

the modern champion

by jonathan chang

jonathan chang
917.270.7949
jonchg@gmail.com
DRAFT #2 - 4/18/05

EXT. BEACH - DUSK

A LONE, MALE SILHOUETTE stands before the orange SUN, setting in the distance. He is the HERO. He sports a long, flowing, Japanese robe and a bamboo peasant's hat. The hat conceals his face...

CU: JAPANESE CHARACTERS, imprinted on the back.

SUBTITLE: "Honor"

CU: HAND ON THE HILT -- the Hero's hand grips tightly the bamboo handle of a curved SAMURAI SWORD, the blade still hidden in it's bamboo sheath.

CU: WOODEN SANDALS, as the feet of our Hero dig into the sand.

We go WIDE as 3 DARK FIGURES approach, surrounding the lone figure. They circle him, ready to pounce. NINJA #1 speaks up --

NINJA #1
(in Japanese)
Samurai! Your honor has no value here.
This is an evil land, and you are
trespassing. For that, you will pay a
price. That price is death!

The Hero remains still. Will he draw his blade?

ATTACK. SILENCE. The Dark Figures lunge, weaponless, at the Hero. SLOW MOTION as the Hero effortlessly flips each enemy to the ground in a series of quick, flawless Judo moves.

CU: LIFELESS BODIES, lying in the sand, their attack deterred by the Hero.

CU: The Hero starts to turn his head, TOWARDS CAMERA...

EXT. BEACH - DAWN

EYES OPEN. PULL OUT. Meet JAKE, early 30's, dressed in a business suit, barefoot with his pant legs rolled up. His fancy shoes hang loosely in his hand, tied together by the shoelaces.

We PULL OUT WIDER to reveal the modern setting, a hazy, warm morning at the beach, as FAT BEACHGOERS, LAZY VACATIONERS, and SHADY BOARDWALK VENDORS go about their respective affairs. Jake checks his watch --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE (V.O.)
 7:25 AM. Little over an hour to go. 45
 minutes will go to sitting in traffic.
 15 minutes before I force myself to get
 out of my car and walk into the office.
 That leaves 5 extra minutes
 (short beat)
 I can spend it here...

Jake looks around at the sad, FAT BEACHGOERS.

JAKE (V.O.)
 ...Or not.

Jake looks around as he reacquaints himself with the "real
 world." He SIGHS.

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK: the modern champion

CUT TO:

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE - MORNING

CU: a finger pushes the power button on the front of a
 computer -- CLICK.

JAKE (V.O.)
 Ritual. Without it, we're just another
 primate.

The computer BEEPS, starting up --

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING

CU: The BEEP turns into the RING OF AN ALARM CLOCK, as a HAND
 reaches to turn it off --

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE - MORNING

CU: the mouse -- CLICK. We see the motion of the HAND and
 the corresponding action of the CURSOR.

JAKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I wonder how many lifetimes people spend
 moving a mouse in a 6" circular field?
 How many countless hours do we waste on
 news, pornography, movie times, and e-
 mail?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

QUICK CU MONTAGE: WEBSITES, E-MAIL, ART PROGRAMS, ACCOUNTING PROGRAMS, POPUPS, DATEBOOKS, DOWNLOAD PROGRAMS, MEDIA PROGRAMS.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - MORNING

The circular motion of the cursor turns into a HAND, cleaning off the steam from a bathroom mirror, revealing Jake.

We see a FORTUNE COOKIE FORTUNE, taped to the mirror:

CU: "It is very possible that you will achieve greatness in your lifetime."

Jake looks at himself in the mirror.

JAKE (V.O.)

How many hours do we waste everyday? How many hours do we waste pretending to be something that we're obviously not?

He moves to dry his hands...

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE, BATHROOM - MORNING

Jake dries his hands on a paper towel. A FLUSH is heard behind him. HAROLD, late-30's, walks out of a stall. Jake sees him from the reflection in the mirror.

JAKE (V.O.)

Monday morning ritual. Cue the suck up.

HAROLD

Mornin' Jake!

JAKE

Good morning, Harold.

Harold moves to wash his hands.

HAROLD

Have a good weekend?

JAKE (V.O.)

Like clockwork. Every Monday, Harold catches me in the bathroom and asks about my weekend. Every Monday since we started here.

JAKE

Yeah, good weekend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAROLD

Bet it was more exciting than mine!

Harold LAUGHS. Jake LAUGHS too, in an effort to be nice. It sounds forced.

JAKE (V.O.)

I'm sure it wasn't.

Jake tears an extra piece of paper towel for Harold.

JAKE

No, not too exciting.

There's an AWKWARD PAUSE as neither person has anything else to add. Jake moves to exit.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Well, I guess I'll see you at the meeting.

HAROLD

I'll be there. Have a good day, Jake!

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jake sits at his computer, sipping a cup of coffee. He CLICKS away like a drone...

JAKE (V.O.)

9:30 AM. Check the purchase orders to make sure they're still within budget.
9:45 AM, prepare for the staff meeting.
Still need to draft notes for the group.
10:00 AM, the dreaded pre-meeting meeting with The Big --

THE BIG MAN -- strangely enough, a WOMAN, late-30's, tall and attractive if you look at her that way and happen to not work for her -- ducks her head in --

THE BIG MAN

Jake. You busy?

JAKE

(surprised)

No... no, just uh, wrapping some stuff up for the meeting, y'know, checking --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE BIG MAN

Good good. Finish up and come see me.
Important news from up top, I want you to
know before you go into your meeting.
Capiche?

JAKE

Yeah. Sure. Just give me --

Jake looks up. The Big Man's gone.

INT. WOODEN HUT - DAY

The Hero sits in a rocking chair, his back facing to us. He
adorns a cowboy hat, the brim covering half of his face. A
SMOLDERING CIGARETTE BUTT sits on the arm of the chair...

The smoke shifts, signaling a presence --

CU: The Hero's RIGHT EYE opens. Without turning his head,
the eye shifts to the right...

We RACK FOCUS to reveal 3 BOUNTY HUNTERS behind him, GUNS
drawn --

BOUNTY HUNTER #1

Well, well... if it isn't the town hero.

The Hero starts rolling himself a fresh cigarette, as if this
were an expected encounter...

BOUNTY HUNTER #1 (CONT'D)

Now don't be rude and pretend we're not
here. You and I know there ain't no law
here to protect nobody -- and "nobody"
includes you.

A pause. No response.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1 (CONT'D)

GODDAMNIT HERO, ANSWER ME!

Still no response.

BOUNTY HUNTER #1 (CONT'D)

A'right. I see how it is. You want to
play your straight against my flush, I
ain't gonna stop ya. If you're really
the hero everyone claims you are, meet me
at sundown on the east corral pass, and
we'll see if your guts are as tough as
the townsfolk say...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Bounty Hunters back out slowly -- carefully -- guns still drawn...

CU: The Hero centers his eye ahead again, as if nothing had even happened...

INT. THE BIG MAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

CU: Jake's RIGHT EYE.

We pull out from Jake's EYE to reveal The Big Man's minimalist office. There's a chrome name plate on her desk that reads: THE BIG MAN. The Big Man is now sporting a pair of fancy dark-rimmed GLASSES. Does she even need them to see?

Jake sits alone in the room, as The Big Man wraps up a phone call --

THE BIG MAN

(quick, rushed)

...Yeah, in the corner. The one with the window... I don't care if he's still in there, move him! ...I don't care where, just not in that office! Capiche??

The Big Man continues talking, but Jake's VOICE comes through...

JAKE (V.O.)

Abuse of power. It's everywhere. Cops do it. Politicians do it. Bosses love to make the underlings feel like they're nothing. Why? Because at one point or another, they were treated the same way.

THE BIG MAN

(antagonistic)

Thank you!

She hangs up the phone.

JAKE (V.O.)

But then again, some bosses have never worked a day in their lives...

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

I don't know how you do it, Jake.

JAKE

I'm sorry -- do what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE BIG MAN

Manage this staff. Manage this circus we call an office.

JAKE

We have good people, I've never had --

THE BIG MAN

I'll get right to the point, Jake. You're a winner around here when it comes to lower management, and not many people who've worked your job before can claim that. You have your finger on the pulse of the staff, and believe me, I know -- I'm watching.

She does that annoying thing where she uses her INDEX and MIDDLE FINGER to point at her bright, BLUE EYES.

JAKE

Well, I just do my jo --

THE BIG MAN

They trust you. They listen to you. They follow you. How many employees have we lost since you started here, Jake?

JAKE

Well there was that intern that quit...

THE BIG MAN

None. Zero. Not one person. Interns and assistants don't count. Well, now things are changing quickly and we need to start accepting reality around here.

JAKE (V.O.)

"We?" "Reality?"

THE BIG MAN

We have 10 designers on staff. I've been told by the owners that if we want to keep them, we need to cut down on "other costs."

She does the finger quotes as she says "other costs."

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

Now I know I'm a hardass with the grunts, but with you I can be honest.

Jake's shifts uneasily in his chair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JAKE

So... you're saying that I need to let someone go.

THE BIG MAN

In so many words, yes. I know you've never had to fire anyone here so I'll make it easy on you. I need one gone by the end of the week. And lucky for you I've already got someone in mind. Harold in accounting -- capiche?

Jake's face looks blank...

JAKE (V.O.)

Sure, if "capiche" means you take that idea and shove it up your --

JAKE

But Harold's been here as long as I have. We came on staff the same day.

THE BIG MAN

So what? He's making more than anyone else in his department, and quite frankly, I don't like the way he presents himself. He's a brown noser. He's gotta go.

JAKE

Sure he's a bit of a suck up, but is that any reason to fire someone? He's been a department head for 3 years. I mean, what am I gonna tell him?

THE BIG MAN

Ah, you're so green, Jake. Just make something up! I know you'll come up with something good. You were fine lying to that client on the Stevens job...

JAKE (V.O.)

Yeah, I'm also not directly responsible for the client's bi-weekly paycheck.

JAKE

Right.

THE BIG MAN

Great! I knew I could count on you.

Jake gets up and shakes The Big Man's hand, in that girly way that women shake hands...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THE BIG MAN
Keep me posted.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Jake sits at the head of the table, quiet. 5 EMPLOYEES -- including Harold -- sit quietly, watching him. It's an AWKWARD SILENCE as they wait for him to say something...

HAROLD
You okay, Jake?

Jake looks up.

JAKE
I'm sorry guys.
(short beat)
Listen, I know we scheduled this meeting to talk about the results from our first quarter, but I have to tell you guys... I just had a meeting with The Big Man...

OTHER EMPLOYEE #1
Oh boy...

JAKE
I know you guys are on edge. You've all been working really hard to fix the books after last year, but what I need... what I need right now is your help.

HAROLD
Whatever you need Jake. You let us know.

Jake TAPS his pencil nervously.

JAKE
Thanks, Harold.
(short beat)
We need to lose someone. And by someone, I don't mean one of the freelancers. We need to drop someone on staff.

GROANS all around.

JAKE (CONT'D)
The good news is that management isn't pointing any fingers -- yet. They say we won't be able to cover our overhead if we don't do something.

OTHER EMPLOYEE #2
Cover our overhead? Are you kidding?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE

I wish I was.

HAROLD

(to Jake)

I think what he's trying to get at is that we're well below our expenditures mark for the year, Jake. Unless there's another expense account we're not taking into consideration, we should be fine for covering the staff's salaries for at least another 6 months.

JAKE

Are you sure about that?

HAROLD

About 98%. Maybe more.

Jake's pencil TAPS faster...

JAKE (V.O.)

I hate this. I fucking hate this.

JAKE

Well, I've been told different by The Big Man, so let's assume we're wrong, and upper management is right.

More GROANS.

JAKE (CONT'D)

All I want you guys to do for now is get me some info. I'd like to see a breakdown of all the staff salaries, and I want to know the exact hours everyone works. Pull all the timecards. I want to know who's here all the time and who isn't. We need to re-evaluate the need for every single person on the company payroll.

Harold scribbles on his notepad quickly as Jake talks...

HAROLD

(without looking up)

Overtime employees too?

JAKE

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HAROLD
(still writing)
What about our department?

OTHER EMPLOYEE #1
Shut up!

JAKE
Yes, including this department.

Harold finally looks up.

HAROLD
And department heads?

JAKE (V.O.)
Sorry, Harold.

JAKE
Yes, all department heads minus The Big
Man. Including me. I want to see
everything.

Harold smiles -- genuinely, as if he has nothing to worry
about. One more last scribble.

HAROLD
You got it.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JAKE (O.S.)
Thanks, Harold.

Jake loosens his tie as he walks into his apartment. He
turns the lights on. The apartment's hazy from dust and
countless cigarettes. MOVIE POSTERS, REPLICAS, and OTHER
MISC. MEMORABILIA are both set up and strewn all over the
place. It looks like the place hasn't been cleaned in years.

Jake starts stripping off his suit. Before he reaches his
couch, he's in his boxers. He picks up a pair of NUNCHAKU
from his couch. He starts swinging them around wildly --

JAKE
(imitating Bruce Lee)
"Art is the expression of the self. The
more complicated and restricted the
method, the less the opportunity for
expression of one's original sense of
freedom.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE (CONT'D)

Though they play an important role in the early stage, the techniques should not be too mechanical, complex or restrictive. If we cling blindly to them, we shall eventually become bound by their limitations."

The lights behind Jake dim. Now all we can see is Jake, except he looks convincingly like Bruce Lee. His nunchaku skills now look real, *believable*...

JAKE (CONT'D)

"Remember, you are expressing the techniques and not *doing* the techniques. If somebody attacks you, your response is not Technique No. 1, Stance No. 2, Section 4, Paragraph 5. Instead you simply move in like sound and echo, without any deliberation. It is as though when I call you, you answer me, or when I throw you something, you catch it. It's as simple as that - no fuss, no mess."

Jake plops down on his couch, back to reality. He's sweaty and tired from his "interpretation." He lets out a HEAVY SIGH...

INT. KUNG FU DOJO - NIGHT

The Hero sits in the middle of the dojo, his back to us, blindfolded. His Sifu (master) walks around him as The Hero meditates...

SIFU

(in Chinese)

In battle, the degree at which you can execute your skills will be tested. You become another man when you are forced to protect not only your own life, but perhaps the life of another.

Sifu CLAPS his hands twice. A DOOR opens, and a YOUNG WOMAN -- bound and gagged -- is tossed into the dojo.

CU: The Hero reaches for the blindfold --

STOMP. Sifu stamps his foot loudly on the dojo floor, right next to the Hero --

SIFU (CONT'D)

(in Chinese)

CONCENTRATE!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIFU (CONT'D)

You are fully aware of the situation.
You know what is happening. But do you
know what to do?

CU: The Hero puts his hand back down.

SIFU (CONT'D)

(in Chinese)

Sacrifice, young hero, learn to accept
it. On the battlefield, you will have no
time to think, no time to establish the
rules. There are no rules. There is
only you, your skills, the girl... and
the enemy. The sacrifice can be
determined by only one.

(short beat)

Are you certain it will be you, that
makes the choice?

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - MORNING

The ALARM CLOCK goes off, and Jake wakes up in a cold sweat.
He wipes the moisture from his forehead.

**QUICK MONTAGE: JAKE GETTING READY FOR WORK; SHOWERING,
BRUSHING HIS TEETH, GETTING DRESSED, PACKING UP HIS
BRIEFCASE, ETC.**

JAKE (V.O.)

Ritual. Without it we're just another
primate...

(beat)

Do I fire Harold? Do I even know the
guy? 5 years working together, I've
never even had a drink with him outside
of work. He doesn't even know me, and if
he did...

(short beat)

...would he still be so friendly?

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE - LATER

Jake sits in his office. He stares blankly at his monitor,
like it's going to do the work for him.

JAKE (V.O.)

What do I do, what do I do, what do I do,
what do I do, what do I --

Jake stops. He looks up...

Meet CRYSTAL -- early-20's, the kind of attractive that makes
you feel like a puddle of water, she's that beautiful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Big Man pops out from behind her --

THE BIG MAN

Jake! Man of the hour. Meet Crystal,
our new designer.

Crystal extends her hand to shake. She shakes like a man,
*like someone who isn't trying to impress you with their
etiquette.*

CRYSTAL

Crystal. Nice to meet you.

JAKE

(still processing)
Our... new... Jake.... My name's Jake.

THE BIG MAN

(to Crystal)
Jake's a bit shy, but once you get to
know him, you'll find out why everyone
loves him. You'll see.

(to Jake)

Jake, you'll show Crystal the ropes, help
her out with anything she needs --
capiche?

JAKE (V.O.)

I don't know if I should jump for joy or
hate my job more.

Quick -- give them the fake smile --

JAKE (CONT'D)

Sure. No problem...

THE BIG MAN

(to Crystal)
See! I told you he was good. Why don't
you settle into your new office, and
Jake'll check in with you before lunch.

JAKE (V.O.)

I can't believe she gave her the corner
office.

CRYSTAL

It was nice meeting you, Jake.

JAKE

Yeah, nice...

Crystal starts walking away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THE BIG MAN

Thanks Crystal! Remember, if you need anything, talk to Jake.

The Big Man turns to Jake --

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

(in a low, quiet voice)

Listen -- Crystal's my cousin from back east. She just moved out here, and she's got a great resume to boot. Really talented. Fresh blood.

JAKE

(also low)

But what about Harold?

THE BIG MAN

What *about* Harold?

JAKE (V.O.)

You'd think she never even met the guy.

JAKE

How do I explain this new hire to the rest of the staff?

THE BIG MAN

You don't. Just work her in like you would anyone else. And DON'T tell anyone she's my cousin.

JAKE (V.O.)

More lies, more trickery.

JAKE

Okay.

THE BIG MAN

And do me a favor, Jake. Keep an eye out for her. I don't want any of the other designers or god forbid any of the grunts hitting on her. I'm leaving you responsible. Capiche?

JAKE (V.O.)

I really hate that word.

JAKE

Capiche.

Jake is left alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JAKE (V.O.)
God help me. God help all of us.

INT. OFFICE BREAK ROOM - LATER

Jake walks in with an empty coffee cup to fill as Crystal is telling a story to some other STAFFERS.

CRYSTAL
...so the client comes back and says the logo looks too much like a gun.

EVERYONE LAUGHS.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
A 145 year old rifle company -- that mass produces state-of-the-art handguns -- complains that their logo looks too much like a gun!

The LAUGHTER continues...

CRYSTAL
But they were just another asshole client that didn't know what they wanted.

RANDOM STAFFER #1
(sarcastically)
Big surprise.

CRYSTAL
Right?

RANDOM STAFFER #2
Was it weird to work for a, well, y'know, a gun company?

CRYSTAL
To be honest, I actually kinda dig the stuff. I'm a self-proclaimed action movie junkie at heart. I'm not your usual romantic-comedy sappy little girl.

Jake's spits out his coffee. EVERYONE looks over. The OTHER GUYS in the room nod at each other in approval of Crystal. Jake moves to say something, but hesitates --

Instead, he just leaves. EVERYONE redirects their attention to Crystal, but she eyes Jake as he walks out...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Once again in his boxers, Jake meditates while sitting indian-style on the floor. He tries to relieve all his stress...

EXT. BEACH - DUSK

The Hero's silhouette stands out from the setting red SUN...

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

KNOCK KNOCK.

Jake opens his EYES abruptly and throws on a nearby robe. He answers the door. It's a SAMURAI --

He SLAMS the door.

Thinking for a moment, he re-opens the door.

It's now the PIZZA GUY, a teenager.

PIZZA GUY
Jake -- what gives?

Jake's a bit nervous...

JAKE
Shhh... Nothing. Just got... confused for a second there. I don't want to piss off my neighbors so keep it down. What do I owe you?

PIZZA GUY
(whispering)
\$15 bucks. Yo, did you hear about the new movie with Jackie Chan?

JAKE
Yeah, High Ransom. It's good.

PIZZA GUY
(whispering)
Can I borrow it?

JAKE
You don't have to whisper man, just keep it down.

PIZZA GUY
(whispering)
Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jake walks back to his apartment, rubbing his eyes. He grabs his wallet and a DVD off his shelf without looking. For the first time, we see Jake's super-organized, massive DVD collection. Returning to the door, he hands the Pizza Guy the DVD.

PIZZA GUY (CONT'D)
AWW THANKS DUDE!!

JAKE
(annoyed)
Keep it down...

PIZZA GUY
(whispering)
Oh yeah. Sorry.

Jake hands him a \$20 dollar bill as the Pizza Guy hands him his pie.

JAKE
Keep the change. Thanks man.

PIZZA GUY
(whispering)
When do you want this back?

JAKE
Whenever. Already watched it 3 times.

PIZZA GUY
(loudly)
AWESOME!
(whispering)
Oh, sorry. Thanks bro!

JAKE
No problem.

Jake closes the door and immediately pulls out a slice, devouring it.

JAKE (V.O.)
Pepperoni pizza, you're my only friend.

EXT. BEACH CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The Hero -- back in SAMURAI GARB -- eats a bowl of rice with chopsticks, the only light source being the fire in front of him. Again, his back is turned to us. He sits there quietly, eating his food, when all of a sudden --

A WOMAN SCREAMS. The Hero sits up, attentive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He drops the bowl of rice, leaving his SWORD, and sprints off into the night, following the SOUND OF THE SCREAMS...

EXT. BEACH SHORELINE - CONTINUOUS

The MOONLIGHT shines down on 2 SILHOUETTES -- a MAN and a WOMAN. The Man SLAPS the Woman across the face.

MAN

(in Japanese)

How dare you speak to me with such fowl language? Do you know what the Royal Guard would do to you if you even uttered a single word in their presence??

The Woman, frightened beyond comprehension, stops SOBBING for a minute to point out The Hero's presence.

MAN (CONT'D)

(in Japanese)

What do you want, wanderer?

No response.

MAN (CONT'D)

(in Japanese)

Are you deaf? This matter does not concern you! Leave!

SILENCE. The Hero stands his ground, making the Man even more frustrated.

MAN (CONT'D)

(in Japanese)

It's not enough that my rice won't grow and that I have a wife who thinks she's wiser than me, I have to deal with a wandering fool who thinks he knows right from wrong.

The Man swiftly moves towards The Hero to fight --

-- but is stopped cold by a swift SWEEP. The Man lands on his back in the sand, baffled. He looks up at The Hero's face...

MAN (CONT'D)

(in Japanese, shocked)

You...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The Big Man has come down from her office to hold the monthly staff meeting. Now she sits at the head of the table, with Jake sitting right next to her. Harold and Crystal are also present, along with the other FAMILIAR FACES OF THE STAFF.

THE BIG MAN

I'd like to thank everyone for their hard work on the Tarramin account. I've looked at the timecards and I know some of you have put in more hours than I'd ever ask of you.

Jake ROLLS HIS EYES. Nobody notices.

JAKE (V.O.)

(sarcastically)
That's the truth.

THE BIG MAN

But as many of you already know, we've been looking for ways to cut costs so we can still give you bonuses at the end of the year. I know it's still a ways off, but I'm sure all of you can agree that that's in everyone's best interest.

Not much of a response. Harold nods his head in approval. Jake notices.

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

I was hoping for you all to come up with some ideas where you think we can save some bucks. I'm sure many of you can spare your 3rd cup of coffee...

CRICKETS. No one laughs. Crystal and another EMPLOYEE WHISPER to each other as The Big Man continues talking --

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

CRYSTAL. There's a common rule around here, maybe nobody's told you yet since you're *new*.

She says "new" in a snotty, antagonistic tone...

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

You don't talk when I'm talking.

CRYSTAL

But --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE BIG MAN
BUT I'M NOT FINISHED.

JAKE (V.O.)
Bitch!

THE BIG MAN
You don't talk when I'm talking, shit,
you don't talk PERIOD during staff
meetings unless you're a department head.
We only do this once a month little lady,
so I don't think it's too much to ask for
you to SHUT YOUR TRAP for the hour when
we're here.

Harold nods his head in approval.

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)
(to Harold)
And you! You think agreeing with
everything I say is going to get you by??
Huh? You think that lame ass smile is
going to buy you your next raise? Well
laugh it up, Harry, 'cuz Jake's been
telling me you might not work here that
much longer. That you're a "suck up."

The "quotes" thing again -- ugh. Harold looks at Jake like
he could break down at any moment.

JAKE (V.O.)
What. The. Fuck.

Jake holds back, knowing better than to talk back... for now.

THE BIG MAN
Don't look so shocked, Harry. You've
been here, what, 4 years?

CRYSTAL
5, Carol.

EVERYONE looks at each other. Who's Carol?

THE BIG MAN
(getting nervous, vulnerable)
WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT SHUTTING UP WHEN I'M
TALKING?? Am I crazy? Did I not say
that already??

The room stays QUIET.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)
4 years, 5 years, grunt or department
head -- who gives a damn? You're still
not the boss -- I AM.

JAKE
So what?

THE BIG MAN
Excuse me?

If it was quiet before, it's sure as shit DEAD SILENT now...

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)
What did you say?

Jake stands up, pushing his chair backwards...

JAKE
"Take no thought of who is right or wrong
or who is better than. Be not for or
against."

THE BIG MAN
Have you lost your mind?? I'd expect
this from anyone else, but you --

Jake breaks out in a series of KUNG FU MOVES, punching and
kicking the air. The room is shocked...

JAKE
I'm through taking "orders" from you.
I'm through with all the dirty work.

He does the "quotes thing" to mock her.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'm through sitting back while you talk
sweet to me and talk shit to the rest of
the staff. *I'm through.*

HAROLD
Jake, I'm not a suck up, just because I'm
a nice guy, doesn't --

JAKE
Harold, accept it -- you're a suck up.
Everyone here knows you're a suck up.
Now shut up.

He takes a breath, still throwing a couple kung fu punches
just to keep the energy going...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm through letting you talk to YOUR OWN
COUSIN like she's a pet.

He points at Crystal.

JAKE (CONT'D)

And I'm not going to say that I think
Harold should be fired -- because Harold
does his job and he's done it everyday,
twice the hours I've done my job, since
the day we started here. And if there's
one single person in this room who thinks
Harold should be fired, it's you and only
you -- not me.

THE ROOM GASPS! Jake BREATHES HEAVILY as he tries to cool
off from the rant. Crystal watches him in awe. The Big Man
can't even make eye contact...

THE BIG MAN

(trying to be unflinching,
slightly afraid)

Well Jake, now that all the cards are on
the table, I guess we all know who's
going to be jobless after today. I can't
say I'm not... disappointed -- shocked,
really...

Still no eye contact. The Big Man extends her HAND to shake
Jake's. He doesn't bother. Instead, he gathers up his stuff
and walks out of the conference room. *Is there a smile on
his face?*

THE BIG MAN (CONT'D)

It's been a pleasure working with you
too!

(under her breath)

Asshole.

Jake whips around, SUPERHERO POSE --

JAKE

WHAT?

THE BIG MAN

Nothing. I didn't say anything.

INT. JAKE'S SWANK OFFICE - LATER

Jake packs up his stuff into one of those filing boxes you
see piled up in legal offices. Crystal and Harold swing by
to say goodbye. Jake avoids eye contact...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAROLD

I wanted to thank --

JAKE

Don't thank me. You don't need to. You're a good worker, Harold, you've always been a good worker. And if the management here tries to fire you or force you to quit, I'm confident you'll do the right thing.

HAROLD

You're a good man, Jake.

JAKE

(sarcastically)

Yeah. A real hero to the masses.

CRYSTAL

Believe it or not, you gave a lot of people hope today, standing up to The Big Man. Not many people give themselves up to be the sacrificial lamb. Shit, I'm her cousin and I could barely get out a sentence.

Jake looks up. Crystal and Harold both smile sympathetically... *genuinely*. He returns the favor.

JAKE

Thanks guys. It's been good working with you guys... Well, Harold anyway. I mean, I haven't, uh, worked with you long enough to... whatever, I'm sure you're, uh, great too, Crystal...

Crystal LAUGHS it off. Jake shakes both their hands -- for real. Walking out of the office, he shakes the hands of ALL THE EMPLOYEES on his way out. They CLAP for him.

INT. JAKE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jake throws the box in the passenger seat and starts the car. He pauses for a moment, looking at his ex-office building.

JAKE (V.O.)

"The future looks extremely bright indeed, with lots of possibilities ahead -- big possibilities. Like the song says, 'We've just begun.'"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAKE
 (out loud, to himself)
 Bruce Lee, you are a *genius*.

Pulling the car into "reverse," we notice a bright YELLOW POST-IT NOTE in his box:

CU: "Call me sometime, The Big Crystal (310) 555-7949"

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

A SILHOUETTE looks out at the ocean as the orange SUN sets in the distance. He is weaponless. The flowing robe of the Silhouette flaps in the wind. He is the Hero.

JAKE (V.O.)
 Peace. It's a hard thing to achieve.
 Humanity is inherently chaotic, messy.
 The never-ending datebooks, schedules,
 meeting times -- they don't help.
 (short beat)
 I once thought it was ritual that got us
 by, that repetition would keep me numb
 from everything else. But not today.
 Today I enjoy, for the first time...
peace.

He turns towards us, finally revealing his face...

Meet Jake, The Modern Champion.

END CREDITS

INT. THE BIG MAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Harold sits in front of The Big Man, looking *confident*.

THE BIG MAN
 I know we've run through a rough patch
 recently. I adored Jake, but the truth
 is that we need someone experienced to
 take his place. Someone who has their
 finger on the pulse of the staff. You
 can't just hire someone who doesn't know
 the intricacies of each person working
 here, y'know? So I've talked to upper
 management and...
 (short beat)
 They've agreed to offer you the job.

We PULL OUT from the office, the DOOR closing as we exit...

BLACK.