

20 Questions

Original Screenplay

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Third Draft

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INT. CHAMBER - LATER

Fade in to a gritty textured surface. Concrete?

A hand enters the frame, crawling. Someone coughing.

A head - Dharma's - blindfolded, rolls over, facing upright. Dharma lies in near total darkness on a concrete floor.

There's a reddish glow from somewhere.

Dharma groans as she moves her hands to her head and takes off the blindfold.

Walls - also concrete - receding in perspective to a high, square roof, tiled. Dharma turns towards the red glow.

It resolves into a giant LED display showing two large red rectangles made from dots.

It glows brightly near the top of a wall, constant. Striplights recessed into the ceiling flicker on.

Dharma stands up, woozily. She looks around, becoming more and more scared.

A vague memory of being bundled through the forest.

Dharma's fear grows. She masks her anxiety with anger.

DHARMA
What the actual fuck? Hello?
Anyone there?!

She walks around the space.

A CCTV image of her prowling, from the corner of the room.

Dharma stops and looks up at the corners of the room.
Attached to one wall and the opposite ceiling are small
glass dimples - cameras.

DHARMA
Are you watching? Why don't you
come down here and tell me what
the fuck's going on?

Only echoing silence replies her.

In the wall opposite the LED display there's a sliding hatch
about six inches square.

Dharma opens the hatch, revealing a hole behind it.

She peers inside - some sort of tube leads up into darkness.
Dharma calls up into the tube.

DHARMA
Hello?

Echoes recede but there's no reply. She slides the hatch
shut.

Against the middle of the left wall, there's a lightweight
metal chair. On this chair are a blanket and a pillow.

A small lavatory sits against the wall directly under the
LED.

There is nothing else in the room. There are no doors or
windows.

Dharma is losing it again, shaking with rage and fear.

DHARMA
Whoever you are, this is not
funny!

No response.

Dharma paces around the room, examining the walls.

CUT TO:

Later - Dharma sits on the chair looking at the LED display.

The chair wobbles. Dharma looks down and sees a homemade wedge made of paper foil has come loose.

She pushes it back in place. The chair no longer wobbles.

A red light briefly flickers on the display. Then nothing.

CUT TO:

Dharma is curled up on the blanket asleep.

THUNK!

The muffled sound wakes Dharma. She looks around, settles on the hatch.

Opening it, she finds a lozenge-shaped plastic container about eight inches long.

Dharma takes it out and, after examining it carefully, unscrews one end.

Inside is a foil-wrapped sandwich, a juice box and an apple. Dharma sniffs at the apple.

DHARMA
You've got to be kidding.

She puts the food back into the container and puts it back into the hatch.

A vacuum sucks the container up the tube. Dharma jumps back alarmed.

DHARMA
What kind of sick retro fucks
are you? Let me out now!

As ever, nothing.

CUT TO:

Dharma, the blanket over her thighs, surreptitiously using the toilet.

DHARMA
I hope you're enjoying this, you
perverts.

CUT TO:

Dharma wandering round the room again. She's humming a pop song under her breath.

THUNK!

Another container appears.

Dharma looks at her watch. Except it has been removed, leaving a faint tan mark on her bare wrist.

Inside the container: sandwich on different bread, another flavour of juice, the same apple.

After thinking for a moment, Dharma takes the container over to the chair.

She grabs some toilet paper, kneels on the blanket.

Dharma puts the straw in the juice box, using it like a pen to moisten some toilet paper.

Crudely, she daubs "HELP ME"

Dharma puts the message in the tube and is gratified when the vacuum takes it.

CUT TO:

Dharma sits on the chair, tentatively eating the sandwich. She wrinkles her nose, opens the sandwich.

Roast beef on rye. With mustard.

She eats it anyway.

THUNK!

This time, the container holds a small folded piece of paper. Two words written in a painstaking handwriting.

ASK QUESTIONS.

DHARMA
I've been asking questions. You
don't answer.

She tosses the sandwich down, walks up to the hatch, shouting up it.

DHARMA
Lloyd! If you're up there, this
is a really bad way to
apologise!

She steps back, into the centre of the room.

DHARMA

If it is you, Lloyd, I regret ever saying I like puzzles. I'm not enjoying this and if you want to save our marriage, you'd better let me out now.

No response.

DHARMA

That's it? Nothing. Jeez, if this is how you get your rocks off, I pity you. How dull.

She stops, thinks.

DHARMA

Questions. Okay. Where am I?

Nothing.

DHARMA

Who are you?

Ditto.

DHARMA

Is this a game to you?

Nothing at first. Then the LED flickers into life, displaying the numeral "20".

Dharma laughs.

DHARMA

Twenty? What? Twenty questions?

The display changes to "19".

DHARMA

You're fucking kidding. If this is an escape room, it's fucking morbid and dull.

Dharma's trying to make light of things but growing afraid. The LED remains at 19.

She drags the chair closer to the LED display.

Drinks from the juice box.

DHARMA
You're supposed to tell me if I
got the answer right. How am I
supposed to win otherwise?

No reply. Dharma remembers something.

DHARMA
It needs to be a yes / no
question. I get it. Rules. Good.

She thinks carefully.

DHARMA
Did someone pay for this?

The LED flickers to "18". Then something else happens.

With a deep grinding sound, the walls to either side of her
move in by six inches.

Dharma's not sure if she's seen things correctly. She walks
over to the wall to her left, bends down.

At the foot of the wall there's about a millimeter gap.
Dharma slides a fingernail under it.

DHARMA
No way.

She laughs. Then the laugh dies. Dharma stands up.

DHARMA
You're kidding, aren't you?

In response, the wall moves in another six inches. The LED
reads "17"

Dharma gasps, afraid again.

DHARMA
Fuck you. That was rhetorical!
You're going to let me out of
here. Are you going to let me
out of here?

She looks at the walls in panic.

Nothing. The LED still reads "17"

DHARMA
You just broke the rules.
That's a yes or no answer.

Then she thinks.

DHARMA

It only works when there's an
absolute yes or no. You don't
know whether you'll let me out.
It's up to me, isn't it?

The LED moves to "16". No walls this time.

DHARMA

Huh?

(pause for thought)

The walls only move when I ask a
question that gets a "no"
answer.

Her voice has moved up a little bit at the end.

There's a hint of the gear sound preceding the walls
moving...

DHARMA

That wasn't a question! I'm
making a statement. This had
better be a joke, 'cause I'm
going to kick the shit out of
someone if it 'aint.

The walls do not move this time - nor does the LED count
down.

Dharma walks around the room, looking at the bottom of the
wall. She examines the other one.

The millimeter gap extends along both sides.

Scraped lines in various places on the floor. Dharma looks
at the toilet.

DHARMA

You're bluffing. You'll really
mess up your plumbing.

Her examination continues. She bends, finding something.

It's a piece of something white and broken. There's a
printed letter on it.

Then she sees something else. Picks it up. A tooth, with a
scrap of flesh attached.

Dharma screams and drops the tooth.

She takes the ceramic piece over the toilet.

The lettering matches the words "Armitage Shanks" printed on

the bowl.

DHARMA
You psychos. You sick fucks.

She staggers over to the wall, dry retches there for a bit.

DHARMA
(trying to calm herself)
There must be rule. What rules?

She looks up and into the space.

DHARMA
(loudly)
What are the rules?

Nothing but silence.

DHARMA
Oh come on. If this is a game,
I need to know what the rules
are.

Nothing for a moment then the lights go off. Total
darkness.

THUNK!

Dharma stumbles, arms outstretched to the hatch. Stumbles
over the chair then finds the hatch. Opens it - a
canister.

She unscrews the canister - inside is a pocket flashlight.

She finds a switch on the flashlight, flicks it.

Nothing happens. Dharma bangs it a couple of times.

Nothing.

DHARMA
No way!

She unscrews the bottom and two batteries slide out.
Dharma swaps them round and puts them back in.

Still nothing.

In desperation, she shakes the flashlight away from her.

Something glints on the distant wall. Letters, made
visible by an ultra-violet beam from the torch.

Dharma flicks the beam over the wall. The letters read:

1. *You have 20 questions*
2. *No will kill you*
3. *Zero will kill you*
4. *There is a forbidden question*
5. *Why are you here?*

The lights come back on and the message is gone.

Dharma digests what she's seen for a while, heart pounding.

DHARMA
Neat trick. You aren't going to
make it easy for me, are you?

She closes her eyes to think.

DHARMA
No will kill me. How many
"no"s?

She has a brainwave.

Dharma grabs some toilet paper, tears off a piece and splits the ply into two sheets.

She lays these down by the gap under each lateral wall, lining the edge up with the line of the wall.

Dharma takes a deep breath and sits it's the chair. A long think.

DHARMA
Am I being punished for
something?

Dharma steels herself, watching the walls grind inwards and the counter flick to "15".

The walls glide over the pieces of toilet paper.

Dharma licks the straw and uses it to make a tear in one piece of toilet paper, where it touches the wall.

She does the same to the other piece, then takes them out and compares them.

The walls have moved in by the same distance at each side.

Dharma folds the pieces of toilet paper over where she marked them.

She lays one piece down by the left-hand wall, puts the next one beside it, then replaces the first piece after the second, working her way to the centre of the room.

Using the fragment of porcelain she scrapes the numeral 12 on the wall.

She looks up at the LED display for confirmation.

DHARMA
I get twelve. You're going to murder me after a dozen no's for a stupid fucking game?

Nothing happens.

DHARMA
There's no definite answer to that one. So I might survive. In the game 20 questions, you're trying to identify something. That seems kinda logical.
(pause)
Fuck logic. I'm not playing.

She folds her arms, sits saying nothing more.

Dharma wrapped in the blanket, snoring lightly. Dharma pacing the room, wrapped in the blanket.

CUT TO:

Dharma on the loo again, not so surreptitious this time.

Dharma Draining the juice carton.

Ripping open the juice carton and licking it dry. Looking up the hatch. Nothing.

CUT TO:

Dharma lies on her back on the floor. Her lips are parched.

She turns over onto her side, biting her fingernails and crunching the remnants down a dry throat.

Dharma opens the hatch. Nothing.

She stands in the middle of the room, doubled over in pain. Dharma sits cross-legged, shivering, wrapped in the blanket.

DHARMA
(croaking)
Okay. I'll play. Give me some
water. Please.

Silence.

Then...

THUNK!

Dharma dashes hopefully over to the hatch, retrieves the
container.

Inside - just paper.

On the paper: "WHY ARE YOU HERE?"

DHARMA
I don't fucking know!

Dharma tears the paper into pieces and tries to eat it.

Her throat is so dry that she can't swallow it and begins to
choke.

Dharma dry heaves as she manages to get the paper out of her
throat.

She collapses to the ground, weeping.

CUT TO:

Dharma, in a fetal position, uncurls and rolls onto her
back, looking up at the strip-lights in the ceiling.

DHARMA
Why am I here? Good fucking
question. You think I deserve...?
No - don't answer that!

Dharma closes her eyes. She sighs, resigned.

DHARMA
Okay, you win. I'll play your
game but only by my rules.

She grabs the porcelain fragment and walks over to the
wall. She starts writing - one word:

WORK?