

THE OTHER SIDE

Written by

Bruce A. McClelland

Logline: When a popular science-fiction novelist loses the ability to write coherently, a specialist in near-death experiences urges him to post his strange writings on social media. A cult following interprets them as messages from the "other side", and they will kill to get more.

Copyright (c) 2022 by Bruce A. McClelland

Draft 3.2 - February 27, 2022

Bruce McClelland
511 1st St. N, Apt. 607
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 242-4981 bmcclell@outlook.com

INT. LARGE CHAIN BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

It's standing-room-only around banks of folding chairs occupied by the animated audience for a reading and discussion by the noted science-fiction writer KEVIN BASCOMB (mid-40s).

Bascomb, dressed in authorial black, stands at a podium on a makeshift dais. Seated behind him, facing the audience, is his publisher, REGINALD SMYTHE (60s). Kevin's wife, EMILY (slightly older than her husband), sits in the front row.

Publicity placards with author photos of Bascomb, images of the cover of his recent book, a couple of blurbs, announce the current event:

WELCOME TO THE 17TH ANNUAL BOOK FESTIVAL
AN EVENING WITH KEVIN BASCOMB, AUTHOR OF "THE EMPATHY BOX"

Kevin closes the hardback book he has just read from, and takes a slight bow.

KEVIN

Thank you.

Thunderous applause. Gradually, people in the audience stand up, still clapping. Kevin bows with gratitude. Realizing there is more, the applause abates, people sit back down.

KEVIN (cont'd)

Thank you. I'd be glad to take any questions or comments.

A goateed hipster, TOBY FREEMAN (20s), eventually stands up.

TOBY

Hi, Mr. Bascomb. My name is Toby Freeman. Thank you so much for reading parts of your latest book. My question is, does your title refer to Philip K. Dick's story, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep"?

Toby sits down.

The sound of a muffled, slow, regular HEARTBEAT overlays the exchange between Toby and Kevin.

KEVIN

That's very astute of you, Toby. Yes, it does. Most people only know that that story was the loose basis for "Blade Runner".

Kevin looks around for follow-up questions.

The HEARTBEAT grows slightly louder, slightly faster.

HASHTAG, a skinny blonde with hollow eyes, stands up. Kevin points to her.

KEVIN (cont'd)
Your name?

HASHTAG
Hi. "Hashtag." Don't ask.

KEVIN
And what is your hashtag-Question?

HASHTAG
Um, actually I think I saw a lot of
Dick in your book.

People snicker. Hashtag looks around and scowls.

HASHTAG (cont'd)
Oh grow up! Anyhow, Mr. Bascomb. I'm
wondering if you think anyone might
accuse you of ripping him off. Phil
Dick, I mean.

The HEARTBEAT is now much louder, much faster.

Kevin takes a sip of water from the glass at the podium.

KEVIN
Well, I haven't been shy about
acknowledging my admiration and his
influence. But "ripping off"? That
seems--

The glass in Kevin's hand drops, shatters, spraying water
and glass fragments around the stage.

The HEARTBEAT races.

Kevin looks down at what has just happened. He bends over as
if to pick the glass up, but instead collapses. His hands
and face are suddenly covered in blood. Kevin is lifeless.

Emily jumps up, rushes over to him, doesn't know what to do.

EMILY
(screaming)
Help! Somebody help him! Please!

Commotion and panic follow. A middle-aged MAN in the audience pushes his way through the crowd, gets down and prepares to administer CPR. After a few compressions,

The HEARTBEAT suddenly STOPS. The man looks up at Emily and shakes his head: Sorry.

A bookstore SECURITY GUARD breaks through the crowd carrying a portable defibrillator.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT - MOVING

A muffled SIREN wails. Kevin, unconscious, his face cut, wears an oxygen mask. A rapid irregular heart rate is visible and audible on the monitor. An EMT calls in status updates over the two-way communications system.

A second EMT, KEISHA, early 20s, masked, adjusts Kevin's oxygen.

KEISHA
At least there's a pulse.

She checks a monitor.

KEISHA (cont'd)
Be a shame if he dies. He's so young.

INT. CARDIAC CARE UNIT - NIGHT

PRE-LAP: BEEPING and other Intensive Care SOUNDS. Muted chattering VOICES.

Kevin lies in a hospital bed, still unconscious. Alien tubes and wires connect him to several monitors.

DR. CHARLES LIDDELL, Cardiology Resident, mid-30s, stands by the elaborate bed, watching the monitors.

Emily and Reg Smythe hang back to watch the magic of Kevin being pulled from an induced coma.

LIDDELL
His body temperature is returning to normal, and we've started to withdraw the drugs that kept him in a coma.

EMILY
How long will this take? Will he be alright?

LIDDELL

He should be coming around any minute. I need to warn you: our last E.E.G. suggested some left frontal damage. But we won't really know the extent until he's conscious. Even then...

Emily gasps. Tears well up.

EMILY

You mean--?

Liddell shifts focus to his patient. He scans the monitors, then smiles as he sees Kevin's eyelids begin to twitch.

Signs of life! The doctor holds Kevin by the shoulders in a congratulatory gesture. He speaks to his patient slowly and loudly, the way Americans tend to talk to foreigners.

LIDDELL

You were *dead*, buddy! But we pulled you back!

Kevin, eyes fully open, looks around, confused. He notices his wife and Reg.

LIDDELL (CONT'D)

I'm Dr. Liddell. Do you know where you are?

KEVIN

(disoriented)

This is strange... very strange.

Kevin eyes all the equipment.

KEVIN (cont'd)

Where did that kind man go? He was just-- Did something happen to me?

LIDDELL

Do you know what day it is?

Cleverly, Kevin looks at a whiteboard calendar of nursing shifts and prescribed treatments on the wall.

KEVIN

The third?

The physician smiles, checks with Emily.

LIDDELL
Seems he's really back, folks.

EMILY
Welcome back. I don't know who you
were with, but you're with us now.

Everyone in the room smiles in agreement. Kevin smiles back,
not exactly sure why.

KEVIN
'Whom.'

INT. CARDIAC CARE UNIT - DAY

Kevin sits up in the complicated bed, his hospital gown open
enough to reveal some bruises and bandages. He is now only
attached to a BP/EKG monitor.

Emily stands next to the railing holding his hand in one
hand and a tablet in the other.

EMILY
Made the front page of The Progress.

She shows him the screen, which reads:

"AUTHOR BASCOMB COLLAPSES AT BOOK FESTIVAL"

KEVIN
Lucky me. But, sorry. Total blank.
Seems an odd way to get some
publicity, though.

EMILY
Your heart stopped. By some
definitions, you were dead.

KEVIN
Whoa! Sounds serious.

EMILY
No, not really. A coma for three
days, is all. Piece of cake.

KEVIN
Yeah, so they told me. I had this
incredible dream. This...amazing...
man! I didn't want to wake up.

A floor nurse pushes a cart of equipment into the room. Emily realizes it's time to go. She leans down and kisses him on the forehead.

EMILY

Your nurse is stuck with you now.
I'll be back.

NURSE

No, ma'am. Your man is stuck with himself. He's the one made the choice not to leave us for now. You know I'm right, don't you, Mr. Kevin?

INT. UNIVERSITY NEUROSCIENCE LAB - DAY

Kevin sits alone in a small office with an open laptop: he is writing. Or: trying to write. He taps at the keys, then stops, then stares at the screen. He repeats this several time, each time more disappointed.

He grabs his head as if to keep it from exploding, then slams the laptop clamshell closed, stands up, yanks out the plug, and storms out of the room with it.

INT. DR. NIA THORNTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Kevin, fully dressed, sits on the edge of an examination table in the office of Dr. NIA THORNTON, early 40s, a university hospital-affiliated neurologist. Emily sits in a chair by the wall.

THORNTON

Kevin, you may feel fine physically, but you're still recovering, and it's only been a couple of weeks.

KEVIN

That's what my-- my--
(points toward Emily)
she says. Not to, you know, get all
wor-- all--
(struggling)
upset. But what do I do? How long?

THORNTON

Your writing test results confirm you are suffering from a condition known as agraphia - it affects your ability to write, but not so much to talk or understand.

KEVIN

Great. I'm a writer, you know.

(turns toward Emily)

Or: was.

Emily stands up.

EMILY

Is there a chance it will improve?

THORNTON

Actually, it may be of some benefit to continue to write... That can reactivate the damaged neural pathways. So don't give up.

Kevin gets off the table. Dr. Thornton picks up a sheet of paper from a desk and hands it to him.

THORNTON (cont'd)

I'd like to refer you to a psychologist who has done a lot of work with patients who've... come back from, let's call it the "other side". With experiences like yours.

EMILY

Thank you, Dr. Thornton.

Kevin glances at the paper, frowns.

KEVIN

(points at Emily)

I have my own shrink, thank you very much.

THORNTON

Oh, he's not a therapist, Kevin. He's a scientist...an investigator. But he might be able to help you understand what happened when you were... dead.

INT. NEUROSCIENCE LAB/DR. WOLFSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Kevin notices an open office door and a sign reading "Dr. Gray Wolfson". He enters tentatively.

WOLFSON sits preoccupied at a large desk littered with stuffed folders. He is slim, early 70s, wearing a bow tie and a rumpled off-white linen suit.

The accolades and degrees hanging on the walls tell us he is a big deal.

Kevin taps on the door to announce himself, walks in.

KEVIN
Dr. Wolfson?

Wolfson looks up, smiles, motions for Kevin to close the door behind him.

WOLFSON
Ah! Mr. Bascomb? Thank you for coming in. Please sit down.

Wolfson points to the chair across from him. Kevin sits, looks around at images and strange devices.

WOLFSON (cont'd)
I don't know if you're familiar with what we do here, but--

KEVIN
Well, there's lots of stuff about you on the web.

WOLFSON
Ah, yes. So you know we study near-death experiences. NDEs. Nia - Dr. Thornton - shared some details about your case with me.

Kevin can only nod.

WOLFSON (cont'd)
What can you tell me about your experience?

KEVIN
Gotta tell you up front, I don't remember any tunnels or brilliant lights, or looking down on my body, any of that stuff. Sorry.

WOLFSON
Of course. Those are rare features. But you were in a state where your body stopped functioning, and your brain wasn't getting any oxygen.

KEVIN
I don't know if it was what you call an NDE.

(MORE)

KEVIN (cont'd)
It felt more like a dream, but... I
don't know... mystical? Like I was in
another world. Definitely.

WOLFSON
Anything else?

KEVIN
There was this man. Kind of.

EXT. DREAMY UNREAL SPACE

A hazy, slightly unfocused image of a MAN's face high in an
abstract frame. The man smiles warmly, welcoming. His face
resolves to vaguely resemble Wolfson. His facial expression
is paternal, open.

END FLASHBACK

KEVIN
That's all I remember: just this man.
He was like welcoming me. Greeting
me.
(grins)
Now that I think about it, he looked
kinda like you.

Wolfson smiles, jots a note on a pad.

WOLFSON
I'm not sure what to make of that. I
don't remember being in your mind. At
least that evening.
(chuckles)
But you never know. So... I hope you
don't mind that Nia showed me some
writing samples from your neuro exam.

Kevin shrugs.

WOLFSON (cont'd)
Don't worry. It's completely
confidential. I just want to discuss
one thing, you mind?

KEVIN
Shoot.

Wolfson pulls a sheet of paper from Kevin's file.

WOLFSON

This is your first writing sample,
when she asked you to try to write
the beginning of a story. Ready?

(reads aloud)

"Mars heads to me here with red leg
stuff surround there planet. Face
droid father leaves." Can you tell me
what that means?

Kevin shakes his head, scowls.

KEVIN

No idea.

WOLFSON

Do you think it made sense to you
when you wrote it?

Kevin at first shakes his head, then nods.

KEVIN

Yeah, maybe. I guess.

WOLFSON

Most people in my profession -
including Dr. Thornton, by the way -
think this kind of difficulty writing
is caused by brain damage. But I want
you to know that in your case, I
think something else is going on.

Kevin sits up, surprised.

KEVIN

Oh?

WOLFSON

I'm very interested in your
experience, and especially your
strange - let's call them
'difficult' - writings. Would you be
willing to work with us in the
department? As a subject, I mean.

KEVIN

Well, I don't know. I mean, I've got
to do something. I'm obviously not
going to be a writer again.

WOLFSON

Let's not rule that out. After all, the information form you submitted seemed to have logical answers. So maybe it's not the act of writing itself that is the problem.

KEVIN

You mean kind of like writer's block?

WOLFSON

Not exactly. But we'll have to see. In any case, thank you for your time. My assistant will contact you to enroll you into our study.

They shake hands. Kevin leaves Wolfson's office.

INT. NEUROSCIENCE LAB/DR. WOLFSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Kevin notices an open office door and a sign reading "Dr. Gray Wolfson". He enters tentatively.

WOLFSON sits preoccupied at a large desk littered with stuffed folders. He is slim, early 70s, wearing a bow tie and a rumpled off-white linen suit.

The accolades and degrees hanging on the walls tell us he is a big deal.

Kevin taps on the door to announce himself, walks in.

KEVIN

Dr. Wolfson?

Wolfson looks up, smiles, motions for Kevin to close the door behind him.

WOLFSON

Ah! Mr. Bascomb? Thank you for coming in. Please sit down.

Wolfson points to the chair across from him. Kevin sits, looks around at images and strange devices.

WOLFSON (cont'd)

I don't know if you're familiar with what we do here, but--

KEVIN

Well, there's lots of stuff about you on the web.

WOLFSON

Ah, yes. So you know we study near-death experiences. NDEs. Nia - Dr. Thornton - shared some details about your case with me.

Kevin can only nod.

WOLFSON (cont'd)

What can you tell me about your experience?

KEVIN

Gotta tell you up front, I don't remember any tunnels or brilliant lights, or looking down on my body, any of that stuff. Sorry.

WOLFSON

Of course. Those are rare features. But you were in a state where your body stopped functioning, and your brain wasn't getting any oxygen.

KEVIN

I don't know if it was what you call an NDE. It felt more like a dream, but... I don't know... mystical? Like I was in another world. Definitely.

WOLFSON

Anything else?

KEVIN

There was this man. Kind of.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. DREAMY UNREAL SPACE

A hazy, slightly unfocused image of a MAN's face high in an abstract frame. The man smiles warmly, welcoming. His face resolves to vaguely resemble Wolfson. His facial expression is paternal, open.

END FLASHBACK

INT. FIRESIGN PUBLISHING OFFICE - DAY

Kevin, a leather messenger bag slung over his shoulder, follows his editor, Reg, out of his office into the lobby.

Reg -- old school, horn-rimmed glasses, bow tie, the works -- pauses by the desk of his ASSISTANT, who is texting someone.

SMYTHE

We're going down to the Greek place for lunch. Should be back in an hour or so.

INT. VIVLIOTIKI RESTAURANT - DAY

The lunchtime crowd at a local Greek eatery is a cross between business casual professionals, students, hipsters. Kevin and Reg Smythe sit uncomfortably at a small two-top in the corner. The WAITER pours Kevin and his editor each a glass of dark red wine, and walks away, taking their menus.

SMYTHE

Of course, with your heart attack--

KEVIN

Cardiac arrest.

SMYTHE

...your cardiac arrest, we're glad to give you an extension on your contract. But we'd need to see something soon. You're our top seller, and to be honest, things have not been--how do I say this?--

KEVIN

They suck? Well, my life, too.

SMYTHE

Well, I wouldn't put it so--

KEVIN

Look, here's the thing, Reg. When I try to write, I think it sounds fine, but when someone reads it back to me, like Em, it doesn't make sense. I use the wrong ...sound meanings...words.

SMYTHE

Well, maybe my copy editor can fix that. Have any pages with you?

Kevin reaches into his messenger bag on the floor next to him, and pulls out a large envelope, hands it to Smythe.

Smythe extracts a thin sheaf of pages from the packet and begins reading. His expression deteriorates.

SMYTHE (cont'd)

I see what you mean. Let me take it back and think about it. But you're right: I can't publish this as is.

KEVIN

What's weird is, the urge to write. I can like see the whole story. I don't remember anything from that time, but it feels like I can sort of watch things. Out of body. But I can't make sense when I write.

SMYTHE

I'm sorry, Kevin. Let's hope this is temporary.

KEVIN

Yeah, yeah. "Lucky to be alive," right? But what if I'm not?

INT. BASCOMB HOME - KEVIN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The desktop printer in Kevin's office makes a GRINDING noise, indicating a possible paper jam. Kevin puts his laptop aside and gets up to inspect the printer.

KEVIN

Shit! Fuck!

He yanks at the crinkled and useless output until he gets it all out from the rollers. He looks at the page and scowls.

KEVIN (cont'd)

(to himself)

Goddamn it!

In a frustrated huff, he stamps out of his office into the living room to show the catastrophe to his wife, who is sitting on the sofa, reading. She peers up over her glasses.

INT. BASCOMB HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

EMILY

What's up, hon?

KEVIN

This!

He holds up the ripped page and waves it in the air.

KEVIN (cont'd)

Not only won't they let me write, now they won't let me even read it! What the fuck is going on?

EMILY

Your printer jam again? Calm down, Kevin. So it's time to get a new one. What's the big deal?

KEVIN

You don't understand. It's like they're after me.

Emily stands up and walks over to her distressed hubby.

EMILY

Oh come on, Kev. Nobody's after you.

KEVIN

I know, I know. But sometimes it really feels like that. Like I'm not in control anymore.

Emily puts her arms around Kevin.

EMILY

So these demons or whatever are coming after your old laserjet? Why? A little out of date, whoever 'they' are. You should post everything online now.

KEVIN

(calmer)

You're right, of course. It's just that--

Emily takes the ripped page back to the sofa, and starts to read aloud.

EMILY

"Body was Russian police predator. Nebulous presence of killers grow insidiously. Kill only killers antipathy box."

Emily stares at the page as if doing so will make it clear.

KEVIN

What do you think? Shall I?

EMILY

Hmmm... I kind of see why you're being followed.

(grins)

And, no, I don't mean literally. The Russian police should intrigue them. And the Electric Sheep reference.

KEVIN

When I hear you read it, it's really different from what I heard in my head. Can't explain it.

EMILY

You don't need to. It's good for you to keep writing. And keep posting these passages. What's the harm?

KEVIN

Right. Worst case, everyone thinks I'm crazy.

(whispers to himself)

What's the harm?

INT. MAGOO'S BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Kevin, in khaki shorts and a film festival T-shirt, browses the Science Fiction section of a small indie bookstore. A handful of book lovers scan other shelves.

Kevin bends down to pull out a hardback from a low shelf: Philip K. Dick's *The Crack in Space*. As he stands back up, he is accosted by TOBY, who attended Kevin's reading. He no longer sports a goatee.

TOBY

That's one of my favorites, though it's not very well known. It predicts Obama. And the pandemic!

Kevin is surprised by this customer's intrusion, but why not chat the guy up?

KEVIN

Yes, it was quite prescient in '63. Me, I tend to like stories about breaches in the space-time continuum, discovery of parallel or superimposed worlds, that kind of stuff.

Kevin scans Toby's face more closely.

KEVIN (cont'd)
Hold it! Do I know you?

Toby grins that the author maybe remembers him.

TOBY
You answered my question at the
festival. You know. Right before
you--

KEVIN
Right before I what?

TOBY
You know. That thing that happened.

KEVIN
Oh, *that*! Gee, I'd almost completely
forgotten.

TOBY
Really?

KEVIN
(smiling)
No.

Kevin turns to check out. Toby touches his arm.

TOBY
Mr. Bascomb?

KEVIN
Kevin. Please. You've earned it.

TOBY
Well, Mister - I mean, Kevin. I'm in
an online group of sci-fi fans.
Stans, maybe. We sometimes do meet-
ups. It would be totally mental if
you could come talk to us.

Kevin's expression goes from doubt to curiosity to pride.

KEVIN
Well... I'm not sure I have much to
say these days.

TOBY
Are you cra-- kidding? We can't stop
talking about that stuff you've been
posting lately. Like, what it's
really about. Those messages.

(MORE)

TOBY (cont'd)

It would be a coup to hear it from
the Man!

Pride fades into uncertainty.

KEVIN

Oh, that stuff? That was my wife's
idea, to post those things online.
You know: my "experimental writing"
phase. So you think I know what
they're about?

TOBY

It doesn't matter. It would be
totally cool just to hear what you
think. Tell you what. We've got a
group on FB. You know--
(smirks)
a channel for you old guys. It's
called HorseloverFat. One word. Check
it out, and if you join the group,
you can see if you'd like to talk to
us. We'd love it. Oh, and Hashtag
will be there.

KEVIN

Hashtag?

Toby is surprised by Kevin's failure to recognize the name.

TOBY

Seriously. We'd love it.

Kevin looks down at the Philip K. Dick novel he has been
intending to purchase.

KEVIN

OK. But I'd better pay for this
before I forget to do that, too.

INT. UNIVERSITY NEUROSCIENCE LAB - DAY

Kevin sits at a desk with a laptop in front of him. His head
is covered with a mesh network of small electrodes, the
wires dovetail into a braided cable plugged into
visualization equipment.

Drs. Wolfson and Thornton stand opposite Kevin. A young LAB
TECH adjusts various connections and parameters.

WOLFSON

Kevin, we're just trying to capture a series of "snapshots" of your nervous system when you are trying to write. We want to see what parts of your brain "light up" when you are writing certain things, and especially when you are struggling.

The lab attendant finishes, gives a thumbs up to the docs.

Kevin reaches up to touch his scalp, but Thornton waves for him to stop. He complies.

KEVIN

I'd like a selfie to post on my blog. I can only imagine what this looks like.

THORNTON

No problem. If you want, we can even give you images of your scans. Video!

WOLFSON

I want to thank you again for agreeing to do this. It won't hurt in the least, we're just trying to get a baseline. I'm going to give you a couple of "writing assignments." Our device will capture various impulses while you write - even when you don't. We can synch the results to the actual output.

KEVIN

Do you think this will help me write again?

WOLFSON

Well, it won't hurt. But that's not our purpose. As you know, I think you have the ability to reach unconscious memories of your NDE. We're just trying to find evidence of that.

KEVIN

Whatever you say, boss. At least you're giving me some influencer content!

THORNTON

We'll be in the next room so you don't feel self-conscious. Just relax. You can't do anything wrong.

KEVIN

First time anyone's ever said that to me!

The two scientists walk away into an adjoining room, leaving Kevin alone. He looks around, stares into the laptop monitor to make out his pale reflection.

He looks strange to himself. He is tempted to touch one of the electrodes on his head, then remembers Thornton's caution. He sits back.

Wolfson's VOICE beams into the room over a ceiling speaker.

WOLFSON (O.C.)

Kevin, for your first assignment, I'd like you to reflect on a memory you have of you and your father. Anything - a baseball game, a drive somewhere. Whatever. This will be timed for about five minutes. You can start writing...now.

Kevin puts his hands on the keyboard. At first, he types slowly, one word at a time. But then his fingers start to fly over the keys, as though he were typing random letters.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)

Kevin, now STOP.

He does.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)

Very good. Very good indeed. Now, Kevin, for your second assignment. I want you to describe as much as you can remember when you were coming out of the coma.

KEVIN

(toward the ceiling)

That's not very much, I'm afraid.

WOLFSON (O.C.)

We'll see about that. But it doesn't really matter for our purposes. Are you ready? BEGIN.

Once again, Kevin hesitates, then begins to type staccato. He closes his eyes but continues to touch type. His typing speed increases to normal for a professional writer: fast but not blistering. He never stops to correct any typos.

The assignment time is up.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)
Kevin, now STOP.

Kevin opens his eyes, stops. He wants to scratch his head, but avoids doing so.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)
Great, Kevin. Now for your final assignment, I want you to think about something you've already written. Maybe from one of your books - something you remember. Preferably, one of your stranger or more mystical passages. I want you to try to recreate that passage as much as you can. Is that clear?

Kevin looks toward the speaker, nods.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)
OK. Begin.

Without hesitation, and with his eyes open this time, Kevin starts typing as rapidly and rhythmically as if he were taking dictation. Again, he does not seem to stop to correct mistakes.

WOLFSON (O.C.) (cont'd)
Kevin, now STOP.

Kevin looks at the screen with the page he has just typed. Superimposed on the word processor is his dim reflection, with all the electrodes. But his face is different: the reflection resembles the face of the man in his coma dream.

Wolfson and Thornton come back into the room. Thornton deftly removes the electrodes from his scalp, while the tech unplugs various cables and powers down the boxes.

WOLFSON
That's all for today. How do you feel?

KEVIN

Really strange. I could see the things you wanted me to describe, but the text on the screen confused me. On the second one, I closed my eyes, but it didn't really help.

WOLFSON

That's good to know. Nia and I are going to go over this experiment together, and we'll contact you with anything we can share with you, OK?

KEVIN

I guess.

THORNTON

Thank you very much, Kevin. Your participation is very valuable for our research.

Kevin gets up. The doctors extend their hands to say good-bye. Kevin walks out of the lab.

INT. BASCOMB HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Kevin sits with a coffee mug at the breakfast nook. He reads a Twitter feed on his tablet while Emily finishes plating.

KEVIN

Holy shit! Em! Listen to this: quote Those SciFires losers continue to look for hidden references to P.K.D. in K's recent posts. Fuckheads. Totally missing the Truth. Unquote.

Emily sets two plates of scrambled eggs and toast on the table.

EMILY

Need anything else before I sit down? Juice? More coffee?

KEVIN

Jesus. Gets worse. Twitter. "K makes reference to the 'Russian police' in his post on July 3rd. Those losers claim this is an obvious reference to androids. But @AfterLifer says the Russian police is what K..."

(MORE)

KEVIN (cont'd)
- I think that's supposed to be me -
"calls the guards that don't want you
to come back."

Receiving no reply to her question, Emily sits down.

EMILY
I don't know, Kev. Seems pretty
obvious to me.
(grins)
OK, not really.

KEVIN
When I decided to start posting this
stuff, I wasn't expecting this kind
of... whatever it is.

EMILY
Insanity?

KEVIN
By the way, I met with Gray
yesterday.

Emily rolls her eyes.

EMILY
You call him 'Gray' now? You too?
Jesus. The stories. My roommate.

KEVIN
I know. I've seen the way he checks
out the merchandise. But he's really
done his homework on all this stuff.

Emily jerks her hand against her coffee mug so hard it
sloshes over.

EMILY
Just be careful, Kevin. I get it he's
a big shot and everything, especially
after he did consulting for that
movie. About the med students.

KEVIN
Yeah. Six degrees of Kevin. Thing is,
he actually seems interested in all
this trolling about my posts.

EMILY
Why?

KEVIN

I'm not sure. He seems convinced that when I was dead, and because I'm a writer, it's like I was "sent back" here with these messages.

EMILY

For whom? No one I know understands that language.

KEVIN

Wouldn't it be funny if these crazy conspiracy people were on to something real, but they're too dumb to know it?

EMILY

Dumb enough to be dangerous. As we saw not so long ago. Like I said, Kev: be careful.

INT. FIRESIGN PUBLISHING OFFICE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Reg, along with his senior editor NANCY DELOITTE (40s) and his marketing manager BILL HAVLICEK (50, paunchy), sit casually around an oval conference table. Kevin sits across from them.

REG

Kevin, you know Nancy, of course.

Kevin nods in her direction.

REG (cont'd)

And this is Bill Havlicek, our new marketing manager. Bill came over from NetX to help us develop our posture in the social media world.

Kevin looks at Bill, but doesn't nod.

REG (cont'd)

I'd like Bill to walk you through what we're seeing online with regard to our recent projects.

KEVIN

I guess you mean Electric Sheep.

REG

Well, yes, but--

Bill stands up and walks over to an electronic whiteboard, holding a remote control.

BILL

Hi, Kevin. I've heard a lot about you and how important you are to Firesign. I'll confess I hadn't read your work before signing on... Science Fiction isn't really my cup of tea.

KEVIN

Is that what you call it?

Reg scowls at Kevin. Bill clicks the remote, and a social network graph appears on the board. He points to a dense area of the network with a laser pointer.

BILL

This is a kind of simplified network graph that looks at some connections to Firesign. This dark area here? That's you.

KEVIN

Doesn't look like me.

Forced laugh from Bill.

BILL

Well, to me it does.

He clicks again, and the dense area expands and drifts to the center of the screen.

BILL (cont'd)

I'm not expecting you to understand all the details, but if you look closely, you'll see that the links have different colors. Depending on whether our sentiment analytics show them to be positive or negative.

Nancy clears her throat.

NANCY

Exactly how do you determine positive or negative sentiment? That kind of binary thinking seems simplistic.

BILL

That's a good question, and we can discuss that offline.

(MORE)

BILL (cont'd)
But we live in a polarized world, you
can't ignore that. And what this
shows...

Bill hits the remote again, a bar graph appears.

BILL (cont'd)
...is that Kevin's online postings of
his... what would you call them,
Kevin, those texts?

KEVIN
How about "experiments"?

Bill muffles a sneer.

BILL
Works for me. Anyway, what we're
seeing is that there's a lot of
interest in Kevin out there.

Bill moves to the next screen: a more elaborate heat map
with lots of dark red areas.

BILL (cont'd)
That interest...

He points the laser pointer at a very dark red square on the
map, then a bright thick red line.

BILL (cont'd)
...is unfortunately mostly negative.
And it's connected right to us.
Firesign. In other words...

Bill turns off the screen and moves back to his chair and
sits down.

BILL (cont'd)
Hostility to Kevin's online activity
is adversely affecting us. Our
reputation.

Kevin turns to Reg, boiling.

KEVIN
Reg. Really? You dragged me in here
just so this puffed up marketing dude
could show some phony baloney pseudo-
analysis to give you cover for
killing my Electric Sheep contract?

REG

Kevin, hold on. First of all, Bill's analytics are hardly "pseudo". His work at NetX kept them alive through the pandemic.

Reg nods at Bill, who smiles.

REG (cont'd)

Secondly, no one's talking about killing your project. But we do have to pay attention to the public. That's the same root that's in "PUBLISHer", you may be aware.

Kevin stands up.

KEVIN

We've worked together a long time, Reg. My books have allowed both of us to have careers doing something we like. We never paid attention to the thuggish opinions of the great unwashed, and we did fine.

NANCY

Kevin, calm down. We're just saying that some of the reactions to the... "experiments" you've been posting are unexpected, and Bill's analysis has indicated that it's having an effect on the sales of the other books on our list.

KEVIN

OK. Let's see how calm you'd be in my position. My cardiac arrest leaves me unable to write "fiction" anymore. My neurologist thinks that continuing to write will help my brain maybe. Reg, it was you and Emily thought it would be fun for me to start posting those ravings. Let's be honest about what they really are. So I did. Then I lost my career, my income, and now you're bailing on my only contract.

Kevin turns to leave.

KEVIN (cont'd)

I don't have much choice. Funny thing is, negative or not, at least there--

REG

Kevin--

KEVIN

...are a lot of people reading my stuff. If you look at that first network Bill showed, maybe you can see that the most connections were to me. Not to Firesign or any of your other writers. What would you do? No, Reg. Let's let this play out. Do what you've got to do to protect your precious reputation from "negative sentiment."

Kevin walks out of the room.

EXT. LOFT BUILDING - NIGHT

A once industrial neighborhood in the middle of hipsterization: a few craft beer and espresso joints, cannabis dispensaries, etc.

Kevin searches for the entrance to the right loft building. He finds the name on the door: "TOBY FREEMAN - 3C". He presses the buzzer.

No answer. He presses again, this time longer. Again no answer.

Kevin pulls out his phone, searches for a number. Taps the corresponding entry. He can hear the phone RINGING through a window on the third floor.

He is about to hang up when the call is answered.

KEVIN

(into phone)

Toby? Hey, it's me. Kevin. Bascomb.
I'm down-- what? I can't hear y-- Oh!
Are you alright?... Can you get to
the--?

The door buzzes. Kevin pockets his phone and opens the front door.

INT. HALLWAY/TOBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - TRACKING

Kevin reaches the third floor landing, almost out of breath. He looks right, then left. The door at the end of the hall has been defaced with huge red letters:

"@KaNDE"

Kevin walks up to the door, knocks loudly.

KEVIN
Toby? Are you alright?

The door opens slowly. Toby is hanging onto the door's edge and the doorknob. He has been beaten up.

Kevin pushes his way past the door, helps Toby over to a couch in the living room. He looks around.

Chairs that had been arranged in a loose circle are now on their backs or sides; the cheap wooden ones are broken.

KEVIN (cont'd)
Omigod, Toby. What happened?

Toby struggles.

TOBY
They just barged in. We were getting ready, and...

KEVIN
Who? Who barged in?

TOBY
I don't know. Four, no, five of them. Called themselves "Candy".

KEVIN
Yeah, they left their autograph on your door. Who are they? Why did they do this?

Toby points to a pile of books strewn on the floor near a coffee table. Some are reprint editions of "PKD" novels.

TOBY
Called us "losers." You oughta know: they're following you. Your blog and everything.

KEVIN

Never heard of them. So what does that have to do with you?

TOBY

That's what we wanted to know. The best I can make out is that the stuff our group posts about your writing really pisses them off. One guy just said we got it all wrong, and it was going to mess up their plans.

KEVIN

What plans? And who was here, what happened to them?

TOBY

I don't know how they found out you were coming here, but I guess their plans have something to do with you. Some of the local members of our meetup group were already here. They were all forced to leave. Hashtag really tried to take it to them, but they ganged up on her.

KEVIN

Did you call the cops or anything?

TOBY

No, of course not. What would they do?

KEVIN

I don't know. Bust them?

TOBY

Yeah, right.

INT. BASCOMB HOME - KEVIN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Kevin sits in his office, the only light being the bluish glow from his laptop screen. He speaks his search queries.

KEVIN

New Twitter search: "at-sign k-a-n-d-e".

SERIES OF SHOTS - SEQUENCE OF SEARCH RESULTS ON MONITOR