

This Is Just A Nightmare

Other Books By John A. Deering:

Sitting At Home All Day, Doing Nothing

My Happy Childhood Memories

Five Miles Over the Speed Limit

This Is Just A Nightmare

Gloom / SodaCorp

Antipod / Raised Consciousness

MEET THE PLAYERS.

WILL.

The star of the show. Will is a man who is trying to live two lives at once. On one hand, he's a family man, with a wife and two teenage daughters. On the other, he is a scientist, working at an important science laboratory. Like any self-respecting scientist, he finds himself drawn into his work, to the exclusion of everything else – even his loved ones. He is the type of person who wants to be there for his family, and who thinks that some time soon he will be, it just never seems to be happening yet.

WILL'S FAMILY: LAURIE, JULIA, ERICA, TOM, & SAM.

The circle of people that Will considers his family: his wife, first daughter, second daughter, Laurie's brother, and Will's father. Will is definitely the unusual one in his family: his wife, daughters, and Dad (and Tom) are never be able to keep up with the things he says about science.

SHADOWY FIGURES 1, 2, & 3.

Almost no information is known about the three shadowy figures. The only thing we know is that they work in the United States government, they have a keen eye for science, and they do not come from this world.

MINOTAUR.

A monster that exists only in the virtual nightmare world.

DAVID BOOTH, DRIVING INSTRUCTOR.

Will's instructor from the three Driver's Ed courses he took when he was 16; but he seems a bit more twisted, perhaps evil, in the nightmare . . .

THIS IS JUST A NIGHTMARE.

ACT ONE.

Scene 1.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE – DINING ROOM – EVENING

We're in Will's dining room. It's evening time – time for dinner. The whole Cumberland family is gathered here to eat. Will is here, already making it a special occasion; Laurie, Tom, Julia, Erica, and Sam join him.

For several seconds, the family is seated at the table, eating. Then, Will stops.

WILL: Man . . . this is so good.

SAM: You haven't been around the house much, to have dinner, have ya?

WILL: Not in *this* century, no.

SAM: See? Now you see what you've been missing all this time. Always being gone, always busy with work, work, work. How often do you just stop and have dinner with your own family?

Will shrugs.

WILL: I mean . . . I don't *plan* for it to happen like that . . . I just . . .

LAURIE: You just get busy.

Another few seconds of silence. Will shrugs again, then nods his head.

WILL: Yeah, basically.

JULIA: Man, you must have been working on that work project for like ten years, Dad. I was probably still in elementary school when you started disappearing.

ERICA: Nobody has still even seen it. What could it be, that you've been so busy with for that long?

LAURIE: Oh, now, you know what happens when you ask your father these questions. He just says:

WILL & LAURIE: The Dream Machine Project has been taking a lot of time and hard work, but with a little more patience, I expect it to be finished relatively soon.

ERICA: "Relatively", huh?

WILL: Well, actually . . . you might think you've heard that from me a hundred times, but I've got news to report today.

LAURIE: Oh?

JULIA: Do tell.

WILL: Not *only* do I expect the project to be finished relatively soon . . . but today, a date was set, *in stone*, for the start of human testing.

That stops the conversation right there.

ERICA: (struggling a little with her food) I . . . uhh . . . what?

SAM: Yeah, say that again? I musta had something in my ear.

Will looks around at the other faces at the table, and smiles.

WILL: I've been waiting to say that for years. Man, that was great.

LAURIE: . . . Wait . . . you're not joking, right? Were you joking?

WILL: Fraid not. The first working model of the Dream Machine Project has seen *completion* of construction. Now, if it were up to me, I'd just call it case closed and fork over the Nobel Prize to the whole team . . . but, it's not. Two and a half weeks from today – two weeks and three days, to be exact – marks the start of human testing.

A few more seconds of silence as his family members take in the shock of the news, and think of what to say next.

LAURIE: Human testing . . . you mean . . .

WILL: Oh, nothing harmful to anyone, don't worry about that. Animal testing has been officially wiped out of the schedule. No animals will be tested on for the project – people only. God, what a headache *that* all was . . .

ERICA: I don't understand.

WILL: The animal testing has been ceased, before any of it began. See, everybody realized, animals can't talk, and in the case of *this* project, we *need* a test subject that can talk, or else we don't know what the Hell we've done right or wrong . . .

ERICA: No, no . . . I meant . . . what I'm saying was . . . I don't understand *any* of this. Like, one single word.

SAM: (reaching his hand up for a high-five) You tell it, girl!

Will sighs, then stands up.

LAURIE: Oh, honey, stay put – don't leave! This is the first –

SAM: Oh, now you've gone and upset the man!

WILL: No, no . . . (spreading out his hands) *Everyone, listen up.* I'm not leaving the room. I'm just gonna do something I've wanted to do for the last ten years, just never knew how to . . . I'm gonna *explain what the Dream Machine Project is.*

The family all gasps at once.

Will looks left, then right, to make sure he has everyone's attention.

SAM: Go on . . . I'm all ears.

WILL: (inhaling one last time, to compose himself)

The Dream Machine is . . . quite literally . . . a machine. It's the next major leap in the name of dream science and technology – in fact, one could argue, the biggest leap made thus far, and the first of its scope and magnitude.

SAM: Okay, there he goes again, with the Greek. I'm already lost.

WILL: *Dad!*

Laurie sighs, and shakes her head.

WILL: Well, now . . . the Dream Machine is a chair. Just like the one you're sitting on right now. Except, it's a machine.

A few seconds of silence; he looks left, then right, to make sure they're still following.

WILL: Well anyway, there's these wires that go directly from this chair into a small circular metal band, which is directly connected to your cerebr – err, to your head – to make the mind go unconscious.

SAM: Wait . . . I . . . I think I'm getting it. This machine of yours – this electronic chair, it makes you fall asleep? That's what I thought I heard.

Will nods his head.

SAM: (nodding his head too) Yeah, yeah . . . that could be good . . . but . . . why wouldn't people just take sleeping pills?

It takes three seconds for Will to understand, and then he sighs, giving up.

WILL: It's not like that . . . it doesn't just make you go to sleep. I mean, it *does*, but it also stimulates the mind to enter a *virtual dream-state*. That is, you are asleep, and you're dreaming, but there are images and objects being implanted *into* the dream, from a computer.

A few of Will's family members gasp.

TOM: That sounds insane! Who would do that?

WILL: My team. Or – the team that I'm on.

LAURIE: . . . And what's in this computer dream? Like, mountains? Flowers?

WILL: (shrugs) Any number of things could theoretically be implanted from a computer to a dream. Let's say: *a red rose*. Or: *a brick wall*. The computer would implant these programmed suggestions into a human mind, but the human mind would still be in charge of how it all looks and feels, based on personal imagination . . . specifically, it would be coming from left-brain activity.

Will stops talking.

He just remains still.

None of his family members say anything.

That was more than any of them could keep up with, and yet . . . they *are* following it, and this *does* sound like news a person could get breathless about.

WILL: Or . . . (ahem) I mean, not that any of this is *proven*, or anything. All we have for now is 20 different theories from 20 different people . . . and this is all gonna *remain* a tangled mess until human testing begins.

TOM: Now tell me, Will, what *possible* use could a person have for all that?

WILL: What possible use? Hundreds!

TOM: No, I mean, like, everyday use.

WILL: Yeah, me too – there's *hundreds* of everyday uses for the Dream Machine!

TOM: Name *one*!

WILL: You could go through, like, a three-dimensional model of this house, let's say. The computer could contain a fully-mapped layout of this house, and you could just *walk around* in it, without having to get up and actually walk, or without disrupting anything! If you're thinking of buying a house, you could just take a dream-world tour, and walk around inside, from a thousand miles away!

Tom stops to think about that.

TOM: *That* part, maybe, but still . . .

SAM: My *God!* Next generation of kids will never go outside again!

Will sighs. Nobody ever seems to get it.

LAURIE: Well, now. You've finally said it to your family. Now don't you feel better?

WILL: I sure do! That's been in my head for years – I can't believe I just let it all out! Oh, but when the human testing begins . . . man . . . that's when I'll *really* feel better!

Will chuckles.

WILL: Wow. So many years . . . I just can't believe it. It feels like . . . like . . .

LAURIE: Like what, dear?

WILL: . . . like this is all just a dream.

Fade to black.

(Now that this scene is done, begin clearing the set to be replaced by the exterior of Will's house.)

Scene 2.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE – BEDROOM – LATE AT NIGHT

STAGE RIGHT. Will and Laurie are sleeping in bed. Laurie is sleeping, at least – Will is tossing and turning restlessly. Nothing he does works. He just can't fall asleep. With an irritated groan, he gets up and starts walking around.

LAURIE: (groggily) Where you going?

He's startled! But, when he turns his head and sees Laurie, he cools down.

WILL: You gave me a start there.

LAURIE: You're not going somewhere, are you?

WILL: No, no! Of course not. I just . . . I can't sleep.

LAURIE: Baby, it's . . . (as she checks the time) *two in the morning?*

WILL: Look, don't worry about me – just the usual perks of being a mad scientist.

LAURIE: Is this gonna persist for the next two weeks and three days?

WILL: No, no . . . I just . . . I don't know. It's just this one night. I can't sleep. I don't feel right. Look, just don't worry about it . . . go back to bed, I'll be asleep shortly.

Will hears the sound of a doorknob turning.

He turns.

WILL: Whoa, did you hear that? Was that just me?

LAURIE: Probably just a neighbor.

WILL: Man, I thought I was losing it. Wait – you heard it too, though, right?

The same sound repeats.

Then, we can hear the sound of a door being kicked open.

WILL: What the Hell? Hey! Is someone at our door?

Laurie sits up in bed – no longer trying to sleep.

Will looks around for something he can use against a burglar.

WILL: I knew it! That's why I couldn't sleep! I could sense the danger! Someone's at the door – trying to break in!

LAURIE: What are you doing? What are you looking for?

Finally, Will finds a baseball bat. He grins.

WILL: Ha haaa . . . come to Daddy.

LAURIE: Will!! What are you doing??

WILL: Somebody's trying to break into the house.

LAURIE: Baby, we have an alarm system – nobody could get past it! Just stop freaking out and –

WILL: (as he gets the bat ready:) Whoever's breaking in, was somehow able to bypass the alarm. Well, they won't bypass me.

His own bedroom door is kicked open!!

Laurie screams, and jumps backward, as three men walk in!

This is not the moment Will expected. These are three men in black suits – standing perfectly straight and tall, smiling. They are not street thugs or burglars – they look like people with as much political power as the President.

WILL: Is . . . there something I can help you with?

Shadowy Figure 2 points at Will, still smiling. Figures 1 and 3 walk his way.

Will takes charge again.

WILL: You'd best tell me what's happening, right now! I have the right to know, before anyone *touches* –

1 and 3 grab him by the shoulders.

WILL: *What the Hell are you doing??*

Laurie screams again, and scoots backward against the wall.

WILL: Identification! Tell me who you are! Tell me right now!

Shadowy Figure 2 points toward the door.

WILL: *Who on Earth are you people??*

Shadowy Figure 2 walks up to Will, and stands directly in front of him.

SHADOWY FIGURE 2: We are *not* from Earth.

That sentence has a particular impact on Will, who stops like a deer in headlights.

WILL: You're not human. *You're not human!*

Shadowy Figure 2 leaves. 1 and 3 follow shortly behind – dragging Will with them, kicking and screaming.

WILL: They're not human! *Where are you taking meeeee??*

Right as they're about to get out . . . Laurie bolts out of bed and breaks open a glass bottle against the back of Shadowy Figure 3's head!!

He doesn't move. He doesn't react. He just freezes. After a second of silence, he turns around to look at Laurie. She's petrified – her arm is shaking violently.

LAURIE: You touch my husband and I'll –

SHADOWY FIGURE 3: You are not a factor in the experiment.

He uses a spray can on Laurie . . . and she collapses, unconscious.

With Laurie down, the shadowy figures resume their business. 1 and 3 drag Will away, kicking and screaming.

#2 looks around the room, one final time.

He heads out.

Fade to black.

(Clear the set to be replaced with the dream world.)

Scene 3.

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE – FRONT

CENTER STAGE. Outside of Will's house, 1 and 3 continue to drag Will away, toward a van parked directly out front. He keeps thrashing, trying to break free.

WILL: Hey!! Hey!! Get your hands off me!! You inhuman ffffreaks!!

#2 jumps inside the van. 1 and 3 follow shortly after, carrying Will with them.

WILL: Why do you keep doing this?? I'll kill you! You hear me?? Ahhh ha ha haaa!! I'll get outta this and I'll find a gun and *I'll kill you all!! I'll wipe you out!!*

Fade to black.

(At this moment, the actor playing Will is completely offstage; he walks around and re-enters the stage from STAGE RIGHT. He lays down, in the shadows, with no light cast on him.)

Scene 4.

INT. VAN – STAGE LEFT

There are three scenes happening at once now:

A, the interior of the van (STAGE LEFT);
 B, the exterior of Will's house (CENTER STAGE);
 and C, the dream world (STAGE RIGHT).

(The exterior of Will's house, at CENTER STAGE, does not disappear – but the light over it fades to black, casting it in darkness.)

From this moment on, there are two Wills – one in the van, and one in the dream. The one in the dream is played by the same actor who was playing him before; Will in the van is played by a separate actor, who should dress and appear similar, if not identical, to Will in the dream.

We are inside the van now. The shadowy figures are bringing Van-Will into the high-tech laboratory set up inside. They throw him onto a table; all three shadowy figures stand over him.

We can hear a lot of sounds at once: electronic hissing and cackling of wires; sounds of super-computers at work; the van's engine starting up and driving. Through all of this, Will struggles and thrashes about, but doesn't say any solid words.

Shadowy Figure 2 presents a metal object – similar in shape to a horseshoe – and holds it over Will's head.

Will doesn't really get hysterical, fight back, or even question it. He just looks at the metal object, mesmerized, like a baby – not entirely sure how to react.

WILL: Jesus, that's . . . that's . . . the Dream Machine Project . . .

Shadowy Figure 2 places it onto his head, like a crown.

SHADOWY FIGURE 2: Virtual dream-state to commence in three . . . two . . . one . . . begin.

WILL: Hey wait, no!

Shadowy Figure 3 takes two wires and presses them together.

Instantly, Will begins convulsing. Too much energy is hitting him at once for him to handle. He leans forward, shaking back and forth, his eyes clenching half-shut, his pupils rolling up in his head.

WILL: Haaaaaaaaa!

He passes out.

Scene 5.

INT. DREAM WORLD

STAGE RIGHT. There is nothing here in this dream world but pitch black and a floor, on which Will (original actor) is lying down. A blue spotlight shines down on Will from the ceiling.

(The voice that speaks to him is Shadowy Figure 2. Inside the van, we can see him talk into a microphone, while in the dream world, we can hear his voice.)

VOICE: William Cumberland.

Will sits up, and assumes the same position as he just did in the van-lab; he sits up, shaking back and forth. His breathing is convulsive.

After a few seconds, the instinctive reaction settles down, and he finds himself sitting calmly. He breathes a little slower.

He looks at the floor and inspects both of his hands.

WILL: Am I alive? Am I alive?

VOICE: You are alive – but you have lost consciousness.

WILL: . . . But, I'm alive?

Another few seconds of silence and composure.

WILL: Okay, I'm alive . . . and . . . I'm unconscious . . . thus . . . I am having a dream.

VOICE: Correct.

WILL: I'm dreaming. All right, how much of this is a dream? How much of this – did those men really come in . . . hey, where am I? Tell me where I am!

VOICE: Your body is inside our laboratory. You are being driven to a remote location. You have been plugged into the artificial dream-state.

Will stops.

WILL: *Why?*

VOICE: Do you understand what this is?

WILL: . . . The Dream Machine Project.

VOICE: Correct. Human testing for the project has begun.

WILL: Human testing? Hey – hey, wait a minute! I'm not a *test subject!* I'm a *man!* I have rights, I –

VOICE: The rules will be explained to you.

WILL: No! Fuck that, no they're not! I never signed up to volunteer for this! You can't just treat me like another lab mouse! Jesus, I helped *design* this thing – I helped *build* it!

VOICE: So did we.

A moment of shocked silence and awe, on Will's part.

VOICE: This is the situation you are in. Right now, you are not able to disconnect yourself. Do you understand your situation?

WILL: (calming down) Y-yeah . . . I do.

VOICE: During the course of the project, your body will remain in the van, and you will remain in the dream-state. You will undergo a series of tests to challenge your mental capabilities. Throughout the course of these ten tests, you are to do as you are commanded. When it is all done, you will be disconnected and returned home.

WILL: . . . So, I don't die?

VOICE: Correct.

WILL: (sighing with relief) Thank God.

VOICE: Do you understand the situation?

WILL: Yes. Yes, I do.

VOICE: Do you understand the rules?

WILL: Yes.

VOICE: Are you ready to begin the tests?

WILL: Yes. Begin. Let the test begin *right now*.

VOICE: Are you *sure* you don't need a minute to think?

WILL: Hell no! Let the tests start right now!

VOICE: Very well. To your right, you will find a door. Open the door, and you will enter testing area number one.

Will faces the audience – looking at an imaginary door.

WILL: Okay. I see it.

A few seconds of silence pass.

WILL: S-so – you want me to open it?

VOICE: Yes.

WILL: . . . A-and right now, you mean?

VOICE: Are you afraid, Will?

WILL: Afraid? No – absolutely not.

VOICE: Are you *completely* sure of that?

We hear the sound of crackling thunder. A bolt of lightning. An animal roaring.

Will looks around a little bit . . . but finds nothing. It's just sound.

WILL: If you were trying to frighten me, you're gonna have to try harder.

VOICE: Good – then, you are ready to begin.

Will opens the door to the first testing area. With his hand on the doorknob, before he lets go, he looks up at the blue light to address the shadowy figures directly.

WILL: And let me tell you something else . . . once I'm done with these tests . . . I'm gonna whoop whoever's ass that put me in this.

He looks straight again, and walks all the way through the open door.

WILL: Bring it on.

He spins around on his heel and faces the other direction.

Scene 6.

INT. DREAM-WORLD

Right now, there are still two scenes happening:

A, the interior of the van (STAGE LEFT), with Will and the shadowy figures;
and B, Will in the black-and-blue dream world (STAGE RIGHT).

Will, walking away from the viewer, turns to his side and inspects his hands again, turning them around and waving them to see that unreal blue glow.

WILL: Whooo, hooo! What a crazy dream!

VOICE: This is more than a dream, as you're certainly about to learn.

The blue spotlight shines at CENTER STAGE, revealing a blue wall that stops Will's walking abruptly.

WILL: (startled, at first) Whoa! . . . A blue wall.

VOICE: You now find yourself in the middle of a maze of walls.

Will looks around himself.

WILL: Whoa, what? There's walls everywhere! How . . .
. . . Wait, I start out in the *middle* of a maze? What?

VOICE: The center is the starting point. Your goal, in this test, is simply to walk through the maze and find the end. The walls follow the layout of a perfect grid design. They can only be positioned in two different directions. This maze was randomly-generated, and thousands more could be . . . but there *is* a pattern to this, and if you figure it out, you *will* find the end.

WILL: Dear God, I've . . . I've *seen* this . . . on a screen! I've *seen* this, as an electronic computer program! Like a tiny little fucking Atari game! It's so much *bigger* here . . .

VOICE: Your goal, in traveling through the maze, is simply to reach the end. There is a time limit, however: five minutes.

WILL: Why, what happens in five minutes?

Will suddenly hears a roaring sound, coming from some unseen animal.

VOICE: In five minutes, you will meet the Minotaur of the Maze.

Will starts shaking and shuddering.

WILL: W-what? What kind of fucked up test is that?

VOICE: You'd better hurry, Will – time is ticking. The test begins now.

The sound of a ticking clock begins.

At first, Will doesn't move. He just stand there, petrified.

WILL: What kind of fucking scientific test is this??

He starts walking around, feeling the walls with his hands, while continuing to talk.

WILL: Jesus Christ, what kind of sick, messed-up people would just do this to a person?

With both hands on one wall, he starts walking in a more organized, planned manner.

WILL: Fine, then, all right. You want me to get through the maze? Fine. I could get through a maze. Even a randomly-generated one.

He continues walking and talking.

WILL: You'll see.

Fade to black.

Fade back in – about a couple minutes later.

VOICE: Two minutes left.

WILL: And I'm still in the game.

VOICE: You've been doing well so far, Will.

WILL: Ha. This is a piece of cake. You really can't keep me contained with something like this. See, I learned a little trick about mazes, as a kid – all you really have to do is follow the left wall. It eventually ends at the end of the maze.

Finally, Will finds a giant glowing red X that marks the end of the maze.

VOICE: Congratulations, Will – you made it to the end of the maze. This is good. Now the *real* testing shall begin.

The glowing red X disappears . . . and now Will, moving completely from CENTER STAGE to STAGE RIGHT, can see the inside of the science lab.

Scene 7.

FADE IN on the inside of Will's workplace, the science laboratory, as it exists in the distorted nightmare world.

Five other scientists are standing around, all wearing white lab coats. They appear exactly the same way one should expect them to appear at work, on any given day. They have no names here – only numbers.

VOICE: Welcome to your workplace, Dosan Laboratories.

WILL: Jesus Christ, how do you know my work??

VOICE: We have been working here for decades before you were born.

Will stops talking for a second.

VOICE: One of your fellow scientists is not actually a person – he is *the Devil*. But you don't know *which* person it is. You'd better figure out who, within five minutes – or he will blow up the whole room.

Will shakes his head.

WILL: This is nonsense. This is impossible.

WILL: Ohhh, okay. Okay, I get it. The Devil is not real. You want to use humans' scary storytelling and mythology to scare me. So you think I'll fall for it. But the Devil's not in this dream.

DEVIL'S VOICE: Don't be so sure.

A chill takes over Will.

VOICE: You must talk to the people to gather their clues.

WILL: What? What in the world would I say?

VOICE: Your test begins now.

WILL: Wait, no, I –

The sound of a ticking clock begins.

Will stops moving and talking, as he realizes that it has begun.

WILL: You know what, I just got a great idea.

Will approaches Number One, to ask him a question.

WILL: Are *you* the Devil?

Number One smiles, laughs, and puts his hand on Will's shoulder.

NUMBER ONE: Ha ha! My boy, you need to learn, the Devil does not exist! You, of all people, should know that the first thing that does not mix with a science lab is religion!

WILL: Kay. (as he approaches Number Two) Are *you* the Devil?

NUMBER TWO: If you ask me that again I'll kill you.

WILL: Kay. (as he approaches Number Three) Are *you* the Devil?

NUMBER THREE: Nah, nah, nah, I'm not a part of this test, I'm not a part of this test. I've got my own life. Don't talk to me.

Number Three backs away and walks off.

WILL: (as he approaches Number Four) Are *you* the Devil?

Number Four suddenly has a giant wad of money that he's holding with both hands and arms! He starts throwing it at Will!

NUMBER FOUR: Here you go, please have this free money!

Will's eyes go wide.

He approaches Number Four (who is a smiling attractive girl), who suddenly runs to him before he can finish his sentence. When she talks, she not only changes, but redefines, the scene.

WILL: Are *you* the –

NUMBER FIVE: Heeeey there, Will. You know, I'm not really one of the real-life scientists. I'm that hot young receptionist you just got a few weeks ago. You get pissed off because you think I don't know what I'm doing at times, but at the same time you wouldn't want to see me gone, because I'm so . . . well . . . you haven't dared to say it out loud – but you've *thought* about it.

Will gulps.

WILL: Are you the Devil?

She smiles, and giggles.

NUMBER FIVE: How are you gonna find out?

Will thinks about it.

He starts waving his hands around wildly.

WILL: Angels, and Heaven! Angels, and Heaven!

Number Five's confidence seems to suddenly stop. She turns serious, looking at Will, eyes wider.

NUMBER FIVE: What are you doing?

WILL: (still waving his hands) Angels, and Heaven! And rainbows! And happy thoughts, and sunshine! Heaven!

Number Five starts twitching.

NUMBER FIVE: Is that *really* what you're thinking about right now, Will? Is it *really*?

WILL: *Angels! And harps, and music, and . . . babies, I guess . . .*

Number Five starts twitching harder than before, almost convulsing.

NUMBER FIVE: Surely *you* have the imagination to do much more productive things in your dream . . . much more *fun* things . . .

Fade to black, as we hear the sound of an explosion . . . *BOOM!*

Scene 8

INT. DREAM WORLD – BLACKNESS

A spotlight shines back on Will, but only him.

WILL: (smiling, chuckling) That was quick thinking, Will. Good job.

Will stands in place for several seconds.

. . . And the silence continues.

. . . There remains nothing but silence.

WILL: (looking around) Hello?

He stands up.

WILL: Hello?

(he looks down at his feet) Hey, guys?

More silence.

WILL: (looking up at the ceiling) Guys? Isn't the next test supposed to start?

For

the next

five seconds,

there remains nothing

but silence.

WILL: What the Hell is going on??

He starts to sound heavily depressed.

WILL: What in the world *is* all this?

(shaking his head) Oh, man . . . I feel so bad now . . . testing on all those mice . . . putting them in mazes . . . (holding his forehead and face) Oh, man . . .

Finally, he snaps, turning angry.

WILL: Ahhh, WHY DO I GOTTA BE IN THIS?? Huh?? WHY WOULD YOU PICK ME FOR THIS AND JUST . . . THROW ME IN HERE?!

No response.

Will lets it all out. He runs forward and starts beating the air with his fists.

WILL: Ahhhhhh!! I'll kill you when I find you! I'll track you down and kill you!

No response.

WILL: Come on, voices! Aren't you gonna come back?

. . . Nothing.

Sighing, he gives up.

WILL: Fine, then. I don't care.

He sits down on the floor. After seeing that it works, that he can still do this, he lays back.

WILL: Whatever, I don't care. I'll just catch some rest. I *accept* this, right now.

He relaxes, and lets all his breath out.

WILL: I'll just take a breather.

Fade to black.

Face back in, presumably several minutes later.

WILL: 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499 . . . and now . . . finally . . . 500.

VOICE: Congratulations, Will – Test Three is over.

WILL: But you never even told me when Test *Two* was over. You never even told me when Test Three *began*.

VOICE: Exactly.

Will finally realizes it.

WILL: I guess you look at me and all you see is just another mouse.

VOICE: Test Four will begin in a much more familiar area . . . a sight much more close to home!

Scene 9.

INT. DREAM WORLD – EXT. WILL'S HOUSE

FADE IN on the sight of the exterior of Will's house.

Will walks up to this dream-world replica of his home, overcome with awe.

WILL: This is . . . my home . . .
(brief pause, as he holds his face)
Jesus, you have the architecture of my *home* mapped out on the Dream Machine?
What, do you have the whole neighborhood, or just –

VOICE: You must focus on the tasks at hand.

WILL: Still, this isn't every day!

He walks back toward his house . . . but stops as an idea hits him.

WILL: Wait a second. (looking away from the house) That's my *car*. Does *that* work?

He gets no answer from the voices. So, he walks up to his car and starts feeling around on it with his hands.

WILL: I can feel it. My car, it's here . . .

He runs his hands down to the back of the car.

WILL: Okay, yeah, it's got the gas cap . . . yep, it does. It's got the spare key.

Will walks away.

WILL: Good. All I needed to know.

VOICE: Enter your house, Will.

WILL: Oh, I will.

VOICE & WILL: Test Four is
WILL: about to begin, yeah, I know. Yeah. Great.

Will walks up to his own front door and holds the doorknob.

WILL: Here I go. Wish me luck.

He holds in his breath, as though about to jump into the water.

He opens the imaginary door, and steps through.

Fade to black.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

Scene 1.

INT. DREAM WORLD – INT. WILL'S HOUSE

There are still only two scenes going on at once right now:

A, the interior of the van (STAGE LEFT);
and B, the interior of Will's house, the living room (CENTER STAGE).

At STAGE RIGHT is Erica's bedroom, with no light on it yet.

One important note to keep in mind is that, at STAGE LEFT, Will is always sitting in the van. Although he's asleep, his body continues to react to the dream – during moments of depression, his physical body becomes visibly depressed; during moments of fear, his physical body becomes visibly afraid.

Slowly, Will pokes his head inside. He begins to move about his house at a slow speed, seeing the distorted dream-world version of it.

The dining room does not look the way it did at dinner. The table is laying on its side. The chairs are scattered across the room. This could not possibly be the same place he just saw hours ago.

He walks by the table, running his hand across it.

WILL: God, it feels . . . so . . . so *there!* So *right here!* But it's not! Right?

No answer.

Will continues to walk around the scene. He uses his foot to move a chair, then brings it back.

The next time he talks, he addresses the blue spotlight again.

WILL: Why are you doing this to me, man??

He shakes his head. This situation is getting to be hard to take.

WILL: What kind of person would just – *abduct* a guy out of his house? His own house?? And just drag him into this nightmare!

VOICE: You are being counterproductive, Will.

WILL: No! You know what, no tests of yours are gonna start until *I* say they will! I'll refuse to comply, I'll refuse to play by your rules!

VOICE: All you can do right now is kill time.

WILL: . . . Yeah, well . . . look, just tell me this situation that's going on, that's all I ask!

Five people make slow, dragged-out sounds of giggling. Will's spine straightens.

WILL: Who's there??

The light shines on the five people entering the room from STAGE RIGHT. They are: Laurie, Julie, Erica, Tom, and Sam.

Will is shocked. He doesn't know how to react. He doesn't say a word.

WILL: Laurie?

All five people start smiling. All five people start laughing.

This moment doesn't change. It just continues for at least ten seconds: the Cumberland family laughing, Will frozen still, looking left and right, unable to figure out what to do.

WILL: Okay. This is supposed to scare me, right? This biiig, scary nightmare of yours, it's supposed to have me *catatonic* and traumatized now, right?

As he talks, his family members come closer.

WILL: Wow. That's it. That's the whole test. Well, this ends now!!

Will finally looks directly at his family members.

WILL: Everyone!

He *slams* his hand onto the table!

WILL: You guys don't exist! *None* of you!

No reaction from any of them; they continue to move toward him.

WILL: Well, this is *my* dream, and *you* guys are in it. So, I command you – I *order* you – to act normal. Act the way you normally would! (snaps his fingers)

Everything falls into place. The blue spotlight becomes regular white light again. All the members of the family walk to the table and chairs, and right them.

LAURIE: Okay, let's get this dining room back into gear. Let's make this place presentable again.

ERICA: I'll help. I'll get the table.

Will shudders. Everything is becoming a little too real for comfort.

Finally, with everything set straight again, everyone walks to their chairs and has a seat.

VOICE: Impressive. See how they behave normally, when you tell them to.

WILL: Look . . . this ain't lasting any longer.

He gets up to leave the room.

LAURIE: Aww, honey, why do you have to leave?

ERICA: We just got here! We haven't even started eating yet!

SAM: What, you got more of your work to do?

WILL: Look . . . umm . . . five minutes. I'll come back in five minutes. I've just got one little thing to take care of. All right?

A moment of silence.

WILL: All right. Good.

He leaves the living room, toward STAGE RIGHT. Fade to black.

Scene 2.

INT. DREAM WORLD – WILL'S HOUSE – ERICA'S BEDROOM

FADE IN as he enters Erica's bedroom.

VOICE: What are you doing, Will?

WILL: You mean you don't know? You can't just read my mind?

VOICE: No, we cannot.

Will chuckles.

WILL: That's right. You can all *see* me . . . you can all *see* what I'm doing . . .
(tapping his forehead) But you can't *see* the thoughts I've got up here.

VOICE: We are entitled to know.

WILL: Well I choose not to tell you.

VOICE: We will eventually find out, one way or another; you may as well tell us.

WILL: (sigh) All right, creepos. This is my daughter's bedroom. She's got a computer here. I had a feeling it would be here . . .

VOICE: You realize, of course, that the computer only exists in the dream.

Will sits down in a chair, and starts typing on a computer. He continues to type, and doesn't stop until further notice.

WILL: Hmm . . . yep . . . I had a feeling. It works.

VOICE: The computer is not real, Will. It may look, sound, and even *feel* like it is there . . . but, so does your family. So does your table.

WILL: Yeah, well . . . *this* thing, it actually *does* have some real-world use.

He keeps typing, looking more irritated now as he tries to get things to work.

WILL: C'mon, c'mon, how long's this gonna take . . .

VOICE: This computer is only in your imagination. What possible use could you have for it?

WILL: Look. I know that this computer only exists in this nightmare. I know I can't *actually* connect to the Internet, or send e-mails that people would see in real life. I know it's only here for the dream.

VOICE: Then, why?

WILL: I can type in commands . . . that's all I need. That's all this nightmare really is, right, just a bunch of programming, and electronic impulses? So why don't I just type in some commands and rewrite some of the programming code around me?

VOICE: You don't have the software necessary to control the dream.

WILL: Don't need it. All I need is the Cretaceous-era technology in my daughter's room. All I need is something with a black screen, white letters, and the ability to enter commands. As long as I know my ABCs, and six programming languages, I'm all set.

VOICE: If you could truly change things, then why is nothing happening?

WILL: Configuration is taking longer than I expected . . . here, let me reset the RGB value in this room real quick. Let's just take the Blue value down to zero, and Red up to 255. See if it works . . . and . . . (as he presses a button) Enter!

The spotlight in the room changes color from blue to red!

Will stands up, lit up with excitement, a light bulb flashing through his head.

WILL: *Yes!* Success! . . . You know what, this kind of looks like a warehouse.

VOICE: Congratulations, Will. You are playing this game very well.

WILL: You do realize who you kidnapped, right? I mean, I'm not some teenage kid working at fast food, asking if you'd like fries with that! I *designed* this thing! I *know* how programming works! And what I just did a second ago, with the colors? I could do the same from any computer in the world . . . even though it's just a dream.

He continues to type, making his next move.

VOICE: What use do you have for red lighting? How has your move helped you?

WILL: It didn't, really.

VOICE: Then, why exert yourself to do it?

WILL: That red lighting trick? That was just a test. I wanted to see . . . if I could do *that* . . . then what *else* could I do?

He stands up again, and walks while talking.

WILL: Now, I just typed a command to make a chair appear, just like the one I'm sitting on. So, let me just walk out the door . . . see if it's there or not . . .

He reaches into the open door, and pulls another chair into the room.

WILL: And, yep, just like I thought. There are now *two* of these chairs in here.

He types on the keyboard again, quickly, frantically.

WILL: Now . . . let me see . . . another command . . . EXIT!

Will stands still, waiting, for several seconds.

WILL: . . . Damn it!

VOICE: Did you really think that would work?

WILL: . . . You know what, not really.

He tries typing some more.

WILL: Quit. Exit. Leave. Nah, what was I thinking . . . that would never work.

Bang, bang, bang! Several people start knocking on the door – everyone from the dining room.

LAURIE: Will!

SAM: Get out here!

LAURIE: It's been five minutes!

ERICA: What are you doing in my room??

WILL: Uhh . . . one minute! One minute!

He quickly types some frantic commands.

LAURIE: (bang, bang, bang) Noooow!

WILL: A little more, a little more!

Done. He gets up and leaves, returning to the living room at CENTER STAGE.

Fade to black.

Scene 3.

INT. DREAM WORLD – WILL'S HOUSE – DINING ROOM

FADE IN as everyone enters the room at once, led by Will.

LAURIE: So, you're done with – whatever you were just doing?

WILL: Yep.

ERICA: Dad, what the Hell was all that about? What important business could you have to conduct from inside my room?

WILL: Erica, take a look under your chair there . . . tell me if you find anything.

She has a strange look on her face.

ERICA: Wwww*what* are you talking about?

WILL: Never mind, then, *I'll* do it.

He pulls her chair back, then kneels down and takes a baseball bat from underneath.

WILL: See this? This baseball bat? It wasn't here before. But, just like with the chair I copied, I *made* it appear, just by typing enough basic commands.

He looks at the ceiling again.

WILL: I'm talking to *you*, by the way. *You* creepy people in your creepy van that probably has no windows.

VOICE: You have not passed all the tests yet, Will. You are not out of this yet. If you could truly get yourself out, you would be out by now.

WILL: Yeah? Well, look at this bat. Did you expect that to happen? Did you expect me to have this on me?

Silence.

WILL: Yeah, that's what I thought.

VOICE: If you can surprise us, we can surprise you.

All of Will's family members suddenly present knives from their pockets, which they hold up in the air, as if about to use them.

Will is silent for three seconds.

WILL: Okay, *that* I did not see coming.

VOICE: This is the situation that's happening, Will. What are you going to do?

Will doesn't talk, at first.

WILL: Well . . . I think I'm gonna . . . *run like Hell!*

He bolts out of his chair, running as fast as he can out the front door of his house (toward STAGE RIGHT). His family members waste no time running after him.

LAURIE: Get him!

JULIE: He's getting away!

Scene 4.

INT. DREAM WORLD – EXT. WILL'S HOUSE

Will runs out of the house and across the front lawn – his family following shortly behind him. He's running toward his car.

As he runs, he quickly, desperately grabs for his keys, feeling his pockets, his sides, his chest . . . nothing.

WILL: Shit. Where are the keys?

He keeps fumbling, but still finds nothing.

WILL: FUCK! COME ON, where are my keys??

He's at his car now, yet he seems to have hit a dead end.

An idea hits him . . .

WILL: Wait . . . *spare key!*

He quickly races to his car's gas cap, opens it up, and grabs a spare key from it.

WILL: Ha ha! Spare key! I knew it!

He quickly uses the key to open the car's door. He climbs inside, and starts the engine. He goes into Reverse, looks behind him while reversing, turns the wheel, goes into Drive, and floors it.

Scene 5.

INT. DREAM WORLD – INT. WILL'S CAR

Will is still inside his car (which should at least consist of a chair and a steering wheel), driving away.

The spotlight cast over his family fades away, leaving them in blackness; they exit the scene.

As Will continues to drive away, we hear the sounds of him driving, just about as fast as he can. Already, he's getting out of breath.

WILL: This is just a nightmare, Will! Just a nightmare!

VOICE: You are running away.

WILL: This is true.

VOICE: Why is this so?

WILL: I don't wanna die!

VOICE: Only time will tell how you handle your escape.

WILL: Man, y'all are starting to freak me out!

Quickly, almost too fast for Will to keep up with, some kind of unidentified animal flies through the air toward his car, making the *mooring* sound of a cow. Will *swerves* the car to another lane while braking – causing the combination of two loud screeching sounds at once – in order to dodge it. He doesn't completely stop, however. Within seconds, the animal flies over his car.

Will doesn't say a word for three seconds.

Then, finally, he speaks up:

WILL: *WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT??*

VOICE: Be careful while you're driving, Will.

WILL: (getting out of the car) *Jesus Christ! Oh my God! You guys are too much!*

VOICE: But Will, where are you going? The fourth test is not concluded.

WILL: Yeah, well – I ain't stickin around to see how it pans out!

VOICE: You haven't answered the question, Will . . . where are you going?

Will pauses, then climbs back into the car.

WILL: You don't know? No, of course not . . . all right, I'm trying something new. I'm gonna go to the store.

VOICE: What store?

WILL: The *store* – the, uhh – the *grocery store*, where Laurie and I always go shopping.

VOICE: Then, you have been here before.

WILL: Yes, yes I have. I know the place in and out. I'm assuming, if I could find my *house* in this nightmare – if you guys have *that much* of the area mapped out, or if I remember that much of it in my dream – then maybe I can find the grocery store.

VOICE: What do you expect to find here?

WILL: . . . Not my family members!

VOICE: You cannot run forever. They will catch up.

WILL: Yeah . . . well . . . if everything goes according to plan, I should find whatever I need at the store anyway. I'll be ready then.

VOICE: What is it you are in search of?

WILL: Weapons. Whatever I can find – knives, bats, crowbars, duct tape, whatever I see, whatever they've got.

VOICE: How do you intend to find these weapons?

WILL: Simple. Shoplifting. I mean, I doubt there's any laws about stealing stuff, or paying money, in a nightmare, right?

VOICE: Do you expect to find what you want here?

WILL: Hey, it may not be the best selection, but I'll take what I can get, ya know? I ain't gonna be too picky right now. Besides . . . I figure, they'll probably have another computer in there somewhere.

VOICE: Why do you expect to find a computer?

WILL: Well – there *has* to be a computer. Right? *Somewhere* in this store, I'm sure there is one. And when I find one, I can type in commands.

Suddenly, Will slams on the brakes, parks, and hops out.

WILL: Okay. We're here.

VOICE: I would advise you to be careful.

WILL: Way ahead of you there.

VOICE: You never know what you will find.

WILL: I realize that.

VOICE: Will . . . stop for a second . . . listen.

Will stops.

He listens.

A roaring sound is heard . . . one very different from anything we've heard so far.

The scariest animal Will could ever meet is screaming.

VOICE: Do you hear that?

WILL: . . . Y-yeah . . .

VOICE: It's coming from inside the store.

WILL: No it's not.

VOICE: Yes, it is.

WILL: . . . You're right. It is.

VOICE: You don't recognize that sound. You cannot identify it, because you have never heard it before. Therefore, you don't know what to expect. But, I can tell you this: remember the randomly-generated maze? . . . The Minotaur is back.

Will shivers heavily.

VOICE: This is your situation, Will – and this is your fifth test. Behind you, your family is still coming after you. Ahead of you is the store, which *may* have weapons, but which also contains an unknown monster. What move will you make? Will you enter the store, or risk another encounter with your family?

WILL: Heh. No contest! I'm going in.

VOICE: But, you don't know what to expect in the store. With your family, you know what you're facing.

WILL: Hey, if they can just pull knives out of nowhere, I think it's safe to say I *don't* know what I'm facing!

VOICE: Will. I am being serious. I advise you against going into the store.

WILL: No can do. I'm going.

He pulls the baseball bat from the car.

VOICE: You are hereby ordered to stop and turn back.

WILL: Then I'm disobeying orders.

Another screaming roaring sound.

VOICE: Are you prepared to face this unfamiliar threat?

WILL: No – but I'm going anyway.

He gets his baseball bat ready for action.

WILL: And I'm taking this with me.

He walks up to the front entrance of the store.

VOICE: Then, the fifth test has begun.

WILL: Wish me luck.

He leaves the scene, to enter the store (toward CENTER STAGE).

Fade to black.

Scene 6.

INT. DREAM WORLD – GROCERY STORE – FRONT ENTRANCE

FADE IN as Will enters the store – lit the same way as everything else, dim shades of black and blue.

The roaring sound continues to play.

WILL: Jesus, you are freaking me out with that.

VOICE: I warned you to turn back.

WILL: Not till I find my supplies.

He starts taking things off shelves, and putting them into a pile on his shirt, held with his left hand.

WILL: Hmm . . . this should be good . . . yeah . . .

VOICE: What are you expecting to accomplish?

WILL: Homebrewed weapons.

VOICE: You already have your bat.

WILL: Well . . . it may not be enough. I mean, you heard the sound of that thing!

VOICE: What weapons are you finding in the store?

WILL: Not "finding", necessarily . . . *making*. A spray bottle of deodorant. A cigarette lighter. That's all I need to make me a flame-thrower.

VOICE: How is this a weapon?

WILL: Deodorant, and a cigarette lighter? Easy. You light up a flame, you spray it with deodorant, instant fire.

VOICE: This sounds dangerous.

WILL: Yes. You're right. It's dangerous – *very* dangerous. Honestly, I shouldn't even be messing around with this.

VOICE: Then, why are you?

WILL: Because just taking my chances with dragons or whatever you have in store for me, might be worse.

Will kneels down, and drops everything to the floor, sighing with relief as he does so. He holds up the deodorant can and cigarette lighter, and creates his first flame. We either see an actual flame, or imagine it while hearing the sound effect of flames.

VOICE: Are you truly ready?

WILL: Ready as I'll ever be!

We hear banging noises. We hear the sound of that inhuman roaring again.

VOICE: Be warned. The monster is zeroing in on you. The monster is on the other side of that shelf.

We hear the sound of footsteps moving from right to left.

VOICE: It will be upon you in five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . .

. . . nothing happens.

Will looks around.

There is nothing.

WILL: (sighing with relief) That's all? Ha ha! That's all there is?

Suddenly, the monster leaps into view from STAGE RIGHT!

Will runs at it, screaming a war cry! He unleashes the flames! We can hear the sound of flames being shot, while also seeing the monster scream and hearing inhuman roars of agony.

WILL: Yeah, that's right! What now!

He goes for it again.

The monster thrashes an arm at him, striking him in the side; he is flung back, dropping his tools on the way.

He lands several feet back, groaning in pain as he does so.

He tries to feel around for his weapons. He feels his chest, side, pockets . . . no, they're gone.

WILL: I . . . dropped it . . .

The monster walks his way.

WILL: No . . . I dropped it . . .

He finds the baseball bat, and stands to his feet again.

WILL: No problem. Don't need one! I still got the bat!

He runs forward again, screaming another war cry.

He hits the monster with the bat!

It screams in agony again as it moves backward!

WILL: Yeah, that's right!! No one messes with me!! No one!!

The monster leaps forward, grabbing him by the shoulders! Will falls backward, lying on his back on the floor! The monster tries to eat him while he writhes around helplessly!

VOICE: This is not looking good.

WILL: SHUT UP! I don't need to hear that!

The monster gets in *really* close.

WILL: Oh, that's it. No choice now.

Will uses both hands to push the monster's face back.

WILL: No choice now – but for human nature to kick in!! The inner animal! Human instincts! The inner caveman!!

Will springs up, filled with a rush of power, overpowering the monster.

WILL: NOBODY!

He swings a right punch!

WILL: EATS!

He swings a left hook!

WILL: ME!

He deals the final blow with the bat!

The monster turns to the right, fatally hurt by that last blow. It falls to its knees.

Will drops the bat.

The monster groans, and finally collapses to the floor.

WILL: . . . Did I do it? Did I kill it?

VOICE: Congratulations, Will. You passed the fifth test.

WILL: I did?? I did! Yeah! I did!

VOICE: The monster is down. You have won the fight.

WILL: I passed the test! I beat that guy!

VOICE: Now that you have passed, you are halfway through the ten tests. Five are down, and five remain.

WILL: Oh, but not just yet, not just yet. (shaking his head) Mm-mm. I'm not starting any more tests until I get what I need.

He takes his cigarette lighter and deodorant with him.

WILL: (smiling) Although this flame-thrower *does*, in a way, make me feel complete.

He exits STAGE RIGHT. Fade to black.

Scene 7.

INT. DREAM WORLD – INT. WILL'S CAR

Back to Will inside his car – driving off again.

WILL: Hmm, let's see . . . turn on the radio . . .

He turns on a radio. Through it, the sounds of the black, shadowy figures are heard.

VOICE: Where are you going now?

WILL: Wherever I feel like.

A moment of silence. Both sides have reached a stalemate for the moment; they can't read his mind, and he has some kind of trick up his sleeve.

VOICE: Whatever you're planning, know this: we are in control of this world.

WILL: You're not in control of Earth.

VOICE: No, but we're in control of *this* world, the one you're in right now. You are at our mercy.

Will shrugs.

WILL: I'll find ways.

He finally stops driving, and puts the car in Park.

WILL: No need to park anywhere. I'm right here at the front door.

VOICE: What is this place?

WILL: You guys have my whole city mapped out, I figure. So, here I am: the bank.

He walks inside the bank, at CENTER STAGE.

Scene 8.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – BANK

Will approaches an ATM, and starts pressing buttons.

VOICE: What are you doing, Will?

WILL: This machine is an ATM. A money dispenser. An electronic machine. A . . . a computer.

VOICE: But you cannot program things from this.

Will looks visibly angry as he realizes this.

WILL: Damn! I thought I could! I thought there'd be a keyboard or something and I could use . . .

He sighs.

WILL: Well, fine, whatever. At least I can withdrawal some money.

He has to stop for a second to think.

WILL: Wait, is this gonna affect my real-life bank account, if I do this?

He has to think about it for a moment.

WILL: Could that happen?

He thinks some more.

WILL: Okay, *this* ATM machine is not real . . . it's just a dream . . . but, this dream technology is connected to the real-life technology of the Dream Machine chair . . . and *that* could become interconnected with a computer, therefore the Internet, therefore possibly real-life bank information . . . wait, no, could it?

He shakes his head.

WILL: No. This won't affect it, that's crazy.

Behind him, a few people start slowly walking up toward the machine. Will doesn't look at them, but he's aware that they're there.

WILL: (pressing more buttons) Withdrawal . . . one million dollars.

The machine starts whirring as it gets into use.

Will smiles, and chuckles.

WILL: Ha ha. Unlimited funds! Unlimited cash!

VOICE: What use is money, Will?

WILL: Well . . . I thought I'd be able to type in commands at this ATM . . . I'm just trying to get *something* out of it.

VOICE: Your money will not help you.

WILL: No, it won't. *But*, money can brainwash people. Like this.

Will starts throwing money onto the floor.

WILL: Look, everyone, free money! *Free money!* Don't question it, just take your money and run!

Chaos ensues; Will runs off, making his getaway.

He goes back into his car at STAGE RIGHT.

Scene 9.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – INT. WILL'S CAR

Will starts driving again. He starts putting some of the money into his pockets.

VOICE: But money won't solve every test, Will.

WILL: Oh, shut up!

VOICE: The sixth test is upon you, Will. I won't tell you any of the rules – but rest assured, it *has* begun.

Will shifts uneasily.

VOICE: Go. (*ding!* sound goes off)

INSTRUCTOR: Hi there!

Will turns his head.

Dear God, he just now realizes that there's a second person in the car with him.

INSTRUCTOR: (extending a handshake) I'm David Booth, your Driver's –

WILL: (pointing at him) Driver's – Driver's Ed, yeah . . . yeah, I remember you! I did three Driver's Ed sessions with you when I was 16!

The instructor is silent for a second, and then he leans his head back, eyes widened.

INSTRUCTOR: Really?

WILL: All right, no, I'm *not* going through this.

VOICE: (the real voice, not the radio) Welcome to Driver's Ed, Will. After going through about 15 miles of the streets and highway, your instructor is going to kill you. Be prepared.

WILL: This is insanity.

INSTRUCTOR: *Yes*, now you're getting the picture.

Will becomes terrified as he continues to drive. He looks surprised by something.

WILL: Whoa, what? We're on the highway already?

The sounds of heavy traffic are heard: the sounds of other cars zooming past.

WILL: Jesus Christ, everyone's going 90! (picking up his speed, to keep up) Everyone's weaving in and out! This is all wrong!

INSTRUCTOR: Today we're gonna learn about "keeping up with traffic" . . .
(Will gulps) . . . when the road is *up-side down*.

Will's eyes go wide, and he quickly jerks backward. He looks like he's inside a carnival's giant spinning top-shaped ride, pinned in a downward direction by gravity.

INSTRUCTOR: (making hand-motions while talking) You see, this road is twisting up-side down, but the road is full of magnetic fields, and thus this car is bound *magnetically* to the track. Don't worry, you have no chance at all of falling off the track, and falling down a hundred feet . . . unless, of course, one of these other cars hits you. Then, yeah.

WILL: (terrified) *This* wasn't in Driver's Ed!

INSTRUCTOR: Remember, little William . . . it's all about *keeping up with traffic*.

Will continues to drive, at extremely fast speeds.

WILL: And if I keep up with traffic, I'll live?

INSTRUCTOR: Yeah. Basically.

The sound of a siren is heard!

A chill takes over Will.

Red light flashes across the scene as an ambulance pulls up behind him.

INSTRUCTOR: Remember that when ambulances are approaching, you should look in your rearview mirror, but *not* look behind you. I won't advise you to look behind you until after you've been driving for a few more months, and have more of a feel for it.

WILL: What's that ambulance doing? *What's that ambulance doing??*

INSTRUCTOR: It's coming for you, Will.

WILL: STOP IT! Stop doing that! (starting to become sad) Please. I don't want this. I don't want to die. I don't want this to be the end.

The instructor smiles, and chuckles.

INSTRUCTOR: Heh heh . . . of course ya don't, Will. Nobody does.
(suddenly turning extremely serious) Wait, no, Will LOOK OUT -!!

CRASH! The ambulance crashes right into Will, knocking him off course! Both Will and the instructor start to move through the car wildly as it is crashed into, and as they fall off the track and start falling, up-side down! We hear the sound of wind flapping past us as we follow Will and the instructor through their fall off the road!

WILL: Okay. Okay. We're falling. This is it. Game over. We're gonna die.

Fade to black.

END OF ACT TWO.

ACT THREE.

Scene 1.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – STREET

At this moment, there are still just two scenes going on at once:

A, the interior of the van (STAGE LEFT), with Will and the shadowy figures;
and B, Will in the black-and-blue dream world (STAGE RIGHT).

FADE IN on Will at STAGE RIGHT, lying in the street, laying down comfortably.

Suddenly, he bolts up out of sleep.

WILL: WHOA! It was just a dream . . . just a dream . . .

He starts breathing heavily.

VOICE: Welcome to the site of the seventh test, Will.

Will sits around and thinks about it.

WILL: The part where I wake up?

Silence.

WILL: Okay, let's stop and review.

(feeling his chest, sides, pockets) Okay, I've still got the money. I've still got all the cash. I've still got the lighter . . . and the deodorant. Yes. But I've lost the bat.

He thinks for a second.

WILL: Well, I've just gotta weigh the advantages and disadvantages I have going for me right now, the pros and cons. Okay, let's see . . .

(counting them on his fingers) A, I can't get tired. I can run all day long and never run out of energy, as long as I *believe* I won't.

B, I don't need to eat, or drink. So I'm all set there.

C, as long as I can find another computer, I can do tricks . . . hmm . . . where would I find another one?

He sighs.

WILL: I have no idea where I am right now.

The true mysteriousness of this moment finally hits him.

WILL: Where *am* I, anyway? I can just die in a car crash, and just wake up in a . . . a new dream, I guess?

VOICE: Your mind is entering its fourth dream cycle of the night.

WILL: . . . Really?

That gives him something to think about.

WILL: Wait, so . . . everything I've been through . . . wait, have there been dream sequences that I can't remember?

VOICE: Do you know where you are, Will?

Will looks around himself.

WILL: Dear God, I'm . . . at college. I haven't been here in years.

VOICE: Do you remember this place, Will?

WILL: Yeah, I mean . . . well, no, I haven't really been here since I was a student. I don't really remember everything about college.

As he walks on, the spotlight shines on more of the area.

WILL: But seeing it in person is starting to bring it all back! Ha ha! Oh, man! I *kind of* remember it now!

The spotlight shines on a banner showing the school's name:

PALIN OBAMA UNIVERSITY.

WILL: (eyebrows scrunched) *That's* not what it was called!

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, 2008's Republican Vice Presidential Candidate, Sarah Palin, and Democrat President-Elect Barack Obama both enter the scene from STAGE RIGHT . . . as a loving interracial couple wrapped up in one another.

Will's eyes go wider than ever.

WILL: Just stop the nightmare right here.

PALIN: Well, Will, we both wanted to greet you personally for the seventh test.

OBAMA: We know just how difficult it is to have incredible obstacles thrown our way. Obstacles you sometimes feel you can't handle.

WILL: Jesus, what is wrong with my mind?

PALIN: And that's why . . .

OBAMA: . . . we have come bearing gifts.

(reaching into a Christmas stocking, and pulling out an object) X-Ray glasses . . . which actually work.

PALIN: (reaching into her stocking, then handing Will his gift) And this is a gun, dear.

WILL: Wait, wait? A gun? And . . . X-Ray glasses that actually work??

Will puts on the glasses, and looks around. Immediately, the scene becomes lit with green light, as though we are seeing the world through the glasses.

PALIN: We wish you the best of luck, dear.

Palin and Obama exit the scene.

WILL: Okay. So. Yeah. Now I've got a gun, *and* X-Ray glasses that actually work. Didn't see that coming.

He walks on . . . and suddenly gets another idea.

WILL: Wait a minute. I remember how to have a basic walk around this campus! I remember where things are! *The computer lab!* I could go there . . . command myself some more weapons . . . maybe even a helicopter! Yeah! I'll make myself a helicopter!

He starts to think about it.

WILL: Wait a minute. *Here's* a command, right now: the next time I walk through a door, it will take me directly to the girl's locker room.

No response from the shadowy figures; he smiles, going with this new idea.

He walks through the nearest door.

Scene 2.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – COLLEGE LOCKER ROOM

Will walks around the room, looking around in awe.

WILL: Woow. I never thought the machine would be able to capture *this* much detail, *this* fast . . .

He hears the sounds of footsteps approaching.

He runs to the nearest locker, jumps inside, and closes it almost completely shut.

Two hot girls walk in, appearing to be wearing nothing but towels. They're still lit by the bright green spotlight, while Will is still lit blue; he's looking at them with the goggles, looking *through* the inside of the locker itself.

WILL: Thank *God* for these X-Ray glasses . . .

He stops talking as the girls, towels wrapped around them, start getting their clothes out of their lockers.

GIRL 1: God, all I can say is, as soon as we find this guy, he's *dead*.

GIRL 2: Oh, you're telling me. D-A-E-D-D, *dead*.

GIRL 1: Oh, why do you think I had my Mom buy me a gun? So that as soon as we found this guy, we could kill him.

Both girls look toward Will.

GIRL 2: By the way, Will, we're talking about *you* –

Without warning, Girl 1 suddenly whips out a gun and shoots Will!

BANG!

Scene 3.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – STREET

Will wakes up.

Lying in the middle of the street again.

WILL: . . . Wait . . . so . . . *that* was all the dream?

No response.

WILL: . . . I'm . . . in a new dream right now?

No response.

WILL: I . . . keep dying . . . but I just can't seem to actually die?

No response.

Will gets up, and walks around.

WILL: Okay. I'm here at the college. (checking his pockets) Okay, I've still got the gun, and the X-Ray glasses that actually work.

He thinks for a second.

WILL: Am I dreaming this?

He can't be sure.

He pinches himself.

WILL: Okay, I can feel me pinching myself.

He tries it again.

WILL: But . . . even this could be a dream. Well, either way, I'm up to the eighth test –

VOICE: Exactly, Will. The eighth test, however, is only going to be a retake of the seventh.

WILL: Awww . . . I get killed by killer cheerleaders again?

VOICE: But this time, your choices might be different . . . your situations might be changed . . . this time, you might have an alternative outcome.

WILL: Okay, I recognize this. This is the main campus. Same place I started out as before. Only, instead of going into the girls' locker room, no, this time I'll go somewhere else . . . like, the computer labs! And program myself some new guns and a helicopter!

He smiles, nodding his head.

WILL: Yeah! Just like the last dream! . . . Only this time, I'll do it *right*.

He walks off, toward STAGE RIGHT.

Fade to black.

Scene 4.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – COLLEGE LOBBY

WILL: So, this is the eighth test. The lobby.

A radio suddenly kicks in.

RADIO: *chhk* Ahhh, attention Officer 13, this is Officer 12, do you copy? Over.

chhk Copy that, this is 13. Over.

chhk There's that fellow in the building, William Cumberland . . . it's time to kill him. Over.

chhk Copy that, we're coming to kill him right now. Over.

Will grabs his gun desperately.

WILL: Thank God I got this!

Will tries to duck down and remain hidden behind things. He suddenly notices that a laser pen is being shined on a wall nearby.

It's coming closer to him.

RADIO: *chhk* He can't be far. We must be near him. Over.

He aims his gun.

He crouches down, and tries to remain hidden, out of sight . . .

. . . Suddenly, he gets up, and starts running!

RADIO: THERE HE IS!! Get him!!

The sound of a siren is heard.

Red lights flash on and off.

WILL: UHHHH-ohhhh. They're coming to get me. Not good.

He dives out of sight, toward STAGE RIGHT . . .

Scene 5.

INT. DREAM-WORLD – HILL

(Start out in blackness.)

FADE IN on Will on a sled. Suddenly, he's wearing a fleece cap and coat normally meant for sledding.

His body is shaking back and forth, indicating that he's sledding down a hill.

WILL: . . . What . . . the fuck. Why am I sledding. In the snow.

RADIO: *chhk* Damn, I think we've lost him. Over.

chhk He was just here a second ago, where could that little fucker have gone?

Will continues to slide out of sight, still terrified by the experience of sledding but relieved to see that he is making his exit.

WILL: Thank . . . God. (long sigh of relief)

VOICE: You are getting away from them successfully, Will. But, notice that the weather is changing. It's suddenly much more snowy here.

WILL: You. Crazy bastards. Are out. Of your God-forsaken minds.

VOICE: Be aware that there are some . . . thunderstorms coming.

The sound of rumbling thunder is heard.

The sound of lightning hitting the ground.

The sounds of rainfall.

Will starts shivering, shocked by the sudden feeling of rainfall.

WILL: It's . . . raining . . .

VOICE: Be aware of who controls the weather here. Today's forecast calls for some heavy thunderstorms in a very . . . unusual manner!

Light suddenly shines on the image of a red thunderbolt, for one quick second! The sound of lightning is heard, and then the light fades to black.

Will flinches.

WILL: Okay. No. That missed me.

VOICE: You must steer your sled to avoid the lightning.

WILL: I. Am gonna. Kill you. Violently. When we meet each other.

VOICE: The red lights on the ground are a warning. The red lights indicate where the lightning is about to strike. You have a fair shot at winning this game.

WILL: What could you *possibly* be doing now?

VOICE: Begin.

Three red circles of light appear at the ground – starting out aiming toward STAGE RIGHT, then all moving at once, in a somewhat bumpy pattern, toward STAGE LEFT. They are the red circles of light Will sees on the snowy ground as he sleds downhill.

WILL: So that's where the lightning strikes.

Will steers his sled toward the right. Immediately, all three circles of light move away, until all are out of view; but, only a few seconds later, three new circles begin at STAGE RIGHT!

All the while, the sound of lightning is heard. Occasionally, lightning strikes, shining light on the image of a green bolt for one second, while the sound effect of a lightning strike is heard, before fading to black.

RADIO: *chhk* Wait a minute, I see him! I see him! He's been sledding down that hill this whole time! Over.

A red spotlight shines on Will!

A new siren noise is heard – a horn that one would normally expect to signal the end of a basketball game!

Will's eyes widen, and he notices immediately that the speed of his sledding seems to slow down, then stop.

WILL: I've reached the bottom of the hill.

RADIO: *chhk* All units, contact. Repeat, all units, contact. William Cumberland has just been spotted at the bottom of a hill. Attention, everyone in the city: kill this man. Kill this man immediately.

With mere seconds, right there at the bottom of the hill, Will starts to notice five strangers staggering into the scene at once.

STRANGER 1: Kill Will!

STRANGER 2: Kill Will!

STRANGER 3: Yeah! Kill Will! Exactly!

STRANGER 4: I say we kill him.

STRANGER 5: I get dibs!

Will flinches.

WILL: I think I'd rather be going through the lightning than this.

Stranger 5 runs toward Will, in a crooked and curved path, while smiling.

STRANGER 5: *Hi, Will! My name is Loxar!* I'm gonna kill you!

Will backs up.

WILL: You don't exist. You're just a figment of my dream. You don't exist!

STRANGER 5: (swinging at him with a knife) Ohhh, but I'm just real enough to kill you, I'll tell you that!

Will backs up, and leans backward to dodge the knife.

STRANGER 5: I'm gonna kill you! I'm gonna kill you!

Will suddenly leaps forward and punches the stranger!

The stranger staggers backward. Will grabs the man's arm, pulls his knife out of his grip, and –

– the stranger kicks him and pushes him back, stopping him for the moment. His smile never fades.

Will runs up to a red circle on the ground. He gets a red light beam aimed at him. He runs up to the stranger, then runs behind him. Now the spotlight is shined on the stranger.

Immediately, the stranger is shot.

The red light moves on.

WILL: Whoa, man, you all right?

No response.

WILL: Well, this *is* just a dream, so . . . that didn't really happen.

Will's wife Laurie, dressed as a cheerleader, enters STAGE RIGHT.

CHEERLEADER LAURIE: I'm so proud of you, Will! You passed the eighth test! I knew you could do it, baby!

WILL: What? You're dressed as a cheerleader . . .? (shakes his head, then shrugs) Whatever.

CHEERLEADER LAURIE: You *did* it, baby, you've made it all the way to the ninth test!

WILL: Is that the final one?

CHEERLEADER LAURIE: Huh? No – there's ten altogether.

WILL: Awww, man.

CHEERLEADER LAURIE: But that's just the bad news. The good news is, you get to redo the exact same “college” test again, as Test Number Nine!

WILL: What? For real? A third time?

CHEERLEADER LAURIE: Remember: learn from your mistakes! Peace out!

Cheerleader Laurie jumps away, eventually becoming out of sight.

Fade to black.

Scene 6.

INT. DREAM WORLD – FRONT ENTRANCE TO COLLEGE

FADE IN as Will wakes up yet again.

WILL: Okay. New dream. New . . . test?

VOICE: The ninth test is only another retake. How will you do, moving through your school for the third time?

He looks around himself.

WILL: Yeah, this is the Circle . . . that's the lobby over there . . . no, *bad* idea, the snipers . . . hmm, no, I'll go into the guard booth this time. Yeah. That's what I'll do.

Light shines on CENTER STAGE at a lit guard booth.

WILL: The guard booth . . . there's no guards around . . . (chuckling) Perfect.

He climbs inside.

Surprisingly, light shines at STAGE RIGHT to show an entire classroom, with five students sitting in chairs, being taught by a professor!

WILL: What?

PROFESSOR: All right, class, today we study . . . oh, look who's decided to join us!

WILL: What? . . . Oh. Sorry.

PROFESSOR: It's all right, just take a seat.

Will sits down, and excitedly begins typing on a computer.

WILL: All riiiiight. New weapons. New helicopter!

PROFESSOR: Mr. Cumberland!

Will looks at him.

PROFESSOR: (very sarcastically) Weeeelll, don't let me interrupt your little game time!

WILL: Huh? Oh, I'm just programming a helicopter to appear, that's all. It won't take long.

The professor gives him a strange look, and a pause.

PROFESSOR: My dear boy, you care to run that by me again?

Will stops typing for a second, irritated to be torn away.

WILL: (sigh) I'm programming a new helicopter to suddenly appear right here in this classroom. So I'll just take off and fly around. What's so hard about that?

PROFESSOR: What if there's bad weather? What if a lightning storm starts up?

WILL: . . . (long pause) . . . Shit, that's true! Lightning storm! That would be such a bad nightmare! (shivers)

PROFESSOR: My dear boy, I do advise you to understand how to pilot such a vehicle as a helicopter *before* trying to create one yourself.

Suddenly, the professor staggers back, falling off-balance and being caught off-guard! Everyone begins to shake and rumble, reflecting what's happening to the world!

WILL: . . . Shit. Whoops. I didn't mean to hit Enter then.

Loud sounds of a propeller begin to build up.

PROFESSOR: My dear boy, what did you *do*??

WILL: I . . . I kind of created some propellers, like on an airplane . . .

PROFESSOR: Propellers??

WILL: . . . and – they're kind of attached to the building, so we're all just flying away . . .

The other students begin rolling around on the ground, uncontrollably affected by the heavy levels of gravity.

WILL: Yep. Okay, we're taking off. The building is taking off. With propellers.

STUDENT 2: (panicking, grabbing Will's collar) *What are we gonna do??*

WILL: Well . . . uhh . . . if you're planning on making a jump for it, now would be the time.

STUDENT 3: You can't be serious.

Will starts running toward the window.

WILL: Ahhh, man, we've floated away too far already. Ahh, man. No. No.
(grabbing his head with both hands, walking away) Ahhh, this is not good.

STUDENT 3: Hey, hey! I just got an idea!

Will looks at him.

STUDENT 3: Why not just program some parachutes for us all?

Will thinks about that.

WILL: Oh my God. Say that again?

STUDENT 3: Program some parachutes, for all of us!

WILL: (gasp) *How* did you think of that?

STUDENT 3: (shrugs) I don't know, I – I just *thought* of it, suddenly.

WILL: Oh, you're a genius!

He immediately sits down and starts typing.

He types away furiously. He never seems to be able to type enough; the more he does, the more into it he gets, and the more he tries to do.

Finally, it's done.

WILL: *Done!* Okay, look behind you –

As he turns his head away from the computer, he sees a giant parachute that the other students are holding.

WILL: Okay, good, you've got it.

STUDENT 3: But what about the other –

Bing! Bing! Bing! Bing! Bing! Five duplicates are immediately created.

STUDENT 3: Oh, okay.

STUDENT 2: (walking up to Will, smiling) Wow! So now we all have parachutes, and can land safely on the ground! I'm proud of you, Will! You saved us all!

WILL: Heh heh. Well, you guys don't really exist anyway, so, I dunno . . .

Everyone else starts exiting the scene.

Fade to black.

Scene 7.

INT. DREAM WORLD – BLACKNESS

VOICE: Congratulations, Will. You have made it all the way to the final challenge. This is the tenth, and final, test. After this, you will be released.

WILL: What? Tenth and final?

(after he gets no response) Did you say tenth and final?

(after he gets nothing but silence again) Tell me where to go! Tell me what to do! I'll pass this test blindfolded!

VOICE: You have learned.

The color of the spotlight above changes from blue to green; not just in the grocery store, but inside the van scene at STAGE LEFT as well.

Will walks around a little, searching for the ninth testing area . . .

Scene 8.

INT. DREAM WORLD – VAN-LAB

. . . and walks right into the van.

WILL: What the . . . ?

VOICE: Your tenth, and final, test has begun.

WILL: Is that . . . is that . . . me?

(Shadowy Figure 2 continues to talk into the microphone – right in front of Will.)

VOICE: You are still unconscious. This is still a dream.

WILL: (feeling his head and chest) I'm not awake, still??

VOICE: This is what you have looked like throughout the dream-state.

Will puts his hands on his knees, and breathes deeply.

WILL: You really had me confused for a second there.

VOICE: Your objective in this test is to find a way to exit the dream world and return to the real world.

WILL: What?? But – I tried that already! Nothing worked!

VOICE: It is all a matter of how you play your cards.

WILL: But – I can't! I'm just in a dream right now! This is just a nightmare – I can't just make myself *exit* at will!

Will walks around the van-lab.

WILL: How is this possible? How can I be . . . ?

VOICE: All your questions have answers within this van.

Will looks around.

He inspects things.

He reaches down and taps his double on the forehead.

WILL: Yoo-hoo? . . . Nothing happened.

He inspects the wires on his double's head.

WILL: My God. All these wires. I don't feel these wires at all!

He feels his own forehead.

WILL: Is this really real? Wow . . .

Another screaming roaring sound happens.

At CENTER STAGE, the monster from the grocery store gets to his feet.

VOICE: You'd better hurry up, Will. The Minotaur of the maze, and the monster you encountered in the grocery store, is coming back.

WILL: No he's not. *No he's not!*

As the voice continues to talk, the monster continues to move.

WILL: I – I – I need a minute!

VOICE: You don't have a minute.

WILL: I just – I need one little minute to think, and then I could do this!

VOICE: Time is a luxury, of which you have run out. The tenth test has begun.

Yet again, the sound of a clock's ticking begins.

WILL: Okay, okay, think. Think. How do you get out?

He paces around, frantically, trying to come up with something.

He shakes his head. There are just no answers.

WILL: I can't do this.

He looks up at the ceiling.

WILL: THIS IS A TRICK QUESTION!

VOICE: There *is* a way out of this, Will.

WILL: Well then what is it?? Tell me what it is!!

VOICE: You must find the answer on your own.

WILL: BUT I CAN'T!! I'm only in a dream! I can't do anything that affects the real world!!

VOICE: You have 10 seconds until the monster is upon you.

Will looks around – and, finally, spots a computer.

WILL: (gasp) A computer! That's it!

He races toward it, and starts typing as fast as he can.

WILL: Computer, computer! Oh, thank God! Just one quick moment, that's all I need!

VOICE: Five seconds.

Suddenly, Will stops talking as he comes to an important realization. For the first time, everything becomes calm and serene for him.

WILL: Oh . . . wait . . . *that's* the answer. *That's* what I do. It's so simple.

He reaches into his pocket, and pulls out the gun.

WILL: This is all I needed to do, all along.

VOICE: (the *ding!* sound of a timer plays) Your time is up.

The monster roars again.

WILL: POWER OUTAGE!

Will starts shooting all the computers!

Immediately, sounds of sparks and bursts build up.

He grabs for the deodorant and lighter in his pockets.

WILL: Yeah, that's right, if I destroy this, then I get myself out! My mind will be sending the signals that actually *do* disconnect the dream from the machine, from the dream's end! And you know what, I've still got the flame-thrower, so let's just burn it too!

The lights begin to flicker wildly, and soon, everything fades to black.

All the sounds of electronic humming fade away.

Everything is dark.

(The actor who was playing Will's plugged-in body in the van exits, STAGE LEFT. The actor playing Will in motion lays down to become the one who is plugged in. The shadowy figures exit the scene, STAGE LEFT, as well.)

Scene 9.

INT. REAL WORLD – VAN-LAB

Fade in.

It's the same scene as before – the van-lab, with Will plugged in. However, the green light is gone, and for the first time in the van-lab, everything looks normal. The shadowy figures have vanished as well.

Will sits up. He looks around, inspects the scene a little, and breathes slowly.

WILL: I'm awake.

He grabs the wires on his head, and pulls them off. He stands up.

WILL: ALL RIGHT, people . . .

As he looks around the van, he finds that it is empty.

WILL: . . . Where are you?

He walks around.

WILL: Guys? I did the ten tests. I did what I was supposed to! Where are you?

He continues to search, with no luck.

WILL: Oh, that's it? I get myself out of the dream-world and you're not even here to congratulate me?

He sighs.

WILL: Well, human testing is over – for me, at least.

He opens the van's doors.

He jumps out (toward STAGE RIGHT).

Scene 10.

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE

Will walks away from the van, back toward his house.

We can hear all the sounds one would normally expect to find outside, at night: namely, the blowing of the wind, and the chirping of crickets.

Will continues to breathe heavily while he walks.

Red and blue lights flash on.

Will's whole body jolts in shock.

OFFICER: FREEZE!

WILL: Whoa!

OFFICER: Freeze right there!

The officer walks toward Will, aiming a flashlight at him.

OFFICER: Show me your hands!

WILL: Hey! Hey! Hold on a second – this is my house! I live here!

OFFICER: (walking over to him with a flashlight) Yeah? Yeah, tell me, sir, what's your name?

WILL: Will. William Cumberland. Jeez, how do I know *this* isn't just another dream . . .

OFFICER: *What??* . . . Look, you have any ID on you?

WILL: Uhh . . . I . . . I don't know, I'd have to check my pockets.

As Will starts to feel around in his pockets, the officer stops him.

OFFICER: HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE EM! Jesus . . .

WILL: Whoa, whoa! Hey! I told you – I live here! I'm William Cumberland! *Dr.* Cumberland, a scientist at Dosan Labs!

OFFICER: Okay. Tell you what. Bout ten minutes ago, we got a report in a call coming from *this* house. Now, I don't like being out and about like this at three in the morning . . . but, I got the call.

WILL: This house here? Yeah, I –

OFFICER: *I'm talking.*

Will swallows.

OFFICER: I was told that three men:

(counting the crimes on his fingers) broke into this house; assaulted a woman who lives here, and rendered her unconscious; and dragged a man out of bed, kicking and screaming, into an unknown location.

Will is silent.

OFFICER: And, the caller from this house said this man was her father, Dr. William Cumberland.

Will exhales, sighing with relief.

WILL: That's me.

OFFICER: Tell me. What's been happening the last ten minutes?

WILL: Ten minutes? More like two hours.

The officer shakes his head.

OFFICER: The call came in eight minutes ago. I've only been out here the past *three* minutes.

WILL: Eight minutes . . .? Oh . . . of – of course, the dream . . . dreams happen in only a second or two . . .

OFFICER: I wanna hear your story. Start talking. Where did you just come from?

Will points toward the van.

WILL: That van over there . . . they pulled me into there.

OFFICER: Who's "they"?

Will laughs.

WILL: The three people that are gonna find themselves *very* arrested.

OFFICER: Start all over. Start from the beginning.

WILL: It's gonna be a long story.

OFFICER: I've got all day.

Will sighs, feeling relieved.

WILL: All right. I don't even know where to start, but I'll try . . . wow, it's just so . . . so unreal now. Like a bad dream. A nightmare.

He looks up at the sky.

WILL: It's all over.

Fade to black.

END OF ACT THREE.

END OF PLAY.

Special Features

In July 2008, at the end of my first year of college, I wrote five plays with the hopeful goal of one day seeing them performed by my school: *This Is Just A Nightmare*, *Gloom*, *SodaCorp*, *Raised Consciousness*, and *Antipot*.

But, five months before that, in February 2008, there once came an earlier attempt at writing an action / adventure / horror play, with a nightmare-oriented story, to be performed by my school. This earlier attempt was called "Bad Dream Reality", and I've included it as a Bonus Feature for this book. However, let me state real quickly that I only view "Bad Dream Reality" as a Special Feature, here to help you, the reader, understand the roots of my main play, "This Is Just A Nightmare", and to further appreciate its vision. I don't view "Bad Dream Reality" as part of a family of six plays, the way I would with *SodaCorp* and *Raised Consciousness*, each also 10 pages long.

Now for the story of how I came to write all this. See, my Mom is a college teacher . . . that's most of the story right there. Throughout my teenage years, I became familiar with a good amount of the Lynn University campus where she taught, knowing that one day I'd go there for absolutely *free*. I started classes in September 07, just three months before my 20th birthday. Five months later (February 08), Mom told me about an opportunity to write a play and see it performed at the school, by other students!

Here's how it would work. The Lynn 24-Hour Theatre Project was a project, consisting entirely of Lynn students, being held at the school between 7:00 Friday night and 7:00 Saturday night. It would involve six plays, each ten minutes long, being written, directed, and performed by students. By the end of the 24 hours, all six plays would be performed in succession on the stage in the lunchroom, and seen by a fair-numbered audience. Being my Mom's son, I could just drop in at 7 p.m. and sign up as a writer (along with her); otherwise, I never would have heard of the project.

All the writers selected the names for their plays off a list, with over 25 choices. Mom picked the name "Do Not Climb on the Animals" for her play (based on an idea she'd had for a story in college, about angels in Heaven sitting around arguing about the existence of man). I picked the name "Bad Dream Reality" for mine. So, you see, it turns out I didn't just make that name up from nothing after all.

So, what would my play be about? . . . Hmm . . . that was a difficult choice. I had a million books I was writing in my spare time, but it was difficult deciding which one story might work as a play, to the exclusion of everything else. Honestly, I just wanted to present the audience with something unexpected. I just wanted to shock people and create something totally unlike what everyone else was doing. I figured that everyone else would be making light-hearted comedies, probably about school life . . . and so they would never see my play coming, although it would be the kind of play you always wanted to see deep down inside (at least, if you're exactly like me).

My original vision for my play was . . .

. . . well, basically, it was "This Is Just A Nightmare", in 10 pages.

I didn't actually have a story fleshed out, but I had some ideas for what I was in the mood for: action; horror; nightmares. I wanted to do something with *way more* special effects involved than, say, a comedy play with two people standing around talking – though the effects would have to be possible on basically no budget.

All the writers selected their crew of actors and directors, by reaching into a hat and pulling out slips of paper with written names. I got one director, one actor, and three actresses. Now, I realized, I was getting into a writing project where I interacted with people all throughout the creative process. If I'd just sat at home and written something by myself, I could have produced, say, "This Is Just A Nightmare". In the 24-Hour Project, I would have to shape the script around these people: my play had to have four characters, three girls and one guy. One of the actresses had her arm in a sling; I wrote that into the play (although, in real life, the arm-break came from growth spurts, I think).

Right after this page are the two brainstorming pages I wrote while everybody around me was inputting their ideas – the energy was going on too fast for me to catch every single word. I was getting input from everybody, so I was *not* the only person to pitch ideas for the story, as I'd originally thought. And all this time, I'd thought actors were just there to read their lines and endorse products – now I was learning that they were real human beings, with thoughts and feelings, just like me. The actors had a vision of their own for the play they wanted to be in:

A light-hearted romantic comedy about money!

. . . Uh-oh. I had a bad feeling about this.

Everyone talked long enough to reach a basic agreement for a story. Then, when everyone else left the building (to go to: sleep; shop around for props; dance the night away at clubs), I remained at school, at 1:30 in the morning, typing the 10-page script up on my laptop. Before long, I realized that all of this felt very unreal, and probably something I'd never be able to explain to my friends without sounding insane.

This was a difficult task for me, trying to satisfy two different crowds at once: on one hand, action / adventure / horror, and on the other, a light-hearted romantic comedy. I don't know if you've ever tried to mix the two (five?) genres before, but it's slightly hard . . . though a damn interesting challenge, being so unusual. I made the most of my situation, writing a play to hopefully please both them and me, and hoping my script could appear a good candidate for an episode of "the Twilight Zone".

But oh no, the actors didn't like the script. They grouped together to write a new draft, while I was asleep on the couch. Eventually, I woke up, of my own accord, to discover that we were running short on time, and had to get printed copies of the script ready for everyone. Due to some technical difficulties, the actors weren't able to print out enough copies of their revision in time, so everyone was stuck with my play. (I knew, right away, that I was probably gonna make a play out of all this, some day – probably with a name like "What Being A Writer Is Like".)

Group script readings. One-on-one readings with actors, with pep talks to get them further into the roles. Rigging the audio equipment to play a song at a character's request. Rehearsals. The script-memorizing process. Final rehearsals. *Showtime!*

Six plays were performed on stage that Saturday night, from 7 to 8:00 p.m. One of them was written by me. That night, I got the privilege of seeing something greater than what I alone could create: a script I had written, brought to life by five people, on a school stage theater, and succeeding in entertaining a crowd of people of a not-bad size. In spite of how rough the road had seemed before, I now realized that I was pretty happy with the final result, and the whole experience in general (as a one-time thing, anyway).

But then, in that coming May, I wrote "This Is Just A Nightmare" . . . and *this* time my play would be dark and depressing, damn it!

Brainstorming Page 1

TOP IDEAS

- Captain BackCrack
- waking up in a nightmare and having to escape
- guy confronting ex-girlfriends in a nightmare
- Impaired Judgment
- NO - dating game
- YES - jiggalo
- NO - fitness show
- some type of inheritance a guy knows about?

3 girls and one guy

Guy wakes up in a crazy dream, his memory is wiped, three girls know about his MONEY but he doesn't cause his memory is gone.

Three girls in the dream turn out to be MADE UP, IN HIS HEAD.

A guy is at a restaurant with his girlfriend, he goes away to a different part of the room, different woman, three girls altogether one at a time . . . at the end we realize he's waking up and was dreaming it all.

Turns out he's just been trapped in a cave or something for a few weeks.

OR:

he sees the same girl in real life, but she's different.

OR:

he saw them in passing earlier, or on TV or whatever.

CHARACTERS

ONE GUY

GIRL 1

GIRL 2

GIRL 3

Brainstorming Page 2

REVISE IT ALL.

A guy is in a restaurant, and talks to three different girls, one at a time. He's just a BABE magnet. He wakes up, and it turns out he was just dreaming it all up, and he's actually a hobo.

He just requests a song, snaps his fingers, and it appears.

The restaurant's type of food changes rapidly.

Bad Dream Reality

Brooke and Nicole enter from stage right. Both are smiling, and seem to be having a good time.

He walks her to her chair. She sits down. Brooke takes his seat as well.

NICOLE

Well, Mr. Alexander, you seem like an interesting person.

BROOKE

Why, thank you!

NICOLE

I'm not sure what I wanna get . . .

BROOKE

I think I'm in the mood for some Italian tonight . . . some pasta.

NICOLE

Ooh! Pasta! That's my favorite!

BROOKE

Ha ha! All right! I'll order us a pasta dish to split.

NICOLE

Why, thank you.

Brook and Nicole sit in silence for a few seconds.

BROOKE

Ahem . . . well, uh . . . so, what do you do?

NICOLE

I'm a secretary.

BROOKE

Ah! A secretary! That's interesting.

Brooke sits in the silence a little more.

BROOKE

So . . . umm . . . you enjoy your job?

NICOLE

Uh, yeah, I'd say I somewhat enjoy it. (sigh) It's a pretty monotonous, routine kind of job, though . . . you know, sit down all day, answer the phone, say the same thing over and over . . . not that exciting.

BROOKE

Yeah. But, at least you enjoy it.

Nicole shrugs.

BROOKE

Umm . . . so, your arm . . .

Brooke makes a couple awkward hand motions, trying to hint about her broken arm without actually saying it.

NICOLE

Oh – you mean, the cast?

BROOKE

Yeah . . .

NICOLE

Oh . . . heh heh. It's such a stupid story . . . you'd think I'm an idiot.

BROOKE

Awww. No I wouldn't.

NICOLE

Weeell . . . I was holding too many books in my hand at once, and I . . . tripped and fell down the stairs . . .

She holds her face with her good hand.

NICOLE

God, it was so stupid of me . . .

Brooke walks up to her, and puts one hand on her shoulder.

BROOKE

Aww . . . there, there.

NICOLE

Everything is so much harder now, with one arm broken . . .

BROOKE

I'll help you do things. I'll help you out.

NICOLE

Well . . . thanks!

BROOKE

No problem.

Brooke sits in the silence for another several seconds.

He sighs.

He seems to be running out of ideas for what to say.

He talks as though he wants to wrap it up.

BROOKE

Well, Nicole, you, uh . . .

NICOLE

I think I'm gonna go to the ladies' room real quick.

Brooke nods his head; exactly what he wanted to hear.

BROOKE

Okay. You do that.

Nicole gets up and leaves.

Brooke turns his chair away.

He sits, and waits.

While he turns back in the original direction, he sees that a second girl, Melissa, is approaching.

MELISSA

Well, Mr. Alexander, you seem like an interesting person.

BROOKE

Why, thank you!

MELISSA

Hmm . . . wonder what I'm in the mood for tonight . . .

BROOKE

I think I'm in the mood for some Greek food.

MELISSA

(gasp) Greek food? Gyro sandwiches are my favorite!

Brooke smiles.

BROOKE

That so? I'll order us a gyro to split.

MELISSA

Why, Mr. Alexander, you shouldn't have . . .

BROOKE

So, tell me a little about yourself.

MELISSA

Well, me, I'm a pretty upbeat kinda person – a *people* person.

BROOKE

Oh yeah? What do you do?

MELISSA

I work at a nightclub. Late night.

BROOKE

Oh! Exciting!

MELISSA

Yeah . . . I really can't work day jobs. Can't stand the mornings.

BROOKE

Yeah? A night person, that's awesome.

MELISSA

What I love about my job is the music.
The whole experience of being there with
the music playing. It's what I live for!

BROOKE

Who do you like?

MELISSA

Lots – I wouldn't know where to start.

BROOKE
Justin Timberlake, at all?

MELISSA
(gasp) Justin Timberlake? He's my idol!

Brooke leans his head in the direction of somebody out of our view.

BROOKE
Hey! A request! "Bringing Sexy Back!"

Melissa furrows her eyebrows.

MELISSA
A "request"? What're you –

The song starts playing.

MELISSA
Oh!

Brooke sits back, and gets more comfortable.

MELISSA
Well, enough about me . . . I'm interested in *you*.

Brooke sits upright again, appearing more interested.

BROOKE
Oh, yeah?

MELISSA
Yeah. Tell me about yourself.

The music stops.

BROOKE
Well, uhh . . . my name is Brooke . . . but you already know that . . .

Melissa comes closer to him.

MELISSA
You're a handsome guy. But you must get that a lot.

Brooke smiles and shrugs.

MELISSA

How many girls come after you at once? How much competition would I face?

BROOKE

Well, hey . . .

MELISSA

Anyone else ever commented on your sexy blond hair?

BROOKE

Sure, here and there.

He tugs on his collar; he actually seems to be growing nervous.

BROOKE

Err – I, uh –

MELISSA

Excuse me for a minute. I'm gonna go to the ladies room.

BROOKE

Yeah . . . you go do that.

Brooke turns away.

Melissa exits.

Lissania enters.

Brooke turns back to face her.

BROOKE

Hello!

Lissania is a lot more direct than the previous two girls. She cuts right to the point.

LISSANIA

Well, Mr. Alexander . . . I'm really not interested in all this.

Brooke seems somewhat confused.

BROOKE

What do you mean? Not interested in what?

LISSANIA

You know – in sitting down here, and ordering food,

and exchanging bits of pointless conversation . . .
 it's all just filler, really. Why do you really
 want me to go through this routine?

BROOKE
 Err . . . well . . .

LISSANIA
 What do you want me to do, Brooke? Ramble on about where I work? Ramble on about
 how *my* favorite food is also *your* favorite food? And how the song *you* love is also the
 song *I* love? Do you want me to act like a good little girl, nice and smart? Or sssensual,
 and sssexy?

BROOKE
 Well . . . I mean . . .

LISSANIA
 Brooke, you and I are not going to do anything meaningful. You know that! We're not
 going to have a meaningful conversation, we're not going to share a meaningful
 experience, and you're not going to take me home with you, and have a night to
 remember. You know this, Brooke – you know all of it.

BROOKE
 Wait – no! Please!

Lissania steps backward.

LISSANIA
 Why don't you just grow up, Brooke? Why don't you just acknowledge it? Why do you
 have to keep drowning yourself in fantasies? Are you really getting anything out of this?
 Anything at all?

BROOKE
 Wait . . . wait! Lissania! Please, don't leave! Not yet! You're the only girl so far who
 was perfect . . .

Lissania walks away from the table.

She brings her chair with her. She sits down in the chair again, several feet away from
 Brooke and the table, facing away from him.

Brooke lays back in his chair, as if to fall asleep.

He spends a few seconds just laying there, asleep.

Then, he pops up, eyes open, wide awake.

BROOKE
I woke up.

Nicole and Melissa enter the stage. They sit down in chairs behind Lissania, and in front of Brooke.

Lissania is sitting in her chair, and is operating a steering wheel.

LISSANIA
Are we all ready? Everyone's sat down and buckled up?

Lissania is a bus driver; Nicole, Melissa, and Brooke are all passengers.

Lissania talks into a microphone to speak to the whole bus.

LISSANIA
Thanks again, everyone, for choosing Blackhound Express as your method of travel.
Next stop: Delray Beach! Estimated time of arrival: 30 minutes.

NICOLE
God, I hate riding the bus.

MELISSA
Hey, it's just two more hours and we're done. Two more hours.

NICOLE
(groaning) Yeah, but still . . .

A few moments of silence.

NICOLE
So, did you see the show earlier? You would have loved it.

MELISSA
Oh, no, I didn't see it – was it good?

NICOLE
Yeah, it was great! This one guy got up and did an impression of Joe Pesci! It was *so* funny!

MELISSA
Joe Pesci? Like, the guy from "My Cousin Vinny"?

NICOLE
Yeah, exactly, that one!

MELISSA
Oh, I wish I'd seen it!

Brooke stands up. On his first word, he seems to cut off the flow of the two girls' conversation; they stop talking, and look at him.

BROOKE
(groggily) Uhhhh . . . Delray? That's . . . my stop . . .

He hiccups, has a little bit of trouble standing upright, and finally coughs.

Nicole and Melissa give Brooke a strange look, not saying a word, mouths open and eyes blinking. After a couple seconds, they look at each other.

Lissania talks to Brooke in the same tone as the other two.

LISSANIA
Sit down, mister! Stay buckled up till the bus is stopped!

BROOKE
Oh . . . uh . . . sorry.

Brooke sits down.

He looks at the two girls.

BROOKE
Ladieees.

The two girls whisper to each other, while looking at Brooke. They giggle to each other.

Brooke sighs. He looks weary and depressed as he sits in his seat.

BROOKE
Next time . . . it's gonna be good. Next time . . . it's gonna go right.

He sags his head, looking depressed.

BROOKE
Next time, when I say it's a good dream . . . I'm gonna *mean* it.

He leans back, eyes closed, to fall asleep again.

He starts breathing heavily.

After a few seconds, this turns into snoring.

NICOLE

Wow. Is that homeless guy *snoring*?

MELISSA

He's been here for hours. Who sleeps on a bus?

NICOLE

I guess he doesn't have any better place to sleep.

She shudders.

NICOLE

People like that creep me out . . . this is why I *hate* taking the bus.

MELISSA

I could *never* live like that.

Several seconds of silence follow.

NICOLE

He looks peaceful, though.

MELISSA

He must be having a good dream.

The two ride on in silence.