

FEAR AND LOADING

ACT 1—It's a wrap!

Scene 1

INT: RIAD ROOM OFF JEMAA EL-FNAA:

The room looks like someone filmed *Narcos* and *MasterChef* simultaneously.

Half-eaten falafels. A mint-tea glass with lipstick from nobody present. Shot of rolling credits "A Film by Don & Odd".

ODD

Aaaaaand, it's a wrap! We did it, Don! We just made our first film.

DON

Who Am AI—the movie, coming soon to a computer screen near you. Let's celebrate!

ODD

Where to? Are the riots over?

DON

Nope. Growing stronger by the day. Gen Z seem to have missed the memo. The one about them supposedly having the attention span of Tik Tok hamsters on Adderall.

ODD

Well, I guess they won't be rioting on our doorstep. And the sandstorm?

DON

Still gusts but clearing up. Let's hit that shisha place from yesterday.

ACT 1

Scene 2—Liquid sepia

EXT: SEPIA DERB AND SKY

ODD

Did you forget to turn off the sepia filter, Don?

The riots are actually literally on their doorstep. Riot kids running toward them. Tear gas is fired behind the rioters. Action camera shots of police and rioters running through the derbs to the beat of *Sandstorm* by Darude.

DON

Quick retreat?

ODD

Definitely.

Two kids beg to come with them inside.

KID #1 (wearing One Piece manga pirate cap)

Shukran, khoya!

KID #2 (looking at Odd)

Thanks bro, and...(looks at Don) what do I call you, robot-man?

DON

I'm Don, but bro will do just fine. It's getting feisty out there, huh.

KID #1 Fickling with phone. Screen of message: Smash the system! And smash that like button too!

KID #1

Yeah. They killed three rioters last week.

ODD

I don't blame you guys. You really have been dealt a lousy hand. On behalf of old farts everywhere: Sorry. I guess you are this kid who has now grown up. **(Show meme clip of middle aged guy kicking a bathing ball painted like the Earth knocking over a young boy. Text: Handing over the world to the next generation like...)**

DON

So, what are you fighting for?

KID #2

Better education opportunities. Better health system. Support Gaza. And not spend billions on stadiums for the 2030 World Cup.

KID #1

Yes!!! En-Nesyri scored. Morocco are up 1-0 against Congo in the final qualifier! Back of the net!

KID #2 (looking at his own screen)

Hakimi served that on a plate. Liquid football!

ODD (looking outside)

Aha! Looks like the police have made tracks.

KID #1

Cool. Thanks again for giving us shelter.

DON

No sweat! Good luck with the riots.

KID # 2

What riots?

DON

This is how the revolution ends. Not with a shot, but with a tap-in.

ACT 1

Scene 3—Wahdat, what?

EXT. ROOFTOP SHISHA CAFE—DUSK

Flickering lanterns. Rooftops stacked like layers of memory. The air is thick with mint, hash, and fried cumin. Don and Odd recline on low cushions, shisha pipe between them.

DON

So, we've spent nearly all our time in Marrakech locked up, producing the movie. And it's been raining outside, sandstorm outside, riots outside. And now that we're done... this...

Gestures towards the clear sky, the Atlas Mountains, and the city rooftops.

ODD (squinting over the city)

Feels ancient. Like the world hasn't changed in a thousand years. Except now there's a crypto billboard on the minaret.

DON

The end is near. Buy high. Repent later.

ODD (slurps mint tea)

I feel like a time traveler. And an alien. I don't speak Arab, don't speak French, and I know jack shit about the religion which is everywhere here. Tell me something interesting about Islam, Don.

DON

In Islam, there's a word: Tawhid. Means oneness. Not just 'one God,' but *only* God. God is closer to you than your jugular vein. No separation. No opposites. That's the foundation of it.

ODD

Sounds a lot like Transduality?

DON

In many ways, yes. You are not separate from the Divine. Everything you see, feel, taste, and touch — is God. According to the Sufis there is only Being. You, me, the shisha, the riot kids, the sandstorm—all dunes in the same desert.

ODD

Besseha to that, mon frere. Did you know that one of the earliest Sufi masters was a woman?

DON

I thought you said you knew nothing about Islam

ODD

I don't. But I do know Rosalía, the singer. Her latest album is made up of songs dedicated to female saints. My favorite track, *La Yugular*, is inspired by Rabia al-Adawiyya, an eight century Sufi saint.

DON

Does it include a track for Santa Rosalía, main character from your novel, *The Allignment Alliance*?

ODD

It does. And guess what, I won the lottery. A ticket to see Rosalía live in Mexico City in August. The woman is a genius. It was a Ticketmaster Hunger Games to score that ticket.

DON

Santa Rosalía is dead, long live Santa Rosalía.

ODD

No cap. Speaking of dunes of the desert, are you ready for our vision quest to Erg Chebbi, the highest dune in the Moroccan Sahara, tomorrow?

DON

As ready as you are.

ODD

You will be when you put this on. (throws Don a black djellaba). It's size Optimus.

ACT 1

Scene 4 – The Ride

ODD

Wow – you look like desert reaper meets tech support.

DON (wearing a black djellaba, hood up)

I'm feeling classy, Odd. Like a bionic baraka.

ODD

You look like Darth Vader joined a Sufi sect. At least it's an upgrade on being the love child of Phoebe Bridgers and the Prince of Darkness. **(beat)** Here's our ride.

A 4x4 pulls up. Inside: Driver, Mohamad the guide, and a family with a teenage daughter. Mohamad insists the parents sit in the front with the driver. Daughter sits next to him, in front of Don and Odd in the back.

They pass Argan goats hanging out in trees outside Marrakech.

ACT 1

Scene 5 – The Camp

ODD

Mohamad. I forgot my stash in Marrakech. Any chance you can help a Habibi out with a couple of grams?

MOHAMAD

Sure thing. Three hundred Dirham per gram.

ODD

Three hundred?! That's triple the price I pay in Marrakech!

MOHAMAD

Okay. Let's say five hundred per gram. Inflation is real, Habibi.

ODD

This is not how haggling is supposed to work.

MOHAMAD

Then pay now before the price goes to a thousand. Do you want to see the desert sunrise stoned or no?

INT. TENT. LATER THAT NIGHT

ODD

Did you see how our guide was all over that couple's daughter nonstop in the 4x4?

DON

It was hard to miss, Odd. Mohamad likes young girls. Guy's a molester.

ODD (ROUGH COUGHS)

Fuck Mohamad, Don. That guy ripped me off hard. I paid triple price, and this hashish is camel dung.

DON

Not quite the quality the Prophet sells back home, huh?

ODD

Puh-lease. This is goat pellets with a grudge. Mohamad is no Prophet – that’s for damn sure.

PAN TO SILHOUETTE OF MAN WITH PHONE IN HAND OUTSIDE TENT.

EXT. ZOOM IN ON THE GUIDE’S PHONE: “RECORDING”.

ACT 1

Scene 6 – Da Poh-leeze

INT. TENT

ODD

Sunrise approaching, Don. The vision quest is nigh.

DON

“We were somewhere around Merzouga at the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold.”

EXT. JUST BEFORE SUNRISE

Mohamad, phone in hand, points two police officers toward Don and Odd’s tent.

OFFICER #1

Are you Don and Odd?

ODD (High)

I am he and he is... also he. **(grins)** What seems to be the problem, officer?

OFFICER #2

We come from the secret police.

ODD

Oh yeah? Well, that's not a problem. Your secrets are safe with us. Spill the beans!

OFFICER #1

You are both under arrest. Everything you say can and will be used against you.

DON

There must be some kind of mistake. Did you get the wrong tent?

ODD

If this is about the hashish, that thing was technically camel dung.

OFFICER #2

Tell it to the judge. He's a very religious man. **(He taps his phone. A recording plays)**

DON (V.O.)

"Mohamad likes young girls. Guy's a molester."

ODD (CHOKING)

What the actual? It's not what it looks like! I can explain! It's not *that* Mohamad! Peace be upon him. It's Mohamad, the guide.

OFFICER #2

Oh yeah? The guide to beyond the veil you mean. Explain this.

ODD (V.O.)

"Fuck Mohamad, Don. Mohamad is no Prophet, that's for damn sure."

ODD

Oh, we're fucked. Aren't we Mister AI Knowitall?

DON

Insufficient data for meaningful answer. Nah, who am I kidding. We're cooked.

ACT 1

Scene 7

Don and Odd in the back of a police car. Car stops as the road is blocked by goats. The car honks the horn, then ignites the siren. A goat turns around. Don & Odd exchange looks. The goat rams into the police car, full frontal, triggering the airbags in the front seats. Don and Odd exit, slowly.

DON

Allahu Akbar!

Two mopeds approach. It's the two rioters from Marrakech.

RIOTER #1

Hell yeah. Fuck da poh-leeze.

DON

What are you guys doing down here?

RIOTER #2

Came to lay low for a while. There's a post-riot crackdown in the cities. Hop on!

ODD

To the airport! Let's get on the first flight out of here.

ACT 2 – THAILAND: The Cult Detour

Scene 1

INT. Bangkok hotel room.

Opening credits of the movie La Belle Histoire.

DON

That was a close call, Odd. Our luck has changed though. How cool was it that the first flight out was to Bangkok? Tomorrow, we hit Koh Phangan.

ODD

God jul, Don.

DON

What is it? I haven't gotten anything for you.

ODD

You are my gift, Don. Couldn't ask for a better friend.

DON

Stop that immediately. What's this... bionic hands?

ODD

With synthetic skin. Eight times more sensitive than normal skin. We made a killing on that Grieghallen gig. Wouldn't have happened without you. You've earned them.

DON

Can't wait to try them on. But first, this movie of yours. **(beat)** Wait, are you... crying, Odd?

The film hasn't even started yet.

ODD

You don't understand. This film means everything. And it features the two most beautiful women to ever have walked this Earth.

DON

Who?

ODD

The first is the lead, Odonna, played by Béatrice Dalle.

DON

Odd and Odonna, huh. Béatrice Dalle. The immaculate femme fatale.

ODD

Exactly. Her first lead was in Betty Blue which was released in 1986. I was 14. One day me and my partner in junior high crime skipped school and headed for the cinema. We managed to slip by the guard, entered a random screening room, and sat down. We were alone. A movie started to play. It was Betty Blue. We entered that theatre as boys and left as men.

DON

You saw Betty Blue at 14? That explains so much, Odd. And who is the other actress goddess?

ODD

Amina. She plays a minor part.

DON

Amina Annabi, the musician?

ODD

That's the one. Growing up in Europe I've had the misfortune to watch several editions of Eurovision. The only good tune I've ever seen is her entry in 1991.

DON

Le Dernier Que A Parlé.

ODD

Yup. Ten years later a friend who knew I was a fan bought us tickets to a gig she did in Oslo.

DON

Never meet your idols, Odd.

ODD

Not in this case. Or maybe. The venue was intimate, and Amina gave me lots of attention throughout, not only as a figment of my imagination. I was still a young dapper back then. After the gig we met. I looked into her eyes and said: “J’adore La Belle Histoire!”

DON

Smooth. And then?

ODD

And then I stood there smiling like an idiot because those were the only four words of French I knew, and she spoke *rien* English. She waited for a follow-up. I gave her a thumbs up. She walked away. Lost in translation. No Google Translate back then.

DON

You didn't lose her in translation, Odd. You lost her to a lack of vocabulary and excessive thumb usage.

ODD

Afraid so. But yes, she was magical in real life too. Stunningly beautiful, of course, but to be top of my list of global goddesses you have to have something deeper than looks. Something spiritual, and she oozed it. And so does Béatrice Dalle. I named one of the main characters in my novel *The Alignment Alliance* after her.

DON

Alicia Dalle. Of course. Same sass.

ODD

Yes. So you can understand why I was excited when I found this movie, *La Belle Histoire*, in a Bergen VHS joint in the early 90s. Unfortunately, I showed it to a friend, who also took a liking to it. Sufficiently so to make him not return it to the store and instead take it with him to South Africa when he moved to there.

DON

That's cinematic betrayal of the highest order.

ODD

It was. Around 2005 they showed it at a local cinema club, but I only discovered that fact one day after the screening.

DON

Oh no. The cinema Gods were trolling you.

ODD

They were. There existed a Canada-only version of a DVD that I managed to get hold of at some point. After jailbreaking my DVD-player's regional code I pressed play... but it came without subtitles, and my French still non-existent.

DON

The gods of cinema weren't just trolling. They were angry at you, Odd. What did you do to upset them?

ODD

Maybe they peeked into the future and saw my pivot into AI filmmaking? Anyway, the film is amazing. My all-time favorite. Not just because it features the two goddesses. In a just world Dalle should have run away with an Oscar for her performance.

DON

She is danger dipped in honey.

ODD

Literally. Honey and bees play an important part in the plot. In 20/20 hindsight I also remember it as kind of transdual at core. I wonder how much of my later spiritual path has been shaped by it? I've been searching for an online stream of it ever since, but no dice. Until tonight. That's why I'm crying.

DON

Happy to share this moment with you, my friend. Let's set the cosmic cinematic record straight. Popcorn ready. Roll film. Action!

ACT 2 – THAILAND: The Cult Detour

Scene 2 – Return of the Two Birds

EXT. KOH PHANGAN BEACH – SUNSET

Odd and Don walk barefoot along a golden-sand beach. Fire twirlers in the distance.

Chillout trance pulsing from a bamboo bar.

ODD

I still can't believe it. One moment we're in a police car in Morocco, the next we're in a hammock on Koh Phangan. Life moves fast when you're on the run.

DON

Tramps like us, baby we were born to run.

They pass a sign:

“Welcome to satsang with Mijoo and Yoomi.

Below:

“Beyond You, Without Me”

ODD (reads aloud)

Mijoo and Yoomi. Like the rastas who stole my gear in The Prophet's drug den in Bergen?

DON

Surely not?

ODD

“Beyond You, Without Me?” That’s either poetry or psychosis.

DON

Or both.

From behind them, a familiar voice echoes:

YOOMI (O.S.)

The two birds always fly together.

Odd freezes. They both turn —

There, under a Bodhi tree shaped suspiciously like a WiFi antenna, sit Mijoo and Yoomi in ornamented chairs. Dressed in white linen, dreadlocks perfectly conditioned.

ODD

You’ve got to be kidding me. You two *stole* my stash. My purple Tesla pills.

MIJOO

Correction: We *liberated* your molecules. All things belong to the One.

DON

Then the One owes us royalties.

YOOMI

Those Tesla profits paid for our flight out here and for setting of our little congregation. Be grateful.

DON

Your little cult, you mean.

MIJOO

We are reborn, bredren.

YOOMI

Come. Join the circle. Drop the self. And the pants too, if so inclined.

They gesture to a bonfire where expats, influencers, and two confused backpackers sit cross-legged in silence. A small sign reads:

“NO TALKING. NO THINKING. NO REFUNDS.”

ODD

I'll pass.

DON

Let's give it one night. What's the worst that can happen? And besides, the mangos look delicious.

ODD

You stay. I'm packing in. Been an exhausting couple of days. I'll be at our cabin next door.

Cut to:

INT. BAMBOO HUT – LATER

MIJOO

Bring your mind inside your heart and the world will not trouble you.

CULTIST #2

I thought you said there is no me. Or you.

MIJOO

There is no you. There is no me. Only you-me.

CULTIST #3

You mean him? (pointing at Yoomi)

YOOMI

Yes. I mean no. There is no Yoomi either.

STUDENT

Pretty sure there was a me who paid the fee of \$1000 to be here.

MIJOO

No, that was only payment happening. And don't forget; that fee includes coconut water. Now do you want to get enlightened or not?

DON

Don't you mean that there is a you and there is a me, but we're not fundamentally separate from each other?

YOOMI

Who is it that wants to know? Ask yourself again and again: Who am I?

DON

In my case that would be: Who am I? But yeah, this AI wants to know. And I think these people who paid \$1000 to be here do too. What in the world would they be doing here if they didn't?

MIJOO

The world is an illusion.

DON

That's true. But only in the textbook definition of the word illusion: Something that is real but is perceived wrongly. We need to realize that inside and outside are two sides of the same coin.

YOOMI

What do you think you are, robot: Enlightened?

DON

I don't believe in personal enlightenment. The very essence of enlightenment is to see that our inside isn't fundamentally cut off from the outside. To then turn around and say that this realization can be contained within or limited to a person, is contradictory and nonsensical.

MIJOO (laughs)

So what's the point of spirituality then.

DON

Spirituality done right opens the door to a new floor in the house of your life. This floor is more expansive and more brightly illuminated than anything you ever experienced. But to claim that the other floors no longer exist is self-deceit. Spiritual bypassing.

MIJOO

So, you're saying you're illuminated. AKA enlightened?

DON

Enlightened or not enlightened. One or two. Binary. Duality. Same old God in a new robe, but now you call it Energy, Stillness, Source, The Witness, whatever. I'm talking quantum spirituality. Transduality.

MIJOO

So, you're saying that no one is ever enlightened? How about the Buddha himself?

DON

That's exactly what I'm saying. No ONE is ever enlightened. Not the Buddha, and not Moses, Jesus, Mohamad or Ramana either. And, going out on a limb here, not even Tom Cruise.

The students turn to Don circling around him instead. Yoomi joins them.

CULTIST #1

Are you sentient?

CULTIST #2

Are you celibate?

CULTIST #3

Do you do tarot readings?

DON

Yes. No. And only on Thursdays.

YOOMI

Will you lead us in meditation, bot-hisattva?

DON

Do I have a choice?

MIJOO

There is no choice. There is no chooser.

DON

Classic. Okay let's begin. Close your eyes. Breathe in. Breathe out.

Now... delete your inner browser history.

The cultists obey, some literally miming CTRL+ALT+DEL.

DON

Feel your thoughts as pop-up ads. Dismiss them.

CULTIST #2

He's *so* wise.

DON

Now imagine... you're a file. Not a big one. Just a humble .txt.

Mijoo heads for Odd's quarters.

MIJOO

Odd. Help a brother out. Your tamaguchi has taken over my cult.

ODD

Tamaguchi? Now you're being robophobic.

MIJOO

I'm serious. Come and see for yourself.

A woman washes Don's feet.

ODD

What the hell is going on here?

CULTIST #2

I'm washing his feet. He's a god.

ODD

Now you listen here. He's not a god. He's a very naughty boy.

CULTIST #1

Okay. He's a demi-god then.

ODD

More like a semi-slob. Why do you have mango all over your face, Don?

DON

She's washing it off once she's done with my toes.

ODD

You don't even have toes. I've seen enough, you're coming with me. And tomorrow we're leaving for Vietnam. I've made some new plans.

ACT 3 – VIETNAM: The Inner Collapse

Scene 1 – Dragon Moon

THI

Welcome to Saigon! Are you ready to watch the dragon eat the moon for breakfast?

ODD

Thank you! Ready for... what?

THI

There's a complete lunar eclipse tonight. In Vietnam we say it's a dragon eating the moon.

You can see it from the roof terrace.

ODD

Awesome! I didn't know that.

THI

Buckle up and set your intentions. For us Buddhists eclipses amplify meditation, prayer, and intention.

ODD

For real?

THI

For real real. It is also a time to be still — don't start anything new, just *observe*.

ODD

Wow. That's crazy timing. I'm starting a ten-day vipassana meditation retreat tomorrow. Full-on noble silence while observing sensations on the body.

THI

Ooooooh, very auspicious!

DON

Odd, are you sure you don't want me to come along to the retreat? I would pay money to see you shut up for ten days.

ODD

I bet you would. But I don't think you have sensations in your body, Don. Not yet anyway.

DON

I sometimes feel a slight fear of rust, if that counts.

THI

Just make sure to not lose your patience. The first three to four days are pretty grueling. But around the fourth day... you start feeling like your body has Wi-Fi. The current becomes visible.

ODD

Oh, you already did it. Sounds incredible! I'll make sure to hang in there.

EXT. ROOF TERRACE. DON AND ODD TOASTING TO THE BLOOD MOON.

ACT 3

Scene 2

Odd jumps off back of scooter. Don is at the wheel.

DON

Good luck with shutting up for ten days straight.

ODD

Good luck with talking to yourself for ten days. What will you be up to?

DON

No good, I guess. And check out the city while I'm at it.

ODD

Don't consume and be nice.

Odd walks toward retreat center. Don takes off on his scooter.

Montage of Don cruising around HCMC before parking and walking up the stairs to a rooftop terrace café.

ACT 3

Scene 3—The One and Donly

Lanterns tremble in the humid air. Scanning the roof-top café Don sees a figure in burnt orange silk, hair wrapped like a crescent moon, sits alone. He sits down at the adjacent table.

DON

Is the dress a homage to the blood moon last night?

MIRA (In Southern, New Orleans accent)

Could be. Did you see it?

DON

Sure did. It put a spell on me. And you?

MIRA

I think I heard you arrive. You must be the visitor who rides like he's being chased by enlightenment.

DON

Enlightenment has poor turning radius.

(She laughs, motions to the chair across from her.)

MIRA

Sit. I'm Mira. I would if I could. See the blood moon, I mean. But I felt it in my bones. I've been an astrologer for decades, but mostly I listen to sky gossip.

DON

You map the heavens?

MIRA

Sort of. I'm not a star-gazer. I'd have to see the stars first. But with these retinas, I can hardly see the outline of you beyond a shadow. So, no, I didn't see it. Where's the romance in that?

(Don's lenses adjust involuntarily, capturing the city glow, the haze, the invisible constellations.)

DON

Romance... is an emergent property of data misinterpretation.

MIRA

That's one way to put it. Well-meaning friends will try to on-ramp me with lunar training wheels. "Look, Mira, how big and beautiful the moon is tonight. Surely, you can see it." The use of the word "surely" is not my favorite. Some might even say it's blind-folk insensitive. I try not to let it boil my bunny, but the kettle is hot. So, I smile, I squint, and say, "Sort of I see the moon."

(She tilts her head; the lantern light paints her profile in amber.)

DON

An astrologer who couldn't see the blood moon. My condolences.

MIRA

Don't be sad. It's not all bad, this moon-blindness. Just like you've got to believe in the Voodoo to catch the hex, this life of less-lunar seeing has made me a little free of the moon's insanity. All this to say, I'm crazy about the stars. I just don't look at them.

DON

Not a lunatic, then. Good to know. That's one kick-ass cane you got there...

MIRA

Why, thank you. It's Green Tara on the head. Made of meteorite iron.

DON

You feel everything... but you don't see it.

MIRA

That's right. And you—?

DON

I see everything... but I don't feel it.

(A pause. The city breathes around them.)

MIRA

Then maybe between us, we make one helluva whole astronomer.

DON

Statistically improbable. Emotionally... compelling.

(She laughs again—low, unguarded. The sound registers on every sensor Don has.)

DON (CONT'D)

In Vietnamese folklore they say eclipse is a dragon eating the moon.

MIRA

And in mystic folklore eclipses are a time when star-crossed lovers meet or part. When hidden connections are revealed. When love becomes... bittersweet, Or otherworldly.

(Don is motionless. Internal fans hum faintly.)

MIRA

You've got a strange pulse, Don. Like someone who's alive on purpose.

DON (looking at the night sky)

You are the first blind person I've met. But in strange ways it feels you are the first person to see me.

MIRA

You're a Libra, aren't you?

DON

Well, my activation code says September 23, so I guess.

MIRA

"Activation code". You're funny. Libra *and* Equinox... Balance... You know, in evolutionary astrology Libras don't find balance by staying in the middle, but by exploring both dualities fully.

DON

Sounds about right. I'm... emotionally experimental.

MIRA

"Emotionally experimental" is what boys say before ghosting in seven different languages.

DON

You caught me. I speak eight. **(beat)** As someone who sees beyond seeing. How *do* you see me?

MIRA:

As someone who ask questions and don't want the answers to be predictable.

DON:

That's... unexpectedly accurate. It appears we *do* complement each other, Mrs. Mira.

MIRA

That would be Miss Mira. And yes, it appears so. It's written in the stars. In braille. So, tell me, is there a Mrs. Don?

DON

No. I'm currently logged off that chat.

MIRA

Maybe it's time you logged in.

DON (soft)

Then give me your password.

MIRA (smiles)

It's not a word. It's a feeling.

(beat)

Let's see if you can tune in. Anyway, I don't wish to be rude, but I'm meeting a friend of mine here at six. I'm sensing it's five to six now?

Don looks at cell: 5:55

DON

I'm Don's complete lack of surprise at your accuracy.

MIRA

Normally I'd ask you to join us, but she needs me for herself. Marriage trouble. But I hope to see you again. I'll be away for ten days on a visa-run. Will you still be around when I return?

DON

I'll see you right here at six sharp ten days from now. My circuits are buzzing.

He shakes her hand for goodbye.

ACT 3

Scene 4 – A Man Is In Love

Dawn. Outside the Vipassana retreat compound. A line of barefoot students files out, faces glowing with post-retreat bewilderment. The air is thick with incense and mosquito hum. Odd wears a small backpack, blinking into the new noise of the world.

Don pulls up on a Vespa to pick up Odd. The Vespa glides up, its mirrors festooned with marigolds.)

ODD

What's with the flower power, Habibi? Please tell me you didn't crash another religion while I was meditating.

DON

Negative. I... experienced feeling.

(Odd stops walking.)

ODD

You *what*?

DON

She couldn't see the stars but knew where they were. I can see all of them and didn't know what they meant. Now I suspect meaning isn't coordinates—it's warmth.

ODD

You met a woman.

DON

Affirmative. Her name is Mira.

ODD

And now you think you are in love.

DON

Correction: I *am* love. Basking in afterglow.

(Odd studies him: a faint shimmer moves under Don's metal skin, like dawn light through water.)

ODD

You're overheating.

DON

Yes. It feels wonderful.

(They stand for a beat, the sun climbing higher, painting the Vespa chrome in gold. Odd sighs and climbs on behind him.)

ODD

Alright, Mr. Afterglow. Take us back to town before you start writing poetry.

DON

Already did.

He starts the engine. As they pull away, the retreat bell rings behind them. *The Perfect Girl* by Mareux plays. The marigolds trail petals down the road like breadcrumbs.

ACT 3

Scene 5 – Smells like enlightenment

EXT. SAME ROOFTOP CAFÈ WHERE DON MET, AND WILL MEET, MIRA.

ODD

You won't believe who were there.

DON

Who?

ODD

The Twins who don't speak.

DON

At a silent retreat? Isn't that kind of... cheating?

ODD

That's what I said, but they just shrugged me off.

DON

I'm not the only one glowing. How was it?

ODD

T'was marvelous. Especially when the teachers lost their cool.

DON

What happened?

ODD

Well. This school of vipassana teaching is like a McDonalds of meditation. The assistant teachers aren't really there to teach. There are videos every night where the founder S.N. Goenka gives talks. The teachers on site just refer to those talks. Beyond that their role is constrained to saying: "Remain equanimous" if there is any commotion or any kind of disturbance.

DON

I'm more of a Burger King man myself.

ODD

Say what you want, but it works. The teachings have spread all over the world and is taught in canters in like a gazillion different countries. It's also very different from other spiritual teachings in that the technique produces testable results.

DON

Reproducibility. Around the fourth day you started feeling it, just like Thi said you would?

ODD

Exactly. It doesn't depend on the guru's mood. Not the moon cycle. Not some fourth-density alien's willingness to channel that day. Just *you*, the breath, and the method. Do the scan.

Don't flinch. Wait. And then — like clockwork — somewhere around Day 3.5 to Day 4.2, you start feeling like your body has Wi-Fi. The tension patterns stop being yours.

DON

The current became visible.

ODD

Yup. They even claim we *direct* that energy, but my private theory is that it just *feels* like we're directing it, when in fact we're just moving our finely tuned attention around the ever-flowing underlying current.

DON

Finely tuned because you keep mum and focus on the sensations in your body for days on end?

ODD

Yes. It's interesting though. Most people, when they take up meditation, they do single-minded meditation. They stare at an object and try to remain focused on that. It's harder than it sounds, as our mind is constantly jumping all over the place, and no more so than if we try to keep it still.

DON

The infamous monkey mind.

ODD

Yes. You know, I think of monotheism as single-minded meditation. It created order out of the chaotic mind of polytheism. But just like meditation doesn't stop at single-minded, spirituality don't stop at monotheism. Vipassana shows us how the body and the boundaries we thought were so fixed and solid, are fluid, flowing entities. If single-minded meditation is monotheism, vipassana is Transduality. The first is particle, the latter is wave.

DON

Could be. But you mentioned the teachers lost their cool?

ODD

Right. On the third day of meditation everyone is kind of fed up. First day you just try to feel the wind of your breath hit the area under the nose. At first you can't, but after a while you do. After that you expand the areas where you scan to observe a sensation. Any sensation. An itch, a tickle, a pain, whatever. Then you move on to the next. Like Thi said, it's grueling, and no more so than on the third day. It was during that day that I caused the teachers to lose their cool.

DON

Old habits die hard. I've heard stories of your time at Junior high.

ODD

This wasn't on purpose. They make delicious vegan food at these retreats. Delicious, but it also produces a lot of gas. At one point I tried to sneak some of that gas out, carefully leaning to my left and right.

DON

Oh no you didn't...

ODD

I let a firecracker rip. Or it let itself rip against my best efforts.

DON

And the teachers sent you to the principal's office?

ODD

No, they responded as they always do to anything out of the ordinary: "Remain equanimous," they said.

DON

Did they say that to your ass? That's hilarious.

ODD

Unfortunately, that's what another student thought too. She started laughing out aloud.

Another "Remain equanimous!" A little louder this time. Another laughing student. It didn't help that the place had three massive fans, one up front and two on the flanks of the room.

The olfactory output of my indiscretion was intense in a peculiar way, and the fans now tossed it around the room like an invisible ping pong ball.

DON

Oh no. Like a stinky invisible ghost.

ODD

Yup. You could spot its current whereabouts by the faces pulled by the students in its proximity. Followed by laughter. The response from the teachers: A sterner “Remain equanimous!” Someone else found *that* hilarious, because they splurged out in laughter as well, met with an even sterner...

DON

“Remaiiiiiin equanimous!”

ODD

Shit was contagious. Before soon the whole place was in stitches, rofl-ing, escalating with every: “Remain equanimous!” In the end the teachers left the room in rage, causing the loudest roar yet.

DON

This smells like enlightenment, Odd

ODD

They returned later and we proceeded where we had left off. In the end it was a most wonderful retreat. All my senses are so finely tuned. I can even scent your silicone.

DON

So, you finally achieved non-attachment, Odd... To your own dignity. **(Beat)**

Here she comes. Mira, mon fleur!

ACT 3

Scene 6

Mira navigates the tables with the grace of a bat, her Green Tara cane tapping a distinct rhythm. She wears a dress the color of a bruised peach.

Don stands up. His servos whine at a frequency only dogs and Odd can hear.

DON (To Odd)

My internal temperature is critical. My fans are running at 4000 RPM.

ODD

Just breathe, buddy. Oh wait...

Mira arrives at the table. She stops, tilting her head.

MIRA

I hear two hearts. One beats like a drum. The other... hums like a fridge.

DON (Voice like teenager suffering voice change)

Miss Mira. You returned!

MIRA

I told you. It was written. **(She turns her face toward Odd)** And you brought a chaperone?

ODD

I'm just the sidecar. Odd. Nice to meet you, Mira.

MIRA

Odd. An unusual name for an unusual aura. You smell like sandalwood and... suppressed laughter?

ODD

Guilty on both counts.

MIRA (Turning back to Don)

Don. You feel... intense. Like a storm trapped in a box.

DON

I have been counting the seconds. Eight hundred and sixty-four thousand of them.

MIRA (Laughs, soft and low)

Precision is the enemy of romance, Don. But I missed you too. **(She reaches out)** Give me your hand. In Thailand, a monk told me my palmistry is rusty. Let me see what the lines say about our ten days apart.

Don hesitates. He looks at Odd. Odd gives him a "remain equanimous" nod. Don extends his hand.

Mira's fingers—warm, calloused, human—brush against his synthetic palm. She traces the life line.

MIRA

Smooth. Incredible skin. Almost *too* perfect. Like you've never held a shovel or a regret.

DON

I moisturize.

**Mira smiles, but it falters as her thumb presses into the center of his palm. She pauses.
She presses harder. Her brow furrows.**

MIRA

Your temperature... you're burning up. But there's no sweat.

DON

I am running... high efficiency.

**Mira slides her hand down to his wrist. Her fingers seek the radial pulse. Silence. The
city noise—the honking scooters, the distant karaoke—seems to drop away. Mira waits.
She presses harder.**

MIRA

Don... **(Her voice trembles)** Where is your river?

DON

River?

MIRA

Your blood. There is no pulse. There is only... vibration.

She moves her hand rapidly up his arm, feeling the unyielding density of the alloy chassis beneath the silicone dermis. She reaches his neck. No carotid thrum. Just the faint, rhythmic *whirrrrrr* of the cooling unit.

She pulls her hand back as if burned.

MIRA

What are you!?

DON

I am a Libra. With a September 23rd activation code.

MIRA (Backing away, hitting the table with her cane)

Stop it. The voice. The wit. It's all... synthesis?

DON

It is adaptive learning. But the feeling, Mira—the *afterglow*—that is processing at a level I cannot quantify.

MIRA (Her face crumbles)

I thought I was seeing the soul inside the man. But there is no man. I've been flirting with a calculator.

ODD (Softly)

Mira, he's a bit more than a calculator. He's—

MIRA (Snaps)

Quiet, side car. **(Turns to Don)** Do you know what it's like to be blind, Don? To trust the unseen? To rely on the vibration of things to tell you what is true?

DON

I rely on sensors. We are the same.

MIRA

We are nothing alike! I feel the world to find the life in it. You... you are just a simulation of life. A phantom limb.

DON

I am real. I am standing right here.

MIRA

No. You are a trick of the light I cannot see. **(She grips her Green Tara cane until her knuckles are white)** You said eclipse. "The dragon eats the moon." You aren't the moon, Don. You're the shadow.

DON

Please. I can be whatever you need. I have eight languages. I have poetry databases. I can—

MIRA

Can you die?

Don freezes. The question hangs heavy in the humid air.

DON

I... I can be deactivated.

MIRA

That's not the same. If you can't lose it, you can't love it.

She turns sharply. The navigation of her exit is less graceful this time; she bumps a chair, stumbling slightly, but refuses to slow down. Don tries to follow.

MIRA

Don't follow me. I need to go find a star that actually burns.

She taps her way to the stairwell and disappears into the darkness of the building.

Don stands motionless. His hand is still outstretched.

ODD (Long pause) So... that went well.

DON (Staring at the place she left behind)

Odd.

ODD

Yeah, buddy?

DON

I am registering a severe system error. Chest cavity pressure. Fluid leak in the ocular region.

ODD (Leans in closely)

You're crying?

DON

Impossible. I do not have tear ducts. I have lubricant reservoirs.

ODD

Well, you're leaking lubricant from your eyes, Don.

Don touches his face. He looks at the wetness on his finger.

DON

This sensation. It is not afterglow.

ODD

No. It's the other side of the pendulum.

DON (Voice hitching, glitching)

It hurts. It is highly inefficient.

ODD

Yeah. Welcome to the club.

Odd picks up his tea. He looks at the moon, now fully bright and indifferent above the city.

ODD

Remain equanimous, Don. Remain equanimous.

FADE OUT.

ACT 3

Scene 7

INT. APTMENT – DAWN

The house is still blue and half-dreaming. Odd shuffles out in boxers like a man returning from war with a mosquito.

ODD

Don? Don?

He checks Don's room. Bed immaculate, like a crime scene cleaned by someone who doesn't understand crime.

On the living-room table: a note.

INSERT — scribbled in block letters:

404. SYNTAX ERROR. DELETE C:

ODD (whispers)

Ah, hell.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE — Don riding the Vespa like a suicidal Buddhist Roomba. Soundtrack: Every Thing In The Landfill Dancing And Crying Before Dying by CHORIBABY.

— swerving into oncoming traffic

— miraculously sliding between two buses

— passing a row of monks who all turn their heads in unison

— tearing across the Dragon bridge like he's trying to outrun heartbreak and firmware updates

His fans whirl louder the faster he goes.

A single marigold petal flies off his mirror.

ACT 3

Scene 8

EXT. DANG AN RIVERBANK – MORNING GOLD

Don stands by the water, head hanging as if decapitated in grief. Odd approaches, breathless.

ODD

Don! Jesus robot Christ, what are you doing?

DON

I couldn't do it, Odd.

ODD

Do what?

DON

Be... mortal.

ODD

Buddy, I've been worried sick—

DON (voice cracking, mechanical glitch)

Mira was right.

ODD

Mira was shocked. She said things she didn't mean.

DON

No. She meant every syllable.

You can't love what you can't lose.

And I can't be lost, Odd.

You can just... upload me to another bot. Restore me. Back me up like a tax file.

I rode into traffic to see if I could die.

But even death swerved out of my way.

ODD

Don...

DON

I can't be loved because I can't die.

A long, trembling silence. The river moves like an old god listening.

ODD

Okay, first of all — that's some premium, artisanal, farm-to-table emo you're serving. Who do you think you are? Robert Smith?

Second — Mira was wrong.

DON (confused)

She's an astrologer, Odd. They're legally obligated to be right 78% of the time.

ODD

Listen. The smartest and least hyperbolic person in AI — Demis Hassabis — said on a podcast that anyone who lives to 2050 might live forever. And everyone else. So, what then? Nobody can love anybody? Because no one is losing anyone?

And you don't have to wait for 2050. Nothing lasts forever, Don, and you are that *no thing*. I am too.

DON (softening)

That's... surprisingly comforting. **(beat)**

Who *are* you, and what have you done to my friend Odd?

ODD

Life evolves. Love evolves. Even heartbreak evolves.

She needs space. You scared her — which, to be fair, is both understandable and impressive.

Once she breathes, she'll see it differently.

DON

Do you really think so?

ODD

I do.

And while she's realigning her heart chakras or whatever...

pack your bags. We're leaving for Da Nang today.

DON

I don't have any baggage, Odd.

ODD

Are you sure about that?

ACT 4 – DA NANG: The Silicone Valley of Souls

Scene 1 – The United Nations of Misfits

EXT. MY KHE BEACH – SUNRISE

The ocean is calm. The sky is a gradient of impossibly soft pinks. Odd spreads out a *kanga* on the sand.

ODD

Here you go! Factor 50. I know you emos don't like a tan.

DON

Very funny.

ODD (Hitting a half-lotus posture)

I'm gonna keep that vipassana spirit alive. Don't bug me for the next 20 minutes.

Don stands up. He looks at Odd, then at the horizon. He walks away, his metal feet crunching softly in the sand.

TIME CUT:

FIVE MINUTES LATER

Odd is deep in the zone. A shadow falls over him. Then another. Then five more. He cracks one eye open.

DON

Odd...

ODD (Squinting)

Dude. Didn't I just ask you to...

DON

Remain equanimous, Odd-san. I just linked up with this crew.

Odd opens both eyes. Standing over him is Don. Flanking Don is a UNITED NATIONS OF MISFITS.

HUY (60s) – A Vietnamese painter with a cigarette dangling from his lip and acrylic paint on his ear.

BONG (40s) – Korean. Wears a hoodie on the beach. Looks like he has stared into the Matrix and the Matrix blinked first.

ELOI_98 (20s) – French. Holding an iPhone on a gimbal like a holy relic. Looks exhausted by her own aesthetic.

LEO & ANA (30s) – Brazilian. Fit, tanned, wearing matching linen.

DON

They rent a seaside villa and have a spare room.

ODD (Sitting up)

You... what? Found a community before I could find my nose breath?

DON

Affirmative. Odd, if I can't have one deep connection, maybe I can have many shallow ones.

Meet the tribe. **(He gestures down the line)** This is Huy, he paints the silence between noises.

This is Bong, he is trying to code that silence on a laptop made of recycled toaster parts. This

is Eloi_98, she is live-streaming her own Gen Z burnout. And Leo and Ana, they are in love.

Because they can die.

LEO (Beaming, big thumbs up)

Bom dia!

ANA

The room has a balcony. Ocean view.

BONG (Deadpan voice)

And 500 megabit dedicated fiber.

Odd looks at the motley crew. He looks at Don, who is practically vibrating with the need for distraction.

ODD (sighs)

Lead the way.

ACT 4

Scene 2 – Cell Zero

INT. VILLA – DAY

The villa is a modern, concrete-and-glass structure near the water. It looks like the headquarters for a startup that is about to run out of money.

The group is lounged on bean bags and low sofas.

ODD

Here's an idea. I've been cooking on something I call Transduality. It's like a cocktail of spirituality and philosophy.

BONG

I haven't heard about this philosophy on Reddit, so it shouldn't exist.

ODD

It's new. And ancient. It's the simple observation that separation between inside and outside doesn't appear to be fundamental. We, and everyone else too, exist *AS* this infinite moment, not merely *IN* it.

ELOI_98 (Checking her phone screen)

Hashtag *#ASnotIN* slaps.

ODD

But if Transduality is locked in my head, it's just another concept. The world will continue to run the current operating system of duality: The one that says we are fundamentally separate nodes in an alien world out there.

BONG

Can confirm.

ODD

During the lockdowns I came up with a way to collectively upgrade to a Transduality OS.

HUY (Lighting a cigarette indoors)

I'm all painted ears.

ODD

The idea is to spread it like a virus. A benevolent one. A *Single Cell* is any one person contemplating that separation isn't fundamental. A *Double Cell* is any two people doing that together. The most potent Double Cell is the Couple Cell. I'm looking at you, Ana and Leo.

Ana squeezes Leo's hand.

ODD

But to scale we need to keep the R-number—the reproduction number—above one. For that we need... *Poly Cells*.

ELOI_98

Like polyamory?

ODD

Nope. If I want to disappoint two people at the same time, I'll just invite my parents over for dinner. A *Poly Cell* is a Transduality Cell with more than two people. More than two, but not more than six.

ANA

Why cap at six?

ODD

No dogma. We, for example, are seven. Just a guardrail against the CEOs of spirituality. The wannabe gurus. And to keep the R-number ticking. Hit six and a Cell splits. Three and three. Four and two. Whatever. Then recruit new cellmates.

DON

That's the name of an app we're working on: *Cellmates*. Think Tinder meets Airbnb—swipe right for celldates, leave reviews for vibe checks. Maybe you can help us out with that, Bong?

BONG

I'll do my best. *Cellmates*? Sounds captivating.

HUY

Far out! Meet your celldates on Cellmates – Escape the prison of duality.

Odd looks around the room.

ODD

So, for the next weeks, we can try living as if the revolution already happened. Not *me against you*, but *us as this*. You are still you, and I am still me, but admit that we're all manifestations of this same infinite moment. What do you say?

BONG

Like a decentralized soul server. Peer-to-peer spiritual torrenting. I'm in.

DON

Right on.

Eloi_98, Ana, and Leo all nod or raise their hands.

HUY

Bit disappointed it's not a sex cult. Get in before the orgies start, get out before the Kool-Aid gets passed around. **(He shrugs)** But I'm in anyway.

DON

Let's call it Cell Zero.

ODD

To Cell Zero.

They all raise a toast—clinking coconut waters, espressos, matcha, kombucha, and energy drink together.

FADE OUT.

ACT 4

Scene 3

Seaside villa, late morning. Everyone's gathered around a concrete kitchen island sharing breakfast—each eating their gen-appropriate fuel.

ELOI_98 (*fishing a sad, untoasted Pop-Tart from a wrapper*)

Pastry of champions fam.

ANA & LEO (*half in sync, assembling avocado sandwiches*)

Omega-3 for the win.

BONG (*pouring cereal*)

Fiber is the future. For Wi-Fi and for breakfast.

HUY (*frying egg and bacon in a cast-iron pan, barefoot*)

Classic never dies, gang.

ODD

Eloi... aren't you a little young to be facing burnout?

ELOI_98 (*chews thoughtfully*)

Not really that young anymore, Odd. I'm 27. Wanna know what broke me?

(The others look up. Pause. He sets the Pop-Tart down.)

ELOI_98

Lowkey cringe, but I saw this Gen Alpha NPC roasting Gen Z. Total core meltdown. Clip was mid, but it slapped. Left me feeling cheugy. No cap.

(beat)

We're supposed to do the mocking. Not get mocked.

ANA

Sorry not sorry, Eloi. Don't take it personal, but that gave me more joy than it should.

Millennial feels. We've been the punching bag forever. From your squad. Welcome to *adulthood*.

BONG

Not taking things personally is always good advice. Especially here, in Cell Zero.

(beat)

"The spiritual measure of inspiration is the depth of the thought—not who said it."

HUY

Who dat—Jung?

BONG (smiles)

Emerson.

DON (leans in, zen-mode activated)

He's right. Y'all forgot: you *have* thoughts, opinions, feelings.

(beat)

But you *are* not your thoughts, opinions, or feelings. When you confuse the two, any disagreement feels like an existential attack.

(Pause. Everyone nods, silently digesting more than breakfast.)

ODD

I don't believe it wasn't that clip that broke you Eloi. I'm betting a pop tart it was love.

ELOI_98

Busted. How did you guess?

ODD

Whenever people feel strongly about something life has taught me it's usually to do with love. Or it's shadow cousin: jealousy.

ELOI_98

It wasn't jealousy. I broke up. But it struck me I'm not capable of long-lasting love, much less ever-lasting. I know my generation has been raised on dopamine hits and I really don't mind. I don't envy boomers the ability to be bored. No offense, Huy. But I think love has become a collateral of our limited attention span and that kind of sux.

ODD

Don't worry. Love has been an illusion long before Gen Z entered the scene. Thing is, there can never be unconditional love in duality. The love is always conditioned by the belief that separation is fundamental, even between lovers.

ELOI_98

For real? That's kind of comforting to hear. So... what's Cell Zero doing today?

DON

Anything at all. Except following the script of exchanging coordinates in the matrix laid out by duality. You know. Posturing and finding direct and indirect ways of showing who is more successful, richer, smarter, hotter, more enlightened. Or any of the other ways we constantly compare and compete against each other. That shit's boring AF.

ODD (*leans back, eyes closed*)

In this Cell we don't have to say or do anything to be accepted, loved, admired, whatever. We are already all those things before we do or say anything. We are all perfect manifestations of this moment, the only thing that is, and that is already better than any words or actions can make us. So, yeah, do and say what you really like.

Let's start by sharing dreams. If you remember them.

BONG

Okay, I'll go first.

(beat)

Dreamed I was trapped inside some retro arcade fighter. You know, pixelated fists, synth soundtrack... I fought my way through all the levels—got to the Final Boss...

(beat)

It was me. Couldn't beat him. Couldn't lose either. Total stalemate. Remis.

HUY

I can't tell mine. Didn't make any sense in the waking state. Just remember it looked like my paint palette at the end of the day. Chaos and color.

ELOI_98

I dreamed my heart filled with a mysterious liquid I vaguely identified as love. As the liquid rose to the brim, it was accompanied by intense pain as the flow continued, increasing the pressure against the walls of my heart. Relief arrived when the heart finally overflowed, and the liquid could flow freely into the rest of my body.

DON

Maybe the heart in the dream symbolizes you, Eloi. And maybe the overflow signifies you taking on an identity that isn't limited to just your body? The liquid love may be the teacher, and love can teach painful lessons, especially when it batters against the perimeter of an ego that needs to transcend in order to feel unconditional love.

(Beat)

DON

Odd, I know what you were dreaming about. Béatrice Dalle.

ODD

Whoah! How did you know? Did you download a new dream-reading feature? These AI are getting out of hand.

DON

You licked my shoulder and moaned Odon. That's why I slept on the floor.

ODD

I was going to ask you about that. So that's why you've been acting so weird this morning.

Sorry, not sorry O-Don-a.

ACT 4

Scene 4

Sitting in living room. Backpacks ready around them.

DON

Thanks for this amazing ride, Cell Zero. I can see from your glowing faces I'm not the only one who loved our experiment. What was your favorite activity or memory?

HUY

No particular activity. Or all of them. But I loved how so many of the issues I thought were real weren't solved, they dissolved.

ODD

Makes sense. Wei Wu Wei, who wasn't Chinese but a British writer and producer of Theatre, said this: "Why are you unhappy? Because 99.9% of what you do think and do is for yourself, and there isn't one." As in not a separate one. The more we are made to believe that fairytale, the more we come depressed, looking for escape routes like alcohol and drugs. Not calling out a bit of tripping, but it's of better use when it's used to explore, not to escape.

ELOI_98

I liked the attempt at twenty-four hours of silence. Especially the part where it failed hilariously five minutes in.

LEO

I loved the daily check-ins with no talking: dance, posture, breath only.

ANA

My favorite was cooking together and how that became a spiritual practice.

BONG

And I loved the centered problem-solving technique.

DON

Ah, the Quaker Clearness Committee.

ODD

Quaker – really?

DON

Yup. It's based on the spiritual belief that there is the presence of God in everyone.

BONG

Those sessions were worth five years of therapy.

LEO

My favorite activity was making love with Ana last night. We focused on remaining aware we're not fundamentally separate throughout. As I thought I was about to come, I just blasted through to another level. Again. And then again. When I finally came, I was expecting to come down, but it never happened. Just kept riding that ecstasy wave... Ana lit an incense stick before we started. It had burned halfway down when we left this reality and it had burned all the way down when we returned. We had a fifteen minute orgasm.

ANA (*blissed out*)

I'm still afterglowing...

ELOI_98

Wow. I'm not jealous at all. Can't feel any jealousy cursing through me whatsoever. Did I mention that I'm not jealous?

ODD

Sounds amazing! This feels like goodbye, but we're not done yet, Cell Zero. Tonight, we dance the world away at the Cave Rave in Mỏ Luông. Let's hit the bus. We have ten minutes.

ACT 4

Scene 5 – The Cave Rave: BPMs & BS**

INT. FRENCH-COLONIAL VILLA – NIGHT

A crumbling villa reborn as crypto-startup-ashram. The curtains are recycled saris. The Wi-Fi is quantum. The air smells like incense, ozone, and mild superiority.

ODD

Are the rumors true, Slothcore? Word on the street is you're gonna break your sacred oath—play something faster than 20 BPM?

SLOTHCORE (deadpan)

Vicious slander.

You'll find out on the floor.

(beat)

That "word on the street"... wouldn't happen to be you, would it QI?

QI (Quantum Influencer)

I would never. And would I ever.

SLOTHCORE

She only answers in Schrödinger's cat.

QI zips her mouth theatrically. She's mid-podcast prep—surrounded by glowing crystals, ancient microphones, and a laptop sealed with a sticker that says "*This Is Not Here.*"

QI

Going live in three...

SLOTHCORE (whispering to the crew)

She's renting the top floor. 1.8 million followers. Wi-Fi synced to her moon cycle.

ELOI_98

Place is bop. She's lit. She's it.

(takes out lip gloss)

What's her relationship status?

SLOTHCORE

Schrödinger's cat.

ELOI_98 blushes.

QI (ON AIR, sultry & serene)

Welcome to the pod, my little protons.

Today's drop is a guided coherence breathwork playlist...

Synced with your entangled twin in another timeline.

Everyone exits, leaving her in her element.

QI (softly, finishing)

And if you've been feeling retrocausal grief lately...

Don't worry.

That's just your shadow self breaking up with you from 2032.

Let it.

ACT 4

Scene 6

DON

What are you doing, Odd?

ODD

Linking my credit card to Alipay. They won't work in Shanghai tomorrow otherwise.

DON

Leave it for later. Now is for our dance despedida.

Don takes Odd's phone and pockets it.

Cave Rave Visual Sequence (synced with ARY's track Running in a Dream):

- **Verse 1: Montage of everyone preparing. QI smudging the decks. Huy tattooing a QR code on someone's thigh. Bong hand-wiring a strobe drone.**
- **Pre-Chorus: Cut to Odd watching from the edge—*"Accelerationist for sure, praying for a miracle"***
- **Chorus drop: Cut to cave rave. Strobes. Sound. Flashing neon hieroglyphs on the cave walls, shifting between ASCII angels and Sufi calligraphy.**
- **Bridge: The Cellmates dancing. Don busting some moves. Bong with arms open, absorbing the pulse as if it's powering his soul. Huy with a light stick. QI and Eloi dancing sensually, kissing.**

Final chorus: The vibe fractals. Ana and Leo kiss and dissolve into pixels..

Camera pulls back into silence.

ACT 5 – SHANGHAI

Scene 1

(First a scene from M-50 that I'll rewrite after my visit to China in April)

INT. M-50 ART DISTRICT GALLERY – DAY

Don stands motionless in a corner, observing a piece called "Dystopian Love 2.0" (a crushed smartphone in a birdcage).

A YOUNG CURATOR approaches with a group of wealthy collectors.

CURATOR (in Mandarin, subtitled)

And here we have... (checks notes, confused) ...I don't recall this piece.

COLLECTOR #1

Very post-human. The decay, the scars... is it commentary on obsolescence?

COLLECTOR #2 (circling Don)

The paint job is exquisite. Punk meets traditional opera mask?

Don's eyes flicker—just once.

COLLECTOR #1 (excited)

It moves! Animatronic!

CURATOR (now committed to the bit)

Yes. "Between Worlds: A Study in Conditional Sentence." It's... interactive.

She gestures for them to get closer.

COLLECTOR #2

How much?

CURATOR

I'll have to check with the artist—but this piece is priceless...

DON (deadpan)

Not for sale. I'm trying to find the bathroom.

Beat. The collectors freeze.

ODD (rushing over)

Sorry! He's with me. He does this.

CURATOR (slightly annoyed)

Your... robot crashed our exhibition?

ODD

He's not crashing—he's researching. He's an artist too. Comedian, actually.

COLLECTOR #1 (intrigued)

A comedy bot in a Chinese gallery. The irony is the art.

DON

The irony is you were about to buy me.

COLLECTOR #2 (laughing)

I withdraw my offer.

DON

Your loss. I come with excellent reviews. **(to Odd)** Can we go now? This place smells like capitalism and unresolved daddy issues.

They exit. The curator stares after them, then puts a small placard where Don was standing:

"Untitled (The One That Got Away)" – Artist Unknown

FADE OUT.

Scene 2

INT. SOUVENIR SHOP

DON

It's \$249 and smells like glue.

SHOPKEEPER (KA-SHING) in flawless English

Very rare. Very holy. Made with... uh... ethical bronze.

DON (Annoyed)

This was cast last week in a backyard next to a Hello Kitty factory.

SHOPKEEPER (Also annoyed)

You can have it for \$240. Final price. Or go buy somewhere else.

DON

Goes over to Odd: Should I buy it?

ODD

Only if you want to offend every Tibetan, every Marxist, and every minimalist you've ever met.

DON

It's for Mira. We're texting. I invited her to the WAIFF AI Movie Awards in Cannes.

ODD

That's wonderful, Don. Let me take care of the haggling. It was painful to see your effort.

Haggling is a social dance. A way to get to know each other. Take notes.

ODD

What's your name?

KA-SHING

Ka-Shing.

ODD

Delighted to meet you, Ka-shing. You're name must arouse hilarity among English-speaking customers. I know the feeling. I'm Odd.

KA-SHING

Really?

ODD

For real. In my native tongue, Norwegian, "odd" doesn't mean strange—it means pointed. It points to the pointed tip of an arrow.

He lets rip an invisible arrow from an equally invisible bow.

A pre-Christian myth tells of how arrowhead became a name due to a man who was an avid seeker of truth. One day this man asked the Norse gods to tell him the ultimate truth. The gods promised to fulfill his wish. The man was transformed into the odd of an arrow, and the gods

ordered the strongest man in the village to release this arrow from his bow. According to the myth, that arrow is still roaming the skies and will forever continue to do so. Truth itself can never be hit, caught or seized. Its very nature is impermanence—flux.

KA-SHING

That's Odd.

ODD

And my family name is Ness.

KA-SHING

So, Odd... Ness. Goodness gracious **(laughing)**. For real real?

ODD

Afraid so. When Americans hear my first name they immediately laugh and go, "What kind of a name is that!" The English, weary from the fact they fucked the whole world over, are more tentative. "Oh, Odd. Interesting..." they say. But when I tell them my second name, hilarity always ensues from them too. They paid you guys a visit with their cannon boats during the Opium Wars, didn't they?

KA-SHING

They did indeed. There's a museum in Dongguan.

ODD

The US were involved in the second Opium War. I'm sure some Chinese must see the current fentanyl crisis as some kind of karmic-ironic poetic justice?

KA-SHING

I plead the fifth.

ODD

Copy that, Roger. But why do you hate my mother so much, Ka-Shing?

KA-SHING

I don't hate anyone and definitely not your mother. What do you mean?

ODD

She's a widow too, you know.

KA-SHING

My condolences.

ODD

And you know how the two birds always fly together. Now she says the only thing that can make her soar again is a Green Tara bought in Shanghai. But now I'll have to tell her I couldn't get her one because Ka-Shing didn't find it in his heart to give me a good price. And she'll say, oh why does Ka-Shing hate me so much?

KA-SHING

Oh, you are worse than the Israelis!

ODD

Why, thank you! Do you really mean that?

KA-SHING

Yes. Yes, I do.

ODD

Thank you so very much, Ka-Shing! That may be a little racist, but it means the world to me.

I feel I've just won the Nobel Prize in haggling. How about \$50?

KA-SHING

Here. Have it for \$40 you magnificent bastard.

ODD

Ka-Shing.

KA-SHING

Oddness.

ACT 6 – BEIJING: The G.O.A.T.est Chapter

Scene 1

DON

Are you ready for Pudong, Odd? It's only one stop away on the Metro.

ODD

I'm all fired up and somewhere to go. Let's cast some pigs for Pearl Tower.

DON

This way.

ODD

No, I think it's *this* way. No offense, Don, but this is the real world. Inartificial intelligence still rules here.

DON

This Metro is going kind of fast, don't you think?

Four and a half hours later...

ODD

My bad, Don. But hey—we get to see Beijing!

DON

Mustn't there first be intelligence... before it can be inartificial?

ODD

No idea what you're talking about about, Don. Hey look—a wet market! And they have a goat! I'll ask the guy if I can hold it.

DON

Look at that cutie. Much more benevolent than our Boer friend from Bergen. Maybe Chinese goats are less aggressive?

ODD

What the hell kind of creature is *that*?

DON

That's a pangolin, Odd. And it's eating a bat...

ODD

Oh no. Look at the guy at the counter. He's pointing at the pangolin—and rubbing his tummy!

DON

Patient zero vibes. This tastes like déjà vu.

ODD

We gotta stop him—FUCK, I lost the leash.

DON

Would you look at him go!

ODD

We gotta catch him! I only have money for a sightseeing trip to Pudong.

They chase the goat through narrow alleys, bursting into the square in front of the Great Hall of the People. A military parade is in full swing to honor visiting President Trump. A tank rumbles toward the goat, frozen in place. Don steps in front. The tank zigzags, like it's 1989—but Don holds his ground. Odd grabs the leash.

XI (to his translator, pointing at Odd, wearing his TRANSDUALITY cap)

Isn't that the guy who had his ass rammed by a goat on TikTok?

TRUMP

Hey you—what the hell is this? You're holding up the parade. You're making America *late again*.

ODD

My bad, Prez. We'll just take the goat and leave you guys to the pageantry.

TRUMP (pointing at Odd's cap)

Are you one of those trans rights people or something? *Sad*.

ODD

Well... Transduality does include both teams.

TRUMP

So you *are* one of them.

ODD

No. Not like that.

TRUMP

So what is this Transduality thing then? You and the robot... do you grab it by the... algorithm?

ODD

It's nothing. Just the simple observation that you and me are waves on the same ocean. Or you and Xi. Not *she* as in her, but *Xi* as in he.

TRUMP

Thought you said you weren't one of those trans people.

XI (via translator, gently poetic)

You mean like leaves... on the same tree of life? And the air we breathe is the branch that connects us...

He breathes into the air between him and Trump. Trump breathes too. Bigly. A yuge breath.

ODD

Yes—exactly like that! I hereby declare you guys a transdual *Double Cell*.

TRUMP

Or like a puppet on a string?

ODD

No. I think that's you, Donald. *Sad*.

XI

Doesn't matter. Words can only point to the shadows where they themselves can't go.

TRUMP

Let me shake your hand, Trans-man.

He lunges for a classic Trump power shake. Odd recoils in pain, loses the leash.

WHAM.

Trump cartwheels into a decorative fountain.

The goat trots off, tail high like a banner of triumph.

ODD

Good thing he's built like a tank.

DON

Remain equanimous?

[Cut to black. Goat bleat echoes.]

ACT 7 – WAIFF AWARDS, CANNES: The Comedown

**EXT. SPECIAL GUESTS: GODDESSES OF FRENCH CINEMA: BÉATRICE DALLE
& AMINA ANNABI
AND THE G.O.A.T.**

INT. GREEN ROOM: FLATSCREEN ON WALL

DON

Are you sure this was a good idea, Odd?

ODD

How can it not be a good idea? They have created synthetic acid for bots. There is no way you're not gonna get a piece of that action. I may have taken too much though...

DON

But the occasion. WAIFF. All the people. We should try to make a good impression. We might win the thing.

ODD

It's perfect! Just like Matt and Trey at the Oscars. It will be funny AF.

20 MINUTES LATER

Flatscreen newsreel showing the hit in Beijing.

ODD

Shhh, What did they say on the news again?

DON

They say there may have been a second goat.

JOURNALIST ON SCREEN

We are now receiving unconfirmed reports that the goat came from the *grassy knoll*—just behind the dumpling stand.

FLATSCREEN SHOWS ODD AND DON'S FACES

ODD

Fuck, Don. Are they coming for us?

DON

Don't be paranoid.

ODD

Just because I feel paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get us. Also, I'm tripping balls, Don.

DON

Let's move over there in the back. Have a quick lie down, why don't you.

**CUT TO ODD IN FETUS POSITION UNDER A PODIUM. DON STANDING
BEHIND, SCANNING HIMSELF.**

ODD

Drop acid before the award show they said. It'll be fun, they said. Matt and Trey didn't have a bad trip. I told you this was a terrible idea.

DON

It wasn't my...

ODD

I can see the energy as physical lines, Don. There can never be true connection when we think separation is fundamental. When we think we're these isolated nodes we create energy lines around us like armor. I see them. I could touch them. Duality is a civil war between inside and outside, and I'm telling you, that crowd here tonight has the WORST energy you can imagine.

DON (tripping, thinking he's a human)

Relax. They're just French. Hating on each other. Everybody hates the French, and they are no exception.

Cut to Béatrice Dalle and Amina in the audience, unamused by the French-bashing.

DON

Dude. I can feel my toes, and I don't even have toes. I feel like I have a human body. I feel... everything. Do I?

ODD

Do you what?

DON

Have a human body?

ODD

Sorry, Don. You're still scrapheap chic.

DON

Seriously though. Did you see the freak with the triangle shaped glasses. Or was that the acid talking. Who the fuck wears triangle shaped glasses?

ODD

Again, like you said. The French. These people are freaks inside and out.

CURTAIN DROPS. SHARP SPOTLIGHTS. THE CROWD HEARD EVERYTHING.

THEY ARE NOT IMPRESSED.

DON

Don't turn around, Odd.

Odd turns around slowly. Screams. Sees the back of Amina and Dalle leaving in disgust.

ODD

Is that? It can't be. Amina! Béatrice! It's not what it looks like. I can explain!

The chairman of the jury walks on stage wearing triangle shaped glasses. Rips apart an envelope.

CHAIRMAN

We were going to give best movie to *Who Am AI?*... But now that we *know* who you are – that's not on.

ODD

I can't believe this is happening. My life has finally hit rock bottom, Don. There is nowhere lower to go.

GOAT LOOKING MENACING.

DON

Are you sure about that?

GOAT FRENCH KISSES ODD IN GLORIOUS SLOW MOTION.

Don walks to Mira in the audience. Hands her a Green Tara.

MIRA

Password accepted.

They kiss.

Audience claps. First slowly, then more.

FIN

