



VIRTUALITY

“Go/No-go”

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"We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are."

-- The Talmud

"I know Kung Fu."

-- Neo, The Matrix

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

Or more accurately we "shimmer in," with a hint of pixilation, as though reality is re-arranging itself into a vibrant tableau, as we find ourselves --

EXT. GRASSY RIDGE - SUNRISE

SOMEONE is lying in the tall grass just under the crest of this ridge, the verdant scene AWASH in SUNLIGHT, the SOUND of CRICKETS filling our ears. The setting feels almost hyper-real, every color and sound heightened until they seem to resonate with our own senses.

A HAND enters frame as a MAN runs his fingers through the preternaturally green blades of grass, each shimmering with dew, before plucking one and bringing it to his mouth to chew... as we RISE into a Spaghetti Western-style CLOSE-UP: keen, watchful EYES under the brim of a dusty slouch hat, eyes that have seen more than their share of bloodshed and death.

MAN'S POV: a bucolic vista of a rural RAILWAY STATION and the sleepy little TOWN built around it. The locale: the American South; the time, 1863. The man raises a set of FIELD GLASSES.

FIELD GLASS POV: a platoon's worth of CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS load supplies onto a short freight train that's also taking on water and coal.

THE MAN lowers the field glasses, then wriggles back on his elbows until he has sufficient cover to stand, revealing that he's wearing the UNIFORM of a Union Colonel. He walks back down the ridge, where an entire MOUNTED CAVALRY TROOP -- nearly a hundred men, most of whom have seen hard action -- wait in a line, their horses snorting restlessly and pawing the grass. As the Colonel mounts up beside his grizzled CAPTAIN at the front of the line --

COLONEL

Caught'em napping, Captain. Men ready?

CAPTAIN

Ready, willing and eager.

The Colonel nods, eyeing the troop approvingly -- until his gaze stops on a young CORPORAL, one leg hooked casually over the pommel of his saddle as he looks away at the morning sun. The Colonel frowns.

COLONEL

Not inconveniencing you are we,
Corporal?

The corporal turns, revealing a handsome face dominated by a pair of arresting GREEN EYES. He smiles an innocent, naive smile.

CORPORAL

No, sir. Just admiring the day.

COLONEL

You new here, son?

CORPORAL

Joined the regiment at Vicksburg, sir.

The Colonel eyes him for a beat longer, something about this new trooper bothering him on an unconscious level. Then he draws his sword and nods to his bugler.

COLONEL

Give us a tune.

THE RIDGE - A MOMENT LATER

The charge SOUNDS as the troop thunders over and down into --

EXT. SOUTHERN TOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

The rebels loading the train at the end of the street scatter. It looks like the Colonel's charge has indeed surprised them. But suddenly, rifles poke out of windows and over the parapets of roofs. Simultaneously, the door of a freight car at one end of the street slides open, revealing a GATLING GUN, while TWO WAGONS are wheeled out of stables at the other end of the street, blocking it off as more Confederate soldiers take up firing positions behind them. As the surprised Colonel and his confused troop pull up --

CAPTAIN

Colonel, it's a trap! It's a --

He's SHOT OFF HIS HORSE. All hell breaks loose: a chaotic bloodbath straight out of a Peckinpah film. Both sides take heavy casualties as bodies tumble from roofs and horses. And right in the middle of it is --

THE COLONEL -- slashing with the saber, shooting with his sidearm, a cool customer in the middle of the chaos and carnage all around him. He wheels and guides his wild-eyed horse with his knees until the animal is SHOT out from under him and they crash to the ground. As he struggles to free his pinned leg, he suddenly hears:

VOICE

You're not fooling anyone, Frank.

The Colonel looks up in astonishment to see:

THE GREEN-EYED CORPORAL

standing casually over him, untouched and seemingly unconcerned by the bloody chaos swirling around him, almost as if it didn't exist.

COLONEL

What -- what did you say?

CORPORAL

I said you're not fooling anyone, Frank.
Least of all, yourself.

And so saying, he draws his own revolver and SHOOTs the Colonel in the chest. The Colonel is knocked back down. He finds himself staring up at the sky... a BLUE SKY that gradually turns DARK, until the cold pinpricks of STARS appear, and we DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE ON THE SAME MAN'S FACE

Eyes closed, head now propped on a temperfoam pillow, some sort of sparely elegant, futuristic HEADSET wrapping around his temples. He opens his eyes, a confused look on his face as he tries to sort out what happened to him. The sounds of battle have been replaced by the quiet, nearly inaudible hum of machinery and electronics, the Technicolor surroundings and sweeping cinematography now swapped for de-saturated hues and a more naturalistic hand-held camera -- fantasy, for reality. REVEAL we're in:

INT. PIKE'S QUARTERS

COMMANDER FRANCIS "FRANK" PIKE, early 40s, takes off his headset, which we'll come to learn enables a neural connection to an advanced virtual reality program, and sits up.

Pike's quarters have a Zen feel, just a few pieces of ABSTRACT ART on the walls, some hand-painted painted Civil War FIGURINES on a built-in shelf by a digital clock. He crosses to a small BATHROOM, where he splashes some water on his face, then studies his reflection in a mirror.

PIKE

Jean -- messages?

A disembodied MALE ELECTRONIC VOICE replies.

JEAN (A.I. VOICE)

Just two, sir. Doctor Meyer would like to speak with you and Mister Braun wanted to know if you'd had a chance to catch the results of the Game.

Pike groans inwardly.

PIKE

And they were?

JEAN

New York, 27 to 10.

That sucks. Pike pulls on a lightweight Patagonia crew jacket, the brand name prominent, and EXITS into --

INT. PHAETON - CORRIDOR

...a long, heavily insulated CORRIDOR, broken up by a series of small PLEXI WINDOWS through which we glimpse SPACE and the distant STARS. As Pike walks along, we PULL BACK through one of the windows to hover --

EXT. SPACE - PHAETON

-- outside the corridor, revealing it to be part of an aft LIVING MODULE of a LARGE SPACE CRAFT, long as a football field and comprised of a variety of interconnected modules rotating with a spinning cylindrical core, capped at the prow by a wedge-like armored flange, like the head of a battering ram, and at the stern by a ring of ion drive THRUSTERS encircling a series of thick alloy DISKS.

The overall look is neither sleek "Star Trek" nor Gothic "Alien" but something much closer to a blandly contemporary NASA design, only scaled up in size and reflecting more advanced technology. The name "PHAETON" is painted on the side beside the familiar NASA LOGO, and a larger CORPORATE LOGO of the private Consortium that is funding this mission. And as we PUSH IN on the ship's name, we CUT TO:

INT. CONFSSIONAL

A MAN faces camera in CLOSE-UP, a RED COUCH visible in the b.g. in this otherwise featureless room. He's in his early 40s, roughly handsome, with intelligent eyes that guard a hard kernel of bitterness. We'll come to know him as DR. JAMES "JIMMY" JOHNSON, a nuclear scientist and engineer. TIME CODE tells us we're watching a VIDEO RECORDING.

JOHNSON

Why am I going? You're asking me this now?

In response to someone's inaudible off-camera prompt, Johnson sighs, then begins a somewhat by-the-numbers recitation:

JOHNSON (cont'd)

Because when technology offers us the chance to expand our horizons, our innate curiosity compels us take it. As a species, we have a need to explore.

(beat)

That what you're looking for?

He looks at the o.c. presence for a moment, doesn't like what he hears.

JOHNSON (cont'd)

Look, I do my job, okay? I'm not here to give the old sales pitch to the dopes sitting back home sucking on the Inter-V teat, okay? That's your problem -- I got enough of my own.

And as he glares angrily at camera, we CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR

A man in an ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR is rolling toward Pike. A beat as we realize it's Johnson. He's a paraplegic, uses his good arm to manipulate the chair's joystick.

As the pair get closer, they exchange familiar greetings --

PIKE

Dr. J.

JOHNSON

El Jefe.

PIKE

(in SPANISH)

How are the children?

JOHNSON

(in SPANISH)

Ready to make big boom.

And as Johnson glides past, heading for our camera --

INT. MESS AREA - SURVEILLANCE CAMERA ANGLE

A very different shot of a very different Johnson: inebriated at a BIRTHDAY PARTY, a bottle in his hand and flanked by several crew members we have yet to meet, as he looks up toward camera and offers a mocking toast --

JOHNSON

"Why am I going?" Hey Fallon -- you still want know why I'm going? 'Cause I like to blow things up!

The image FREEZES as we REVEAL we've been watching this on an SCREEN in a dark room. The frozen image is dragged into an AVID-style editing timeline, as camera PANS to an adjacent SURVEILLANCE-STYLE MONITOR, where Pike can now be seen climbing a ladder into an access conduit, then out of view.

EXT. PHAETON

Camera pushes in on the exterior of the access tunnel: a tube connecting two modules, about a third of the way forward.

INT. VERTICAL ACCESS CONDUIT

Pike climbs up the narrow tube and into a larger HUB where ALICE THIBADEAU and her husband and fellow exobiologist KENJI YAMAGUCHI, both in their 30s look a bit flushed and disheveled for two people supposedly just standing there working a maintenance console.

ALICE

Commander. Hey.

KENJI

How's it going?

PIKE

Alice, Kenji...

KENJI

We were just, um...

ALICE

...Yeah, were uh...

PIKE

I'm sure you are. Carry on.

As Pike climbs past them into another narrow portion of the conduit, the couple trade "busted" looks, off which --

INT. CONFSSIONAL

Alice and Kenji sit on the red couch, holding hands as they talk to the camera.

ALICE

Having a partner makes a huge difference on a mission like this, especially now with "Go/no-go" just days away.

KENJI

(nodding)

It's all comes down to this -- all the planning, all the training. One last chance to pull the plug or take the plunge.

ALICE

(ribbing him)

One last chance to mix our metaphors.

KENJI

Hey...

He elbows her playfully. Then, to camera --

KENJI (cont'd)

Seriously, just knowing she's here, right here -- not a few million miles away -- makes a huge difference.

ALICE

I don't think either of us could've done it ourselves.

KENJI

I don't think anyone could. NASA didn't even consider applications from married astronauts unless the spouse was one too.

ALICE

I think we're pretty lucky. Nothing like a ten-year adventure to add some romance right?

And as they beam at each other and snuggle closer...

RESUME: INT. ACCESS CONDUIT HUB

Kenji and Alice watch Pike as he disappears from view --

KENJI

He knows.

ALICE

Maybe. Didn't help that your pants are on backwards.

Kenji looks down, then shrugs and grins.

KENJI

(suggestive)

Guess I gotta take 'em off again.

And as they start to strip off each other's clothes, giggling like a married couple enjoying a second honeymoon, it's now pretty obvious what Pike interrupted.

ALICE
Have we run out of new places?

KENJI
There's still the core.

ALICE
Zero-G? Could be tricky.

And as they laugh again as he pushes her up against a bulkhead and she wraps her legs around him --

EXT. PHAETON

Pushing in now on a bulbous module near the ship's midpoint, with a skylight-like slit on one outer wall.

INT. CORRIDOR

At the end of a corridor, Pike opens a hatch marked "HYDROPONICS" and enters --

INT. GREENHOUSE

A high-tech oasis in space: a variety of plants growing in hydroponic tables rising in tiers up the curving sides of the module like the terraces of a rice paddy, illuminated by bright LED lighting. Pike walks along a central path at the base of the module, alongside other plants in bins of synthetic soil, meanwhile looking up at...

...microbial ecologist RIKA GODDARD, an attractive woman in her late 20s with a runner's physique, who's testing the solution in one of the hydroponic beds.

PIKE
You're up early. Aren't you on nightshift this week?

RIKA
Couldn't sleep. Hey -- I left some greens down there. Mind taking them to the guys?

PIKE
No problem.

As she watches him grab a bucket of greens sitting nearby --

INT. CONFSSIONAL

Rika on the red couch, talking to camera.

RIKA

You could say plants are better adapted to space travel than we are. They don't need soil, only the nutrients it contains. They don't care if their light comes from the sun or an LED lamp. They have a much greater tolerance for a reduced geomagnetic field.

(beat)

They don't get lonely.

(beat)

Do I miss Earth? Sure. Sometimes. The good parts. I miss the good parts.

Her expression darkens slightly -- or is it wistful?

RIKA (cont'd)

But I guess we're about to say goodbye to all that, the good and the bad... I mean really goodbye.

(pensive)

Ten years...

And as her voice trails off, we --

RESUME: INT. GREENHOUSE

Rika watches Pike exit with something more than just a colleague's casual interest, then goes back to her plants (and the keen-eyed may notice a flash of gold WEDDING BAND on her ring finger).

INT. CONFSSIONAL

Now facing us on the couch: MANNY RODRIGUEZ, 32, a wiry, intense mathematician -- boot-strapped out of a barrio on the strength of his gifts -- and his partner VALENTIN ("VAL") ORLOV, 35, a bearish Russian geologist.

MANNY

When I was a kid, there were these rocks we used to dive off in Rosarito, back when there still was a Rosarito. Once we dared each other to do it at night. You couldn't even see the water... just had to tell yourself it was there.

(beat)

That's what this reminds me of.

VAL
(nodding)
 "Leap of faith."

MANNY
 Yeah -- faith that what we think is out there is out there...

VAL
 ...and we will find it... if we go.
(beat)
 "To go or no go," that is question, eh?

And as they exchange tense looks...

INT. GALLEY

Part of a mixed-use social area that includes a dining area (MESS) and a partitioned-off briefing area. Manny and Val are cooking dinner, Val methodically dicing an onion, eyes tearing, while Manny casually shakes spices into a sauce pot.

MANNY
 You done with that yet?

VAL
 I keep telling you -- is not about just throwing things in pot.

MANNY
 I keep telling you, 'bro, this ain't a restaurant and I've got real work to do.

VAL
 So do I, and your bitchings won't get this done faster, "bro."

At which point Pike enters, setting the greens on a counter.

PIKE
 Fresh from the garden.

VAL
 Good. We make salad.

Pike dips a finger into Manny's sauce pot, gets his hand slapped for his trouble.

MANNY
 Hey!

PIKE
(tasting)
 Needs salt.

He exits, the two men looking after him for a beat before returning to their bickering.

VAL

I tell you more salt, you no listen.
You no ever listen!

MANNY

I no listen? I no listen?! Let me tell
you something you big stupid sack of --

INT. SICKBAY

Pike pokes his head into the compact, high-tech sickbay.

PIKE

Doc? Meyer, you in here?

But the space is empty. Pike addresses the ship's A.I.

PIKE (cont'd)

Jean, can you locate the doctor?

JEAN

Dr. Meyer is in the forward observation
room.

Pike shrugs, wondering a bit at that, then exits as we CUT TO:

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

The planet NEPTUNE is a small blue sphere visible in the center of a wall-sized viewing port. But DR. EYAL MEYER, 36, Phaeton's medical officer, isn't even looking, his attention focused instead on a large PET SCAN of a human brain that has been projected on a translucent wall panel.

The scan renders the twin hemispheres a deep, oceanic blue, while in the center and upper third of the image, an area of neural activity appears as two kidney-shaped ovoids of red -- like pulses of heat in those cool depths.

Meyer, a controlled, thoughtful man, studies the scan with an intent but otherwise neutral expression.

MEYER

Jean, analysis?

JEAN

I estimate a six-point-three percent
decrease in dopamine activity in the
basal ganglia.

(MORE)

JEAN (cont'd)

Also, a two-point-four percent increase in the accumulation of transition metals on neurons in the substantia nigra. Would you like more detail, Doctor?

MEYER

No, Jean. That's fine.

And as he continues to study the scan --

INT. PHAETON - ANOTHER CORRIDOR

Pike enters the long corridor, then reacts to the sight of BILLIE KASHMIRI. 28, entering at the other end. Billie's the ship's computer specialist, but right now she's playing another role, gesturing oddly while appearing to talk to herself.

BILLIE

(to herself)

So as we prepare to slingshot around the iridescent planet of Neptune -- slinging... sling-shotting around the glowing blue jewel that is Neptune...

Pike sighs inwardly, as if anticipating an unpleasant encounter, knows he can't avoid her at this point, and forces himself to keep heading toward the woman talking to herself at the other end of the corridor. But at this point we CUT TO:

INT. CONFSSIONAL

Billie seated on the couch, answering a question.

BILLIE

Am I nervous? Sure. I get nervous every time we make a course adjustment. And now, with "go/no-go"? -- I guess we're all a little freaked out.

(beat)

But so what. This is what we signed on for, right? The real question is whether what we fear is worth what we might find.

INT. EDITING BAY - CLOSE ON MONITOR

We're tight on another editing monitor again, this time watching a SURVEILLANCE VIEW of Billie looking frustrated as she walks along a corridor, wearing what looks like a bluetooth HEADSET that incorporates a tiny VIDEOCAM. A red light pulses: it's recording.

A man's HAND taps a button on a keyboard, and the image CUTS to a DIFFERENT ANGLE from a different surveillance camera--

BILLIE (ON MONITOR)
 ... the topaz-blue jewel that is roaring
 past the burning blue flame in the
 darkness that is Neptune --

FALLON (O.C.)
 Billieeee.

On the monitor, Billie reacts to what is clearly a voice in her headset.

BILLIE (ON MONITOR)
 What?

REVEAL ROGER FALLON, 40, leaning forward to speak into an intercom as he works his editing console, situated amidst a curving bank of surveillance-style monitors that show various views of the ship's interior and exterior. Fallon is both the ship's psych officer and its on-board media liaison, and has an avuncular air that is as disarming as it is misleading.

FALLON
 Just keep it simple. Let the situation
 speak for itself.

INTERCUT: INT. CORRIDOR - BACK ON BILLIE ON THE MOVE

We cut back and forth between the editing bay angles and the real time action in the Corridor. Billie pitches her narrative toward the surveillance cameras, knowing exactly where each one is located.

BILLIE
 Sorry.
 (trying again)
 As Phaeton approaches our final "go/no-go" point, where a slingshot around Neptune can send us home or launch us into deep space and the next phase of our five-year journey to Eridani, the air of tension aboard is palpable.

And now she notices Pike approaching and her face lights up, like a castaway at the sight of a potential rescuer.

BILLIE (cont'd)
 And here's the man who will ultimately
 decide whether ship and crew are fit to
 continue this extraordinary mission.
 (MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)
 It's been a team effort so far, but now
 "go/no-go" rests squarely on his
 shoulders. Frank... I mean
 Commander...?

Pike stops, but his expression remains wary.

BILLIE (cont'd)
 (sotto)
 We could really use some more interview
 footage of you. You know, the last one
 didn't go quite like we, um --

Pike smiles into the lens of her miniature videocam.

PIKE
 Hey Roger, is it true you get a cut of
 every download and webstream back on
 Earth? I'm sure our viewers would love
 to know about the financial interests of
 the ship's therapist. I know I would.

In the editing bay Fallon sighs in irritation, clearly no love
 lost between these two. But Pike just smiles and heads off.
 Fallon speaks in Billie's earpiece.

FALLON (HEADSET)
 Forget it. We'll deal with the
 commander's passive aggression later.
 Head up to the core.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

On the Flight Deck -- the cockpit or control center of Phaeton
 -- co-pilot SUE PARSONS, 32, is kicked back in her chair with
 her feet up on her console, eyes closed and wearing a headset
 like the one Pike had on earlier, while DR. JULIUS "JULES"
 BRAUN, 42, a former NASA scientist and college professor,
 wearing a N.Y. Giants ball cap, finishes a webcam interview as
Fallon nods and edits in an iChat-style window on his screen.

JULES
 ... It's the first large-scale
 application of this technology, without
 which Phaeton would never be capable of
 the near-light speeds that will let us
 reach another star system in a matter of
 years instead of lifetimes...

FALLON (MONITOR)
 Great, Jules, that's all I need.

Fallon's image disappears as Pike enters and makes a quick
 check of the instrument panels. Jules looks over with a grin.

JULES

Oh, and look who owes me money.

PIKE

Blocked field goal and a bad pass interference call -- that's what you call dumb luck.

Jules grabs a small FOAM FOOTBALL, spirals it to Pike.

JULES

No, that's what I call tough D, a good referee, and five g's you owe me, buddy. At this rate you're gonna owe me around five *million* by the time we get back.

PIKE

(tossing the ball back)
I'll make it back in baseball season.

He eyes Sue, still zoned out in her chair. Her eyes flick and move to images only she can see. Jules apologizes for her.

JULES

She was up all night checking the acceleration grids for erosion.
(re: her headset)
Said she had to "get wet."
(off his look)
Surfing. It's her new thing.

Pike nods and exits, as we push in on Sue's headset until we hear the FAINT SOUND of BREAKING WAVES, as if we're listening to a sea shell, and a broad grin spreads across her face...

EXT. PHAETON

Pushing in on a section near the prow, where a reinforced viewing window looks out on the void. We've traversed the length of the ship.

INT. PHAETON - OBSERVATION ROOM

The doctor now staring out at that distant "blue jewel" of Neptune, hanging in space. He doesn't turn as Pike enters.

PIKE

Hey, doc. You wanted to see me?

MEYER

Yes. I've got something I need to tell you...

(turning to face him)
(MORE)

MEYER (cont'd)

...and I'm afraid it may seriously jeopardize the mission. A member of the crew is ill. Seriously ill. In fact... it could be fatal.

PIKE

Who?

Meyer starts to answer, then glances up at a CAMERA in the bulkhead. He motions Pike closer and whispers in his ear.

INT. EDIT BAY

Where Fallon has indeed been eavesdropping. And as he watches Pike's surprised reaction on a MONITOR, Fallon's face is more intrigued than concerned...

FADE OUT.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

DARKNESS

Then a single SPOTLIGHT cuts through the air -- air that veritably vibrates with the HUM of anticipation as 15,000 unseen people hold their breath -- and FINDS...

A GUITAR PICK

Held aloft in a woman's raised HAND. The HUM builds to a LOW ROAR as those thousands of voices now beg for release. Then the hand DESCENDS, slashing across the strings of a scarred Les Paul guitar in a massive power chord, causing...

INT. TOKYO - BUDOKAN ARENA - NIGHT

... the HUGE CROWD to erupt as Billie Kashmiri, now dressed like a Joan Jett-like rocker, only with a few zillion kilowatts more charisma and confidence -- leads her band, the Hellraisers (the name "Nikki Stardust and the Hellraisers" emblazoned on a BANNER behind them), into -- of all things -- a hard-rock version of the Mary Tyler Moore theme song -- IN JAPANESE. It all but ignites the crowd as they SING ALONG, standing and waving lighters, before the final power chords come crashing down to thunderous applause.

A sweat-soaked, exhausted but jubilant Billie/Nikki Stardust acknowledges the cheers of the crowd with a raised fist -- as we ZOOM IN on her IN-EAR MONITOR, where a voice crackles:

ROADIE'S VOICE

Nikki, we just got a fix on Lazarus' position. He's in Shanghai.

The crowd chants "Nikki! Nikki!" as she triggers a throat mic:

BILLIE

Skip the encore. Prep the chopper.
(to crowd, in JAPANESE)
WE LOVE YOU TOKYO!

INT. BACK STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Billie leads her band off stage, handing her guitar to a ROADIE in a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses, who in return hands her a water bottle and a dossier. She flips through the file, finds a single, slightly blurry SURVEILLANCE PHOTO of a bald man with a scarred face stepping off an expensive YACHT.

BILLIE

This our only shot?

ROADIE

(nods)

And both Interpol and MI6 believe he's changed his appearance again.

BILLIE

All the plastic surgery in the world won't save his ass this time.
Hellraisers -- let's roll!

As she leads her band/commando squad off, we hang back with the roadie, who flips up his sunglasses to reveal a pair of startling GREEN EYES. It's the same man we saw in Pike's Civil War scenario. And off his enigmatic smile...

FALLON (O.S.)

Lunch break's over, Billie.

The screen goes dark as we're SUCKED out of this virtual reality and deposited back into --

INT. PHAETON - EDIT BAY

Finding Fallon at his editing deck and Billie on a couch, taking off her V.R. headset. By now we're beginning to appreciate the casual way these personal virtual reality interludes are woven into the fabric of life on the ship.

FALLON

I finished a rough cut of yesterday's shoot. Thought you might like to have a look.

BILLIE

It's terrible, isn't it? I mean I was terrible. I knew it.

FALLON

On the contrary. You have an obvious talent for on-camera work and I'm going to recommend that you become the new host of the documentary series.

BILLIE

Me? The host? I'm a computer geek, not some Inter-V star.

FALLON

You underrate yourself, as always. The network tells me you test well -- people relate to you, women especially -- and the truth is I was never very good in front of a camera myself.

(re: his editing console)

(MORE)

FALLON (cont'd)

So while I'll continue to lend a hand "behind the scenes," so to speak, I gratefully cede the stage to you.

BILLIE

Dr. Fallon... I don't know what to say.

FALLON

Frankly, it's time I put my focus back on my "day job." Once we pass "go/no-go" and the realities of this mission sink in, my responsibilities as psych officer are sure to increase.

(indicates her V.R. headset)

The virt modules may provide a psychological haven of sorts -- a safe environment for the crew to defuse their anxieties... "blow off steam" -- but there are still bound to be tensions, and I'm afraid some of them may be displaced onto you.

BILLIE

Onto me? Why?

FALLON

It would be natural for some of the crew to develop feelings of envy or resentment. In a way, you'll be the narrator of this mission -- helping to shape the way it's perceived by billions of viewers. No doubt there are some aboard Phaeton who will complain about your choices.

JEAN

Excuse me, Dr. Fallon. Manny and Val would like to speak with you.

FALLON

Speaking of complaints -- I'll be right with them, Jean.

(to Billie)

We'll talk more later. For now, congratulations and enjoy your accomplishment. You earned it.

And as Billie stands to leave, still absorbing it all...

INT. PHAETON - BIO-LAB - CLOSE ON MONITOR

Where KATE THIBADEAU, late 20s, is propped up in a hospital bed, breast-feeding her newborn son as she beams at camera.

KATE (MONITOR)

Nothing like being reduced to a source of nourishment to put you in your place. Seriously, 'sis, I hope you know how grateful we are to you for helping us relocate. Don't know if you see a lot of news footage up there, but the Gulf Coast looks like a lost cause.

REVEAL Alice is watching the screen, while Rika studies some slides in a microscope nearby. Kate starts tearing up.

KATE (MONITOR) (cont'd)

Little Coker here will be in his teens by the time you get back... so he'll thank his big brave aunt in person --
(the baby starts crying)
Whoops. Better hang up before I start bawling too. Bye, 'sis. Love you.

The screen goes BLANK. Alice stares at her blank screen for a thoughtful beat, while Rika looks over sympathetically.

RIKA

I ever tell you I was seriously thinking of getting pregnant right before we went into training?

KATE

No. You?

RIKA

Yeah. Wasn't the right time though -- lot of reasons, not just the mission.
(beat)
Sometimes I wonder if I made the right choice...

Alice looks surprised as she goes back to work, manipulating a 3-D model of a primordial RNA molecule on her screen.

RIKA (cont'd)

You and Kenji ever talk about kids?

Even as Alice talks, her pace and focus on her work only increases, as if she's trying to distract herself.

ALICE

Sure. And we knew when we applied that it meant giving up having kids. But it was a conscious decision and we don't have any regrets.

Rika nods, then goes back to work. OFF Alice, her expression nearly blank as she fixates on the computer screen...

INT. EDIT BAY

Monitors now playing news and weather broadcasts from Earth, including a satellite view of a massive hurricane spiral hanging over the Gulf states. The sound is muted as Fallon tries to focus on editing the footage from Billie's tour despite the presence of two angry visitors: Manny and Val.

MANNY

We are scientists, dammit, PhD's, and you're trying to turn us into a pair of bitchy kitchen queens!

FALLON

I didn't put you in the galley. I don't even make those assignments.

MANNY

And yet the somehow footage of us bickering keeps ending up in the show.

FALLON

I'd be glad to help you with your interpersonal issues in counseling. But as executive producer of this mission I have a responsibility to provide our network partners with an accurate depiction of life aboard this ship.

VAL

We all make -- how you say? -- Devil's bargain. And you are Devil.

Fallon sighs, no longer the avuncular mentor but a harried producer with little patience for the temperamental "talent."

FALLON

I'm speaking to you now honestly and for your own good. Our download and streaming numbers have been slipping. The network wants better material. "More drama." So when you choose to vent your marital issues in the public areas of the ship, they become fair game. And if either of you refuse to cooperate, you'll both be held in violation of the "additional duties" clause of your contract.

MANNY

We're 400 million miles from Earth,
Roger. What are you gonna do -- sue us?

FALLON

That shouldn't be your only
consideration.

He taps a monitor showing a storm surge overwhelming a levee.

FALLON (cont'd)

Dry land is an increasingly expensive
commodity back home and you both have
family members applying for relocation
waivers. You breach your contracts, the
Consortium will revoke the waivers and
your families will have to get in line
like everyone else.

He doesn't need to spell it out; the implication is clear.

VAL

Like I said. Devil's bargain.

JEAN

Attention all crew. Please report
immediately to the Briefing Room.

INT. BRIEFING AREA - A SHORT TIME LATER

Dropping into an intense meeting involving all of our twelve
crew members, who are scattered on various couches and chairs,
our documentary-style POV alternating between our own HANDHELD
CAM and the still jerkier roving lens of the VIDEOCAM now
being wielded by Billie, which at the moment is aimed at SUE,
who's angrily accusing someone off-screen...

SUE

Questions?! Damn right I've got
questions...

...as our HANDHELD now finds VAL, sitting beside Manny with
two mugs of coffee from the galley.

SUE (cont'd)

...starting with how long have
you known about this and why
are the rest of us just
hearing about it now?

VAL

(re: coffee, overlapping)
Careful. Is very hot.

Manny nods a distracted thanks as he accepts the mug... as the
VIDEOCAM now WHIP-PANS to PIKE, responding evenly to Sue...

PIKE

That's really not the issue.

SUE

The hell it isn't, Frank...

... OUR HANDHELD now on KENJI and ALICE, also sitting together, Kenji nodding morosely as he mutters to her...

KENJI

Knew it. Things were going too smooth.

...before Sue reacts to the VIDEOCAM being thrust in her face.

SUE

And get that flippin' thing outta my face!

BILLIE (O.C.)

Just doing my job...

And so on, in this fractured mode, Johnson now observing sarcastically to Rika, who's sitting beside his wheelchair --

JOHNSON

So that's her job now?

FALLON

Please, everyone, let's give ourselves a chance to absorb all the information before making accusations.

SUE

It's a question, not an accusation.

PIKE

And here's your answer: the doctor came to me yesterday with his preliminary diagnosis. I asked him to take some more time to confirm it. He did, and now you're being briefed.

VAL

"Parkinson's." What is this disease?

MEYER

In brief, it's is a chronic, degenerative disorder of the central nervous system --

KENJI

-- Degenerative? Does that mean it's fatal?

MEYER

Not on its own, but it can create complications that are. So far I've only experienced some warning signs. Hand tremors... cramped handwriting --

JOHNSON

-- So you won't win a penmanship award. What's next on the hit parade? You start drooling?

Some of the others cringe at Johnson's caustic tone. But Meyer takes it in stride, as if accepting it as his due.

MEYER

Problems with mobility... also with speech and swallowing. Fatigue. Impaired dexterity and coordination. Possible non-motor symptoms include mood disorders, problems with impulse control and prioritizing and assessing data. Short term memory loss and dementia, including hallucinations and paranoia, are fairly common late-term developments.

And Johnson laughs, the others now turning to him in shock. But Meyer almost smiles too, as if appreciating a bleak joke.

MEYER (cont'd)

Oh, man... we are screwed...

JULES

Can it be controlled by medication and, if so, do we have those medications?

MEYER

Yes, to varying degrees... and yes, but only in limited supplies.

(off reactions)

We didn't plan for something like this.

ALICE

(to Kenji)

So much for all that genetic pre-screening.

Pike steps forward, takes control again.

PIKE

Okay. We were coming up on the go/no-go decision point anyway. All this means is that we're facing it a little sooner than we anticipated...

SUE

I say go.

VAL

Dementia, hallucinations, paranoia...

MEYER

Those are possible symptoms -- and far down the road at present.

MANNY

I'm with Sue. There's a lot riding on this mission and I don't want to turn back unless we absolutely have to.

Val looks at him, surprised, as Fallon plays to the camera --

FALLON

(low)

This is a dangerous moment for the crew of the Phaeton. Hitherto buried divisions and animosities could potentially burst forth into open conflict.

Which is in fact what he is disingenuously hoping to accomplish for by fanning the flames: generate more "drama."

KENJI

How do we go forward with the ship's physician fighting this kind of illness?

JOHNSON

If he's willing, I'm willing. I vote go.

VAL

This is serious business. I want more information.

ALICE

Are we all getting a vote?

PIKE

No one's voting. This isn't a democracy. I'll make the final decision, after hearing the doctor's personal and medical assessment. Nor is anyone else going to be briefing Mission Control or the Consortium about this situation -- got that, Roger?

Fallon makes a gesture of acquiescence, but rather than settling things for the others, Pike's statement just prompts another round of heated overlapping exchanges --

ALICE	JULES
How is that fair? I mean	There's a chain of command --
we're <u>all</u> in this together,	
aren't we?	

EXT. SPACE - THE PHAETON

Cruising through space.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT (V.R.)

A man in a bathrobe stands on a balcony looking out as gentle waves roll in, silvered by a nearly full moon. It's Pike. Again the scene presents itself with a hyper-real palette, as if filtered by the romanticized lens of a Hollywood melodrama.

A woman's arms slips around his waist. He looks back to see Rika, also in a robe. She rests his head on his shoulder.

PIKE
It's always so... restful out here.

RIKA
Not always. There are windy nights.
Storms, even. The last one almost took
out the supports under this balcony.

When Pike turns to look back at her, puzzled...

RIKA (cont'd)
I wanted it to be as real as possible.
Though sometimes I think the program
picks up on my own moods. Tonight -- I
guess I'm in a romantic mood.

PIKE
I guess so.

RIKA
'Course we could meet at your place
instead of mine.

PIKE
(preoccupied)
I don't think you'd like my place.

RIKA
Why? They don't have beds there?

PIKE

Not really.

RIKA

You know, a less secure woman might take it personally when she breaks the rules, invites a man to share the only private space she'll to have for the next decade, and can't get him to share his space in return.

PIKE

Good thing you're more secure than that.

(beat)

It's not something I... can share. My module isn't as... relaxing as all this. More like something I'm trying to sort out on my own.

RIKA

Finding more problems to solve? Don't you have enough of those in the real world, especially now?

(a beat, then)

Can't you let go of all that? Just for now... just for this time we have together?

She takes his hand and, after a last look at the ocean, Pike lets her lead him back into the dark house.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sometime later, Pike and Rika lying in each other's arms, post-coital.

MAN'S VOICE

Hey, Colonel, remember me?

They both sit up suddenly --

ANGLE - THE GREEN EYED MAN

Now sitting in a chair on the other side of the room and dressed in sleek, contemporary clothes.

PIKE

Jesus!

RIKA

Where'd he come from?

PIKE
 (recognizing him)
 Wait a minute -- he's from my module.

RIKA
 Yours? You brought him over here?

PIKE
 I don't even know how to do that.

MAN
 No one brought me over, Frank. But I am here.

He suddenly produces a GUN, a modern automatic.

MAN (cont'd)
 And I told you before, you're not fooling anyone.

The barrel of the gun spits fire --

INT. PIKE'S QUARTERS

The SOUND of the gunshot still seeming to echo as Pike's eyes jerk open again, only this time he finds himself alone again in his bunk on the Phaeton, breathing hard.

INT. RIKA & FALLON'S QUARTERS

A frightened Rika's eyes pop open as a man's hand, wearing a wedding ring, gently removes the V.R. headset that she's been wearing. It's Fallon, lying beside her in bed, having just switched on a bedside light. She, too, is breathing hard.

FALLON
 You're white as a sheet, baby. I warned you about bringing these things to bed.

It takes her a second to adjust to the here and now.

RIKA
 Yeah... gave me a... bad dream...

FALLON
 You want to talk about it?

RIKA
 No. I'm okay. Let's just go to sleep.

She turns away from him, pulls up the covers.

Fallon eyes his wife's back for a beat, his thoughtful expression edging into something else. Then he turns off the light, plunging us into DARKNESS.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

CLOSE ON - A CANVAS ON AN EASEL

An off-screen painter is making adjustments to a striking vista of craggy mountain peaks and forested hillsides, as seen from a lush valley. REVEAL the painter to be Meyer. We're:

EXT. WILDERNESS VALLEY - DAY (V.R.)

The same setting depicted in the painting. No sound other than the sighing of the wind, the occasional buzzing of an insect. Meyer seems at ease here as he uses a fine brush to add some evergreens to a mountainside, then looks up as the same trees now appear on the actual mountainside. He's literally creating this setting with his brush, like some sort of existential landscape designer.

JEAN/A.I.

Pardon the interruption, Doctor Meyer.

MEYER

Yes, Jean?

JEAN/A.I.

Doctor Fallon is with you and would like a word.

Meyer takes a deep breath, drinking in the scene, then reaches up to his temple --

INT. SICKBAY

-- where Meyer REMOVES his HEADSET. Fallon is here, sitting calmly nearby and leafing through a BOOK.

FALLON

(without apology)

Thought we should have a little chat.

MEYER

Isn't the patient supposed to seek help when he's ready for it?

FALLON

Sometimes.

(re: book)

Ninety-two weeks on the New York Times best selling EST list.

He lifts the book and now we can see the cover features a picture of a smiling Fallon in a space suit and the title: "Lessons from the Void: Discovering Your Authentic Self."

MEYER

That a record?

Fallon registers the sardonic note but shrugs it off easily, half smiling as he flips through the book.

FALLON

Nah. The bible's longer.

MEYER

Must've been tough leaving all that acclaim behind.

FALLON

Fame never really appealed to me. The work's always been the priority. Still is. I thought you might want to talk --

MEYER

(waves toward ceiling)
And the cameras?

FALLON

This is a therapeutic visit. These conversations are unrecorded and contain privileged information, not for broadcast -- it's all in the contracts you signed at the outset. Jean could provide you with a copy --

MEYER

That won't be necessary.

Fallon studies a couple of realistic oil PAINTINGS of bucolic LANDSCAPES.

FALLON

Billie said you'd taken up painting. From the level of technique I'd say it's more like revisiting painting.

Meyer can't help glancing over protectively, as if there's something about the paintings he wants to guard.

MEYER

Something I used to do.

FALLON

And now you just happen to be doing it again. At the same time you're diagnosed with a serious illness.

MEYER

Yes. I'm sure there's a connection.
But I don't know what it is as of yet.
I should think about it and then come
talk to you about it when I'm ready.

Fallon eyes him evenly. Meyer knows just how to deflect Fallon as one doctor to another and Fallon knows he knows. On top of that, the two men don't really like each other.

FALLON

Making your own diagnosis must have been
a wrenching experience. How did it feel
when it happened?

MEYER

I'm still processing my feelings.

FALLON

I see.

(beat)

You know, my father was diagnosed with
terminal cancer when he was in his 70s.
Doctors gave him six months. He lived
into his 90s, then died crossing the
street.

MEYER

"Life is unpredictable."

Fallon picks an AMPOULE of medicine off a counter.

FALLON

Ever notice how the language of western
medicine is so militant? We "attack"
infections with "targeted drugs"...
deploy "aggressive treatment strategies"
to combat "invasive tumors." It's like
we're marshalling our rhetoric to
maintain the illusion of control when
the truth is, we don't know with
certainty what's going to happen
tomorrow, never mind ten years from now.

Somehow, there's an ominous note to this otherwise innocuous idea and Meyer finds himself slightly uncomfortable. Fallon starts to leave, then pauses to eye the paintings again.

FALLON (cont'd)

Personally, I always favored the
Impressionist approach: re-creating the
sensation rather than the subject.

(beat)

(MORE)

FALLON (cont'd)
 Reality, after all, is a relative
 concept.

He exits. OFF Meyer, who seems disturbed by the visit...

INT. GREENHOUSE - SURVEILLANCE CAMERA ANGLE

From OVERHEAD, we see Rika showing Pike a piece of dead,
 rotted root from one of the hydroponic beds.

RIKA
 ... problem's the lack of biological
 protection in the root zone. I think I
 can control it by introducing some
 protective microbes into the solution.

PIKE
 Good. Last thing we need is a threat to
 our fresh food and oxygen supply.

RIKA
 Exactly. Let me show you the test beds
 I've been working on...

She leads him OUT OF FRAME.

ANGLE - RIKA & PIKE

Deliberately moving out of range of the camera. Rika glances
 back to make sure they're out of its line of sight. Quietly:

RIKA (cont'd)
 So, what happened last night? Who was
 that character and why would he do that?

PIKE
 I have no idea.

RIKA
 Well, who is he in your program?

PIKE
I don't know. He's not someone I
 created.

RIKA
 What? You mean he's computer-generated?

PIKE
 I guess. Virtual software isn't really
 my field. I didn't think any of us
 could get into someone else's module
 without an invitation and an access
 code.

RIKA

And I gather you didn't extend my invitation to your little friend?

PIKE

So he could execute us in the sack? I'm not that kinky.

RIKA

You have your moments. Well, the computer didn't just do that on its own. Someone had to make a file transfer.

(beat, then worried)

You know, it's exactly the kind of stunt Roger would pull if he knew I was cheating on him --

PIKE

Ho-ho-ho. Wait a minute. No one's cheating on anyone here. I haven't so much as laid a hand on you. This is all just some harmless fantasy.

RIKA

Really? Then you wouldn't mind if I told my husband would you?

From his expression, it's clear Pike would mind very much.

PIKE

Okay. Fine. But he's not a software expert either, he's a therapist. He doesn't have the skills to pull off something like this.

RIKA

Then someone else is screwing with us. Someone in the crew.

PIKE

Whoever they are, they picked a fine time to start playing games.

RIKA

Right. God -- I'm sorry I'm even bringing this up. Are you okay? Have you told Mission Control yet? Are we going home?

PIKE

Yes, no and I don't know.

RIKA

They'll scrub if you tell them, right?

PIKE

Ship's medical officer gets potentially fatal disease? Scrub. No question.

A quiet beat.

RIKA

You really wanna put the whole decision on your shoulders?

PIKE

Well... that's why they pay me the big virtual bucks.

(beat)

We go home, there's not another shot at this for twenty years. Twenty years the way things are going back there...?

He just shakes his head. She kisses him gently.

RIKA

You'll make the right call. You always do.

INT. CORRIDOR

Jules walks along speaking into a small recording device.

JULES

Dear Shawn... a lot's happened since my last letter. We've had some bad news -- our ship's doctor is ill. It may threaten the mission. We all worked so hard for this... *competed* so hard to be a part of it... you'd think that'd be the only thing on our minds right now. But after six months in a metal tube, you can lose track of your priorities. The tedium gets to you... the artificial days... and sometimes instead of facing the real problems, you focus on other things... things that just make you crazier.

As he now opens the hatch to the --

INT. GALLEY/MESS

JOHNSON pops an M.R.E.-style dinner in a brown plastic pouch into a microwave, as Manny, tossing a pasta salad, reacts.

MANNY

I just spent two hours making dinner and you're eating that crap again?

JOHNSON

Sorry.

Manny sighs, as we find Sue grabbing a bowl of food from Val while Jules waits his turn, then angrily trailing Billie back to the table, where Alice and Kenji are already seated.

SUE

Hey -- are you listening? This guy paddles into the line-up, waves like I'm his bud, then cuts me off on a wave. Next thing I know I'm sucking water while I get drilled into the reef. By the time I managed to rip off my headset, it felt like I had really bought it!

BILLIE

You should reset the parameters to no-generated character interaction.

SUE

(duh)
Really? I never thought of that. I programmed it for a mellow break. Mellow. Peaceful. Someone hacked my module.

Billie suddenly gets her drift.

BILLIE

You're looking at me?

SUE

You're the computer chick.

BILLIE

I didn't touch your module.

SUE

Really? Sure you didn't think that programming a little "danger" wouldn't make for a better show now that you're the new host?

BILLIE

Is that what this is about?

She looks around, the others are listening.

BILLIE (cont'd)

That what everyone thinks? That I'd start using your private modules for the show just to get ratings?

SUE
 Sure aren't going to get them on your
 looks.

Billie STORMS OUT.

ALICE
 Sue!

SUE
 I'm sorry, but I know a computer hack
 when I see one and that guy with the
 freaky green eyes was hack a mile away.

ALICE
 That doesn't mean Sue had anything to--

SUE
 Don't you get on your high horse --

JULES
 Hey, I'm eating here.

Johnson wheels over with his nuked meal -- a burger and fries.

JOHNSON
 Shut-up, man. On the verge of watching
 a good old-fashioned cat-fight here.

ALICE
 Jesus.

Alice heads for the door. Kenji follows.

ALICE (cont'd)
 I'm okay...

KENJI
 I know...

ALICE
 No. Really. Just... you know.
 Everything. Need a little time alone.

KENJI
 Sure.

He tries to hide it, but there's a hint of hurt in his voice.
 She kisses him.

ALICE
 (sotto)
 And tonight... maybe we can try the
 core.

Kenji grins broadly. She smiles, then EXITS, hiding her ambivalent look from him...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY (V.R.)

INSERT - a woman writes her name on a patient sign-in sheet: "Alice Thibadeau." CUT TO:

ALICE, as she takes a seat in the waiting room, one of those blandly benign spaces that resist the passage of time. The only other patient, a PREGNANT WOMAN, smiles at her then goes back to her knitting as Alice picks up a magazine-sized reading slate from a stack on an end table.

The slate activates at her touch and presents an opening menu with various media options: Time, Newsweek, Golf Digest, etc. Alice taps the button for "Time" and the screen displays a dramatic cover photo of a blazing wild fire with the headline: The Wildfire Threat: Can It Be Contained?"

PREGNANT WOMAN (O.S.)

Eight weeks?

ALICE

(caught off-guard)

I'm sorry...?

PREGNANT WOMAN

You're just starting to show, so I'm guessing... eight weeks?

ALICE

Yes. Eight.

Alice reflexively touches her belly.

PREGNANT WOMAN

You won't feel anything yet hon, but they will be able show you the heartbeat. That's when it really hits you... the reality of it. At least that's how it was with me.

ALICE

It *is* real, isn't it? It *feels* real.

The other woman nods understandingly.

PREGNANT WOMAN

As real as you are.

She goes back to her knitting. Off Alice, who seems anything but at ease, buffeted by new thoughts and sensations.

EXT. WILDERNESS VALLEY - DAY (V.R.)

Meyer is continuing to paint both on the canvas and the larger canvas of the wilderness. Then his right hand SHAKES slightly, marring his brushstroke, and he watches with disgust as an ugly SLASH APPEARS on the MOUNTAIN SIDE. Reaching for a palette knife to scrape away the mistake, his eye is caught by a GLINT OF LIGHT atop a distant ridge. It seems to wink at him. Picking up a pair of BINOCULARS, he scans the ridge -- and is stunned to find a lone FIGURE looking down at him, using a small mirror to flash sunlight at him.

MEYER

Jean, identify the human figure in my landscape.

JEAN

I'm sorry, Doctor Meyer, but there is no other human figure.

MEYER

I'm looking right at him.

And off his mounting puzzlement and irritation...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - EXAMINING ROOM - DAY (V.R.)

Alice sits atop an examining table, naked from the waist down under a disposable patient gown. The papery material rustles as she shifts uncomfortably, feeling very exposed. A sonogram machine reposes in a corner. Then the DOOR starts to OPEN and we go TIGHT ON ALICE, her face brightening at the sight of --

DOCTOR (O.S.)

Mrs. Thibadeau, good to see you again.

EXT. ROCKY OUTCROPPING - DAY (V.R.)

Breathing heavily, Meyer scrambles up to the top of a rocky ridge, only to find it empty. Exhausted, he walks to the other side where he peers over the edge of a SHEER DROP.

He never even sees the green-eyed man before he PUSHES HIM OVER THE EDGE. Meyer flails... the ground rushes up... at the moment of impact --

INT. SICKBAY

The doctor jerks upright in his chair, yanking off his V.R. headset as he does so. He's sweating and breathing hard, and his right hand is TREMBLING again. But as he puts his other hand over it to steady it, and gradually controls his breathing, he starts to CHUCKLE. Then LAUGH. The adrenaline rush of the fall leaving him exhilarated and almost giddy.

MEYER

Oh my god... whoo-oooo! Jeez-louise....!

As he sits there laughing to himself...

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - LATER

Neptune now looming larger in the window. Meyer is addressing the crew, Pike standing near him, Billie filming again. Meyer seems decidedly less somber and grim than before, a lightness to his whole being.

MEYER

... and Rika thinks we can extract enough levodopa from the plants onboard to provide an adequate supply for the rest of the mission. That should keep some of the more severe symptoms in check.

(beat)

If not, Dr. Fallon is also a licensed physician, and several of you have medic cross-training. One way or another, I'm confident you'll manage.

JOHNSON

I'm glad you're confident. Question is, just how confident should that make us?

Pike looks like he's about to intervene, but Meyer indicates that he wants to answer. He turns back to Johnson, but he's not just speaking to him, he's speaking to all of them.

MEYER

I've been feeling off... wrong... for a while now. At first I thought it was the illness. But now I know it wasn't. I was struggling with... letting go. Of Earth. Of my family. Of everything that had defined my life up to now.

(beat)

I was afraid, and that fear made me feel hollow inside. But today I had this... experience in my virt module. Kind of a glitch, actually...

SUE

(shoots Billie dirty look)
Lotta that going around.

MEYER

Whatever it was, it suddenly forced me to let go -- quite literally.

(MORE)

MEYER (cont'd)
 It was terrifying, but then... freeing.
 Exhilarating. I felt... alive.

In the back of the room, Fallon leans over to Billie.

FALLON
 (sotto)
 Stay with him. Give me a nice big close-
 up here. This is gold.

MEYER
 My illness may or may not prove
 manageable. But as one of you said the
 other day, we're all at risk out here.
 And the biggest risk, in my opinion, is
 not achieving what we've already trained
 and sacrificed so much for. I want to
 live. And I want to live on my terms,
 doing what I want to do.

(beat)
 I want to see Eridani.

He looks to Pike, who eyes him for a beat before turning to
 the others.

PIKE
 I've already made up my mind. But this
 affects all of us... and everyone we
 left behind. So I've decided to make
 this a democracy after all.

(beat)
 I want a go/no-go decision from
 everyone. Right now. Standard mission
 rules are in effect: one no-go and
 that's it.

Looks are exchanged around the room, but no one speaks.

PIKE (cont'd)
 Rika?

She returns his look, trying to keep hers impersonal...

RIKA
 Go.

But Fallon eyes both of them for a beat -- and is it possible
 he does know about them? -- as the vote meanwhile continues
 around the room, with Kenji now announcing confidently --

KENJI
 Go.

Then Alice, trying to sound just as sure as her husband...

ALICE

Yes. Go.

MANNY

(squeezes Val's hand)

Go.

VAL

(returns the squeeze)

Good to go.

Billie lowers her camera, at once tentative and excited...

BILLIE

Go.

JULES

Go.

Fallon's turn. With a look at Meyer...

FALLON

Go.

Johnson's turn. No snark in his voice now. Serious.

JOHNSON

Go.

And finally an impatient --

SUE

Damn straight. Let's light this candle already.

PIKE

Then I'll make it unanimous. It's "go."

A beat as the decision sinks in. Then:

PIKE (cont'd)

All right. Full systems check at oh-nine-hundred, followed by a launch sequence rehearsal. Dismissed.

The crew moves out. Last to leave, Pike pauses to look out the window at the planet hanging in the dark, then reaches out and touches the glass. Finally, he exits, too, as we...

FADE OUT.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - NEPTUNE

Starting close on the curving blue edge of the gas giant, then pulling back rapidly through high atmosphere tendrils of frozen methane, then Saturn-like rings of dust particles, until the side of the moon Triton shoulders into frame -- dwarfing the tiny form of Phaeton, now speeding past it.

BILLIE (PRELAP)

This is it, ladies and gentlemen: the moment of truth. We're about to launch ourselves into the abyss of deep space for the first time...

INT. EDIT BAY/INT. CORE - INTERCUT

Fallon now watching Billie on a monitor as she FLOATS WEIGHTLESS in the CORE -- a large, cylindrical space, with curving walls honeycombed with receptacles where dozens of matter-antimatter WARHEADS ("pulse charges") are housed behind HEXAGONAL HATCHES. A ROBOTIC ARM is loading one of the barrel-like warheads into a delivery tube leading to the stern.

Billie talks to the camera while JOHNSON FLOATS beside her, looking annoyed as he tries to do his job manipulating the robotic arm.

BILLIE

I'm in the Core, surrounded by sixty matter/anti-matter warheads -- more destructive firepower than the combined nuclear arsenals of the U.S. and Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. But these instruments of death serve a benign function here on Phaeton, as our resident physicist, Dr. Johnson, is about to explain. Jimmy, can you simplify it for our viewers?

Johnson doesn't even look at her, gives her the most corn-pone voice he can summon.

JOHNSON

Sure, Billie-girl. Basically, we're gonna blow us up a bunch of big-ass bombs off the ass-end of this ship.

(MORE)

JOHNSON (cont'd)

Those big-ass bombs gonna vaporize some big-ass alloy plates, and the translation of all that big-ass mass into big-ass energy, per Einstein -- ya'll remember him, right? Old dude with the crazy hair -- is gonna make us go real fast. Like yippee-kay-yah, mother-fu --

BILLIE

All right. Thanks Jimmy. Thanks...

Back in Editing, Fallon just shakes his head, taking this in stride. He's already called up a simplified Fischer Price-style ANIMATED GRAPHIC of the process on another screen as --

BILLIE (ON MONITOR) (cont'd)

(to camera)

... And thanks to this week's sponsor: Patagonia, the last word in extreme wear.

JOHNSON

Enough. Get yourself strapped in. We're getting close to show-time.

As Billie floats away, Fallon straps himself into his chair even as he calls up some other footage in the editing bay, showing an earlier interview with Jules, along with another ANIMATED GRAPHIC showing Phaeton's slingshot course.

JULES

-- once we pass go/no-go, that's when we engage the Orion drive for the first time...It's the first large-scale application of this technology...

PIKE (RADIO)

This is the flight deck. All personnel assume stations for the burn.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Pike, Jules and Sue strapped into the forward pilot's, navigator's and engineer's seats, respectively. The rest of the crew -- except for Johnson and Fallon -- are strapped into seats at various stations around the room: more like a mini-Mission Control than a Star Trek bridge. All wear com headsets.

SUE

I'm good here, skipper.

PIKE

Very well.

SUE

(sotto)

You hear back from Mission Control about Meyer and our "go" vote?

PIKE

Nope. 'Course I didn't send the message until about ten minutes ago, which they won't get it for another ninety minutes so we're looking at probably another two hours for a response.

SUE

(grins)

Guess they'll have to grin and bear it.

PIKE

Guess so.

(to headset)

This is the flight deck. Initiating de-spin. Stand by for zero-g.

EXT. SPACE - THE PHAETON

The revolving modules slowly stop spinning, the ship no longer a spiraling bullet but an arrow aimed at Neptune's heart.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Alice's stylus starts to float away. Kenji reaches out and grabs it, hands it back to her... while up front --

SUE

Distance now at 100,000 clicks. Speed increasing to thirty clicks a second.

PIKE

NAV, how's our aim?

JULES

We're three milliarcseconds off in the B-plane. RCS thrusters auto-firing to compensate.

EXT. SPACE

Small thrusters on Phaeton's hull fire, nudging the ship slightly closer to the approaching outer curve of the planet.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

SUE

Back in the pipe, five by five. Ready for slingshot.

PIKE

Initiate.

EXT. SPACE

A spectacular shot as Phaeton threads Neptune's rings -- small ice particles obliterating themselves as they smash off the ship's armored prow -- then skims over its blue atmosphere.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

A jazzed Fallon pops up on Pike's screen.

FALLON (MONITOR)

Getting some amazing stuff here, guys.

PIKE

Happy for you, Rog, but we're a little busy here. Nav, status?

JULES

Perfect burn...

EXT. SPACE

Phaeton now veers away from Neptune, heading into deep space.

JULES (V.O.)

Slingshot complete.

INT. CORE

Where Johnson works his console while Pike turns to him in a window on his screen.

PIKE (MONITOR)

Your show, Jimmy.

JOHNSON

Hope no one had a big lunch 'cause the ride's about to get bumpy. Deploying first charge.

INT. DEPLOYMENT TUBE

The barrel-like charge is propelled down the tube, and into...

EXT. SPACE

...directly behind Phaeton's massive aft "pusher plate." At a distance of 60 meters, it detonates -- the soundless EXPLOSION creating a cigar-shaped wave of plasma debris which IMPACTS...

...the PUSHER PLATE, partially VAPORIZING the surface of the giant disk, the vaporized atoms now providing an equivalent amount of reactive thrust.

The massive SHOCK ABSORBERS connecting the plates to the hull COMPRESS, partially absorbing the explosive jolt, and...

PHAETON leaps forward.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

The crew is pressed back in their seats by the intense g forces, which gradually abate. Jules checks his screen.

JULES

On course. Speed nineteen point two million meters per second -- roughly one-fifteenth light speed

On Pike's screen, Johnson grins.

JOHNSON

Ready for another?

PIKE

Hit me.

A moment later, there's another huge JOLT. OFF Pike's face, as it's plastered back against his headrest...

TIME CUT TO:

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Empty. Lights blinking on various unattended consoles, suggesting the ship is once again under automated control.

FALLON (V.O.)

(dictating)

As I observed in Chapter 5, long-duration space missions present a psychological challenge for maintaining crew motivation, morale and individual well-being.

INT. CORRIDOR

A Roomba-like vacuum skitters along the otherwise empty corridor.

FALLON (V.O.)

Up to now, empirical knowledge of relevant psychological issues has been based on missions of up to one year.

INT. GALLEY/MESS

Empty as well. In the Galley, an unattended COFFEE MAKER drips coffee into an already full pot, while in the adjoining Mess, a DRINKING BIRD metronomically dips his bill into a glass of water -- the two devices creating a minimalist duet.

FALLON (V.O.)

However, the extended duration of the Eridani mission presents unique issues as well as promising opportunities for further study.

INT. CORE

Johnson FLOATS on his back in zero g, wearing a V.R. headset and an expression at once relaxed and intent.

FALLON (V.O.)

The re-purposing of virtual reality technology -- originally designed to maintain mission-critical skills -- as a recreational tool is one new feature...

INT. GYM

A small space, with aerobic machines and a compact resistance setup. Sue is on a rower, eyes closed, V.R. headset on.

FALLON (V.O.)

...that is already showing promise as a means of ameliorating crew tensions and enhancing morale.

Sue pulls the machine's handles toward her, as we MATCH TO:

EXT. RIVER DAY - DAY - AN OAR BLADE (V.R.)

emerges from the water at the end of a stroke. Revealing Sue in a SINGLE SCULL, taking her exercise in its intended natural environment, thanks to the V.R. program.

FALLON (V.O.)

Of course, as with any new therapeutic methodology, there are variables and unknowns.

INT. JULES' QUARTERS

Jules works on a slate, computing trajectories and speeds. Tired, he rubs his eyes, then turns to look at a PHOTO of himself posed with an attractive woman and a young boy.

FALLON (V.O.)

Among them, conflicts between clients' expectations and the still-unknown limits of the technology...

And as Jules' gaze is drawn to a V.R. headset on his bunk...

INT. EDIT BAY

Where Fallon is dictating into his slate, the text appearing as he speaks.

FALLON

...as well as problems that cannot be anticipated due to the unique fusion the technology enables between heuristic computer systems and their biological model...

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT (V.R.)

In a driving RAINSTORM, a man pulls a hybrid car into the driveway of a modest suburban home and parks.

FALLON (V.O.)

...the human mind.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

JULES kills the engine, then looks at the PORCH LIGHT burning in the rain -- and smiles. Home.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - SOMEONE'S P.O.V.

The woman in the photo -- Jules' wife, ROXANNE -- sits at a table paying bills while glancing at a small flat-screen TV, where an internet weather channel is airing flood reports.

Revealing Jules watching her silently from the doorway, a wistful expression on his face. A beat, then she notices him.

ROXANNE

There you are. I told Shawn to go to bed an hour ago, but he's still waiting up for you.

(an old story)

Wants to see the latest blueprints.

JULES

Then I better not keep him waiting.

But he doesn't move just yet. A beat, then she looks up from the bills again with a puzzled expression.

ROXANNE

What?

JULES

Just looking.

She smiles fondly as she turns back to the bills.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (V.R.)

A set of technical drawings and artist's renderings are open on the bed, SHAWN, 8, hungrily poring over them as his father sits beside him. A TELESCOPE is set up by a window. The boy points to the pusher plate and shock absorber assembly at the stern of the ship.

SHAWN

That's the... Orelion drive, right?

JULES

Orion. It's named after the first design for a space ship with nuclear pulse propulsion, almost a century ago.

SHAWN

A century...? That's a hundred years?

JULES

Right. Sometimes it takes a long time for an idea to become a reality.

SHAWN

Don't you wish you were going?

JULES

I'm a a scientist, not an astronaut.

SHAWN

But you designed it, Dad.

JULES

That private Consortium I told you about
-- they're already assembling a top-
notch crew and... *Jean, freeze program.*

The program FREEZES around him as he stands, frustrated.

JEAN

Is there a problem, Mister Braun?

JULES

This isn't my son. He's generic. Could
be anybody's son.

JEAN

The program extrapolates as best it can
based on the data available to it:
public records, school reports, your own
requests and instructions --

JULES

Forget all that crap!

He considers for a beat, then:

JULES (cont'd)

Access me.

JEAN

You, Mr. Braun?

JULES

Yes. Use my psych records, my
evaluations, my family histories and all
other data available to build a more
realistic version of these characters...
then... then tap into the neural
interface and use real-time biofeedback
from my cognitive responses to shape the
characters -- help me find out what
they'd really be like, Jean.

There's a beat -- the entire room SHIVERS -- and then the
scene RESUMES. The boy, Shawn, is still looking over the
plans but now he's silent. Jules sits back down beside him.

JULES (cont'd)

Shawn...?

(when the boy doesn't
respond)

Son... are you all right?

Suddenly, the boy turns to him with a cold expression.

SHAWN

Why do you come home every night now
when you never used to before?

JULES

What?

SHAWN

Why do you come home every night now
when you never used to before...

(beat)

...before we died?

And as Jules stands, stunned by the chilling accusation... and the understanding that it's coming from... himself...

EXT. URBAN PARKING GARAGE - ROOF - NIGHT (V.R.)

A MAN runs across the garage roof, a search light from a HELICOPTER dogging his racing footsteps. A cable dangles from the helicopter, and clinging to the end of the cable...

...BILLIE, in the guise of rocker/super spy "Nikki Stardust" is chasing after "LAZARUS." As the chopper dips low, she drops from the cable, hits the roof and rolls, and is up and running without missing a beat.

At the edge of the roof, the man leaps up onto the hood of a parked car, and then to the roof's parapet, launching himself across a ten-foot gap to an adjoining rooftop.

A moment later, Billie follows without hesitation.

EXT. URBAN ROOFTOPS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS (V.R.)

The parkour-style chase continues with Billie and her quarry leaping across the gaps between buildings and jumping to lower rooftops while the helicopter keeps pace, struggling to keep its searchlight on both pursuer and pursued.

Finally, Lazarus races up a CONSTRUCTION CRANE and into the open top floor of --

INT. UNDER-CONSTRUCTION HIGH-RISE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS (V.R.)

Billie's only a second behind him, but when she comes around the corner Lazarus SURPRISES HER and COLD-COCKS her with a smash to her face. She goes down, then rolls to her feet just as Lazarus steps out of the shadows and reveals himself to be the green-eyed man. Nikki can't suppress her surprise, recognizing him from before.

BILLIE

You -- one of my own roadies? How can you be Lazarus?

GREEN-EYED MAN

(approaching her)

"Lazarus?" We can be whatever we want in here, right Billie?

Warning bells start to go off for Billie.

BILLIE

"Billie?" Wait a minute. How can you know my real name? Jean freeze the --

But she's let him get too close and suddenly she's KNOCKED ON HER ASS by a stunning blow. She looks up in surprise, then anger, leaping up to counterattack out of instinct rather than rational thought.

The Bourne-style fight is surprisingly -- for Billie -- savage and short, much of it played from Billie's POV as the green-eyed-man quickly gets the better of her, then KICKS her across the chin when she's down, before walking a few steps away.

A stunned and woozy Billie raises a hand to touch her bleeding mouth, as her adversary pick something off the floor. We alternate now between close-ups of Billie and her POV, playing the rest of this scene as if we're sharing her experience.

GREEN-EYED MAN

Bitter, isn't it -- the taste of your own blood? Leaves an indelible memory. I expect that's what you're experiencing now. But this...

He comes back to her, now carrying a roll of wire.

GREEN-EYED MAN (cont'd)

... this should be new.

He drags her roughly to an upright girder, then tightly wires her wrists to it above her head. Billy gasps at the pain.

BILLIE

Okay, that's enough. Jean - *freeze program.*

But nothing happens. Real panic comes to Billie.

BILLIE (cont'd)

Jean! This is a priority override!
Freeze program!

GREEN-EYED MAN

Shhh...

He rips off her belt, gagging her with it as he wraps it around the girder as well. She (and we) can't see everything he does next, but she feels his hands on her, pulling at her clothes, sees them unbuckling his own belt. She groans a muffled "No!" through her gag as she struggles to free her hands. But she can't, the wire biting deeply into her wrists, making them BLEED, as we CUT TO --

INT. BILLIE'S QUARTERS

where she lies writhing on her bunk with her V.R. headset on, her hands at her sides as if pinned there by invisible bonds.

We don't need to see what is happening to her in the virtual reality; we know. But even watching her here and imagining her experience is terrible. She writhes on the bunk, eyes darting, body tensing as she struggles to break a mental block and free herself from a fantasy gone terribly wrong.

RESUME: INT. UNDER-CONSTRUCTION HIGH-RISE - CLOSE ON

BILLIE'S FACE distorted with pain, eyes streaming tears as the green-eyed man LEANS IN and whispers close in her ear --

GREEN-EYED MAN

It's your fantasy, Billie. Why not enjoy it?

We push in still tighter on Billie's tortured face for a long, terrible beat, until we hear him sigh.

Then we watch again from her slumped, tear-stained POV as he picks up his coat, then walks out of frame. A beat as we hear Nikki's muffled crying, then --

CLOSE ON Nikki's wired wrists, now slippery with blood, as she finally manages to work one free, then the other...

INT. BILLIE'S QUARTERS

as she tears off her headset, then sits up, pulling her knees to her chest and pressing herself into a corner, finally free to sob openly.

FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. CONFESSIONAL/FALLON'S OFFICE - OVERHEAD SURVEILLANCE VIEW

Now we're looking down on the room where the interview and confessional snippets seen earlier were shot, and we realize it also serves as Fallon's therapy office.

Billie is the couch, looking composed -- no sign of the trauma we just witnessed. Fallon sits across from her in an easy chair. Billie crosses her legs and we CUT TO --

BILLIE - A DIFFERENT SURVEILLANCE ANGLE

Eye-level, this time, the camera ratcheting in slightly and re-focusing with a whirring sound, inaudible to its subject, who sits there looking calmly at --

FALLON - ANOTHER EYE-LEVEL SURVEILLANCE ANGLE

Who sits looking at Billie as she re-crosses her legs. Our camera angles will continue to switch, depending on who's talking, as if an invisible director is recording the scene.

A long beat of silence. Fallon temples his fingers. Billie brushes a lock of hair out of her face. Finally:

BILLIE

So my first thought was that it was a glitch of some kind. Maybe even an Easter Egg.

FALLON

An Easter Egg?

BILLIE

A subroutine left behind by one of the original programmers, as a prank...
(off his look)
...though obviously in this case it got out of hand -- probably because its code became corrupted in some way. But that wasn't even my biggest concern.

FALLON

No?

Billie tucks the errant lock back behind her ear again, starting to show the barest signs of being discomfited.

BILLIE

What really worries me is that I couldn't get the program to stop. Couldn't exit the module without physically removing my headset, which... because of certain aspects of the scenario... was mentally difficult to do. Like my motor control got screwed up or something. Which in turn suggests there's something deeply wrong with the program's source code...

She pauses, waiting, perhaps, for Fallon to interrupt her or comment. When he doesn't --

BILLIE (cont'd)

I think we should take the entire program off-line -- all the virt modules -- until I can fix the problem. I mean what if someone gets trapped in an even worse situation and struggles to get out of it like I did? There could be -- I don't know -- synaptic damage for all I know.

A beat as Fallon waits to see if she's finished. Then:

FALLON

Of course you should do what you think best. You're the computer expert, after all. What I'm left wondering, though, is whether you're treating this a bit too intellectually. A computer problem to be solved -- a "glitch" as you put it -- instead of something very traumatic that happened to you personally.

BILLIE

Well... nothing happened to me, really. I mean *physically* -- in *reality* -- *nothing happened*. If you think about it, it's really no different than a bad dream, and dreams aren't real, right?

FALLON

On the contrary, the events they portray may not be, but the feelings dreams evoke, and the memories they leave behind, can be as real as anything in our lives.

(after she absorbs that)

But I'm also curious why you chose to describe what happened as a dream.

BILLIE

What do you mean?

FALLON

Some people believe dreams are the mind's way of exploring things that would normally be suppressed in the waking world.

BILLIE

You're talking about fantasies. I don't have a "rape fantasy" if that's what you're getting at.

FALLON

I'm not "getting" at anything. What I'm drawing your attention to is your choice of words -- by comparing this to a dream, you're implying this was something you "dreamt up." As if you blame yourself for what happened to you... that maybe you think you deserved it in some way.

And now it's Billie's turn to be silent, staring at him for a moment before her eyes retreat to the floor. The silence fills the room for a long beat. Then she abruptly gets up.

BILLIE

It's a software bug. And that's all it is.

She EXITS.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - LATER

Pike is addressing the ENTIRE CREW. Billie remains silent throughout, giving no indication that she knows anything more than anyone else.

PIKE

As some of you know, there have been some... anomalies cropping up in the virt modules. Unknown characters appearing at random times and places. Up to now, I assumed these were isolated and relatively harmless incidents. A parlour mystery at worst -- maybe even someone aboard wanting to playing hacker in their spare time.

(beat)

No more. An assault has occurred. A... sexual assault.

Shocked looks go around the room.

MANNY

Can you be more specific?

SUE

"Assault" against who?

PIKE

There's a privacy issue here and I'm at liberty to describe the attack in detail or who experienced it. But I cannot imagine any member of this crew having planned or allowed something like this to happen in any way. So in my opinion, this is not a case of malicious hacking. But that means there is a serious defect in the virt software and as a result, I'm ordering the modules shut down immediately.

MANNY

For how long?

PIKE

Until we know for certain the problem has been identified and repaired. I've informed Mission Control and asked them if new software can be uploaded, but Jean tells me it's unlikely at this distance from Earth.

MEYER

So this could be a permanent shut-down?

PIKE

Possibly.

(trying to be light)

I guess we'll all just have to read books.

JOHNSON

Well... we've all experienced computer glitches before and just to play devil's advocate here, isn't it possible we're overreacting?

Sue, Rika, Alice and Billie all look up sharply at this -- the women on the crew taking immediate umbrage --

SUE

You heard him say "sexual assault," didn't you?

JOHNSON

So what does that mean exactly? There's a big difference between someone getting a pinch on the ass and being gang-raped.

ALICE

Someone was violated. By a computer program. It doesn't matter what it was "exactly."

JULES

I have to agree with Jimmy, here. I'm not trying to be insensitive or anything, but these programs are pretty much the only chance for privacy any of us have on this ship, and if all we're talking about is some computer character copping a feel --

A chorus of outrage from the women crashes down around his ears:

ALICE

And that's all right?!

SUE

What kind of thinking is that?!

RIKA

One of these characters shot me, Jules -- is that bad enough for you?

She tries hard not to look at Pike as all eyes turn to her.

JOHNSON

People get shot in their action programs all the time. There's no permanent damage.

RIKA

I wasn't in an "action program." I was relaxing in a beach house. It was supposed to be alone. And an intruder came into my bedroom and shot me. In my bed. When I was alone.

JOHNSON

So you were shot and someone else was "assaulted." Whole thing's a simulation. Go back in, create a couple of machine guns and get yourself some bad-ass revenge. I still don't see what the big deal is -- none of it's real. It's all just in your head.

Suddenly, Billie bolts from the room.

JULES

I think it's a little more real than
that than to one of us...

SUE

You're an asshole, Jimmy.
(glares at the male crew)
Same goes for the rest of you.

VAL

Please not to be including me with them.

Sue gets up and goes after Billie. We go with her, into --

INT. GALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Billie tries to re-fill her mug from the coffee maker but the
carafe is empty. She tosses her mug in the sink, leans on it.

SUE

I'm sorry. They're idiots.

BILLIE

Knew that.

SUE

What they don't get -- what none of them
get -- is even when something like this
happens in the real world... your mind
is where it happens. More than your
body. You're not even in your body;
they've already taken that from you.

Billie turns, her tear-stained face asking a question.

SUE (cont'd)

Training mission. Two guys in my own
unit. I ate with them, racked with
them... That was the worst -- the
realization that none of that mattered,
that I didn't really *exist* for them,
except as...

She trails off, lost in her own traumatic memory.

BILLIE

What did you do?

Sue's eyes become hooded -- a place she can't go.

SUE

You don't wanna know...

EXT. AMERICAN SOUTH - FIELD - DAY (V.R.)

Pike, dressed again as a Union Colonel, stands by his horse, watching his cavalry troop trot by him, saluting as they do, while they sing along to a fife and drum (a popular Union song: "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp"). We sense Pike's saying goodbye to all this, when --

JEAN

Commander, Doctor Fallon is with you.

PIKE

Thank you, Jean.

The scene SHIMMERS AWAY around Pike, until he's back in --

INT. PIKE'S QUARTERS

He takes off his headset, turns to Fallon.

FALLON

Hard to step away, isn't it?

PIKE

Just taking a last look.

FALLON

A last look? Let's hope not.

(beat)

I hope you realize, Francis, the overriding importance of the virt modules as they relate to the psychological well-being of the crew.

PIKE

I remember the psych-briefings.

FALLON

Forget the briefings. Think about where we are now: committed to years of living inside a ship with only twelve other human beings in the world. Without the ability to escape the confines of this metal tube periodically -- to experience other environments and interact with other people, even if they're only computer-generated -- the pressures of the mission will turn inward. Divisions will form among the crew, barely acknowledged animosities and jealousies will crop up, paranoid and even delusional behavior is possible

--

PIKE

Well, we'll have just have to be better than that. We'll have to be adults and take responsibility for our lives.

FALLON

This is not a question of willpower. It's human nature. You know history -- think of the first long-duration space mission to Mars and what happened to that crew --

PIKE

That was a different time and different circumstances. Plus that ship was about a quarter the size of Phaeton, almost guaranteed to drive you crazy.

FALLON

It's not the size of the ship. It's the isolation from humanity and the natural world. I'm telling you as a psychologist, that it is imperative that the virt modules be repaired and reactivated as soon as possible -- and I'm certain that Mission Control, the Consortium and the network will all back me up on this.

PIKE

Well, none of them are here. I command this mission, Roger. And I'll decide when and if the modules go back on line.

Beat.

FALLON

Making a lot of decisions on your own these days, Francis. Just like the commander of the Mars mission did.

PIKE

Nice try, but I'm not going round the bend yet.

JEAN

Excuse me, Commander. There's a call from Jules on the Flight Deck.

Pike taps his computer, and Jules APPEARS in a window.

JULES (MONITOR)

Gotta a problem here, boss. We retracted the com array to run an air-breaking test and now it won't deploy again. Looks like a failure in the power supply. I've done all I can from here -- someone's gonna have to go for a walk and put in a new AE 35 unit.

PIKE

All right. Tell Sue to meet me in the air lock.

He turns to go, but Fallon is still there.

FALLON

Did Rika confide in you with her story of being shot?

PIKE

What --? No. Why?

FALLON

You didn't seem surprised.

PIKE

Nothing surprises me anymore.

He's not entirely convincing. Pike EXITS. OFF Fallon...

EXT. PHAETON - HULL SURVEILLANCE CAM VIEW - LONG SHOT

The airlock opens and the two tiny SPACE-SUITED FIGURES of Pike and Sue emerge, trigger their PROPULSION PACKS, and move slowly over to one of the larger modules.

INT. EDIT BAY

Close on a surveillance monitor showing that long view, while another shows a closer view of Sue and Pike alighting on the module's hull near the base of the com array -- a large antenna currently folded into the hull. CUT TO:

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Jules, Johnson, Alice and Kenji at stations, monitoring the EVA. Pike's and Sue's helmet-cam views are displayed on their screens as well, tagged with their last names.

SUE (RADIO)

Circuit board's fried. Gimme a minute to swap it out.

PANNING to the trio of Kenji, Alice and Johnson, who are still hashing over Pike's pronouncement.

KENJI

It's like any other addictive drug: the more you use it, the more you need it. Ask me, the Commander's doing us a favor.

Alice reacts to his righteous tone as if feeling personally rebuked, even though Kenji clearly had no such intention.

JOHNSON

Speak for yourself. I've taken enough drugs to choke a horse, just to keep me alive. But this is the only one that can get me out of this chair.

SUE (RADIO)

Got it.

KENJI

In your mind, perhaps.

JULES

Great, read-out's up. Power supply active. Replace the back-up and we should be good to go.

JOHNSON

The mind's all we've got. Rest of you just haven't realized that yet.

Suddenly, an ALARM sounds.

JEAN

Alert-alert-alert. The com array is deploying.

JOHNSON

Who ordered that?

JEAN

Unknown.

INTERCUTTING the helmet-cam views on Jules' screen with --

EXT. PHAETON

As the large antenna array swings rapidly out of the hull, vertical rods SLASHING PIKE'S SUIT while the mass of the array SMASHES HIM OUT INTO SPACE like a giant pinball flipper.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Near panic as the crewmen try to understand what's happened.

SUE (RADIO)

Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!

JULES
Sue! What's going on out there?!

SUE (RADIO)
(staticky)
The array just hit Pike! I'm going
after him!

By now Jules has locked a camera on Pike's receding body.

JULES
Negative! Your EVA suit does not have
the capacity to reach him!

SUE (RADIO)
(static obscuring curses)
Fuck! Fuck it! I'm going anyway!

JULES
Do not go after him, acknowledge!
Lieutenant, confirm you acknowledge!

But now there's just static from Sue's radio along with the SOUND of PANICKED BREATHING. Alice, Kenji and Johnson are all staring dumbfounded at their screens, where Pike's helmet-cam view is spinning wildly, showing blurred streaks of stars, then brief flashes of Phaeton, the ship growing smaller.

MANNY
I can hear him breathing! He's still
breathing!

JEAN
You are hearing Lieutenant Parson's
respiration. Commander Pike's bio-
readouts have ceased.

Alice's hands are half-covering her face as she stares.

ALICE
Ohmygod... Ohmygod...

INT. EDIT BAY

Where one of the surveillance monitors shows Pike's body receding like a tumbling white speck. Pulling back from the bank of monitors to reveal Fallon's chair is empty.

FADE OUT.

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN;

EXT. SPACE - THE PHAETON

heads toward us. Lacking a relativistic frame, it appears to be moving very slowly. During this long and stately approach, we INTERCUT a series of brief video "confessions"...

INT. CONFSSIONAL

Billie facing camera with a stoic expression.

BILLIE

*So, it's Saturday. Or is it Sunday?
Time's different now. Everything's
different now, I guess. Everything's
slower. Or faster. I'm not sure.*

(forced cheer)

*But it's Saturday somewhere, right?
Dancing, booze, hook-ups -- pahhh-tee.*

(beat)

Same here. Nothing but laughs. Yeah.

She takes a deep breath, her facade starting to crumble.

BILLIE (cont'd)

*I wish -- I wish I knew him better. He
was the -- the strong, silent type, you
know. None of us really knew him.*

INT. CONFSSIONAL - ON RIKA

As she just stares at camera for a beat, then looks away.

INT. CONFSSIONAL - JOHNSON

*Spins around in his wheelchair, looking thoughtful, troubled,
also saying nothing.*

INT. CONFSSIONAL - MANNY AND VAL

*Holding hands, both distraught. Manny crying quietly, Val
comforting him silently. After a beat, Manny looks up at us.*

MANNY

*It's selfish, I know. But I keep
feeling like he marooned us. He's an
experienced astronaut -- the most
experienced of any of us. How could he
let this happen?*

INT. CONFSSIONAL - SUE

Just a flash of her. She's SCREAMING at the camera. No words, just an outraged noise!

INT. CONFSSIONAL - ALICE AND KENJI

Sitting a short but telling distance apart on the couch, Alice lost in her own thoughts, Kenji sneaking troubled glances at her as he speaks to camera --

KENJI

There were twelve of us. Now there's eleven.

(a glance at his wife)

Eleven of us for the next ten years.

(another glance, then)

It feels lonelier already.

INT. CONFSSIONAL - FALLON

Looking a bit uncomfortable under the gaze of his own camera.

FALLON

I don't ordinarily do this... but maybe I should do it more. "Dose of my own medicine," you know?

(beat)

The many qualities that make a good leader are so rarely found in one man. But Francis was... he was...

(beat)

It's safe to say, he left a gap that may never be filled.

INT. CONFSSIONAL - SUE

Still screaming as she heaves the couch over, then tosses Fallon's easy chair against a wall -- as Fallon, Meyer and Val rush in and try to restrain her. We catch chaotic fragments --

FALLON

Hold her down!

VAL

I am trying.

Meyer is trying to uncap a hypodermic as we --

INT. CONFSSIONAL - MEYER

Breathing heavily, sitting on the roughly rearranged couch, glaring at camera, holding his trembling hand --

MEYER

Are you happy, Roger? Will this boost our numbers? Are... you... happy?!

END INTERCUT

And we're out... just as Phaeton reaches us, passing under our pivoting camera and revealing three space-suited figures working around the damaged com array, before the ship heads away into space. Over which --

JULES (V.O.)

Dear Shawn... I wish you could read this. I wish a lot of things. We're still making repairs to the com array and it's unclear when we'll be able to resume our packet bursts. Means we're also cut off from Earth. Truly on our own. But then I guess we always were.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

A disheveled Jules sits on the floor with his back against the huge window, speaking into a recording device.

JULES (V.O.)

There wasn't any question about turning back. Having passed go/no-go, we're committed to the mission.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM

The crew is assembled, arguing -- Fallon looking as if he's facing off against the others, Johnson in particular, while Jules plays moderator.

JULES (V.O.)

But there was a brief argument about who or what was responsible for the accident, which was resolved when Mr. Johnson, who was second in command, declared it a system malfunction.

(beat)

Johnson's first order, after consulting with Mr. Fallon, our psych officer, was to reinstate the virt program even as we investigate the problems we've been having with it.

INT. SICKBAY

Meyer fills a syringe from an ampoule and gives himself a painful injection, the first of many.

JULES (V.O.)
 After that, we all just tried to get
 back to normal.

INT. EDIT BAY

Fallon edits the footage of Pike's fateful space walk, his expression neutral as he splices the disturbing footage.

JULES (V.O.)
 But what's normal, you have to ask
 yourself, when you're hundreds of
 millions of miles from Earth, home is a
 collection of metal compartments...

INT. GREENHOUSE

Rika digs a hole for a plant in a soil bin, then buries one of Pike's little hand-painted Civil War figurines beneath it.

JULES (V.O.)
 ...and you've just lost the one man who
 was able to hold you all together?

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

JULES
 I'll tell you what I want to do. I want
 to start over. Be honest with you...
 and with myself. No more lies. No more
 fantasies built on lies.

INT. JOHNSON'S QUARTERS

Johnson wheels into his quarters, painfully muscles his uncooperative body into bed, then puts on a V.R. headset.

JULES (V.O.)
 Just the truth. A new start.

EXT. MOUNT EVEREST - NORTH FACE (V.R.)

Johnson clambers out of a mountaineer's tent on sturdy functional legs and takes in the stunning view.

JULES (V.O.)
 Maybe for all of us.

INT. PARTIALLY CONSTRUCTED HIGH-RISE - NIGHT (V.R.)

We're sharing someone's POV of a blood-stained girder, a tangle of construction wire still looped around it.

REVEAL BILLIE staring at it. Another woman puts a reassuring HAND on her shoulder. Sue.

BILLIE
So what do I do now?

SUE
You mean what do we do.
(off her look)
We find that scumbag... and we kill him.

INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM/OFFICE (V.R.)

Alice is trying to barge past a NURSE.

NURSE
You can't just come in here without an appointment!

ALICE
Get the hell out of my way!

She pushes though the door, down a short hall, then pushes through a door into the doctor's private office, where --

THE GREEN-EYED MAN, in a doctor's white coat, looks up at her with mild surprise.

ALICE (cont'd)
We need to talk!

And off this strange confrontation and it's puzzling implications -- Does she know who he is? -- we CUT TO:

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

Jules clicks off the recording device, the red light goes off.

JULES
Jean?

JEAN
Yes, Jules.

JULES
I want to create a new virt module. Can you help me?

JEAN
Of course, Jules. Tell me what you need.

EXT. PHAETON - PROW - POV ANGLE LOOKING FORWARD

At first we might think we're sharing the POV of a surveillance camera. Then we pull back to find Jules standing on the hull, sans space suit, his hand on the shoulder of his young son, Shawn, their hair tousled by a light cosmic wind.

And as we pull back from the strange yet somehow beguiling image -- like Leo and Kate on the bowsprit of Titanic -- while Bowie's "Space Oddity" plays on the soundtrack, we...

FADE OUT.