

HERO SCHOOL

by

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"HERO SCHOOL"

FADE IN:

INT. COPROCORP OFFICE (PRESENT DAY) - DAY

An office desk top. A gang of small action figures, wind-up toys and plastic dinosaurs are clustered around a taller, evil-looking action figure.

A hand brings in a heroic male action figure, facing the group.

The background babble of voices and phones resolves to one conversation.

CUSTOMER (V.O.)

You're not listening to me. The thing doesn't work!

The hand uses the hero figure to knock down the other toys one by one. After a few, he pauses, and the hero pants for breath.

CAL (O.S.)

Sir, CoproCorp has determined that our product is not defective--

CUSTOMER (V.O.)

I'm talking about the chip!

Another hand brings a female action hero in from the right. She starts knocking down the toys.

CAL (O.S.)

--Our product is not defective, but as per your service agreement, you have the option of returning the entire item to our service center.

The hero and heroine knock down all the toys, except the larger evil one. They circle warily.

CUSTOMER (V.O.)
 And get charged to replace the
 whole board! No thanks!

CAL (O.S.)
 The service center will have to
 determine--

The hero and heroine rush the evil action figure and punch at it, back and forth. The heroine "kneels" behind the evil figure, and the hero pushes him over her.

She "kicks" the evil figure until the hero stops her. Arms up, they dance about in celebration, then "kiss."

CUSTOMER (V.O.)
 Hey, I'm not some Gomer that's
 scared of a wireless mouse! I
 built my own computer! I know the
 board is fine except for that
 freaking nine seventy three chip,
 and that's causing everything to
 crash! I don't want to bring it
 in! I don't want the board
 replaced! I just want it to work!

CAL, a ruffled twenty-something computer nerd, sits in a tiny, chaotic cubicle in a room full of them, wearing a telephone headset, toys scattered across his desk.

He puts the hero and heroine figures down.

CAL
 I'm not supposed to tell you this.
 You know the Fuzzy Friends talking
 game?

CUSTOMER (V.O.)
 Yeah.

CAL
 Get a used one. On the circuit
 board is one twelve-pin chip. It's
 a foreign knock-off of the nine
 seventy three, but it works better.
 Pull it, replace your chip when no
 one's looking. Got it?

CUSTOMER (V.O.)
 Yeah! Thanks, Dude!

Customer hangs up. Cal makes a mark on a white board.

CAL
Yes! Another satisfied customer!

His phone rings.

CAL
Thank you for calling CoproCorp
Technical Support, my name is Cal,
how can I help you?

CALLER (V.O.)
Calvin Webber?

CAL
Yes?

CALLER (V.O.)
Congratulations! You've been
accepted to the applied heroics
program of the Hector Stalwart
Academy!

CAL
The what?

CALLER (V.O.)
Are you not the Calvin Webber who
filled out the online application?

Calvin sits up, excited.

CAL
Oh, yeah! The reality-show thing
where you do stunts and gunfights
and things. That was months ago!

CALLER (V.O.)
We have a long waiting list and few
are accepted--

CAL
You won't regret this! I'm perfect
for TV! This is so cool!

CALLER (V.O.)
You have twenty-four hours, Calvin
Webber, then our staff will pick
you up at your residence. Your
questions will be answered on your
arrival. Do you understand?

CAL
Sure! I mean, roger that!

Cal leaps up from his desk. A small robot attached to his phone lights up and waves its arms.

ROBOT (V.O.)
Danger! Danger!

Cal stops, pulls off his headset before reaching the end of the cord.

INT. BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Cal rushes up to the slightly larger cubicle where his BOSS sits. All items on the desk are lined up, nothing touches anything else. Boss is carefully marking up a thick report with a red pen.

CAL
Hey, Mr. Carter, I've got--

Boss holds up his hand, Cal waits for him to finish.

BOSS
All right, Cal, what is it?

CAL
I'm going to be on a reality TV show, so I need to take some time off.

BOSS
You've used up your vacation days.

CAL
I know. It would be time without pay. They just called me, and I have to leave tomorrow.

BOSS
You're on thin ice already, and it would be bad for morale if you got special treatment.

CAL
I'll call in sick. For a month!

BOSS
I've as generous as I can be. And I've overlooked your unsanctioned customer solutions. I can't do you any more favors.

CAL
But I have to do this!

BOSS
That's your choice.

INT. CAL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Electronics parts, toys and movie collectibles strewn about.

Cal packs several large dufflebags.

CHARLOTTE comes in. She looks like the girlfriend of a computer nerd.

CHARLOTTE
Oh my god! Are you leaving me?

CAL
What?

CHARLOTTE
You're packing! Are you going somewhere?

CAL
I'm going to be on TV!

CHARLOTTE
Serious? Tonight?

CAL
Remember that show where they teach people to do stunts and fight scenes, and the winner gets to be in a movie? It's like that! And they picked me!

CHARLOTTE
In LA?

CAL
Probably.

CHARLOTTE
How long will you be gone?

Cal starts to answer, thinks.

CAL
I don't know. They pick me up tomorrow.

CHARLOTTE

Oh.

She sags, disappointed.

CAL

Oh no! I won't be here to help you
move in! I'm so sorry!

Cal tries to hug her, she maneuvers behind furniture so he
can't.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, about that... Maybe it's not
such a good time for me to move.

CAL

No! It's fine! I'll probably only
be gone a few weeks. You can get
settled in, and when I get back, it
will be great!

CHARLOTTE

My psychic said I should give it a
chance, but my therapist thinks
we're rushing things.

CAL

You're seeing a shrink?

CHARLOTTE

No, Luna, my massage therapist.
And Jewel thinks I can do better.

CAL

Your taking advice from someone who
works in a tattoo parlor?

CHARLOTTE

Jewel did say all men are lying,
slut-chasing cheat weasels. She
has issues. I know you're not like
that.

CAL

I know I'm not the best looking
guy, but I really like you. Don't
you like me?

CHARLOTTE

Sure, but that's not it. You spend
your time building these little
robots and watching movies!

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

You're smart, but you work at a crummy job!

CAL

Well... not any more.

CHARLOTTE

And you don't have tattoos.

CAL

But I'm going to be on TV! You can't leave me now.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry.

They both look down, unable to meet the other's gaze.

CHARLOTTE

I should go. Good luck with the TV show.

Charlotte leaves. Cal gloomily takes a few robots out of a dufflebag.

EXT. CAL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Cal sits beside a large stack of assorted luggage on the sidewalk. He's dressed in a bright Hawaiian shirt, shorts, and sunglasses.

His watch beeps an alarm. He silences it, just as a black SUV with dark-tinted windows pulls to the curb.

Instructors FOLEY and OATES get out. They're in dark SWAT-like uniforms, with sunglasses. Fit and good looking, but only a tight bun of hair reveals that Oates is female.

OATES

Calvin Webber?

CAL

That's me!

OATES

Instructor Oates. Instructor Foley.

CAL

Great to meet you!

Cal extends his hand. Foley opens the back, and he and Oates get back into SUV.

Cal looks at his bags.

INT. SUV - DAY

Oates and Foley in front, Cal in back. Can barely see city streets through windows as they drive.

CAL
This is excellent! I never expected to get chosen, I mean, I'm not really the kind you usually see on TV. Is this going to be really physical, cause I'm not exactly in great shape?

Oates and Foley don't react.

CAL
I get it! You're not supposed to tell me anything. That's okay.
(pause)
Seriously, though, what's the deal? Can you give me a hint? Anything?

Still no reaction.

CAL
Oh! They're filming us now, right?

Cal looks around for hidden cameras. Inspects the dome light, and gives it a big wink.

CAL
(loudly)
You two are doing a great job keeping everything secret!

View around SUV goes dark, with flickering lights zipping by.

CAL
Where are we? There's no tunnels in this part of town.

Lights are going by faster and faster. Sound of SUV stops, eerily quiet. Cal watches lights go by.

CAL
This is a really long tunnel.

EXT. ACADEMY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

SUV drives past sign "Hector Stalwart Academy." Academy looks like a cross between a military base and Ivy-League college.

EXT. ACADEMY RECEIVING AREA - NIGHT

SUV is one of several parked in front of plain building.

Cal finishes unloading his bags, closes door. SUV drives off. Cal looks around.

CAL

Wow. Big budget!

REGISTRAR approaches, with armload of books and other materials. He's dressed in a flashy suit from the fringe of high fashion.

REGISTRAR

Calvin Webber?

CAL

Me! I mean, yes.

REGISTRAR

Welcome to the academy! The Commander's opening address starts soon. Most questions are answered in your Trainee Manual, though. Sign here.

Registrar hands Cal a thick book, and presents an electronic clipboard for signature.

Cal signs it, it spits out several sheets of paper, which the Registrar hands to him.

REGISTRAR

Pick up your gear from the quartermasters and hurry to the assembly. Second building on the left. Welcome and good luck!

INT. QUARTERMASTER - NIGHT

Huge warehouse, stuffed with huge racks of boxes, crates, barrels, etc., all behind chainlink. Cal gazes about at the shelves.

QUARtermaster
Bags on the belt.

Cal jumps. Quartermaster, behind counter, has done this a thousand times.

QUARtermaster
Bags on the belt.

Cal sets his bags onto conveyer belt, which zips them through into an unseen room beyond.

Rattles and thumps, like luggage is rolling downhill.

QUARtermaster
Stand on the feet.

He points to a tall, open cylinder, with two footprints painted in the center.

Cal steps in.

CAL
What does --

QUARtermaster
Hold still.

Quartermaster flips a switch, lasers sweep across Cal, very rapidly head to toe.

A mechanical whine, and the counter opens to reveal a stack of folded clothes, boots, hat and other gear.

CAL
Are these --

QUARtermaster
Changing room, there. Clothes and gear, duffle. Civilian clothes, off hours only. Your acceptable personal items, here.

A small box comes back on the belt.

CAL
What about --

QUARtermaster
Store your duffle and head to the assembly. Next!

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - NIGHT

Cal enters hall, wearing gray jumpsuit and sunglasses. Room is huge, noisy, with rows of chairs around edge, and in center they are grouped in sets of four. Two hundred people standing in gray are in the center, with hundreds of people in dark jumpsuits around the perimeter.

Cal approaches a group of TRAINEES, in the back row.

CAL
Excuse me? How do I tell where I'm
supposed to be?

TRAINEE #1
Who's your instructor?

CAL
I don't know.

TRAINEE #2
It's on your registration sheet.

Cal pulls the crumpled forms from a pocket.

CAL
It says "Stone."

Trainees react with surprise and sympathy.

TRAINEE #3
Tough break.

CAL
You know who he is?

TRAINEE #1
You don't? He's only like the most
famous --

TRAINEE #2
He single-handedly captured
Tiberius Vee!

CAL
Who?

They stare in disbelief. Cal edges away.

FRONT ROW

Cal takes his place in the front row, the last empty chair in the cluster of four. The other three people in his Team look at him as he takes his place. They are ACHILLES DUKE; tall, handsome, muscular, RIATA STEELE, also tall, gorgeous, and athletic, SARA WRIGHT, cute and petite. All early 20's.

CAL
Hey. I'm Cal.

SARA
Hi, I'm --

Fanfare sounds. Trainees snap to attention, Cal follows. The room is silent.

The DEAN, who looks like an aged professor in tweed coat and tie, approaches the podium.

DEAN
Please be seated.

Everyone sits, Cal follows.

DEAN
(continuing)
Welcome to the Hector Stalwart Academy. I am Dean Tuttle. If you forget my name, you may just call me Dean.

The Dean chuckles creakily. No one else laughs.

DEAN
(continuing)
Very well, then. It is my great pleasure to introduce the Commander of this fine Academy, Commander Rupert.

Commander RUPERT takes the podium. Career military, fit and rugged, 40's. He makes his dark jumpsuit look crisp and disciplined.

Trainees all stand, followed by Cal.

RUPERT
Trainees! I am Commander Rupert. If you forget my name, you may call me 'Sir.'

A wave of laughter crosses the room. The Dean looks peeved.

RUPERT

(continuing)

There is a war on. The forces of evil are rising, seeking footholds in our cities, in our homes. Our governments have the military and law enforcement to use when our enemy rushes in like a wall of water. The enemy knows this. They act not a wave, but as a myriad tiny drops that seep through our defenses. They spread wide, from our biggest cities to the loneliest frontiers, waging this war. If you succeed in your training, you will go forth to be the first line of defense against that rising tide.

CAL

(whispering)

I get it. This will be like a video game.

Sara gives him a vicious look. Cal turns back, but soon loses interest again. The commander's speech fades as Cal scans the room, looking for something.

RUPERT (O.S.)

As we train new heroes, our enemy recruits new agents. Our graduates fight each day, but it is not a war that we can ever win. We fight, because we must. We resist the forces of evil, because we refuse to surrender to chaos and suffering.

Cal notices a trainee with vibrant blue hair, some others are completely bald. He shakes his head.

RUPERT (O.S.)

(continuing)

We continue each and every day, knowing that when we are old, this fight will still rage on and our part in it may seem as inconsequential as drops in an ocean.

Sara nudges Cal. He looks, she gestures with her head that he's supposed to be paying attention.

His eyes go above her and he lowers his sunglasses to check out Riata.

RUPERT (O.S.)

(continuing)

You alone must decide whether you can live with this. If you complete your training and take up the arms of the hero, you must do so not for wealth or glory. Whether you save a billion lives, or only one, you must act merely to stave off the flood of evil.

Riata looks at Cal. He smiles. She turns back to the Commander.

RUPERT (O.S.)

(continuing)

I challenge each and every one of you to find that which is heroic in you, and join the pantheon of those dedicated to this eternal struggle. Good luck, Trainees! Make us all proud!

Applause. Dean takes the podium again.

DEAN

Please be seated. Thank you, Commander, for those words. Trainees, you may now return to your barracks to meet your instructors. You are dismissed.

Trainees rise, and begin filing out.

CAL

Why did they bother with chairs?

EXT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

More like upscale dorms than military barracks, each team has their own section and entrance.

Oates and Foley stand by door. Other trainees are lined up outside, waiting.

Cal saunters up, and joins the line.

FOLEY
 Trainees! Your lead instructor,
 Instructor Stone!

Trainees snap to attention, followed by Cal.

STONE comes through barracks door, a hulking, lethal-looking man who lives in uniform.

STONE
 (casually)
 At ease, Trainees. Trainee Duke,
 welcome. Always good to have
 trainees with combat experience.
 Congratulations on your medal. Not
 one to boast, are you?

DUKE
 No, sir!

STONE
 Didn't think so. Trainee Steele.
 Good to have you aboard. I read
 your paper on infiltration. Very
 impressive.

RIATA
 Thank you, sir!

STONE
 Trainee Wright! I've had the honor
 of serving alongside your mother.
 I'll be expecting a lot from you.

SARA
 Yes, sir!

STONE
 Trainee Webber...

CAL
 Call me "Astro."

STONE
 Right.
 (to group)
 We've got a lot to cover in the
 coming weeks. For now, learn your
 Trainee Manual, get chow if you're
 hungry, and we start first thing in
 the morning.

(MORE)

STONE(cont'd)

And we're not the military here,
but you can call me "Sir," and it's
a good idea. Dismissed!

Instructors leave.

CAL

(mostly to Riata)

Is anyone else starving? I'm going
for food. Want to join me?

DUKE

No thanks. I'm going to study the
manual.

RIATA

Yeah, me too.

SARA

I'll go with you.

CAL

Okay. Do you know where...?

SARA

Dining hall's this way.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Dining hall is utilitarian, but not unpleasant. Only a few
other trainees are there.

Sara has to reach up to get dish from top shelf. Sees Cal
smirk.

SARA

You can say it, but unless it's a
short joke I've never heard before,
I will hurt you. A lot.

CAL

No, I'm good.

Cal and Sara get food, served by efficient workers in
pristine white uniforms.

SARA

So, is Astro a family name or
something?

CAL

No! Are you kidding?

SARA

Then why do you want to be called that?

CAL

It's like nobody knows me here, I can start fresh. A new identity.

SARA

And that's the best you could come up with?

CAL

It's better than "Calvin Webber." Try going through grade school with that.

Cal takes a dish of hot-pink gelatin.

SARA

Are you really going to eat that?

CAL

Sure! I love this stuff.

TABLE

Sara and Cal find an empty table and sit.

SARA

I'm Sara Wright. That's my real name.

CAL

Do you have any rules about people flirting with you?

SARA

Lots, but I saw how you were checking out Riata.

CAL

She's hot, but way out of my league. You're even too good looking for a guy like me, but I think we're clicking pretty well so far.

SARA

Sorry, I don't think it's a good idea for us to get involved.

CAL

No? Weren't you checking out Duke back there?

SARA

I don't really like big muscles.

(pause)

What were you looking for in the assembly?

CAL

Cameras. They've hidden them really well, I haven't seen any. This whole place is a lot more elaborate than I expected. I thought there'd be sixteen of us or something.

SARA

No, it's a big deal. Trainees come from everywhere, from the far reaches of civilization. And some places that aren't so civilized.

CAL

Right, like Canada.

SARA

Haven't you read your Trainee Manual yet?

CAL

No, I got it just before the assembly.

Cal scans around for cameras again.

SARA

Read it. It explains everything. For me, the academy is a family tradition. My mother graduated, and her father before that. I've got to graduate, it's a matter of pride.

CAL

You're really into this whole back story thing. I suppose I should read up so I can play along too, or the producers will be yelling at me.

SARA

You're not from around here, are you?

CAL

No, why do you say that?

SARA

I understand the words you say, but half the time you don't make any sense.

Cal slides the gelatin into his mouth, and realizes it is horribly not what he expected. He spews it out.

INT. GUYS ROOM - DAY

Day 1, Morning. Room is like dorm with private bath. Cal sleeps. His side is as messy as Duke's is neat.

Cal's alarm clock plays cheerful but unfamiliar bugle call. He blearily shuts it off.

Duke comes out of the bathroom in boxer shorts, toweling his hair dry. His clothes are laid out on his already-made bed. He starts getting dressed.

DUKE

Good morning, Astro! I'm Achilles Duke, but just call me Duke, everyone else does. I hope you don't mind that I got up before you were awake.

Cal grunts.

DUKE

You're probably wise to get the extra sleep, but I was so excited to get started. I'll regret it later, especially after staying up so late studying!

Cal groggily slides his feet to the floor and sits up.

DUKE

Oh good, you're up! Would you mind quizzing each other on the manual? Go ahead, ask me anything!

CAL
The only thing I know so far is how
to find the dining hall.

DUKE
Oh. The dining hall is building
four seventeen, and is in the
central section next to the armory.
Correct?

CAL
Exactly what I would have said.

DUKE
For you, what is the Academy's
charter?

CAL
I have no idea.

DUKE
Okay, easier question. What are
the five aspects of heroism?

CAL
Don't know.

DUKE
What was established by signing the
treaty of--

CAL
Duke! Tell you what. I think I
better get dressed and have some
breakfast. We don't want to be
late, do we?

Cal stumbles into the bathroom.

DUKE
No, of course not.

CAL (O.S.)
Oh man, they took my toothpaste!

EXT. OBSTACLE COURSE - DAY

Stone stands at end of obstacle course, holding stopwatch.
Duke scrambles over final obstacle, followed by Riata.

STONE
Good pace, trainees! Well done.

Sara appears, hurling herself over barriers almost as tall as she is.

STONE

Very good, Trainee Wright. Don't give up.

Sara crosses finish. Three trainees wait, while Stone continues to stand with stopwatch.

Cal finally appears, flops over barriers, panting. He stumbles across finish.

STONE

Time! All right Trainees, a good warm up. Let's get moving.

Strides off. Trainees follow, Cal moving slowly.

EXT. URBAN TRAINING CENTER - DAY

Trainees and instructors stand outside windowless building.

STONE

We'll start with something simple. You'll find ten stations in the building, each with a piece of equipment. Move through to the end, and identify all items to Instructor Foley. Any questions? Good. Wait on my signal.

Instructors enter building.

CAL

Good. This should be easy.

RIATA

Have you ever done this before?

CAL

No.

RIATA

They'll try to distract you. Be ready for it. Focus on your mnemonics for each item.

CAL

Right. I'll do that. Thanks.

STONE (O.S.)
 Trainee Astro! Go!

INT. TRAINING BUILDING - DAY

Cal enters, and flinches at barrage of noise. The room thunders with sounds of machinery, gunfire and explosions. Bright strobes flash erratically.

Cal stumbles about, finds station #8, a pair of binoculars.

Oates appears, banging trash-can lid on wall next to Cal, and shouting.

Cal flees, passes another station, looks at it, as Stone shines blinding flashlight full in his face.

Cal lurches away, looking for more stations among the deafening chaos.

Lights and sound crescendo, blurring all else out...

EXT. BEHIND TRAINING BUILDING - DAY

Cal throws open door, staggers outside. Foley is waiting.

FOLEY
 Trainee! Identify station one!

CAL
 Ummmm...

FOLEY
 Station two!

RIATA

Riata stands where Cal was, just outside door.

RIATA
 First aid kit.

FOLEY
 Station three!

RIATA
 Flashlight.

FOLEY
 Station four!

DUKE

Duke stands where others were.

DUKE
Hacksaw.

FOLEY
Station five!

DUKE
Canteen.

FOLEY
Station six!

SARA

SARA
Entrenching tool.

FOLEY
Station seven!

SARA
Combat knife.

FOLEY
Station eight!

CAL

CAL
Ahhhh?

FOLEY
Station nine!

CAL
Sorry?

FOLEY
Station ten!

CAL
Um, binoculars?

FOLEY

Exercise is over. Return to the front of the building and wait there.

EXT. URBAN TRAINING CENTER - DAY

Duke comes around corner to where Team is waiting.

RIATA

Duke! How'd you do?

DUKE

Good, I think. I forgot the model number of the radio, though.

CAL

There was a radio?

SARA

Astro didn't do so well.

DUKE

Don't worry, it's just the first day. I'm sure they'll expect everyone to make some mistakes.

CAL

I didn't get any right.

DUKE

Oh. Sorry.

CAL

It's cool, I don't really expect to make it through to the end. I figure I'll mix it up in the challenges, have some fun, and get my fifteen minutes of fame.

RIATA

What are you talking about?

SARA

See? I'm not the only one who doesn't understand what you say.

CAL

I mean I know I won't win. I never win anything. I'm here to have fun, be the comic relief until I get booted. It's no big deal.

DUKE
No big deal? You...! The
Academy..!

Duke raises his hands toward Cal as if to throttle him, but merely grabs his shirt and pulls him close...

DUKE
Just stay out of my way.

Duke storms to the edge of the training area.

CAL
What's with him?

RIATA
Everyone in his platoon trained for
a year to apply here. It means a
lot to him.

SARA
To all of us.

RIATA
We're supposed to be a team.

CAL
But...

SARA
You should stop talking now.

Instructors come out of training building. Stone looks at the tableau.

STONE
Trainees, head to lecture hall
three for the next session.

Duke, Riata, and Sara leave, followed by Oates and Foley.

Cal stands there, miserably.

STONE
Is there a problem, Trainee Astro?

CAL
No... Well, yes there is. Why do
you ignore me? You talk to them
all the time, but you hardly say a
word to me.

STONE

Son, I've been doing this job a long time and I'm good at it. I've learned not to waste my time on certain trainees. Now get over to the lecture hall, and we won't waste any more of their time, too.

INT. GUYS ROOM - NIGHT

Duke polishes boots, by light of small desk lamp. Cal enters.

CAL

Hey!

Duke doesn't even look up.

CAL

You want me to quiz you now? I might actually learn something.

(pause)

No, okay, this is good, actually. Conflict. Keeps things interesting. We'll probably get more air time.

Cal lays down on the bed, picks up manual.

CAL

I'm going to study.

(pause)

Let me know when you start talking to me again.

Cal lasts only a few moments before the manual drops and he snores gently.

EXT. OBSTACLE COURSE - DAY

Cal is clutching rope to swing across mud pit. Takes a false start.

Duke runs up behind him, swings across on second rope.

Riata is close behind. Cal hands her his rope, she swings.

Sara appears, grabbing Duke's rope as it swings back, swings across.

Foley and Oates are trotting along, give Cal a look.

The rest disappear. Cal starts to take his swing, looks about. Nobody. He quickly jogs around the pit.

EXT. FIRING RANGE - DAY

Trainees stand in row, wearing hearing protection.

STONE

Before we begin, Trainee Astro, would you care to demonstrate the use of a side arm?

Cal steps forward. Foley draws his weapon, cycles the slide, and hands it to Cal.

Cal points it, one-handed down range at bullseye target. He leans back as he squeezes the trigger...

Cal flinches as the gun fires. Hits target near bullseye.

STONE

Very good, Trainee Astro, you've successfully killed Trainee Steele's target. I'm sure she's grateful. Instructor Foley, take Trainee Astro to the secondary range for remedial firearms training.

Foley recovers his weapon, leads Cal off.

Oates wheels in a rack of various weapons; assault rifles, shotguns, and some strange ones with gleaming tubes, wire coils, and knobby projections...

CAL

Wait, what where those? They look like fun. Can I shoot some of them?

EXT. LAKESHORE - DAY

About a hundreds yards from the water, trainees, in helmets and PFD's sit on sleek machines, a cross between motorcycle and personal watercraft.

Cal is busily inspecting the controls.

STONE

I'm sure you're all familiar with an amphibious personal vehicle, so you'll have no problems driving to the lake, transitioning to water, circling the buoy and returning here. Anyone wish to volunteer for remedial training, Trainee Astro?

CAL

No, I can do this.

STONE

Really? Then make your run.

Cal nods, slips on goggles. He revs the machine. It doesn't move. Revs again, puts it in gear...

The APV lurches forward, veering to the side. Cal wobbles, crashes through shrubs. Zigzags toward water.

Cal crosses the beach and splashes into the water. APV revs, but barely moves.

Cal flips a switch. Headlights come on.

He thumbs switch on handle. APV rockets forward, spraying tail of water.

Still wobbly, he navigates to the buoy. He has to slow down, but makes the turn.

More steadily, he heads back to the beach.

At the shore, he flips the switch as he hits the sand, and wheels kick in. He teeters, but stays up.

Triumphantly, he rides up to the others. He brakes hard, but stops successfully. He grins.

Others look dubious.

STONE

Instructor Foley will be available after hours for any trainee who needs practice. Wright, you're up!

INT. RESCUE BUILDING - DAY

Large building, looks like junked factory. Oates is laying under large piece of machinery. Others are standing on raised viewing platform at one end.

STONE

Listen up, trainees. Your task here is to remove Instructor Oates from underneath the object that has her trapped. Two at a time, work as a team. Duke and Steele, you're up first. And, go!

Metallic crashing echoes through the room. Oates screams and thrashes about.

Duke and Riata slide down the metal handrail on the stairs to the lower level, and dash over to Oates.

DUKE

I'll lift!

RIATA

I'll pull. Lift it!

Duke strains at the machinery. Slowly it raises.

RIATA

Little more! Good!

Riata grabs Oates's arms and pulls her free. Together they lift Oates to her feet.

A horn sounds, and the crashing noises stop.

STONE

Good time, Trainees! Now let's put her back for the second team.

Stone heads down the stairs.

Sara turns to Cal.

SARA

You better not ruin this.

CAL

What?

SARA

You can play around on your own time, but I have to do well. If you make me look bad, I will make every second you're here a misery you cannot imagine.

CAL

Right. No looking bad.

STONE (O.S.)
Second team, ready! And go!

Crashing and booming resumes. Sara hurls herself down stairs, Cal follows.

They rush to Oates, Cal braces himself to lift.

He strains at it. Nothing. He tries again.

SARA
Lift it!

CAL
It's too heavy!

Sara joins him, together they heave, but can't lift it.

SARA
We'll have to dig her out!

CAL
(looking around)
With what?

Sara scrabbles at the ground. Cal spies a thick metal ring on a pile of scraps, and a rope leading under a ledge.

He grabs the ring and a circle of webbing.

CAL
Get the rope!

SARA
Why?

CAL
Trust me!

She grabs up the rope. It doesn't come free from under the ledge.

She looks, it's tied to something several feet in.

SARA
It's tied!

CAL
Crawl under and untie it!

Cal loops webbing through ring so it holds tight.

Sara hesitates, and crawls under the ledge.

The room noise fades, replaced by her breathing and the thumping of her heart.

She focuses on the knot. She reaches it, starts untying.

The space closes in. Her heart races.

The knot is almost done, she pulls at it.

The space is darker, closer. A slight whimper escapes her.

Finally the knot comes free, she tries to slide back, but can barely move. She thrashes about, gasping.

Cal grabs her hand, slides her from under the ledge.

The room noise rushes back.

CAL

You okay?

Sara nods. He helps her up. Quickly he tosses one end of the rope over an exposed girder above the machinery.

He loops it through the ring, which is attached via webbing to the machinery.

Cal throws the rope over the girder again, and ties it to the ring.

CAL

Pull!

Together they pull on the improvised block and tackle. The machinery shifts.

SARA

It's working!

CAL

Pull again!

They heave again. The machinery lifts, just enough...

Cal braces himself to hold the rope, and Sara grabs Oates and drags her free with all her strength.

Cal releases the rope and the machinery falls with a crash.

Exhausted, they help Oates to her feet. The horn sounds.

CAL

Yeah!

He holds his hand up for a high five. Sara ignores it, but gives him a jubilant hug. They look at Stone.

STONE

Adequate.

CAL

All right! I'm up to "adequate!"

(to Oates)

And you're welcome.

Oates stares, with the slightest hint of a smile when Cal isn't looking.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Entry area for barracks. Racks for gear on one side, stairs to women's room upstairs on the other.

Door opens, Duke carries in gear. He's coated up to his chest in some dark, vile muck. He looks stunned.

Riata enters, covered in the same muck to her shoulders. They look about for somewhere to put their coated gear.

Sara enters, mucked head to foot, quickly followed by Cal, who is spotlessly clean.

CAL

Wait! I'll put down a tarp.

Cal grabs a tarp, and spreads it on the floor. The others drop their gear on it.

CAL

I am so sorry. That was totally my fault.

DUKE

No, don't worry about.

RIATA

Any one of us could have done it.

DUKE

I could tell you were trying not to.

They start peeling off soaked jackets and boots.

CAL
I'll help you clean up. Want some towels?

SARA
I think we need a fire hose.

CAL
You guys, I am really, really sorry. I know I've been kind of a screw up here, but I didn't want it to affect you. I want to make it up to you, can I like, buy you all a drink?

RIATA
It's going to take hours to get this clean.

DUKE
We shouldn't be out late.

CAL
I'll help! Please. It would mean a lot to me.

Trainees exchange looks, nod.

CAL
Great! I'll go hose these off.
(picks up gear)
Eww! I got some on my arm!

Other trainees look at him.

CAL
Sorry! Sorry.

INT. OFF-CAMPUS PUB - NIGHT

Pub is sparsely filled, some patrons have outlandish clothes or hairstyles. Several small bumper pool tables are in center of the room.

Trainees are at a table, in civilian garb. Oddly colored drinks and strange bottles are on the table.

CAL
So who is this Tiberius Vee person?

SARA
You don't know?

CAL
That's why I'm asking.

DUKE
He's the most notorious lawyer,
ever. He made a fortune in
advertising.

RIATA
But got into extortion, blackmail,
money laundering, you name it.

CAL
Couldn't they just arrest him?

DUKE
No. He made sure nothing could be
traced to him. And he knew how to
work the law in his favor.

SARA
Instructor Stone learned that Vee
was plotting to poison an entire
city in hopes of starting a major
war, and playing both sides against
each other for a huge profit. The
police went after him, but he fled
to his secret stronghold. Stone
single-handedly tracked him down,
captured him, and brought him back
to justice. Vee is Stone's mortal
enemy, sworn to vengeance.

CAL
Our Stone? He seems so... casual.

DUKE
Don't be fooled. He's incredibly
dangerous. Now, if you'll excuse
me...

Duke stands, and bumps TOD, a local, as he's making a shot at
the pool table.

TOD
Watch it!

DUKE
Sorry! I didn't see you.

TOD
Yeah? They're taking blind people
at the academy?

DUKE
Excuse me?

TOD
Let me teach you a lesson in
manners, academy boy!

Tod brings up his cue like a club. Duke reflexively takes the poises stance of a trained fighter...

Cal leaps up between the two.

CAL
Hold on there. Do you really want
to take a swing at the big guy?

TOD
Sure. This is our place.

CAL
Of course, uh, what's your name?

TOD
Tod.

Cal pulls Tod to the side, but not too far.

CAL
You're right, Tod, this is your
place. You like it. You probably
come here all the time, right?

TOD
Yeah.

CAL
Too bad it's so near the academy,
huh? Trainees all over the place.
You and your friends get in a lot
of fights with them?

TOD
Every few days.

CAL
So these fights, do they make you
happy?

TOD
What?

CAL
Do you win these fights, and feel
happy?

TOD
No, usually we get whapped.

CAL
So why do you fight?

Tod mulls over that questions.

TOD
I dunno. It's our place.

CAL
Sure it is. We're just visiting.
We don't want trouble, we feel bad
that you're not happy we're here.
Do you really want to fight him if
it just makes everyone feel bad?

TOD
I guess not.

CAL
Sure. Why don't you just accept
his apology.

Cal turns him around to face Duke again.

DUKE
I'm sorry for... sorry.

TOD
That's all right.

CAL
Okay, shake hands.

The two don't move. Cal grabs their wrists, press their
hands together and move them up and down.

CAL
Shake hands, good! Now you can
finish your game.

Tod returns to the pool table, Duke and Cal sits down.

SARA
That was so great!

DUKE

Thanks. I didn't think of that.

CAL

No big. I thought maybe for once people could resolve their differences without hitting.

SARA

If I didn't know better, I'd think you were taking things seriously.

CAL

Yeah, about that. I've been thinking a lot about what I said earlier, and I'm really sorry. I was being an idiot and I don't want to be the goof-off any more. I want to do well, if I can, and I'd understand if you didn't want to help me, but if you did, I'd really appreciate it.

Cal doesn't see Riata giving him The Look.

DUKE

Of course. We're a team.

RIATA

That's right!

SARA

Good for you, Astro!

CAL

My name's Cal. Call me Cal.

SARA

Here's to Trainee Cal!

She raises her glass. The others follow.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS - NIGHT

The team crosses grassy area. All look a bit tipsy.

SARA

You two go on ahead. I'm going to show Cal something.

She pulls Cal to the side.

RIATA
See you back at the barracks.

DUKE
Don't stay up too late!

Riata and Duke head off toward the barracks.

CAL
How do you know they don't want to see?

SARA
Don't be dense. This is so they can have some time alone together. But I do want to show you something.

The edge of the parade grounds looks over a lower field. Dozens of glowing objects move about below, with occasional flashes, like giant distant fireflies.

CAL
What is that?

SARA
Night training. Isn't it pretty?

CAL
Yeah.

Sara wobbles, grabs Cals arm for balance and giggles.

CAL
Maybe we should sit.

SARA
Good idea.

They sit. Sara leans up against Cal as they watch the lights.

CAL
So you think Riata and Duke...?

SARA
I think so. Like you said, beautiful people only end up with other beautiful people.

CAL
I didn't say that. Not exactly.

SARA
But that's what you meant. I
thought we should at least give
them the chance.

CAL
So does that mean you and me...?
Well, you did say it was a bad
idea.

SARA
You were really a jerk at first.

CAL
Yeah, but how about now?

SARA
I'm liking you a little better.
But I'm still too good-looking for
you. You said.
(pause)
And you're still interested in
Riata.

CAL
It's that obvious?

SARA
You're not exactly subtle.

CAL
I just can't get her out of my
mind. She so perfect that when I'm
around her I can only act like a
complete idiot. If I'm lucky, she
feels pity for me.

SARA
We can't help who we're attracted
to.

CAL
I suppose it doesn't matter,
really. Any day now Stone is going
to kick me out.

SARA
My grandfather always said that
those who graduated from the
Academy weren't always those with
the most muscle, but with the most
heart.

CAL

I think the only way Stone would see my heart is if he tore it out of me.

SARA

You might be surprised. And I think you can do well, if you actually try.

CAL

Thanks, Sara.

INT. TRAINING POOLSIDE - DAY

Team is beside large swimming pool, putting on swim fins and masks.

CAL

What's with these masks? They make everything look green.

Instructors Foley and Oates enter, in swimming suits and carrying fins. Cal quickly lowers mask.

CAL

Whoa!

Duke follows Cal's gaze.

DUKE

Oh! You didn't know Oates was so attractive?

CAL

I wasn't even sure she was a woman.

Stone enters, in standard uniform. Team hustles to poolside.

A transparent maze is suspended below surface of the water, close to the bottom.

STONE

Trainees! Your purpose is to swim through the maze. This is not timed, but your mini breather does not contain an infinite supply of air. Trainee Astro, pick up your breather.

CAL
That's Webber. Trainee Webber.
Sir. Oh, right.

Cal hustles over, picks up his breather, a small canister with a scuba regulator at one end.

STONE
If you are unable to navigate the
maze...
(looks at Cal)
...the bottom is open. Swim down
and out. If you should begin to
drown, Instructors Foley and Oates
will rescue you. Trainee Duke! In
the water!

Duke leaps in, swims down to entrance of maze. He puts
breather in his mouth, and swims in.

He zips along, pushing off the walls and swimming strongly.

He comes to latched door. He hardly slows down, opening door
and going through. He approaches center of the maze.

Stone gives a signal, and the all the lights in the room turn
deep red.

Duke stops, reaches out blindly, twisting from side to side.

SARA
What's wrong?

CAL
Red lights. Green mask. He can't
see!

Duke thrashes more wildly. He runs into maze wall, knocking
his breather away. It sinks to the bottom.

Duke flails about, searching for breather in wrong area.

The instructors merely watch.

CAL
Help him!

Duke flails. Everyone watches.

Cal slides on his mask and leaps into the water.

Riata and Sara follow him.

POOL

Cal swims below maze to Duke.
Hands him his breather. Duke takes
it, sucks in air.

Cal looks for Duke's breather. With mask on, can barely see.
His searching gets frantic.

A hand grabs his. It's Riata, she presses Duke's breather
into his hands. Cal takes a breath.

They look for Duke. Sara has gotten him calmed, and back to
the maze.

The three swim below, following Duke's progress.

Duke swims out, and to the surface. The others follow.

As they surface, the lights come back on.

CAL

You all right?

DUKE

I'm good. A little phobic about
dark water. Thanks.

STONE

This exercise is over. Get out,
get changed, and get a move on!

INT. TRAINING POOLSIDE - DAY

Instructors waiting. Foley and Oates are back in uniform.

Cal enters, in uniform. Approaches Stone.

STONE

Something you want to say, Trainee
Webber?

CAL

Can we talk? In private?

STONE

Happy to. Come with me.

INT. GYM - DAY

A gym, with exercise equipment and wide area with gymnastic
mats on the floor.

Stone goes to the center, turns to Cal.

STONE

You want to take a swing at me? Go ahead.

CAL

No! I don't want to hit you. Sir.

STONE

Worried about getting in trouble? Here, I'll take the hat off. Now it's not instructor and trainee, it's just us. Go on, take your best shot.

Stone takes off his hat and tosses it to the side.

CAL

No, I wanted to say that I realize I've been a major screw-up so far, and I want to do better.

STONE

Good, distract me. Then swing for my gut, it's harder for me to block.

CAL

Wait! No! I don't want to fight you! I'm... asking for help. I don't want to be a failure.

STONE

You sure? Here, I'll look the other way.

Stone turns his head far to the side.

CAL

Instructor Stone, please! I think I've hosed up a lot of my life so far because I've made stupid mistakes, and I really don't want to do that here. I want to make it through, and even if I can't, I don't want to bring down anyone else on the team. This is way too important for them.

STONE

All right then. The hat's going back on.

Stone scoops up his hat.

CAL
Fine. Sir.

STONE
Trainee, you've got a lot of
catching up to do. I suggest you
get a start with reading your
Trainee Manual.

CAL
Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir!

Cal hesitates.

STONE
Something more, Trainee?

CAL
I admit, I did kinda want to take a
swing at you.

STONE
You had your chance. The hat
doesn't come off twice.

CAL
I know...

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

Sunset. Exhausted team is packing up two crates of gear.

SARA
This box is ready to go. Cal, do
you want to take the other end?

CAL
Sure.

DUKE
They're rather heavy. It would
make more sense for me to take that
one with Sara, and Cal and Riata
take the other.

CAL
Fine with me.

SARA
Okay, sure.
(gives Cal a look)
Let's go, Duke.

Duke and Sara lift and carry one crate away.

Cal and Riata pack the other.

CAL
You know, Sara showed me the night training so you and Duke could be alone.

RIATA
Uh huh.

CAL
So did the two of you... ?

RIATA
We talked.

CAL
I see. And?

RIATA
Nothing happened. I don't think he's interested in me.

CAL
Not interested? In you? Oh! The big guy's gay! I wouldn't have guessed it. Although he is very pretty.

RIATA
What are you talking about?

CAL
Sara will be disappointed. I think she wanted you two to be happy.

RIATA
I told myself that I wasn't going to get involved with anyone at the academy. It just makes things complex. And I get... self-conscious.

CAL
You? You're like the perfect woman. What could you be self-conscious about?

RIATA
When I was younger, I had a boyfriend who... he said I was a terrible kisser.

CAL
How bad could you be?

RIATA
There was a comparison to a fish.

CAL
That's harsh.

They put the final items in the crate and close it.

CAL
If you wanted an objective judge, I'd be willing to do that.

RIATA
Oh, you're smooth.

CAL
Seriously. Okay, I might enjoy it a little bit, but I studied science. You want to know if he's right, don't you?

RIATA
Sure. Okay, be honest.

They kiss.

CAL
Wow! Well, that was good, but it could just be a fluke. I think I need another sample for comparison.

They kiss again, longer, silhouetted by the setting sun.

CAL
Yeah. I think you just need some practice. Fortunately, I'm willing to help. A couple sessions every day.

RIATA

Where I come from, three kisses
like that and we'd be dating. And
we need to get this crate to the
quartermasters.

CAL

Right.
(takes one end of crate)
Maybe it was a fish that could kiss
really well...

EXT. OBSTACLE COURSE - DAY

Cal is at starting line, determination on his face.

STONE

Trainee Webber! Go!

Cal dashes to first obstacle. Crawls under it, arms and legs
flailing, but making good time.

He emerges, runs to narrow beam, starts crossing.

Halfway through he wavers, recovers, and completes it.

Team members back at start cheer him on.

Cal, panting, traverses the next obstacle.

STONE

If you can keep this pace, Trainee,
you can beat the course record!

Cal gets to the mud pit, leaps and swings over.

Cal continues with each obstacle, awkwardly but determinedly
getting past them.

The team cheers even more vigorously.

Cal approaches final barriers. He's exhausted, using the
last of his strength to scramble over them.

He stumbles, almost falls, and lunges across the finish
line...

STONE

Time! Well done, Trainee!

CAL
 (panting)
 Did I... beat... the record?

STONE
 (laughing)
 No, not even close!

CAL
 You... son of a... Why did you tell
 me...?

STONE
 Got you moving, didn't it? Your
 best time, too.

Cal mutters something.

CAL
 ...Sir.

INT. GYM - DAY

Paired off for hand-to-hand practice. Duke with Foley, Sara
 with Oates, Cal with Riata.

Cal does a few warm-up punches.

CAL
 Don't worry, I'll take it easy on
 you.

RIATA
 Okay.

She laughs, regains her composure. Then giggles.

CAL
 Come on, Stone's watching.

RIATA
 Sorry. Okay, come at me.

Cal starts moving forward, she waves her hands in mock
 terror.

RIATA
 (giggling)
 Eeeek!

CAL
 Fine!

Cal lunges, grabbing at her.

She sweeps his feet from under him, still giggling.

Cal thuds on the mat.

He clambers to his feet, faces off with her again.

Her lips quiver, trying not to giggle.

He advances, and she breaks into laughter again.

He tackles her, both fall to the mat.

Cal tries to pin her, but she twists and tries to get him into an armlock.

RIATA

I meant to tell you that I thought it was very brave of you to go into the water to help Duke. Especially with Stone watching.

CAL

It seemed the right thing to do. I bet it looked good for the cameras.

Riata leverages him onto his back, pinning him by sitting on his chest and arms.

Her hands are on the mat beside his neck, arms crossed just above his throat, her face near his.

RIATA

What cameras?

Cal arches his back, she dives forward and rolls to her feet.

He gets up, not as gracefully.

CAL

You know... cameras for the show.

Riata sweeps his feet again, and he thuds to the mat.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Trainees sit in large lecture hall. Stone is at the front of the room.

Cal sits at end of the row, half-listening as he sneaks looks out the window.

STONE

Don't think you only need to be able to identify the five aspects of heroism. You must absorb them into your life, live and breathe these ideals.

Cal watches a Trainee, wearing civilian clothes and carrying dufflebag, walking toward Academy entrance, escorted by an Instructor.

STONE (O.S.)

(continuing)

Conviction. Your unshakeable belief in a noble purpose, specifically the endless fight against evil, wherever it appears.

Three trainees in uniforms run up to the one with dufflebag, who stops. They plead with him.

STONE (O.S.)

(continuing)

Commitment. Your dedication to your conviction through action. Courage. This means bravery and fortitude in the face of adversity and danger, but also the strength to hold to your ideals when it would be easier to let them slide.

The one turns and stomps off, then wavers, stops. Returns to the others and hugs them all.

STONE (O.S.)

(continuing)

And Humility. Could you live your life following these ideals, all the while knowing that your efforts would forever go unrecognized? Or are you here for fame, for personal glory?

The Trainee picks up his dufflebag and continues his exodus. The others wave, some are crying.

STONE (O.S.)

(continuing)

Sacrifice. Being a hero means giving up your life. Not necessarily dying, although that may be your ultimate fate.

Cal turns to look at his Team. They are all somberly absorbed in the lecture.

STONE

(continuing)

Sacrifice in the sense of letting go of the life you had before, to accept your new responsibilities. Being willing to release what you hold dear for a higher purpose.

The penny drops; Cal realizes that this is not a TV show, it's real. He's stunned.

STONE

(continuing)

Most people can display these qualities, some more some less. However, very few people can hold themselves to the highest levels, not just now and then but every day, as a way of life. Those are the people we're looking for. Those are the ones that make it through to graduation.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Team moves quietly along moonlit trail through wooded hillside. They carry bulbous stunner pistols.

Duke signals a halt. The others gather around.

DUKE

We'll have a better chance of finding our target fugitive if we split up. Riata, Cal, you stay here. Ambush Oates and Foley if you can, so they can't find him first.

SARA

I want to stun an instructor!

DUKE

If we see one, you get first shot. Let's go.

Duke and Sara head off into the dark.

Riata and Cal hunker down in undergrowth, scanning the trail.

CAL
I need to tell you something.

RIATA
Yes?

CAL
Earlier, in the lecture, I realized
this is real, it's not a game!

RIATA
This is just a training exercise.

CAL
No, I mean here, this place, it
really is an academy.

RIATA
You didn't know that?

CAL
No! I had it all wrong. The way I
was acting, you must have thought I
was an idiot.

RIATA
That was one of the leading
theories.

CAL
When I got the call, I thought it
was a reality TV show.

RIATA
A reality what?

CAL
Reality TV!

RIATA
Never heard of it. And keep it
down, we are supposed to be an
ambush.

CAL
Sorry. I thought everyone on Earth
knew reality TV.

RIATA
I'm from Parmatha, not Earth.

CAL
What? Nice try! Like you're
really not from here.

Riata stares at him in disbelief.

RIATA
This isn't Earth.

CAL
Oh right! Like Oates and Foley
picked me up and we drove to
another planet...

As Cal speaks, clouds break, revealing second moon, and small
ringed planet in the night sky.

CAL
What the...

Cal stares, at the sky, then at Riata.

RIATA
Have you read any of the Trainee
Manual?

Distant shouts and a fusillade of space-weapon sounds is
heard. Lights flicker down the hillside.

RIATA
They found them! Let's go!

She leaps up, runs off. Cal remains, gaping at moons.

INT. GUYS ROOM - NIGHT

Riata, Sara and Duke cluster together. Cal sits on his bed,
still staring.

SARA
Do you think he'll be okay?

RIATA
I hope so.

SARA
Maybe he got hit with a stunner.

DUKE
Or he accidentally stunned himself.

SARA

Duke!

He shrugs.

SARA

I do see your point.

DUKE

What was it he said?

RIATA

Apparently he thought the academy was some sort of entertainment show. And I don't think he knew he wasn't on his home planet.

DUKE

How could he not?

RIATA

He said he's from Earth. I tried to look it up. It's not a listed world.

SARA

Then how did he get to the Academy?

CAL

It was on the internet.

The others rush to him. He regards them warily.

SARA

You're awake!

CAL

Yeah, the whole time. I could hear you, you know.

RIATA

We thought you might have gone catatonic. There was some drooling.

CAL

I read about the Academy on the internet.

DUKE

And what's that?

Cal buries his face in his hands with a groan.

SARA
You broke him again!

DUKE
Sorry.

CAL
Where am I? What... planet am I
on?

RIATA
This is Thexia, the seat of
government for the coalition of the
seven dimensions.

CAL
You're not kidding me, are you?
This isn't some elaborate joke?

The others shake their heads.

CAL
(continuing)
You all knew about these seven
dimensions?

The others nod.

CAL
Well, nobody bothered to tell me.

SARA
If you had read --

CAL
Don't say it! I don't know why I'm
so freaked out! I read Sci Fi! I
watch Star Trek! I have Sliders on
DVD! But this is just too weird!

DUKE
Now he's raving. Should we do
something?

CAL
Tell me everything. I know it's in
the book, but tell me. What is the
coalition? Where are you from?
Why don't you look more alien? Why
does everyone speak English? I
have to know.

DUKE

I guess we can do that.

RIATA

This will take a while.

INT. GUY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hours later. Duke is asleep on his bed, still in uniform.

Cal, dressed in his civilian clothes, is packing.

Duke wakes, sees what Cal's doing.

DUKE

Are you leaving?

CAL

Yeah. I can't stay.

DUKE

I'm sorry to hear it. I suppose it must be quite a shock to learn not only that other dimensions exist, but you're in one far from your home planet.

CAL

Shock is not the word. Even after you guys explained things, part of me still can't believe it. The other part thinks it's great. I've always wondered what it would be like to meet extraterrestrials. Now I have. I really like that.

DUKE

Then why are you quitting now?

CAL

Earlier today, before the really big surprise, Stone's lecture about heroics... I realized this wasn't just some TV show, everybody's here to become heroes. Real heroes, who go out and save people's lives and fight evil. To the death, even.

DUKE

That's true. That's why we're all here.

CAL

But I'm not! I came to have fun on a game show and spend some time in the spotlight. My life wasn't going so great and I thought it might change things for the better.

DUKE

It could still do that.

CAL

But I'm not the rescuer type! I don't want people relying on me for life and death issues! In my job, if I make a mistake then someone's system crashes, but nobody dies. I couldn't take the pressure.

DUKE

I don't see that.

CAL

Really? What do you see?

DUKE

It appears that the youthful aspects of your psyche are resisting acceptance of the mantle of adult responsibility, causing you to feel dis-empowered and stuck in a pre-adult role. At least, that's what it would be where I come from.

CAL

That's pretty insightful, big guy. How'd you come up with that?

DUKE

Before I joined the military, I pursued advanced academics in psychological study.

CAL

I almost got my Ph.D. in mechanical engineering.

DUKE

Almost?

CAL

Yeah, I dropped out in the last semester.

DUKE

You say you want to make your life better, but do you really think you will by continuing this pattern of giving up before you complete a goal?

CAL

I don't... Okay, I have in the past. But this is different. I'm only going to hold you guys back. You all really want this. I don't want to be the one who messes it up for you.

DUKE

They say the Academy never makes a mistake. Everyone they select has the potential in them to succeed.

CAL

Well, I must be the first time they got it totally wrong. It's just not for me. I'm not cut out for this. Tell the others I'm sorry. And that I know they'll make it.

Cal drags his dufflebag out the door.

EXT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Cal exits the barracks, quietly. He hefts his bag and starts to walk away.

STONE

The registrar's closed.

Cal jumps. Stone leans against barracks.

CAL

What?

STONE

You can't check out until they're open. You might as well stay.

CAL

I can't do this.

STONE

If you say so.

CAL
Don't start! You said I wasn't
going to make it.

STONE
No. Never said that.

CAL
You wouldn't waste your time --

STONE
I know what I said. I also told
you I'm very good at my job. Son,
I could have yelled at you all day,
called you more names than you can
imagine, and you would have
hustled. But how many people in
your life have pushed you to do
better, or yelled at you to shape
up?

CAL
A lot.

STONE
And has it worked?

This sinks in.

STONE
(continuing)
This isn't a military "one size
fits all" program. If I'd pushed,
you would have walked the first
day.

CAL
No, I wouldn't.

STONE
If you say so.

Cal struggles for a comeback, but knows Stone's right.

CAL
I've given this a lot of thought.

STONE
Then you must have asked yourself
why, out of seven dimensions, is
there only one Academy?
(MORE)

STONE(cont'd)

Why, out of billions of soldiers,
law enforcers and rescue workers on
all the planets, did they only take
two hundred trainees? And why did
they select you?

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS - DAY

Cal, in civilian clothes, carries his dufflebag through fog
toward registrar's building.

EXT. ACADEMY RECEIVING AREA - DAY

An unfamiliar instructor escorts Cal to SUV.

Cal throws his duffle in the back. Looks around, hopefully,
but nobody's there.

Cal gets in, and SUV pulls away.

EXT. ACADEMY ENTRANCE - DAY

SUV leaves the Academy. Cal watches the sign go by.

He slumps down, stares at the floor.

Ahead, a short figure in an improvised robot costume waddles
into the road. The instructor brakes to a hard stop.

The robot raises a weapon, and a huge spark leaps to the
SUV's hood. Its engine dies.

Flares rocket across the road, spraying sparks. Smoke
grenades land on the ground, spewing smoke.

Cal flinches as smoky figures throw open the door... Duke and
Riata, gleeful.

DUKE

Don't be afraid!

RIATA

We're here to rescue you!

CAL

Me?

RIATA

Of course.

Sara joins them, still wearing some pieces of costume.

SARA
Did you like the robot? That was
my idea.

DUKE
We couldn't let you go, so close to
the end.

Smoke clears a little, revealing Stone, Oates, and Foley
observing.

RIATA
Will you come back and finish with
us?

CAL
You guys are great. No.

Stunned silence.

CAL
(continuing)
Do you really think I'd be such a
jerk? Of course I will!

Relief and excitement.

STONE
This unofficial exercise has put us
behind schedule. Parade ground!
Now!

Duke, Riata and Sara dash off, followed by Oates and Foley.
Cal grabs his dufflebag.

CAL
(to Stone)
You're looking for some hidden
quality, right? Something rare but
crucial. You think I have it.

Stone meets Cal's gaze, a brief moment acknowledging respect
and admiration between them, and Instructor Mode returns.

STONE
You're out of uniform, Trainee
Webber. Let's move.

EXT. QUALIFICATION EXERCISE #1 - DAY

<Sara reveals her claustrophobia. The team manages to
succeed. They are elated.>

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Cal carries an armload of gear into entry area. Riata is leaning a little too casually by the door to the guy's room.

RIATA
What's all that for?

CAL
Remedial training. I'm still behind.

Cal heads for his room, Riata intercepts him.

RIATA
There's more room out here. And I can help you study.

CAL
All right.

Cal sets the gear down in the entry area, then heads for his room again.

RIATA
I thought we were studying now.

CAL
Sure, I need my manual.

RIATA
Use mine. It's upstairs.

CAL
Mine's right here.

Cal reaches for door. Riata scoots in front of him.

RIATA
We don't need it.

CAL
Hey, did you guys do something to my stuff?

Cal tries to dodge around her. She grabs him. He tries again, not too forcefully.

Riata kisses him, slow and lingering. He responds.

Cal breaks away first.

CAL
What's going on?

He grabs doorknob, pushes door open.

GUYS ROOM

Sara and Duke are in bed together. They jump when the door opens.

Cal stares, wide-eyed.

Sara wraps sheet around her and slides from bed, taking the sheet with her.

SARA
Apparently somebody failed guard
duty class.

RIATA
He looks so helpless. I couldn't
club him.

DUKE
I'll get dressed now.

Duke, wearing just his boxers, grabs his uniform and modestly heads to the bathroom.

Sara pauses on her way out to watch him go.

SARA
(to Cal)
Okay, I kinda like the muscles.

EXT. ACADEMY WILDERNESS - DAY

The team stands in a wide valley, ringed by tall mountains. Stone opens back of transport vehicle, revealing a variety of hiking and climbing gear. Four crystal ellipsoids, like clear oversized footballs, are in a rack.

Another vehicle roars up, braking hard. Oates and Foley spring out.

STONE
Thanks for joining us, instructors.
I hope this job isn't keeping you
from anything important.

OATES
We heard a rumor, Sir.

FOLEY
We thought you should know.

OATES
Tiberius Vee has escaped.

STONE
That's impossible.

FOLEY
Command confirmed it, that's why
we're late.

OATES
They couldn't say if he was heading
to Thexia.

STONE
No, his hideout here is known.
There'd be no point.

FOLEY
You're here.

Stone glares at him, and abruptly turns to the trainees. He activates a holographic map of the valley. An air field is marked on the map near the starting point.

STONE
For this qualifying exercise, you
will each transport one of the
ellipsoids to the target on the top
of that mountain.

The holograph zooms in an image of the mountain top, showing a circle with a flag in the center.

STONE
(continuing)
This map is in your locators, and
you may take any equipment that's
here. You must deliver your
ellipsoid, unbroken, before your
chronometer counts down to zero.
However, the trainee with the best
time will receive an extra grade on
this exercise. Any questions?

No one speaks. The holograph turns off with a snap. Stone clicks his stopwatch.

STONE
(continuing)

Then your time starts now.

The team jostles around the gear on the transport. Duke grabs a backpack and a rope, and heads off across the valley at an easy lope. Riata and Sara follows soon after.

Cal carefully stuffs his ellipsoid into the flimsy pack, and looks at the instructors. They all watch, impassively.

Cal hesitates, but turns and follows after the others.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - DAY

Cal jogs along, the ellipsoid banging against his back. The others are far ahead. He looks at his locator screen, then ahead at the mountain.

CAL
Hey guys! Wait up!

He speeds up, then stops, shifting the pack around so it hangs on his chest. Wrapping his arms around the pack, he runs after the others.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The others are at the bank of a river. Duke is already pulling out his rope and preparing to throw it across. Cal runs up.

CAL
Wait! We're doing it wrong.

DUKE
What?

CAL
We're missed something. This is too simple.

RIATA
We don't have time to argue.

CAL
That's another thing. Why train us as a team, then make us compete against each other?

SARA

What are you saying?

CAL

It's a qualifying exam. It's got to be more than just a hike up a mountain.

DUKE

Maybe there's challenging terrain up ahead.

They pull out their locators to see the maps.

RIATA

There's no direct route.

DUKE

I don't think those cliffs are very high.

SARA

Even so, it will slow us down, we'd have to run the rest of the way.

RIATA

What are you thinking?

CAL

The maps show an academy air field, right back there. Why would we start close to that if it wasn't important?

DUKE

I doubt we're supposed to fly up there.

CAL

Stone never said we had to walk.

The others think back...

RIATA

He's right. We were just told to transport the ellipsoids.

SARA

If we go to the airfield and you're wrong, there's not enough time to get there.

CAL
 You just said there wasn't enough
 time anyway.

The others exchanges glances, not quite convinced...

CAL
 (continuing)
 I know it seems a long shot, but
 this training isn't about hiking up
 mountains. They're looking for
 creative teams, not competitive
 athletes. If they just wanted
 physical fitness, I would never
 have been accepted.

DUKE
 You think we're supposed to work
 together?

CAL
 I do.

DUKE
 Good enough. I'm in.

SARA
 You've been right before.

RIATA
 What's the plan?

CAL
 Let's go see if there's a ride for
 us at the air field.

EXT. ACADEMY AIRFIELD - DAY

A sleek four-seat tilt-rotor sits on the tarmac at the
 airfield. A MECHANIC is doing a pre-flight inspection. The
 team hunkers behind a stack of cargo barrels watching.

DUKE
 That's perfect.

RIATA
 So how do we get it?

SARA
 Too bad we don't have a stunner.

RIATA
We could distract him.

DUKE
That's good. I'll sneak on board
and fire it up.

CAL
I've got a better idea.

Cal stands and walks toward the tilt-rotor.

SARA
What are you doing?

Cal approaches the Mechanic.

CAL
Hey. I'm here for the aircraft for
Instructor Stone's trainees.

MECHANIC
This is it. All set to go.

The mechanic hands Cal a bulky plastic card and a clipboard.

MECHANIC
(continuing)
Here's the key, and sign here.

CAL
Thanks.

MECHANIC
Have a good flight.

Cal gestures for the others to join him. As they approach,
he opens the door.

SARA
What, he just gave it to you?

RIATA
Now, that seems too simple.

CAL
But it proves I'm right. Look.

He slides a cargo case from behind the seats. It has four
padded spaces, perfectly sized for the ellipsoids.

CAL
All we need is a pilot. Can
anybody fly this thing?

The other three raise their hands.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP TARGET - DAY

The circle and flag are just as seen in Stone's hologram.
The tilt-rotor makes an approach, and settles onto the rocky
ground nearby.

The Instructors stand by their transport, watching.

The team cheerfully gets out, starts toward the target area.

SARA
The ellipsoids!

CAL
I'll get them.

Cal reaches behind the seat, pulls the case out...

And watches in horror as the case comes apart, dumping its
contents.

Time slows as he tries to catch the falling objects, but the
crystals drop to the ground, smashing into pieces.

The rest of the team stares, shocked.

SARA
What happened?

CAL
I'm so sorry.

RIATA
We're... It's over.

DUKE
We all failed.

CAL
No. They wouldn't?

They look at the Instructors.

SARA
I can't believe it.

She fights back tears. Riata puts a hand on her shoulder.

DUKE
Let's go. We can at least finish
with dignity.

He, Riata and Sara turn to head back to the instructors.

DUKE
Cal?

Cal picks up the pieces of the case. He sets them down.

CAL
It's my fault.

DUKE
Come on.

Together they walk to the target area and face the instructors.

STONE
Instructor Oates, take the tilt-
rotor back to the air field.
Trainees, into the transport.

CAL
Instructor Stone? Sir?

STONE
Something you want to say, trainee?

CAL
It's not fair to punish them for my
mistake.

STONE
Is that right?

CAL
Yes, Sir. I messed up, I deserve
whatever happens. But it shouldn't
keep them from graduating. That
wouldn't be right.

STONE
Do any of you agree with Trainee
Webber?

DUKE
No, Sir. We're a team.

RIATA

We failed to achieve our goal.
We're responsible, regardless of
the reason.

STONE

Trainee Wright, are you content to
let your future rest with Trainee
Webber's actions?

SARA

Yes.

STONE

Duly noted. Now, into the
transport. Don't make me tell you
again.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS - NIGHT

Stone jogs briskly. Cal steps out from shadows, and Stone
runs right by him.

Cal runs to keep up.

CAL

You haven't said whether you're
going to fail the team.

Stone continues running.

CAL

(continuing)

I was thinking about what happened.
I understand why it was too far to
travel by foot. So we had to
figure out to find the plane. But
that case was bothering me. It was
obviously there for that purpose,
so why would it be so fragile?

He pauses, expecting a reply...

CAL

(continuing)

It was rigged to fall apart. We
were supposed to fail. It's like
where I come from there's this TV
show, and the starship captain...
He's at the academy, and there's
this test that nobody passes.

Stone stops.

STONE

What is it you want from me?

CAL

I thought, you might... if you knew that I knew, then...

STONE

You want me to pat you on the head and tell you everything will be all right? If you're so smart about figuring everything out, you know it doesn't work that way. Maybe the lesson is that sometimes you do your best and it just isn't good enough.

CAL

Maybe you're seeing whether we pull together under stress or pull apart.

STONE

Maybe. Does it say in the manual that I have to explain myself to you?

CAL

Probably not.

STONE

No. What is it with you, Webber? Most trainees are scared to death of me. You act like I'm your friend.

CAL

No, I'm terrified of you, too.

STONE

Good.

Stone continues running, as Cal turns back.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - NIGHT

Stone jogs around a track to exercise station. Does ten quick pull-ups. Hears a noise...

He drops to the ground. Two masked HENCHMEN face him, holding stunners.

Stone lunges to the side, revealing a Henchman behind him, who fires his stunner, striking one of his own. The Henchman falls, twitching.

Stone rolls, grabs the one behind him, pulls him so the second stunner shot hits him. Stone drops the man, advances on the only Henchman standing.

The man retreats, and Stone pursues.

The henchman runs around a shed. Stone follows, and is suddenly surrounded by six more Henchmen...

STONE

Crap.

He jerks as a stunner hits, and then Henchmen overwhelm him.

EXT. BARRACKS - DAY

The team waits outside the barracks.

DUKE

This isn't good.

CAL

What? They're a little late.

RIATA

Would you want to be late twice in a row?

CAL

Good point.

Oates and Foley arrive, looking distressed.

FOLEY

The exercise is delayed. Remain here until further notice.

CAL

What's wrong?

FOLEY

Nothing.

CAL

That's not true. Sir.

OATES
Instructor Stone hasn't been seen
since last night.

SARA
He's gone?

FOLEY
We don't know. Remain here.

Oates and Foley dash off. Duke heads for the barracks.

CAL
Where are you going?

DUKE
To wait. As instructed.

CAL
Oh, no no no. Don't you see? It's
not about what we do, but whether
we figure it out!

RIATA
You're doing it again.

CAL
This is the third test! We're
supposed to find Stone!

SARA
They've never tricked us with an
exercise before.

CAL
Oh, right. Do you think it's
coincidence that they told us Vee
escaped?

DUKE
But it was on the news report.

CAL
Was it? Or did you just assume it
was?

The others exchange looks, considering this.

RIATA
I suppose it's possible.

CAL
Possible? It makes perfect sense.

DUKE
We'll need equipment. And we don't
even know where he is.

SARA
Well, they all but told us the
location of Vee's stronghold.
Wouldn't that be a logical place
for him to go?

CAL
Exactly! Let's go get some gear.

EXT. QUARTERMASTER - DAY

A large cargo truck sits in front of the Quartermaster's
building.

Cal flips open the canvas covering the back, revealing four
APV's and two large cargo crates.

CAL
See? We're set to go.

RIATA
I think Cal's right about this.

DUKE
We should not have doubted you.

CAL
Thanks, but praise me later! Right
now, we've got a test to pass.

They pile into the truck, and drive off.

Moments later, the doors to the Quartermaster open. Two
instructors and four trainees step out, look for their truck.

EXT. VEE'S ESTATE - DAY

The team crawls up to the edge of a ridge, revealing
stronghold beyond. It is dark and still. Duke looks at it
with binoculars.

DUKE
Nobody's here.

CAL
Try the thermal scan.

Duke switches settings, looks again. This time, the vents on the roof glow hot, and the bunkers show heat.

DUKE
Cal's right; someone's trying to hide.

RIATA
They'll be watching the front.

SARA
We could come in from the bay.

DUKE
Use the APV's, and swim in.

RIATA
Too risky during the day, we should go in at night.

CAL
You okay with that, big guy?

DUKE
Fine. I'll be fine.

CAL
This is going to be great!

EXT. BAY - NIGHT

The team surfaces, four dark shapes in the water wearing scuba gear. Cal looks at stronghold with night-vision, sees large doors at waterline.

He points, others nod. They all duck down again.

EXT. VEE'S STRONGHOLD - NIGHT

The team surfaces by the doors, whisper together.

RIATA
How do we get in?

CAL
There's a spillway tunnel. We can cut the grate off.

DUKE
We can't fit through that.

CAL
Only one of us has to.

Everyone looks at Sara.

SARA
I can't do it.

RIATA
No, he's right. You can open the
doors from the inside.

SARA
I'm claustrophobic. I'd panic.

DUKE
Maybe there is another way.

CAL
No. Sara, we need you to go
through the tunnel.

SARA
Please, no!

CAL
Would your family want you to back
down?

Sara agonizes, finally relents.

SARA
I'll need a mini tank.

RIATA
Give me your gear.

EXT. TUNNEL OPENING - NIGHT

Duke cuts through the final bars of the grating over the
small opening, and it drops away.

Sara pauses in front of the opening. Cal gives her a "thumbs
up" sign.

Duke squeezes her hand for a moment, and she wiggles into the
tunnel.

Sound fades as she creeps through the dark, tiny space...

EXT. VEE'S STRONGHOLD - NIGHT

The others wait. The seconds tick past. Finally, the door begins to rise.

The three duck under water and swim through.

INT. BOAT HOUSE - NIGHT

The team surfaces inside. Sara takes her gear from the others.

Cal nods at two guards, unconscious and tied up.

CAL

I knew you could do it. Nice work.

Sara smiles.

Riata listens at the door.

RIATA

Sounds like a couple guards. I distract them.

She unzips her wetsuit, revealing a skimpy bikini top. The others take positions on either side of the door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Riata opens the door, steps through and turns to face two GUARDS.

RIATA

Hi! Do either of you have a towel?

One guard gets her into an armlock, pinning her against the wall.

The second guard reaches for a radio.

The others stun the guards. Duke drags them into the boat house area.

CAL

Was that your plan?

RIATA

No. They must be gay like Duke.

SARA

What?

CAL

Quiet! There might be more guards!

Duke returns to the group.

DUKE

Did you want me?

Cal frantically gestures for quiet.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

As the group approaches stairs, they hear someone descending toward them. They pull back behind corners.

CAL

I've got this one.

A GUARD comes down the stairs, reading from a clipboard.

Cal jumps around corner, too early. He hits the clipboard, which smacks the Guard in the head.

GUARD

Ow!

CAL

Sorry.

Cal lunges, gets guard in headlock.

CAL

I know this is just a test, but I got you.

The guard pushes backward, slamming them both into the wall.

CAL

Ow!

Cal lets go. The guard draws a gun...

Duke grabs the guard, pulls him around the corner. The gun falls to the floor.

Cal shakes his head to clear it. Sara picks up the gun, releases the clip, and stares at it.

CAL
What's wrong?

SARA
Live ammunition.

Riata and Duke join them, looking concerned.

CAL
That's not safety-minded.

RIATA
No, they'd never use live ammo for
an exercise like this.

DUKE
That means...

SARA
These are real guards.

The enormity of the situation sinks in...

CAL
But that would mean that Vee
really escaped.

SARA
And took Stone.

DUKE
This isn't a test.

RIATA
And nobody knows we're here.

CAL
Okay, conference.

Cal pushes open some double doors, and after a quick check, the team goes through. A moment later, Cal comes out, and drags the guard in with them.

INT. MECHANICAL ROOM - NIGHT

A scramble of vents, ducts and wiring cross the walls and ceiling, and the room is filled with the rumble of machinery.

RIATA
We can go back the way we came in.

SARA

Nobody's raised an alarm, so they probably haven't found the other guards.

DUKE

We can notify the authorities that Vee's probably hiding here.

CAL

We can't go back.

DUKE

You mean we take another route?

CAL

No, we have to see this through.

RIATA

Now's not a good time for jokes.

CAL

I'm serious. It's what Stone said about courage and commitment. Having the strength to hold to our ideals, even when it would be easy not to.

SARA

But there's four of us, against... a lot!

CAL

Isn't that what we're training for? To go against impossible odds.

RIATA

But we're still trainees. And we don't even know if Stone is really here.

CAL

Vee escapes, his fortress is secretly guarded, Stone disappears. What else does that add up to? Sure, it's safer for us to go back, let someone else handle it, but that's going to take time. What happens to Stone in the meantime?

They grimly consider Stone's likely fate.

DUKE

Cal's right. We need to find Stone.

RIATA

We're in over our heads.

SARA

So what's the plan?

DUKE

Perhaps we can exploit some of their mechanical system.

SARA

Anybody know what these are?

Cal points to the various systems...

CAL

That's heating. Power. That's probably communications. And those, plumbing.

RIATA

I'm impressed.

CAL

I studied mechanical engineering.

DUKE

Could we use the air vents to move about unobserved?

CAL

It would be quieter to strap metal drums to our feet and hop down the hallway. If we didn't just get stuck. Not very heroic.

RIATA

We should get moving, then.

DUKE

Right. I'll take lead, unless... ?

CAL

No, I'm okay with that.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

The team moves silently up the stairs, cautiously checking around corners.

Cal tries door marked "LAB". It's unlocked. He peers into the dark room, and gestures for the others to follow.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

The lab is filled with equipment, but is dark and unoccupied.

Cal shines his flashlight over a set of large gas canisters.

SARA

I hope you don't want to take that with us.

CAL

No, I've got an idea. The main ventilation stack should be right behind there. Can you make a hole in the wall?

DUKE

Affirmative.

RIATA

What are you going to do?

CAL

If we release these together into the air supply, everyone who breathes it should fall asleep.

SARA

Wait, wouldn't that include us?

CAL

It will take a while for it to spread. When we notice the effects, we've got the mini tanks.

RIATA

How long is a while?

CAL

Estimating the volume of the building, and the rate of air flow...

Cal mumbles to himself, doing mental equations.

CAL (CONT'D)
About ten minutes, I'd guess.

SARA
That's great.

CAL
Yeah, something I learned in
college is actually being useful.
Help me pull this over there.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A. The team leaves the lab and moves down the hall.
- B. The team hides as guards pass by.
- C. Duke and Sara watch the hall as Cal and Riata check a room.
- D. The team moves quietly down a long, bare corridor.
- E. They open a wide set of doors at the end of the corridor.

INT. MAIN CHAMBER - NIGHT

Stone sits, gagged and tied to a chair. He is badly bruised and slumped over. Doors open, and Cal and Riata look in.

RIATA
He's here.

Stone looks at them, struggles and tries to speak.

The team rushes over to him and remove his gag.

STONE
What are you idiots doing?

CAL
We're here to rescue you.

STONE
Please tell me there's an army with
you.

RIATA
No, it's just us.

Stone closes his eyes and shakes his head.

CAL
What's wrong?

The wall behind them rises, revealing TIBERIUS VEE, a huge but well dressed lawyer, and a dozen HENCHMEN.

CAL
Oh.

VEE
Apparently everyone knew there would be an ambush, except you. What an unfortunate surprise. Do I need to explain about handing over your weapons?

Henchmen take the team's weapons.

STONE
Do you expect me to beg for their lives?

VEE
I wish you would. But that's not like you, is it?

CAL
They'll come looking for us.

VEE
What? I won't get away with this?

CAL
No.

VEE
That's what I love about your side. You're all so predictable. Yes, an assault force is on the way. I knew they'd come, after the necessary debate and legal procedure. An advance team of trainees is a pleasant surprise, however.

CAL
So you'll surrender now?

VEE
You're funny. I'll save you for last.

Henchmen wheel in a large table with straps and nasty-looking attachments.

VEE (CONT'D)

We'll be gone by the time they arrive. But we've got time for one of you.

Henchmen bring Riata to the table.

VEE

No, that's what they'd expect. Start with that one.

He points to Duke. The henchmen pull him toward the table.

STONE

This isn't about them.

VEE

No. But this is going to hurt you to watch, and that's what this is about.

Henchman yawns as they push Duke onto the table. One fumbles for the straps, drops them.

Behind Vee, his henchmen droop.

Duke pulls an arm free, the groggy henchmen try to stop him.

VEE

Quit goofing around!

Vee yawns, shakes his head.

Duke grabs the henchmen, slams two together.

DUKE

Untie Stone!

VEE

Stop them!

His henchmen lurch, but fall over each other. Duke and Riata launch themselves into the crowd. Sara goes to Stone, pulling her tank from her vest.

Vee heads for the door.

CAL

I'll stop Vee!

Cal chases Vee. They're both staggering.

Cal grabs at Vee, who spins, tossing him off.

VEE

No! This is some kind of trick!

Cal dizzily swings at Vee, but merely bumps into him, sending him staggering.

Vee charges. Cal steps aside, and Vee thuds into a wall.

They face each other in karate stance, weaving groggily.

Cal tenses to attack, starts to yell...

Vee crumbles, falling face forward into the floor.

Cal stares, everything goes fuzzy.

The team and Stone grab him, push his breathing tank on him.

Cal inhales deeply, shaking his head to clear it.

CAL

I got him.

A rumbling distant EXPLOSION shakes the building. Alarms sound.

STONE

Did you do that?

CAL

The combination of gases might be... unstable.

STONE

Unstable?

RIATA

Now you tell us.

STONE

We're leaving, Trainees. Grab Vee.

Duke hauls Vee up, Cal starts to take the other side, but Stone pushes him aside, and hands him a guard's weapon.

STONE

Lead us out of here.

EXT. VEE'S STRONGHOLD - DAY

Dawn is breaking as the team hauls the inert Vee away up the road from the stronghold. The alarms are still sounding.

They reach the ridge, and turn to look back.

CAL
We should move farther away. It
will probably blow up any second.

They watch. The alarms continue, then shut off.

Silence. The team looks at each other.

CAL
Or maybe not.

STONE
That's all right, Trainee. They
usually do. Where's your
transport.

RIATA
About a mile. Sorry.

CAL
Duke didn't want to pay for valet
parking.

Stone gives him a look.

CAL
Just a joke. Sorry.

Stone shakes his head, as the sound of approaching helicopters builds.

STONE
Lucky for you. I was going to make
you carry him.

An academy helicopter lands beside the road.

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - DAY

The commencement ceremony is underway. Again, trainees are in the center, this time in dark uniforms, and the surrounding audience is a mix of colors. Commander Rupert is at the podium.

RUPERT

In conclusion, I would like to bestow the Academy's Award of Merit on four trainees who volunteered for a dangerous extracurricular assignment, and performed heroically in the face of danger.

The team steps forward onto the podium. As Commander Rupert calls their names, he hands them a medal.

RUPERT (CONT'D)

Achilles Duke. Riata Steel. Sara Wright. Calvin Webber. Congratulations to you all, and our thanks for a job well done!

The audience erupts in applause.

The team presses the medals to their jumpsuits, where they stick. Cal following the others, of course...

They turn, and leave the stage.

EXT. ACADEMY ENTRANCE - DAY

The team moves through a huge crowd of trainees and their families.

FOLEY (O.S.)

Congratulations!

They turn, Oates and Foley are behind them, without sunglasses and smiling.

OATES

We knew you'd all make it.

CAL

You look like Foley and Oates but you're all smiling and friendly.

RIATA

What he means is thank you.

CAL

Did you really think I'd make it?

FOLEY

Most of the time.

OATES
You really made Stone work for it,
though.

CAL
Thanks, I guess.

FOLEY
Good luck. I'm sure we'll be
seeing you soon.

OATES
What do you plan to do?

CAL
I guess I'll go back home. Not to
my old job, though, how could I do
tech support after rescuing Stone
and everything? I'll have to take
some time and look for something
different.

Everyone stares.

OATES
I meant for the weekend.

CAL
What?

SARA
You never read anything, do you?

DUKE
Second phase training starts next
week.

CAL
We're not done?

FOLEY
Done? Not hardly. You've got a
lot to learn.

RIATA
If you're not going anywhere, you
could come home with me. You could
meet my parents.

CAL
Serious?

Riata takes his hand.

RIATA
Remember what I said about kissing
a third time?

CAL
But we didn't... Oh, when Sara and
Duke were... I thought you didn't
want things to be complex?

RIATA
You want to talk me out of it?

CAL
No! I want this more than
anything. But where I come from,
women like you don't end up with
guys like me. Sure, we get to be
friends, but you don't go out, or
look at me like that, or say...

Riata presses a finger to his lips to quiet him.

RIATA
Just kiss me.

CAL
What?

RIATA
You know, for practice.

CAL
Yeah.

Cal kisses her.

FADE OUT.

THE END