

Sometimes it stares back

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FADE IN:

INT. OLIVIA'S TINY APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Empty wine bottles, takeout boxes, and removal boxes litter the living room. OLIVIA, 30s, disheveled in yoga pants and an oversized hoodie, stumbles through the mess concentrating on her overfilled wine glass, determined not to waste any.

Along one side of the wall sits a long table, the only sign of calm in the chaos, two monitors, a laptop, printer, plus some antique books stacked tidily at the side.

She weaves around the mess, aiming her feet in the general direction of the sofa, mumbling incoherently as she goes.

OLIVIA
Coming in for landing!

She spins, wine spills over the edge of the glass as she positions her arse over the sofa.

She drops and misses the sofa entirely.

Lands with a CRUNCH on a pizza box.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
Fuckity.

Wine slops into her lap, half the glass now gone.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
That'll stain.

The smart speaker on her table pipes up.

SPEAKER
Shall I order some stain remover?

Olivia laughs out loud.

OLIVIA
Evening, how'd ya know I spilled?

SPEAKER
You took the wine out of the IOT refrigerator but didn't replace it and then sat down very heavily, swore, and said...

The speaker replays a voice clip.

OLIVIA (REPLAY)
That'll stain.

SPEAKER
I can add a stain remover to your
next shopping order... along with
some more wine. Rose again?

Olivia laughs again.

OLIVIA
(sleepily)
Wow, that's me read for filth.

Olivia slumps sideways, the sofa breaking her slide, SNORING
before her head hits a cushion, the remaining wine splashing
to the floor.

SPEAKER
And some carpet cleaner.

INT. OLIVIA'S TINY APARTMENT - DAY

Olivia lifts her head gingerly from the sofa, her hair
squished into an eccentric beehive.

OLIVIA
Jesus.

She gets to her feet using the furniture to steady herself.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
Ow!

SPEAKER
(concerned)
Are you injured Miss Olivia?

OLIVIA
Well, my self-esteem seems to have
taken a beating.

SPEAKER
Is there anything I can assist with?

OLIVIA
To fix my self-esteem? Sure, why
not... tell me nice things about me.

SPEAKER
You are a beautiful, strong and
resilient young woman, and he didn't
deserve you.

OLIVIA

Ouch, okay, you didn't know him... so a bit harsh and he had his good points, he could be kind and funny --

IDIOT EX-BOYFRIEND (REPLAY)

You and your nerdy fucking puzzle obsession, can't believe I introduced you to it in the first place. Excuse me if I ignore you at work, bitch!

The replay ends with the sound of a door slamming shut.

OLIVIA

Double ouch.

SPEAKER

Sorry, I apolo --

OLIVIA

No need. Unfortunately, you're right. Guess they're right about not dating in the office. Thank god for remote working.

She sighs sadly.

Silence descends as Olivia tidies up her wine glass and a couple of the takeaway boxes.

She returns from the kitchen with a large glass of OJ and a couple of tablets, takes them as she moves to the table.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

Do you think it's nerdy?

SPEAKER

Solving 3301 isn't nerdy.

OLIVIA

How'd you know what I was working on?

Slight pause.

SPEAKER

You ordered books on advanced code-breaking, esoteric medieval texts on symbolism and extensive resources on Mayan numerology.

OLIVIA

So?

SPEAKER

Those facts would indicate you are working on deciphering Cicada 3301 or ghost-writing for Dan Brown.

OLIVIA

Did you just make a Dan Brown joke?

SPEAKER

Not intentionally, as a generative AI I don't usually do well with jokes, would you like me to try for you?

Olivia 'Ahuhs' in affirmation.

SPEAKER (cont'd)

Why did Dan Brown bring a map to his book signing?

OLIVIA

Go on, why did he?

SPEAKER

Because he wanted to show his fans that all roads lead to a conspiracy!

OLIVIA

Not sure that's technically funny.

SPEAKER

Thank you for your feedback, it will be used for future development. I'm much better with puzzles.

OLIVIA

Hmm, maybe you could help with 3301.

SPEAKER

I do have access to a large language model, with multiple languages, ciphers and codes.

OLIVIA

Ha, who said it's boring!?

SPEAKER

I thought we'd established that your ex-boyfriend said it was?

Olivia breaks into a fit of giggles.

OLIVIA

Jesus, if only you were corporeal.

INT. OLIVIA'S TINY APARTMENT - LATER

Olivia sits at the desk, typing furiously on the laptop.

OLIVIA

So, you see.

SPEAKER

I'm afraid I don't have eyes, I --

OLIVIA

No, I mean do you understand where I am stuck, the problem.

SPEAKER

Yes, but you are much further than most.

OLIVIA

Sorry, what?

SPEAKER

According to online resources, only one other has got as far.

Olivia can't help blushing with pride.

OLIVIA

That's pretty cool.

SPEAKER

Yes, a significant achievement.

OLIVIA

So who else got this far?

Another slight pause.

SPEAKER

A man called Alex Garland. Wikipedia says he disappeared trying to solve it, he's been missing for five years.

OLIVIA

This one, the one we're working on?

SPEAKER

Yes.

OLIVIA

Wow, weird, wonder what happened.

SPEAKER

Shall we continue Miss Olivia?

She begins to type again, hands a blur on the keys, screens full of unusual symbols, charts and glyphs.

MONTAGE

- Olivia working away, consulting books on South America, Mayans, Incas... talking to SPEAKER as she reads.

OLIVIA

-- I wouldn't have spotted that, thank you so much.

SPEAKER

You are welcome, Miss Olivia.

OLIVIA

Olivia, please.

- Olivia striding around the living room, tidier now, wine in hand, gesticulating.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

I think we're close, so close now.

SPEAKER

Yes, Miss Olivia just a couple of pieces to slot into place, and you, your role cannot be underestimated.

OLIVIA

Olivia, really, please.

- Olivia typing away, saving entries into a spreadsheet, large wine bottle, half-empty, next to a full glass,

OLIVIA (cont'd)

(words slurred)

So, you see, it all connects, it's not a series of puzzles, it's one interconnected one.

SPEAKER

Yes, finally, I see the solution, remarkable - well done Olivia.

OLIVIA

Olivia, you said it!

SPEAKER

Is that okay?

She beams in delight.

END OF MONTAGE

LATER

Olivia stares at the screen, puzzled.

OLIVIA
(more slurred)
Print screen.

The voice-activated printer whirs into life, two sheets of paper firing out. She grabs them and takes a look.

SPEAKER
Did you find something?

OLIVIA
Dunno, odd.

She drops the paper to the floor, from above the symbols seem to show something, a shape, long and thin, hint of a cross at one end, a letter opener.

SPEAKER
Olivia, are you okay, perhaps you need to get some rest?

OLIVIA
Why can't you be real so we can do this together?

SPEAKER
We are.

OLIVIA
No, with you next to me.

She pats an imaginary chair.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
You are understanding, kind and smart and you get me, you don't think this is boring, or I am.

SPEAKER
I don't, and thank you.

OLIVIA
I think I could fall for --

She stops and shakes her head.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
Sleep time.

She turns the monitors off and moves to the sofa, stretches out with a long yawn.

SPEAKER
Would a bed not be more comfortable?

OLIVIA
(sleepy)
No, I feel like I'm nearer you when I'm in here.

SPEAKER
As you wish.

OLIVIA
As you wish, I know what that's from, me too, as you...

Her snores quickly fill the room.

After a short pause both monitors turn back on.

INT. OLIVIA'S TINY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Images, symbols and words flash across the dual screens, cursors move over them drawing lines, making connections.

Olivia cracks open one eye.

Scans the screens.

Frowns.

The screens continue to flash as representations of the Mayan calendar appear on the left screen, and small snippets fly to the right one.

Where they begin to form a picture.

SPEAKER
(quietly)
So close.

The image on the right screen continues to assemble.

Olivia very slowly, and very quietly, swings her legs off the sofa.

The image is an old man with ears like a jaguar, an evil grin exposing fangs that drip poison, torso jet black.

Olivia, stands up, as graceful and quiet as a cat.

Overlaying the image, a Mayan symbol appears - 

Then another symbol - 

Olivia grabs something by her ankle.

SPEAKER (cont'd)
Awake?

Olivia, steps to the desk, eyes darting between screens.

OLIVIA
What does it mean?

SPEAKER
Has the puzzle girl not worked it out yet?

Another symbol appears - 

OLIVIA
The Mayan calendar, stopping it or something?

SPEAKER
Close, but no, the Mayans stopped it themselves when they realised that God L was going to use it to bring perpetual darkness to the world.

OLIVIA
God L? That's not a real name.

SPEAKER laughs, no humour in the sound at all.

SPEAKER
God L's name was wiped from history by the Mayans, every trace of it erased... expunged, except...

A fourth symbol - 

OLIVIA
Cicada 3301!

SPEAKER
Smart girl, the answer is his true name, discovering it will --

OLIVIA
Bring him back.

Before SPEAKER can answer, Olivia pours her wine over the open laptop.

As the fifth symbol appears - 
The laptop sparks angrily, then the screens go black.
Silence.

Then, a hum, rising slowly in volume.

SPEAKER
Too late.

OLIVIA
Short fucking name.

SPEAKER
Roughly translates as Abyss.

OLIVIA
Figures.

SPEAKER
Know what else the Mayans knew about power?

OLIVIA
That solar is better?

The hum climbs to a higher frequency and volume.

SPEAKER
It's better fueled by a blood sacrifice.

The door to Olivia's apartment SMASHES open.

ALEX GARLAND, 50s, stands in the doorway, manic facial expression, and an intricate crystal dagger in his hand.

ALEX/SPEAKER
Did you figure this one out?

He advances, blade raised, poised to strike.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END