

SERENITY

A MOVIE

Written

by

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UN-NUMBERED DRAFT
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We see the Earth.

White pops blossom on the surface, and moments later ships -- huge, intricate space-freighters -- come roaring from the surface, passing camera with a thunder of gas and flame.

We hear a woman's voice:

VOICEOVER

Earth-That-Was could no longer sustain our numbers, we were so many.

We see a solar system; a sun like our own, surrounded by many more planets than ours, they in turn surrounded by moons.

VOICEOVER

(continuing)

We found a new galaxy: dozens of planets and hundreds of moons.

We see a terraform station; a bunker-like complex many miles across, air billowing from it, electricity running over it.

VOICEOVER

(continuing)

Each one terraformed -- a process taking decades -- to support human life. To be new Earths.

We see a futuristic megalopolis, gleaming and cool.

VOICEOVER

(continuing)

The Central Planets were the first settled and are the most advanced, embodying civilization at its peak.

We see an empty desert plain, then pull out to see the entire planet -- and further, to see we're on the edge of the galaxy.

VOICEOVER

(continuing)

Life on the outer planets is much more primitive, and difficult. That's why the Central planets formed the Alliance, so everyone can enjoy the comfort and enlightenment of true civilization. That's why we fought the War for Unification.

During this a woman steps in front of the last image and we see it is on a wall screen in a:

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

It's a group of twelve-year-olds, serious and well dressed. They sit on their heels under a sparsely elegant tent, small wooden desks with embedded screens in front of them. The tent is on a lawn surrounded by lush foliage. People walk about and vehicles glide quietly overhead. A utopian vista.

GIRL

Now that the war's over, our soldiers get to come home, yes?

TEACHER

Some of them. Some will be stationed on the rim planets as Peace Enforcers.

BOY

I don't understand. Why were the Independents even fighting us? Why wouldn't they look to be more civilized?

TEACHER

That's a good question. Does anybody want to open on that?

GIRL

I hear they're cannibals.

ANOTHER BOY

That's only Reavers.

ANOTHER GIRL

Reavers aren't real.

ANOTHER BOY

Full well they are. They attack settlers from space, they kill them and wear their skins and rape them for hours and hours --

TEACHER

(in Chinese)

<We will enjoy your silence now!>
(calmer)

It's true that there are... dangers on the outer planets. So let's follow up on Borodin's question. With all the social and medical advancements we can bring to the Independents, why would they fight so hard against us?

RIVER

We meddle.

TEACHER

River? <I'm sorry?>

RIVER is a dark, intense little girl, writing with one hand and "typing" with the other. (Typing consists of holding a long wooden stylus and tapping either end down different columns of chinese characters on her desktop screen.) She is a good two years younger than the other kids.

RIVER

People don't like to be meddled with. We tell them what to do, what to think, don't run don't walk we're in their homes and in their heads and we haven't the right. We're meddlesome.

TEACHER

(gently taking her stylus)

River, we're not telling people what to think. We're just trying to show them **how**.

She violently PLUNGES the stylus into the girl's forehead --

INT. LAB - NIGHT

And we FLASH CUT to the actual present: a 16 year old RIVER sitting in a metal chair, needles stuck in her skull (one right where the teacher had stuck her) being adjusted by a technician. A second monitors her brain patterns.

The lab is cold, blue, steel. Insidiously clean.

2ND TECHNICIAN

She's dreaming.

FIRST TECHNICIAN

Nightmare?

2ND TECHNICIAN

Off the charts. Scary monsters.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Let's amp it up. Delcium, eight-drop.

DOCTOR MATHIAS is not instantly likable -- nor gradually, for that matter. A cold man, and more than a little satisfied with himself.

Behind him stands a GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, observing. And making him a little nervous.

The Inspector is in shadow, but his uniform indicates substantial rank, as does the eagle-crested baton -- no longer than a ruler -- that he clutches in one gloved hand.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

(continuing)

See, most of our best work is done when they're asleep. We can monitor and direct their subconscious, implant suggestions...

River starts convulsing, mewling in misery. The Inspector starts forward, slowly.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

(continuing)

It's a little startling to see, but the results are spectacular. Especially in this case. River Tam is our star pupil.

The Inspector steps into the light. He is rigid, cold, staring at the girl with no emotion at all. His name, as we will very soon learn, is SIMON.

SIMON

I've heard that.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

She's a genius. Her mental capacity is extraordinary, even with the side-effects.

SIMON

Tell me about them.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Well, obviously, she's unstable... the neural stripping gives them heightened cognitive reception, but it also destabilizes their own reality matrix. It manifests as borderline schizophrenia... which at this point is the price for being truly psychic.

SIMON

(moves toward her)

What use do we have for a psychic if she's insane?

DOCTOR MATHIAS

I don't have to tell you the security potential of someone who can read minds. And she has lucid periods -- we hope to improve upon the... I'm sorry, Sir, I have to ask if there's some reason for this inspection.

SIMON

(turning)

Am I making you nervous?

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Key members of Parliament have personally observed this subject. I was told their support for the project was unanimous. The demonstration of her power --

SIMON

(turns back to her)

How is she physically?

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Like nothing we've seen. All our subjects are conditioned for combat, but River... she's a creature of extraordinary grace.

SIMON

Yes. She always did love to dance.

He drops to one knee, slamming his baton to the floor.

ANGLE: THE BATON

As the top pops off like a bouncing betty (the grenade), flying up over Simon and River's heads and then bursting forth in a flat circle of blue energy that bisects the room, flowing through the staff's heads and knocking them out.

Simon rushes to River, gently removes the probes from her head and swabs her, whispering:

SIMON

(continuing)

River. Wake up. Please, it's Simon. River. It's your brother. Wake up...

She begins to stir as a noise moves him to the door, looking out and removing his uniform to reveal an orderly's tunic beneath.

River is suddenly next to him. He jumps a little.

RIVER

Simon.

A beat, as they face each other, Simon fighting emotion.

RIVER

(continuing)

They know you've come.

INT. GUARD STATION - CONTINUING

As a guard looks at a monitor. He mostly resembles a secret service man -- more bureaucrat than thug. A second man rolls into frame on a chair behind him, also watching the screen.

INT. RESEARCH CENTER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Simon walks River through the corridor. They approach a pair of double doors.

SIMON

We can't make it to the surface
from inside.

Simon turns suddenly as he hears footsteps, people heading at them from the other side of the doors.

SIMON

(continuing)

Find a --

But River has, impossibly, scampered up over some lab equipment to the dark top of the corridor, where she holds herself in a perfect split, feet against the walls and outstretched hand holding the sprinkler for support.

The doors burst open and two doctors pass by, hardly noticing the lone orderly. Passing right under River.

EXT. VENTILATION SHAFT - MOMENTS LATER

It's small, 15 feet by 15 feet. Goes a long way up and a long way down. One wide hinged window looks in on the hall inside. Simon and River approach with quiet haste.

They slip through the window. Simon shuts it, wedges his baton into the handle as the SECURITY AGENTS APPROACH. They fire at the glass, but their lasers have no effect.

Wind whips River's hair about as she looks up to see a small patch of daylight visible ten stories up. Sees the sky blotted out by a small ship that hovers above them.

ANGLE: THE SHIP is floating over the grass of rolling hills, the city gleaming far beyond. This facility is well hidden.

A gurney-sized section of the ship's belly detaches and drops down ten stories, cables spooling it out of the ship. It comes to Simon and River and stops suddenly.

SIMON

Get on!

He is standing by the window -- and the Security Agent is right behind him, PUNCHING the window with all his might.

Simon helps River onto the gurney, then jumps on himself as the Security Agent cracks the glass. The two are whisked up in the gurney, River on her knees, Simon standing beside her holding one of the cables --

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)

Stop.

The action freezes.

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)

(continuing)

Lovely. Lovely. Backtrack.

The action REVERSES, taking us back to the moment of Simon and River on the gurney just before it rises.

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)

(continuing)

Stop.

There is a motionless beat, River frozen in that crouch, and he **steps through** what we now see is a hologram of the event. The Government's man. We'll just call him THE OPERATIVE.

He is thoughtful, a little removed. Wire-rimmed glasses, a suit too nondescript to be a uniform, too neat to be casual wear. He is in:

INT. INSTITUTE RECORDS ROOM - DAY

-- which is long and bare but for drawers of holographic records, a set-up for watching recordings (where the image of Simon and River floats), and a table with computer and chair. The Operative crosses to the table, looks over some papers.

THE OPERATIVE

Biograph. Simon Tam.

CLOSE ON: THE OPERATIVE'S GLASSES

As Simon's history files down in print and pictures -- graduation, security photo from his medical internship -- over one lens of the Operative's glasses.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Remarkable children.

Doctor Mathias storms in, two security men (not the ones from the opening) and a nervous young female intern following. Mathias looks greyer and more gaunt than when we saw him last.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Excuse me! No one is allowed in the records room without my express permission.

THE OPERATIVE
(over this, quietly)
Enter the doctor.
(to Mathias)
Forgive me. I prefer to see the event alone, without bias.

Mathias looks at the hologram -- realizes which one it is.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I need to see your clearance.

THE OPERATIVE
You're right to insist. I know you've had security issues here.

He places his hand on a screen as he says it. Mathias looks at the readout, and drops the bluster.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Apologies. An Operative of the Parliament will of course have full cooperation.
(looks at screen)
I'm not sure what... I see no listing of rank, or name.

THE OPERATIVE
I have neither. Like this facility, I don't exist. The Parliament calls me in when... when they wish they didn't have to. Let's talk about the Tams.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I assume you've scanned the status logs...

THE OPERATIVE

River was your greatest success.
A prodigy -- A phenomenon. Until
her brother walked in eight months
ago and took her from you.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

It's not quite so simple.

THE OPERATIVE

I'm very aware of that.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

He came in with full creds. He
beat the ap-scan, the retinal...
There was no way I could --

THE OPERATIVE

No, no. Of course. The boy spent
his fortune developing the
contacts to infiltrate this place.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Gave up a brilliant future in
medicine as well, you've probably
read. Turned his back on his
whole life. Madness.

THE OPERATIVE

Madness, no. Something a good
deal more dangerous. Have you
looked at this scan carefully? At
his face?

Mathias looks uncertain.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

It's love, in point of fact. He
loved his sister and he knew she
was in pain. So he took her
somewhere safe.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Why are you here?

THE OPERATIVE

I'm here because the situation is
even less simple than you think.
(eyeing him)
Do you know what your sin is,
Doctor?

DOCTOR MATHIAS

I... I would be very careful about
what you --

THE OPERATIVE

(sadly)

It's pride.

He touches the computer screen and the hologramic image jumps
to the Doctor and Simon in the lab, Mathias repeating:

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Key members of Parliament have
personally observed this subject.
I was told their support --

THE OPERATIVE

(shutting it off)

Key members of Parliament. Key.
The minds behind every diplomatic,
military and covert operation in
the galaxy, and you put them in a
room with a **psychic**.

DOCTOR MATHIAS

She was... she read cards, nothing
more.

THE OPERATIVE

It's come to our attention that
River became much more unstable,
more... disturbed, after you
showed her off to Parliament. Did
she see something very terrible in
those cards?

DOCTOR MATHIAS

Whatever... secrets she might have
accidentally gleaned... it's
probable she doesn't even know she
knows them. That they're buried
beneath --

THE OPERATIVE

But they are in her. Her mind is
unquiet. It's the will of the
Parliament that I kill her. And
the brother. Because of your sin.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing; moving
to his briefcase)

You know, in certain older
civilized cultures, when men
failed as entirely as you have,
they would throw themselves on
their swords.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(fed up)

Well, unfortunately I forgot to
bring a sword to --

The air rings crisply as the Operative pulls out his sword.

THE OPERATIVE
The Parliament has no further
interest in psychics. They
represent a threat to the harmony
and stability of our Alliance.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I would put that down right now if
I were you.

THE OPERATIVE
Would you be killed in your sleep,
like an ailing pet? Whatever your
failings, I believe you deserve
better than that.

The agents move. He slices the throat of the one behind him
with true grace, thrusting at the second as he's pulling out
his gun and pinning his hand. A moment, and the dying agent
reflexively squeezes the trigger, shooting his own arm.

The Operative pulls out the sword and the agent falls as
quietly as the first.

Mathias bolts but the Operative pins him to the wall. He
bunches his fingers and jabs the side of the Doctor's spine.
Mathias stiffens, suddenly, agonizingly immobile.

The Operative steps back, observes the Doctor's rigid grimace
for a moment. Almost ceremoniously, he drops to one knee and
holds the blade out to one side, hilt to the floor and point
tilted toward the doctor. The Doctor stares at it in horror
as his paralyzed body begins to tip over toward it.

The Operative turns toward the terrified intern at the door.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

Young miss, I'll need all the logs on behavioral modification triggers. We'll have to reach out to River Tam, and help her to come back to us. No matter how far out Simon has taken her, we can --

He's almost startled when the Doctor's body drops into frame, slowed suddenly by the sword. It squeaks down the blade, the Doctor unable to cry out, as the Operative whispers to him:

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

This is a good death. There's no shame in this, in a **man's** death. A man who's done fine works. We're making a better world. All of them, better worlds.

Mathias is dead. The Operative pulls the sword out as the body rolls over. As he wipes the sword down:

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

Young miss, I need you to get to work now. I think I may have a long way to travel.

She goes. He approaches River, very close, staring...

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

Where are you hiding, little girl?

The noise is sucked suddenly out of the room as we black out.

SERENITY

... becomes the name painted on the side of a spaceship, with the same in Chinese behind it.

EXT. SPACE, ORBITING THE MOON "LILAC" - DAY

We move away from the ship. The name is on the nose, under the bridge. It sticks out from the body of the ship like a craning neck. The body is bulbous, with propulsion engines on either side and a giant glowing back. There are two small shuttles tucked in over the 'wings' of the engines. It's not the sleekest ship in the 'verse, to be sure.

As it hits atmo, the propulsion engines take over and she starts to rock a bit, noise filling our ears. Camera comes around the front, at the windows and into the bridge, to see the Captain, MALCOLM 'MAL' REYNOLDS, standing and watching.

At that moment, a small piece of the nose **breaks off** and goes flying past the window.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

[Note: the following sequence will take us through the ship in one extended STEADICAM shot.]

The bridge is small: two pilot seats on either side, and a tangle of wires and machinery all about.

Mal wears the knee-length brown coat and boots of an old Independent. Gun at his hip. He's not unlike the ship -- he's seen a bit of the world and it left him, emotionally at least, weathered. Right now, though, he's mostly startled.

MAL

What was that?

He's addressing the pilot, WASH. Flight gear and a hawaiian shirt, toy dinosaurs populating his station -- no old soldier, but just as startled.

WASH

Whoah! Did you see that --

The ship bucks --

MAL

Was that the primary buffer panel?

WASH

It did seem to resemble --

MAL

Did the Primary Buffer Panel just
fall off my gorrann ship for no
apparent reason?

Another buck --

WASH

Looks like.

MAL

I thought Kaylee checked our entry
couplings! I have a very clear
memory of it --

WASH

Yeah well if she doesn't give us
some extra flow from the engine
room to offset the burnthrough
this landing is gonna get pretty
interesting.

MAL

Define "Interesting".

WASH

(calm suggestion:)

"Oh god, oh god, we're all gonna
die?"

MAL

(hits the com)

This is the Captain. There's a
little problem with our entry
sequence; we may experience slight
turbulence and then explode.

(to Wash, exiting)

Can you shave the vector --

WASH

I'm doing it! It's not enough.

(hits com)

Kaylee!

MAL

Just get us on the ground!

WASH

That part'll happen, pretty
definitely.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

The camera leads Mal down. On either side of the hall are ladders leading down to crew's personal quarters.

The hulking mercenary JAYNE is coming up out of his bunk as Mal passes. He carries a number of rifles and grenades.

JAYNE

We're gonna explode? I don't
wanna explode.

MAL

Jayne, how many weapons you plan
on bringing? You only got the two
arms...

JAYNE

I just get excitable as to choice,
like to have my options open.

MAL

I don't plan on any shooting
taking place during this job.

JAYNE

Well, what you plan and what takes
place ain't ever exactly been
similar.

MAL

No grenades.
(Jayne groans)
No grenades.

First Mate ZOE enters from the lower level. Her mode of dress and military deference mark her as a war buddy of Mal's.

ZOE

Are we crashing again?

MAL

Talk to your husband. Is the mule
prepped?

ZOE

Good to go, sir. Just loading her
up.

(to Jayne)

Are those grenades?

JAYNE

Cap'n doesn't want 'em.

ZOE
 We're robbing the place. We're
 not occupying it.

All that plays in the background as we lead Mal into the:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

It's the communal space of the ship, homey and messy. There is food left lying on the table. Mal swipes a dumpling from a plate, pops it in his mouth as another jolt rocks him and sends most of the tableware clattering to the floor.

MAL
 (calling out)
 Kaylee!

He enters:

INT. AFT HALL/ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
 (still calling)
 Kaylee, what in the sphincter of
 hell are you playing at?

The hall leads to the rust-brown chaos that is the engine room. Working around the engine in a forest of wires, sparks and smoke is the sweetly pretty mechanic, KAYLEE. She passes Mal with a slightly impatient smile as he stands in the doorway, raising his voice above the din.

MAL
 (continuing)
 We got the Primary Buffer --

KAYLEE
 Everything's shiny, Cap'n. Not to
 fret.

MAL
 You told me --
 (jolt)
 You told me the entry couplings
 would hold for another week!

KAYLEE
 (working)
 That was six months ago, cap'n.

MAL
 My ship don't crash. If she
 crashes, you crashed her.

Steam and electricity shoot at him, backing him up.

He turns to see Simon behind him. Simon is more seasoned than before, but still contrasts the Captain entirely in dress and manner. He is implacably proper. Also pissed.

MAL

(continuing)

Doctor. Guess I need to get
innocked 'fore we hit planetside.

Simon nods, the ship jolting again.

MAL

(continuing)

Bit of a rockety ride. Nothing to
worry about.

SIMON

I'm not worried.

MAL

Fear is nothing to be ashamed of,
Doc.

SIMON

This isn't fear. This is anger.

MAL

(laughs)

Well, it's kinda hard to tell the
one from t'other, face like yours.

SIMON

I imagine if it were fear, my eyes
would be wider.

MAL

I'll look for that next time.

SIMON

You're not taking her.

MAL

(brushing past him)

No no, that's not a thing I'm
interested in talking over with --

SIMON

She's not going with you. That's
final.

MAL

(turning back)

I hear the words "that's final"
come out of your mouth ever again,
they truly will be.

(turning away again)

This is my boat. Y'all are guests
on it.

He heads down a side corridor that has steps leading down to:

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

Simon is right on his heels as we lead them down the stairs.

SIMON

Guests? I earn my passage,
Captain --

MAL

And it's time your little sister
learned from your fine example.

SIMON

I've earned my passage treating
bullet holes, knife wounds, laser
burns...

MAL

Some of our jobs are trickier than
others --

SIMON

And you want to put my sister in
the middle of that.

MAL

Didn't say 'want'. Said 'will'.
It's one job, Doc. She'll be fine.

The passenger dorm has a time-worn warmth that most of the
ship shares. Except, of course, for the sterile blue of:

INT. INFIRMARY - CONTINUING

Into which the two men step.

SIMON

She's a seventeen year old girl.
A mentally traumatized sevente--

MAL

She's a reader. Sees into the truth of things; might see trouble before it's coming. Which is of use to me.

SIMON

And that's your guiding star, isn't it? What's of use.

MAL

(laughs)

Honestly, doctor, I think we may really crash this time anyway.

Simon jabs the inoculation needle into Mal's arm.

SIMON

Do you understand what I've gone through to keep River away from the Alliance?

MAL

I do, and it's a fact me and mine have been courteous enough to keep to our own selves.

SIMON

Are you threatening to --

MAL

I got one purpose here: keep this boat in the air. I take the jobs I get -- which is less and less, case you ain't been keeping track.

He starts away, Simon still keeping pace.

MAL

(continuing)

Every year since the war the Alliance pushes just a little further out towards the rim. Makes it a chore for naughty men like us to slip about -- and keeping you two on board means working twice as hard to avoid the law. Means turning down a score of honest jobs.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

They enter the biggest space on the ship. Giant doors sit at the front, which will open upon landing to reveal a lowering ramp. Catwalks surround the space, leading up at the front to the foredeck hall. We've come all the way through Serenity.

MAL

So here is us, on the raggedy edge. Don't push me and I won't push you. <Are we clear here?>

Simon starts up the stairs as Mal calls to him:

MAL

(continuing)

Things get gritty I will keep her from the fray, but she's coming. Best you get her ready.

As Mal walks on, we tilt up to see the **Mule**, a four-man hovercraft hanging from chains near the ceiling. Jayne and Zoe are tossing duffle bags into it.

MAL

(continuing)

Zoe, is Wash gonna straighten this boat out before we get flattened?

ZOE

Like a downy feather, sir. Nobody flies like my mister.

The camera picks up Simon's feet as they enter foreground on the catwalk, and track with them to find:

SIMON

River...

She's lying on her side, looking straight at us. A loose summer dress draped over her small frame.

RIVER

I know. We're going for a ride.

EXT. LILAC -- DESERT GULCH - DAY

Serenity settles gently down as the cargo bay door opens.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

The chains are hoisted back up into the ceiling of the ship. The mule floats just above the floor, Jayne piling in next to River in the back:

SIMON

Now, River, you stay behind the others. If there's fighting you drop to the floor or run away. It's okay to leave them to die.

River puts on a huge pair of goggles, looks at her brother.

RIVER

I'm the brains of the operation.

ZOE

We should hit town right during Sunday worship. Won't be any crowds.

MAL

If Fanty and Mingo are right about the payroll, this could look to be a sunny day for us.

SIMON

(approaching)

Captain, I'll ask you one last time...

MAL

Doctor, I'm taking your sister under my protection here. If anything happens to her, anything at all, I swear to you I will get very choked up. Honestly. There could be tears.

He peels out, leaves Simon fuming. Kaylee sidles up to him...

KAYLEE

Don't mind the Captain none, Simon. I know he'll look out for her.

SIMON

It's amazing. I bring River all the way out to the raggedy edge of the 'verse so she can hide from the Alliance by **robbing banks**.

KAYLEE

It's just a little Trading Station. They'll be back 'fore you can spit.

(as he stalks off)

Not that you spit...

Kaylee watches him go, a tad forlorn.

EXT. LILAC - DAY

We see the town sprawled before us, as the mule heads in.

The town embodies the lives of folk out here: adobe and wood mix with metal and plastic -- whatever's on hand to build with. Right now the streets are mainly empty.

EXT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

The mule pulls up, Zoe hitching it as they speak:

JAYNE

What are we hoping to find here that equals the worth of a turd?

MAL

Alliance payroll. There's peace enforcing squads stationed all about this quadrant. Can't use credits out here -- they got to pay their boys in cashy money. Which once a month rests here.

ZOE

Something about stealing from the Alliance just warms a body like whiskey in winter.

JAYNE

(cocks his gun)
Shiny. Let's be badguys.

Mal turns back to River.

MAL

You ready to go to work, darlin'?

RIVER

There's no pattern to the pebbles here, they're completely random. I tried to count them but you drove too fast. Hummingbird.

MAL

(never mind)
Right. Great. Let's go.

INT. TRADING STATION - DAY

We are in a camera's eye view, right above the door.

The door slams open, Mal and Jayne stride in, Zoe following and whipping her hogleg right at camera without looking. Reverse to see the camera is also a small screen with "Welcome to Lilac" on it for the millisecond before it's blown to bits.

There's maybe fifteen people in the place: store workers, farm-folk and a couple dirt-poor kids. It's a combination post-office, general store, bank, and most other things.

MAL

Hands and knees and heads bowed
down! Everybody, now!

Two men who appear to be farm folk rush Mal and the others. Mal draws on the elder one and he stops dead in his tracks. Mal's gun is long, not unlike Civil War era issue, but very much new in design.

The other tries to tackle Jayne, which is not necessarily a great idea. Jayne clotheslines him so hard he spins right upside-down -- and Jayne grabs him by the legs and CRACK! -- bounces his head right off the floor, knocking him out cold.

MAL

(continuing)

Y'all wanna be looking very
intently at your own belly
buttons. I see a head start to
rise, violence is gonna ensue.

The guy who rushed Mal complies along with everyone else. Jayne dumps his catch on the floor and rips open his dirty shirt to reveal the purple of an Alliance uniform.

JAYNE

Looks like this is the place.

He looks up at Mal, who motions for Zoe to open the front door. She does, and River steps in.

ANGLE: RIVER'S BARE FEET -- walking slowly among the hunched-over customers as Mal addresses them.

MAL

You've probably guessed we mean to
be thieving here, but what we are
after is not yours. So let's have
no undue fussing.

As he is speaking, Jayne is scrambling to the back office, finding the small vault locked.

JAYNE

She's locked up.

River suddenly looks around, perturbed.

CLOSE ON: a young tough.

River looks up at Zoe, alarmed, and silently points to the young man. He is slowly reaching for the weapon in his belt.

He finds Zoe's sawed-off nuzzling his cheek.

ZOE

You know what the definition of a hero is? It's someone who gets other people killed. You can look it up later.

He drops his weapon, slides it across the floor.

Mal moves to the Trade Agent. Hauls him up, tosses him toward the vault. Zoe and Jayne follow.

TRADE AGENT

This is just a crop moon, don't think you'll find what you --

MAL

(in Chinese)

<Shut up and make us wealthy.>

The old man punches in the code. What opens is a tiny wall safe. Bundles of bills, some scattered coin. Unimpressive. Jayne and Zoe are behind the captain, peering in.

ZOE

At last. We can retire and give up this life of crime.

Mal reaches in, pulls a lever and the floor opens, a six foot hole appearing, stairs leading to a corridor, all gleaming metal and blue light. Zoe smiles. Jayne peers down as Mal addresses the Trade Agent.

MAL

Is there a fed down there? Be truthful.

TRADE AGENT

(nodding)

Y'all are Browncoats, hey? Fought for independence?

MAL

War's long done. We're all just
folk now.

(calls down)

Listen up! We are coming down to
empty that vault!

The voice of a young Alliance GUARD comes up from below.

GUARD (O.S.)

You have to give me your
authorization password!

Jayne impatiently fires a burst of machine-gun fire down into
the hole. A beat...

GUARD (O.S.)

(continuing)

Okay...

Mal looks at Zoe and they head down into:

INT. VAULT - CONTINUING

Which is as modern as something off the Central Planets. A
short corridor leads to a real vault door, that the guard is
already opening. Behind that door, a few bags of the real
deal: neatly stacked cash, waiting to be robbed.

INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

We move in on River as something crosses her face. Worry.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A WOMAN carrying a bucket and her nine year old SON are
looking at the trading station a few buildings away.

SON

Repeater.

WOMAN

Did sound summat like gunblast...
Maybe you aught run tell Lawman...

She turns and right by her, in the shadows, is a man.

Mostly. He is hideously disfigured, a combination of self-
mutilation and the bubbling red of radiation poisoning. His
clothes are rags, his eyes pinpoints of glazed madness.

A blade blurs through frame...

INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

River SCREAMS and flops onto her back, pinned by revelation. Others look at her, concerned, as Jayne makes his way to her.

JAYNE

What the hell is up? You all right? What's goin' on?

He holds her, as she whispers, wide-eyed...

RIVER

Reavers.

INT. VAULT - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe is hauling out the last of five bags as Mal talks to the guard, holding his gun at him:

MAL

Leg's good, it'll bleed plenty and we avoid any necessary organs...

GUARD

I was thinking more of a graze...

MAL

Well you don't want it to look like you just gave up...

JAYNE (O.S.)

MAL!

MAL

(to himself)

Every heist, he's gotta start yelling my name --

JAYNE

(barreling in)

Mal! Reavers! The girl's pitchin' a fit. They're here or they're comin' soon.

He is already loading up with bags as Mal thinks quickly.

MAL

(to Zoe and Jayne)

Get on the mule.

(to the guard,
pointing to the
vault)

Does that open from the inside?

GUARD
Whah -ah- yes...

MAL
You get everyone upstairs in there
and you seal it. Long as you got
air you don't open up, you
understand?

GUARD
I -- Buh I --

Mal is in his face, dark and huge:

MAL
GET THEM INSIDE THE VAULT.

EXT. TRADING STATION - DAY

The doors burst open, Jayne and Zoe coming out first, Mal
behind with River in hand. She is freaked, in her own space.
Jayne and Zoe throw the bags on --

MAL
Zoe take the wheel --

JAYNE
You see 'em? Anybody see 'em?

-- and jump on themselves, Mal scanning the area as he hands
River up to Jayne's care. As the craft powers up, slowly
moving, the young man Zoe kept from trying to pull his weapon
bursts out of the station, grabbing the back of the mule.

YOUNG MAN
Take me with you!

MAL
Get in the vault with the others --

YOUNG MAN
I can't stay here! Please!

MAL
It's too many. Drive, Zoe.

A Reaver craft ROARS over their heads. It's nearly the size
of Serenity. Torn apart, belching smoke -- a welded
conglomeration of ruined ships, painted for war. Predator,
pure. It disappears over the rooftops.

YOUNG MAN
PLEASE!

MAL

Drive!

Zoe's face is set with unhappy determination as she floors it, shooting out and leaving the young man in the dust.

As they move from him, four Reavers jump out of the shadows and grab the young man. Mal unhesitatingly draws his gun. He nudges a lever with his thumb and a cartridge pops back.

Mal fires twice. The young man takes both bullets in the chest, slumps down dead.

ANGLE: THE EDGE OF TOWN

As the mule shoots past the last building, we see a **skiff** shoot out from behind the buildings of the adjacent street, right abreast of our gang.

ANGLE: THE CENTER OF TOWN

We see the church as the first ship and an even larger one come to hover over it, Reavers dropping down on cable lines to swarm into it.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule and the skiff are booking through the rocky terrain. The skiff swings closer, but Jayne peppers it with automatic fire and it swings away. There is sporadic return fire.

JAYNE

How come they ain't blowing us out of the air?

MAL

They wanna run us down. The up-close kill.

River is squashed down on her back, being very small.

RIVER

They want us alive when they eat us.

JAYNE

Boy, sure would be nice if we had some **grenades**, don'tcha think?

Mal says nothing, keeps firing.

ZOE

Wash, baby can you hear me?

INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is in a frenzy of switchflipping, prepping for take-off.

WASH

We're moments from air. You got somebody behind you?

We intercut Wash and Zoe at this point:

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

ZOE

Reavers.

WASH

(blanching)
<merciless hell...>

ZOE

We're not gonna reach you in time.

WASH

Just keep moving, honey. We're coming to you.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As she lifts off and starts heading toward the others.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

Zoe gets the mule in front but a harpoon **thwinngs** through the air from the skiff and **SHHNNK!** Goes through Jayne's leg. The harpoon grips the leg and pulls --

Jayne goes flying off the back of the Mule, Mal just grabbing him as the harpoon line reels slowly tighter --

MAL

Grab on!

Jayne grabs the Mule, legs dangling, pulled out between the two vessels as Mal slams a new cartridge into his pistol.

JAYNE

I won't get et! You shoot me if they take me!

Mal steadies himself and takes aim, seemingly at Jayne --

JAYNE

(continuing)
Well don't shoot me **first!**

Mal fires. Again. Steadies himself for one more...

The line holding the harpoon is split by Mal's third shot.

The mule surges forward as Jayne drags on the ground. Mal hauls him in as River bounds into the front to make room.

JAYNE

(continuing)

Rutting pigs! Where's --

And River is holding out his weapon before he can ask for it.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity rushes across the desert floor, not much higher off it than the smaller crafts.

WASH

(to Zoe)

Get some distance on 'em. You come to the flats, I want you to swing round. Gonna try a Barn Swallow.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash hits the com.

WASH

Simon! Open the loading dock!

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Simon moves next to the huge sliding doors at the front, hits a couple of buttons. The doors pull open, as the huge ramp beyond them opens down, letting in a rush of wind and light.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule reaches the flats, away from the rocks.

WASH (O.S.)

(in Zoe's ear)

Okay, baby, we've talked this through...

ZOE

Talkin' ain't doin'.

She throws the wheel and the mule comes hard about, fishtailing slightly as it faces the oncoming skiff.

WASH (O.S.)

Don't slow down!

ANGLE: THE SKIFF

As it heads for the mule --

ANGLE: THE MULE

As it heads for the skiff -- and Serenity **swoops down** out of the sky, bay doors open, and comes right up behind it -- The Mule swallowed by the bigger ship --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

And only its forward momentum keeps it from being squashed as it flies backwards into the bay, narrowly missing Simon and smashing back into the staircase, sparks and people flying --

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity tries to get altitude -- but slams right into the oncoming skiff, tearing it apart --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

A flaming portion of the top flies in, skids to the floor as small fires erupt from the mule as well -- Simon pulls a lever and jets of CO2 shoot out of the floor.

Simon hits the button to start the outer ramp closing, then runs to the mule. The CO2 stops and he finds River sitting in her seat, completely unharmed. Zoe is climbing painfully out of the other seat, Mal and Jayne both having been thrown.

SIMON

River?

RIVER

I swallowed a bug.

Kaylee runs in to see how everyone is. She goes to Simon.

KAYLEE

Are you okay?

MAL

Is **he** okay?

A bloodied Reaver **POPS** into frame from under the skiff-top. He lunges for Mal, baring sharpened teeth --

Mal spins and draws, fires into his belly as Jayne and Zoe both fire at the same time. The freak takes too long to go down, but down he goes. Dies sitting against the skiff top.

Everybody takes a moment to look at each other.

WASH (O.S.)
 We all here? What's going on?
 Hello?

ZOE
 (moves to the com)
 No casualties. Anybody following?

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
 Nice flying, baby, and that's a
 negative. Clean getaway -- Out of
 atmo in six minutes.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

MAL
 Set course for Beaumonde.
 (to the others)
 First thing, I want these bod --

Simon suddenly **punches** him in the face, causing Mal to
 stumble back, and Simon to shake his hand in pain.

MAL
 (continuing)
 <You wanna bullet? You wanna
 bullet right in your throat?>

SIMON
 You stupid, selfish, son of a
 whore ---

MAL
 I'm a hair's breadth from riddling
 you with holes, Doctor --

SIMON
 "One simple job! She'll be fine!"

MAL
 She IS fine! Except for bein'
 still crazy, she's the picture of
 health!

ZOE
 Wasn't for River, we'd probably be
 left there. She felt 'em coming.

SIMON
 Never again. You understand me?

MAL

Seems I remember a talk about you giving orders on my boat.

SIMON

Well sleep easy 'cause we're off your boat. Just as soon as River gets her share of the "bounty".

KAYLEE

Well let's not do anything hasty...

MAL

No, shiny! I'm sick a' carrying tourists anyhow. We'll be on Beaumonde in ten hours time, you can pick up your earnings and be on your merry. Meantime you do your job. Patch up my crew.

A beat.

RIVER

He didn't lie down. They never lie down.

She is looking at the Reaver. Everyone does, for a moment.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Zoe enter from below.

ZOE

No, I think things'll glide a deal smoother for us without River and Simon on board... but how long do you think **they**'ll last?

MAL

Doc made his call. They's as babes in a basket when we took 'em in; we sheltered 'em plenty. Man has to cut loose, learn to stand on his own.

ZOE

Like that man back in town?

They stop by Mal's room.

MAL

I had to shoot him. What the Reavers woulda done to him before they killed him...

ZOE

I know. That was a piece a' mercy. But before that, him begging us to bring him along...

MAL

We couldn't take the weight. Woulda slowed us down.

ZOE

You know that for certain --

MAL

Mule won't run with five. I shoulda dumped the girl? Or you? Or Jayne?

(considering)

Well, Jayne...

ZOE

Coulda tossed the payload.

MAL

And go to Fandy and Mingo with air in our mitts, tell 'em "here's your share"? They'd set the dogs on us in the space of a twitch, and there we are back in mortal peril. We get a job, we gotta make good.

Wash enters from the bridge.

ZOE

Sir, I don't disagree on any particular point, it's just... in the time of war, we woulda never left a man stranded.

MAL

Maybe that's why we lost.

She's not happy with the reply. Mal climbs down to his room as Wash reaches Zoe, slides his arms around her.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Once alone, Mal lets his own disappointment show. He pulls off his holster and drops it over a chair. Kicks the toilet closed and sits on his bunk.

The place resembles a submarine cabin, with charts and clutter, ancient maps on the walls.

Mal moves a bunch of papers off his bunk and a picture slides out. Hits the floor and starts moving: it's a snapshot-movie of:

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - DAY

We're close on a beautiful woman who looks at us with amused exasperation. Behind her is an opulently dressed little shuttle.

INARA

Kaylee, are you ever gonna put that capture down?

KAYLEE (O.S.)

We gotta have records of everything. A bona fide Companion entertained clients on this very ship! In this very bed!

The picture pans over to the bed -- which River is bending over and sniffing curiously. Inara is packing things up.

KAYLEE (O.S.)

(continuing)

For one sweet second, we was almost classy.

INARA

You promised to help me pack.

KAYLEE (O.S.)

Honest, Inara, why do you have to leave?

Inara shoots an uncertain look at the camera -- and the picture freezes, goes back to the beginning.

During all this, Mal has picked it up. He looks at it a moment, tosses it aside. Looks around at nothing much.

JAYNE (V.O.)

I do not get it. How's a guy get so wrong?

INT. CARGO BAY - LATER

We see the doors in the floor slide open, a second set below. Pan to see, for a moment, the dead Reaver's face.

Kaylee is opening the doors with a keypad on a cable. Jayne drags the corpse closer to the doors as he continues:

JAYNE

Ain't logical. Cuttin' on his own face, rapin' and murdering -- I mean, I'll kill a man in a fair fight... or if I think he's gonna **start** a fair fight, or if he bothers me, or if there's a woman, or I'm gettin' paid -- mostly only when I'm gettin' paid. But these Reavers... last ten years they just show up like the boogeyman from stories. Eating people alive? Where does that get fun?

He dumps the body in, she starts the doors closing.

KAYLEE

Shepherd Book said they was men that reached the edge of space, saw a vasty nothingness and just went bibbledy over it.

JAYNE

Hell, I been to the edge. Just looked like more space.

KAYLEE

I don't know. People get awful lonely in the black. Like to get addlepatated ourselves, we stay on this boat much longer. Captain'll drive us all off, one by one.

JAYNE

You're just in a whinge cuz that prissy doc is finally disembarking. Me I says good riddance. He never belonged here, and his sister's no saner than one of them Reavers.

KAYLEE

That ain't even so! River's a dear heart and a boon to this crew! You just don't like her 'cause she can read your mind and everything you think is mean.

JAYNE

Well, there is that.

KAYLEE

Her and Simon could have a place here. Now they're leaving us. Just like Shepherd Book.

She looks up toward one of the shuttles.

KAYLEE

(continuing)

Just like Inara...

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

And here she is, moving back and down into frame, her eyes half closed in passion. She settles on a cluster of brocaded pillows, and we see another head lowering in for a kiss...

Come around to see it's another lovely young woman -- and that there is a group of ten others watching intently, all in saris, on their knees. Two handsome young men with shaved heads in the back, also on their knees.

Inara stops before the kiss, smiling and coming back up. She speaks to the girls (We hear only soft music) as she repositions the one she's with, lowering again; showing her the motion of surrender as if it were a dance step.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

They love you.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DUSK

Inara looks out at the mountains. The space she's in resembles a Tibetan monastery, if slightly more opulent.

Widen to see she is with SHEYDRA, a somewhat older Companion, the woman whose voice we heard. She hands Inara a drink.

SHEYDRA

The girls. They've learned more from you these last months than the rest of us could show them in two years.

INARA

They're very sweet. But they're not Companions.

SHEYDRA

(wryly)

You've no hope for them? Junk the lot, start anew?

INARA

On Sihnon we started training at twelve. Years of discipline and preparation before the physical act of pleasure was even mentioned. Most of these girls --

SHEYDRA

They're all of good family, the highest academic standards --

INARA

Control. Was the first lesson. And the last and these worlds are not like the Central Planets. There is barbarism dressed up in the most civil weeds. Men of the highest rank who don't know the difference between a Companion and a common whore. It's unsafe.

SHEYDRA

All the more reason the girls look to you. You came out here alone, before the Alliance ever thought to establish a House this remote. You've seen so much. You're a figure of great romance to them.

INARA

Great romance has nothing to do with being a Companion, Sheydra. You should know better.

SHEYDRA

I'm not the one who had a torrid affair with a pirate.

Inara nearly spills her drink.

INARA

A who? With a what?

SHEYDRA

(smiling)

It's the talk of the House. The girls all trade stories in the dorms at night.

INARA

I didn't... have a pirate...

SHEYDRA

In one of the stories you make love in a burning temple. I think that's my favorite.

INARA

(sitting)

This is unbearable. Captain Reynolds is no pirate; he's a petty thief. And he never laid a finger on me. All he ever did was rent me a shuttle and be very annoying.

(mutters in Chinese)

<A switch to those girls' backsides is just good enough.>

SHEYDRA

A year on his shuttle and he never laid a finger on you. No wonder you left.

INARA

(bridling)

I left because -- go away. We're no longer friends. You're a stranger to me now.

SHEYDRA

I do love to watch you boil. Don't worry. The stories will fade. And your Captain Reynolds has probably gotten himself blown up by this time.

INARA

(looking away again)

Yes. That would be just like him.

EXT. BEAUMONDE: ATOLL PLAZA - EVENING

Serenity touches down on the crowded atoll amidst a number of other, equally disreputable ships. The place is filled with every kind of immigrant culture and shop imaginable.

EXT./INT. SERENITY - EVENING

The ramp is open and everyone is filing out, ready to hit the town. Kaylee is talking to Simon, who has River in hand.

KAYLEE

Don't talk to the barkers -- only the captains.

(more)

KAYLEE (cont'd)
 You look the captain in the eye,
 know who you're dealing with.

SIMON
 I wish there was...

Since he doesn't know what to say, she rattles on:

KAYLEE
 You shouldn't aughta be so clean.
 It's a dead giveaway you don't
 belong, you always gotta be tidy.
 Don't pay anybody in advance. And
 don't ride in anything with a
 Capissen 38 engine, they fall
 right out of the sky.

SIMON
 Kaylee.

She turns and heads off. Simon starts in the other
 direction, but River looks after her and the others.

SIMON
 (continuing)
 River... do you want to stay with
 them?

RIVER
 It's not safe.

SIMON
 No, I fear it's not safe anymore.

He's heading off and doesn't hear:

RIVER
 For them.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD - CONTINUING

We start on a CorVue screen, showing a news report. On the
 screen is a shot of the town our gang robbed, now half of it
 a smoking ruin.

NEWSPERSON (V.O.)
 ... that it was a band of Reavers
 remains unconfirmed. The only
 survivors of the massacre
 apparently locked themselves in
 the Trade Station vault until --

During this we come around to see that the screen has a blinking light behind it, come THROUGH the wiring of the back to look out at the bar, with the word "recording" in the corner. Every screen is a camera, even down here.

We pick up Mal and Kaylee heading down into the bar. Cutting away from the camera's view, we can look two stories straight down as they go, to a close group of dark tables and booths and a second screen playing in the corner.

MAL

It's not my fault the Doc's got no stomach for Rim living --

KAYLEE

It is entirely and for all your fault! If you'd given Simon a moment, just a moment where he didn't think you were gonna throw them off or turn them in, he might've --

MAL

What? Swept you into his cleanly arms? Made tidy love to you?

They have reached the guncheck, where Jayne and Wash have already checked their guns. It works like a lunch automat: Mal sticks his gun in a drawer, pulls out a chit -- the drawer closes and rotates, revealing another empty one. A large bouncer with a shockrod watches impassively.

KAYLEE

(as they continue down)

Don't you dare joke! You know how much I pined on Simon. And him fair sweet on me, I well believe, but he's so worried about being found out --

ZOE

Captain didn't make 'em fugitives.

KAYLEE

But he coulda made 'em family! Steada driving them off. Steada keeping Simon from seein' I was there, when I carried such a torch and we coulda -- goin' on a year now I ain't had nothin' twixt my nethers weren't run on batteries!

MAL

Oh god! I can't know that!

JAYNE

I could stand to hear a little more...

KAYLEE

If you had a care for anybody's heart you woulda --

MAL

(enough)

You knew he was gonna leave. We never been but a way station to those two. And how do you know what he feels? He's got River to worry on but he still coulda shown you... if I truly wanted someone bad enough, wouldn't be a thing in the 'verse could stop me from going to her.

KAYLEE

Tell that to Inara.

For a moment, Mal is too shocked to react. Kaylee storms out.

MINGO

Domestic troubles?

MINGO is young, tough -- somewhere between a gangster and a fur-trader. Sounds lower-class British, or something like it.

FANTY

Domestic troubles?

FANTY moves out from behind Mingo to reveal that he is Mingo's **identical twin**. Apart from slight differences in dress, they are indistinguishable.

MINGO

'Cause we don't wanna interrupt.

FANTY

A man should keep his house in order.

MAL

(greet's them each)

Mingo. Fanty.

MINGO
 (pointing at his
 brother)
 He's Mingo.

MAL
 He's Fanty. You're Mingo.

MINGO
 Ghahh! How is it you always know?

MAL
 Fanty's prettier.
 (pulling out a chair)
 Feel to do some business?

MINGO
 (re: Mal's gang)
 Bit crowded, isn't it? As you
 see, we come unencumbered by thugs.

MAL
 Which means at least four of the
 guys already in here are yours.
 All's one. I'll just keep Jayne
 with me.

ZOE
 Sir, are you sure you don't --

MAL
 Go. Go get yourselves a nice
 romantic meal.

WASH
 Those are my two favorite words!
 (to Zoe)
 Honey... "Meal..."

MAL
 (to Zoe)
 It's business. We're fine.

They leave and the four remaining men sit. Fanty tosses a few coins to a saloon-girl, who does a little fan-dance...

ANGLE: THE CORVUE CAMERA'S POV of the men is conveniently blocked by her little dance.

Mal's foot nudges a duffel bag of money to Mingo's foot.

MINGO
 Quite a crew you've got.

MAL

Yeah, they're a fine bunch of rubebens.

MINGO

How you keep them on that crap boat is the subject of much musing tween me and Fanty.

FANTY

We go on and on.

MAL

So I'm noticing. Is there a problem I don't know of? You got 25% of a sweet take kissing your foot, how come we're not dispersing?

FANTY

Our end is forty, precious.

JAYNE

My muscular buttocks it's forty --

MINGO

It is as of now. Find anyone around going cheaper.

FANTY

Find anyone around going near a sorry lot like you in the **first** instance.

ANGLE: RIVER has entered, is looking about.

Jayne sees her, nudges Mal, who looks and turns back to business. We stay on her as she wanders around the perimeter of the bar, vaguely listening in on Mal's deal.

FANTY

(continuing)

You're unlikable, Mal. You got no respect for us above you, you got enemies in every quadrant, and your ship's older than the starting point of time. You's charity cases to such as us.

MAL

Well here's a foul thought. I conjured you two were incompetent; sent us out not knowing there were Reavers about. Now I'm thinking you picked us out because you **did**.

MINGO

That were a sign of faith, boy. And it doesn't affect our forty per. Danger is, after all, your business.

JAYNE

Reavers ain't business, double dickless.

This is all background noise to River, who has moved to the **CV screen**, on which is a commercial. It's animated, goofy, cartoon animals and anime-style Asian girls all transforming to insane fantasy figures as they sing about:

COMMERCIAL

FRUITY OATY BARS, POW! HEY! FRUITY BARS, MAKE A MAN OF A MOUSE, MAKE YOU BUST OUT YOUR BLOUSE, EAT THEM NOW, BANG! PING! ZOW! -- TRY FRUITY, OATY BARS.

We push in, the light from the CV on River's face, pushing to **EXTREME CLOSE UP**, all noise but the jingle fading out, finally that as well, just the hum in River's ears.

And she whispers:

RIVER

Miranda.

She turns and looks back at the crowd.

What happens next happens very fast.

She strides silently to the first table -- two men drinking quietly -- and she slams her foot into one's face, then whips it back into the other's, knocking them both unconscious as --

-- people are turning, just registering that this girl --

-- kicks the table into a card player even as she sweeps a bottle off it behind her -- the bottle hits a man behind her square in the face, a man she never even looked at -- people are rising, fleeing or pushing forward --

MAL

River...

JAYNE

Whuhuh?

She's taking out a group of four, high kicks and perfect precision -- Two men come from either side, one whipping out a knife -- she does a perfect split, grabs his wrist above her head, using his momentum to stab the other one --

Mal fights to get back to the gunrack. The bouncer reaches her and she wrests his shockrod from him, uses it on him, on Fanty and Mingo -- the fan-dancer is bolting and River hurls the rod at her head, knocks her cold...

She's everywhere. On tables, chairs, under your legs, using the room itself to take out every single person there. One man hides behind a wall -- impossibly, she swings her leg around the corner and nails his face.

Jayne grabs her from behind --

JAYNE

(continuing)

Gorrammit, girl, it's **me!**

She grabs his crotch and squeezes -- his grip loosens and she spins, facing him, and flat-heels his nose with her palm, twirling into a gut kick that doubles him over, dispatching of another while she cracks Jayne's head with a small table --

Somebody pulls a gun and she snaps his elbow, causing him to scream out even before he shoots himself in the gut --

Mal frantically wrests a gun from the vending locker as River knocks the other guy's gun in the air, kicks someone else and then catches it, whips it around just as Mal comes up with his, they are pointed right at each other --

SIMON

Eta Kooram Nah Smech!

And River drops to the ground, fast asleep.

There is a beat. Mal looks around the bar. He and Simon, who has run up to the entrance, are the only ones standing.

He looks down at River. She lies unconscious, helpless.

MAL

I think maybe we ought to leave.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We see two sleek warships glide silently into frame, followed by a third, bigger ship. This is the Operative's vessel, and it is everything Serenity is not: sleek, predatory, icy cool.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

The Operative is looking at the Maidenhead security feed -- and River is staring right at him.

THE OPERATIVE

(captivated)

Hello again. Yes, it's me. I'm glad you've finally asked for me.

An Ensign is revealed looking at a separate monitor:

ENSIGN

We got a pos on a retinal -- man carrying her out is Malcolm Reynolds, captains a Firefly-class transport ship, "Serenity". Bound by law five times, smuggling, tariff dodge... not convicted. Nothing here that would --

THE OPERATIVE

The ship. The name of the ship.

(softly)

Crossref. Malcolm Reynolds. Serenity.

He looks over at the Ensign with a small, strange smile on his lips -- as his glasses are covered by text.

ENSIGN

Sir?

THE OPERATIVE

Serenity Valley. Bloodiest battle of the entire war. The Independents held the valley for seven weeks, two of them **after** their high command had surrendered. 68% casualty rate.

ENSIGN

Of course, Sir, I just didn't --

THE OPERATIVE

There.

His glasses stop scrolling and Mal's military file opens, a picture of Mal in one lens.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

If the feds ever bothered to crossref justice files with war records... Yes. Our Mr. Reynolds was a sergeant, 57th Overlanders. Volunteer. Fought at Serenity till the very last. This man is an issue. This man hates us.

ENSIGN

First Mate Zoe Washburn, formerly Corporal Zoe Alleyne, also in the 57th. Career army, looks like.

THE OPERATIVE

She's followed him far... Give me the crew, registered passengers -- Our Captain is a passionate man, no room there for subtlety. He's bound to have some very obvious...

CLOSE ON: THE LENS of his glasses. On it is a slowly moving picture of INARA.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

...weakness...

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River is still asleep, Mal finishing chaining her wrists. She lies on her side, breathing evenly.

Mal stares at her a moment, then:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

He exits to find the whole group waiting for him, sans Wash.

SIMON

May I see her?

MAL

She's still napping just now. And I believe you've got some storytelling to do.

WASH

(entering)

We're out of atmo, plotted for Haven. No one following as of yet.

KAYLEE

Haven? We're gonna see Shepherd Book?

MAL

(nodding)

We got to lay low. And I could fair use some spiritual guidance right about now.

(to Simon)

I am a lost lamb; what in hell happened back there?

WASH

Start with the part where Jayne gets knocked out by a ninety pound girl. 'Cause I don't think that's ever getting old.

ZOE

Do we know if anyone was killed?

MAL

It's likely. I know she meant to kill me 'fore the Doc put her to sleep, which how exactly does that work anyhow?

SIMON

Safeword.

(beat)

The people who helped me break River out -- they had intel that River and the other subjects were being embedded with behavioral conditioning. They taught me a safeword, in case... something happened.

KAYLEE

Not sure I get it.

SIMON

A phrase that's encoded in her brain, that makes her fall asleep. If I speak the words, "Eta --

JAYNE
(jumping back)
Well don't **say** it!

ZOE
It only works on **her**, Jayne.

JAYNE
Oh. Well, now I know that.

MAL
"In case something happened."

SIMON
What?

MAL
You feel to elaborate on what that something might be? I mean they taught you that fancy safeword, they must've figured she was gonna, what -- start uncontrollably crocheting?

SIMON
They never said what --

MAL
And you never did ask.

Mal grabs him and throws him against the wall, in his face.

MAL
(continuing)
Eight months. Eight months you had her on my boat knowing full well she might go monkeyshit at the wrong word and you never said a thing --

SIMON
I brought her out here so they couldn't get to her, I don't even know how they --

MAL
My ship. My crew! You had a gorramn timebomb living with us!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River's eyes open.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL

What if she went off in the middle
of dinner, or in bunk with Kaylee,
did that give you a moment's pause?

Simon looks at Kaylee, the truth of Mal's words hitting him.

SIMON

I thought she was getting better.

JAYNE

And I thought they was gettin' off!
(off looks)
Didn't we have a intricate plan
how they was gonna be not here
anymore?

KAYLEE

We couldn't leave them **now**...!

JAYNE

No, now that she's a... killer
woman we ought be bringin' 'em tea
and dumplings!
(to Mal)
In earnest, Mal: why'd you bring
her back on?

Mal looks at Jayne, at all of them. Doesn't have an answer.

SIMON

May I see her.

Mal steps aside. Simon enters the locker.

JAYNE

She goes woolly again, we're gonna
have to put a bullet to her.

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River mouths the next words right along with Mal:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL

It's crossed my mind.

WASH

Can I make a suggestion that
doesn't involve violence, or is
this the wrong crowd?

ZOE

Honey...

WASH

Fanty and Mingo might be coming hard down on us, or the laws... or maybe nobody could be bunged about a little social brawl. We need to get our bearings. I think we need to talk to Mr. Universe.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

The camera swoops in at a sparking ion cloud, then through the cloud at a barren, metallic satellite moon. Then further in to reveal a sprawling -- and completely empty -- communications complex. Giant satellite dishes everywhere.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

Inside, we find an unkempt young man. Also sleep-deprived, over-caffeinated and kinda sweet. This is MR UNIVERSE. He is alone but for his mannikin-like Love-bot, Lenore.

He's surrounded by screens, computers, feeds -- machinery that looks both ultra-modern and long neglected. All the screens play different images -- it's a mediaverse.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As he watches the security feed of River's fight his image becomes a vidscreen. He's addressing Wash, Mal and Zoe.

We intercut between the two spaces:

MR UNIVERSE

Oh, this is good. This is...

(giggles)

...she's beating up all the burly men and I'm having a catharsis, it's happening right now, you guys always bring me the very best violence. You think you're in a hot place?

WASH

That's what we're looking to learn. Is there any follow up, a newswave...

MR UNIVERSE

There is no "news", there's the truth of the signal, what I see, and there's the puppet theatre the Parliament's jesters foist on the somnambulant public. Monkey taught to say the word "monkey" -- lead story on 32 planets. But the slum riots on Hera, not a --

MAL

What about this? Did this make the... puppet theatre?

MR UNIVERSE

No sir. And no lawforce flags, either -- I hadda go into the security feed direct...

MAL

You can do that?

MR UNIVERSE

Can't stop the signal, Mal. Everything goes somewhere and I go everywhere. Security feeds are a traipse to access -- and I wasn't the first one in, this has prints on it -- oh! Look at her go! Everyone is getting bruises and contusions. Contooooosions.

ZOE

(to Mal, over that)

So somebody else has been fed this. That doesn't like me too well.

MR UNIVERSE

Zoe, you sultry minx, stop falling in love with me. You're just gonna embarrass yourself. I have a commitment to my Lovebot, it was a very beautiful ceremony, Lenore wrote her own vows, I cried like a **baby**, a hungry, angry baby.

(re: screen)

And she falls asleep. Which, she would be sleepy.

MAL

Can you go back? See if anybody spoke with her 'fore she acted up, made any kind of contact with her...

Mr Universe works the screen. The image rewinds and stops on River coming up to it, looking at it. She whispers the word, "Miranda", and starts to move away.

MAL

(continuing)

Miranda...? Go back further.

MR UNIVERSE

No...

He pulls another screen close, starts working that one. Matching timecodes, he pulls up the commercial.

MAL

Um... please?

Mr Universe has a third screen showing the commercial as well -- and it starts breaking down, bursts of (non-matrixy) code showing through. As he does so:

MR UNIVERSE

Friends and potential lovers, I have good news and I have the other kind. Good is you're very smart. Someone is talking to her.

WASH

The oaty bar?

MAL

Subliminal. It's a subliminal message broadwaved to trigger her.

MR UNIVERSE

(nodding)

I been seeing this code pop up all over, last few weeks. And I cannot crack it. It's Alliance and it's high military, so here then is the bad. Someone has gone to enormous trouble to find your little friend. And found her they have.

Mal, Zoe and Wash look at each other.

MR UNIVERSE

(continuing)

Do you all know what it is you're carrying?

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River stares at us, impassive, as the camera pulls away from her to reveal Simon, who is cleaning blood off her face.

RIVER

They're afraid of me.

SIMON

I'm sorry...

RIVER

They should be. What I will show them... Oh God...

She starts tearing up, breathing faster... Simon runs his hands through her hair.

SIMON

It's okay, it's okay...

RIVER

(somewhere else)

Show me off like a dog, old men covered in blood, it never touched them but they're drowning in it... so much loss... I don't know what I'm saying. I never know what I'm saying...

SIMON

You said something. When you were triggered, do you remember? The Captain saw you say something on the feed...

RIVER

Miranda.

SIMON

Miranda.

RIVER

(laughs bitterly)

Ask her. She'll show you all.

SIMON

Show us what? Who is Miranda?

(beat)

Am I... talking to Miranda now?

She shoots him a look.

RIVER

I'm not a multiple, dumbo.

SIMON

No. Right. But I think somehow when they triggered you it brought this up, this memory --

RIVER

It isn't mine. The memory. I didn't bring it and I shouldn't have to carry it, it isn't mine.

(urgently:)

Don't make me sleep again.

SIMON

I won't.

RIVER

Put a bullet to me. Bullet in the brain pan, squish.

SIMON

Don't say that. Not ever. We'll get through this.

She reaches out and touches his face, affectionately.

RIVER

Things are going to get much much worse.

SIMON

Well, the Captain hasn't tossed us in the airlock, so I'd say we're --

RIVER

He has to see. More than anyone... he has to see what he doesn't want to.

SIMON

River. What will Miranda show us.

She thinks.

RIVER

Death.

SIMON

Whose death?

And she starts laughing. Quietly at first, then louder, then almost uncontrollably, screaming in his face:

RIVER

EVERYBODY'S!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

Black Silence.

INT. CAVE - DAY

It's pitch black here, til Serenity's lights throw a hard relief on the rocky wall. She flies in after, slow and steady, revealing herself to be in a huge **mineshaft**.

BOOK (O.S.)

Lord, I am walking your way.

ANGLE: THE RAMP lowers to reveal Shepherd BOOK, a working-class preacher and former crew member. He smiles as they come out to meet him:

BOOK (O.S.)

(continuing)

Let me in, for my feet are sore,
my clothes are ragged.

EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

We see the camp: a few shacks and a working mine, as our group come down to it, greeted by a few miners, including an eight year old boy that rushes to Kaylee...

ANGLE ON: A CANNON mounted at the edge of town. The guy manning it sees them arrive, also goes to greet them.

INT. COMMUNITY KITCHEN - NIGHT

We see the gang sitting and eating. Comfortable, even laughing a bit. Jayne presents Book with a couple of cigars. Kaylee hoists the boy on her lap.

BOOK (O.S.)

Look in my eyes, Lord, and my sins
will play out on them as on a
screen. Read them all.

EXT. MINING CAMP - NIGHT

Mal approaches Book on the edge of a rise overlooking the town. Mal has a bowl and chopsticks. Book is finishing:

BOOK

Forgive what you can, and send me
on my path. I will walk on, until
you bid me rest.

MAL

Hope that ain't for me, Shepherd.

BOOK

(lighting a cigar)
It's prayer for the dead.

MAL

Then I **really** hope it ain't for me.

BOOK

It's for the men River might have
killed in that bar.

MAL

Weren't River that did it, you
know that. Somebody decided her
brain was just another piece of
property to take, fenced it right
up.

BOOK

You got a plan?

MAL

Hiding ain't a plan?

BOOK

It'll do you for a spell, and the
folks here'll be glad of the extra
coin...

MAL

...but they'll be coming.
Alliance is after this girl with
a powerful will. I look to hear
the tromp of their boots any
moment.

BOOK

You won't.

(off Mal's look)

This isn't a palms-up military run, Mal. No reports broadwaved, no warrants... much as they want her, they want her hid. That means Closed File. Means an Operative, which is trouble you've not known.

MAL

I coulda left her there.

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

As he continues, we see an image of him watching over the sleeping girl, his mind racing.

MAL (O.S.)

I had an out -- hell, I had every reason in the 'verse to leave her lay and haul anchor.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

BOOK

Not your way, Mal.

MAL

I have a way?

(thinks)

Is that better than a plan?

BOOK

You can play the thug all you want, but there's more to you than you're ever like to 'fess.

MAL

You just think that 'cause my eyes is all sorrowful and pretty.

BOOK

Only one thing is gonna walk you through this, Mal. Belief.

MAL

Sermons make me sleepy, Shepherd. I ain't looking for help from on high. That's a long wait for a train don't come.

BOOK

When I talk about belief, why do
you always assume I'm talking
about God?

(Mal has no response)

They'll come at you sideways.

As he continues, we see:

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

Inara stands waiting, her back to us, in front of the very
vista we first saw her before.

The Operative comes slowly up the staircase, stands before
her.

BOOK (V.O.)

It's how they think: sideways.
It's how they move. Sidle up and
smile, hit you where you're weak.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

BOOK

Sorta man they're like to send
believes **hard**. Kills and never
asks why.

MAL

It's of interest to me how much
you seem to know about that world.

BOOK

I wasn't born a Shepherd, Mal.

MAL

Have to tell me about that some
time.

BOOK

(looking out)

No I don't.

He walks away, offering this:

BOOK

(continuing)

Sideways.

Mal watches him go, thinking.

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The Teacher from the very beginning is standing in front of River, whose desktop screen depicts a single, dark planet.

TEACHER

River?

Eight-year-old River is working away, not paying attention.

TEACHER

(continuing)

River, you look tired. I think everybody's a little tired by now; why don't we all lie down.

River looks up, scared. All the other children wordlessly get up from their seats and lie on the floor next to them.

TEACHER

(continuing)

A little peace and quiet will make everything better.

She starts to lie down herself, right on the grass.

RIVER

No...

TEACHER

River. Do as you're told. It's going to be fine. Lie down.

RIVER

NO!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River starts awake.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal does too, shirtless on his bunk.

MAL

Whuh huh nuhwhat?

WASH (O.S.)

(for the third time)

Mal! You up? Got a wave. I'm a bounce it down to you.

He pops up, turns to the screen as the white noise becomes:

MAL

Inara.

REVERSE ON: Inara on Mal's screen. We see her from about chest level up. She, presumably, sees the same.

INARA

Mal. I uh, is this a bad time?

MAL

Good as any.

INARA

Please tell me you're wearing pants.

MAL

(slight grin)
Naked as the day I come cryin'.
How's your world?

INARA

Cold. It's autumn here.

MAL

Still at the Training House?

INARA

Right where you left me.

MAL

I remember it as nice enough.
Picturesque.

INARA

It is that. What about you?

MAL

Still flying. So what occasions
the wave? Not that to see you
ain't... well you look very fine...

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Zoe and Wash are secretly watching both Mal and Inara on two different screens, smiling at their formal shyness.

Jayne enters, wondering what's up...

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA

Oh. Thank you, I... I guess we have something of a problem here. With the locals, I thought maybe...

MAL

You could use a gun hand?

INARA

I'm hoping not. But if you were close at all, you -- the crew -- could take your ease here a while... and there'd be payment...

MAL

Payment is never not a factor. I could sound out the crew... This pot like to boil over soon?

INARA

Soon. Not right away.

MAL

Well, it would be, I mean I would like to... Kaylee's been missing you something fierce --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a general groan among the audience, which now includes Kaylee as well...

KAYLEE

Oh they're so pathetic!

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA

I miss her too. I even miss my shuttle, occasionally.

MAL

Yeah, you left a... got some of your stuff in a trunk, never did get a chance to drop it off.

INARA

Oh.

MAL

I didn't look through the... stuff... just sundries I expect.

Inara smiles blandly, nods. An awkward beat.

MAL

(continuing)

Well, it's kind of late where I'm at. I'll send a wave as soon as I can.

INARA

Thank you.

She disappears. Mal thinks a moment.

INT. BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes up in, buttoning his shirt.

WASH

Inara. Nice to see her again.

ZOE

So, trap?

MAL

Trap.

ZOE

We goin' in?

MAL

It ain't but a few hours out...

WASH

Yeah, but, remember the part where it's a trap?

MAL

If that's the case, then Inara's already caught in it. She wouldn't set us up willing. Might be we got a shot at seeing who's turning these wheels. We go in.

KAYLEE

How can you be sure Inara don't just wanna see you? Sometimes people have feelings -- I'm referring here to **people**...

MAL

Y'all were watching, I take it.

Guilty glances.

KAYLEE

Yes.

MAL

You see us fight?

KAYLEE

No.

MAL

Trap.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

The ship moves gracefully over the mountains.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH

We're about seventy miles from the Training house. And nobody on radar... if the Alliance is about, they're laying low.

MAL

They're about. Find us a home. I'll take the shuttle in closer. Zoe, ship is yours.

He starts out, turns back to Zoe.

MAL

(continuing)

Remember: if anything happens to me, or you don't hear from me within the hour... you take this ship and you come and rescue me.

ZOE

What? And risk my ship?

MAL

(exiting)

I mean it. It's cold out there. I don't wanna get left.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

She is nestled in a gorge, overhanging rocks all but burying her from view. The shuttle on the right lifts off from the side of the ship and glides off, keeping low.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

A line of young trainees files by in robes and red shawls pulled over their heads -- one trainee a good deal larger than the others.

INT. INARA'S ROOM - LATER

She is kneeling in front of a statue of Buddha, lighting a few incense sticks.

The room is sparsely lush -- not as opulent as the shuttle where she entertained men, but still beautifully furnished and draped. A lace curtain hangs in front of the light, casting its pattern in shadow over everything. Including the rather large figure in a red shawl who kneels beside Inara.

MAL

Dear Buddha, please send me a pony, and a plastic rocket, and --

INARA

Mal! What are you doing here?

MAL

You invited me.

INARA

I never thought for a second you'd be stupid enough to come!

MAL

Well that makes you kind of a tease, doesn't it?

INARA

You knew my invitation wasn't on the level --

MAL

Which led me to the conclusion that you must be in some trouble.

INARA

I'm fine! I'm... giddy.

MAL

For a woman schooled in telling men what they wanna hear, you ain't much of a liar.

INARA

Mal, you cannot handle this man.

THE OPERATIVE

(entering)

I have to say, I'm impressed that you would come for her yourself. And that you would make it this far in that outfit.

MAL

(standing)

I can be very graceful when I need to.

THE OPERATIVE

I've no doubt.

Mal sheds his shawl and robe. Inara kneels at the alter, picks out another incense stick.

MAL

What are you doing?

INARA

I'm praying for you, Mal.

THE OPERATIVE

That's very thoughtful. But I mean it when I say you're not in any danger.

MAL

Speak your piece.

THE OPERATIVE

I think you're beginning to understand how dangerous River Tam is.

MAL

She is a mite unpredictable. Mood swings, of a sort.

THE OPERATIVE

It's worse than you know.

MAL

It usually is.

THE OPERATIVE

That girl will rain destruction down on you and your ship. She's an albatross, Captain.

MAL

Way I remember it, albatross was
a ship's good luck... til some
idiot killed it.

(to Inara)

Yes, I've read a poem. Try not to
faint.

The Operative moves further into the room. Whenever he
moves, Mal counters.

THE OPERATIVE

I've seen your war record. I know
how you must feel about the
Alliance.

MAL

You really don't.

THE OPERATIVE

Fair to say. But I have to hope
you understand you can't beat us.

MAL

I got no need to beat you. I just
wanna go my way.

THE OPERATIVE

And you can do that, once you let
me take the girl back home. Give
me the opportunity to help you.

MAL

All I gotta do is let you take one
more thing away from me. I've had
a lot of things taken in my time.
And it may just be that this is
one too many.

THE OPERATIVE

This psychotic, potentially
murderous girl who can't have the
slightest awareness of your
protection. This is where you
"draw the line".

MAL

Well I'm a whimsical soul.

THE OPERATIVE

There's a number of lives that
hang in the balance here. Lives
under your care. Are they as
whimsical as yourself?

MAL

I got no notion that I'm being
heroical at all. Any more than I
think you're really just a
harmless bureaucrat come to help
me out. You move like a killer.

The Operative is stopped by this. Unhappily, he continues:

THE OPERATIVE

I have a warship in deep orbit,
Captain. We locked on to
Serenity's pulse beacon the moment
you hit atmo. I can speak a word
and send a missile to that exact
location inside of three minutes.

Mal pulls a small device, clipped wires sticking out all
around it, and tosses it to the Operative.

MAL

You do that, best make peace with
your dear and fluffy lord.

THE OPERATIVE

Pulse beacon.

MAL

Advice from an old tracker: you
wanna find someone, use your eyes.

THE OPERATIVE

How long do you think you can
really run from us?

MAL

Oh, a jack-rabbit, me. 'Sides, I
never credited the Alliance with
an over-abundance of brains. And
if you're the best they got...

THE OPERATIVE

Captain Reynolds, I should tell
you so that you don't waste your
time: You can't make me angry.

INARA

Oh please. Spend an hour with him.

Mal smiles -- then glares at Inara, mouthing "Hey!"

THE OPERATIVE

I need her, Captain. River is...
my purpose and I will gather her
to me. The brother as well.
Whatever else happens is
incidental. In the greater scheme.

MAL

Why is it that the greater scheme
always makes everything not that
great?

THE OPERATIVE

I want to resolve this like
civilized men. I'm not
threatening you. I'm unarmed.

MAL

Great!

He draws and shoots the Operative in the chest. The
Operative goes down as Mal grabs Inara, moves for the doorway.

The Operative is on him in a second, choke-hold from behind.

THE OPERATIVE

I am of course wearing full body
armor. I'm not a moron.

He tosses Mal hard against a wall, spinning and blocking a
blow from Inara -- she is clearly trained in martial arts,
but he flat-heels her to the ground within seconds.

Mal is going for his gun again, turning, and the Operative
kicks him in the face, sends him back, gun flying. Mal gets
to his feet and they square off. Mal breathing hard, nose
dripping blood. The Operative perfectly poised, waiting.

MAL

No back up? We're making an awful
ruckus...

THE OPERATIVE

They'll come when they're needed.

MAL

I'd start whistling.

THE OPERATIVE

Captain, what do you think is
going to happen here?

They come at each other. The Operative is the much better
trained -- he's fluid, his blows sparse and deadly.

Mal is more bluster and determination, and the Operative's precision is wearing Mal down.

Mal punches wild -- the Operative counters with a spin-kick to the head that sends Mal to the ground not far from Inara, breathing hard. He tries to rise again, painfully, but Inara places her hand on his arm.

The Operative goes to his briefcase by the door, pulls out his sword. His face has taken on that remote kind of fascination as he looks at it.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)

Nothing here is what it seems.

INARA

I know.

THE OPERATIVE
He's not the plucky hero. The Alliance isn't some evil empire. This isn't the grand arena.

INARA

And that's not incense.

He turns to look: the incense stick burns away -- rather like a fuse -- and FLASHES in an explosion of light and sound.

It's a flash-bomb: The Operative sails back as everything goes smoky white and the sound dies to a tiny buzz.

The Operative tries to get his bearings -- and four armored soldiers are in his face, asking him for orders... Mal and Inara are gone. He motions for the men to follow them.

THE OPERATIVE
Just a flash bomb. Go! Go!

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - CONTINUING

Inara leads Mal (who is reholstering his gun) down some steps and along a corridor. The sound is still tinny and weird.

MAL
...I had him...

INARA
What?

MAL
(deafly loud)
I think that I was winning!

EXT. SIDE OF MOUNTAIN, BY MAL'S SHUTTLE - DAY

Mal and Inara move quickly down the mountain. They look to see that Mal's shuttle has four Alliance guards waiting by it. Mal ducks back out of sight, pulls a fancy-looking grenade out of his pocket. Pops the top and hurls it over at the foursome.

CLOSE ON: THE GRENADE, as a series of bars of light go out one by one, counting down --

ALLIANCE SOLDIER

Grenade!

Everybody dives for cover. The moment they do, Mal and Inara race into the shuttle, Mal sweeping up the grenade just as the last light goes out and nothing happens.

One soldier turns to look and Mal shoots him back down as the door shuts on him and Inara.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Inara pushes into the pilot's seat.

INARA

Hang on to something.

MAL

You sure you remember how it --

He nearly falls over as:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle shoots straight up, spinning and heading out.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Inara stares straight ahead, relaxing her grip on the controls. Mal is gone.

INARA

I told you to hang on.

MAL (O.S.)

(in great pain)

I'm fine...

EXT. SPACE - LATER

We are below Serenity as her bay doors are closing, six little objects floating out of her belly like roe.

These objects are roughly the size of pony-kegs, and clearly home-made, parts welded together almost haphazardly. They all spark silently to life -- and shoot off in six different directions, as Serenity herself fires up her Firefly effect and burns away from us.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

The Operative sips tea and rubs his temple.

THE OPERATIVE

(into a com)

Forget the pulse beacon, there has to be another way to track the ship -- get a read on the nav sat. It's a registered transport, you must be able to locate --

ENSIGN (O.S.)

Sir?

THE OPERATIVE

Have you found a nav sat trajectory?

ENSIGN (O.S.)

Sir... we've found seven.

The Operative looks more unhappy than angry.

THE OPERATIVE

(to himself)

Does he think this is a game?

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher and students sleep as River -- as we saw her in the institute, older, with blood seeping from the needle-holes in her head -- makes her way through them.

Slowly she walks to the floating lecture screen. On it is the solar system, glowing lines connecting all the stars and planets. She becomes wide-eyed, breathing hard as it pushes in to one system, one planet...

She looks over to one side of the tent, and we see:

INT. LAB - CONTINUING

Her POV is of the lab. There stand some five older men in formal dress. They stare at her, impassive.

We see flashes of corpses, lying in houses, in city streets -- and a Reaver's screaming face --

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - DAY

And River awakens. A moment to get her bearings, then her eyes narrow with intent.

INARA (V.O.)

We have every reason to be afraid.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

JAYNE

Why, 'cause this guy beat up Mal?
That ain't so hard --

MAL

He didn't beat me up --

INARA

Because he's a believer.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP, A DARK CABIN

As Inara continues, we see: Fanty and Mingo, tied to chairs. Light spills onto their bruised faces as the Operative enters.

INARA (V.O.)

He's intelligent, methodical and devout in his belief that killing River is the right thing to do.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

INARA

I honestly think the only reason we haven't been blown out of the air is that he needs to see her.

SIMON

Needs to see her why?

INARA

I'm uncertain. I would say to be sure of the kill, but... I just know he'll kill us all to get to her.

JAYNE

So no hope of a reward, huh?

ZOE

Did he mention a deal of any kind?

MAL

(looking at Simon)
Give the two of them up. Go my way.

JAYNE

Which you was all ready to do not a day ago. What went sour?

MAL

Cutting them loose ain't the same as handing them over.

JAYNE

That so? 'Cause the corpse I'm about to become is having trouble telling the difference.

SIMON

(to Inara)
Did he say anything about a "Miranda"?

INARA

What is that?

MAL

Don't know who or what, but it's on River's mind. Conjure it might be the reason he's after her.

INARA

You think maybe it poses some kind of threat to the Alliance?

WASH

Do we care? Are we caring about that?

JAYNE

You dumbass hogs, the only people she's a threat to is us on this boat!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River is near the ceiling, keeping herself up in a split again, feet against the walls. There is a wire mesh cover to the light, and she has bent part of it out, is working it inside the lock of her shackles.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - MOMENTS LATER

MAL

Look, we get back to Haven in a few hours time --

JAYNE

Hiding under the Shepherd's skirts, that's a manful scheme --

MAL

You wanna run this ship?

JAYNE

Yes!

MAL

(small beat)

Well you can't!

JAYNE

Do a damn sight better job'n you. Getting us lashed over a couple of strays...

(to Simon)

No offense, Doc, I think it's noble as a grape the way you look to River, but she ain't my sister

(to Mal)

and she ain't your crew. Oh, and neither is she exactly helpless! So where's it writ we gotta lay down our lives for her, which is what you've steered us toward.

MAL

I didn't start this.

JAYNE

No, the Alliance starts the war -- and then you volunteer. Battle of Serenity, Mal: besides Zoe here, how many --

(Mal turns away)

-- I'm talkin' at you -- how many men in your platoon came out of there alive?

Mal stares at him.

ZOE

(dead cold)

You wanna leave this room.

JAYNE

You're damn right I do.

He stalks upstairs. There's a quiet moment.

INARA

This isn't the war, Mal.

Mal turns, eyeing her.

MAL

Are you telling me that because
you think I don't know --

INARA

You came to the training house
looking for a fight.

MAL

I came looking for you.

INARA

I just want to know who I'm
dealing with. I've seen too many
versions of you to be sure.

MAL

I start fighting a war I guarantee
you'll see something new.

Mal walks out into the cargo bay, Inara following, over:

SIMON

We'll get off. River and I'll get
off at Haven and find some --

KAYLEE

Nobody's saying that.

WASH

Nobody besides Jayne is saying
that.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Inara tries to catch up to --

INARA

Mal.

MAL

(turning)

I got no answers for you, Inara.
I got no rudder. Wind blows
northerly, I go north. That's who
I am. Maybe that ain't a man to
lead but they have to follow so
you wanna tear me down do it
inside your own mind.

INARA

I'm not trying to tear you down --

MAL

But you fog things up. You always
have -- you spin me about. I wish
like hell you was elsewhere.

INARA

I was.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Jayne is looking at the storage locker door. A beat.

JAYNE

<Enough of this nonsense.>

He moves to the aft hall, shuts and locks the door. Goes
back to the locker and starts to unlock it, pulling his gun.

JAYNE

(continuing)

No trouble now, little crazy
person... we're going for a nice
shuttle ride --

He opens the door and she is on him in an instant, whip blow
to the throat, the nose -- he **fires** wildly as she jumps on
him, wraps her arms around his neck and topples him back --

INT. AFT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The crew enters, drawn by the shots. Mal is first -- can't
open the door. Looks in to see an unconscious Jayne...

MAL

The other way! Find her and do
not engage!

Everyone piles out the other way. Simon remains, to look in
the window.

ANGLE: SIMON'S POV: There is Jayne, not moving -- and River pops up right in front of us.

He starts, then waits as she opens the door.

SIMON

It's gonna be oka --

She elbows his throat viciously. He drops to his knees, shocked and gasping, as she spin-kicks him to the ground. He doesn't move. She looks at him a moment, then takes off.

INT. CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mal is throwing his shoulder against the bolted door to the upstairs. He gives up, looking around.

ZOE

She's sealed off the bridge. I do not like her there.

KAYLEE

Cap'n!

She tosses him a bolt remover. He starts pulling a bolt out of a panel on the wall, tells Zoe:

MAL

Check the shuttles. She coulda snuck in.

He pops the panel off and starts wriggling in among the wires.

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - LATER

A floor panel hinges open, Mal pulling himself up. He moves quietly to the bridge, gun drawn.

He enters to find River frantically punching up coordinates on a big Cortex screen she's pulled out by the copilot's seat. She whips Jayne's gun at his face, never looking at him. A moment, and Mal lowers his own gun.

MAL

The government's man, he says you're a danger to us. Not worth helping. Is he right? Are you anything but a weapon? I've staked my crew's life on the ~~theory that you're a person,~~ actual and whole, and if I'm wrong you'd best shoot me now.

(she cocks the gun)

Or we could talk more...

RIVER
 (pointing to screen)
 Miranda.

It's a planet. Matches the one from her dream.

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Everyone has gathered. Wash is piloting now, as they are in atmosphere. River is by Simon. She moves restlessly, upset.

KAYLEE
 How can it be there's a whole planet called Miranda and none of us knowed that?

MAL
 Because there isn't one. It's a blackrock. Uninhabitable. Terraforming didn't hold, or somesuch. Few settlers died.

RIVER
 (to Simon)
 I had to show them. I didn't know if you were going to make me sleep.

SIMON
 (hoarse whisper)
 You could've asked...

KAYLEE
 (re: planet)
 Wait a tick, yeah! Some ten years back, before the war. There was call for workers to settle on Miranda, my daddy talked about going. I should've recalled...

WASH
 But there's nothing about it on the Cortex -- History, Astronomy... it's not in there.

MAL
 Half of writing history is hiding the truth. There's something on this rock the Alliance doesn't want known.

INARA
 That's right at the edge of the Burnham Quadrant, right?
 (more)

INARA (cont'd)
 Furthest planet out.
 (Mal nods)
 It's not that far from here...

WASH
 Whoah, no, no --

ZOE
 (moving to the screen)
 That's a bad notion --

WASH
 Honey...

ZOE
 I got it, baby.

WASH
 Show them the bad...

She hits some commands on the screen, pulls back to reveal a couple of other planets near Miranda.

ZOE
 This is us, see? And here's
 Miranda. All along here, this
 dead space in between, that's
 Reaver territory.

WASH
 They just float out there, sending
 out raiding parties --

ZOE
 Maybe a hundred ships. And more
 every year. You go through that
 you're signing up to be a banquet.

WASH
 I'm on board with the run and hide
 scenario -- and we are just
 about...

He looks at his monitors, looks ahead...

WASH
 (continuing)
 Wait...

EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

The ship swings around a mountain to come into view of the camp.

It is a world of fire.

Every building burns, some blown right apart. Bodies litter the scene, not one of them moving. There's a grounded Alliance ship not far from the cannon that shot it down.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

We see Mal's face as the sight hits him like a gut-punch.

EXT. MINING CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The crew pours out even as the ramp lowers, going off in all directions, calling out to people...

Kaylee heads for the burning church.

KAYLEE

Shepherd? Shepherd Book!

She stops, looking at the ground by the steeple. There is the body on the ground, face down. The child she played with at dinner. Kaylee stares, at first uncomprehending.

ANGLE: MAL, moving in the other direction, approaches the cannon, Jayne behind him. He stops and sees:

Book, lying by the cannon, torn up badly from the waist down.

MAL

(to Jayne)

Get the Doc.

He moves to the Shepherd, grabs his searching hand.

MAL

(continuing)

Shepherd... Don't move.

BOOK

Won't go far...

MAL

Shouldn't've been you. I'm so sorry, it was... they should've hit us. They should've hit me.

BOOK

That crossed my mind.

(coughs)

I shot him down --

MAL

I seen.

BOOK
I killed the ship... that killed
us. Not... very Christian of me.

MAL
You did what's right.

BOOK
(not unkindly)
Coming from you, that means...
almost nothing... HNAAH! Ah, I'm
long gone...

MAL
Doc'll bring you round. I look to
be bored by many more sermons
'fore you slip -- don't move --

BOOK
Can't... order me around, boy.
I'm not one of your crew.

MAL
Yes you are.

Book coughs up blood, grabbing Mal. Urgent, almost angry.

BOOK
You... it's on you now... all this
death, this shit... you have to
find a course. This can't mean
nothing. River... you have to...

MAL
Come on, keep it up --

Book grabs Mal's face, talks as though replying to something:

BOOK
I don't care what you believe!
Just... believe it. Whatever you
have to...

His breathing becomes laboured. Hitched.

Stopped. His hand slips away, his blood leaving a distinct
print on Mal's face.

Jayne and Simon run up, Simon slowing down -- going to the
~~Shepherd, but entirely aware he's dead. Zoe and Wash join~~
them as Jayne looks around him, Mal still fixed on Book.

JAYNE

How come they ain't waiting? They know'd we was coming, how come they only sent one?

Zoe realizes the answer, turns to Wash.

ZOE

Get on the Cortex. Wave the Sanchez brothers, Li Shen -- anyone whose ever sheltered us after a heist. Tell them to get out. Get out **now**.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Silence.

Every Cortex screen is on, each looking at a different place. Every one shows fire, destruction or the snow of an interrupted signal.

Mal stands alone amidst the screens, saying nothing. After a long moment, all of the screens hitch, the images replaced by identical images of the Operative. He looks solemn.

THE OPERATIVE

I'm sorry. But I cannot let you hide and I cannot let you run. Things become... extreme. And we wish for another way.

MAL

Don't talk at me like a righteous man. You are a killer of children.

THE OPERATIVE

When God wanted Pharaoh to release His people from bondage -- you know the story? He didn't **ask**. He sent his plagues down upon Egypt. That's me, Captain. The path to peace is paved with corpses. It's always been so.

MAL

So me and mine got to lie down and die so you can live in your better world?

THE OPERATIVE

I'm not going to live there. How could you think -- there's no place for me there, any more than there is for you. Malcolm, I'm a monster. What I do is evil, I've no illusions about it. But it must be done.

MAL

Why? Do you know why?

THE OPERATIVE

It's not my place to ask.

MAL

You will never see River Tam. I'm telling you this.

THE OPERATIVE

Maybe not. But you'll keep her close now, and when I blow Serenity out of the air, this will be ended. You're so terribly out of your depth, Captain. Your old boat can't take the pressure.

MAL

She ain't buckled yet. And the only reason you're talking such a lot is you can't get a fix on us.

THE OPERATIVE

Yes, your scrambler's code is too old for our seekers. You love that, yes? The small triumph over modernity. You really are the noble savage.

MAL

Nobody -- **ever** -- calls me noble.

THE OPERATIVE

But that's what's going to kill you, Malcolm. Nobility. It confuses your text, which is self-interest. And sin.

MAL

~~Only man I know who still believed in sin just died by your hand.~~

THE OPERATIVE

What do you believe in?

MAL

Not a solitary thing.

THE OPERATIVE

If that were true, you'd be
nothing more than a Reaver.

Something changes in Mal's expression.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

But then, maybe you're not that
far from --

Mal flicks a switch and every screen goes dark.

EXT. MINING CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes striding out, where the crew have been gathering
bodies, laying blankets over them.

MAL

Get these bodies together.

ZOE

We got time for gravedigging?

MAL

Zoe, you and Simon are gonna rope
'em together. Five or six of 'em.
I want them laid out on the nose
of our ship.

SIMON

Are you insane?

KAYLEE

What do you mean, the bodies...

MAL

Kaylee, I need you to muck the
reactor core, just enough to leave
a trail and make it read like
we're flying without containment,
not enough to fry us.

KAYLEE

These people are our friends --

MAL

Kaylee, you got a day's work to do
and two hours to do it.

(more)

MAL (cont'd)

(turns from her)

Jayne, you and Wash hoist up that cannon mount. Goes right on top. Piece or two of the other ship, stick it on. Any place you can tear hull without inner breach, do that too.

(looking around)

And we're gonna need paint. We're gonna need red paint.

INARA

(getting it)

<Oh merciful Buddha protect us...>

ZOE

Sir. Do you really mean to turn our home into an abomination so we can make a suicidal attempt at passing through Reaver space?

MAL

I mean to live. I mean for us to live. The Alliance won't have that, so we go where they won't follow.

JAYNE

God's balls, there's no way we're going out there!

And everybody (save River) is talking at once:

SIMON

What's the point of living if you sink to the level of a savage --

WASH

<There's nothing about this plan that isn't horrific!>

INARA

Please, we should talk this over --

JAYNE

I ain't takin' orders from a man has lost his brainstem --

~~And in the middle of it, Mal pulls his gun. Jayne, the most~~
in his face, steps back, hand on his.

MAL

This is how it works. Anybody doesn't wanna fly with me anymore, this is your port of harbour. There's a lot of fine ways to die. I'm not waiting for the Alliance to choose mine.

He walks through the group, toward the smashed cockpit of the Alliance fighter. Struggling to get out is the badly wounded pilot. He sees Mal coming and raises his hands in surrender.

Mal shoots him in the head, turns back.

MAL

(continuing)

I mean to confound those killers, and take my shot at getting to Miranda, maybe finding out what all I'm dying for. That's my theme now. So I hear a word out of any of you that ain't helping me out or taking your leave I will fucking shoot you.

He grabs a body -- drops it at Zoe's feet as he heads toward the ship.

MAL

(continuing)

Get to work.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON THE BODIES as they BURN, flames passing over them and suddenly flickering out as dark falls. They are patches of leathered flesh stretched over bone -- monsters, screaming soundlessly in the nothing of space.

We arm past them to the windows of the bridge, looking in at Mal, watching, with Zoe behind and Wash at the helm.

And we pull back out to see the whole of Serenity for the first time: It is hardly recognizable. Charred corpses on the nose, Cannon atop with a space-suited corpse draped within, long scars, welded-on parts and war paint... the trail of green light burns out with sporadic bursts of vapor.

It looks, for all the world, like a Reaver ship.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Mal comes down the stairs to the catwalk. He hesitates, then steps into the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

It's dark in here. Mal stands with his back to the door, no light on his face, shaking. Not crying, but overcome.

INARA

Mal.

He looks up: she's in the corner looking through that trunk of hers, hands on a long oilcloth wrapped around something.

MAL

Didn't see you.

INARA

I figured that.

MAL

Anything of use in there?

INARA

Maybe.

She puts it down and crosses to the bed. He sits by her.

MAL

You don't have to stay in the shuttle, you know. There's empty rooms, if you wanna sleep awhile.

INARA

You think anyone's set to sleep? Simon's portioning out overdoses of morphine, just in case.

MAL

Cheerful fellow.
(looking around)
Did you really miss this place?

INARA

(rueful smile)
Sometimes... Not so much right now.

A beat. He doesn't look at her when he asks:

MAL

Why did you leave?

~~She does look at him.~~

INARA

Why didn't you ask me not to?

Dissatisfied, Mal rises.

MAL

I, uh, I'd better go check on the crew. See how the inevitable mutiny is coming along.

They both want to say more. They don't. He goes.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

Serenity flies, silent.

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - NIGHT

The group make their way toward the bridge. Those close enough to get a view out the window are looking freaked -- those already on the bridge are stock still. Pressed up against the glass of the window is River, just staring.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Reverse to see: an **armada**.

The black sky is filled with what must be ninety ships in a vague cluster, as Serenity breaks frame headed toward them. Most of them hang still in the air. Some move swimmingly about. Some turn in gentle drifts, as though looking around.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

They all wait, tensed up, as they approach the armada...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

And arrive, moving slowly through the ranks of ships.

Serenity passes a large, bizarrely shaped ship. It turns, as though watching her. But lets her pass.

Another minute, and Serenity is through the Armada, headed for the small planet just beyond.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - LATER

The Operative stares blankly at the Ensign.

THE OPERATIVE

Define "disappeared".

The Ensign just looks uncomfortable.

INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - LATER

Kaylee, Simon and River have left the bridge. The clouds fog the windows, so nothing below is visible.

ZOE

Every reading I'm getting says normal. Oceans, land masses... no tectonic instability or radiation.

WASH

Yeah, but no power, either.

MAL

Nothing at all?

WASH

Wait. Something. Might be a beacon, but it's awful weak.

MAL

Find it.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

As she touches down, filling the frame. After a moment Mal, Zoe and Jayne emerge from the airlock in full suits, armed. Zoe reads a handheld scanner...

MAL

Gravity's Earthnorm.

ZOE

O2 levels check, pressure... if there's anything wrong the scanner isn't reading it.

Mal pulls off his helmet. Breathes, looking around him.

MAL

Well something sure as hell ain't right...

WIDER ANGLE: They're in a CITY. Gleaming metal, spread out for miles in every direction. Portions decimated by fires long since cold, others overgrown with weeds, but mostly intact. But silent, as if trapped in amber.

JAYNE

~~This ain't no little settlement.~~

ZOE

We flew over at least a dozen cities just as big. Why didn't we hear about this?

MAL

Beacon's up ahead.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Out of their suits now, Mal, Zoe and Jayne take point as the entire crew walks along the street, looking about them.

ZOE

Ho.

She moves rapidly, gun out, to:

ANGLE: A SKELETON

Face-down on the ground, clothes tattered. She examines it as Mal approaches, waving the others back.

ZOE

(continuing)

No entry wound, fractures...

MAL

Poison?

JAYNE (O.S.)

Got another one!

ANGLE: JAYNE is by a downed hovercraft. Inside are three skeletons: two grown-ups and a small child. Clothes in better condition, and again no sign of violence.

JAYNE

They's all just sittin'. Didn't crash...

ANGLE: RIVER is quietly becoming more and more upset.

CLOSE ON: KAYLEE walks in front of an office building, staying away from the cars as she hears:

JAYNE (O.S.)

Couple more here...

~~Kaylee takes another step -- and the corpse of a man is~~
pressed up against the glass wall right behind her. Mouth open, skin dead blue, terribly skinny... a thing to haunt.

SIMON
(seeing it)
Kaylee... Come this way. Come
here. Don't --

But she looks --

KAYLEE
GAAAAaaoh God --

-- and steps back, horrified, as the others approach.

It's an office. About half the employees are there, in chairs or on the ground, all in the same state as the first fellow. We see ANGLES of the corpses as the gang evaluates...

JAYNE
How come they're preserved?

MAL
Place must've gone hermetic when
the power blew. Sealed 'em.

KAYLEE
(very upset)
What're they doing? What's
everybody doing?

SIMON
There's no discoloration, nobody's
doubled over or showing signs of
pain...

MAL
There's gasses that kill painless,
right?

INARA
But they didn't fall down. None
of them. They just lay down.

SIMON
More than anything, it looks like
starvation.

MAL
Anybody want to bet there's plenty
of food around?

INARA
They just lay down...

They notice River now, in the middle of the street, keening. She drops to her knees, clutching her head.

As she speaks we see, as she sees, FLASHES: bodies. In homes, in piles: an entire world, gently dead.

RIVER

<Merciful God please take me away>, make them stop, they're everywhere, every city every house every room, they're all inside me, I can hear them all and they're saying **nothing! GET UP! PLEASE, GET THEM UP!** <I will close my ears and my heart and I will be a stone>, please God make me a stone...

JAYNE

(upset)

She's starting to damage my calm.

ZOE

Jayne --

JAYNE

She's right! Everybody's dead! This whole world is dead for no reason!

WASH

Let's get to the beacon.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - DAY

It's small -- landing is easier in cities with flying vehicles. At the end of a short runway, tipped and damaged, is an Alliance Research Vessel. The gang makes its way towards it.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - DAY

It's a mess, doors pried open, signs of violence but no bodies. The gang walks through it, looking around.

River pulls away from Simon, suddenly determined. She approaches a console, and a small cylindrical object. She turns it slightly --

A hologram squawks to life amidst them all. First we see images that resemble the flashes from River's mind: Corpses, everywhere. We hear and then see DOCTOR CARON standing exactly where she was when she recorded this message...

(As she speaks, we see angles of everyone watching, taking it in... River silently mouths every word.)

CARON

-- just a few of the images we've recorded, and you can see it isn't... it isn't what we thought. There's been no war here, and no terraforming event. The environment is stable. It's the Pax, the G-32 Paxilon Hydrochlorate that we added to the air processors. It's...

(tearing up)

...well it works... it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Make a peaceful... it worked. The people here stopped fighting. And then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, stopped breeding... talking... eating...

(trying for control)

There's thirty million people here and they all just let themselves die. They didn't even kill themselves. They just... most starved. When they stopped working the power grids, there were overloads, fires -- people burned to death sitting in their chairs. Just sitting.

There is a loud bang somewhere behind her -- she starts, gathers herself.

CARON

(continuing)

I have to be quick. There was no one working the receptors when we landed, so we hit pretty hard. We can't leave. We can't take any of the local transports because...

The bang again.

CARON

(continuing)

There are people... they're not people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax. Their aggressor response increased... beyond madness. They've become...

(more)

CARON (cont'd)
 they've killed most of us... not
 just killed, they've done...
 things.

WASH
 (quietly)
 Reavers... they **made** them...

CARON
 I won't live to report this, and
 we haven't got power to... people
 have to know...
 (loses it here)
 ... We meant it for the best... to
 make people safer... to... God!

She whirls, grabs a gun and fires -- then aims the gun at her
 own head - but a Reaver is on her, knocks the gun away and
 bites her face --

She **screams** continuously as the Reaver tops her, biting at
 her and tearing at her clothes, at her skin.

JAYNE
 (quietly)
 Turn it off.

Wash does, nobody saying anything.

Mal walks outside.

EXT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

He takes a few unsteady steps away from the vessel. Inara
 appears behind him, follows -- he holds a hand out behind
 him, seemingly to make her stop, but then he grabs her
 shoulder, holds her for support. She puts her hand over his.

MAL
 I seen so much death... I been on
 fields carpeted with bodies,
 friends and enemies -- I seen men
 and women blown to messes no
 further from me than you.

INARA
 Mal...

MAL
 But every single one of those
 people died on their feet.
 Fighting.

(more)

MAL (cont'd)

Or, hell, running away -- doing
summat to get through. This is...

INARA

Mal, I need your help with this.
I need you to help me, because I
can't --

He looks at her, folds her into his arms. Brings her face to his, not kissing but **touching**, pressing into each other with the urgency of pulsing, necessary life.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

River falls to her knees, vomiting. Simon goes to her, puts his hand on her back, lets her ride it out.

SIMON

River...

RIVER

I'm all right.

She looks at him, wet eyes full of clarity.

RIVER

(continuing)

I'm all right.

Wash pulls the recording cylinder out of the console.

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The cylinder is on the table. Mal stands at the head, looking at his crew.

MAL

This report is maybe twelve years
old. Parliament buried it, and it
stayed buried til River dug it up.
This is what they feared she knew.
And they were right to fear,
'cause there's a universe of folk
that are gonna know it too.

(touches the cylinder)

They're gonna **see** it. Somebody
has to speak for these people.

He pauses. Everyone waits.

MAL

(continuing)

You all got on this boat for different reasons, but you all come to the same place. So now I'm asking more of you than I have before. Maybe all. 'Cause as sure as I know anything I know this: They will try again. Maybe on another world, maybe on this very ground, swept clean. A year from now, ten, they'll swing back to the belief that they can make people... better. And I do not hold to that. So no more running. I aim to misbehave.

There is a beat as he eyes them all.

JAYNE

My grandma always told me: if you can't do something smart, do something right.

By way of emphasis he loudly cocks his big-ass rifle. Mal takes in the fact that Jayne has spoken for them all.

MAL

That the same grandma told you there was an evil dwarf spirit living in your well?

JAYNE

(nodding)

She was a fun grandma.

SIMON

Do we have a plan?

MAL

Mr Universe. We haven't the equipment to broadwave this code, but he can put it on every screen for thirty worlds. He's pretty damn close, too.

RIVER

Based on our orbital trajectories, he reached optimum proximity just before our sunset. If we make a direct run within the hour we're only 67,332 miles out. At full burn we'd reach him inside of three hours.

She doesn't notice the reactions to her sudden clarity -- she's still somewhat in her own world.

WASH

Still got the Reavers, and probably the Alliance between us and him.

ZOE

It's a fair bet the Alliance knows about Mr Universe. They're gonna see this coming.

MAL

No.

He takes a long moment, his jaw tightening imperceptibly.

MAL

(continuing)

They're not gonna see **this** coming.

CLOSE ON: One of Serenity's jet engines, as it FIRES up.

EXT. CITY - AFTERNOON

Serenity is taking off, leaving the dead place behind.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

He's talking with Mal and Wash again, very animated.

MR UNIVERSE

It's no problem! Bring it on bring it on bring it on! From here to the eyes and ears of the 'verse, that's my motto, or it might be if I start having a motto.

MAL (ON SCREEN)

We won't be long.

MR UNIVERSE

You're gonna get caught in the ion cloud, it'll play merry hob with your radar, but pretty pretty lights and a few miles after you'll be right in my orbit.

MAL (ON SCREEN)

You'll let us know if anyone else comes at you?

DROP BACK WIDE to see: The Operative and ten soldiers are in the room, visible to Mr Universe but not to the screen.

MR UNIVERSE

You'll be the first.

CLOSE ON: the Operative's sword, as he unsheathes it.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We are amongst the Reaver armada. Serenity slices quietly through the ships, as we come around and see Miranda receding in the distance.

Serenity drifts through the armada -- and suddenly another ship fires up, running next to her...

The two ships pace each other, another vessel coming about as though staring at Serenity, who comes closer and closer to frame, till we see the suited corpse draped on the cannon.

It suddenly moves: it's Mal.

He swings the cannon round and fires at the ship pacing them. It BLOWS, fragmenting into burning bits that spiral into other ships, causing two smaller ones to blow as well.

Mal swings around and fires at another ship.

EXT. SATELLITE - NIGHT

In close orbit waits the Alliance force, at least fifty strong, and clearly with high tech firepower. We move in on the Operative's ship, in the middle of the cluster.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As the Operative waits with the others.

HELMSMAN

I'm reading activity in the cloud.

THE OPERATIVE

(into com)

Lock and fire on my command.

(to himself)

You should have let me see her.

We should have done this as men.

Not with fire...

HELMSMAN

Sir!

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

It's the Operative's POV: the swirling Ion cloud as Serenity breaks through and heads at us, fully Reavered out.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

He looks confused, then smiles at the ruse. Hits the com:

THE OPERATIVE
Vessel in range, lock on...
(admiringly)
Bastard's not even changing
course...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

As Serenity get a bit closer, **FIFTY REAVER SHIPS** suddenly burst from the cloud, also heading straight at us.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

The Operative -- and everyone around him - goes big-eyed.

THE OPERATIVE
That's not good...

HELMSMAN
(freaking)
Sir?

THE OPERATIVE
Target the Reavers!
(into com)
Target the Reavers! Target
everyone! Somebody **FIRE!**

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity suddenly lists hard to port -- until she's almost upside down -- the Alliance ships FIRE, missing Serenity but tagging a few Reaver ships, none of whom have slowed down --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal is back on the bridge as we look out at the upside down Alliance fleet, missiles just passing us --

MAL
We're too close for them to arm --

ZOE
This is gonna be very tight --

JAYNE
(entering)
Hey look, we're upside down.

Zoe and Mal shoot a look at Jayne.

WASH
(to himself)
I am a leaf on the wind, watch how
I soar.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity slips right under the Operative's ship and ducks and weaves between dozens more. The Reaver force hits the Alliance head on -- and several ships do just that, smashing into bigger ships kamikaze-style, everything exploding --

The fleet mobilizes, blasting Reaver ships, circling around, and an air war begins, a frenzied, balletic ecstasy of destruction that the camera hurtles through as ships and parts of ships fly at and past it.

ANGLE: SERENITY

She nearly makes it all the way through the alliance fleet before a barrelling chunk of debris -- which is twice their size -- forces them to come hard about and remain in the fray.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks out at the chaos...

MAL
Chickens come home to roost...

They are suddenly JOLTED by a glancing blow from another ship -- Wash struggles to control her --

MAL
(continuing)
The hell --

WASH
(panicky)
It's okay! I am a leaf on the
wind!

MAL
(also panicky)
What does that mean?

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity makes her way past the carnage and heads down toward the tiny satellite moon.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

As the vessel shakes, clearly breached, The Operative moves to a door marked: DART. He puts his thumb to a panel and the door slides up to reveal a standing, almost formfitting one-man cockpit.

EXT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - CONTINUING

The Dart disengages and bullets down towards the surface. As it moves from the Operative's ship, we see that a Reaver vessel has smashed into the main viewshield, and the ship is spinning, explosions popping silently all over it.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

She continues down, the metallic expanse of Mr Universe's little moon complex sprawling below them. A moment after Serenity blows through frame, so does a Reaver ship.

It fires an electronic pulse at Serenity and sparks fly.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH

We're fried! I got no control!

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

Sparks -- and arcs of electricity -- are everywhere here. Kaylee jumps back as she is electrocuted -- Simon runs in and pulls her out, slams the door shut on the erupting fires.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

MAL

Where's the back up? Where's the back up?

He and Wash are frantically flipping buttons -- the ship whirs to a semblance of life --

ZOE

Back up reads at 20%...

(to Wash)

Can you get us down?

WASH

I'm gonna have to glide her in!

ZOE
Will that work?

WASH
Long as that landing strip is made
of fluffy pillows...

MAL
(on the com)
Everybody to the upper decks!
Strap yourselves to something!

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We can see it, a long strip, which halfway along becomes a kind of hanger. Serenity arcs at it uncomfortably fast.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is fighting the stick with extreme concentration as Zoe pulls out a seat as well, straps in.

INT. AFT HALL - CONTINUING

Jayne, Simon and Inara pull harnesses not unlike "Batman the Ride" seats from the ceiling, help the others in.

EXT./INT. LANDING STRIP/HANGER - CONTINUING

And Serenity HITS the ground -- the landing gear folds and snaps under the weight -- the ship keeps going, now inside the hanger, heading towards the entrance to the facility, slowing, fishtailing and coming about a full one eighty -- it goes beyond the strip and crashes down into the pedestrian area, so that the nose is sticking back out at the runway but the body of the ship is hidden from it.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a moment of quiet.

WASH
I am a leaf on the wind. Watch --

A massive harpoon CRASHES through the windshield and impales him to his chair. It's as thick around as a telephone pole.

Wash has time to open his mouth in surprise before he is dead.

ZOE

WASH!

She moves to him --

ZOE

(continuing)

Wash baby baby no, come on, you
gotta move you gotta move baby
please --

Mal rips her away and to the floor as another projectile slams through the window into the wall above them.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We see the ship that has fired the harpoons as Reavers start out of it. A second Reaver vessel enters frame from above, about to land next to it.

EXT. SERENITY - MOMENTS LATER

The cargo bay door opens -- just the little door housed inside the ramp -- and Jayne comes out with his biggest gun. He looks up, toward the edge of the runway, but no Reavers have arrived yet.

JAYNE

Go!

The entire crew piles out, all heavily bedecked with weapons.

MAL

Head inside!

INT. BLACK ROOM/INNER HALL - MOMENTS LATER

A small double-sized doorway leads to the "Black Room", which is the entrance proper to the facility.

Mal hits a button and huge, thick, blast doors open from the sides AND the top and bottom, creating the effect of a square hole getting bigger. The hall itself is smaller than the black room, but still has the arrows on the ceiling, that point to an elevator some fifty feet away.

MAL

Come on. Jayne, rearguard.

Zoe slows, looking around her.

ZOE

Sir.

(he turns to her)

~~This is a good hold point.~~

MAL

We all stay together --

ZOE

No. They have to come through here; they'll bottleneck and we can thin 'em out. We get pushed back there's the blast doors.

KAYLEE

I can rig 'em so they won't re-open once they close.

MAL

Then shut 'em and hide til --

ZOE

We need to draw them til it's done. This is the place. We'll buy you the time.

JAYNE

(to the others)

Move those crates back there for cover -- and make sure they ain't filled with anything goes boom.

KAYLEE

Wait, Wash -- where's Wash?

Nobody (but River) realized he wasn't there. Zoe is dead calm.

ZOE

He ain't comin'.

Everybody takes that in, Kaylee's eyes welling up.

JAYNE

Move the gorram crates! Come on!

We hear savage SCREAMS from the hanger -- they're approaching. Mal moves to the door, Jayne beside him.

ANGLE: HIS POV

Reavers rush toward them.

He turns to Jayne.

MAL

Tell me you brought 'em this time...

Jayne smiles grimly, tosses Mal a grenade as he pops his own and **fastballs** it at the Reavers.

It **explodes** in their midst, smoke and man-parts flying about. Mal rolls his a shorter distance, then slams the door shut.

ANGLE: THE GRENADE

Explodes, raining a bunch of equipment -- and part of a catwalk -- right in front of the door.

In the black room, the door nearly buckles from the explosion. Everyone takes positions behind the crates. Zoe stands calmly, her back to the door, loading her sawed-off.

MAL

(continuing; moving
back to Zoe)

Zoe... are you here?

She looks up at him.

ZOE

Do the job, sir.

MAL

You hold. Hold till I'm back.

He takes off -- passes Inara, the two of them holding a look for as long as they can. Then he's in the elevator and gone.

Jayne moves over to Zoe.

JAYNE

Captain's right. Can't be thinking on revenge if we're gonna get through this.

ZOE

You really think any of us are gonna get through this?

He looks back at their army: A companion, a doctor, a mechanic and a more-than-usually out of it River. A beat, and he looks back at Zoe with forlorn hope:

JAYNE

I might...

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator stops and Mal makes his way to the island of screens and machines in the center of the space.

The first thing he takes in is that every broadwave port has been destroyed. The second:

ANGLE: MR UNIVERSE is lying **dead**, eyes open, half draped on his equally still lovebot. A trail of blood shows he crawled from his chair.

Mal comes close. Nothing. He starts to move away again and the lovebot turns her head, her eyes focusing with an audible whir. She speaks with surprisingly realistic expressiveness, and a warped, computery version of Mr Universe's voice.

LOVEBOT

Mal.

Mal stops.

LOVEBOT

(continuing)

Guy killed me, Mal. He killed me with a sword. How weird is that? I got... a short span here... they destroyed my equipment but I have a back-up unit... bottom of the complex, right over the generator. Hard to get to. I know they missed it. They can't stop the signal, Mal. They can never stop the signal.

(beat)

Okay this is painful. On many levels. I'm not --

She turns back, powering down. Recording over.

A beat, and Mal takes off.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

Inara is on her knees, unwrapping the oilcloth we saw in her shuttle. River is in the corner, clutching her head.

RIVER

I can't shut them up...

SIMON

It's okay...

RIVER

They're all made up of rage. I can't...

A BANG as a body slams against the door.

SIMON

Just stay low. I'm right here.

Jayne moves past them to Zoe, takes position by her.

JAYNE

She picked a sweet bung of a time
to go helpless on us.

ZOE

(calls out)

Jayne and I take the first wave.
Nobody shoots less they get past
our fire.

Simon moves to Kaylee, who is shaky as hell. The bangs on
the door continue.

KAYLEE

Oh, I didn't plan on going out
like this. I think we did right,
but...

SIMON

I never planned... anything. I
just wanted to keep River safe.
Spent so much time on Serenity
trying to find us a home I never
realized I already had.

She looks at him with soft surprise.

SIMON

(continuing)

My one true regret in all this is
never being with you.

KAYLEE

With me? You mean to say, as, sex?

SIMON

(smiles)

I mean to say.

Kaylee snaps her cartridge home with way more precision than
we might expect from her, takes steady aim at the door.

KAYLEE

Hell with this. I'm gonna **live**.

Simon looks at her a moment, then turns his attention to the
door.

Inara come up into frame with the contents of the oilcloth:
a bow and arrow, which she pulls back with focused grace.

ANGLE: THE DOOR starts to come off its hinges.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

A panel is kicked in from the ceiling and the Operative drops down, having clearly entered from a different location.

He looks around, carrying a laser-pistol. He moves past Mr Universe and Lenore --

LOVEBOT

Mal.

(The Operative turns)
Guy killed me, Mal.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal has reached it and surveys the situation.

Before him is a railing, and he can look down on the generator shaft. It's miles deep, with machines rotating and grinding, and arcs of electricity ricocheting around it.

On the other side is a platform, with the broadwave console sitting behind a clear plastic partition. Cables and chains run along the ceiling, around a series of ladder rungs.

MAL

Hard to get to. That's a fact.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

The door is pried partially open -- enough for one Reaver to squeeze through and charge.

Zoe stands up and shoots him in the head. He arcs back hard as the second comes, Zoe shoots him, calmly walking toward the door --

JAYNE

Zoe... Gorramnit...

But she is in a trance, and we see beneath the calm, to the bubbling magma of rage that keeps her firing, single shots, each one a kill, till five men down and she's out of ammo.

The sixth comes at her swinging a blade and she blocks, the precision of military training still in her as she flips him, wresting the blade free and swinging it down out of frame, bringing it up bloody, swinging again as the **door bursts open** and she's rushed from behind --

But Jayne totes an automatic, sprays killing fire on the lot, moving forward himself --

JAYNE

(continuing)

ZOE! Get yer ass back in the line!

She looks up, almost confused -- and one of Jayne's targets comes back off the ground and slices at her back with a blade, she screams as he cuts deep -- and an arrow lodges in his neck.

Inara pulls up a fresh arrow, shaking only slightly.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - LATER

Mal is on the railing, reaching for the 'rungs' on the ceiling just above him. He can almost get them -- one wrong move and he pitches into the jaws of death...

A laser shot nails him in the lower back -- he arches, legs sliding off the rail -- he falls and hits the rail with the backs of his legs, flipping painfully onto his face as he falls, mercifully, back onto the platform.

The Operative comes around some equipment for a closer shot as Mal gets shakily up.

MAL

(in pain)

Shot me in the back. I haven't...
made you angry, have I?

THE OPERATIVE

There's a lot of innocent people
in the air being killed right now.

MAL

You have no idea how true that is.

There's no wise-ass attitude in him now. They stand, facing off at ten paces.

MAL

(continuing)

I know the secret now. The truth
that burned up River Tam's brain
and set you after her. And the
rest of the 'verse is gonna know
it too. 'Cause they need to.

THE OPERATIVE

You really believe that?

MAL

I do.

THE OPERATIVE

You willing to die for that belief?

MAL

I am.

The Operative raises his gun -- but Mal is the quickdraw master, shoots the gun out of the Operative's hand and gets two hits to the chest (armored) before he makes it to cover.

MAL

(continuing)

Of course, that ain't exactly plan
A...

He drops out his cartridge and slams another in.

The Operative hides behind some machinery. Tries to peek out at Mal -- and more shots send him scrambling back to cover.

Mal holsters his gun and jumps for the rung above him, starts going hand over hand to the island, moving as fast as he can.

The Operative sees his moment, dives for his gun -- but it's been ruined by Mal's shot. He looks over at Mal with death in his eyes. He runs at the railing, vaults off it, and grabs a chain -- it snaps and he swings, grabbing another.

He reaches Mal and double kicks him from behind -- Mal flies off the rung but grabs a chain -- he tries to kick at the Operative, but the guy is frikkin' Tarzan, he climbs up and pulls a lever releasing one end of Mal's chain -- Mal goes swinging, smacks into the wall six feet below the platform.

He scrambles up just as the Operative swings himself toward the platform from above.

INT. BLACK ROOM/INNER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Jayne is still firing continuously as he drags Zoe back to the barricades. Simon moves to help -- Kaylee firing now, squinting with effort -- and pulls open the cut back of Zoe's shirt, checks the wound.

SIMON

Spine's intact --

ZOE

Just gimme a bandage.

Simon pulls a spraycan from his bag, sprays the wound with a foam that hardens instantly into an elastic covering.

There are a few gun shots (as well as nail-balls and blades) from the Reavers. Jayne switches weapons, tossing another to Zoe and opening fire --

JAYNE

Oh, now you're likin' guns, huh?
Cheaters!

He takes a hit in the shoulder, grimaces and keeps firing.

River watches, the gun limp in her hand. Kaylee grabs it and starts another round -- but she's peppered with dart-like projectiles. She screams and drops the weapon, pulling the projectiles from her -- Inara helps her up, pulls her back as Zoe shouts:

ZOE

Everybody fall back! Fall back!

Everyone stumbles or is dragged into the inner corridor. Inara hits the controls and the doors start to close, from each side and above and below. Then, when the hole is maybe four by four, they **stop**.

ZOE

(continuing)
Jayne! Grenade!

JAYNE

Very last one...

He tosses it through the hole. Zoe doesn't even flinch from the blast as she thinks.

ZOE

They're gonna get in --

KAYLEE

Can close it... from outside...

ZOE

No one's coming back from that...

She tries to stand, fails.

ZOE

(continuing)
How much ammo do we have?

JAYNE

We got three full cartridges and my swingin' cod. That's all.

Inara is by the elevator, pounding for it to come.

INARA

Lift isn't moving...

ZOE

When they come, try to plug the hole with 'em...

Kaylee cries out and Simon moves to her.

KAYLEE

I'm starting to lose some feeling here... I think there's something in them darts they threwed at me.

SIMON

Lie still. I'm gonna give you something to counteract the --

He stands, looking around him. His bag is over by Zoe.

SIMON

(continuing)

My bag.

and **SHKOWW!**, the bullet takes him in the belly -- everything suddenly moving very slowly as he spins slightly, one foot lifted, a confused expression on his face -- then speeding right back up as he slams down on his back, gasping for air.

River's mouth opens in a scream she doesn't make.

Blood spreads from Simon's belly. Inara rushes to him, grabs cloth and puts pressure on the wound, puts Simon's hand on it.

INARA

Keep pressure here...

SIMON

My bag. Need... adrenaline... and a shot of calaphar for Kaylee... I can't... River...?

She is by his side, takes his hand. She has a kind of serenity to her, like she understands something now.

SIMON

(continuing)

River... I'm sorry...

RIVER

No. No.

The lights go out. Everyone looks about them. Jayne fires again, but all the sound has bled out save these two.

SIMON

I hate to... leave...

RIVER

You won't. You take care of me,
Simon. You've always taken care
of me.

She stands as the emergency lights come on, giving her face an unearthly glow as she looks down at him.

RIVER

(continuing)

My turn.

She's running so fast, nobody has time to react til she **DIVES** through the hole in the doors, then Simon **SCREAMS** her name, the scream following us back into the Black Room where River lands in a perfect roll, comes up in a room full of Reavers.

Without a moment's hesitation she makes it to the panel, gets the doors closing. She dodges a blade, but a blow to the back of the head shakes her. She weaves around a couple of Reavers to get to the closing doors, but at the last second her ankle is grabbed and pulled out from under her.

The last thing we see is her being dragged back as they swarm over her.

ANGLE: THE BLAST DOORS, as they shut with a shuddering **KLUNG**.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal gets up the chain to the platform. The Operative is on Mal before he gets his footing, tackles him as Mal's gun goes skittering over the edge into oblivion. There is a railing here or Mal would go over as well -- but he comes back with a couple of hammer blows, gets the Operative off him.

They square off, Mal stumbling back into a tool chest, knocking over tools and computer parts.

The Operative reaches behind him and pulls his sword gracefully from the holster under his jacket.

Mal produces his weapon: a tiny screwdriver.

He hurls a toolbox at the Operative and rushes him, gets inside sword range and tries for the neck with the screwdriver -- the Operative blocks it and works the sword point against the edge of Mal's stomach. Starts pushing slowly, despite Mal's resistance, and breaks skin.

Mal looks at the Operative a moment -- and the sword slides all the way through Mal's belly. Mal's eyes go wide.

THE OPERATIVE

You know what your sin is, Malcolm?

MAL

(shaky smile)

Aw hell, I'm a fan of all seven.

He headbutts the Operative viciously, then punches him so hard he staggers back, losing his grip on the sword. The Operative responds with a spin kick -- Mal holds up the screwdriver and the Operative swings his foot right into it, gasping as Mal pulls the screwdriver -- and leg it's stuck in -- back as he rockets his fist into the Operative's chin.

The Operative goes down hard, dazed, as Mal grabs the sword still in his belly.

MAL

(continuing)

But right now...

He pulls the sword out, grimacing. Holds it over the Operative. The smile gone.

MAL

(continuing)

I'm gonna have to go with Wrath.

He stabs down at his foe's face -- but the Operative rolls out of the way, kicks Mal from the ground and is up in a second, grabbing Mal's sword hand -- the sword drops -- and punching him repeatedly in his stomach wound.

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is subdued -- because they are all of them injured and Simon is slipping away. Jayne looks at Zoe.

JAYNE

You suppose he got through? Think Mal got the word out?

ZOE

(almost convincingly)

He got through. I know he got through.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal goes down hard, spitting up blood. He sees the sword, moves -- but the Operative kicks him in the face. Picks him up, Mal too tired to throw a decent punch.

THE OPERATIVE

I'm sorry.

The Operative spins him and **DIGS** his bunched fingers right into the same nerve cluster that he paralyzed Doctor Mathias with. Mal goes rigid, his face a rictus of pain.

The Operative goes near the railing and retrieves his sword. Mal trembles, trying to move -- but nothing happens.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)

You should know there's no shame in this. You've done remarkable things. But you're fighting a war you've already lost.

He lunges -- and Mal twists gracefully out of the way, grabbing the Operative's swordhand and pulling it forward -- while driving his elbow into the Operative's neck with staggering force.

MAL

Well, I'm known for that.

The Operative drops the blade, mouth open, stumbling back, unable to make a sound.

Mal spins him, grabbing both his arms and working his own through them in a twisted full nelson -- then bringing his arms up suddenly, the Operative's mouth going wider as we hear his arms **crack**.

Mal drops him sitting against the railing, picks up his sword, saying:

MAL

(continuing)

Piece a shrapnel tore up that nerve cluster my first tour. Had it moved.

He squats down, looks the Operative in the face.

MAL

(continuing)

Sorry 'bout the throat. Expect
you'd wanna say your famous last
words now. Just one trouble.

He reaches over the railing, pulls the back of the
Operative's jacket through and shoves the sword through the
fabric, pinning the Operative in his sitting position.

MAL

(continuing)

I ain't gonna kill you.

He moves to the console, starts prepping it.

MAL

(continuing)

Hell, I'm gonna grant your
greatest wish.

He inserts the cylinder, turns it slightly. It hums to life.

MAL

(continuing)

I'm gonna show you a world without
sin.

He hits "send all". The cylinder lights up and the broadcast
begins. Here it is projected as a two-dimensional image on
the clear plastic partition, right in front of the Operative.

There are images first of the city -- of bodies, on the
street, in homes and offices.... image after image, just as
we saw on the research vessel -- and in River's mind.

CARON (V.O.)

These are some of the first sites
we scouted on Miranda. There is
no one living on this planet.
There is no one...

Mal hits the controls and a ramp extends towards the other
side. He begins to cross. Never even looks back.

On the Operative, trapped, watching in growing horror...

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

CLOSE ON: A Reaver in EXTREME SLOW MOTION. Face full of
fury, he is swinging his blade in a frenzy of hate.

And a small hand smashes that face so hard that teeth fly --
the Reaver clearing frame to reveal:

River.

She is bloodied, but not killed. She's as she was in the bar -- moving faster and more efficiently than anyone can, ducking and weaving and gutting and kicking and there are piles of Reavers already, she never breaks concentration as she uses their own blades against them, throws them, does everything in her power to stay one step ahead of -- or above -- the mob.

She slams backwards into a wall opposite the blast doors -- and a grappling hook punches through it, just missing her.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

The Operative watches the end of the broadcast. We are on his face through the clear plastic, so the images projected on it blur right before him: the Reaver, Dr. Caron -- and her screaming doesn't stop til something is shoved in her mouth.

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is still trying to patch themselves together when the elevator doors open. Mal staggers out, holding his bleeding side.

ZOE

Sir?

MAL

It's done. Report?

Zoe looks at the badly wounded Simon, is about to give a report -- and the doors start to open behind her.

Everyone turns to look, those who can feebly raising weapons, as the square iris of the opening blast doors widens to reveal River, standing alone. She is holding two Reaver blades, is bloody but unbowed. And the only one alive.

We hold on her a moment, then the wall behind her is **ripped completely away**.

Behind it, grappling hooks chained to a huge tractor pull the wall away as through the smoke come some fifteen Alliance soldiers, who line up, rifles trained on our gang...

SOLDIER

Drop your weapons! Drop 'em now!

ANOTHER SOLDIER

Do we engage? Do we engage?

Mal and the others tense up. River turns slowly to face the soldiers, blades still gripped... A soldier levels his gun at her, sweaty and frantic... others still shouting...

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

The Operative sits in silence, the voices coming over his com:

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Targets are acquired! Do we have
a kill order? **Do we have an order?**

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

CLOSE ON: THE SOLDIER'S FINGER, SQUEEZING THE TRIGGER...

BLACK OUT.

EXT. DESERT PLANET - SUNSET

We are close on a gravestone. It is rounded, looks more like a bell than a headstone. It is topped by a jar built into the stone. The jar is weathered tin at top and bottom, but glass in the middle. Inside the glass we can see one of those slightly moving photos. It is of Mr Universe and his lovebot, and the name Mr Universe is carved roughly in the stone beneath.

The camera moves to the right and we see another such stone, this one bearing the image and inscription: Shepherd Derrial Book.

The third is Hoban Washburne. Wash.

The camera continues moving right, but the next stone houses a small home-made rocket with pieces of paper taped to it instead of a picture-jar. And fixing another slip of paper to it is River.

She moves away from the stone as Mal does likewise. They're flanked by the crew: Jayne, Inara (to whom Mal moves), Simon, who stands holding River before him and hand in hand with Kaylee. He has a crutch supporting his other side.

There is a moment, then they all move aside, saying nothing. Between them walks Zoe, in a simple white funeral gown, holding a burning taper.

She stands at the stones a moment, then holds the taper to the rocket fuse. Stands back with the others.

The rocket shoots up into the darkening sky. They all watch its sputtering tail a moment, then it it explodes in a series of fireworks.

WIDE ON the group, as the fireworks go off over their heads.

We are close on another explosion when it becomes:

CLOSE ON: A BLOWTORCH spitting sparks. Widen to see:

EXT. REPAIR YARD/SERENITY - DAY

Zoe is harnessed to the nose of the ship, welding on a replacement for the very window the harpoon that impaled Wash came through.

INT. DUCT INSIDE SERENITY - DAY

We are close on River as she works inside a crawlspace just above the engine room, replacing wires. Some of them run to a computer screen that she checks and adjusts.

EXT. REPAIR YARD/TOP OF SERENITY - DAY

Mal and Jayne hold onto the cannon as a crane is lifting it off the top of the ship.

Close on Mal as he watches it go...

WIDER ANGLE:

EXT. REPAIR YARD - CONTINUING

And here we see the whole ship for the first time, harnessed by the wings above the ground so she can be worked on all over. The cannon is being hoisted away from her as a crew of repairmen wheel new landing gear under her belly.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - DAY

Kaylee, deeply greasy, tweaks a part on the engine and crosses to the back where Simon, shirtless and not entirely ungreasy himself, is wrenching a bolt into place above his head. A moment looking at him and she can't help herself -- she slides her arms around his chest...

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

On a scaffold, Inara repaints the name on the nose with elegant precision.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - DAY

Kaylee and Simon are just making out like fiends, work completely forgotten. With nothing resembling elegant precision, they sink out of frame to the floor.

A beat, and River's head appears from the crawlspace above, looking down at them with detached curiosity.

EXT. REPAIR YARD/SERENITY - DAY

It's raining as Mal is hauling in the last of the repair equipment. The camera moves around him, skirting the ground of the junkyard, till it lands on a figure in foreground, standing watching him from some twenty feet away.

Mal stops, doesn't turn. Hand near his gun.

MAL

If you're here to tell me we ain't finished... then we will be real quick.

The Operative stands just under the canopy of the nose of the ship, framed by the rain behind.

THE OPERATIVE

Do you know what an uproar you've caused? Protests, riots -- cries for a recall of the entire Parliament.

MAL

(turning)

We've seen the broadwaves.

THE OPERATIVE

You must be pleased.

MAL

'Verse wakes up a spell. Won't be long 'fore she rolls right over and falls back asleep. T'aint my worry.

THE OPERATIVE

I can't guarantee they won't come after you. The Parliament. They have a hundred men like me and they are not forgiving.

MAL

That don't bode especially well for **you**... giving the order to let us go, patching up our hurt...

THE OPERATIVE

I told them the Tams were no longer a threat -- damage done.

(more)

THE OPERATIVE (cont'd)
 They might listen, but... I think
 they know I'm no longer their man.

MAL
 They take you down, I don't expect
 to grieve overmuch. Like to kill
 you myself, I see you again.

THE OPERATIVE
 You won't. There is...
 (small, grim smile)
 ...nothing left to see.

Mal looks at him a moment, then picks up his gear to head
 inside. The Operative starts away into the rain, then stops
 to look up at the nose of the ship.

ANGLE: the newly painted Serenity, standing tall in the rain.

THE OPERATIVE
 (continuing)
 "Serenity". You lost everything
 in that battle. Everything you
 had, everything you were... how
 did you go on?

Mal hits the button to close the inner doors, steps inside as
 they slide together. Glances at the Operative, unimpressed.

MAL
 You still standing there when the
 engine starts, you never will
 figure it out.

The Operative watches the door shut. A moment, and he goes.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Mal stows the gear as Zoe approaches.

MAL
 (to himself)
 What a whiner...

ZOE
 Sir, we have a green light.
 Inspection's pos and we're clear
 for upthrust.

MAL
 Think she'll hold together?

ZOE

She's tore up plenty. But she'll
fly true.

A beat between them before:

MAL

Make sure everything's secure.
Could be bumpy.

ZOE

Always is.

She takes off and Mal heads up the stairs.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Mal comes in and runs into Inara. Jayne passes through as they talk, heading down into his bunk. Pays them no mind. Neither do Simon and Kaylee, in the dining room stowing supplies.

MAL

We're taking her out. Should be
about a day's ride to get you back
to your girls.

INARA

Right.

MAL

(moving past her)

You ready to get off this heap and
back to a civilized life?

INARA

I, uh...

(he stops)

I don't know.

He looks at her, a smile in his eyes.

MAL

Good answer.

He turns and heads into the bridge.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal eases himself into his seat. Takes a moment to adjust one of Wash's dashboard dinosaurs, then looks to his left.

MAL

You gonna ride shotgun, help me
fly?

River is in the copilot's seat, looking intently at the
screens and buttons.

RIVER

That's the plan.

MAL

Think you can work out how to get
her in the --

She is flipping switches without even looking, as the ship
hums to life.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

Her engines fire up and tilt. She lifts gently off the
ground.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks slightly, only slightly nonplussed.

MAL

Okay, clearly some aptitude for
the... but it ain't all buttons
and charts, <little albatross>.
You know what the first rule of
flying is? Well, I suppose you
do, since you already know what
I'm about to say.

RIVER

I do. But I like to hear you say
it.

He looks out at the rain on his windows, at his screens,
taking her up as he says:

MAL

Love. You can learn all the math
in the 'verse, but you take a boat
in the air you don't love, she'll
shake you off just as sure as the
turning of worlds. Love keeps her
in the air when she oughta fall
down, tells you she's hurting
'fore she keens. Makes her a home.

River also looks out at the sky.

RIVER
Storm's getting worse.

MAL
We'll pass through it soon enough.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As we shoot up with her through sheeting rain, towards the top of the sky.

EXT. SPACE - MOMENTS LATER

We are looking down on the stormclouds as Serenity bursts out of them, comes at us, flared by the sun behind the planet as she passes us, her Firefly effect lighting up, about to shoot off into the heavens --

There is a spark and a piece of paneling pops off, whips at camera, blacking out the frame.

MAL (O.S.)
What was that?

THE END