

Gateway  
(A Short Film)

Written by

Matt Williams

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FADE IN

OVER BLACK

SEBASTIAN (V.O.)

I've been experimenting with memory.  
Not as it pertains to hard drives, as  
one might think given my profession.  
No, I've found a way to encode  
segments of encrypted information  
inside my own mind.

1 INT. CORRIDOR - ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT 1

From behind, we see the silhouette of a man, DR. BERNARD,  
walking down a dark hallway of an abandoned building. We  
follow him all the way down the corridor until he turns  
into...

2 INT. OFFICE - ABANDONED BUILDING - CONTINUOUS 2

...a dark room with one overhead light illuminating a table.  
Dr. Bernard walks to a table and sits down half in shadow. He  
lights up a cigarette.

DR. BERNARD

Thank you for coming Ms. Mullen. I  
apologize for the advanced security  
upon your arrival.

Across the table sits MULLEN, plain, stoic, cold looking. She  
remains still.

MULLEN

You must be Dr. Bernard. No worries,  
it's completely understandable.  
Although I like to keep a weapon on me  
in these situations.

DR. BERNARD

The job for which we've hired you  
won't require it.

MULLEN

You never know. But I appreciate you  
hiring me.

DR. BERNARD

You proved yourself last time. Forgive  
me for asking, but with your limited  
experience, how did you manage to

break one of our top cryptologists in less than an hour?

Mullen considers for a moment the best way to answer.

MULLEN

It's all in the eyes. They say that the eyes are a gateway to the soul. I'm trained to look into a person's soul, and figure out what their worst fears are; what their deepest desires are. And then manipulate them; use that against them.

Dr. Bernard nods in approval.

DR. BERNARD

(motioning O.S.)

What do you know about him?

MULLEN

Only what's in his file. I must admit, you haven't given me a lot of information.

DR. BERNARD

You have all you need.

MULLEN

The more information I have, the more I can use against him.

Dr. Bernard leans fully into the light.

DR. BERNARD

The less information you have, the less he can use against you.

(beat)

The man is a genius. He's one of the most brilliant minds in our field. So be careful.

Mullen considers him a moment.

MULLEN

You're frightened of him. Some history there?

Dr. Bernard doesn't respond. He stares at her, questioning.

MULLEN

It's all in the eyes, Dr. Bernard.

DR. BERNARD

You think you're smart.

MULLEN

Yes.

(beat)

You hired me to get information. Despite my, as you said "limited experience," let's operate under the assumption I know what I'm doing. His being brilliant just means he's accustomed to using his mind. And the mind is a very powerful thing to be able to control.

CUT TO

3 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - ABANDONED BUILDING - LATER

3

CLOSE ON an interrogation hood. The hood is removed to reveal SEBASTIAN, late 20s.

As the light hits his eyes, Sebastian looks around fearfully, confused. His hands are handcuffed behind a chair. Mullen is standing in front of him holding a folder. The room is bright, sterile, minimal. Across from Sebastian is a table and another chair, and on the wall, a two-way mirror.

MULLEN

Good evening, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

(frantically)

Where am I? How do you-- who are you?

MULLEN

Relax. I'm going to make this very simple for you. You have information that I want. You'll give it to me, and then we'll let you go.

SEBASTIAN

I'm just a programmer!

MULLEN

Aw, don't sell yourself short.

(reading from the file)

Graduated Magna Cum Laude from MIT in

Computer Engineering and Mathematics at age 19, then contracted by the CIA as a cryptology and cyber security specialist, then on to the DOD as a consulting expert in cyber counterintelligence, and most recently at the NSA as Chief Cryptology Strategist.

SEBASTIAN

How do you know all that?

MULLEN

I'm just reading it here in your file...

SEBASTIAN

My file is classified.

MULLEN

Yes. It is. So, have I established myself as someone who isn't to be toyed with?

SEBASTIAN

Ok. Assuming I do have whatever you want, how do I know you won't just kill me after I tell you?

MULLEN

I'm not a hit man, Sebastian. You don't know who I am or where you are. Letting you live doesn't put anyone at risk of anything. I just want information.

Sebastian gives a slight nod. He looks like he may vomit.

MULLEN

You have access to an encryption key. I want it.

Sebastian's breathing steadies a bit.

SEBASTIAN

I work with encryption every day, I have access to thousands of--

MULLEN

The one I'm interested in is off the books, and protects very sensitive

material.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sorry, but you've just described most of my job.

MULLEN

Are you playing games with me?

SEBASTIAN

No! I--

MULLEN

You've been stealing classified information from the United States.

Sebastian's eyes widen. He remains in stunned silence.

MULLEN

There we are. Now I am not working for a government agency, you won't be charged with espionage or treason.

(lowering her voice to a hiss)

But I also don't give a shit how I get this information from you. Understand?

Sebastian swallows hard.

MULLEN

This encryption key. It unlocks metadata you stole from U.S. intelligence, correct? What were you planning on doing with it? Releasing it? Selling it?

Mullen sits, staring deeply into Sebastian eyes. He looks panicky, and remains silent.

MULLEN

Suit yourself.

She grabs the hood that was on his head and walks towards him.

SEBASTIAN

Ok! Ok. Adi Shamir.

MULLEN

Go on.

SEBASTIAN

The man you're looking for is Adi Shamir.

MULLEN

And who is Adi Shamir?

SEBASTIAN

You really don't know?

All of a sudden, Sebastian's demeanor completely shifts. He no longer acts panicked, but perfectly calm and confident. He sits up straight, and actually has a smirk on his face, as he stares directly into Mullen's eyes.

SEBASTIAN

You really don't know.

MULLEN

Why don't you tell me.

Sebastian has a read on her.

SEBASTIAN

You're just a hired gun... You've got no vested interest in whatever this operation is. You're just an interrogator whose only job is to get me to talk.

MULLEN

What the hell makes you think--

SEBASTIAN

You have no idea what you've gotten yourself into. I want to talk to the administrators. The ones who hired you. Because you're way out of your league, sweetheart.

MULLEN

You'll talk to me. But if you call me sweetheart again--

SEBASTIAN

I talk to them, or I don't talk at all.

Mullen simply stares at him, fury raging in her eyes.

SEBASTIAN

You want answers? Whoever's got me here knows who I am and what I'm capable of, and I don't say a single thing until I see *them*. Not some imposter who thinks she can intimidate me into telling her information she knows nothing about.

Furious, Mullen walks right up to Sebastian and PUNCHES him hard across the face. Sebastian begins to laugh.

MULLEN

Have it your way.

SEBASTIAN

Come on, it's nothing personal, I just want to say hello to them. Then I can be all yours, I promise.

Mullen grabs the hood and forcefully puts it back over Sebastian's head. He continues to laugh like hysterically as Mullen walks out, shutting off the lights and leaving him in total darkness.

4 INT. OFFICE - ABANDONED BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

4

As she leaves the interrogation room, Mullen storms towards Dr. Bernard who has been watching behind the two-way mirror.

DR. BERNARD

(sarcastic, but not amused)  
So, how's it going?

MULLEN

You set me up to fail.

DR. BERNARD

I beg your pardon?

MULLEN

What the hell was that? How did he figure that out so quickly? Does the word *credibility* mean anything to you?

DR. BERNARD

Didn't I tell you he was a genius?

MULLEN

Didn't I tell you I needed more information? Who the hell is Adi



Shamir?

Dr. Bernard sighs.

MULLEN

I swear to god, you better give me something.

DR. BERNARD

Adi Shamir is an Israeli cryptographer. He's widely known for what's known as Shamir's Scheme. It's an encryption algorithm. If you were one of us, you would have known that. He was testing you.

MULLEN

Jesus. Ok. Now what?

DR. BERNARD

Now? I'm sorry, do you want me to help you out of this? I'll be honest with you, I thought it was a bad idea bringing you in. I knew he'd see right through your inexperience and use it against you. And look at that, it took him two minutes to break you down!

MULLEN

You need to go in there.

DR. BERNARD

No.

MULLEN

I'll still analyze him, I'll still manipulate him, interrogate him, but you know how his mind works...

Dr. Bernard loses his patience.

DR. BERNARD

If he sees me, he'll know I can't just let him walk out of here, so he would have no reason to talk. That's why we hire people like you.

(beat, menacing)

And another thing. If I step foot in that room, you're not getting a dime. So do your fucking job.

MULLEN

(pause)

Give me my gun.

He stares at her inquisitively.

MULLEN

Give me a gun!

DR. BERNARD

For what?

MULLEN

To do my fucking job.

CUT TO

5 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MINUTES LATER

5

The interrogation hood is removed again. Sebastian shakes his head as though he's just coming to. He's certainly not the same scared man from before.

SEBASTIAN

You know, I don't think we got off on the right foot...

(Seeing the gun)

Oh wow, did I piss you off that badly? Listen darling, this isn't like the movies. This room is pretty small, and no offense to the interior designer, but rather reverberant. If you fire that in here you're going to go deaf.

MULLEN

If I fire this in here, someone's going to be shot.

Sebastian takes the hint. Mullen un-cuffs his hands from behind them and moves them to his front. She moves the table over where there lies a piece of paper and pen. As she does this...

SEBASTIAN

By the way, I failed to mention just how beautiful you are. Honestly, I thought you were playing good cop at first, because you just don't look like bad cop. But that right cross you threw...

She sits down across from him, then cocks the gun.

SEBASTIAN

Ok! Ok, so you want the encryption key that decodes the files I've been stealing... allegedly. Let me ask you something, do you even know what an encryption key is?

MULLEN

Yes. I do.

SEBASTIAN

Good! So you know encryption can be a simple password, a series of passwords, randomly generated passwords, a series of randomly generated passwords... It can be as complex as one wants. And, forgive me for patting myself on the back, but I'm the world's leading expert.

MULLEN

I'm very happy for you.

SEBASTIAN

I say that to make the point that with information this sensitive, do you think I just have the fucking thing memorized?

MULLEN

First step is for you to tell me how I can get it. We'll go from there. I don't care if you memorized it or if it's on a hard drive somewhere in the arctic tundra. You have access to it.

SEBASTIAN

Say, for the sake of argument, that it is in the arctic tundra...

MULLEN

I've got nothing but time.

Sebastian looks at her for a moment.

SEBASTIAN

Did you know a shorebird called the Red Knot lives in South America for the winter and then in the summer

travels 9,000 miles to breed in the arctic tundra?

MULLEN

I'm not fucking around.

She stands up...

SEBASTIAN

Neither are they, that's a long way to travel just to have sex!

...and points the gun at his kneecap.

SEBASTIAN

Alright! Fine! Jesus woman, I just thought you'd like to hear an anecdote. No reason this can't be fun.

MULLEN

I'm doing my best to stay patient Sebastian, but it's wearing thin.

SEBASTIAN

Look, beautiful and indomitable as you may be, I'm growing a little weary of talking to you. So may I suggest we untable my first request again?

MULLEN

Why do you want to speak to these people so badly? What difference does it make to you?

SEBASTIAN

Because, we haven't seen each other in a long long time. Isn't that right, Dr. Bernard?

Sebastian turns, and looks directly at the mirror.

6 INT. OFFICE - SAME

6

Dr. Bernard looks out the mirror at Sebastian staring right back at him. Dr. Bernard's eyes widen.

7 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - SAME

7

Mullen remains staring at Sebastian, expressionless.

SEBASTIAN

Come on, I know exactly what this. I could smell Bernard's desperation lurking in the air, even through that hood. A little melodramatic, by the way.

(off Mullen's look)

What? You don't think I know my biggest competitor? Yes, I steal classified information from the United States. So does he. I'm just better at it. Subsequently, but unfortunately, I started putting Dr. Bernard out of business.

(turning to the window)

And now he's acting like a bully on the playground who got embarrassed by the nerdy kid.

(to Mullen)

What, he didn't tell you any of this? Of course not. You're just the hired gun... sweetheart.

Mullen stands, furious, but at that moment the door to the room opens, and Dr. Bernard stands at the threshold.

SEBASTIAN

Ah, Dr. Bernard.

DR. BERNARD

And what exactly is your plan from here, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

I told you. I just wanted to say hello.

As Mullen moves behind Sebastian, Dr. Bernard steps into the light and enters the room.

Suddenly, Sebastian's eyes seem to roll back in his head. He closes them and takes deep breaths. Then he stops and sighs.

SEBASTIAN

Ahhhh look at that, I remember.

Sebastian grabs the pen and paper and writes a long encryption key. He looks up at Dr. Bernard with a smile on his face. Dr. Bernard rushes to get it.

DR. BERNARD  
Is this the key?

SEBASTIAN  
Yes. Pretty impressive, right? But  
you'll still need the cipher.

DR. BERNARD  
Well, where is it?

Sebastian just smiles and chuckles at him. Dr. Bernard loses his cool and PUNCHES Sebastian across the face. Sebastian begins laughing as blood pours from his mouth. Then he suddenly stops, stone-faced.

SEBASTIAN  
Ouch.

DR. BERNARD  
Who has it!

SEBASTIAN  
(Motioning towards Mullen)  
She does.

BANG! From behind Sebastian, Mullen pulls the trigger, hitting Dr. Bernard in the stomach and throwing him against the wall.

There's a deafening RINGING sound, as Mullen unlocks Sebastian's handcuffs.

SEBASTIAN  
AHH! Goddamnit, I told you it would be  
loud!

Mullen pulls two inconspicuous ear plugs out of her ears as she frees Sebastian.

MULLEN  
Sorry. Didn't have any spares.

SEBASTIAN  
When did you put those-- oh you're  
good.  
(rubbing his face)  
Son of a bitch, why did you have to  
hit me so hard?

MULLEN  
You called me sweetheart.

The two of them approach Dr. Bernard, who is barely clinging to life. Blood is soaking his shirt.

SEBASTIAN

Oh Bernard. I've always been smarter than you. You just always failed to accept it.

DR. BERNARD

How-- How did you--

SEBASTIAN

Ah, this is really quite great, you're gonna love it. See, while you and the NSA have been busy spying on useless Americans, I've been experimenting with memory. Not as it pertains to hard drives, as one might think given my profession. No, I found a way to encode segments of encrypted information into my own mind. Specifically, my long-term *cued* memory. Meaning I can't remember it "off the top of my head," as they say. I only have access to the information when my memory is triggered by a certain stimulus. In this case... you.

Dr. Bernard gasps for breath, but looks confused.

SEBASTIAN

We were so close back in the day. We were going to change the world. But you got greedy. And I was on the verge of a breakthrough. So obviously I needed to test it. And what better subject than the man who thought he could double cross me? I must admit, setting up this fairly-elaborate ruse wasn't easy, but I knew if I made you believe I had keys to a kingdom you'd try to get it from me. And I was right. You're just so goddamn predictable. I also wasn't lying. I just needed to say hello.

(beat)

By the way, the encrypted information you were after... it doesn't exist. There's nothing there. I just wanted to prove it could be done. And to make you see, finally, that you will never

beat me.

MULLEN

As I said, Dr. Bernard, the mind is a powerful thing to be able to control.

As life fades from Dr. Bernard, Mullen grabs the interrogation hood and slips it over his head.

From a WIDE SHOT, we slowly PULL OUT. Dr. Bernard lies dead against the back wall. Mullen and Sebastian walk out the door. They hit the lights...

CUT TO BLACK

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