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HEART FORCE

Pilot Episode (1 of 6)

Jade Phallus Heist

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pilot script by John Selby

(Inspired by the novels High Heart  
and Higher Forces by John Selby)

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INT. STANFORD UNIV HALLWAY - NIGHT

Carrying a day pack, a slender YOUNG MAN (whose face we don't see) walks fast up to an iris-scan. It recognizes him and the door slides open -

INT. NEURO-PSYCH LAB [CONTINUOUS]

Lights are dimmed for the night, no one is in the large lab room. The young man walks silently past several MRI machines and a dozen desks with computers.

He pauses at a slightly-open interior office door. Rock music is playing. He looks inside - and quickly does something with his hands.

INT. OFFICE [CONTINUOUS]

Professor ROB HADLEY (57) is hunched over his computer writing furiously with total concentration. The young man comes up behind him - and aggressively presses a wet cloth over the professor's nose and mouth.

The professor struggles but quickly goes limp. The young man calmly takes a syringe out of his day pack and injects something into the professor's neck, then speaks with a slight accent:

YOUNG MAN
Pues, Jon - you had your chance.
Now it's adios amigo.

He turns and walks casually out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. UC BERKELEY LECTURE HALL - DAY

TWO YEARS LATER -

JACK HADLEY (30, confident, energetic but fed-up) is finishing up a lecture to around a hundred students. They listen attentively and he speaks playfully, laid-back but still sounding professorial:

JACK
(west-coast accent)
So off you go, swaggin' into open
spaces. I'll be down south in Baja
for the holidays catching some non-
(MORE)

JACK (cont'd)
tech sunsets. Be sure to check out
that amygdala research I posted you
know where - and hey, I've enjoyed
every moment here with ya - Happy
Holidays!

To various muted cheers and even some enthusiastic applause,
Jack makes a quick side-door exit.

EXT. UC BERKELEY CAMPUS [CONTINUOUS]

Jack comes fast out of the lecture hall. It's December, a
bit windy, looking like rain.

JACK
(to himself)
Finally - done with that.

A fellow teacher (LESLIE, 30s) approaches him as he walks
down the path toward the parking lot. She speaks quietly
like a friend.

LESLIE
Wait. Jack - we haven't talked
about, you know, vacation. Are you
coming over?

JACK
(abrupt)
I was going to call. I feel like
I'm gonna explode - I'm heading
south for a few weeks.

LESLIE
(disappointed)
Oh. So. Is it okay to ask who're
you going with?

Jack stops walking, responds with a kinder tone.

JACK
Nothing like that - total solo,
grab a bit'a monk time in Todos
Santos but hey, have a real good
holiday, drink a glass, take a toke
for me.

LESLIE
(honest)
But damn, I had my heart set on
more of what we did last week - but
(MORE)

LESLIE (cont'd)
okay, whatever. Oh, somebody said
you're shipping out to Google.

Jack reacts - shakes his head.

JACK
Misinformation. Dumb. Not possible.

LESLIE
What I mean, Jack, is that I might
be heading there myself. I need to
get out and do something real.

JACK
Working for Google?

LESLIE
They're a force of nature. They
still mean to do good.

JACK
Depends on how you define good.

LESLIE
(a bit pissed)
You do have an attitude on that.

JACK
Yeah, got it from my dad, he got it
from his dad - hey, t'would be
lovely to hang with ya but really,
Baja calls. I gotta run - party on!

She watches as he walks off in his Levi's and boots - then
she smiles slightly, turns and heads back up toward campus.

EXT/INT. VW CAMPER [CONTINUOUS]

Jack walks across the Psych Department parking lot and
climbs into his custom Volkswagen CAMPER.

He's jolted to find a casually-dressed man, LARRY BISH (50s,
easy-going but brilliant) sitting quietly in the passenger
seat waiting for him.

JACK
(annoyed - joking)
So, breaking and entering - illegal
trespass. Google have you out
playing spy versus spy today?

Larry grins, not reacting.

LARRY

Door was unlocked. Hey, we're looking forward to your Ted talk.

JACK

Mom phoned last night, said she's working directly for you now.

LARRY

Danny's an asset. You would be too.

JACK

(over-reacting)

Larry, ease up - let me be, will ya? No more Google talk.

Larry looks at Jack with genuine concern.

LARRY

What's up with you recently Jack? I think it was Alan Watts who said that life is so damn serious, if you take it seriously it'll kill you.

JACK

And look what happened to him, dead at 57, same as my dad.

LARRY

(beat) Yeah. Jon being gone, still harsh on all of us - but you know, my therapist helped me through all that. Got his number if you want. It's been two years now. Time to give it up and let go.

Jack is staring blankly out the VW window at two young men walking hand in hand. He takes a long breath and then speaks in a dead-pan tone.

JACK

I'll let go when the cops nail whoever killed him.

Larry seems shocked a bit by Jack's words. He takes his own deep breath to let the air clear.

LARRY

It's weird, you know, when people like you and me start talking like we're in some cop show.

JACK

Well maybe we should write it all down, pound out a treatment, get ourselves a contract and split this whole psych rut.

LARRY

Sounds like you're overdue for a vacation. I've put a whole week aside for Christmas. You too?

JACK

Oh - I was going to tell you. I'm headed to Baja like right now. I've been lecturing about synchronicity all semester - time to head off into that flow myself for a couple weeks, let some quantum sync take over. There's zero flow at all for me around here.

LARRY

Well you're the flow guy on campus. But - Baja? Your mom is counting on a big Christmas feast over in Marin.

JACK

Sorry but no go - and you seem to satisfy her these days. For me it's take off time, right now if you'll kindly remove your Google butt.

LARRY

Jack, wait - I didn't drive up here to talk family vacation plans. WE need to talk about something related to your dad.

Jack meets Larry's eyes, then looks again out his window. Showing zero emotion, he remains mute.

LARRY (cont'd)

So here's the thing. Totally under the radar, there's a new neuro-E mood manipulation treatment in the works - and it's all based on your dad's research.

JACK

(beat)

So?

LARRY
(getting charged)
So as of this week we're hot after
that IP. And get this - there's
peripheral data pointing to who
maybe offed Jon, if in fact anybody
did.

Jack exhales loudly but remains mute. Larry hands him a cell phone.

- CU on phone: Jack sees a telephoto HEAD SHOT of a young quite-striking woman (MAHALENA BERNHARDT, 30, Mayan/German).

INT. MUSEUM DISPLAY ROOM [CONTINUOUS]

Mahalena's photo image morph-cuts to a body-cam video shot following the live Mahalena as she walks through a bunch of museum visitors in a Guatemalan-artifact exhibit.

Mahalena walks up to a life-size masterfully-carved ancient Mayan JADE PHALLUS on display.

She turns and looks around the room. As she looks again in the camera's direction, we morph back to:

INT. CAMPER AT BERKELEY [CONTINUOUS]

Jack is staring at the photo on the cell phone.

LARRY
That woman's brother was one of the
seven grad-students identified
passing through the iris check into
your dad's lab that night Jon died.

JACK
(impatient)
So?

LARRY
So there's emerging evidence this
same guy is down south somewhere
doing illegal brain experiments
that run parallel to your dad's.

Jack hands back the cell phone - stays silent.

LARRY (cont'd)
This woman - by chance I just got
word she's over at the Marin Museum
(MORE)

LARRY (cont'd)
right now, maybe part of some
visiting exhibit. You might zap
over, spark a conversation, maybe
learn where her brother's lab is.
Finding him is vital to me, Jack,
essential to Google - and maybe to
you too.

JACK
So - you're spying on this woman,
you're stalking her?

LARRY
I'm just quietly reaching out with
the photo. A guy who used to work
for Google gave me that info, for a
pretty penny. I'm being cautious -
that's why I'm asking you for a
first look, not my usual team.

JACK
Well forget it, I'm not biting. I'm
burnt and heading south.

LARRY
(not giving up)
Her name's Mahalena Bernhardt,
beautiful eyes - you gotta admit
she's quite a magnificent specimen.

JACK
Larry, that kind'a talk seriously
dates you.

LARRY
Come on, just get over there, chat
her up - then get back to me with
info on her brother. I feel a flow
here, you're my man. Please, do
this. For your dad.

Jack takes the phone and stares at the woman again.

The sound of a fine-tuned engine shifting masterfully in
traffic cuts in -

INT. CAMPER ON FREEWAY - DAY

Jack is enjoying driving fast. He reaches and turns on a
Spotify rock/blues station - over CREDITS a rough raw male
blues tune cuts in:

BLUES/ROCK SINGER (V.O.)
Well I met this woman the other
night yes I did. She walked up to
me in broad moonlight yes she did -
and she said, 'Didn't I know you in
another life? It seems to me that I
was once your wife. Won't you come
with me - I need you to come with
me - won't you come with me now...'

Jack looks perplexed/intrigued by the lyrics.

EXT. MUSEUM PARKING LOT - DAY

The parking lot is seen through a video surveillance lens.
It's now raining hard. Jack's suped-up camper splashes into
the parking lot. The surveillance camera watches him along
with several other arrivals.

EXTERIOR VIDEO MAN (V.O.)
This is boring, nothing at all
happening out here. How long is she
gonna just sit in there?

INT. MUSEUM LOBBY [CONTINUOUS]

The hidden body camera in the lobby is still focused on the
same young woman as before (Mahalena, Mahee for short, 30,
slender, alert). She is now sitting upright on a sofa.

INTERIOR VIDEO MAN (V.O.)
(whispering)
Yeah, boring but I wouldn't mind
getting my hands on a bit'a that.
Hey, just wondering - did Larry
Bish text you earlier today with a
photo?

EXTERNAL VIDEO MAN (V.O.)
No - why would he? We're all done
with Google.

INTERIOR VIDEO MAN (V.O.)
Yeah, I brushed him off. The pay on
this side is double. Just keep on
her, see what she's up to.

INT. MUSEUM LOBBY - NORMAL POV

A wall-clock shows 4:15. The museum is jam-packed. Jack enters, looks around, grabs a brochure. On the cover is a photo of the lifelike ceremonial jade-phallus artifact.

Jack glances up - finds a Mayan statue staring back at him. He unzips his jacket and closes his eyes, inhales deeply - and does a couple pleasurable neck rolls.

His eyes open and he glances around the room, checking out several young women. One of them catches his glance, smiles. He blinks, looks away - and finds himself looking at the profile of that same woman in Larry's photo. Mahalena is sitting alone in a far corner.

She turns her head and looks directly into Jack's eyes.

People come between them, she disappears - then bodies part and she's visible again, sitting with her eyes now closed, long dark hair loose around her shoulders -

She opens her eyes suddenly and looks again directly at Jack, with the slight smile of an intimate friend. She cocks her head inquisitively - and drops the smile.

The crowd moves. Jack loses sight of her again. He starts to push impulsively toward her - then surrenders to the flow of the visitors and goes on into the Guatemalan-display room.

INT. DISPLAY ROOM [CONTINUOUS]

Jack spies the jade carving positioned near a far wall. It's surrounded by about thirty people and a fat armed GUARD. A red cord keeps observers a few feet back.

Jack steps into an open space to see the thing close-up. Perched on its velvet stand, the piece is rotating slowly with tiny spotlights highlighting its organic curves.

As Jack stares at the life-size jade phallus, someone right beside him speaks in a low resonant female voice with a slight hard-to-identify mellifluous accent:

MAHALENA

(playful)

Ah, Nokalito, so you have come.

Jack glances ... it's the woman he noticed in the lobby.

JACK
(flustered)
Uhm, oh - it's you. I mean, do I
know you?

MAHALENA
Who can say. I saw you walk in.

JACK
Well hi. My name's Jack.

MAHALENA
(lightly - smiling)
So yet another Jack has come to
gaze upon the holy genitalia of the
long-lost Mayan autocracy.

JACK
(smiles back)
Uhm, yeah. Well put.

They stare intently at the jade piece as it turns.

MAHALENA (V.O.)
In the highland Maya tradition from
whence this hunk comes there are
two teachings. The first is that we
must always remember and even
worship our ancestors. The second
is that we must strive to let go of
the past and embrace whatever is
emerging. (beat) I do wonder what
residual wisdom this piece might
still be carrying.

JACK
Yeah, I was just wondering who
actually made it and, really - why?

MAHALENA
Pues, a thousand years ago there
was a well-balanced Maya society
flourishing in the highlands. Then
the inevitable winds of change blew
away that balance. Raw male forces
seized power - and they generated
this gaping misogynist tool.

She pauses - puts both hands over her heart.

JACK
It's perfectly sculpted. Imagine
making that without power tools.

MAHALENA

In my imagination I see innocent virgin girls - I cannot escape what was done to them. But perhaps I am sounding a bit too harsh. I believe in regaining the male-female balance, not honoring those who violated it.

JACK

I'll smoke to that. So what else does the brochure say?

MAHALENA

Tradition tells us that Caban, the Atitlan god of the volcano, judged the priests' sacrificial behavior as unacceptable. One day in 1018 he blew his holy top. Lava spewed to the high heavens and all was lost - except for this piece. It was re-discovered in 1939, then stored away during the war. Now it is again being brought to the fore.

She glances quickly around the room as if on high alert.

JACK

So was this particular carving ever used in a Mayan ceremony - were there female victims involved?

MAHALENA

(somewhat joking)

You are now asking, at least from your own cultural perspective, a rather pornographic question.

She looks over at the guard who is talking with tourists. When she looks back, her expression is quite serious.

MAHALENA (cont'd)

Whenever we perceive anyone as a helpless victim, we disrupt the deeper integrity of that person. But yes. An innocent virgin would ceremoniously receive the jade - and then yield her heart. The gods would be grateful and support the priests - but I cannot imagine a god who would demand such a gross violation of the feminine spirit.

They both stare at the slowly-spinning artifact.

MAHALENA (V.O.)

However, this piece does fascinate me. Even right now it might be radiating a more integrated male presence and purpose.

She glances at her watch.

JACK

So - uhm. Are you yourself from the lake where they found this?

Her expression softens.

MAHALENA

I was born and raised on Lago Atitlan. Since then I have been, how do you say it, around.

A LOUD COMMOTION jolts the hush of the display room. Over by the guard a YOUNG WOMAN is perhaps having an epileptic fit.

Jack turns and watches the guard make a move toward the staggering woman but too late - she collapses down hard onto the floor, her short dress flying up revealing yellow underwear.

Jack turns his head back to the jade piece - he catches the Guatemalan woman pushing against the red cord.

Her left hand reaches into her purse and emerges with a duplicate of the artifact. Her right hand quickly grabs the original as her left sets the replacement on the pedestal.

The woman is still convulsing on the floor. Mahalena slips the stolen piece into her purse. She looks around the room to make sure no one has seen what she's done - and catches Jack staring right at her.

MAHALENA (cont'd)

(quietly urgent)

Por favor, stay calm, come outside with me and I will explain.

The woman on the floor is now recovering as the distracted guard tries to pull her dress down over her underwear.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MUSEUM [CONTINUOUS]

POV surveillance camera - Mahalena and Jack walk fast to a beat-up SPORTS CAR parked at the curb.

Jack's phone rings. He sees it's Larry phoning - and turns off his phone.

MAHALENA

We need to depart immediately.

JACK

And if I refuse?

MAHALENA

Please. This is important.

They stare each other down a moment - then Jack nods.

As they get in and drive off, we HEAR the surveillance team:

EXTERIOR VIDEO MAN (V.O.)

What's going on in there, did she do anything before she left?

INTERIOR VIDEO MAN (V.O.)

(hesitates)

Uhm, no, not that I saw.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRIVATE PATIO - DAY

DANIELLE HADLEY (DANNY for short, 50s, well-groomed) is sitting with a friend on a covered private patio under an outdoor heater. Beyond them are several vintner buildings and a large Napa Valley vineyard.

A steady rain is falling as the two middle-aged women sip wine and nibble. A cell phone rings - Danny answers.

INT. OFFICE COMPLEX - GOOGLE [CONTINUOUS]

Larry is on his phone, looking out a window at the rain.

LARRY

(curt)

Danny. Sorry to interrupt your afternoon up there but I need you to phone Jack. Don't mention me, just chat a bit, use your detective

(MORE)

LARRY (cont'd)
edge - find out where he is, who
he's with and what he's doing. I
don't want to push him myself.

DANNY
This is slightly strange, Larry -
why Jacky?

LARRY
It's nothing. I asked him to check
on someone. No major concern. Just
phone him, see who he's with and
what he's doing - and report back.
Can you do this, now?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT/INT. BACK MARIN ROAD - DAY

Mahalena is driving fast, one hand on the wheel while the
other loosens her hair. The rain has momentarily stopped.
Jack is silent - then speaks.

JACK
(just talking)
What you did - I must say you got
da burgla swag. I'm sure you know
it wasn't an original move, I
remember something similar in an
old movie. Anyway you done good.

MAHALENA
(smiles)
And of course such a small museum
is sporting zero touch-sensitive
security.

JACK
I did some field work with the
Huicholes, I savvy native outrage
over stolen tribal objects. You've
moved outrage into action.

She turns onto a curvy residential road up Mount Tam.
Handling the turns deftly, she drives up a few more twists
then comes to a stop in front of a small ramshackle cottage
with a nicely-overgrown yard squatting beside big estates.

She turns off the engine. Silence for a moment.

JACK (cont'd)
Your home?

MAHALENA

My cousin's. She is gone and I am
babysitting her cats.

A few big splatters of rain run down the windshield.

JACK

So, uhm - you do that kind of
robbery thing often?

MAHALENA

(eyeing him)

Are you perhaps tempted to go tell
the police?

JACK

Not if the piece originally
belonged to your people and you're
returning it to them.

MAHALENA

(trace of humor)

Bueno - then I shall not have to
shoot you. (beat) Do you know what
the piece in my purse is made of?

She hands him her purse.

MAHALENA (cont'd)

Don't take it out - just feel it.

JACK

Uhm, this is a bit weird - it feels
like the real thing. It's jade?

MAHALENA

Geologists tell us that 27 million
years ago a large meteorite slammed
into highland Guatemala just north
of Lago Atitlan. The immense heat
melted stone into a union of
celestial meteor and earthly rock.
Eventually what you are fondling in
your lap was chiselled -

JACK

I'm not fondling it! But really,
this artifact must be priceless.

MAHALENA

It is also rumored that it carries
the resonant capacity to be
(MORE)

MAHALENA (cont'd)
programmed with information that
even now might be recovered.

JACK
Well, maybe in some radical quantum
theory. A friend at Princeton is
doing research at that level.

MAHALENA
My grandmother down at the lake,
she might know rituals from our
tradition to perhaps gain access.

A sudden heavy downpour hits the windshield, pounding tin-
drum-loud on the car's roof. Mahee (her nickname) exhales
slowly, glances at Jack - then makes up her mind.

MAHALENA (cont'd)
(friendly smile)
I have told you all this - I know
not why. If you are friend and not
foe, I wish to invite you in.

She nods toward the cottage, takes her purse from his lap,
jumps out of the car and goes running athletically across
the lawn to the front porch.

Jack hesitates a moment, watching her athletic feminine
backside. Then he shrugs his shoulders, opens his door and
goes running through the downpour after her.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF LAGO ATITLAN - DAY

Down below is the large highland Guatemalan lake with
dormant volcanoes on its south side - a magnificent view!

We zoom down fast to the rural east shore, to a private
lagoon and well-preserved hacienda [subtle animation?]. A
modern adobe extension has been built up a low ridge, with a
dome room at the top.

INT. DOME ROOM [CONTINUOUS]

Three people are sitting around a coffee table in the high-
ceilinged round room. Down below through large window, the
sun is setting over the lake.

One of the three people, BERNARDO BERNHARDT (30, thin-lipped
and intense, in tailored black suit) has his laptop open as
he watches live video footage of -

- his twin sister Mahalena and Jack as she unlocks the front door of the Marin cottage. They disappear inside.

Bernardo talks to the laptop in subtle Latino accent.

BERNARDO

You have no idea who that man is?

A female voice responds.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Not yet.

BERNARDO

(angry)

Well my sis, she's obviously up to no good, she must have somehow found out. Fuck her - she has now gone way too far. Confirm - are you set to take down that site as we discussed?

The other two people at the table suddenly look concerned.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Affirmative - we were inside an hour ago while she was at the museum. Security system was lame.

BERNARDO

Bueno. Hold on a minute.

Bernardo closes the laptop and looks to the two people at the table with him - and speaks to them both:

BERNARDO (cont'd)

Pues - I am now entirely out of patience with her. We cannot tolerate further interference. Having her show up at the museum today - she's plotting against us, she's onto the jade. She has now clearly become our enemy. Sad to say, I must finally deal quite forcefully with her.

URSULA EKLUND, the woman at the table (30, Nordic, athletic, brilliant) is instantly upset.

URSULA

(Swedish accent)

But no, Bernardo. Impossible - have you gone crazy, what do you mean? She is your family, your twin!

BERNARDO

(cold)

Sharing a genetic and cultural heritage means nothing. I've been patient far too long - we must remove her from the scene before tomorrow. She could play one of her witchy Mahee games and bust our balls at the museum.

URSULA

But I strongly object!

BERNARDO

Objection overruled.

She turns to the other man at the table.

URSULA

Talk reason to him, Nate. He can't do this, it's entirely beyond the bounds I agreed to. Is he joking? Am I being played here - or has he now totally lost his mind?

NATE WINGSTER, a middle-aged American in a poorly-cut suit, shows zero emotion as he looks from one to the other.

NATE

I'm not a priest. I'm not making this call. All I can say is our logistics will be much easier with that bitch removed from the scene one way or the other. If she comes back down here we could lose everything - and I mean everything.

URSULA

(outraged)

Then - damn you too! (beat) So. I see you two won't listen to me. It's been an exhausting day. I'm going down to bed.

She walks to a spiral staircase and disappears downstairs. The two men watch her go, then meet each other's eyes.

NATE
I don't trust her.

BERNARDO
Nate, even with all your training
you still don't see the full vista
here. I do trust her - to do
exactly what I've already fully
prepared for.

Bernardo opens the laptop screen - and nods just slightly to the awaiting woman in Marin.

Closing the laptop, Bernardo sighs as he looks out over the darkening lake. His face shows just a momentary twinge of familial regret before shifting back into action gear.

EXT. HACIENDA GARDENS [CONTINUOUS]

Ursula comes fast out of the new hacienda building and hurries down through gardens toward the old hacienda building beside the lagoon.

INT. HACIENDA [CONTINUOUS]

Ursula runs through a modern-style living room, up stairs to her bedroom. Highly agitated, she locks the door, opens a safe - takes out a phone and punches in a number.

URSULA
Fran, help! Help!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MARIN COTTAGE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jack is sitting in a breakfast nook sipping a glass of red wine. He looks out a window at the back yard, redwoods and a deep ravine. There are houses way over on the other side.

A CAT jumps up onto the table. Jack pets it.

Mahalena is busy at a gas stove cooking them dinner. She turns to him, spatula in hand.

MAHALENA
Shall we now exchange names? Up
here I am Lena. In Europe, Magda.
Down south at the lake I am Mahee
or the full Mahalena. And you?