

Zarathustra: The Programme

Written by Iliyan Velinov

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PART 1

ZARATHUSTRA: THE PROGRAMME

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WGA Registration: 2321535
Registered: November 15, 2025

FADE IN:

EXT. RIJKSMUSEUM - COURTYARD - DAY

Amsterdam light - clean, cold, perfect. The museum rises like a cathedral of culture. Tourists cluster at the entrance, phones out, selfie sticks extended.

A BIKE LOCK clicks open. Hands - strong, deliberate - secure a black city bike to the rack.

The MAN straightens. Early 30s. Dark hair, unkempt in a way that looks intentional. Leather jacket over a faded band tee. Jim Morrison energy - feral, magnetic, dangerous in a way you can't name.

He moves through the crowd. People glance. A WOMAN in her 50s pauses mid-sentence, watches him pass. A TEENAGER with headphones turns. The Man doesn't acknowledge them. Or maybe he's so used to it, it's invisible.

INT. RIJKSMUSEUM - ENTRANCE HALL -
CONTINUOUS

High ceilings. Light pours through glass. The Man badges in with a membership card – the kind that says he's been here before, many times.

He walks with purpose but no hurry. Past the gift shop. Past the information desk. Into the galleries.

INT. RIJKSMUSEUM - GALLERY OF HONOR - DAY

Rembrandt. Vermeer. The Night Watch looms in the distance. Tourists bottleneck there, phones raised like offerings.

The Man turns left, into a quieter wing.

INT. RIJKSMUSEUM - SMALLER GALLERY - DAY

Fewer people here. Older paintings. Lesser known. The air feels thicker, like the room is holding its breath.

He stops.

An OIL PORTRAIT hangs on the wall, modest frame, no velvet rope. A WOMAN – mid-20s, blonde, luminous. She wears

something timeless, maybe 17th century, maybe yesterday. Her eyes are the kind that follow you, but not in the cheap haunted-house way. In the way that makes you wonder if she's deciding whether you're worth her time.

The placard reads: "Portrait of an Unknown Woman, c. 1650, Artist Unknown."

The Man steps closer. His reflection ghosts over the canvas in the frame glass.

MAN (V.O.)

Two forces run the world.

He tilts his head. Studies the brushstrokes – the way light catches her cheekbone, the faint smile that might be pity or invitation.

MAN (V.O.)

The Simulation. And the Programme.

Behind him, a TOUR GROUP shuffles past. A GUIDE drones about Golden Age techniques. The Man doesn't turn.

MAN (V.O.)

When you're born, the
Programme is weak.
The Simulation is strong.
Every night it resets,
feeds you dreams, shows you
worlds.

He leans in until his breath almost fogs
the glass.

MAN (V.O.)

As you grow, the Programme
hardens. It draws the maps.
Writes the scripts. Makes you
average.

The gallery lights flicker – just once,
barely perceptible. Or maybe it's his
pulse syncing with the hum of the
fluorescents.

The Woman in the painting seems to shift
– a microscopic tilt of her gaze, like
she's looking at him now instead of
through him.

He freezes.

MAN (whisper,

barely audible)

Can I create you?

Silence. Then—

A CHILD laughs somewhere in the next room. The spell breaks.

The Man exhales, steps back. His hands are trembling. He shoves them in his pockets.

A COUPLE walks past behind him — mid-30s, holding hands, speaking Dutch in low tones. As they pass, both turn their heads toward him at the exact same moment, same angle, same duration. Then they look away and keep walking.

He watches them go, jaw tight.

MAN (V.O.)

Or maybe I'm seeing things.

He turns back to the portrait one last time. The Woman stares back, unchanging.

He leaves.

EXT. RIJKSMUSEUM - STEPS - DAY

The Man descends the wide stone steps.
Unlocks his bike. Throws a leg over.

A TRAM glides past, silent except for
the hum of electric rails. Every
passenger in the window is looking at
their phone. Same posture. Same angle.

He pedals away.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - DAY

The city flows around him. Canals.
Bridges. Narrow brick buildings leaning
like old men. He rides with headphones
in, but we don't hear the music yet –
just the city breathing.

Traffic lights flip green ahead of him
in sequence, one after another, like
dominoes falling in his favor.

He doesn't notice. Or he's pretending
not to.

INT. GYM - ENTRANCE - DAY

A modern box of glass and steel.
Minimalist. The Man swipes his

membership card, nods at the FRONT DESK ATTENDANT — a guy in his 20s with a clipboard and a smile that's been optimized for customer retention.

ATTENDANT

Good session today, yeah?

The Man doesn't answer. He's already moving toward the locker room.

INT. GYM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

He changes quickly. Tank top. Shorts. Beats headphones. He catches his reflection in the mirror — lean, defined, the body of someone who's been at war with entropy for years.

He looks away.

INT. GYM - ROWING AREA - DAY

A row of Concept2 ergs. Most are empty. The Man takes the one in the corner, facing the wall.

He straps his feet in. Adjusts the damper. Grips the handle.

The monitor blinks to life: READY.

He pulls.

The first stroke is smooth. The second is faster. By the tenth, he's found the rhythm — a metronome weaponized.

The monitor counts: 500m split, watts, strokes per minute. Numbers climb.

1:28... 1:26... 1:24...

His face is stone. Sweat beads on his forehead, drips.

1:23... 1:22.5...

The monitor flickers. Just for a frame. The split drops to 1:21.8 — a number that would put him in the top percentile, close to world-class.

Then—

BEEP.

The number snaps back to 1:25.0 and locks there, no matter how hard he pulls.

A small message flashes at the bottom of the screen: LIMIT REACHED.

He keeps rowing. Harder. The handle bends in his grip. His breath saws. The number doesn't move.

1:25.0.

1:25.0.

1:25.0.

He stops. Lets the handle fly forward. Chest heaving. Sweat drips onto the rail.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme shows you more than you can do.

Then reminds you what you're allowed.

He sits there, staring at the monitor like it lied to him.

Behind him, FIVE PEOPLE walk past in a slow, staggered line:

1. A WOMAN in yoga pants, towel over her shoulder.
2. A MAN in a business suit, gym bag in hand.
3. A TEENAGER with a basketball.
4. An OLDER MAN, grey beard, reading glasses.
5. A YOUNG WOMAN, headphones on, eyes down.

As each one passes, they glance at him – same beat, same angle, same duration. Like a conductor cued them.

None of them speak. They flow past like a tide he summoned.

The Man watches them go. His jaw tightens.

MAN (V.O.)

Another day inside the Programme.

He stands. Unstraps his feet. Grabs his towel and water bottle.

As he walks toward the locker room, the gym feels wrong for a heartbeat – like the air forgot what to do, like the

fluorescent hum skipped a note – then normal resumes.

He doesn't look back.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PART 1

PART 2

ZARATHUSTRA: THE PROGRAMME

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INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
NIGHT

Small. Clean. Minimalist in a way that feels intentional, not empty. A single bookshelf: philosophy, code manuals, a

few novels. A laptop on a low table. No TV.

The Man sits on the floor, back against the couch. Headphones on. Eyes closed.

A BOOK lies open on his lap: "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" by Friedrich Nietzsche. Dog-eared. Highlighted. Margin notes in tight handwriting.

But he's not reading. He's listening.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O., filtered through headphones)

"I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome.

What have you done to overcome him?"

The Man's lips move slightly, syncing with the words. He knows them by heart.

MAN (V.O.)

I rediscovered Nietzsche three months ago.

Or maybe he found me.

He opens his eyes. Stares at the

ceiling.

MAN (V.O.)

At first, I read. Then I
listened.

Now I can't stop.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Man lies in bed. Dark room. City
light bleeds through the curtains.

Headphones still on. Eyes closed. The
audiobook plays.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"You must be ready to burn
yourself in your own flame:

how could you become new, if
you had not first become ashes?"

His breathing slows. He's drifting.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Alarm buzzes. The Man wakes. Headphones
tangled around his neck. The audiobook

is still playing—hours later, a different chapter.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"And life itself confided this secret to me:

'Behold,' it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself.'"

He sits up, rubs his face. Looks at his phone: 6:47 AM.

He rewinds the audiobook to the beginning. Again.

INT. OFFICE - OPEN PLAN - DAY

The Man at his desk. Headphones on. Code on one monitor. Slack on the other.

His fingers type fast, precise. But his eyes are distant.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O., faint)

"Man is a rope, tied between beast and Overman—
a rope over an abyss."

A COWORKER—mid-30s, friendly, Dutch accent—leans over the partition.

COWORKER

Hey, you coming to the standup?

The Man doesn't hear. The Coworker waves a hand.

COWORKER

Hello?

The Man pulls one earcup back.

MAN

Yeah. Two minutes.

COWORKER

You always listening to music?

MAN

Something like that.

The Coworker smiles, confused, and walks away.

The Man puts the headphone back. Returns to the code.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - EVENING

The Man bikes home. Headphones on. The city glows in twilight.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"The higher we soar, the smaller we appear
to those who cannot fly."

He weaves through traffic. A PEDESTRIAN steps into the bike lane without looking. The Man swerves, misses by inches.

The Pedestrian doesn't flinch. Doesn't even turn.

The Man looks back. The Pedestrian walks on, same pace, same posture.

MAN (V.O.)

Patterns. Everywhere.

INT. GYM - ROWING AREA - NIGHT

The Man rows. Headphones on. The audiobook plays under the rhythm of the

erg.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"You must have chaos within
you
to give birth to a dancing
star."

His strokes sync with the words. Breath.
Pull. Recover. Repeat.

The monitor flickers. 1:24... 1:23... BEEP.
1:25.0. LIMIT REACHED.

He doesn't stop. He rows through it,
eyes closed, lips moving.

MAN (whisper,
syncing with audiobook)
"....chaos within you..."

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
NIGHT

The Man sits on the floor again.
Headphones on. The book open.

He's reading along with the audiobook
now, finger tracing the lines.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"And once you have said 'Yes'
to one joy,
you have said 'Yes' to all
woe as well."

He stops. Rewinds. Listens again.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"And once you have said 'Yes'
to one joy,
you have said 'Yes' to all
woe as well."

He closes the book. Stares at the cover.

MAN (V.O.)

I listen to it every day. At
work. At the gym.

At night, while I sleep.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT
(MONTAGE)

A series of nights:

- The Man lies in bed. Headphones on.

Eyes closed. The audiobook plays.

- He shifts. Mumbles in his sleep. The words bleed into his dreams.
- He wakes at 3 AM. The audiobook is still playing. He doesn't turn it off.
- Morning. He wakes. Rewinds. Starts again.

MAN (V.O.)

I don't know if I'm learning it or if it's learning me.

INT. OFFICE - OPEN PLAN - DAY

The Man at his desk. A MEETING notification pops up: "Q3 Roadmap Review."

He dismisses it. Opens a private note file. Types:

"Can I create you?"

He stares at the line. Deletes it. Types again:

"What have you done to overcome him?"

He closes the file.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
NIGHT

The Man sits cross-legged on the floor.
Headphones on. Eyes closed.

The audiobook plays, but now he's not
just listening—he's somewhere else.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"I am a wanderer and a
mountain climber," said he to his heart.

"I do not love the plains,
and it seems I cannot sit still for
long."

The room feels smaller. The walls
closer. The air thicker.

He opens his eyes. Looks at his hands.
They're trembling.

MAN (V.O.)

Something is changing.

He looks at the bookshelf. At the
window. At the ceiling.

MAN (V.O.)

Or maybe I'm just seeing it now.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

The Man stands at the counter. A row of bottles lined up like soldiers:

- Mucuna Pruriens (L-Dopa precursor)
- Ashwagandha
- Rhodiola
- A grinder with weed
- Espresso machine hissing

He takes the mucuna. Two capsules.
Swallows with water.

Ashwagandha. One capsule.

Rhodiola. One capsule.

He grinds weed. Rolls a joint. Lights it. Inhales.

MAN (V.O.)

I optimized everything.
Sleep. Food. Supplements.

Training.

He exhales smoke. Sips espresso.

MAN (V.O.)

Mucuna floods dopamine.
Weed amplifies it.
The gym burns it into my
system.

He looks at the bottles.

MAN (V.O.)

I thought I was unlocking my
body.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

Maybe I was just becoming the
perfect battery.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Man sits with his laptop. Opens Instagram. Scrolls.

An AD appears: Exactly the supplement he
just took. Mucuna Pruriens.

He stops. Stares.

He closes Instagram. Opens YouTube.

A RECOMMENDED VIDEO: "Optimize Your Dopamine - Biohacking Guide"

He didn't search for it.

He closes the laptop.

MAN (V.O.)

The internet knows.

He picks up his phone. A NOTIFICATION: "Your rowing session yesterday was 5% above average."

He didn't open the app.

MAN (V.O.)

It's watching.

He puts the phone down. Looks at the supplements on the counter.

MAN (V.O.)

I had the most dopamine in Amsterdam.

And the Programme... noticed.

EXT. AMSTERDAM - CANAL - NIGHT

The Man walks alone. Headphones on. The city is quiet.

He stops on a bridge. Looks down at the water. His reflection stares back, distorted by ripples.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"One must still have chaos within oneself

to give birth to a dancing star."

He takes off the headphones. Silence.

The city hums. A tram passes in the distance. A bike bell rings.

He puts the headphones back on.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm ready.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Man lies in bed. Headphones on. Eyes open.

AUDIOBOOK

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"You must be ready to burn
yourself in your own flame..."

He closes his eyes.

MAN (V.O.)

Tomorrow, I'll find out.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PART 2

PART 3

ZARATHUSTRA: THE PROGRAMME

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INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
AFTERNOON

Saturday. Light slants through the window. The city hums outside—distant, muffled.

The Man sits on the floor. No headphones this time. Just silence.

On the low table in front of him: a small bag of dried mushrooms. Maybe 3 grams. Maybe more.

He stares at them like they're a door he's been circling for weeks.

MAN (V.O.)

You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame.

He picks up the bag. Opens it. The smell is earthy, ancient.

He takes them out. Chews slowly. The taste is bitter, wrong.

He swallows. Drinks water. Sits back.

MAN (V.O.)

How could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?

He closes his eyes. Waits.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
LATER

Time passes. 20 minutes. 30.

The Man opens his eyes. The room looks the same. But the light is different—sharper, like the edges of things are too defined.

He stands. Walks to the window.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - CONTINUOUS
(THROUGH WINDOW)

The street below. Bikes. Pedestrians. A tram in the distance.

Normal.

He watches.

Then—

A WOMAN on a bike slows. Stops. Mid-pedal. Frozen.

A MAN walking his dog—mid-step. The dog's paw hangs in the air.

A TRAM glides into frame and stops. Not at a station. Just stops. Mid-track.

The Man's breath catches.

He blinks. Rubs his eyes.

They don't move.

MAN (whisper)

No.

He steps back from the window.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
CONTINUOUS

The room feels smaller. The walls breathe. The air is thick, syrupy.

He looks at his hands. They're trembling. Or vibrating. Or both.

MAN (V.O.)

This isn't real.

But it is.

He moves to the door.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY -
CONTINUOUS

He opens the door. Steps into the
hallway.

Silence. Complete. Not even the hum of
electricity.

He walks to the stairs.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STREET -
CONTINUOUS

He pushes through the front door.

The world is frozen.

A CYCLIST-mid-turn, leaning into the
curve, one foot off the pedal.

A CHILD-mid-laugh, mouth open, arms
raised.

A COUPLE-mid-kiss, eyes closed, hands on
each other's faces.

A PIGEON—mid-flight, wings spread,
suspended three feet above the
cobblestones.

The Man walks into the street. Turns in
a slow circle.

Nothing moves. Not the trees. Not the
canal water. Not the clouds.

MAN (V.O.)

Time stopped.

He walks closer to the Cyclist. Reaches
out. Touches the man's shoulder.

Solid. Warm. Real.

But frozen.

The Man pulls his hand back like he
touched fire.

MAN (whisper)

What did I do?

He looks up at the sky. The sun hangs
there, unmoving. The light doesn't
shift.

He checks his watch: 3:47 PM.

He waits.

Nothing changes.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - CONTINUOUS

He walks. Past frozen people. Past
frozen bikes. Past frozen trams.

His footsteps echo in the silence.

He passes a CAFÉ. Inside, a BARISTA
pours coffee—the stream frozen mid-air,
a brown arc connecting pot to cup.

He passes a CANAL. A BOAT sits
motionless on glass-still water.

He passes a PARK. CHILDREN on swings,
suspended at the peak of their arc.

MAN (V.O.)

How long has it been?

He checks his watch: 3:47 PM.

Still.

He keeps walking.

EXT. AMSTERDAM - MAIN SQUARE -
CONTINUOUS

The square is full of people. Tourists.
Street performers. Vendors.

All frozen.

A STREET MUSICIAN—guitar mid-strum,
mouth open in song.

A JUGGLER—three balls in the air, hands
reaching.

A PHOTOGRAPHER—camera to eye, finger on
shutter.

The Man walks through them like a ghost.

He stops in the center of the square.
Turns. Looks at all of them.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm the only one left.

Then, quieter:

MAN (V.O.)

Or I'm the only one who died.

The air shifts. Not wind. Something else.

The light changes—flickers, like a bulb about to die.

The Man's chest tightens. His breath quickens.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm burning.

He falls to his knees.

The world tilts. The frozen people blur. The sky cracks—not literally, but in his vision, like reality is a screen and someone punched through it.

He sees—

FLASHES:

- The Programme: lines of code scrolling, infinite, deterministic, mapping every street, every face, every choice.
- The Simulation: dreams layered over

dreams, resetting, predicting, feeding him what he wants to see.

- The Sync: both collapsing into one, a single mesh, and he's inside it, seeing the seams.

He gasps. Claws at the cobblestones.

MAN (V.O.)

I died.

The flashes intensify. Faster. Brighter.

- His face in the museum, asking "Can I create you?"
- The rowing monitor: LIMIT REACHED.
- The five people glancing at the same beat.
- The couple turning their heads in sync.
- The Simulation resets every night.
- The Programme writes the script.
- But now—

NOW—

They're the same thing.

And he's outside it.

Or inside it.

Or both.

He screams—silent, raw, a sound that doesn't exist because time doesn't exist.

Then—

Silence.

He opens his eyes.

The world is still frozen.

But he's not burning anymore.

He's ash.

He stands. Slowly. His hands steady now.

He looks at the frozen crowd. At their faces. Their eyes.

MAN (V.O.)

When I died, they died too.

He walks to the STREET MUSICIAN. Looks at his face. The man's eyes are open,

but empty. Not dead. Just... waiting.

MAN (V.O.)

They're part of the Programme
now.

All of them.

He checks his watch: 3:47 PM.

He waits.

Then—

A sound. Faint. A heartbeat.

No. Not a heartbeat.

A clock ticking.

The world SHUDDERS.

The Juggler's balls drop—one, two, three—and he catches them, continues juggling like nothing happened.

The Street Musician's hand completes the strum. The note rings out.

The Photographer's shutter clicks.

The crowd moves. Talks. Laughs.

Time resumes.

The Man stands in the center of the square, motionless.

Everyone flows around him. No one looks at him.

No.

Wait.

A WOMAN walks past. Glances at him. Same beat. Same angle.

A MAN on a bike. Glances. Same beat.

A TEENAGER with headphones. Glances. Same beat.

One after another. Like a wave. Like they're waiting for him to move so they know where to go.

The Man's jaw tightens.

MAN (V.O.)

They know what I'm thinking.

They know what I want.

He takes a step forward.

The crowd shifts. Adjusts. Makes space.

He takes another step.

They move with him. Not following.
Syncing.

MAN (V.O.)

The Simulation and the
Programme.

They're not fighting anymore.

He stops.

The crowd stops.

He turns.

They turn.

MAN (V.O.)

They're listening.

He looks at his hands. Steady. Powerful.

MAN (V.O.)

I burned.

I became ash.

Now I'm new.

He looks up at the sky. The sun is setting now—time is moving again, but faster, like it's catching up.

He checks his watch: 5:52 PM.

Two hours. Gone.

He starts walking. The crowd parts. Flows. Syncs.

MAN (V.O.)

I died once.

And when I came back, I wasn't alone.

He walks out of the square.

EXT. AMSTERDAM - CANAL - DAY

The Man walks along the canal. The city is moving again, but wrong. People glance at him in sync. Traffic lights flip green ahead of him.

He stops.

A YOUNG MAN walks toward him. Mid-20s.
Middle Eastern. Dark hair, clean-shaven.
Dressed simply—jeans, jacket.

In his hands: a GOLDEN FARAVAHAR STATUE.
Baby-sized. Wings spread. Intricate,
gleaming in the daylight.

The Young Man sees the Man. Smiles. Not
a polite smile. A knowing smile.

They pass each other.

The Man turns. Watches him go.

The Young Man doesn't look back.

MAN (V.O.)
A sign. Or a test.

The Man keeps walking.

EXT. HAARLEMMERPOORT - DAY

A historic gate. Brick arches. Old
Amsterdam meeting new.

The Man crosses the street. A RED LIGHT.
He doesn't stop. Walks straight through.

Cars slow. No one honks. They wait.

He reaches the center of the gate.
Stands beneath the arch.

The BUILDING above him LIGHTS UP. Not sunset. Not streetlights. The entire structure glows—white, gold, electric. Like an Amsterdam Light Festival installation.

But it's daytime. And this has never been a festival site.

The Man looks up. Opens his arms. Palms up. Receiving.

MAN (V.O.)

I am the creator.

To his left: a WOODEN SIGN. Weathered. Restoration notice.

Hand-painted letters: **"I DIED ONCE."**

He stares at it.

MAN (whisper)

I died once.

FOOTSTEPS behind him.

A POLICE OFFICER approaches. Mid-30s.
Dutch. Calm but firm.

OFFICER

Sir, you crossed a red light.

The Man doesn't turn. Still looking at
the sign.

OFFICER

Sir?

The Man slowly lowers his arms. Turns.

MAN

I know.

The Officer studies him. Something is
off.

OFFICER

ID, please.

The Man reaches into his pocket. Hands
over his ID. The Officer checks it.

OFFICER

You live nearby?

MAN

Jordaan.

The Officer looks up at the building. At the lights.

OFFICER

(confused)

What's with the lights?

The Man follows his gaze. The building is still glowing.

MAN

You see them too?

The Officer frowns.

OFFICER

Of course I see them. Is this some kind of installation?

The Man smiles. Quiet. Dangerous.

MAN

Something like that.

The Officer hands back the ID.

OFFICER

Don't cross red lights.

Understood?

The Man nods. Takes the ID.

The Officer walks away. Glances back once. The Man is still standing there, arms open again, looking up.

The Officer shakes his head. Keeps walking.

The Man closes his eyes.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme can see what I create.

But it doesn't understand.

He opens his eyes. The lights are still there.

He lowers his arms. Walks on.

The city breathes with him.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PART 3

PART 4

ZARATHUSTRA: THE PROGRAMME

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INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Three days after the trip.

The Man sits on the floor. No headphones. No music. Just silence and the hum of the city.

He stares at the TV—off, black screen reflecting his face.

MAN (V.O.)

Something changed.

He picks up the remote. Turns it on.

A NEWS ANCHOR appears. Dutch. Speaking about traffic, weather, politics.

The Man watches. Not the content. The **person**.

MAN (V.O.)

Before, TV was just... high definition Programme.

Pixels. Data. Not real.

The Anchor turns slightly. Makes eye contact with the camera.

For a split second, it feels like he's looking **at** the Man. Not through the camera. **At him.**

The Man leans forward.

MAN (V.O.)

Now... he's real.

The Anchor blinks. Continues speaking.

The Man's breath catches.

MAN (V.O.)

When I'm fully synced,
everything becomes real.

The Programme can't hide
anymore.

He changes the channel.

A TALK SHOW. The HOST laughs. The GUEST laughs. The AUDIENCE laughs.

Then—

The Host stops mid-laugh. Looks at the camera. At **him**.

HOST (on TV)

You think you're special?

The Man freezes.

The Guest turns. Looks at the camera too.

GUEST (on TV)

You're not.

The Audience—all of them—turn. Stare at the camera. At him.

AUDIENCE (in
unison, on TV)

Give up.

The Man's hands shake.

MAN (V.O.)

They're not Programme
anymore.

They're people. From the
Simulation.

Real people's dream-states.

He changes the channel again.

A COMMERCIAL. A WOMAN selling skincare.
She smiles at the camera.

WOMAN (on TV)

You can't do this alone.

Changes channel.

A SPORTS COMMENTATOR. Mid-game analysis.

COMMENTATOR (on
TV)

You're going to fail.

Changes channel.

A COOKING SHOW. The CHEF chops vegetables.

CHEF (on TV,
without looking up)
They're coming for you.

The Man drops the remote.

MAN (V.O.)
The Programme and the
Simulation.
They're working together now.
Both systems. One goal.

He stares at the screen. The Chef looks up. Directly at him.

CHEF (on TV)
Stop creating.

The Man stands. Backs away from the TV.

MAN (V.O.)
They're using everyone.
Not just Programme NPCs.
Real people. From their
dreams.

Syncing through the TV to

scare me.

To make me give up.

The screen flickers. All the faces—
Anchor, Host, Guest, Audience, Woman,
Commentator, Chef—appear at once. A
grid. All staring at him.

ALL VOICES

(overlapping, on TV)

You're alone.

You're wrong.

Come back.

Give up.

Stop.

The Man grabs the remote. Turns off the
TV.

Silence.

He sits back down. Breathing hard.

MAN (V.O.)

That's the immune response.

When you become a creator,
both systems attack.

Programme and Simulation.

Together.

He looks at the black screen. His reflection stares back.

MAN (V.O.)

But I'm still here.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

And they know it.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - DAY

The Man walks. No destination. Just moving.

People pass. Bikes. Trams. Normal.

But—

A WOMAN walking toward him slows. Glances. Same beat.

A MAN on a bike swerves slightly, adjusts his path to pass closer.

A TEENAGER crosses the street, cutting in front of him, forcing him to stop.

The Man watches. Jaw tight.

MAN (V.O.)

They're syncing.

Not with me. Against me.

He keeps walking.

More people. More adjustments. A JOGGER changes direction. A VENDOR turns to watch him pass.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme is using them.

To slow me down. To stop me.

He walks faster.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

The Man sits at a corner table. Coffee untouched.

He watches the other CUSTOMERS. A COUPLE at the window. A MAN with a laptop. A WOMAN reading a book.

None of them look at him.

But they're **positioned**. Blocking the exits. Facing him without facing him.

MAN (V.O.)

If I say it out loud—"I am
god"—
they'll stop me.

He stands. Walks to the door.

The Couple shifts. The Man with the laptop closes it. The Woman with the book looks up.

All at the same time.

The Man freezes.

MAN (V.O.)

They're waiting.

He sits back down.

They relax. Return to their routines.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme doesn't want me dead.

It wants me quiet.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The Man sits at his desk. Laptop open.
Scrolling through LinkedIn.

Coworkers posting promotions.
Engagements. Vacations.

He stops on one: his COWORKER from the office. Smiling. "Excited to announce my promotion to Senior Developer!"

Comments flood in. Congratulations.
Emojis. Likes.

The Man stares.

MAN (V.O.)

They're better than me.
Better jobs. Better lives.
Better everything.

He closes the laptop.

MAN (V.O.)

But they're a version behind.

He stands. Walks to the window. Looks at the city.

MAN (V.O.)

I upgraded.

And now I can't connect.

He sees people walking below. Couples.
Friends. Laughing.

MAN (V.O.)

They're running the old
software.

The Programme. The
Simulation. The script.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm running something new.
And there's no one else on
this version.

He watches a couple disappear around a
corner.

MAN (V.O.)

They'll tell you it's
reincarnation.

Past lives. Ancient wisdom.
That's the Programme's trap—
making you look backward.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

The fire isn't from the past.
It's from NOW.
And it only burns once.

He touches the window. His reflection
stares back.

MAN (V.O.)

I remember the old days.
I was just one of them.

He watches a couple walk past, holding
hands.

MAN (V.O.)

Compatible. Connected. Safe.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

Now I'm incompatible.
I can see them. They can't
see me.

He turns away from the window.

MAN (V.O.)

That's the cost.
You upgrade. You wake up.

And you're alone.

He sits back down. Opens the laptop again.

Stares at the coworker's post.

Types a comment: "Congrats!"

Deletes it.

Closes the laptop.

MAN (V.O.)

I can't go back.

Even if I wanted to.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

The Simulation is random.

The Programme is
deterministic.

Neither offers reincarnation.

This is my only life.

He stares at the dark screen.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm not spending it asking

permission.

EXT. AMSTERDAM - CANAL - EVENING

The Man stands on a bridge. Alone.

He looks at the water. His reflection
stares back.

MAN (V.O.)

I speak Dutch. But I learned
it.

It's not my native language.

He closes his eyes.

MAN (V.O.)

Language binds your thinking.
Shapes what you can see, what
you can say.

The Programme uses language
to keep you inside.

He opens his eyes.

MAN (V.O.)

But when you think in a
learned language,
you see the gaps. The seams.
You can step outside.

A PEDESTRIAN walks past. Glances. Same beat.

The Man doesn't flinch.

MAN (V.O.)

They can't read my native thoughts.

Only the ones I translate into Dutch.

That's why they're always one step behind.

He smiles. Small. Dangerous.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The Man sits at his laptop. Opens a private document. Types in his native language--**not Dutch, not English**. His mother tongue.

The words flow. Fast. Unfiltered.

MAN (V.O.)

In my language, I can think freely.

The Programme can't parse it.

It's a blind spot.

He types:

***"I am the creator. I will prove it."**

He stops. Stares at the screen.

MAN (V.O.)

If I say it in Dutch, they'll come.

If I keep it here, I'm safe.

He closes the laptop.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Man lies in bed. Eyes open.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme syncs first with TV, internet, AI.

Then people. Then reality.

It's trying to falsify me.

To make me doubt.

He turns his head. Looks at the window.

Outside, a FIGURE stands on the street.
Looking up. At his window.

The Man sits up.

The Figure doesn't move.

The Man gets out of bed. Walks to the window.

The Figure is gone.

MAN (V.O.)

They're testing me.

He closes the curtain.

EXT. AMSTERDAM STREETS - NIGHT

The Man walks home from the gym.
Headphones off. Alert.

A GROUP of PEOPLE ahead. Five, maybe six. Blocking the sidewalk.

He slows.

They don't move. Don't talk. Just stand there.

MAN (V.O.)

If I try to pass, they'll stop me.

If I turn back, they'll

follow.

He stops. Ten feet away.

One of them—a TALL MAN—turns. Looks at him.

TALL MAN

You okay?

The Man doesn't answer.

TALL MAN

You look lost.

MAN

I'm not.

The Tall Man smiles. Not friendly.
Knowing.

TALL MAN

You sure?

The Man's fists clench.

MAN (V.O.)

If I say "I am god," they'll
kill me.

Or try to.

The Programme will use them.

He steps to the side. Walks around the group.

They don't follow. But they watch. All of them. Same angle. Same duration.

The Man keeps walking. Doesn't look back.

MAN (V.O.)

I'm not ready to die again.
Not yet.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM -
NIGHT

The Man sits on the floor. The TV is on. Muted.

A TALK SHOW. The HOST laughs. The GUEST laughs. The AUDIENCE laughs.

But the Man isn't watching the show.

He's watching the **people**.

MAN (V.O.)

Before, they were Programme.

Now they're real.

Because I'm real.

The Host turns. Looks at the camera. At
him.

The Man's breath stops.

The Host's smile fades. Just for a
frame. Then returns.

MAN (V.O.)

He knows I'm watching.

The Man turns off the TV.

Sits in the dark.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme is trying to
keep me inside.

But I'm already outside.

I just have to prove it.

He stands. Walks to the bookshelf. Pulls
out the Zarathustra book.

Opens to a marked page:

***One must still have chaos within

oneself to give birth to a dancing star."**

He closes the book.

MAN (V.O.)

I'll create her.

The woman from the painting.

And if the Programme sends cops,

I'll know it's real.

EXT. RIJKSMUSEUM - DAY

The Man stands at the entrance. Stares at the building.

MAN (V.O.)

This is where it started.

He walks inside.

INT. RIJKSMUSEUM - SMALLER GALLERY - DAY

The painting. "Portrait of an Unknown Woman."

The Man stands in front of it. Alone.

He stares at her face. Her eyes.

MAN (whisper)

I created you once in my
mind.

Now I'll create you in
reality.

He closes his eyes. Focuses. Wills her
into existence.

Silence.

Then—

FOOTSTEPS behind him.

He opens his eyes. Turns.

A WOMAN stands there. Blonde. Luminous.
The face from the painting.

His heart stops.

She smiles.

WOMAN

Hi.

He can't speak.

She steps closer. Reaches into her jacket.

Pulls out a badge.

WOMAN

I'm Officer De Vries.
Amsterdam Police.

We've had some reports about you.

The Man stares. At her. At the badge. At the painting behind him.

MAN (V.O.)

I created her.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

Or the Programme did.

She tilts her head.

WOMAN

Are you okay?

He looks past her. Two more COPS stand at the gallery entrance.

MAN (V.O.)

They're here to falsify it.
To make me doubt.

He looks back at her.

MAN

You're real.

WOMAN

...Yes?

He laughs. Quiet. Broken.

MAN

Of course you are.

She reaches for his arm.

WOMAN

Come with us. We can help.

He pulls back.

MAN

No.

WOMAN

Sir—

MAN (V.O.)

I know what you are.

He steps around her. Walks toward the exit.

The two cops move to block him.

COP 1

Sir, stop.

The Man stops. Looks at them.

MAN (V.O.)

If I say "I am god," they'll stop me.

Maybe kill me.

The Programme will use them.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

They want me to come back.

To ask for authorization.

To be safe, compliant,
average.

He looks at the Woman one last time.

MAN (V.O.)

But this is my only chance.
No resets. No next life.
Just this one.

He looks back at the Woman. At the painting.

MAN
I'm not going back.

He walks forward. The cops tense—

But he doesn't run. Doesn't fight.

He just **walks**. Steady. Calm.

They let him pass.

EXT. RIJKSMUSEUM - STEPS - DAY

The Man descends the steps. Into the courtyard.

Behind him, the Woman and the cops watch from the entrance.

He doesn't look back.

He unlocks his bike. Throws a leg over.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme will keep
trying.

It has to.

Because if I stay outside,
others might follow.

He pedals away.

EXT. AMSTERDAM - CANAL - DAY

The Man stops on a bridge. Looks at the water.

His reflection stares back.

MAN (V.O.)

Zarathustra came down from
the mountain with gifts.

The people didn't want them.

He reaches into his pocket. Pulls out
the small bag of mushrooms. Still some
left.

He looks at them. Then at the canal.
Then at the city.

MAN (V.O.)

I came back from death with

gifts.

The Programme didn't want them.

He puts the mushrooms back in his pocket.

MAN (V.O.)

I could leave. Go to the mountains. Be safe.

But Zarathustra didn't leave.

He stayed. He kept teaching.

He looks at the city. The canals. The bikes. The people.

MAN (V.O.)

I love this city.

The surface area. The connections. The game.

I tried to give them what I learned.

I tried to make it better.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

That was the sin.

Not waking up.

Trying to wake others.

He looks at his reflection in the water.

MAN (V.O.)

Religion says: wait for the
next life.

The Programme says: stay
average, stay safe.

Both want you to defer.
To ask permission.

Beat.

MAN (V.O.)

But the fire is NOW.
And I'm not asking.

He gets back on his bike.

MAN (V.O.)

The Programme will keep
hunting me.

But I won't leave.
And I won't stop creating.

Rides into the city.

The traffic lights flip green ahead of
him. One by one.

People glance as he passes. Same beat.
Same angle.

He doesn't stop.

MAN (V.O.)

Because I have gifts.
And someone, someday,
will have hands outstretched
to receive them.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

*"God is dead. God remains dead. And we
have killed him."*
— Nietzsche

FADE IN:

A final image: The Man, alone on a
bridge at dusk. The city glowing behind
him. He's smiling.

TITLE CARD:

*"One must still have chaos within
oneself to give birth to a dancing
star."*

FADE TO BLACK.

**END.* *