

A QUESTION OF JUDGEMENT

by

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FLARE TO WHITE. BEGIN TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. ENTRANCE TO DESTINY - EARLY MORNING

We swim through clear blue water. Colourful sea plants sway gently in the currents. Shafts of light pierce the aquatic environment from above. A pair of hands-with-fins-on appear unsteadily from below frame as they attempt to gain control of this deep-sea flight. A bright white shaft of light appears in the distance, emanating from an opening in a coral formation. The fins maneuver through the blinding white center of the light.

END TITLE SEQUENCE.

Motion stops. We are inside a sea cave. Strange shapes abound. The fins relax and drop. The camera turns to reveal FISHMAN (38). He is white, healthy, and wears a rainbow trout fish suit. He is dripping wet and looks quite ridiculous.

FISHMAN  
Hello? Hello?

A kindly old woman (85) appears from behind FISHMAN. She also wears a rainbow trout fish suit. She appears to be floating. She offers FISHMAN a cup of tea, rather awkwardly, with her old fins.

GRAMMA  
Oh, hello dear. Here already?  
This is quite a surprise! Good  
luck.

FISHMAN  
(Happy)  
Gramma!

She returns his smile.

FISHMAN  
(suddenly concerned)  
Gramma? How is that possible...?

As FISHMAN reaches out, Gramma dissolves, taking her teacup with her. A mangy dog appears and barks as it too floats along. The dog also wears a fish suit, unconvincingly.

FISHMAN  
Sparky! There's a good puppy!

FISHMAN tries to pet Sparky, but the fins are not so good. He looks confused as Sparky floats away.

Suddenly, there is loud trumpet fanfare, startling our already bewildered FISHMAN.

FISHMAN  
Jesus Christ!

FISHMAN sees that the bright light comes from an opening in the cave wall. FISHMAN walks unsteadily toward the opening. His fish suit is not easy to move in. Nevertheless, he walks through the doorway.

FISHMAN  
What the hell?

HEAVENLY HOST  
Careful now - everything counts.

FISHMAN turns and sees he is no longer alone. HEAVENLY HOST (25) blond, gorgeous, dressed in a lovely angelfish costume stands before him, like a restaurant hostess. FISHMAN is gobsmacked.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Welcome.

Heavenly Host gives him a big smile, and steps forward, arms outstretched. She attempts to give him a hug, but the fish suits get in the way. FISHMAN remains stunned. She takes his fin and guides him forward toward the light.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Do you know where you are?

FISHMAN  
No...  
(beat)  
Who are you?

HEAVENLY HOST  
(giggles)  
I'm your HH.

FISHMAN  
My HH?

HEAVENLY HOST  
Heavenly Host. I'm here to help  
with your...  
(beat)  
transition.

FISHMAN  
My transition?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 (caring but mechanical)  
 You've passed from your worldly  
 body to this 'temporary' form so  
 that you may be judged.

FISHMAN  
 (bewildered)  
 So I'm dead?  
 (new thought)  
 What do you mean, judged?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 Just like it sounds.

FISHMAN  
 (tries to appear urbane)  
 You mean the post mortem pearly  
 gate thing...like when Saint Peter  
 decides to let you into heaven?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 Sort of. But in the spirit of  
 tolerance, equality, political  
 correctness and all that, we're now  
 governed by the DJA.

FISHMAN  
 DJA?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 (mechanical)  
 Divine Judgment Act. The question  
 of admission shall be decided by  
 the CMR...

FISHMAN  
 CMR?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 Council of Major Religion-isms...

FISHMAN  
 Religi-what?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 The Council of Major Religion-isms.  
 Your uh... Jury. And here they are  
 now!!

FISHMAN  
 My jury?

Heavenly Host has led FISHMAN into a large bright chamber. Though inside an underwater cave, this is clearly a courtroom.

Suddenly, a dance track blares and Heavenly Host and FISHMAN watch as a group of people in various types of fish costumes walk swimmingly into the cave. Clearly, they have this walking-in-a-fish-suit thing pretty much nailed. They bob and weave as they grow closer, trying to approximate fish movement. PETER (18) is a white male Minnow, a bit scruffy; TARO (28) is a dark skinned male Spotted Headstander - he has a peaceful countenance and an engaging smile; BLAISE (36) is a beautiful female Sailfin Tetra with a slight edge; GANESH (40) is a short, bald male Grouper with dark skin and a jovial smile; ERIN (34) is an intense, wound up female Blowfish with dark hair and cold eyes; NAIMA (25) is a small female Guppy with dark skin and intense dark eyes. All are engaged in some sort of energetic, good-natured discussion as they form into a semi circle behind individual podiums. It appears to FISHMAN that they seem caught up in their own revelry and are unaware of his presence.

HEAVENLY HOST  
 (smiles a bit too much -  
 she's clearly interested)  
 Oh, there's your Saint Peter...

PETER  
 (smiles at Heavenly Host)  
 Hey good lookin...

FISHMAN notices the flirtation and is a bit annoyed.

FISHMAN  
 (to Heavenly Host)  
 He's a bit young for a saint, isn't he?

HEAVENLY HOST  
 We get a lot of that...  
 (winks at Peter)  
 And that's the COUNCIL of MAJOR Religion-isms - who will, (consults note attached to fin) following the completion of applicant questioning and consideration of the applicant's responses, accept the applicant as 'resident'.

The jury applauds. Heavenly Host turns to the council and curtsies. She turns back to FISHMAN.

FISHMAN  
Resident of?

HEAVENLY HOST  
Not so fast...

FISHMAN  
Let me get this straight. You're  
telling me that, if I want to get  
into Heaven...

HEAVENLY HOST  
Well get in - sort of like you'd  
rather be a member than not, get  
approval than not...  
(beat)  
You know sort of like an exclusive  
club.

The men on the jury erupt with applause. Naima begins to  
applaud but then notices Blaise and Erin as they look at her  
in disbelief - she immediately stops clapping.

GANESH  
Here, here.

PETER  
Fantastic job - just fantastic.

TARO  
Well done.

FISHMAN  
Well, what's the alternative?

Heavenly Host looks lost. The jury murmurs. She looks at  
the jury, expecting guidance. Except for Blaise, they avoid  
her glance.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Alternative?

FISHMAN  
Yeah. What's the alternative to  
getting in?

The Heavenly Host pulls on a rope that appears out of  
nowhere. An extremely large book is lowered from above,  
clankingly.

HEAVENLY HOST  
I'm kind of new.

FISHMAN

Oh great.

She looks through the manual, finds what she is looking for, closes the book, pulls the rope, and all watch as it goes upward and out of sight.

FISHMAN

What does it say?

HEAVENLY HOST

There is no alternative.

FISHMAN rolls his eyes. The jury applauds, except for Blaise and Naima who look completely irritated.

HEAVENLY HOST

So let's get down to business.  
Each member of the CMR will ask you  
one question.

FISHMAN

What if I get the answer wrong?

Heavenly Host looks a little lost again and is about to pull the rope, but is interrupted by FISHMAN.

FISHMAN

Oh don't bother - you'll probably  
tell me there are no wrong answers.

BLAISE

Good thinking.

FISHMAN looks at Blaise. She winks at him as she adjusts her many bracelets while the rest of the jury turns and scowls at her.

GANESH

We would get an existentialist.

ERIN

Last time we had an atheist - it  
was ridiculous.

PETER

This is my first time.

The jury looks at him. Heavenly Host smiles.

HEAVENLY HOST

Good luck.

TARO  
Don't be nervous.

FISHMAN looks incredulously at the jury.

FISHMAN  
I have to answer to them? My  
future lies in their... hands?

HEAVENLY HOST  
No, it rests in yours.  
(businesslike)  
All right, let's get a few  
introductions out of the way.

Heavenly host looks down at her fin again.

HEAVENLY HOST  
There's Peter, who represents two  
billion Christian fish.

Peter waves. Heavenly Host smiles at Peter and then looks  
down at her fin again.

HEAVENLY HOST  
And then there's Naima representing  
Islam with its 1.3 billion fish.

Naima barely reacts.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Then there's Ganesh who casts his  
vote on behalf of 900 million Hindu  
fish.

Ganesh nods his head.

The Heavenly Host looks down at her fin again.

FISHMAN  
(indignant)  
Are you cheating?

HEAVENLY HOST  
(embarrassed)  
Well um...  
(beat)

BLAISE  
She was your choice.

FISHMAN  
What do you mean my choice?

BLAISE  
She's your fantasy - what you want.

TARO  
AHHH wanting...

BLAISE  
Yeah, yeah suffering comes from  
want, but we all have wants.

TARO  
Useless cravings Blaise, the key is  
useless.

BLAISE  
Well, you want Nirvana.

TARO  
(puzzled)  
Well except for Nirvana.

BLAISE  
(sarcastic)  
Yeah, yeah, all truths are relative  
except for THE TRUTH that all  
truths are relative. Do I have  
that right?

The panel looks at Blaise with irritation and some confusion  
- except for Ganesh who has nodded off.

HEAVENLY HOST  
That's Blaise and Taro.  
(back to business)  
Taro represents the 360 million  
Buddhist fish. And next is ERIN -  
representing Judaism with 140  
million fish.

With this last comment, the jury suddenly seems quite  
uncomfortable. Ganesh snorts awake.

ERIN  
Make that 14 million fish.

FISHMAN  
There's only 14 million? Then,  
well...

ERIN  
Out with it.

FISHMAN

Well, how'd you get a seat with one fifth of one percent of the world's population?

Erin smiles knowingly. The jury kvetches. They'd like to move on.

FISHMAN

No really - I thought fish like you didn't believe in all of this stuff anyway?

ERIN

What stuff?

FISHMAN

Well - you know... Heaven?

ERIN

Heaven. Who said anything about Heaven?

The jury laughs uproariously. FISHMAN looks perplexed.

HEAVENLY HOST

And last but not least is Blaise representing the 850 million nonreligious fishes: agnostics, humanists, atheists, etc.

Blaise smiles coquettishly and adjusts her fishnet stockings.

FISHMAN

Okay that's weird. How does someone who doesn't believe in any religion get on a jury of major religions?

HEAVENLY HOST

Remember the new order of inclusion and tolerance Sunshine?

(beat)

Ready?

FISHMAN

Well seeing as I don't have a choice...

BLAISE

(in earnest to FISHMAN)  
Choice.

(MORE)

BLAISE(cont'd)

Choice is the cornerstone of a fish's existence. Because you are free to choose your own way...

HEAVENLY HOST

(interrupts Blaise on purpose)

It's time!

The jury applauds. At that moment A VERY OLD WOMAN (105) in a Spotted Pimelodella fish suit ambles onto the scene. She pulls a circular game wheel past the jury. The jury ignores this late arrival. Game show music begins with canned applause. Blaise fumes, Naima looks annoyed, and the rest of the jury becomes animated. On the wheel's surface is a pie graph divided into six sections: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Non-Religious. In the wheel's centre is a spinning pointer.

PETER

(ruefully)

I miss Vegas.

HEAVENLY HOST

Go ahead and give her a spin.

FISHMAN reaches forward and reluctantly spins the pointer. A loud clicking noise is heard. The council leans forward and watches as the spinner stops on Buddhism. The jury claps and then quiets down. All look at Taro. Taro leans forward.

TARO

Did you seek Enlightenment?

The jury erupts into inaudible excited chatter.

GANESH

Well done.

FISHMAN

Well I...

BLAISE

(interrupts)

Enlightenment? Enlightenment? You call previous lives, bad karma, transcending desire enlightened? The enlightenment is a call to reason - is this reasonable? What evidence is there of past lives?

GANESH

The goal of being enlightened...

BLAISE

(interrupts)

Oh don't get me started with you  
Hindus - reincarnation through  
what, yoga?

PETER

Yeah.

ERIN

Right, and Christians really strive  
for enlightenment - that must be  
why your good book was in Latin for  
all those years - for all those  
(tries to indicate italics with his  
fins) "Latin" scholars seeking  
enlightenment?

NAIMA

(to Peter)

Not very democratic.

A large gong sounds.

HEAVENLY HOST

(cheerful)

Okay times up.

FISHMAN

What? I didn't even answer the  
question.

HEAVENLY HOST

Gotta be quick.

(beat)

Judges please tally your scores.

FISHMAN looks lost. The jury begin to tally their scores. The Very Old Woman walks towards the back of the cave and returns - she pulls an enormous bulletin board on rickety wheels into position. FISHMAN watches with interest as she carefully positions what appears to be a scoreboard. Meanwhile, Blaise looks deep in thought while Erin quickly writes something down; Peter writes furiously but then seems to run out of ink while Taro and Naima momentarily pause and then write down their scores. Ganesh looks puzzled.

HEAVENLY HOST

Times up. Please reveal - starting  
with Peter.

PETER

Oh man - okay well sorry brother.

Peter reveals a large white card with a picture of a strange looking dog that is clearly half finished. Ganesh laughs while Erin looks annoyed.

HEAVENLY HOST

Taro?

Taro smiles at FISHMAN and reveals the words VERY GOOD. Naima looks at Taro in disbelief as does Blaise. They feel Taro has been too kind.

HEAVENLY HOST

Blaise?

Blaise holds up a blank card.

BLAISE

I refuse to partake in this - I'm not sure why the hell I'm even here.

The jury members shake their heads.

HEAVENLY HOST

Ganesh?

Ganesh holds up his card with 1005 written on it. Erin looks annoyed once again.

ERIN

What? 1005 - is there something the rest of us don't know?

Ganesh grins - he has a great set of teeth - very white.

HEAVENLY HOST

Erin?

Erin reveals the Yiddish word "SCHLIMAZEL."

FISHMAN

What? This is absurd - they have different scores - how...

(beat)

I don't even know what Schlimazel means.

HEAVENLY HOST

Now now, let's not waste time.

(beat)

Naima?

ERIN  
Schlimazel is a habitual failure.

FISHMAN  
What?

ERIN  
That's what it means.

FISHMAN  
(exasperated)  
Hey...  
(beat)  
And I meant all of them - how does  
1005 relate to Very Good or  
schleemeezeel).

ERIN  
Schlimazel. Schlimazel.

The jury look at FISHMAN momentarily and then continue doing their own thing. Taro tries to get into a more comfortable position while Peter and Ganesh play Rock, Paper, Scissors which doesn't make any sense as we only see their fins moving up and down. Blaise has begun to read Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Naima?

Naima reveals a large blue circle. Taro smiles at her, but Erin looks suspicious.

ERIN  
Why Blue? I thought blue...

NAIMA smiles at Erin but says nothing. The Very Old Woman deliberately and quietly gathers the scorecards from each of the jury and makes her way back to the large scoreboard and, with difficulty, inserts the cards.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Okay then. That's round one. Time  
to spin again.

Canned applause. The Very Old Woman is startled. FISHMAN turns the spinner. It lands on Hinduism. The jury claps.

FISHMAN  
Why clap at that - it's going to  
land somewhere...

HEAVENLY HOST  
Getting a little testy are we?

FISHMAN  
I thought you were on my side.

HEAVENLY HOST  
Ganesh?

GANESH  
Thank you.

Ganesh, putting his fins in the prayer position, takes a moment to think.

FISHMAN  
(irritated)  
He seems to get all the time he needs?

HEAVENLY HOST  
Shhh.

FISHMAN  
Don't SHHH me!

GANESH  
Do you believe in God?

Silence.

PETER  
Be careful on this one, Dude.

FISHMAN  
(rises to the challenge)  
Do you mean God or do you mean Gods?

GANESH  
(as Groucho Marx)  
We've got ourselves a live one...