

mONSTER

A PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 80 MINUTES

DECEMBER 2018

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SUMMARY

A play about human enslavement to the shiny toys of consumer technology.

September 1994. The dawn of the World Wide Web.

In a tiny and cramped college dorm room Nessa and Brill have just met as incoming freshman roommates. Nessa is bounding in energy, eager to conquer every party on campus, wanting to explore all the college experience has to offer. Brill meanwhile never leaves the room. Moreover, Brill never leaves her chair in their room, sitting before a strange digital workstation all times day and night. Nessa finds Brill's constant presence unbearable and petitions Greg, their dorm RA, to move Brill as far away on campus as possible.

But Brill won't switch rooms. Because Brill can't leave their room. There's something very important that Brill is doing in this very particular room.

And if Brill stops doing it, even for one minute, the world will go berserk.

mONSTER asks: is mass human adoption of new technology without new moral complication? Or has the harm of online culture always been the monster within us?

CHARACTERS (2F, 1M)

NESSA, 18, female

BRILL, 18, female

GREG, 21, male

All ethnicities are considered open.

TIME

1994. The first week of September.

THE STAGE

At center stage is a small and cramped college campus dorm room. A single. With one bed. The identity of the room is represented by a bifurcation through its midpoint, as if two sides of the room are two opposing personalities.

The stage right half of the dorm room is sparse and bare. A single bed, low to the ground, containing a factory mattress, is of a dark metal, possibly rusting in spots. Flanking the bed, towards upstage center, is a softwood double-dresser. A single window, the only window to the outside, is over the bed. The wall is a drab grey and unadorned.

The stage left side of the dorm room by contrast is a hive of activity. Near the stage left door is a desk study station. Atop that desk station is perched a large CRT screen monitor with base attached to a 1994-era Toshiba 1910 desktop computer. Directly downstage of the desktop on separate carrier station is an HP LaserJet 4P printer. By the printer is an unusually tall and cumbersome stack of printer paper. The balance of the stage left side of the dorm room is overrun with a wieldy digital hardware network comprised of RISC PC stackables and interlocked boxes and ZIP drives, all tethered by a snarled meshwork of colored CAT-5 wiring. Components and wiring might be on the ground, or on the wall, or hanging over one side of the study station. Their lights might blink on and off.

Meanwhile, the upstage wall on the stage left side of the dorm room is peppered by individual sheets of printer paper. The sheets could have once been assembled in some kind of order but are now tacked and taped to the upstage wall in haphazard fashion. As though a mass profusion of computer paper is growing from the wall.

Otherwise, faded carpet covers the floor. When the dorm room's light switch is activated an overhead fixture sprays weakly. The CRT screen and window also provide illumination.

In the corner of the dorm room, affixed to the wall, is a hanging punch-button phone.

Above, beneath and surrounding the dorm room is the Web cluster.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

mONSTER received its world premiere on September 29, 2017 at the Southern Theater in Minneapolis, MN, as produced by Swandive Theatre, directed by Meaghan DiSciorio, and with production director Damon Runnals, assistant director Bryan Grosso, set designer Sean McArdle, costume designer Lisa Conley, lighting designer Jesse Cogswell, sound designer Kevin Springer, and with following cast:

NESSA, Jamie Fields; BRILL, Kelsey McMahon; GREG, Avi Aharoni.

mONSTER received its NYC premiere on December 12, 2018 at The Jewel Box, as produced by Between Us Productions, directed by Samantha Manas, associate produced by Jasmine Brown, and with following cast:

NESSA, Lauren Vernea; BRILL, Riley MacIsaac; GREG, Rafi Abramowitz.

*To Stephen 'Weed' Phillips,
and for Ken 'Cat Daddy' Lennox,
roommates who made college worth
remembering.*

SCENE 1.

The dorm room is barely lit.

We see BRILL as silhouette, hunched before her digital workstation.

GREG appears. He holds a white binder. An oversized 1994 smartphone, the Simon, is clipped to his belt.

GREG

Um...

I don't know.

Unformed.

And not there.

But.

There.

Big.

Maybe not big, more like...

Enlarged.

And sharp.

But somehow smooth.

Jagged and bright and powerful and severe.

And lurking.

Definitely lurking.

We see the first illumination of the Web cluster, a pinpoint of twinkling light in fixed position above the stage.

Lights shift.

SCENE 2.

As dorm room light develops from the outside window so does music, the throbbing radio rock of 1994, something akin to the extended intro from Bush's Comedown.

We see BRILL hunched before her workstation, squinting at her screen. She yawns, a big yawn. BRILL rubs her eyes, then stretch-twists her head.

BRILL takes the large Chi-Chi's takeout cup. She dips her fingers in the cup and spritzes her face with water.

BRILL then moves to a corner of her side of the room where she has her one travel backpack. She takes from her travel backpack a t-shirt, smells it, decides against putting it on.

We hear a soft computerized sound, like a flat bird squawk.

BRILL

That can't be, I'm right here.

The printer produces a single sheet of paper.

BRILL

[Taking the paper, reading] Museum of Bad Art dot com.

BRILL moves to the wall on her side of the dorm room, searching the hanging sheets of paper, then tacks the new single sheet to the wall.

As BRILL continues we see NESSA arrive outside the room door, almost skipping.

NESSA wears a backpack and cradles a stuffed and bulky duffel bag. She digs through her pocket for the room key.

BRILL

[Types, talking the words] I got a soft ping in the lower Ms but I don't see it here. I'll stick around to make sure. Four thirteen local, two hours and twelve minutes 'til my next cycle.

NESSA inserts her room key and jiggles the door lock, freezing BRILL.

NESSA enters, swinging the door open.

NESSA

OHHHHH, YEAH! Let the college experience begin! [Seeing BRILL] Oh, my God, I'm sorry, I...[checks the door]...this is 305, right? [Dropping the bag and taking a hand-drawn map from her pocket] Chesapeake 305?

BRILL

I guess, yeah.

NESSA

They didn't say there'd be another...oh my, God, they screwed this up, too. I don't believe it. Well, I guess I believe it after everything else that's already been screwed up today. This campus, huh? Well...damn! I mean if I'm Chesapeake 305 and you're 305...if we're *both* 305!...

BRILL

Yeah.

NESSA

Well...hey!

BRILL

Hey.

NESSA

Yeah. So. Nessa Harmon.

BRILL

Uh-huh.

NESSA

I mean between late acceptance, last-minute financial request, all the forms saying I was assigned a single room to myself!, but you would not BEE-LIEVE this day, one major screw-up after another. They screw you up, too?

BRILL

Something like that.

NESSA

All day mess-up-ed-ness, back and forth, one side of campus to the other. Maybe this happened to everybody, yeah? What to pack, what to expect, what to preregister for, but nobody prepares to show for to their first day at college and meet their surprise roommate! We're roommates!

BRILL

Uh-huh.

NESSA

Right?!? It's cool though, I'm a total extra-dimensional thinker. Like I always say: never confuse screw-up with adventure. And so far that's ALL today's been, screw-up and adventure. But in a good way. I mean, I don't know if the same thing happened to you when you got here today, but...

NESSA has exited, her voice dropping, and she reenters lugging into the room a second bag.

As NESSA continues she extracts from the bag her own CD boombox and CD sleeve book.

NESSA

...the incoming freshmen a bunch of random lines stretching all the way through the Quad and campus who-hahs in their Go U! shirts with bullhorns barking orders, and when I finally got to the front of the line this woman looked up my name and was all like 'You gotta go to Registrar' and I'm like where? and she's like 'Reg-ist-rar' and by the time I mapped my way there they wouldn't release my Campus ID because of some other screw-up...

NESSA exits, and returns with a third bag, and opens it, extracting random personal items: perhaps a hairdryer, clothes, rolled maps.

NESSA

...and it turns out Registrar wouldn't deal with me until I first stopped by Facilities...wow, you're already moved in and everything! And I get the window bed?

BRILL

I can't have my back to any door.

NESSA

Awesome, I'm like a total last-thing-in-the-morning sleeper, like if the sun doesn't hit my face I could sleep straight through tomorrow, you know? Bam! Kodak moment for the incoming freshman class, September nineteen-ninety-four!

NESSA has pulled out of the third bag an era-appropriate camera and snaps an awkward 1994 selfie.

NESSA

Should have used this for my picture cuz Facilities wouldn't give my ID until some money thing got sorted at Financial Aid so it was another hike-and-a-half over there which turned out to be all that and a sack of Hot Pockets cuz I walked past the big welcome tent...[pulling pamphlets from her pockets]...Engineer Cheer Club, eh, Society for the Advancement of Engineering, bleh, Rock-Paper-Detonator, sweet!, Midnight Multicultural Thermo-Naked Dungeons & Dragons Laser Tag!?!?!? It's like I want to do it all, you know?

NESSA is out again.

We hear a soft computerized sound, like a flat bird squawk.

The printer has activated and produced another sheet of paper, which BRILL retrieves.

BRILL

Megadeath.

NESSA reenters, lugging another bag.

*BRILL shuts and locks the door behind
NESSA.*

NESSA

...and by the time I finally got to Residential Life they gave me the wrong 305 at some other dorm, but all hell-a-cute boys there, like EVERYWHERE, like we are LIVING with them!, and then back to Res Life where they were like, 'sorry! wrong 305', and my Mom was so tired of getting dragged around and around that by the time we got all the screw-ups unscrewed she dropped me here at Chesapeake, said 'I'm proud of you', hugged it out, revved her Oldsmobile and hauled. I'm sorry, I feel like I'm doing all the talking. So. You gotta name?

*GREG appears in the hallway, rushed, out
of breath. He approaches the 305 door and
prepares.*

BRILL

I don't mean to sound rude but you can't be here in...[referencing the screen]...two hours and nine minutes.

NESSA

Not be where.

BRILL

Here. This room.

GREG knocks on the door.

*BRILL freezes and then NESSA unlocks and
opens.*

This holds, momentary reactions from all.

GREG

Nessa Harmon?

NESSA

Hi!

GREG

Good. Well, not good. I mean I was trying to catch you at the Quad and then apparently just missed you at Registrar and Facilities and everywhere else before I had to go off on...another search. Anyway, administrative miscues! Keys not fitting locks, forms misplaced, people assigned to the wrong room. Maryland's been around since it was a colony, you'd think we'd be past these glitches in the code by now, huh?

NESSA/BRILL

...

GREG

So yeah, I'm Greg. The RA for Chesapeake.

NESSA

You're the RA.

GREG

Living down the hall.

NESSA

Hi.

GREG

Yes, hi, and, um...when'd you get here?

NESSA

This morning.

GREG

Right, no, I meant the empirically accepted here. Like here-here. Like Room 305.

NESSA

Just now.

GREG

So you two have...

NESSA

Totally!

GREG

And everything's...

NESSA

I mean, I didn't think I was getting a roommate.

GREG

Right, see, that's why I wanted to catch you, because I'm new, I mean I'm a senior but I'm new as paraprofessional cuz I didn't think I was coming back for my senior year, but then I was sort of forced to and Res Life offered me the RA position here at Chesapeake, the freshman engineering dorm, the forgotten edge of campus, the outhouse of the ivory tower.

NESSA

Looks pretty sweet to me.

GREG

Yeah, but this room. I mean, I can show you others.

NESSA

You kidding? This is the dream spot! Last room at the end of the hall?

GREG

But you don't have everything cleared with Res Life, right?

NESSA

Hey, if I knew all I didn't know I'd literally be a genius.

GREG

...aha, well, before you unpack maybe I could show you something down on the second floor.

NESSA

After having lugged all my stuff up here I am set and done! Besides, I got the bed by the window so it's all good.

GREG

So you want to stay.

NESSA

With this view? Ivy-covered buildings, the marching band, and look!, the party shuttle's taking people to the kickoff barbeque! C'mon, who's with me?

GREG

Okay...well...[from the white binder, to NESSA]...here's your Campus ID.

NESSA

Perfect, thanks.

BRILL

[To GREG] What are you doing.

GREG

Ummm...[to BRILL]...took me a while but I found it.

GREG then hands to BRILL a desktop computer fan.

BRILL snatches it from GREG and goes to the back of her system to attach the part.

NESSA

I just wave this around?

GREG

Yeah, to pay for books, food, whatever.

NESSA

What'll they think of next, right?

GREG

Look, maybe we meet back later, here, to talk dorm policy, quiet hours, and the Roommate Agreement. To see if this is the right fit.

NESSA

Oh, this is the fit. This whole place is the fit! Everyone I've met today has been so welcoming and super-accepting...this is already the best day of my life.

BRILL

I can't see anything back here. Damnit!

GREG

Good. Well, not good, I mean...later, then. Here. Later. Okay.

GREG goes to off and BRILL makes sure the door is shut behind his exit.

NESSA

Our RA is one intense dude. Hey, what classes you got? [Another folded sheet of colored paper from another pocket] Check it: Comp Sci 101. And you look kinda computer genius.

BRILL

Something like that.

NESSA

Which is super-awesome cuz I once tried to get the high score on that Microsoft Excel game which did NOT go well. You can totally help me.

BRILL

Don't look at the screen.

NESSA

Your *screen*? This *whole place* is ready to be explored, who wants to sit around and stare at a screen. Here, I already drew a map of campus. I draw maps, that's my thing. Now the scaling isn't exact and the symbology is roughed in but the important thing's where people told me the first-night parties are at. We hit the barbeque then hit the scene.

BRILL

I need to be here.

NESSA

Comp Sci is 10:00am to-morrow. Meanwhile, everyone I've introduced myself to to-day has been talking 'bout the kickoff barbeque to-night.

BRILL

Look, since you're going, and since you have to come back at some point, for your stuff, maybe you could bring some food back. I don't exactly have a meal card.

NESSA

Just come use mine.

BRILL

You'll bring back food?

NESSA

Umm...

Brill.

BRILL

Brill...[last name]?

NESSA

You can do that?

BRILL

Bring you food.

NESSA

But only after...[referencing her screen]...two hours and five minutes. Got it?

BRILL

Um.

NESSA

And don't look at the screen.

BRILL

Sure. I mean...roommates.

NESSA

[Her attention already to the screen] Something like that.

BRILL

Lights shift.

SCENE 3.

As GREG speaks we see more illumination from the Web cluster.

Some pin lights might be brighter than others, some distant, some close, some multiple colors.

GREG

Appalling.

Ugly, really, but that's simple to say, it was more un-simple, it was...

Frenzied.

Like...[GREG perhaps makes a face]...

I think.

It was just a brief moment.

But I could tell.

While un-simple how it was so...

Dark.

Blood dark.

Mesmerizing.

I couldn't turn away.

Lights shift as music rises.

SCENE 4.

We hear 1994 party music, something akin to 69 Boyz' Tootsee Roll, the opening callout 'Yeah, 1994!'

NESSA holds court, perhaps from her bed. BRILL is hunched before her screen, eating barbeque and drinking from her Chi-Chi's takeout cup.

GREG has withdrawn from the white binder the Roommate Agreement.

NESSA

Okay-okay-okay-okay-okay-okay-okay-okay-okay-okay, one more!

GREG

We really need to look at your Roommate Agreement.

NESSA

Last one, I promise, so! There's this woman...

GREG

...where's this?

NESSA

That would give the answer if I told you *where* it was, but the woman's got on...a mask.

BRILL

[A mouthful of food] Whaddy mean, mask?

As NESSA continues, BRILL goes to her travel backpack and retrieves the same t-shirt, now using it to wipe food grease from her hands and mouth.

NESSA

All I can say is she's wearing a mask, *and!*, that she's wearing the mask...to protect herself. But then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the woman decides to take off this mask. And as a result of taking off the mask...the woman dies. Now: what made her take off the mask.

GREG

Look, your ice-breakers have been...

BRILL

Disrupting.

GREG

[To NESSA] The Roommate Agreement helps avoid future disruptions to an otherwise perceived glitch-free environment.

NESSA

So let's agree ourselves somewhere off-campus and we'll work on it under the influence of external co-ed-ercion.

GREG

You're old enough to drink.

NESSA

Well, *I* think so. Ain't like my Campus ID's the only ID I'm packing, if ya know what I'm saying.

BRILL

This room needs to be empty in one hour and fifty-two minutes.

GREG

Or I could just show you another room.

NESSA

See, this is funny 'cuz we've known each other now for...

BRILL

Five hours and sixteen minutes.

NESSA

...and all you've been doing is asking me to switch rooms but all I wanna know about is how come you're so intense about all this whatever-you-keep-saying. You some kind of super-geek engineer?

GREG

I'm majoring in Advanced Software Programming with an emphasis on Integrative Telephony.

NESSA

...that's intense.

GREG

Granted, it used to be kind of meta.

NESSA

I'm down with meta.

GREG

But now it's real. More than real. [Taking from his belt the actual phone] I present the Simon Personal Communicator. IBM's calling it the world's first 'smart phone.' Phone, pager and fax machine all rolled into one. Now on sale for nine hundred.

NESSA

Dollars?

GREG

And that's just the phone. The part I was working on, the app you buy after to load on it is three grand.

NESSA

For one app? Three grand is almost half a year's full tuition.

GREG

That was my summer internship, coding the secondary app that allows remote connection to all other phones. At IBM! Everyone's dream job! Where I gave every brain-sweat and finger-cramp to support the Simon's launch. But at the end of the summer IBM was like you should go back to finish your degree and I was like why can't I stay cuz you'll need ongoing support once this thing takes over the market and they were like why don't you go back to finish your degree and I was like who does that anymore? They so don't get it.

NESSA

I guess I don't either. I mean, all we want to do is hang out in a room and dance to good music. Why do we need to make it complicated with all that stuff just to end up in the same place we already got?

GREG

It's too late. We've won. IBM has totally won. Technology is disrupting everything.

NESSA

Room 305 already has a phone on the wall.

GREG

This new phone will be the fire, electricity and steam engine of our time. Or so I thought. Because I got back here all...intense...I have to wait a whole year before rejoining the mothership of invention...and came across something. Something I'm not sure I can explain. Something IBM doesn't have, or maybe isn't aware of. This new World Wide Web.

NESSA

The computer screen thing.

GREG

You've seen it.

NESSA

Thought it was one of those Microsoft games.

BRILL

It's not a game. Don't call it a game.

GREG

So you've seen the World Wide Web.

GREG and BRILL are staring at NESSA.

NESSA

Once. Kind of. This summer. Couldn't figure it out. No sense of how to get around, or even what I was doing. See, I draw maps cuz I know here's a place and there's a place and that's where I'm going and that's where I've been. That World Wide thing was the opposite, like puking in my brain.

GREG

Exactly. Without IBM setting the standard can we be sure if the letter A really is the letter A? Or if that screen is really a screen? [To BRILL] What do you think?

BRILL

I think no one can be in this room in...[checking her screen]...an hour and fifty minutes.

GREG

[The paper] Question three...

NESSA

Oh, c'mon! We don't need to spend our first night as college freshmen going over more paperwork. We might've just met but we're cool.

GREG

The Agreement is for beta testing when things might not be so cool.

NESSA

Look at us! We're literally the two most regular ordinary-ish people ever! Besides, like I always say, never confuse different with adventure.

GREG

Alright. Then say you two have both arrived to a strange and cramped room. And the only thing you see in the middle of that room is...[taking the cup]...a Chi-Chi's takeout cup. And filled to the middle of that cup is...

BRILL

Crystal Pepsi.

GREG

What do you think?

NESSA

I'd think this room is super-awesome cuz I'm a cup half-full kind of gal.

BRILL

Caffeine is a stimulant.

GREG

[Reading from the Agreement] I study best in...

NESSA

Last-minute panic.

BRILL

Isolation.

GREG

And room visitors.

NESSA

Hell, yeah!

BRILL

No one's allowed in this room...no one.

Pause.

GREG

Learning how to accept new and different is the unflexed muscle of life. What if A for you is B for you? What if that screen is no longer a screen? What if something we happen to see in there is...[a moment, then hands the Agreement to NESSA]...well. Guess I'll be down the hall. If you need me.

GREG goes. BRILL shuts and locks the door behind him.

BRILL

Disrupting jerk.

NESSA

C'mon.

BRILL

You're going.

NESSA

We're going. The roommates of Chesapeake 305, to assault this campus. You can just feel the wild and crazy, like you can power something with the air! What about this shirt? You like it?

BRILL

I'll like it when you're not in the room in one hour and forty-eight minutes.

NESSA

Alright, c'mon, talk to me. [BRILL's setup] This all for class?

BRILL

Please! Don't look at the screen.

NESSA

Right now there's literally a zillion-and-a-half parties waiting for us to go all Lewis-and-Clark on 'em and you want to be here guarding your compu-stuff while Greg wants us doing [reading the Agreement] mental-or-emotional-harm. [Tossing it aside] I say we start on second floor with these cute soccer boys I met for some light socializing before heading to that other 305 for their Melrose Place drinking game before going to wherever the night and Zima wine coolers flow. [Offering lipstick] Frosted apricot?

BRILL

[Having retrieved the Agreement, reading] In general I am a light sleeper. In general I am a heavy sleeper. I sleep at normal hours. I sleep at strange hours.

NESSA

I sleep when it's time to sleep. I'm more worried about when I gotta wake up.

BRILL

Well I know. When I need to sleep. And it's very important that you know when I need to sleep.

NESSA

I know you somehow scrapped your bed to make more room for mission control. We gotta listen to your stuff beep and ding all night? Watch trippy toasters fly across your screen? Where do you even plan to sleep?

BRILL

Not where, when.

NESSA

Okay. I'm listening. [Computer voice] When-do-you-plan-to-sleep.

BRILL

Twenty minutes every four hours.

NESSA

...sorry?

BRILL

I need to sleep twenty minutes every four hours. A twenty-minute timer will count down so if you're in the room you'll know how long you have to keep absolutely still until it's okay to move again. But better yet...[revealing from the corner of her side of the room]...I could put one of my sleeping masks on the doorknob so you'd know to stay away.

NESSA

...a mask.

BRILL

Either way, you'd be waiting outside the room for twenty minutes at most. Law of averages puts it closer to eleven minutes and twenty seconds. Oh, and my alarm's loud so it might wake you up. If you're still in this room.

NESSA

You need to sleep twenty minutes every four hours.

BRILL

It's the only way, really. And I know what you're thinking, the relentlessness of it, the constant wearying pressure. Even after the biorhythm adjusts you still barely manage to cope.

NESSA

Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking.

BRILL

Also why I can't have anybody else in the room. Because Greg's right about one thing: the world's changed. It's no longer the one we knew. And people don't realize it's here but it's here. On this screen. And it doesn't have an Agreement. Oh, and I don't wear makeup.

NESSA

Right, I get that.

BRILL

But since you're listening to me, actually talking to me like a real person, and did a good job with the food, you wouldn't mind getting something else?

NESSA

Napkins?

BRILL

D-cells. Need two batteries.

NESSA

You're going to miss the first night of college sitting here while I go get you batteries.

BRILL

And water. I'll handle paperwork [the Agreement] while you're out having a good time and getting that stuff. Alright?

NESSA

Sure. Roommates.

BRILL

[Her attention already to the screen] Great.

NESSA goes and the lights shift.

More illumination from the Web cluster slowly comes to visibility. They undulate. A beckoning.

SCENE 5.

Night.

We might hear 1994 party music, something akin to K7's Come Baby Come.

Room 305 is lit by glare from the computer screen.

BRILL is hunched before the screen, yawning. Perhaps putting computer parts in her eyes to keep them open.

NESSA approaches the door gripping a large liquor bottle. She uses her room key to unlock the door.

NESSA

YYYY-OHHHH! I'm back! Resident 305 back from the A-ttack! Did I wake you? Wake up, Brill!

BRILL

[Shutting the door] I'm up.

NESSA

Sweet you're up that is super-awesome you're up cuz I gotta tell you since you're up: YOU MISSED IT.

BRILL

What are you, drunk?

NESSA

Literally the most drunk I've ever been tonight. [Flopping on the bed, perhaps draping a sleeping mask around a foot] First night of college was everything I DREAMED ABOUT!

BRILL

Seriously.

NESSA

That's what Greg said.

BRILL

You talked to Greg.

NESSA

The screen's not real. You're not real.

BRILL

He said something.

NESSA

He's all 'room reassignment' and I'm all 'let's get party train out the station!' and he's all Engineer Intense.

BRILL

This *is* intense.

NESSA

oooOOOOooo...

NESSA tosses BRILL a set of batteries.

As NESSA continues, BRILL places the batteries into a flashlight and then uses the flashlight to see behind her system so she can swap out the old computer fan and replace with the fan GREG previously brought her.

NESSA

Since you wouldn't come and since Greg wouldn't come I rolled solo. Started at the Quad just waiting for the good times to swerve on by and say hop aboard little freshman! And this big bicep dude also waiting there was all how the good times were BUMPING at some frat rush, so I rode his bike while bicep dude jogged beside to up-campus where next thing I know I'm bong-blasting these Brazilian nacho Dor-jito rumpshakers with this gangly white boy wearing this John Stamos-Uncle Jessie's Girl-sweatshirt who gave scoop on some underground bar called *Hashtag*, whatever that is, you gotta be told about it, you gotta be *tagged* to get in. Damn, my feet are wrecked. Prolly cuz I biked myself zippy quick with bicep dude to find The Tag. And believe me when I tell you The Tag WAS ON! Totally the ons. Just a good vibe with upperclassmen, *what I'm saying*, people with *enhanced* good-time skills. So I'm flirting all kinds'a chatter with this non-bicep Junior Guy I meet at The Tag named Zach, some all-knowing Quantum Physicist, and he's like HEY: *why are you here*. Like that, popping the serious while Toad The Wet Sprocket pumped the air and the dance floor writhed around us. I'm like: cartography! He's like maps? I'm like I got skills and smarts but I suck at taking tests and my SAT scores reeked which is why I was late accepted and he's like *yeah, that's cool, but Why Are You Here?* And I thought that's pretty heavy stuff to talk about first night of college but then Junior Zach Guy leaned in and went: *you must visit the restroom*. So I crossed The Tag floor all beer sticky, past red haze lights all red haze lighty 'til I'm before one half-unhinged door, and I pass through...and it was CENTER MAP. Boys and girls doing weird things in stalls and on stalls and behind stalls and I'm a little freaked cuz they didn't talk about THIS at orientation but it was that moment, you know, so that moment that college makes clear: we all share the same toilet now. I can't believe you missed it.

NESSA is passed out.

BRILL tests the contents of the liquor bottle; impressed, water.

BRILL searches NESSA's belongings. Gathers toothpaste.

BRILL goes to brush her teeth, using her finger and contents from the bottle.

But then we hear a new computerized alert, more trenchant than the flat squawk, now harsh and full.

BRILL

No.

The Web cluster lights go red. Everything is red, pulsing, throbbing.

BRILL

Oh, God...[looking to NESSA]...

Again, the new alert sounds as the printer begins spewing out paper.

BRILL grabs the sleeping mask and places it over NESSA's head.

BRILL rushes to the printer, grabs sheets, reviewing.

BRILL

Netboy dot com.

BRILL keystroke enters a command string and as the noise intensifies BRILL rushes to activate one conspicuous black box, screaming to the screen.

BRILL

C'MON. WIPE ALREADY!

This goes until we hear a ping-pong 'all clear' sound. The red subsides. The Web cluster stops.

BRILL pushes back from the black box, hand over her mouth, stifling anguish.

We hear music, something akin to Oasis's Supersonic.

SCENE 6.

The next day.

NESSA is passed out on her bed, same position as before, the sleeping mask still over her face.

BRILL is asleep on the floor, eyes closed, wearing headphones.

Taking the place of music is a pleasant and soothing soundscape as if through BRILL's headphones, something akin to ocean waves.

GREG stands outside the Room 305 door. He holds the white binder and the Simon is on his belt.

GREG tries to listen through the door. No movement. GREG knocks.

Nessa?

GREG

GREG knocks louder.

Nessa?

GREG

NESSA, sleeping mask still covering her face, gets up and shuffles towards the door, arms outstretched, a la searching in the dark.

NESSA opens the door.

Just checking to see if everything's—

GREG

[Croaking, weak] Hi!

NESSA

NESSA starts shuffling back to her bed.

GREG

First night...?

NESSA

Amazing.

NESSA pulls the mask back over her face and collapses on her bed.

GREG

Didn't hear from you so I just wanted to—...[seeing BRILL]...I can come back later.

NESSA

[Singsong, still weak] What-ever.

An awkward moment, GREG by now standing among two sleeping women.

GREG then leans to look at BRILL's screen.

As GREG looks at it, begins to peer into it, we hear a series of muffled noises as if through BRILL's headphones: explosions, horns honking, alarms blaring.

BRILL from her prone position blasts an exhale, before rising and removing her headphones, a routine.

BRILL sees GREG.

BRILL

The hell are you doing.

GREG

Nothing.

BRILL

You let yourself in.

GREG

No. Nessa...

They look at NESSA. No movement.

GREG

I was knocking and Nessa opened the door.

NESSA

[From the bed] You even knock intense.

BRILL

You looked at the screen.

GREG

No.

BRILL

You were looking at it.

GREG

Campus staff receive a daily bulletin with incident reports. One of today's incidents...[withdrawing a sheet from the white binder]...a stolen bike.

NESSA is up as GREG goes off. He returns rolling a bike.

GREG

Was leaning outside 305 here. [Pause] There's a pretty detailed description of the woman last seen with it.

BRILL

...but that's my bike.

GREG

Yours.

BRILL

Nessa used it to get some items for me. She actually gets things when I ask for them. It's all in our Agreement.

NESSA

...hi.

BRILL

[Handing GREG the Agreement] Anything else?

GREG hesitates, then goes.

BRILL shuts the door and locks it.

BRILL

Don't let him in here again. Can't trust him anymore.

NESSA

...okay?

BRILL

Let's just hope I'm not misjudging you.

BRILL punches her keyboard, waking her screen, back to work.

NESSA

Well, thanks. For the bike thing.

BRILL is now perhaps reviewing paper sheets, highlighting or rearranging order of papers on the wall.

NESSA

Yeah, after dancing for a while with Junior Zach guy that bicep dude wasn't around so I pedaled back, past the fountain outside the library. People splashing around, singing the Maryland fight song. I was filling the bottle when I saw this girl had D-cells for her light-up slip-n-slide tube. Literally the greatest night in the history of mankind. But this morning kinda sucks.

BRILL

Afternoon, actually.

NESSA

Damn. Get some coffee before I die. Wanna grab some waffles?

BRILL

Sorry.

NESSA

Throw on some deodorant so your funk doesn't roll my stomach. Keep me and the waffles company.

BRILL

I told you, I can't leave the room.

NESSA

Why's that again?

BRILL

This'll go better if we stay out of each other's way.

NESSA

Gonna be hard doing that. Your contraption everywhere.

BRILL

Don't touch that. It's sensitive.

NESSA

...ain't the only thing.

BRILL

You alter one piece, the entire system could go offline. It would allow for a level of havoc the world isn't ready to handle.

NESSA

I mean, we wouldn't want college getting in the way of your character scoring the whatever.

BRILL

I told you, this isn't a game.

NESSA

You just seem not thrilled to be here.

BRILL

End of the hall. Isolated. The only room getting internet speed approaching one meg transfer a second.

NESSA

You're a transfer.

BRILL

I need a fast connection. This room has the fastest connection on the floor. I checked.

NESSA

See, we got something in common. We explore. Now let's go explore some waffles.

BRILL

...let me guess. Now that you're in college you have to be around the action cuz you're sick of being by yourself. And that sort of loneliness forced you to map the buried parts of yourself you hadn't truly explored so you puff out your smile as far as it will take you. Even if you're not happy doing it.

NESSA

...well. Guess I'd rather be that than addicted. To the exhaust vent for losers. No offense.

BRILL

I'm stuck. What I am is stuck.

NESSA

Stuck was high school. I was the person stuck to the side. On the side you're the person half the people can't remember and the other half don't notice. Otherwise, I was the girl afraid of taking the next test. Like getting an answer wrong meant I wasn't smart enough. Getting too many wrong meant on the side is where I belong. I thought if there was a way to get me off the side, to the center.

BRILL

Maps got you unstuck.

NESSA

Dreams and empires. The places we've never been. The new worlds waiting to accept you. What's more human than a map? Created my own style of map art, circular maps of family trees, resource maps of small cities, even drew my college essay in the form of a map. Figured it was going to be at least another year at home with Mom before I could get my SAT scores up and reapply here. But then I got late-accepted.

BRILL

To get all boozy and throw yourself to the petty Peters of this place.

NESSA

What I wanted is a college experience. To come off the side. To recreate who I am without changing what I am. To not have to feel that what I couldn't do then has anything to do with what I can be now. Or who I'm with.

BRILL

I don't need a friend.

NESSA

But my help? Food and batteries? Let me guess. Your parents are business accountant lawyers who paid more attention to your straight-A sports star brother cuz they never understood a thing about your computer addiction and since you don't have any real-life friends when you tried to run away from home that first time it didn't even last twenty-four hours.

BRILL

...you never fought with yours?

NESSA

Just me and my Mom. You'd think we'd be tight cuz we're all we got. We get along enough. I mean she's proud I'm here.

BRILL

Not sure my parents are proud. I haven't talked to them since I did finally leave home. Four months ago.

NESSA

Well, they paid for you to be here, didn't they?

BRILL

Something like that.

NESSA

Maybe you just need someone to lead you to uncharted territory. C'mon. We'll pick out something decent for you to wear, walk out that door together, past front desk, college.

BRILL

You don't think I want to be out there? I told myself I shouldn't look but I couldn't help myself. People reading strange books on sunlit grass. Laughing.

NESSA

Leaving the room isn't gonna kill you.

BRILL

Maybe not me.

NESSA

Come again?

BRILL

Since the World Wide Web went live four months ago I haven't left my screen. As alone as I've become I don't want to put this on anyone else.

NESSA

I'm not asking you to. But after all the nice I've tried throwing your way by getting you stuff all I've gotten back is a monster freak-a-tomic about how //if anything touches your—

BRILL

//Wait-wait-wait!...where'd you hear that.

NESSA

What.

BRILL

Monster.

NESSA

...you don't want to tell me what you're about, fine, and I guess how I feel about that's my business. But don't be asking me to get you things and treating me like some slave. I'm a college freshman in the engineering department who happens to be your roommate.

NESSA goes to exit through the door.

BRILL

You know Tim Berners-Lee?

NESSA

[Stopping her] That a grunge band?

BRILL

He invented the World Wide Web. Before four months ago, the internet was basically a spider web. A few computers threading data to the next computer, in the dark. The internet was all about what you couldn't see. [Her computer] Toshiba 1910, extended nine-and-a-half-inch screen, monochrome, with BallPoint mouse. HP LaserJet printer with extended loader tray. RISC stackable running MSBACKUP on a CD-ROM combo drive. But this...[the conspicuous black box]...this is my Wiper.

NESSA

And you need all this to sleep twenty minutes every four hours.

BRILL

I need it to keep the world from going berserk. When I was younger I learned to ride a bike just so I could get to that store no one else seemed to know about, and bring home what it took to get on the internet. It was a hobby. Strangers chatting on black screens. That's what the internet was, harmless fun for people who liked being alone. Then four months ago. The World Wide Web. The first application giving normal people a way to thread onto the internet. [Showing one of the paper sheets] This long thing up here is what we call a Website.

NESSA

H-t-t-p-weird dots-two slash marks.

BRILL

Lycos dot com. I'm L through P.

NESSA

How many of these Websites are there?

BRILL

Now? Over two thousand.

NESSA

That's huge.

BRILL

And growing by the minute. And you're all getting on it, World Wide, not realizing that something is out there. [Pause] They say it was buried in the deepest, darkest bottom of the internet. That the Web has now turned it loose. That it slithers and howls among the screens. That it's come for us. [Pause] My small crew of pre-Webbers is trying to wipe away any Website where it appears in full. Because if we stop what we're doing, if we stop wiping the Websites where it appears, and it gets out and people see it...

Pause.

NESSA

Well, hey! I'm gonna hit the café, you want something?, I want something, I mean this is the kind of college talk best done over something, right?

BRILL

First we thought the earth was flat. Then we learned there were eight more. Now we know the universe has ten times more galaxies. And the thing is, what I've really been struggling with the past four months is...did we invent the Web? Or was it always there? Waiting to be discovered?

NESSA

We'll find bicep dude, give him his bike, all ride to The Tag and party like Juniors.

BRILL

I wish I never turned this on. Something I was in love with is now something that makes me terrified.

NESSA

It's easy, Brill, we take the little switchy thing and—

BRILL

DON'T TOUCH IT!!!

NESSA

...

BRILL

And don't look at the screen. Don't ever look at it.

NESSA

I was just trying to help.

BRILL

That's good. Because there's something else I need.

*We hear music, something akin to
Soundgarden's Fell On Black Days.*

*More illumination from the Web cluster. It
expands. The lights throb and pulse.*

SCENE 7.

GREG in the hallway, perhaps trying to get close to the door, maybe to listen.

NESSA exits Room 305, wearing her hiker's backpack.

Hey. GREG

...hey. NESSA

How's it going? GREG

Fine. NESSA

Yeah? GREG

Sure. NESSA

Haven't seen you. GREG

No, I've been... NESSA

Class. GREG

NESSA
All four of 'em! Up to twelve hours a week, it's intense.

GREG
Really, I haven't seen you the past week. Or your roommate. Everything fine in there?

NESSA
I should get to class.

GREG

She show you her screen? She did, didn't she. She showed you.

NESSA

...I've been thinking about what you offered, Greg, last week on move-in day. About switching rooms.

GREG

...oh.

NESSA

So.

GREG

You know. Res Life.

NESSA

Yeah?

GREG

I advise working things out.

NESSA

I've been trying but she doesn't leave the room. She's whacked out with some computer fantasy mission, hunched over her screen, eyes squinting, grunting little noises all day and night. She hasn't been to one class. She keeps the room cold to stay awake. And her sleeping schedule makes her all twitchy and nervous. And she's been taking from my stuff when I leave the room. Toothpaste and socks, like I wouldn't notice. I felt sorry for her at first so I agreed to get her a couple things for her system but it's gotten out of control.

GREG

Maybe I can help.

NESSA

With switching rooms.

GREG

What kind of things?

NESSA

[Taking a list from her pocket] Is it normal to ask your freshman roommate to go on a scavenger hunt for a blue Cat-5 cable...a fuser assembly for an HP LaserJet printer...

GREG

HP???

NESSA

And on and on.

GREG

[Almost sotto] Not an IBM printer.

NESSA

You gotta move her out.

GREG

Her.

NESSA

Why should I move?

GREG

You know the first thing ever sold on the internet? Marijuana.

NESSA

Right about now I could try some.

GREG

At MIT. Notice it always starts at college. [Taking papers from the white binder] Since getting back here and seeing it on her screen I've been trying to print the Web from my room. Arizona State, Michigan State, all cameras pointed at fishtanks, boring, but fast connection, because college, until I saw this.

NESSA

What is that?

GREG

I don't know. Some kind of self-validating feedback loop? Electromagnetic radiation from a collapsed DARPA server? Cosmic hate letter from God?

NESSA

It's weird.

GREG

[Close] There's something in there.

NESSA

How much marijuana we talking about?

GREG

You must've seen it by now. You've must've looked at the screen.

NESSA

I told you, once. I worked extra hours at Structure all summer selling thigh highs to help my Mom pay for what I thought would be juco. The store manager threw a house party. We were all having a good time, dancing, until one by one people instead started crowding the computer in the corner of the room. But the screen was slow, you know, waiting for some Web picture to arrive line by line. Some of the people watching started to freak out, you know, losing it. It didn't feel right.

GREG

You're different than the others, Nessa. You put yourself out there but somehow you're safe.

NESSA

Cuz I can't afford it. You ever think all this computer nonsense is a trap to see who gets sucked in? Like a shiny new toy for bored people? Point is, I don't care to see it and that's all she wants to see. I don't want to talk about it and that's all she wants to talk about. I thought being here would be super-awesome, but it's become super-stressful. I think it's best to move her someplace she can't bother anyone else.

GREG

[Handing her the white binder] My official RA roster. Residents. Room assignments. Read 305.

NESSA

...Nessa Harmon...just me.

GREG

She showed up on the floor before move-in day. I figured Res Life forgot to mention another IBM flunkie like me needed last-minute housing. Room 305, but not Nessa Harmon. Said she can't be interrupted. Locked the door, the only sound a printer. When I went to sort it out, to see if she wasn't assigned the wrong 305...that's when she showed me her screen. For a brief moment she let me see.

NESSA

Which room was she assigned?

GREG

[Taking back the binder] I tried to find you on move-in day, to deflect you before you got here.

NESSA

Let me map this out for you: I need her out of my room so I can be in it.

GREG

Nessa: there's some kind of monster in the World Wide Web.

NESSA

[Laughing] You get high and say that to all the freshmen you 'help'?

GREG

You know the theory this is all some simulation run by a higher power? Scary part?, maybe it's true. Which means: maybe we're not where the truth is supposed to be. Which means: maybe this World Wide Web is to make us see what isn't there. But it is there. I Saw It.

NESSA

It's taking up half my room.

GREG

Seeing her screen for that brief moment, I felt a change. Agitated, almost primal. So I tried to recreate her exact setup, to find it myself, but it's like the only place it exists in full is Brill's screen...[another sheet]...you see?

NESSA

Okay, what I see is you let an impostor crash my room.

GREG

After she let me see she said she needed a computer fan, gave the part number, and slammed the door. I thought what if IBM was giving me a test? And planted her on campus?

NESSA

Do you even hear yourself.

GREG

But I see now that something is happening in Room 305 and only Room 305. We can't just move her out.

NESSA

Yeah, we can.

GREG

Alright...I'll petition Res Life...to move *you*.

NESSA

Me.

GREG

Any room you want. You and the bike.

NESSA

...[is this for real?]

GREG

But in return I need a full map of her system.

NESSA

You let Brill crash my room and now you want me to map you all the stuff I'm getting for her Web backup print monster thing before you let me move out of my room.

GREG

Her name's Brill?

NESSA

Oh, my God.

GREG

I'm not sure what's in there but it looks more disruptive than anything I've come across and that's saying something. Once I understand what it is maybe I reengineer it, bring it to IBM and get back to leading the tech revolution instead of being stuck here with a bunch of freshm—...look, I'm not just risking my senior year here but my entire future.

NESSA

And I want to create the world's next great map but you don't see me screwing someone over for it.

GREG

Maybe the next great map is what's in there. Why I haven't talked about it to anyone but you. Besides, you're the only one not babysitting a screen.

NESSA

No, I'm babysitting her.

GREG

Any room you want. Senior apartment.

NESSA

...guess I could apply quant symbiology. Draw a thematic to identify subclass.

GREG

Damn.

NESSA

I'll do the map when she's sleeping. Twenty minutes every four hours. Otherwise she's like some rabid animal protecting her screen.

GREG

Thank you.

NESSA

Guess I should go see what test I'm bound to fail.

GREG

But the map.

NESSA

[Exiting] Right. Your map.

SCENE 8.

GREG, a prisce.

GREG

The thing about coding is you have to be wrong to be right.

It's kind of academic.

I wanted to be wrong.

Because I had seen it.

And once you see it you can't un-see it.

It's all I could see.

And I needed to see it again.

I had to see it again.

Unformed.

BRILL is pounding on the outside of Room 305's door.

BRILL

[Pounding] Nessa!

GREG

But there.

NESSA is in Room 305, starting to dismantle BRILL's system.

BRILL

[More pounding] NESSA! I'm serious, get this door open RIGHT NOW!

GREG

What are you doing out here?

BRILL

She threw me out!

GREG
What?

BRILL
She tossed me from the room!

GREG
Who?

BRILL
Who do you think?

GREG
Nessa? It's Greg. Nessa.

NESSA
[Inside 305] I can't deal with her anymore!

GREG
[To the door] It's 3:30 in the morning.

BRILL
Let me in!

GREG
On a Tuesday.

NESSA
Whatever-day! Screen Queen can go live with her REAL roommate.

BRILL
You told her???

GREG
[To the door, to NESSA] Open the door, Nessa.

NESSA
Cuz this is MY ROOM and it's alllll getting moved to HER ROOM.

GREG
[To BRILL] Was she drinking?

BRILL
Both of them!

GREG

Both of who?

BRILL

I woke up and some guy was in the room, looking at the screen!

NESSA

Ever since I got here it's been get her food, ink toner, Iomega Zip drives, do her laundry, all while she's been stealing from my stuff, and I didn't say a word, and all I get for trying to be nice and-and nice is-is...

BRILL

DON'T LOOK AT IT!

NESSA

NON-ROOMMATE-NESS!

BRILL

[To GREG] We agreed on this!

NESSA

...wait, hold up...

BRILL

I showed you just enough so you'd see I can't be disrupted!

GREG

I said I would try!

NESSA

[Opening the door]...what did *you two* agree on?

BRILL

[Rushing past, seeing her system] NO!!!

NESSA

[To GREG] You two had an Agreement?

BRILL

You turned it off???

GREG

You brought a guy to your room???

NESSA

It's called college, that's how it works.

GREG

Who was he?

NESSA

Nobody, a junior, Hashtag Zach.

GREG

You were supposed to be making a map, not showing her screen to some guy!

BRILL

[The screen] It's out. It's loose now.

NESSA

I see what's going on now. The girl who barely makes it here. The girl you think you can push around cuz she's scared of going back to the side.

GREG

That's not it at all.

BRILL

Anyone can see it in full.

NESSA

Brill asks me to get all this stuff by day and you ask me to map it all by night and this whole time?, you and her?

We hear from the distance a scream, long, piercing and horrid. GREG rushes to off.

BRILL

Congratulations: you just made the world go berserk.

NESSA

Man, I am just so not even drunk anymore.

BRILL

[Shutting the door and locking it] Can't believe I trusted you!

NESSA

[At this point outside the room, from the hallway] Hey!

BRILL

I woke up and you were partying with it? You don't even know what you've done!

GREG

[Rushing back on] I don't know, second floor maybe.

We hear from the distance another scream.

NESSA

Gimme your Simon, I'm calling front desk.

GREG

Hold on.

NESSA

Res Life!

GREG

This is more than just you.

NESSA

Oh, you got other people making maps?

GREG

This is everything!

BRILL

I can't stop it.

GREG

Did you see it? Did you?

NESSA

Uhhh, news flash! I'm not here for some IBM screen game. I'm here for coll-ege ex-per-i-ence. And there's two people ruining that. Room 305 is something I somehow earned and my Mom's somehow paying for. The thing that's been holding me back has been me and I'm not gonna be stuck to the side anymore. [To the door] YOU HEAR ME, BRILL! [To GREG] It's moving day.

NESSA goes to full off.

All is dark. Except the Web cluster.

SCENE 9.

We hear music, the entirety of something akin to Jeff Buckley's Last Goodbye.

From the Web cluster we see images of the World Wide Web.

We see faces of corruption, hate-filled comment sections, advocates of violence, people destroying people, affiliation sites of snark and demeanment, search strings of vicious antagonism, forums of uselessness, assemblies of vanity, portals of greed, gateways of hatred, and on and on and on and on...until the song fades at its conclusion...

SCENE 10.

*We hear the music shift, something akin to
Everything But The Girl's Rollercoaster.*

*Beneath the Web cluster, light develops and
we see Room 305.*

*We now see hanging from the wall on
NESSA's side of the room a huge map of the
world, arty and stylish. Flanking that are
smaller maps: maps of ancient cities, maps
of forgotten parts of the world. NESSA's
side of the room is now unpacked and
arranged.*

*Meanwhile, at stage left, BRILL's digital
contrivance is dismantled. All papers
previously hanging from the wall now lie on
the ground. Computers and drives are off.*

*NESSA sits by her bed, headphones on,
informed by the music. She holds a
highlighter and reads from a textbook.*

GREG appears outside Room 305.

This holds.

Then GREG knocks.

NESSA

Yep!

GREG knocks again, louder.

NESSA

Yo! [Removing her headphones, fading the music] S'open!

GREG

It's Greg.

*NESSA jams the CD boombox player,
stopping the music. This holds.*

NESSA
What do you want.

GREG
To talk to you.

NESSA
You allowed to do that?

GREG
Not really.

NESSA
'Kay, then.

NESSA recups headphones over her ears.

GREG
Nessa.

NESSA
What.

GREG
Can you at least open the door?

NESSA
Why.

GREG
I told you.

NESSA
I don't want to talk to you.

GREG
It's important.

NESSA
Go bother someone else.

GREG

There are no someone elses. Not anymore.

NESSA goes to the door.

NESSA

What.

GREG

Seriously.

NESSA opens the door. They look at each other.

NESSA

What.

GREG

Can I...[come in]?

NESSA

No?

GREG

C'mon.

NESSA

You're not worried Res Life might see.

GREG

Maybe three days ago.

NESSA

Call my room phone from your Simon.

GREG

Battery's dead. Only holds a thirty minute charge. Besides, some things are best face-to-face.

NESSA

Lies? Res Life said you're banned from coming near me 'til this gets sorted out.

GREG

Yeah, I know what Res Life said. It's important.

NESSA considers then walks back to her bed, leaving the door open.

NESSA

[The door] Can leave that open now.

GREG

Guess things have...[entering, seeing the map décor]...changed.

NESSA

I don't want an apology.

GREG

That's fine, you're not getting one. [BRILL's computer mess] The smoldering ruins? Surprised to see it still here. Figured you would have torched it right after Brill fled to the Wednesday morning sunrise.

NESSA

It's how I found it when I got back from telling Res Life about the extra person in my room.

GREG

She must have done this before she ran off.

NESSA

She took her backpack. And the bike.

GREG

Yeah.

NESSA

Probably pedaled herself long gone by now. Unless you helped her find another host to crash.

GREG

She say she's coming back?

NESSA

Last time I saw Brill she locked me out of the room.

GREG

Now's she's loose, too. Out there.

NESSA

She's a real-life hacker, Greg. Taking over rooms for connection. I wonder if this was even the first room she tried. [Pause] Or if she starved somewhere else first.

GREG

...so you have been thinking about her. You must be worried.

NESSA

...[the textbook] I'm worried about not being ready for my first test.

GREG

I think we're taking it.

NESSA

You know everything.

GREG

If I did I wouldn't be here.

NESSA

What's so important.

GREG

We have to find Brill.

NESSA

Go ahead. Have her move in with you. You two'll be perfect for each other. You can listen to her rant about containment and wiping away the looming disaster, and then—shhh!—she has to sleep for twenty minutes. And while she's sleeping you can spy her screen. And then twenty minutes later Brill awake asking if you wouldn't mind spending your day scouring campus to bring back a new keyboard space bar, or little micro thingy. I tried to be accepting but it went too far.

GREG

She wouldn't just abandon. Not something this important.

NESSA

Only if it's important to you.

GREG

It's everyone.

NESSA

Look, today's Saturday. The football tailgate's supposed to be the biggest party ever but I'm already missing it cuz of all this learning. You're not supposed to be in here. Neither was Brill. [Hands GREG a hand-drawn map] Just take it and go.

GREG

You still drew it. A map of her system.

NESSA

She was weird as hell, but...never confuse weird with adventure. Now it's almost strange without her here.

GREG

And you didn't look at the screen.

NESSA

[The textbook] I'm trying to look at this.

GREG

You don't get it.

NESSA

You're right, I don't. You let some rand-o stump my room cuz of your IBM religion.

GREG

To make the world more connected. More available. More together. But in the past three days all my beliefs got shattered by what was in there. How many centuries did we say it hovered by the edge of our campsite, drawn to our firelight, and if seen would run off, scared, back to being an outcast just because we saw it. But now it's flipped, like we're the ones forced *to* the screen just by seeing it.

NESSA

Greg: stop the screen and look around, okay? We're in college.

GREG

Maybe you can tell me which college that is: cocoon isolated from reality? Computer lab of techno-intensity? Or partyville with no consequence? Choose from the dropdown menu of living it up while *that* sits just outside our realm of awareness, just inside the edge of reality, smashing us all together like college roommates for the first time, without an Agreement. If the whole point of college is to teach us our simulation has more than one truth, fine, I can live with that, but we all need to rely on the same Agreement. And I just don't know what that is anymore. [Pause] I got a partial glimpse and couldn't handle it. Now it's loose, and we don't have Brill. [Pause] What happened Tuesday night.

NESSA

What do you want me to say?

GREG

His name was Zach. He looked at the screen.

Pause.

NESSA

I told him about Brill, all that, you. He's this sweet physicist, funny, likes to dance. Her mask was covering the doorknob. We went in anyway. She looked so peaceful sleeping. I turned off her alarm, thought I'd do her a favor and let her get some real sleep. Zach loved the setup. I remember the printer rattling and while I tried to figure out which cord to unplug to keep the noise from waking Brill, Zach went before the screen. His head kind of...slumped. He got weird. Not Brill weird, real weird. Vibrating.

GREG

Vibrating.

NESSA

Spazzing out. Tripped some wires, knocked over stuff. Woke up Brill. Then he ran out.

GREG

[From the white binder] Campus bulletin from two days ago. [As NESSA reads it, and reacts] That him?

NESSA

...I...[shocked by what she's reading]...don't know his last name.

GREG

I don't think Hashtag will reopen anytime soon.

NESSA

This can't be the same Zach.

GREG

Nessa, something terrible is now happening.

NESSA

This isn't me. This isn't this room. I'm the end of the hall, third floor, grey walls and bad carpet choices. I'm here to have a college experience.

GREG

That's over! No one's having a college experience anymore! Now that that thing is loose.

NESSA

A monster from the World Wide Web.

GREG

How else would you explain it.

NESSA

Check the sign-in logs at front desk.

GREG

Checking front desk is when I noticed. The desk attendant: slackjawed and stupefied. Before her screen, kind of trembling in place. I made rounds to other floors, careful not to look at the screen myself. The soccer guys on second floor?

NESSA

The party animals.

GREG

Now caged animals. Before their screens, transfixed, quivering. I checked with other RAs. Before their screens, beholden, cackling. Yesterday, my Adjunct, fossilized. Today, Res Life: shivering banshees. Upperclassmen, underclassmen, all over school.

NESSA

They're hung over.

GREG

Missing football? There's no one at the tailgate. Except a couple people swivering in random directions, bellowing like madmen, their arms flailing. Otherwise the classrooms, the Quad, the walkways, hallways, the administration, the fifty yard line...

NESSA

Yeah?

GREG

Yeah!

NESSA

They're here to reidentify, explore. If we're not harming each other while doing it then what's the problem? I mean, I saw it, I didn't like it, I moved on.

GREG

You half-saw it. If I hadn't half-seen it first I might have fallen prey like everyone else. In three days whatever Brill was keeping in there has spread, people getting full and direct looks without warning. The entire campus is now in some kind of fit. Brill's the only one who might know how to reverse engineer it.

NESSA

Call IBM.

GREG

That's like calling our parents. They won't know what to do. Besides, when you're part of it, you don't always see you're the problem. I get that now. Maybe Brill did, too. You were living with her. She must have said something?

NESSA

...she said...that it's like getting drunk. That if you see it, it makes you on the outside who you really are on the inside.

GREG

Oh my God. What's happening to us?

NESSA goes into the ruins and pulls out a shipping box, unopened.

NESSA

It came yesterday. She was waiting for some new wiper.

GREG

[Return address] Stanford. You know this name?

NESSA

She never mentioned a Jerry. Just take it. Along with the map. I'll go on with my life, you go on with yours.

GREG

There's nowhere to go. That's why I'm here, Nessa, I need your help.

NESSA

Where's today's bulletin?

GREG

It never came. It's like you and I are the last two people who haven't been affected. Like we're the last two on campus to know.

NESSA

A screen attached to a bunch of boxes.

GREG

This isn't a symbol of the world anymore, this now *is* the world. And I get how you feel about it, so yeah, you could shut yourself in here. You could ignore it. That is a choice. A choice is to avoid it. Or you could accept it. Respect what it can do. Understand what it means for today, and tomorrow, and all the other tomorrows we can't know about. Maybe even embrace it. Because everyone else will. And not only will they embrace it, not only will they come to depend up on it, but they will defend its very right to exist. Like they won't know how to be without it.

NESSA

...you know, there are still places on earth we haven't mapped. Maybe there are places we aren't meant to go.

GREG

Who'll be responsible when we do?

Long pause.

NESSA

[The textbook] Getting bored of this anyway. I'll hit main campus, the library, see if I can't snag a phone number for this Jerry. Since Brill's gone maybe I talk to him and learn how to stop whatever-this-is from going any further.

GREG

Thank you.

NESSA

But I'm still pissed about my room.

GREG

Maybe it was all necessary, our reality backup, wherever we are now.

NESSA

The first two weeks of college.

GREG

Try not to party on your way to the library.

NESSA

Right.

GREG

[As NESSA goes to exit] But maybe leave the rest of the box. What if Brill comes back while you're gone, you know?

NESSA rips the address label, hands the box to GREG, and retains the address label for herself as she exits.

Lights shift.

The Web cluster morphs to full view.

SCENE 11.

As BRILL speaks we can see activity from Room 305.

GREG holds the shipping box. GREG decides to open the box. He takes out a computer part. He holds it. GREG compares it to NESSA's drawn computer map.

GREG reassembles the digital workstation.

And then GREG turns on the screen.

BRILL

Monster.

Grotesque.

Vile, unclean.

Don't look.

But look.

You have to.

Bright touch glare warm.

Underneath slices cold.

Please make it you.

Be a liar, be a victim, a wretched scream.

But be it.

Because you need it.

Don't look.

But look.

GREG is before the screen. Almost slumped forward. Jittering.

BRILL

It's already gone.

It's another world.

You're the same person you weren't before.

Didn't you know?

Lights shift as BRILL disappears from view.

GREG remains.

SCENE 12.

Lights from the Web cluster and screen. A color and pattern that suggests warning, danger.

We hear music in the distant background, canned and tinny as if through headphones, skipping, hiccupping and repeating the same short excerpt. Something dark, akin to Crash Test Dummies' Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm.

GREG is before the screen, rocking forward and back.

NESSA approaches and uses her key to enter.

NESSA

OHHHHH, YEAH! You are not gonna BEE-LIEVE what I found. Jackpot!

GREG

Hi.

NESSA

Yes, hi. Now, before I tell you why I was gone super-long—[stopping the CD player]—weird—I just have to tell you how hard it is to find someone with nothing but their name, location and a friend in common. But then I thought the *phone book*. Duh! So I ditched microfiche and grabbed the White Pages and no librarians were at the desk so I borrowed their long-distance code and desk rotary and, bam!, this guy David answers, Jerry's *roommate!*, both of 'em grad school engineers at Stanford who apparently launched this...new...

This holds.

NESSA

What's going on.

GREG

What do you mean.

NESSA

Well...this.

NESSA

Hi, but look, as I'm starting to tell the Stanford roommate about what's happened here with Brill gone and people going berserk, the librarians went nuts. It was batty, the librarians of all people snarling and barking, and after I ran out of there and started back is when it hit me: *you can't make a map with just letters of the alphabet!* [Picking a random sheet of printer paper] Brill said she was L through P. Alpha-only is a terrible way to map location. But these four-number batches? Some kind of coordinate protocol? I think I got something here. Greg.

GREG

Nessa.

NESSA

If more and more of these Websites are getting made and if this Jerry and David and whoever else in their crew are trying to map the Web to wipe wherever it appears—*they ain't doing it right*. C'mon, I need your long-distance code.

GREG

You need it.

NESSA

Damn straight. Call back and talk to this Jerry guy and stop whatever's happening from getting worse than it already is!

GREG in one violent motion yanks the phone from the wall and throws it across the dorm room.

GREG

Well. Guess it's time for you to look now.

NESSA

...

GREG

A viewing party. I know you like to party.

NESSA

What's wrong with you.

GREG

I know more than I can say, and the little I can say wouldn't be said, had I not known more.

NESSA

...

GREG

I think we should talk.

NESSA

You just ripped my phone from the wall.

GREG

A short talk. About things.

NESSA

Can you turn off the screen?

GREG

It's very deceptive. Isn't it.

NESSA

It's a screen.

GREG

It was always ours. You know.

NESSA

No.

GREG

You asked.

NESSA

No.

GREG

You asked: what makes the woman remove her mask. Remember?

NESSA

Turn off the screen and I'll tell you the answer.

GREG

Deepsea divers go so deep, a dark and savage place to keep. Disoriented, in wonder of the violent sea, disrupted of her senses, the woman removes her breathing mask. In awe. The woman surrenders to the dark and savage.

NESSA
What did you do?

GREG
What do you think?

NESSA
How long did you look?

GREG
It's open. It's free.

NESSA
Can you turn it off?

GREG
Come sit.

NESSA
That's okay.

GREG
You didn't look before.

NESSA
You're kinda scaring me, huh?

GREG
Take off the mask and look.

NESSA
There's no mask.

GREG
Loud, enraged. It does because it does. You see?

NESSA
No.

GREG
Why this is. What this is.

NESSA
A screen.

GREG

What makes it so powerful. So perfect.

NESSA

What.

GREG

...harm.

Pause.

NESSA

Help!

GREG

Civilization-scale harm.

NESSA

I saw Brill! She's coming.

GREG

Because it's beautiful, isn't it.

NESSA

What if Brill can't get in?

GREG

There's honesty in harm. Pleasure.

NESSA

She's outside, right now.

GREG

Lucidity in harm. Grace. That's what this is.

NESSA

That's not what that is.

GREG

Where we all want to go.

NESSA

I want you to stay over there.

GREG

That's not where you want to go.

NESSA

I want you to leave.

GREG

The one program. The one design. Harm!

NESSA

A screen. A dumb, flat screen.

GREG

A equals B and B equals C and it all ends up at Zee! AND IT SHALL BECOME
A MIGHTY PLACE AND KILL THE SUN! IT WILL FIGHT GOD AND BE
GOD! IT SHALL MURDER LIFE AND BECOME THE VALUE OF DEATH!
Now. I want you to see it.

NESSA

I did, okay?

GREG

Before you see it...I want you to say it first.

NESSA

Everything you're saying's awesome, okay? We're Agreeing.

GREG

Say: I want it to happen to me.

NESSA

[Getting dragged to the screen] No.

GREG

I want it to happen to me. I WANT IT TO HAPPEN TO ME.

NESSA

No-no-no, NO! NO! N—!

GREG forces NESSA before the screen.

GREG

I WANT IT TO HAPPEN TO ME I WANT IT TO HAPPEN TO ME I WANT IT
TO HAPPEN TO ME I WANT IT TO HAPPEN TO ME...

The Web cluster comes alive. We hear the noise of the World Wide Web.

NESSA is before the screen. And sees. She starts to scream but only a half-squeak emanates. She can't scream. She is paralyzed, held by the power of the screen.

NESSA transforms, her scream and horror slowly loosening into revolting acquiesce, then reluctant compliance.

Her head slumps forward.

GREG exits the room and locks the door, leaving NESSA, recontinuing the chant.

GREG

I want it to happen to me I want it to happen to me I want it to happen to me...

Lights fade.

SCENE 13.

BRILL appears outside Room 305's door. She's wearing her backpack and rolling the bike.

BRILL looks around the hallway. She then tries the door handle, locked. She takes a card-sized ID and picks the lock. The lock gives and BRILL turns the door slowly inward to darkness.

BRILL rolls the bike into the room and shuts the door behind her, leaning the bike against the door.

BRILL turns on the Room 305 light.

NESSA might be huddled in the corner of the room, legs against her chest, or sitting by the bed, or standing straight against the wall.

BRILL

[Startled, seeing NESSA] Jeez.

NESSA: no movement.

BRILL

So yeah. You've probably seen it by now.

NESSA: no movement.

BRILL

Guess you didn't expect me back.

NESSA: no movement.

BRILL

Thought I'd return your fake ID.

NESSA: no movement.

BRILL

And, um, to say I'm sorry. About the way I was. And for what's happened since.

NESSA: no movement.

BRILL

You know this wasn't the first place I crashed. One of the other pre-Webbers, someone I chatted with for a while, young girl like us, she was like why don't you come stay with me and we'll wipe L through P together? My parents were pretty steamed about me never leaving my room and I didn't really know how long I could stay there before they kicked me out, so I took a bus cross-country to Maryland. Never been outside Nevada before. People from the screen seemed so real, safe. Packed everything I could manage in a backpack, including a bunch of social courage I didn't know I had, and showed up at the girl's house...and it wasn't really so much a young girl. Older dude with one eye running a computer parts business from his basement. I couldn't really sleep with him around, even taking shifts. I was so freaked out. So during one of his twenty minutes I took his delivery van and some computer gear and drove off. I didn't know what I was doing or where I was going. I stopped at a Chi-Chi's cuz that's safe. Crying and feeling so lost and confused and even more alone than before. But being offline was killing me so I took, a map, from the glove compartment and realized how close I was to here. Ditched the van outside campus. Hustled all the computer stuff to the engineering dorm. Figured here I might have a chance to meet the right person who'd get I need to be kept alone. The thing is, you find something that's so you, you come across a thing that says I know how to keep you alone, and you inhale it, it becomes a cure for life. But then the cure becomes the disease. It's been a long time since anyone reached out to me. The real me. Then you did. In a way, by turning it off you turned me back on. So even though I was unstuck, finally free from it, I hung around campus as you. Exploring I guess. Started at the computer lab to follow along the unfolding disaster. Place was empty. Pedaled to the Rec Center. Abandoned. Then the Gym. I took a shower. Felt so good. And then the curving paths. Leaves falling. The sun. The sun. After a while I just laid down between two massive oaks in a patch of Black-Eyed-Susans. I slept there. Twenty-four hours. Maybe two days. I felt so refreshed, defragged. Figured it was safe to return. After getting something to eat. [From her travel backpack] The café's wide open so I loaded up. Hope you don't mind but the waffles are kinda stale.

A visceral response from NESSA, perhaps hugging BRILL.

BRILL

Okay, like, I'm now afraid to tell you about the coffee. Hey. Hey.

NESSA

I just wanted to go to college.

BRILL

Well. You're here. You made it. Forget about me. Forget about what you saw, alright? This is gonna blow over and everything will go back to normal and you're gonna have great times and...guess anything sounds convincing, you say it enough times to yourself.

NESSA

I ask you something?

BRILL

...okay.

NESSA

The first time for you. What was it like?

BRILL

Like looking over God's shoulder. And then God turning around and saying don't look over my shoulder. Then God wiping the filth of it onto me and walking out of the room.

NESSA

I used to think I could get along with anyone.

BRILL

Yeah.

NESSA

That there wasn't a place or thing I couldn't handle.

BRILL

I used to feel I didn't have anywhere to go. Now I'm not sure I have anywhere left.

NESSA

Like if that's the new center, I'd rather go back to the side.

BRILL

Think we all learned something.

NESSA

Well. I also learned my butt hurts sitting on that chair too long. And I can't get the twenty-minutes-every-four-hours down. Keep sleeping through your blast alarm.

BRILL

...what.

NESSA

Even tried sleeping standing up. And the right-click on the mouse is busted.

BRILL

No. No-no-no.

NESSA

Need someone to get me a part.

BRILL

I didn't mean to interrupt college for you.

NESSA

[Sipping the coffee] Damn, that's good.

BRILL

I didn't mean to reorient your path. I am very sorry, for you, for everyone, but you have to forget about this. There's nothing more anyone can do.

NESSA

I talked to Jerry at Stanford.

BRILL

...what.

NESSA

Through your Webmail. Typed him that he should forget about wiping and instead make his thing a guide. A Website to be a master map of all the other Websites. To colonize the Web.

BRILL

You wrote him that.

NESSA

That and change the name. Yet Another Officious Oracle is dumb.

BRILL

He and David are shortening it. To Yahoo.

NESSA

Said they're willing to try my idea.

BRILL

He thought it was me typing.

NESSA

Didn't tell him you were...

BRILL

Out there.

NESSA

You talk to anyone?

BRILL

Still gotta work on that part.

NESSA

They won't know how to handle this.

BRILL

Blaming technology for human failure is such a human failure. Maybe people don't know to operate themselves.

NESSA

We didn't do so great.

BRILL

No.

NESSA

What happens now?

BRILL

Guess we'll find out. [Pause] Brought you the bike.

NESSA

I can't leave the room.

BRILL

This isn't right. It's not for you to fix.

NESSA

I saw it, Brill. I saw it. Every great map means someone went in first to clear the area and make the center safe for others. Mom paid for the first semester. Then I'll have to explain why it's 1995 and I haven't been to class.

BRILL

Jerry pays with Yahoo stock. Supposed to be worth more than money. I'll split it with you. I owe you.

NESSA

I'd rather you be down the hall when I need a micro thingy.

BRILL

As cozy as it all is I'm not for this place. [Unfolding a piece of highlighted paper] Lighthouse.com. One of the Ls. No internet, no Web. But I still get to stare through a screen and warn those hurtling towards harm. Who knows if I'll even make it to Chesapeake Bay. All I got is a bike, your fake ID, and a bunch of Yahoo stock.

NESSA

You'll still be alone.

BRILL

When you get tired of standing in for God come find me. Like hitting the escape key. Some cramped third floor lighthouse watch room, eating stale waffles, watching for whatever comes from the endless deep. Maybe two strangers can get to know each other. For real.

NESSA

It always starts at college.

BRILL

Then they drop out of college.

NESSA

Well, it's...[checking]...three hours and twenty-two minutes 'til my next--

We hear a soft computerized sound, like a flat bird squawk. The printer has activated.

NESSA

[Reading a sheet]...it just doesn't stop...[assuming command before the screen]...

BRILL

Alright. I guess...keep the paper feed clear. Screen at low brightness. The door locked. You'll be okay?

NESSA

Something like that.

BRILL turns and with the bike and her backpack goes out the door.

BRILL shuts the door behind her and remains there.

NESSA yawns. She then squints at the screen and starts pecking at the keyboard.

We hear music, something akin to Live's I Alone.

SCENE 14.

As music plays GREG appears. He is in the Web cluster.

GREG wears a mask, or silicon, or the look of harm. He could be anybody.

GREG goes to BRILL's screen.

GREG turns the screen to the audience, the light a bright flash.

GREG

Begin program.

The screen light extinguishes.

As music continues the Web cluster goes to...

Blackout.

END OF PLAY.