

# **CALIBRATION**

Episode 7 – "ESCAPE"

Written by

Jeremy Salsburg

calibration.ThresholdFiction.com |  
info@ThresholdFiction.com

(561) 247-3842

## COLD OPEN

**INT. DIA FACILITY – REINFORCED HOLDING CELL – NIGHT**

The cell. The fluorescent. Hugo on the cot.

SUPER: DIA FACILITY, VIRGINIA – MARCH 2025

Hugo has been in this cell for three weeks. The tray of food – his fourth meal today, 5,000 calories, the minimum his body requires – sits on the floor, empty. The facility has been feeding him correctly. They've read Raya's data. They know what he needs.

Hugo stands. He walks to the door. He places his palm flat against the steel – six inches thick, rated to withstand a breaching charge.

He pushes.

The sound is not dramatic. It is mechanical: the groan of steel exceeding its yield strength, the pop of bolt anchors pulling free from reinforced concrete, the shudder of a door that was never designed to resist a force that shouldn't exist.

The door bends. Then folds. Then tears free of the frame and falls inward to the corridor with a sound like a car crash.

Hugo steps through.

Two ARMED GUARDS stand at the end of the corridor. M4 carbines up, safeties off, the training of soldiers confronting an impossible threat. They are afraid. They should be.

Hugo walks toward them. Slowly. His hands are at his sides. Open. Not fists.

**HUGO**

I'm leaving. I'm not here to hurt anyone. Step aside.

The guards hold. Their training says hold position. Their instincts say something else. The man walking toward them just tore a six-inch steel door off its hinges.

GUARD 1

Sir, we have orders to –

**HUGO**

I know your orders. Your orders don't apply to me. Nothing in this building applies to me. I am walking out. You can shoot me, and the rounds will flatten against my skin, and I will keep walking. Or you can step aside.

He stops. Five feet from them. His voice is calm. His body language is deliberately non-threatening – open hands, relaxed shoulders, the posture of a man who means what he says.

GUARD 1 looks at GUARD 2. A decision made in the space between heartbeats: do we fire on a man we cannot stop, or do we let him pass?

They step aside.

Hugo walks between them. He does not look back.

> TITLE CARD: CALIBRATION

## **ACT ONE**

**EXT. DIA FACILITY – PARKING LOT – NIGHT**

Hugo walks across the parking lot. No alarm sounds – the facility's response is not klaxons and lockdown. It is phone calls, encrypted channels, the institutional machinery of managing an asset who has decided to stop being managed.

Hugo reaches a vehicle – a government sedan, keys in the ignition (standard practice on a secure facility where everyone has clearance). He gets in. Starts the engine.

He drives through the gate. The GATE GUARD watches him pass. The guard has received no orders to stop him. The orders are still being formulated three floors above, in a room where Catherine Lyle is discovering that containment has failed.

Hugo drives east. Then north. Then west. The Virginia mountains fall behind. The interstate opens. He drives through the night toward Colorado.

**INT. DANNER HOME - KITCHEN - 4:00 AM**

SUPER: ESTES PARK, COLORADO - MARCH 2025

The kitchen. The table. The permanent configuration.

Hugo enters through the front door. The house is dark. He navigates by memory - the stairs, the hallway, the kitchen, the chair where his father always sits.

ABEDNEGO is at the table. He is not sleeping. He is sitting in the dark at four in the morning, as if he's been waiting. Perhaps he has. The old man is 63 now, but he looks 80 - white hair, trembling hands, the body of a man whose guilt has consumed his physical reserves the way the incomplete cascade consumes the PROMETHEUS embryos.

**ABEDNEGO**

You're here.

**HUGO**

I'm here.

Hugo sits. The table between them. Father and son, the same table where Anna learned the truth, where Hugo learned the rules, where every crisis of this family has been processed.

**ABEDNEGO**

They called me. Lyle's people. They said you broke out of containment.

**HUGO**

I walked out. There's a difference.

**ABEDNEGO**

They'll come for you.

**HUGO**

I know. That's why I'm here.

Hugo looks at his father.

**HUGO (CONT'D)**

I need the complete protocol. The four missing targets. The timing sequence. The vector design. Everything you left out of the journals.

Abednego stares at him.

**ABEDNEGO**

Why?

**HUGO**

Because someone is going to try again. Not Lyle - someone after Lyle. The journals are out there. The PROMETHEUS data is out there. Someone will piece together thirteen of fourteen targets and try the cascade, and they will fail, and the failure will produce -

**ABEDNEGO**

Suffering.

**HUGO**

Yes. Unless the complete protocol is destroyed. All of it. The journals, the PROMETHEUS data, the samples, the embryos. Everything.

**ABEDNEGO**

And the complete protocol? If I give it to you -

**HUGO**

I'll destroy that too. After I use it to identify every component at Fort Detrick. I need to know what to look for.

Abednego is silent for a long time. He looks at his son across the table – the son he created, modified, calibrated, and released into a world that has done exactly what he feared: claimed Hugo as a resource, studied him as a specimen, and attempted to replicate him as a product.

**ABEDNEGO**

The four missing targets. Listen carefully. I will say this once.

Hugo listens.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

Target eleven: TERT telomerase, but not the standard edit. A custom promoter sequence – I'll give you the base pairs. Without it, the healing factor doesn't integrate with the collagen modification. The body heals, but the healed tissue isn't enhanced. It tears under the enhanced muscle load.

He pauses. Hugo nods.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

Target twelve: HIF1A, hypoxia-inducible factor. Again, not the standard edit. The timing is critical – it has to activate after the EPO modification, not simultaneously. Simultaneous activation produces polycythemia. The blood thickens. Stroke within weeks.

Hugo absorbs. The technical language is dense, but Hugo has read the journals. He understands enough.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

Target thirteen: PGC-1 $\alpha$  mitochondrial biogenesis. The edit increases energy production. But the timing – it has to come last. After all other

modifications are integrated. If you activate mitochondrial enhancement before the connective tissue is established, the energy surplus goes to the muscles. The muscles grow faster than the skeleton can support. The body –

**HUGO**

Tears itself apart.

**ABEDNEGO**

Yes.

He takes a breath. The trembling in his hands is worse.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

Target fourteen is the cascade controller. It's not a gene edit. It's a synthetic regulatory element – a kill switch, if you want to call it that. It monitors the feedback loop between BMP2 and SOST. If bone growth exceeds threshold – if the modification starts consuming the host – the regulatory element downregulates the entire cascade. Without it, the modification is a fire with no sprinkler system.

**HUGO**

And the PROMETHEUS embryos don't have it.

**ABEDNEGO**

They don't have target fourteen, and they don't have the timing sequence for targets eleven through thirteen. What they have is a fire that's burning them alive from the inside.

Silence. The kitchen clock ticks. Outside, the first gray of dawn appears over the Continental Divide.

**HUGO**

The vector design. The custom AAV.

**ABEDNEGO**

The AAV is standard – AAV9, crosses the placental barrier. The payload is custom. I'll give you the sequence. Memorize it. Don't write it down.

He recites. Hugo listens. The transfer takes twenty minutes – twenty minutes of a dying father passing the most dangerous knowledge in human history to the son that knowledge created.

When it's done, Abednego sits back in his chair. He looks smaller than he did twenty minutes ago. The knowledge was the last thing he was carrying. Without it, he is just an old man in a cold kitchen.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

Hugo.

**HUGO**

Yes.

**ABEDNEGO**

The bone growth. The BMP2/SOST feedback loop. Under prolonged stress –

**HUGO**

I know. Raya's data. The osteosarcoma risk.

**ABEDNEGO**

It's not a risk. It's a certainty. The modification doesn't have a failure mode. It has a timeline. Your body will start producing runaway bone growth. The joints first, then the spine. It's already beginning, isn't it?

Hugo is quiet. He looks at his hands. He flexes his fingers. Something – a stiffness, a resistance in the knuckles that wasn't there a year ago.

**HUGO**

Yes.

**ABEDNEGO**

How long?

**HUGO**

Raya estimated months. Maybe a year. She didn't know about the fourteenth target. With the regulatory element -

**ABEDNEGO**

The regulatory element would have slowed it. Not stopped it. I never solved the long-term cascade stability. The modification is perfect for twenty years. Maybe twenty-five. After that -

**HUGO**

After that, it consumes the host.

Father and son look at each other across the table. The truth between them is not new. It is the truth that has always been there, embedded in the modification like the fourteenth target: Hugo Danner was never going to grow old. The modification that made him extraordinary is the same modification that will kill him.

**HUGO (CONT'D)**

Thank you. For telling me.

**ABEDNEGO**

I should have told you sooner. I should have told your mother. I should have told everyone everything, from the beginning.

**HUGO**

Yes. You should have.

He stands. He reaches across the table and takes his father's hand. The handshake - the calibrated pressure, five percent, the baseline for every human being he will ever touch.

**ABEDNEGO**

What are you going to do?

**HUGO**

I'm going to Fort Detrick. I'm going to destroy everything.

**ABEDNEGO**

And then?

**HUGO**

I don't know yet.

He releases his father's hand. He walks to the door.

**ABEDNEGO**

Hugo.

Hugo turns.

**ABEDNEGO (CONT'D)**

I'm sorry. For all of it. Every needle, every notebook, every secret. I'm sorry.

**HUGO**

I know.

He leaves. Abednego sits at the table. Dawn fills the kitchen. The old man is alone in the house where he changed the world and ruined his family, and neither action can be undone.

## **ACT TWO**

**EXT. FORT DETRICK - FREDERICK, MARYLAND - 3:00 AM**

**SUPER: FORT DETRICK, FREDERICK, MD - 3:00 AM**

The perimeter. Chain-link fencing topped with razor wire, concrete barriers, a guard post. The base is military - active, staffed, secured. Building 568 sits in the northwest corner, a repurposed BSL-4 facility surrounded by its own secondary fence.

Hugo parks the sedan on the access road. He gets out. He walks to the fence.

Two MP GUARDS at the gate.

MP 1

Sir, this is a restricted military installation. You need  
—

Hugo grips the chain-link fence and tears it open. The metal screams. A six-foot section peels apart like paper. Hugo steps through.

The MPs draw sidearms. Hugo turns to face them.

**HUGO**

I'm not here to hurt anyone. I'm here for Building 568. Call your commanding officer. Tell them Hugo Danner is on base. They'll know what that means.

He walks toward the building. Behind him, the MPs radio in. The base response activates — not an attack protocol, because Lyle's briefings have made one thing clear to every security officer on this installation: Hugo Danner cannot be stopped by force. The protocol is observation, documentation, and damage control.

Hugo reaches Building 568's secondary perimeter. Another fence. He tears through it. The entrance: a steel security door with biometric access. Hugo grips the handle and pulls. The handle, the lock, and six inches of reinforced steel frame come away in his hand. He sets the debris aside and enters.

**INT. FORT DETRICK — BUILDING 568 — SERVER ROOM — 3:15 AM**

The server room. Racks of equipment — hard drives, processors, networking infrastructure. Three years of PROMETHEUS data: the gene sequences, the cascade modeling, the embryo monitoring data, the medical data harvested from Hugo's body.

Hugo stands in the center of the room. The servers hum around him. Indicator lights blink green and amber.

He begins.

He pulls servers from racks and crushes them. Not theatrically – methodically. Each hard drive is removed, placed on the floor, and compressed between his palms until the platters shatter. Each rack is bent, broken, reduced to scrap.

The process takes twelve minutes. When he finishes, the server room is a junkyard. Three years of data – \$183 million of research, the combined work of fourteen scientists, the attempted replication of his father's achievement – destroyed by the hands of the man they were trying to replicate.

Hugo moves to the sample storage. Freezers containing blood samples, tissue biopsies, genetic material – his material, taken by Raya's hands, cataloged by Raya's notes, stored for a purpose he never authorized.

He opens each freezer. He destroys each sample. The frozen vials crack in his grip. The liquid nitrogen containers he punctures with a finger, the compressed gas hissing into the room.

**INT. FORT DETRICK – BUILDING 568 – EMBRYO LABORATORY –  
3:30 AM**

The fourth floor. The embryo lab. Hugo stands at the door. This is different from the server room. The servers were data. This is life – compromised, deteriorating, dying, but life.

He enters.

KEYES is here. The scientist sits in a chair beside the artificial wombs, a tablet in his lap, the posture of a man who has been watching his life's work die for weeks and has stopped going home. He looks up at Hugo without surprise. He knew this was coming. Not tonight, specifically, but eventually. The data was always going to

bring the man.

**KEYES**

I heard you downstairs.

**HUGO**

Are you going to try to stop me?

**KEYES**

No.

He sets the tablet down. He stands. He looks at the four artificial wombs – the embryos floating in blue-lit fluid, connected to monitors that show the same declining numbers he's been watching for months.

**KEYES (CONT'D)**

They're in pain. I don't know if they can feel pain at this developmental stage. The literature says no. But the literature was written about normal embryos, and these are not normal. They have enhanced neural development. Enhanced pain receptors. If they can feel anything –

**HUGO**

Then ending it is mercy.

**KEYES**

Yes.

Hugo walks to the first artificial womb. The control panel is simple: power, nutrient flow, temperature, and a red button marked TERMINATE – the clinical euphemism for shutting down a life support system.

He does not press the button immediately. He looks at the embryo. A tiny form, floating, the sixteen-week shape of something that was supposed to be a person and was instead a product – an attempted reproduction of a modification that was itself an act of reproduction without consent.

Hugo presses the button.

The monitors flatline. The nutrient flow stops. The amniotic fluid circulation ceases. The embryo is still.

He moves to the second womb. He looks. He presses.

The third. He looks. He presses.

The fourth. He looks. His hand hovers over the button. CLOSE ON HUGO'S HAND – the same hand that crushes steel and bends rifle barrels, touching a button with the gentleness he brings to everything fragile.

He presses.

Four flatlines. Four monitors displaying the same horizontal line. The lab is silent except for the hum of systems that no longer have a purpose.

**HUGO**

No one will ever do this again.

Keyes says nothing. He picks up his tablet. He walks out of the lab. At the door, he stops.

**KEYES**

For what it's worth – I'm glad you did it. I couldn't have.

He leaves. Hugo stands alone among the dark tanks. The blue light fades as the systems power down. The room becomes gray, then dark.

**ACT THREE**

**EXT. FORT DETRICK – BUILDING 568 – DAWN**

Hugo exits the building. The base is awake – MPs in vehicles, officers on radios, the controlled chaos of a military installation managing an unprecedented breach. No one approaches Hugo. The orders, relayed from Lyle through Harker through the chain of command, are clear: observe, document, do not engage.

Hugo walks through the torn fences. He gets in the sedan. He drives off the base.

No one follows. Not because they can't, but because Lyle has decided that containment failed and pursuit is pointless. Hugo Danner cannot be captured by any force the United States military possesses. The institutional response will require a different kind of weapon.

**INT. RENTAL SEDAN - INTERSTATE - DAY**

Hugo drives west. The sun is behind him. The Appalachians, then the Plains, then the Rockies approach. He is driving home.

His phone sits on the passenger seat. It buzzes - messages from Lyle, from Harker, from numbers he doesn't recognize. He ignores them.

One message appears from a number he recognizes: RAYA.

He reads it at a glance, eyes returning to the road.

CLOSE ON PHONE: "I tried to stop them. I failed. I'm sorry for all of it. Please be safe. - R"

Hugo sets the phone face-down. He drives.

**INT. DANNER HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING**

The kitchen table. Hugo sits alone. The house is empty - Abednego is not here. A note on the table, in Abednego's shaking handwriting:

"Hugo - Federal agents came this morning. I went with them. I won't resist. The notebooks are gone but the knowledge is with you now. Do what I couldn't: choose well. - Dad"

Hugo reads the note. He sets it down. He sits at the table where his family processed every truth and every crisis of his life, and the table is empty. His mother is dead. His father is in custody. The modification's bone growth is reaching his joints - the stiffness in his knuckles, a new

ache in his shoulder, the beginning of the end that was always built into what he is.

He looks at his hands. The hands his father made. The hands that held eggs and glass and rifles and Raya's face and embryo termination controls. The hands that have done everything a human body can do and many things no human body should be able to do.

**HUGO**

What am I for?

The question from age eight. The question from the boulder in the meadow, from the ridgeline above Steamboat Springs, from every moment of solitude in a life defined by solitude.

And for the first time, he finds an answer.

**HUGO (CONT'D)**

Nothing. Men are not for things. Men simply are.

The answer is not triumphant. It is not a breakthrough or a revelation. It is the quiet acceptance of a man who has spent twenty-three years searching for a purpose that would justify what he is, and has finally understood that no purpose was required. He is not a weapon, not a template, not a specimen, not a soldier. He is a man. The modification is what happened to him. It is not what he is.

He sits at the table. The evening light fades. The mountains darken outside the window.

**HUGO (CONT'D)**

Home.

HOLD. The kitchen. The table. The man. The mountains. The silence of a house that once held a family and now holds a single extraordinary person who has, for the first time, told himself the truth.

> SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

> NEXT: "THRESHOLD"

> END OF EPISODE