

*Douglas Cole*

**Background Man:**

**My Day as an Extra on the Set of Steven Soderbergh's Film, *Kimi***

*I*

I received a phone call from Rich King, the head of casting for extras on *Kimi*, the new Steven Soderbergh film that would be filming here in Seattle. In a very fast voice, he asked if I was still interested in being an extra. I couldn't follow everything he said, but I caught that much, he was literally speaking that fast. I imagine I was on a list of a lot of calls he was in the process of making, putting this group together. I said, "Sure, I'm interested." He also asked if I knew any others who would be interested in working. He needed more people. I said I'd ask around. He said more, but I really didn't catch everything. He then asked if I'd been vaccinated for Covid. I said yes, I had. And I think he asked my age, asked if I were a U.S. citizen. "Do you have a suit?" he asked. "I have a magic suit," I said. I seemed to make a good impression because he went on to tell me how he had lived in LA for a while but had eventually moved to Atlanta. Apparently, that's the new suburb of Hollywood. But while in LA he had, and I think I got this right, he'd worked for a catering service and had done several parties out in the walled and gated communities of the stars. Jack Nicholson was one. And Jack's neighbor, Marlon Brando, eventually moved leaving a lot open for Jack to buy, giving him a hilltop of his own. I think he was talking about Jack. I could be wrong about that. Oh, and apparently, according to Rich King, Leonardo DiCaprio is an asshole.

I had to have a Covid test. That was primary. I had to have one before costume fitting and then another before filming. I would receive notification directing me to both. The testing would be done at Northgate (as the name implies) at the north end of town. I live in West Seattle, which had recently become an Alcatraz because the bridge that connects us to downtown began to fall apart. We learned this right when the whole city shut down for Covid. Getting out of west Seattle meant driving south a few more miles to the First Street Bridge. It didn't affect me that much since things were shut down and I was able to work remotely teaching college writing classes, from my computer at home. I've got a few jobs: teaching, assessing entry exams for the Foster School of Business at the University of Washington, these commercial "acting" gigs I do for Seattle Talent, usually "lifestyle" videos for real estate sales, one commercial for an investment firm, stock footage for commercials, a farm to table restaurant, Microsoft apps, and a promotional video for PBS in which I play a guy who discovers a banjo in an antique store and gets fired up to learn to play only to find out it's harder than it looks, but through the miracle of watching Ken Burn's documentary on country music, I wake up with a band playing like a natural at a hootenanny.

None of these jobs pays the bills alone. And I like the commercial work. It's fun. It's easy. And I usually get a weird story or poem out of it and a little paycheck I can use to take my girlfriend out to dinner. Getting up to Northgate twice in one week was going to be a bit of a hassle, because of the bridge, so I asked Rich King if I could go to another testing center. "Nope," he said, "It has to be Northgate."

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“Okay, that’s fine,” I said. And I waited for my notification.

The first notification I received was an email telling me to show up for fitting on Tuesday at 1:30. Filming would be on Friday. Like I said, I would need a Covid test before both. The exact location of fitting and filming were unspecified, so I wrote back asking for direction. No response. Then I got an email saying:

*Hello all Seattle talent*

*I want to say thank you for all your help on KIMI. Things are a bit different nowadays with all this added Covid testing. And now I am reaching out to invite you to do even more for us. Our Costume department wants to do some pre-fit on Tuesday May 12<sup>th</sup> to work on your scheduled work day of Friday May 14<sup>th</sup>.*

*Thanks again for everything and looking forward to having you on set Friday May 14<sup>th</sup>. More details soon...*

*Rich / Kelly*

*Rich King Casting*

Ok....I got that. I wrote back that I was indeed available. I received another email a few days later:

*Hello again and happy Saturday.*

*The one thing you can always count on in Hollywood – are changes.*

*Forget my last email to you. New and improved info...*

*The goal is to get you in for a Wardrobe fitting on Wednesday May 12<sup>th</sup> to have you dressed and ready for work on Friday May 14. In order to make this happen we have to do a covid test a day or so before the fitting and another test a day or so before the work date on Friday.*

*Now the tricky part. After you test on Monday or Tuesday, we would need you to go to your wardrobe fitting on Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> at Pan Pacific Hotel (more times and location to come). Also, on Wednesday we would need you to do one more test to clear you for Friday’s work. Basically, you need one test to do a fitting in one test to work. Isn’t that a lot?*

*You are a sharpened dress movie star.*

*I am attaching the fitting schedule. Thanks for rolling with all the punches. All the new safety rules are crazy, but we want everyone healthy and happy. Really excited to be filming in Seattle*

*thanks !*

*Rich King Casting*

I replied that everything was fine by me, and I soon received the fitting schedule. I saw my name listed with a 1:30 pm appointment. I also received a text: “OptumServe Notice: Your Patient ID is 8589374858. Please have this number ready upon arrival. Reply STOP to stop, HELP for help.”

So, it looked like I was all set up for testing and fitting. A lot of testing,

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but I figured that's just the way it was going to be. But not long after this, I received another text saying, "Thanks for replying, we needed 50 people to fit and are now booked for fittings. You now only need to take 1 Covid test on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Will sent(sic) info soon. Thanks"

I was a little confused. So, was I to do fitting or not? I texted back, "Does this mean I'm not doing the fitting?" I got no reply to this, but four days later I received another text: "Kimi Movie: YOUR WORK 5/14! (around Fed. Bldg, downtown) Details after 7p. Early call time: like 6:00a?? Will text info link later, TODAY!! Casting." Quickly after that, I received another text: "Kimi Movie: YOUR WORK 5/14 (heads up) @ Fed. Bldg. downtown. Your category: GOVT. WORKERS LIME @6:30AM! (Info-link texted in one hour!) casting."

After the two texts, I received an email with a set of pictures of the various "looks" they wanted, including the "GOVT. WORKERS" look, which was what you'd expect: government worker, business clothing, NCIS, suit and tie-look. I was pretty sure at this point that I didn't have to go to fitting, but just to make sure, I tried to call Rich King back on the number he used to call me.

When I called, a man answered, same fast talking, and at first it sounds like Rich King. I said, "I'm calling for Rich King."

"He's not at this number. How did you get this number?"

"This is the number he called me on," I said, "I just wanted to confirm whether or not I was supposed to go to fitting."

"I don't deal with those people," he said. "What's your name?"

"Douglas Cole."

"And you want to know what?"

"I'm just trying to clarify whether or not I'm supposed to go to fitting. I received an email with a fitting time, then a text message saying they had 50 people already. I just want to make sure I'm not supposed to go to fitting."

"Look," he said, "There are three people in charge: Rich, Kelly and me. I'm third in charge. The others are a bunch of shit-heads. I don't get down in that muck."

I laughed. "Ok..."

Then I heard him shouting back to someone else, "He says he got a text saying they had 50 people already..."

I heard some more muffled talking. Then he came back, "Yeah, you're 51. No need for wardrobe."

"Ok," I said. Thanks for your help. And thanks for coming down into the much with us."

"What do you expect from a disgruntled ex-Beverly Hills cop?" he said.

I got my appointment time for the Covid test, and I drove up to Northgate. This was the first time I'd been up there since Covid shut the city

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down. The parking lots were mostly empty. Grass had grown high in the parking strip spaces around the lot. It looked abandoned. It looked like a post-apocalyptic movie set.

The test site was a drive-through, a tent at the edge of the parking lot. A guy at a folding table came up and checked my name, my appointment time. I pulled ahead. A young woman in a yellow full-body medical gown and face shield and gloves came over and swabbed my nose, both nostrils, with a cue tip and slid it into a vial. I was done. That was it. "You'll get your results at the end of the day."

Sure enough, later that day I got an email from OPTUMServe: "Your test results are now ready and you are **cleared for work.**"

## II

I received directions to the location, a parking down on First Avenue, along with a note that the site would have signs saying "Amygdala" and to follow the signs. I also received an email saying to bring "extra looks," meaning clothing, so in addition to my government worker suit I brought a pair of jeans and tweed-looking overshirt. After I parked, I went down to the entrance where there was a sign saying "Amygdala." A woman was standing there, and she said, "Are you one of the extras?"

"I am."

"Up the street and to the right," she said, pointing across the street where there was a line of porta-potties and signs with arrows, all saying "Amygdala." I liked it. Amygdala, but I had no idea what it meant. Code, I suppose, rather than using the film's name. Around me, others were arriving. There were a lot of government worker looks.

The staging areas was another parking lot across the street. That parking lot was only a few stories high, the top level of which had been set up with folding tables and chairs and some tent covers, and just below on another level was a set of tents with make-up and wardrobe stations. We were all wearing masks. We went through an initial screening station where we had our temperature taken and where we had to show documentation of having been tested. Then we checked in at another station. Then it was up to the tables and chairs, a little food set-up where we were given a boxed breakfast with eggs and bacon and potatoes, or a vegan option. With my government suit and a change of clothes over my arm, I picked up my boxed breakfast and went to my section: LIME, designated by a lime-colored strip of tape across the tables. The chairs were all set up at either end of the tables for social distancing. I sat down across from a guy in a suit. I said, "Hey, there, I'm Doug."

Brian," he said.

Brian looked... Brian had a physical condition. His head was a little larger on one side, his eyes a bit far apart and not exactly level. I was thinking the Elephant Man and feeling really guilty about that thought. We got to chatting a bit. Brian also worked as an accountant at a cruise ship company. He had never done this kind of thing before, and this was

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when I found out that the call for extras had been broadcast over various social media platforms. I had learned about it through Seattle Talent, the agency that usually finds me work. I didn't know that there had been a general call. It didn't change anything, but it made sense as I looked around and saw that there were probably a good hundred, hundred and fifty people or more there. I wondered if Rich King had called every one of them.

Brian had been, like a lot of us, working remotely.

"Yeah, me, too," I said. "Teaching."

"What do you teach?"

"Writing. Literature."

"Do you teach that kind of writing with the thesis and..."

"I do. I teach a lot of composition."

"What kind of literature?"

"World lit, Poetry, Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare! I've read Othello."

"That's a good one. Jealous guy kills his wife."

"Iago."

"Shakespeare's still popular, once people get the hang of the language. The stories are still favorites: lovers committing suicide. People falling in love with one person only to fall in love with another. Revenge. Ghosts. A magician on an island."

"Yeah."

"And the cruises? Not too much of that going on lately."

"It got so bad," Brian said, "that they fired everyone except me and the manager. I guess they kept me because I train people, when they need training."

I glanced over, and I saw a guy who looked very familiar. I stared hard at him, and then he looked over, and then it hit me. "Hey, I said, "Aren't you Eddy's husband?" He smiled and looked at me and shook his head...

"I don't remember you..." he said.

I stood up and walked over, taking off my mask. He took off his. "Wait a minute," he said, and he took my picture with his phone.

"We met first," I said, "I think it was at Eddy's apartment when she was playing the cello? Or maybe when she was still living at Shelley's house..."

"Oh yes!" he said, and I could see it light up in his brain. It had been almost ten years. He and Eddy had moved to Germany for a few years, had a kid, moved back. She wrote paranormal sci-fi romance books. I have no idea what he did.

"Tell me your name again?" I said.



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"Oscar."

"Yes."

How strange to see Oscar, here. One of the assistants came buy and said, "Please keep your masks on." I nodded, put my mask on. Oscar did the same. In that muffled impossible to hear voice I said, "Good to see you. Say hi to Eddy." I realized then that this was the first time I'd been out in over a year, in any kind of public space. I hadn't been to a restaurant, to a friend's house. I felt a little giddy. On the news driving in, there had been an announcement that the CDC had now said people who had been vaccinated really didn't have to wear masks. It was the people who hadn't been vaccinated who had to worry.

After the food. We went down the ramp to the wardrobe and make-up stations. An assistant pointed me over to a lanky guy with long black hair and baggy, thrift-store looking (probably designer) jeans. He looked me up and down and said, "Is that your suit or our suit?"

"My suit," I said. "I was told to dress as a government worker."

"Do you have anything else?"

"I held up my jeans and my tweed shirt."

"Do you have another shirt?" He was pointing at the blue shirt I had on.

"No, just this one."

He went back to a rack of shirts and picked one that looked...well, it didn't look that much different than the one I was wearing. "Try the jeans and this shirt," he said. I looked around. There was a row of little red tents next to us, and I thought I might have to use those to change, but I wasn't sure, so I asked. "Where do I change? Sure enough, he pointed at the tents.

"Go around to the other side," he said.

I went around to the other side of the tents and found an open own and zipped myself inside. I took off my magic suit and put on my jeans, the shirt he had given me and went back and stood before him. He looked me up and down again and took my tweed shirt and held it up and said, "Put this on over that."

I put the tweed shirt on and he said, "Good. That looks good."

Then he was on to the next person, and for a moment I drifted, unsure where I was to go next. Another assistant caught me and pointed me to another tent, "Make up..."

Off I went to make up. And there, the young guy looked at me, nodded. No makeup, but he gobbled a bunch of hair product onto his palms and pushed it back into my hair. "I like it," he said, standing back and looking at me. That's a nice thing to hear.

"You should have seen me a week ago," I said. "My hair was a foot-long."

"Covid hair?"

"That's right. I hadn't cut it in over a year." I was going to say, and then

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one day I was just sick of it, so I hung my head over the edge of the tub and took the clippers to it myself...guillotined it all off myself. But I decided not to tell him I'd cut my own hair.

After that, I ran back to my car to drop off my magic suit. Then, I went back to wardrobe and make-up and stood there until another assistant shouted out, "All right everyone, I'm Pez. That's right Pez. I want everyone to line up!" Pez was a big guy with a sun-burned face. He wore Cargo shorts and a plaid shirt with the arms torn off. He was Mr. Grunge. We all lined up as a group. Another assistant walked down the line of us and took a picture of everyone, front and back. Then another assistant came around and handed everyone a fluorescent yellow zip tie. Pez shouted out "You're to attach that to a belt or a shoe, somewhere that doesn't show. It's your proof that you're part of the background extras." Then, we were marched up the street to the federal building like a class on a field trip.

We went up to the federal building and clustered in front of the entrance. Pez told us to gather in close so that we could hear the officer standing in front of the entrance give us further directions. Basically, the officer said that we had to be screened, to go through the metal detectors, that we had to take off all our jewelry, metal, belts and shoes, and once cleared we would receive a "mark" on the wrist to show that we had been checked in case we had to come and go from the building after that. It was a federal building after all, open for regular federal business. "And don't walk around with your hands in your pockets," he said. "It makes us nervous."

It was strange and a little funny to see the extras who had been dressed in police uniforms with bullet proof vests standing there as we faced the federal officer who himself was also dressed in uniform, except his shirt was loose and a bit un-tucked. He hadn't gone through wardrobe and make-up. Other guards stood behind him. The movie cops looked a lot snappier and a lot more real. The federal guards looked more like department store security. Meaning, if something were happening and you needed a cop, you'd probably run up to one of the extras first.

It was just like going through TSA at the airport, the same edgy scrutiny, the same annoyed disrobing and re-robing, tempered a bit by the fact that we were getting into the reality of making a movie! What was going to happen once we were inside?

Our group, the "lime" group, was led back through the lobby to a windowless conference room. As we sat down at social-distance distances, masked, one of the assistants, rapid-speaking near-indiscernibly through his mask, said we'd wait there until called, and that we would be taken out to the lobby once we were needed for the scene. We would then be directed to leave the building through the revolving door, and if our birthday was a winter birthday, we were to leave and walk to the right. If our birthday was a summer birthday, we were to leave and walk to the left. No one asked what to do if they were a spring or a fall. Bathrooms, he said, were just out the door and down the hall on the right. He left, and we sat there, quiet, and waited.

An hour went by. Then another. We waited. An assistant, a different one this time, came back and said to just hang tight. So we waited. Now

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people were starting to chat. Some were taking off their masks. A guy next to me said, "Oh my god...when is going to happen?"

"We could be working in a mine," I said. He laughed.

"Roofing." He said. "I liked roofing."

A few others around us started talking. People stood up and stretched. Off came the masks.

"Nice suit. Is that your own?"

"Nope. They gave me this one."

"What did you come as?"

"Government official. They made me a pedestrian."

"Glad they fed us."

"I skipped the food. Looked pretty watery, but now I'm feeling..."

"Low blood sugar?"

"I get a little grumpy."

"Still, not a bad way to get paid."

"It's kinda like real government work."

"No, it isn't!" one woman said. She sounded pretty stern. "I know. I do government work."

Everyone went quiet. Eyebrows up.

After a while, people started going out and looking around. I went out, checked the bathroom, looked up the hall. More groups of extras were sitting around in the lobby. I wandered up there and looked around. Out in the plaza in front of the building were camera set-ups, assistants, and more groups of extras. I suppose I could have jumped groups to get closer to the action. I went up by the window where a few other extras were standing. "Anything happening?" I asked.

"They're filming down there on the corner. But they just came up to the top of the stairs."

We were not supposed to take pictures, but a couple of people had their phones out, pointing their cameras that way. The windows were tinted, so no one outside could really see us. Across the plaza, near the southeast corner, there was a set of rails for a dolly camera that was attached to a little chair. And there was Zoe Kravitz, wearing gray sweatpants and an orange hoody and a darker gray overcoat. Her hair was dyed blue, bangs coming out from under the hood she wore on her head. She was talking to Steven Soderbergh, who was dressed in black jeans, a black coat and a black baseball cap. He also wore a black mask. Zoe Kravitz looked like a student at the community college.

They talked and walked back and forth from the corner of the plaza towards the entrance to the building, walking along the trolley rails. They talked and walked. Zoe was drinking an iced latte. I know really nothing about either of them, meaning I couldn't tell you much about what they've done. I intentionally did not "research" anything before taking this job. I



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knew Soderbergh had made *Sex Lies and Video Tape* and some *Oceans* movies. I knew Kravitz was the daughter of Lisa Bonet who I liked in *Angel Heart* and Lenny Kravitz who made "Are you Gonna Go My Way" and had a kind of psychedelic sixties vibe. And that was it. I mean, I'm not walking around with my head in the sand. I pay attention to the culture. But that's about as much as I'd absorbed. I was neither in awe nor oblivious.

Then the assistants started going around to the various groups, telling us to get ready. I went back to the conference room and sat down and got out my phone. I had no idea how ready I should be.

### III

One of the assistants came back, poked his head through the door, pointed a finger at me and said, "One." Then he pointed at others and numbered, "Two, three, four five...come with me."

We followed him as he fast-walked us out through the lobby and into the plaza. Kravitz and Soderbergh were still walking back and forth along the trolley tracks. The assistant took us to the west edge of the plaza where there was a set of stairs and told us to stay there. Another assistant there told us to go down the stairs to a small landing and wait. So we did. Let's see. It was me, dressed like a "pedestrian," an older guy with white hair who wore a suit, another guy with long black hair tied back in a bun who also wore a suit, and a young woman in a skirt and blazer, business attire. We waited.

There was a hierarchy to this, but I couldn't see quite how the rankings fell. I knew we are extras, which meant anyone could tell us what to do. They didn't call us "actors." We were what's called "Background." When a scene started for filming, they'd first say "rolling," which meant just what you'd think, then "Background," which meant we were to start moving, then "action," which meant the actors started moving. There seemed to be assistants and sub-assistants—a whole chain of command. And around the plaza were different groups of extras, background. In the middle were the "actors," Zoe Kravitz, of course and some others, but I didn't recognize anyone. I hadn't seen the scene play out, yet. So I didn't know who was who beyond that.

"All right," the assistant near us said, "now when I say "Go!" you two (he pointed at me and the older man in the suit), walk up the stairs and across the plaza together, around the tree, staying on the right, and then out the other side through the arch. You got that?"

"Yes," we both said.

"Okay, this is a rehearsal. Just hang on."

So we waited. The older guy said to me, "What do you think we're supposed to be together?"

"I suppose you could be my lawyer."

"Ok," the assistant said, "Get ready." We poised and waited. He had a

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finger pointed at both of us. We heard a call above, "Rolling" (We weren't, apparently, this was just rehearsal), "Background" ...the assistant lifted his finger..."Go!"

The older guy and I walked up the stairs, crossing the plaza. Zoe Kravitz was walking towards the entrance. Soderbergh was sitting on the dolly chair looking through the camera as an assistant pulled him backwards. A blond woman on my right shouted "There you are!" as my lawyer and I continued around the tree and under the arch. "Cut."

Another assistant on the street on the other side of the arch looked at the two of us and pointed at me and said, "You in the gray, next time, just you."

"Just me," I said.

"That's right."

"Positions!" someone shouted.

I could feel my companion, my lawyer, was a bit disappointed. We headed back to the landing and waited under the finger of the assistant there.

I waited, one foot on the stair in front of me, and then I heard "Rolling." The assistant had his finger pointing at me. Then I heard "Background!" I waited a moment longer, and the assistant said, "Go."

I went up the steps again. The blond woman on the right had already walked forward and was now on my left. She said, "There you are!" I looked straight ahead, kept on walking, stepping over the trolley tracks and through the arch.

"Cut."

"Reset!"

The assistant on the other side said, "Good. Now go back."

As I went back, Zoe Kravitz and I crossed paths, quick eye contact fast as a blink. I had to hesitate just a beat to let her pass as she went back to her position. They rolled Soderbergh forward on his chair behind his camera, back to his starting position. I took my place on the landing down the stairs, waited for the signals, and we did the scene again. Same as before. I reached the other side, turned around and went back to the stairs, passing Zoe Kravitz just as I had before. We did this maybe five times. The stairs were in the shade when we started, but now the sunlight had crept over.

"Rolling!"

"Background!"

"Go!"

Everything ran the same as before, only this time I was up the stairs a little sooner and passed in front of the blond woman before she reached the spot where she shouted, "There you are!" A slight difference. But when I reached the other side, the assistant said to me, "Next time, make sure you walk behind her."

We didn't do another shot of that scene, though. Now, they pulled up

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the trolley tracks. Things relax. We all waited. Zoe Kravitz and Steven Soderbergh were talking. Some assistants brought over what looked like apple crates, and Steven Soderbergh sat down, looking up at Zoe Kravitz.

The assistant from the other side of the arch came over to me and told me to go stand at the southeast corner of the Plaza. He said, "Ok, by this time you'd have reached this spot." So, I stood there. Now I was able to look over while Zoe Kravitz and Steven Soderbergh rehearsed the scene, only in this take he was going to do a close-up on her face. But I was able to see how the scene was playing out more thoroughly, whereas before when I was down the steps I couldn't really see Zoe Kravitz at all since she was to my left as I walked across the plaza.

Now I saw this: as the blond woman calls out "There you are!" a tall man in a raincoat, and carrying an umbrella, walks behind Kravitz, seeming to clip her heel. She reacts like WTF? As the blond woman comes up to her, another man approaches from the opposite direction, arriving at the same moment as the blond and just as Kravitz turns and falls. The man and the blond woman sort of catch her. That's the moment, that part of the scene. Three people converge on Kravitz: blond woman, man in raincoat, and shorter man. She seems to swoon in a way, as if everything has gotten very weird, as if these people are out to get her. I found myself wondering if the blond woman, the man in the trench-coat and the other man had come up from LA with the crew. Are they actors I might have seen before? With each take, the man in the trench-coat stops perfectly at "Cut" with one arm forward in mid-walk stride. His face remains perfectly expressionless. He goes back to his starting position precisely. They each do, like machine parts rewinding. They work very professionally. But for all I know, they might have been randomly picked from the extras to play these more intimate parts. Someone might have walked up and said, "You, stand over here..."

At this point, Kravitz had to go to the bathroom. One of the assistants escorted her through the revolving door into the building. Everyone noticeably relaxed, popping out cell phones, sitting down on nearby cement planters. A guy rode up on a little bicycle. He had an enormously overstuffed backpack and jeans that had been spray-painted silver. He was not part of the group of extras. He looked around. He could tell something was going on, but I could see that he was not sure what. He got out his cell phone and...he didn't talk, just held it to his ear. One of the assistants went over to him and said, "Excuse me, do you have business in the building?"

"Oh, yeah," he said. "I've got a warrant I gotta take care of."

The assistant looked skeptical but also uninterested in engaging him. Then one of the police officers, a real one, started heading over. They guy saw this and in no hurry at all, got on his bicycle and rode off. Whenever someone walking down the street came over, in fact, assistants quickly approached them and guided them away. Most people lingered, looking into the plaza, but moved on as told. There was another, beefy-armed assistant who wore a fierce look and cruised around the set eyeballing everyone, and I got the feeling his job was to memorize everyone's faces and to keep a lookout for anyone slipping past the police and outer ring of assistants.

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At one point, during the little break, I took a notepad out of my back pocket and started writing some of this down. He stared me down hard and then came over. "Are you part of the extras?"

"I am," I said, and I showed him my fluorescent zip-tie identifier.

"There's no filming or photographing on the set," he said.

"Oh, I wouldn't think of it."

When Kravitz came back she was eating a slice of pizza. It was around 2 in the afternoon by now. I think a lot of people were getting hungry. They shot a few more versions of that scene, the swooning scene, just that way. We crisscrossed the plaza like a dance troupe, guided by the assistants who communicated with each other on Walkie Talkies. Something about it all still felt haphazard, yet it all ran smoothly, and no one got in anyone's way—it all came off quite gracefully. We moved in unison, and it looked like people just going about a typical day. Then we reset, went back to our original positions, and did it again. From the outside without knowing what's going on, it must have all looked very strange, like an eddy in the flow of time that sort of repeats itself but never exactly. And when we were still, we seem more like a Delacroix or a Breughel. The people are very small, and there is an Icarus falling unseen.

And in those moments when we froze, waiting for the scene to start again, I looked over at Steven Soderbergh and Zoe Kravitz, and I thought how in this day, in this sunlight their experience was uniquely different from ours, partly because after the process was over they would have multimillion dollar checks while we would take home hourly pay. I say this with no resentment. I was just aware. Even the inner circle of PA's and AD's, whatever those really are, they would also go home with far less though they were no less dedicated from the look of things. Yet still, there is the reality of who Steven Soderbergh is and who Zoe Kravitz is and how their very identities gravitationally draw people in, create attention, which can be converted into influence and advertisement and further calculated into an economy with more moving parts than even this big ballet of extras and our keepers. Popularity is a reality and life's always been a contest. It's fair they get more, in a way.

Yet I also see how they are the energetic center of this organism, this fluid thing. They are the center of the story, they are character. And that, too, is a bigger responsibility and a measurable quantity, and it's also what gives them that otherworldly look because the truth is they are not here, in this space, in the existential sense. They move within a space distinct from our greater ensemble. They are a super-charged nucleus. There is a touchable, invisible membrane within which they work alone. And that space is the story. And Steven Soderbergh, to me watching close enough to reach over and tap him on the shoulder at times, he looks like that character played by James Spader who sees the world best through a camera. In fact, when he does the close-up on Kravitz, he holds the camera in his hands and sits on the apple crate as one of the assistants comes over and drapes him with a black cloth (to block out any backlight as he looks through the lens, I suppose). But it's like what he's seeing at that moment is too intimate to share. He goes inside something. It's the prestidigitators' cloak, his

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secret room, and it's there he creates his filmmaker's magic, not in CGI or post-production, but in that almost nineteenth century, steampunk flash zone where he disappears and then reemerges for the next shot.

Things slowed down now. I stayed in my position at the top of the stairs, there in the southeast corner. Then, one of the assistants led Zoe Kravitz my way. They passed me, and then went down the stairs to the corner, to the crosswalk, and down the street. We were all called over to gather where we had first stood when we got to the building. Pez told us we could head back to the staging area, for lunch. But otherwise, it's a wrap. So en masse we started walking down the street. I waited a bit, letting most of the group go ahead. I didn't mind being the last to leave. The plaza was now clear. No kind of normal human flow had returned yet. It was still a blank canvas, the paint removed. Steven Soderbergh was standing at the south edge under a tree, looking at the empty space, smoking a cigarette.

I'm there, if you want to see me: from 1:09:56—1:09:59. You'll see me emerge from a tree, right behind the blond woman shouting, "There you are!" One, two, three steps and then I'm gone.