows up his foes with every punch? It's silly schlock, but it's got a surprising amount of heart.

BROCK

You're tryin' to distract me, aren't you?

RICHARD

'Course not! You just... look like a TV guy. Nice night to chat about it.

Richard keeps his cool, but Brock grows agitated. With his back to the reader in the left side of the foreground, Elias slips his helmet back on while the gunman's distracted.

BROCK

Now ain't the time for conversation.

RICHARD

Now, the heart of the show? That's the bond with him and his sidekick, Joey Blanket. He makes him stand up for himself, they get back at their state's politicians, and best of all? **Plenty** of homoeroticism in the later seasons.

BROCK

QUIT THROWIN' ME OFF! THIS THING IS LOADED, MOTHER—

Richard's bent left elbow strikes Brock in the gut, forcing him to lean inward.

BROCK
OOOF!

Elias grabs Brock's wrist with one hand and wraps the other around the pistol's slide. The two shots fired strike his visor but fail to penetrate it.

BLAM! BLAM!

Brock stomp-kicks The ElectroNuke in the gut, whipping the pistol out of both their grips and over the edge.

SH-WHOOOCK!

The ElectroNuke bellyflops on the ground with most of his upper body leaned over the water. This way, he catches the pistol by the grip before its splashdown can occur.

FWIP!

Elias sits up with one hand against the pavement and takes aim at Brock with his own pistol, thus forcing him to accept defeat and raise both his hands.

BROCK

chuckle You always **were** hard to keep down. If I offer somethin', will that keep you from cappin' me?

With both opponents now standing up, The ElectroNuke keeps a wary eyebrow raised.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Try me.

BROCK

The robbery you stopped a couple nights ago? That bank they robbed? That was H.R. MacDougal. Biggest on 7th Street. Few of 'em took a second truck you never stopped.

THE ELECTRONUKE

Yeah? Go on, shoot.

In an extreme closeup, the left corner of Brock's mouth lifts up.

BROCK

Thought you'd never ask.

In a profile from The ElectroNuke's left, Brock reaches into his back pocket, prompting a shot through the chest.

BLAM!

Instead, all Brock pulls out in the closer profile that follows is some miniature stainless steel drill resembling a metal old-school pencil sharpener.

BROCK

sputter Here. They'd all be... **grunt** ...comin' after my ass anyhow.

The magic 8 ball-sized drill gets its own extreme closeup from The ElectroNuke's perspective.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

A Locke & Keys steelwork micro-drill. Nearly a thousand dollars. Released a year-and-a-half ago. Perfect for unsealing a bank safe.

BROCK

'Least I'm finally outta the race, huh?

In another profile, The ElectroNuke looks back up to find Brock toppling over backwards. From above and behind them, The ElectroNuke and Richard stop in front of the balcony to spot Brock face-up in the water, dying the surface red.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

To think he almost earned his medal.

Just past Elias's ear, the scene opens with him in his white jacket and both his hands clutching a photo in its scalloped pyrite frame, the grain implying it was taken in the dark. It displays a chain of gray-paneled McMansions with black gable roofs, but the one at the end of the straight cobblestone driveway holds a matching steeple over a rusting belltower. Most of the setting's buried beneath the layers of fog that match the overcast sky, including the decaying tree skeletons scattered about and forming a wooden enclosure out back. As his eyes pierce the setting, a voice emanates from behind him.

YOKO

I don't know why you keep that with you.

The high-angle shot reveals his saddened contemplative gaze, as well as the khakis and blue ElectroNuke seal tee beneath his jacket. Meanwhile, Yoko sets a hand on his shoulder. Their suite is spacious, but it's no Trump Tower. Making up the furniture in the living room are blue-and-white-cushioned folding chairs and sofas, well above which a white ceiling fan spins from the height of the sizable headroom. Their kitchen is more of a kitchenette, with the granite countertops and cabinets forming a small ring just to the left of the front entrance, three navy barstools lining the island counter. On a short foundation in front of that is the glass dining table, lined with a black border, matching legs, and ice-white-cushioned chairs. While there are bronze funnel ceiling lights suspended over the dining room, kitchenette, and front entrance, nearly the entire wall to the north of the living and dining rooms is one huge window, letting in the soft glow of natural light.

YOKO

You're not there anymore.

Now, the two are focused on in a view positioned at the edge of the picture frame in Elias's hands. In contrast with her, he musters a weak smile.

ELIAS

Hm. A part of me is. This... aura it carries, though... it's kind of pretty in a way.

YOKO

I'd rather not expose myself to it. Neither should you.

The wide following panel switches the perspective to Elias's teenage self back when he received the invitation, or rather him scurrying down an uneven cobblestone path which cuts straight between two rows of dead trees hanging in toward each other. A familiar mist fills the space between their branches and the fallen autumn leaves, which are scattered by both his soles and those of a shorter child he's taken by the hand. At this point, both teens are ash figures scratched into the page by hand. The next time we see them, it becomes clear that the shorter boy is also incredibly slender, with traces of mild facial hair under his black baseball cap. He and Elias stop to bend over and catch their breaths.

ELIAS

pant *pant* Alright, well... *pant* ...let's hope we've made some tracks. *pant* I reckon we should split up.

TOMMY

pant *pant* So, you never thought to... *pant* *pant* ...give me a second thought 'til now?

Elias straightens his posture...

ELIAS

pant Look... Tommy... most of my time here, I've not been in a good place... but I'm better now. If one aspie here takes a beating... *pant* ...it's better me than you.

...before smiling warmly in a profile with a hand on Tommy's shoulder.

ELIAS

Go on. If they catch up, I'll keep 'em off you. Alright?

With a smack to his upper back, Tommy takes off down the trail.

ELIAS

Don't come around here again. **GO ON!**

In the panel after, a boisterous voice prompts Elias to look over his shoulder from behind.

DONNY

All yers, Brock.

Filling the space between Elias and the rest of the path is a stout boy with the cheeks of a chipmunk and the gray tracksuit of a gopnik. An indigo tee lies beneath his zipped-up hoodie, and between him and a creepily Matt Gaetz-looking jock with torn jeans and a bruised lower lip is Brock, albeit much shorter and missing his tats. The baby-faced boy on the far right continues mounting pressure on the latter.

DONNY

Bitch has gone soft, Brock. Whack the "retard" out of his head.

Brock steps forward with faux bitterness in his eye. In a shot facing him, Elias sees right through it and leans his nose in. A reverse angle positioned next to Elias's left cheek goes on to highlight Brock's feeble attempts to avoid trembling. An even closer shot of Elias dwells on the vacant look in his eye, begging for a broken nose.

Finally, in a closeup positioned beside Brock's forearm, he thrusts a clenched fist forward. Elias's nose is caved in like a water bottle, blood drizzling from his nostrils.

PWAAACK!

The next panel sees Elias wobbling back up with his eyes aimed up and both hands spread against the ground. The next sees Donny's white tennis shoe whack him in the jaw, ejecting a straight jet of blood from his lips. In the process, another body phases out of Elias's: a black silhouette of himself, like a literal shadow.

THWAAACK!

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

And out, he went.

The shadow struggles his way back to his feet with concern for his owner...

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

I was hopeful I would never have to see him again.

...then bolts away like Tommy on the right side of the foreground while Elias gets curbstomped by all three boys on the left side of the background.

NARRATOR (BLUE BOX)

Now, I wonder if he ever left.