

MASTERS OF DOOM

Written by

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Based on the nonfiction book Masters of Doom by David Kushner.  
For educational and non-commercial display.

OPENING SCENE

INT. HYATT HOTEL BASEMENT - DAY

TITLE CARD: 2000

The camera pans over a massive, chaotic scene of hundreds of gamers hunched over their computers, intensely focused on their screens. Quake III: Arena is being played on giant monitors above. Rockets fly, space marines and dominatrix warriors battle it out in brutal deathmatches.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

We changed the world. Everyone thinks that what we started and everything that came after it came from "Doom." While, in a way, that might be accurate, it would do a disservice to the story in its entirety.

This is a massive gathering akin to modern-day eSports tournaments. Lights flashing everywhere, music blaring. A couple walks by, their newborn baby wearing a tiny Quake logo onesie. We also see gamers, perhaps tournament players, sharing in the frenetic energy the event carries.

The scene buzzes with energy. This is no ordinary game tournament. It's the Cyberathlete Professional League with posters featuring the sizable \$100,000 prize for the winner. It also reads SPECIAL APPEARANCES BY JOHN CARMACK AND JOHN ROMERO.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was the story about how two guys got together and created an empire.

INT. HYATT HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

A red Ferrari pulls into the parking lot, tires screeching as it comes to a halt. The door opens, and CARMACK steps out. He's wearing a T-shirt with a quirky walking hairball cartoon. His expression is stoic, as if the chaos inside doesn't faze him.

Without hesitation, he walks past the crowd gathering outside the event and heads into the hotel, completely focused.

EXT. HYATT HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

The screen splits into two, dividing Carmack on the left and Romero on the right.

LEFT SIDE:

CARMACK'S FERRARI pulls into the parking lot on the left side of the split-screen. The sound of the tires screeching is muted, as Carmack, calm and understated, steps out of the car.

CAMERA ANGLE: Wide shot of Carmack, alone, quietly closing his door and walking straight toward the entrance. No fanfare. He's wearing a casual T-shirt with a quirky hairball cartoon. He's a man that would slip in with the rest of the crowd. The left side of the screen remains clean and focused, minimal in style.

RIGHT SIDE:

Simultaneously, on the right side, a sleek black Ferrari pulls in. The sound of the engine revving is louder, more pronounced. ROMERO steps out, dressed in tight black jeans, with his signature flowing black hair, radiating confidence.

CAMERA ANGLE: Low angle shot, emphasizing Romero's swagger. STEVIE CASE steps out next to him, a playful smile on her face as cameras flash in their direction. Romero and Stevie are surrounded by flashes and fans. The right side of the screen is chaotic and flashy, capturing the rockstar energy Romero embodies.

INT. HYATT HOTEL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The energy shifts inside as Romero and Stevie make their way through the hallway, surrounded by fans and reporters. Romero waves, signs autographs, and basks in the attention.

Carmack, walking through the same hallway in the opposite direction, remains unfazed by the attention his former partner is getting. His eyes stay locked forward, his demeanor focused and moving with robotic precision.

For just a moment, the two turn their heads and spot each other. Almost like a lighthouse to a lost boat at sea. The massive crowd around them seems to disappear for this one moment, this brief moment that tells a story that unfolds for more than a decade. The two titans of their industry lock eyes.

The energy between them is palpable.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
I always wonder if the Romans ever  
wondered how their empire would  
end. Then again, why would they?  
Maybe it was because everyone on  
top ultimately knows that as great  
as things are, there is one  
universal truth at the core of all  
success.

They nod at each other. A brief, obligatory acknowledgment of  
their shared past. Nothing more. They turn and head their  
separate ways—Romero toward the adoration of the fans,  
Carmack slinking quietly back to the games.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But nothing lasts forever.

We FADE OUT and refocus back at the beginning.

[FLASHBACK MONTAGE BEGINS]

INT. YOUNG CARMACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Carmack finishes reading "The Hacker Ethic." His eyes  
gleam with a new sense of purpose.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(Reflective)  
The one book that changed  
everything for me was the Hacker  
Ethic. When I finished that book,  
one thought echoed in my head:  
"This was me." I was stuck in a  
nowhere house, nowhere school, no  
real computers, no hacker culture.  
I knew I had to find my way in, and  
so, I had to find my way out.

He puts the book down and turns off the light. The scene cuts  
to Carmack and his friends, edgier kids from Raytown,  
discovering the underworld of early online communities: BBSs.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Some of the other hacker kids and I  
got together, and we discovered  
bulletin board systems, BBSs...  
little underground hideaways where  
we could thrive. I found a place  
where I could escape and feed my  
obsession.

We see them huddled around computers, exchanging ideas, exploring phone phreaking, multiuser dungeons (MUDs), and eventually... bombs.

EXT. UNDER A BRIDGE - DAY

Carmack and his friends blow up concrete blocks under a bridge, their faces lit with excitement and fear. Later, the mischief turns criminal. Cut to Carmack sneaking into a school at night.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

It wasn't just about the explosions. Though I have to admit that those were pretty cool.

They sneak into a school, apply thermite paste to a window, and break in. But the alarm trips. Police arrive. Carmack is caught.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY

A young Carmack sits across from a psychiatrist, clearly disinterested.

PSYCHIATRIST

Do you think you would've done this again if you hadn't been caught?

Carmack leans back, nonchalant.

YOUNG CARMACK

Yeah. Probably.

The psychiatrist scribbles a note: "No empathy for other human beings."

INT. MGB SPORTS CAR - DAY

The sound of the engine hums as JOHN CARMACK (early 20s, quiet and introspective) drives his small, worn MGB convertible. The open road stretches out ahead of him as he drives into Shreveport. Boxes of equipment, cables, and books are packed tightly in the passenger seat.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

(calm, focused)

I left Kansas. I had to. I had made enough money to stay afloat on my own, doing what I loved: coding.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Selling games I programmed in the  
early mornings, late at night,  
whenever inspiration struck.

The camera shifts to show Carmack's hand gripping the wheel, his eyes scanning the road ahead with calm intensity. Quick flashes of him sitting alone in his apartment, surrounded by monitors, coding deep into the night, intercut with his current drive.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(reflective)  
But something was missing. After  
all those hours alone, I realized I  
could do more if I worked with  
others. It wouldn't hurt to have a  
stable source of income.

He passes a sign: "Welcome to Shreveport." Carmack looks at it briefly before refocusing on the road. He approaches Softdisk's building - a small, inconspicuous office that sits tucked between larger structures. It doesn't look like much from the outside.

INT. SOFTDISK OFFICE - DAY

Carmack steps through the door, taking in the sight of other programmers working. People seem relaxed, yet there's an undercurrent of passion in the air. Laughter and the clacking of keyboards are the dominant sounds. He looks down at his backpack, packed with code notebooks, then up at the buzzing office.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(measured, but with a  
glimmer of hope)  
Softdisk wasn't what I expected.  
One side of the office was very  
much your typical corporate job. A  
bunch of Monday through Friday  
programmers who could care less  
what they were doing as long as  
they punched in and out. They were  
the worker bees. Al Vekovios,  
Softdisk's owner, wasn't going to  
put me in with them. Al was at  
least smart enough to recognize  
talent, anyway. He wanted me to  
help create their Shareware games  
as part of "The Gamer's Edge"  
magazine they'd be sending out.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
It was slowly, but surely, becoming  
the main source of income for the  
company. From what he blabbered  
about over the phone, he had  
recently hired another hot shot  
programmer that he absolutely had  
to pair me up with.

Carmack sets his backpack down next to a desk. He observes  
the other developers. They're in the middle of intense  
conversations about projects, designs, game mechanics.  
Carmack lingers for a moment before taking a seat and pulling  
out his notebook, sketching a diagram of code on a blank  
page.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(thoughtful)  
Being here gave me the tools, the  
resources, and a team.

The camera focuses on his sketches, his notes quickly filling  
with lines of code and geometric diagrams of 3D graphics. He  
begins writing more furiously, the sound of his pencil  
scratching against the paper.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(quiet determination)  
This was the beginning of something  
bigger. I had a vision - that  
future, the one I'd always dreamed  
of. I wasn't going to settle for  
the games people expected. I wanted  
more. I wanted to build what they  
thought was impossible.

The scene shifts to Carmack standing in front of a small CRT  
monitor. His eyes reflect the glowing lines of code scrolling  
across the screen. For a brief moment, we flash to Carmack's  
imagination - a future filled with complex digital worlds,  
advanced 3D games, and the Holodeck from Star Trek: The Next  
Generation. He's sketching it on a doodlepad, then turning to  
his computer and getting back to work.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(excited but controlled)  
I knew the future was still waiting  
to be built. And if I was going to  
be the one to build it.

He taps a few keys, the code compiles, and a crude early game  
renders on the screen. Carmack watches it intensely, his lips  
curling into a barely perceptible smile. He knows this is  
only the beginning.

CARMACK walks into the office. His expression is stoic, almost robotic, as he strides past several programmers who barely look up from their screens. The room is cluttered with old computers, discarded manuals, and half-empty coffee mugs. Everyone looks like they're just going through the motions.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Softdisk didn't seem like much, at least to me. Al was running a million-dollar company selling shareware for the Apple II, but it felt like a machine that was slowly falling apart. The programmers were just cogs, grinding away, waiting for the next directive.

The camera follows CARMACK as he heads towards the office labeled "GAMER'S EDGE," pushing the door open without hesitation.

INT. GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE - DAY

Inside, we see three people sitting around an outdated computer setup. JAY WILBUR, with his 'frat president' vibe, is lounging back in his chair, sipping coffee. LANE ROATH has a stack of notes in front of him, completely absorbed in his work. And then there's JOHN ROMERO, who is animatedly talking about something, full of energy. The room falls silent when CARMACK walks in.

Freeze Frame as the camera locks on CARMACK standing in the doorway, deadpan.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
This is where I met them for the first time. Jay was... functional. Lane was competent. John, well, was a different story. Oh, there was Tom, but he was busy at the time.

Unfreeze, and the moment resumes.

JAY  
(grinning, holding out his hand)  
So, you must be John.

ROMERO  
(already fired up, standing up from his chair and shoots his hand out)

(MORE)



ROMERO (CONT'D)  
Dude! Al hasn't shut up about you  
since he hired you. I'm John, too!

Carmack remains unfazed, though slightly tuned into Romero's enthusiasm.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
John and I walked a similar path,  
but how we walked was a different  
story. He walked, I leaped.  
Everything was clean and by the  
numbers with John, but that wasn't  
me. Me? I was a showman.

[FLASHBACK MONTAGE BEGINS]

Young Romero writing games as a kid (1982):

QUICK CUTS:

12-year-old Romero eagerly opening up Christmas presents:  
"Apple Graphics Arcade Tutorial" and "Assembly Lines."

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
For Christmas in 1982, I wanted  
just two things: books on graphics  
and assembly language.

MONTAGE: A young Romero stays up late at his Apple II, coding  
obsessively. He draws crude game sprites by hand, refining  
assembly language.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
When other kids were busy playing  
games, I was making my own from  
scratch... I drew my own art...  
packaged them myself.

Romero's recognition at school and his stepfather's new job:

SCENE: Schoolmates are gathered around Romero, admiring his  
games.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I was the game maker. My hard-ass  
stepdad was in the Air Force, and  
when he wasn't kicking my ass, some  
of his own bosses wanted me to  
design a program for them.

SCENE: A stern-looking military officer leads young Romero  
into an icy room filled with large computers.

The boy's eyes light up at the sight of the classified flight simulation on the monitor.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
No problem.

The rise of personal computing and video game crash:

NEWS CLIPS CUT  
IN:

Footage of 1982's Time magazine cover, featuring the computer as "Machine of the Year."

Shots of video games flooding stores during the 1983 crash. Aisles are empty, shelves are full of unsold games. The Atari E.T. and Pac-Man games are flashing as well as the infamous landfill in New Mexico.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
By 1983, the North American Video Game industry crashed due to shitty games and systems. This was an opportunity to build the future.

Romero's rebellious streak and violent comics:

SCENE: Romero, drawing a violent comic strip in class called "Melvin," where Melvin is brutally punished by his stepdad for not doing chores. This is intercut with John's tough home life.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
At home, things were tough. I channeled it into writing violent comics. It was catharsis. If nothing else, I loved being the star and writing some deeply disturbing shit.

Romero's first publication and rise in confidence:

SCENE: Romero receives an envelope from InCider magazine. He rips it open and grins widely as he holds up a cash prize in all his rocker glory.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I got around to selling games to magazines and winning. I started signing my letters as 'John Romero, Ace Programmer,' and laughed my way to the bank. I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd make it big.

Romero's Applefest and first major break:

SCENE: Romero walks into a buzzing convention center at Applefest, his games playing on the Uptime booth screens. People gather around, impressed. None moreso than our focus, JAY WILBUR.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I had a small following. My games were everywhere. People were taking notice. One person in particular was Jay Wilbur at that year's Applefest.

Romero's early career turmoil:

SCENE: Romero drives across the country to work for Origin in New Hampshire with Kelly, his pregnant wife, sitting beside him.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'll admit, I gave up a lot to get to where I wanted. It didn't always play out. I was married back then. (Snorts) That didn't work out, by the way. I risked it all to join a start-up. And when it collapsed... I lost everything.

Romero's determination and ultimate pivot:

SCENE: A down-on-his-luck Romero makes a desperate call to Jay. Cut to Romero packing his bags for Shreveport, determined yet tired. His wife looks at him disapprovingly, a clear sign that they are experiencing strife.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
When Jay called from Softdisk, I took the shot. I had to. So I packed my bags and moved halfway across the country. It was all or nothing.

**[FLASHBACK MONTAGE ENDS]**

INT. SOFTDISK OFFICE - Continued

We see the two John's, and Lane, start talking with each other as they quickly look like they'd be friends for years. This looks and feels like the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

From the moment I met John, I knew for the first time probably ever that this is where I wanted to be. It wasn't that John was just a gifted programmer, but we bonded. Lord of the Rings, D&D, the deficiencies of the Apple II. The one thing about John more than anything else was that he wanted to have a good time. There was always something enigmatic about John that just drew you in.

INT. SOFTDISK OFFICE - Al's Office

Romero is sitting across from Al in his cramped office, with a book in front of him detailing the specifications of a 386 PC.

ROMERO

Look, Al, we've got to start thinking about what the future is going to look like. (We're not going to be able to do much on the Apple II. We need the PCs.) It ain't going to be on the Apple II.

AL

(Skeptical, but engaged)  
I get that is what you want to work on, but nobody in this office has ever worked on a PC, not even you and "Wonderboy." It's a big thing to ask, John. It'll slow us all down.

ROMERO

(Unfazed)  
Uhm, okay? It's not for the whole team, Al. Just for the Gamer's Edge guys. We're the ones who really need them. Those guys don't want to learn a PC? Fine! I don't give a shit. We can learn them, no problem.

AL

(Coming around)  
Okay, but I'm taking a risk here. I had to lay 25 people off last month, and I'm already pissing off a lot of the staff here by getting you guys your own office.

(MORE)

AL (CONT'D)  
Which, by the way, looks like a  
fucking dungeon in there. I do this  
for you, I need something pretty  
fast so I'm not throwing that money  
in the toilet.

ROMERO  
(Victoriously grins)  
Of course, Al. Anything. What do  
you need us to do?

CUT TO

INT - GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE - DAY

We see Romero surrounded by Lane, Tom, and Jay. Carmack is  
huddled away, standing by as technicians begin setting up the  
new 386 PCs in the office, and they look slightly perturbed  
about the messy condition in the office.

LANE  
(Shocked)  
One month? He wants two games in  
one month?

JAY  
Yeah, not a great idea, John.

ROMERO  
Alright, enough. Yeah, it's going  
to suck, but we can get it done.  
Right, John?

CARMACK  
(Still eyeing the PCs  
hawkishly)  
Mhm?

ROMERO  
(Back to the group)  
John and I already have  
two games we've made that  
should easily port from  
the II's to the PC. All  
we have to do is pretty  
them up, package them,  
and let it roll. (Then  
it's on to the cool  
shit.)

JAY

That's two games in four weeks.  
Have you ever worked on a PC? Has  
he? (Motions to Carmack)

Carmack is laser-focused, almost salivating for his station to get set up.

ROMERO

Look at the guy! He even has robot  
noises to match his frame. John,  
what do you think?

CARMACK

(Slightly turns to the group) We'll  
have to have a pretty rough  
development cycle. Limited breaks,  
working around the clock, getting  
to know the new system..

The technicians leave Carmack's station. He pushes the power button on his PC to turn it on for the first time.

CARMACK (CONT'D)

(Continues) It might sound  
tough...(PC powers fully on) But this  
one won't kill us.

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- NIGHT

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

After John and I, along with the  
rest of the group got our feet wet  
with the PC and got our two games  
out to Al no problem, Al wanted us  
just to make one big game for the  
December issue. (At this point, we  
settled into a pattern with  
mechanical precision. John worked  
on level and character design,  
Adrian provided the artwork, and  
every now and then, Tom would sneak  
out of the main Softdisk offices to  
help out...

The crew is seen behind Carmack, who remains hyper-focused on his coding. It's a mix of productivity and chaos. Romero is mock-sword fighting with a cardboard tube, Adrian is scribbling artwork on the whiteboard, pizza boxes pile up, and empty cans of Diet Coke are scattered across the desks. The time passes as day turns into night, the atmosphere light and creative.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
...and that left me to code.

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The office has emptied out, the chaos from earlier now nothing but scattered remnants of a long workday. It's quiet, except for the hum of the computers. The only light comes from the screen of Carmack's monitor, which flickers across his face as he remains hunched over his keyboard, still coding.

TOM pushes open the door, the creak louder in the silence. He's surprised to see the room still occupied.

TOM  
(surprised)  
Holy shit, John. I didn't see you there.

Carmack, lost in his work, doesn't respond immediately, his fingers still flying across the keyboard.

CARMACK  
(focused, mumbles)  
Mmm?

Tom steps further in, looking around at the aftermath of the day's chaos—empty pizza boxes, discarded cans. It's clear the others have long since left.

TOM  
(curious)  
Just you tonight?

Carmack finally glances up from his screen, his eyes adjusting to the dim room. He gives a small, almost imperceptible nod.

CARMACK  
(softly)  
I like it here at night. It's quiet. I can be left alone to work.

Tom, intrigued by what's keeping Carmack so engrossed, leans over his shoulder.

TOM  
Still working on Slordax?

Carmack turns slightly, the faintest hint of a smile curling at the corner of his lips. It's not often that he shows emotion, but the pride in his work is evident.

CARMACK  
(turning back to the  
screen)  
Not exactly. (Beat) Come  
take a look.  
Tom moves closer as Carmack begins  
typing furiously again, his hands  
gliding over the keys with  
precision. The sound of the  
keystrokes fills the room.

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
(while typing)  
The thing about PCs is that they're  
not designed to do games like what  
we're seeing on the Nintendo. It  
has limitations. Take Mario 3, you  
move to the right, and the screen  
keeps going. A PC can't do that.  
So, with a bit of work, we have to  
convince it that it can.

A few more quick, deliberate keystrokes. The monitor shifts,  
and something changes on the screen. TOM's eyes widened in  
disbelief.

TOM  
(in awe)  
Oh man. You got it to scroll? How  
did you do that?

Carmack is almost casual, still typing as he explains.

CARMACK  
By tricking it into thinking it  
can. Normally, a PC redraws every  
pixel once the screen hits the  
edge, but by making it think  
instead of drawing the next tile...

Carmack pauses, glances at Tom with a knowing look.

CARMACK AND TOM  
(together)  
...it redraws the first tile all  
over again.

Carmack stops typing for a moment, satisfied with the result.  
The screen shows smooth scrolling. Something that PCs at that  
time simply couldn't do. He turns back to Tom.

CARMACK  
I call it "Adaptive Tile Refresh."



Tom steps back, hands on his hips, clearly impressed. He knows this is more than just a clever trick. He's witnessing a boundary being broken, and for a moment, he stares at Carmack in awe.

TOM  
(sincerely)  
John... this could change  
everything.

He pulls up a chair next to Carmack, suddenly bursting with inspiration.

TOM (CONT'D)  
I have an idea.

Carmack gives him a sidelong glance, intrigued but not breaking his focus.

Tom leans forward, a grin spreading across his face, ready to share his new concept.

CUT TO

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- JOHN ROMERO'S WORKSTATION

On Romero's keyboard rests an unassuming black floppy disk. On it is a sticky note that has "Type DAVE2" scribbled on it. Romero then puts the floppy into his computer and follows the directions.

We zoom out and see the title of "Dangerous Dave in Copyright Infringement," and see just what exactly Tom and John worked on the night before. Romero starts playing, and his face immediately turns to one of excited delight.

ROMERO  
(excited) Holy shit!

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- JOHN CARMACK'S AREA

A hurried Romero looks like he sprinted down the street to get to Carmack, already with his eyes glued to the screen, though he acknowledges Romero's presence with his typical "Mhm"

ROMERO  
Do you realize you just made Super  
Mario Brothers on a PC?

CARMACK

Yes. That's something along the lines Tom said last night.

ROMERO

You designed this last night? You have to be a vampire. (Beat) Not even Nintendo is doing this right now.

Romero hurridbly breaks from Carmack to look outside the door. Carmack, still working, knows exactly what Romero is going to do. He also wears the expression of annoyance as he knows what will likely happen next.

CARMACK

I don't think they're interested.

Romero turns away from Carmack, his head out the door and facing the office. He shouts.

ROMERO

(Shouting to the office)  
Hey! You guys need to come over here and take a look at this.

CUT TO

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- JOHN ROMERO'S WORKSTATION

Many of the Softdisk staff are huddled around ROMERO'S computer as he demonstrates "Dangerous Dave." We see Tom and Adrian among those huddled behind him. Absent is Carmack.

As Romero shows off the game with a giddy smile, particularly the screen refresh feature, his excitement peaks.

ROMERO

Did you see that? Did you see what John did? Is this the coolest fucking thing on the planet or what?

A disinterested Softdisk employee looks at his watch and checks over his shoulder. He is clearly not interested.

SOFTDISK EMPLOYEE

Yeah. That's pretty neat, I guess.

This sets John off.

ROMERO  
(Turns. Agitated) "Neat?" What is  
the matter with you?

The regular Softdisk staff walk away. Tom, Jay, Lane, and  
Adrian have stayed behind. Romero continues to chide at them.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
You fucking idiots!(Faces the  
group) You know what? We're done  
here. We are so gone!

The group look at each other nervously, but Romero is unfazed  
by their hesitation. He knows what they have in front of them  
and the ideas are already firing off in his head.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
Did you just see that? These people  
saw something they've never seen  
before, something that they can't  
even comprehend with their heads so  
far up their asses. (Beat) We need  
to start our own company. Do this  
ourselves.

Jay shakes his head, still nervous, but wanting to see where  
Romero goes with this.

JAY  
John, take a second. Breathe.

ROMERO  
I'm serious, dude!

JAY  
John, you get like this after you  
win a round of Pac-Man. I'm sure  
the kids at the pizza parlor  
probably need therapy from the last  
time we were there. Take it easy  
for a second.

Romero spins backs in his chair, staring at the ceiling where  
instead of the fluorescent lights, he sees visions of  
grandeur. He then turns back around, facing the group, toned  
down but still amped

ROMERO  
If we stay here, this will die here  
and now. This is the future! You  
think Softdisk cares about this?  
Fuck no!

(MORE)

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
This is too big to waste on those  
guys...this (disgust) company. This  
is our time. We got to make this  
happen!

Jay takes a second. He has come around.

JAY  
You know...

Romero turns to Jay. The others look to hear what he has to  
say before cautiously delivering their own opinions.

JAY (CONT'D)  
I have this place by the lake...

Romero knows where this is going. He claps his hands and  
laughs loudly. Tom and Adrian join in and are on board.

INT -- GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE -- JOHN CARMACK'S AREA

Carmack is still glued to his screen, typing and clicking  
about. He's greeted by a hurried Romero. His excitement is  
still flowing.

ROMERO  
Dude (beat) What are you doing this  
weekend?

CARMACK  
Working.

Romero then cracks his best Joker grin, knowing that was  
exactly what Carmack was going to say.

EXT. SOFTDISK OFFICE - NIGHT

The cars were lined up outside the Softdisk office, trunks  
open, yawning into the cool night air. The faint hum of  
crickets and the distant flicker of a streetlamp were the  
only sounds. It was late--late enough that everyone else had  
gone home, their minds already settling into the quiet lull  
of a Shreveport weekend.

Romero slams the trunk of his car shut, a sly grin on his  
face as he dusts off his hands.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
The majority of Softdisk was still  
working on Apple II's.  
(MORE)

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
John was right that they didn't want to pivot to PCs, so there were plenty that were barely being used. Jay also had been ordering new parts for them in anticipation for John's master plan. We were going to head to Jay's lake house for the weekend, and it was going to be all the time we needed. After all...

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
We're just borrowing them.

CARMACK, adjusting his glasses under the streetlight, gives a rare smile, already eager to dive into the work ahead.

CARMACK  
(Waving at a disinterested security guard watching them)  
We'll have them back by Monday!

One by one, they loaded the Softdisk computers into their cars—Romero, Tom, Jay, and Lane—working quietly but with an undeniable energy. This was more than just some weekend coding session; they were on a mission.

As the last computer was packed away, they all hopped into their cars, forming a small caravan heading out of the deserted downtown.

EXT. HIGHWAY OUT OF SHREVEPORT - NIGHT

The dim glow of the city receded behind them like a streak of neon as the cars sped down the highway. The buildings gave way to low-hanging trees and the distant shimmer of Jay's lake house, the moonlight reflecting on the water.

ROMERO tapped his fingers on the steering wheel, stealing a glance at the other cars in the rearview mirror with a seemingly uncontrollable grin.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - NIGHT

JAY unlocks the door, flipping on the porch light. Unlike their cramped offices in Softdisk, this is a compound.

There is a backyard pool, a boat, and inside, enough room for the chaos ahead.

JAY  
(smiling)  
Beats the hell out of the office,  
right?

INT. LAKE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In no time at all, the lake house has turned into an extension of the Softdisk office. The living room is littered with Diet Coke cans, pizza boxes, and a row of the "borrowed computers" with their screens illuminated. We pan over to see various illustrations, a Dungeons and Dragons game that looks like it was interrupted part way through.

Romero and Carmack sit side by side, both glued to their screens. Tom bounces between studying the VCR and TV setup with Super Mario Bros. 3 to his station.

ROMERO  
(eyes wide, excited)  
Look at that! Look how smooth it  
is!

Carmack barely looked up from his screen, fingers flying across the keyboard.

CARMACK  
Just a few more tweaks...

Carmack and Romero see the finished project, both smiling ear to ear and nodding in approval.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Romero leans back in his chair, eyes red, but he is simply electric and seemingly unable to run out of energy.

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
This is it.

The others gathered around the screen. Tom, Lane, and Jay stand behind Romero and Carmack as they show off their creation. We see the familiar Super Mario Bros 3 title screen, underneath it is the Nintendo copyright notice, but we focus on the line beneath it.

JAY  
(Squinting)  
"Ideas from the Deep?" Maybe you'll  
want to shorten that?

Carmack and Romero exchange glances once more.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The sun rises. No one notices.

JAY

So... what do we do now?

ROMERO

Simple. We send this to Nintendo.  
They're gonna freak.

The group exchanged excited glances, their tired bodies still buzzing with the adrenaline of the last 72 hours. Romero grabbed a floppy disk, labeled it, and stuck it in an envelope addressed to Nintendo's headquarters.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

(grinning)

Let's see what they think of this.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - WEEKS LATER

Weeks had passed when the letter from Nintendo finally arrived. Romero rips it open, the group huddled around him, waiting.

ROMERO

(reading)

Nice work, but no interest in the  
PC market.

The silence that followed is thick with disappointment. For a moment, they all look as robotic as Carmack. Romero alone is unfazed. He looked up, a fire still burning behind his eyes.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

Screw 'em. We don't need Nintendo.  
I know a guy.

Carmack smiled slightly. He is catching on to John's drive and what could possibly come next.

As Romero gathers everyone around, Carmack stands next to him.

[FLASHBACK MONTAGE BEGINS]

ROMERO (V.O.)  
 Okay, so after we did "Pyramids  
 From Egypt," I started getting  
 letters from a bunch of different  
 people...

Romero is reading the letters in question, looking happy from the feedback.

CARMACK (V.O.)  
 I remember. You even pinned one on  
 the wall.

Romero does just that in the next scene before continuing on. He's reading more letters, but he goes from being happy to looking upset.

ROMERO (V.O.)  
 Yeah, well you know what? I started  
 noticing the letters were coming  
 from different names, but one  
 single address. It was just one  
 fucking person sending me letter  
 after letter after letter.

We then see Romero reading a game magazine, drinking a Diet Coke in the Softdisk office as the others work around him. He stares down a Softdisk worker who walks past him and gives him a look before he turns back to the magazine. We ZOOM IN on his face as he reads something that nearly makes him spit out his drink in disgust.

ROMERO (FLASHBACK IN SYNC WITH V.O.)  
 Scott Miller.

At home, Romero's attention is drawn to the phone ringing. He slides his chair over and turns to pick up the handset.

ROMERO (FLASHBACK ENDS. V.O.  
 CONTINUES) (CONT'D)  
 So I go home one night, and my  
 phone rings, and wouldn't you know  
 it...

Romero answers the phone with a furious, fierce gaze.

(FLASHBACK IN SYNC WITH V.O.)

Scott Miller, you asshole!



We see things go in practical reverse, with Romero incensed, but quickly calming down as he listens to what MILLER has to say. He then sits down, looks up, smiles, and nods.

ROMERO (V.O.)

Ends up that Scott is a big time gamer and he owns a studio called Apogee. He started talking about how wanted to publish "Pyramids" as shareware.

**[FLASHBACK ENDS]**

CARMACK

I don't know, John. How hard did you look into this guy?

ROMERO

John, the guy started making text-based games a few years ago and he's already quit his day job, getting interviewed in magazines and is making a lot of money. Basically, he's us.

CARMACK

(Contemplative) He's a coder, too...

ADRIAN

But we can't do another level of "Pyramids." Softdisk owns it. There's no way they'd let us get away with it.

ROMERO (GRINS)

Who said anything about us doing anything with "Pyramids?"

The guys turn their attention to the "Super Mario Bros 3." floppy disk. Their next step is increasingly clear.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

John sent the game to Scott and Apogee. They wanted us to create something new just for them, and they'd release the game on Shareware. Because Scott kept his costs low by making his games on his own, selling games for \$15 or \$20 each, he was nearly keeping every dollar of it.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
John wanted something to seal the deal, so Scott sent us a \$2,000 check and gave us three months to make a game. We were all for it. There was one loose end we were going to have to tie up sooner rather than later. Little did we know, it would come sooner than we think.

INT. GAMER'S EDGE OFFICE - DAY

Carmack is back to work on a title for Softdisk. The usually rambunctious, chaotic office is eerily calm. The rooms are clean, the environment peaceful.

Behind him, Al walks in, surveying the situation. He comes up behind Carmack and peers over his shoulder, looking at the title on his screen, which uses the scrolling technique Carmack innovated.

AL  
Wow! That's something I've never seen before. Hey, maybe you should patent that?

Carmack freezes, as if hitting a wall. He HATES the idea.

CARMACK  
(Seething)  
If you ever suggest anything like that to me again, I'll just walk out of here.

Al looks taken aback but tries to backpedal.

AL  
I didn't mean anything by it, John. Take it easy.  
(Al continues)

AL (CONT'D)  
You know, I ran the numbers the other day, and Jay has been ordering a lot of new parts for the PCs we brought in for you guys and the magazine. The problem is, he didn't run it by me.

CARMACK  
(Unfazed)  
Mhm.

AL  
(Directly)  
You wouldn't know anything about  
that, would you?

CARMACK  
(Still typing on his  
screen)  
Al, I am already having a hard time  
wondering why it would matter to  
you. We're the ones keeping the  
doors open around here.

AL  
(Stiffens up)  
And the computers you're all  
loading up over the weekend? That's  
something that wouldn't matter to  
me either, I guess?

Carmack stops typing. He takes a deep breath, still not  
looking at Al.

CARMACK  
When you put it that way, no. I'm  
surprised you're not applauding us  
for "taking initiative."

AL  
(Curious)  
Oh? And why's that?

CARMACK  
(Sighs, irritated)  
Because you have terrible  
programmers here. They stink. I get  
the impression you know that, too,  
because you keep coming in here  
wanting to see what we're working  
on.

AL  
(Taken aback)  
Yeah? Well, those terrible  
programmers are the reason you have  
a job, an office, and a paycheck.  
Don't you care about these guys?  
How about how hard I have worked to  
support you?

CARMACK  
(Robotic)  
Actually, no. I don't care at all.

AL

(Upset)

Alright John, enough. I get that you're a little troll, and this is the cave for you and the rest of those freaks to do your work. God knows I've taken more complaints about favoring you guys from the rest of the office while you've turned this place into a dump. How many pizza's can you people eat? And haven't you heard of a trash can? And guess what? Things get complicated when I hear you're using MY equipment to do side jobs. If you were all so smart, you'd know it's a problem for you, too! That's probably why I'm here talking to you first instead of the other John. You probably don't give enough of a shit to lie to me.

Carmack finally turns to face Al, his expression blank.

CARMACK

Yes. It's all true, Al, except for one thing. (Beat) John doesn't like you either. He's just trying to be nice.

Al turns red, infuriated, on the verge of exploding.

CUT TO:

INT. SOFTDISK MEETING ROOM - DAY

Al sits at one end of the table, livid. Across from him are Carmack, Romero, and Lane, huddled together. Al is mid-rant as we enter the scene.

Carmack is stoic and unfazed. Romero has a slight grin.

AL

(Angrily)

So, I'm hearing you're all running a little racket behind my back. MINE. I'm hearing it from the rest of the staff, and Robocop here ( points to CARMACK ) ratted you out...

Al pauses, trying to regain his composure, softening his tone.

AL (CONT'D)

(Calmer)

But we can fix this. Maybe help each other out here? Say we go into business together. You can keep doing what you're doing. Make whatever games you want, and I'll put up the money for it. We'll split things down the middle. What do you say?

Romero leans forward slightly, ready to speak for the group.

ROMERO

No.

He leans back, and the others nod in unity. AL is beyond furious now.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

Being free from Softdisk gave us the freedom we needed to create our game for Apogee, Commander Keen. Tom came up with the idea of Keen being a boy genius, and with a tight deadline, we started our first real death march to get the game to Apogee by December. No problem.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Carmack and Romero are seated at their desks, fully focused on their screens, working in sync.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

John and I handled the programming duties—me smoothing out the engine, while he focused on the design. We were totally in sync, moving the project along like a well-oiled machine.

CUT TO:

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)

Lane, though, just couldn't keep up with the pace. And despite John really liking him, we had to let him go.

Lane is struggling to keep pace with the project. Romero approaches him, placing a hand on his shoulder before leading him out of the room.

CUT TO:

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)

The rest of the team pulled their weight. Tom took charge of the art, and we brought on a new artist, Adrian Carmack-no relation. Though he wasn't too thrilled with how much Tom loved creating cute little critters.

Tom is sketching game art at his desk, a look of pride on his face. In the background, Adrian is watching, slightly annoyed.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Jay is behind the wheel of the boat, calm and steady, while the others relax. The boat cruises smoothly. Romero is asleep with his mouth wide open, next to Carmack.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

It was pretty clear that if any of us were a "manager," it would have had to have been Jay. He kept his head on straight and kept us on target.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The GROUP is gathered around a table, working through details of the enemies in Commander Keen.

Tom leans in with an intense expression, breaking the focus of the group.

TOM

They just... fucking die. You know? Dead, dead, dead. They're cute and all, but dead.

The GROUP exchange stunned glances, then burst into laughter.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
We incorporated that, too.

FLASH CUT TO:

Gameplay footage of Commander Keen where the yorps "just die."

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Carmack and Romero are seated at their desks, fully focused on their screens, working in sync. All of a sudden, Tom walks into the room with his designs and everyone turns around, expecting him.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
John and I handled the programming duties—me smoothing out the engine, while he focused on the design. We were totally in sync, moving the project along like a well-oiled machine.

Tom clears his throat and launches into a rapid-fire performance.

TOM  
(Deep, ringleader-like voice)  
Billy Blaze, eight-year-old genius, working diligently in his backyard clubhouse, has created an interstellar spaceship from old soup cans...

The room goes still. All eyes on Tom.

TOM (CONT'D)  
...While his folks are out and the babysitter's asleep, Billy sneaks out to his workshop, dons his brother's football helmet, and transforms into... COMMANDER KEEN. Defender of justice!

Silence. Then, LAUGHTER breaks out—real, genuine. Even Carmack claps.

CUT TO:

## INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The group is gathered around a table, deep in a game of Dungeons & Dragons. Carmack, as Dungeon Master, is narrating an intense moment. Jay is focused, jotting down notes.

NARRATOR  
(CARMACK V.O.):

When we weren't grinding ourselves down, our D&D campaign was becoming legendary—our longest and deepest one yet. Saturday nights turned into all-night sessions with me as Dungeon Master, guiding us through every twist and turn. It was a world as complex as the one we were building in our games.

## INT. FANTASY-STYLE DUNGEON - NIGHT (ANIMATED IN CLASSICAL FANTASY STYLE)

A medieval-style room lit by a flickering torch. Carmack, in wizard-like robes and a dark hood, sits at the head of a long, wooden table. Romero, Tom, and Adrian are around him, each dressed in fantasy armor with exaggerated details—Romero's spiked pauldrons, Tom's oversized helmet, and Adrian's intricately carved staff.

Before them is a massive demon, not unlike Doom 2's Icon of Sin, speaking down to the animated warriors gearing for battle. Carmack's voice booms as the game master as Adrian holds The Demonicon.

CARMACK  
(ominously)  
The demon before you has an offer  
to make. Give him the Demonicon...  
and he will grant you your heart's  
greatest desire.

Romero's eyes glint with excitement, and he leans in, smirking as he strokes his chin.

ROMERO  
(mischievously)  
Oh yeah? If I'm handing over this  
book, then I want something  
epic—give me... the Daikatana.

The others gasp, visibly worried. Tom grabs Romero's arm, shaking his head vigorously.

TOM  
No, man, you can't! That sword's  
way too powerful! You're gonna mess  
everything up.



Adrian furrows his brow, clutching his staff with both hands, his expression shifts to irritation.

ADRIAN  
(Seething)  
God damn it John, stop it...you're  
going to fuck it up...

Romero grins wider, ignoring them. He meets the demon's dark stare.

ROMERO  
(defiantly)  
Do it. Give him the book.

As the group voices their discontent, we see the die glowing above, ready to decide their destiny. The light cast from the die fades, now glowing a hellish shade of orange beneath them as the large demon cackles. They are soon surrounded by a horde of demons, who overwhelm the helpless heroes and attack until they are reduced to their skull and bones. The hilt of the Daikatana falls on the beaded skull of Romero's character.

CARMACK  
(coldly)  
The demon uses the Demonicon to  
summon an army of the damned. They  
pour from the shadows, consuming  
the material plane. The world is  
overrun with demons. Everyone... is  
dead.

Now back in the real world, the camera focuses on Romero, who stares at Carmack, stoic as always, but with a hint of disappointment at the end of the game.

ROMERO  
No way. That's it?

Carmack leans back, his expression unyielding, calm, but final.

CARMACK  
(solemnly)  
That's it.

The group takes a moment to realize that in just a single moment, their game is in fact finished. The one single act of reaching too far for glory has ruined everything.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. SCOTT MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1990

SCOTT presses a key. Onscreen: COMMANDER KEEN: MAROONED ON MARS uploads.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
By Christmas, sales for the first  
Commander Keen were closing in on  
thirty thousand dollars.

QUICK CUTS:

Letters pour in.

Phones ring nonstop.

SCOTT'S MOM answers two at once.

SCOTT arrives, greeted in the doorway by his mom who hands him a ringing phone.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - NIGHT (NEW YEAR'S EVE)

A rager. PRINCE blares. Boats cruise the lake. Smoke rolls off the grill. Tom, Jay, and Romero are buzzed, dancing in the kitchen.

Romero spots Carmack off in the corner, alone.

ROMERO  
(slurring)  
John, don't be a baby. It's gonna  
be 1991! Drink this.

CARMACK hesitates. Then, quietly, takes a glass of champagne.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Romero finds Carmack leaning against the wall, mid-sip.

CARMACK  
(stoic)  
I am losing control of my  
faculties. Mmm.

Romero cracks up. Repeats the phrase robotically to everyone, slurred and barely clinging on to his consciousness as the party rages on. Romero vomits, but doesn't miss a beat as the party rages on.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
It was only the beginning.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGHWAY - DAY - MONTAGE

A U-HAUL barrels down the highway. A MADISON, WISCONSIN road sign passes by. Cardboard boxes get unloaded. A new, empty office space begins to fill with desks, monitors, and life. Oh, and a shit load of pizza boxes and Diet Cokes. Some things never change.

CARMACK (V.O.)  
It was time to expand--and that meant getting the hell out of Shreveport. Tom suggested Madison, Wisconsin. Not all of us made the move.

QUICK FLASH:

Adrian tossing bags into a van.

Jay standing behind, hands in his pockets, smiling and waving goodbye as the guys drive away from the lake house one last time.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Adrian came along. For now, Jay didn't. He wasn't ready to leave Softdisk, and I respected that. I really liked Jay.

The U-Haul slams shut. The id Software crew stands in front of their new building.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
We were starting fresh. id Software was finally real. And after wrapping up our work with Scott and Apogee on Commander Keen, it was time for something bigger.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Carmack and Romero stand at a whiteboard. A scribbled title reads: \*Escape From Castle Wolfenstein 3D.\*

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
 There was this old game John and I  
 loved back in the '80s—\*Escape from  
 Castle Wolfenstein.\* We figured...  
 what if we gave it a new engine, a  
 new face, and turned it into  
 something no one had seen before?

ROMERO  
 (grinning)  
 Let's kill some Nazi's.

INT. WOLFENSTEIN 3D-STYLE GAME LEVEL - NIGHT

The setting is classic Wolfenstein: stone walls, flickering  
 torches, and pixelated Nazi banners. A pixelated Romero  
 stands alone in the corridor, eyes wide with excitement, gun  
 ready. He starts to walk down the hall, his pixelated head  
 bobbing as he walks us through the vision.

ROMERO (V.O.)  
 So here's the deal: I'm thinking of  
 Nazis. Everywhere. And I'm talking  
 mow 'em down fast. Like, you're  
 running, shooting, you turn a  
 corner and—BAM—another Nazi.

Pixelated Romero rounds a corner, coming face-to-face with a  
 Nazi guard who yells, "Achtung!" He blasts him with his  
 pixelated gun. The guard goes down.

ROMERO (V.O.)  
 (excited)  
 Blood, guts, the whole deal. So  
 much blood like no one's ever seen  
 before in a game! Bags of it!

As he blasts another guard, pixelated blood splatters across  
 the wall. Romero nods, satisfied.

ROMERO (V.O.)  
 And then I'm thinking about dogs!  
 German dogs. German shepherds! Big,  
 angry Nazi German shepherds, ready  
 to tear you apart!

Suddenly, a snarling pixelated German shepherd with a Nazi  
 hat and uniform lunges at him. Romero jumps back, wide-eyed,  
 and shoots. The dog yelps and collapses. Romero smirks and  
 gives a thumbs-up.

TOM (V.O.)

(joining in)

And, of course, you've gotta have stuff to collect, right? Like, treasure. Maybe a few crosses here and there. And have them in secret rooms you'll have to look for, or run into by accident

Pixelated crosses and treasure chests appear behind a sliding door as it would show in Wolfenstein. The POV switches to Romero's pixelated face illuminating with the golden shine. Romero picks them up with a satisfied grin.

CARMACK (V.O.)

(joining in)

That's a cheap trick.

ROMERO (V.O.)

(laughing)

Oh, and health items! So no boring med boxes or health packs. I'm thinking turkey dinners, maybe even... dog food!

The door closes. Romero's health bar is low. He picks up a can of pixelated dog food, looks around, then "eats" it with exaggerated chomping sounds, his health bar replenishing.

TOM (V.O.)

(laughing)

Or imagine this: you're down to, like, ten percent health, right? So you crawl over some dead Nazi guts and—bam!—health restored!

Romero dramatically crawls over a pixelated, blood-stained floor where a Nazi has fallen. His health bar spikes up as he "slurps" loudly. He wipes his mouth with exaggerated satisfaction, shouting into the moonlight like a vampire with pixelated blood around his mouth.

ALL (V.O.)

(deadpan)

Dude, no! Gross.

Romero looks directly at the camera, smirking with a shrug, then turns to shoot another Nazi, sending more pixelated blood splattering across the walls.

Romero, now fully back in reality, has a smirk on his face as he tosses his pencil down on the cluttered table. Around him are Tom, Carmack, and Adrian, looking like they've been laughing their asses off.

Adrian holds up a rough sketch—a snarling German shepherd with a bullet wound. The guys lean in, nodding approvingly at the dog's fierce expression.

ROMERO  
(grinning, gesturing at  
the sketch)  
That's it! We're going to make  
something fast and nasty. Something  
NOBODY has ever seen before.

They all sit back, exchanging excited glances, each energized by the new direction.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - VARIOUS TIMES OF DAY AND NIGHT

Carmack sits at his computer, eyes focused, typing at lightning speed. Behind him, Tom and Adrian are chuckling, launching crumpled wads of paper at Romero across the room. Romero ducks, retaliating with a handful of his own paper bombs. A few stray missiles hit Kevin, who shouts, returning fire.

CUT TO:

A close-up of Carmack's eyes squinting with concentration as sounds of Nazi yells, laughter, and paper fights echo in the background. Carmack grimaces but keeps typing.

CUT TO:

Tom beside Carmack, leaning in, casual but persistent.

TOM  
Hey, man, how about putting in a  
secret push wall? Every game's got  
easter eggs.

CARMACK  
(without looking up)  
Nope. That's an ugly hack. I have  
things to do.

CUT TO:

Late-night scene. Romero joins Tom in pitching their idea, seated on either side of Carmack as he types.

ROMERO  
Just this one thing. Give us push  
walls.

CARMACK  
(brushing them off)  
Go away.

CUT TO:

The team is taking a break outside, playing football in the pool. Romero takes another shot while Carmack, never stopping, furiously codes.

ROMERO  
(smiling)  
John, push walls, god damn it! You  
can't just run down these halls and  
not find anything!

CARMACK  
(snapping)  
No.

CUT TO:

Close-up of Adrian, sketching gory details: skeletons hanging by chains, walls splattered with blood. He's focused, clearly in his element, far from the cutesy critters of Commander Keen.

CUT TO:

Romero and Tom laughing wildly into a microphone, recording sounds: "Achtung!" "Schutzstaffel!" "Mutti!" (Mommy). Their laughter echoes as Carmack sighs in frustration.

CUT TO:

Romero holds up a sketch of the "Death Cam" feature to Adrian, who nods enthusiastically.

Romero and Adrian

(together, raising fists)

Fuck Hitler!

CUT TO:

Tom giving the push wall argument one last shot as Carmacktypes.

TOM  
(pleading)  
Just one?

CARMACK  
(smirking, turning his  
chair)  
I thought you'd never ask.

CLOSE-UP on Tom and Romero, stunned for a beat, then breaking into wide grins as they realize Carmack finally relented.

QUICK CUTS:

Romero testing the game, pressing the spacebar as walls slide open to reveal hidden rooms packed with treasures, ammo, and health items.

Adrian sketches a secret level inspired by Pac-Man, featuring the familiar ghosts and maze elements.

Romero and Tom high-five, sharing a triumphant grin at having "beaten" the Carmack machine.

Carmack leans back, a subtle smile on his face as he watches his team's excitement and pride, satisfied with their collective genius.

### **END MONTAGE**

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - DAY

A shot of Wolfenstein 3D on a computer screen, gameplay roaring as we see a figure mowing down pixelated Nazis, blood splattering across the screen. The player laughs in amazement.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
(enthusiastic)  
When we put Wolfenstein 3D out there, we had no idea it'd blow up like it did. We knew it was good, but the response was insane. Everyone was talking about it.

CUT TO:

A montage of early 90s media: magazine covers, news clippings, and tech shows, all covering the explosive success of Wolfenstein 3D.



NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(more subdued, reflective)  
Yeah, it was a hit, but for me, it  
was about perfecting the engine.  
Wolfenstein pushed the limits of  
what we could do technically. I  
wanted to go further, make things  
faster, cleaner.

CUT TO:

Carmack at his desk, buried in coding. Even with the acclaim,  
his expression remains focused, intense, as he works late  
into the night, his screen reflecting in his glasses.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(chuckling)  
People were calling us the  
rockstars of gaming. I'm talking  
conferences, photo ops, all the  
stuff that gets the blood pumping.  
The success was wild.

CUT TO:

Romero at a gaming expo, on stage, arms raised as fans cheer.  
He's clearly enjoying the spotlight, relishing the attention  
and acclaim.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I didn't need recognition. I wanted  
to move on to the next project.  
There was always more to build, to  
push further. A cleaner, better  
engine was all I wanted.

We see Carmack at his computer again, tuning out the revelry  
around him.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(wistfully)  
But there was this feeling we were  
onto something even  
bigger...something that'd make  
Wolfenstein look like a warm-up.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

The team gathers around a table, late at night. TOM is  
leading the conversation with sketches of Commander Keen,  
trying to make his pitch.

TOM

So, picture it: Commander Keen in full 3D. We take our lovable genius kid, and instead of side-scrolling, we've got him running in a full 3D world. It's the next step.

Romero leans back, arms crossed, clearly less enthusiastic.

ROMERO

Tom, Keen was great, but we were thinking of something with more...teeth. Something with a bite.

The others murmur in agreement. Tom looks around, realizing he's losing the room.

CARMACK

(quietly, almost to himself)

We want to push things even further than Wolfenstein. I've been working on something to do just that since we wrapped up.

Everyone goes silent, intrigued. Carmack continues, eyes distant, like he's seeing the future unfold.

CARMACK (CONT'D)

It'll be bigger than Wolfenstein, but it will FEEL bigger. More immersive.

ADRIAN

(nodding)

I'm picturing something... hellish. Dark corridors, monsters, and lots of blood. None of that kid-friendly stuff.

Romero grins, the wheels in his head turning as he envisions it.

ROMERO

I'm liking this. We give them a reason to scream.

TOM

(disappointed, but realizing the direction is set)

So, Commander Keen is out, then.

ROMERO  
(clapping him on the back)  
Commander Keen is out.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE - THE BIRTH OF DOOM

Shots of the team hard at work. Carmack typing at rapid speed, tuning the engine, pushing the limits of what it can do. Adrian sketching monsters and demons, eyes wide with excitement. Romero organizing sounds and level design, bringing in gory new elements.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
(with dark enthusiasm)  
Hell unleashed.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(methodical)  
Doom was going to MAKE modern gaming. We wanted to take the gaming world knee deep into the dead.

CUT TO:

The screen displays the title: DOOM.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

The office is quiet, lit only by the glow of computer screens. Tom stands at a whiteboard, scribbling notes, while Romero and Carmack listen, leaning back in their chairs. TOM's face lights up as he outlines his idea.

TOM  
Alright, so picture this:  
scientists on a remote moon.  
They're studying some strange  
anomaly, but—surprise—it rips open,  
and they think it's aliens. But  
it's way worse. Demons from hell  
start flooding in. It's a portal  
from hell!

Romero nods, intrigued, while Carmack looks underwhelmed.

CARMACK  
(leaning forward, matter-  
of-fact)  
A story in a game is like a story  
in a porno. It's there, but it's  
not that important.

Tom's face falls, and he clenches his jaw. Romero chuckles,  
but Carmack remains unfazed.

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
Doom is going to be just one big,  
continuous space. We're not going  
to have any levels or phases like  
"Keen." It's just...(he pauses,  
outstretching his arms like ta-da)  
Doom.

TOM  
(defensive)  
But that structure is what made  
Wolfenstein work! You get to the  
end of a level, you feel good, then  
move on. That's what video games  
are.

Romero glances between Tom and Carmack, then shrugs, siding  
with Carmack.

ROMERO  
No, no, no. John might be onto  
something.

Tom looks at Romero, crestfallen, realizing he's outnumbered.  
He slumps in his chair.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - LATER

Carmack is deep into coding. On his screen, early lighting  
effects begin to take shape. Romero peers over his shoulder,  
impressed.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
John and I knew how to bring the  
best out of each other. When it  
came to what we wanted Doom to be,  
he and I were breaking ground  
together. We wanted something no  
one had seen before.

Carmack points to the screen, explaining his code to Romero.

ROMERO

Imagine running down a hallway  
and-bam!--the lights strobe.

CARMACK

Can you draw something up so I can  
work with the lighting?

Romero hurries back to his desk, booting up the map editor.  
He draws warped walls and twisting hallways. Adrian joins  
him, wide-eyed as he sketches grotesque demons and blood-  
splattered walls.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)

Doom was already demanding the best  
of us, and we had just gotten  
started. Unfortunately, not all of  
us were ready to run out of the  
gates.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - DAY

Tom sits next to Carmack, showing him the Doom Bible--a  
detailed document of backstory, characters, and world-  
building elements.

TOM

So imagine a group of marines  
playing cards, just guys on duty.  
Then boom! A portal opens up, and  
demons tear them to shreds. Real  
terror from the start.

He watches Carmack, hopeful, but Carmack is focused on his  
screen. He feints a turn, then exhales while turning and  
actually takes a moment to scan the document as Tom readies  
his follow up pitch.

TOM (CONT'D)

Everything in here will work for  
what you're making. You wanted a  
seamless world? We can have that  
and a story to go along with it.

Carmack glances at the document, then shrugs.

CARMACK

We've moved on from that. Going  
back to traditional levels is  
simpler.

Tom's eyes widen.

TOM

You're fucking with me, right? Do you know how long I've been working on this and making it fit what you and John said you wanted to do? That's two months of work I spent building this concept!

Carmack, calm and unfazed, turns to him.

CARMACK

Why? Doom doesn't need a story. That was made clear two months ago. It needs a guy with a gun. I think we got that covered. Adrian is designing those right now.

Tom stares at the Doom Bible before walking back to his desk, a defeated look in his eyes. Across the room, Romero gives him an apologetic shrug.

CARMACK (CONT'D)

(mocking under his breath)

"Playing cards."

He resumes coding, his vision for Doom becoming clearer with every line.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

Romero and Adrian work side-by-side, testing levels with flickering lights, twisted walls, and terrifying demon designs. Carmack glances at them, quietly pleased.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)

As much as I hate to admit it, John was the key. Doom could've been Wolfenstein on steroids, but that would have been too easy for him. His made everything darker, more intense than what we had before..

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)

(reflective)

And John could make something beautiful out of it. We created a world that was brutal and terrifying.

FADE OUT.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

As we became more involved with Doom's development, things started to surface that we didn't expect. First was Tom. The pressure of the project was getting to him. Tom wasn't happy we abandoned Commander Keen for Doom, and his contributions weren't what we needed at the time. He was becoming increasingly disconnected from his work, so the four of us made the decision to let him go.

Across a dimly lit office table, Carmack, Romero, and Adrian sit across from a dejected Tom, who looks more defeated than angry. Romero's expression is somber, clearly saddened by the decision.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)

We continued along regardless.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE - DOOM DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES

Clips show Romero posing with a pistol, while Adrian sketches different weapons: a pistol, a shotgun, a mini-gun, and the infamous BFG. We see these sketches transition onto a game screen, showcasing how each of Adrian's drawings translates to Doom's graphics.

The team remains lively and rambunctious despite Tom's absence, bringing Doom to life with unrestrained energy.

INT. ROMERO'S OFFICE - DAY

Romero, working intently on the level editor, tries to open his office door but realizes it's jammed. He tugs, but the door won't budge.

ROMERO

Hey! I'm locked in. Get me out of here!

The team gathers outside ROMERO's door, laughing and scratching their heads, trying various ways to free him, each attempt backfiring in increasingly ridiculous ways. Finally, Carmack speaks up with a straight face.

CARMACK  
I have an axe.

CUT TO:

Carmack wielding an oversized battle axe, reminiscent of something from their D&D sessions. Jay and Adrian stand nearby, hyping him up.

JAY  
John, don't worry—John is bringing  
an axe!

ROMERO  
(Stunned)  
The battle axe?

JAY  
Yeah!

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
Hell yeah! Do it!

The team starts chanting, "Battle axe! Battle axe!" with Romero joining in from inside his office. With a dramatic swing, Carmack strikes the door, splintering it. Romero laughs uncontrollably as the door finally breaks open, leaving it a mangled mess.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
But we were having fun.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - DAY

The room is cluttered with Doom concept art, Diet Coke cans, and pizza boxes. The energy is frenetic, the air stinks of humanity, but probably not unlike what you'd expect with a bunch of 20-somethings sitting in front of computers all day and night.

Romero leans back in his chair, arms crossed, visibly annoyed. Kevin, seated next to him, knows he's losing this battle but tries anyway. Carmack, ever stoic and unreadable, keeps his focus on the design documents in front of him, barely acknowledging the conversation.

Through the glass-paneled door, we catch a glimpse of SANDY PETERSEN (37) in the waiting area. A soft-spoken, bespectacled man with an unassuming demeanor, flipping through a game magazine as he waits.



ROMERO

(exasperated, to Kevin)

A Mormon? Kevin, you idiot, we're writing a game about demons rising from hell, and blowing them to shit with shotguns. The last thing we need is some religious guy in here getting all offended and fucking things up.

Kevin shifts uncomfortably but holds his ground.

KEVIN

(firm, but careful)

Okay, okay, John. You said we need a designer after Tom left, and he's one of the best designers out there. You heard of Call of Cthulhu? Horror stuff. That's the guy.

(beat)

What's the worst that can happen?

Romero rubs his temples, still unconvinced.

ROMERO

(muttering, half to himself)

Jesus Christ.

CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Romero, Jay, and Kevin sit across from SANDY, who has a big smile on his face, the parallel opposite of Romero.

Sandy is heavysset, balding, wearing glasses and suspenders. Bright-eyed. Cheerful. Completely unfazed by the skepticism across the table.

On a nearby computer screen, the DOOM engine is running. Sandy moves through the level design toolkit with expert precision—but the layout looks directionless and messy.

Romero leans in, eyes narrowing.

ROMERO

What are you doing?

Sandy, completely unbothered, keeps tinkering.

SANDY

Well, say your Doomguy comes this way... I'm putting a door here, and when he opens it—bam!—monster pops out. Then you're heading down this hallway, and right here—the lights go out...

As Sandy keeps working, we see it: Romero gets it.

His eyes light up, the skepticism melting into something else—excitement.

CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jay and Kevin shake hands with Sandy, sealing the deal.

A now thrilled ROMERO claps SANDY on the shoulder, grinning.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)

Sandy knew what we were going for, and we gave him the job. He said he'd take it—with a higher offer.

(beat)

And you know what? We gave it to him.

The camera lingers on Carmack, who—for once—actually looks satisfied.

CARMACK

(simple, approving)

This is really good. I think you'd be a good fit for us.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - HALLWAY

Sandy walks down the hallway, giddy, excited, riding the high of landing the job.

From the other direction, Carmack approaches—rigid, robotic, his mind clearly elsewhere.

Sandy smiles and waves, his enthusiasm genuine.

SANDY

How are you, John?

Carmack stops. Blinks. Then—the impossible happens—he cracks a faint smile.

CARMACK  
Hi. Congratulations.

Sandy nods, appreciative.

SANDY  
Thanks! Really looking forward to  
working with you guys.

But Carmack isn't done yet. He pauses, tilts his head, and  
stares at Sandy like a scientist studying a bug under a  
microscope.

CARMACK  
You know, I said your work was  
good, then I heard you asked Jay  
for more money...

Sandy's smile fades. He raises an eyebrow.

Where is this going?

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
(continues, flatly)  
I just don't want you to think I  
said your work was good because I  
wanted you to take less money.  
(beat. A long, awkward  
pause.)  
Mmm.

Carmack walks away, completely oblivious to how fucking weird  
that sounded.

Sandy watches him go, wondering when the last time this guy  
saw the sun.

SANDY  
(mutters, shaking his  
head)  
What the fuck was that?

INT. ID SOFTWARE - ROMERO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: OCTOBER 1993

The room is dimly lit, save for the CRT monitors glowing with  
the latest DOOM level. The office is a disaster zone—Diet  
Coke cans, pizza boxes, sketches strewn everywhere. Romero is  
locked in, fingers hammering keys, his character tearing  
through corridors.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
By this point, we were in the final stretch of Doom. John built the engine, Adrian had pumped out the art, and Sandy and I had just about wrapped up the levels.

The door creaks open.

Carmack steps inside, arms crossed, eyes fixed on Romero's screen. His expression doesn't change, but there's approval in his silence.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
John couldn't care less about level design. It was always about the tech. So when he stopped by my side of the office, it was strictly business.

Romero doesn't turn away but senses him.

ROMERO  
(distracted, still playing)  
What's up?

Carmack steps forward, arms still crossed.

CARMACK  
It's time to start testing the networking.

Romero pauses, tilting his head slightly, processing.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
Right. Networking. The part of the game we'd promised months ago but barely touched. The thing that was supposed to make Doom unlike anything before it.

Carmack moves toward the desk, standing over the screen.

CARMACK  
The setup's mostly there. I just need to write the IPX communication protocols, get the serial connection stable...

But Romero is already miles ahead, his mind racing with possibilities as Carmack drones on.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
Up until this point, video games  
were a solo thing. Sure, you had  
head-to-head fighting games in the  
arcades. Some early modem-to-modem  
stuff like NetTrek... (beat) But  
nothing like this.

His eyes scan his screen, focusing on a hallway with a  
massive window overlooking a toxic green pit.

He pictures it—

Two marines on opposite sides.

Missiles screaming across the map.

The explosion lighting up the walls.

His pulse spikes.

ROMERO  
(under his breath,  
grinning)  
If we can get this done... this is  
going to be the fucking coolest  
game the planet Earth has ever  
fucking seen in its entire history.

Carmack—silent, composed—just gives a small, knowing nod.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CARMACK'S OFFICE - TWO WEEKS LATER

The room is a wiring nightmare—network cables sprawled across  
the floor like electronic vines, leading to two massive PCs  
facing each other.

Carmack sits at his terminal, typing furiously. His screen is  
a wall of code, lines of text scrolling as a live connection  
script compiles in real time.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
John always wanted to push the  
envelope. Be the one to make things  
happen that had never happened  
before. (beat) And now...

He leans forward, presses a key.

ON SCREEN:

A space marine moves forward.

Carmack glances at the second monitor across the room—another perspective of the same game.

The marine moves forward on both screens.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Doom wasn't just a game anymore.

Carmack leans back, exhales, his lips curling ever so slightly.

He's done it.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - ROMERO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Romero bursts into the office, still in his leather jacket, eyes wild.

Carmack simply gestures to the screen, wordless.

Romero leans in, watching the two monitors, his jaw dropping.

ROMERO  
(whispers, awestruck)  
Oh my God.

He bolts out of the room—racing to his own computer.

CUT TO:

ROMERO'S SCREEN:

Carmack's space marine avatar appears in a dimly lit corridor.

Romero's marine spawns in behind him.

A moment of silence. Then—

BOOM!

Romero unloads a shotgun blast, Carmack's marine flies backward, a spray of pixelated blood exploding onto the walls.

ROMERO  
(laughing, victorious)

SUCK IT DOWN!

Carmack respawns instantly, unfazed.

Suddenly--another monitor flickers on. Then another.

JAY. KEVIN. ADRIAN.

One by one, the team takes their places, grabbing keyboards, mouse clicks filling the air.

The office is transformed into an arena.

The shouts of digital marines mix with the real screams of their creators. Explosions. Gunfire. Laughter. Chaos.

On screen, it's war. In the office, it's history.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Romero paces the hallway, still buzzing from what he just witnessed.

From inside, the sound of gunfire, laughter, shouting.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: DECEMBER 10, 1993

The office is a wreck--crushed soda cans, discarded pizza boxes, broken chairs, and old DOOM concept sketches pinned to the walls. The taped outline of someone's body still lingers on the floor, collecting dust. Appropriate as these guys have been killing themselves.

At the center of it all, Jay sits at his computer, hands poised over the keyboard. Carmack, Romero, Adrian, Kevin, and the rest of the id team huddle around, running on pure adrenaline and caffeine, eyes locked on the monitor.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
Thirty straight hours. That's how long we had been awake. Doom was done. The only thing left was to give it to the world.

## EXT. INTERNET - VISUALIZATION

A stylistic representation of the early Internet—a black void filled with lines of green text, usernames flickering in and out.

Thousands of gamers wait in Internet Relay Chat (IRC), their messages stacking fast:

"WHERE IS DOOM?"

"IS IT UP YET?"

"I'M LOSING MY MIND HERE."

Meanwhile, on the Wisconsin FTP server, users have started creating dummy files as makeshift messages:

"UPLOAD DOOM NOW"

"WE ARE WAITING"

"PLEASE GOD"

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
No publisher. No physical copies.  
Just the Internet. We told them  
Doom was dropping at midnight. They  
were ready.

## INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

The clock hits 12:00 AM. The team cheers, claps, exhales in relief.

Jay presses the upload button—a final moment of triumph.

Silence.

Jay stops clapping, his smile fades as he stares at his screen, furrowing his brow.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
And then... nothing happened.



CLOSE-UP - JAY'S SCREEN

ERROR MESSAGE:

CONNECTION REFUSED - SERVER FULL

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

Jay types furiously.

JAY  
No, no, no, no—

He picks up the phone, dialing frantically.

INTERCUT - PHONE CALL

INT. UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SERVER ROOM - NIGHT

DAVID DATTA, a frazzled systems admin, answers his ringing phone. His computer screen flashes warnings as bandwidth surges to capacity.

DAVID  
(over phone)  
Uh, yeah, we have a problem..

JAY  
(snarling)  
Yeah, I fucking know! We can't get  
in—your whole system is full!

David types frantically, sweat forming on his brow.

DAVID  
Okay, okay—hang on. I can up the  
user limit. Give me a second—

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

The team watches anxiously as Jay hovers his finger over the button, waiting for David's go-ahead.

ON SPEAKERPHONE:

DAVID  
Alright... now!

Jay hits the button.

JAY  
Goddammit! It's still full!

Silence. The team deflates.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
We had tens of thousands of people  
waiting to download Doom. And we  
couldn't even get in to upload it.

JAY SLAMS HIS KEYBOARD - THEN GETS AN IDEA

He pulls up the IRC chatroom where hundreds of messages flood  
in per second. He cracks his knuckles and types:

JAYWILBUR:

"Listen up. If you guys don't log out of the FTP now, Doom  
isn't getting uploaded at all."

A long pause.

Slowly, usernames begin disappearing from the FTP server.

Jay reloads the connection-

CONNECTED.

Jay slams the button. The upload progress bar begins to move.

MOMENTS LATER - INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES

The team collapses onto chairs and couches, exhausted but  
elated.

Romero closes his eyes. Adrian rubs his temples. Carmack  
leans back, arms folded.

Jay watches the upload bar crawl forward.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
Thirty minutes later, the last bit  
of Doom data made its way to  
Wisconsin.

Then-

BOOM.

The lights flicker. Jay's phone rings instantly.

INTERCUT - PHONE CALL

David is on the other end, stunned.

DAVID  
(over phone, shell-  
shocked)  
Oh my God.

JAY  
(concerned)  
What now?

DAVID  
The whole system just...crashed.

Beat.

David laughs—a mix of disbelief and admiration.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
I've never seen anything like this.

Jay leans back, grinning.

JAY  
(To the group)  
We did it, guys!

The whole team celebrates. They finally crossed the finishing line.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
And the world would never be the same.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. COMPUTER GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE - 1994

A packed auditorium watches a large screen as DOOM runs flawlessly on a Windows machine. The Microsoft logo lingers in the background.

Carmack stands to the side, arms crossed, watching as the audience gasps and murmurs at the technical showcase.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Microsoft wanted a piece of what we built. They asked me to port a demo to Windows. It wasn't about money for me. It was about proving that my code could run anywhere."

Romero watches from the side, playing along and hyping it up as the crowd erupts in excitement.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES

A NEW YORK TIMES reporter walks through the id offices, passing Ferrari posters, Doom artwork, stacks of fan mail, and a pile of broken keyboards from past outbursts.

A photographer snaps a shot of Romero leaning back in his chair, sunglasses on, grinning like a rockstar.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
The press couldn't get enough of us. Forbes wrote that we made Microsoft look like a second-rate cement company. Variety called us the future of entertainment. I mean, holy shit.

QUICK CUTS TO  
MAGAZINE  
HEADLINES:

Forbes: "Profits from the Underground: id Software Makes Microsoft Look Like a Second-Rate Cement Company."

New York Times: "The Future of Gaming is Here, and It's DOOM."

Variety: "Hollywood, Meet Your New Competition."

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CARMACK'S OFFICE

Carmack, emotionless, sits at his dual monitors, already working on the next evolution of the Doom engine.

The excitement outside his door doesn't faze him. He doesn't even look up.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
The media didn't matter. The attention didn't matter. What mattered was what was next.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS - ROMERO'S PRIORITIES SHIFTING

Gaming magazine cover: "JOHN ROMERO - THE ROCKSTAR OF GAMING."

Romero laughing, signing autographs at an industry event.

A fax machine printing a contract from Raven Software—DOOM's first licensed spin-off, HERETIC.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
John didn't care about the  
spotlight, but I sure as hell did.

INT. AUSTIN VIRTUAL GAMING - DOOM TOURNAMENT

A tiny, cramped gaming café—six computers, dim lighting, the sound of keyboard clicks and gunfire filling the air.

Five Doom addicts in baggy jeans and Nirvana T-shirts bow repeatedly at Romero's feet.

GAMERS (CHANTING, GRINNING)  
We're not worthy! We're not worthy!

ROMERO smirks, soaking it in.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
I'd walk into places and people  
would literally bow to me. You have  
no idea what that does to someone.

QUICK CUTS:

Doom Tournament brackets filling up.

Crowds cheering at a local LAN party as a frag counter explodes onscreen.

College dorms packed with guys playing Doom until sunrise.

TRENT RENZOR of NINE INCH NAILS walks into his trailer after finishing a concert, walking past howling fans just to power on his computer and play Doom.

EXT. LUXURY CAR SHOWROOM - THE FERRARIS

Carmack and Romero step into a sleek, high-end car showroom, the bright lights gleaming off polished metal.

They stare at a gleaming red Testarossa.

ROMERO (AWE-STRUCK, GRINNING)  
Holy shit! Come to daddy!

Carmack, ever calm, pulls out a checkbook.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
If he was getting one? Hell, I was too.

A slow-motion shot as the dealership hands over the keys—one red Ferrari, one fly yellow.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
John loved the spectacle of success. I just wanted the best machine. Fastest processor, fastest car—it was all the same to me.

EXT. ID SOFTWARE PARKING LOT - SIDE BY SIDE

The two Ferraris are parked perfectly aligned outside the office.

From the second floor, through a window, we see Carmack working late at his computer, barely acknowledging the ultimate status symbols below him.

Romero, arms crossed, admires the cars like a king surveying his empire.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
We parked them just right so we could look down at them while we worked. Because that's what id was—speed. Power. Unstoppable.

But then—

FAINTLY, FROM  
INSIDE:

A frustrated voice. A heated argument.

Romero turns away from the Ferraris and heads inside.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
As good as this was, we had no idea what we were headed for.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: 1994

The team is back to work, this time on Doom 2. Romero sits at his desk, testing the final level of the game.

On the screen, the player battles through hordes of enemies before coming face-to-face with the final boss: a grotesque wall of flesh with a demon's face embedded in it.

ROMERO

Alright. Let's see what you've got.

The boss falls, and suddenly, Romero's eyes widen as an unseen voice screams. He tilts his head, intrigued.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

Dude, I dig the demonic chants.  
What is it saying?

He turns to Adrian, who smirks knowingly. The guys in the back are also trying to hold it together.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

Seriously, what's it saying? What the hell is wrong with you?

ADRIAN

It's saying "To win the game, you must kill me, John Romero." Just like you keep screaming at us you fucking weirdo.

Romero cackles at the inside joke, but Adrian puts his hand on his shoulder and moves him aside to bring up the tools so he can see the next iconic easter egg.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)

Take a look at this.

Romero digs into the game files, uncovering the now-legendary easter egg: an impaled head of himself behind the boss's wall, complete with the in-game audio clip of him screaming.

ROMERO

Oh my God! Are you kidding me?  
That's me!

The room erupts in laughter as Romero points at the screen.

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICE - NIGHT

The dim glow of a CRT monitor flickers, lines of code scrolling endlessly. Carmack sits alone, fingers gliding over the keyboard, refining Doom II.

The rest of the office is empty. Silent.

He pauses. Looks around. Seeing nothing.

Something's missing.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
I used to look up and see John  
right there, grinding away. He'd be  
testing levels, messing with code,  
pushing things further. The office  
was getting quieter. Work wasn't  
getting done like it used to, and  
we had A LOT of work to do.

Carmack cracks his knuckles, eyes narrowing as he keeps  
typing.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Faint laughter echoes down the corridor. The muffled sounds  
of rapid-fire keyboard clicks, followed by the distant  
screams of DOOM multiplayer carnage.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - MULTIPLAYER ROOM

A cluster of developers are locked in a heated DOOM  
deathmatch, screens flashing as rockets and shotguns tear  
through pixelated marines.

At the center of it all: Romero, grinning ear to ear,  
dominating.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
We built something insane and I was  
going to enjoy every second of it.  
John couldn't let go of his code. I  
couldn't stop with the game.

Romero leans back, triumphant, watching the frag counter tick  
up.

ROMERO  
(laughing)  
Suck it down, motherfuckers!

A loud cheer erupts. The energy is electric.

But one person isn't cheering.

Carmack stands in the doorway. Arms crossed. Watching.  
Expression unreadable.

Romero wipes his hands on his jeans, smirking.

Carmack doesn't even blink.



INT. ID SOFTWARE - CARMACK'S OFFICE - LATER

Romero enters, still buzzing from the match, flopping into a chair. KEVIN CLOUD and Adrian sit nearby, hesitant.

Near the door, an awkward young newcomer watches the scene—AMERICAN McGEE (21), punkish, shaggy-haired, unsure of where to stand.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Doom II was behind schedule. John  
was always out, so I found someone  
to fill in the blanks.

Carmack gestures toward the new hire.

CARMACK  
(to Romero, bluntly)  
This is American McGee. He's gonna  
help finish the levels. We're  
falling behind and need the extra  
help.

Romero eyes him, unimpressed, steeples his fingers.

ROMERO  
Cool name.

American cracks a small grin, nodding.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
American had talent, but, most  
importantly, actually in the  
office.

Carmack glances at Kevin—who avoids eye contact.

Then to Adrian—who gives a slight nod of agreement.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS - AMERICAN MCGEE'S RISE

American sits beside Carmack, nodding as Carmack explains a technical detail.

American clicks rapidly through the DOOM II level editor, assembling a new map at lightning speed.

A whiteboard tally: DOOM II LEVELS COMPLETED - McGee: 12 / Romero: 6.

Carmack watches, actually smiling as he sees McGee's work ethic.

Romero's grin falters—just a little.

INT. CARMACK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Carmack watches as Romero stretches, completely unfazed.

ROMERO

(smirk)

Look, we're killing it. Doom is huge. You really think anyone gives a shit if we take our time? Doom II is almost done, anyway.

Carmack studies him, then turns back to his screen.

CARMACK

"Almost done" is still behind schedule. Even with American pulling his share of the weight, we're still behind, John.

Romero chuckles. Carmack just can't cut loose.

ROMERO

Look John, I get it. The new guy's good, but that's basic stuff. You know it.

A long silence.

Carmack's fingers hover over the keyboard. He doesn't type. He does subtly shake his head as his comment failed to make a mark.

Romero claps his hands on his knees, standing up.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

(grinning, walking away)

I mean, we kind of hold all the cards right now. Nobody else can do what we do.

Carmack stops, if only for a moment. Turns to face him.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

You know the work I'm doing with Raven Software? Heretic? It's just a little mod to the DOOM engine, and that's it. LucasArts already reached out to us about them using the engine to make a "Star Wars" game. I mean, we can't stop making money off this thing. How much did Atari pay you to port it for the Jaguar?

CARMACK  
(flatly)  
Two hundred and fifty thousand  
dollars.

ROMERO  
Exactly. John, let's see how far  
this thing can take us. We're  
holding all the cards and waiting  
for everyone to catch up to us.

Carmack nods slightly, unreadable.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
We spent years killing ourselves to  
make this happen. That wasn't fun.  
This is fun. No more 30-hour  
workdays. No more death schedules.

Romero smiles. Outlining his vision. Their future.

Carmack slowly turns back to the screen.

Romero gets the hint.

He nods, then exits.

And then—

He's gone.

Carmack stares at the empty space where Romero had been  
sitting.

The cursor on his monitor blinks.

The hallway outside hums with distant laughter.

Carmack turns back to the screen—

And keeps working.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
In the past, he would've stayed.  
But now? Now, John Romero had  
somewhere else to be.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CARMACK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The dead of night. The office is dark, save for the familiar  
glow of CRT monitors. Empty Diet Coke cans sit between lines  
of code and stray cables.

Carmack and American sit at their respective computers, side-by-side but worlds apart in experience.

They sip their Diet Cokes, bonding in quiet. This is usually when the Johns would work deep into the night together—testing boundaries, fusing code with imagination.

Now, only one of them remains.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)

I wasn't worried. We never had design documents before. We just built the thing and made it great. That was the id way.

American leans back in his chair, stealing a glance over at Carmack.

AMERICAN

Was it always like this with John? I mean, the guy is like, never here.

CARMACK

He's slacking off, but he'll come around. He always does.

AMERICAN

"Slacking off?" John, I mean, I know you guys go way back, but that's cutting a guy a break. You're here more than anyone and I'd figure you'd—

CARMACK

(cutting him off)  
You are NOT John Romero.

A pause. That hits harder than American expected.

AMERICAN

(quietly)  
Okay. Sorry.

Carmack leans back in his chair for a moment—then turns his attention back to the monitor.

CARMACK

Despite what you've noticed, you're forgetting some details: the levels he created for Doom II were the best ones. Same with Doom. When Quake comes around... it'll be the same with Quake.

A tense silence between them. Carmack's eyes never leave the screen.

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
(reserved)  
That is how it is going to be.

American watches him for a moment, unsure if Carmack is being nostalgic or just burnt out.

AMERICAN  
I don't know, man.

CARMACK  
Unless you've been through what  
we've been through, you just don't  
know. John is a strong finisher.  
He'll come through.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - DESIGN ROOM - DAY

The team is gathered around a long table cluttered with snacks, Diet Cokes, and a whiteboard in the background with vague scribbles about "Quake." Romero hands Sandy a thin packet and takes his seat by the whiteboard, but clearly itching for the door.

Sandy flips through a thin packet in his hands. He looks bewildered.

SANDY  
(confused)  
What the hell is this?

Romero stands at the head of the table, casually leaning with confidence.

ROMERO  
This is what I got for Quake.  
That's everything.

Sandy stares at the pages like they're written in crayon.

SANDY  
So we are building an entirely new  
game with an entirely new engine,  
and all we got to go off here are  
two--(flips through) not full pages,  
but two pages? Some of this is in  
pencil.

ROMERO

We'll make it work. Once John gets the engine, we'll add all that stuff in later. That's how it goes around here.

SANDY

It's two pages.

ROMERO

(shrugging)

So what? Were you expecting some sort of manifesto or Tolstoy book? The last time someone did something like that here was Tom, and we didn't use any of his ideas. He got fired. That's just not how it works here, dude.

SANDY

(dry)

This is... two pages.

ROMERO

(grinning)

And it'll be great. I'm off. Catch you later!

Romero casually exits, leaving the team speechless.

SANDY

(under his breath)

Great. I'll be sure to ask questions...

The others exchange stunned glances. No one says a word.

SANDY (CONT'D)

(quiet, to himself)

If you're ever even here anymore.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The team is huddled around, bouncing ideas off each other and looking worse for wear. In the background are notes and a prototype of Carmack's engine as well as scribbled ideas.

Carmack, American, Kevin, Adrian, Sandy, and a few other developers sit scattered around the table, and are starting to show signs of wear and tear dealing with the engine.

Romero stands confidently in front of the room with a marker in one hand and boundless energy.

ROMERO

(excited, pitching)

Here's what I'm saying: Quake should be an epic battle fought across the fabric of time! We go across different periods in history, all with unique enemies and weapons, and with the textures and designs. But I got something that we can put in there that'll blow everyone's minds.

The room is skeptical.

SMASH CUT TO:

#### QUAKE - FANTASY VISION - IN-GAME SEQUENCE

An impossibly sleek version of Quake. The player glides from FPS into cinematic third-person, with a ROMERO-inspired figure and hard rock music playing in the background. A BLAZING SWORD ignites in the character's hand. Fluid swordplay ensues—slow-mo slashes, particle explosions, dramatic lighting—pure next-gen fantasy.

ROMERO (V.O.)

(amped)

I recently came back from Japan-- I'm sure you fuckers got the postcards? Well, over there I got a chance to play Virtua Fighter and I thought, "We need to have this," and it'd be like, here we are running around, blowing shit up, and we're out of ammo. In Doom, we had brass knuckles, but in Quake? Hand to hand combat!—and then BOOM—one button press and you're in third-person! You drop your guns and you PULL OUT A SWORD, or axe, or whatever it is you are putting in there.

SANDY (V.O.)

It's an axe.

The sword gets scrubbed out, replaced with an axe. The Romero sprite is no worse for wear.

ROMERO (V.O.)  
Okay, axe. And you swing it.  
There's blood. You get your ammo  
back, and then you go back into  
first-person.

BACK TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Silence.

American blinks.

AMERICAN  
(slowly)  
You want full cinematic transitions  
for a dedicated engine for just  
melee combat. That'll mean new  
camera angles. The textures we've  
got for the levels alone might be  
too much as it is, and you want us  
to render it for a third-person  
view?

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
Exactly! Total immersion.

ADRIAN  
(flat)  
Can we do that?

CARMACK  
(sharply)  
No.

ROMERO  
We can make it work.

KEVIN  
(rubbing his forehead)  
Here's what I think will happen...

SMASH CUT TO:

A crude in-engine transition attempt. The game locks up mid-  
animation.

WINDOWS 95 ERROR  
MESSAGE POPS UP:



This program has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down.

BACK TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Silence. It lingers. A damning indication on how far ROMERO'S ideas will go this time.

CARMACK  
That isn't going to work, John.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CARMACK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The room is dark, save for the cold glow of a CRT monitor. Lines of code flicker endlessly across the screen.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Quake was not going to be a patch job on a new engine. I was creating something entirely from scratch, and all resources we had before were incompatible. I began to lose myself in time. Things weren't working like I had hoped, and not only were we losing time, but I felt that there were moments I started losing my mind.

Carmack sits motionless, hunched over the keyboard, eyes wide and unblinking.

He slowly rolls his chair away from the desk.

The monitor's glow reflects in his glasses.

He rubs his face, exhausted.

Then—he FREEZES.

His eyes track something on his hands.

CLOSE ON: His palms.

LINES OF CODE begin to trickle down his skin like digital ink.

They spill to the floor.

Then to the walls.

The entire room begins to fill with cascading lines of code.

Carmack blinks—then GASPS.

And just like that...

SNAP.

He's back in the dim office. Alone. Still on the screen.

His breathing steadies.

Without a word, he leans forward—

And gets back to work.

FADE TO BLACK.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE - OFFICE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Carmack sits at his desk, the only light coming from his monitor. He hears FOOTSTEPS echoing down the hall.

Annoyed, he rolls his chair back to see who's making the noise.

It's Sandy, fumbling with his keys, clearly heading home.

SANDY

Oh, hey, John. Goodnight.

CARMACK

Where do you think you're going?

SANDY

Home. You know, where I live? It's 8 o'clock and the guys and I have been working 11 hours straight.

CARMACK

You're leaving early. You all leave early.

SANDY

Uh, no. You're just not here when we are here.

(beat, half-joking)

(MORE)

SANDY (CONT'D)  
Goodnight, John. Get some rest. Or  
some water. That might help.

Sandy exits. Carmack stares after him, eyes burning with quiet rage.

INT. CARMACK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Carmack slams back into his desk chair. Opens a fresh file.

Begins FURIOUSLY TYPING. Each keystroke sounding deeper like a sledgehammer.

INT. ID SOFTWARE - OFFICE FLOOR - NEXT DAY

The team sits at their desks, stunned. Each one holds a printed REPORT CARD.

Letter grades. Harsh notes. All written by Carmack.

The room is silent. The fun is gone.

MONTAGE:

Carmack wheels his desk into the hallway, watching everyone like a prison warden.

American types nervously, glancing back at Carmack every few minutes.

Adrian quietly throws his head back in frustration.

Romero looks like he's having the time of his life...because he's on vacation.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
We were not working hard enough.  
They were not working hard enough.  
HE wasn't working hard enough.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The team's all here. They're tired, tense, and nowhere close to the end. Carmack sits at his desk like a sniper in a crow's nest, arms crossed, unreadable. The rest of the dev team are scattered around, frustrated and close to exhaustion.

SANDY

Listen John, I don't give a fuck if you are intending on working us to the point where we die or all our collective minds just shut off. Even you know we're nowhere near getting things done with Quake and I know you know why.

Carmack couldn't turn any further away from Sandy if he wanted to. He knows this conversation has been coming and dreading it.

SANDY (CONT'D)

I don't care about my D-minus report card, frankly because the real problem and the one you don't want to talk about is the one giving all of us the big F-U.  
(beat)

And don't you all sit there pretending like it's just me.

(turning)

We all know it's John.

CARMACK

I understand how it can be frustrating to wait on John, but he has a vision and he'll perform when he's ready to do so.

AMERICAN

(Sheepishly) Well, John is the one saying we have to wait on YOU.

Carmack's head lifts slightly.

KEVIN

That's the whole idea, guys. The engine needs to get done and then we build on top of it.

SANDY

(Sharply) That's bullshit.  
(To Carmack) Listen, I know John is a great designer and I'm not saying he isn't, but I've worked at big companies where this is all they do and never have I worked somewhere where our lead designer is constantly out to lunch.

(MORE)

SANDY (CONT'D)  
The fact of the matter is, we  
aren't going to get ANYTHING  
finished without him, even if YOU  
finish first.

Carmack's expression sinks. He sees the team-finally seeing  
them-and realizes what he has to do next.

CARMACK  
(To Kevin) Where is John?

KEVIN  
He's coming back tomorrow. He's  
doing something with Raven for  
Hexen.

Silence. Carmack realizes what has to happen next. He exhales  
and looks Kevin dead in the eyes.

CARMACK  
Call a meeting. (beat)

Tomorrow. Everyone. Including John.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. BLACK CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The black Venetian blinds only allow slivers of light into  
the room, casting long shadows across the table. The tension  
is heavy. At the head sits Carmack, his focus directly on the  
man across from them, intense. To his left, Adrian looks like  
he would want to be anywhere else. Kevin, sitting closer to  
Romero, fidgets and keeps looking around. American and Sandy  
sits in the middle, American is sunken into his chair. Across  
from them, Romero lounges back, confident yet seething. The  
air crackles with conflict waiting to explode.

CARMACK (CALM, FIRM)  
You're not doing your work, John.  
The bottom line is—we're wasting  
too much time waiting for you to  
show up and do what we need you to  
do. If you're not going to do what  
we need, we're going to fire you.

ROMERO (LEANING FORWARD, DEFENSIVE)  
Not doing my work? Fire ME? John,  
cut the bullshit. You know I work  
as much as anyone else. I'm here  
all the time!

(MORE)

ROMERO (LEANING FORWARD, DEFENSIVE)  
Just because I don't live here like  
you doesn't mean I'm not involved.

Romero's eyes dart around the room, searching for an ally. But Adrian focuses his gaze, while Kevin nervously adjusts in his seat, clearing his throat. American looks straight down to the table.

KEVIN (UNSURE, QUIETLY)  
He does come in... and does his  
work.

Carmack's eyes narrow. He's flabbergasted, caught off-guard by the lack of support. His voice sharpens.

CARMACK  
The vanity projects and constant  
deathmatching has taken you away  
from your work. You're disconnected  
from the process and it's causing  
problems. We're here trying to  
finish the game by December, which  
is not enough time for us to do  
this comfortably. We have already  
been in the grinder for months and  
we're still behind. It took us only  
six months to create DOOM. So far,  
all the game design that we have  
that is usable came from American.  
That's supposed to be your area of  
expertise as Lead Designer, yet  
here we are.

Romero grits his teeth, clenching his fists beneath the table. He takes a deep breath, trying to maintain control as his eyes burn with frustration.

ROMERO  
(Scoffs) I've been promoting id.  
What's the harm in that? Are you so  
immersed in this thing you've made  
that you can't see it? Everytime I  
have an interview or I'm on a  
magazine cover, or a convention,  
what does that do for us? Huh? And  
why is it that just because you're  
all having a hard time with this  
thing that we're not supposed to do  
our own thing on the side.

ADRIAN

You're spending too much time promoting yourself, John, and it's getting out of hand and starting to interfere with development. When you keep telling people how amazing of a game we are making, it makes it that much harder on us when we STILL don't have much of a game to present.

ROMERO

(Sharply to ADRIAN)

Shut the fuck up, Adrian! Just be comfortable in your chair.

Romero leans back, a self-satisfied grin spreading across his face. Adrian seethes. Carmack remains stoic. For a moment, he seems to think he's won the room.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

I hope you remember how much we blew up because of Wolfenstein and Doom, and who was there, on the boards, pushing us through when we were knee-deep in all that shit. And don't forget—we sacrificed too. We got rid of Tom, and I fucking loved Tom.

CARMACK

(takes off his glasses,  
rubbing his eyes)

It was a decision we all had to make. He was slowing us down and his contributions weren't getting us anywhere. Not unlike how you are right now. The only difference then was that Tom had nothing to contribute that we needed, and that's why we're here today.

ROMERO

I'm slowing you down? No, you just built something you can't control, and now you think everything has to be perfect—

CARMACK

(cutting him off, firmly)

It does.

ROMERO

(raising his voice,  
pushing back)

And you seem to have forgotten what we built didn't just come from your lines of code, John. What good is an engine when the game looks like shit and nobody wants to play it?

CARMACK

(Directed to ROMERO)

We had a plan for Wolfenstein and Doom, and we didn't have to work hard to get you involved. Even during those times when you were gracing us with your presence, we were still having to work our asses off to make it happen, and that's why it worked. This is not Doom. It's a new animal, and I don't think you understand that. We're running out of time waiting for you to focus. Once the engine is done, you need to deliver the design per our instructions.

ROMERO

(Upset)

Oh, trust me, that won't be a problem. You know why? These "ideas" are shit! We can do so much more with the presentation than this. Doesn't anyone realize how basic this game looks?

Carmack's expression doesn't change.

CARMACK

That is irrelevant. We couldn't incorporate your ideas to begin with, and we certainly can't do them now. The engine is almost ready...

ROMERO

(Cutting in)

It's always about you and your engine, isn't it?

CARMACK

Fine. Let's talk about your ideas and understand that we are already doing something nobody has done before. You want cinematics.

(MORE)



CARMACK (CONT'D)

You want the game to transition from different perspectives at the push of a button. You want this to be some sprawling epic like "The Ten Commandments" and think it can be made just like that. It's out of our scope right now, and I'm surprised with how smart you are that you can't put it together.

Romero rolls his eyes as Carmack continues.

CARMACK (CONT'D)

We're making the first real 3D game that people can actually play. Nobody cares about Flight Simulator. Quake will run better on PCs that aren't needing thousand dollar parts just to run a piece of software. We're giving that experience to the gaming world. The only reason Nintendo and Sega and the rest haven't done it is because they don't know they can, and that's exactly what we're going to show them. (Pause) It has to be about the engine, John. You think our Ferraris out there go fast because of the red paint?

ROMERO

(Scoffs) The design makes it a Ferrari. (Pause) Hell, if time's so important, why not just slap the Doom palette over it, call it Doom 3, and work on Quake to make the game we really want it to be? We'd be done in two weeks, and everyone would call it a masterpiece.

Sandy pipes up and slaps the table to Romero's response.

SANDY

That's a great idea. You know what? It's the best idea you've had so far. Maybe that will get you to actually come to work and help us out once in a while?

American speaks up quietly from the corner.

AMERICAN MCGEE  
(calm but firm)  
We're already making the game,  
John. We can't start over now.

Romero glares at American, his intensity growing. He's not used to being challenged like this.

ROMERO  
Oh yeah? A fucking black-on-black-on-grey game with demons? It's Doom with the lights turned off! That's the best you all could come up with? Seriously? I'm surprised you guy haven't finished the fucking game already.

Adrian jumps in quickly, his voice tinged with anger.

ADRIAN  
(snapping)  
We've done a shitload of work on this, John. This isn't some easy change. We're not scrapping nearly a year's worth of resources because you suddenly decide to give a damn.

ROMERO  
(sarcastic)  
What the fuck do you know, Adrian? You've never built a game from start to finish like I have. Go back to writing on your doodlepad and don't open your mouth again while the adults are talking.

The room erupts in conflicting voices as Romero tries to hold his ground, but it's clear the tide is turning against him. He looks across the table, locking eyes with Carmack, who remains disturbingly calm. Romero's heart sinks as he realizes Carmack isn't defending him. He is alone.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
(desperate)  
John, we're trying to make a great game. Not a tech demo. You're getting away from why we started doing all of this in the first place! You're leaving so much on the table, and honestly, I don't think you realize it.

Carmack's voice cuts through the chaos with chilling calmness.

CARMACK

Everyone here has been working hard—everyone except you. You haven't built anything. Aside from talking, you've done nothing to help us get this done. Now is not the time for new ideas. That came a long time ago. You would know if you had been here.

ROMERO

(bitter, frustrated)

You still don't get it, John. Maybe these guys don't see it now because you're making me look like the bad guy, but this isn't how we do things, we can't sacrifice what we love doing just because it doesn't fit into your line of code.

CARMACK

(calm but cold)

Sometimes, you have to give yourself the freedom to back away from something when it's not working. Bullying ahead... that's how you leave a crater in the ground. We're finishing what we started, John.

Romero stares at Carmack in disbelief. It's clear now—they are no longer aligned. He glances around the room at the newer faces, realizing they've chosen the safer, simpler path. His world is crumbling before him.

ROMERO

(resigned, defeated)

You know what? Fine... I'll design the game with what you're asking for. We'll get it out.

Romero rubs his temple as he speaks, trying to keep his composure. But inside, he knows this is the end. His time at id Software is over.

The room buzzes with the team's murmurs, but it feels distant to Romero. The camera pulls back, leaving him isolated at the table, surrounded by his former allies as they continue discussing the future without him.

MONTAGE: THE FINAL MONTHS OF QUAKE

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

A dimly lit room. CRT monitors cast a pale glow over exhausted programmers and artists, hunched over their keyboards. The sound of furious typing, the occasional frustrated sigh. The walls are scarred with holes—computer parts embedded like knives.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
We had to make up for lost time.

QUICK CUTS: THE CRUNCH AT ID

Sandy at his desk, slamming his keyboard down in frustration, running his hands through his hair.

American scrolling through lines of code, bloodshot eyes locked on the screen.

Adrian sketching gothic structures, his trash can overflowing with scrapped designs.

Carmack at his workstation, robotic as ever, deep in code, oblivious to the chaos around him.

ROMERO'S DESK—empty.

DISJOINTED VISIONS  
Gameplay footage flashes across the screen, showcasing the disorganized styles:

ROMERO'S LEVELS: Medieval castles, grand and intricate.

AMERICAN'S LEVELS: Brutalist cyberpunk corridors.

SANDY'S LEVELS: Strange gothic puzzles, eerie and abstract.

DESTRUCTION & FRUSTRATION

A monitor SMASHES against the floor.

A keyboard FLIES through the air, embedding itself into the drywall.

A programmer PUNCHES his desk, storming out.

CARMACK (V.O.)  
As tough as it was, there was no denying that Quake was going to be our masterpiece.

JUNE 22, 1996 - THE RELEASE OF QUAKE

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - SATURDAY - LATE AFTERNOON

A silent hallway. Empty desks. An eerie stillness.

ROMERO walks in, alone.

His footsteps echo as he passes the id awards, the Freddy Krueger mask, the Doom plastic shotgun.

He slows as he reaches the main room—desks abandoned, chairs pushed away. Nobody is here.

He sits down, stares at the screen. The cursor blinks. The upload is ready.

INT. ONLINE CHATROOM - NIGHT

ROMERO logs into a Quake fan chatroom, watching as thousands of excited messages flood the screen. The clock hits 5:00 P.M. ROMERO exhales, then presses the button.

A progress bar fills.

The upload completes.

QUAKE IS LIVE.

Cheers explode in the chatroom. The fans are ecstatic. Romero watches the screen, but there's no joy in his face.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
It felt weird that none of the  
other guys were here with me. But  
it all added up.

CUT TO

Carmack still coding, oblivious.

CUT TO

Adrian flipping through sketches, exhausted.

CUT TO

The rest of the team, at home, not celebrating.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
They weren't gamers anymore. They  
didn't even play games. They were  
broken. Hypnotized and lost in  
John's machine.

ROMERO  
(To himself) It's over.

INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A mostly empty Mexican restaurant. A half-eaten meal sits on the table, but only one person is eating.

Carmack, calm and methodical, cuts into an enchilada, eating without urgency. Across from him, Adrian and Kevin sit in silence, their plates untouched.

The air is heavy. They all know why they're here.

Carmack washes down his bite with a sip of Coke, then finally looks up.

CARMACK  
(steadily, firm)  
We're not putting this off any  
longer.

Adrian shifts uncomfortably. Kevin glances away.

ADRIAN  
There isn't... another way? It's  
John.

CARMACK  
(quick, sharp)  
Right. And if we keep him, we'll  
lose the company. The relationship  
is unsustainable.

KEVIN  
I get it. But it still sucks.

Carmack gives a small shrug, unfazed. He takes another bite, chews, swallows. Then—

CARMACK  
Call him in. Tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The blinds are half-drawn, cutting harsh shadows across the room.

Carmack sits at the head of the table. Adrian to his left, Kevin to his right. In front of them—a single empty chair.

A beat. Then—FOOTSTEPS. The door creaks open.

Romero steps in.

No bravado. No smirk. Just a man who already knows why he's here.

He takes his seat. The tension is suffocating.

CARMACK  
(flat, almost mechanical)  
We're letting you go.

A beat. Then Carmack slides a resignation document across the table.

Romero catches it but doesn't look down. His eyes stay locked on Carmack.

ROMERO  
What is this?

CARMACK  
Your resignation. Sign it, or we  
fire you.

Silence.

Romero exhales sharply. He leans back, gripping the pen.

ROMERO  
(disbelieving)  
This is bullshit.

He shakes his head, flipping through the document like it's some kind of joke. But it isn't. He looks up, scanning their faces. No sympathy.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
I did the work. I killed myself for  
Quake these last seven months. And  
this— (slaps the document) —is what  
I get?

Carmack leans forward slightly, his voice like a blade.

CARMACK  
You weren't there for us, John. We  
were dying because of you.

Romero flinches, just barely.

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
(quiet, measured)  
We needed you to do better. And you  
didn't.

Romero exhales through his nose. The fight is leaving him.

CARMACK (CONT'D)  
One last time. Quit, or be fired.

A long, unbearable silence. Then—

Romero moves forward. He signs. Flips the pen.

He stands, straightens his jacket. He looks at them, waiting  
for someone to say something. Nobody does.

Without another word, he heads for the door.

Kevin and Adrian let out a quiet breath.

Carmack watches Romero go, his expression unreadable. The  
door clicks shut.

A long beat. Then, without thinking, Carmack lets out the  
faintest, almost imperceptible smirk.

FADE OUT

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - DAY

Carmack sits at his desk, typing away on the Quake II engine.  
His focus is unwavering, but the office environment around  
him feels different—subdued, quieter, and lacking the chaotic  
energy that Romero once brought. Carmack glances around at  
the team, all focused on their work, but something is  
missing.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(reflective) After John was fired,  
he started Ion Storm in a glitzy  
high-rise in Dallas. It was  
designed to be the studio of his  
dreams, full of flair and excess,  
just like him. Tom Hall followed  
him there.

(MORE)



NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
John was free to do whatever he  
wanted, without anyone like me  
telling him otherwise.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DAY

The camera moves through the sleek and luxurious office, featuring massive windows with breathtaking views of Dallas. Employees rush around, working intensely at their stations. At the center of it all is Romero, excitedly pitching ideas to his team. He's animated, full of energy, gesturing wildly as he talks about his vision for Daikatana. Tom Hall watches from the side, more cautious but still hopeful.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(reflective, slightly detached) He  
wanted to create the game we  
couldn't with Quake—a time-  
traveling epic filled with sci-fi  
elements and wild, unique levels.  
Maybe we would have gone in that  
direction if John had stayed with  
us. Who knows?

Romero proudly shows off a sword concept to his team.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(reflective) He called it  
Daikatana, a weapon he had obsessed  
over since our days playing  
Dungeons & Dragons. He made such a  
big deal of it back then, it killed  
off our campaign. Now, it was the  
heart of his new game.

NT. GILDED ELEVATOR - TEXAS COMMERCE BUILDING - NIGHT

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
(SERIOUS) I've got two words for  
you...

The elevator slows. A soft chime echoes. The doors slide open, revealing the sprawling, two-story penthouse. Romero steps forward into the wide, empty space.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Penthouse. Suite.

Romero steps further into the penthouse, walking toward the floor-to-ceiling windows that wrap around the entire space. He pauses, gazing out over the city.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I was on top of the whole world.  
 There was nothing stopping me now.

Romero smiles to himself, spinning around to take in the vast, empty space. His imagination runs wild.

ROMERO  
 (excited) This is it!

His excitement builds as he pictures the possibilities through his POV with an editing tool: A room full of pillows. A Vegas room. A "Break Shit" room. His eyes sparkle with boundless potential. The ideas quickly materialize into reality in a time lapse. ION Studios was born.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
 We'd done things John's way for way too long. At the heart of it, he'd just tell everyone all you needed was a table, a chair, and a computer. Typical small picture John. He grew out of touch with whatever constituted a fun side with him. Fuck him..

Romero steps to the edge of the room, his reflection cast against the window as he stares out over Dallas.

NARRATOR(ROMERO V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 (Cont'd)...I was building an empire.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DAY

Romero and Tom sit across from a game publisher in a sleek office. The publisher looks on as Romero lays out his bold demands: \$3 million per game, a 40% royalty, intellectual property rights. Romero speaks with confidence, Hall backing him up with nods and agreement.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
 I got on the phone with Tom and brought him back in for this. We cut our first major deal with Eidos Interactive. \$3 million per game, a sizable chunk on the royalties, and IP rights. They knew who they were talking to, so of course they signed off on the deal.

Quick FLASH CUT to Romero smirking, leaning back in his chair.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM - DAY

The new company is in full swing. Romero, Tom Hall, and TODD PORTER huddle over a table, sketching plans for their dream games. Papers are scattered across the table, with Todd passionately explaining his concept for Doppelganger. Hall interjects with thoughts on his sprawling, comedic adventure, Anachronox.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)

Tom started working on his adventure game, Anachronox. We also brought on Todd Porter, and he was working on something called Doppelganger, a strategy game about body-snatching slugs. And me? There was never a doubt.

ROMERO

(focused)

Daikatana.

Romero sits at his desk, scribbling ideas onto a notepad, furiously dumping a lifetime of ideas as he finally has a shot to make his dream come to life. We see flashes of his imagination: a glowing sword, time travel, epic battles.

INT. DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS GAME - FLASHBACK (ANIMATED)

Animated avatars of Romero and Carmack are now in the Dungeons & Dragons world. Carmack's voice is calm but menacing as he tempts Romero's character with the legendary Daikatana. Romero is entranced.

CARMACK

Do you take the sword?

Romero stares down at the Daikatana, hands trembling. The character smirks, takes the sword, and PLUNGES it into CARMACK as he flails until he moves no more. As his lifeless corpse hits the floor, blood splattering upward, ROMERO's animated avatar reigns triumphant.

ROMERO

Suck it down!

INT. ION STORM - DAY

Back in the present, Romero types away on his computer, the Daikatana logo bold on his screen.

NARRATOR (ROMERO V.O.)  
This time, it was all me. Design  
was law.

Romero smiles, driven and full of confidence, as the camera lingers on the shining Daikatana logo on his screen.

FADE OUT.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - NIGHT

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(Measured, almost sympathetic) John was about to find out how far his rules could take him. When we were together, we knew what we were capable of, and we should have after all the hours we put in. The programmers that John brought in were all young and inexperienced, drawn by his reputation. Knowing John, I knew he couldn't resist the adulation. I was too busy to postulate about Ion Storm, mainly because I knew that John would eventually turn it into a playground. Those programmers would see what I saw. The partying, the distractions, and the impossible goals he kept setting. They wanted the John who made Doom. What they got was the one we had to beg to finish Quake.

Romero is seen playing a round of Quake and looking like he's having the time of his life in the lavish Ion Storm office. As we pan out to programmers behind him, looking lost and needing direction, the cracks are starting to show.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DAY

Tom oversees a group of workers installing black curtains on the windows of the lavish Dallas high rise. At his side is lead developer STEVE ASH, and he is not looking too happy.

Romero comes out of the elevator and into the office, looking like he's ready to party when he sees Tom and Steve. He is holding a massive book.

ROMERO

(Stops, looks at curtains)  
What the fuck is this?

TOM

The guys were complaining that their monitors were overheating. I had to order these curtains so that we don't fry out our computers. We already had the problem with the air conditioners before we started moving into the building. (To himself) Did we even get that fixed?

ROMERO

(Grins)  
Heh, cool!

Tom and Steve look at each other. Steve looks back at Romero.

STEVE

(Puzzled)  
What is that?

Romero's eyes widen, as if he's been waiting for this moment for years. He has been waiting for this moment for years.

ROMERO

Dude. I'm about to rock your world.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - MEETING HALL

Romero is now front and center, right where he wanted to be. Tom is seated next to him and Steve is with the rest of the programmers, looking on. There is a palpable air of excitement as these young programmers have been waiting to get a taste of Romero's genius.

ROMERO

Here at Ion Storm, we believe in one thing. You know it, right?

ALL

Design is law.

ROMERO

Fuck yeah! We are about to start putting things together for Daikatana, and we are going to make something nobody has ever seen before.

Romero picks up his book, a massive text, and slams it next to him.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

This is the design book for Daikatana. We are going to do something nobody has ever seen before. You didn't see it in Quake, you didn't see it in Doom. This game is going to have it all.

The room hums with energy. Romero, confident and charismatic, stands in front of the assembled team, passionately pitching Daikatana. Behind him, the screen flashes between lush visuals of ancient Greece, cyberpunk Japan, and the characters that will accompany players on their epic journey.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

(Excited)

We're not just making another shooter. This is an epic. 24 levels, traveling through time and space, from the past to the future. This is going to be a game that fuses the best of every genre. It'll have aspects of FPS, JRPGs, and multiplayer madness!

The room is filled with murmurs of excitement. The programmers are taking notes, eyes wide with enthusiasm. Even Tom, sitting near the back, seems intrigued at first.

ROMERO (CONT'D)

When I was back at id, discussing Quake, I wanted to push the boundaries of something nobody had ever seen before. Here, we're going to create AI sidekicks that evolve with you, a great story, and a chance to stake our claim as bad mother fuckers! And you know why?

A slide shows the timeline of development—various stages of production, culminating in the game's release.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
(Grinning)  
I told Eidos we could have it ready  
for Christmas.

The room falls silent. Tom Hall shifts uncomfortably in his seat, his initial excitement dimming. He looks around the room at the anxious faces, clearly concerned.

PROGRAMMER #1  
(Under his breath)  
That's nine months. Is he serious?

PROGRAMMER #2  
(Whispering)  
There's no way. Not with everything  
he just described...

PROGRAMMER #3  
(Whispering)  
I mean, this is the guy that did  
Doom and Quake.

The enthusiasm in the room has evaporated. The team, once energized by Romero's vision, now looks panicked, overwhelmed by the impossible task ahead. Steve and Tom exchange exasperated glances. Who knew about this?

But Romero, oblivious to the growing dread around him, is still smiling, practically glowing with enthusiasm. He sees what he wants to see.

ROMERO  
(Confident)  
Now that we've got the best team  
assembled, we're going to crush  
this. Nine months, guys. Plenty of  
time. We can make it happen.

Tom gives a quick, worried glance at Romero, but says nothing. He leans back in his chair, arms folded, looking deep in thought. Around the room, the rest of the team is frozen in a mix of disbelief and panic.

ROMERO (CONT'D)  
(Beaming)  
Suck it down!

He claps his hands, still buzzing with energy, while the rest of the team stares at him in stunned silence. They know the mountain ahead of them is impossibly steep, and yet, the only one looking genuinely enthused is Romero.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - MEETING HALL

It's now just Romero, Tom, and Steve at the table. The massive book on the table.

STEVE

...I don't know if nine months is going to be enough time. Some of these guys, it's their first job. They came to learn from you.

ROMERO

Relax Steve, it's the Quake engine. With all these guys working on the engine, it'll just come down to getting the design down and we'll be able to drop it right in. No sweat.

TOM

This is four times the size of Quake. I mean, you have 35 different weapons and \*150\* different kind of enemies? Even that book you have looks like it's bigger than the bible. John, I think there were only seven guns in Quake.

STEVE

I don't know, John. What if the AI keeps crashing into walls or some weird shit like that? That's too risky.

ROMERO

It's nothing I haven't worked on before. We're going to make this game unforgettable. It WILL be unforgettable. Just make it happen.

CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

Back at id Software, Carmack sits alone, coding late into the night. The rest of the office is quiet, save for a few stragglers working on Quake II. American McGee leads a discussion nearby, organizing the creative team. Carmack watches them for a moment before turning back to his work.



NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
 (reflective) Meanwhile, back at id,  
 things were changing. Without John,  
 America had taken over a lot of his  
 duties. We moved forward with Quake  
 II, but it wasn't the same. The  
 ideas were flowing from everyone,  
 and I wanted to avoid the chaos  
 that happened last time. So I put  
 my foot down every time things  
 started to spiral out of control.

McGee and the other developers huddle around a screen,  
 discussing creative ideas. Carmack, absorbed in his work,  
 brushes off their excitement. The team does not look too  
 happy, and it is clear the dynamic has changed as Carmack is  
 missing a piece of his humanity.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 (calm, but distant) But as things  
 changed for John, I kept ignoring  
 the changes happening here. Why  
 would I need to pay attention? All  
 that mattered was the engine.

The camera zooms in on Carmack's intense focus, typing away  
 at his keyboard. Around him, the team grows more distant,  
 their excitement about the creative possibilities of Quake II  
 tempered by Carmack's unwavering focus on technology.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DAY

Romero is still deathmatching and having a blast with his new  
 squeeze, the blonde and beautiful STEVIE CASE. A screen shows  
 the unfinished code for Daikatana. His once-vibrant office is  
 now half-empty, morale is low, and deadlines have been  
 missed. Tom enters the office, and finds the programmers  
 looking lost and despondent.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
 (reflective, slightly melancholic)  
 John had his dream project, his  
 team, and his rules... but the game  
 wasn't coming together. No amount  
 of creative passion could make up  
 for the lack of focus and  
 discipline.

INT. JOHN ROMERO'S OFFICE - DAY

Romero slumps in his chair, staring at the daunting mountain of unfinished work before him. Outside his office, the buzz of the once-vibrant studio is starting to dim.

CUT TO:

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

Carmack finishes a new line of code, satisfied with the latest iteration of the Quake II engine. The office is now completely empty except for him.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
(calm but reflective) The engine was all that mattered. But sometimes, when I looked up from the code, I couldn't help but wonder what might have happened if John had stayed. What kind of game we could have made together. But those thoughts never stayed for long. There was always another line of code to write.

He looks out the window, lost in thought.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(steady, reflecting)  
That isn't to say Daikatana wasn't moving along. It was. John didn't have the kind of team around him to make what he wanted when he wanted it, and he was never around. What he was doing was what John usually does, something to appease his ego. While Daikatana was crawling at a snail's pace, John went back to doing what he did best—hyping the game in his free time. Only this time, he went a little too far.

INT. ROMERO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Romero and Tom are staring at the glaring red screen, the infamous magazine ad for Daikatana front and center. The bold text "John Romero's about to make you his bitch" is illuminated on their faces.

Tom grins confidently, nodding in approval, while Romero is visibly uneasy, tapping his fingers on the desk. He's clearly nervous about the boldness of the statement.

ROMERO  
(uneasy)  
Are you sure this is a good idea?

INT - E3 EXPO - MAIN HALL - DAY

The convention center is packed wall to wall. Game enthusiasts buzz with excitement, craning their necks to see the newest titles. Booths display vibrant posters and demo screens, with two prominent ones: Ion Storm and id Software.

INT - E3 EXPO - id SOFTWARE BOOTH - DAY

At the id booth, the Quake II demo runs seamlessly. The graphics are sharp, and the smooth gameplay draws an enthusiastic crowd. Awe spreads through the audience, their eyes glued to the screens. Adrian and American are mixing it up as they help attendees.

Carmack, steely-eyed and unfazed, watches it all with quiet satisfaction. Adrian steps over to him, catching his attention.

ADRIAN  
(gestures toward Ion's booth)  
Well, there he is. Here to make us his bitch.

Carmack's gaze turns to where Romero stands across the hall, surrounded by fans and press. His expression unreadable.

CARMACK  
(flatly)  
We have the better game. He knows it too. Not much for me to look at.

INT - E3 EXPO - ION STORM BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

The Ion Storm booth is decked out with flashy Daikatana posters and demo stations. Romero is fixed on the id booth, transfixed by the Quake II demo. His expression is one of awe, as if witnessing a masterpiece. The sounds around him fade as he focuses on the screen.

ION STORM PROGRAMMER  
(confused)  
John? You good?

Romero doesn't respond, his attention entirely on the id demo.

Behind him, Stevie and Tom hold posts by Daikatana stations, smiling at attendees. But the demo's rough state quickly disappoints. The framerate stutters; characters glitch through walls. The attendees murmur in frustration, shaking their heads and moving on. Some even laugh at the infamous poster, perhaps the most positive experience observed at the booth. Tom glances around, his face tight with concern.

INT - E3 EXPO - id SOFTWARE BOOTH - SAME TIME

Back at the id booth, Carmack notices Romero across the way, still captivated by Quake II. He exchanges a subtle look with Adrian, and cracks a victory-wide grin at him.

INT - E3 EXPO - ION STORM BOOTH - LATER

Steve and Tom exchange worried glances as ROMERO, seemingly oblivious, finally tears his eyes away from Quake II. He tries to maintain enthusiasm as he faces the Daikatana demo, but his grin falters. An ION STORM PROGRAMMER pulls him aside.

ION STORM PROGRAMMER  
(whispering, hesitant)  
Uh...John...they're not responding well  
to the build.

TOM overhears, exasperated.

TOM  
No shit.

Tom, noticing where Romero's attention had been, approaches him, concern in his eyes. Romero is still lost in thought, barely acknowledging him.

He glances back at the Eidos booth, his face a mask of realization as he contemplates what to do next.

CUT TO:

INT. EIDOS BOOTH - LATER

He looks over to the Quake II demo across the room. He knows what he has to do.

ROMERO  
(breathless)  
Tom. Get Eidos on the phone. We  
need that engine.

TOM  
(dumbfounded)  
Are you serious?

Romero doesn't respond, his gaze drifting back to Quake II,  
almost reverent.

ROMERO  
It's beautiful. That son of a bitch  
did it again.

TOM  
John, if you turned around and are  
seeing what I am seeing, we're  
having a hard time with this engine  
let alone whatever that is. The  
guys back at the office aren't  
going to like this.

Romero pulls his attention from Quake II and looks at TOM  
with a strange calm.

ROMERO  
Part of my license deal with id  
when I left was an option to  
upgrade to their next engine. THIS  
is what Daikatana needs. There's no  
way we're competing with this.  
We'll just convert everything we've  
had onto the engine and it  
shouldn't take us that much longer.

TOM  
They want the game before  
Christmas.

Romero looks away, taking a steadying breath, a wasted effort  
to bring him back to his center. But he can't help  
himself—his gaze drifts back to Quake II.

ROMERO  
(Sharply) They want a GAME. Call  
them, Tom. Just fucking do it.

Tom sighs, the flicker of doubt in his eyes widening as  
Romero's unwavering confidence threatens to drag them further  
into chaos.

FADE IN:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - MEETING ROOM - DAY

The Ion Storm team is gathered around a large conference table. The room is tense, filled with uneasy glances and whispered conversations. Stacks of design documents and concept art for Daikatana are scattered across the table, like relics of an ambitious but doomed project.

At the head of the table sits Romero, trying to project confidence but visibly anxious. Across from him, Tom, Steve, and several other PROGRAMMERS and ARTISTS exchange worried looks. Some look exhausted, others frustrated, but all of them are waiting for answers.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

Tom did make that call, but things weren't as easy as John thought.

The door opens, and Tom enters, a phone still in his hand. He looks at Romero with a grim expression and sets the phone down on the table.

TOM

(quietly)

They said yes, John. We can upgrade to the Quake II engine.

ROMERO

(smiling, relieved)

Hell yes. This is what we need. Once that engine's in place, Daikatana's going to make Quake II look like shit.

The team doesn't respond with the enthusiasm he expects. Instead, they stare back at him, their faces tense and uncertain.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

While we did give him the chance to upgrade to our next engine for his game, that was the extent of his special treatment. We weren't going to make the same mistake we did with Doom and have the source code just out for anyone. Anyone who wanted to use the Quake II engine would have to wait until the game was released, including John.

STEVE

(skeptical)

Wait, so... when exactly do we get the engine?

TOM  
(looking at Romero,  
hesitant)  
Not until after Quake II is on the  
shelves.

PROGRAMMER #1  
(stunned)  
You're kidding. So we're stuck  
waiting?

ROMERO  
(nodding)  
I know, I know. Look, once we get  
the engine, we can transfer  
everything over. It'll take, what,  
a month to convert?

The team exchanges glances, doubt spreading across their  
faces. Tom looks down, rubbing his temples.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
John thought we just ran with the  
first Quake engine and made a few  
refinements just like we did with  
Doom to Doom 2. It wasn't that  
simple, but then again, how could  
he have known?

ARTIST  
(sighing)  
So everything we've done... all the  
animations, the textures, the  
levels—it's all just... gone?

ROMERO  
No. We know what we want the game  
to look like and we saw what this  
thing can do. Keep doing what  
you're doing and we'll move it over  
on the Quake II engine.

The room falls silent. Romero looks around, realizing the  
depth of his team's disappointment.

PROGRAMMER #2  
(incredulous)  
And we have to wait for the engine?  
How long are we talking?

TOM  
(idly calculating)  
Quake II hits shelves around  
Christmas. So, most likely January.  
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)  
And then we'd still need at least a month for retooling.

ARTIST  
(bitter)  
So... what? We just sit around for the next four months?

ROMERO  
Ultimately, our game HAS to come out this way. Let's refine what we have so when we DO get the engine, it'll be drop and go. (Pause) This is what it's all about, everyone.

FADE OUT

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - EXECUTIVE FLOOR - DAY

A stunning, expansive office with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking downtown Dallas. The skyline gleams in the Texas sun, casting a warm glow across the office's lavish decor—leather couches, glass tables, and expensive artwork line the hallways. It's a palace designed to impress, a physical manifestation of John Romero's ambition.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
All the while, Ion Storm was losing money. Most of the \$13 million Eidos gave them was almost gone.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - MAIN DEVELOPMENT FLOOR - DAY

Rows of cubicles filled with top-of-the-line computers, multiple monitors at each workstation. About 80 PROGRAMMERS and ARTISTS are hunched over, coding, designing, testing. Despite the impressive tech, there's a visible tension in the air—exhausted faces, frustrated murmurs.

INT. ION STORM - RENOVATION SITE - DAY

The camera follows a small group of CONSTRUCTION WORKERS and DESIGNERS as they install yet another custom-made glass door.



NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Renovations for the office alone  
cost \$2.5 million, and we aren't  
even talking about the staff.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - JOHN ROMERO'S OFFICE - DAY

Romero, dressed in his usual rocker attire, sits behind a massive, custom-designed desk, oblivious to the tension outside. Concept art for Daikatana covers his walls, and a Daikatana sword replica rests on a stand behind him.

Tom stands across from him, holding a stack of invoices and a concerned expression. Romero leans back, looking almost relaxed.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
John had almost 80 programmers  
working for him.

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - GAME DESIGN AREA - DAY

A programmer, MARK, stares at his screen, exhausted, his face illuminated by the glow of his monitor. Behind him, STEVE ASH and a few other developers murmur amongst themselves.

MARK  
(grumbling to Steve)  
We're not even close to finishing  
this game.

Mark shakes his head, glancing warily over his shoulder.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - ACCOUNTING DEPARTMENT - DAY

Two ACCOUNTANTS pore over balance sheets and expense reports. They exchange grim looks as they tally the latest expenses.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
Eventually, Eidos was going to  
expect him to deliver.

CUT TO:

INT. EIDOS BOARDROOM - DAY

A sleek conference room in London. EIDOS EXECUTIVES sit around a table, reviewing financial reports on Ion Storm's spending. A young executive looks up, visibly exasperated.

FADE IN:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DEVELOPMENT FLOOR - NIGHT

The office is dimly lit, save for the glow of computer monitors. Empty coffee cups and takeout containers litter the desks, evidence of long hours and late nights. The Quake II engine code is displayed on multiple screens, casting an eerie, greenish hue over the exhausted faces of the ION STORM PROGRAMMERS.

ANGLE ON:

Romero, pacing back and forth, his face tense with frustration. He stops behind Steve, who's hunched over his computer, scrolling through line after line of Carmack's complex code.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

But there was another problem, a big problem: John realized he couldn't crack the code.

CLOSE ON: The Quake II engine code flickering on the screen. It's intricate, dense, and unlike anything Romero's team has seen before.

ROMERO

(Seething)

God damn it.

STEVE

(Bitterly) He rewrote everything, John. We can't just slot our work into this. All the work you wanted us to build from scratch in the Quake I engine? Well, we're going to have to rebuild everything.  
(Annoyed) Again.

Romero's jaw clenched as he stared at the screen, grappling with the reality of the situation.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)

I wasn't there, but I could only imagine that's when he knew he was backed into a corner.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Romero stands at the front of the room, addressing his team and a few EIDOS REPRESENTATIVES over a speakerphone. Behind him, a whiteboard is filled with frantic sketches and diagrams for Daikatana.

The faces around the table are tense, uncertain. Tom and Steve exchange worried looks, while others sit back, arms crossed, visibly skeptical.

ROMERO  
(to the room)  
This is going to take a while. We  
can't just slot Daikatana into this  
engine. We're going to need to  
rework a lot of what we've done.

The Eidos representatives exchange uneasy glances, their expressions hardening.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON SPEAKER)  
(tight)  
John, you promised us March. Is  
that no longer on the table?

Romero shifts uncomfortably but tries to project confidence.

ROMERO  
(quickly)  
Look, March isn't going to happen,  
no. By the summer, we'll have the  
game ready.

A murmur runs through the team. Steve shakes his head, his patience thinning.

NARRATOR (CARMACK V.O.)  
The code that caught John by  
surprise. It wasn't my intention.  
John just forgot how hard I wanted  
to push the boundaries of what's  
possible.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - PROGRAMMING AREA - NIGHT

Later, Romero and Steve are back at their desks, both staring in frustration at the code on their monitors. The room is silent except for the low hum of the computers and the occasional sigh of exhaustion.

STEVE

(quietly, defeated)

John, this isn't going to work.  
Just go back to the original Quake  
engine. It's not like anyone's  
expecting us to out-engineer id  
Software and John Carmack. Plus,  
we've already got the designs and  
resources that we can finish.

Romero's face hardens. He spins in his chair to face Steve,  
his eyes filled with defiance.

ROMERO

(voice rising)

We're not doing this halfway,  
Steve. We're not going to put out  
something that looks like  
yesterday's news.

Steve looks away, his frustration mounting.

STEVE

(shaking his head)

You're not hearing me, John.

Romero leans in, his tone intense.

ROMERO

(almost pleading)

So what, Steve? It'll take longer?  
So what? We're here to work, right?  
Then we'll work until we'll make it  
work!

The room falls silent. Steve studies Romero's face, seeing  
the unrelenting determination there, and realizes there's no  
convincing him.

EXT. ION STORM OFFICES - 1998

TITLE CARD: One Year Later

CUT TO:

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Romero walks alone through the dimly lit office. He stops to look out the floor-to-ceiling windows over the Dallas skyline, his reflection staring back at him, haunted and defiant.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMERO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Romero is now on speakerphone with Eidos. He listens, waiting, his face set with steely determination.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE)

(tired, frustrated)

I can't say we are too happy about all of this, John. Accounting has you in the red and the few games you have released from the studios have flopped. There's a lot of talk over here about how we are going to resolve this without losing any more time and money. People want to know where Daikatana is. We need something--anything--before we lose faith here.

ROMERO

(determined) My guys are working 12-hour days, six days a week. They're only focus is getting the game out by December.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE)

We understand that, and we don't doubt that you are all working on it, but the board wants to see something it can work with. E3 is right around the corner and we want Daikatana there.

ROMERO (SUNKEN)

Yeah. We know.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE)

Alright, John. We're going to have to see something. I think we've already had the discussion with Tom and you already know the situation the company is in.

(MORE)

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
We're not wanting to get to a point  
where we have to cut our losses,  
but our accountants have told us  
that at this rate, we're saving  
money by buying you out and  
absorbing the studio.

Romero's eyes shut and his head flings back. This isn't the first time he's had this conversation, perhaps not even the first time this week.

ROMERO  
(brief hesitation) ...We'll have something.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE)  
That's great, John. It really is.  
(PAUSE) The board wants to confirm  
if it will be playable or not.

Romero glances out the glass window of his office, looking at the clearly run-down and demoralized staff. A moment of doubt flickers across his face, but he quickly steels himself.

EIDOS REP (V.O. ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
John? The game. Will it be  
playable? Hello?

Romero slowly hangs up, the sound echoing in the quiet office. He stands alone, surrounded by sketches and designs that seem to loom over him, challenging his ambition.

The phone rings again. Romero gives it a moment, unwilling to talk to Eidos again, but picks up.

ROMERO  
(Tired, annoyed)  
Yeah?

TOM (V.O. ON PHONE)  
John. We have a problem.

FADE OUT.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - PROGRAMMING AREA - NIGHT

A large group of programmers are huddled to one side of the room, Steve among them. Stevie and Tom, along with a few others, stand opposite.

The programmers with Steve look exhausted, upset, and past their breaking point.

Tom looks hurried, as if he just came out of a brawl and is catching his breath. The door forcefully swings open and Romero charges in.

ROMERO

What the fuck are you all doing?  
You need to get back to work!  
Steve, get your team and get back  
there.

TOM

(Quietly) John...

ROMERO

No, not now Tom. (To the group)  
Don't you all understand what we're  
trying to build here? This is  
crunch time. This is the time that  
actually matters more than anything  
else. Do any of you seriously think  
I wasn't where you are right now  
designing Wolfenstein, Doom, and  
Quake? That was done with FEWER  
people than this. So I don't  
understand what the fucking problem  
is.

The programmers don't care. They're over it. Steve speaks up, undeterred by his boss.

STEVE

We don't want to work for you  
anymore. Quite honestly, we don't  
think this game is ever going to  
get made at this rate.

ROMERO is seething. Tom is rubbing his face in the background and STEVIE'S eyes reach to the ground.

STEVE (CONT'D)

We could have finished this by now  
if we stuck to the plan, your  
original plan. That changed and now  
we have an engine we can't figure  
out, and neither can you, John.  
We're done. Goodbye.

The programmers, led by Steve, all put their resignations on the table and begin to walk out. Romero stares daggers into them as they walk up. Some are disappointed that they let down their icon, others are simply relieved that they don't have to work with him anymore.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
 Whatever's not here you can find at  
 their desks.

TOM  
 (Quietly) I already picked those  
 up.

The rest walk out of the room, leaving Romero, Tom, Stevie,  
 and the remaining few who will eventually finish Daikatana.

EXT. ION STORM OFFICES - 1999

TITLE CARD: 1999

The once-lavish Ion Storm building is now run down, a shadow  
 of its former self. The giant Daikatana poster that once hung  
 on the front of the building is faded and torn.

INT. ION STORM OFFICES - DAY

The few remaining staff, disheveled and weary, gather around  
 a small table. Stevie and Tom place the finished Daikatana  
 game in front of a defeated Romero.

A caption fades in:

"Eidos eventually acquired Ion Storm, restructuring the  
 company and canceling several projects. Daikatana was  
 completed, but it failed to meet expectations, selling only  
 40,000 units. Both John Romero and Tom Hall left the company  
 in 2001 following the closure of the Dallas office."

The camera lingers on the torn and faded Daikatana poster  
 still clinging to the wall.

EXT. HYATT HOTEL PARKING LOT - QUAKE III TOURNAMENT - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: 2000

The Texas night is still and warm, the hum of a dying  
 tournament barely audible from inside the venue. The parking  
 lot is mostly empty now—except for one lone Ferrari, its hood  
 popped open, and Carmack standing beside it, expression  
 unreadable.

He turns the key again. Nothing. The car refuses to start.



HEADLIGHTS flood the scene, washing over Carmack in a harsh, golden glow. The low rumble of a powerful engine grows closer. A vehicle pulls up beside him.

A YELLOW HUMMER blasting rock music.

The engine shuts off. The driver's side door swings open.

Romero steps out, says nothing, and looks into the massive engine of Carmack's Ferrari. He smiles, goes to his trunk, and comes back holding a pair of jumper cables like a crab.

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
Need a hand?

Carmack, ever stoic, studies him for a beat—then exhales, nodding slightly, cracking a smile.

CARMACK  
(flatly)  
Yeah.

Romero moves to connect the cables. Carmack watches as he works, arms crossed, the faintest flicker of amusement in his eyes.

The HUMMER'S ENGINE rumbles again, sending power through the cables. Carmack turns the key. The Ferrari sputters—then ROARS to life.

For a moment, neither of them speak. Just the sound of the engines purring side by side. The tension of years, of rivalry, of broken friendships—softened, if only for now.

Romero shuts the hood. Looks at Carmack. A quiet beat.

ROMERO  
(grinning)  
You know, I still think the paint matters.

CARMACK  
(smirks, shaking his head)  
You would!

The two share a laugh. Despite all that's happened and the path's they've taken, they stand tall not as icons, but friends.

FADE TO BLACK.

BEGIN FINAL MONTAGE.

Carmack's Continuing Success at id Software

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - DAY

Carmack sits at his workstation, deep in code, surrounded by a new team. His focus is unshaken, his fingers gliding over the keyboard with robotic precision.

A caption fades in:

"John Carmack continued to innovate at id Software, pushing the boundaries of 3D graphics and game engines. He would leave id in 2013."

QUICK CUTS of industry headlines:

"Carmack's Next Breakthrough" — "Revolutionizing VR" — "The Tech Genius Who Never Stopped"

Romero's Epilogue

INT. ROMERO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Romero sits alone, a modest laptop in front of him. On the screen, an old Doom level plays. His fingers hover over the keys, but he isn't really playing—just watching, remembering.

A caption fades in:

"John Romero struggled to regain his footing in the industry after Daikatana. He eventually returned to smaller projects, learning from the mistakes of his past."

Romero exhales, leans back, and notices an old magazine on his desk—his face on the cover, captioned: "The Rock Star of Gaming."

He stares at it for a moment, then tosses it aside. He's moved on.

Tom Hall's Career Path

INT. SMALL GAME STUDIO - DAY

Tom Hall sits at a desk, laughing with a small team. He's relaxed, at peace—so different from his time at Ion Storm.

A caption fades in:

"Tom Hall continued his career in game design, finding stability in smaller, more collaborative studios."

INT. ID SOFTWARE OFFICES - NIGHT

The office is nearly empty. Carmack, alone, sits at his desk, writing new code. He pauses, opens a drawer, and pulls out an old photo.

It's a shot of him and Romero from their Doom days—grinning, full of youthful ambition.

He stares at it for a moment, then exhales, places it back in the drawer, and resumes coding.

Final Image: John and John Today

A split-screen fades in: modern-day JOHN CARMACK and JOHN ROMERO.

Romero, older, but still with his signature long hair, smiles as he talks on a podcast. A caption reads:

"John Romero still works in the gaming industry, mentoring young developers and working on independent titles."

Carmack, in a high-tech workspace, wears VR goggles, adjusting new software. A caption reads:

"John Carmack continues to push technological boundaries, now exploring AI and the future of computing."

The two images linger side by side. Different paths, different visions—forever connected.

A caption fades in:

"The two Johns remain friends to this day."

FADE TO BLACK.