

The Zero Theorem
by
Pat Rushin

FADE IN:

A rim of swirling light appears, circling helplessly into a gigantic BLACK HOLE. It spirals inward...

A phone RINGS.

INT. RUN-DOWN CHAPEL - NIGHT

Dim, high-ceilinged. Guttled of half its pews. Broken stained glass windows. Vandalized statues of saints. Iconoclastic clutter lies beneath rusted, wrought iron stands of votive candles.

At the chapel's front: a decapitated Jesus hangs from a charred wooden cross above where an altar once stood.

The altar space: converted to a computer work station. Piles of carelessly stashed discs and printouts abound.

Sacristy doorways lead to kitchen and bathroom. An unmade brass bed sits off to one side.

In an alcove off to the other side, a SHRINE. Candles burn in a votive stand. Framed pictures hang above it, their faces turned to the wall.

A tormented FIGURE sits at the computer...

Meet: QOHEN LETH, 40s, gaunt, pale and completely hairless.

His hands clench and unclench above his keyboard as he stares mesmerized at the swirling image of a BLACK HOLE SCREENSAVER.

His rotary phone RINGS.

Qohen blinks out of his trance, a look of panic on his face, and reaches for the phone... too late.

The phone stops ringing before he can answer it.

Qohen MOANS softly and turns back to his computer. He taps a key and the screensaver disappears, replaced by a scrolling flurry of esoteric symbols.

He types frenetically, eyes focused intensely.

The phone RINGS. Qohen snatches the receiver.

 QOHEN
Hello? Hello?

No answer.

Qohen SIGHS, slowly hangs up the receiver, and returns his attention to the computer screen. He begins typing again...

His wind-up clock RINGS. Its hands read 5:09.

Qohen jumps. He slaps the alarm off, rubs his eyes as if he's just awakened. Standing and stretching, he raises his eyes to the disfigured crucifix before him.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Qohen stands in his small galley kitchen, waiting for the microwave to finish, an open container of generic "INSTANT OATMEAL" on the counter in front of him.

An open cupboard above reveals various food products, all bland, all tasteless, all generically packaged in white with block black lettering.

Qohen methodically sets the counter with plate, napkin, spoon... and, after retrieving the spoon from its drawer, notices a steak knife.

He picks it up, studies its edge, then... gently traces a forearm vein, like an architect drawing a blueprint.

The knife draws blood.

Qohen stares at it.

The microwave BEEPS.

The wall phone RINGS.

Qohen looks confused for a moment. Then, frantic and hopeful, he lunges for the phone.

QOHEN

Hello?

He listens, face turning bland.

QOHEN (CONT'D)

No... We're sorry... We're afraid you have the wrong number.

Qohen hangs up, takes his steaming bowl of oatmeal from the microwave. He stands at the counter, spoon in hand, staring at the bowl with slight distaste: just another job to do.

He absently brings his wrist to his mouth, tastes the blood.

His face sours.

He grabs his napkin and wipes his tongue clean.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Qohen stares at himself in the mirror as he brushes his teeth. He spits, takes a deep breath.

INT. CHAPEL - LATER

Clad in black, sleeves and collar buttoned, Qohen pops a disc out of his computer and slips it into his shirt pocket.

SHRINE - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen lights a candle. He stares at one of the picture frames, then carefully turns it to reveal its hidden photo.

INSERT - PHOTO

Standing on the front porch of a suburban home, Qohen's WIFE holds their baby SON in her arms, both smiling at the camera. She holds the baby's hand up in a pudgy-fingered wave. Standing behind the two, YOUNG QOHEN beams with pride.

BACK TO SCENE

Qohen gazes at the photo, then bows his head, fighting his emotion. He turns the picture's face to the wall again.

He walks down the long aisle to the chapel door, opens it.

INT. DILAPIDATED VESTIBULE - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen approaches a great oak door. He hesitates as he touches the doorknob, bracing himself, then opens it...

...to a blast of light and STREET NOISES.

EXT. INNER-CITY STREET - MORNING

Qohen exits. Colorful graffiti mars words etched in stone above the door: "THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE INEFFABLE NAME".

He hurries past caged storefronts, eyes downcast.

Near his bus stop, Qohen sees a GIRL, 10, sitting on the curb beside a toppled bicycle. She holds a skinned knee, CRYING.

Qohen hesitates, looks around. No one else is there to help. He approaches the Girl cautiously.

QOHEN

We hate to impose ourselves, but... may we assist you in any way?

The Girl covers her face with her hands, still CRYING.

Qohen stares at her helplessly, then moves to her bike.

A bent fender scrapes the front wheel when he tests it. He tries to pry the fender back into shape.

The Girl drops her hands from her face.

GIRL
Leave my bike alone! Leave it alone!

A SIREN sounds close by, and a helmeted MOTORCYCLE COP skids up to the curb, engine ROARING. He turns off the siren, dismounts, slowly approaches Qohen and the girl.

MOTORCYCLE COP
Please step back from the child, sir.

QOHEN
We were simply attempting to --

MOTORCYCLE COP
Put down the bike and step back.

Qohen gently lays down the bicycle.

His bus passes, and he hastens to his stop.

The bus door opens. Qohen looks at the Motorcycle Cop comforting the crying Girl. His face tightens.

INT. CITY BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen sits alone in the rear seat. The bus jumps and jostles. Qohen shuts his eyes, hands folded as if in prayer. TRAFFIC NOISES BLARE in a crescendo of anxiety.

INT. QOHEN'S WORK CUBICLE - AFTERNOON

Neat and orderly. No sign of personal belongings.

One poster adorns the wall: a man's torso in a sharply-tailored taupe suit. Bold letters proclaim: "MANAGEMENT". Smaller script reads: "Everything's Under Control."

A video camera (labeled MANCAM) records Qohen's every move.

Except Qohen doesn't move. He simply sits staring at his computer monitor, trancelike.

The image on the monitor shows Qohen from behind, staring at an image of himself on his monitor staring at an image of himself... ad infinitum.

His phone RINGS.

Qohen slowly comes back to reality as the phone continues RINGING. Finally, he picks up the receiver.

A female COMPUTERIZED VOICE speaks.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.)
Hello -- Qohen Leth -- Corporate Health
Maintenance has approved review of your
disability request for today at 14:40.
Please be prompt.

QOHEN
We are nothing if not prompt.

Qohen hangs up, glances at his watch. He touches his
keyboard: the image of himself shrinks to the screen's upper
corner, replaced by a column of flashing signs, cryptic
symbols, formulae and numerals.

Qohen frowns and with some effort begins typing.

MR. JOBY, 20s, appears in the cubicle's doorway, scratching
an elusive itch inside his ill-fitting suit coat. He is a
soft, manic-looking man with shaggy hair and beard.

JOBY
How's it hanging, Quinn?

QOHEN
(without looking up)
It's Qohen, Mr. Joby, and, as we've told
you before, it isn't hanging at all well.
We're dying.

JOBY
Again? Better see the medics about that.

QOHEN
We have an appointment this afternoon.

JOBY
Not this afternoon, Quinn.

QOHEN
You approved it.

JOBY
Cancel it. You got that Transfinite
Quantum Paradox Project due today.

QOHEN
We attached it to you yesterday.

JOBY
Good work. But you still have that
Whatchacallit Project due next week.

QOHEN
The Neural Synaptic Intervention
Project. Also finished.

(MORE)

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Tautologics Division is running the
standard redundancies.

JOBY
Whoa! You did all that this morning?

QOHEN
We did it all at home last night. As
we've told you repeatedly, we find our
work environment... distressing. The
people, the lighting, the noise, the
interruptions, the... the people...
(taking a deep breath)
Considering our at-home output, we can't
begin to imagine why you insist on our
coming here each day.

Joby removes his suit coat and reaches over his shoulder to
pursue a particularly shy itch.

JOBY
That's a Management decision, Quinn.

QOHEN
Qohen. Q--no U--O-H-E-N.

JOBY
Out of my hands.

QOHEN
Perhaps we should talk to Management.

Joby stifles a guffaw, then casually drapes his suit coat
over the ManCam.

JOBY
(voice lowered)
Nobody talks to Management, Quinn. No
way, no how, nuh-uh, nyetskis. Take my
advice. Knock off the bitching and
moaning. It's not all that bad here.

QOHEN
It's worse than you can imagine,
Mr. Joby, but we could suffer the wear
and tear on our nerves if only we weren't
afraid of missing our call.

JOBY
Your call...

QOHEN
Yes, our call. We've mentioned it a
number of times.

JOBY
... Ain't ringing a bell.

QOHEN

We're expecting a certain phone call, a call we've been waiting for all our lives, a call that will give our lives purpose and meaning, and each minute we spend here, we fear we may be missing it.

JOBY

Oh. Right. That call. Um... How about letting your machine take it? Or get call forwarding. I guess I could bend the rules on personal calls in your case.

QOHEN

We have to be home to receive it.

Joby shakes his head, stumped. He moves behind Qohen and massages his shoulders.

JOBY

I feel for you, Quinn, but there's nothing I can do.

QOHEN

(stiffening)

We prefer not to be touched.

Joby stops, steps back.

QOHEN (CONT'D)

We've been extremely patient, Mr. Joby, but we're afraid we must now issue an ultimatum. Either you let us work at home, or we will be forced to resign.

JOBY

You can't quit, Quinn! You're the best cruncher I got!

Qohen turns back to his computer and resumes typing.

QOHEN

If our meeting with Health Maintenance is successful, the issue will be settled. If not, you leave us no choice.

JOBY

You're killing me! Be reasonable!

Qohen ignores him.

Joby grabs his coat and turns to leave, frustrated.

JOBY (CONT'D)

I'll see what I can do, Quinn.

INT. HEALTH MAINTENANCE BOARD - DAY

Three doctors sit at one end of a long table, grayish light from an overcast day sifting through the window behind them.

At the head sits DOCTOR #1, a prim woman in a drab business suit. She polishes her bifocals with a tissue.

To her right sits DOCTOR #2, a middle-aged man in hospital scrubs that reveal a NicoDerm patch on his upper arm. He chews a wad of Nicorette gum while perusing Qohen's file.

DOCTOR #3 slouches to Doctor #1's left. A handsome young man in a white lab coat, stethoscope draped around his neck, he gazes out the window with the soulful look of a bored poet.

Qohen sits stone-faced at the far end of the table.

Doctor #1 puts on her glasses to appraise him.

DOCTOR #1
And this is...?

Doctor #2 nervously clicks his pen, chomping on his gum.

DOCTOR #2
Qohen Leth, Ontological Research
Division, requesting Disability Leave.

QOHEN
Or reassignment to work at home.

DOCTOR #1
That's a Management decision, Mr. Leth.
We only deal with health issues here.
What seems to be the problem?

QOHEN
We're dying.

DOCTOR #3
Who's "we"?

QOHEN
Us. Ourselves.

DOCTOR #3
But there's only the one of you.

QOHEN
So it would appear.

Doctor #3 SNIFFS, returns to gazing out the window.

DOCTOR #2
(consulting file)
Subject's had five physicals in the last
year. He's healthy as a horse.

Doctor #1 takes the file from him, scanning it.

DOCTOR #1
What makes you think you're dying?

QOHEN
We can feel it. Deep inside us...

DOCTOR #2
Heart's strong as an ox.
(a frustrated puff on pen)
BP and cholesterol I could only dream of.

QOHEN
Our hair has fallen out.

DOCTOR #3
Idiopathic.

DOCTOR #2
Perfectly harmless. The tests don't lie.

QOHEN
Then the tests are merely mistaken.

DOCTOR #1
According to your file, you're the most
productive number cruncher in your --

QOHEN
Entity cruncher. Our data is much more
complex than mere numbers.

DOCTOR #1
Dying people are rarely so productive.

QOHEN
Nevertheless, we're dying.

DOCTOR #2
No you're not.

QOHEN
Yes we are.

DOCTOR #2
No you're not!

QOHEN
Yes we are.

Doctor #2 grabs the Nicorette pack, savagely rips loose a piece of gum and shoves it in his mouth.

Doctor #3, supremely bored now, uses his stethoscope to listen to his own heartbeat.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Perhaps we should get another opinion.

DOCTOR #3
Oh, let me do this one! Please?

Doctor #1 nods. Doctor #3 sits up, clears his throat.

DOCTOR #3 (CONT'D)
From the moment we're born, we all begin to die. Sooner or later, beggar or king, death comes to all.

DOCTOR #1
That will do, Doctor.

DOCTOR #3
But it's true.

DOCTOR #2
Where'd you get your degree?

DOCTOR #1
Disability request denied. It's back to work for you, Mr. Leth.

Qohen rises to leave, defeated. Doctor #1 takes off her glasses, studying him.

DOCTOR #1 (CONT'D)
This board must also recommend that you seek psychiatric evaluation.

Doctor #2 waves a CD-ROM.

DOCTOR #2
I saw this coming a mile away.

QOHEN
We've seen psychiatrists in the past.
It's proven to be a waste of our time.
We must stay home to wait for our call.

DOCTOR #2
You'll have time for this one.

He slides the CD-ROM down the table. Qohen picks it up. The cover reads: DR. SHRINK-ROM: INTERACTIVE PSYCHIATRIST.

DOCTOR #2 (CONT'D)
She makes house calls.

INT. QOHEN'S WORK CUBICLE - LATER

Joby stands in Qohen's doorway, arms folded.

JOBY
 Didn't figure the medics would help, but
 Joby's here. I can get Management to see
 you. He'll be at my party tonight.

QOHEN
 Party?

JOBY
 (sheepishly)
 Guess you missed your invitation. Whole
 office is coming, including Management
 himself. Just show up. I'll take care
 of the rest.

QOHEN
 We're afraid we can't.

JOBY
 What, gotta stay home and shampoo?

Joby playfully musses Qohen's hairless head but, seeing his
 frigid expression, quickly stops.

QOHEN
 We fear parties... We especially fear
 living rooms at parties... We never know
 quite... where to stand.

Joby stares, then suddenly LAUGHS, slapping him on the back.

JOBY
 You kill me, Quinn. See you tonight.

Joby leaves. Qohen takes a deep breath to calm himself.

QOHEN
 It's Qohen.

INT. JOBY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Qohen uncomfortably plods his way through a room crowded with
 CO-WORKERS. He is lost amid the LAUGHTER AND CONVERSATION.

He passes a couple of CO-WORKERS who eye him derisively.

CO-WORKER #1
 Who's the geeky goth?

CO-WORKER #2
 Cube zombie. Some kind of Einstein.

Qohen bumps into BAINSLEY, 20s, wearing a loudly-patterned dress her buxom figure seems to be bursting out of.

Qohen steps to his right just as Bainsley steps to her left. She steps to her left just as Qohen shifts to his right.

Bainsley GIGGLES, still blocking his way.

BAINSLEY

I love the look. Fifty-first century human, the final evolutionary product. Maximum brain, minimalist body.

Qohen stares at her, then clumsily makes his way past her.

Qohen finds Joby, obviously tipsy, laughing with a crowd.

JOBY

Party boy! You made it!

QOHEN

Is Management here?

The group looks at Qohen strangely. Joby LAUGHS uncomfortably, takes Qohen's arm, and moves him away.

JOBY

(whispering)
You wanna start a rumor riot?

QOHEN

Where is Management?

JOBY

Probably on his way. Soon as I spot him, I'll let you know. Meantime...

Joby slaps Qohen on the back. Qohen flinches.

JOBY (CONT'D)

(loudly)
Lighten up, have a little fun for a change. Mingle, Quinn, mingle!

QOHEN

It's Qohen.

JOBY

Of course it is.

Joby gives Qohen a push on his way.

As Qohen looks for a place to retreat from the party crush, NOISES FADE. He enters a quiet corner of the room.

DIMLY-LIT CORNER

Two wing-back chairs flank a table with a reading lamp.

In the furthest chair sits MANAGEMENT, dressed in the same taupe suit featured in the poster in Qohen's office, a suit that, chameleon-like, matches the color of the chair. He blends in so well that, at first, Qohen doesn't even see him.

But when he does, Qohen stops, takes a step back.

Management holds a book at eye level. With his other hand, he balances a teacup and saucer on his knee. Apparently engrossed in his reading, Management lifts the teacup, takes a delicate sip, and returns the cup carefully to its saucer.

Qohen quietly turns to leave.

MANAGEMENT

I take it you're not happy, Mr. Leth.

Qohen hesitates, startled.

QOHEN

Do we... know you?

Still not looking at Qohen, Management turns a page.

MANAGEMENT

I know you, Mr. Leth. Sit.

Qohen grimaces in the direction of the party, then nervously perches on the edge of the empty chair.

Management sips from his teacup, eyes riveted on the page.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

What seems to be the problem?

QOHEN

We... We simply want to go home.

Qohen notices Management's bland disinterest.

QOHEN (CONT'D)

We could easily double our output there.

Management turns another page.

Qohen drums his fingers on his knees.

QOHEN (CONT'D)

Our chief concern is that we might miss our call... You see, we have been waiting for a certain call all our lives now...

Management stops reading, slowly looks up from his book.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 ...and although the nature and origin of our call remain quintessentially a mystery to us, we can't help but hope it will provide us with a purpose we've long lived without.

Management studies Qohen for a moment, then blinks and returns his attention to his book.

MANAGEMENT
 You're quite insane, Mr. Leth.

Qohen stands, cowed by Management's bland disinterest.

QOHEN
 We're sorry to have disturbed you.

He turns and flees to the...

LIVING ROOM

Bainsley hovers over a tray of hors d'oeuvres, stuffing her face. She spies Qohen making for the door.

Suddenly a drunken Joby snags Qohen.

JOBY
 Quinn, you chrome-domed bastard! Where are you going? Have a drink! Eat!

QOHEN
 We saw him.

JOBY
 Who?

QOHEN
 Management.

People nearby overhear and turn to stare quizzically. Joby makes a show of LAUGHING skeptically.

JOBY
 Better watch the cocktails, Quinn!
 (pulling him aside, whispering)
 Are you crazy? Management parties incognito!

QOHEN
 This isn't working, Mr. Joby.

JOBY
 No shit! You're blowing his cover!

QOHEN
We're afraid we must go now.

JOBY
Wait. I'll get you a meeting with him.

Joby steers Qohen to the buffet table.

JOBY (CONT'D)
You're not leaving without eating, Quinn!

QOHEN
It's Qohen. We've apparently had our meeting. And our diet dictates against all foods with perceptible flavor.

JOBY
Eat. That's an order.

Qohen surveys the food tray grimly. He SIGHS, selects an olive, and tucks it into his mouth, frowning.

JOBY (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Plenty of eats!

Joby slaps Qohen on the back.

Qohen GULPS, lodging the olive deep in his throat.

JOBY (CONT'D)
Plenty more! Plenty for everybody!

Joby moves off, drunkenly glad-handing other guests.

Qohen stumbles away, struggling for breath.

HALLWAY

Away from the crowd, Qohen falls against the wall, panic-stricken. He pounds his chest, trying to free the olive.

He lurches to an open doorway.

STUDY

As if by magic, Management sits behind a mahogany desk reading his book and sipping his tea. His eyes move from the book to Qohen with an expression of mild amusement.

MANAGEMENT
What is the meaning of life, Mr. Leth?

Qohen clutches his throat, eyes bulging.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

So close to its end, and still no answer.

Management closes his book.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

I have a special project for you that might prove to be mutually beneficial.

The room blurs.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

But there's not much time, Mr. Leth. Not much time at all...

Qohen's knees buckle...

And then he is suddenly lifted off his feet from behind and dragged back into the...

HALLWAY

Bainsley performs the Heimlich maneuver on Qohen. She loses her balance, stumbles down the narrow corridor with him. She hangs on fiercely, heaving him off his feet again and again.

The olive SHOOTS from his mouth, ricochets off the wall and rolls to a stop by the baseboard. Instantly a scruffy rodent appears, grabs the olive and disappears back into the wall.

Bainsley releases her hold. Qohen gasps for breath.

BAINSLEY

I thought I smelled trouble.

The neckline of Bainsley's dress is tugged low. She blithely plumps her breasts while rearranging her clothing.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Everybody hates to make a scene, but the worst thing you can do is go off by yourself. Embarrassment's the number one cause of choking deaths.

Qohen stares into her eyes, speechless. He suddenly beelines for the bathroom. Closes the door. Locks it.

BATHROOM

Qohen splashes water on his face. He stares at himself in the mirror. He reaches to touch his reflection... then staggers backward with a look of pain.

He sits on the toilet seat, face buried in his hands.

A loud KNOCK at the door. Qohen jumps to his feet, startled.

BAINSLEY (V.O.)
Still alive in there?

Qohen quickly dries his face and opens the door. Bainsley squeezes past him, hands him her wine glass.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Hold this.

She heads for the toilet, hiking her dress to the top of her thighs. Qohen stares. Bainsley smiles...

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Care to join me?

QOHEN
Excuse us?

BAINSLEY
(winking)
Close the door... I won't be long.

HALLWAY

Qohen closes the door and stands uncomfortably, wine in hand. He sniffs it distastefully, then eases to the study.

STUDY

Qohen scans the room, puzzled. Management is gone.

HALLWAY

Qohen stands obediently outside the bathroom door.

The toilet FLUSHES. The faucet RUNS.

The door opens. Bainsley exits, smoothing her dress. She flashes Qohen a sexy smile, takes the wine glass from him.

BAINSLEY
So I saved your life. No big deal?

QOHEN
Forgive our ambivalence. Thank you.

BAINSLEY
You owe me. I'm Bainsley.

She takes his hand in hers, looks him up and down.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
And you are...?

QOHEN
Qohen. Q--no U--

BAINSLEY
You work with these people?

QOHEN
In a manner of speaking.

BAINSLEY
What do you do?

QOHEN
We crunch entities.

BAINSLEY
You got a mouse in your pocket?

QOHEN
Excuse us?

BAINSLEY
Who's "we"?

QOHEN
Us. Ourselves.

BAINSLEY
Catchy.

She tugs at her dress as if uncomfortable with its fit.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
You're staring at me. You think my dress
is incredibly ugly.

QOHEN
We -- we really should be going --

BAINSLEY
It's my daddy's fault. He used to buy me
these incredibly ugly clothes to keep the
boys away. Didn't work. Only made me
want to get naked, and that's no way to
keep the boys away. So I never developed
a fashion sense. Are you on drugs?

QOHEN
No.

BAINSLEY
Have you tried them?

QOHEN
We have tried many pharmaceuticals, both
therapeutic and recreational, but we've
discovered none with sufficient potency
to treat our essential condition.

BAINSLEY

I hear you. You should try natural herbs. I'm happy with the herbs. Way happy. They should put St. John's Wort in the drinking water, like fluoride...

She leans close and rests an elbow on his shoulder.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

...Are you here alone?

QOHEN

We are generally everywhere alone.

BAINSLEY

The "we" thing: royal or plural?

QOHEN

Generic.

She trails her fingernails over the skin of his scalp.

BAINSLEY

Love it. You're the enigmatic workaholic technogeek. I'm the mysterious party-girl. My place or yours?

QOHEN

We'd only disappoint you.

BAINSLEY

Best line I've heard all night.

Her lips move close to his. Qohen pulls back, flustered.

QOHEN

We can't imagine your interest in us.

BAINSLEY

I saved your life. That's a turn-on.

QOHEN

We really must be leaving.

Bainsley touches a finger to his lips.

BAINSLEY

Seriously. We could have some fun.

She caresses his chest, pulls a felt-tip pen from his pocket, and scrawls her name and number on the palm of his hand.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Call me.

Qohen stares at his hand.

INT. CHAPEL - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Qohen scrubs his hand in scalding water. He looks at himself in the mirror. Steam obscures his reflection.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Gulls SCREECH. The surf CRASHES and ROARS.

Young Qohen is buried in the sand up to his neck.

His Wife tamps the sand down, LAUGHING, while his Son decorates the mound with seashells. Qohen struggles gamely to free himself, grinning with red-faced delight.

Then his face goes slack, and he stares straight out at his inevitable future with a mixture of fear and revulsion...

INT. CHAPEL - SHRINE - NIGHT

Qohen studies the photo. He traces Young Qohen's smile with his finger, then turns the picture's face to the wall.

INT. CUBICLE HALLWAY - DAY

Joby leads Qohen past a maze of cubicles. Sounds of TYPING, CONVERSATION, phones RINGING. Qohen hastens to keep up.

JOBY

Be careful what you wish for, Quinn.

QOHEN

What's this all about?

JOBY

You're going home. Management assigned you to the Zero Theorem Project. He's been hand-picking talent to crunch it since before I was hired. So far, no luck. The Clones are at your place right now setting up your hardware.

QOHEN

Clones?

JOBY

Research and Development techies. They already changed the locks. Not to worry. You'll get a key.

They reach a door labelled "MANCOM". Joby unlocks it.

JOBY (CONT'D)

I got my money on you, Quinn. Some big, bad entities to crunch, but I'm sure you'll be proving the theorem in no time.

QOHEN
What exactly will we be proving?

JOBY
Don't ask. It's all very hush-hush...

Joby opens the door, releasing a cold fog.

INT. MANCOM MAINFRAME - CONTINUOUS

A cavernous room filled with blinking banks of HUMMING, ceiling-high computers. Qohen can see his breath.

JOBY
... But just between you and me... You solve Zip-T, I bet Management helps you get you that call of yours.

Qohen stops -- surprised, hopeful.

QOHEN
He can do that? But how?

Joby tugs Qohen's sleeve, pulls him forward.

JOBY
Management works in mysterious ways, Quinn.

As they walk down an aisle, a faint CLICKING grows louder.

JOBY (CONT'D)
This is ManCom, biggest neural net computer in the world. Learns just like a human, trial and error, but a hell of a lot faster. Already the smartest thing on the planet... and still learning!

They turn a corner.

BOB, 15 -- frail, anemic, baggy-eyed -- sits at the control console rapidly CLICKING a mouse. He's bundled in heavy jacket, hooded sweatshirt, scarf and fingerless gloves.

A row of monitors flash dizzying images, a fast-changing encyclopedic array of charts, pictures, and geometric code.

JOBY (CONT'D)
Working hard, Bob?

BOB
(without looking up)
Hardly working, Bob. Still teaching this stupid motherfucker... Excuse my French.

JOBY
 Don't mind me. I'm just getting Quinn
 here started on Zip-T.

Bob pulls off his hood to reveal a ratty pony tail. He gives Qohen a sideways glance.

BOB
 I give him two weeks.

QOHEN
 To complete the project?

BOB
 (rolling eyes)
 Till you crash and burn, Bob.

Joby pulls Qohen past Bob, turning another corner.

QOHEN
 Who was that?

JOBY
 That was Bob.

QOHEN
 But he called you Bob. He called us Bob.

JOBY
 Bob calls everybody Bob. Says it's a
 waste of brain cells remembering names.

QOHEN
 Isn't he rather young to be working here?

JOBY
 Kid could program before he could walk.

They reach a row of file cabinets. Joby opens a drawer, pulls out a stack of CD-ROMs, piles them into Qohen's hands.

JOBY (CONT'D)
 Crunch this stuff for starters. Upload
 ASAP. ManCom will send you new downloads
 every day. Miss a deadline, you're off
 the project. How's that for pressure?

Joby gives him more disks. Overwhelmed, Qohen struggles to keep from dropping them. Joby reaches into the drawer again.

JOBY (CONT'D)
 Don't worry, Quinn. You got what you
 wanted. Everything's under control.

Joby holds up the last disk, stares through its hole.

JOBY (CONT'D)

You ever get the feeling the whole universe is a big fat cosmic joke... and maybe you're the punch line...? You ever get that feeling, Quinn?

QOHEN

It's Qohen.

Joby tucks the final disk into Qohen's shirt pocket.

JOBY

Uh-huh... That's what I figured.

INT. CHAPEL, KITCHEN, BATHROOM, SHRINE - MONTAGE

1. Qohen working at his computer, featuring several bulky new drives. Geometric hieroglyphics scroll down the monitor.
2. Monitor showing file download in progress.
3. Qohen ordering generic groceries from a website.
4. Qohen standing at his KITCHEN counter, eating a bland, joyless meal from a microwaveable container.
5. Qohen crunching entities. His new touch tone phone RINGS. He answers hopefully. He listens, hope dimming, then punches several buttons on the touch tone.
6. Monitor showing file upload in progress.
7. Qohen at his BATHROOM mirror rubbing baggy eyes.
8. Entities scrolling at breakneck speed on monitor, Qohen's fingers flying on the keyboard, his expression grim.
9. Qohen lying awake in bed, tired eyes restless.
10. Qohen at the shrine lights a candle, gazes at the candle flame as the match burns down to his fingers, unnoticed.
11. A framed photo of Qohen's Wife and Son walking hand in hand through a field of wildflowers. The photo comes to life, and Wife and Son look out, startled and saddened.
12. Qohen stares at the photo, eyes moistening. He turns and walks out of the alcove to his computer, raising his eyes to the crucifix. Mounted where Jesus' head should be, a MANCAM trains its lens on him, the lens morphing into...
13. The Black Hole... A phone RINGS... fades.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen at his computer, the ManCam trained on him.

Qohen's monitor: DR. SHRINK-ROM, 50s, an interactive CD-ROM therapist. Warm and caring, she sits in a great leather chair, notebook in hand, pen poised.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
You seem tense, Qohen. Perhaps you'd like to start over. Let's return to the subject of your fears.

QOHEN
We fear...
(deep breath)
Nothing.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Go on.

QOHEN
We're afraid we can't.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Of course you can. Let's explore this contradiction. You say you fear nothing, but in previous sessions...

A notebook window pops up next to Dr. Shrink-ROM, showing the bulleted list she reads from.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
...you've reported fear of death, fear of life, fear of open spaces, fear of closed spaces, fear of people, fear of missing a certain phone call, fear of --

Qohen moves his cursor to close the notebook window.

QOHEN
We fear many things, but ultimately we fear nothing more than anything.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Noted. Please go on.

QOHEN
In what manner, Doctor?

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Are you trying to be difficult?

QOHEN
Not at all... It seems we're capable of being difficult without trying.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Perhaps you'd like to start over. We've spoken of your fears. Would you care to discuss your joys?

QOHEN
At present, we can think of very little
that brings us joy.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
(gently)
Your wife and son were a source of joy.
Weren't they, Qohen?

Qohen's eyes cloud.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
Why don't you ever talk about them?

QOHEN
What good is joy when it doesn't last?
We haven't felt joy in years.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Tell me what you're feeling, Qohen.

QOHEN
We feel... nothing.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
You're a tough nut to crack, Qohen... and
of course I don't mean "nut" in the
pejorative sense... Perhaps you'd like
to start over. Let's return to --

The phone RINGS, interrupting. Qohen looks at it with a
mixture of hope and despair. He picks it up.

QOHEN
Hello?

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.)
Hello... Qohen Leth... Your next
installment of data is due for upload in
one hour. If the target timetable is
attainable, press one. If not --

Qohen presses 2, interrupting the voice.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Please enter estimated number of minutes
needed for target overrun.

Qohen hesitates, considering, then presses 1-2-0.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A moment, please... ManCom will allow 70
minutes. Goodbye... Qohen Leth.

QOHEN
That's not enough time!

The line has gone dead. Qohen hangs up.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Perhaps you should get back to work.

QOHEN
What difference does it make? We'll never finish. ManCom sends new downloads before we've finished with the old ones. We've never worked with data like this. It refuses to stay crunched!

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Deep breaths, Qohen, deep breaths...

Qohen stares up at the crucifix. ManCam's red light shines.

QOHEN
All we want is our call...

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Yes... Your call... Let's continue our discussion next session. I find your feelings fascinating and look forward --

Qohen clicks on exit, and Dr. Shrink-ROM vanishes.

He types a command, and a menu bar reads: ZERO THEOREM PROJECT. A stream of signs and symbols scroll.

With a pained expression he goes to work.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Qohen at his computer, feverishly typing. A STORM rages outside, and his driven eyes are lit by LIGHTNING FLASHES.

He stops typing, freezing the scrolling signs and symbols.

QOHEN
This can't be right...

Qohen types a command, and the entities begin scrolling in reverse. He slows the stream of symbols, stops.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Nothing adds up...

He resumes his typing, the symbols scrolling faster and faster as he works himself into a frenzied pace.

Suddenly, LIGHTNING FLASHES and the PHONE RINGS.

With a cry of pain, Qohen snatches up the receiver.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Hello! Hello!

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.)
Qohen Leth... Data is overdue for upload.
Please enter estimated number of minutes
needed for target overrun.

Qohen savagely punches numbers.

COMPUTERIZED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That time frame is not authorized...
Please enter estimated number...

Qohen drops the phone. The message repeats itself. Symbols scroll in a dizzying blur.

Qohen stares at the monitor in despair...

Then his eyes narrow in anger...

He opens a file drawer, rummages through it wildly, and pulls out a ball-peen hammer. He looks at it, eyes full of doubt. He hesitates a moment, then -- decided -- lifts it high.

Dr. Shrink-ROM suddenly pops up on the monitor.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Deep breaths, Qohen. Perhaps a mild
sedative is in order. I can arrange --

Qohen SMASHES the monitor, shorting out Dr. Shrink-ROM.

The storm looses a LIGHTNING BOLT.

Qohen turns the hammer to the phone. SMASH!

Qohen looks around wildly. His gaze moves to the shrine and lingers a moment. He lifts his eyes to the crucifix ManCam.

He raises the hammer. A look of despair crosses his face.

All is quiet... except the distant RUMBLE of thunder and the soft PATTERN of rain on the roof. The storm has passed.

Qohen lets the hammer drop to the floor.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen lies on his bed, his expression blank.

The intercom BUZZES repeatedly. Qohen slowly rises, walks to the door, and presses the intercom.

QOHEN
Yes?

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Phoneman. Management says you got a
problem. Let me in, buddy.

Qohen buzzes the street door open.

MOMENTS LATER

QOHEN opens his door to a white jump-suited Joby, who wheels
in a hefty duffel bag and throws an arm around Qohen.

JOBY
Quinn! Long time no hug!

Qohen goes rigid, awkwardly backs away.

JOBY (CONT'D)
Still dying, I see.

QOHEN
What are you doing here?

JOBY
Field work. I love it. Gets me out of
the office and into a snappy uniform.

Qohen follows Joby to the work station. CHUCKLING, Joby
genuflects before the crucifix. He rises, looks around.

JOBY (CONT'D)
You could use a woman's touch, Quinn.

Qohen closes his eyes, jaw clenched.

JOBY (CONT'D)
ManCom can't reach you. What's up?

QOHEN
At present, we are having difficulty
maintaining our upload schedule. Our
entities are acting strangely...

Joby pokes at the broken monitor, eyebrows raised.

JOBY
Personnel meltdown. Seen plenty of it.
Me, I'd yank you and go to the bullpen.

Joby glances at the shattered phone, then picks up the ball-
peen hammer from the floor, shakes his head.

JOBY (CONT'D)
But Management's giving you another
chance. Don't ask me why.

Qohen takes the hammer from him, puts it in a file drawer.

Joby shrugs, pulls a new phone from his duffel bag.

JOBY (CONT'D)
It's all about connections, Quinn. Wires
and wireless weaving a world wide web.
Can't do anything if you're disconnected.

He plugs in the phone, then pulls a new monitor from his duffel bag. He wipes imaginary sweat from his brow.

JOBY (CONT'D)
Whoa. Manual labor makes me parched.
Got a spare beer for a working man?

QOHEN
We have tap water.

JOBY
Yum.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Joby guzzles a tepid glass of water, BURPS.

JOBY
I've missed you, Quinn. A supervisor
doesn't make many friends, you know.

QOHEN
You consider us a friend?

JOBY
Sure do.
(conspiratorially)
So tell me, what's the real problem?

QOHEN
The Zero Theorem is unprovable. We're
dying. We haven't received our call.

JOBY
(nodding)
You don't trust Management.

QOHEN
Nothing adds up.

JOBY
Or maybe everything adds up to nothing.

QOHEN
What do you mean?

Joby slaps Qohen on the back, making him jump.

JOBY
 Poor bastard. All stressed out... I know someone in the decompression business who might be able to help. Might even help you get that call of yours... Who knows? Let me see what I can do, Quinn.

QOHEN
 It's Qohen. Q--no U--O-H --

JOBY
 No need to spell it out. Joby's here.

THE BLACK HOLE

Light swirls violently around the inky blackness.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Qohen sits up in bed, struggling to orient himself. The computer's glow illuminates his face. He tilts his head.

There is a distant BUZZ...

INT. CHAPEL - DOOR - DAY

Qohen presses the intercom.

QOHEN
 Yes?

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
 Troubleshooter. Buzz me in, babe.

MOMENTS LATER

Qohen opens the door, revealing BAINSLEY. Dressed all in white with plunging neckline and short skirt, she looks like a nurse outfitted by Frederick's of Hollywood.

BAINSLEY
 Surprise.

QOHEN
 ... You... You're... Bainsley...?

BAINSLEY
 You never called. I waited forever!

QOHEN

She steps in, inspecting Qohen closely.

BAINSLEY
You look awful, poor thing. Joby's
right. You need me.

QOHEN
Mr. Joby sent you...?

BAINSLEY
Joby doesn't send me anywhere.
(pausing, looking around)
We're just neighbors.

She walks up the aisle in wonder. Qohen follows.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
I can't believe you live in a church.
How otherworldly. I feel so... holy!

QOHEN
It's a chapel, actually.

Bainsley turns to him, grasping his arm.

BAINSLEY
(singing off-key)
Go-ing to the chap-el of loooove...

She marches him up the aisle, clutching his arm.

QOHEN
(flustered)
We prefer not to be touched.

Bainsley makes no move to turn him loose.

BAINSLEY
The rent must be outrageous.

QOHEN
Actually, we own the building. We bought
it from an insurance company. There'd
been extensive... fire damage...

Qohen glances toward the shrine, troubled.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
The previous occupants were an order of
gnostic monks who'd sworn vows of
poverty, chastity, and silence...
Apparently... No one broke his vow to
yell, "Fire".

BAINSLEY
Holy frying friars!

They reach the work station, but Bainsley pulls Qohen to the
bed. She places a hand on his chest and pushes him backward.

Qohen plops on the mattress. Smiling coyly, Bainsley leans over him, fingernails grazing his bald head.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
You have the most intriguing bone structure, so polished, so pure...

Qohen opens his mouth to speak, but Bainsley puts a finger to his lips. She spins around and strides to the computer.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Mighty big hard drive you got here...

She sits in front of the computer, begins typing.

QOHEN
Mr. Joby seemed to think you might help us get our call.

BAINSLEY
Yeah, he mentioned the call thing...
(without looking)
You're staring at me.

QOHEN
We're terribly sorry.

Bainsley squints at the screen, typing rapidly.

BAINSLEY
This is the goopiest software I've ever seen. But your hardware's dreamy. I can definitely work with your hardware.

QOHEN
Our problem is not with our computer.

Bainsley suddenly SQUEALS, swiveling away from the computer. She sucks on her middle finger, teary-eyed.

BAINSLEY
I just broke a nail on your big, fat, stupid keyboard!

Qohen jumps up and goes to her.

QOHEN
We'll get our first aid kit.

BAINSLEY
(pouting)
Could you please just kiss it?

QOHEN
Excuse us?

BAINSLEY
Whenever I hurt myself, my daddy would
kiss it and make it all better.

Qohen stands wringing his hands.

QOHEN
We fail to see how --

BAINSLEY
Please...?

Qohen hesitates, then bends to place a hasty kiss on the tip
of her outstretched finger.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
You call that a kiss?

Bainsley takes his hand, slowly sucks his middle finger into
her mouth. Her lips slide down and up, lingering on the
fingertip in a soft kiss. Her eyes dance with mischief.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
There... all better...?

Puzzled, paralyzed, pitiful, Qohen stares into her eyes.

Dr. Shrink-ROM pops onto the computer.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
I realize I'm not authorized to present
an opinion, but I couldn't help noticing
this woman's attempt to project issues of
paternal abandonment onto you. Given the
age difference between the two of you, as
your psychiatrist, I must warn you --

Bainsley grabs the mouse, clicks on exit. Dr. Shrink-ROM
vanishes.

BAINSLEY
Nosy bitch. My daddy didn't abandon me.
He died.

Qohen opens his mouth as if to speak...

Bainsley touches his cheek.

Qohen stares into her eyes a moment... then draws away,
breaking the spell. He turns his back to her.

Bainsley rises, wanders toward the shrine, gazing about.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
I can help you, Qohen... but you're going
to be a challenge...

She reaches for one of the pictures, goes to flip it forward.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Who's your interior decorator?

Qohen snaps to attention, rushes toward her.

QOHEN
Don't! Don't touch those!

Qohen pulls her away. The picture falls face-down on the floor, glass CRACKING. Qohen quickly picks it up, carefully re-hangs it, face to the wall. He breathes heavily.

BAINSLEY
I prefer not to be manhandled.

Regaining control, Qohen turns to her.

QOHEN
We didn't mean to hurt you.

Bainsley rubs her arm.

BAINSLEY
In case you got the wrong idea, I should tell you I don't do sexual intercourse any more. I don't care if a guy wraps himself up like a latex mummy, nothing's going inside me. Way too dangerous.

She shrugs it off, smiling slowly.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
I'm into bioteletantric interfacing now. It's smart and safe and -- oh my God! -- it feels so super-tingly!

She spins away on a spiked heel, short dress flaring.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Got anything to eat around here? I'm starving my butt off.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Bainsley perches prettily on the counter, feet dangling, devouring a microwaved meal. Qohen leans against the sink, watching her. She licks her fingers, mouth full.

BAINSLEY
How can you stand this stuff?

QOHEN
We've grown accustomed to it.

She stops chewing, swallows.

BAINSLEY
You're staring at me again.

QOHEN
(looking away)
Forgive us.

BAINSLEY
You're forgiven already.

QOHEN
In our experience, forgiveness doesn't
come so easily.

BAINSLEY
What kind of guilt trip are you on?

Qohen doesn't answer.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Here you are, locked up all alone...
waiting... for what? A phone call?
What's that all about?

QOHEN
We prefer not to speak of it. Our past
is... painful...

Bainsley hops down from the counter.

BAINSLEY
Who's isn't?

She touches his arm. Qohen flinches. She strokes his tense
neck, Qohen visibly uncomfortable.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
I'm here to help, Qohen. Trust me.
Confession's good for the soul.

QOHEN
Assuming we have a soul...

BAINSLEY
Everybody has a soul.

QOHEN
That remains to be proven.

Bainsley draws away, studying him.

BAINSLEY
So I saved your life for nothing...?

Qohen wilts with guilt.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
 Come on, Qohen. How can I help if you
 won't tell me anything?

Qohen meets her eyes then looks away. He takes a deep
 breath.

QOHEN
 We... we can't tell you.

BAINSLEY
 Why not?

Qohen looks away, embarrassed.

QOHEN
 You're staring at us...

MOMENTS LATER

Bainsley pokes through cupboards and drawers, trying her best
 not to look at Qohen.

Qohen stands in the middle of the kitchen, eyes closed, hands
 clasped nervously. His voice is low, on the edge of
 breaking.

QOHEN
 We suffered... a great loss... and we
 struggled for a long time to understand
 the reason for it... the reason we were
 chosen, if chosen we were, to go on
 living with this misfortune... We came
 to this place... It seemed to suit us...
 We stopped eating. We dulled our pain
 with drink and drugs. We lost all
 hope... We came to this place to die...

Qohen's face glows with a tortured fervor.

Bainsley glances at him. Her eyes fill with tears.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 One night a storm struck. We lost power.
 We lit candles. And in the flickering
 shadows, we decided to end our lives. We
 ingested every drug we could find...

Bainsley stands at the sink, turning the water on and off.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 Then the phone rang... We answered... A
 voice said, "Qohen Leth," and suddenly we
 felt a flash of light... We felt... a
 current of pure energy connecting us to
 something... something greater...

(MORE)

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 We suddenly knew clearly that we only had
 to answer, say "Yes," and the voice would
 reveal the purpose behind our loss...
 would give us a reason to go on...

Bainsley turns from the sink.

BAINSLEY
 ...And then...?

Qohen opens his eyes. His gaze is bland, lifeless.

QOHEN
 We awoke in a hospital emergency room.

BAINSLEY
 And you've been waiting for a callback
 ever since?

Qohen nods.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
 What kind of drugs did you take?

QOHEN
 You think we're insane.

BAINSLEY
 It could've been somebody selling time
 shares... I mean... Life goes on, Qohen.

QOHEN
 So it would appear. The question is...
 to what end...? And we doubt you can
 help us in providing an answer.

Bainsley goes to him. She worries the buttons on his shirt,
 head lowered. She raises her eyes.

BAINSLEY
 I can try... Let me try.

Gently, Qohen pulls her hands from his shirt.

QOHEN
 We told you. We prefer not to be
 touched.

Bainsley bites her lip.

BAINSLEY
 I can get around that...

INT. CHAPEL - LATER

Lying scattered about the work station: open boxes, computer
 parts, accessories and cables.

Bainsley models a VIRTUAL REALITY SUIT, a tight, translucent, shimmering red sheath that covers her from head to toe.

She pirouettes seductively, showing all her curves. Sequin-like transistors sparkle all over. A braid of wires hangs from her hood down her back, ending in a computer jack.

BAINSLEY

This thing is years ahead of the competition. It works on all the nerve endings, of course, plus it's synched directly to the brain's synapses.

She pulls off the hood, shaking her hair free.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

What do you think? Joby said it's based on one of your projects.

Qohen sits stiffly on his bed, staring doubtfully.

QOHEN

We never imagined our projects actually had any purpose.

BAINSLEY

Don't put it on your resume yet. Top secret. I'm the cyberspace test pilot.

She pulls an identical and incredibly tiny-looking suit from a box, drapes it across Qohen's lap.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

For you.

QOHEN

We're supposed to wear this?

BAINSLEY

One size fits all.

She strokes his head.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

I can help you, Qohen. Trust me.

She turns, suddenly efficient, and marches for the door.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

I bookmarked my website for you. Just put on the suit, plug in, and click on me at midnight.

QOHEN

You're going out dressed like that?

BAINSLEY
 They can look but they can't touch.
 (blowing him a kiss)
 Oh! I can't wait! Don't be late!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Qohen stands before the mirror, wearing the virtual reality suit. He tugs uncomfortably at the crotch.

QOHEN
 (muttering)
 One size does not fit all.

INT. CHAPEL - LATER

Suited up, with braid of wires connected to his computer, Qohen sits before his monitor. Bainsley's website features a picture of lingerie-clad Bainsley and the words "ENTER ME!"

Qohen moves his cursor to "ENTER".

DR. SHRINK-ROM pops up on the screen, her face troubled.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
 Don't, Qohen.

QOHEN
 Don't what?

DR. SHRINK-ROM
 Don't use this girl.

QOHEN
 We have no intentions of --

DR. SHRINK-ROM
 (interrupting)
 You've built a wall around yourself. Is she prepared for what she'll find inside?

Qohen slowly removes his hood.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
 She's an emotionally damaged girl. You are emotionally bereft. Listen, Qohen...

QOHEN
 This interruption is unacceptable. We insist you run a scan on your program.

Dr. Shrink-ROM frowns, nods slowly. Her movements run in reverse for a moment -- RESET -- then snap back to normal.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
 So sorry. The glitch is fixed. Don't mind me. Carry on, Qohen.

Dr. Shrink-ROM disappears.

Qohen stares, perplexed. Bainsley's sexy image awaits.

Qohen hesitates, then pulls down the hood, clicks on "ENTER".

EXT. TROPICAL ISLAND - BEACH - SUNSET

Swaying palm trees reach for a deep blue sky above.

Wearing swimming trunks, Qohen lies on a blanket spread over the sand. He gazes skyward, puts a hand to his head to discover... a full head of hair!

BAINSLEY

Like it?

Bainsley kneels beside him, wearing a skimpy bikini.

They lie on a beach, ocean before them, lush jungle behind them. The sun sets, the horizon awash with color.

Bainsley pulls food from a picnic basket -- stone crab, chilled asparagus spears, a loaf of bread -- arranging it on the blanket. Champagne chills in a bucket beside her.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

I made it just for you -- the hair.
Something special for a special guy.

Qohen runs his hands through his hair, eyes distant.

QOHEN

We're not sure it's quite... us.

BAINSLEY

Don't be silly.

Bainsley hands the bottle of champagne to Qohen.

QOHEN

Actually, we don't drink any longer.

BAINSLEY

You can do anything you want here. You can drink and never get drunk. You can eat and never get full.

She picks up a crab claw, produces a ball-peen hammer...

Qohen flinches as she SMASHES the claw open.

She pulls a huge chunk of crab from the shell, takes a savage, giggling bite, brings the morsel to Qohen's mouth.

Qohen recoils, but Bainsley insists, pressing it to his lips.

He takes a tentative nibble and, despite himself... shivers with pleasure. He grabs the rest and fills his mouth.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Good?

Qohen looks at her, swallows, regains his reserve.

QOHEN

Where is this place?

BAINSLEY

All in your mind... from my mind. My father used to clip pictures from travel magazines and put them on the fridge. When he saved up, we were going to take a vacation to some exotic tropical island.

A fleeting look of sadness crosses Bainsley's face, but she GIGGLES suddenly, and it is gone.

She takes Qohen's hand, kisses his fingertips.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Do you feel this, Qohen?

Qohen melts for a moment, then freezes up.

QOHEN

It's not real.

Bainsley sits back.

BAINSLEY

It's better than real. You're in your computer. I'm in mine. We're connected by memory chips and fiber optics. We're safe here, Qohen. This is my place.

QOHEN

But what about our call?

Bainsley puts a finger to his lips.

BAINSLEY

You worry too much.

She takes an asparagus spear, nibbles its tip, eyes dancing.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Trust me, Qohen.

Qohen looks at her in wonder.

She grabs the champagne and thrusts it in his hands.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Let's get this party started!

Qohen holds the bottle awkwardly. Bainsley guides his hands, kisses him lightly on the lips.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Pop your cork, boyfriend.

Qohen looks into her eyes, then, struggling, POPS the cork.
Foam bubbles out of the bottle.

Bainsley lunges over him to lap at it. She grabs the bottle and pours into his upturned mouth.

Bainsley LAUGHING and Qohen SPUTTERING, they roll and wrestle in the sand, champagne pouring all over them...

MONTAGE - JUNGLE, BEACH

1. Qohen and Bainsley walk a jungle path. Bainsley plucks a flower, puts it behind Qohen's ear. He touches her hand.

2. Bainsley climbs a tree, beckoning Qohen to follow. He shakes his head. She showers him with handfuls of leaves, then gives a TARZAN YELL and swings down on a vine, colliding with Qohen and knocking them both tumbling, LAUGHING.

3. Qohen and Bainsley sit at the shore, watching the sunset. Bainsley stands, stretches, wades into the surf. She turns, motions for Qohen to join her. He shakes his head. She folds her arms sternly. He shakes his head again. She splashes him. Qohen stands dripping, then, WHOOPING, dives in, surfacing before her and locking her in an embrace.

END MONTAGE -- STAY IN SCENE

They gaze into each other's eyes. She kisses him. He kisses her back. Bainsley takes a breath.

BAINSLEY
Whoa. Who knew?

Qohen holds her, eyes troubled.

Bainsley kisses him again, the passion building.

Self-consciously, Qohen breaks away, wades out of the water.

Bainsley follows him with her eyes, SIGHING.

EXT. TROPICAL ISLAND - BEACH - LATER

Qohen and Bainsley, wrapped in a blanket before a campfire. She bites into a tropical fruit. He stares out to sea.

The sun is still setting into the ocean.

QOHEN
Shouldn't the sun have set by now?

BAINSLEY
I like to keep it this way.

Bainsley puts the fruit to Qohen's lips. He takes a bite, chews slowly. Tears well up in his eyes.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

QOHEN
We don't deserve this.

BAINSLEY
Don't deny yourself, Qohen.

She grabs his arm excitedly.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Hey! Want to have some fun? Take us someplace else. A place all your own. Just imagine it. The virtual program will do the rest.

QOHEN
We're not at all certain --

BAINSLEY
Oh, you. You're never certain. Come on, take a chance. I'm giving you the controls, Qohen. Relax, close your eyes.

Reluctantly, Qohen reclines, closing his eyes.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Now take us someplace special. Picture it in your mind.

Qohen's face tenses with effort.

Bainsley leans over him, strokes his forehead.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Easy, Qohen. Don't strain your brain... Just imagine...

Qohen grits his teeth, his expression turning tortured.

CUT TO:

SPACE

Bald, naked, and curled tightly in the fetal position, Qohen floats amid a backdrop of brilliant stars. His eyes open wide, staring, as he fights the dread inside him.

BAINSLEY

Wow! What an imagination!

Bainsley, also naked, slowly orbits around Qohen, revelling in the freedom of zero gravity.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

And what a dirty mind! Where's my bikini, Mr. Leth?

Oblivious, Qohen continues to stare past her.

Bainsley floats closer, facing him.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

She reaches for him, draws his rigid body close, then turns her head to follow his gaze.

THE BLACK HOLE

A maelstrom of blazing interstellar dust and matter spirals into its black depths, carrying Bainsley and Qohen with it.

Bainsley freaks. She hugs Qohen tight, and now they are tumbling end over end.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)

Jesus, Qohen, stop it! Make it stop!

With great effort, Qohen tears his gaze from the spinning, fiery black hole and shuts his eyes tight.

INT. HOUSE IN FLAMES - FLASHBACK

Qohen's eyes snap open to a room engulfed by flames.

Qohen COUGHS, GASPS, smoke so thick he can barely see.

From far away, his Wife's plaintive voice...

WIFE (O.S.)

Qohen! Qohen!

... then his Son's...

SON (O.S.)

Daddy!

Burning beams fall all around him.

BAINSLEY (V.O.)
Qohen! Qohen!

Qohen stumbles through the smoke and fire, crashes through a window...

WIFE (O.S.)
Qohen!

CUT TO:

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen lands with a whiplash effect, seated before his computer. Trembling, he slowly removes his hood.

COMPUTER MONITOR: Error messages flash. Symbols speed to a HUMMING blur. Suddenly -- POP -- the screen goes black.

Qohen stares at his reflection in the screen, his face in shell-shocked torment. He slowly reaches for the screen.

As his finger nears, a static spark CRACKLES. He jerks his hand back, his face turning blank as a zombie's.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHAPEL - THE DISFIGURED CRUCIFIX - LATER

Qohen lies in bed, staring up at the crucifix.

Intercom BUZZES. Qohen continues staring.

Intercom BUZZES. Qohen blinks. Intercom BUZZES and BUZZES.

Qohen rises, makes his way to the door, presses the button.

QOHEN
Who is it?

BOB (V.O.)
Bob. Buzz me in.

QOHEN
Bob who?

BOB (V.O.)
Bob who has to take a wicked pee. Buzz me in, Scotty.

QOHEN
Our name isn't Scotty.

BOB (V.O.)
I know that, Bob.

QOHEN
Our name isn't Bob.

BOB (V.O.)
Like I give a shit. Come on, I'm doing
the tinkle dance out here.

Qohen frowns.

QOHEN
We're afraid our home is not a rest stop.
There's a convenience store a block east.

Qohen turns away from the intercom, returning to his bed.

BOB (V.O.)
They look at you funny unless you buy
something. Buzz me in, Bob, I'm starting
to dribble!

The intercom BUZZES several more times then falls silent.

The sound of RUNNING FOOTSTEPS from the vestibule. Qohen
rises from bed just as the deadbolt turns and the door opens.

Two acne-scarred young men, SLIM CLONE and CHUBS CLONE, stand
in the doorway, dressed in white short-sleeved shirts with
bulging pocket protectors, sloppy ties, thick glasses. High-
belted trousers show white socks in black wingtips. Hair
slicked to the side, frazzled strands sticking up in back.

One is fat and the other skinny, but they could be twins.
They enter, flank the doorway, look around suspiciously.

Suddenly Bob races in. He's dressed in sneakers, untucked T-
shirt and long, baggy shorts with huge cargo pockets.
Headphones hang around his neck.

He rushes up the aisle toward Qohen, face twisted in agony.

BOB (CONT'D)
Where's your bathroom?!

Qohen stands gaping.

BOB (CONT'D)
Bathroom-bathroom-bathroom!

Bob charges through the door to the kitchen. He WHIMPERS.
He reappears in the doorway, face desperate.

Qohen slowly points the direction.

Bob races into the bathroom: the HISS of piss on porcelain.

Qohen looks at the Clones, bewildered. They walk down the aisle side by side toward him.

Bob exits the bathroom, wiping his brow dramatically.

BOB (CONT'D)
Think I did some renal damage, holding it that long. Slim got stuck in traffic.

SLIM
Chubs drove, Bob.

CHUBS
Fast as I could.

BOB
Can't tell you Clones apart anyway.

QOHEN
What... What are you doing here?

Bob ignores him, sits at the computer station.

BOB
(melodramatically)
Black screen of death!

He raises his hands, fingers spread, and carefully places them on the console, as if performing a Vulcan Mind Meld.

QOHEN
We asked you a perfectly simple --

BOB
Shhh! How'm I supposed to do my job when you keep talking?

QOHEN
What job? What's going on?

Bob returns his attention to the screen.

Slim approaches Qohen with a clipboard and pen.

SLIM
Sign here.

QOHEN
For what?

SLIM
Receipt of delivery.

QOHEN
What delivery?

CHUBS
Management's son. Assigned to help you.

SLIM
Sign here.

Overwhelmed, Qohen signs.

CHUBS
We'll pick him up in exactly four hours.

SLIM
Don't lose him.

They turn in unison and walk down the aisle and out the door.

Bob rises from his seat at the work station.

BOB
I wouldn't mess with the Clones, Bob.
They look harmless, but they're the
toughest geeks in Research and
Development. They'd just as soon
vaporize you as look at you.

He unpacks computer components from his deep pockets.

BOB (CONT'D)
But you're a pretty scary looking guy
yourself. Promise you won't hurt me.

QOHEN
Of course we won't hurt you.

BOB
Not even my feelings, Bob. Promise.

QOHEN
Will you please stop calling us Bob?

BOB
What do you want me to call you?

QOHEN
Mr. Leth would suffice.

BOB
Mr. Leth... Leth... Nah, too wormy.

QOHEN
Qohen, then. Q--no U--O-H-E-N.

BOB
You gotta buy another vowel, Q.

QOHEN
Q?

BOB
Q'll do. Q is you. Happy now?

Qohen's irritation simmers.

QOHEN
How can you possibly help us?

Bob pulls tools from his pocket and opens up a hard drive.

BOB
By getting you off your ass and back to work. No more messages from Darth Vader's phone doll.
(mimicking COMPUTERIZED VOICE)
"If the target timetable is attainable, yank your crank. If not, kiss my ass."
No more candy-ass upload schedule.

Bob pulls out a fried circuit board, replaces it.

BOB (CONT'D)
I'll be your worst nightmare four hours a day, seven days a week, for the next four weeks. That's all he can spare me. You solve Zip-T by then or you're fired. Them's the terms from Daddy Dearest. He's tired of fucking around.

Qohen's face hardens.

QOHEN
And if we don't agree to those terms?

BOB
Then I don't get you your call.

Qohen's mouth drops open.

QOHEN
You? You can get us our call?

Bob looks away.

BOB
How the hell do I know? It's my first day on the job. All I know is...

Bob fires up the computer. A hodgepodge of symbols flash and fizzle, along with ERROR messages.

BOB (CONT'D)
... no Zippidy-T, no ring-a-ding-dingy.

Bob types rapidly, the screen changing, re-configuring. Suddenly his own image appears on the screen, as recorded by the ManCam hanging from the crucifix.

BOB (CONT'D)
Gotta disable this thing. How can you
work with the old man gawking at you?

QOHEN
We have nothing to hide.

BOB
Right. Keep telling yourself that, Q.

Bob types a series of commands. He stops, finger poised
above the "Enter" key. He grins up at ManCam, waving. His
image waves back on the monitor.

BOB (CONT'D)
Bob's on the job, Dad...

He hits "Enter" and his image disappears. ManCam blinks out.
Bob begins typing and clicking at superhuman speed.

BOB (CONT'D)
Now I gotta clean up your mess... Pop
quiz, Q. What's better, crunching Zip-T
code or getting ass-banged by a troop of
rabid baboons? Be sure to phrase your
answer in the form of a question.

Qohen blinks. Blinks again.

QOHEN
We wish you would curb your liberal use
of profane language. It's... unseemly.

BOB
Excuse my freaking Fortran. Wouldn't
want to seem unseemly.

LATER

Qohen lies in bed, staring at the ceiling.

Bob pushes himself back from the computer, rubbing his eyes.
He COUGHS, SNIFFLES, SNEEZES.

QOHEN
Are you coming down with something?

BOB
Usually.

Bob wipes his nose on his sleeve, WHEEZING.

BOB (CONT'D)
That's it for today. I got your systems
working, but I still gotta retrieve all
the Zip-T shit from ManCom. It's gonna
take a couple days at least.

QOHEN
We're used to waiting.

BOB
Well, I'm not. Where are those bastards?

Bob SNEEZES again. He pulls an asthma inhaler from his pocket, takes a quick blast.

The deadbolt clicks, the door opens, and the Clones enter.

Bob whirls, eyes fiery, and strides down the aisle.

BOB (CONT'D)
You're late!

Chubs and Slim check their watches.

CHUBS
Um. Bob. We're right on time.

BOB
No excuses. Don't let it happen again.
(to Qohen)
I'll be back. You better be here too.

QOHEN
Where else would we possibly be?

BOB
And by the way. You gotta lose the "we"
thing. Too annoying. Ask Doc Shrink-ROM
if you don't believe me. Vaya con
fucking Dios, Q... excuse my Spanglish.

And with that Bob is out the door, the Clones on his heels.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Qohen at his computer in a session with Dr. Shrink-ROM.

QOHEN
... and apparently Management has
assigned his son to get us our call. We
fear he's much too young to be entrusted
with a responsibility of such paramount
importance. We fear that he --

DR. SHRINK-ROM
Don't be such a wuss, Q.

Qohen is speechless with surprise.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
Bob's a genius whiz-kid super-brain. And
if you don't believe it...

Dr. Shrink-ROM stands. A RAP BEAT plays in the background.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
Yo, look. Shut up and listen.

Qohen stares at her, incredulous.

DR. SHRINK-ROM (CONT'D)
We cannot, won't not help you, Q,
We wanna help you, ain't it true,
But we won't help you get your call,
We will not help you, not at all,
Until you first shed verbal truss,
First-person plural, Qs-R-Us...
We got a plan for your sure cure,
That gives you singular allure,
But help from this computer whiz
Must come without the plural biz...
We do not like first-person plural...

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

Bob slouches at the computer, keying in more code.

BOB
You keep it up, I'm gonna hurl.

Qohen lies in bed.

QOHEN
We -- can't seem to help ourselves.

BOB
Jeez, it's like an audience with the
queen here. How long you been talking
this way?

QOHEN
Ever since...

Qohen hesitates, glances toward the shrine.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
A former therapist suggested it as a
temporary coping mechanism.

BOB
That's pitiful. You gotta give it up, Q.

QOHEN
(suddenly stern)
How did you tamper with Dr. Shrink-ROM?

Bob grins, still typing.

BOB
 She's a tool. All you gotta do is push
 the right buttons. Hey, order me a
 pizza, huh? I missed breakfast, and this
 is gonna take awhile.

QOHEN
 We have oatmeal, if you'd care to --

BOB
 -- vomit? Order the pie. Double cheese.

LATER

Intercom BUZZES.

Bob opens the door.

An athletic, curvaceous PIZZA GIRL, 17, enters wearing a
 backwards baseball cap on her blonde, pony-tailed head.

PIZZA GIRL
 (handing Bob the pizza)
 Cash or charge?

Bob stares at her, dumbstruck.

PIZZA GIRL (CONT'D)
 Hey?

He continues to stare. Qohen appears, pays the girl. She
 turns to go, glances back at Bob.

PIZZA GIRL (CONT'D)
 What are you staring at?

BOB
 Uh... nothing.

She flips her cap brim forward, adjusts her mussed pony tail
 with both hands, perky breasts rising. She winks at Bob.

PIZZA GIRL
 (cooly)
 Wrong answer.

She leaves. Qohen closes the door and turns to Bob, who
 stares at the door.

QOHEN
 Are you all right?

BOB
 (snapping out of it)
 Whoa! I got this hormonal paradigm shift
 going on, 'case you didn't notice.
 (MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
 Puberty's hell... Was she looking at me funny?

QOHEN
 We've grown accustomed to people looking at us funny.

BOB
 Yeah, but you're funny looking.

Bob opens the pizza box, grabs a slice, takes a huge bite, sauce dribbling down his chin. He carries the box to the computer, drops it carelessly on the desk, takes another wolfish bite while typing one-handed.

BOB (CONT'D)
 (mouth full)
 How long till Geek and Geekier come for me?

QOHEN
 Not long.

BOB
 Damn.

He tosses the crust over his shoulder. Instantly, a scruffy rodent bags it, drags it through a crack in the floor.

Bob nods toward the pizza box.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Help yourself to the rest.

QOHEN
 We're afraid our diet precludes pizza.

BOB
 Put it in the fridge, then.

Bob attacks the keyboard with both hands.

Qohen retrieves the pizza box, carries it toward the kitchen.

He absently licks a bit of sauce from his finger and halts, eyes closed. A look of fleeting pleasure crosses his face. He opens his eyes, frowns, making sure Bob hasn't noticed.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Qohen lies in bed, tossing and turning, unable to sleep.

He goes to the shrine, lights a candle, stares at its flame.

As if against his will, he turns a picture face forward.

It is a close-up profile of his wife's face. She's looking at something off camera, LAUGHING.

The picture comes to life, and she turns to face Qohen, her LAUGHTER DYING. She looks at him with pity.

Qohen replaces the picture, face to the wall.

He trudges to his work station, sits at the computer.

Qohen touches the mouse: the menu appears. He sees Bainsley's icon, hesitates, then clicks.

A live video of Bainsley fills the screen. Barely dressed in white lingerie, she stretches seductively on a bed with red satin sheets, eyes closed. She MOANS passionately into a headset microphone, her hands caressing her corseted breasts.

Raunchy CHATROOM MESSAGES scroll below her image.

Qohen's head spins.

Bainsley smiles wickedly, her eyes slowly opening. She licks her lips with a sultry smile, then sits up, smile freezing.

BAINSLEY (V.O.)
(softly, into microphone)
Qohen?

Shocked, Qohen exits the site. He stares at his screen.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen lies on his bed, looking at his signature on the receipt from the Clones.

Bob sits at the computer, typing furiously and softly WHEEZING. His eyes are baggy with fatigue.

QOHEN
We never thought of Management as a family man.

BOB
Yeah, well, I'm it. Heir to his dark throne. Like I want it. He gave me this rap about my mom dying in childbirth, but I know she just ran off. I'm out of here too, soon as I finish my Ph.D.

QOHEN
Aren't you rather young for a doctorate?

BOB
It's just Quantum Systems Analysis. Old man says I shoulda finished last year. Typical control freak.

Bob hits a key, and signs and symbols swiftly scroll.

BOB (CONT'D)
OK, Q. You're ready to go.

He stands, loses his balance, steadies himself against the desk, breathing heavily.

QOHEN
Are you all right?

BOB
Fucking allergies.

Bob takes a hit from his inhaler, sucks it in deep.

QOHEN
What exactly are you allergic to?

Bob pockets the inhaler, speaks through clenched teeth.

BOB
Bald old farts laying in bed instead of getting to work. Up and fucking at 'em.

Heaving a great SIGH, Qohen moves to the work station, takes his seat. He tentatively touches a key: symbols scroll. Bob peers over his shoulder.

BOB (CONT'D)
These babies are shivering for your special touch, Q. Just like that yummy bikini babe you been playing Tarzan with.

Qohen stops, mortified.

QOHEN
How do you know about her?

BOB
(gesturing at computer)
You kidding? Your life's an open beeping book, excuse my five-second delay... So what's she like in the virtual flesh?

QOHEN
That's none of your business.

BOB
You're no fun. You sound like my dad.

Qohen grudgingly types. The scrolling slows, stops. He hesitates. Types. The scrolling speeds up.

Qohen stares at the screen, hands frozen above the keyboard.

BOB (CONT'D)
What's the prob, Bob?

QOHEN
Our name is Qohen. Q--No U-- O --

BOB
Come on, Q. You're looking for the least
little en... tit... tee... The little
entity that could. Start him up and he
drags the rest behind.
(pointing)
Whoops! There's the little bugger!

QOHEN
Where?

BOB
There! Don't let him get away!

Bob pushes Qohen out of his chair and takes his place, one
hand controlling the mouse, the other swiftly typing.

BOB (CONT'D)
Gotcha, you little bastard.

Bob scrolls and types at lightning speed as Qohen stands back
in awe. The symbols re-configure in tidy rows.

BOB (CONT'D)
There. See? Easy. Now you do it.

Bob stands, and Qohen hesitantly takes his place. He stares
helplessly at the screen, fingers poised above the keyboard.
Qohen's shoulders slump in despair.

Bob leans over him, coaxing. He touches Qohen's shoulder.

Qohen stiffens.

QOHEN
We prefer not to be touched.

Bob draws his hand away, his eyes going hard.

BOB
How'm I supposed to work with this? You
got your head stuck so far up your ass
you can't see shit. Do you even know
what Zip-T's all about?

QOHEN
No. Do you?

BOB
The old man says it's none of my biz.
But if I was working on it long as you,
you can bet your ass I'd have some clue.

QOHEN
We only care about our call.

BOB
Don't even get me started on that.

The deadlock CLICKS and the door opens.

The Clones flank the doorway, arms folded.

CHUBS
Time to go, Bob.

Bob ignores Chubs, still staring at Qohen.

BOB
You really are a burnout, ain't you...
Get a clue, Q.

SLIM
Time to go, Bob.

BOB
Time to kiss my ass, Chubs.

CHUBS
I'm Chubs.

Bob turns and heads to the door. He glares at the Clones.

BOB
If I ever take over, you guys are fired.

Slim and Chubs shoot each other worried glances.

BOB (CONT'D)
Like I'll remember who the fuck you are.

They all leave.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Qohen sits at his computer, scrolling through page after page of neat and orderly signs and symbols, his lips unconsciously forming soundless words as he strives to comprehend.

The Intercom BUZZES. Qohen raises his eyes to the crucifix.

MOMENTS LATER

Qohen opens the door, and Bainsley is in his arms. Her trench coat flashes open, revealing she's naked underneath.

Qohen pulls it closed. She GIGGLES.

QOHEN
You're drunk.

Bainsley rubs up against him.

 BAINSLEY
Mostly.

 QOHEN
What are you doing here?

 BAINSLEY
You clicked on me.

 QOHEN
We -- we visited your web site in error.

 BAINSLEY
Sure you did... You want me.

She wraps her arms around his neck, kisses him.

Qohen resists at first but then closes his eyes and, despite himself, begins to kiss her back.

And now Bainsley breaks away, hot and flustered.

 BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Easy, killer. Let a girl catch her
breath!

Qohen turns away, struggling to contain himself.

Bainsley pulls a VR suit from her coat pocket, shakes it out.

 BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Go put yours on. I'll hook us both up to
your computer. Oh! I can hardly wait!

Qohen stares at the suit, aghast.

 BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

 QOHEN
We will never wear that suit again.
We... We can't ever go back there.

 BAINSLEY
Bad trip last time. I know. This time
will be different. Trust me.

Bainsley wraps the VR suit around Qohen's neck, pulls him close for a kiss...

But Qohen resists. He takes the suit from his neck, stuffs it in her coat pocket, then firmly pulls her to the door.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
 You're playing hard to get... You think that turns me on... And it does... a little... But enough's enough, Qohen.

They stand in the doorway. She touches his chest, face raised to his...

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
 Come on... Let's have some fun...

Qohen holds her by the shoulders at arm's length.

QOHEN
 We don't have fun. We aren't any fun. We have work to do. And we can't imagine why you'd ever be interested in us.

Bainsley's eyes blaze.

BAINSLEY
 I'm starting to wonder myself. I just didn't want to be alone tonight.

She turns to go.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
 Maybe you really don't have a soul... But I'm ready to find out when you are...

She leaves, closing the door behind her.

Qohen stares at the closed door... then, shoulders slumping, he slowly returns to his computer.

He stares at the screen, rubs bleary eyes, tilts his head as if listening. His eyes light on the crucifix and slowly widen as a thought occurs to him.

QOHEN
 (under his breath)
 Impossible.

He sits up straight, scrolls through the columns of signs and symbols faster and faster, eyes sharp and swiftly moving.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen stands by the door, signing a receipt. He gives it to the Clones, and they leave.

Bob plops a laptop computer on Qohen's bed, inserts a wireless network card into its slot, then sits at Qohen's work station. He pulls up the Networking screen.

BOB
I'm tapping into your network. Figure I
can always play "Go Fish" with ManCom...

Qohen goes to the work station, stands behind Bob.

BOB (CONT'D)
So what's the agenda today, Q? Sit
around staring at the phone? Order
another pizza? I'm for pizza, myself.

QOHEN
We -- we think we may have discovered the
purpose of the Zero Theorem.

Bob pauses.

BOB
You're shitting me.

QOHEN
Language...

BOB
(smiling, pleased)
Give it up, Q-dog.

Qohen rubs his forehead, stares up at the crucifix.

QOHEN
As far as we've been able to ascertain,
the Zero Theorem employs a densely
compacted language that seeks to codify
all known phenomena in the universe.

BOB
Try it in English, Q.

QOHEN
The Zero Theorem seeks to explain the
purpose of existence.

Bob's eyes widen.

BOB
You are fuh-reaking shitting me. Holy
crap. Holy crap! That is just too cool!

Bob turns back to the computer, types frantically.

QOHEN
We nail this bad boy, we're talking
groupie chicks from arts and sciences!
I'm laid for life!

Qohen remains silent, glumly staring. Bob looks at him.

BOB
What's the matter? Let's roll, Q!

QOHEN
The project is impossible.

BOB
No way to know without trying.

QOHEN
But if we try and fail, then you and your
father won't help us to receive our call.

Bob whirls around, suddenly impatient.

BOB
Quit leaning all over me, huh?. You
smell like you died. Go for a walk or
something, air yourself out.

Qohen takes a step back.

QOHEN
We prefer not to go out.

BOB
Then take a shower. Give your dome a
turtle wax. Do anything besides stand
around giving me the eye. You're
creeping me out. Let me finish up here.

Bob reaches for his inhaler.

Hurt, Qohen backs away.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Qohen scrubs himself viciously with a washcloth. He stops,
leans against the tile, closes his eyes. The spray hits him
in the face, water trickling down his cheeks like tears.

INT. CHAPEL - SHRINE - LATER

Qohen quietly exits the bathroom and stops.

Bob stands in front of the shrine, looking at the photos, all
of which are facing forward.

Qohen's breath catches. His eyes burn. But then he breathes
deeply. He goes to the shrine, stands quietly next to Bob.

Bob looks at Qohen. Their eyes lock.

BOB
What happened to them?

Qohen stares at the photos: his Wife, his Son, his former self in various family poses, various degrees of happiness.

QOHEN
There was a fire.

He gazes up to the chapel's charred beams, jaw set stoically.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
And we can never understand the reason...
until we receive our call.

Bob tears up. He touches Qohen's arm, drops his hand.

Qohen turns a picture's face to the wall again, then another.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
We prefer that these not be touched. The
memories are... painful.

Bob turns away from Qohen, overwhelmed with emotion.

BOB
Oh, Jesus, Q. I feel so bad.

QOHEN
It's all right. You didn't know.

BOB
No. I feel bad for lying to you.

Qohen stops what he's doing.

QOHEN
What are you talking about?

Bob walks back toward the work station, Qohen following.

BOB
Your call. Nobody can get it for you.
Not my dad. Not me. Not anybody.

QOHEN
But you said... Mr. Joby told us...

Qohen is unable to finish.

Bob raps his knuckles on the monitor, fighting tears.

BOB
(roughly)
Yo, Doc, off your ass and on the clock.

Doctor Shrink-ROM appears on the screen, rolling her notebook into a tube and twisting it nervously.

BOB (CONT'D)
The truth. Come on, I'm authorizing you.

DR. SHRINK-ROM
It's true, Qohen. Your phone call is a delusion. I've wanted to tell you... I've wanted to help you... but I was programmed to leave your peculiar pathology untreated... I'm sor --

Bob clicks her off.

QOHEN
But... But why?

BOB
The old man uses everybody Q. You're a tool. We're all tools. Joby, me, that hot bikini babe...

QOHEN
Bainsley?

BOB
Your call girl was paid by the hour.

Qohen looks dizzy. He covers his face with both hands.

Bob eases him into his chair.

BOB (CONT'D)
I'll never ever lie to you ever again.
That's a promise, Q.

Qohen slowly lowers his hands from his face.

QOHEN
Our call is real. We've been waiting. It will provide our lives with purpose and meaning... a reason to go on...

BOB
(gently)
Wake up, Q.

QOHEN
(desperately)
Perhaps not by phone... Perhaps that was our delusion... But somehow, some way...

BOB
There is no call, Q. There's only Zip-T. And you and me have less than three weeks to solve it now.

Qohen's eyes harden.

QOHEN
Why in the world should we bother?

BOB
Because it's your job...

Qohen stares at him.

BOB (CONT'D)
For the advancement of science...

Qohen slowly shakes his head.

Bob ducks his head, peeks up with pleading eyes.

BOB (CONT'D)
Do it for me, Q...? Please...?

Qohen is taken aback.

QOHEN
Why do you care so much about the Zero
Theorem?

BOB
The truth?

QOHEN
That's what you promised us.

BOB
The old man told me if I helped you prove
Zip-T, he'd buy me a car.

QOHEN
That's it? That's your reason?

BOB
Well, duh... Chicks dig the wheels, Q...
And soon as I get me some, I'm burning
road. I'm a million light years from
that bossy bastard... Come on, Q. Help
a kid out. Pretty fucking please?

Qohen looks into Bob's pleading eyes, softening.

QOHEN
Unseemly...

Excited, Bob gives Qohen's shoulders a quick squeeze.

BOB
You and me, Q. Your big ass computer and
my speedy little laptop.

Qohen frowns.

QOHEN
On one condition.

BOB
What?

QOHEN
Our call is real.

Bob studies Qohen, then grins.

BOB
I believe you, partner. Let's go to
work.

INT. CHAPEL - MONTAGE

1. Qohen working desperately at his computer while Bob lies on the bed working just as feverishly on his laptop.
2. The Clones appearing in the doorway to pick up Bob.
3. Qohen signing a receipt for delivery.
4. Qohen signing another receipt.
5. Bob taking a hit from his asthma inhaler, Qohen pausing from his work, looking at him with concern.
6. Qohen working alone on his computer late into the night, haggard but determined.
7. Qohen kneeling at the shrine, lighting a candle.
8. Bob grabs the last slice of pizza. He takes a huge bite, sees Qohen staring at him. He holds out the slice. Qohen hesitates, then takes it. He bites, swallows, smiles a small smile, hands it back. Bob devours the rest.
9. Qohen signing yet another receipt.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen sits at the computer, manipulating entities.

Bob lies on Qohen's bed, headphones on, listening to music while he works. He plays air drums while SINGING off-key.

Qohen shoots him a glance, irritated.

Bob hits an air cymbal.

BOB
Any progress?

QOHEN
Impossible to tell. And you?

Bob slaps his laptop closed, frustrated.

BOB
I'm crunching in circles.

He gets off the bed, stands behind Qohen at the work station.

BOB (CONT'D)
The old man pulls me off the job in two days. We gotta speed up the process.

QOHEN
Perhaps he'll give us an extension.

BOB
Not my old man. Push, push, push. I'm three years old, watching cartoons after a hard day's calculus, and he's like:
(lowering voice)
"Son, you'll never fulfill your destiny that way." I'm like, "Jeez, Pop, how about next commercial?" He gave up on me before I even learned to ride a bike.

Qohen nods, hesitates.

QOHEN
Our problem is... it's pointless.

BOB
What is?

QOHEN
The Zero Theorem. Follow the math. Don't you see? The point is to prove that there is no point. All of existence is a cosmic accident. It started from nothing and will end in nothing.

Bob moves about the work station, idly picking up objects.

BOB
I guess that's not good.

QOHEN
It would make our lives meaningless.

Bob nods, distracted. He shrugs.

BOB
So let's prove Zip-T's wrong.

QOHEN
Then your father won't give you a car.

BOB
Fuck him. I gotta prove something, Q.
Let's do it.

QOHEN
How?

BOB
I don't know. Use your imagination.

Qohen stares at the monitor, thinking.

QOHEN
Energy begets matter... Matter begets
energy... According to the theorem,
everything must be accounted for... In
order to disprove it, we must find
something that can't be counted,
something outside the equation.

BOB
Such as...?

Qohen closes his eyes, then suddenly opens them, realizing.

QOHEN
Our soul.

BOB
Is that all?

QOHEN
It may be all we've been waiting for...
but we can't imagine how to prove its
existence...

BOB
Whoa. Talk about a gnarly existential
brain-burner...

Bob idly opens the box that holds the VR suit, pulls it out.

BOB (CONT'D)
... and my brain's half-toasted as is.

Bob holds the VR suit up to his chest.

BOB (CONT'D)
Some fun in the sun could help. Think
that Bainsley chick would give me a
freebie?

QOHEN
Unseemly.

BOB
I'd sure like to get inside her program.

QOHEN
We're afraid you'd find it empty.

Bob stops, lost in thought. Suddenly he stuffs the suit in his pocket, grabs his laptop, and heads for the door.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

BOB
Major breakthrough! I gotta get with ManCom and figure out the details.

QOHEN
What about the Clones?

BOB
They can fuck each other up their asses. I ain't waiting for them. I ain't waiting for nothing. I'm grabbing a cab.

Bob slams the door behind him, leaving Qohen bewildered.

QOHEN
Language...

LATER

The Clones flank the doorway, Qohen standing before them.

SLIM
You let him go?

QOHEN
How were we to stop him?

CHUBS
Duct tape works.

SLIM
Management won't be happy about this.

CHUBS
I wouldn't want to be in your shoes.

SLIM
You're in deep trouble.

Qohen's jaw clenches. He smiles coldly.

QOHEN
Bob left a message for you.

INT. CHAPEL - SHRINE - NIGHT

Qohen stares at the pictures, all face forward.

INT. CHAPEL - LATER

Qohen sits at his computer looking longingly at Bainsley's icon. He clicks on it: "Access Denied!" Qohen slowly runs a hand over his bald head. He clears the lump from his throat.

INT. CHAPEL - MUCH LATER

The Black Hole SCREENSAVER swirls before him.

INT. QOHEN'S CHAPEL - MORNING

A box drops in front of Qohen. He opens his eyes. Bob stands beside him, baggy-eyed, short of breath, but grinning.

BOB
Problem solved.

QOHEN
Where have you been?

BOB
Lurking and working. Conferring, consorting, and hobnobbing with ManCom on the sly. Turned in my Ph.D. Dissertation while I was at it. Committee chair about had a stroke just reading the abstract. He'll flunk my ass for sure.

Bob looks around the chapel.

BOB (CONT'D)
Clones were here, right?

Qohen nods.

BOB (CONT'D)
They'll be back. The old man put out an APB out on me. Every Clone in R&D's on the hunt. No time to waste, Q.

Bob opens the box and pulls out the VR suit, which now sports even more wires and transistors and a crudely sewn big gold "Q" on its chest. He hands it to Qohen, pushes him out of his chair, takes his place, and begins typing rapidly.

Qohen eyes the suit in his hands with dismay.

QOHEN
More virtual reality.

BOB
Nope. I rewired it. This baby's a real live inner-space soul-search suit. All I gotta do is rig an interface with ManCom.

QOHEN
What are you talking about?

BOB
Energy, Q-dude! Everything inside you releases energy -- from cell division to a synapse firing. This suit'll pick up the data and relay it to ManCom. If you have a soul, this'll find it... And ManCom'll connect you to it.

Bob SNEEZES, wipes his nose on his sleeve.

Qohen stares at him.

BOB (CONT'D)
Don't look at me like that, Q. It sounds crazy, but I got it all figured out.

QOHEN
We're afraid you've been studying too much philosophy and not enough physics.

BOB
You sound like my dissertation director. There's plenty of room for philosophy between subatomic particles.

Bob hits a few more keys. A DIALOGUE BOX pops up: "MANCOM READY FOR INPUT".

BOB (CONT'D)
No time to waste. Suit up, Super-Q.

Qohen picks up the suit.

QOHEN
We're afraid we can't wear this.

BOB
Sure you can. I even had it dry-cleaned.

Qohen shakes his head.

BOB (CONT'D)
You gotta. When you're connected, you'll know everything ManCom knows.

Qohen delicately traces the "Q" on the suit with a fingertip.

QOHEN
Is it dangerous?

Bob meets his gaze.

BOB
 Jesus, Q.... ManCom's the biggest,
 baddest neural net computer ever made...
 Your brain could come out like a carrot
 in a blender for all I know...

He looks away helplessly.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Truth is, it scares the fuck out of me.

QOHEN
 Unseemly...

The Intercom BUZZES.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 Did you order a pizza?

BOB
 Fucking Clones.

Bob drags a pew down the aisle to block the door, WHEEZING.

Qohen catches up, stops him.

QOHEN
 No. They have a key.

Qohen touches the intercom button.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 Yes...?

MOMENTS LATER

Qohen opens the door to reveal BAINSLEY. Wearing jeans and a T-shirt, hair in a pony tail, she looks young and vulnerable.

BAINSLEY
 Can I... come in?

Qohen steps back.

Bainsley enters. Spotting Bob, she raises puzzled eyes.

QOHEN
 Bainsley -- Bob. Bob -- Bainsley.
 Bob is Management's son...
 (to Bainsley, darkly)
 You know Management... don't you?

Bob stares at Bainsley. He takes a blast from his inhaler.

BAINSLEY
I'm so sorry, Qohen... Joby told me I
could have the VR suit if I played along.

QOHEN
Then we suppose you have what you wanted.

BAINSLEY
It's not like that... Not anymore...
Now I just want... you.

Bob makes a GAGGING sound, then SNEEZES. He recovers.

BOB
No way, babe. You're like major league,
and he's like, I mean... look at him.

Bainsley steps to Bob, touches his cheek, smiling sadly.

BAINSLEY
Please don't laugh at me.

Smitten by her touch, Bob stares at her in wonder...

... and Qohen stares at her in disbelief.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
I'm going away, Qohen. Come with me...
to a special place... an island... a
real one... just for you and me.

Qohen raises his eyes to the chapel's charred rafters. A
pair of pigeons nest atop a crossbeam, softly COOING.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
You and me -- we connected...

Qohen looks deep into her eyes.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
We can be together for real...

Qohen breaks away, looks at Bob as if for an answer. Bob's
face is a study in torn emotions.

BAINSLEY (CONT'D)
Qohen...?

Qohen gazes toward the shrine, all the pictures there. He
hesitates, then hugs Bainsley close, whispers in her ear.

QOHEN
We're afraid... we can't...

Bainsley's eyes brim with tears. She kisses him softly.

BAINSLEY
 (desperately)
 Oh, run away with me, Qohen. Please?

Qohen kisses her, eyes shut tight...

... Then his eyes snap open...

... and he backs away from her, mastering his emotions.

Bainsley searches his stoic face. A SOB escapes her.

She turns away and walks out.

Qohen closes the door.

Emotionless, he turns to Bob.

BOB
 Damn, Q... You got any heart at all?

Qohen doesn't answer.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Um... Want to suit up?

Qohen closes his eyes.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Need a break?

Qohen opens his eyes, looks around the chapel.

QOHEN
 We feel like a rat in a rat trap.

Bob follows Qohen's gaze. He SNEEZES.

BOB
 I been ready to gnaw my foot off since I
 got here. Let's get out of this tomb.

INT. VESTIBULE - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen stares uncertainly at the great oak door to the street.

QOHEN
 We haven't gone out in a long time...

Bob takes his arm.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The sun is bright. Qohen squints, takes a misstep, staggers.

Bob supports him. He pulls surfer sunglasses and baseball cap from his pocket, puts them on Qohen, the cap backwards.

BOB
You don't need skin cancer.

They head down the street.

QOHEN
Can we go back now?

BOB
There's a park just up the street. Let's air you out. You're way overdue.

Qohen hugs himself, looking frail, feeble.

QOHEN
Should we have gone with her?

Bob gives him a pitying look.

BOB
What do I know? I'm just a kid.

Bob hooks his CD player on Qohen's belt, puts the headphones on Qohen's ears. He pushes "play".

Qohen's eyes widen.

They continue walking. A trio of OLD LADIES pushing shopping carts veers around them as they pass in the other direction.

EXT. PARK - LATER

PEOPLE jogging, rollerblading, picnicking, feeding pigeons.

A pair of sisters -- LACY, 18, and BONNIE, 15 -- try to launch a kite. It lifts, spins, nosedives. They LAUGH.

Qohen and Bob sit under a big oak tree, backs against its trunk. Bob looks at Qohen, looks away, hesitates.

BOB
What's it like getting old, Q?

Qohen gazes into the branches, eyes clouding, voice robotic.

QOHEN
You will question the worth of your life. Nothing will satisfy you. You will be alone. You will feel empty as a gourd...

Qohen snaps out of it, sees Bob's consternation.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
Excuse our nihilism.

Bob shrugs, watches Lacy and Bonnie. The kite crashes to the ground again. Lacy and Bonnie MOAN at the failure, GIGGLING.

BOB
A little tail would make that thing more aerodynamically active. And speaking of a little tail, that girl is hot!

Bonnie tries again to get the kite airborne. She shoots Bob a fleeting look, smiling shyly.

BOB (CONT'D)
(wistfully)
I don't know any girls my age...
(snapping out of it)
Think I should get a tongue stud?

The question draws Qohen out of his despair.

QOHEN
For what purpose?

BOB
Chicks, dude. Chicks dig the metal.

Qohen stares into the distance, trying to take the question seriously, searching for the proper response.

QOHEN
In our experience, the female is attracted to the male in direct inverse proportion to the male's misguided efforts to attract her attention.

BOB
Fuckin' huh?

Qohen smiles.

QOHEN
Chicks dig the real you.

Bob reaches over, squeezes Qohen's shoulder.

BOB
I bet you were a good dad, Q.

Qohen attempts to speak, but his emotion overcomes him.

Bob pats his arm and looks away, embarrassed. He spies a HOT DOG VENDOR and jumps to his feet, losing his balance.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Whoa. I need food. Do us a coupla dogs,
 Q? Coupla wieners for a coupla weenies?

Eyes misting, Qohen watches Lacy and Bonnie playing.

QOHEN
 May we have relish on ours?

Bob grins, trots off towards the hot dog vendor.

MOMENTS LATER

Qohen sits deep in thought, gazing into the oak's branches. The LAUGHTER of Lacy and Bonnie echoes. He looks at them. They can't get the kite airborne, but they're having fun.

Qohen wrestles with a sudden impulse.

Bonnie holds the kite while Lacy, at the other end of 50 feet of string, prepares to run with it.

Qohen stands, takes off his sunglasses, takes a deep breath, and tries on a smile. It fits nicely. He approaches Bonnie.

QOHEN
 Beautiful day for kite flying, isn't it?

Bonnie looks at him the way one might look at a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. She smiles uncertainly.

BONNIE
 Except there's not enough wind.

Lacy eyes Qohen suspiciously, drops the string and moves toward them.

QOHEN
 We'll fix that.

Qohen produces a clean handkerchief from his pocket, shakes it out with a flourish, then bends down and ties it to the tail of the kite.

Bob returns with one-and-a-half hotdogs, the missing half in his mouth. He stops and stares at Qohen fixing the kite for the grateful girls, then quickly swallows, shoves the other half of his hotdog in his mouth.

LATER

Qohen sits beneath the oak tree, eyes closed, savoring the final bite of his hotdog.

He opens his eyes with satisfaction, watches Bob and Bonnie holding onto the string of the airborne kite.

Lacy strolls down by the pond, leaving them alone. She looks up, waves to Qohen, smiling. He waves back.

Bob pulls the string: the kite dips, barely missing the ground, soars skyward. He and Bonnie LAUGH with delight.

Qohen's eyes brim with joy, then slowly darken.

Bob spots Qohen looking at him. He hands Bonnie the string, whispers in her ear. She smiles and squeezes his hand.

Bob ambles to Qohen, plops down next to him, beaming.

BOB
Q-dog. How you doing, bud?

QOHEN
Well. You?

BOB
Whoa... You know?

Qohen smiles, puts a hand softly on Bob's arm.

QOHEN
We know.

BOB
Look... About that soul-search thing...

Bob looks off at Bonnie. The kite is losing altitude. She scrambles backwards to keep it in the air.

BOB (CONT'D)
You don't have to do it. I will.

QOHEN
But... Why?

BOB
Just to show the bastard.

QOHEN
No. You're much too young. We're not at all certain --

Suddenly, Bob pokes his finger sharply into Qohen's forehead.

Qohen winces.

BOB
Wake the fuck up, Q! You think you're the only one who wants a call?

Qohen sits dazed.

QOHEN
 Sorry. I never thought...

Bob stares at him.

 BOB
 What did you say?

 QOHEN
 I said I'm sorry. I --

 BOB
 Q... Dude... You just turned singular.

 QOHEN
 (confused)
 I did?
 (hearing himself, smiling)
 I suppose I did.

 BOB
 Jeez. I shoulda slapped you upside the
 head the day we met.

Bob looks at Bonnie again. The kite has crashed, and she's
 untangling herself from a swirl of string. He sighs.

 BOB (CONT'D)
 I guess we better get back to work...

Bob stands. Qohen rises too, puts a hand on his arm,
 stopping him.

 QOHEN
 No. Not yet. There's... there's someone
 I have to see first.

Bob stares at him, uncomprehending, then breaks into a grin.

 BOB
 You're going after Bainsley.

 QOHEN
 If you don't mind me leaving you here.

Bob looks over at Bonnie, smiles.

 BOB
 Meet you back at the tomb later.

Qohen hesitates. Bob playfully rubs Qohen's bald head.

 BOB (CONT'D)
 Go get her, Q. I can wait.

INT. CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen gets into a cab, slams the door.

DRIVER

Where to?

Qohen views him from behind: short-sleeved white shirt, tie sticking out of collar, unruly hair slicked to the side. In the rearview mirror: a flash of thick glasses.

Qohen catches his breath. The driver looks like a Clone.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Nowhere to go...?

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen runs from the cab, dodging traffic to the other side of the street. He races down the sidewalk, heart pounding.

INT. BUS - LATER

Qohen sits in the rear of a nearly-empty bus, gazing out the window as they travel through an upscale suburb.

He closes his eyes and rests his head against the glass.

When he opens his eyes, he spots a rider up front: short-sleeved shirt and tie, thick glasses.

He looks around: acne-scarred faces, slicked hair, too-short trousers, white socks in scuffed wingtips.

He ducks down: this can't be real.

The bus WHEEZES to a stop.

A line of Clone-like men board through the front door.

Panicking, Qohen jumps up and pushes through the rear door.

EXT. UPSCALE STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen runs, lungs aching, GASPING. Everywhere he looks...

... Clones: driving their cars, walking their dogs, watering their begonias. Clones and more Clones, fat, skinny, short, tall, but all strangely identical in demeanor and dress... all stopping what they're doing to stare at Qohen.

He veers off the street, cuts through...

BACKYARDS

... dodging trees and flower beds, koi ponds and patio furniture... running, running, running in desperation.

He vaults a fence, catches his foot, sprawls on the ground.

He lifts his face to the sky with a strangled SOB. Then his eyes harden. He gets to his feet, sets off running again.

EXT. JOBY'S HOUSE - LATER

Out of breath and dishevelled, Qohen pounds on the door.

Joby opens it, all jovial.

JOBY

Well if it isn't my old pal Quinn! Come in! Have a beer! Have some tap water!

Joby stops, deep in thought.

JOBY (CONT'D)

Wait a minute... You're supposed to be baby-sitting your little buddy Bob. You didn't leave him all alone, did you?

QOHEN

Where is Bainsley?

JOBY

Management won't like that. No... It'll be a regular Clone convention around your place, poor kid... I bet your phone's ringing off the hook even as we speak.

QOHEN

Bainsley. Where does she live?

Joby squints in thought, taps his lip.

JOBY

Bainsley... Nope, ain't ringing a bell.

Qohen grabs Joby by the shirt-front.

Joby snaps to attention, eyes narrowing.

JOBY (CONT'D)

She packed up and took off. Chasing the wind. She's the least of your worries.

QOHEN

You're lying. You're Management's tool.

JOBY
 You poor bastard. We're all tools. Get
 used to it, Quinn.

Qohen slowly releases him.

QOHEN
 (helplessly, by rote)
 My name is Qohen... Q...

His voice dies out.

JOBY
 I know. I know who you are... Do you?

Joby steps back, looks at Qohen with pity, shakes his head.

JOBY (CONT'D)
 Go home, Q...

The door closes. Qohen stares at it, wracked with
 indecision, then suddenly takes off running down the street.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Exhausted, Qohen lets himself in, looks around fearfully.

QOHEN
 Bob...?

The room is dark, gloomy, lit only by the sputtering candles
 at the shrine and the ghostly glow of his computer.

Holding pews for support, Qohen drags himself to the shrine.
 He falls to his knees, buries his face in his hands.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 Bob!

After a while, he rises, wiping his face. He staggers to his
 bed and collapses with a GROAN, exhausted and disheartened.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
 Oh, Bob...

A RUSTLING from under the bed. Qohen jumps to his feet.

BOB (O.S.)
 (voice weak, gasping)
 Dust bunny... biosphere... down here.

Bob crawls out from under the bed, shivering and COUGHING.

Qohen beams with joy, wraps Bob in a bear hug.

BOB (CONT'D)
Clones came by twice. They'll be back.

Bob SNEEZES, WHEEZES, teeth chattering. Qohen releases him, smooths Bob's sweaty hair from his forehead.

QOHEN
You're burning up.

Bob pushes Qohen's hand away, pulls out his inhaler.

BOB
Just a fucking fever, Q. Don't wig out.

QOHEN
You need medical attention.

Suddenly dizzy, Bob sits on the bed.

BOB
Nah... Just get me some aspirin and run
me a cool bath... And bar the door...
No way I wanna see another Clone...

BATHROOM - LATER

Bob lies in the tub in his boxers. Qohen kneels beside him.

BOB
She gave me her number. Her name's
Bonnie. She's the hottest chick ever.
Her sister's name is Lacy. Too old for
me... You interested, Q?

Qohen soothes Bob's forehead with a washcloth, silent.

BOB (CONT'D)
So how'd you score with Bainsley?

QOHEN
She's gone.

BOB
Wish she was here giving me a bath.

QOHEN
So do I... But I seem to have lost her.

Bob COUGHS at length, closes his eyes.

BOB
Nobody's ever really lost Q-dog... We'll
find her... Soon as we nail Zip-T... get
your fucking call... excuse my...

Bob drifts off mid-sentence. His ragged breathing softens.

Qohen smooths back his hair, presses a cheek to his forehead, lingers there, then lifts him from the tub. He drapes a towel over him, steps back, struggling under Bob's weight...

Qohen slips and falls against the mirror, keeping his hold on Bob. Righting himself, Qohen glances to the broken mirror...

Amid the shattered glass, a red light shines.

CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen tucks Bob into bed. Hand on Bob's brow, he checks his temperature. He draws back his hand, still worried.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen raises the ball-peen hammer and SMASHES the ManCam. Its red light blinks out.

CHAPEL - LATER

Qohen drags a pew down the aisle, stacks it against two others blocking the door.

CHAPEL - MORNING

The door's deadlock CLICKS open.

Qohen awakens with a start, sitting in a chair next to the bed where Bob still sleeps, softly SNORING. He removes his hand from Bob's head, listening, disoriented.

The door shudders, moves. Pews GROAN as they move.

Qohen springs up, Bob still sleeping, and rushes to the door.

A THUD from outside moves the blockade. The door opens a crack. Qohen throws himself against it with all his might.

The THUD and GRUNT of shoulder on door, pushing Qohen back.

The door opens a foot. Qohen looks around in a panic.

Bob sits up in bed, bleary-eyed with fever.

BOB

Q...?

Qohen sprints to the shrine, picks up the candle stand in both hands, and runs back down the aisle. Candles fly, landing in piles of computer printouts, igniting them.

With a STRANGLED SCREAM, Qohen hurls the stand at the door.

Wrought iron wedges. The door THUDS and THUMPS, stuck.

But when Qohen turns around to check on Bob, he sees:

FIRE.

It's a small paper fire, but in Qohen's eyes it turns to:

FLASHBACK - BURNING HOUSE

Qohen fights through smoke and flames, CRASHES through a window, rolls on the ground, smoldering, SOBBING.

BACK TO SCENE

Qohen throws himself on the pile of burning printouts, eyes clenched tight, mouth open in a soundless scream. He rolls over and over, burning himself, but putting out the fire.

Bob gets out of bed, wobbling with fever. He COUGHS, WHEEZES, then collapses on the bed, unconscious.

Qohen rushes to him.

The door bursts open, pews and wrought iron SCREECHING against the floor. Slim and Chubs push through, breathless.

Qohen cradles Bob in his arms. The Clones walk up the aisle.

QOHEN

Take him to a hospital.

Chubs reaches for Bob. Qohen hugs him closer for a moment, then carefully places him in Chubs' arms. Bob's breathing is ragged. Qohen smooths the hair from his eyes...

QOHEN (CONT'D)

Please. Hurry.

The Clones turn to go. Slim glances at Qohen's work station.

SLIM

Your time's up. We'll be back for the hardware tomorrow. Don't touch anything.

They head out the door with Bob. Qohen stares after them.

CHAPEL - LATER

Qohen kneels before the wrecked shrine, a single burning candle in his cupped hands.

He stares through the flickering flame at the photos.

LATER

Qohen sits at his computer, dressed in the soul-search suit.

MONITOR: "MANCOM READY FOR INPUT".

Qohen traces the "Q" on his chest, then pulls on the hood. He hits the "enter" key.

A low-pitched HUM as the program powers up.

Monitor fills with STATIC. White noise HISSES.

Qohen sits rigid, waiting.

Five long seconds pass...

HISSING stops. HUM winds down. Monitor blinks. The BLACK HOLE SCREENSAVER appears.

Silence.

Qohen raises his face to the crucifix in despair...

He touches the braid of wires at the back of his hood, adjusting them, and suddenly:

A FLASH OF LIGHT

SPACE - MANCOM MAINFRAME - CONTINUOUS

Qohen spins weightless through labyrinthine corridors. There is no up or down. Only a dizzying expanse of computer banks stretching as far as the eye can see.

Qohen weaves his way through a BUZZ of circuitry.

As he approaches a computer bank, its lights FLASH, and...

MANCOM PORTAL - CONTINUOUS

... Qohen is spinning headfirst through a SPARKING rainbow-lit tunnel of circuits. Qohen is inside ManCom.

His braid of wires flies behind him, shooting FLAMES.

Electrical currents arc from every passing circuit board to the trailing wires, creating a comet's tail of voltage.

Qohen clutches his head in pain, turning sharp angles amid explosions of color, accelerating at every turn, a bolt of SCREAMING lightning.

Up ahead, spinning toward him, the end of the tunnel: Space.

And spinning in the center of Space: The Black Hole.

Qohen closes his eyes in terror...

SPACE - MANCOM CONTROL - CONTINUOUS

Qohen opens his eyes to find himself motionless, standing on solid flooring, ManCom's computer banks behind him, the control console in front of him opening onto starry space... and beyond that... the Black Hole looms.

A dark Figure hunches over the control console.

Qohen removes his hood, catches his breath. He steps closer.

QOHEN

Bob...?

The Figure swivels to face Qohen. It is Management, dressed in his taupe suit, the Black Hole rotating behind him.

MANAGEMENT

I'm afraid you won't find my son here,
Mr. Leth. He's been hospitalized.

QOHEN

Is he... Will he be all right?

Management stands, turns to face the Black Hole, his voice low and hoarse, as if speaking to himself.

MANAGEMENT

If I believed in miracles, I'd be praying
for one now. My son... is not well.
He's never been well. I've tried to
protect him, but he's always chafed at my
touch... Eventually, a father must let
go. Surely you know that, Mr. Leth.

He turns to face Qohen, smiling sadly.

Qohen looks around.

QOHEN

Where, precisely, am I?

MANAGEMENT

This is your mind, Mr. Leth. This is
your mind in ManCom.

QOHEN

Then are you real or just in my mind?

MANAGEMENT

Is there really a difference? You're
part of the Neural Net now. All of your
knowledge, all of your being has been
incorporated into ManCom.

Qohen stares in despair.

QOHEN
What is the answer?

MANAGEMENT
That depends upon the question.

Qohen's jaw clenches.

QOHEN
What am I living for?

MANAGEMENT
(amused)
Good question, Mr. Leth, but posed to the wrong person. You've apparently mistaken me for an entity of considerably higher power. I am not the source of your call. I am neither God nor Devil. I am simply a man who seeks the truth.

QOHEN
And what is the truth?

MANAGEMENT
You're looking it dead in the eye.

He sweeps his hand toward the Black Hole behind him.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)
Chaos encapsulated. This is all there is in the end, as it was in the beginning.

Qohen stares at the Black hole in dismay.

QOHEN
Then you've proven the Zero Theorem.

Management sits on the edge of the control panel, frowning.

MANAGEMENT
Not quite. ManCom is still, as you put it, "crunching" the data. But it's only a matter of time.

Qohen struggles to control his anger.

QOHEN
Why would you ever want to prove that all is for nothing?

Management adjusts his tie with finicky precision.

MANAGEMENT
The saddest aspect of mankind's belief in a purpose beyond this life is that it makes this life meaningless -- a way station on the road to eternity.

The black hole swirls behind Management, a yawning maw of emptiness framing his head like a dark halo.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

You've persisted in believing that a call could give your life meaning. You've waited and waited for that call to come. And as a result, you've led a meaningless life. We give our own lives meaning... even if we can't understand the reason... Every rose has its thorns, Mr. Leth.

Management approaches Qohen, puts a hand on his shoulder.

MANAGEMENT (CONT'D)

(sadly)

I'm sorry, Mr. Leth. We're not really all that different, you and I... But ultimately you must find your own way.

Qohen stares at Management's hand...

... and suddenly Management disappears.

Qohen slumps for a moment, staring at the Black Hole...

Then, eyes burning, he seats himself at the control panel. He locates a keyboard, begins typing desperately.

Nothing.

Frustrated, Qohen leaps to his feet, rips the keyboard from the panel, and hurls it at a nearby computer bank.

The keyboard shatters without doing any damage, but suddenly the computer bank lights up like a flashing pinball machine.

Qohen stares at the light-show in wonder...

Frantically, he begins demolishing the control panel, hurling pieces at the computer banks... He heaves up the desk-top...

... and something falls CLANGING to the floor.

It is a ball-peen hammer. Qohen stoops to pick it up.

He holds it in his hand, flexing its weight, smiling coldly.

And then he goes berserk, throwing himself against bank after bank of computers, wildly swinging, SMASHING, swinging, grinning like a demon on fire...

He rampages down the corridor of computer banks, hammering.

And while each machine remains undamaged, all flash wild lights after he hits them, a frenzied flashing and WHIRRING that seems to match Qohen's unbridled anger.

He finally falls to his knees, weary, and raises his eyes...

All the way down the endless corridor, ManCom's computer banks are powering up.

He turns and, still on his knees, gazes at the Black Hole. It seems to loom closer, larger.

Qohen's eyes light up like fire as the realization hits him.

Qohen gets to his feet. He pulls up his hood, places a hand on the "Q" on his chest, pats it for reassurance, raises his hammer high...

... then takes off at a sprint up the corridor.

Computer banks flash, spark, explode in his wake...

He vaults the control panel in a single bound and is suddenly soaring through...

SPACE

Arms outstretched, hammer leading the way, a comet's tail of fire and light trailing him, Qohen flies straight toward...

THE BLACK HOLE

It spins closer and closer, an open mouth of darkness, as Qohen streaks toward...

IMPACT

EXPLOSION OF COLORS

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TROPICAL ISLAND - BEACH - SUNSET

A brilliant sun is setting, half-submerged in the ocean.

Qohen stands on the beach, mesmerized by the sunset.

He drops his hammer, comes back to himself, turns around...

The island is just the way he and Bainsley left it so long ago. Their footsteps dot the sand. The campfire burns low.

He walks to the campfire, picks up the rumpled blanket, hugs it to his chest, remembering.

 QOHEN
 (softly)
 Bainsley...

He drops the blanket, stands staring at the sunset.

He lowers his eyes, closes them, and when he opens them...

... He sees his Wife and Son sitting nearby on the beach. His wife helps his son build a sand castle.

Slowly, they both turn to look at Qohen. His Son waves goodbye to him, his face joyful. His Wife raises a hand in farewell, smiling and nodding slowly, as if offering him absolution, as if releasing him to live his life.

Qohen smiles back, his eyes filling with tears.

He turns to face the nearly-set sun again. The horizon is a riot of crimson reflecting off the sea.

He raises his outstretched arms, hands seeming to cradle the sun. Slowly, he lets his hands descend.

The sun begins to set. Qohen lowers his hands to his sides, and the last of the sun dips into the ocean.

Qohen turns around. Stars twinkle in the darkening sky above the jungle. He stares up at them.

FADE TO WHITE.

A phone softly RINGS and RINGS...

FADE IN:

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Qohen sits at his work station, fully suited and still plugged in, though the computer is dead.

The phone RINGS and RINGS.

He slowly pulls down his hood, stares at the RINGING phone. He reaches for it, then stops.

QOHEN
(under his breath)
No... No more...

He rubs his eyes. His fingers trail down his cheeks. With a look of surprise, he feels the top of his head.

His face and head show the trace of stubble.

The phone stops RINGING.

Qohen unplugs his braid of wires from the computer and stands, weak and dizzy.

He makes his way to the Shrine, gazes at the pictures there. He touches the one with the broken glass, a sad smile curving his trembling lips, then wipes the tears from his eyes.

He smashes the frame, slips the photo under the torso of his suit, next to his heart.

He takes a candle back to his work station. He touches the flame to a pile of computer printouts, starting a small fire. He watches as the fire grows.

The phone RINGS.

Distracted, irritated, Qohen snatches it up.

QOHEN (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I'm afraid you have the wrong number.

BOB (V.O.)
Jesus, Q! I been calling for the last hour! Where the fuck you been?

QOHEN
(joyfully)
Bob?! Where are you?

BOB (V.O.)
On the way. I just left the hospital.

He watches the flames grow. He eases back from the fire, trailing the phone cord behind him.

QOHEN
You're... you're all right then?

BOB (V.O.)
Miraculous recovery the docs refused to believe. I had to wait till everybody took a smoke break to escape.

Qohen backs further away from the fire.

BOB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Listen, Q, don't put on that VR suit!

QOHEN
Um... I'm wearing it right now.

BOB (V.O.)
Well don't plug in! I heard from one of the Clones ManCom had a meltdown last night. Fucking thing's babbling like a baby on acid. Not a safe trip at all.

Qohen smiles.

QOHEN
I'll keep that in mind.

BOB (V.O.)
Good. Go outside and wait for me. I'll
be there in a minute.

The line CLICKS dead.

The fire is raging now, the computer in flames, spewing
noxious smoke. Qohen backs away as far as the taut phone
line will allow, then punches 9-1-1 on the handset.

QOHEN
(into phone)
Yes, I'd like to report a fire...

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Qohen stands on the sidewalk, face aimed at the sunny sky.

PASSERSBY stare at his costume, but Qohen doesn't notice.

He turns to look at his chapel. Smoke billows out the
windows. He walks to the curb...

...and suddenly spots Management, flanked by Chubs and Slim,
standing in a shop doorway across the street.

A sports car comes screeching to a halt in front of Qohen.
The tinted window rolls down, and Bob pokes his head out.

BOB
Get in! I stole this from the old man.
Every Clone in town'll be after me.

Qohen circles the car to the passenger side.

Hand on the door, he hesitates.

Across the way, the Clones move forward, eyes menacing.

But Management stops them with a motion of his hand.

He nods to Qohen, puts a finger to his lips, and, smiling
sadly, takes one last look at Bob.

Then he turns and goes into the shop, the Clones following.

BOB (CONT'D)
(frantic)
Come on, Q!

Qohen gets in the car.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Qohen puts on his seatbelt.

A fire engine's siren WAILS in the distance, getting closer.

BOB
The bastard has the heat after me.

Bob hits the gas and peels out, steering wildly.

QOHEN
Please don't refer to your father as a
bastard. It's... unseemly.
(hesitantly)
Are you old enough to drive?

BOB
Who cares? We're on the lam, Q!

Bob comes to a jerky stop at a red light. He rests his
forehead on the steering wheel.

BOB (CONT'D)
Jesus, Q, I can't believe what I've gone
through lately. I'm totally wiped.

QOHEN
Perhaps you and I should take a vacation.

BOB
Where to?

QOHEN
I'm picturing an exotic tropical island.

Bob looks at him skeptically.

BOB
You really think we can find her?

Qohen gazes out the window into the distance.

BOB (CONT'D)
You know how many tropical islands there
are in the world?

Qohen turns to Bob, smiling.

QOHEN
As it happens, I know the exact number.
You're not the only genius in this car.

Bob looks at Qohen and slowly breaks into a huge grin.

The light turns green.

BOB
What the fuck are we waiting for?

Bob floors it, the tires squeal, and Qohen's eyes widen.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

The car careens down the street, barely missing a fire engine going in the other direction.

Qohen's wailing voice rises above the SIRENS.

QOHEN (V.O.)
Un-fucking-seemly.

FADE OUT.