

GAME LIFE

Pilot

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FADE IN:

EXT. HERCULEAN COURTYARD - NIGHT

A party is in full swing at the Silicon Valley game studio. Employees enjoy a full bar, boar roasting on a spit and bounce house. The DJ spins a funkified 8-BIT song.

The courtyard features a life-size sculpture of the HERCULEAN LOGO, a muscle-bound man holding a gamepad above his head.

A banner reads: "CONGRATULATIONS ON THE RELEASE OF BOUNCE MAN" complimented by an image of a cartoon bouncing man.

THREE NERDY PROGRAMMERS approach TWO COSPLAY GIRLS who blow them off and go cozy up to a few MEN IN SUITS.

As the party carries on, CAMERA RISES above courtyard, toward a WINDOW in the surrounding office building, into --

INT. HERCULEAN VIDEO GAME TESTING ROOM - SAME TIME

The trendy exposed brick walls are adorned with posters of video games, each stamped with the Herculean logo. The room houses leather recliners, curved monitors and game consoles.

THREE GAME TESTERS slave away on cellphones testing B-MAN, a superhero game with the bouncing titular character who releases an irritating laugh. Each tester has a PC that mirrors their phone display and logs bugs.

TESTER #1 gazes out the window at the party below in disdain.

TESTER #1

Celebrating the release of a game
that's not even done yet.

Sitting behind the testers with a view of all three monitors is ZEKI YILMAZ (20), Middle Eastern features, a playful glint in his eyes, relaxed pose. He's at ease in any situation, existing in the middle of a Venn diagram of geeky and cool.

ZEKI

Just keep playing.

VFX: Everyone has an ANIMATED HEALTH BAR floating above them labeled "ENERGY LEVEL." All the bars are RED AND SHORT except for Zeki's, whose bar is GREEN AND LONG.

Zeki sits back, studies the screens of his peers as they repeatedly die battling a GIANT REPTILIAN BOSS.

TESTER #2

This boss is impossible.

ZEKI'S POV+VFX: The other three testers' monitors OVERLAP AND FUSE INTO A SINGLE SCREEN. Multiple B-Men simultaneously battle the boss, getting knocked into different pits.

Within the chaos, a SHADOW B-MAN is projected into the mix. He successfully dodges the lizard boss's attacks.

END POV. We are back to Zeki examining the separate screens.

TESTER #3

There's no way past this.

ZEKI

Pause it.

Zeki has his GAME FACE on -- his signature look when he means business. He restarts the boss battle. Testers watch in awe.

TESTER #3

He's beating it.

ZEKI

Everything has a pattern.

TESTER #1

Five mil to license B-Man.

He looks outside towards the bounce house. As he talks --

INT. BOUNCE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Producer PAT GERRARD (40), bespoke suit, permasmirk face you want to throw a controller at, bounces up and down while holding a sloshing cocktail. In this moment, he couldn't be enjoying himself any more in the giddy company of his well-tailored PEERS and COSPLAY GIRLS.

TESTER #1 (V.O.)

Pat just wants the game released in time with the movie to make money.

EXT. HERCULEAN COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Pat exits the bounce house and mingles, shaking hands and slapping backs. As he passes by the Herculean statue he rubs the well-polished crotch for good luck like a Wall Street trader paying reverence to the Charging Bull.

Pat ends his tour at a gathering of a FEW MIDDLE-AGED EXECUTIVES. White-haired MORRIS GRADEN (50s) speaks.

MORRIS

Pat's the youngest lead producer of a AAA title at the company.

PAT

And a partner soon, right, Morris?

MORRIS

Let's see how launch goes.

PAT

No worries here. Game's ready.

They execs toast him with a nod of approval. Pat glances up in concern at the game tester window.

INT. TESTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zeki defeats the boss. The others cheer. Zeki makes notes.

PAT (O.S.)

You're only on level two?

The testers turn around to see a fuming Pat.

PAT

We deliver next week. All sixteen levels better be tested by Monday.

He stares everyone down. They all avert their gaze but Zeki.

PAT

Zeki, something I can do for you?

Zeki holds out a DOCUMENT.

ZEKI

I've got the next game we should do. A good one.

Zeki gestures expansively.

ZEKI

We know AR allows us to turn our world into a digital canvas.

ZEKI POV+VFX: All objects in the room: people, chairs, walls, take on COLORED OUTLINES. Additional information is displayed: distance between objects, temperature, mass.

It's our everyday world with an extra layer of color and awareness filtered through a great imagination.

ZEKI

But are we really exploring how to manipulate the world and create new relationships between objects?

Zeki places the document in Pat's hands. Pat doesn't even glance at it.

PAT

Something about games: know when it's your turn. Get back to QAing.

ZEKI

What I do is way beyond QA. Ammo recharge rate, health kit placement, animation timing -- my design choices make this unplayable game tolerable. I should lead a design team. Let's make this next.

Pat tosses the document at the trash. It banks off a YELLOW POSTER and drops in.

PAT

You can report to Mark on Monday.

ZEKI

(livid)
Mark, head of toddler titles?
You're demoting me?

PAT

Your unsolicited ideas create more work for the team. That means more expenses. That's not your role.

ZEKI

What's my role here, then?

PAT

To do what I say.

Brief stare-off before a COSPLAY LARA CROFT tugs on Pat's tie and pulls him back to the party. Zeki, crushed and speechless, watches Pat walk off. The other testers sheepishly turn back to their monitors.

VFX: DECISION OPTIONS under Zeki like a role-playing game:

-> Let it go, get back to work. Your time will come.

-> Do not let it go. Pat needs to be taught a lesson.

A CURSOR HIGHLIGHTS option two. He's not letting this go.

Zeki transitions into game face. His gaze settles on the yellow poster. He examines the part highlighting the INDIE GAMES CORNER. He RIPS the poster off the wall, folds it up, steps into --

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A modern building with wide plate glass hallways. Nearby TESTING ROOMS have OVERWORKED TEAMS testing other games. Through the glass, other parts of the campus are visible including a large cafeteria with a sushi-go-round, a retro arcade, a VR room, a parlor game room and a gym.

Zeki looks around to confirm the coast is clear and ducks into a nearby office.

INT. CODER OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Zeki walks over to a PC. He does a quick search for "Pat Gerrard" in the company database, finds a PICTURE and bio. He COPIES the image, launches a B-MAN DESIGN PROGRAM, browses through the character models. He settles on the lizard boss.

INT. GAMESPOT STUDIO - DAYS LATER

Celebrated game critic, JESS MCDONELL (27), reviews the game.

JESS

Another day, another release of a superhero movie tie-in game. This time it's preteen sensation Bounce Man. Replete with a flaccid bouncing mechanic, ugly textures and repetitive gameplay, the only highlight was a random interesting boss fight that couldn't rescue this subpar platformer. But let's face it, B-Man in all his forms will be gobbled up by young fans in their unending desire to, I don't know, possess bouncing superpowers? Jess McDonell, bouncing out!

BAD CGI ANIMATION of Jess bouncing off the screen.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- GAMERS watching review on phones, tablets, laptops.
- B-Man climbs on video game charts into TOP 10.
- GAMERS play in an Uber, discreetly under the dinner table and even in the theater during an actual B-Man screening.
- BLOGS and TWITTER feeds with comments posted about the game.

END MONTAGE.

INT. PAT'S OFFICE - DAY

On the phone, a pleased Pat reviews charts on his screen.

PAT

Even better than expected release figures. I don't care about the reviews... What about lizard boss?

INT. VARIOUS

GAMERS encounter LIZARD PAT. They attack and destroy him. His DEATH ANIMATION is repeated again and again and again.

INT. HERCULEAN VIDEO GAME TESTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door SLAMS open, startling all the testers but Zeki. Pat stands with two security guards.

Zeki slowly swivels around in his chair while doing a lizard impression by rapidly sticking his tongue in and out and moving his head side-to-side in a jerky motion.

PAT

You're done.

ZEKI

Done making your stupid games.

The others watch as Zeki is escorted out. He turns around.

ZEKI

Just need my jacket.

Over the back of the chair rests a well-worn UCLA 90s BOMBER JACKET with an ENGINEERING patch. Pat tries it on. It's too tight and RIPS at the shoulder. Zeki's face drops.

PAT

Nice fit. Think I'll keep it.

EXT. HERCULEAN OFFICES - MORNING

Zeki emerges through the entrance under the crotch of a TWO-STORY TALL SCULPTURE of the Herculean logo. He turns and faces the building the size of half a city block.

ZEKI POV+VFX: Zeki REACHES INTO HIS OWN POV with his hand and TEARS the building out of the frame like a ripped Polaroid, revealing THE MILKY WAY GALAXY behind it.

END POV. As Zeki walks away the building stands undamaged, the rip was all in his imagination.

INT. BARB'S BASKETS - THE NEXT DAY

Zeki plays on his phone in the cozy flower shop. Behind the counter sits BARBARA YILMAZ (40s), Caucasian features. Hair pulled back, she wears a smock with the FLOWERY LOGO for "BARB'S BASKETS." She dethorns roses with a pair of shears, PRICKS herself and winces.

Zeki notices her badly scratched hands. He PAUSES the game.

ZEKI

Mom, you need better shears.

BARBARA

Store needs other things first.

ZEKI

Pinball machine.

Barbara sarcastically nods in agreement.

VOICE ON PHONE (V.O.)

The city still needs you, hero!

BARBARA

How you play games all day... at least you're making money.

ZEKI

I was just--
(interrupts self)
I'm just helping a bad company make bad games.

BARBARA

One day if you get to do what you want, you'll see it's no easier.

ZEKI

Good.

Barbara checks her phone, is visibly disappointed.

BARBARA

Was hoping that holiday gig would come through today. Let's wrap it up.

She flips the "BLOOMING" sign on the door to "DORMANT."

EXT. FLOWER SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

They get into the BARB'S BASKETS DELIVERY VAN that has a WHEELCHAIR LIFT.

INT. YILMAZ APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Modest, two bedroom, some Turkish flair including a hookah, evil eye charms and rugs. The place is years overdue for refurbishment. The San Jose skyline lies in the distance.

On the mantel is a graduation photo of a dashing young Turkish man, ALI YILMAZ (early 20s) with the bomber jacket. Next to it is a framed UCLA mechanical engineering diploma. More PHOTOS show Ali and a younger Barbara (20s) getting married and raising a young Zeki. The final few photos show Ali progressively degrading over the years due to ALS.

At the dining room table, Barbara shaves an ALI YILMAZ (40s). She leaves a mustache. Very thin, Ali sits slumped over in a wheelchair with a monitor mounted in front of him. ALS at an advanced stage, the only motor function left are his eyes.

Nearby, Zeki carries out an experiment taking POLAROID PHOTOS of the room, tearing up the photo, and placing the pieces on a LARGE POSTER OF THE MILKY WAY GALAXY.

BARBARA

See, just like back in college.

ZEKI

That looks stupid.

BARBARA

That's what I used to think. He would only shave it off for me. Now I miss it.

Barbara holds a mirror up to Ali. Using an eye-tracking device, Ali guides a CURSOR across a virtual keyboard. A SYNTHESIZED VOICE comes out of the monitor speaker.

ALI
I'M A STUD.

She pats Ali on the cheek.

BARBARA
Yes you are.

Zeki motions to a nearby backgammon board.

ZEKI
I know you've got a move for me.

ALI
BLOT TWO AND SIX.

Zeki moves Ali's pieces, examines the board.

ALI
HOW IS PROTO TYPE.

ZEKI
Tired of only playing in my head.

Barbara goes through the mail, opens up a letter, concerned.

BARBARA
State's lowering disability again.

ALI
IS GOING TO BE OKAY.

BARBARA
You always say it's going to be
okay and then we're worse off.

ALI
NOT ALWAYS.

Zeki rolls the dice, examines the board, thoughts distant.

EXT. YILMAZ APARTMENTS - DAY

Zeki stares at the indie competition poster as sits on a bench next to Ali in his wheelchair. Zeki eats from a jar of olives, spitting the seeds at a stop sign and achieving a satisfying PING every time he connects.

ZEKI
How am I gonna tell Mom about work?

ALI
DON'T.

PING.

ZEKI

I just humiliated an exec at the
largest game company in the world.
No one's gonna hire me.

Zeki spits another seed at the sign and misses. Barbara walks
up, lovingly puts a sunhat on Ali's head, walks away.

ALI

SON.

ZEKI

Yes, Baba?

ALI

LIFE IS MULTIPLAYER GAME. FIND
OTHERS TO HELP PLAY IT.

ZEKI

I don't have money to hire anyone.

ALI

MONEY BALL.

Zeki chews an olive thoughtfully. Spits the seed -- PING.

EXT. MAIN QUAD, STANFORD - DAY

Students study under trees, eat lunch, walk to class.

SUPER: "STANFORD UNIVERSITY"

INT. COMPUTER SCIENCE DEPARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Zeki checks out a display case with PHOTOS OF STUDENT
PROJECTS from a computer competition. His attention is on the
winning project: "BUTTONS UP." A DEMO VIDEO exhibits BERNIE
LEWIS (19), African-American, pudgy, glasses, proudly showing
off the project of how various camera sensors alert someone
if they've misaligned buttoning up their shirt.

Down the hallway, Bernie approaches. He spots someone.

BERNIE

Hey, Tam--!

Bernie trips over a "WATCH YOUR STEP" SIGN and goes
sprawling, his glasses skittering across the floor.

VFX: FREEZE FRAME. "BERNIE" PLAYER ATTRIBUTE CARD pops up.

ENGINEERING: Genius
 HEART: Teddy Bear
 CONFIDENCE: Low
 RISK-TAKING: No, Thank You
 COORDINATION: Below Average

Artsy Vietnamese-American TAM VAN (20), sits nearby SKETCHING into a NOTEBOOK. She has splotches of paint on her arms, an eyebrow piercing, a denim jacket and checkered leggings. Eclectic and it works. She rushes over to help Bernie.

TAM
 Bernie! You okay?

BERNIE
 (embarrassed)
 Yeah, yeah. I was gonna say next weekend, I could pick up tickets to The Begonias reunion concert.

TAM
 You don't even like The Begonias.

BERNIE
 I think I could get into them.

TAM
 Well, okay, but we go dutch.

BERNIE
 Oh, sure.

They walk past Zeki into --

INT. COMPUTER LAB - CONTINUOUS

Bernie and Tam enter the room set up with rows of computers.

BERNIE
 Ready for the test?

TAM
 Yeah, your tutoring's been helpful.

BERNIE
 Still on for study later?

Tam gives a polite nod and turns in her seat to the computer.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - LATER

50 students each face a computer. Bernie stands at the front. In her seat, Tam sketches in her notebook.

BERNIE

Okay, class, today's exam will
test C++ proficiency.

(distracted by Tam)

If you've been doing your homework,
you shouldn't have a problem.

Bernie leans on the desk, knocks over a pen container. Scrambles to clean up.

BERNIE

When you've completed, call me over
to mark your score. Begin.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- ON THE MONITORS is a small ROCKET SHIP with an unfinished line of code under it. A SMALL HOUSE sits in the distance.

- A STUDENT types in a line of code -- DING! A correct answer. The rocket LAUNCHES STRAIGHT UP to the moon.

- ANOTHER STUDENT inputs an incorrect command -- BUZZ! The rocket CRASHES into the terrain.

- Students raise hands as they finish. Bernie marks scores.

- Tam finishes. Bernie is elated to give her a passing score.

- Bernie does his rounds as students finish and leave.

END MONTAGE.

Bernie hears TYPING and turns to see the final test taker sitting in the far corner of the lab: Zeki. Zeki inputs a command, the rocket flies off and explodes.

BERNIE

Having some trouble?

ZEKI

Nope.

Zeki checks his scrap piece of paper, inputs some commands.

BERNIE

Uh, I think you're way off.

The rocket IMPACTS the distant house and BLOWS IT UP.

ZEKI

Got it.

BERNIE

Oh, you're not trying to launch the rocket to the moon.

ZEKI

Moon no go boom.

BERNIE

I didn't know you could blow up the house.

ZEKI

Neither did I till I tried.

Bernie's ALARM BEEPS.

BERNIE

That was all the time allotted for the exam. What's your final score?

ZEKI

Completed answers: zero. Ability to blow up houses: 100%.

BERNIE

So... I have to give you a zero.

ZEKI

The work I did firing the rocket into the house was way harder than the test questions.

BERNIE

I guess, but the task was to answer the questions on the test.

ZEKI

These questions test specific bits of knowledge, not actual comprehension.

BERNIE

By that definition, let's throw all things that use metrics out the window. Physics, economics, games--

ZEKI

Yes! Games. You get it.

BERNIE

I don't get it.

ZEKI
You definitely get it.

Bernie's ALARM BEEPS again. On his phone the words: "DATE W/TAM" appear. Zeki glances at the screen.

ZEKI
Hot date?

BERNIE
Study date. I'll give you a pass.
(looks at list)
Sorry, don't know who you are.

ZEKI
Name's Zeki. Not in the class.

BERNIE
(befuddled)
You're not? What are you doing here? Why argue about your score?

ZEKI
Same reason you did: that's the game we were playing.

BERNIE
What game?

ZEKI
This one right now.

BERNIE
I'm not playing a game.

Bernie grabs his bag and leaves. Zeki grins and follows.

EXT. QUAD - CONTINUOUS

Zeki walks alongside an irritated Bernie.

BERNIE
Leave me alone.

ZEKI
You're good at playing.

BERNIE
No, I'm not. This isn't a game.

ZEKI

Tell me, what's not a game? Chess,
get the king. Politics, get the
vote. Dating, get the girl.

They are in front of the LIBRARY. Bernie pushes open the door
to enter. Inside is a MALE STUDENT scanning IDs.

ZEKI

Hold up, I can't enter, don't have
a student ID.

Bernie grins at Zeki's impediment, goes to enter--

ZEKI

Buttons up.

Bernie stops walking.

ZEKI

Your final project last semester: a
program that recognizes if a shirt
is off by a button. You write code
that analyzes live camera data.

BERNIE

So? I'm not the only one that can
code that stuff.

ZEKI

Anyone else who does is... working.

BERNIE

Oh, now I get it. You want me to
code something for you for free.

ZEKI

No. I want to make a great AR game
with you from the ground up.

Zeki POKES Bernie in the shoulder.

BERNIE

Don't do that.

Zeki takes out the yellow GDC poster and unfolds it.

ZEKI

Many Bothans died to bring you this
information. Next month is the Game
Developers Conference with an indie
competition corner. Winner gets a
distribution contract and \$100,000.

Another POKE.

BERNIE

Stop that!

Zeki lifts his poking finger.

BERNIE

Don't...

Zeki hovers, begins to drop his finger, then goes to poke, but Bernie is ready and SLAPS it away -- but Zeki quickly POKES Bernie with his other hand and instantly deflates Bernie's brief sense victory.

ZEKI

This game will make money.

BERNIE

The game doesn't even exist.

ZEKI

It does as soon as you see it.

BERNIE

Told you, I don't do games.

ZEKI

Sure you do. Buttons. Happens to be a lame, useless, Rube Goldberg--

Bernie is not amused and heads into the library.

ZEKI

FYI, your shirt button's off. You should use what you got.

Bernie looks down at his shirt. He is indeed OFF BY A BUTTON. Face red, he marches in. Zeki calls after him.

ZEKI

We're gonna work on you. I need your camera coding skills. We only have a few weeks before submission!

Through a window, Zeki sees Bernie join Tam in a study room. Zeki can see Tam sketching into her notebook.

Bernie spies Zeki outside and shuts the blinds.

INT. LIBRARY STUDY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tam draws as Bernie is stares at a laptop screen of code. He peeks over at Tam's drawing of a SAMURAI slaying beasts.

BERNIE
What's that for?

TAM
Oh, just for fun.

VFX: Pixelated animated hearts drift from Bernie towards Tam.

BERNIE
That's cool.

TAM
What's cool?

BERNIE
That you're drawing a samurai. I like Asian stuff.

VFX: EYE LASERS from TAM begin to shoot down Bernie's hearts with accompanying PEW-PEW SOUND EFFECTS.

TAM
I'm Vietnamese.

BERNIE
I knew that.

TAM
There are billions of people who are different types of Asians. It doesn't have to be fetishized.

Eye lasers continue to shoot down the hearts. Not many left.

BERNIE
Who's fetishizing? I'm not like a fetishizer or anything. I just think the guy you drew is cool.

TAM
It's a woman.

Any remaining hearts are destroyed. END VFX.

Bernie reexamines it, she's right. He changes the topic.

BERNIE
Wanna get started on the next assignment?

Tam exhales and regrettably closes the notebook.

INT. BUS DEPOT - NIGHT

The BUS DRIVER gives Bernie a little shake on the shoulder.

BUS DRIVER
Wake up. End of the line.

Bernie gets his bearings, looks out the window at the depot.

BERNIE
I missed Fairlane?

BUS DRIVER
A mile back.

Bernie groans and stands up.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Bernie, eyes droopy, crosses the street to avoid a group of MEN (20s) who pal around on a run-down street corner.

INT. BERNIE'S HOME - LATE NIGHT

Bernie quietly slips in to encounter his father, KEN LEWIS (40s), dressed in a USPS uniform, as he puts on his shoes.

KEN
How's school?

Bernie shrugs. Walking out of the kitchen with a steaming thermos of coffee is LARRY (40s), Ken's live-in boyfriend. Larry hands Ken the coffee and gives him a peck on the cheek. He turns to Bernie.

LARRY
(with a wink)
You making those millions yet?

BERNIE
Not yet.

KEN
It's comin'. You got scholarship
'cause they know my boy is genius.
Now get some sleep, son.

Ken puts on his work cap and heads out.

INT. BERNIE AND CHARLES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

A small room that barely fits a desk and two single beds. Bernie's little brother, CHARLES LEWIS (8), plays the B-Man game on a TABLET WITH A CRACKED SCREEN. He fights Lizard Pat. Bernie takes it, turns it off.

BERNIE

You're supposed to be sleeping,
little man.

CHARLES

I was just waiting up for you.

BERNIE

Sure.

Bernie turns off the lights, gets into bed and closes his eyes. He hears Charles turn the tablet back on to play B-Man.

BERNIE

Charles, turn it off.

CHARLES

Just one more level.

Bernie watches him play for a BEAT.

BERNIE

Why do you like games?

CHARLES

Real life sucks.

Bernie ponders this.

INT. VAN MARKET - MORNING

A medium-sized grocery store. A mix of perishables and packaged goods in English and Vietnamese fill the shelves.

Tam's mom, GNOC VAN (40s) works the checkout aisle, ringing up a CUSTOMER.

GNOC

You try dragonfruit. It real good.

The customer nods. Gnoc calls over to Tam who is surrounded by her paint supplies.

GNOC

Tam! Bring dragonfruit.

Tam is mid-painting an elaborate DRAGONFRUIT SIGN. As she works, she references a sketch of the dragonfruit from her notebook. With the level of detail and style, the painting belongs in a gallery more than a grocery store.

TAM

My hands have paint on them.

GNOG

I tell you, make simple sign.
Finish fast. You make big deal and
now you useless.

TAM

Fine, I got it.

Tam takes a paper towel and reaches for a dragonfruit --

REVEAL: Zeki, witness to the entire exchange, holding out a dragonfruit. Tam eyes him suspiciously, takes it.

TAM

Thanks.

ZEKI

You're from campus right? Art
major?

TAM

Business.

ZEKI

(disapproving)
Why?

Tam doesn't appreciate her life choices being questioned.

TAM

My business, not yours. You are?

GNOG

Tam! Bring dragonfruit!

Tam puts her question on hold, walks over to her mom.

She returns to the dragonfruit stand, doesn't see Zeki. The door DINGS as Zeki exits. She shrugs, lets it go.

Tam settles back to her drawing -- her notebook is gone.

She frantically searches, knocking over a dragonfruit pile.

Gnoc looks to a small PHOTO SHRINE of her late husband.

GNOC
What wrong with her today?

Tam rushes to the door, notices a drawing stuck on the handle: it's the female samurai from her notebook. On the back is scrawled: "408-310-2121"

GNOC
(in Vietnamese)
You make me crazy.

TAM
We said no Vietnamese in the store.
Only English.

This sets off Gnoc yelling in Vietnamese. Tam exits to the street, note in hand.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Tam walks and dials. ALI'S COMPUTERIZED VOICE answers.

COMPUTER VOICE (O.S.)
THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS.

TAM
What?

COMPUTER VOICE (O.S.)
FINDER'S FEE FOR NOTEBOOK. MEET AT
CAMPUS QUAD, 2 P.M.

TAM
Finder's fee my ass! This is
blackmail. You think I care about a
stupid notebook enough to pay thr--

The line goes dead. Tam let's out a scream of frustration and startles some walkers who quickly move away from her.

INT. HOTEL RECEPTION HALL - DAY

Zeki wheels a dolly packed with flower arrangements. He wears a Barb's Baskets shirt. Barbara chats over his Bluetooth.

BARBARA (V.O.)
Nicholas is the event coordinator.
His other supplier fell through.
It's important we impress him. We
need this hotel contract.

ZEKI
I'm all outta bubble gum.

BARBARA (V.O.)
Why do you always say that?

A flustered NICHOLAS (40s) rushes up.

NICHOLAS
Thank God you got here so fast!
(to worker)
Get these on the table centers.

Standing nearby at the backstage entrance is Pat studying notecards. A sign establishes the "HERCULEAN SHAREHOLDER MEETING". Pat glances up, sees Zeki unloading flowers. He smugly walks over, leans over a bouquet and inhales.

PAT
Good to stop and smell the flowers
from time to time.

Zeki has instant game face, doesn't miss a beat.

ZEKI
You still have a jacket of mine.

PAT
I like souvenirs. By the way, one
update patch and your little prank
was erased. They gave me a raise
and made me partner to keep me
happy, so I should thank you.

ZEKI
(sincerely)
You're welcome.

Zeki sticks a FLOWER in Pat's pocket. It's Zeki pulling a Zeki -- throwing someone off by flipping the script on the expected. It works, Pat doesn't know how to react.

MORRIS (O.S.)
My honor to welcome to the stage,
the newest partner in this great
Herculean venture, Pat Gerrard!

APPLAUSE from the event.

PAT
There's my cue. Gotta go to work,
you know, at a game company.

ZEKI

You keep up the good work.

Zeki gives Pat a big grin. Pat is much less satisfied than he wants to be, walks away slightly disturbed. Zeke drops his fake positive persona as Pat walks away.

As Pat approaches the side door, he encounters a MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR struggling to wheel himself through the door. Pat, irritated, tries to work around the guy while the guy tries his best to get out of Pat's way. This results in the wheelchair getting STUCK sideways and blocking the door. Pat attempts to climb over.

MAN IN WHEELCHAIR

Excuse me, dude.

PAT

I'm trying to but you're in the way.

Pat manages to stumble over the guy, straightens his suit jacket and enters backstage.

ZEKI

Can I help?

MAN IN WHEELCHAIR

Yes, thank you. Some people.

Zeki helps the man in the wheelchair, then follows Pat into --

INT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Pat pass by AV GEAR and walk up to a podium in front of the crowd. A LARGE PROJECTION screen behind the podium displays Pat's name and title. Zeki's glance settles back on the AV cart that has a LAPTOP on it streaming the presentation.

PAT

The video games industry generated 110 billion dollars last year. With continuing growth forecasted through the next decade, Herculean is uniquely positioned. Retail partnerships, indie studio acquisitions and branded content will pave the way. A title I recently brought to market, B-MAN--

The VOICE of a DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR kicks in over the PA.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Coprophagy, the practice of eating
excrement, is seen practiced here
by this American Iguana.

The audience laughs at the screen behind Pat.

PAT
What the--

INTERCUT PAT/BACKSTAGE

Zeki streams a YOUTUBE VIDEO with a lizard eating poop onto
the large projection screen behind Pat.

Pat rushes over to the AV cart and frantically unplugs wires
as the audience continues to laugh.

Zeki allows himself a smirk of satisfaction, walks away.

VFX TEXT: "BONUS SIDEQUEST: STICK IT TO THE MAN". A CHECKMARK
appears in a box labeled "Quest Completed".

INT. BODEGA - DAY

Barbara walks up to the checkout queue. She purchases
groceries using a SNAP card. She eyeballs a LOTTO SCRATCHER.

CASHIER
A Ten to Millions please.

Barbara pays with cash. She scratches, wins TWENTY DOLLARS!

BARBARA
Two more cards, please.

EXT. YILMAZ APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Zeki clocks an EMPTY parking space as he enters the building.

INT. YILMAZ APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Zeki walks in and is surprised to see Barbara at the kitchen
table going through bills. Ali is nearby.

ZEKI
You're home? Didn't see the van.

BARBARA
I sold it.

ZEKI

What? Why?!

BARBARA

It's too much an expense. Most orders will fit in a smaller car.

ZEKI

But how will we move Dad? The van--

BARBARA

We're not getting paid for the big order today because of your stunt.

ZEKE

(weakly)

But I delivered the flowers.

BARBARA

No income from that and your dad told me about work.

ZEKI

Baba!

ALI

SHE TRICKED ME.

ZEKI

I wasn't getting anywhere there--

BARBARA

You had steady income. You should at least have something else lined up first. And you lied to me.

ZEKI

I didn't. Just didn't say anything.

Barbara's look confirms it's the same thing.

BARBARA

God, please let me keep the store going until the holidays kick in.

ZEKI

I'll help with payments.

BARBARA

With what income?

ZEKI

My game... When it sells.

Zeki looks ahead in anticipation. He's relieved to see a waiting Tam twenty yards away. She double-checks her purse.

ZEKI

Alright, when she gets upset, I'll take it from there.

BERNIE

When who gets upset?

ZEKI

(calls out)

Tam!

Bernie spots her. He turns to Zeki, concerned.

BERNIE

What are you up to?

Tam turns to see the guys. Zeki holds out the notebook. Tam's eyes go wide in shock. She snatches the book back.

TAM

Bernie! You were a part of this?
How could you?!

BERNIE

What? I-I didn't--

Bernie takes a step away from Zeki to disassociate from him.

ZEKI

You're here because this notebook means something to you. It's the part of you you want to pursue but are stopping yourself. We never wanted your money -- we want you to finish filling these pages.

TAM

(incensed)

Who the hell do you think you are?
You don't do things like this to people. It doesn't work like that.

ZEKI

Maybe you're right. But doesn't mean we're not right too.

BERNIE

Zeki! Tell her right now--

Zeki holds up his finger.

ZEKI
Yes, I'm about to.
(to Tam)
We're making a video game and we
want you to do the art for it.

TAM
Why the hell didn't you just ask?!

ZEKI
Because you would have said no.

Tam is speechless, overwhelmed with the flood of thoughts to consider in response.

BERNIE
No, that's not it at all! Let me
explain. I didn't know--

TAM
(cautiously interested)
What's the game?

BERNIE
(stunned)
The game?

SFX: Pac-Man gobbling a Power Pellet.

Zeki's eyes light up, the plan is working. Bernie is barely keeping up with this new development.

ZEKI
(to Bernie)
You wanna tell her about it or
should I?

BERNIE
Uh, you go ahead.

Zeki takes a breath, gestures expansively, eases the mood.

ZEKI
Take a look around us and imagine,
in your head--

TAM
Where the imagination is.

ZEKI
Funny.

Zeki holds out his cameraphone as if to scan his environment.

ZEKI

Any location -- on a bus, your kitchen, this quad -- if you can scan it, you can play it. Living in a game world. But how?

Zeki pauses for effect, Tam begrudgingly humors him.

TAM

Okay, play it how?

ZEKI POV+VFX: As he describes the game, we see cracks forming in the quad around him and THE GALAXY shining through.

ZEKI

An immersive puzzle. Once a scan of your environment is completed, it's shattered into smaller pieces.

The quad SHATTERS and Zeki floats in outer space, the puzzle pieces of the quad hovering around him. Like a giant touchscreen, Zeki begins to move the pieces back into place and reassemble his environment.

ZEKI

Piece by piece, you attach it back together. A cloud into the sky. A building there. A tree. A car.

Zeki finishes reassembling the quad. END POV. He is again standing next to Bernie and Tam.

BERNIE

Clever.

TAM

And the other players?

ZEKI

Hm? What other players?

TAM

Intrinsic to setting up a game is a real world location. What if someone else is standing there with a copy of the game on their phone? You're only pitching this as a single-player game.

ZEKI

(considering)
Multiplayer...

ZEKI POV+VFX: Although similar to his vision from a moment ago, TAM joins him, also assembling the world.

The pieces placed by Zeki are highlighted in BLUE, the pieces by Tam highlighted in RED.

ZEKI
Competitive puzzle-solving.

A HAMMER POWER-UP appears, Zeki knocks away a red piece.

ZEKI
Power-ups to attack the other.

Tam grabs an ICE POWER-UP and FREEZES the hammer.

TAM
And defend against them.

END POV. The quad is back to normal.

TAM
Take on the world wherever you are.
Let me see your business plan.

ZEKE
(caught unprepared)
Business plan?

TAM
And marketing documents.

ZEKE
Marketing documents?

TAM
Yeah, you need me alright, for art
and business.

VFX: FREEZE FRAME. "TAM" PLAYER ATTRIBUTE CARD pops up.

ART: Inspired
EDGE: Cutting
AMBITION: High
BUSINESS SENSE: Way better than the other two
PRESENCE: Undeniable

BERNIE
You should totally join our team!

Zeki pulls Bernie aside. Hey whisper.

ZEKI
Our team?

BERNIE

What am I getting myself into with you?

ZEKI

(friendly with an edge)

Don't try to figure me out, pal. I don't like it when people try to figure me out.

Bernie is taken aback, doesn't know how to handle the advice.

TAM

What's our budget?

BERNIE

\$100,000 to the winner of the games competition we're entering. Pro bono before.

TAM

(considers)

I see. Three-way split?

Tam and Bernie look to Zeki for a reply.

VFX: SPLIT-SCREEN with Zeki on one side, Tam and Bernie sharing the other. DIALOGUE TEXT OPTIONS appear under Zeki like a role-playing game. A CURSOR HIGHLIGHTS each option as Zeki considers saying it:

- > The game is brilliant, why do I even need to convince you?
- > Bernie, we can still split this 50/50.
- > (Agree to split)
- > (Walk away and start over)

Cursor hovers on WALK AWAY, then settles on AGREE.

Zeki nods. He and Tam lock eyes.

TAM

Agreed we make a game, not play one with each other.

BERNIE

It would be so cool if we had a handshake. Like one only we know.
(self-doubt)
Nevermind. That's a stupid idea.

Zeki immediately tries to figure it out and Tam joins in.

ZEKI

What about I come in like this?

TAM

Wait, do that again and I do this.

BERNIE

Then bring your arm in.

ZEKI

From around the back!

Elated and carefree, they laugh at themselves. In the background, a FLAG rises up a pole to the top.

SFX: SUPER MARIO BROTHERS-ESQUE LEVEL COMPLETION MUSIC.

CODA

INT. GAMER HEAVEN LIBRARY - DAY

Ali Yilmaz (30s), in his prime, vibrant, healthy, walking around, no sign of ALS, stands at a counter. Behind him is a wall of hundreds of video game items including consoles, joysticks, games and accessories. A heavenly, 70s, white-dominant retro aesthetic sets the tone.

Ali places on the counter a VECTREX, a video game console with a built-in 9-inch screen. He speaks to the camera like a talk show host.

ALI

Hey gamers, great to have you here.
Today, we're going to explore the
1982 Vectrex.

He pops out the built-in controller, fires up the system. He plays Minestorm, a version of Asteroids with 3-D effects.

ALI

This puppy is in contention for the greatest game system that never had a chance to shine. As we'll cover in other episodes, the video game crash of 1983 took down many exciting new contenders or the day. This system was unique for two reasons: First, it had a built-in screen, which drove the marketing campaign to parents of taking back their main TV from their kids obsessed with this new fad called video games.

INSERT FOOTAGE OF 80s VECTREX COMMERCIAL.

ALI

But even more notable than the dedicated screen, at the time, other consoles were competing to put more and more sprites on screen. By only focusing it's power on drawing lines, the Vectrex gave the ability to rotate and scale objects three dimensionally to give a sense of depth previously unseen in a home console.

ANGLE ON: The ship in the game moves from the background to the foreground, blasting enemy ships along the way.

ALI

The history of the games industry is filled with design choices that were of the times, ahead of the times, and changed the times. The Vectrex is at the center of that conversation, and still to this day has an active game development community worth checking out. See you next episode when we'll cover...

He turns to the wall behind him.

ALI

Well, we got a lot to cover, I guarantee it'll be cool. Till then, remember, whatever happens out there, it's just a big game.

He returns to playing Vectrex.

DISSOLVE INTO MULTI-COLORED BLOCKY PIXELS.

END OF EPISODE