

CASE FILE #001: The Hollow Chorus

Investigator: A. Quinn

Date Opened: October 3, 2025

[PRIVATE - DO NOT SHARE]

ENTRY 1.1 — The Impossible Footage

Timestamp: 02:37 AM, October 4

I should have walked away when the surveillance footage showed him in two places at once.

But I didn't. Because I'd already spent six hours scrubbing the metadata, cross-referencing building security logs, pulling traffic cam angles from three different intersections. Jordan Cross was on that rooftop at 11:47 PM. Jordan Cross was also in the alley below at 11:47 PM. Same ratty jacket with the reflective striping. Same beaten skate shoes. Same way of moving—that restless, kinetic energy like he's always about to bolt.

Two Jordans. Both real. Both *there*.

I have twelve monitors in my office. I made myself watch all twelve feeds simultaneously for forty minutes, waiting for a skip, a glitch, any sign of tampering. There wasn't one. The footage was clean. Too clean. My eyes started to cross around minute thirty-two, the way they do when I've been staring too long, and I saw—

No. I'll come back to that.

My hands were shaking. I made tea. Earl Grey, two bags, steeped exactly four minutes. The bergamot usually helps ground me, pulls me back from the edge when I start seeing patterns that aren't there.

It didn't help.

I should have walked away. Told my client—Marcus Chen, whose brother disappeared three weeks ago after getting mixed up with some urban explorer crew—that I'd hit a dead end. Refunded half his deposit. Closed the file. I have seventeen other cases that don't involve reality breaking.

Instead, I opened a new folder on my desktop. Named it "Impossible." Created the first entry:

Subject: Jordan Cross, 24
Last Known: Rooftop chase, Old City District
Anomaly: Simultaneous manifestation
Threat Level: [Unknown]

Then I did what I always do when my brain starts screaming that something's *wrong*—I made a list.

EVIDENCE LOG — Night of October 3

Item 1A: Security Footage (Rooftop)

- Subject appears to be fleeing from unknown pursuer(s)
- Movement pattern: parkour, skilled, reckless
- 11:47:13 PM — Subject leaps across 12-foot gap between buildings
- 11:47:31 PM — Subject approaches skylight, hesitates
- 11:47:33 PM — Glass shatters (cause unclear—no visible impact)
- 11:47:34 PM — Subject falls through

Item 1B: Security Footage (Alley Camera)

- Same timestamp: 11:47:34 PM
- Subject appears *in alley below*, standing, breathing hard
- No evidence of fall
- No broken skylight visible from alley angle
- Subject looks up, appears disoriented
- 11:47:49 PM — Subject exits frame heading north

Item 1C: Traffic Camera (Jefferson & 5th)

- 11:48:02 PM — Subject appears, moving rapidly on foot
- Gait analysis: consistent with rooftop subject
- No visible injuries despite alleged fall through glass

Preliminary Conclusion: Impossible.

Secondary Conclusion: I need better locks on my office door.

ENTRY 1.2 — The Pattern Emerges

Timestamp: 04:15 AM, October 4

I couldn't sleep. Obviously. So I did what I do—I pulled every connected thread I could find.

Marcus Chen's brother, Daniel, disappeared on September 14. His last known location was a warehouse in the industrial district where, according to his friends, he'd gone to explore "some weird art installation." The friends described it as "mirrors and broken glass everywhere" and said Daniel got "real quiet" after spending time there. Started talking about "seeing too many versions of himself."

They thought he was on something. I'm not sure anymore.

I cross-referenced missing persons reports from the past six months. Found twelve cases with similar descriptors:

- Sudden behavioral changes
- References to "seeing double" or "multiple selves"
- Last seen near Old City or industrial districts
- Ages 19-32
- No apparent connection between subjects

Twelve people don't just develop the same psychotic break independently.

But here's what made my chest tighten, made me triple-check my door locks: **five of them were found**. Not "rescued"—*found*. Wandering. Incoherent. Speaking in fragmented sentences about "whispers" and "watching eyes" and "choosing wrong."

All five are currently institutionalized. All five became catatonic within 72 hours of recovery.

And all five, according to hospital records I absolutely should not have been able to access, have the same phrase written in their charts:

"Patient presents with extreme paranoia and dissociative ideation. Claims to hear voices providing contradictory instructions. Unresponsive to standard treatment protocols."

I started a second file.

Subject: Unknown Phenomenon

Working Title: "The Hollow Chorus" (based on recovered subject testimony)

Hypothesis: [REDACTED—too early, sounds insane]

ENTRY 1.3 — First Contact

Timestamp: 09:42 AM, October 4

Jordan Cross walked into my office this morning.

I didn't have an appointment scheduled. I didn't give him my address—it's not listed anywhere, part of the whole "trust no one" lifestyle that keeps me alive in this work. But he knocked, and when I checked the door camera, there he was, backpack slung over one shoulder, looking exhausted and wired simultaneously.

I considered not answering. Considered calling the police, though what would I say? "Officer, there's a man who was in two places at once and now he's at my door"?

I opened it. But I kept my hand on the pepper spray in my jacket pocket.

"Avery Quinn?" he said. Not a question, really. He already knew.

"Depends who's asking."

"Jordan Cross. I think..." He ran a hand through his hair, a nervous gesture that repeated three times in five seconds. "I think you've been looking for me. Or—looking *into* me. The rooftop thing. Last night."

My throat went dry. "How did you—"

"I saw you. I mean, I didn't see you see me, but I saw... futures? Possibilities? God, I sound insane." He laughed, but it was ragged around the edges. "Look, can I come in? I'm not dangerous. Well, I don't *think* I'm dangerous. I haven't hurt anyone. Except maybe myself, and that was—I'm rambling. I do that. ADHD, diagnosed when I was seven, medication made me feel like a zombie so I stopped taking it in high school, probably a mistake, definitely a mistake, but now I'm—"

"You can come in," I said. Because here's the thing about my particular brand of anxiety: I see the dangers. I map them. And standing in my doorway, Jordan Cross registered as... not a threat. Or not a *deliberate* threat.

Which might have been worse.

He sat in the client chair, but he couldn't stay still. Leg bouncing. Fingers drumming. Eyes darting to the windows, the door, the monitors showing my building's security feeds.

"You saw me in two places," he said. Not a question.

"Yes."

"Did you see..." He swallowed. "Did you see the others? The—the ghost versions?"

My pulse spiked. "Ghost versions."

"When I blink—and I don't mean *blink* blink, I mean when I *move*, when I jump or dodge or whatever—I see them. Alternate mes. Making different choices. Taking different paths. And

sometimes..." His voice dropped. "Sometimes they don't fade. Sometimes I can't tell which one is real. Which one is me."

I should have called someone. A psychiatrist. A priest. Anyone but the paranoid PI who sees threats in every shadow.

Instead, I said: "Tell me everything."

ENTRY 1.4 — The Testimony

Timestamp: 10:33 AM, October 4

Jordan's story came out in fragments, non-linear, exactly how I'd expect from someone whose brain works like his. I'm reconstructing it here in sequence, but that's not how he told it:

Three weeks ago, he was doing a courier run. Quick cash, under the table, delivering packages for people who don't ask questions. The drop was in the industrial district—same area Daniel Chen disappeared.

He took a shortcut across rooftops. Faster, and he likes the movement, the flow state of parkour. Except this time, mid-leap, he *saw himself* take a different route. Not imagined it—saw it. A ghostly outline of Jordan branching left while he went right.

He thought it was exhaustion. Sleep deprivation. Too much coffee, not enough food.

But it kept happening. Every decision point, he'd see the path not taken. The alternate Jordan making the other choice.

Two weeks ago, during another run, he was being chased—wouldn't say by who, got evasive when I pushed, which means either dangerous people or he's protecting someone. He leapt for a fire escape, missed, and *should have fallen*.

Except he didn't.

He *blinked*—his word for it—and suddenly he was on the fire escape he'd missed. Like reality skipped, rearranged itself to the version where he'd made the jump.

"I thought I was losing my mind," he said, that nervous laugh again. "Dissociating or whatever. But then it happened again. And again. And I started... controlling it? Kind of? I can feel the split, the moment where choices branch, and if I focus, if I really *push*, I can pick the branch."

"And last night?" I asked.

His face went pale. "Last night, someone was following me. Not just following—hunting. I could feel it, this *presence*, and every time I looked back, there was nothing there, but I *knew*. So I ran, and I kept blinking, kept jumping between paths, and then—"

He stopped. His hands were shaking.

"Then what?"

"Then I fell through the skylight, and I was in the bathroom, and I was also in the alley, and I was also still on the roof, and for a second I could see *all of them*, all the Jordans, all the choices, and something was *watching*, something huge, and it whispered—"

He cut himself off. Pressed his palms against his eyes.

"What did it whisper?"

"It said: 'You can be everything.'"

ENTRY 1.5 — Decision Point

Timestamp: 11:47 AM, October 4

I should have walked away.

Should have told Jordan Cross I couldn't help him, that this was beyond my jurisdiction, my expertise, my *sanity*. Should have referred him to a therapist, maybe, or told him to check himself into a hospital.

But I didn't.

Because while he was talking, I felt it. That familiar spike of adrenaline, the one that hits right before danger. My foresight—that's what my therapist calls it, "heightened threat detection combined with pattern recognition," but that's clinical bullshit for *I see bad things before they happen*—was screaming.

Not about Jordan. About what's coming.

I saw three futures in that moment:

Path One: I turn him away. He leaves. Two days later, his body is found in the river, drowned, except his lungs are full of whispers instead of water.

Path Two: I turn him away. He doesn't leave. He fractures, splits into a dozen ghost-selves, and I watch him dissolve into possibilities until there's nothing left.

Path Three: I help him. And everything gets worse in ways I can't see yet.

I chose Path Three.

"I believe you," I said.

His head snapped up. "You... what?"

"I believe you. Something's happening. Something impossible. And you're not the only one."

I turned my monitors toward him, showed him the missing persons files, the hospital records, the pattern I'd been mapping for the past six hours.

"There are others," I said. "Others like you. And something's hunting them. Hunting *us*."

"Us?"

I hesitated. Then I pulled up my sleeve, showed him the burn scars on my forearm—six parallel lines, perfectly symmetrical, that appeared three days ago when I touched a piece of broken mirror in Daniel Chen's abandoned apartment.

"I see things," I said quietly. "Futures. Outcomes. Dangers. It's getting stronger. And I think whatever gave you your 'blink' gave me this."

For a long moment, we just stared at each other—two people who'd stepped off the edge of reality and hadn't hit bottom yet.

Then Jordan said: "So what do we do?"

I pulled up a new file. Started typing.

CASE FILE #001: The Hollow Chorus

Status: ACTIVE

Operatives: Quinn (lead investigator), Cross (field agent)

Objective: Identify phenomenon. Locate other affected individuals. Survive.

"We find the others," I said. "Before whatever's hunting us does."

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES — Personal

It's 2:18 AM. Jordan crashed on my office couch three hours ago. Kid sleeps like he's still running even in dreams—twitching, muttering, shifting positions every few minutes.

I should sleep. I won't.

Because I keep seeing it, the thing I noticed at minute thirty-two when I was watching those twelve monitors:

In the rooftop footage, right before Jordan falls through the skylight, there's a *thirteenth* Jordan. Barely visible, a shadow-outline, standing perfectly still while all the others run.

And it's watching the camera.

Watching *me*.

I've rewound the footage seventeen times. It's there. Always there. And every time I look at it, I swear it gets clearer.

My door has three locks. My windows are bolted. I have a burner phone, a go-bag packed, exit routes mapped from six different scenarios.

None of it will matter if I'm right about what's coming.

But I chose Path Three. So I'm in this now.

God help us both.

[END ENTRY 1.5]

Next Action Items:

- Cross-reference Jordan's timeline with other disappearances
- Investigate "mirror installation" in industrial district
- Locate Amara Vélez (EMT, multiple anomaly reports)
- Acquire better security systems (current setup insufficient)
- Stop checking the footage. The thirteenth Jordan is still watching.