

DREAM PARLOR

A Novelization by
CHRISTOPHER ANDREWS

Based on the original screenplay by
CHRISTOPHER ANDREWS & JONATHAN LAWRENCE

>>IN THE 21st CENTURY, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND UNIFIED EUROPE, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE TO ESTABLISH A GLOBAL *UNIFIED NATIONS*, UNVEILED THEIR PLAN TO RECALL ALL U.S. AND EURO CURRENCY OVER A TWO-YEAR PERIOD. CONCURRENTLY, ALL CITIZENS WERE TO RECEIVE COMPUTER *IDENTIFICATION CHIPS*, CALLED *IDCs*.

>>THE CHIPS, DEVELOPED USING A REVOLUTIONARY NEW *CYBERNETIC INTERFACE GELATIN*, WERE TO BE SAFELY AND PAINLESSLY IMPLANTED IN THE BACK OF EACH CITIZEN'S RIGHT HAND. THEY CONTAINED ALL PERTINENT INFORMATION, SUCH AS FULL IDENTIFICATION, MEDICAL HISTORY, AND FINANCIAL STATUS, TO MAKE EVERYDAY CHORES — BANKING, HEALTH CARE, SHOPPING — MORE CONVENIENT.

>>DUE TO THEIR *SMART FUNCTION*, THE *IDCs* COULD BE TRACED VIA CELLULAR SATELLITE LINKS, MAKING ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS DRUG TRAFFICKING, VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE U.S. AND UNIFIED EUROPE PROUDLY PREDICTED THAT IF EVERYTHING PROCEEDED ACCORDING TO PLAN, THE *IDCs* WOULD LEAD TO A ONE-WORLD ECONOMY WITHIN *FIVE YEARS*.

>>GLOBAL PEACE AND A NEW WORLD ORDER WERE JUST AROUND THE CORNER ...

The steel birds of prey circled above. Young Elijah Barrett looked up at the hovering Police Organizer craft, but he could barely make it out from his short viewpoint amidst the rolling waves of the human sea around him.

His father's voice somehow drifted down to him over the chaos. Led by his anxious mother — and she *was* anxious, whether she wanted him to know it or not — Eli pushed forward toward his father. Mencer Barrett, slender, tall, *proud*, called out to the gathering before him from the back of an old flatbed truck, acknowledging the line of Police Organizers around him only when it served to further his points. *The Constitution guarantees us the Right to public assembly*, his father cried, *so why did I need a permit to be here tonight? Why are there men with guns all around us?!* Eli didn't understand everything that his father was yelling about, but he knew that it was very important.

Eli watched as a government man in a business suit climbed up onto the back of the truck beside his father. The man shook his finger in Mencer's face, shaming or warning him it seemed, but his father simply did what he did so well — he turned the situation to his *advantage*. He seized the man's accusing hand and twisted it, exposing to the crowd the new IDC chip that everyone had been talking about at school — before Eli was removed from the public system in favor of home education.

(“What do ya mean, your dad's not gonna let you get one? Everyone's gonna get one, you dork!”

“Nuh-uh! Mydad says it's a trick, and the government is tryin—”

“I heard about your dad, Eli. My uncle says he's a

trouble-maker."

"My mom said he's a freak!"

"That's not true! My dad's a great man!"

"Oh, really? Then how come he's not gonna let you get an IDC? Haven't you heard about all the great stuff you can do when you scan your chip?")

Mencer indicated the clear-and-black chip on the suited man's hand. *Is this what you want?! he demanded. Is this what you want for yourselves, for your children?!*

No! The bluster of the crowd grew more indignant, more hostile. Eli looked around nervously, his heart quickening in his chest and butterflies fluttering in his stomach. He wished his mother would pull him free of this!

The IDC isn't about your convenience! his father insisted. *It's about power ...*

The government man pulled his arm free and shoved Mencer aside. A surge pulsed through the crowd, and for a frightful moment Eli lost sight of his father.

Now listen to me, the suited man ordered.

Then everything *really* went crazy. As the suited man leaned forward, trying to stare his authority into the masses, a spectator burst forth from the rest of the crowd. Before the Police Organizers could react, he leaped onto the side of the truck, wielding a knife which he thrust at the startled government man. Eli and his mother broke into the front of the crowd just in time to see the Organizers grab the man with the knife and hurl him to the pavement.

Eli gaped in shock and confusion. His mother was yelling, his father was yelling, *everyone* was yelling as the Organizers beat the man with their clubs. The man wasn't even holding the knife anymore — he was just trying to protect himself.

Mencer jumped over the side of the truck. He tried to reach the beaten man, but one of the Organizers turned on

him and pushed him back into the side of the truck. Eli's mother tried to go to him, but then more men in suits grabbed *her*.

Eli panicked. He swung at the men holding his mother, hitting them with all the strength his eight-year-old body could muster, but they wouldn't let go.

His father finally shoved his way past the Organizer, but the policeman spun around, lashing out with his club. He caught Mencer across the side of his left knee, bringing the larger-than-life man to the ground.

Before the horrible sight could even sink in, Eli was lifted right off his feet and carried forward as the protestors reacted to the assault, converging on the Organizers and suited men. The heat of human bodies and human rage threatened to smother Eli. Legs, knees, feet, and flailing arms pounded him from every angle, and for the first time in his few years, Eli experienced *fearing for his life*.

Finally, the swell of protestors ebbed just enough to allow Eli his path. Mencer knelt before him, clutching at his broken joint and drawing breath through clenched teeth. Eli had never before seen his father so vulnerable, so mortal.

Sensing his son's presence, Mencer lifted his head. Eli reached out with a numb, caring hand and touched his father's face, feeling the heat and sweat so foreign to his gentle visage. In spite of the turmoil around them, Mencer met Eli's gaze and actually smiled at his little boy.

Around Mencer's neck, a small, wooden cross had dangled into view. Eli reached out and touched the reassuring symbol.

It was over now. This would all stop soon and everything would be all right. They would go home and—

A Police Organizer parted the crowd like a shark. His arm was a blur of violence as his club cracked against the back of Mencer's skull. His father's head jerked unnaturally



Around Mencer's (Richard Hench) neck, a small, wooden cross had dangled into view. Young Eli (Andrew Martin) reached out and touched the reassuring symbol.

to the side, snapping the cord from around his neck, and Elijah Barrett found himself standing alone, the wooden cross dangling from his clenched fist.

Like the passing of a torch ...

The biggest mistake the System ever made was murdering Elijah's father, and letting him live to remember it. It was as though ... Goliath had given the stone to David.

Deep inside, everyone knew we could not win that day, but few realized just what it was we stood to lose. It was more than a simple endeavor for power — it was a quest to control our minds ...

... and deplete our souls ...

CRUCIFY!

The glaring spotlights swept over the studio audience as they jumped and cheered for the hovering digital cameras. The electric eyes sailed through the sound stage, finally coming to rest on the beefy, chrome-plated letter -X- riveted to a concrete overhead girder. A side curtain parted, and the cheesy Host stepped out to bask in his typically warm reception. He parted his arms over his head as if in mass embrace of his beloved fans, then turned his toothy grimace to the cameras.

“Welcome back to the Execution Channel!” the Host called into his old-style microphone, and the audience erupted into another round of cheers and applause. The Host milked the response within a centimeter of its death before continuing, “Our first example on ‘Death Row Tonight’ is Citizen One-One-Eight-One-One, surnamed Elijah Barrett, son of the sociopathic Mencer Barrett.

“Eli’s convictions include tampering with government records, embezzling food rations for Non-Citizens, and propagating spiritual awareness. Before the break, we asked you — our voyeur participants, as well as the Citizens here in the studio — how One-One-Eight-One-One should be deleted from the system ... and The Verdict Says?!”

The cameras whip-panned around to focus on the studio audience as they shouted out in mob-like passion, “Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!”

The Host mugged for the cameras once more as he called back, “Yoouu asked for it! ... Yoouu got it!”

He parted his arms in the air again as he stepped aside.



Citizen 11811, surnamed Elijah Barrett
(Christopher Andrews).

The backdrop beneath the chrome -X- broke away, revealing an old, rugged cross, gaily trimmed with blinking Broadway-style lights. Two muscle-bound men, stripped to the waist and oiled to highlight every ripple of their physiques, lowered the massive cross flat onto the stage floor.

From the wings, the bruised, bloody, and badly beaten twenty-eight-year-old Eli Barrett staggered out, led by three vixens clad in slutesque executioner leathers, their bodies of such sexually-provocative proportions, they flagrantly slapped Mother Nature in the face. The audience went berserk.

The muscle men seized the helpless Eli, throwing him backwards onto the cross. Before he could react — and it was uncertain whether or not he even had the strength to do so — two of the vixens held him down while the third handed huge spikes to the men, who positioned each of the stinging points firmly against Eli's palms.

The audience cacophony reached a fevered pitch as the

muscle men raised mallets high into the air and brought them down with full force — then the heavy, deafened sound of metal on metal silenced even the studio mob. Every vein in Eli's body swelled as the steel shanks pierced his hands, embedding deeper into the wood of the cross with each blow. The audience was morbid and still.

When Eli was finally secured to the dense timber at his hands and feet, the unaffected vixens posed and gestured as the muscle men ceremoniously raised the cross into the air, finally dropping its base hard into a hole in the center of the stage floor. Eli's shoulders were wrenched from their sockets as the cross locked into an upright stance ...

* * *

Eli's eyes popped open. His own staccato breathing rasped loudly in his ears, topped only by the throbbing of his pulse. A moment later, his panic declined just enough for him to grasp the concept that his crucifixion had been a nightmare.

But it could have been real, a little voice reminded him.

Throwing the thin sheet aside, Confirmed Citizen 11811, Elijah Barrett, bolted from his cot to the undersized mirror over his utility sink. Trembling, he twisted the controls until a stream of water finally sputtered and spit from the faucet, then he bent and splashed it onto his face. Rational thoughts were steadily working their way to the forefront of his mind, but he still could not resist the urge to examine himself for any signs of injury. He inspected his slender body, then checked his hands — and he wasn't really surprised when he found them unmarked.

Well ... almost unmarked ...

Turning his right hand over, Eli regarded his IDC. It was about 2 x 4 centimeters, with its interface housing dark

to signify his status as a Citizen.

Just like the Suits that night ... just like the Organizers.

His mother had no choice, of course. Openings for Citizenship were disappearing at a frightful rate, and what good would it do to honor her husband's memory if it landed herself and their son on the streets as Non-Citizens?

As an adult, Eli could appreciate her predicament — and tried not to imagine what personal sacrifices she might have subjected herself to in order to insure they passed her Vocational Screening and his Aptitude Test. As a child, however, he saw the world in fewer shades of gray, and he'd been bitter towards her for making him “betray” his father and take the chip. He felt especially guilty for that bitterness after his mother ...

Well, at least *Nora* had been there for him.

Eli at last settled down to meet his own gaze in the mirror. His sand-colored hair, cut short for efficiency, was darkened slightly by sweat, and the tap water dripped past blue eyes over a face that, in spite of the passing of many hard years, had maintained some semblance of youth and innocence. If two decades of living and working in the System hadn't erased that countenance from his face, then a simple nightmare stood little chance of doing so.

But, if nothing else, he thought wryly, it's inspired me for my next assignment.

Glancing at his watch, Eli decided that he wouldn't be getting any more sleep tonight. Taking three steps to the opposite wall of his living unit, he took his brush and paste from their shelf. Back at the sink, he began brushing his teeth.

THEY ALWAYS DO

Nora flicked her tongue over her front teeth. She was beyond noticing the fuzzy texture of built-up plaque, but the coppery taste of blood got her attention. An experimental finger demonstrated that the same teeth were just the slightest bit loose as well. She rolled her shoulders, but the ache in her joints worsened rather than receded.

How ironic that a person who'd never spent even an hour at sea could be showing signs of scurvy ...

She made a mental note to dig especially deep in the local trash bins for any fruit she could find, no matter how nasty — even an apple with a worm would provide her much-needed Vitamin C.

The problem, of course, was quite academic — Nora Puente simply was not yet skilled at life as a homeless vagrant.

Oh, pardon me, that's "Non-Citizen" according to the latest political lingo.

While she'd never been rich, she hadn't been the most impoverished kid on her block, either. She'd been halfway toward becoming a Registered Nurse when the world turned upside-down — in fact, if she hadn't been so involved in her studies, she might have paid more attention when they announced the new government's Vocational Screening ... and how critical it was not to miss your scheduled testing date! She wasn't used to not being allowed to hold a job or own property ... or stop by the local supermarket for something as simple and necessary as a tooth brush, loaf of bread, or bottle of multi-vitamins.

Nora straightened her back, which brought another piercing throb. She shook her head and, in spite of the pain, grinned.

When Doctor Corbit promised how real this would be, she thought in sheer wonder, he wasn't kidding.

Then the boy and his mother appeared ... and all other considerations left Nora's mind.

There they were, just like before ... two new Citizens, their opaque IDCs in such critical contrast to Nora's clear one. They emerged from the early morning fog, the adult in the lead but somehow not really guiding the boy. The mother stared straight ahead, not seeing anything beyond her own tortured thoughts, and the boy occasionally sneaked glances down at the small wooden cross hanging from his neck — there had been talk of banning all religious icons, and Nora was surprised that the mother allowed the boy to wear his so openly.

Nora watched them approach, and she felt both excited and apprehensive, a guilty pleasure that she strove to accept and ignore.

Just like Doctor Corbit said ...

As the pair passed her, Nora rose to her feet. This was cheating a bit — she hadn't actually followed them quite so closely the first time — but she wanted to be near when it happened.

Although the mother remained oblivious, the boy noticed her, and he slowed to stare at this strange NC who trailed after them. The woman continued at her same pace, and her hand slipped from her child's.

"I know you," she whispered, not truly aware that she was speaking aloud. It was all so real ... "I know you."

The boy merely stared, his back to his mother at the crucial moment.

Turn around now, Nora urged silently. Turn around and

see ...

The boy did turn, and his breath caught when he spotted his mother collapsed to the ground. He rushed to her, and Nora's lips quivered and eyes moistened in pity as she watched him shake her, urging her to awaken. He looked around frantically and appeared to see something further down the alley — perhaps a passing Citizen, perhaps the ghost of his own denial. The boy rose and moved away ...

... and Nora went to work.

She knelt over the woman, pushing her onto her back. Placing her hands the proper distance up the sternum, Nora dove into CPR.

The boy heard the pumping movements and turned to watch her. Nora cleared an air passage, gave a few puffs of the Breath of Life, then returned to pumping her chest as the boy walked numbly back toward them.

Nora quickly realized that it was hopeless — the woman's lips were already blue. For a massive coronary, CPR was rarely enough — without a defibrillator, there was no chance.

Slowly, Nora stopped. She hesitated to meet the boy's eyes — indeed, she would spend the next years fearing that the boy secretly blamed her for failing — but she forced herself to look up. Any moment now, the boy would fall into her arms, crying and trembling, his heart breaking beyond all hope. And Nora would be there for him, holding him tight, and promising that ...

Something was wrong.

The boy wasn't crying. He was staring at her blankly, his eyes cold and dry.

On the ground beside her, the woman's body vanished in a breeze of morning fog, but Nora was beyond noticing.

What's happening?! Corbit said—!

Then, the words she had dreaded hearing for the last twenty years:

“You let her die,” Eli spat, his eyes suddenly no longer cold but fiercely hot, “I hate you!” Turning sharply, Eli marched away.

“Wait!” Nora cried, her heart thundering in her chest. “Don’t leave! I tried to save her ...”

This was all wrong! Everything was coming apart! When that husky Organizer turned her over to Corbit, she’d been more confused than afraid, but the famous doctor had explained that he simply needed her help — her help — and that in return, he would give her something few Non-Citizens dared to think about anymore.

He would give her her dreams.

Corbit wanted nothing more of her than that she dream, and keep on dreaming as long as she liked, as long as she could, until ... what? He had never been clear about that, but it had been evident that he expected something to eventually happen.

But this ... Please, God, don’t let this be what she wanted! This was no dream — this was her greatest nightmare, her most secret guilt, displayed right before her mind’s cringing eye!

“This isn’t right!” she cried to the heavens, praying the man outside might hear. “This isn’t the way it happened!”

She turned back to the sight of the retreating boy. He blamed her. He hated her! All these years, hadn’t she always known how he secretly despised her? Hadn’t she?!

“Elijah, you were there!” she pleaded. “I tried to save her! Remember, Elijah, remember?!”

Eli stopped, turned, and glared at her with unadulterated bitterness and loathing ...

... and Nora’s soul died.

She had failed. She’d failed Eli, failed in the only true

task ever meant for her. She was the lowest of the low, unworthy of drawing another breath. She deserved to be struck down by God himself, smitten and burned out of existence ...

... and then, she was.

* * *

“Come on, Nora ...”

The haggard Hispanic woman screamed on the dreamslab, twisting back and forth, her right hand almost-but-not-quite pulling free from the interface gel. Her hair was matted, her face dripping heavily with perspiration — sweat of heat, sweat of *pain*. Her eyes darted back and forth beneath closed lids in rapid eye movement.

Doctor James Edward Corbit gripped the edge of his work station, his anxiety having nothing at all to do with Nora’s personal danger. The surly man divided his gaze between Nora herself and the monitor scope that displayed her brainwave patterns.

In the background, the computer’s synthesized voice rattled off various attempts to stabilize the subject — all of which were *failing*. “*Warning: Regressive bio-feedback in progress. Endorphin increase: No effect. Alpha-wave suppressant: No effect ...*”

“Listen to me, Nora, you can do this!” Corbit continued, insistent. “You can beat this thing!”

Nora screamed again at the top of her lungs. Corbit grunted — his REM-emitters gave him only vague insight into the specific content of his subjects’ dreams, but it looked like the mainframe’s defense this time was to consume her in *flames!*

“Keep fighting!” he urged. “Come on, Nora, come on!”

Her convulsions grew worse, and she began to



Dr. James Corbit (Harold Cannon) divided his gaze between his subject and the monitor scope that displayed her brainwave patterns.

hyperventilate between bellows of agony. She cried out in her native Spanish, her words slurring together.

Then the smell hit him — the pungent reek of burning flesh. Corbit glanced over his shoulder at her smoldering form. He'd seen physical manifestations in response to the mainframe's torment before — indeed, the Powers That Be were pushing him for increased psychosomatic reactions every day — but he'd never witnessed anything this *extreme*. Her blood must be literally boiling, raising her body temperature to seemingly *impossible* levels. Heat blisters erupted all over her body, like paint peeling from overheated metal, and blood trickled from her eyes, nose, and ears.

The computer voice raised in volume, spouting warnings of the subject's rapid decline, "*Warning: Lethal psychosomatic reaction — subject will not survive ...*" As if Corbit couldn't figure that out for *himself*!

Corbit rushed to her side, biting back the nausea

prompted by the close proximity. He leaned over her scalding face, switching to Spanish in false empathy and raging for her to fight, to *win!*

The woman writhed violently one last time, her IDC hand finally wrenching free of the interface gel as she choked her last breath. The IDC itself had practically melted right into her skin. Smoke rose from her charred flesh.

“Total synaptic hemorrhage,” the computer stated with objective finality. *“Link to mainframe severed. Session terminated.”*

Corbit glared blankly down at the dead woman. Some long lost part of him wondered if he should *feel* something for her, some instinctive human emotion in response to the pain and suffering he had caused her. He considered his own IDC, wondering what it would feel like to have it cooked right out of his body. He knew how ingrained into the nervous system the IDCs really were. Who else in this God-forsaken hell-hole had explored its potential further than the man who invented the *Dream Parlor?*

But he felt nothing for her, beyond what she represented for him personally: Another damned *failure*.

“Private Entry, March Twenty-First: The subject, Nora Puente, appeared stable, at first ... they always do ...”

Slowly, begrudgingly, Corbit stepped back and shut down the dreamslab’s primary generator.

“Shortly after the assigned dreamscan slipped into free fall, the subject experienced regressive bio-feedback, triggered by some bitter-sweet memory tainted with suppressed guilt. I increased the pleasure stimulation to her fantasy early in the process, but this had little or no bearing on her will to stay in her selected dream.”

Corbit methodically pulled the extra material of the blue-green bed sheet up and over, covering Nora’s corpse and cutting the stench just a bit.

The same damn thing every time. They start off fine, entertaining themselves with whatever petty joyrides their limited imaginations could conjure, then *wham!* — the mainframe reacts, and their dreams ricochet off into *hell*. What was the catalyst?

Taking a moment, he removed the top of the skull sitting to one side of his work station. He selected a candy at random and popped it into his mouth.

“Guilt,” he speculated idly as he munched away, “it’s gotta be *guilt*.”

“What I need is a strong subject to get anywhere — if I can break the unbreakable, I’ll be ready to move forward with my research. However, finding a Citizen whose mind has not been totally molested by the System is like finding a virgin whore.”

Sighing, Corbit pushed away from the table and proceeded to dispose of Nora’s remains in the usual fashion...

