

THE ONLY WAY

A Short Film By

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY PARK - AFTERNOON

SUPER: Ottawa, 2047

Good friends and co-workers, DAN and STELLA, play chess at an outdoor table. They are mid-game and talk as they make their moves.

DAN

Higgs or graviton? Go.

STELLA

Come on. That's like asking to pick between children.

DAN

Well our names are only on the graviton paper, not the Higgs, so we can really only claim parentage to one of them.

STELLA

True.

DAN

I hadn't thought about it before but it appears we have had a child together. Scandalous. What would Scott say?

STELLA

Yes, us, and about 15 others too.

DAN

Very scandalous. How are things going with Scott?

Stella lets out a quiet but derisive laugh suggesting Scott is not in her good books right now.

STELLA

Fine. Not great. I don't want to talk about it right now.

Dan is silent, suddenly concentrating on the game.

DAN

Checkmate in 12 moves.

STELLA

12 moves... I'm not sure if I trust you.

DAN

I would love to show you.

They look at each other and Dan smiles. Stella begrudgingly places her king on its side, resigning the match.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - AFTERNOON

Dan and Stella walk together down the street. Various futuristic media portals and vendors are on the sidewalk.

STELLA

How many moves can your brain see in advance?

DAN

I don't know. It doesn't count them.

STELLA

One of my physics professors said the best human players in existence can only think 35 moves in advance.

DAN

That seems low.

Stella pauses, thinking Dan is joking. She sees he isn't.

STELLA

You're serious. Forget physics research - the government needs minds like yours. You might be able to help prepare us for when the inevitable happens.

Stella points to news report that says "Another Star System Falls to K.O.S." It includes a grainy picture of giant starships surrounding a planet.

STELLA

They say K.O.S. could be here in as soon as a decade.

DAN

The government already has the best minds. I don't think I could add anything that they haven't already thought of.

STELLA

Maybe... Maybe not.

They continue walking. They see more news reports and headlines.

STELLA (CON'T)

(mild disgust)

It's just so unbelievable - some reports are suggesting that K.O.S. is just one alien who somehow gained control over a shitload of automated military production. One guy - destroying whole civilizations. Can you imagine? How could he live with himself?

DAN

I guess Earth may not be the only planet with Hitlers.

They continue walking.

STELLA

Scott thinks there's no hope.

(looks at Dan)

What do you think?

Dan looks into Stella's eyes.

DAN

I think there's always hope.

INT. DAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

An alarm clock showing 3:33 A.M. Dan sleeps, and then... GASPS, AS HE SITS BOLT UPRIGHT IN BED. He breathes heavily, eyes wide, catching his breath. He reaches for his smart phone, which sits on the night stand.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stella's smart phone rings. Stella, groggy, fumbles for her phone, which sits on her night stand. She looks to see who is calling. She sits up and answers.

STELLA

Dan? What's up?

She listens to Dan make his request - a faint voice on the other end says: "We need to meet at Casper's Diner, now."

It's important."

STELLA (CON'T)

Now?

INT. CASPER'S DINER - NIGHT

Dan is seated at a booth looking sheepish as Stella walks up and sits down. Two cups of coffee are on the table - one for each of them.

DAN

This is your fault.

STELLA

My sincerest apologies.

DAN

My brain had a dream.

STELLA

Did it? That's... great.

DAN

I need you to track with me.

STELLA

What?

DAN

Like chess - we're going to look at the moves in advance. I need you to track them with me to make sure they check out. Can you do that?

STELLA

Dan, I like chess but I don't need to study it at four A.M....

DAN

It's not about chess. It's about hope. I may have found something.. unique.

Stella looks unconvinced.

DAN (CON'T)

Just trust me.

STELLA

Fine. Yeah, for sure.

DAN

What if the Kingdom of Stars had a defector? One that had all of the plans needed to defeat the psycho galactic alien Hitler guy at the top?

STELLA

I thought all the K.O.S. soldiers were androids. And androids don't defect.

DAN

I don't mean an android. I mean a real living being. Let's say it's one of galactic Hitler's inner circle.

STELLA

We don't even know if this guy has an inner circle. All we can tell is that he's crazy, and wants to rule and/or exterminate the universe.

DAN

You're right, it could be that it's just one lonely guy. If it is, we can only pray that God intervenes. But leaders tend to have inner circles. Let's speculate that he does too. The number of planets - whole civilizations - that they are annihilating - it has got to weigh on any sentient being - hardcore.

STELLA

So then one of his friends just slips a pill in his drink. Done. Easy.

DAN

Maybe it's not so easy. Galactic Hitler protects himself from any harm, even from internal threats. He's anal about it. But, one of his trusted advisors has a crisis of conscience and wants to stop everything - but there's no way to kill the top dog on his own - and he can't risk exposing his change of heart to any of the other advisors. What does he do?

STELLA

He sabotages the whole operation - plants a bomb or uploads a computer virus.

DAN

No, there would be too many fail-safes for one person alone to bring down an operation of that size. Every operation has weaknesses but they don't have an ultra-convenient death-star energy core - and there's too much computer security to get a virus in that effective. What does he do?

Stella thinks but can't come up with an answer.

MONTAGE - ENEMY PLANET

A shadowy figure at a computer terminal, downloading information onto a data storage unit.

An industrial production facility.

An alien satellite, orbiting the planet.

A large concrete bunker or stone-walled fortress.

An alien security panel with blinking lights.

DAN (V.O.)

He leaves. He downloads all the schematics he can. All of the details on the production facilities, the defenses of those facilities, the defenses of the planet, and even the facility, bunker or freakin' castle, that galactic Hitler uses to hide his sorry, cowardly ass.

END MONTAGE

DAN (CON'T)

This defector takes all of the data and figures out a way to slip out. This much he can sabotage.

STELLA

But that doesn't work - if he leaves with the schematics, they change

everything - the codes, the defenses,
locations- They close all the gaps in
their security.

DAN

No, not if he was smart enough...

MONTAGE - ESCAPE

A crematorium furnace, flames blazing. His clothes and a
picture of his wife on the floor in front of the furnace.

A subtle ripple of air over an evening sky (a cloaked ship
flying off into the horizon).

DAN (V.O.)

...and this guy is smart. He can do it so
they don't even know he left. He fakes
his own death, does it right - he uses
a cloaked ship to leave the planet.
Look, we're speculating right?

END MONTAGE

DAN (CON'T)

I get that this whole idea is low
probability but given our best guess on
the initial conditions, nothing else is
even possible, right? Again, outside of
divine intervention, if the universe
was going to offer up a crack in the
armor of K.O.S., this may be the only
way so let's play out what happens...
This defector, he knows what he has to
do to make sure there is no suspicion,
and he does it. Then what?

STELLA

So... He finds the nearest planet and
gives the plans to its government.

DAN

The nearest planet?

STELLA

The nearest planet that they haven't
captured or destroyed. The nearest
planet that still has a government.

DAN

How many planets, even with the full disclosure of all of the enemy's weaknesses, have the capacity to defeat K.O.S.? This has to be a group effort.

STELLA

Right...

MONTAGE - JOURNEY

A ship traveling through space.

A data storage unit lying in the ship.

A reflection in the ship's window of a shadowy figure looking out into space.

DAN (V.O.)

So he has to go further. K.O.S. is always advancing, so he's got to go deep. He can't afford to waste the plans - the only thing that has even a chance of bringing down the empire. The fate of the galaxy rests on him finding the most safe and viable hands for them.

END MONTAGE

DAN (CON'T)

By most viable, I mean He needs a planet with the best possible combination of two things: the strongest space-based military force, and the greatest ability to amass the allegiance from other star systems. So, based on our knowledge of this galaxy, which star system is that?

STELLA

Sol. Us.

DAN

Exactly. He doesn't go anywhere else. He knows we've stayed politically neutral in most inter-system conflicts. He knows we have the most allies while

having one of the largest fleets. It's Earth or nothing.

STELLA

Well, it sure hasn't happened yet. As far as the public knows, there are only defensive plans against K.O.S. right? They're just too powerful to attack.

DAN

And it may never happen, but are we tracking? If there is a hope, this is all we can see. And if so, do we have a plausible, if not the most plausible, path that this guy takes?

STELLA

Yeah, I guess.

(thinks harder)

Yes, I see what you're saying. But-

DAN

Here's where we go from there.

MONTAGE - PROBE

An alien probe rocketing into the atmosphere of a planet.

Smaller probe with antennas on top of a building.

Communication lines.

DAN (V.O.)

Now, the going theory is that K.O.S. has a network of probes and drones that travel to planets way ahead of the coming attack, and these things infiltrate the planetary networks, even some government networks. It's the perfect attack strategy. That may be the major reason why no planet has been able to defend against them.

END MONTAGE.

STELLA

So the defector can't just speak openly to try to lay the plans on the government.

DAN

His hands are tied, even once he gets here.

STELLA

So he just tells the nightly news. Blows it wide open.

DAN

All networks are still compromised. K.O.S. hears any publically broadcast details, which, once again, gives them time to change all of the defenses, add in new ones. All is lost.

STELLA

Ok, so he's got to keep it secret - talk with officials in person and never let the details get recorded.

DAN

It's true, the government supposedly has an ironclad, closed-circuit network - no connection to the primary planetary or interplanetary web. Regardless, talking with the government is the only way that any sort of interplanetary coordination can happen. That has to be the end goal.

STELLA

And we'd never know if it happens. It would be kept secret. Right up until the moment we hear of victory or defeat.

DAN

Right, but how easy is it to get an audience with the government when all of the public networks are compromised? He can't send any direct message that informs them - and not many people get an audience with the government just by walking up to the capitol and saying - 'Hey I've got some really important information, but I can only share it with your top officials, in person'. Say hello to jail - and there's no way he gets his message out safely then.

STELLA

If he can't get anything through to the government, it's a dead end. It's over.

DAN

Not necessarily. Look, maybe there's a way to get a message through, maybe there isn't. But for the sake of our speculation, let's say he's got a limited timetable and no opportunities are presenting themselves. He might be able to bide his time to figure out a way, but perhaps he can't. Perhaps he's old, or dying, and doesn't know if he'll live long enough to see his plan through.

STELLA

Why assume that? It seems unnecessary.

DAN

Just stick with me - it's plausible and it leads to a unique outcome.

STELLA

Okay, so, what - he hides his work somewhere, keeping it secret for someone else to find in case he doesn't make it?

DAN

Exactly, but how does he do it? It could be lost forever if it's too hard to find. And if he leaves a clue out in the open, then some random person finds it. They spew it all over the news, and it's all over. We're still in major risk territory here.

STELLA

What then?

DAN

He has to hide it in the open - in such a way that it can be found by someone who's looking for it, predicting his moves - and therefore knows how serious it is to keep quiet to anyone except the government.

STELLA

Hide it in the open?

MONTAGE - COMPUTER SCAN

Computer screen showing hundreds of files and folders being scanned rapidly.

Computer screen showing an encrypted file being decrypted.

DAN (V.O.)

Yes, consider: he can't make the content digital and put it anywhere on the web. It'll get scanned even if it's encrypted. We have to assume that K.O.S. has the most powerful encryption breaking protocols ever known, if they've cracked government networks. So if it can't be digital, it's gotta be -

END MONTAGE.

STELLA

- Hardcopy.

DAN

Right. It's a lot of information so it's carefully organized and collected.

STELLA

A file?

DAN

A file is too loose. It's got to be bound so nothing is lost.

STELLA

A book.

DAN

(nodding)

And where's the best place to hide a book, in the open, but completely unassuming?

STELLA

A library?

DAN

(knowing smile)

A library. Which Library?

STELLA
(in disbelief)
The Library and Archives? Here in
Ottawa?

Dan nods.

STELLA
Why on earth here?

DAN
Have you forgotten that it's the
biggest library on the planet - ever
since the Library of Congress and the
British Library were destroyed in World
War 3? Look it up on Wikipedia. If he
wants someone to predict his moves, he
picks the most obvious choice: the
biggest library.

STELLA
But a library isn't safe. Anyone could
pick it up, realize it's legit, and
expose it. Boom, plan fails. Why not a
private library? Fewer people go
through those.

DAN
How many private libraries are there on
Earth? Most have no database. You'd
have to check them one by one.

STELLA
Database? You think he'd just make a
book and title it 'A Defector's Plans
to Defeat the Kingdom of Stars?' Again,
some random person will read it and
miss the part about keeping it quiet.

DAN
It's true, there would be a chance of
accidental discovery, but this is minor
if you position it right. Think of how
many rows of old volumes are in the
library that never get touched? Even
less chance if it was logged in the
database as a book that no one was
actually looking for. But - and here's
the key - he doesn't write it at face

value, for this very reason. He encodes it all into a work of fiction, or maybe poetry. Accidental discoveries are safe from causing exposure because whoever picks it up thinks they're just reading a regular book.

STELLA

But all published books are digitized right? If it's digitized, it can be analyzed, like you said. The K.O.S. computers would probably make sense of the content even if it was written as fiction or poetry.

Dan is impressed.

MONTAGE - BOOK BINDING

A man working at a book binding machine.

Pages of a single book being arranged and bound.

DAN (V.O.)

He doesn't publish mainstream. He self publishes, at a local shop that does binding. He technically only needs one copy - probably wants it this way to minimize risk of exposure.

END MONTAGE.

STELLA

But you can't just get any self-published book into the library. It doesn't work that way, unless-

DAN

(proud of her)

-He puts it in himself.

STELLA

So he plants it. But how is anyone supposed to find it? You said yourself, he could put it beside old books that always get overlooked. Is someone supposed to check all of the books in the Library and Archives one by one?

DAN

Of course not. It's got to be searchable on the wider library network database. He wants it to be found by an appropriate person, someone who has thought this out and looks for it. He wants the best chance of that happening.

STELLA

But what you're talking about is, an ability for someone from any of the greater arm planets doing a network search for a book - that means it's got to be officially registered in the system.. Oh.

MONTAGE - HACK JOB

A shadowy figure at a computer terminal.

Gloved fingers typing on a keyboard.

DAN (V.O.)

Exactly. So he hacks in, or gets a job at the library - and logs his own book in the system. Relatively simple to do actually.

END MONTAGE.

STELLA

Okay but even so, he's not the only person in over a hundred planets to write a book about the defeat of K.O.S. There's got to be hundreds, maybe even thousands, of both fiction and poetry. That's a lot of reading to do on such a thin longshot.

Dan smiles.

DAN

Remember, I said it leads to a unique possibility? There's just one more move to anticipate, Stella. Don't forget we can view all the information on these books in the database. His is the only one that comes from a publishing company that doesn't actually exist -

that there's no record of anywhere. He would make sure of this when he enters the record. It's the easiest way to make his searchable entry stand out to a person who's looking for it, but look normal to everyone else.

STELLA

Right, even though he self-publishes, he leaves a signpost..

(entranced, slowly)

So what you're saying is: We go to the Library and Archives here in Ottawa, and perform a search - for a lone fiction or poetry book about the defeat of K.O.S. We cross reference the publishing companies, and if a book turns up that has a non-existent publishing company.. We have the very real plans to defeat Galactic Hitler - that were smuggled out of the lion's den by a rogue member of his inner circle?

DAN

Want to find out?

INT. LIBRARY CONCOURSE - HELP DESK

A smiling HELP DESK ANDROID in the form of a young, extremely well-kempt woman, stands behind a desk that has signage saying "Help Desk". She speaks fluidly, looks fully human, but signage clearly designates an android.

Dan and Stella walk up to the desk.

HELP DESK ANDROID

Hello. How can I help you today?

DAN

We'd like to find a book.

HELP DESK ANDROID

Sure. Do you know the name of the book you're looking for?

DAN

No, we'd like to do a topical search of certain genres?

HELP DESK ANDROID

Which genres would you like to search?

DAN

Fiction and poetry.

HELP DESK ANDROID

Ok. And what is the topic?

DAN

Let's start broad - anything on the Kingdom of Stars.

HELP DESK ANDROID

Ok. Searching... There are 13,945 books in the selected genres on this topic in all libraries in the greater arm library network.

DAN

What about in this library only?

HELP DESK ANDROID

Searching... There are 1,863 books in the selected genres on this topic, at this library.

DAN

How many of those have only one copy of the book across all libraries.

HELP DESK ANDROID

Searching... 786 have only one copy across all libraries.

DAN

How many of those are published by a publishing company that has published no other books on record, in any library, or anywhere else?

HELP DESK ANDROID

Searching...

Dan and Stella look at each other. The tension is palpable.

HELP DESK ANDROID (CON'T)

One... Would you like to know where to find it?

Dan turns to Stella.

DAN

Absolutely.

Dan pulls out his phone, and holds it up in front of him.

INT. LIBRARY - 7TH FLOOR ELEVATORS - NIGHT

The elevator door opens. Dan and Stella walk toward the specified section and row. As they walk, Dan rechecks the info that has been transferred to his smart phone. They find the section...and then the row.

They slowly walk down the row, watching the numbers on the books. THEY SEE IT. They stop and look at each other. Stella pulls it out. The title says "Feces on Canvas: Abstract Visual Poetry Inspired by the Dirtbag Leader of the Kingdom of Stars". She pages through.

STELLA

It's only images. Looks like paintings made with real shit... classy.

(continues paging)

No technical specifications on defenses... And if these are the methods needed to defeat him, I'm not sure the plan will work.

(more paging)

What if he digitally embedded the information, super small, using the pixels of the images?

DAN

Possible. But printing doesn't usually retain that level of resolution. I doubt you could reconstitute information that small... but we could scan it - see if we find something...

Dan looks like he's thinking.

STELLA

What is it?

DAN

We got excited. There's one thing we didn't ask in our search.

Dan taps his phone, swipes and taps again - it chimes.

DAN
 (to phone)
 Were more than one copy of this book
 printed?

Dan points the phone at the book cover. The phone chimes.

PHONE ASSISTANT
 Yes, 50 copies were printed.

DAN
 (to phone)
 Are there digital copies available?

PHONE ASSISTANT
 Yes. Would you like the link?

Dan lowers his phone. It's not the jackpot they were looking for. Stella looks intently at Dan who is disappointed but still processing.

STELLA
 Hey, it was a good thought - an amazing
 thought. We should keep checking back.

(with care)
 To see this far... is amazing.

DAN
 (still thinking)
 It was just a hunch. A pretty low
 probability one at that. I mean with
 how long this war has been going - if
 there was a defector, chances are he
 would have reached this side of the
 galaxy a long time ago. Any book should
 have been here already, logged in, even
 if someone else beat us to it.

Dan smiles at Stella.

DAN (CON'T)
 We can still hope the government has a
 plan before the Kingdom gets to us.

STELLA
 If there was a defector, maybe he made
 it to the government.

DAN

Yeah. He would have thought of a way.

(smiles)

We should go. It's almost time for work... I'm really sorry about keeping you up.

STELLA

(showing book)

It's no problem. I found a really good book. I've been meaning to get into art.

Dan chuckles as they start walking back towards the elevator, book in hand. They approach the elevator.

STELLA

You know the worst part about this?

DAN

What?

STELLA

I can never play chess with you again.

Dan smiles as they enter the elevator, presses button. Stella takes hold of Dan's hand - the door closes.

Immediately, the adjacent elevator door opens and an extremely elderly employee exits, pushing a cart of books. He wheels it over to the poetry section - to the row directly behind the one Dan and Stella were in.

He stops at the end of the row, picks up from his cart, a thick, recently bound book with a plain cover and new registration sticker on the spine. The book is called "The Only Way: Defeating the Kingdom of Stars".

He holds it in both hands and gazes at it with tired eyes that begin to tear up. He kneels down and slides it into the bottom corner of the row, beside a set of other books of exactly the same design and color on the bottom shelf. He waits a few moments longer, looking at it.

He stands up and walks away, wheeling the cart.

FADE OUT.

THE END