

CLEVER
Season 1, Episode 1

Written by

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FADE IN.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

STUART GODDARD, WM, 25, sits in an empty and unmarked interrogation room. He glances at the two empty chairs across from him, then at the camera in the corner, watching him.

The door opens and a man and woman walk in, dressed in matching black suits. DIAZ, HM, late 20s, and SANTIAGO, HF, early 30s.

Stuart looks at each of them in turn and then he smirks.

STUART

And who are you two with?

DIAZ

We'll ask the questions.

SANTIAGO

And we have LOTS of questions.

Stuart laughs.

STUART

I have all the answers. What do you want to know?

DIAZ

Why don't you start at the beginning?

SANTIAGO

Tell us everything.

Stuart pours himself a cup of water and begins.

STUART

I'm a mediocre person with aspirations towards greatness. I'm above average, but average isn't that great. I could accomplish great things, but I won't. I could do great things, but I don't. I do good enough that people always tell me I do great things. But they've always been wrong.

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)
Until yesterday. Yesterday is when
I saved the world.

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

DIAZ
You always talk this much shit?

STUART
It ain't bragging if you can back
it up.

Diaz and Santiago exchange an exasperated look.

SANTIAGO
Go on.

STUART
I've always been a clever guy. The
problem is that nobody likes clever
guys. Most people hate us. Part of
it is jealousy. Part of it is
feelings of inadequacy. Part of it
is fear. Whatever it is, they
always seem to be rubbed the wrong
way by me. I never really developed
too many close friends. And I was
almost always a better friend to
them than they were to me. Everyone
else always had this casual ease
with which they made friends and
had fun and interacted with each
other. I never had that.

DIAZ
You gonna start any time soon?

Stuart stares at Diaz for a moment.

STUART
I soon figured out that people
didn't like me because I was too
clever. That stung. But I wasn't
going to dumb myself down. So I
just didn't make too many friends.
If they wanted to go, let them go.
Good riddance.

Stuart stares at his hands.

STUART (CONT'D)

So then it becomes easier not to make new friends. And you end up alone a lot. But all that time alone can give you the freedom to learn about all kinds of things. Including how to save the world.

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, I was telling you about how I saved the world yesterday.

SANTIAGO

Finally.

Diaz laughs.

STUART

It's a funny story. Not funny like a joke, but funny like something that isn't funny at all. But who gets to save the world? I mean, unless you wear tights and work for Stan Lee, it's not something that comes up a whole lot. Or ever. And I only was able to save the world because I'm clever. But, boy do I have a story for you. It'll be something you can write home about.

DIAZ

I'm gonna die of old age.

STUART

So how does one go about saving the world? It's not something you really have much coursework in. It's not something that there's an instruction manual for. Oh, sure, you can read a lot of books, watch a lot of movies, play a bunch of video games. But despite what the average geek will tell you, saving the real world is not something you can prepare for by leveling up and finding another health pack. No, this is something you kinda have to figure out on the fly. You're wondering what exactly it was I saved the world from. Well, what COULD one save the world from? Let's take a look at the options...

(MORE)

STUART (CONT'D)

Maybe there was a giant asteroid that was going to hit the earth and I was the first to spot it with my little backyard telescope. I told someone about it and they sent up Bruce Willis and Ben Affleck and they blew it up and saved the day. Nope, that wasn't it.

SANTIAGO

You sure I can't shoot him?

DIAZ

Not yet.

STUART

More realistically, maybe it was some new virus, that if it made the leap over from the monkey world to the human world, it would become a supervirus and it would wipe out the entire human population. And I discovered it and came up with a cure. Only problem was that I never went to med school and have no idea how to spot a virus.

SANTIAGO

Obviously.

STUART

Alien invasion? I've read enough "Science of Star Wars" books to know how unlikely that is. Nuclear war? What am I, some kind of diplomat? The machines becoming sentient and taking over? I failed auto shop.

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)

No, the reality of it all is that I stopped every fanboy's dream apocalypse--I stopped the zombies from taking over.

SANTIAGO

Zombies?

DIAZ

Let's hear him out.

Santiago glares at Stuart.

SANTIAGO

Okay, but you need to speed things up. I'm getting bored. Zombies?

STUART

Before you get into all that crap about how zombies aren't real, I'm just telling you what I know. I thought we had more chance of being taken out by sharks with laser beams strapped to their heads than being taken out by the walking dead. But I was wrong.

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)

And so were you.

Santiago scoffs.

STUART (CONT'D)

I can't explain it, so don't ask. I'm sure when I go on Oprah, she'll ask.

SANTIAGO

YOU aren't going on Oprah. Ever.

STUART

She'll ask, but I won't know. And I doubt the government will let me tell Oprah or anyone else. But I'm already telling you my story, so they won't be able to stop it from getting out. It's already out.

DIAZ

It's not getting out.

Stuart stares at her for a moment, concerned.

STUART

The reality, of course, is that the "invisible hand" of the free market is what led to zombies and what led to all of us almost being taken out by them. If it weren't for me, that is. Again, you're welcome. It was the least I could do.

EXT. RURAL RESEARCH STATION - DAY

A white car zips down a lonely road through endless Kansas cornfields. There's a logo on the door of the car, but it's blurred out. It takes a long time for the car to get there.

STUART (V.O.)

The zombie "ground zero" was at a lab in rural Kansas that was testing some corn-related stuff for a certain mega-corporation whose name I can't say for "legal" reasons. I think their goal was that by 2050, everything in America would be made from genetically-modified corn. Corn-based sugar. Corn-based plastic. Corn-based gas. Corn-based alcohol. Corn-based cell phones. Corn-based wheat. You name it, they were working on a corn version. Or Corn Version 2.0.

The CAMERA zooms in on the car and Stuart is driving.

STUART (V.O.)

So, I don't know how they did it, but they somehow came up with ethanol zombies. At least that's what I called them. How do I know? Well, I worked for [BEEP] of course. I managed the network for their labs and plants and offices in Kansas. Good money, too. Particularly since I don't have a degree. But it's still early enough in the game that if you can do the work, you don't need a degree. Give it ten years or so and you'll need a degree to change passwords for dorks who work in the secretarial pool.

Stuart parks in the lot and gets out of the car. He wears a pair of khaki pants and a white polo that has the same logo as the car. The logo is blurred out as well.

STUART (V.O.)

Anyway, I work mainly out of their Lawrence office, but I have to drive around to various offices and labs and factories and such around the state when there are networking problems or the lab geeks can't figure out how to back up their data on the mainframe. Seriously, in 2011? Still?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Diaz and Santiago stare at Stuart, short on patience.

STUART

So I was on a call to this little lab in some rural area. I'd tell you where it was, but then I'd have to kill you. And let me say, I've had a lot of practice killing people of late, so don't test me on that one.

The officers aren't impressed.

STUART (V.O.)

I arrived at the place to do my service call. It's a small lab, so usually less than ten people worked there...

EXT./INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart opens the front door to the lab and goes inside. The front room is sparsely decorated. A rack with outdated and faded brochures and two chairs make up a waiting area. Across from that is a desk and secretary.

STUART (V.O.)

I knew the secretary at the front desk. She's hot. Beautiful blonde hair. Way out of my league. I like to flirt with her, and, to her credit, she always flirts back. But I know it doesn't mean anything. She's not the type that's into nerdy guys. Very glamorous type. Lots of make-up. The kind of girl you'd see in a night club and never ask to dance. Her name is Shelly.

Shelly smiles as Stuart comes inside.

STUART (V.O.)

Shelly was there when I got there. She's always there. Never misses a day. I probably didn't have to make the service call since I think I could've walked the staff through the fix over the phone, but, you know, Shelly's there, so I told my boss it's a road trip I have to make. He doesn't question it. He could care less. IT is not his thing.

SHELLY

Well, hey there, Stuart.

She's genuinely glad to see him.

STUART

Hi, Shelly. You're looking beautiful as always.

SHELLY

Oh, you're so sweet. Thank you.

STUART

You still go to Club Japone?

SHELLY

Sure, I go there all the time. How did you know about that.

STUART

I go there all the time, too.

SHELLY

Wow, I've never seen you there.

STUART

I see you there all the time.

Stuart offers a weak grin.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Diaz gives Stuart a concerned stare.

DIAZ

You always this creepy with women?

Stuart is flustered.

STUART

No... I... Uh... Only with
Shelly... I mean... Ummm... No.

SANTIAGO

Sounds like a yes to me.

Diaz and Santiago chuckle. Stuart frowns.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Shelly offers Stuart a strained smile.

STUART (V.O.)

If she noticed my creepiness, she didn't say anything. That was very nice of her. She could very easily have reported me for sexual harassment or something and I would have had no defense. I was relieved that she was either very, very nice or she was not so smart and didn't understand in the first place. Either way, I was okay with it at the moment, as I envisioned trying to comply with the state's extensive unemployment compensation paperwork.

Next to Shelly's desk was a door with a glass window in the middle, which could only be accessed with a keycard. Next to the door was the "break glass in case of emergency" box with the fire axe in it.

STUART (V.O.)

Funny thing was that she had absolutely no idea what was going on behind her in the restricted areas. It was early enough in the day that I'm guessing she hadn't even gone behind the protected doors at that point.

STUART

I'm here about the mainframe.
Again.

Shelly buzzes Stuart back.

STUART (V.O.)

I kind of wish she hadn't buzzed me back that day, but if she hadn't, we'd all probably be dead right now. I'm sure that Dr. Dole or Dr. Wyden would've come up to the glass window in the door at some point--completely infected--and she would've let them out. Then she would've gotten infected. And then they would've gone out into the cool Kansas afternoon and started an apocalypse.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Stuart grins at the officers.

STUART

Luckily for the world, Shelly buzzed me back.

SANTIAGO

You know, you aren't nearly as clever as you think you are.

DIAZ

Quite annoying, in fact.

SANTIAGO

Should we end this now? Stop wasting everybody's time.

Diaz stares at Stuart for a second. He gets nervous and sits up taller as the officer stares at him.

DIAZ

Nah, personality isn't what matters here.

(to Stuart)

Go on, but maybe stick to the facts and stop patting yourself on the back so much.

SANTIAGO

You think you can do that?

Stuart shrugs.

STUART

You haven't even told me why I'm here.

SANTIAGO
Isn't it obvious?

STUART
You think I'm so cool you want to
invite me to join the X Files or
Men In Black?

He grins hopefully.

DIAZ
What we've heard about your story
is hard to believe.

SANTIAGO
VERY hard to believe.

STUART
Then why are you even talking to
me, the other cops already have my
account of what happened. This
feels redundant.

Diaz and Santiago exchange a glance.

DIAZ
Keep talking.

SANTIAGO
We're doing our due diligence.

DIAZ
We aren't done with you yet.

Stuart frowns.

STUART
Okay. Luckily for the employees of
BEEP's secret lab in "If I Tell You
I Have to Kill You," Kansas, only
three scientists were working that
day. The aforementioned doctors
Dole and Wyden were there. Also on
hand was some kind of technician
whose name was Woodring or
something like that. In addition to
Shelly, those were the only
employees on hand that day at the
lab.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart walks through the door and stops in the hallway. The door closes and locks behind him.

STUART (V.O.)

I guess you'd probably have to count their test subjects in the count of people on hand. There were a man and a woman whose names I'll probably never know that were also in the lab that day. Sort of. It's hard to say whether or not you should count people who were dead when they came to the lab as being part of the body count or not. This was my first time staving off a zombie apocalypse, so I'm a little sketchy on the analysis of such things.

Stuart looks around, like he's waiting for someone.

STUART (V.O.)

Now I knew that this particular lab was designated solely as a lab for testing corn-based fuel for cars and such. Most of the labs they had in the state were single-subject. Or so I thought at that point. It turns out that this lab certainly had a bit more going on that what was revealed to the average employee, much less to the public.

Stuart gets fidgety and cranes his neck to see down the hallway better.

STUART (V.O.)

I should've known something was wrong when I walked through the doors and nobody was there to greet me. One of the doctors was always there to greet me before then. They usually quickly escorted me directly to the workstation and watched over me like a hawk. They never let me wander around or use the restroom or anything. It's get in, get the job done and get out. They were never rude, but you could tell I was an unwelcome intrusion. But no one showed up to escort me.

(MORE)

STUART (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That should've been enough. But it
wasn't.

Stuart slowly starts walking down the hallway.

STUART (V.O.)
I'd been there enough times that I
knew where the workstation was. I
knew what they wanted me to do and
I knew they didn't like me to
wander or to stay very long. So I
made my way down the hall to the
only room I had been in except for
the one where Shelly sits. Or sat.
She doesn't work there anymore.

The CAMERA goes through the door and catches up to Stuart.

STUART (V.O.)
As I walked back, I realized that I
was going to have some trouble if
someone didn't show up soon. The
room I worked in was always locked.
All of the rooms in this place were
always locked. And without a
keycard, I wasn't going to get in.

Stuart stops. He sees that the door he's walking toward is
open. He looks down and a foot clad in a black and white
Chuck Taylor holds the door open.

STUART (V.O.)
Times like that are when you really
find out who a person is. A less
clever person would've panicked and
probably would've caused the
destruction of the world. I didn't
know I was saving the world at that
moment, but that's what I was
doing.

Stuart looks back towards the exit. He hesitates. Then he
moves towards the door. And the foot.

He walks toward the door and pulls it open. He looks at the
body on the floor.

STUART
Dr. Wyden?

Stuart nudges the body with his foot, but there's no
response. Dr. Wyden is dead.

Wyden is a WM, 50s, wearing khaki pants and a white lab coat over a white shirt and tie.

Except that there's blood everywhere. All coming from a wound on his neck. The wound is fresh and still bleeding.

Stuart looks around the room. No one else is in it. The workstation Stuart was to work on sits empty. Next to it is a bookshelf with professorial tomes. A few extra chairs sit around the workstation, as if people were gathered around looking at the screen, which now shows a log-in screen.

On the back wall are a fire extinguisher and a hang-in there kitten poster. Several coffee cups sit on a table in the center of the room, still steaming.

STUART (V.O.)

That's when I heard the gurgling sound.

Stuart turns to see Dr. Wyden, who is now standing. The gurgling sound comes from his throat.

STUART (V.O.)

The gurgling sound that still wakes me up in the middle of the night.

Dr. Wyden stares at Stuart, a green hue covering his eyes.

STUART (V.O.)

This is the part where the clever guy with lots of free time realizes he's facing a zombie. I had to quickly figure out what kind of zombie it was. The different kinds of zombies all have different tactics with which one has to use on them.

Stuart runs and hops to get to the other side of the room.

STUART (V.O.)

I did a quick hop, skip and a leap to the opposite side of the room, testing his reflexes and speed. He couldn't keep up with how fast I moved.

The zombie's head slowly turns as Stuart goes. It arrives at Stuart's new position long after Stuart does.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Stuart gets animated as he explains what happened, waving his arms and moving about.

STUART

Okay, so that meant he wasn't a Danny Boyle-type zombie. That was good. I'm not that fast.

Diaz chuckles.

SANTIAGO

No shit.

STUART

The next determination I had to make was if he was a Night of the Living Dead-style zombie or a Return of the Living Dead-style zombie. If he was a Return zombie, there was little I'd be able to do about it in such a confined space. I'd be trapped in the room with no way to get past him. And judging by the bite on his neck, he had friends. There was a good chance they'd be here soon, once the commotion began.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart reaches for the fire extinguisher.

STUART (V.O.)

I had previously planned my hop, skip and jump to deposit me right next to the fire extinguisher, the only item in the room that could be wielded as a weapon.

Dr. Wyden slowly walks towards Stuart.

STUART (V.O.)

This was the first moment of truth. Could I kill someone? Well, not someone, but something. Could I kill a zombie?

The fire extinguisher is strapped to the wall and Stuart frantically struggles to free it.

And I don't mean that in a "do I have the guts to do it" or a "will my normal pacifism stop me from hurting someone" type of manner, I meant it in an "am I strong enough" kind of way.

Stuart raises the extinguisher over his head and brings it down with all his strength on Dr. Wyden's head.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Stuart sits in the chair.

STUART
Has to be a head shot, right?

DIAZ
You watch a lot of TV, huh?

Stuart grins.

STUART
I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

Santiago sighs.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart brings the fire extinguisher down on Dr. Wyden's head.

STUART (V.O.)
The first thing I noticed was that it hurt like hell. Not him. Me. The jarring of the extinguisher hitting his hard skull shook me all the way to the elbow. It hurt horribly and I almost dropped the extinguisher.

Stuart hits Dr. Wyden again.

STUART (V.O.)
The second thing I noticed was his skull giving in under the blow.

Dr. Wyden falls to the floor, dead. Again.

STUART (V.O.)
I hit him in the head again. Double tap.

Stuart brings the fire extinguisher down on Dr. Wyden's face, crushing the rest of his skull.

STUART (V.O.)

Time to go. After he stood up, the door had closed behind Dr. Wyden and locked itself. No problem, I grabbed his keycard, swiped it and pulled the door towards me.

A bloody hand grabs Stuart by the shoulder. The hand is bloody and missing the last two fingers and part of the palm. Stuart screams and he drops the fire extinguisher. It bounces down the hall past the man holding Stuart's shoulder.

Stuart turns to see who grabbed him. It's a man in blue jeans, a light blue polo shirt and a doctor's coat. His nametag says DR. DOLE.

Further down the hall is a man in a jeans and a light blue polo shirt, with the name WOODRING sewn on the breast. Woodring the zombie shambles past the fire extinguisher.

STUART (V.O.)

The best advice ever given? Don't panic.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Santiago looks at Diaz, puzzled. Then, at Stuart.

SANTIAGO

Plato? Aristotle?

DIAZ

No, no, no. It was Stan Lee? Or maybe Jesus.

STUART

Douglas Adams.

Santiago is still puzzled.

SANTIAGO

Who?

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart easily breaks free from Dr. Dole's weak grip. He runs towards the front door, but he drops Dr. Wyden's keycard as he goes.

STUART

Shit!

Dr. Dole follows Stuart, stepping over the fallen keycard. Stuart starts to panic. He runs to the front door and bangs on the glass. Dr. Dole and Woodring follow.

STUART (V.O.)

Later, I looked up the doctors who worked there and Dr. Wyden was a medical doctor and he apparently was from some strange unaccredited school that no one I've ever met has ever heard of. He certainly wasn't qualified to work on ethanol or any kind of fuel.

Stuart peers through the glass, but Shelly isn't at her desk. He looks back to see the two zombies closing in on him. It's a short hallway.

EXT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - CONTINUOUS

Shelly stands outside, finishing a cigarette. She puts it in an outside ashtray.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - CONTINUOUS

Shelly comes in to Stuart banging on the inner door. The noise shocks her and she rushes to the door. She pulls her keycard, which is on a retractable cord on her belt, and swipes it.

It doesn't work.

Shelly looks down at the card and chuckles to herself. Stuart continues to bang on the glass and scream. Shelly flips the card over and rescans it. She looks at Stuart with concern.

SHELLY

What's wrong? What's happening?

Stuart rushes through and shuts the door behind him.

STUART (V.O.)

It was a good thing they hadn't informed her about what kinds of things that were going on in the back of the lab and an even better thing that this lab didn't have higher security measures than it did. If it did, I'd be dead. And so would you.

Stuart bumps into Shelly coming through the door and she almost falls over. He's too slow in shutting the door and Dr. Dole is halfway through. Stuart smashes the door into Dr. Dole's head with a thunk.

Dr. Dole reaches and tries to grab Stuart. He tries pushing the door harder, but it's no use.

STUART (V.O.)

I tried pushing the door harder, but it was no use. There was no way I was getting that door shut with Dr. Dole still coming after me. I just wasn't strong enough. I called for Shelly to help me, but her slight frame didn't bring much to the door-pushing, Dr. Dole-crushing party.

STUART

Help me!

Shelly steadies herself and pushes on the door. It holds. Woodring comes closer and Stuart and Shelly exchange a look of panic.

STUART (V.O.)

That's when I had to make a decision. That's when I had to be really clever. So I was.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Santiago is bored. Diaz frustrated.

SANTIAGO

It's taking you longer to tell this story than it took you to live it.

STUART

Like I said, I'd been to this place a number of times and I remembered the one tool left in this office that would help me save the world.

SANTIAGO

Sounds like two tools to me.

Diaz tries not to laugh and fails.

STUART

The fire emergency box with the axe in it. What better weapon to take out zombies than an axe? If I had let go of the door, though, then Dr. Dole would've gotten through and taken me out. And Woodring was almost to the door as well and I doubt I could've held them both off. So I needed Shelly's help.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart pushes as hard as he can against the door, temporarily holding Dr. Dole back.

STUART

Shelly!

SHELLY

What? What? I'm pushing as hard as--

STUART

Stop! We aren't strong enough.
Break the glass!

Shelly is puzzled and she doesn't push as hard. Stuart slips a bit and Dr. Dole's bloody hand reaches for Shelly. She screams.

STUART (CONT'D)

The fire axe, get it for me!

She walks to the axe and grabs the little hammer to break it. She hesitates.

STUART (CONT'D)

Hurry, Shelly! It's okay, it's definitely an emergency!

Shelly breaks the glass and gets the axe free as quickly and as safely as she can.

STUART (CONT'D)
Get out of the building and lock
the door!

He grabs the axe and she runs for the front door. Stuart
waits for her to get outside and lock the door.

STUART (CONT'D)
Is it locked?

Shelly pulls on the door and it doesn't open.

SHELLY
(muffled)
Yes!

Stuart steps away from the door, pulling it open behind him.
Dr. Dole falls through the doorway and crashes to the floor.

STUART (V.O.)
I had to be quick or they'd take me
out. I had to be strong or it
wouldn't be enough. I had to be
perfect. And that's exactly how
that shit went down.

Stuart lifts up the axe and brings it down forcefully,
splitting Dr. Dole's skull. It's a clean split and the axe
easily comes when Stuart pulls it free.

Woodring moves through the doorway. Stuart holds the axe like
a baseball bat and swings away. He cleanly takes off
Woodring's head and it roles down the hallway.

Stuart sets the axe down and pulls the bodies out of the
doorway and it shuts behind him. He turns and goes back to
the front door and opens it.

STUART
Shelly?

She's pretty far away, but she moves closer to the door at
his voice.

STUART (CONT'D)
Anybody else in today besides
Wyden, Dole and Woodring?

SHELLY
No, that's it.

STUART
Good. That means we're in the
clear.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Diaz and Santiago are very interested by now. They're waiting to see how this ends.

STUART

Then I remembered the bite marks. Dr. Dole and his missing fingers and Dr. Wyden and his missing esophagus. Someone or something had bitten them. That's how they became zombies. They didn't bite each other and although I never saw a bite on Woodring, I guessed--correctly it turned out--that he wasn't patient zero, either.

Santiago and Diaz exchange a look.

EXT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - THEN

Stuart grabs the front door, but it's locked. He turns to Shelly.

STUART

Give me your keycard.

SHELLY

(puzzled)

Why? It's over, right? The police are on their way.

She holds up her cell phone.

STUART

I think there's at least one more zombie.

SHELLY

And?

STUART

And I'm going to kill it.

She hands him the keycard and he goes back inside. Shelly makes another phone call.

INT. RURAL RESEARCH LAB - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Stuart makes sure the door is locked behind him. Then he swipes the card on the inner door. He holds the door slightly and sticks his head through the doorway.

STUART
(yelling)
Hello! Anyone home?!

He pulls his head back through the doorway, but keeps his ear to the slightly open doorway.

Stuart repeats the process.

STUART (CONT'D)
Hello! Zombies? You there?

As he listens, Stuart hears something and cocks his eyebrow.

STUART (CONT'D)
Last call! You don't have to go to hell, but you can't stay in this dimension.

At the end of the hall, a really CRUSTY ZOMBIE in a hospital gown stumbles out of a doorway and heads towards Stuart.

STUART (V.O.)
The zombie had no visible bite marks, so I guessed he was patient zero. I decided then and there this guy's name was Zed and I proceeded to use my axe to make sure that Zed was dead.

Stuart grabs the axe, pulls the door open and quickly walks down the hall. The zombie reaches for him and Stuart swings and takes off the zombie's head.

A moan comes from the room Zed came from. Stuart holds the axe up ready to strike.

Nothing happens.

Another moan, but no other sounds or movement.

Stuart slowly walks towards the door. He peeks around the corner and sees the last zombie.

STUART (V.O.)
Whatever this thing used to be, I couldn't really tell anymore, although it appeared to have once been female. It was laying on a metal table and it had no legs or lower body. What was left of its upper body was made of what appeared to be rotting meat.

(MORE)

STUART (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't know to this day if she was something they found in the wild-- she certainly looked like she could be--or if Dr. Wyden and Dr. Dole had been doing some Dr. Herbert West-style experimentation on this poor sucker.

Stuart walks to the table and decapitates the zombie. Then he walks back through the lab's various rooms, making sure there aren't any more zombies.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NOW

Stuart walks back-and-forth, animatedly waving his arms as he finishes his tale.

STUART

I went around the building and checked every room I could for anything else, but there was nothing. The bastards must have kept all their ethanol zombie experiments confined to the one room. They were all gone and I was ready to get the heck out of Dodge. And that's what I did.

Stuart sits in the chair, smiling as Diaz and Santiago eye him warily.

STUART (CONT'D)

The police came and the media came and I asked Shelly out and we went out and got married and had three babies and lived happily ever after. Well, the police and the media came, but I haven't really seen Shelly since.

DIAZ

You done?

Stuart nods.

STUART

That's the story of how I saved the world. By being clever. I guess this clever thing is working out for me after all.

SANTIAGO

Good, tired of hearing your voice.
Most of this was on video, anyway.
Clever? Seems more like lucky.

STUART

Next time the world's about to end,
why don't YOU handle it, then?

Santiago barks a humorless laugh.

SANTIAGO

You have no idea what I'd do to
save--

The door opens and FOX comes in. She's a tall WF, 30s, with shoulder-length red hair. She wears a black suit and red tie. She smiles at Stuart as she walks quietly across the room and hands a card to Diaz.

Diaz looks at the card and sighs. Santiago sits back and crosses his arms. Fox walks back out of the room without saying anything.

DIAZ

You're hired.

STUART

For what?

SANTIAGO

You'll see.

EXT. LONGVIEW APARTMENT BUILDING, WICHITA, KANSAS - NIGHT

The Longview is an aging eight-story brick building. Stuart enters.

INT. LONGVIEW APARTMENT BUILDING, LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Stuart walks through the lobby quickly, covering his face as much as he can so the person at the front desk doesn't see him.

He pushes the up elevator button multiple times, bouncing up and down nervously.

The elevator doors open and he gets on board. He pushes the fourth floor button. He pushes the close door button multiple times. Urgent.

The door starts to close. A large white hand reaches in and grabs the door, holding up the elevator. The doors open to reveal the Longview's resident manager, CHAUNCY, WM, 40s, tall and thin.

CHAUNCY
Mr. Goddard.

STUART
Chauncy.

CHAUNCY
I almost missed you.

STUART
(under his breath)
That was the point.

CHAUNCY
Yes, well... your rent is now two months late. I'm afraid we're going to have to initiate eviction proceedings.

STUART
Could you give me another few days?
I just started a new job...

Chauncy frowns.

CHAUNCY
We will be filing the eviction papers Monday morning at 9 a.m. Promptly.

Stuart frowns.

STUART
You need two months--

CHAUNCY
Three months, tomorrow is the first.

STUART
Three months? How do you expect me to get that much money in two days?

CHAUNCY
We don't care.

Chauncy walks away.

INT. STUART'S APARTMENT - LATER

Stuart sits on his couch, playing PS5. He defeats the final boss on Cuphead. He gets up and takes the disc out and puts it back in the case.

STUART

They need to make some harder games. I need a challenge.

He tosses the Cuphead box onto a stack of games that includes Bloodborne, Dead Cells, Returnal, Elden Ring, Dark Souls 3, Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice, and Devil May Cry 5.

He walks into the kitchen.

STUART (CONT'D)

Time for dinner.

CUT TO:

The kitchen looks like it's out of a cooking show. Pots boil, pans sizzle, every burner occupied. The countertop is covered in bowls of ingredients and spices. Everything in it's place, presented perfectly. The kitchen is otherwise spotless, Stuart's a clean-as-you-go kind of guy. It's too much food for him, but he lives alone.

The adjoining living room's walls are lined with crammed bookshelves. There is no fiction. Every book teaches you how to do something or is a genre-specific encyclopedia, from zoology to cryptozoology, from political systems to country-specific histories, from books about weapons and martial arts to spycraft. Thousands of them. Nestled among them is a complete set of Miles Morales comics.

His phone rings. He awkwardly extricates himself from the kitchen and crosses to the dining room table. He picks up the phone.

STUART (CONT'D)

Yello?

He listens.

STUART (CONT'D)

Mr. Slate?

Stuart frowns.

STUART (CONT'D)

Let me grab one.

He goes to the counter and grabs a pencil and paper.

STUART (CONT'D)
Got it. Shoot.

Stuart starts writing.

STUART (CONT'D)
Lottie... in HR...

He furrow his brow and writes down a phone number.

STUART (CONT'D)
What's this about?

He frowns.

STUART (CONT'D)
I'm what? Why?

He throws the pen and paper down in disgust.

STUART (CONT'D)
When is it effective?

Beat.

STUART (CONT'D)
Monday? Thanks a...

The line's already dead. And his sauce is burning.

STUART (CONT'D)
Dammit!

He tries to save it.

EXT. ALFRED E. SMITH PARK, NEW YORK CITY - DUSK

CLAY CURRY, BM, 7, thin, wearing a Miles Morales t-shirt, shorts and Under Armour basketball shoes stands at the top of the slide. He checks his watch. He stares at the basketball court for a few moments. The OLDER KIDS are playing with a blue-and-red ball.

Another BOY starts climbing the ladder to the slide. Clay looks down and then slides.

He stands up and runs from the playground. He stops on the sidewalk and watches the blue-and-red basketball bounce for a bit.

He checks his watch again and takes off running. Once he's out of sight of the basketball players, he runs in front of a sewer entrance.

A blue-and-red ball bounces out of the sewer and directly at Clay. He stops and catches the ball.

Clay stares in the sewer tunnel. He can barely make out THE SHADOW MAN.

THE SHADOW MAN
Hello, Clay.

Clay is surprised. He considers running.

CLAY
H-hi.

THE SHADOW MAN
Could you bring me my ball?

Clay thinks for a second.

CLAY
I... I can throw it.

He cocks his arm back to throw the ball.

THE SHADOW MAN
No. I'm partially blind... the sun.

Clay brings the ball back down.

THE SHADOW MAN (CONT'D)
Please bring it to me. I can't come into the light. I have a skin condition.

Clay frowns.

THE SHADOW MAN (CONT'D)
I'll give you twenty dollars.

A pale hand emerges from the shadows holding a crumpled \$20. Clay smiles, thinking of the comic books he can get with it.

He walks towards the tunnel. The CAMERA pans up.

Clay screams.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SEWER TUNNEL ENTRANCE - LATER

Outside the tunnel, cops have cordoned the area off. Crowds have gathered, including the basketball players.

Near the police line stand MR. and MRS. CURRY, his arms wrapped around her as she cries.

The blue-and-red ball sits alone in a gutter.

EXT. THE CUBE, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI - DAY

The Cube is a huge building whose full exterior is copper-tinted glass.

Stuart, dressed in his best suit, opens the front door and goes inside.

INT. THE CUBE, LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Stuart enters a large, busy lobby. He looks around and sees Diaz and Santiago, standing near a guarded door to the back.

They wave him over. He joins them happily.

INT. SECTION Z BRIEFING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Diaz and Santiago walk into the room ahead of Stuart and take seats at a conference table. Stuart is greeted by JENNIFER GREEN, BF, 40s. She wears the same suit that Diaz and Santiago wears.

JENNIFER

Mr. Goddard, welcome to Section Z.

She shakes his hand.

STUART

Yes, and who might you be?

JENNIFER

I'm your new partner. Jennifer Green.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

And this is our Section Z leader, Mr. Wiggins.

She waves to MR. WIGGINS, WM, 50s, wearing a similar, but more expensive suit than the others.

MR. WIGGINS

Please have a seat, Mr. Goddard.

STUART

Thank you.

Stuart and Jennifer sit down. Mr. Wiggins slides three folders across the table.

MR. WIGGINS

I'm going to let you choose your first case.

Stuart is pleasantly surprised. He grins as he picks up the first folder, labeled Los Angeles. The files are all thick. This one includes a photo of a pretty blonde actress, STARRY STROMILE. It's stamped "missing."

Stuart peruses the second folder, labeled Memphis. It's filled with photos of a white supremacist militia and numerous caches of military-grade weapons.

Stuart opens the New York folder to a photo of Clay Curry, wearing his Miles Morales t-shirt. It's stamped "missing."

Stuart traces his finger over the image of Miles Morales. He closes the folder and slides it to Mr. Wiggins.

STUART

This one.

Jennifer smiles.

JENNIFER

That was my choice, too.

Stuart returns the smile.

MR. WIGGINS

Okay people, we're wheels up for New York in 43 minutes.

FADE OUT.