

Opening credits are small at the bottom of a black screen. A male voice plays over them.

KAUFMAN (VOICE OVER)
Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head? Maybe if I were happier, my hair wouldn't be falling out. Life is short. I need to make the most of it. Today is the first day of the rest of my life... I'm a walking cliché. I really need to go to the doctor and have my leg checked. There's something wrong. A bump. The dentist called again. I'm way overdue. If I stop putting things off, I would be happier. All I do is sit on my fat ass. If my ass wasn't fat, I would be happier. I wouldn't have to wear these shirts with the tails out all the time. Like that's fooling anyone. Fat-ass! I should start jogging again. Five miles a day. Really do it this time. Maybe rock climbing. I need to turn my life around. What do I need to do? I need to fall in love. I need to have a girlfriend. I need to read more, improve myself. What if I learned Russian or something? Or took up an instrument? I could speak Chinese. I would be the screenwriter who speaks Chinese...and plays the oboe. That would be cool. I should get my hair cut short. Stop trying to fool myself and everyone else into thinking I have a full head of hair. How pathetic is that? Just be real. Confident. Isn't that what women are attracted to? Men don't have to be attractive. But that's not true, especially these days. Almost as much pressure on men as there is on women these days. Why should I be made to feel I have to apologize for my existence? Maybe it's my brain chemistry. Maybe that's what's wrong with me -- bad chemistry. All my problems and anxiety can be reduced to a chemical imbalance or some kind of misfiring synapses. I need to get help for that. But I'll still be ugly, though. Nothing's gonna change that.

CUT TO:

INT. "BEING JOHN MALKOVICH" SET - DAY

2.

TITLE: ON THE SET OF "BEING JOHN MALKOVICH" SUMMER 1998

It's the "Malkovich Malkovich" restaurant set, but it's behind-the-scenes footage shot with a hand-held video camera. The crew is setting up. There are many extras dressed in rubber over-the-head John Malkovich masks. The actual John Malkovich sits at one of the tables. He is dressed as a woman.

MALKOVICH
Shut up! Shut up, okay?

The crew chatter dies down.

MALKOVICH (CONT'D)
Let's really try today to solve our camera problems.

TITLE: JOHN MALKOVICH, ACTOR

MALKOVICH
Keep between-take time at an absolute minimum. These masks are really hot. Okay? I want to be very well heard on that from everybody. Don't futz unless it's absolutely important to the shot. Okay? I don't say that for me. I say that for the people sitting here in the four hundred pounds of rubber.

(beat)
I like my dress. Okay?

The crew laughs. The camera follows the first assistant director as he walks through the scene.

1ST A.D.
Folks, you better heed that advice. Okay? Heed that advice.

TITLE: THOMAS SMITH, FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

1ST A.D.
Stand by for picture.

The camera follows the first assistant director past the cinematographer setting up his shot.

CINEMATOGRAPHER
Have her rotate around the table a little bit further.

TITLE: LANCE ACORD, CINEMATOGRAPHER

the camera follows the first assistant director to an out-of-the way area where Charlie Kaufman, 40, stands awkwardly by himself.

TITLE: CHARLIE KAUFMAN, SCREENWRITER

1ST A.D.
(to Kaufman)
You. You're in the eyeline. Can you please get off the stage?

Kaufman exits the soundstage.

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Kaufman stands dejectedly outside the soundstage.

KAUFMAN (VOICE OVER)
What am I doing here? Why did I bother to come here today? Nobody even seems to know my name. I've been on this planet for forty years, and I'm no closer to understanding a single thing. Why am I here? How did I get here?

EXT. VOLCANIC ERUPTION - DAY

FIRST TITLE: HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

SECOND TITLE: FOUR BILLION AND FORTY YEARS EARLIER

We move in until we are on the Earth's endlessly barren and lifeless surface. The atmosphere is hazy, toxic-looking. Meteors bombard. Lightning strikes, concussing murky pools of water. All this in silence.

We move in to a murky pool, closer, closer, until we see a single-cell organism multiplying. Soon there are millions of them.

In the ocean: odd, small blind jellyfish collide, recoil, and hover.

A turtle swims, past ancient-looking fish, onto the beach. In the background, leafy plants and small dinosaurs grazing.

Soon we see ancient small mammals, monkeys, ice ages, prehistoric men, cities being built and finally a close-up of a baby being born. As we move into his bawling face,

CUT TO:

INT. L.A. BUSINESS LUNCH RESTAURANT - MIDDAY

Kaufman sitting with Valerie, an attractive woman. They both pick at salads. Kaufman steals glances at her lips, her hair, her breasts. She looks up at him. He blanches, looks down.

KAUFMAN (VOICE OVER)
I'm starting to sweat. Stop sweating.
I've got to stop sweating.

A rivulet of sweat slides down his forehead. Valerie watches it. Kaufman sees her watching it. She sees him seeing her watching it. She looks at her salad. He quickly swabs.

KAUFMAN (VOICE OVER) (CONT'D)
Can she see it dripping down my forehead?... She looked at my hairline. She thinks I'm bald.

VALERIE
We think you're great.

KAUFMAN
Oh, wow. Thanks. That's nice to hear.

VALERIE
We all just loved the "Malkovich" script.

KAUFMAN
Thanks. That's....

VALERIE
Such a unique voice. Boy, I'd love to find a, a portal into your brain.

KAUFMAN
(nervous stab at a joke)
Trust me, it's no fun.

Uncomfortable chuckling from both. Silence.

VALERIE
So, tell me your thoughts on this crazy little project of ours.

KAUFMAN
First, I think it's a great book.

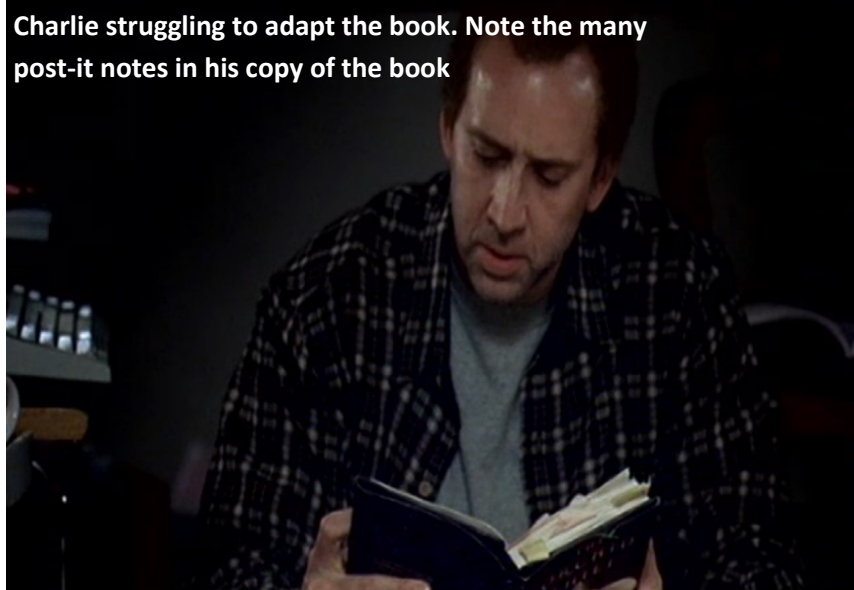
In one motion, Kaufman swabs his forehead and pulls a book entitled The Orchid Thief from his bag.

(CONTINUED)

“I guess we thought that maybe Susan Orlean and Leroche could fall in love, and...”



A networking lunch between producer and writer



Charlie struggling to adapt the book. Note the many post-it notes in his copy of the book

“Okay. But, I’m saying, it’s like, I don’t want to cram in sex or guns or car chases, you know... or characters, you know, **learning profound life lessons** or **growing** or coming to like each other or **overcoming obstacles** to succeed in the end, you know. I mean... The book isn’t like that, and life isn’t like that. You know, it just isn’t. And... I feel very strongly about this.”



Charlie has a not particularly helpful meeting with his agent



“...I can’t structure this...”
“The book has no story, there’s no story”



“Alright, make one up. I mean no one in this town can make up a crazy story like you. You’re the king of that”.

