

ACTUAL DEATH EXPERIENCE

by

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PREVIEW

FADE IN:

BLACKNESS. Nothing but a sound. Distant at first. Getting louder --

WHUMP. WHUMP. WHUMP.

Something very large BEATS the air.

INT. AIR VENT

Above a rotating fan

A JAPANESE MAN

Falls backwards into the gleaming blades, penetrating shock etched on his face.

Chaotic noise, unfocused, gradually overcomes the sound of the fan.

But it transforms into the familiar --

WRENCHING metal, panicked SCREAMS, tearing flesh --
Unadulterated terror somewhere unseen, far away from here, as the man collides with the spinning metal --

Flesh is ripped from bones in an instant, a body torn apart in the blink of an eye.

A cloud of red mist dances above the churning blades. The remains of a vaporized human being.

INT. LOACYTE LABORATORIES - PROCEDURE ROOM - DAY

The man from the air vent explodes out of a reclined chair, GASPING for air. He is grabbed by thin, tanned arms, guided back onto the chair. Underneath --

ROBOTIC ARMATURES fold down into the floor.

ELENA FAULKE, (20's), strong, beautiful, could be the poster girl for some cause, eases the man back on to a padded cushion, smiles sweetly as she wipes a tear from his face and tidies his pale blue gown around him.

ELENA

Mr. Fukiama? Mr. Fukiama?

FUKIAMA snaps around, stares wide eyed at Elena.

ELENA (CONT'D)

It's okay, breathe now, that's it.
That's it. Good, good. You're back.

(CONTINUED)

Fukiama's eyes flick around his surroundings -- The room is like a five star hotel spa -- all beige furnishings, soft lighting. Cozy and womb-like.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Salt or sugar?

Fukiama still tries to catch his breath.

FUKIAMA
Sa-- salt.

Elena opens a small silver packet branded with the name "LOACYTE" -- Inside are a handful of peanuts. Fukiama stuffs them in his mouth eagerly.

ELENA
(to the air)
April nineteen, Twenty one fifteen.
Fukiama Zero Five Seven - procedure complete.

Elena works at a glass touch screen panel, shuts down the system.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Mr. Fukiama, Catherine will be here in a few moments with your aftercare package. I hope your experience was fulfilling?

Fukiama nods.

FUKIAMA
Yes. It was, most fulfilling.
That's the first time it made me cry -- I cried. I really cried.

He wipes a finger under his eye, examines the liquid. Elena smiles that sweet smile again, and walks to the door.

ELENA
Take care, sir.

She leaves, the door a type of airlock -- there is no intrusion of light or sound from outside.

INT. LOACYTE LABORATORIES - CORRIDOR - DAY

Diffused glowing white surfaces. If heaven had a lobby, this would be it. Glass walled labs line the corridor, blue text and lines scroll across digital walls, guide personnel to different destinations.

Elena cuts a path directly towards a bank of glass elevators. One opens up, releases CATHERINE, pale pink shirt, blonde, cute, mischievous. She salutes Elena.

(CONTINUED)

CATHERINE

He ready?

ELENA

All yours. He cried.

CATHERINE

The poor dear. I'll make him right.

They pass each other without stopping as the blue guide lines change to a pulsing pink, guiding Catherine back towards the room containing Fukiama.

Elena steps inside the --

INT. GLASS ELEVATOR

As the doors SHUNK closed. She slowly sinks back against the wall, closes her eyes, relaxes, as if recovering from a bad day.

ELENA

(to the air)

Research.

A BEEP, the elevator HUMS as it descends.

Elena slides a finger over her right cuff. Her blue shirt turns orange, like a dye diffusing in water.

Under the sleeve -- an arm covered in patches of ragged scar tissue. Elena massages her skin, grimaces slightly, throws two blue PILLS into her mouth as the elevator drops into a --

HUGE OPEN ATRIUM

Hundreds of stories high, filled with wide walkways, and splashes of green planting. The elevator falls fast, the floor below growing in size and detail --

THE ELEVATOR

Dives through the floor, outside dark, and into the lower levels of the building.

Elena opens her eyes, stands up straight and composes herself. The humming gets lower as the elevator stops. The doors open on --

INT. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FLOOR - DAY

The walls are overlaid with orange guide lines. Elena steps out, acknowledges a passing colleague and walks towards a door marked "LAB 5".

(CONTINUED)

Elena passes a small door with a round window set in it, glances in. She stops, backtracks, and goes into --

CHANGING ROOM

KELLY, 21, sits on a pale white bench, clinging to herself modestly in an orange gown and little else.

ELENA

Hi.

Kelly looks up.

KELLY

Hi.

ELENA

You OK? You here for an A.D.E?

The girl nods as Elena sits down beside her.

ELENA (CONT'D)

I'm Elena.

KELLY

Kelly. Y'up. Need cash for college. Easy money, I'm told.

ELENA

You just lie down and feel great. I'm told.

Kelly's head snaps around.

KELLY

You never had one? Done one? Does it hurt?

Elena's hand rests softly on the girls knee.

ELENA

No, I never had one. You'll be fine. You've watched the program?

Kelly glances at a screen on the wall. A highly detailed CGI demonstration of the A.D.E procedure loops. It's simplified, dumbed down, like an aircraft safety video.

ON SCREEN

The equipment doesn't look anywhere near as extreme as what was seen earlier -- The robotic armatures look positively cuddly.

BACK TO SCENE

(CONTINUED)

KELLY

So just like a theme park ride or something?

ELENA

Oh no, it's practically real-- the actual death experience from a donor--

KELLY

Real?

You mean a vic...

--a donor, is re-inserted into your nervous system. That releases endorphins and other cool stuff that make you feel great.

--Yeah getting hit by a train, or shot. Real cool.

It's the perfect high. You can tell them all in college-- These don't go cheap. Maybe--

Elena smiles, to evoke a similar response from Kelly, but no joy.

KELLY (CONT'D)

So... Does it hurt?

ELENA

The tiniest of pinches, then it feels phenomenal.

KELLY

So you're told.

ELENA

So I'm told. You about ready to start?

A nod from Kelly. She gets to her feet, smooths the gown down around her body. She looks up at the screen again, now showing the section on NEEDLE INSERTION.

The video makes it look like the client is receiving a massage -- not being stabbed in the back a hundred times.

KELLY

All that really get's shoved into my spine, my nervous system? That's the pinch?

Elena squeezes the girls hand.

ELENA

Don't worry about that part. You won't see it anyway. Okay?

KELLY

Okay.

INT. LAB 5 - DAY

A tech head's wet dream. Utter sterility. Metal and glass perfection. TWO RECLINERS sit side by side, made of polished titanium and white plastic, with a simple opaque screen between them. The centre pieces of the room.

BEN GARLAND (30's), in an orange shirt, inputs gestures on a touch screen. He's a Geekjock; a nerd with the enviable curse of being naturally athletic. His rugged face lights up as he sees Elena usher Kelly into the room.

Ben selfconsciously rubs a scar near his right eye -- a memory he can't forget.

Ben holds out a hand.

BEN

Kelly, yes? I'm Ben. I'll be running your procedure. Keeping an eye on you.

ELENA

He's a pro, you'll be fine.

BEN

Somebody nervous?

Kelly smiles weakly. Elena puts a hand on her shoulder.

KELLY

I heard it can be addictive.

ELENA

You'd have to have hundreds of these for there to be any cumulative effect. We only allow volunteers to undergo ten A.D.E's, max. Now, we'll get you prepped. I need you to turn around.

As Kelly complies, a TECH pushes a tray on a swing arm into position beside Elena. From it, Elena takes a swab and draws it down Kelly's bare back.

Kelly flinches.

ELENA (CONT'D)

It's cold. Sorry. There.

Ben assists Elena in putting Kelly into the recliner. The entire spine is missing from the chair, a chasm runs the length, just where the human spinal cord would be.

(CONTINUED)

Kelly lies back, Elena clears her gown away from the open section as underneath -- a ROBOTIC ARMATURE unfolds under Kelly's bare spine, micro lasers crisscross the tiny hairs on her back.

ELENA (CONT'D)

We're just going to get a position lock. It may feel warm.

Beneath the chair the arm opens up to reveal -- millions of FIBROUS NEEDLES that stop millimeters from Kelly's back, perfectly aligned with her spine. A ballet of technological precision.

Ben nods to the technician.

BEN

Load the Thanatos Drive.

The tech enters a command. Elena notices, turns to Kelly.

ELENA

Okay, there'll be a pinch, pressure, and then the main event. It'll be over in seconds, and I'll be right here after.

Kelly blinks. Nervous.

BEN

Close your eyes. And hold still.

Kelly's eyes slam shut.

BEN (CONT'D)

Run program.

The tech taps once on the screen. Powerful servos ram the needles into -- KELLY'S SPINAL COLUMN. Her mouth shoots open and she pulls in air loudly.

ON THE TECH'S SCREEN

A progress bar races towards one hundred percent as --

KELLY'S EYES

snap open.

BACK TO SCENE

BEN (CONT'D)

Unusual--

One hundred percent reached -- Kelly arches her back off the recliner, the needles pull blood from her spine as they withdraw, at all kinds of wrong angles.

(CONTINUED)

ELENA
Jesus chri--

BEN
Shit!

Kelly kicks and spasms -- Ben throws himself over her, tries to hold her down.

BEN (CONT'D)
(to the Tech)
What the hell did we give her?

TECH
Standard A.D.E. -- Sudden impact.

Without warning --

BLOOD ERUPTS from every one of Kelly's orifices, showers the lab in crimson matter.

Elena instinctively turns and ducks as Ben jumps back. The Tech dives to the floor.

The volcano of blood hoses the lab. Kelly, in the last throes of her life, convulses violently on the chair.

The eruption continues, time almost standing still, until the blood flow subsides to a stream. A slow rhythmic pulse passes through Kelly's body, the last few desperate heart beats.

A red pool gathers under the recliner.

THE ROBOT ARM

Oblivious to what has happened, returns to it's default position below the chair and

SPLASHES BLOOD

From it's recess as it locks home.

Elena wipes the red from her face, gapes over at Kelly's barely recognizable form.

Kelly won't see twenty two.

The tech gets to his feet, tentatively approaches Kelly's body.

BEN
DON'T!

The tech jumps back. Ben leans cautiously towards the chair.

COMPUTER VOICE (O.S.)
Biohazard detected. Containment
protocol initiated.

(CONTINUED)

The lab doors seal, locks clamp their frame, as something heavy and unseen slides home behind them -- THUMP! A klaxon BLARES.

Elena, Ben and the Tech stand perfectly still, fixated on Kelly's body.

INT. LOACYTE LABORATORIES - PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

A pale blue room, with an empty desk in the centre. Cold. Functional. Intimidating.

At a huge panoramic window, fitting in perfectly with his surroundings, stands the elderly form of HAROLD AIGNES. He's somewhere on the other side of eighty, a professional, geriatric entrepreneur -- waist deep in the grave already.

Aignes looks over a CHICAGO that no longer reaches for the sky -- but for space. Buildings are impossibly high, some at angles that invite collapse, yet somehow defy gravity. The once famously tall Willis Tower now dwarfed by a maze of progress.

It is clear from the view that Aignes stands in the tallest spacescraper there is -- Kilometers in the air.

AIGNES

Another waste.

Aignes peers over his shoulder like a hawk noticing prey for the first time. Grey eyes focused tightly, unwavering. Something unnatural about them -- Almost youthful.

Elena and Ben stand with their backs to the door, at attention.

ELENA

It was an accident, Mr. Aignes.

In the shadows, a man (70's), steps forward, tilts his head towards Ben, continues past. JOHN PAVER, thin, gaunt, the personification of a vampire, is no geriatric when he moves.

PAVER

This makes it four. All during similar A.D.E's. And they're getting worse. We'd nearly a month with no accidents. We can reset that counter. If this leaks, we can kiss our research licence goodbye.

Aignes pivots around slowly, faces his guests.

AIGNES

Accidents fuel scientific progress, John, let them speak. Thoughts?

(CONTINUED)

Ben clears his throat.

BEN
Possible contamination.

AIGNES
Again?

BEN
Potentially each procedure could contain different contaminants. I mean, it's unlikely--

AIGNES
Most unlikely.

Ben is floundering. Elena steps up.

ELENA
There could be a physiological complication. The cortex mapping may not go deep enough, some individuals may have underlying conditions that exacerbate the problem. Any number of things we haven't yet discovered.

AIGNES
Yes. More likely. It would be nice to know exactly the cause. Add this unfortunate incident to your research pool. Have your department run some tests.

(returns to the view)
Maybe this upset doesn't need to be a wasted opportunity. Have the subject's loved ones been notified?

PAVER
Sent a Griefer to meet them.

Aignes chortles lightly.

AIGNES
Griefer. Reaper. Very well.

So dismissed, Elena and Ben make for the door. Paver holds the handle, ready to open it.

AIGNES (CONT'D)
You're lucky it didn't occur at the executive level. The death of a client during an actual death experience wouldn't exactly encourage others to enjoy them. Or pay your salaries. The potential liability would be -- large.

(CONTINUED)

It stops them in their tracks. They wait for more, but nothing comes. Until --

AIGNES (CONT'D)
Miss Faulke?

ELENA
Sir?

AIGNES
You're still taking the trip, I assume?

ELENA
(weakly)
Yes sir.

AIGNES
Good. Be good for you. Should be a marvellous experience -- New aircraft and such. That is all.

Paver opens the door and guides them out, closes it behind them.

AT THE PANORAMIC WINDOW

Aignes presses a palm against the glazing, looks down on the vast metropolis below. Paver waits behind, watches.

PAVER
Mr. Aignes?

Aignes ignores him, slides open a portion of the glazing and steps out onto the --

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

And into near silence.

Instead of the rush of explosive high altitude winds, Aignes is greeted with a zen-like calm.

Paver follows, but stops inside the doorway, watches Aignes walk to the edge and extend his hand through --

A shimmering FORCE-FIELD that keeps nature at bay. A blue haze sizzles where Aignes arm intersects the field.

Aignes sleeve and hand are buffeted by wind outside the field, the effort to keep his arm steady etched on his face.

AIGNES
Looks ridiculous. Doesn't it? Just flapping mindlessly -- like an insect. Trapped... That is man without science.

(CONTINUED)

Aignes pulls his hand back inside the safety of the force field, the tips of his fingers now blue.

AIGNES (CONT'D)

When the ability to record the sensation of death, the moment of cessation, was discovered, the scientific and medical community went mad.

(beat)

Then, when it became apparent that the experience could be re-inserted, complete, into a healthy human subject, the entire world herself went insane.

(beat)

Insane for those milliseconds of rapture. The greatest, safest high ever discovered. With no obvious side effects.

PAVER

There's a dead girl in research who'd disagree. It was outlawed for a reason. A reason that's becoming more apparent.

Aignes smirks at being reminded.

AIGNES

If people stopped working to spend time with their family, climb impossible mountains, become one with nature, they'd be lauded. Death is taboo, John. Death scared the few who dared not experience her. Fear. Fear was the reason.

Aignes gestures at the sky.

AIGNES (CONT'D)

Science will eventually make us greater than gods. Perfect. Immortal. What is being done here is vital to that pursuit.

Paver watches Aignes examine his hand, like an infant discovering his foot.

AIGNES (CONT'D)

Tea, John.

Paver backs away from the opening, and disappears inside.

INT. LOACYTE LABORATORIES - ATRIUM LOBBY - DAY

Hung with invisible supports, a huge slab of granite floats like a mountain above a vast glass reception area.

Engraved upon the granite; "LOACYTE B.P.M. - BIOLOGICAL - PHARMACEUTICAL - MEDICAL" and underneath; "SCIENCE YOU CAN TRUST."

An arrogant pretence writ large for all to see. Behind the reception area --

AN ELEVATOR

Reaches the floor, deposits Elena and Ben in the lobby. Elena steps out, hand held to her forehead. Ben follows.

Across the lobby Elena catches sight of a well dressed woman, a GRIEFER, with a middle aged couple. The female half of the couple suddenly convulses, sinks to the floor, barely held up by her partner.

The Griever guides the couple away from the lobby. Away from curious eyes.

BEN

You want to go somewhere, talk about it? You've been quiet--

ELENA

I need air. And noise.

Ben gently takes hold of her shoulder.

BEN

Hold on now.

ELENA

What?

BEN

You didn't kill her.

ELENA

Ben, she exploded. What does that to a person? What sense input causes a human body to spontaneously pop?

Ben glances around nervously. A few heads stare back.

BEN

Keep it down. Relax. It's happened before. It's nothing new.

(CONTINUED)

ELENA

Heart attacks happened before. In perfectly healthy volunteers with no history of heart conditions -- now this? This is on a different level.

(leaning closer)

She repainted the damn lab!

BEN

Fine. It's escalating. Lets see if we can figure out why, okay?

Elena, hands on hips, takes in the lobby.

ELENA

You go back up, start. I still need air, clear my head. You know I forgot to feed my damn cat today? Again? Christ.

Elena takes a breath.

ELENA (CONT'D)

I'll follow you up. Go on.

Ben skulks back to the elevators. Elena watches him go, moves quickly out through the main exit.

INT. ATRIUM - VIEWING GANTRY - DAY

High above the floor, Paver leans over a rail, tracks Elena as she leave the lobby. Paver gives it a few seconds, then hurries into the main building.

EXT. GRANT PARK - HARBOUR BOARDWALK - DAY

A wide lattice of walkways, inches above a calm, glassy Lake Michigan, spreads out like a creeping ivy at the base of the spacescrapers.

Elena watches other citizens enjoy the scenery from the end of one walkway. She stares into the water, as two SEAGULLS splash down, squawking over a damp bit of floating food.

A COURIER strides towards Elena. She glances at her wrist, a notification light blinks under her skin.

ELENA

Shit.

Data scrolls INSIDE Elena's eye -- a call log from an implanted phone. She blinks the data away as the courier reaches her, slides his helmet back.

(CONTINUED)

COURIER
Elena Faulke?

ELENA
Yep?

The Courier hands over a slim envelope, a small digital device held beside it.

COURIER
Print.

Elena shoves a thumb onto the devices screen, as it emits a pleasant BEEP. The courier notices the two seagulls, still going at it.

COURIER (CONT'D)
Survival. They'll do anything to live another day. Have a nice one.

He leaves Elena alone, envelope in hand. She watches the gulls separate, and lift off, the larger of the two claiming the prize.

THE ENVELOPE

Simply has her name on it. Nothing else. She tears it open and tips the contents into her hand.

A RESIN ENCASED CHIP

Lands on her palm. Tiny, innocuous. Only a RED LINE on one side marks it. She flips the envelope over -- There is something else.

Written on the back -- "HOW DO I EXIST?"

Elena eyeballs the chip, reads the note again.

ELENA
Because someone made you.

INT. PREFAB CONDOMINIUM - CORRIDOR - DAY

Elena grips the envelope tightly, presses her free thumb on a reader set into the wall. The door of "NUMBER 523" clicks open.

INT. CONDOMINIUM 523 - ENTRANCE HALL

Elena is barely inside before a black CAT races to her, tangles its self in her feet. She scoops the animal off the floor as it meows excitedly.

(CONTINUED)

ELENA

Hey Jasper. Food, yes, I know. You going to learn to order takeout someday soon?

(pause)

You're a cat, why would you.

JASPER purrs contentedly, his human now returned to feed him. Elena lets the cat down on the floor, steps into a --

KITCHEN

-- that could pass for a lazy students dwelling. Buried somewhere under all the leftover food cartons are high-tech brushed steel digital counter-tops.

Jasper springs to a corner cabinet, scrapes it, meows.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Yeah, priorities.

Jaspers FOOD BOWL fills with jellied meat. Elena watches him eagerly dive in, eat like it could be his last meal. Elena quietly leaves him to it, moves into the --

BEDROOM

A space filled with wall mounted memories, and the flavour of a girl who didn't want to grow up. Pictures of a younger Elena, with an older man and woman, parents clearly, stand out. They smile at something far off that no longer exists.

Elena finally releases her grip on the envelope as she drops to the bed. She lies back, removes the chip, examines it closely.

The chip is old tech, but barely worn on the edges. It almost looks like an antique that's never been used.

Elena quickly slides the chip into the envelope, seals it. She opens the bedside locker, pulls out a little paper notebook.

As Elena flicks through the notebook, a 3D HOLOGRAPHIC SONOGRAM falls on her lap. Elena picks it up like it might explode. Five seconds of fetal movement loops, stamped with "E. FAULKE - 1ST TRIMESTER".

ELENA

(softly)

Shit.

Elena finds the page the sonogram fell from; shoved into the spine between two pages -- a little square PHOTOGRAPH of Elena, and a young guy with a mop of blond hair, both smiling, both barely twenty.

(CONTINUED)

ELENA (CONT'D)

Shit.

EXT. CHICAGO - ABOVE THE EL-TRAIN - DAY

Sleek carriages WHIR along frictionless rails.

INT. EL-TRAIN (MOVING) - DAY

Elena sits at the window, looks through the world below her. The train passes into a poor part of the city -- The DEAD RING, separated from the rich centre she has left behind.

Elena barely notices.

Elena's arm VIBRATES -- an incoming call. She dismisses it with a blink.

EXT. CHICAGO - DEAD RING ZONE - STREET - DAY

Outside a red brick Victorian building -- The remnants of a different era dropped between modern, decaying facades.

Elena moves past cast iron railings and jogs down the steps to the

BASEMENT LEVEL

Elena shifts a sheet of graffitied hoarding from a window.

INT. RED BRICK VICTORIAN - BASEMENT - DAY

Elena steps through the open window frame, peers around the architectural stain that is the basement -- A no star, rat infested squat.

Stagnant puddles are splashed away as she steps to the centre of the room.

Elena whirls around, searching.

ELENA

Tom? It's me.

Silence, save for a distant drip O.S. somewhere.

ELENA (CONT'D)

I know you're here. What, is there a secret knock now?

Silence again.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Fine.

(CONTINUED)

She goes to leave, when--

THE ENTIRE WALL

Behind her SHUNKS open with an almost sub-sonic BUZZ. From within, CHARON, the blond guy from the photograph, same mess of hair surrounding his head, steps into the light.

CHARON

Elena Faulke, you pussy.

ELENA

Tom Cotler. You paranoid prick.

CHARON

Tom ain't street. Harbinger of death needs to be cool. Feared.

Elena looks at the floor.

ELENA

Tell me.

CHARON

Charon.

Charon steadily backs into the lair behind him, beckons Elena to follow. She complies, goes in.

AN UNDERGROUND LAB

An explosion of hi-tech and jury-rigged equipment.

CHARON (CONT'D)

Welcome to Hades.

Elena lifts an eyebrow.

ELENA

I expected more.

CHARON

Oh there is. C'mon.

Charon grins wickedly, turns a corner. Elena follows, finds herself inside --

A HI-TECH PROCEDURE ROOM

Not unlike the room at Loacyte. In the centre, the same type of chair. This one though, is occupied.

CHARON (CONT'D)

Hope you don't mind, I got one on the slab.

The guy on the slab, overweight, sweating, unsure, sits up.