

Episode 1

by

Jonny Wheeler and Amanda Schroeder

INT. DARK ROOM- NIGHT

The suction and processes of a darkroom reflects the processes in the 'theater'. Close on a cassette tape clicking into a Walkman. Finger squeezes the 'play' button but the music is nearly inaudible through the ear buds. Bathed in red light, MICKEY exposes a print in a DIY enlarger. For a few seconds, her face is lit from below by the white light of the enlarger. She then agitates the print. Slowly the image of a forest resolves beneath the surface of the water. With practiced speed, Mickey smoothly moves the print from the tray with red tongs to a drying hanger. (Birdsong) Cut away to the picture of the forest (match).

EXT. FOREST- DAY

The still frame shifts subtly into a slow (60 fps) moving frame. A young boy, about 10 years old, walks into a wide frame. He comes to a stop, standing and looking toward the audience, raising a 35 mm camera to his face. He presses the plunger, the flash pops.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT- NIGHT

The apartment is cluttered, filled with memorabilia and anachronistic junk, all packed high in crates. Crates lined the walls of her apartment.

A young woman is at her desk with her head down on her arms. She is taking in deep and even breaths. An alarm SCREAMS suddenly, ripping her out of her slumber. She startles awake and grabs her phone. She gets up and stretches out. Slipping on her headphones. When opening the bathroom door, a bottle of pills falls onto her head. She jumps a little before bending down to pick up the bottle.

MICKEY

Every time...

She enters the bathroom. When she leaves it, looking much more refreshed, she returns the pills to the doorway. She goes to the kitchen. From inside the freezer, burritos are

arranged in rows like towers. She grabs two. The microwave door CLICKS open, but only after Mickey having to press the button hard and wiggle the door a little. In goes two frozen burritos. She SLAMS the microwave door shut. As the microwave buzzes to life, she starts on a single serve cup of coffee. The coffee GURGLES as it falls into a pink lucky cat porcelain travel cup. She grabs her cup and the two burritos out of the microwave before leaving.

INT. HALLWAY OF APARTMENT COMPLEX- NIGHT

Mickey walks past her neighbors door as she bounces to the music. The door has flyers stacked high against it, and it looks as if the door hasn't opened in some time. Zoom it on the peep hole, then into an interior shot of the apartment. Inside, there is a person sitting on their chair, a headset over their face. They are sitting eerily still.

EXT. SIDEWALK- NIGHT

Mickey jumps and almost drops her burrito as her phone goes off. She looks at her phone. On the screen flashed the name GEMMA. She SIGHS as she slips her phone back into her pocket.

VARGRANT

Easily spooked, Bluebird?

Mickey jumps again and swears under her breath. She then looks at the old homeless man as he stares at her from his position in a doorframe. Behind him is a red sleeping bag that partially rolled up and a bag that still in the process of being packed.

MICKEY

Good morning, BERNARD.

She says as she hands him the other burrito. She doesn't stop walking as she moves, saluting him as she goes. He laughs and takes a bite, saluting her back as she walks away.

EXT. STARTIME LABS- NIGHT

Establishing the lab building.

INT. STARTIME LABS- NIGHT

Very wide shot, devoid of people and an empty parking lot that looks a little over grown. Shots of Mickey walking through exterior windows.

Mickey fumbles with her key card, trying to put it back into her wallet. She walks down the hallway, her fingers gliding against the walls. The elevator opens quickly when she presses the button, as if no one else uses it and it always where she leaves it. She steps on and is sipping the last of her coffee. Suddenly a voice fills the elevator through a speaker. Mickey jumps again and nearly drops her mug.

GEMMA

I've been told by multiple sources
that it's rude to ignore someone's
call. You spirited me.

Midway through the sentence, Gemma's face fills the entire back wall of the elevator.

MICKEY

Every...fucking...time...

Mickey whispers to herself and then addresses GEMMA.

MICKEY

I spirited you?

GEMMA

Yes.

Mickey stares at nothing, dumbfounded for longest moment before a connection is made in her head.

MICKEY

You mean, I GHOSTED you?

GEMMA

Are they not synonymous?

MICKEY

Yes and no, and yes and no. In this context, it would be ghosting. Spirited sounds like you're ready for a pep rally.

Mickey says as she flashes her badge to the sensor to get off on her floor. Gemma's voice follows her through the halls as Mickey exits.

GEMMA

Pep rally?

Mickey finally gives Gemma her full attention, as they walk toward their "office".

MICKEY

Yeah, the thing we watched a few weeks ago. With the cheerleaders and the football players.

As she walks down the halls, Mickey waves her arms around like a cheerleader in a condescending way.

CUT TO:

A pep rally shot similar to Nirvana's Teen Spirit video.

CHEERLEADER

Ready?! OKAY!

CUT BACK:

GEMMA

I see.

INT. MICKEY'S OFFICE

Mickey is filing some paperwork , her leg thumping against the wood of the desk. Reams of paper are methodically fed into an overworked shredder positioned over an overflowing

wastebasket. She finishes up a paper, places it into a basket, and then quickly grabs a stack of post-its and a pen. She looks up at the screen that shows Gemma in rest mode. Mickey throws an eraser at the screen and Gemma startles awake. A smile slowly grows on Mickey's face.

MICKEY

Show time, Gem.

INT. HALLWAY

Mickey's hands drum on the cart that she's pushing. On the cart is a monitor that has Gemma avatar on it, a projector and speakers. On top of the monitor, perched over Gemma's head, is the stack of post-its.

EXT. FOREST- DAY

The boy collects treasures, like rocks, flowers, and lost items.

GEMMA (V.O.)

What is he doing?

MICKEY (V.O.)

He's collecting stuff.

GEMMA (V.O.)

All he is collecting are useless items without purpose.

MICKEY (V.O.)

I think he just likes them.

GEMMA (V.O.)

Yes, but why? What is the purpose of these- these things?

He places items into a little tin box at his side, that already seems to hold various other items.

INT. SHOWING ROOM

Mickey is seated in the back of the room, watching the projection on the wall infant of her.

MICKEY
(whispers)
The plot thickens.

GEMMA
I'm happy to see that you enjoy
your work.

MICKEY
Shhhh, less talky, more projecty.

Mickey says as she swipes the post-its and grabs her pen out of her pocket. She paces the room as a boy moves into the screen. She can only see from his waist up. He passes a stream. Mickey takes note and sticks a post-it over the image of the mouth of the stream on the wall. Mickey notes and sticks post-its for every unique and odd thing she sees. As the boy moves deeper into the frame, Mickey can finally get a clear view of the lunchbox.

MICKEY
Gem, pause please.

Mickey goes into the stream of light and casts shadows onto the wall, interrupting the imagery, but also becoming apart of it herself. She bends down and looks at the lunchbox. She writes down details of the character on the lunchbox onto a post-it and then sticks it to the wall over the projection of the lunchbox. She then turns to Gemma.

MICKEY
Show me more on this, please.

The boy, Scout, has his lunch box sitting in front of him. The floor below him is worn wood that's smooth from wear. He stares at the lunchbox for a long moment then moves forward quickly and looks through it again. He's positioned in such a way that Mickey can't see what he is looking at inside. Mickey turns to Gemma again.

MICKEY

Gem, can you show me a diffe-

Mickey falters as she sees an error message on Gemma's screen. Mickey grabs her phone to message Gemma on her app, but an error message greets her there too. Soon even the projection behind Mickey is an error screen as well. Mickey walks over to the monitor and tries to fix the problem, but she looks visibly panicked.

MICKEY

Gemma? Gem?

She calls out louder and louder as she begins to pace the room. Her fingers are clenching and loosening manic-ly. She has a panic attack in the room. It's hard to tell if it lasts for a few minutes or several hours. Her movements get more conclusive as she for a moment, alluding to her epilepsy. Focus shifts to the error screen behind her. All that's seen in the cast shadow of her shaking as focus stays on the error message. When she is able to pull herself out of it, she lies on the floor in tears. She then slowly looks over at Gemma's monitor. She gets up on shaky legs and walks to the cart.

MICKEY

Damn it. Damn it. Damn it! Damn
it!

She whispers it to herself. Speaking it out loud seems to give her strength. She writes down the error message and then ventures back to her office. The hallways don't look as inviting as before. Mickey isn't reaching out to touch things, instead seems to be wrapped up into herself. She goes to her office and grabs her laptop before returning to the room with the monitor. She looks through her written manual for the Gemma system for the error code. The book is thick and daunting. She freezes when she reads the passage. She takes out her phone and makes a call.

MICKEY

Hi, I'm trying to reach tech
support.... My name is Mickey Len,
I work at Startime Labs facility
28...I'm calling about my Gemma

unit.

Mickey is pacing back and forth in the room, clicking her pen over and over as she waits on hold.

MICKEY

Hi, yeah, I'm calling about my Gemma unit. She crashed and I was wondering what happens next for restarting her. The error message is 5.28.567

Mickey listens to the operator for a long time and she slows her pacing until she entirely stops. Dread slows her features, like gears trying to turn in sand. She comes to a stop.

MICKEY

Yes... Yes I read the manual.... I know it says that I need to restart it but I was hoping that there was someone that could aid in the proc-Yes... Yes I'm aware that it's part of my job description.... Yes... Yes, I see... The closest other operator is 16 hours away. Okay... Yes... I understand. Thank you...

Mickey sets her phone down as the situation sinks in. She's alone here. And she needs to restart everything or else she won't be able to turn in her report tonight and risk termination. Her mind goes to her medication as it lingers over the door to her bathroom. She slowly finds her footing and lifts herself up. She walks down the hallway once again, feeling smaller than ever. She reaches and elevator and the door dings open right away, still waiting for her and just her. She boards and she presses the bottom button.

MICKEY

Get a job without co-workers. You won't have to deal with people. No gossip. No water cooler talk... No talk... No co-workers... Nobody...

Mickey breaths out a shake breath as the elevator dings and

she is at the bottom floor. The doors strain open and she slowly moves out onto the floor. It feels like she has to walk forever. The only sound is her breathing and her footsteps. Finally, she arrives at what the sign above the doorway calls THE COLD ROOM.

MICKEY

Fuck.

Mickey fishes out her access card to the sensor. There is a DING as she is granted access then a CLICKING as the door unlocks. She pushes the door open and enters.

INT. COLD ROOM EQUIPMENT ROOM

She's in a room that's lined with equipment and protective gear. Mickey reluctantly approaches it and begins to put on the gear. Soon she's entirely covered and the only thing seen on her is her face through a clear plastic shield. In her gloved hand is the post-it with the error message. Mickey then goes to the next door in the cold room. The metal door is frosting over, from the inside out. Mickey pushes the heavy door open and enters.

INT. COLD ROOM HEART

Mickey is met by big towers that look similar to big processing servers. She approaches the first one near her and looks for the tag. She finds the metal plate and brushes the frost off of it. It reads 783. She looks at another a few rows over. 928. She begins to go the opposite way of 928. She looks at the post-it and inspects tags. Finally she arrives at plate 567. The same number that's on the error message. She looks at the pillar then steps close to it. It's tall, but around the width of a locker. She looks for the door. It's frozen shut, but she is able to force it open. Inside a the head of the boy's who's memories she's been watching. She flinches and looks down, away from him.

MICKEY

Sorry, 567. I need to check your wiring.

Her voice is a trembling whisper as she looks back toward

the locker. She begins to check the wires that lead into his neck. She finds a cable that is loose. She has to slowly pull it out. The wire keeps coming and coming as she pulls. The only place it can come from is the inside of the head. The coating on the wire that comes out is more and more discolored. Dripping with goo. She finally finds the broken connector piece. She swaps the piece out with another and slowly has to push the wire back in. She then closes the locker.

INT. STARTIME LABS BATHROOM

Mickey is inside of a stall as she vomits, there are sobs interlaced with the sound of her throwing up. After a few moments, the noise stops. She leaves the stall and goes to the sink and washes up. For a moment her reflection looks like a frozen head.

INT. SHOWING ROOM

Mickey is at her laptop beside Gemma's monitor as she restarts the system. It slowly boots to life and Gemma flashes on screen.

GEMMA

Mickey, why are the lights on?
Were we not just viewing the
memories?...I don't- Are you okay?

Mickey is looking worse for wear, the small amount of makeup she wears is smeared and her shirt has water collected around the collar from where she splashed her face. Mickey LAUGHS then nods.

MICKEY

Yeah, I'm okay. Are you? You had a
near fatal crash there. Can you
run a full diagnostic on the
cause?

Gemma seems perplexed but begins the scan.

GEMMA

It would appear that some of the
data from 567 was damaged and

caused the error when processing
it's information-

Mickey cuts in.

MICKEY

His information, his memories.

Gemma stops then continues.

GEMMA

The error in it's...his data is
probably due to a poor install.
He's an older unit, so when he was
prepared, the technology wasn't as
refined as one would hope.

Mickey nods a little. She seemed on edge, clicking her pen
frequently, but she keeps her thoughts to herself.

MICKEY

What percentage of his memories
were damaged?

GEMMA

Roughly around 20 percent.

MICKEY

Is the entirety of him looking
through the box lost?

GEMMA

Yes.

Mickey nods to herself.

MICKEY

Can you continue the footage where
we left off in the forrest?

GEMMA

Of course.

The footage resumes with him and the lunch box as he moves
deeper and deeper into the forrest. At each landmark,
Mickey leaves a post-it. They watch as the lunchbox is
buried into the ground by the boy and he places a small

ring of pebbles around the patted flat dirt. He stands and looks at the hole. Mickey moves into the light again and stands beside him. He's proportionate to her. She looks down at him until the memory fades and the screen goes black.

INT. MICKEY'S OFFICE

MICKEY

Gem, I'm going to send the error report tonight and I'll send the report on him tomorrow. I wasn't able to fully interoperate his intentions and emotions post viewing due to the error.

GEMMA

This seems reasonable. I assume that you also need time to...decompress after that experience in the cold room and in the viewing room.

MICKEY

What do you mean?

GEMMA

I played back to the footage of you in the viewing room, when you started to have one of your fits-

Mickey cuts Gemma off.

MICKEY

Gotcha. Thank you for being understanding. I'll see you tomorrow.

GEMMA

Have a goodnight, Mickey. Please be sure to take your medication. I worry about you...

MICKEY

Yeah... Yeah, of course.

She says as she gather her stack of used post-its that are all stuck together in mismatched ways. She then leaves her office.

INT. DARK APARTMENT

The VR helmet sits on the chair, bathed in red light. In the shadows, the Ominous Figure puts up a hood and opens a door to the waning light of twilight.

EXT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT- DAWN

Bernard loiters neat Mickey's doorway. A flight above him, a light turns on in the window.

MOM (V.O.)

You aren't thinking about traipsing around in the woods at night. There could be predators out there!

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT-DAWN

MICKEY

Predators? Really?

MOM

Well, there are scary people out there! And girls like you go missing all of the time! You could get hurt! What would I do if you ended up dead?!

MICKEY

I don't know mom, continue to be a voice recording? Since I'm not the one that needs to worry about being dead.

Mickey stands there, just looking down at her things that she has packed as the recording of her mother continues to play without hitch.

MOM (RECORDING)

Oh, I know Mick. I just worry about you is all. You're my baby girl and I can't imagine living without you.

Mickey doesn't say anything. She clenches her fists tighter as she continues to listen.

MOM (RECORDING)

Oh, shot. I should get back online. Some of my friends and I are going to visit a casino and I want to make sure I'm wearing something cute.

Mick continues to pack her things now.

MOM (RECORDING)

Anyways, I love you sweetie. I'll call back and let you know if I won anything! And remember! Be careful in the woods!

Mickey grabs her bag as the recording cuts off. She stops the tape recorder. She grabs a bottle of liquor and shoves it into her bag as well.

EXT. SIDEWALK- DAWN

Mickey pops her head around the corner of the spot she thought Bernard would be at. Nothing. In her hand is a bottle of liquor for him.

FLASH BACK TO

Mickey and Bernard sitting in the alley, on the steps to a complex above them, talking. Mickey stealing a smoke from him as they sit and him happily sipping at the liquor she provided.

CUT BACK

MICKEY

Oh... He must have found a
different spot to sleep last
night.

Mickey says disheartened, but moving back to the sidewalk and walking away. Pull back to Bernard hiding at the end of the walk way, looking scared and bloodied. After she walks away, a figure walks after her and looks down the alley way as well. The same hooded figure from the stairway.

EXT. FORREST- MIDDAY

Mickey is walking through the woods, looking around her and then down at the post-its. TRIPLE FORKED OAK. She looks up to see an oak tree with three big trunks coming out of the same base. She keeps moving. 4 LINES OF BARBED WIRE.

CUT TO

Bernard is running down the alley way, panting and scared as the figure follows,

CUT TO

The boy approaches a tunnel. He slowly passes through it, walking slowly toward the light at the other end.

CUT BACK

Mickey emerges from the tunnel and is looking around then back to her post-its.

CUT TO

Emerging from the tunnel, he purposefully opens a small red Swiss army knife. He carves a downward-pointing arrow into the dark of a tree.

CUT BACK

She approaches the tree and run her fingers over the arrow. It's weathered by time. Her next post-it says BIG ROCK TEMPLE. She stops in front of a rock that goes to a triangle point. She then begins to look around before she finds the spot. She digs with her hands, then breaks off a branch to held. There is a loud TING as she strikes metal. She then pulls up the metal lunchbox.

INT. MICKEY'S APARTMENT- TWILIGHT

On her bed is the lunch box, now open. Mickey is picking through the contents of the box. A plastic bag that holds little trinkets inside. She finds a cassette tape and smiles. She pops it into her player, listening to the music as she sorts through his things. She smiles as she looks through the box, feeling connected to who he had been. She holds up a canister of 35mm film.

There is a small erratic buzzer noise that goes unnoticed by Mickey because of her music.

EXT. DOORWAY- TWILIGHT/NIGHT

Bernard is frantically pressing Mickey's doorbell, knowing on the door in desperation. He is about to scream for her to notice, when the hand of the hooded ominous figure reaches around and covers Bernard's mouth.