

ZERO TO ONE

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FADE IN:

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - NIGHT

The restaurant is all but empty except for a couple studying in one corner and a lone man sitting at the counter.

MALE STUDENT

You know Rosa Parks killed public transportation?

FEMALE STUDENT

That's not why the state is opposed to mass transit.

MALE STUDENT

Public transportation means economic development but if you can't control who uses public transportation you can't control who benefits.

FEMALE STUDENT

So better to shoot yourself in the foot than let someone you don't like have even a chance at success? That doesn't make sense.

MALE STUDENT

Hate never does.

WAITRESS

You two want some more coffee?

They nod yes.

The waitress pours the coffee then checks on her customer at the counter.

MAN

I don't like it.

The waitress follows the man's line of sight.

WAITRESS

Just two kids studying.

MAN

Him and her. Ain't right. And you, why ain't someone taking care of you?

WAITRESS
You want more coffee?

He puts a tip on the counter. When she reaches for it, he grabs her hand.

MAN
Woman like you should be taken care of.

The waitress snatches her hand away, pours him a cup of coffee and walks away.

The man stares at the waitress while drinking his coffee.

Behind him Moira age 30, either Hispanic or Indian ENTERS scanning the restaurant for an appropriate sized booth.

She finds one in the corner and takes a seat.

WAITRESS
Just you?

MOIRA
I'm expecting others.

The waitress shrugs, goes to get Moira some water.

The solitary man at the counter smiles lewdly now at Moira.

Moira ignores him, checks the time.

INSERT: 11:48 P.M.

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The waitress returns with a glass of water for Moira.

Moira waits nervously, one eye on the door, one eye on the lecherous man staring at her then....

Ethan ENTERS the restaurant. Moira holds her breath.

Ethan sees Moira. He takes a deep breath, walks over to her.

ETHAN
Moira.

MOIRA
Ethan. Look at you.

ETHAN
Look at you.

Ethan sits down, never taking his eyes off Moira.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
It's been a while.

MOIRA
30 years to be exact.

The waitress returns.

WAITRESS
This everybody?

MOIRA
Uh, no, not yet. Waiting for two
more.

The waitress leaves to get Ethan a glass of water.

Moira and Ethan resist the urge to touch each other.

JIA
He's not here yet?

Moira and Ethan are jolted from their reverie. They look up
to see....

JIA a bookish, 30 year old Asian woman smiling down at them.

MOIRA
Jia? We didn't see you....

ETHAN
(off her look)
The commander doesn't know.

JIA
I won't tell him. But it isn't
words that will give you two away.

MOIRA
How'd you know it was us?

JIA
(shrugs)
Just did.

ETHAN
What's all that?

JIA
 Mankind's greatest contributions.
 The Egyptian Book of the Dead, The
 Bhagavad Gita and a DVD of
 Broadway's 'The Lion King'.

The waitress returns.

WAITRESS
 Y'all ready to order?

JIA
 Just waiting on one more.
 (to Ethan and Moira)
 Have you two had coffee? It's the
 best. I'll have coffee. Do you guys
 want coffee?

Moira shakes her head. Ethan shrugs.

JIA (CONT'D)
 So, what's the verdict?

Moira is about to answer but....

ETHAN
 I think we should wait until the
 Commander arrives.

Just then, a homeless black man enters.

He is MICHAEL. Though 30 years old like the others, his dark brown skin seems worn by the harshness of life. His dreads are matted and his clothes are filthy.

Moira, Ethan and Jia greet him ceremoniously.

The man at the counter watches suspiciously as the group greets the homeless man.

MICHAEL
 Sorry.

MOIRA
 We were worried.

Michael shakes his head either unwilling to talk or to assure her he really is fine.

JIA
 You must be starving.

Jia waves the waitress over.

The waitress looks at the assembled group skeptically.

JIA (CONT'D)

This calls for a celebration. Today is our birthday but seeing as how you don't have cake can you bring us one of these with candles in it.

Jia points to a picture of chocolate pie.

The waitress nods her understanding, still trying to make sense of this rag tag group.

Moira shifts uncomfortably under the stare of the man at the counter.

Ethan notices the man too.

A loud BANG as the sound of dropped dishes rings through out the restaurant startling everyone.

Ethan grabs Moira's hand protectively.

They share a long look before realizing what they are doing and quickly letting go of each other.

The commander has not missed this.

The waitress returns with a pie and four plates.

The waitress puts four candles in the center of the pie and lights them with a match.

Moira, Ethan and Michael look on curiously.

JIA (CONT'D)

(to the group)

It's a celebration of the day you arrived on earth!

(waits for their reaction)

It's celebrated annually and we sing, how does it go again, happy birthday to us, happy birthday to us.

ETHAN

But why the flame?

JIA

I don't actually know.

(to the waitress)

Shouldn't there be one candle for each year?

WAITRESS

One for each of you. Same idea.

JIA

(to the others)

So now we all blow the candles out
at the same time.

One...two...three...

Jia takes a big breath. The others follow suit. Jia blows on the candle. The others repeat her actions.

Jia can barely contain her excitement.

JIA (CONT'D)

Can you imagine? An annual
celebration of life!

Jia serves Michael the first slice, then Moira, Ethan and finally herself.

Michael surprises himself with how fast he eats his slice of pie.

Michael reaches for a second slice then sees them looking at him concerned.

MICHAEL

I've gotten so used to the feeling
of hunger.

(between mouthfuls)

We've only got seven minutes left.

What are your reports?

They exchange looks. The moment they've been dreading has arrived.

ETHAN

It was a mistake sharing our
technology with them. They've more
of a danger now than ever before.

JIA

They're so determined. They never
give up.

ETHAN

That's the problem. They won't stop
trying to destroy what they don't
understand. They value such petty
things and argue over such trivial
differences.

JIA

That's only a small group.

ETHAN

They're like children playing with guns. We have to stop them before they hurt themselves.

JIA

They're immature sometimes but they can learn from their mistakes.

ETHAN

Before or after they kill themselves and destroy the only inhabitable planet in this system?

JIA

We can't predict the future.

ETHAN

We don't have to, we can just look at what they've done and their unending capacity to repeat the same mistakes.

MICHAEL

Moira, your thoughts.

Jia and Ethan look at her expectantly.

MOIRA

Ethan is right.

Jia rolls her eyes.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

And so is Jia.

Ethan looks incredulous.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

They are violent, driven by their fears but they are closer than any other species we've ever observed. We thought Europe was doomed. Called it the Dark Ages and then....

ETHAN

Commander, what has been your experience?

Ethan gives Moira a defiant look.

Michael finishes the last of his pie.

MICHAEL

They are violent, I've experienced it. They will torture and mistreat their own because of gender or skin color or whether they believe in a being with supernatural attributes. They are kind. They will share their last morsel of sustenance, they will put themselves in harm's way to save another. But the question isn't what can they do as individuals, the question is what can they do collectively. What must be done requires cooperation, sacrifice. Can they do it?

MAN

Alright that's enough now!!!!

The four of them look up, surprised to see the man, once sitting at the counter, now pointing a gun at them.

The other patrons sit frozen, unsure what to do.

WAITRESS

What are you doing?

MAN

Did you hear them? They're planning an attack.

JIA

No, we're---

MOIRA

(to Jia)
Shhhhhhhh.

MAN

(increasingly nervous)
Now stop talking.
(to waitress)
Gal, call the police.

WAITRESS

Put the gun away. These people are just enjoying some coffee and pie.

MAN

Look at em. They look like they're just eating pie and coffee? Who the hell are you guys?

MOIRA

We'll just go.

She starts to get up.

The man aims his shaky gun at her.

Ethan grabs her arm and pulls her back down in her seat.

Michael gets to his feet.

MICHAEL

You don't understand what's going on.

The man aims his gun at Michael now.

MAN

And you. Who the hell are you?
Their drug dealer?

MICHAEL

Put the weapon away before someone gets hurt.

MAN

Don't you tell me what to do! I ain't lettin you get away with this. I ain't gonna let you hurt these people. I heard you all talkin'. I know what you're tryin' to do.

JIA

Commander he's just scared.

Michael holds up a hand to silence her.

MAN

And why do they keep calling you commander!?!?!

MICHAEL

An inside joke. Please, before you hurt yourself.

MAN

No!!!

(to waitress)

Where are those goddamned police!!!

Michael takes a step toward the man.

The man pulls the trigger.

The patrons GASP.

The bullet is suspended in mid air between Michael and the shooter.

Ethan, Moira and Jia surround Michael.

Moira looks at the clock.

MOIRA

One minute to midnight.

JIA

(to Michael)

This is just one. He doesn't represent them all.

ETHAN

They'll never be able to control their fear. The same thing that happened to Mars will happen here.

Michael walks around the bullet. The man, frozen in place, follows Michael with terrified eyes.

MICHAEL

They are violent, selfish, fearful, hopeful, selfless and kind. There is every reason to believe they will destroy themselves. But they haven't done it yet. The most unlikely of odds favors them. Let's see if the odds will continue to favor them.

ETHAN

But sir--

MICHAEL

It won't be the first time a species has destroyed itself. The planet can survive. It will take longer if that happens but if I'm right....

The bullet drops to the floor with a CLINK.

Michael steps over it, walks out.

Jia follows him.

Ethan stands in stunned disbelief.

Moira takes his hand reassuringly. She smiles at him.

Moira and Ethan walk out together.

EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Michael looks back at Moira and Ethan.

MICHAEL

They've grown closer since becoming
human.

JIA

(smiling)

One of the many perks of humanity.

One by one, they disappear in a flash of light.

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The man remains frozen, pointing his gun at empty space.

Blue lights flash. Police rush in, guns drawn ordering the
man to drop his weapon.

Finally released from his paralysis, the man drops the gun.

The man is forced to the ground by the police.

The man stares at the bullet lying on the ground in front of
him as the police handcuff him then lift him to his feet.

EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The waitress and other patrons watch through the window as
the police lead the man away.

FADE TO BLACK.