TREY JACKSON

WRITING SAMPLES

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Born in Detroit, and raised in Southern California, Trey Jackson is a writer for TV and film, comics and interactive media. Trained as a conceptual artist, with a unique blend of a decade-long career in SaaS product management and support combined with his writing experience, he brings an distinct perspective to everything he writes.

Recently, he worked alongside showrunner Pat Charles (BLACK LIGHTNING), to shop his drama pilot THE CYPHER, about a broke underground rapper who discovers he may be better suited to be a private eye, and earned a story credit for an upcoming feature produced by Michael Steinberg (THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY). He was also long listed for the ABC/Disney Writer's Fellowship, as well as having been a Film Independent Project:Involve fellow.

Trey's time moving between the worlds of art and technology influence the elevated genre works he writes, which feature strong-willed but underestimated outsider characters navigating between different worlds, while standing up for their truth against opposition from a dominant culture.

Trey holds a Bachelors in Studio Art: Conceptual and Information Arts from San Francisco State University. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, a science teacher. In his spare time, he likes to tinker with illustration, sound and animation. You can check out some of his art at www.goodtimeghost.com.

HAINT NO PROBLEM

Short film script - 7 pages

Logline: A man on the run takes refuge in his aunt's house in the country, only to stumble into a greater threat.

HAINT NO PROBLEM

written by

Trey Jackson

July 11, 2026
Outline

FADE IN:

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

CHARLIE (late 20s, casual but city-boy stylish, on edge) drives his beat-up silver SUV down a country road. Late afternoon sun peeks through tall trees. It will be dark soon.

EXT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Charlie looks behind him after he turns off onto a gravel road, as though to make sure he's not being followed. A cover of "Country Roads" plays on the radio.

He's listening to a voicemail from his sister, MAGGIE.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Please call me, Charlie, I know we haven't talked in a long time, but it's important. OK?

He hangs up and keeps driving.

EXT. SMALL COUNTRY CABIN - DUSK

As daylight starts to fade, Charlie arrives at a small, old house -- more of a cabin, really -- in a clearing ringed on all sides by dense forest.

Charlie gets his duffel bag and backpack out of the car, and takes them into the house. He hears something RUSTLING in the forest, but shrugs it off.

INT. SMALL COUNTRY CABIN - DUSK

The house is dark, plastic wrapping on the furniture, mostly clean but there's a layer of new dust -- it hasn't been cleaned recently. In the living room area, stacks of books on esoteric topics line a bookshelf and copies of the Fortean Times magazine sit on the coffee table.

As Charlie enters the house, his aunt DOLORES (50s, straight shooter, threadbare black clothes, unkempt hair) stands, arms folded, staring at him.

DOLORES
You almost didn't make it before dark. You need to be more careful.

CHARLIE
Hi to you too, Aunt Dolores.

Charlie drops his duffel bag and backpack on the plastic-covered couch.

CHARLIE
We've been over this, I haven't forgotten the rules.

He grabs a beer from the fridge. There's hardly anything else in it. He heads for the front door.

DOLORES
Don't linger out there, Chuck.

Charlie calls back:

CHARLIE
It's Charlie now!

EXT. CABIN PORCH - NIGHT

Charlie sits on the porch and cracks open the can of beer. He whistles absent-mindedly. A minute later, he hears HIS SAME WHISTLE coming back from the trees.

He jumps up, on edge. No one comes out.

Then he hears a voice coming out of the darkness, just beyond what he can see. It sounds like a child.

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hello?
(beat.)
Hello?

Charlie peers into the darkness, trying to see who's making the sound. He does not respond.

CHILD'S VOICE (O.S.)(CONT'D)
You have to help me.

Then a TICKING SOUND, like a clock, is heard moving around the ring of trees, to Charlie's left. Charlie follows the sound's movement in disbelief.

CHARLIE
What in the...?

From that ring of trees, closer, MUCH CLOSER, to the house, Charlie hears ALMOST LIKE DOLORES', from the same place. It's off, though, too strained and gravelly.

DOLORES' VOICE (O.S.)
Come on out, Charlie.

Chilled to the bone, Charlie backs inside and SLAMS the door.

INT. SMALL COUNTRY CABIN - NIGHT

He goes inside. His Aunt's frantic.

DOLORES
What did you do?

CHARLIE
Don't worry about it, Auntie.
It'll be fine.

But he's not convinced either.

DOLORES
Why did you call them here? You
never listen.

Charlie waves her off as he tries calling his partner, no answer.

CHARLIE
C'mon, c'mon... fuck.

From outside the creature MIMICS CHARLIES'S VOICE, closer now, like it's on the porch.

CHARLIE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Don't leave me.

DOLORES
(voice shaking)
Make sure all the doors and
windows are locked up tight.

He obeys and starts checking the windows.

CHARLIE
I should double check everything
anyway, until my friend comes to
get me.

He finishes the window check and makes sure the back door is locked.

DOLORES
You always think you know better.

CHARLIE
It's just confidence. I've always
been like this. It's who I am. I'm
just being myself.

DOLORES
Well, stop doin' that. Nobody
likes it.

CHARLIE
Don't need to remind me. There's a reason why I left.

DOLORES
We all hoped you'd come back a different person, but I guess it didn't take.

He rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE
We've had this *exact* conversation before.

DOLORES
Well, this will be the last time.

Charlie looks up at her. That was odd. Her face is expressionless.

CHARLIE
What the fuck is out there? What does it want?

DOLORES
You ask me, we're just game to them. We're being fished for.

CHARLIE
By who?

Dolores laughs to herself. It's a little unsettling.

DOLORES
Rabbits and pheasants, chickens and cows.

Dolores turns serious again.

DOLORES (CONT'D)
Don't leave the house tonight. Don't leave til dawn.

CHARLIE
I *know*, Aunt Dolores.

Dolores looks at him mournfully, with finality.

DOLORES
I just worry about you.

With that, Dolores walks back down the hallway into shadow until we can't see her anymore.

Charlie gets a call.

CHARLIE
Nate, good to hear from ya, brother.

NATE (O.S.)
Stay cool, I'm on my way. Gonna be a delay. The opps realized the package is missing, so I gotta take the long way out.

CHARLIE
Well, hurry it up. This place is fucking weird.

NATE (O.S.)
(amused)
You're the one chose it. Ain't that where your people are from?
(beat.)
Are you good?

CHARLIE
Yeah, yeah, I'm good. Just rather be somewhere else, that's all.

Nate laughs.

NATE (O.S.)
Wouldn't we all, bro. They say just don't whistle in the dark and you'll be fine.

Nate hangs up. Charlie looks around for Dolores.

CHARLIE
Dolores! Hey! You back there?

There's no response. Charlie tries to laugh, to reassure himself.

CHARLIE
Not funny, Auntie! I *know* you didn't leave this house!

The attempt at levity falls flat in the empty space.

Charlie goes into the back bedroom, and not only is Dolores not there, everything looks undisturbed. The bed is perfectly made up, desk is clean, no indication someone lives here.

Frantic, Charlie runs through the rest of the little house looking for her but now she's nowhere to be found. The house is abnormally still. No sound, no breeze, nothing.

He gets another call: his sister again. He answers this time.

CHARLIE
Maggie, I—

MAGGIE
Charlie, let me speak. I was trying to reach you ‘cause Dolores passed away a couple days ago. I’m sorry.

CHARLIE
What? How—

MAGGIE
She’d been fightin’ cancer and didn’t tell nobody. You told me not to call you, but I know y’all were close. Don’t be mad at me.

CHARLIE
No, I just... thanks for letting me know. It just woulda been nice to say goodbye is all.

Maggie sounds surprised at his softness.

MAGGIE
Well listen, if you need anything--

Charlie hears scratching at the back door and hangs up on her. He grabs his bag and backpack to get the fuck out of there.

From outside, he hears a DOLORES’ voice.

DOLORES’ VOICE (O.S.)
Let me in.

CHARLIE
Nah, fuck this.

He runs for the door and hears FOOTSTEPS around side of the house, along with the TICKING SOUND, matching his pace.

EXT. SMALL COUNTRY CABIN - NIGHT

He runs to the front door, takes a deep breath, and opens it to run to the car.

Just past the porch is something human-shaped, pale, too tall, with too-long limbs, wearing an approximation of DOLORES’ FACE. It repeats his whistle back and LUNGES AT HIM.

Cut to black.

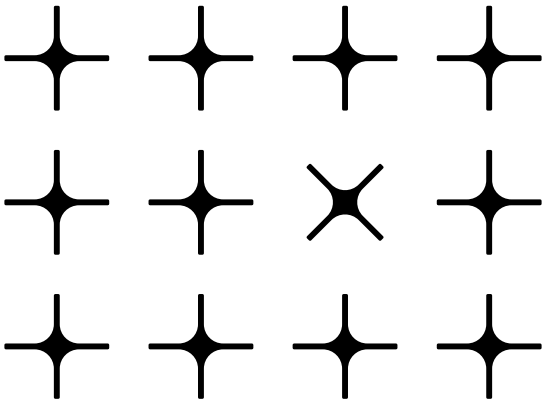
EXT. SMALL COUNTRY CABIN - LATER

Nate (mid-30s, calm & collected, slick dresser) finally makes it to the house, only to find the duffel bag left on the porch, with blood on it. He's creeped out. He grabs it and gets to his car. As he unlocks the door, he hears Charlie's voice, but it doesn't sound quite right.

CHARLIE'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hello? You have to help me.

Close on Nate. He forces a smile, shakes his head, and gets in the car quick.

THE CAR WHEELS SQUEAL OVER BLACK.



GOOD VIBES ONLY

Short film script - 12 pages

Logline: A young traveler and a local girl flirt as something dark and supernatural bubbles under the surface of a tourist trap bar.

GOOD VIBES ONLY

written by
Trey Jackson

August 5, 2026
First Draft

FADE IN

INT. CLUB CUEVA - NIGHT

A young man, THE TOURIST, descends into a cavernous dive bar in a foreign country. He is clearly a traveler, with a big orange backpack. He has a goofy sincerity about him.

The Jamaican DJ SELEKTA, wearing sunglasses indoors, is playing the UB40 song 'Kingston Town' and lightly toasting ad libs.

DJ SELEKTA
Come now! Rock with your selector, people. Rub and scrub, with this musical dub. Come boogaloo upon the barbecue, do it child!

The vibe is great, diverse groups of people laughing and drinking. Everyone's having a fantastic time.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - BAR - NIGHT

The Tourist goes to the bar, and orders his drink from the friendly expat BARTENDER.

BARTENDER
What's your poison, amigo?

TOURIST
(looks at menu)
Wow. Hard to decide. These all look really good. I'll try the "King for a Day."

BARTENDER
Excellent choice. One "King for a Day," coming right up.

An alluring woman locks eyes with him; let's call her THE SIREN. She has a mischievous twinkle in her eye. The tourist is distracted as the bartender brings him his drink.

TOURIST
How much do I owe you?

BARTENDER
Tell ya what, pilgrim. I like your style. First one's on the house.

TOURIST
Are you sure?
(MORE)

TOURIST (CONT'D)
Most people out here seem happy to take a tourist's cash.

BARTENDER
Once you try the drinks here, I'm pretty confident you'll happily give me more of your cash. Enjoy yourself, you're in paradise!

INT. CLUB CUEVA - TABLE - NIGHT

The Tourist and the Siren talk. She is charismatic, but there's something wounded behind her eyes.

SIREN
Let me guess. Tourist... American?

TOURIST
That obvious?

SIREN
I'm afraid so, my love. Not that it looks bad on you. You have a nice look.

Tourist blushes, thrown off. He is definitely not smooth.

TOURIST
(loss for words)
Ahh, uh, you, y'know, you're not so bad yourself. I mean —

She smiles. Too easy.

SIREN
Sorry, my English isn't so good.

TOURIST
No no, it's great. I've been lucky people here speak so much English.

SIREN
What have you seen here so far?

TOURIST
(sheepish)
Ah, you know, tourist shit. I went to the... Onnadumbo Valley, I wanna say?

The Siren laughs a beautiful, musical laugh.

SIREN
Of course! “The navel of the world.” The indigenous people here believed that it was an opening to another world — the universe that existed before this one. But we say it *N’natumbo*. Named after an ancient god.

TOURIST
My bad! They say there are monsters that come from the old world? I’m really interested in the traditional beliefs, do you know more about that?

SIREN
I do. But first I want to dance!

Tourist sets his backpack down.

TOURIST
Is my stuff safe here?

SIREN
This place is really safe. Nothing bad happens here. We’re all connected, we all keep an eye on each other, you know?

They dance, she’s uninhibited and fun, the tourist starts a bit awkward but follows her lead and gets into the vibe.

The energy of the dance floor is infectious and they lose themselves in the music. Everyone dances in synchronized patterns, like they’re different cells in one organism.

The bartender watches them with an odd expression on his face.

The Tourist and the Siren come back from the dance floor a little sweaty and sip on their drinks.

TOURIST
This place does have a great vibe. I was trying to think of another word, that sounds kinda corny, but... good energy I guess?

Siren laughs.

SIREN
Good Vibes, yeah. What’s wrong with vibes now? It’s OK to just say it.
(MORE)

SIREN (CONT'D)
(beat.)
I hope you can stay for a while.

As she says this, she touches the Tourist's hand, laughs. Something ODD about the LOOK IN HER EYES. Too hungry.

The Tourist pulls his hand back. The spell is broken.

TOURIST
Maybe? We'll see.
(beat.)
I'm just gonna go to the bathroom real quick.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - HALLWAY - NIGHT

As he walks towards the hallway to the bathroom, it seems to EXTEND. He keeps walking towards the hallway, but it is IMPOSSIBLY LONG.

As he passes the bar section, some of the people are blurry, as though seen through a gauzy filter but some are VERY CLEAR and they STARE AT HIM, UNSMILING.

Time seems to suddenly RAMP UP and then —

DJ
Reee-wind!

CUT TO:

INT. CLUB CUEVA - BAR - NIGHT

The Tourist lifts his head up to look at the bartender, who, smiling, hands him his drink.

BARTENDER
Try the "King for a Day." You look like you deserve some down time.

Tourist looks around the bar, disoriented. It's still a party atmosphere, positive energy all around. He has NO MEMORY of what's just happened.

TOURIST
(confused)
Sure, sure. Sounds good.

The Siren catches his eye; we notice she's wearing a slightly different outfit.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - TABLE - NIGHT

Tourist sits on the stool at the Siren's table.

As they talk, the woman leans in, curious and sincere rather than flirty like before, as though she's really trying to bond with him this time.

TOURIST
Hey, is this seat taken?

SIREN
It is now. It's all you. So... how long are you here for?

TOURIST
Just a few weeks, then it's back to the mines. I wish I could stay.

SIREN
Well. As someone who lives here in paradise, it is different than being a visitor. But I still say the grass is greener. That's what you say, right?

TOURIST laughs.

TOURIST
Exactly. But I could imagine living here.

SIREN (CONT'D)
You haven't gotten tired of us yet?

TOURIST
(looks around the bar)
I don't think I could ever get tired of this place, are you kidding?

SIREN
(relieved, smiles)
That's nice of you to say.

TOURIST
Everyone here is so friendly. Makes me feel like I belong.

SIREN
It's good vibes, right?

TOURIST
Exactly! Exactly.

SIREN
So what's your next move?

TOURIST
Well I'd definitely like to vibe with you more, get to know you better.

SIREN
I'd like that.

TOURIST
Maybe we could go somewhere away from all these people?

SIREN
We could go out back, there's a lovely little space there, we could look at the stars.
(laughs)
They also have hung strings of those cute little lights you tourists like so much. We could keep this... energetic exchange going. For as long as you like.

Siren touches Tourist's hand, looks him in the eyes.

SIREN
As long as it takes.

Again, Tourist becomes uneasy. He gets off of his stool.

TOURIST
Maybe I should go — both of us should. You could come with me.

He places his hand on hers.

SIREN
I'm not leaving with a total stranger.

She pulls her hand back.

TOURIST
I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that.
(beat.)
I guess I'm gonna head out.

SIREN
(cold)
Suit yourself. I've got nothing but time.

Tourist regards her — what a weird thing to say. He says nothing and turns away.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - NIGHT

As he walks towards the stairs, he realizes that the bar has fallen silent. Music stops. Everyone is looking at him, blank.

The Bartender smiles but his eyes are empty and he is very stiff. When he speaks, his voice is mechanical yet sinister.

BARTENDER
This is all for you, all of it. We only radiate positivity in here. Come on. Just drink with us. I like your style. You deserve a break.

TOURIST
I think I'm gonna go.

BARTENDER
Door's right through there.

Tourist leaves the Bartender, goes up the stairs. The Siren follows him.

The Tourist makes it to the door. As he touches the handle, the Siren grabs his other wrist. He turns towards her, angry, but she locks eyes with him and he freezes under the intensity of her gaze.

SIREN
Not. Yet.

The tourist suddenly STRUGGLES TO BREATHE.

SMASH CUT to DJ SELEKTA

DJ
Reee-load!

"Kingston Town" starts over again.

Tourist descends the stairs again, a little confused. DJ shouts him out.

DJ
Welcome, welcome, to the young man, with the orange backpack. Forever coming back. Will he be her liberator, or is he just another impersonator.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - BAR - NIGHT

Tourist glances at the menu and orders a drink.

TOURIST
I'll have the King for a Day.

BARTENDER
You're the boss, chief.

The Siren is at the bar this time. She catches the Tourist's eye and he goes over to her but more casually, with confidence.

INT. CLUB CUEVA - TABLE - CONTINUOUS

TOURIST
Hey, do you wanna dan—

SIREN
Look, I'm short on time so I'm just gonna lay it all out for you. It's best for a relationship to start out with total honesty. So here we go.

The music FADES into the background as the Siren TAKES A DEEP BREATH —

SIREN (CONT'D)
I've become an appendage of a monstrous intelligence older than time that feeds on human consciousness. This cosmic predator burrowed into the ground and created this bar as a perfect hunting ground.

CUT TO:

INT. CLUB CUEVA - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cut to them suddenly in the bar bathroom. In the mirror behind her he sees the indistinct form of a giant spider head as she continues to explain.

SIREN (CONT'D)
N'natumbo appears in my mind like an iridescent spider with a million eyes. He's all around us right now, enveloping us. A many-armed god that feeds off our pleasure. Look at my arm out of the corner of your eye; you can see the webs.

And he can, webs tugging at her elbow, like a marionette.

TOURIST
What— I don't—

SIREN
Shh. Just listen. In order to escape this paradise, I have to reel someone else in. It can only trap people with a certain *light*.

An unnatural shadow falls across his face and chest.

SIREN
Sorry, you're it. It's already happened. Your consciousness is being digested, in a way.

Tourist is sweating, unable to comprehend what's happening but afraid just the same.

TOURIST
This is fucking crazy... this can't be happening!

SIREN
You know why you can never get to the bathroom on your own? Because N'natumbo uses your waste energy to sustain you somehow in your time cocoon.

TOURIST
Time... cocoon?

He glitches out for a moment, as though reality is breaking around him. An otherworldly silvery sheen, like the scales of a fish, washes over him.

SIREN
Too much too fast, I see. The concept may not translate exactly. But you'll understand soon enough.

CUT TO:

INT. CLUB CUEVA - TABLE - NIGHT

And they're back at their table.

The Siren gestures at the people who are still moving, as blurs, around the people still in focus.

SIREN
Listen, the upshot is, I'll swap with you, yeah? And then I can regrow my soul, and become one of those blurry people, on our original plane of existence, who have no idea that this bar is not a bar.

The people in focus stare, motionless and hostile, at the tourist.

SIREN (CONT'D)
And no inkling that these other people, with their terrible perfect clarity, who can't smile on their own, aren't even people anymore. Just sensory reconstructions, memories of pleasures past.

Angle on the bartender, watching this exchange intently.

BARTENDER
(to himself)
Easy... don't rush it...

SIREN
They need your energy to feel the slivers of themselves that remain. The more we feed, the more of ourselves we're allowed to keep. Like Tony, the bartender. I'm so sorry but it's easier if you just submit. You'll get your chance to escape, someday. I'm so so sorry.

TOURIST
I read about this, at the valley, it's just a myth—

SIREN
Myth does not mean not real. It just means a different kind of real. Just be glad you're not one of the regulars at a table. They've got a long way to go; they can't steal their own light. You, you're starting off at the top of the food chain.

She smiles sadly.

SIREN (CONT'D)
One one hand, you're the light-up bulb on the anglerfish. On the other hand, the drinks are unusually excellent, and you will get to have sex with some genuinely amazing people. You won't age, and you can't fail. So... just have fun with it?
(beat.)
Remember, you were chosen. You're perfect for this. You felt this energy from the moment you walked in. I knew you would be on the right frequency.

As she speaks, we continue pushing in on him, stiffening, his eyes dart back and forth, he's trying to move but he can't, trying to scream but he can't... as he's being excavated by this *thing*.

SIREN (CONT'D)
Y'know. Good vibes only.

From behind him we hear the roar of an unfathomable ocean. A cloud of ash and coruscating sunlight transform the Tourist.

The Siren kisses him, walks away, TRANSFORMING INTO A BLUR on her way up the stairs.

Door SLAMS. Music SWELLS.

As "Kingston Town" blasts again, the Tourist turns around, resolved into a PLASTIC SMILING VERSION OF HIMSELF. He sees a woman at the bar. She smiles, takes her drink and walks towards him.

He now has the SAME ODD LOOK IN HIS EYES the Siren did at the beginning.

CUT TO:

The DJ grins broadly.

DJ SELEKTA
Come now, keep jumping and moving to the sound. Get right with the get down. Rock it! Come and find ya baby, don't say maybe, just give a smile. No rush now...

He lifts his sunglasses to reveal that HIS EYES ARE COMPLETELY BLACK.

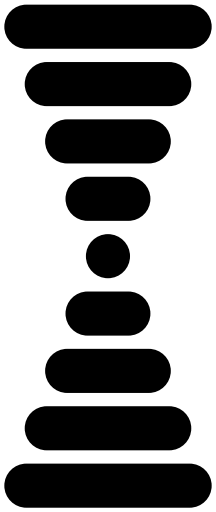
DJ SELEKTA
...Just stay a while.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

White text, all caps:

GOOD VIBES ONLY

FADE OUT



YOU PLAY THE SWORDSMAN

Feature film excerpt - 19 pages

Logline: In a world where you can swap personalities as easily as you can change clothes, Mason, a persona designer, accidentally unleashes the persona of his badass childhood hero, The Swordsman. As The Swordsman is shared, Mason must contain the ensuing chaos, along with a private investigator, Fatima, who opposes the persona technology. But how can you stop someone who is everyone?

Excerpt: Fatima is while investigating an instance where an illegal persona has harmed her girlfriend, Tati. She interrupts Mason during a virtual tour he's giving to student interns. Mason, responsible for the persona, has to decide whether to delete it or continue his investigation.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Carver. Fatima Temple. I'm contracted with Machine Bureau security? And, uh, I need to borrow you.

Mason looks around for someone who can verify this.

MASON
Um, I'm in the middle of...

FATIMA
Yeah! Very enlightening. But —

Fatima looks up at the hologram heads of the students. Mason makes a gesture, and a 'mute' icon appears.

FATIMA
A young woman who works here — she's dying. Brain damage from a neural implant, we think.

Mason reacts, but he's still confused.

MASON
Why are you telling *me* this?

FATIMA
It involves personas, so I was told you're the best person to explain it? By Jennifer Gyft, so take it up with your boss if you have an issue.

Fatima reaches over the table and pulls up a digital signature from Jennifer. Mason gestures, and sends a message to Ryszard in the other room. Then he sighs and unmutes the holograms.

MASON
I'm sorry, everyone, something's come up and I've got to go.

The students groan.

MASON
But you're not done here today.

Ryszard rushes in excitedly.

RYSZARD
I can do this. I was listening, you know.

MASON
They're all yours. Be gentle?

RYSZARD
(excited)
Oh, sure! Whatever it was you just said.
(to students' heads)
On the topic of what constitutes a real mind, there have been also, some fascinating experiments running personas in cybernetically uplifted animals. This of course calls into question whether the self is unique to human beings...

MASON
(quietly)
Hell of a starting point.

FATIMA
(unconvincingly)
They'll be fiiine.

CUT TO:

INT. PEOPLE MOVER™ - DAY

Fatima and Mason enter the people mover™, a sleek future elevator.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
How often do people experience... errors while running a persona? Could brain trauma cause the software to stop working?

MASON
Sure, if the parts of the brain the implant needs to connect to in order to operate were damaged, the persona could shut down.

FATIMA
That's not what it's doing. This is more like... speaking in tongues.

They exit the people mover™ onto the 77th floor.

INT. COPSEC DEPARTMENT - DAY

Fatima and Mason enter the CorpSec offices, a dense grid of terminals and monitors. Mostly, it's filled with crime scene technicians (all robots) with the exception of another human investigator, NASH, a blustery, aggressive cop type. Fatima and Mason head towards him.

MASON (CONT'D)
Why was the victim—

FATIMA
Tati—

MASON
Uh, sure.

Fatima catches herself, stiffens and becomes more professional.

FATIMA
Tatiana.

MASON
You called her Tati.

Fatima relaxes a bit as her cover is blown.

FATIMA
We... were involved.

MASON
I'm not an investigator, it doesn't—
(shakes head)
OK, so Tati was running a persona when she was injured. And it was damaged somehow?

FATIMA
Right. She's twitching, repeating unusual phrases.

MASON
Why not just take her to the hospital? Or GovCorp Justice Hall?

FATIMA
Since it was a persona issue, we brought her here to see if we could make sense of it, make sure Machine Bureau isn't liable. So I need to know why this happened to her, and how long she'd been—

MASON
—Someone else.
(beat)
And if it had been a long time, then how did she feel about you?

FATIMA
(pause)
That had crossed my mind, yes.
(beat)
Once personas reach maximum saturation in the population, would you ever meet a real person again? How would you know if you did?

MASON
I feel like we're maybe getting off-topic...

Fatima looks off into the distance for just a second.

FATIMA
OK. OK, yeah.
(beat)
I mean, how would you know, if someone was running a persona right now?

Mason gestures to Nash, who's busily and noisily ordering the CSI robots around.

MASON
Take him. He's obviously running a GoodCop persona.

FATIMA
Nash? I mean, yeah, but he's also in our CopSec department, so, lucky guess.

MASON
Well. OK. Look at his head. It's constantly cocked slightly to one side, the side favoring the implant. Sign of a cheap implant, by the way.

They're nearly within earshot of Nash now.

FATIMA
Mmhm.

MASON
Second, look at how much he blinks. It's like, a lot.

FATIMA
I always thought that was just Nash being Nash.

MASON
Nash being GoodCop.

They walk up to Nash. He shakes hands with Mason.

NASH
Good to meet you. You must be the persona tech big brain. I'm Nash.

MASON
Mason Carver. Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Nash.

Nash pauses, head cocked to the side.

NASH
Make your acquaintance, huh. Interesting turn of phrase.
(quieter, to self)
Pleased to... make your...that one's new to me.

MASON
Well, I'll let you get back to it.

They walk away from Nash, out of the main offices and into an adjoining room.

INT. CONTAINMENT ROOM - DAY

A large room, decorated in a minimalist style. The floor and walls are made to look like light wood or bamboo. Tati lies on a hospital bed in the far corner.

MASON
Finally, repetition of unusual phrases. GoodCop especially is filled with stock phrases, so when something doesn't fit — and a lot of things don't fit — they take extra time to process. Nash is a longtime user, probably.

Mason examines Fatima.

MASON (CONT'D)
Not you, though.

Fatima walks over to Tati's body.

FATIMA
No need for that persona shit to do my job and keep myself in check.
(MORE)

FATIMA (CONT'D)
I practice the ancient and noble art of self-discipline.

MASON
Well, look at you.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
Fuck your approval, Carver.
(laughing)
Nash can be helpful. He just needs a little push.

Fatima caresses Tati's forehead. Tati is still twitching, and her lips move silently.

MASON
Nah, we are good on him.

Mason pauses and looks to make sure Nash is out of earshot.

MASON (CONT'D)
He's going to miss something, because he thinks he's much better at this than he really is, and needs to makes quick judgments to maintain his self-image.

He turns his attention to Tati, and kneels at the side of the bed. Still keeping his distance.

FATIMA
Neat party trick. What can you tell me about her?

MASON
A persona malfunction is definitely causing that behavior.

A green light extends from Mason's cybernetic eye, scanning Tati's body.

MASON (CONT'D)
I'm going to give her implant a little jump start. Don't be worried, it's safe.

FATIMA
I wasn't, till you said that.

Mason lowers his eye next to Tati's temple, and a different light emanates from it. She jolts up momentarily, and then settles back down, but now she's repeating full phrases.

TATI
You and me forever baby. You—you have to put a stop this baby, here and now. Here and forever baby, stop me. Stop to this, forever.

A flicker of recognition flashes across Mason's face, but he quickly recovers. This is definitely the girl from the club.

FATIMA
What do you think caused it?

MASON
Some of it's due to exhaustion, caused by running the persona for too long. But that would usually just make the persona shut down... in this case it was aggravated by some other conflicting programming, maybe from a low-level intelligent agent.

FATIMA
The initial trauma, though. That doesn't look accidental.

MASON
What — what do you mean by that?

FATIMA
Well, it's clearly another person, an interaction with this individual who set her off. You think this instigator — maybe that's a better word — you think they could've been running a persona that affected her like this?

MASON
(suddenly alert)
That would be unusual.

FATIMA
It would be. There was a registered level 3 disturbance last night, at a club I know for a fact Tati had gone to. Guy *destroyed* some bouncers. Here's the weird thing: when we pulled up the footage—

MASON
(nervous)
You already pulled up the footage?

FATIMA
Of course. What I'm saying is, where we should be able to see the perp's face, there's just this bright light. I thought it was just a malfunction, but it's across different cameras, any angle you look at this guy.

Mason stands up.

MASON
So strange. Didn't think that kind of violence happened anymore.

Fatima places a hand on Tati's forehead and looks to the heavens for a moment, mouthing something.

Mason pulls up a screen from a device on his wrist, and types quickly in a kind of shorthand. He snapshots her behavior.

Fatima turns to him, bemused.

FATIMA
We're all just raw material to you, aren't we?

MASON
(caught)
Uh, it's um, nothing personal.

FATIMA
(smiling)
Exactly.

MASON
I apologize. I should go.

Fatima examines him closely for a moment.

FATIMA
Here's another observation for your little log book.

MASON
Uh, OK?

FATIMA
(pointed)
You're very *nice*.

MASON
(laughs nervously)
So... are you.
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)
Do you not see that in your line of work?

FATIMA
What I mean is: for you, being nice is antisocial behavior. It's how you avoid actually engaging with people. See? We all have our party tricks here.

Mason is stung by this, but covers it well.

MASON
The persona she's running isn't one I'm familiar with. Hard to tell, but… it could be something underground. Unlicensed.

FATIMA
Thanks. I'm sure I'll have more questions. But for now, just one: we can fix it, right?

Mason nods.

MASON
I'll work up a fix. But be careful bringing her back. You don't just pull someone out of a persona while it's still running—even if it's malfunctioning. It's dangerous to wake a deep sleeper.

Nash pokes his head into the room.

NASH
You almost done in here?

FATIMA
For now. We'll track this guy's datashadow: location info, nearby purchases and stuff. It'll just take a little longer. If you think of anything relevant, let me know.

MASON
Yeah, definitely.

Mason, in a bit of a daze, moves towards the door. Before he leaves, he pauses.

MASON
I'm sorry about Tatiana.

Fatima regards Mason for a moment, trying to read him.

FATIMA
Thanks.

He nods, and exits.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - DUSK

Mason gathers his things together and prepares to head home as evening light streams through the large windows of his office.

A giant screen pops up from his desk showing his boss, Jennifer Gyft. She is excited.

JENNIFER
I heard great things about the tour today, great things. And we're ahead on the architect! I need a name by next week.

MASON
We're thinking Kingsley Pettyjohn.

JENNIFER
Love. It. Listen, how's that persona damage case going? Sorry to spring that on you. But it's OK? She's an odd one, right, that investigator?

MASON
She's fine. Very non-CopSec, interestingly enough. She seems pretty spiritual, but like, high-functioning? Anyway, it's going well. I don't anticipate it taking up much more of my time.

JENNIFER
So glad to hear it. Thanks for taking this one for the team.

MASON
Sure, sure.
(thinks a moment)
Listen. I have an idea I've been working on that I want to pitch you. It's a meta-program that would allow you to switch between installed personas.

JENNIFER
If you can pull that off, that would be a game-changer for the entire industry. You'd only need to hit the apparatus once?

MASON
Exactly. Pre-load all of your personas and switch over at will.

JENNIFER
You have something to show?

MASON
I will. By the end of the week.

JENNIFER
Happy to hear that. Now go home and get some rest. Get back in fighting shape for tomorrow.

MASON
You know it.

The bright light of the Jennifer-square vanishes and Mason is left in his now-dark office. He smiles to himself, satisfied.

CUT TO:

INT. FAKE BEACH SET - DAY

A fake beach set in a studio, with real plastic palm trees and a holographic ocean. In contrast to the polish of the other commercials, this is giving futuristic local informercial.

NEON NEAL, a cheap, awful, beardy hipster with blocky sunglasses and glowing clothing, is the pitchman.

NEON NEAL
Premium? That word sounds elitist? Here's a better word: effective. Another word: affordable. You think you're Steve Jobs? Congrats, bro. You just played yourself.

The Palm Greaser icon, an orange hand with a single drop to the upper right, appears next to him and spins into place.

NEON NEAL (CONT'D)
You need the Palm Greaser! For that increased socio-moral flexibility. Hustle hard. Make deals. Win the future.

The icon for the ‘Go-Getter’ whooshes onto the screen behind him. It is dark green, a jagged line going up and to the right.

He puts on a terrible gray blazer and clip on tie. A cardboard-looking briefcase is tossed into his hand from offscreen as he stiffly walks across the set.

NEON NEAL
Go-Getter! Increase your motivation on the job. Get that promotion! Get those vested stock options!
(turns to a different camera)
And finally.

Close on Neon Neal’s smarmy face. Too close.

NEON NEAL (CONT’D)
Party Girl!
(sexily)
Reduce your inhibitions. Become the bad bitch you know you are deep inside.

The words “let go for that special someone” scroll across the screen in tacky, wavy type.

It’s OK! We cut to black so you don’t have to see him breathing all weird for very long.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON’S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mason impatiently presses his thumb to the key-screen in front of his door. He hears a satisfying chime, and the door spirals away, widening like a camera aperture as he ducks in.

INT. MASON’S APARTMENT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Mason’s apartment is clean, minimal. Exposed bamboo walls. Enough networked art frames displaying gently animated abstract patterns, and gorgeous but austere chairs no one’s sat on for years for us to go ‘we get it, you’re a designer’...

...but what catches our eye is the APPARATUS.

It’s in strong contrast to the Apple-like cleanliness of the equipment at Mason’s day job. At the top is a bright light, like you’d see in a dental office; in front of the light is welded metal with strips cut open for the light to strobe.

Headphones wind to archaic audio equipment, circuits bent to provide the proper mind-bending stereophonic sounds.

Circular hard drives are attached to the back, blue lights on top pulsing softly.

Next to this is a VR/computer table, a smaller, rectangular version of the gesture-controlled setup at Mason's office. He sits down at it, pulls up some floating screens with the persona head diagrams we've already seen, and starts typing and gesturing. There's also a lot of information on the Swordsman.

In a new screen, Mason transfers his notes from the investigation via his wrist computer, including some of the phrases Tati was saying. Mason adds the words 'VESTAL SATIN?' in caps.

He's also pulling up an online chat group called THE FICTION UNDERGROUND; bubbles open up showing the heads/torsos of the other people in the room. They include MAYA JANE, a dark-skinned hippie full of Black Girl Magic, and JONO DE RAAD, an acerbic Dutchman.

As their conversation begins, the other heads of the people in the Fiction Underground room turn away, fade into grayscale, and then disappear.

MAYA JANE
Maaaaaaason! You look terrible.

MASON
Maybe I should become a Good Habit person, take up jogging.

MAYA JANE
You're not going to start jogging, *Mason*, just because you had a bad day at our dream job. And anyway, that is not the headline.

MASON
Then what is?

MAYA JANE
Oh my, playing coy. Didn't we tell you not to run a shitty beta of a fucking homicidal maniac?

MASON
I know, I know.

JONO
Do you? Because what the fuck happened out there last night?

MASON
Really?
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)
I figured you would have probably gone over it already.

JONO
(long sigh)
Consensus is, you ran the Swordsman persona for too long and ran yourself ragged. Then you lost control, and without the safeguards of a licensed persona, the Swordsman took over...

MASON
Not true. I was in control. It was just a weird interaction. She was running Vestal Satin. I didn't realize that .ill file was even *out* there.

JONO
Do you ever get tired of the dichotomy? Lecturing people about the evils of unlicensed personas by day, running reckless betas of fictional assassins at night?

MASON
Not really. It makes me complex.

JONO
I can't even begin—

MASON
I'm *joking*. Relax.

MAYA JANE
At least you didn't kill anybody. Not that I've heard, anyway.
(beat.)
I will never understand why bouncer androids contain a blood-like substance, though.

MASON
People won't hold back on androids. They see blood, they think it's a person, they pull back.

JONO
Why can't we just recognize all sentient life as equal?

MAYA JANE
Jono, you fucking hippie. Don't project how we fleshbags want to be treated onto a different category of being.

MASON
Guys. Focus. I didn't just run it as-is. Not to be all artisanal and shit —

MAYA JANE
— Too late —

JONO laughs.

MASON
But you know you gotta build a volatile personality like that from the ground up. Only way you know what it's actually capable of. And that's just what we—

JONO
But we *don't* know what it's capable of. Look, I know you're top of your field—that's a big part of why we chose to work with you on this... well, insanity—but you have to face facts.
(deep breath)
We don't know what we're dealing with, beyond the fact that aggression is built into the base of it. It isn't like working with Sherlock Holmes, or like, Elizabeth Bennet. This persona is made for damage.
(beat.)
Consider shutting it down.

Mason and Maya Jane react loudly.

JONO
Oh, come on! Am I the only one thinking this? Am I the only adult in the room?

MAYA JANE
We had a setback. It just means we have to fix the problem. I'll start digging into the hardware interface tonight.

JONO
Tell that to the girl whose brain is all fucked up.
(to Mason)
And have you even done a diagnostic check on yourself yet?

MASON
I gotta go. I'll upload a brain scan so you can take a look, and then we'll talk about it *later*.

Mason hits a red button. The heads vanish, conversation over.

INT. SWORDSMAN'S WORLD BAR - DAY

In the artificial technicolor world of the Swordsman, he and Vestal Satin are drinking in a tiki-themed bar. Vestal wears an evening gown with a flower in her hair. They banter playfully.

VESTAL SATIN
You scared him off! You owe me a centaur, Swordsman.

SWORDSMAN
Centaurs aren't as rare as you think, my dear Vestal. but tell me, Ms. Satin, how is a warhead like a rocking chair?

VESTAL SATIN
I don't take your meaning, Swordsman.

SWORDSMAN
Ah... but I think you do.

Suddenly they RUSH into a forceful embrace, kissing passionately.

VESTAL SATIN
You and me forever, baby.

The Swordsman glances over at a Bartender.

SWORDSMAN
I'll have what she's having. And we'll both have more.

INT. FATIMA'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

A skeptical Fatima watches the preceding scene on the wall of her office. It's dark, and the surrounding offices are empty.

FATIMA
(to movie screen)
Pause.
(muttering)
Just as corny as I remembered.

She moves around a couple of screens on the table, and tugs up on one to float it in front of her at eye level.

Tati emerges from the shadows, comes up behind Fatima and rubs her shoulders.

TATI
Hey.

FATIMA
You're awake. How do you feel?

Tati kisses her on the forehead.

TATI
Right as rain.

Fatima frowns.

FATIMA
You sure?

Tati walks away from her, waves her hand airily as she enters the kitchen. Appliances softly hum and whirr, producing a cup of hot cocoa.

TATI
Sure I'm sure. What were you doing out here?

FATIMA
Watching one of these old Swordsman movies.

TATI
Nostalgia? I can get with that.

Fatima can't let it go any more.

FATIMA
Where did you get the Vestal Satin persona, Tati?

TATI
Still on that? You already got Mason fired. It's over. I'm fine.

FATIMA
You can't believe Mason was right to run an unlicensed, dangerous —

TATI
He fixed me! He was really sorry!
(beat.)
He did more than you could.

She immediately realizes she shouldn't have said that. Fatima looks down at the workstation.

FATIMA
I can't stop you from making stupid choices. The most I can do is clean up your mess!

TATI
Yeah, you saved me, OK? Thank you. I'm not being ungrateful! I just— it's an experience, a real experience. It's not like running any of this commercial shit. You haven't done it in years, you don't know what this was like.

Tati looks off wistfully.

TATI
It was like having something living pass through you, like you're channeling something beautiful that needs you in order to be complete.

FATIMA
I didn't know it meant that much to you.

TATI
And yeah, it ended badly. Who could've known I'd run into the fucking Swordsman? But sometimes adventures end badly. That's the risk you take.

FATIMA
I'm just worried about you.

Tati looks at her like "and what else?"

FATIMA
Fine. And I don't like unanswered questions.

TATI
That’s fair. That’s fair.

She considers for a moment.

TATI
(hesitant)
There’s a persona party downtown, at Riperton House, that might have some answers.

FATIMA
Really?

TATI
Let’s say... I know a guy. He’ll know what’s up.
(beat)
Will you take that as an apology?

Fatima smiles. She can’t resist Tati when she’s all apologies.

FATIMA
Let’s do it.

Tati jumps up and down and claps her hands.

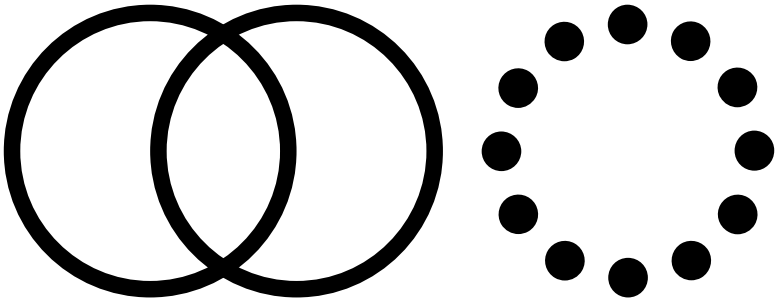
TATI
Yes! We’re going out!

FATIMA
I didn’t say—
(sighs)
Alright. Yes, we’re going out.

Tati hugs Fatima tightly, and Fatima smiles despite herself.

TATI
You should definitely try a persona tonight.

FATIMA
Were you not here for the conversation we just had?

Tati runs into the other room. Fatima stares at the screen paused on the Swordsman and Vestal embracing and sighs deeply.

She grabs her jacket.