

The Beautiful Machine

Book and Music by

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Pop Theater

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*Lighting note: In this enclosed city of concentric rings, the Sun Pearl at the center is the only natural light source. Day and night are only distinguishable in the innermost rings (Diamond, Ruby, Emerald). Further out, the lower class are resigned to suffer the perpetual dimness of artificial light.*

1 INT. LAB - AMBER RING - T.I. (TIME INDISTINGUISHABLE)

1

A videolog begins. ROBERT (40s, African-American, scientist) pulls back from the camera after pressing the record button. He holds a glowing glass sphere. A makeshift lab provides the backdrop.

ROBERT

Videolog, January 19, 2179.  
Embersphere trial #38.

(Holds up Embersphere)

The math looks good! But, since I can't actually leave the city and test it outside in a real radioactive environment, the results are only theoretical. But, it's just a matter of time, really. I'll crack the access code to the exit hatch one way or another. Actually, I'm heading out to Onyx Ring again tonight for another attempt, so we'll see what happens.

Robert reaches toward the camera and stops the recording.

2 EXT. TRAIN STATION - AMBER RING - T.I.

2

Close Up. BEN (19, Mixed-Race, mild-mannered) stares at a PHOTO, we don't see its image. Just then, he's interrupted--A gentle hand on his shoulder, the touch of a mother. Anna Phoenix(40s, White, kindhearted), holds his rolling suitcase.

ANNA

He'd be proud of you, ya know. Very few people from Amber Ring ever get to promote. You've achieved something he never could.

BEN

Because he was cheated. His academic score was in the top *one percent*, and yet he was still rejected because of some inhumane genetic test. It's not fair.

Anna pulls out an INHALER.

ANNA

Life isn't fair, Benji, just look at  
*me*.

(Puffs her inhaler)

But the sick shouldn't envy the  
healthy, for neither is the other's  
fault. Besides, LIFE scores keep the  
city in order, it's just the way it  
is. Now, enough about your father,  
today is *your* day.

BEN

It's been five years, you know, to the  
day.

ANNA

I know...

BEN

I'm going to continue his work, Mom.  
I'm going to solve the food crisis,  
you'll see.

ANNA

Of course you will, honey.

A TRAIN approaches.

ANNA

(Hides her inhaler)

Better not to get caught with this.  
It's my last one, after all.

BEN

You want me to get you more?

ANNA

I got a guy in Amethyst, I'll survive.

Ben pauses, it's the first time he's left home.

ANNA

Well go on, then. The workday gong's  
about to chime and then you'll never  
get to the platform.

The train comes to a stop. Lieutenant CONWAY (30s, his  
personality reflects his high-and-tight haircut) exits the car

CONWAY

All aboard! Promotion train to Diamond

Ring.

BEN  
Love you, Mom.

ANNA  
Love you more.

Ben approaches the station. AMBER RECRUITS wait at the platform. Two ONYX RING AMPUTEES scrub graffiti that reads "Long Live the Firebird!", a CORRECTIONS OFFICER supervises.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER  
Quit your whining, low-life. Be thankful you got a job at all.

Ben bumps into the woman's wheelchair, she drops her RAG.

BEN  
Sorry.

Ben reaches for the rag, the Corrections Officer stops him.

SOLDIER #2  
She's still got arms.

SHAUN  
Well if it ain't Little Benny Phoenix. I guess they're just lettin' *anyone* promote now.

BEN  
I don't want any trouble, Shaun.

SHAUN  
Such a loser. You won't last one day as a soldier.

AMBER RECRUIT  
He'll be cryin' for mommy on the first night!

Amber Recruits laugh.

CONWAY  
Quiet. Tickets out, eyes up.

Conway scans Amber Recruits' LIFE TICKETS and retinas with his DATAPAD as each enters. The others' tickets are blue, Ben's is green.

SHAUN

(Overly confident)

Ready to serve, sir. Trust the process.

CONWAY

Sit down.

(To Ben)

LIFE ticket.

(Scans Ben's retinas)

Phoenix, huh? Interesting. And a green ticket, don't see many of those.

BEN

I plan to be an engineer, sir, in Emerald Ring.

CONWAY

Good for you, kid.

BEN

Do you think we'll see Emerald today? From the train, I mean. I've never, um...

CONWAY

We'll see every ring today, all the way to Diamond at city center. Ever see the Sun Pearl up close?

BEN

No sir. Its light doesn't reach us way out here.

CONWAY

Then today's your lucky day. But don't count those emerald chickens yet, you gotta put two years in the service, first.

BEN

Right, I know.

CONWAY

Hop in, son. Don't want to keep the General waiting.

Ben enters the car, there are no seats left. He looks out at the life he's leaving behind, hand against the glass.

3 INT/EXT. TRAIN CAR/AMBER RING - (CONTINUOUS) 3

["**SOCIETY**" begins]

*The workday gong sounds as the train leaves the station. Amber Ring erupts with people heading to work, crossing in different directions. The train slowly ascends the elevated track, passing over the ring border-wall, into the purple glow of Amethyst Ring. **Society...***

4 INT. MAKESHIFT HOSPITAL - AMETHYST RING - (CONT.) 4

*Injured people of outer ring colors (Onyx, Amber, Amethyst) are being cared for by AMETHYST FOLK. Some lie in cots, other's sit on floor mats. We witness a touching moment with an Emerald DOCTOR as she cares for a sick child.*

*GENERAL KEYSER (60's, militant, heavy-handed) enters with a group of SOLDIERS. Panic! Workers freeze, some try and escape. Soldiers scan people with metal detector wands, one of which beeps when it touches the Doctor's arm. Keyser forcefully grabs the woman, tearing off her glove to reveal a mechanical hand. She's zip-tied and dragged out. A second soldier follows behind, gripping a power drill. He pumps it twice. **Society makes...***

5 EXT. SAPPHIRE RING - MILITARY BASE - DAY(ISH) - (CONT.) 5

*Light from the Sun Pearl is a little brighter here, casting a blue hue over the ring from the reflection of the ring walls. SAPPHIRE SOLDIERS march in organized rows, proclaiming the importance of obeying the Providence. **Society makes you...***

6 EXT. FARMER'S MARKET - EMERALD RING - DAY - GREENISH LIGHTING - (CONT.) 6

*Like a page from a 1950's catalogue, the setting has become idyllic, though completely manufactured. The light from the Sun Pearl is brighter, the streets are cleaner. EMERALD MAN walks his family through a market, bustling with life, lined with fruit stands run by RUBY FARMERS. An ONYX WORKER grabs a piece of FRUIT, his mouth waters, the farmer slaps his hand--he's not the right color. **Society makes you forget.***

7 EXT. - DIAMOND RING PLAZA - DAY - WHITE LIGHTING - (CONT.) 7

*We're back in the train car as it approaches the station. Conway rises to lead the recruits out to a lavishly landscaped plaza. Government buildings rise like marble monoliths behind them. As the recruits file toward their destination, they pass an AMBER TEACHER explaining the **LIFE***

score system to a group of children: "Longevity, Intelligence, **F**it and **E**fficiency." Her overly friendly tone almost masks the true depravity of categorizing citizens through genetic testing. "They call it 'The Process'".

As BEN and the recruits continue on, the plaza slowly fills with people of all colors, marching. The shot pulls out, wider and wider until the crescendo, singing in unison one word: "**SOCIETY!**" Then, an elaborate a capella routine showcases hierarchy through dance, carrying us through the coda. The recruits finally come to rest, at attention, ready for orders.

GENERAL KEYSER paces in front of the recruits.

KEYSER

Good morning recruits, welcome to your first day. For those of you expecting a continental breakfast and a meet and greet, you can forget it. We're in the middle of an uprising and we have a city to protect.

KEYSER reaches into the BAG and pulls out the mechanical arm

KEYSER (CONT'D)

This, boys and girls, is an artificial body modification, liberated from its owner not moments ago. Our intel suggests that these "Grinders", are a faction of the Freechildren, whereby ordinary citizens are fitted with mechanical weapon enhancements; it's called "Bio-hacking". After which, they're told to lay low and carry on as normal until some inevitable call to revolt. Unfortunately for them, our most recent raid in Amethyst not only led to the largest cache of weapon enhancements so far, but the discovery and execution of their creator: a man you all know as the Firebird.

Recruits are awestruck.

KEYSER (CONT'D)

Now, on your way here, you were offered a glimpse into the rings which you are now fortunate enough to protect. And with the Firebird finally extinguished, we are that much closer

to reestablishing balance.

SHAUN  
We didn't see Onyx Ring.

KEYSER  
Excuse me?

SHAUN  
Onyx Ring, we didn't see it.

KEYSER  
I don't remember giving you permission  
to speak!

Keyser hits Shaun, he falls.

KEYSER  
Onyx Ring is not worth defending. It  
is the essence of putrescence,  
proliferated by Xan Jackson and that  
disease she calls the Freechildren. In  
my opinion, no one deserves protection  
who openly speaks out against the  
process. Or don't you agree?

SHAUN  
Yes, sir.

KEYSER  
Speak up.

SHAUN  
Yes, sir!

KEYSER  
Good, now get up.

KEYSER (CONT'D)  
Well then, I look forward to the  
results of your training exercises  
this afternoon. Congratulations, class  
of '85, and welcome to Sapphire Law  
Enforcement. Trust the Process.

CONWAY, AMBER RECRUITS  
Trust the Process!

A stately room. The walls are adorned with portraits of past



presidents, as well as a framed diagram of the City of Rings. A large desk and leather chair claim the center of the room. The PRESIDENT (60s, distinguished, Asian) stands next to his desk, being fitted for a suit by TERENCE (60s, British accent). CLARITY (Late 20s, intelligent, passionate, Asian) stands next to the desk. KEYSER enters.

PRESIDENT

Ah, General Keyser. What's the news?

KEYSER

President Providence, the news is good. We have a handle on the Grinders and demonstrations have diminished since the Firebird's execution.

PRESIDENT

That is good news. Looks like we'll squash this revolution yet.

KEYSER

There's still more work to be done, sir. Our next move--

PRESIDENT

Demonstrations have ceased, Roman, you said it yourself. I say we can call this one win and move on.

KEYSER

Mr. President, with all due respect, she's not just going to back down--

PRESIDENT

She? I thought the Firebird was a man.

KEYSER

I'm talking about Jackson, sir.

PRESIDENT

That farmer out in Onyx Ring?

KEYSER

And leader of a notoriously defiant gang, yes.

PRESIDENT

Oh come now, Roman, they're no more than an hippie social club. I mean, what kind of "gang" calls themselves the "Freechildren"?

CLARITY

What's your evidence?

KEYSER

Excuse me?

CLARITY

You say Jackson's behind this. What's your evidence?

KEYSER

Thought you'd never ask.

Keyser tosses PHOTOS onto the desk, showing people on the floor, cuffed, flanked by soldiers.

PRESIDENT

What is this?

KEYSER

Bootleggers, moving produce out of Onyx to the other six rings through some kind of "smuggler's tunnel". Those boxes are filled with Jackson's produce. And the workers? All outfitted with mechanical body modifications.

PRESIDENT

Interesting...

KEYSER

This proves her intent to weaponize the Freechildren. We shut down her farm in Onyx, and we starve this revolution out, before it takes hold.

CLARITY

The city is already starving, General, and you want to outlaw a viable new food source? Your theories may be compelling, sir, but they're nothing more than that: theories. So until you do have something concrete, we should do no more than thank Jackson for her contribution to the city's food supply.

KEYSER

Her produce is unregulated, Clarity, who knows what poisons it contains?

CLARITY

Well maybe if you actually read the report--

PRESIDENT

Alright, enough squabbling. Roman, get to the point. Thank you Terence.

Terence exits. The President resumes his decadent lunch.

KEYSER

Sir, it's time we send a message, one that reminds the Freechildren of whom holds power.

PRESIDENT

A message. What are you talking about?

KEYSER

We destroy their tunnel. With explosives.

PRESIDENT

Absolutely /not.

CLARITY

/The damage it'll cause!

KEYSER

Jackson's defying the law, we have to be firm handed!

PRESIDENT

I can be firm handed, Roman, but not at the expense of my citizens, be them from Onyx or Diamond Ring. My daughter's right, we should be grateful for Jackson's work. She's found an effective, albeit crude, solution to a burgeoning food crisis and one day we will push for regulation. However, I do agree that she face discipline for illegal trafficking. So, your orders are to seal the tunnel and be done with this.

KEYSER

Explosives give a stronger--

PRESIDENT

The answer is "no", and that's final. Well, now that my food is cold, I guess I'll move on to *important* business. The centennial is the day

after tomorrow and I've got a speech to write.

(Smiles)

Be prepared for a big announcement.

KEYSER

And the Grinders, sir?

PRESIDENT

Go shake up Sector 81 in Onyx, see what Jackson knows.

(Sips coffee)

Come to think of it, while you're out there, procure some more vanilla bean from her, would you? I can barely stand the taste of this government sanctioned swill.

KEYSER

Of course, sir.

PRESIDENT

(While walking out the door)

Trust the process.

KEYSER

Trust the process

CLARITY

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9 EXT. - SAPPHIRE TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY(ISH)

9

SHAUN and RECRUITS brag about the training, BEN is silent. SERGEANT enters, holding her DATAPAD, they snap to attention.

SERGEANT

Datapads out. Now, as I call each one, you'll see the results, and yours only, of this afternoon's training exercises.

(Taps her datapad)

Alright, test one: Physical fitness.

SHAUN

Nine out of ten, let's see someone beat that.

SERGEANT

Test number two: Maps and compass reading.

SHAUN

Oooooh, 99 percent.

SERGEANT

Quiet. And lastly, virtual hand to hand combat.

SHAUN

Hello!

SERGEANT

Those are the numbers. And in fact, we have one recruit who earned the highest cumulative Day 1 score in Sapphire history. Congratulations, to Benjamin Phoenix.

RECRUITS turn to each other, some dumbfounded, some chuckling at the irony.

SHAUN

What?!

SERGEANT

Off to the barracks. We begin field training bright and early tomorrow.

SHAUN

With all due respect, you clearly misspoke.

SEARGENT

Are you questioning a superior officer, Mr. Detroit?

SHAUN

No, ma'am.

SERGEANT

Good, now off to the barracks, *recruit*.

SHAUN

(While passing Ben)

You got lucky, loser. Better watch your back.

Shaun and Recruits exit, Sergeant approaches Ben.

SEARGENT

I have to say, perfect scores, I've never seen numbers like these. Nice work, Phoenix, you've earned you a place with the Lieutenant tomorrow.

BEN  
Thank you, ma'am.

SERGEANT  
What ring did you score into again?  
Emerald?

BEN  
Yes ma'am.

SERGEANT  
Fits you right. Congrats again.

BEN  
Thank you ma'am.

Sergeant exits. Ben pulls out his PHOTO.

**[CHASING A MYSTERY]** begins.

*Ben sings to his father, his confidence growing with each lyric, as he reaffirms his pursuit of his father's ultimate dream: To save the city from inexorable starvation. As Ben holds out the final note, the sound of someone clearing his throat startles him, causing him to drop his photo.*

BEN  
Lieutenant Conway, sir. I was just  
leaving.

CONWAY  
Relax, recruit, I came to congratulate  
you. We'll be investigating the tunnel  
tomorrow morning, it'll be good to  
work with a top soldier like yourself.

BEN  
Thank you, sir. See you in the morning

Ben salutes, he begins to walk away. Conway picks up the photo, staring in disbelief. (We don't see the image)

CONWAY  
Phoenix.

BEN  
Yes, sir?

CONWAY  
You dropped this.

BEN  
Thank you, sir.

CONWAY  
Not a problem. Enjoy the rest of your  
afternoon, soldier.

Ben salutes and exits frame. Conway grabs his RADIO.

CONWAY  
General Keyser, come in. I need to see  
you about an interesting encounter I  
just had, sir.

10 INT. - LAB - AMBER RING - T.I.

10

Another videolog, Robert is smiling slightly.

ROBERT  
Videolog, January 20, 2179. Well, last  
night's attempt at cracking the access  
code was successful, but not quite in  
the way I expected. I was caught,  
actually, by a most fascinating woman.  
Another researcher: Xan Jackson. And  
I'm humbled to say that her farming  
operation is much more successful than  
any of my projects. So, well, we kind  
of struck a partnership. In fact, I  
think I'm going to help her with an  
interesting problem. Yeah. Basically,  
she's run out of resources to make  
grow lights, and needs an alternative  
source of artificial sunlight. So I  
thought--why not grow food outside, in  
real sunlight, under the protection of  
the Embersphere. Now, I admit the  
promise was a bit premature, but she  
said she could get me through the exit  
hatch, so I jumped on it.

11 EXT/INT - SMUGGLER'S TUNNEL - AMETHYST RING - T.I.

11

A heavy metal door marks the entrance to a tunnel. Chains,  
which once held a lock, are cut. CONWAY and BEN approach

CONWAY  
We're responding to a trespassing call  
from earlier this morning. Suspected  
Grinders. Here, take this scanner  
wand, we're looking for mech.