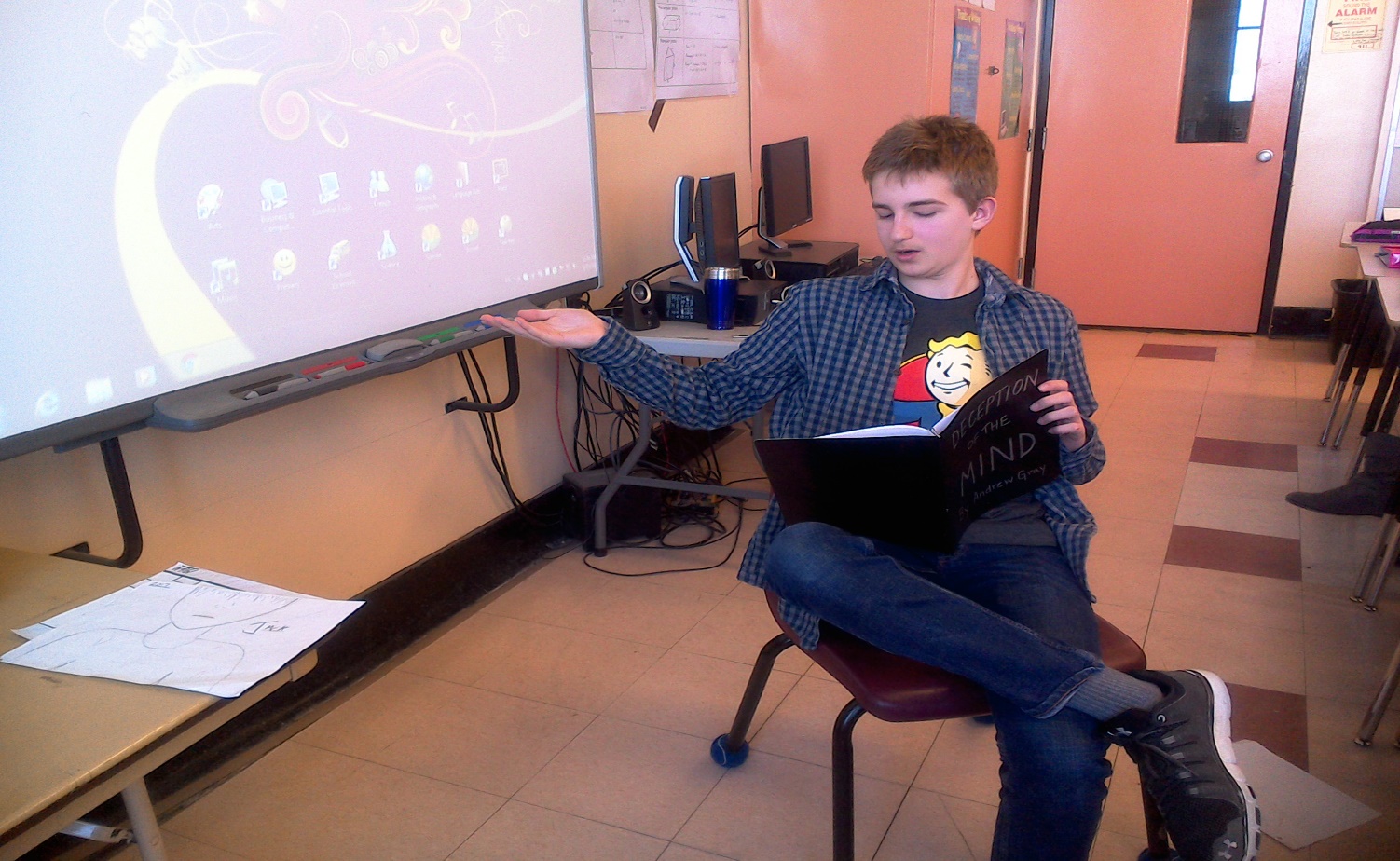
**DECEPTION OF THE MIND**

By Andrew Gray

Genius Hour

Grade 7

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When he woke up, the first thing he felt was pain. He couldn’t remember why his head hurt or where he was, but somehow he knew he had made a terrible mistake. All he could remember was his name: *Jack Alexander*, he thought. *How do I know that?* After a minute or two, he opened his eyes groggily to take in his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was the bright snow falling from the sky and landing on and around him. The next thing he saw was a small girl sitting in front of him. Her mouth widened into a smile when she saw that he was awake.

“Hello mister!” she said. Jack tried to say something, but all that came out was a weak gasp. “You’ve been asleep for so long I was beginning to think you had died,” the girl said.

This time when Jack tried to speak, he managed to say, “Who are you?”

“My name’s Jenny!” the girl said. “And you should probably eat something.”

Jack was starving, so he kept his many questions to himself while Jenny pulled out a half-eaten apple and handed it to him. While he ate, Jack looked around at all the buildings and the snow on them.

“Where are we?” Jack asked once he finished eating.

“New York, silly!” Jenny replied, almost seeming too happy.

Jack didn’t know how to respond to this news, so he just stammered, “Could you… show me around?”

“Absolutely!” came her reply.

Jenny started to lift Jack off the ground but she couldn’t do much to help. After a minute, Jack could stand, although walking made him dizzy. When Jack looked back at where he had been, there was a large gap with no snow.

*How long was I there?* he thought.

Jenny dragged Jack around the streets telling him things he wasn’t particularly interested in, eventually bringing him to a sewer drain.

“Why are we stopping?” Jack said.

“Follow me,” Jenny responded.

She shifted the drain cover enough for her to squeeze through, then disappeared into the dark.

*I suppose she expects me to go down there,* Jack thought.

He moved the cover right off the drain, but it was still a tight squeeze. When his shoes touched the damp ground beneath him, Jack looked around and spotted a dim light in the distance. He walked for a while and saw that the light came from a doorway in the wall. He looked through and saw Jenny talking to a short man with glasses and greasy, thinning hair.

Jack cleared his throat and the man looked at him in surprise.

“Oh! You must be the man Jenny was just telling me about!” he said.

*I don’t like the look of this guy,* Jack thought.

“Well sit down, friend!” the man said. “You deserve the same treatment as our other guests, few though they may be.”

He led Jack towards a wooden table surrounded by plastic chairs. Jack took a seat in one of the chairs, with Jenny and the strange man on either side of him.

“My name is Hubert Sinclair by the way,” the man said. “And Jenny here is my daughter.”

This news took Jack by surprise. Jenny looked nothing like Hubert.

“Now, I’m sure you’re very confused about what’s happening to you,” Hubert continued.

“Yes, extremely confused!” Jack interrupted.

“Yes, well, allow me to prepare you a meal before we discuss it further. You must be starving,” Hubert said impatiently. “In the meantime, you may feel free to roam around with Jenny and find something to do.”

When Hubert left, Jack asked Jenny, “So… where exactly are we?”

Jenny seemed hesitant to answer, as if the question required some thought.

“It’s like an abandoned basement to the city,” Jenny said.

“Huh.” Jack said, still quite confused. “Are there any books or something that I can read?” he asked.

“There’s the newspaper I got for my dad,” Jenny said. “I’ll go get it for you.”

She came back with a dirty newspaper in her hands and handed it to Jack.

*I wonder if I remember how to read. If I ever knew how,* Jack thought.

As it turned out, he was able to read the paper.

“It’s from today, in case you’re wondering.” Jenny said.

The bare bulb provided enough light to read the paper, though some of it was smudged with dirt. The first thing he thought to check was the date. *Thursday, December 3, 1964.* When Jack had read all the interesting articles, Hubert came back with a thick stew and some rolls. Jack tore right into a roll while Hubert spooned stew into his own bowl.

“Alright Jack, the first thing you need to know is that there are people out there looking for you as we speak.” Hubert began.

“What kind of people?” Jack asked.

“Scientists, or so we called ourselves. Long ago I worked with them. Our only goal was to conduct all the experiments and research that the government wouldn’t allow us to in regular society,” Hubert explained between bites of stew. “But you were something else entirely… the one experiment that we weren’t all working on. Only one man really knows what you were meant to be. And no one has heard from him in what must be…about a decade now. His name was David McDonaugh.”

Jack thought about this for a while. After a minute or so, Jenny snapped him out of his trance.

“Mister!” she exclaimed. “Your nose!”

Jack reached up and felt his nose. When he looked at his fingers, there was deep crimson blood on them.

“You’d better clean yourself up. There’s a sink just down the hall on the left.” Hubert said.

Jack jogged down the hall to the dingy bathroom, where a sink was barely clinging to the wall with rusty pipes. He looked in the mirror, realizing he didn’t know his own face.

*What the hell is going on??* Jack wondered.

He was in the middle of cleaning up when, all of a sudden, he heard a loud clatter and Jenny screaming.

“Daddy! DADDY!!!” she wailed.

He quickly ran to see what was the matter, and saw Hubert slumped on the table with Jenny crying beside him. He checked for signs of breathing, and found none. Jack couldn’t see anything that could have hurt Jenny’s father, but he was definitely gone. Jenny was crying hysterically and panicking, so Jack went over to calm her down.

“Hey,” he said softly. “Do you know what happened to your father?”

Jenny calmed down a little and managed to answer through sniffles.

“He… he said it…it tasted funny,” she sobbed.

*Must’ve been something in it,* Jack thought.

Jenny was still in shock, so Jack spoke to her again.

“Hey,” he said. “How old are you?”

After a minute, she said: “Six… why do you want to know?”

“Because I don’t remember how old I am,” he said.

“Why not, mister?” Jenny asked.

“I don’t know. And that’s why I need you to come with me. And on the way, maybe we can find out what happened to your father. Oh and by the way, call me Jack.”

She seemed to take all this in with only a trusting nod, so Jack decided they needed to find this man McDonaugh and set things straight. He searched Hubert and his office (which Jenny led him to) and found a large set of labeled keys. Beside the keys was a note that said: ***Come and find me Subject 192. Sincerely, McDonaugh***. Upon reading the phrase “Subject 192” Jack felt his head ache again. The title brought back a shadowy memory, just out of reach. He decided to ignore it, and instead chose to focus on finding the man who was responsible for this whole mess. One of the keys was labeled 192, and Jack knew that whatever it opened would solve everything.

“Jenny, did your father ever mention where he used to work?” he asked.

“He said if there was ever a problem, I should run to this one big building on the surface,” she said.

“Perfect. Can you show me where that is?” Jack asked encouragingly.

She nodded again.

Jenny led Jack through the dark corridor back to where they first came in, and out onto the streets of New York. After all the time they had spent underground, it was now a crisp winter evening and snow was falling all around them. Jack was surprised to realize that he was wearing only a knitted wool sweater, realizing he couldn’t have been unconscious for long, or else he would have frozen to death.

After a long, bone-chilling walk, Jenny eventually led him to a large, neglected building on a corner. Jack wondered if they looked suspicious to the people passing by as he used the key on the large elaborate lock on the door. Fortunately no one seemed to notice. Once the lock was open, they stepped inside and into the darkness. Jack felt around on the wall for a light switch, eventually bumping into a counter with a flashlight on it. He picked up the flashlight and turned it on, surprised by the bright light it produced. A quick check of the label revealed it to be “Test #87 nuclear powered flashlight.”

When Jack looked around with the aid of the flashlight, he saw that they were in a large lobby, with a single elevator with only a button to go down. He thought this was strange, since the height of the building implied that it had upper floors. Another thing Jack noticed was that even though it appeared abandoned from the outside, the building interior was in good shape with polished surfaces and no dust whatsoever. Finally, Jenny spoke up.

“Jack? Is my daddy going to be all right?”

Obviously, this was not an easy question for Jack to answer, so he chose to distract her instead.

“Why don’t we just focus on what we’re doing now and I’ll answer that question later, alright?”

She nodded but looked unsure. Jack led her over to the elevator and pressed the button. The doors opened immediately, revealing a small enclosed space with no decoration or buttons to be seen. They stepped inside and were surprised to see the doors close behind them automatically. It was only a minute when the light went out and a voice boomed over the intercom.

“Subject 192, you believe you do this because you chose to. Not so! We have predicted and organized your every move. So please feel free to be unpredictable. It’s so entertaining to see you squirm!”

Before Jack could react to this, an arm wrapped around his mouth from behind and he heard Jenny scream before he went unconscious.

When Jack woke up, he felt déjà vu. For the second time, he woke up slumped against a wall with a headache, only this time he remembered all that had transpired, and it was easier to get his bearings. He looked around and saw that he was in somebody’s old office, with filing cabinets all around the room and a desk with lots of pristine sheets of paper on it. The keys that had allowed him into the building were gone from his pocket.

Jack went over to the desk and picked up a handwritten report which read: ***Subject 192 is performing excellently in standard intelligence tests. Agility tests are also progressing well, though 192 will often lose consciousness after certain stressful events. Overall subject 192 is a huge breakthrough, though later subjects are expected to perform even better in areas where 192 lacks. Recommend deployment of 192 for extermination of Hubert Sinclair as final test.*** Jack was astonished upon reading this report. He wondered what it had to do with Hubert, and how it was all connected.

*If 192 is me… did I kill Hubert??* he thought.

The rest of the papers were just scientific equations that Jack didn’t understand. In the corner of the room was a projector with a recording already in it. When Jack approached the projector, it turned on automatically, playing a video of the underground building he’d been in earlier with Hubert. It appeared to have been taken on a camera hidden somewhere in the kitchen. The footage showed Jack, wearing entirely different clothing, entering the kitchen and putting something in the food. Jack had no memory of this happening, which was a feeling he was becoming used to. He was confused about so many things, such as how he hadn’t noticed a hidden camera in the building, what he had done to the food to kill Hubert, and most of all how he would explain it to Jenny.

All that reminded Jack that he needed to find Jenny, and then McDonaugh, to set everything straight. Much as he wanted to kill McDonaugh for messing with him so much, Jack knew he was no murderer, and that it would be better if he lived.

*Then again, if I killed Hubert, maybe I am a murderer,* Jack thought.

He walked over and tried the door, which was of course locked. When he looked around for something to break the lock with, he found a gun taped underneath the desk. It looked too new to have been there long, so Jack assumed it must have been left there for him. He took the gun, checking to see that it had bullets in it, and prepared to shoot the lock. It didn’t seem like a big deal at first, but it was extremely loud and Jack almost dropped it the first time he tried. Eventually he managed to hit the lock, but decided he wouldn’t want to use it again and left the gun behind. Where Jack ended up was not where he had expected. Instead of a hallway or a waiting room, the office door led to a large stairwell that led down.

*Might as well keep going,* Jack thought.

The stairs kept going down for what seemed like miles, until finally Jack reached the bottom, where there was a pair of large metal doors that looked like they belonged on a vault. Curiously however, one of them was left slightly open. Slowly, Jack pushed the door open. But what he saw inside was so amazing, he forgot all about being careful. The room was huge, with a high ceiling and shelves all around. But on those shelves were numerous futuristic-looking gadgets. He saw a machine that looked like a clock with a globe and a toilet attached, a man made of metal who stared at Jack with artificial eyes, blinking occasionally but never moving, and a small silver cube that flew around in circles.

*If these are the experiments that Hubert and his associates were doing, why would anyone want to shut them down?* Jack thought.

The further Jack walked into the large room, the more confused he became. Many of the inventions were too strange and complicated for him to even understand their purpose, such as a sphere covered in blinking lights that beeped occasionally but didn’t seem to do anything. Jack soon noticed that the flying cube was following him around, despite no indication of any form of propulsion or a way of knowing where Jack was. When he reached the other side of the room, Jack saw that there were no doors in the frame. Instead there were metal rods on both sides of the doorway, and when Jack approached a small light above the rods turned red and bolts of electricity traveled between the rods. To test this electric doorway, Jack picked up a random gadget from one of the shelves and threw it towards the door and it was instantly reduced to ash.

*I guess I can’t go through there,* Jack thought.

He looked around for something that could help, and noticed a thick cable that ran across the floor. When he followed it, Jack found a large panel attached to the wall a few meters from the door and slid it back. Behind the panel was a large battery, which Jack removed. When he went back the lights were no longer on, and Jack could walk through unharmed.

*Apparently, the contents of that room were worth protecting,* Jack thought.

Beyond the large room there were more stairs, although this time they led both up and down. Jack considered going up and escaping this entire mystery, but he couldn’t bear to think what might happen to Jenny, so he continued downward. This time the stairs didn’t seem as long, however there were no doors at the bottom. Instead there was a large blue button on the wall. Jack knew that pushing the button was most likely a bad idea, however it seemed to be the only option. Expecting the worst, he pushed the button and the floor started moving down like an elevator.

*Not what I was expecting,* Jack thought.

The secret elevator went down for a long time, but it felt longer to Jack because of how nervous he was. It was then that Jack heard the voice on the intercom again.

“Please excuse my previous hostilities. Your arrival has put me under a great deal of stress and I have much to explain to you,” it said. “You used to have a life before all this. A family even. Though it must seem to you like I am trying to kill you, I wish only to speak with you. Come, and let’s have a chat.”

As soon as the man stopped speaking the elevator stopped and Jack stepped out into a room lined with square pillars. On each pillar hung a banner, each with different things written on them. Many were torn but Jack could read one that said: **No scientist should be bound by morality.** Jack wasn’t sure what to make of this room, but there was another door on the other side. He started moving toward it, but suddenly the floor opened up in front of him and a peculiar contraption rose up out of the hole. It was a long metal device with lenses placed along the inside and attached to the body. Once it was up, the intercom turned on again.

“Many things were built to protect this place, but now you’ve reached the inner parts of the building and at this point, you might need this. It’s a device that focuses light onto a single point so that it heats to extreme temperatures.”

*What he’s trying to say is that it shoots laser beams,* Jack thought.

As he picked up the device, Jack wondered what sort of security there was that required a laser to survive. Attached to the laser there was a leather strap, so Jack slung it over his shoulder and continued on.

Through the door ahead, there was another room like the one he had just left, but instead of pillars there were statues made of gears, wood panels, and steel parts. As Jack approached one, it began to move. Little lights behind its eyes lit up just like the ones on the electric wall, only these ones were just visible behind a bird-like wooden mask. Jack was too stunned by this extraordinary machine to realize that it was not friendly, and the clockwork soldier picked him up and flung him against the wall. Fortunately he had time to brace himself before impacting, otherwise he may have lost consciousness. Scrambling to get up, Jack remembered the laser he was carrying and pulled it out. He noticed that since there was no sunlight to reflect down underground, the laser was relying on a small battery just like the one he had picked up earlier. Jack saw a button on the side of the laser, pushed it, and out came a blinding beam of light that left him disoriented for a moment.

When his vision returned, Jack saw that the laser had burned away all the wood panels, but the general steel structure of the clockwork robot was unharmed. However, getting rid of the wooden parts revealed what they had been concealing: behind the front panel there was another battery, which Jack fired at. When he hit the battery, the whole robot fell apart in a flaming wreck. Jack was relieved to have avoided death so narrowly, but his excitement was deflated when he remembered that the room was full of robots just like the one he had destroyed. He knew he couldn’t destroy them all, however he wondered if he could perhaps sneak past them. Jack looked around and noticed that the robots were watching a certain spot, and if someone it didn’t recognize walked past it would activate and attack them. He searched the area where he had destroyed the robot and found a metal plaque with a serial number on it.

*This must be how they tell friend and foe apart,* Jack thought.

He picked up the number plaque and used a screw from the robot to pin it to his sweater. Slowly, he walked through the room past the robots without alerting any of them.

At this point, Jack thought he was ready for anything, but what was through the door on the other side of the room was even more unexpected. Rather than more clockwork robots, this room contained only a large black orb floating in the center of the room. Jack tried looking at the orb, but every time he focused on it, it seemed to just slip out of his perception. As he approached the orb, Jack began to feel nauseous and sad until he eventually turned around and went back. There didn’t seem to be any way past the orb, so Jack decided he would just have to try to resist the orb’s effects. He did everything he could to ignore the orb, but something about it seemed to just overload his brain with mental agony. After many attempts, Jack noticed that the orb was connected to a device on the ceiling. He tried focusing on this device as he crossed the room, and before he knew it he was on the other side.

*How and why would someone create such a thing?* Jack puzzled.

The orb appeared to be the final defense against intruders, because the next room was filled with computers rather than weaponry.

All the computer screens showed the same image: a black and white photo of Jack that appeared to have been taken by someone standing in the door. The photo was taken while Jack was unconscious in the office room, and there were men standing around him with various clipboards and cameras. Curiously, all of the men were wearing gas masks and surgical attire. The men appeared to be monitoring Jack, though he couldn’t imagine why. Once he had entered the computer room, the intercom turned on again.

“You’re almost here. Just through that door now.”

Jack saw the door in question and headed toward it. Whoever was beyond that door would hold all the answers, and Jack was anxious to get to them.

The room beyond the door was again a surprise. After all of the things Jack had seen here in this underground nightmare, he had been expecting a more dramatic reveal. But what he saw was a plain room with concrete walls and no furniture except for an empty metal chair, and a small round window too dirty to see through. Jack took the hint and sat in the chair. After all he had been through in such a short span of time, it was good to finally sit down. But Jack’s brief relaxation abruptly ended when the chair was suddenly electrified, and Jack along with it! His vision went blurry, and he could barely stay conscious as men came in and bound him with chains. The room went dark for a while, but eventually the lights came back on to reveal that while Jack was stunned another chair had been brought into the room, one that looked infinitely more comfortable than the one he was currently in, as well as a table with some papers on it. All the papers were flipped over so that Jack couldn’t read them. Once he got his bearings, Jack heard footsteps behind him and a man walked around the chair and sat down across from him.

“McDonaugh! I should have expected this!” Jack said, barely able to contain his anger.

“McDonaugh?” the man said. “Friend, you have much to learn.”

“What are you talking about?”

“My name isn’t McDonaugh. I’m Jack Alexander.”

“I don’t understand…”

“No, you don’t, and if you will allow me to explain I will make everything clear. You see, my name is not David McDonaugh. Yours is.”

As soon as he heard this, Jack (or as he now knew was his real name, David) was hit with a series of memories like a brick to the face. An entire life, all rushing back to him. And then almost as quickly as the memories rushed in, they were gone.

“We can restrict all your memories. Remembering old ones, unable to make new ones. This is how it was supposed to be all along, but it was trial and error at first. Now we can fully control what you remember, what you feel, and by extension what you do. But for now, I’ll let you keep them. But don’t grow too attached to your own life David, because soon you won’t remember a thing.”

David thought about everything. Now he knew for certain that he really was David McDonaugh, and that the reason for this experiment was that he knew so much that the government, as well as his own colleagues, grew to fear and resent him. Eventually they organized a plot to brainwash him and use him to their ends. They convinced him that the process would expand his memory and capacity for knowledge, and his selfishness got the best of him. That, he realized, was the huge mistake he had felt like he’d made ever since he first woke up in the alley on the surface.

All that seemed so far behind him, he could scarcely believe it was not so long ago. He also learned that he was the inventor of the clockwork robots, as well as the one who found the mysterious orb where he’d heard claims of a UFO crash site. But the most interesting by far was what he found out about himself. He had a wife once, but she died 10 months after giving birth. And the most shocking thing of all: Jenny was his daughter, not Hubert’s. David had noticed that Jenny looked nothing like Hubert, but hadn’t realized the resemblance to himself until now. He remembered how he had been too occupied with his work to look after her, and gave her to Hubert to take care of her, and realized that they forced him to poison the food Hubert was serving, wanting to kill Jenny and eliminate anyone that David was attached to, making him even more their emotionless slave.

However, through all the information he was being forced to remember, there was one thing that no one remembered except him.

*The problem with letting me know all this information is that I remember details that you seem to have forgotten. You put in a failsafe command to shut down my mind and body. But the fact is, all your little brainwashed slaves must have it as well. And that is something I will find very useful,* David thought.

It took hours, but eventually one of the masked scientists came to check on him. The man was carrying a tray of food for him, and most of it looked quite good and David wished he had time to eat it. When the man walked past, David took his opportunity.

“Activate failsafe protocol number seven,” he said.

Immediately, the man went limp and fell right in front of him. David used his foot to unhook the key from the man’s belt and tossed it up to his hand, praying that it was the right key for the lock on his chains. As he unlocked himself from the chair, the realization dawned that he had just killed someone by uttering a phrase. He shook it off and decided to just continue and find Jenny so that they could both leave this place and forget about everything. But first he looked over the papers on the table to see if they were of any use. As it turned out, one of them was a map of the entire building, and David managed to locate the core room, where he knew from past experience was the most likely place they would take her. And according to the map, it was right beside the room he was in now.

He walked over to the grimy window and wiped it off with his sleeve. Sure enough, he saw the huge, pulsating core that gave power to the whole building by draining energy from all of New York without anyone noticing. There was a maintenance ladder right outside the window, so he opened it and climbed down to the floor far below. He started to look around for Jenny, but suddenly the lights went out and when they turned back on, the real Jack Alexander stood in front of him, and Jenny was chained to a metal pole beside him.

“Don’t move!” he yelled.

David stopped and yelled back.

“What are you doing with my daughter?!”

“Ah, so you remember! Clever little trick you pulled with my minion back there by the way, I was sure we had you cornered! Anyway, here’s the deal: you can either come work for us, killing whoever we tell you and Jenny goes free, or, you can live your life, but we’ll use your daughter for our purposes. It’s you or her McDonaugh. Choose wisely!”

**Ending 1**

“Alright fine! Take her! Just please let me go… I’ve had enough of all this. I just want to leave this place and never come back.”

“An interesting choice, McDonaugh…very well, you are free to leave.”

And so, David McDonaugh left the place he had once called home for the last time. But no matter what he did with his freedom, no matter how he tried to redeem himself, he could never forget what he had done. The guilt weighed heavily on his conscience, he knew that he had doomed his own daughter to the same endless torture he had so selfishly rejected.

**Ending 2**

“You can do whatever you want to me Jack! But don’t lay a finger on my daughter or I swear you’ll regret it!”

“A moment of heroism on the part of the man with such a ruthless past… surprising to say the least! Have it your way McDonaugh. Activate command mode!”

And just like that, David McDonaugh slipped into an obedient trance. All time and action seemed meaningless now. But for every throat he cut for the men that betrayed him, through all the torment and trauma he endured to the last moment of his life, his one and only comfort was the knowledge that his daughter was safe.