

Lab Rats

Contained science fiction thriller

Logline: When four strangers struggling with addiction participate in a clinical study of a new treatment, they develop paranormal powers... and come to believe that their lives are in danger.

Treatment

We open in a bland, windowless medical clinic. People are lined up to interview for a well-paid clinical trial of a new treatment for addiction. Many of the candidates look down-on-their-luck; some look wasted. We focus on four of them:

- **Clint Rogers** (30s/40s) – a contractor and a recovering alcoholic, sober for nine months but worried about falling off the wagon before he can restart the construction business he drank into the ground.
- **Amy Santorini** (20s) – a former sorority queen who can't hold down a job because she's a sex addict and wreaks havoc in every workplace she joins.
- **Luz Aragon** (30s) – a high school teacher fired because she couldn't control her smoking habit; she's recently discovered she's pregnant and now she's desperate to quit.
- **Eddie Huang** (20s) – a tattooed wannabe martial artist, he needs money to pay off the debts from his compulsive gambling.

During the interviews, the candidates are asked who should be notified in the event of an emergency. Our four candidates all say that there is no one – they're on their own. The interviews are conducted in a room with a mirror, and they get the sense that they're being observed.

After the interviews, our four candidates are chosen for the study. They meet the principal investigator for the study: **Dr. Greenleaf** – an imposing black woman who tells them what to expect.

To their surprise, they're told that the clinical trial will start immediately. They're told to strip for a medical exam and asked to surrender their cell phones; they'll be out of touch with the outside world for the next week. No internet, no TV, no radio, no windows – nothing. This makes them nervous, but they all need the money, so they reluctantly agree.

The candidates are examined, cat-scanned, MRI'd, and put through a battery of tests, as they grow increasingly concerned about what they've gotten themselves into. All of the nurses and technicians are unusually large and tough-looking.

At dinner in the lounge the first night, they share their experience and their concerns. They wonder whether the treatment's a waste of time.

Amy promptly starts hitting on all of the others, and makes sure they all know where her room is.

Eddie wants to take bets on whether the treatment will work – who wants to go double or nothing on the \$5000 they're getting?

Luz is dying for a cigarette and worried that she's going to run out of nicotine patches.

Clint really wants a drink and jokes about getting hold of a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

The next day, they get their first treatments, from a machine that looks like an oversized beauty salon hairdryer. The treatment is only slightly uncomfortable, and afterward they feel... different.

As they're hanging out in the lounge afterward, they notice subtle differences:

- Clint (who was always good at building and fixing things) discovers that he's suddenly great at solving "brain teaser" mechanical puzzles.
- Amy (the seductress) finds that she knows what other people want – whether it's a drink of water or a nap or a cigarette – or her.
- Luz (the teacher) finds that she remembers and understands almost everything she reads.
- Eddie (who could always spot another gambler's "tell") can suddenly spot how someone is going to move next. He challenges Clint (who is much bigger) to a sparring match and kicks his butt.

However, as excited as they are about these new abilities, the four feel like they're still under the power of their addictions.

The next day, they're given tests that measure their new abilities – and they realize that they were under surveillance in the lounge, which makes them nervous and angry. They're given more treatments, and more tests, until they're exhausted and becoming rebellious.

One evening, Dr. Greenleaf comes in to tell them how pleased she is with their progress. They complain that the treatment doesn't seem to be helping with their addictions. This doesn't bother her at all.

Amy looks very troubled when the doctor leaves. She gets close to each of the others and whispers in their ears: "she wants to dissect our brains." This, of course, causes considerable concern to the others. But Clint points out that tomorrow is the last day of the study – they'll be going home.

It's the morning of the final day. Everyone wakes up feeling tired and weak. The nurses and techs are all wearing surgical masks and gloves now. Dr. Greenleaf announces that they were accidentally exposed to a highly-contagious and dangerous virus – they'll need to be in quarantine for at least two more weeks. The staff will, too – they're all in the same boat.

Now the four feel trapped. They argue in whispers about whether they're being told the truth and how they should respond. Finally they agree that they should try to escape.

They come up with a plan that uses their new powers.

They carry out their plan and believe they've succeeded – only to be finally confronted by Dr. Greenleaf and a man they've never seen before – **Mr. Harper** (40s).

Harper tells them that they're the first successful graduates of a new program intended to turn addicts into government agents. They've discovered that the same brain abnormalities that lead to addiction can be modified to enhance paranormal abilities. But hardly anyone combines useful abilities with the will and survival instincts that will make them good agents.

The entire experiment was designed to test whether they had the right skills. By working together to "escape," they passed the final exam.

Dr. Greenleaf explains that she never would have dissected their brains – as much as she would like to.

The four are outraged that they've been treated like lab rats. But Harper tells them they're now eligible for well-paying – albeit dangerous – government jobs. It's a chance for a new life.

Clint points out that their addictions haven't been cured – he could really use a drink. Dr. Greenleaf notes that they haven't yet found a way to cure the addictions and keep the abilities. But she can offer them treatments that will at least partially cure them – if they want to lose their abilities ... and all memory of having had them.

After heated discussion, the four all agree to become agents – and they christen themselves "The Lab Rats."