

The Universe Explained?

Professor Douglas Quinn has discovered the true meaning of the universe and all that it entails. He's about to reveal his findings to the world... or is he?

FADE IN:

EXT. CONFERENCE CENTRE- NIGHT

A large conference hall dominates the skyline. The parking lot is packed with cars but noticeably devoid of people.

A sign next to the front gate reads:

TONIGHT'S LECTURE
PROFESSOR DOUGLAS QUINN
THE UNIVERSE EXPLAINED
TICKETS SOLD OUT

INT. CONFERENCE HALL- NIGHT

A vast auditorium in a modern architectural style. The seats are packed, the audience held in rapt attention by the eloquent speaker, DOUGLAS QUINN.

Quinn stands on the stage behind a lectern. A large projector screen behind him displays an image of the solar system.

He's in his 50s, bald and red-faced, with a well kept grey beard. He wears a thick tweed suit but appears unaffected by the heat of the lights. This is his domain, and he's savoring every moment.

QUINN

... Let us consider for a moment, the Tower of Babel as depicted in the book of Genesis. For those of you who are not familiar with the story, allow me to briefly summarize...

Quinn pauses, casually wipes a bead of sweat from his forehead. The audience hang on his every word.

He presses a button and the image behind him changes. It now shows an artist's impression of the Tower of Babel. An ancient, pyramid-like structure reaching up into the clouds.

QUINN

... In a time when the Earth was of one language, descendants of Noah joined forces to build a tower in the hope of reaching the heavens.

(MORE)

QUINN (cont'd)

Fearful of what humanity could achieve with such intelligence and cooperation, God confounded their tongue, confusing their language, so that the builders could no longer communicate, rendering a cooperative effort all but impossible. Hence, the tower was never completed and new languages dissipated across the Earth...

INT. CONFERENCE CENTRE- LATER

Quinn still holds the stage. The audience still rapt.

QUINN

In his fictional story, 'The Library of Babel', published in 1941, Jorge Luis Borges reexamined the Babel mythology and applied it as an analogy for the universe itself...

Quinn presses a button and another image appears on the screen. A hexagonal room containing four identical bookshelves with several staircases leading upwards into oblivion.

QUINN

... The narrator describes the universe as a library consisting of infinite interlocking hexagonal rooms. Each of which contains the necessities for human survival, along with four walls of bookshelves filled with books.

Several audience members look bewildered but all of them are held to attention.

QUINN

The books in this imaginary library are said to contain everything that is known or knowable. Unfortunately, the true books are scattered among an infinite amount of readable but false books, which themselves are an insignificant fraction of the unreadable books of random gibberish. The sheer randomness and quantity of texts in this library, makes cataloguing these books impossible.

(MORE)

QUINN (cont'd)

The librarians in Babel are said to be permanently depressed and in a state of suicidal despair.

Mild laughter resonates around the auditorium.

QUINN

Laugh, if you will, but I believe Borges was on to something... The 'Library of Babel' leads us to the assertion that the universe is a sphere, having its center everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. That the universe is infinite yet at the same time, any one of us can come to understand it in its entirety.

The audience looks on in quiet consideration as Quinn pauses for effect.

Quinn presses a button and the background image changes yet again. This time it's a black and white photograph of a chimpanzee sitting at a typewriter.

Ripples of laughter break the silence.

QUINN

Infinite monkey theorem... The notion that a monkey hitting keys at random on typewriter will eventually type out every and any given text. The complete works of Shakespeare being a popular example.

Quinn smiles, gauging the audience reaction.

QUINN

You're probably wondering what all of this has to do with my explanation of the universe. The answer is everything... and nothing. I believe I have discovered the one simple factor that can define our universe in a nutshell. Allow me to explain...

A CREAKING SOUND from above the stage. The audience look up as one.

The huge lighting rig above the stage CREAKS and GROANS and gradually gives way.

Before Quinn can react, the rig is upon him, connecting with an ALMIGHTY CRASH, crushing the professor under a mess of glass and metal.

The audience let out a collective GASP as we...

FADE TO WHITE:

The sound of howling winds rises up out of the silence.

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT- DAY

Professor Quinn lies flat on his back in the sand. A breeze kicks up a cloud of dust around him. He still wears his tweed suit.

He opens his eyes and slowly gets to his feet.

Quinn looks around in all directions, a bewildered expression on his face.

He catches sight of something in the distance and begins to walk towards it.

EXT. TOWER OF BABEL- DAY

A gigantic, towering structure built from large bricks in a pyramid-style structure. The wind whips up a sandstorm around it, creating an eerie, mystical atmosphere.

Quinn approaches, squinting in awe at the enormous structure before him.

Stone steps curve around the tower which spirals endlessly up into the clouds.

Quinn stands for a moment in quiet appreciation of this man-made wonder. Then walks towards the foot of the steps and begins to climb.

EXT. TOWER OF BABEL- LATER

Quinn ascends the steps, weary but resolute in his task. Passing by archway after archway, all leading to identical interior chambers, all deserted.

Quinn continues with dogged determination, battling against the increasingly turbulent sandstorm.

EXT. TOWER OF BABEL- LATER STILL

Quinn stops to catch his breath. He dares to look down. The ground isn't even visible beneath a swirling mist of sand and dust. He's obviously quite a way up.

The storm is worsening. The wind HOWLS as it whips through the archways and chambers within the tower.

Above the wind, we can hear VOICES. The sound of a heated discussion. Quinn listens intently. It seems to be coming from the chamber directly above him.

He dashes up the next flight of steps.

INT. CHAMBER

A MAN and a BOY stand in the middle of the chamber. They are dark skinned, with straggly hair and dressed in rags.

They argue furiously over a length of rope, speaking in some bizarre language.

MAN
(angrily)
Bilebico camusca suansi anaga!

The boy looks confused.

BOY
Calamiga senco buatazagen? Unje
kupo selatro!

The man grabs the rope from the boy's hand and whips him across the face.

MAN
Turgot menapa!

The boy screams and steps backwards against the wall. The man advances aggressively but then stops and turns towards the doorway.

Quinn stands just inside the room, observing the curious scene. The man moves towards him, gesturing furiously with his hands.

MAN
Tecapet kunagi?

QUINN
I... I'm sorry, I don't
understand.

The man looks furious now. He gestures to the boy, then to the rope.

MAN
Bilebico camusca suansi anaga!
Tecapet kunagi?

QUINN

What are you saying? I... I don't understand.

The man steps towards him and whips him with the length of rope. Quinn backs away, protecting his face with his hands as the man lashes out repeatedly.

QUINN

Please... no!

MAN

Anaga!

He lashes out with his fist this time sending Quinn reeling backwards out of the doorway. His foot catches at the top of the steps and he falls.

EXT. TOWER OF BABEL- SAME

Quinn tumbles heavily down the stone steps. His battered and bruised body finally comes to rest on a flat stone walkway.

The man is upon him in an instant, dragging him to his feet.

MAN

Calatabin, natuzoma!

Quinn is distressed, almost in tears.

QUINN

I'm begging you. Please...
d...don't hurt me.

The man seems more enraged every time Quinn speaks. Grabbing Quinn by his waist, the man hoists him up and throws him over the side of the tower.

Quinn is terrified, eyes wide and arms flailing wildly as he plummets through the sand-filled abyss. The ground isn't even visible, just an endless cloud of dust.

Quinn squeezes his eyes shut as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

Silence.

And then... a sound begins to rise up. The sound of FRENZIED TYPING.

FADE IN:

INT. AUDITORIUM- NIGHT

A vast auditorium illuminated by strip-lighting as far as the eye can see.

The room is filled with desks and chairs like a colossal examination room. On each desk sits a typewriter, on each chair sits a monkey typing frantically.

Quinn sits at such a desk, a typewriter in front of him. He looks truly bewildered.

The monkeys pay him no attention.

The CLATTER of typing fills the room, cacophonous, overwhelming.

Quinn looks at the typewriter before him. A single leaf of paper in the spool. It reads:

THE UNIVERSE EXPLAINED

BY

PROFESSOR DOUGLAS QUINN

The rest of the page is blank.

Quinn glances around the room as the monkeys rattle off page after page after page.

He rises to his feet, looks for a way out, sees nothing but monkeys and typewriters stretching out to all eternity.

The sound of typing is deafening now. Quinn searches desperately for an exit but to no avail.

He begins to walk between the rows of desks. Slowly, cautiously, but then...

THE TYPING STOPS!

Quinn freezes.

The eyes of a thousand monkeys bore into him like daggers.

A nearby monkey slowly raises its typewriter and SLAMS it down on the desk.

The other monkeys follow suit, beating out a chilling rhythm.

SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!

SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!

SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!

Quinn is petrified.

He dashes between the rows of tables, the monkeys watching his every move, slamming their typewriters on the desks in unison.

Quinn is sprinting now, a look of morbid fear on his face as he navigates row after row of typing monkeys.

He's frantic, he sees no way out. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, A DOOR!

Quinn bundles through it without a second thought.

INT. SECOND AUDITORIUM- NIGHT

A mirror image of the first. A thousand monkeys typing away.

Quinn leans against the door and takes in the scene. He begins to sob.

The typing stops. All eyes turn on Quinn again.

The nearest monkey stands up, lifts its typewriter high above its head.

Quinn looks up, fearful, as the monkey approaches.

Quinn SCREAMS as the monkey SLAMS the typewriter viciously and repeatedly on his head.

BLACK OUT.

INT. LIBRARY OF BABEL

Quinn lies unconscious on a polished marble floor.

He is in a large hexagonal room. Four identical bookshelves symmetrically arranged against the walls.

Several staircases spiral up to the floor above, several to the floor below. Corridors and balconies lead off in all directions.

It looks like M.C. Escher's worst nightmare.

Quinn opens his eyes and looks around.

The place is silent, seemingly deserted. Each bookshelf is filled with identical-looking books. The shelves are separated by identical white closets.

Everything is spotlessly clean, illuminated by tiny spotlights in the ceiling.

Quinn stands groggily, runs a hand over his head. He's uninjured.

He approaches a bookshelf, picks up a book. It's bound in red leather, the spine is unmarked. He flips through it. Page upon page of unintelligible gibberish.

He returns it to the shelf and picks up another. It's filled with the same nonsensical writings.

He walks over to a large oak desk in what looks like a reception area. It's deserted. A shiny brass bell is the only object on the desk. He rings it.

BING!

He waits. Not a stir. He tries again.

BING! BING! BING!

A trapdoor opens from the ceiling and a body falls through it.

A bespectacled man hangs from a noose, swinging before him. His face is horribly pale, devoid of life.

Quinn steps back in horror, watching as the dead man swings back and forth, back and forth.

A flicker of movement catches Quinn's attention. He turns to see a HOODED FIGURE dressed in black disappear up a staircase.

QUINN

Hey!

His voice echoes around the room. The mysterious figure is gone.

Quinn cautiously makes his way to the staircase.

INT. LIBRARY OF BABEL- SAME

The upper floor, identical to the last, but for the hanging receptionist.

Quinn emerges from the staircase, looks around.

The hooded figure stands by a bookcase, back turned, flipping through one of the books.

Quinn approaches.

QUINN

Hey...

The figure turns. A woman's face beneath the hood. She glides across to another staircase and swiftly climbs.

QUINN

Hey, wait!

He moves to pursue her but his path is blocked by a tall SPINDLY MAN in 19th century attire. Desperation burns in the man's sunken eyes.

Quinn does a double take.

The man looks at him and smiles.

SPINDLY MAN

Bulerisko conjesta.

QUINN

Do you... speak English?

The man thrusts an open book in his face. A jumble of words.

SPINDLY MAN

Calmoresto jevic.

The man points at a passage of incoherent text.

QUINN

I don't understand... Your language... I don't understand it. I need to find my way out of here.

SPINDLY MAN

(pointing to the book)
Jevic! Jevic!

Quinn slowly backs away as the man stares at him expectantly, before eventually returning to his book.

INT. LIBRARY OF BABEL- LATER

Another floor, another identical room. A RECEPTIONIST, alive and apparently well, sits at the desk.

Quinn enters from one of the balconies. He looks increasingly baffled as he approaches the receptionist- another bespectacled male.

QUINN

Excuse me, I wonder if you could help me?

The man looks at him, stony faced.

QUINN

I seem to be lost. Do you understand me?

RECEPTIONIST

Lost?

The man breaks out into loud MANIACAL LAUGHTER. He lifts his arms above the desk revealing deep cuts in his wrists. Blood pools over the polished oak as the man continues to laugh.

Quinn bolts from the room via the nearest staircase.

INT. LIBRARY OF BABEL- LATER STILL

Another identical room.

Quinn sits on the floor, a pile of books either side of him. He's obviously been there for a while.

He eagerly reads through the garbled text, a desperate look in his eyes.

He's startled as the closet door across the room opens and small OLD LADY in a flowery dress exits.

Quinn waves and tries to speak, but cannot form the words. The lady ignores him and heads up another staircase.

Now distracted from his reading, he hears light footsteps from the corridor. He stands up wearily- the picture of a broken man.

The hooded woman emerges from the corridor. She stares at Quinn, beckoning him with her eyes. Quinn is drawn to her.

He follows as she ascends another staircase.

Quinn reaches the top of the stairs and the woman's hand reaches down for him. He hesitates before taking it in a firm grip.

FADE TO WHITE:

A heart monitor beeps in a steady rhythm. A woman's voice is audible.

WOMAN

Douglas... Dougie? Can you hear me?

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL WARD- NIGHT

Quinn lies in the bed, still bandaged around the head. His wife, ELLEN, is by his side- the hooded woman from the library. She holds his hand.

ELLEN

Can you hear me, Doug? Please
wake up.

Quinn's eyes flicker open, he takes a moment to adjust to the light, then looks at her. She gives a relieved, affectionate smile.

ELLEN

How do you feel? Can you hear me?

Quinn looks at her, his eyes are wide like a waking child.

ELLEN

The lecture... there was an
accident. Do you remember?

He looks baffled, like he doesn't understand.

Ellen places a hand on his cheek.

ELLEN

Can you talk to me, Dougie?

Quinn opens his mouth, forming the words with great effort.

QUINN

Wuh... meh... webble...

ELLEN

Do you remember me? Do you
remember anything?

Ellen looks at him, the recognition is there, but little else.

QUINN

Ib... Ibble... wibble...

FADE TO BLACK.