

CATALYST

by

Johnny Cohen

12 5th Avenue  
Parktown North 2193  
Johannesburg  
South Africa

Mobile: +27721487665  
Email: [johnny@johnnycohen.com](mailto:johnny@johnnycohen.com)

INT. MIT NANOTECH LAB "B" - NIGHT

IN THE SOFT-EDGE, CIRCULAR FOCAL AREA OF AN ELECTRON-SCANNING HOLOSCOPE, A CLUSTER OF SHIMMERING PENTAGONAL CELLS BEGIN TO SWARM, CONVERGE AND INTERLOCK WITH EERILY MECHANICAL PRECISION. LIKE PIXELS IN AN EXOTIC SCREENSAVER, THE SIGHT IS MESMERIZING AND BEAUTIFUL, YET STRANGELY UNNERVING. THEN THE FACES OF TWO THIRTY-SOMETHING MEN MATERIALIZE DIMLY FROM THE SHADOWS BEHIND - ILLUMINATED BY THE EVOLVING GEOMETRIC FORMATION AS THEY LEAN IN FOR A CLOSER LOOK.

Despite the fact that his nose and mouth are covered by some kind of breathing apparatus, MILES ROSENTHAL'S wide-eyed excitement is palpable. VICTOR RAINE's enthusiasm, however, is clearly more subdued, even with his entire face visible - a fact that isn't helped by his austere, square spectacles.

MILES  
(muffled by the breather)  
They're...binding. Actually...

VICTOR  
For now.

Turning to him slowly, Miles cannot contain his disbelief.

MILES  
Victor...are you kidding me?!  
They're binding. Rapidly.

VICTOR  
Sorry Miles. I don't mean to poop  
in your petri dish, but we've been  
here before..or somewhere just like  
this. How many times in five years?

MILES  
(seriously irked)  
Where is your breather, man? What's  
up with you? You know what this is!

VICTOR  
Last time I checked, Milly, these  
were **my** nasal passages. Besides...  
(grinning)  
...don't knock it till you've tried  
it. If it doesn't kill you...

MILES  
That's hilarious Victor. We have no  
data at all on the long-term  
effects of exposure. And you're  
acting like this is happy gas.

VICTOR  
Aren't you forgetting something?

MILES  
(suddenly remembering)  
Oh man.

And he's out of there - dashing towards a glass cubicle where he strips off his lab gear (trying in vain to fold the items into an orderly pile) before slapping his palm on a biometric pad. As the heavy, automated door glides open with an agonizing lack of urgency, Miles shoves something in his ear, agitatedly, and squeezes hurriedly through the gap.

INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE NANOTECH LAB "B" - CONTINUOUS

Striding down the hallway at full clip, awkwardly attempting to don a windbreaker, Miles connects with his wife.

MILES  
Ellie. I'm so sorry, baby. I'm on my way. 60 feet from the exit. 50...40... No you don't have to read a bedtime story to Ash. I will. No. I said I will. I'm 20 feet from the exit now so you can put her in the bath and tell her Dadoo is on his..

Without warning, an ear-shattering explosion suddenly rocks the entire building as Miles loses his footing and falls to his knees - a look of absolute horror on his face.

MILES (CONT'D)  
Victor!  
(beat)  
Ellie, Ellie. Listen to me. Call 911. Tell them there's been an explosion at the lab. I don't know, Ellen, but Victor's still in there!

Struggling to his feet, Miles U-turns rapidly and ploughs towards the column of smoke barreling down the hallway.

MILES (CONT'D)  
I love you, Ellie. I will. I will. Now call 911. Please. And don't forget to tell Ash that Dadoo will see her in the morning.

And then, like a phantom, the lurching figure of Miles Rosenthal melts slowly into the blanket of billowing gray.

INT. RAINE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

SUPER: "SEVEN YEARS LATER"

IN THE SOFT-EDGE, CIRCULAR FOCAL AREA OF AN ELECTRON-SCANNING HOLOSCOPE, A CLUSTER OF SHIMMERING PENTAGONAL CELLS BEGIN TO SWARM, CONVERGE AND INTERLOCK WITH EERILY MECHANICAL PRECISION. THEN THE PORCELAIN FEATURES OF A TWELVE YEAR OLD GIRL, WITH ICE WHITE HAIR, MATERIALIZE IN THE BACKGROUND, SEEMINGLY ILLUMINATED BY THE EVOLVING GEOMETRIC FORMATION AS SHE LEANS IN FOR A CLOSER LOOK, SPELLBOUND.

ASH'S BEDROOM

With every free inch of wall space plastered with digi-paper boy band posters - running their animated loops of glimmering smiles and blown kisses - the room is no different to that of any privileged girlchild in 2032, barring one unique feature: the electron-scanning holoscope on her desk. It's a device which, at present, seems to be providing a dazzling display of eye candy, in mid-air, for ASH ROSENTHAL and her pet Pygmy Marmoset - a thumb-sized primate named FRANK.

ASH  
(totally dumbstruck)  
It's alive, Frank! It's..

Her disbelief doesn't have long to sink in, though, when it is interrupted by loud, angry banging against her door, which instantly spooks the tiny primate - sending him scampering for safety beneath the cushions of her Yohji Yamamoto sofa.

MAN  
(muffled yelling)  
Open this door, Ashleigh! Now! Or so help me I will...I'll...override your security protocol or...tear it open with my bare hands.

ASH  
(yelling back)  
What do you want, Vic?!

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With his face inches from the striated titanium surface of Ash's door, Victor Raine is volcanic, veins throbbing visibly in his temple, as he lets rip at the ten year old girl on the other side - an outburst that is a startling mismatch to his Clark Kent spectacles and GQ attire.

VICTOR

You do not call me Vic! Are we clear?! Now open this door!

ASH

And you do not call me Ashleigh!  
You are not my father!

VICTOR

I want that sample back. And I want it now! You are never to enter my lab again. Now open this door!

Silence.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

So that's how it is, huh? Fine!  
We'll do it the hard way then.

Tapping the arm of his spectacles purposefully, Victor Raine's eyes flit keenly from side-to-side as the rectangular lenses come to life with a tiled array of camera angles from around his palatial residence. And a beat later, with a swipe at the air, he's isolated Ash's room before an "expand" gesture takes him into a 3D wireframe of her door lock.

ASH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Having clearly figured where this conflict is heading, Ash is also burrowing into a wireframe of her lock - a hologram above her desk - in a desperate attempt to prevent Victor from opening it. But things are not looking hopeful, judging by the invisible "hands" now spinning digits in each chamber of the device's access port, unscrambling her combination.

What ensues next is a hacker's Battle Royale - the balance swinging rapidly from Victor to Ash, then back again, in a frenzied display of Gesture Fu. Until finally... Victor manages to distract her enough to gain access to her webcam. So as she leans in, flailing wildly to keep the lock shut...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

VICTOR

Come on. Just a little closer...

Victor strikes. A sudden, single-handed grasp of her webcam image with his left - zooming right into her eye - followed by a rapid jab at the shutter button. A sudden flash...

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

And he's captured an 8K frame of her retina, which he drags over to the wireframe of her lock. So a split second later, he gets the desired result: RETINAL MATCH - ACCESS GRANTED.

ASH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The instant the door slides open, Victor strides in, fury tempered slightly by his smug satisfaction at the victory.

VICTOR

Okay. Hand it over. Now!

But Ash isn't giving up easy - backing against her desk to keep him from the glass vial under the holoscope's lens.

ASH

You're a total scumbag, Vic. That pic you took of me and mom was a back door to my webcam.

VICTOR

Dead right. Because I have no idea what is wrong with you lately..

ASH

What's wrong with me?! Is that some kind of a joke?

Then whirling around, she snatches the receptacle and its crystalline contents - holding it up in her fingertips.

ASH (CONT'D)

This...is what is wrong with us.  
With my mom...with you...

VICTOR

That...young lady, is the reason you have a home like this, and an electron-scanning holoscope and a Pygmy Marmoset and backstage passes  
(pointing to one of the  
boy band digi-posters)  
to every 4EVA TRU concert...  
So I don't wanna hear it any more.  
Okay?! Now give me that sample!

ASH

I don't need all of this stuff! I need a normal life. "What do your folks do, Ash?" "Oh. Nothing much. My stepfather is just the guy who invented Crystal Mech - the most addictive..."

VICTOR

(anger rising again)  
 You listen to me, you ungrateful  
 punk. Your dad and I didn't **try** to  
 invent it. It was an accident!

ASH

And how many people know it's  
 alive? Besides me and a mysterious  
 online "friend" who warned me to  
 check it out for myself?

The sudden, deafening silence speaks volumes.

VICTOR

You don't understand anything, do  
 you?! So get this into your head,  
 if you can. The moment Crystal Mech  
 came into existence...I only had  
 one choice - who would protect us.

ASH

Well I'm glad you chose the Yakuza,  
 Vic. Because sushi is a whole lot  
 better than blinis and vodka.

VIC

I am not having this conversation  
 with a twelve year old! Now give me  
 that sample right now.

But Ash makes a foolish mistake - uncapping the vial and  
 waving it at him with deliberate, careless indignation.

ASH

How do you know this isn't some  
 kind of synthetic parasite that  
 will wipe out half the planet?

The instant the cap comes off, Victor's nostrils flare, his  
 jaw sets and his expression switches to stone-cold-killer.  
 And with blinding speed, his hand darts forward in a blur,  
 grabbing Frank from beneath the sofa cushions before the  
 Marmoset can even react. Then holding Ash's pet aloft in his  
 fist, as if to say "I see your threat and raise you..." he  
 starts to speak - with a strange metallic ring to his voice.

VICTOR

You have precisely three seconds to  
 hand over that Mech. One...

ASH

(totally freaked out)  
 Don't you dare!

VICTOR

Two...

But Ash isn't taking any chances. Dashing up to Victor, she hurriedly offers him the re-capped vial, extending trembling fingers to retrieve her pet - with no trace of the attitude she gave him a moment ago. She looks genuinely terrified.

ASH

Here. Please. I'm sorry Victor.

No reaction.

VICTOR

...one.

In another blur of supernatural speed, the vial is whipped from her grasp as Frank is flung full force across the room - where he lands on her curtains, screeching with terror.

ASH

(dumbstruck)

You're...using. I can't believe...

VICTOR

That was your final warning,  
Ashleigh.

Then turning on his heels, expressionless, Victor punches the titanium door, buckling it, before storming out.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Sleep tight, sugar plum.

INT. RAINE RESIDENCE - MORNING

As golden sunlight streams into a luxurious dining area with a breathtaking view of the Bay, ELLEN RAINE is seated at the breakfast table, scooping wedges of grapefruit into her mouth while Victor watches the Daily News on the cereal box in front of him, munching happily. It's a scene that would be idyllic in every respect were it not for Ellen's thousand-yard stare and the Asian gent standing in the doorway with a Glock Laser Pistol on one hip and a katana on the other. Then Ash walks in, with Frank on her shoulder, followed by a Louis Vuitton homing suitcase trundling obediently behind her.

ELLEN

Hey Ash. Where are you going so early? There's no school today.

VICTOR

Yes...where are you going, Tiger?



Firing a "got-to-be-kidding" look at Victor, Ash approaches her mom with an expression that clearly preempts the response she's expecting. But she gives it a try all the same.

ASH  
Mom, I'm leaving.

ELLEN  
What?! What do you mean "leaving"?  
Leaving where?

ASH  
Ask your husband.

ELLEN  
Victor?

VICTOR  
Ash and I had a little disagreement  
last night because she decided to  
remove a sample from my lab.

ELLEN  
Ash?

ASH  
Whatever. It doesn't matter what I  
say because you never believe me  
anyway. So yeah, I took a sample  
from Victor's lab and he went  
frikkin' ballistic! Busting a  
titanium door...with his fist!

Muting the Kellogg's Daily News with a gesture, Victor fixes his gaze on Ash with slightly overplayed, pursed-lip remorse.

VICTOR  
I admit, I got a little steamed.  
Because I have told you, I can't  
even recall how many times, to keep  
out of my laboratory. So I do  
apologize, Ash. It was wrong of me  
to get so mad. It's just...I'm sure  
you understand how much pressure  
I've been under...we've all been  
under lately.

ASH  
(incredulous)  
A little steamed? Sorry mom, but  
I'm going to grandma. She may be a  
little crazy but at least she  
doesn't have a samurai hiding in  
her refrigerator.

ELLEN

Come on, honey. Have some breakfast with us and think it over...

ASH

Are you even listening to me? I am going! I am leaving home for good.

ELLEN

You know you don't mean that.

VICTOR

Let her go, Ellen.

ELLEN

What?!

VICTOR

It's a rite of passage for every kid. I also...

(gesturing parentheses)

..."ran away from home" when I was her age. But I was back in time for dinner. So seeing as Yoshida San is going to be making Chicken Katsu tonight...we can probably expect to see you around six, right kiddo?

Victor presses his knuckles "playfully" against her chin.

ASH

You're a psychopath.

ELLEN

Ashleigh! That isn't called for at all. Victor apologized to you a minute ago for getting so upset and he asked Chef to make your favorite dinner. I heard him myself. I just don't understand what's come over you. It hurts me to say this, but that attitude really isn't making things any easier. Maybe you should go to your grandma for a while...

Shaking her head, Ash kisses her mom on the forehead and locks eyes with her for a moment - a pleading look that gets no response, besides a furtive downward glance.

ASH

Goodbye mom. So long Vic.

ELLEN

Wait up, Ash. Maybe I can drive...

VICTOR

She'll be okay. I'll have Hiro follow her with the drone.

ELLEN

Just to the Hyperloop Station...

Looking up once again from the News, as if he isn't going to do it again, Victor brings the discussion to a close.

VICTOR

I said she'll be okay. Walking half a mile won't kill her. She's a tough kid. Right Ash?

But she's already gone: through the hall, past the triple volume lobby and down the front stairs - passing at least a dozen identically attired and armed Asian gents on her way.

EXT. RAINE RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

HIGH ANGLE, EXTREME WIDE. THE TINY FIGURE OF ASH, WITH FRANK ON HER SHOULDER, HEADS DOWN THE FRONT DRIVE OF THE HOUSE, FLANKED ON BOTH SIDES BY SYMMETRICAL CADRES OF IDENTICAL, UNFLINCHING HENCHMEN. AND AT THE END OF THE PATH, JUST IN FRONT OF THE CITIZEN KANE-STYLE FRONT GATE, A LONE INDIVIDUAL WEARING A SLIMLINE VISOR BLOCKS HER PATH - HIROSHI TAMURA.

HIRO

Ohayo gozaimasu, Ash. Where are you going?

ASH

I'm outta here. Going to my gran.

HIRO

I'll need to check if the boss is okay with that, okay?

ASH

(pointed sarcasm)  
Which boss?

Looking at her with the slightest trace of amusement, Tamura touches the arm of his visor and connects with Victor Raine.

VICTOR (V.O.)

It's okay, Hiro. Let her go. But keep the drone on her.

HIRO

I will inform Toyo San.

VICTOR  
That won't be necessary.

HIRO  
I don't understand, Mr. Raine.

DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Ensuring that his wife will be out of earshot, Raine steps out onto the terrace overlooking the driveway.

VICTOR  
Ash has no leverage value.

HIRO (V.O.)  
Mr. Raine?

VICTOR  
You heard me, Hiro. She has no value as leverage. Let her go.

Ending their communication, Victor watches the scene below.

DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

A deeply reflective look crosses the face of the usually inscrutable Hiroshi Tamura as he steps aside and gestures with a gracious sweep of his arm for Ash to keep walking.

HIRO  
Soreja mata, Ash. I hope to see you again.

ASH  
You're a good guy, Hiro. For an assassin. I'll miss you.

Then she starts walking towards the gargantuan iron gates which part effortlessly, allowing her passage, as high in the sky above her a Sentinel Mark IV keeps watch.

EXT. HYPERLOOP STATION - LATER

The sight of a ten year old girl walking alone through Little Italy is nothing unusual to the operators of the mobile food kiosks and Botox booths that line the sidewalk of Clinton Station. But if the lingering glances are anything to go by, they aren't used to seeing one with a tiny monkey on her shoulder, followed by a Louis Vuitton homing suitcase. So it isn't surprising that one of them decides to try his luck.

MOOCH

Hey princess. Looks like you can spare a GeoDollar for a man who's seen better days. Whaddya say?

ASH

I say get out of my way or the drone that's following me is going to turn you into cajun chicken.

After a brief glance skywards, the Mooch can't seem to decide whether she's on the level or not. And so, as Ash breezes past, he grabs her by the arm, spinning her around.

ASH (CONT'D)

Bad idea...

A split second later, a laser blast slices the guy's hand clean off and as he stares at his cauterized wrist, howling like a mad dog, Ash whirls back in surprise. Amazingly, the blast came from street level. More precisely, from the work bay of a drive-through Hovercab Repair Centre, where a gent in his late sixties steps out carrying a laser welder.

ELDERLY GENT

(Italian English)

I hate to do something like this, you know. But there is only one cure for stupidity. Pain.

For once, Ash is speechless while the Mooch keeps howling.

ELDERLY GENT (CONT'D)

(shouting at the Mooch)

Hey..stupido! If you make fast, they can put it back for you. Vai!

So snatching his hand off the sidewalk, the guy hurtles off.

ASH

That was..totally disgusting. But thank you.

ELDERLY GENT

Ah, it was nothing. I have a daughter so I'm sensitive about this. My name is Enzo. Garibaldi.

ASH

I'm Ash Rosenthal. And this is Frank. He's a Marmoset.

ENZO

Okay. So what are you doing here?

ASH  
I just ran away from home.

ENZO  
(looking approvingly at  
her LV homing suitcase)  
It must be a nice home...  
(then up at the drone)  
A very nice home.

ASH  
Oh that. My step dad's dumb idea.  
What's the use of running away with  
a Sentinel following you?

ENZO  
I agree completely. Would you like  
a small espresso before you go?

ASH  
You're not a pervert are you?

ENZO  
No I'm an engineer. Now a mechanic.  
But I make a very good espresso.

INT. ENZO'S WORKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Seated at a small table, with a gleaming 1950's Lavazza machine perched on the tool chest behind them, Ash and Enzo are talking animatedly while Frank plays with LED filament.

ASH  
So basically...my step dad became  
insanely rich by inventing  
something everybody wants.

ENZO  
What?

ASH  
It doesn't matter. But once people  
try it, they can't live without it.  
And it's very expensive.

ENZO  
So your stepfather is Steve Jobs?

Ash looks at him quizzically.

ENZO (CONT'D)  
Sorry. A joke from another life.

Temporarily lost in thought, Enzo spots the Sentinel gliding into view through the industrial skylight above their heads.

ENZO (CONT'D)

What do you say we kill that fly?

ASH

Oh yeah.

Rooting around in the tool chest, Enzo retrieves an object no larger than a flashlight, which he aims at the drone.

ENZO

EMP. Like Raid...for drones. Ssst.

A moment after he squeezes the trigger, the Sentinel falls out of the sky, crashing down hard against the steel roof.

ENZO (CONT'D)

Finito.

ASH

When my dad died and my step dad married mom, I thought he was a cool guy. Or maybe I was too young to remember. But that stuff he invented...it stole our happiness ...and turned him into a freak. He's scary now. And dangerous.

ENZO

Hot water only brings out what is inside the coffee beans. The water does not give the beans flavor.

ASH

And that's supposed to mean...

ENZO

Situations don't make people do things. They just reveal what is already in someone's heart.

ASH

That sounds just like something an old Italian guy should tell a kid.

ENZO

Well...maybe I can help you another way. Maybe you don't have to run away from home. Maybe you just need a new friend..no insult to your monkey...

## INT. ENZO'S WORKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Standing in front of a huge steel door labelled SPARES, Enzo places his hand on a biometric pad and in the blink of an eye it whips open, before docking with featherlight precision.

ENZO

This...is my hobby. What I do when I'm not fixing cabs. Top secret.

The moment Ash steps into the tiny room, her eyes light up instantaneously at the creatures that line the shelves - tiny gleaming machines made with unimaginable skill and care.

ASH

Oh wow.

ENZO

Uno momento. Silvio?

And a moment later, a silver stallion - no more than a foot high - comes to life, rearing up on its legs with a snort.

ENZO (CONT'D)

Silvio is my favorite. Cavallino Rampante. He is strong and very fast. You move him with this...

He hands her a glove covered in thousands of tiny dimples.

ENZO (CONT'D)

You'll figure it out.

ASH

(absolutely elated)  
He's mine?! You're not serious!

ENZO

I am very serious. But Ash you must promise me...one - you'll go home to your mother and two - no one must know where you got him. Deal?

ASH

Deal!

## EXT. ENZO'S WORKSHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

As Ash waves to Enzo, wearing the glove, she inadvertently causes Silvio to buck like a bronco, sending his tiny rider - Frank - flying. So with a comic shrug, she puts the dazed primate in her pocket and waves goodbye to Enzo with her other hand, before the three head off into a magenta sunset.