

AD ASTRA

Written by

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AD ASTRA

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND: ONE HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW.

BLACK.

We TILT DOWN to REVEAL:

THE EARTH, AS VIEWED FROM ABOVE.

We HEAR MUSIC: a CHEERFUL PIECE, incongruous with the awesome image of our planet.

CUT TO:

A NEWS REPORT on PBS.

The introductory music accompanies the logo for the Public Broadcasting System.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The bright blue sky of EARTH. Then: THE LARGEST ANTENNA WE'VE EVER SEEN. A structure stretching inconceivably high in the sky, into the outer reaches of the atmosphere--around 100,000 feet in the air. A majestic lattice of multi-wire, high-voltage tethers, studded with hardware. Towering from earth, up through and above the cloud formations. Over THIS, an UPBEAT VOICE:

REPORTER'S VOICE

If this looks to you like something out of one of your children's comic book adventures, then you're not alone!

SERIES OF SHOTS of the ANTENNA UNDER CONSTRUCTION over which the reporter narrates:

REPORTER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

But child's play it isn't. This represents the beginning of a new era in celestial communications. It's called the Gravitational Interferometer Space Antenna, or "GISA," to those of us who can't remember that mouthful. Its goal?

SERIES OF SHOTS of WORKERS in what look like SPACESUITS. On scaffolding, hanging from wires, etc. OVER THESE IMAGES:

REPORTER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

To search throughout the universe for intelligent life. With the recent confirmation of so many planets capable of sustaining life throughout the galaxy, GISA may finally prove, once and for all, that we are not alone.

File footage of ASTRONAUTS on SPACEWALKS.

REPORTER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

The antenna will allow us to *listen in*, across the galaxy, through gravitational waves--seen as the ultimate means of communication through space.

Now: footage of MACHINES going this way and that, spinning a lattice of tethers. They're almost like spiders on a web. Or HYDRAS, with CYCLOPS-LIKE BRIGHT LIGHTS in their centers.

REPORTER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Self-replicators are used for its construction. And it's not just machines; a select few highly-trained folks from the Army Corps of Engineers will have to check every inch of the carbon fiber for flaws. It has proven one of the most demanding jobs on Earth, but these men and women are up to the task. Engineer Major Roy McBride of Las Cruces, New Mexico, says he's not afraid of the challenge:

IMAGE OF FOUR YOUNG MEN and TWO YOUNG WOMEN, seated on a SOFA, in a nondescript office environment with an Army Corps of Engineers logo/graphic on a screen behind them.

One of them is ROY MCBRIDE.

Roy McBride: forties, handsome. His eyes are light blue, seemingly friendly, but reveal little about the man himself. He is even-tempered, but one would not call him kind; there is an icy quality to him. Still, he is not overtly cruel or petty, and to talk to him, one could never question his intentions or his integrity.

Roy speaks slowly, formally, deliberately, as though he does not want ever to repeat himself. He seems guarded, sincere, precise, competent. His face is blank but prone to the occasional awkward joke, and those jokes are made almost for self-amusement. He does not seem morose.

In fact, he smiles all the time, and his face often lights up with little motivation. He speaks with a very slight Midwestern/Western accent. Think Neil Armstrong.

As he speaks, on the screen appears the title "Maj. Roy C. McBride".

ROY MCBRIDE

The Army Corps of Engineers trains us to deal with our fears. And this team here is real inspiring-- Lt. Parsegian did a repair skywalk during an episode of pulmonary edema. Now when you see something like that, you just wanna get up there and do it as good as she did. Be part of that team. So we all feed on each other in that way.

REPORTER'S VOICE

McBride is only the latest in a long line of aerospace pioneers. His father, noted activist and educator H. Clifford McBride, was part of an astronaut colony tragically lost in space eighteen years ago.

It is CLIFFORD MCBRIDE whom we're LOOKING AT. *Looks somewhat like Bill Clinton in that old Georgetown photo--almost like a countercultural figure, a sharp contrast with Roy's buttoned-down appearance.*

ANGLE BACK ON ROY:

ROY MCBRIDE

My Dad was...he was certainly a different kind of astronaut. He was a free-thinker. He went all the way to Neptune. It didn't end up going the way he wanted, but he's the reason I do what I do. I just think you can't worry too much about the past because you don't have control over it. So I look forward. And like I said, we've certainly got ourselves a helluva team here.

REPORTER'S VOICE

(cheerful again)

That team is always on the go.

(MORE)

REPORTER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

In the clouds, it's all about the work, and one gets the sense that Roy would rather be left alone to perform his duties than talk to this reporter:

ROY MCBRIDE

What I want...is to serve, to do my job as good as I can, away from the spotlight. It's real critical to maintain control and not to be vulnerable to outside factors.

Roy flashes that smile.

REPORTER'S VOICE

With all of the risks, do you ever contemplate the larger meaning of what it is you're trying to accomplish? How we may be able, for example, to detect intelligent life out there, and find out what they might have to say to us?

ROY MCBRIDE

No...not really... That's not for me to comment on--I don't consider that sort of thing.

(the smile returns)

But...I do thank you for your interest in the program, and we hope your continued support leads to our success.

ANGLE ON ROY as we:

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. GISA TETHER STATION - DAY

The ANTENNA STRETCHES HIGH INTO THE SKY. LOOKS LIKE IT'S ALMOST DONE.

INT. GISA TETHER STATION - DAY

We are inside a crowded, cramped place, where no attention is paid to aesthetics and a lot is paid to practicality. Exposed wires and computers and electronics. A circular logo of "GISA" (The Gravitational Interferometer Space Antenna).

Video monitors are everywhere, but so are signs of recreation: a ping-pong table, board games, cards, etc are mixed with more high-tech gaming equipment.

HANK WILLIAMS' MUSIC is PLAYING. It's sort of like a party atmosphere here.

CLOSE ON: MEN AND WOMEN SMILING--and looking into the CAMERA. Waving, gesticulating, clapping, egging us on. But we can't HEAR them; we HEAR MERELY the Hank Williams and the SOUND of WHIRRING: an AIRPACK, for a spacesuit of some kind.

It is Roy's POINT-OF-VIEW. He walks in a SPACESUIT and HELMET, in his own world. A RADIO voice breaks in, over the Hank Williams:

RADIO

(OS VOICE, RADIO FILTER)

Let's see, we got some scores for ya, Roy... It was Auburn over Georgia Tech, 35-16... Oklahoma 17, Syracuse 9... And San Diego State beat Oregon, 23-20.

SMILING WOMAN

(muffled; through radio filter)

Skywalk 714! You go, boy!

Roy waves, gives the thumbs up. Then:

INT. POD

Aided by three men in white jumpsuits (the back of which are stamped by corporate logos for RAYTHEON), Roy is positioned inside a small compartment with a LATCH. To a jumpsuited man named SAL:

ROY MCBRIDE

I guess there won't be too many more of these soon, huh Sal.

SAL

Yes sir, almost done!

Sal STARTS PUNCHING SOMETHING into a NEARBY COMPUTER. Roy REACHES AROUND SAL'S EAR, PULLS a GOLF BALL from behind his EAR.

Roy taps Sal, who smiles at the quite nerdy trick, nodding--he's seen it before. Roy GRINS WIDELY. The STEEL DOOR SLIDES OPEN, and SAL GENUFLECTS...

Only now do we realize that we've been in a STATION floating inconceivably high in the sky. Not in space, certainly earthbound, but frighteningly high up--higher than any aircraft we've ever been inside of.

We move outside, above a small PLATFORM.

EXT. THE BRIGHT BLUE ATMOSPHERE

We're in the outer reaches of the atmosphere--around 100 thousand feet in the air. The ground far below is both blue, where the waters are, and tawny, where the land is. The earth's curvature is beginning to be apparent.

The air is frigid and thin, and the environment hostile. But there is no doubt it is beautiful. We aren't in space; we are still connected to the earth, as Roy stands at the station's exterior.

We cannot SEE his face, which is SHIELDED by his helmet's dark visor. We go with Roy as he steps out of the pod and walks onto--

EXT. GISA PLATFORM

Roy BEGINS TO CLIMB DOWN a SMALL LADDER. HAIR-RAISING SILENCE. Roy looks UP. The EDGE OF SPACE ABOVE. Back down:

ROY MCBRIDE (RADIO FILTER)

The earth sure is beautiful today.
As always...

As he MOVES, we SEE, BELOW HIM, the TETHER CORDS, NEVER-ENDING, or so it seems. And, THOUSANDS OF FEET BELOW ROY, THE EARTH. It passes below his FEET, and it's just the most spectacular vista. The CLOUD FORMATIONS are like Van Gogh's "Starry Night," magnificent swirls, vibrant.

Between Roy and the ground is much air activity. About a dozen shuttles (mostly unmanned) crisscross below us, carrying tethers, busses, tether-deployment spools, and other building blocks for modular architecture. Some tethers are dozens of miles long.

SELF-REPLICATING MACHINES, looking like HYDRAS made of GRAPHENE, maneuver up and down the antenna.

With the shuttles below him, and SATELLITES high above him, Roy is sandwiched--with a lot of space--in between.

The project is visually exciting, but for Roy, it's business as usual. We HEAR STATIC. And out of the STATIC, ROY'S RADIO FILTERED VOICE:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Control, I have established visual with tether oh-niner-four-five. Please confirm it is offline. Over.

CONTROL (RADIO FILTER)
That's affirmative, Roy. Tether oh-niner-four-five is offline.

ROY MCBRIDE
Roger that.

Roy floats down perpendicularly alongside a several-mile-long, multi-wire structure.

Roy appears small, like an ant on a tree. We HEAR HIS BREATHING...

He rappels down, rather gracefully. Turns some kind of a wheel that allows two parts of the tether to become attached.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Control, I am...closing the loop now. Over.

A POWER SURGE has HIT THE TETHER. Roy is STARTLED:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
(some concern)
Control, I just experienced some unusual power surges. They appear to be quite extreme.

CONTROL (RADIO FILTER)
(alarmed, but completely under control)
Uh, yeah Roy, we picked that up too. We--we advise aborting here, we uh, repeat--we do advise aborting.

ROY MCBRIDE
Control--I have not yet completed my tasks--

Suddenly: along the entire length of the tether to which Roy is attached, the busses' ACTIVATION LIGHTS come on, one by one. (The lights are how we tell the structure is active.) The HYDRA MACHINES START UP AGAIN!

Roy can see the tether is becoming active, section after section, at breakneck speed--and he pushes himself away from it at the last second, just as it ACTIVATES.

He REBOUNDS against another, parallel (ACTIVE!) tether, IS SHOCKED, as he RICOCHETS against it--changing directions--and begins to SPIN out of control.

He SPINS SO VERY FAST... Is he DEAD...?

But remarkably, he's able to speak--rather calmly, given the situation.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 (through heavy breaths)
 Control--

As Roy continues to tumble, the radio in his helmet squawks away--though never in a panicked tone:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 Obviously a serious malfunction
 here--I've lost balance, over.

ROY CONTINUES TO SPIN, CRAZILY, MADLY. VIOLENTLY. He barely avoids hitting more tethers...

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 I'm gonna try and level out as soon
 as this air thickens up.
 (beat)
 Control?
 (beat)
 Control, do you read?

NO ANSWER.

Then, as he descends: ROY STRETCHES HIS ARMS and LEGS OUT.
In the DENSER AIR, HE STOPS THE SPIN.

At last, Roy straightens himself out. Like a great skydiver.

HE PULLS THE RIPCORDER...

A PARACHUTE shoots out from the back of his suit and opens with tremendous force, YANKING HIM UP and AWAY FROM US.

He RIGHTS HIMSELF and begins to float safely to the earth...

CUT TO:

EXT. COLORADO MOUNTAINS - PLATEAU

Roy sinks to the surface. A WIDE SHOT as we SEE: SCORES of PEOPLE RUNNING TO HELP HIM...

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)

I must say, you seem to be in remarkably good shape, Major.

INT. HOSPITAL - COLORADO SPRINGS CAMPUS - NIGHT

A ROW of HOSPITAL BEDS. Roy is sitting up, on one of them. Each seat/bed has a SCREEN NEXT TO IT. Large WINDOWS LOOK OUT INTO THE COLORADO WILDERNESS.

A pair of MED TECHS are here, doing CHECKS on Roy.

Roy sits alongside a window as they check his heart, lungs, blood pressure, temperature, etc. Roy looks out the window. Earth, dusk. Beautiful, with cloud formations. He has trouble keeping eye contact with the Medical Officers. A MAN takes ROY'S PHOTOGRAPH.

MED TECH #1 (CONT'D)

How d'you feel?

ROY MCBRIDE

Well...my left shoulder's a little sore. It was likely hyperextended at some point during descent.

MED TECH #1 (CONT'D)

Yeah, you got yanked around pretty good. But you're in one piece.

(beat)

Sad to say, some of your fellow engineers weren't so fortunate.

ROY MCBRIDE

(beat)

What's that, sir?

MED TECH #1

We lost your support crew, on the wire--and four hundred some odd more here on earth, too. Been tragic.

ROY MCBRIDE

Gee... That's real unfortunate. I'm real sorry to hear that...

MED TECH #2

Would you like the shades down,
Major?

ROY MCBRIDE

No, it's okay. I like to observe
the, the cloud patterns and the
mountains.

The Med Tech hears this, nods, then TYPES something into a small iPad-type device, except it unscrolls. The CAMERA TILTS UP the ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT TO SEE: "MILD AUTISM".

As the Med Techs pack up, Med Tech #1 holds an earplug-sized item.

MED TECH #1

(hands Roy the earplug)
You might want to put this in your
ear, sleep with it overnight. Just
to check for any head trauma. And
try to stay put, if you can.

ROY MCBRIDE

Yessir. I would like to be able to
return to my work.

MED TECH #1

[If] Your head checks out, you can
be cleared to go back as soon as
tomorrow.

ROY MCBRIDE

Okay. I'd like that very much.
Given all that's occurred, they're
probably pretty shorthanded up
there.

MED TECH #1

(stares for a beat; then)
Of course. Try to rest.

He packs up and leaves.

INT. DORMITORY - LATER

Roy is in bed, sitting up in hospital whites. A GREEN LIGHT and a BUZZ to his left. He PUSHES A BUTTON. PROJECTED in front of him, a very advanced form of FaceTime is showing:

His mother. LEANNE MCBRIDE. *Late sixties. Seems older than her age; her face is lined, her mouth slightly downturned.*

She SEES him, EXPLODING WITH EMOTION. The sound is worse than the image, for some reason:

LEANNE MCBRIDE

Roy!

TEARS FLOW FORTH from HER:

LEANNE MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Thank the Good Lord! I couldn't lose you up there too. You're all I've got...

ROY MCBRIDE

Hello, Ma. I'm all right. I'm gonna go back to work soon.

LEANNE MCBRIDE

I love you--so much. I was just so sick with worry--

ROY MCBRIDE

(smiles)

There's no reason for any kind of concern. The fuss is unnecessary.

LEANNE MCBRIDE

Oh Lord... I know you don't understand--you can't. Maybe someday you will... I'm sorry you're alone there...

ROY MCBRIDE

It's okay.

(beat)

I prefer it.

LEANNE MCBRIDE

I love you, Roy. You'll always be my little one. Maybe I can see you for Thanksgiving?

ROY MCBRIDE

It's possible. Goodbye, Ma.

LEANNE MCBRIDE

Goodbye, darling.

He PUSHES A BUTTON and it SHUTS OFF the image...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DORMITORY - LATE NIGHT

The room is DARK. ROY is prostrate, in bed, asleep. RESTLESS. We HEAR his PULSE, HIS HEART...

Roy's EYES OPEN, and he is COVERED IN SWEAT. His EYES WIDEN-- like he's SEEING A GHOST.

AWAKE, he has a VISION. FLASHING:

An image appears to him, and to us: The striking eyes and most of the face of a YOUNG BOY. He seems around 8 years-old, looking off-screen at something. He's smiling and blinking, in EXTREME, STEP-PRINTED, SLOW MOTION.

But the image is very UNCLEAR. It's BLURRY, almost like a reclaimed moment from the Zapruder footage.

WIDER SHOT -- again, EXTREME SLOW MOTION. A SMALL BOY (probably the same person as the one in the previous image) runs across what might be a wet, cobble-stoned street, on a cloudy day. This time:

A GIRL, an OLDER GIRL, is JOINING HIM. The image is haunting.

The final image: striking, mainly because it's so odd. A MEDIUM SHOT of what looks like a MEDIEVAL CASTLE (!) IRON GATE, COMING DOWN, in the same EXTREME, STEP-PRINTED, SLOW MOTION as in the other image.

ROY'S BREATHING BECOMES LABORED.

CLOSE SHOT on ROY as he then looks out the window. His panic abating somewhat, he allows his head to REST back, ON THE PILLOW. His EYES DART BACK AND FORTH, looking out to the ceiling--and to the heavens...

FADE OUT.

CUT IN:

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

A YOUNG WOMAN IN ARMY FATIGUES comes down a hallway.

INT. DORMITORY

She approaches ROY, who is dressed and sitting up. Going through a "Scientific American" on-screen magazine.

YOUNG WOMAN IN ARMY FATIGUES
 Morning, Major. I'm here to take
 you to SPACECOM Control. For
 debriefing. Is that okay?

ROY MCBRIDE
 Course, Ma'am.

INT. FORT CARSON - CONTROL CENTER - MORNING

It's the center of the base. A big "USSPACECOM" SIGN. Roy
 is being escorted by the woman.

A restaurant, a souvenir stand. MUZAK plays softly.
 Families are here, excited. There is a TOURISM BOARD desk (A
 SIGN READS, "READY TO MEET AN ALIEN? GO TO SPACE!"). A LARGE
 ALIEN CHARACTER, meant to appeal to children, graces the
 painted board: "Andy The Alien". Two YOUNG CHILDREN get
 their PHOTOS TAKEN in ill-fitting army spacesuits in front of
 a powder-blue backdrop.

INT. FORT CARSON - CONTROL CENTER - CORRIDOR

Roy is led down a long, winding CORRIDOR until he reaches a
 closed door.

YOUNG WOMAN IN ARMY FATIGUES
 Would you like anything to eat or
 drink, Major?

ROY MCBRIDE
 (friendly smile)
 No, thank you. The food's real
 good in the dorm.

YOUNG WOMAN IN ARMY FATIGUES
 That's wonderful to hear. We
 brought in a new caterer last month
 and I think it's gotten a lot
 better.

And a LATCH OPENS:

INT. FORT CARSON - CONTROL CENTER - USSPACECOM HEADQUARTERS

This is USSPACECOM's covert ops headquarters. Present are
 FIVE of Roy's SUPERIORS. HE SALUTES THEM, mumbles cordial
 "HELLOS".

They are: BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON, LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE, COLONEL EPINGER, and a woman, ADJUTANT GENERAL AMELIA VOGEL, who refers to a PDA-type device.

Among the others here is an older man, seated SILENTLY in the corner. Observing. His name, we will learn, is DR. MARTIN PEDROSA. More on him later.

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON
Major, I'm Brigadier General
Fallon. This is Lieutenant General
Sharpe, Director of SPACECOM
Special Operations. And Adjutant
General Vogel.

ROY MCBRIDE
(nods; then)
Sirs. Ma'am.

The DOOR is CLOSED BEHIND THEM. Actually, more SEALED THAN CLOSED. Fallon motions for Roy to sit, and he does as well. As the others sit around him, he's looking at a file:

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON
Please--sit down. Your profile's
certainly very interesting. You've
done exceptionally well on the
assessment tests. Says here--
you've got a near-photographic
memory. Basic combat...space
training, too--just exceptional,
'cross the board.

ROY MCBRIDE
(subtly prideful)
Thank you, sir.

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON
(looks up from dossier)
Your pulse's never gone above 80
during any spacewalk or skywalk?
Even on this most recent fall?
That true?

ROY MCBRIDE
It's what we're trained for, sir.
I can't take any personal credit
for that.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE
You know Major, generally we look
for people like you, people who
won't let emotions or fears get in
the way of a task.

(MORE)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

People who might be called "on the spectrum," if you will. I do say that with respect.

(beat)

So you must not be surprised that we've reached out to you.

ROY MCBRIDE

No, sir...I expected a debriefing on account of the accident.

(beat)

I am surprised that Ops is handling it, but it's certainly not a problem of any kind.

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON

Well, we've traveled a long way to see you here today. And it is not a coincidence.

The full-wall VIDEO SCREEN behind Roy plays real-time images of Fort Carson. Lieutenant General Sharpe consults his PDA device. Fallon stares at Roy for a moment, then:

ADJUTANT GENERAL VOGEL

General, we're ready.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE

(nods; then back to Roy)

Major, this is not about your accident--at least, not directly.

(beat)

We have...something of a highly classified nature to show you.

On the WALL-SCREEN, A VIDEO begins to play. LOOKS LIKE OUTER SPACE. Through a TELESCOPE.

No stars or anything visible. Until, tiny on the screen, a blue dot. But not the pale blue dot of Earth. CUT TO: CLOSER SHOT. We SEE that this is the magical, mysterious blue of:

NEPTUNE.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

That is the planet Neptune you're looking at, obviously. Images from the Shun-Barcelli Telescope. Two days ago.

This distant planet is almost all blue, with none of the organic brown of Earth.

It's like a shiny marble jewel, its sheen a uniform hypnotic ultramarine, except for a few darker streaks and a few white smudges of elongated clouds. *Unearthly, that's for sure.*

Then, our vantage point moves, and we CUT CLOSER, longer focal length. We find our view of Neptune momentarily obscured by a faint, partial RING of dust and ice. An arc of white.

And then, an oblong object comes into view between us and Neptune.

LARISSA.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

This is one of Neptune's closest moons, Larissa.

The small moon is dark against the eighth planet, exhibiting a mild, azure glow, perhaps the reflection of the color of Neptune. It's heavily cratered.

We gradually perceive that something odd is going on:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

The degradation begins here.
Followed by--

The peaceful blue diorama is suddenly invaded by a faint greenish blush that starts small as a pinprick and grows slowly larger. All is not right with Larissa. Its blue complexion is overcome by a green blemish which spreads outwards and seems to utterly transform the moon's very substance, cracking and fissuring it...

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

Catastrophic destruction.

The moon formerly known as Larissa becomes a color that alternates between dark green... and dark yellow... and black... and then...

IT EXPLODES. IN DEAFENING SILENCE.

Rock and dust scatter in every direction, as gravity fails to hold together the transformed matter, which now glows green and yellow.

CLOSE ON ROY'S EYES. Then we linger on this unsettling scenario, until we return our focus to the unblinking blue eye that is Neptune...

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE (CONT'D)

That event was most likely the cause of the fluctuations we experienced here, on earth. The ones that almost killed you. And caused many other disasters on the ground as well.

ROY MCBRIDE

(nods)

I'd surely like to know what caused that, sir.

THE LIGHTS COME UP. Beat.

COLONEL EPINGER

Major, what do you know about the Lima Project?

A TURN. Roy FREEZES for A SLIGHTLY PERCEPTIBLE MILLISECOND:

ROY MCBRIDE

It was a research expedition to Neptune, sir. From twenty--I'm sorry, twenty-one--years ago.

COLONEL EPINGER

Mmm-hmm. Anything else?

ROY MCBRIDE

Its objective was to construct a telescope in order to search for signs of extraterrestrial life. My father was director.

(beat)

All crew were lost.

As everyone takes notes, Adjutant General Vogel slides E-PHOTOS to ROY. THEY ARE OF HIS FATHER, H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE:

COLONEL EPINGER

Do you remember how his departure affected you? It WAS a one-way mission, was it not?

ROY MCBRIDE

It was, sir. But the family was not told his absence would be permanent. He said at the time only that it was top national priority to gain knowledge of extraterrestrial life.

COLONEL EPINGER

And how did you handle that?

ROY MCBRIDE

My, my mother has often expressed her devastation by his abandonment.

(beat)

It's the consensus that his departure was unforgivable.

Roy lets loose a small laugh(!). An AWKWARD BEAT. He sobers:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Sir, if you're trying to test my loyalty or fitness here, it's not necessary. I assure you, I'm in no need of any kind of support in this manner. I do accept my father's mental illness. And I acknowledge it led to the mission failure.

The others look at each other.

COLONEL EPINGER

Roy, we have something that might come as quite a shock to you.

(beat)

We've intercepted secret communications sent to Neptune, we believe from Mars. They lead us to conclude that your father and others from the Project are still alive and for reasons we do not understand, appear to be conducting some extremely dangerous experiments. About which we are deeply, deeply, concerned.

ADJUTANT GENERAL VOGEL

The last intercepted communication revealed discovery on Neptune of large quantities of antimatter, Major. Enough when harnessed to destroy the entire solar system.

Roy is BLOWN AWAY; that slight smile disappears. A darkness overcomes his countenance, and he turns inward.

COLONEL EPINGER

Major?

ROY MCBRIDE
(finally; clears throat)
My father is...alive, sir?

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE
We believe so. The Lima Project's A.I. is still online, and as you know, this would indicate crew has survived. We must ensure they can do no further harm. As such, your relationship to him is potentially invaluable to us.

ROY MCBRIDE
Yes sir...

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE
We'd like you to try and contact whoever is communicating with the Lima Project. We've determined that the signal is coming from Mars. Presumably, any message sent there would ultimately reach your father, on Neptune. We've tried already without success. It's a bit of a Hail Mary...but we'd like YOU to give it a shot, find out his location and any other information you can gather.

(beat)
You'll have to go to a secure spot on the moon, of course--for a quantum connection that can't be hacked.

ROY MCBRIDE
Sir, in the event that contact is made, you will then...attempt to apprehend him and bring him to justice?

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SHARPE
That is our intention, yes. Can we count on your participation?

(beat)
Roy?

ROY MCBRIDE
Well sir, I--I'm just trying to understand--

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON
Major, have you not been LISTENING?!?

(MORE)

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON (CONT'D)

Your father has threatened the destruction of our entire solar system. Does that not mean ANYTHING to you?!?

ROY MCBRIDE

Yessir. It surely does.

Beat.

DR. PEDROSA (O.C.)

Roy, I'm Dr. Joao Pedrosa.

About to answer, Roy turns. At that moment, the old man off to the side, Dr. Pedrosa. He speaks with a much kinder tone:

DR. PEDROSA (CONT'D)

I am currently Commander of SPACECOM lunar operations, at Tycho. I knew your father very well--we studied neuroscience together, at Purdue University. He was a very brilliant man--a true legend in the department. He looked at things his own way and contemplated vast concepts. So I can understand well his struggles--because keeping sanity in the face of the infinite can be a monumental challenge.

Pedrosa gets up, approaches:

DR. PEDROSA (CONT'D)

Like you, I was skeptical of his survival. But after reviewing the Neptune transmissions, I am now convinced of their authenticity. Of course under usual circumstances, you would want no part of this. But if he is truly alive, we do not dare lose him twice. Will you help us try to find him?

ANGLE ON ROY. Roy looks down again, at the screen. It's an electronic DOSSIER. (Like an old-fashioned bank file, that opens, but its papery surface is capable of displaying digital information. Such as photos, maps, graphs, etc.) They PUSH THE FILE GENTLY TOWARD ROY. He sees his FATHER'S IMAGE in a photograph. He STARES AT IT. Roy looks back up at the men:

ROY MCBRIDE

I will, sir.

BRIGADIER GENERAL FALLON

You depart for the moon in twenty-four hours.

Adjutant General Vogel SLIPS HIM a black leather folder:

ADJUTANT GENERAL AMELIA VOGEL

All non-relevant information has been redacted. Please familiarize yourself with its contents...

The sound FADES OUT as we:

CUT TO:

INT. PREP ROOM

A small, bright room dedicated to preparing for space travel. What looks like black leather Eames chairs, cases, men and women in white pants and shirts helping astronauts get ready. Roy is being fitted with his suit. Roy slides open a kind of foldable iPad and places EARBUDS into his ear. We HEAR a RADIO VOICE:

RADIO VOICE

Slate One-Niner-Four. Transmission Lima Project, 7/19/15. Voice of H. Clifford McBride.

He is listening to an FILE. We HEAR, with RADIO FILTER:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O.)

(tone: banal, scientific)

We're coming to you now from our base of operations for the Lima Project. And we're going to send you images in a bit from our new Ocular telescope. Sponsored by our good friends at Brookhaven Solar.

OVER THIS: ROY'S POV as: men and women prepare for spaceflight, finishing their attire--as Roy LISTENS, an IMAGE of CLIFFORD MCBRIDE comes up on his screen. It is like a Skype call gone wrong; the image is high-quality, but the feed is poor, vacillating between a still frame of Clifford McBride and a sped-up image. The AUDIO is constant.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O.)

Now that we believe there are microorganisms on many extrasolar planets, and so many Goldilocks planets perfect for life, we ask the question, "How soon will it be before we find intelligent life in the universe?"

ROY'S SCREEN now features IMAGES of SPACE, then NEPTUNE'S MOONS and NEPTUNE'S SURFACES as the AUDIO CONTINUES:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

We are so excited about this prospect. And who really knows if we haven't been contacted already? Who knows if our cosmic friends haven't tried to reach us through gravitational waves, or some other method we can't fathom? We might be cockroaches walking along a chessboard, not knowing about the great game of chess! Now--I...AM a little surprised we don't have anything yet. [Surprised by] The silence. But--I have confidence. So...thank you, Brookhaven Solar! We have many--

The SCREEN GOES BLACK. "PORTION REDACTED."

A MAN IN WHITE PANTS AND SHIRT then checks with Roy. Roy CLOSES the SCREEN. Referring to his suit:

MAN IN WHITE PANTS AND SHIRT

How's that, Major? Not too snug?

ROY MCBRIDE

No, it's fine, thank you.

MAN IN WHITE PANTS AND SHIRT

The pre-breathe for the moon should take about fifteen minutes.

ROY MCBRIDE

Thank you.

The Man PLACES a BREATHING APPARATUS over Roy's mouth and nose. He moves to another passenger.

INT. GALLEY

Roy ascends the narrow scaffolding, with Pedrosa right behind. It's oddly primitive; the way to the shuttle entrance is a fifty-foot stepladder which goes straight up to where the LUNAR SHUTTLE awaits, nose-up. Harrowing climb for most of us, but there are several people on this ladder, looking surprisingly businesslike and quotidian.

A VOICE through a LOUDSPEAKER:

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE

Please use the safety straps for your wrists as you ascend. You will find them located on the rails on either side.

INT. LUNAR SHUTTLE

Roy and Pedrosa, on the shuttle. Both men LOOK into a small SCANNER on the side, near the seats, while stepping on a DEGAUSSING PAD. Then:

VOICE

Degauss complete.

The craft seems to be part of a consortium between the Army and a Southwest Airlines-type company. A hi-tech space. Little attempt at aesthetics--most everything is there for practicality, functionality. BANAL.

A dozen or so PASSENGERS are aboard. Roy finds his seat and snaps together his restraints.

ANNOUNCEMENTS are made in English and then in Mandarin and Spanish by a MALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

Another FLIGHT ATTENDANT (a stout, warm woman) is giving everybody pills and whispering into certain passengers' ears. Then, aloud, a recording VOICE:

FLIGHT VOICE

As we exit the earth's gravitational field, please remember: objects will float if not properly stored or secured.

MALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Guys--our rear passenger attendant, Michelle Grierson, was...MARRIED TODAY, EVERYBODY! GIVE HER A HAND!

The passengers APPLAUD as ROY strains to see this Michelle person behind him.

EXT. EARTH - HIGH ANGLE

The shuttle takes off and begins its ascent to the moon.

INT. LUNAR SHUTTLE - LATER

At the moment when gravity is gone, things begin to float-- stray pens, paper, etc. Roy of course has followed the rules, but his NEIGHBOR, of Indian nationality and middle-aged and burly, LAUGHS at his own ineptitude as his things start to float away from him.

Roy SCANS the SCREEN in the SEAT IN FRONT of HIM: MAPS of the LUNAR SURFACE. CLOSE SHOT on HIS EYES as he PROCESSES the CONTOURS OF THE MOON'S VARIOUS CRATERS and other AREAS.

The Flight Attendant hands out packages of nuts. The pilot makes an announcement:

SHUTTLE PILOT'S VOICE

On the left there, many of you can catch an excellent view of Petavius on the eastern limb. The moon's gibbous period's waning, so you can also see the Atlas, to the north.

Roy looks out the window, SEES the landmarks. But also lights, signs of mining and human development/habitation. Tracks and angular patterns. Snapping Roy out of his observing, with an accented voice:

A VOICE

Your first time to the moon?

Roy turns around. It's his NEIGHBOR, across the aisle. The NEIGHBOR is of INDIAN DESCENT.

ROY MCBRIDE

No, sir. I've been a couple times before, as a child.

INDIAN NEIGHBOR

(trying to make conversation)

A child! Well, it's my first time!
(laughs awkwardly; then)
There's some good new restaurants I read, though.

(MORE)

INDIAN NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

I'm staying near Copernicus--they tell me that's safe. How about you?

ROY MCBRIDE

My visit will be very brief.

INDIAN NEIGHBOR

Oh... I'm in artificial intelligence.

(with enthusiasm; wanting to talk)

It's a very strange thing, you know, that we have so much technology and we keep all our systems without any real awareness. I understand why, but it's...it's strange, no?

ROY MCBRIDE

(that gentle smile again)

Sir--I'd really love to talk to you, but I'm afraid I'm just not allowed. I'm real sorry.

INDIAN NEIGHBOR

Okay. Okay, no problem!

The Neighbor acts like he's not offended. But he is.

The Flight Attendant then makes her way down the aisle and guides herself via a series of hoops and webbing overhead. She checks to make sure everyone is fastened and happy. She is handing out PILLS. Roy takes a pill and sips a drink she hands him from a straw.

SHUTTLE PILOT'S VOICE

(perfunctory)

As we begin our approach: in accordance with FASA regulations, we must remind you that many areas of the moon are in a state of extreme lawlessness. The United States government does not recommend travel to certain districts--please check your nearest USSPACECOM Outpost for a complete list. Thank you and safe travels.

Roy SECURES HIMSELF as the FLIGHT ATTENDANT hands out A CUSTOMS FORM CARD to FILL OUT. She HANDS the Neighbor a STYLUS:

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
(with a laugh)
Don't steal my pen!

Roy LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW to SEE:

As the craft gets closer to the surface: lots of SATELLITES of varying sizes. A tether-type system that may remind us of the GISA.

MINING SITES, GREENHOUSES, SPACE JUNK, DEPOTS, and LIVING QUARTERS that look like they could be housing complexes in Boulder, Colorado. There are also HOUSES OF WORSHIP: a large CHURCH with an open roof (centered by a giant CROSS).

LIT SIGNS ANNOUNCE CHAINS WE RECOGNIZE: McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, etc. MAG-LEV TRAINS link together various bases and neighborhoods, at extreme velocities.

EXT. MOON - LUNAR BASE

The ship adjusts its gyrosopes and turns over (e.g. in Elon Musk's rocket designs), making a gentle landing near the army's TYCHO BASE. The base is heavily guarded.

INT. LUNAR HANGAR

The UNDERGROUND looks almost like New York's Penn Station, combined with an enormous parking garage and the most banal of AIRPORTS. The SHUTTLE MOVES into position, closer to an entrance.

INT. LUNAR HANGAR - CORRIDOR

Dr. Pedrosa leads Roy through the corridor, which is, weirdly, wood-panelled. Or is it fake wood?

There are FOUR MEN and TWO WOMEN who come from the OPPOSITE DIRECTION, all talking amongst themselves. When Roy and Pedrosa walk toward them, they stop talking.

Dogs roam about, smelling them and their belongings. Pedrosa moves to talk to some of the men and women. Roy face brightens at the sight of a dog:

ROY MCBRIDE
(to the dog, warmly)
Hey! How you doin' there, big fella?

DR. PEDROSA
This is Major Roy McBride. As you
know, he is here to help us.

EVERYONE
(to Roy)
Good morning, Major.

ROY MCBRIDE
(looks up from the dog)
'Morning.

A WOMAN, LESLIE CORTEZ, fifties, steps forward. A MAN stands
near, holding a PIECE OF EQUIPMENT that looks like a small
EKG machine.

LESLIE CORTEZ
We've kept a spot for you in the
dormitory. An overnight stay will
be necessary.

ROY MCBRIDE
Yes, Ma'am. But I'm just here to
do what I need to. I have my
duties on the antenna, and they'll
probably be needing me soon.

LESLIE CORTEZ
Of course...

Cortez leads Roy with her hand as we HEAR:

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)
Uplink should be ready to go in
just a moment.

INT. LUNAR BASE - COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LATER

Roy and the others are in what looks like a recording studio.
A glass of water before him. Roy is seated. Dons a headset.

TECHNICIAN ONE (CONT'D)
We're preparing the connection now.

Outside the booth, TWO TECHNICIANS make adjustments.

Roy looks at a MONITOR before him, which gives him cues, as
well as technical info regarding high-rate pulse-position
modulation and error-correcting codes. A RED LIGHT goes on.

Dr. Pedrosa approaches:

DR. PEDROSA

Whatever you say into this microphone will be transmitted to Mars, and then hopefully on to Neptune. The first step is to try to make contact. And then perhaps a negotiation of some kind.

ROY MCBRIDE

Yessir.

Interrupting: the CONTROL BOOTH CHIMES IN:

TECHNICIAN ONE

Point-to-point contact with the Mars signal is now engaged. Through the squawk box, Major.

ROY MCBRIDE

Roger that.

DR. PEDROSA

Depress the button in order to speak. Remember, your father may be listening.

ROY MCBRIDE

Sir... What--what precisely is it that you'd like me to say, in order for us to achieve optimal results?

Dr. Pedrosa takes out a PIECE OF PAPER:

DR. PEDROSA

We have assembled a text for you, one that we believe is appropriate for eliciting a response. It is written using language consistent with your own, utilizing data from your profile.

Roy takes the piece of paper. He looks it over. Weak joke, but a broad smile nonetheless:

ROY MCBRIDE

Maybe I should've taken acting classes! Okay...here goes...

Roy MOVES to DEPRESS the BUTTON. FLICKS ON THE MIC. BEGINS TO SPEAK:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

This is Major Roy McBride, I'm currently on Tycho Base.

(MORE)

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Repeat. This is Major Roy McBride.
I am currently on Tycho Base.

ON THE MONITOR: as he speaks, there's a voice print analysis.

CLOSE ON ROY. Roy's emotions are deeply buried as he READS
THE PREPARED SCRIPT:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Dr. McBride... It's your son, Roy.

(beat)

Prior to this message, I believed you were dead. Our family was informed of this approximately two decades ago. We were told the stress of deep space had altered your behavior. And...as a result, US SPACECOM was forced to terminate your life support systems. However, SPACECOM now believes you have survived. And attempted contact, without revealing yourself due to fear of hacking. If this is true, I'm very much looking forward to hearing from you. I've always felt that it's very important to have a true bond between father and son. We could have this bond. I do recall we would watch motion pictures together, very old ones in black and white--funny ones. And I remember your laugh even more than your face. I would like very much to reconnect with you. I will surely be able to move past any feelings of abandonment your departure presented me with. Your loving son, Roy.

BEAT. NOTHING. These words have unlocked something in Roy.

He flicks off the MIC, stands. Any warmth deserts him:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Hopefully that achieves the desired result.

The PREPARED SPEECH is LIT ON FIRE by a MAN, its ashes placed in a wastebasket.

DR. PEDROSA
 Any transmission will take
 approximately 36 minutes, due to
 the distance. So we must wait.

INT. HALL - LATER

Roy is standing outside, looks out the large window.
 OUTSIDE: A NEARBY SIGN WITH A NEON COWBOY, PUMPING a "THUMBS
 UP" GESTURE--just like the famous Neon Cowboy from Las
 Vegas's Fremont Ave. Pedrosa EMERGES from the Communications
 Center. A grim look:

DR. PEDROSA
 There is no response. Thank you
 for your participation. You will
 be returned to the earth tomorrow
 morning.

ROY MCBRIDE
 I understand. Thank you, sir.
 Sorry I was not of more help.

The men shake hands.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LUNAR BASE - BARRACKS - ROY'S ROOM - LATER

The room's almost like an economy room in a hotel. With the
 exception being that, out the window, hangs Earth. The
 CAMERA DOLLIES OVER TO SEE: a half-eaten meal on a tray.

Roy SITS, near a speaker:

ROY MCBRIDE
 Confirming--shuttle 4339, moon to
 earth, reservation number EH77902.
 Last name, McBride.

VOICE
 Reservation confirmed, McBride, Roy
 C. Number EH77902.

He hangs up.

A beat.

A TV SCREEN is seamlessly embedded into a wall. Some
 programming (news... sports.... something animated...).

The programming forms a low level of constant noise. And then:

The screen CHANGES--completely BLACK.

SILENCE.

A beat. Roy LOOKS UP.

A light, STATIC NOISE.

FADING IN is the sound of:

A MAN SINGING: *"Hello, I must be going./ I cannot stay,/ I came to say/ I must be going./ I'm glad I came/ but just the same/ I must be going..."*

Roy looks at the SCREEN as GROUCHO MARX APPEARS. Groucho resumes singing after Margaret Dumont's part: *"I'll stay a week or two,/ I'll stay the summer through,/ but I am telling you,/ I must be going."*

BEEP! The SCREEN GOES BLACK. SILENCE.

THEN TEXT, on the SCREEN:

"ARE YOU COMING?"

A SERIES OF NUMBERS AT THE BOTTOM of the SCREEN.

CLOSE SHOT: ROY'S EYES. Then we SEE that the screen GOES BLACK. We HEAR:

ROY MCBRIDE (PRE-LAP)
They appeared to be coordinates of
some kind, sir.

INT. LUNAR BASE - CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Roy stands as Dr. Pedrosa and TWO MEN and LESLIE CORTEZ sit around a conference table, with looseleaf binders in front of them. MOON PHOTOGRAPHS, illuminated from behind, line the walls. Chairs all around. Coffee. Roy is reluctant as he stands at attention. HE STARES STRAIGHT AHEAD, NO EYE CONTACT. The others seem STUNNED INTO SILENCE.

ROY MCBRIDE
I believe the proper first step
would be to get me to Mars, to the
specified coordinates. I would of
course be willing, in order to help
resolve this crisis.

LESLIE CORTEZ

We are very grateful to you for your service, Major. We will analyze the information you received. But you may return to Colorado now.

ROY MCBRIDE

No Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I do feel I should continue to aid the mission. My father is the individual at issue here. And under the circumstances I feel I should remain involved in order to bring him appropriately to justice.

DR. PEDROSA

(leaning forward)

A personal connection is an unknown variable and represents serious risk.

ROY MCBRIDE

Yes sir. However, the task itself inherently involves risk, especially as it appears you will not have multiple chances. And if it really IS my father who is trying to reengage, obviously I would be anxious to confront him. But I'm also considering the task itself, and not merely my personal views.

None of them answers. Roy steps forward:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

A situation may arise that only I am able to respond to.

(beat)

So for this reason, I believe I should be part of any continuing mission.

Pedrosa can tell that Roy's serious, DETERMINED.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Sirs? Ma'am? Do I have your permission to continue on in this manner?

ANGLE ON PEDROSA as we:

CUT TO:

INT. LUNAR BASE - MAZELIKE CORRIDOR

SECURITY MEN all SURROUND ROY, like he's the President. A POV SHOT of ROY as he WALKS toward:

AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR is Dr. Pedrosa. Over this:

DR. PEDROSA (V.O.)

You will travel on a United States military craft already designated for Mars. It contains a payload of a classified but routine nature, and the crew will know of you only as a passenger--a higher-ranking officer making a visitation to the outpost. It will depart from outside standard surveillance, on the Far Side of the moon. As your participation was unanticipated, the path from our current point will take us through only recently-settled territory. We will be escorted by the United States Army's Space Division. And I will protect you as far as I am able.

INT. MEDICAL UNIT

Roy is sitting up on a medical table. We STILL HEAR DR. PEDROSA'S VOICE. A MEDIC approaches ROY. CLOSE SHOT on an injection into ROY'S ARM.

DR. PEDROSA (V.O.)

Members of the crew were selected on the basis of skill and limited social needs, and as such should be no impediment.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CORRIDOR

Dr. Pedrosa and Roy board a MONORAIL. As they do, we HEAR:

DR. PEDROSA (V.O.)

You will be contacted by a Colonel Lipset once you reach Mars.

(MORE)

DR. PEDROSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He will assist you as you attempt to communicate with your father. Your stress levels will be monitored at all times. If psychological failure is indicated, you will be removed from the mission. This is necessary due to your relationship with the target.

ROY MCBRIDE (V.O.)

My focus is entirely on achieving a proper resolution, sir. You need not be concerned. He was emotionally unfit, and I am not.

They stop at a GATE.

INT. LARGE HANGAR

Several LUNAR ROVERS are lined up, in the distance. They aren't SLOW, LUMBERING THINGS, however; they are durable and tough and fast and filled with artillery.

The ROVERS WHIR and WHINE with ferocity, their engines warming up and getting ready for the trip ahead.

Roy and Pedrosa enter, joining a host of MILITARY ASTRONAUTS. One of them, a cheerful, burly man named WILLY LEVANT, late forties, pulls up an interactive 3D MAP. It shows the LUNAR TERRITORIES in incredible detail. Roy listens intently as Levant checks his clipboard.

WILLY LEVANT

Should be fine, but... We're gonna be going through what is still technically a war zone.

(looks up, w a laugh)

Here we are, meant to tame the solar system, and instead seems like we've just brought our chaos. This your first time?

ROY MCBRIDE

(broad smile)

No, sir. I've been to many Army-Navy games.

WILLY LEVANT

(turns dark)

This is serious business, Major. There's no real way to know how any man'll react in combat. It's always a surprise.

(MORE)

WILLY LEVANT (CONT'D)

(louder; to everyone)

--Almost a full moon. The Far Side's gonna be real black. Fortunately we should have a clean route from here to Veda. We've had a little problem since September with mining pirates, looking for helium-3. But our boys did a heckuva job and swept it all up a few days ago.

Roy notices that Pedrosa is fiddling with the CRUCIFIX around his neck. Pedrosa SEES Roy looking at him.

DR. PEDROSA

You wish to join us, Roy? For a prayer?

ROY MCBRIDE

(quietly; without any
condescension)

No thank you, sir. It's been my experience that prayer doesn't affect outcomes.

Pedrosa eyes Roy for a moment, nods, then starts to pray with Levant and the others as Roy prepares his suit.

DR. PEDROSA

Almighty and merciful God, who hast commissioned Thy angels to guide and protect us, command them to be our companions from our setting out until our return...

MOMENTS LATER

Roy and the others--in full SPACESUITS--board a souped-up and unenclosed LUNAR ROVING VEHICLE (LRV).

INT. LRV

This rover is CRAMPED. Pedrosa has a smaller version of his mapping COMPUTER in front of him and he is next to Levant. Levant is driving, and he makes a final consultation of the route. ON THE TOP OF THE WINDSHIELD: photos of NUDE WOMEN. Like old PLAYBOY centerfolds...

Roy is in the back seat:

WILLY LEVANT
 Arrright, let's go. Veda, Sea of
 Moscoviensis.

RADIO VOICE
 You should be clear to Veda, over.

WILLY LEVANT
 Autodrive engaged.

EXT. LUNAR BASE

The LRV departs, bursting forward with ferocity.

NOTE: ALL DIALOG in this sequence will have a "RADIO FILTER" effect unless otherwise noted.

INT./EXT. LRV - MOVING

Levant is looking around with hi-tech BINOCULARS. Roy is hunched back, right behind him, watching and listening:

WILLY LEVANT
 Setting two-niner-oh.

The LRV traverses the lunar surface. Occasionally, the lunar DUST kicks up, obscuring our vision. The SUN is SHINING, and yet the SKY IS JET-BLACK.

Roy turns back as the base recedes into the distance. THE EARTH IS IN THE SKY! PEDROSA POINTS TO IT, then DOWN TO THE SURFACE, FOR ROY. A TALL OBELISK, made of STEEL, in the LUNAR DIRT, near the LEGS OF THE LUNAR MODULE:

DR. PEDROSA
 [That is] Tranquillity Base
 Monument.

ROY MCBRIDE
 Surely is a magnificent sight.

SERIES OF SHOTS of LUNAR SURFACE.

EXT. THE MOON - MOMENTS LATER

A CARAVAN OF ABOUT TEN BLACK, ARMOR-PLATED rovers that we'll call the Russian name of LUNOKHODS appear on the horizon, coming toward our GUYS. The Lunokhods are driven by mysterious ASTRONAUTS in DARK BLUE SPACESUITS and HELMETS with mirrored visors.

WILLY LEVANT

(surprised)

What the fuck is this...?

(to radio)

Alpha, what do we got here?

(to radio)

Alpha, we have what looks like between ten and twelve mining Lunokhods approaching our position.

RADIO VOICE

Roger that, Willy. We'll see if they're certified, over.

WILLY LEVANT

I'm sorry, gentlemen. They said they'd cleared this zone out. I'm sure we'll be on our way in just a minute.

AS THEY APPROACH, LEVANT LOOKS THROUGH BINOCULARS. He DARKENS CONSIDERABLY.

WILLY LEVANT (CONT'D)

(beat)

Uh...Alpha...we may have some problems.

(beat; more heated)

They appear to be armed. Possibly with stilettos. Backup requested.

ROY STEELS HIMSELF. The Lunokhods are closing in on our LRV.

WILLY LEVANT (CONT'D)

Alpha, they are definitely assuming hostile formation--

(to computer)

Engage manual operation.

ROY BRACES HIMSELF. Dr. Pedrosa TURNS AROUND, points to a BOX next to Roy's FEET. Roy opens the box: WEAPONS.

GRENADES and a GUN which looks ALMOST LIKE a ROCKET LAUNCHER.

(The BLUE ASTRONAUTS in the Lunokhods brandish a weapon called a STILETTO--an electromagnet-propelled jet of liquid metal resembling a solid bar of light.)

(VISUAL NOTE: LUNAR DUST PERIODICALLY OBSCURES the VISION.)

EXT. THE MOON - THE PROMENADE DE LUNA

The LRV turns onto a route that runs adjacent to a POWER PLANT.

The Lunokhods open fire on our LRV:

WILLY LEVANT
 (to radio)
 Alpha, we're now taking fire! WE
 NEED BACKUP ASAP!

INT. LRV

Everyone bounces forward in their seats, restrained by their seatbelts.

ROY ARMS HIMSELF. Ahead of them, he SEES three possible RAMPS: one to the right, one to the center, and one to the left.

A FORK IN THE ROAD--the left side of the fork is closed off, blocked by A BARRICADE. The LRV is headed right for it.

At the last second, LEVANT jerks the rover to the right. The Lunokhod's driver can't react in time. SLAMS INTO THE BARRICADE. The blue astronaut is hurled from his Lunokhod, CRASHES through the windshield, flies through the air. The Lunokhod flips over and over--no air resistance, so it seems like it won't stop...

LEVANT struggles to control the rover, which is in a major SPIN.

INT./EXT. LRV - MOVING

OUR LRV stops SPINNING. RESTARTING, they take the left.

A BULLET/SMALL ROCKET hits the back windshield, which CRACKS slightly.

The Lunokhods are out of view now, but they're out there. A RADIO VOICE pipes in:

RADIO VOICE
 COLONEL, WE DO CONFIRM YOU'RE
 FACING PIRATE ACTIVITY. Are you
 all clear now, over?

Roy is LOOKING BEHIND HIM:

ROY MCBRIDE
There're at least two behind us--

WILLY LEVANT
(to radio)
That's a negative, Hawk. They're still out there, behind us at 140 and 220 degrees.

Roy leans out. His jaw jutting forward just a bit, he seems anxious to do DAMAGE, a strangely VIOLENT COLDNESS coming through here. He reaches down, takes out a WEAPON.

ROY MCBRIDE
(under his breath; to no one)
I will handle these...

He AIMS his WEAPON at the HORIZON. Then it appears. It COMES CLOSER and CLOSER! The Lunokhod is almost upon them--

HE FIRES HIS WEAPON.

An EXPLOSION. Another Lunokhod appears on the horizon. Gains on them. ROY AIMS, FIRES AGAIN. ANOTHER PUFF of DUST.

WILLY LEVANT
(surprised)
Excellent shots, Major! Excellent!

ROY MCBRIDE
Thank you, Colonel.

A DARKNESS OVERTAKES US. It is PERMANENT NIGHT: THE FAR SIDE OF THE MOON.

EXT. THE MOON - FAR SIDE

We now reach the Far Side (i.e. the side always facing away from Earth) and are weaving amongst Chinese thermonuclear REACTORS. ENORMOUS LIGHTS SWITCH ON in front of the ROVER.

WILLY LEVANT
(into radio)
SpaceCom, we've just entered the Far Side. We need a push in 2500 clicks! 240 degrees, 58 seconds!

ROY LOOKS OVER TO PEDROSA.

ANGLE ON PEDROSA, from ROY'S POV. HE IS SLUMPED FOR A BEAT! HE SITS BACK UP...

EXT. THE MOON - FAR SIDE - ROAD

Multiple SPACESHIPS DESCEND and DROP ORDINANCE. "Daisy cutter"-esque MOABS do their thing. It's gruesome, spectacular, and Roy SPOTS IT looking behind him.

It's a ferocious scene, vicious and unforgiving, made all the more bizarre by the utter LACK OF SOUND. The silence and carnage is astonishing. The EXPLOSIONS are beautiful and ferocious. The sky's lit up for miles.

MOONBASE VEDA is just ahead--it's built over a massive crater and is underneath a DOME.

WILLY LEVANT

We are approaching Veda now, Major.

(beat)

Godspeed to you, gentlemen.

Pedrosa salutes. Levant and the rest of the crew depart, un sentimentally, leaving behind DR. PEDROSA and TWO FACELESS ASTRONAUTS to accompany ROY.

EXT. THE FLATTENED LUNAR LANDSCAPE

Roy disembarks from the LRV, flanked by the Faceless and Pedrosa. PEDROSA and the TWO MEN BOUND DOWN THE SIDE OF THE CRATER, with Roy.

They reach the bottom, a LAUNCH PAD for the fusion-powered craft, THE CEPHEUS.

INT. VEHICLE ASSEMBLY STRUCTURE

A mammoth hangar in a covert underground silo. Greenhouses, other life-sustaining structures inside, too. The SILO is IMPREGNABLE, surrounded by a kind of HEAT MOAT which forms a giant RED CIRCLE around the PAD...

ROY MOVES to a STEEL BAR. DR. PEDROSA PUTS HIS FOREARM under a BLUE LIGHT.

The SILO OPENS.

INT. LAUNCH PAD

The spacecraft--THE CEPHEUS--is poised on the pad, glowing in the beacon lights. Dr. Pedrosa REMOVES HIS HELMET and GLOVES. Roy does the same.

We PULL BACK to reveal the massive nature of the spacecraft/rocket. A WOMAN, SERGEANT ROMANO, approaches:

SERGEANT ROMANO

Major, are you all right? We'd been told an officer would be joining us, and we heard about your trouble getting here--

ROY MCBRIDE

Yes, Ma'am. The chaos is real infuriating, no doubt. But we were able to engage them on their terms.

Pedrosa INTERRUPTS Roy, pulling him aside. Something is WRONG; he's sweaty, white as a sheet. Sotto:

DR. PEDROSA

Roy--please, take it--

He hands Roy a thin silver card. Roy looks at him, bewildered:

DR. PEDROSA (CONT'D)

(sotto)

It is the redacted section of your father's profile. The password is "daisywheel". Examine it only when you are off the grid. The hard drive will protect you from any viral interference.

Roy SPOTS BLOOD, CASCADING DOWN Dr. Pedrosa's HAND. Looks around for help--

DR. PEDROSA (CONT'D)

Roy.

Roy spins back around. Pedrosa grabs him, SMEARING BLOOD on ROY'S SLEEVE:

DR. PEDROSA (CONT'D)

SPACECOM does not trust you. Try to remain as alert as possible; do not allow them to cloud your perception. And you will be required at times to be less than completely honest--but you must, to preserve the mission and the broader truth.

(beat)

I have faith in you.

ROY MCBRIDE
 (ferociously; to others)
 MEDIC!

PEDROSA CRUMPLES TO THE GROUND. MEDICS COLLAPSE on him as ROY BACKS AWAY. Roy is SURROUNDED by ARMY, among them SERGEANT ROMANO. They pull him away from the dying Pedrosa.

Roy holds the CARD in his hand, POCKETS IT.

INT. SILO ELEVATOR

The doors open, Roy exits. OVER THIS, we HEAR:

A WOMAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)
 Major McBride?

INT. SUIT ROOM

Sergeant Romano hands a spacesuit to Roy:

SERGEANT ROMANO
 Your vitals are all here, on your sleeve. Standard. Pulse, oxygen, CO2, blood pressure, and so forth.
 (beat)
 This is your Mission Commander, Captain Lawrence Blunt.
 (to Blunt)
 Captain Blunt, this is Major Roy McBride, he'll be hitching a ride to Mars on the jump seat.

Nearby, three men are donning their suits and going through their EXHAUSTIVE CHECKLISTS. They eye Roy with varying degrees of trepidation.

Focus on LAWRENCE BLUNT--*early 40s, dark wavy hair, dark eyes, powerful physical presence.*

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
 Right-o. Welcome aboard.

Blunt shakes Roy's hand.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT (CONT'D)
 Sounds like you went through some tough territory to get here, Major.

ROY MCBRIDE
 We surely did. Significant force proved necessary.

Blunt nods. He looks through a clipboard, then:

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
You're certified, I'm guessing.

ROY MCBRIDE
Yes. In EVA and spacecraft
mechanics.

ROY NOTICES PEDROSA'S BLOOD ALL OVER HIS SUIT.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
Terrific... This's First
Lieutenant Scobee--our Mission
Specialist.

He refers to DONALD SCOBEE--*late thirties, brown hair in a comb-over. He's in excellent physical condition. Looks like old Nixon aide John Dean.* He stares at Roy with his piercing eyes as he extends a hand.

ROY MCBRIDE
How do you do.

A handshake. Scobee is COURTEOUS but tough as NAILS.

DONALD SCOBEE
Major.

And FRANKLIN YOSHIDA. *Mid-forties. Totally remote, taciturn, a man of science.* Barely makes eye contact with Roy.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
Frank Yoshida's our Medic. And Lt.
Alan Tanner is on for navigation
and payload.

Finally, ALAN TANNER. *Early-30s.* A firm handshake and muttered greeting. Roy responds:

ROY MCBRIDE
Good to meet all you.

Roy tries to turn his forearm to hide PEDROSA'S BLOOD.

A young CADET walks in with food. Blunt looks down at an illuminated SOLAR SYSTEM MAP.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
I am headed to Helios South, on
Mars.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
That's pretty close to where we're headed. We've got a payload for the North division, but you can shuttle South once we're there.

ROY MCBRIDE
Will do. Grateful for the ride.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
(re: food plate)
Well all right then... Make yourself comfortable. Looks like there's some ginger beer and farmed salmon for final meal...

Roy turns to Sergeant Romano. Sotto:

ROY MCBRIDE
Sergeant--do we know the condition of Dr. Pedrosa?

SERGEANT ROMANO
Yes. Unfortunately, he passed, Major.

Roy nods, then turns, looks through GLASS at the ROCKET THAT will TAKE HIM TO THE STARS... THE CEPHEUS... Here, as everywhere, ARMED MEN and WOMEN abound. Looks down at his hand: CLUTCHING THAT DOSSIER CARD.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD

Roy, in his SPACESUIT, walks with the others holding their airpacks into the top of the rocket.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - COCKPIT

The cockpit is aglow with instruments and screens. Roy moves past Blunt and Scobee as they are ensconced to perform final preparations and checks.

Roy STRAPS IN.

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT
(into the radio)
Checklists complete. We are ready when you are, SpaceCom. Destination Helios Station North, Mars. Over.

SPACECOM (RADIO FILTER) (V.O.)
Affirmative, Captain. T-Minus 15
seconds. Ready to go.

SpaceCom commences COUNTDOWN.

ENGINES ROAR to life. The ROCKET SHUDDERS from the force.

DONALD SCOBEE (V.O.)
Ten, nine, eight, seven, six...
ignition sequence begin. We have
main engine start.

INT./EXT. THE CEPHEUS

The LIFTOFF TEAM scrambles to get away. The Cepheus, barely held to the gantry, is ready to go.

EXT. THE MOON

A great fire alights beneath The Cepheus.

DONALD SCOBEE (CONT'D)(V.O.)
Three, two, one.

The Cepheus rises, shaking off its tethers.

DONALD SCOBEE (V.O.)
We have lift off...

It explodes forward, hurtling around the Far Side.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - SEDATION AREA

Roy fights the G's.

SPACECOM (RADIO FILTER) (V.O.)
Cepheus, you are a go at throttle
up. Stand by for separation.

EXT. THE MOON - CEPHEUS

The Cepheus fires its BOOSTERS and explodes forward, hurtling around the Far Side with increasing velocity. DARKNESS returns to the launch pad.

INT. THE CEPHEUS

The group settles in just a bit. The distant sounds of the ENGINE are a soothing, rhythmic lullaby.

DONALD SCOBEE
SpaceCom, we are commencing CTP
ingestion.

Everyone TAKES A PILL which comes ejected from the console-- EXCEPT FOR ROY, who PALMS THE PILL and SLIPS it into his pocket.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - COCKPIT - LATER

Roy looks at his fellow travelers, all engaged in checklist tasks, other mundane activities:

DONALD SCOBEE
Pilot report A one-niner, Mars
trajectory... The burn was on
time. The residuals before nulling--
-minus 0.1...

ROY MCBRIDE
Captain, I think my suit's suffered
an oxygen leak. It's going to
require an epoxy patch.

LAWRENCE BLUNT
Happy to assist, sir.

ROY MCBRIDE
That won't be necessary, Captain.
Thank you. I've got it.

As Roy gets up, we SEE, to his RIGHT: "CAUTION: MANUAL BOOSTER CONTROL".

INT. CARGO AREA

Roy floats in to a SECLUDED PART of the ship. He pulls out what Pedrosa gave him. The DOSSIER/AMULET, a thin, silver card. He inserts it into a slot of a small computer that is in his sleeve. Inserts an earbud.

LASERS and OPTICS read his irises. SCREENS on his helmet inside display his biorhythms.

ROY MCBRIDE
Password DAISYWHEEL. Slate 23.

The password and bioscan activate the ELECTRONIC DOSSIER. The dossier opens up on a screen before him--in what looks like MID-AIR.

ON SCREEN: "LIMA TRANSMISSION INTERCEPT: 12/14/16.
UNTELEVISED CANADIAN BROADCASTING CHANNEL INTERVIEW: H.
CLIFFORD MCBRIDE"

INT. FIAT LUX - OCULUS BASE

PROFESSOR H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE, looking into the camera. Unlike videos from today's astronauts, these are HD, fluid images.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE
Hello CBC...Toronto...

H. Clifford McBride is on a space station, but exactly where is unclear. He looks haggard and unkempt. UNHINGED.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
I'd like to use this opportunity to reach out directly. To my son. If you could get this to him...please...
(beat)
Roy... Solitude has increased my perception... I look so far into the universe here, and I see how cruel it is in its indifference... So many planets potentially suitable for life, yet as of now we hear and see nothing... I've come to worry that our own long-term survival is in doubt. My death is not something I fear. But--the extinction of ALL ideas, of all human expression--that is the true terror. Our consciousness must extend into the future, past any force that renders us extinct. We must commit ourselves to this goal...
(beat)
And so I, I... If you see this--we're, we're real far away. And some people haven't been able to keep their composure...
(looks down, avoiding)
It's been very difficult...

ANGLE ON ROY. His FACE registers that this is his father, addressing him directly--and his father doesn't look good. Roy looks down, at his SLEEVE. His VITALS. Over this:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

I'm sure you will have a lot of questions about the choices I've had to make. But... Perhaps someday you'll understand. I do miss you. I'm sure you miss me, too.

ROY'S PULSE STARTS CLIMBING... So he has to stop watching before the computer redflags his bioactivity...

CUT TO:

INT. CEPHEUS - CARGO AREA

Roy takes the small stick given to him by Pedrosa and puts it in an airlock, adding the PILL they gave him to take. Releases the lever and sends the items into space...lost forever...

A VOICE, through radio earpiece, from another part of Cepheus:

A VOICE

Major! MAJOR!

Roy turns, moves to

INT. ANOTHER SECTION OF CEPHEUS

SCOBEE and YOSHIDA seem to be in some kind of quiet panic. SILENTLY attending to the equipment around them. Then Yoshida comes to ROY/US (the camera is NOW SUBJECTIVE) as ROY settles back into the main area of the craft. Yoshida turns to Roy, with urgency:

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

Major--we're receiving a "mayday" from a craft that's in our zone. Per regulation, it may require you to accompany Captain Blunt on an EVA.

ROY MCBRIDE

No--we can't stop.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA
 (surprised)
 Major?

ROY MCBRIDE
 We need to reach Mars.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA
 (smiles, an uncomfortable
 laugh)
 Major, this is protocol. We have a
 mayday--

ROY MCBRIDE
 We can't stop!

Roy moves past Yoshida into:

INT. THE CEPHEUS - CONTROL ROOM

Roy enters the CONTROL ROOM, sees that the other men have put
 on their helmets.

The ELECTRONIC BEEPING alert plays, and DATA flashes across
 the main MONITORS on the bridge. Lawrence Blunt to the
 radio, with RADIO FILTER:

LAWRENCE BLUNT
 Ninety-seven hundred kilometers
 away, on the proximity alert.

ROY LOOKS OVER THEIR SHOULDERS TO SEE: on a panel screen: the
 image of THE VESTA IX. A small, rotating station orbiting of
 "Earth's second satellite," the asteroid called TORO. Roy is
 agitated:

ROY MCBRIDE
 The Helios Station is the
 destination, Captain--why are you
 stopping?

LAWRENCE BLUNT
 We have a mayday, major--this is
 standard--
 (INTO COMMS)
 Vesta Nine, this is Cepheus Seven,
 United States Armed Forces Space
 Division. Do you read, over?

Roy looks impatient, unsure how to press the case:

ROY MCBRIDE
Other craft will be in the
vicinity. We have our destination.

LAWRENCE BLUNT
(confused)
Major, with respect, we're
obligated to stop. As you are
merely a passenger, I'm not sure I
comprehend your position.

Unable to reveal anything, Roy turns away as Tanner looks
through flight information:

ALAN TANNER
The craft is registered as
Norwegian, the Vesta Nine, orbiting
asteroid Toro. Registered for
biomedical research.

On another screen: A scan of the Vesta IX appears. And on
another SCREEN, ship schematics.

LAWRENCE BLUNT
(INTO COMMS)
Vesta Nine, do you read, over?

Still nothing. Roy looks at a screen for information. Eyes
the SCHEMATICS for the VESTA NINE.

LAWRENCE BLUNT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Vesta Nine, according to the Outer
Space Treaty we are responding to
your distress call.
(beat)
Do you read?

ROY OVERHEARS:

ALAN TANNER
I just accessed their log. Last
transmission was Sept. 17, 13:37
PM.

LAWRENCE BLUNT
(to Command)
Command, I'm going EVA. Possible
forced entry required.
(to Roy)
You're the only non-essential
member of this craft. As you know,
protocol is for you to come along.
(beat)
Will this be a problem?

Roy thinks for a moment, then, with thinly-veiled anger, he starts to suit up.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - EQUIPMENT SECTION

Roy and Blunt strap on equipment and make final suit augmentations for their EVA. Roy SEES Blunt is ARMING A WEAPON, a GUNLIKE object.

LAWRENCE BLUNT
 (stares at Roy for an
 uncomfortable moment;
 then:)
 I'd advise you to arm yourself as
 well. You're no longer in a
 predictable environment.

ROY MCBRIDE
 (curt)
 I'm aware of that.

Frustrated, Roy turns, looks through GLASS to SEE: the Vesta IX, about the size of the Cepheus, slowly rolling in place. We hear Donald Scobee from the cockpit...

DONALD SCOBEE (RADIO FILTER) (V.O.)
 Heading three-three-four. Cannot
 confirm live contact. Range three-
 zero-seven-zero meters and closing.
 (beat)
 Reactor is still hot.
 (beat)
 Optimum approach angle, thirteen
 degrees. Coming around to three-
 three-four.

Blunt leads Roy towards the hatch...

INT. THE CEPHEUS - AIRLOCK

Roy and Blunt stand before the airlock doors... which open into space.

Out they go...

EXT. THE CEPHEUS

A few glittering LIGHTS distinguish the Cepheus from absolute darkness.

Roy and Blunt jet towards the Vesta IX.

EXT. SPACE

They venture away from the Cepheus and frighteningly into deep space. The Vesta is still distressingly far...

And yet, the Vesta gets closer...

And closer...

EXT. VESTA IX

And then they are upon it! Roy reaches the airlock first. He PUNCHES BUTTONS on the DOORFRAME, to no avail. STATIC NOISE. Blunt motions to Roy, who uses a GATLING GUN to blow open the airlock. In SILENCE.

INT. VESTA IX - AIRLOCK

Roy and Blunt enter the craft, pulse weapons at the ready. No one's in sight.

DONALD SCOBEE (V.O.)
Gentlemen, one of you is required
to find the flight recorder box.

Blunt points to Roy, and he and Roy move in different directions...

INT. VESTA IX - DECK

Roy floats through the craft--it's vacant, jammed with idle instruments, empty console chairs. It's quiet, except for an electrical HUM. We HEAR:

CAPTAIN LAWRENCE BLUNT (V.O.)
Vesta, this is Cepheus, responding
to your mayday signal... Do you
read...?

The ZERO GRAVITY renders a lot of things floating: PENCILS, NOTEBOOKS, EQUIPMENT, LIT FLASHLIGHTS. They spin in the craft.

INT. VESTA IX - LAB

Roy floats deeper into the craft. It's dark. Roy scans his TRACKING DEVICE from side to side. The SPINNING FLASHLIGHTS illuminate spots for brief moments. Roy grabs one as it moves.

By the looks of the LAB EQUIPMENT, it appears the craft performs research on viruses and diseases.

Roy continues...

INT. VESTA IX - PASSAGEWAY

Roy MOVES towards an OPENING that leads to a DECK. LIGHTS are coming from that area.

INT. VESTA IX - ANOTHER DECK

Much CLUTTER here, lots of ITEMS floating around.

Roy moves silently. A SCREEN COMES ON. A bearded man, grizzly and haunted. A NORWEGIAN ASTRONAUT:

NORWEGIAN ASTRONAUT

This is a eulogy for 12 good men...
Men who came to space to advance
scientific understanding of the
universe. But... Our supply
generator has failed... We can no
longer see the earth--and it is not
visible from our current
perspective... No more earth. And
we are adrift, without purpose...
With no hope in sight, we have
decided to do the only logical
thing...

Then: something weird... CRIMSON ORBS are floating here and there. There must be at least a dozen. Most are baseball-sized, some are larger, some smaller.

ROY touches one. Liquid. He removes his finger, the orb divides into smaller orbs.

Then--

Something else is FLOATING TOWARDS US... A larger MASS... ROY backs up--

AND bumps into a BODY.

A dead body. He is startled. Roy pushes past them.

MORE DEAD bodies ahead.

One body leaks BLOOD, which bubbles out of the man's torn suit, up, down and around, in every direction, forming the crimson orbs.

ROY MCBRIDE

Cepheus, I have one expired individual here, no signs of anyone alive. I believe I've viewed a suicide video file of some kind.

DONALD SCOBEE

Copy that, Major. Uh, Major, we've momentarily lost contact with Captain Blunt here.

ROY MCBRIDE

Appears I have as well. Will attempt eye contact.

INT. VESTA IX - B-DECK

Roy is in the aft of the ship and is DOWNLOADING information from a central computer shaft. PULLS OUT a BLACK BOX from the console.

A small LIGHT on Roy's tracker FLASHES.

ROY MCBRIDE (RADIO FILTER)

Captain?

No ANSWER.

Roy tenses, looks around. Starts to float in that direction.

Roy moves between cramped rows of SHADOWED EQUIPMENT.

There's MOVEMENT in front of him. He hesitates. Then, another shadowy movement...

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Captain Blunt?

Again, no answer! Roy RAISES HIS WEAPON. MOVES FORWARD TO REVEAL:

AROUND THE CORNER:

We SEE a truly GROTESQUE SIGHT: a BABOON DEVOURING CAPTAIN BLUNT'S FACE!

It's a big one, a Chacma, close to 100 pounds. It's insane and hungry.

Roy jumps back, beyond startled.

ROY'S P.O.V. -- The baboon SEES ROY, SHRIEKS (LOUDLY--but SILENT TO US because of our helmeted P.O.V.). It knocks over some equipment as it swims toward us in the gravity-free space, floating towards ROY'S jugular.

BANG! ROY KILLS THE PRIMATE WITH HIS WEAPON.

It TUMBLES AWAY, dead.

Roy comes over to help. He looks in what remains of Blunt's eyes. The pupils are not dilating. Roy PUNCHES a BUTTON on the SIDE OF HIS HELMET. OUT OF BREATH:

ROY MCBRIDE

Cepheus, a research primate has attacked the captain. He's critically injured. Suggest retrieving the VDR and moving the Captain to the Cepheus as soon as possible. Please advise.

DONALD SCOBEE

We confirm, this is our view as well. Over.

Just then: A RUSH OF MONKEYS APPEARS, CHARGING AT ROY. HE PULLS HIMSELF BACK, through an AIRLOCK, YANKING the SMALL BLACK DATA BOX as well as BLUNT inside. Just in time, too, as the MONKEYS SLAM into the AIRLOCK DOOR. Insanity.

INT. AIRLOCK - VESTA

Roy pulls out a HELMET from a ROW of them, inside the airlock. Locking it into place on Blunt, placing carefully it over Blunt's BLOODIED FACE.

EXT. SPACE

Roy and his cord--pulling the black box as well as an inanimate Blunt--move back to the Cepheus.

EXT. CEPHEUS

As Roy approaches, the Cepheus is SPINNING. He gets to the surface of the craft, waits until the AIRLOCK DOOR approaches.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - AIRLOCK

The airlock doors whoosh open, and Roy rockets in with the

equipment and Blunt's body on a tether cord. The doors close behind him. He takes off his helmet. Yoshida helps him/them through the airlock; PULLING OFF BLUNT'S HELMET, he's horrified to see what's become of his Commander. Yoshida begins immediately to work on Blunt. Roy is out of breath.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

(to Roy)

What the hell happened in there?!?

ROY MCBRIDE

It was a scientific vessel--they lost control somehow.

(with gritted teeth)

I tried to tell the Captain... ALL of you.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

Tell us what?

ROY MCBRIDE

That we have a task in front of us. And that to stop would be a *waste of fucking time.*

Yoshida goes back to work on the unresponsive Blunt. Leaning his HEAD IN through the corrugated arch, ALAN TANNER reaches for the BLACK BOX. He pulls it toward him. Then, sotto:

ALAN TANNER

(re: Blunt)

What's his status?

Yoshida SIMPLY SHAKES HIS HEAD. The CAPTAIN WON'T MAKE IT.

ALAN TANNER (CONT'D)

I'll inform Don, he'll have to be certified for flight.

As Tanner PULLS the black box, Roy follows him into:

INT. COMMAND MODULE - MOMENTS LATER

Tanner begins to draw on the BLACK BOX data. Scobee is going through his checklist, comparing it the BLACK BOX DATA that is coming in on the computer. Roy moves closer.

The RADIO INTERRRUPTS:

SPACECOM VOICE

Cepheus, we received your message concerning Captain Blunt. We have Cpt.

(MORE)

SPACECOM VOICE (CONT'D)
 Scobee's retinal scan on file, and
 he is now in control of the craft.
 Over.

DONALD SCOBEE
 This is Cpt. Scobee, SpaceCom.
 Roger that. Over.

Sotto, to Scobee, Roy grabs Scobee's arm:

ROY MCBRIDE
Mars is our assigned destination.
 That is what requires our complete
 focus.

DONALD SCOBEE
 Understood, Major. We're on our
 way to Helios Station.
 (louder; to Tanner)
 Prepare boosters D-6, D-9.

ALAN TANNER
 Boosters D-6 and D-9, roger that.

Roy HEARS something. Turns back to SEE:

INT. NEAR AIRLOCK

The life is leaving Blunt. ROY can SEE the BODY, ENTOMBED
 inside his SPACESUIT. Yoshida finishes reading LAST RITES:

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA
 ...I commend you to almighty God,
 and entrust you to your Creator.
 May the angels and the saints come
 to meet you, as you go forth from
 this life. May you see your
 Redeemer face to face and enjoy the
 vision of God for ever...
 (to the men)
 Airlock engaged.

DONALD SCOBEE
 Airlock engaged, roger that.

The AIRLOCK opens. A WHOOSH!

EXT. SPACE

THE CEPHEUS RELEASES BLUNT'S BODY into the VOID...

Their fallen commander tumbles away, into the darkness. The Cepheus' BOOSTER ROCKETS FIRE, and the CRAFT speeds away-- leaving Blunt's body to tumble. Forever...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARS - LATER

The RED PLANET, floating in space. A space elevator with a SPINNING DOCKING STATION is tethered to the planet.

The Cepheus ARRIVES into view, its retros thrusting.

INT. CEPHEUS

The men speak:

DONALD SCOBEE
(to radio)
SpaceCom, we are approaching Mars,
Helios North. Over.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SPACE ELEVATOR

It slows to a stop as it DOCKS with THE DOCKING BAY connected to MARS.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - CONTINUOUS

As Roy, Tanner, Scobee, and Yoshida ready themselves to leave: A DOWNLOAD COMMENCES.

SPACECOM VOICE
Cepheus, this is SpaceCom. We have
a secure download for passenger Roy
McBride.

DONALD SCOBEE
Send it through. Over.

The FILE DOWNLOADS. Roy takes the chip and:

INT. SECURE CORNER

Roy downloads the chip:

SPACECOM VOICE

An additional message was sent to the moon's communications center, approximately seven hours after your departure.

ROY FOCUSES. On a SCREEN comes: THE IMAGES OF THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE THAT ROY has OBSESSED OVER! The MUSIC is odd, a strange "easy listening" tune...

ROY MOVES CLOSE TO THE SCREEN. Then, the IMAGERY CUTS OUT, leaving a TEXT SENTENCE, white TEXT on BLACK SCREEN:

"ARE YOU COMING?"

NEW LINE of TEXT:

"06:10:00"

ANGLE ON ROY as we:

CUT TO:

INT. DOCKING AREA - CEPHEUS

Roy SHAKES the hands of Scobee and Yoshida and Tanner:

ROY MCBRIDE

My condolences for Captain Blunt, gentlemen. I do appreciate the ride and wish you the best on the rest of your journeys.

DONALD SCOBEE

Thank you, Major. Glad we could be of service...

The HATCH OPENS for ROY, and he glides through.

INT. SHUTTLE

Roy is in the shuttle to Helios South.

INT. DOCKING BAY - MOMENTS LATER

He enters the docking bay of the space station. Nobody's here to greet him, although there are cameras and active screens. BEEEEEP! ROY SPEAKS:

ROY MCBRIDE

McBride, Roy C. Submit.

Steps forward and puts his eye in the scanner.

WOMAN ON A SCREEN

Approved.

A moment, then a WHOOSH! A LARGE DOOR OPENS TO:

INT. SPACE ELEVATOR

The CREW, entering in the elevator. Roy looks out, SEEING THE RED PLANET'S SURFACE APPROACHING as the thing descends.

INT. HELIOS STATION - MARS SURFACE

The ELEVATOR "lands" on MARS. The LARGE STEEL DOOR UNLOCKS AUTOMATICALLY. ROY steps out.

We don't see any people here yet. But several SIBERIAN HUSKIES walk up and down the halls of the installation. A couple of them come up to our men and sniff around.

A weird SCREECHING sound pervades--as if something large deep inside the station needs repair...or, at the very least, WD40.

THEN: A FEW SCIENTISTS staggering down the hall, too--SINGING some unknown song badly, somewhat drunkenly. A GUY IN ROLLER-SKATES speeds past in the background.

A SEEMINGLY INSANE MARS OFFICER, a woman of fifty, charges to Roy:

MARS OFFICER

Did you bring us seeds?!? What about canned produce, did you do THAT?

ROY MCBRIDE

No. I'm sorry. I don't have any. Sorry... Is your commanding officer--

Roy looks past her. It's MADNESS. More passersby, more revelry... and the return of the Roller-Skater.

Next comes an unctuous officer named SERGEANT PETER BELLO (*fiftysomething, strangely tan*) greets our man. He may not be drunk, but it's unclear if he has his wits about him.

SGT. BELLO

(with a slightly mad grin,
too loud at times)

(MORE)

SGT. BELLO (CONT'D)

Good afternoon! Or evening--or whatever the fuck! WELCOME TO THE VERY LAST MANNED OUTPOST IN OUR SOLAR SYSTEM! [I'm] Sergeant Bello... You comin' from earth, or the moon??? OR WHAT?!? Wait, whose retinal scan'd I approve?

ROY MCBRIDE

I've been sent by SpaceCom to conduct an inspection near Vallis Marineris and I need access to the location as soon as possible. I need to see a Colonel Lipset.

SGT. BELLO

Oh, I bet he's at Shunga Show, brother! Where we should be! Keep ourselves right in the head--and down BELOW, if you get my meaning--

ROY INTERRUPTS him.

ROY MCBRIDE

I need to talk to him. It's urgent.

SGT. BELLO

Okay, cowboy... Okay...

INT. HELIOS STATION - SHUNGA PARLOR

An enormous dark space, almost like the Whale Room in New York's American Museum of Natural History. It's lit only by black light.

PROJECTED ALL OVER, we SEE...several physically perfect STRIPPERS (holographic--but also totally lifelike).

ROY joins the throng of SCIENTISTS & MILITARY. EVERYONE is SMOKING POT and doing a lot of other stuff.

Roy walks through some of the strippers.

SGT. BELLO

(excitedly)

They keep us company! Don't misunderstand me, we're not allowed't make 'em sentient, course. But our scientists here've tampered with 'em--given 'em a little more personality, we'll say!

(MORE)

SGT. BELLO (CONT'D)
 They're still well within legal
 A.I. cognition limits, I promise
 you!

Roy looks around him at a couple of gorgeous (fake) women,
 GYRATING IN UNISON to "TALKIN' LOUD AND SAYIN' NOTHING".

Roy SEES a LARGE BUFFET TABLE with PROCESSED FOOD.

The virtual HOLO WOMEN move around Roy like ghosts.

It's James Brown night, evidently. The Godfather of Soul is
 actually here in person, "on stage"--a perfect, life-like
 hologram.

Roy's sort of pushing the Holo Women away, like swatting
 flies. His hand just goes through them. Roy and the rest of
 the crew encounter:

Sitting on a cushion, smoking a BONG and working on God-knows-
 what with old-fashioned pencil and paper, is astrophysicist
 SAMIR MALIK--*bearded, thirtysomething, bespectacled,*
hippyish. A shit-eating grin. HIS WIFE, CHERYL, is next to
 him. Projected around them is a WARM SPACE, almost like a
 high-end LOG CABIN. STANDING NEARBY: COLONEL LIPSET, a
 grizzled man, about forty-five years old. Lined face, gaunt.
 He STARES AT ROY...

SGT. BELLO (CONT'D)
 Sam, this guy's got orders, from
 SpaceCom. Looking for a Colonel
 Lipset.

Malik smiles broadly, holds out a hand to shake Roy's.
 COMPLETELY STONED. His hand is robotic, a metallic gold (for
 no explained reason).

SAMIR MALIK
 Samir Malik--I'm superintendant.
 With National Institute of
 Sciences. Cal-Tech Mafia! This's
 my wife, Cheryl.

CHERYL
 Pleased to meet you.

SAMIR MALIK
 (with a snort)
 Well, it's a pleasure to meet
anybody this far out--'specially
 anybody with their heads screwed on
 straight! END of the LINE here!

Awkward pause, the MEN LOOK AROUND at the surroundings.
COLONEL LIPSET is still staring. Then:

SAMIR MALIK (CONT'D)
(lets out a laugh)
Gotta maintain that human
connection *somehow*...

The OFFICER REACHES DOWN to a METAL PLANK below his feet and
FLIPS a SWITCH. OFF GOES the HOLOGRAPHIC ROOM AROUND THEM,
that "HIGH-END LOG CABIN", revealing the real space around
them. Stepping forward is Colonel Lipset:

COLONEL LIPSET
Major, I'm Colonel Lipset.

ROY MCBRIDE
Sir. YES.

As COLONEL LIPSET MOVES to shake Roy's hand, he LEANS IN,
softly into Roy's EAR:

COLONEL LIPSET
I've been fully briefed.

Straightening up, and louder:

ROY MCBRIDE
Yessir.

Roy turns, HANDS LIPSET A PRINTOUT.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
My destination is these
coordinates.

COLONEL LIPSET
(looks, then to Malik)
Dr. Malik?

MALIK LOOKS AT IT, then UP AT THEM, LIKE ROY'S NUTS. Grows
DEADLY SERIOUS. Turns to his wife:

SAMIR MALIK
Honey, I've gotta go back to work.
(back to Roy)
Why don't you take a ride with me.

INT. HELIOS CORRIDOR - MONORAIL

ROY, SAMIR MALIK in a SPEEDING MONORAIL. A LIT MAP IS IN
FRONT OF THEM. With Malik is his right-hand, a woman named
KATHRYN COLLINS. COLONEL LIPSET is with them, SILENT.

SAMIR MALIK

The spot is in the middle of our complex of fission reactors. It's a Westinghouse design, built--I wanna say six earth years ago?

He looks to Collins:

KATHRYN COLLINS

That's right.

SAMIR MALIK

Right. Well, there was a meltdown in reactor three a few months after completion. Likely a result of industrial sabotage.

ROY MCBRIDE

What's its current status?

SAMIR MALIK

Kathryn knows more than I do here.

Roy TURNS TO THE MAP IN FRONT OF THEM as it scrolls up to the northern hemisphere, then stops. Like Google Maps' "Street View"--a remote camera has captured the exterior of a Martian REACTOR. Roy studies the location.

Collins points to the map, which shows a "skeleton" of the reactor's innards.

KATHRYN COLLINS (CONT'D)

This area was walled-off after the disaster. They poured concrete to prevent further contamination. And many of the tunnels are still filled with cooling water.

Roy is studying images of a large TELESCOPE ARRAY near the reactor in Valles Marineris.

ROY MCBRIDE

What is that, to the right?

KATHRYN COLLINS

A radio telescope. Still active. Which is why we're continuing to pump electricity, water, and oxygen through the reactor. No one'll spend the money to build a new telescope away from the contaminated area, and it needs those things to operate.

ROY MCBRIDE

So this whole zone is deserted now--
but it still has power, that's what
I'm to understand?

COLONEL LIPSET

That is correct, major.

Everyone falls silent. Lipset's interjection is odd. Then:

KATHRYN COLLINS

SPACECOM's using Cornell University
to do an ongoing study of the
disaster. One of their fellows's
named Francesca DeSanctis. She's
their point person.

As Roy sifts through the reactor scans:

ROY MCBRIDE

I'd like to debrief her--if that's
okay with you.

COLONEL LIPSET

We'll get her to you.

A TENSE BEAT. Then:

SAMIR MALIK

Anything we should know here?

COLONEL LIPSET

I'm sorry, Doctor--how do you mean?

SAMIR MALIK

(looks to Collins, then)
Well...we had a power surge, couple
of weeks ago, and we had a lot of
repair work on our hands.

COLONEL LIPSET

I seem to recall reading that
quakes happen here from time to
time, maybe that was the cause.

SAMIR MALIK

They do, but...

(beat; shrugs)

Look, we've heard rumors. About an
explosion, off Neptune.

(beat)

I guess I'm wondering--should
we...evacuate?

Colonel Lipset looks to Roy, who responds "properly":

ROY MCBRIDE
The mission's classified, I'm
sorry.

Malik purses his lips. Not the most encouraging answer.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Please find the woman.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HELIOS - CHAPEL/LAB - CONTINUOUS

What was once solely a chapel has been converted to a lab mixed with a weird version of a 1960's hippy ashram. Blankets, lamps, etc. A WOMAN whose back is to us.

SAMIR MALIK
Her name is Francesca DeSanctis-- she was born here. She's part of the Cornell Extension program and had been working on the Mars geology project. So she's been researching the territory for years.

A CLOSE SHOT on FRANCESCA DESANCTIS, early forties, as she turns around to us. Lovely but also fragile. Not physically delicate, but somehow, we can tell she's emotionally vulnerable. She is whiter than white--as if her skin has never seen sunlight. Veins are visible beneath her temples.

She looks into the camera, then STANDS UP, walks toward us as ROY ENTERS.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
Hello.

ROY MCBRIDE
Good evening.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
(wide smile)
Or morning.

ROY MCBRIDE
(gentle smile in return)
Right, yes.
(beat)
I'm from USSPACECOM, and I have some questions for you.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

All right.

ROY MCBRIDE

I ask you not to be concerned, I just need to know what you know--

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

(interrupting)

I'm not concerned.

ROY MCBRIDE

Okay, that's good... Dr. Malik informs me that you've been studying the reactors?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Yes. For about four years now, for a SPACECOM study. I toured the area myself before a series of quakes hit the area. I was the last to enter.

(wry smile)

I guess I'm the lucky one.

(beat)

All my records are on file, and I have adhered most strictly to all regulations. My scientific work is very important. It's, it's what I have.

ROY MCBRIDE

(nods; then)

You haven't noticed anything unusual inside the reactors?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Apart from the physical activity?

ROY MCBRIDE

What do you mean?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

I informed SPACECOM about signs of a physical disturbance inside the reactor. Didn't they tell you?

ROY MCBRIDE

(thrown)

No...I, I have no information on that matter...

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Well, it's my feeling that a person has been inside the core. I've noticed what I think are some very obvious signs.

ROY IS STUNNED.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

I can take you down there--if, if that's where you need to go. I know the routes and I can help.

ROY MCBRIDE

(cutting her off)

Thank you. I think I have enough information for now. I'll contact you.

CUT TO:

INT. HELIOS CONFERENCE ROOM

Roy and Colonel Lipset are huddling. Lipset looks at DATA PAPERS. *In medias res:*

ROY MCBRIDE

I do believe now it's possible that my father escaped from Neptune, yes. In a craft of some sort, perhaps--something of 3-D fabrication. We'd have to find out where he's hiding here on Mars, course.

COLONEL LIPSET

Either that, or it's not him.

ROY MCBRIDE

Sir, with respect, there's no one else who had knowledge of the things that have been sent to me. It is him.

Lipset looks up. A beat. Then:

COLONEL LIPSET

No one's been inside there for years. We don't know what's down there.

(MORE)

COLONEL LIPSET (CONT'D)

It could be extremely dangerous--
the radiation, the, the self-
replicators may still be active.
And you don't know the
way--

ROY MCBRIDE

I would go with Ms. DeSanctis. She
would guide me to the location and
I could then initiate the contact
with my father. I would set her
free and convince him to surrender.
You'd have continued access to my
data, and you could speak with me
directly through my MMU.

(beat)

This is the necessary mission, sir.
And time is critical.

Lipset begins to BURN the DATA PAPERS.

COLONEL LIPSET

We'll have to follow you close
behind, ready to move and hopefully
obtain intel on the Lima Project's
precise location off Neptune.

Roy LOOKS TROUBLED. DOES NOT SPEAK UP.

COLONEL LIPSET (CONT'D)

Is this a problem for you?

ROY MCBRIDE

(beat)

No sir...

COLONEL LIPSET

Good. Because we're only here to
help.

ANGLE ON ROY as we:

CUT TO:

INT. HELIOS PREPARATION ROOM

Francesca is getting a SPACESUIT put on her. She's rarely
had one on before; it looks awkward, almost preposterous, on
her. She's older than Roy; she is lovely in her
vulnerability. Incredibly aware and sensitive eyes--as well
as a seemingly easygoing manner:

ROY MCBRIDE

Are you uncomfortable with the unit, Ma'am?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

I've grown up with these but I've never liked them.

ROY MCBRIDE

This one's considerably better than the earlier models. I've noticed increased flexibility with the newer MMUs. They have all our vitals here. And you can release all the nitrogen fuel at once, if you need to, from the pack or even from your boots, here.

(beat; senses her stress)

If you breathe normally, there's no cause for panic.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

That's what I try to do.

(smiles)

"Breathe," I tell myself. It should be easy. It probably is, for you.

She accepts that. Roy REACHES for a SMALL ELECTRONIC FLAT SCREEN, which he unfolds:

ROY MCBRIDE

Is this map accurate?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

(nods; then)

Yes. But when we get there, there's also a guide rope that we installed through the tunnels right after meltdown. It leads to the center of the core.

ROY MCBRIDE

Okay...

(beat)

And--and thank you, Ma'am. You can rest assured that this is of great importance, what you're doing. For the Earth.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

(nods; then)

I've only been to earth once, actually. As a child.

(MORE)

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

I have a tissue disorder because I was born here. They said I'd die if I tried going back, through the radiation belt. But they're working on new medications.

Unexpectedly, she stops speaking. Looks at Roy. Her EYES WELL UP:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

I remember it very well--I remember, it was extremely beautiful.

ROY MCBRIDE

Some parts, yes.
(lets out a laugh)
Other parts...not so much.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

(interior)

I wish I could be there...I wish, more than anything else...

(louder; eases)

A lot of people here get lonely. And they break down. The mental hospital at Helios is always full of patients.

(sotto; looks at the map)

It's why I always thought the reactor crew itself caused the meltdown. I think they just lost it...

A beat. She seems to get an idea:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

Hey, I think I saw a news program on you, from a few years back. I just realized, I think I know you!

ROY IS MOMENTARILY CONFUSED:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

It was--it was about the Space Antenna!

ROY MCBRIDE

Oh yes, the gravitational wave antenna. It's almost finished now. It's going to be an excellent project. We'll be able to hear any intelligent life, possibly even respond.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
 Maybe I'll be able to go to the
 Earth and see it someday...

ROY MCBRIDE
 Yes, it will be completed soon.
 Our team was really working toward
 that. All of us, back home. It's
 a very worthy endeavor--
 communication with other potential
 lifeforms.

DeSanctis looks at her suit. Then:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 I think you're ready.

A BUTTON on Francesca's SUIT is PUSHED and it COLLAPSES
 AROUND HER, SNUG. She looks uncomfortable--but ready. Roy
 SMILES at her; he's comfortable. There's even a level of
 sexual attraction, maybe. Maybe. Roy talks to his sleeve:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 Doctor, Colonel--I think we're good
 to go here.

ANGLE ON ROY as he LOOKS UP. THROUGH GLASS, we SEE: SAMIR
 MALIK and COLONEL LIPSET looking at them.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND STATION

A maze-like installation. A ROVER about to depart.

INT. ROVER

In the ROVER are Roy and Francesca. With KATHRYN COLLINS
 driving.

EXT. MARS - SHUTTLE PORT - DAY

The ground opens up and the rover emerges onto the strikingly
 bright Martian terrain.

EXT. MARS - VALLES MARINERIS - LATER

The rover drives alongside one of Mars's monumental canyons,
 VALLES MARINERIS. It's amazing.

INT. ROVER

A wonder to behold. *ALL DIALOG IS RADIO FILTER:*

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

That is Valles Marineris, over to your right--it's a thousand times bigger than the Grand Canyon on earth. And just about every other month an earthsick person throws himself off it.

INT./EXT. FRONT ROVER - CONTINUOUS

Francesca DeSanctis gestures to a large structure that they're about to pass.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

The area we're entering was self-sufficient at one time, with a greenhouse and self-replicating units for maintenance and repair.

(to Collins)

You can take us right to that white circle, Kathryn.

KATHRYN COLLINS

Will do.

Collins pulls the rover over to the side of the road, near a WHITE STEEL CIRCLE TUBE in the dirt--about 10 feet in diameter. Roy leans forward. To Collins:

ROY MCBRIDE

I have activated GPS so you can find us. When we're done. It reports that we have twenty-six minutes until we need to be inside.

KATHRYN COLLINS

Roger that. We'll be more than happy to come pick you up on our Mars Taxi service!

(no answer from Roy, so)

Good luck, both of you!

EXT. MARS - VALLES MARINERIS - CONTINUOUS

The rover's doors open. Roy steps out.

Roy and Francesca are left all alone as the Rover leaves behind a trail of dust.

It's silent. The landscape is mostly barren--the greenhouse, the radio telescope, and a few other structures are in the distance.

A purple DUST STORM materializes, gathers, grows, approaches.

The atmosphere is obscured.

Luckily, the atmosphere is so thin that these twisters are harmless--they just leave a RED/VIOLET HUE over Roy's and Francesca's spacesuit and helmet.

Francesca finds a HATCH, covered in dust and dirt. POINTS TO ROY. Roy bends down, shoves the dirt away and find a metal protuberance. After removing more dirt, he is ABLE TO LIFT UP THE HATCH.

DOWN THEY GO, INTO AN UNDERGROUND CHAMBER.

INT. UNDERGROUND CHAMBER

A CONCRETE SARCOPHAGUS. A WALL. With a CIRCULAR WHEEL, leading DOWNWARD. FRANCESCA GESTURES.

ROY TURNS THE WHEEL. It opens, and they descend into the DARK WATER:

INT. TUNNELS

THEY ARE NOW SWIMMING in a TUNNEL of DARKNESS. Roy and Francesca have HELMET LIGHTS which illuminate a few feet in front of them.

They PULL THEMSELVES ALONG by the GUIDE ROPE.

ROY'S SLEEVE BLINKS: "EXCESSIVE RADIATION"

INT. DEEPER INTO THE TUNNELS

They are dark.

Only a few feet in front of Roy is illuminated.

THE TWO PULL THEMSELVES ALONG THE ROPE SLOWLY and CAREFULLY. INTO THE DARKNESS.

But then we see the movement of particulate in the air. Something is causing dust to disperse in that DARK TUNNEL...

ROY MCBRIDE
Something appears to be moving.

The breaths quicken.

TERROR on her face. He looks down the pipeway; he can focus on nothing else...

SOMETHING begins to appear in the darkness...

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

I just received a text message,
imploping us not to proceed. It
says if we do we will be
destroyed...

SLOWLY BUT SURELY we begin to make it out...

It is a creaturelike SELF-REPLICATING MACHINE.

We've SEEN SOMETHING LIKE IT before; they were working on the tether, in the beginning of our story. But this one is larger, somehow more unforgiving. Its HEAD is ONE HEADLIGHT; the head looks like Odilon Redon's portrait of the CYCLOPS...

It charges at them in silence, through the dense water. It appears to be WELDING--it has TENDRILS, like a HYDRA, which it uses to push itself down the TUNNEL.

It gets CLOSER AND CLOSER!

ROY MCBRIDE

Please send it code, tell it that
we'll proceed no further and it
need not be concerned.

She is typing into her sleeve. A TENDRIL REACHES OUT about to GRAB FRANCESCA.

AND THEN IT STOPS. STOPS PROCEEDING.

Roy steps forward. Approaches the enormous hydra, which seems frozen and no longer threatening.

AT INCREDIBLE SPEED, he withdraws his PULSE WEAPON, FIRES AT IT. DIRECT HIT!

It moves spasmodically for a moment after it is hit--almost as if in physical pain.

ROY APPROACHES IT, CLOSE, FIRING THE PULSE WEAPON to the CENTER of the EYE of the HEAD...

THE HYDRA JERKS SPASMODICALLY AGAIN.

ROY then GRABS FRANCESCA'S ARM; REACHES OVER and PULLS on what LOOKS LIKE A RIPCORDER of sorts from his MMU.

THE MMU on ROY'S BACK RELEASES ALL THE NITROGEN in the PACK, YANKING HER and ROY with TREMENDOUS SPEED PAST THE DESTROYED HYDRA; they TUMBLE THROUGH THE WATER, BLOWING away from the HYDRA and toward relative safety.

ROY finds the CABLE, and, holding onto FRANCESCA, he uses her own MMU for power.

INT. TUNNEL AIRLOCK

The TWO ENTER:

Francesca leads him.

ROY MCBRIDE

(to radio)

Command, it appears we encountered a self-replicator of some kind, perhaps one meant to secure the structure.

COMMAND VOICE

Copy that, Major. Is it still active?

ROY MCBRIDE

Negative. It has been disabled.

COMMAND VOICE

All right, proceed to the core. You have twelve minutes until you reach the time indicated.

INT. DIFFERENT TUNNEL

The two enter a long, BLUE-LIGHT TUNNEL. After a few steps, Roy stops. Something's wrong:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Major? Are you all right?

A beat.

ROY MCBRIDE

My pulse is getting a little more rapid here.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Mine is as well. We didn't expect to encounter that.

(MORE)

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

The unit was perhaps agitated by the recent quake--disoriented by having to operate alone.

ROY MCBRIDE

No...Ma'am--that's, that's not it. Situations of that nature don't present difficulties for me.

(checks his numbers)

And this is indicating that my metabolic levels are increasing only now, as we approach the core.

(beat; to himself)

I, I have to address this...

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Should we wait to enter?

(beat)

Perhaps you're getting anxious about what you'll find there--

ROY MCBRIDE

(interrupts)

No. We must enter the core.

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR

They MOVE THROUGH the corridor to:

INT. UNDERGROUND CHAMBER - THE CORE

A massive chamber. Roy and Francesca come ACROSS THE ENORMOUS BASE of the REACTOR. A FLICKERING SERIES of FLUORESCENT LIGHTS illuminate HALF the ROOM. It looks almost lived-in, frozen in time. Like there should be half-drunk cups of coffee on the consoles.

Francesca DeSanctis's back is to ROY.

ROY MCBRIDE

Is this it, Ma'am?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Yes.

ROY MCBRIDE

All right. Ma'am, I have to inform you, I've got an operation I need to conduct shortly, and it's classified. So...you're not going to be able to remain here.

(MORE)

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

(beat)
I'm sorry.

She LIFTS THE HELMET OFF HER HEAD. We STARE FOR A BEAT at the BACK OF HER HEAD. Then:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Ma'am? Did you hear what I said?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Did it--ever seem possible that you might find out something about yourself? Something that might--change you?

ROY MCBRIDE

I don't know exactly what you're referring to. As I said, I have some objectives, and our conversation has to be terminated now.

FRANCESCA REACHES OVER, HITS a LARGE KEY on a console. A RECTANGULAR MONITOR begins to PLAY IMAGES WE'VE SEEN, of the boy and girl at THE CLOISTERS!

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

It always felt like we were destined to meet again. Like it was fate.

THIS TIME, we SEE the ENTIRE SET OF IMAGES. A LARGE FAMILY, at THE CLOISTERS. THE YOUNG BOY is DRAWING for a somewhat older GIRL. A SMALL PICNIC, or PARTY... AND the GIRL MOVES to SIT ON...

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE'S LAP. The BOY HANDS A DRAWING TO THE GIRL.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

It's the only time I saw you, the only time I was on earth. But--I feel as though I know you so well. Your father photographed you a lot as a child. And I still look at the pictures and the videos all the time. So...I feel very connected to you.

(beat)
I wish you knew about me.

ROY IS FLUSTERED. FOR THE FIRST TIME in our STORY, HE IS TRULY THROWN.

The RADIO begins to SOUND in ROY'S HEAD:

COMMAND RADIO

Major, we are registering her non-compliance. We are within ten meters, ready to engage.

She TURNS TOWARD HIM and US, HOLDING a BLACK FOLDER in HER HANDS. She takes a step toward him. He reaches down, toward his PULSE WEAPON.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS

Your father was so lonely in his travels. He had another life here, on Mars. Another family.

She smiles to him, gently--a genuine though somehow melancholy smile.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

He is my father, too.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS then PUSHES THE BLACK FOLDER toward ROY. She FLIPS IT OPEN.

IT IS THE DRAWING THAT THE BOY GAVE THE GIRL in the VIDEO.

ROY LOOKS AT THE DRAWING. It's incontrovertible. HE REALIZES. It's TRUE.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)

He wanted me to reach out to you. I was afraid you couldn't be trusted at first. But then I lost touch with him and when I saw you, I knew it was the right thing to do.

(beat)

I called for you, Roy. The messages were from me.

HE APPROACHES the SCREEN. NOW IT IS FOOTAGE OF ROY through the YEARS, beyond the IMAGES we've seen. HIM AS A TODDLER, AS A TEEN, AS A CADET. FRANCESCA is NOW BEHIND HIM AGAIN.

COMMAND RADIO

Major, we are ready to intercede.

ROY MCBRIDE

What...is it you want from me...?

HIS EYES BEGIN TO WATER. YES, WE ARE SEEING TEARS BEGIN TO FORM IN HIS EYES!

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
He needs our help.

ROY MCBRIDE
(for himself)
Dr. McBride...abandoned me...

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
Your father went to Neptune to try
and save us.

Now Francesca, emotional as well, her back to us again:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)
The mission went too far from the
Earth, and many in the crew went
insane...
(over her shoulder, to
Roy)
You've seen for yourself how hard
it becomes when the Earth is no
longer visible. When they
attempted their sabotage, he did
what he had to do to continue on.
(eyes back down to the
floor)
He is a truly great man. He told
me they found antimatter, that he
wanted to make it all anew. But
he's gone silent now. All his
findings have stopped being sent to
Earth. I am concerned--I worry for
him so much...
(she turns to Roy)
He needs our help. I can locate
him. I will give that to you.

Roy STARES AT HER for a MOMENT. Lost, almost as if he's
short circuited:

ROY MCBRIDE
I have...my own...directives.

She approaches him:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
We're his family. He had no way
back, but maybe you will.
(beat)
Please. He needs our help! He
cared about you, he did. HE LOVED
YOU, all this time. I know he did--

HE IS SHAKING. A BEEPING BEGINS; it's his VITALS, on his SLEEVE. THEY'RE OUT OF CONTROL!

She touches his arm with tenderness.

ALL OF A SUDDEN:

The DUCTS SLIDE OPEN. STEPPING IN: TANNER and YOSHIDA, in their suits. POINTING WEAPONS RIGHT AT HER. The THREAT is clear. FRANCESCA is startled. To her:

ALAN TANNER

Down! On your knees! Right now!

Roy begins to approach Francesca. The others intervene. A CHAOS BUILDS. AS TANNER PULLS OUT a STRANGE CORD:

ALAN TANNER (CONT'D)

We'll handle the interrogation from this point forward, Major.

ROY MCBRIDE

She--she may well have information only I can access here!

ALAN TANNER

Major, you are currently under no condition to continue this interview.

ROY MCRIDE

That's incorrect. It's imperative that you interrogate her with me present--

AS TANNER ATTACHES IT TO HER:

ALAN TANNER

Orders are now that you are to retrieve all relevant data and return to the Cepheus. There is a shuttle waiting for you. She'll be processed appropriately.

TANNER PULLS HER AWAY. SHE IS YANKED OUT OF THE SPACE, and as she IS, SHE STARES AT ROY as the two EXIT. Yoshida remains, with Roy.

Roy MOVES to the CONSOLE, where his FAMILY HISTORY CONTINUES TO PLAY OUT IN FRONT OF HIM:

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

Major, we have to proceed now.

Roy does not move. LIKE A SHORT CIRCUIT.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA (CONT'D)

Major.

(beat)

MAJOR.

(beat)

YOUR ORDERS ARE TO RETRIEVE THE
DATA CELLS AND RETURN TO THE
CEPHEUS.

YOSHIDA DEPARTS. ROY MOVES TO THE CONSOLE and BEGINS TO
REMOVE THE DATA CARD FROM THE BOARD, UNSCREWING THE CARDS.

THE IMAGES OF HIM DISAPPEAR FROM THE SCREEN as he TAKES ALL
THE INTEL HE CAN.

EXT. MARS SURFACE - LATER

ROY EMERGES, boards the automated, driverless GPS-guided
ROVER THAT IS WAITING FOR HIM.

INT. SPACE ELEVATOR

CLOSE ON ROY...in the silent elevator car as it lifts up,
away from Mars.

INT./EXT. DOCKING PLATFORM

Roy ENTERS/FLOATS INTO the DECK, returning from the elevator.
Roy retreats inward at the sight of Colonel Lipset:

ROY MCBRIDE

(distant)

The tasks are completed.
Everything from the core's system's
been obtained...

COLONEL LIPSET

I'm sorry, Roy. SPACECOM and I
felt it necessary to contact your
associates from your trip to Mars.
Your behavior with them did cause
concern. We have fully briefed
them now.

ROY MCBRIDE

Concern...?

ALAN TANNER

You sent data into space. You also neglected to take your sedative capsule, and you protested the response to a standard mayday call.

ROY MCBRIDE

(sotto)

You know why I resisted now...

A WARNING LIGHT GOES OFF on the console.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

I'd recommend a sedative for you, Major.

ROY MCBRIDE

NO. My metabolics will return to normal in just a moment. The environment on Mars was high-stress, and it was a standard reaction. I just need to do this--

Roy ATTACHES the DATA BOX to the Cepheus. DATA BEGINS TO FLOW from it into the craft's computer.

Yoshida tries to hand Roy a pill and a cup of water.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

Major--

COLONEL LIPSET

Major, take the sedative--

ROY MCBRIDE

I HAVE TO DO THIS RIGHT NOW. THIS IS MY TASK.

Roy PUSHES THEM AWAY. Alan Tanner looks to Donald Scobee.

Scobee moves to speak into the console as the Cepheus DECOUPLES FROM the elevator's docking platform:

DONALD SCOBEE

SpaceCom, we are ready to proceed.

ANGLE ON ROY as he is turned inward. No eye contact with the rest of the crew.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

Major, I'm going to have to insist.

ROY MCBRIDE
 (to Colonel Lipset)
 What--was the result of your
 interrogation of Ms. DeSanctis?

The men have no reaction at first.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
 Did you gain any further
 information from her?

Then, without a word, LIPSET REACHES OVER and PRESSES a
 BUTTON ON the CRAFT'S CONSOLE MONITOR. He types in
 something, and on comes a SURVEILLANCE CAMERA IMAGE:

THE SURVEILLANCE IMAGE is of Francesca DeSanctis, seated, in
 what looks like a small white room with a dropped ceiling and
 fluorescent light. We hear some MURMURING, which is
 UNINTELLIGIBLE from her, and from the others who surround
 her.

ROY WATCHES, IN TURMOIL.

The MEN who surround her are our team: Lipset, Tanner,
 Scobee, Yoshida. They are at moments on, and offscreen,
 their backs to us. They appear to be interrogating her. We
 HEAR SNIPPETS.

"What were you doing there...?"

"You are sitting there, without any..."

She isn't looking at them. Entering the FRAME is LIPSET:

COLONEL LIPSET
 LOOK AT US.

After a BEAT:

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
 I won't speak to you until Major
 McBride is here. He needs to be
 present.

COLONEL LIPSET
 Major McBride is not part of this
 particular operation. So you're
 going to need to respond to us--
 right now, Ma'am.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
 You don't understand. I am not
 your enemy. You're talking to me
 like I'm your enemy--and I am not.

COLONEL LIPSET
 You are admitting that Clifford
 McBride is your father, and you've
 been in contact with him. That's
 correct, is it not?

She stares at Lipset.

COLONEL LIPSET (CONT'D)
 You're aware he is posing a
 potentially catastrophic threat?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
 I need to see my brother. Major
 McBride.

COLONEL LIPSET
 WHAT IS THE PRECISE LOCATION OF THE
 LIMA PROJECT?

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS
 I need to see my brother.

She STANDS UP. TANNER MOVES BEHIND HER with INCREDIBLE
 SPEED. As this is happening--

LIPSET THROWS her BACK, to the CHAIR. VIOLENTLY. But she
 still TRIES TO GET UP, so LIPSET SLAPS HER, HARD, ACROSS THE
 FACE.

She FLAILS. The MEN CHARGE AT HER, and TANNER PUTS her in a
 CHOKEHOLD. Francesca starts to GASP. And SHAKE.

FRANCESCA DESANCTIS (CONT'D)
 I--I need help--

DONALD SCOBEE
 If you want help, you'll tell us--

Francesca SHAKES VIOLENTLY NOW. Is it a SEIZURE...?

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA
 Hold it, hold on there--whoa--

SHE CRUMPLES TO THE GROUND, her body VIBRATING with
 uncontrollable force. WEIRDLY QUIET, FAST...

TANNER PUTS HIS KNEE ON HER BACK. We HEAR the men through
 MUFFLED SOUND:

THE IMAGE ENDS. BACK TO:

INT. THE CEPHEUS - COCKPIT

Where the men are now ominously surrounding Roy. Tanner at the controls, initiating STAGE-1 liftoff away from the dock:

ALAN TANNER

...Booster looking good at 4 minutes. Level sense arm at 8 plus 17; outboard cut-off at 9 plus 11...

ROY MCBRIDE

(disturbed)

Where--where is she?

COLONEL LIPSET

The subject is dead. She stopped breathing and couldn't be revived. But we extracted the coordinates of the Lima Project transmissions. From the Mars reactor data. We know where to go.

ROY MCBRIDE

(interior)

You...killed her?

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA

It was likely some kind of congenital disorder.

ROY'S RAGE is building.

COLONEL LIPSET

Major, your contribution to this mission has come to a close.

The ship's STAGE-1 thrusters (minor, low-velocity) are FIRING, powering the ship away from the Helios's upper station (the top of the space elevator).

ROY MCBRIDE

(reverts to form)

What's--what's important here is...the mission.

COLONEL LIPSET

We're appreciative of your contributions.

ROY MCBRIDE

I have followed orders and accomplished my objective. I need to brief SpaceCom.

FRANKLIN YOSHIDA
SpaceCom's already fully aware of
the situation. You failed your
last two psych-evals.

Roy stops himself. He sees them surrounding him. Scobee is in front of a control panel.

The Cepheus has reached a safe radius, about a mile away... So the STAGE-2, high-power rocket thrusters now have room to fire safely. Tanner initiates Stage-2 procedure, a COUNTDOWN begins.

The suspense intensifies, and it's eerie, as everyone's just floating, suspended, waiting...

Roy's FACE GOES WHITE.

COLONEL LIPSET
Major. We don't want to have to
eliminate you.

Yoshida moves towards Roy.

Yoshida continues forward, towards Roy--Roy's eyes burn with intensity. Tanner GRASPS his PULSE WEAPON.

It's clear they do want him DEAD. Scobee APPROACHES Roy, too. Lipset stays back. Just as Scobee is near Roy--

Roy IGNITES his MMU's BOOT JETS, which blow Scobee back against the opposite wall with such force that Scobee's KILLED instantly, and he CRUSHES AND KILLS Lipset--behind him--as well by the force of his body.

The OTHERS MOVE TO ROY, who--PULLS DOWN on a THRUSTER on the CONSOLE of the CRAFT.

The ENTIRE CRAFT BEGINS TO REVOLVE, MAKING A FULL REVOLUTION every SECOND.

The CENTRIFUGAL FORCE PUSHES EVERYTHING to the SIDES of the craft--all the CLIPBOARDS, FLIGHT PLANS, PENS, PROCEDURE BOARDS, etc. STICK TO THE WALLS.

The MEN are all SHAKEN up. Completely DISORIENTED for a moment.

Tanner is shaken loose and hit hard, but he's only stunned.

By this point, Yoshida ATTACKS Roy with vicious BLOWS.

Roy LURCHES TOWARD the WALL of the CAPSULE; HE PULLS a small, metal CANNISTER that is strapped to the wall near him.

He swings the cannister at Yoshida and connects with Yoshida's skull. Yoshida tumbles away.

Now, it's just Roy and Tanner. Roy is bleeding. Tanner is holding a PULSE WEAPON. All Roy has is the cannister. But with the CRAFT SPINNING, it's virtually impossible to AIM.

Tanner pulls the trigger--the weapon BLASTS.

Roy manages to twist out of the way of what was bad aim due to the spinning. The BLAST barely misses him.

ROY GRABS a PEN from the SIDE OF THE CRAFT.

He STABS YOSHIDA in the NECK. YOSHIDA'S BLOOD BLOOMS. This FORMS GLOBULES of BLOOD in the WEIGHTLESSNESS!

Roy uses the moment to EVADE Tanner. Utilizing the NETTING/WIRING along the side of the ship, Roy scrambles away.

The SUNLIGHT COMES THROUGH the WINDOWS FLASHES AS FAST AS A STROBE LIGHT...

INT. THE CEPHEUS - ANOTHER AREA - CONTINUOUS

Roy moves around a CORNER, disappearing into a DARKER area of the ship...

INT. THE CEPHEUS - COCKPIT -

Tanner PULLS the REENTRY LEVER over his head. The CRAFT STOPS SPINNING. HE wraps YOSHIDA'S WOUND with a TOWEL, to stop the blood. He TURNS BACK AROUND to FOLLOW/KILL ROY.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - ANOTHER AREA - CONTINUOUS

Tanner pursues Roy.

Tanner presses a BUTTON to OPEN the fairing door, and leans into that section, when...

Suddenly, Roy emerges from the tangle of WIRES AND OTHER MATERIAL against the wall where he'd been hiding, and SHOVES Tanner deep into the fairing section.

And Roy presses the button to CLOSE the fairing section door. He's trapped Tanner in this part of the ship.

The Stage-2 COUNTDOWN approaches liftoff, and Roy hurries to the safety of a harness just in time. He holds onto the harness as the Cepheus EXPLODES FORWARD.

As the STAGING occurs, and the INTER-STAGE FAIRING SECTION and ROCKET ENGINE beneath it can be seen through the window below Roy, falling away into the void.

NOTE: The physical environment in the ship is now especially CHAOTIC and MESSY: Wiring, equipment, debris, balls of blood and sweat... all criss-crossing this way and that in the zero-g...

INT. THE CEPHEUS - COCKPIT

Roy moves into the cockpit.

He check's Yoshida's pulse. Nothing. Yoshida is now DEAD. Roy eyes the floating CORPSES of former crewmates Scobee and Yoshida.

INT. THE CEPHEUS - AIRLOCK

Roy prepares the two bodies with none of the ceremony or religion that were afforded to Blunt. He leaves them in the airlock and steps out, back into--

INT. THE CEPHEUS - OUTSIDE AIRLOCK

He presses a button to open the airlock to the void.

EXT. SPACE - THE CEPHEUS

THE SHIP RELEASES THE TWO BODIES as the Cepheus speeds away...

INT. COCKPIT

Roy grabs a fresh helmet and moves into the cockpit. A man ALONE. He PAUSES FOR A MOMENT; his HANDS are BLOTCHY and BLEEDING...

ROCKET COMPUTER VOICE
 Significant damage to rocket
 staging capability... Reentry
 protection in section THREE
 DESTROYED...

EXT. THE CEPHEUS - SPACE

The spaceship is moving at such a terrific velocity that there's PERCEPTIBLE MOVEMENT in the surrounding field of stars: APPROACHING STARS appear blue, RECEDING STARS become amber. (This is the "red shift" effect.)

INT. COCKPIT

Roy is seated at the fore of the ship. He's still BLEEDING PROFUSELY. He goes through a MEDICAL KIT, applies GELS to his wound. He's trying to stem the seeping tide of blood.

He is ghostly and alone in the ship's DARKNESS. And outside of the ship's darkness: INFINITE PITCH BLACK.

But... finally... a slight GLOW appears from the COCKPIT MONITOR...

ROY MCBRIDE

Destination, Neptune Moon Galatea
coordinates.

COMPUTER VOICE

Length of journey: 19 days, 4
hours, 8 minutes. Sedation is
advised.

Roy HOOKS HIMSELF UP to a FEED TUBE, into his arm. He BUCKLES HIMSELF IN, and straps start sending ELECTRICAL PULSES to his body, to keep his muscles in some sort of tone.

Roy SETTLES IN, and the ROCKETS ALIGHT... He is on his way...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE

The craft PASSES an UNMANNED SPACE PROBE...

A distant ASTEROID FIELD... JUPITER, distant...

INT. CEPHEUS

Roy examines the view outside his window. He grows AGITATED.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, BLOOD STARTS POURING INTO THE CRAFT, from EVERY WALL!

It FILLS THE CAPSULE!

YOSHIDA and SCOBEE are BACK, INSIDE. They ARE ASSAULTING ROY!

THE CAPSULE BEGINS SPINNING AGAIN!

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

And then--

THROUGH THE SPINNING--he REACHES over to the console and injects something into his arm.

Within moments, the craft is no longer spinning. THE ASTRONAUTS ARE GONE.

HE WAS HALLUCINATING...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - SATURN - LATER

The giant gas planet SATURN looms magnificently against the black backdrop. Its RINGS look like thin ribbons encircling the planet. So perfect is this gas giant, so symmetrical and flawless in its geometry... it almost looks UNREAL.

We TILT DOWN to SEE the Cepheus PASS US BY.

INT. CEPHEUS

Roy's EYES ARE HALF-MAST. His P.O.V.: A WATERY surface over his eyes causes a slight oblong, double-vision VIEW of the CAPSULE CONSOLE.

COMPUTER VOICE

Now passing final unmanned outpost,
Trojan QF99. Conserve oxygen and
food supply if possible--

ROY CLOSES HIS EYES.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE - URANUS

The planet, in the distance. Roy's spacecraft passes it...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CEPHEUS

SOUNDS. It's a 1930's RADIO SHOW that somehow his craft has picked up. ROY'S EYES OPEN.

A STRANGE and NATURAL and UNEXPLAINED SPACE PHENOMENON OCCURS.

What looks like FIREFLIES FLOWS through the CAPSULE. It's HALLUCINATORY and ROY SEES THEM through SEDATED EYES.

He REACHES UP to TOUCH THEM; the SPARKS SEEM TO FLOAT RIGHT THROUGH his HANDS. (These unexplained phenomena do exist.)

His BODY BEGINS TO LIFT UP, OUT OF THE SEAT. He STAYS in PLACE because of the seatbelts.

His BREATHING BECOMES HEAVIER. Close to some kind of panic.

Roy starts to HYPERVENTILATE, STRUGGLING. He INJECTS something into his arm. As we:

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE - NEPTUNE

The BLUE PLANET. STILL. EERIE.

INT. CEPHEUS

A CHIME:

COMPUTER VOICE
Task Load Index completed.

ROY UNBUCKLES HIMSELF.

MOVES back to the PILOT'S SEAT.

EXT. SPACE - NEAR NEPTUNE

Now: Roy's spaceship, the Cepheus, comes into view, its RETRO-THRUSTERS firing on full blast (in utter silence) to slow its velocity.

NEW ANGLE

More prominently now, THE RINGS OF NEPTUNE.

CLOSER ANGLE

On one of the OUTER RINGS. The Cepheus is tiny against the magnificent vista.

INT. CEPHEUS

Roy PILOTS the CRAFT as it nears the EDGE of the rings, and keeps pace with the speed of the rings' orbit.

Roy LOOKS DOWN at the CONSOLE. BLINKING:

"CRAFT OXYGEN LEVEL: 12 PERCENT"

He LOOKS OUT HIS WINDOW and is momentarily energized by Neptune's BLUE GLOW. The rings are more visible now. They are magnificent, comprised of various-sized ROCKS of dirt and ice that circle around us, almost like cars on a racetrack.

Roy looks at the control panels, the monitors.

ROY MCBRIDE
Locate signal source.

COMPUTER VOICE
The source is [scientifically
correct location, tbd].

He PULLS a LARGE SWITCH.

The cockpit board flashes: "AUTOPILOT ENGAGED".

ROY PUNCHES THE GALATEA COORDINATES into his SPACESUIT SLEEVE.

A BLINKING RED LIGHT on the CONSOLE.

He REACHES OVER, TOGGLES THE SWITCH:

EXT. THE CEPHEUS - CONTINUOUS

Roy EMERGES from the craft, in his suit. He REMAINS TETHERED TO THE CRAFT. The CRAFT, moving along with the orbiting rings of detritus, begins to move closer to the rings...

CLOSER TO THE RINGS

He maneuvers his way BEHIND THE COCKPIT SECTION of the craft, so he is protected FROM the DETRITUS of NEPTUNE'S RINGS by the CRAFT'S BODY ITSELF.

He REMOVES a SMALL SOLAR PANEL--ABOUT FIVE FEET IN LENGTH, and about THREE FEET IN WIDTH--from the SIDE OF THE CEPHEUS.

He CLIMBS to the ROTATING ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY WHEEL.

He GRABS ONTO ONE OF THE SPINNING WINDMILL-LIKE BLADES.

HE UNHOOKS HIS TETHER.

HE HOLDS ON.

SPINNING AND SPINNING. DIZZYING.

HE LOOKS AT HIS SLEEVE. A COMPASS NUMBER KEEPS SCANNING different DIRECTIONAL COORDINATES.

AND THEN--at JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT--

HE LETS GO.

HE IS PROPELLED THROUGH SPACE, without his TETHER.

EXT. THROUGH THE RINGS

He enters the rings. Miniscule particles begin to hit the SOLAR PANEL that ROY USES AS HIS SHIELD.

Some come insanely close to ROY, to his HEAD, to puncturing his SUIT.

The SOLAR PANEL is GETTING NICKED and DAMAGED by the PARTICULATE, but it protects Roy.

EXT. CLOUDS OF NEPTUNE

He TUMBLES FURTHER, now ENTERING THE CLOUDS OF NEPTUNE.

The CLOUDS are DENSE, like bad CLOUD COVER during an airplane flight. EXCEPT--THEY ARE A RICH, INTENSE BLUE.

As Roy TUMBLES, the SHADE OF THE CLOUDS goes from that BLUE to a BEAUTIFUL and BEYOND-THIS-EARTH PINK, then to a DEEP MAGENTA.

AND THEN IT BEGINS TO APPEAR, EVER SO FAINTLY.

A SPACECRAFT.

It is TETHERED to the slowly ROTATING MOON CALLED GALATEA which orbits NEPTUNE inside Neptune's atmosphere.

It is THE LIMA PROJECT.

CLOSER AND CLOSER it comes to us. ROY SEEMS SPINNING TOWARD IT, OUT OF CONTROL.

And then he THROWS the THRUSTER in his PACK. His tumbling GRADUALLY GETS UNDER CONTROL.

He STOPS. OUTSIDE THE LIMA PROJECT STATION. IN the DISTANCE: a SYMMETRICAL SERIES of SCANNING MIRROR TELESCOPES. In a LATTICE.

NEW ANGLE OF ROY - behind him, in the deep distance, is Earth, a tiny pinprick of light 900 million miles away. (See recent Cassini photograph.) Then, CUT TO WHAT HE SEES:

Hovering over the station, still far away from Roy, are:

ASTRONAUTS. Appearing as figures on the dark blue horizon, levitating over NEPTUNE.

THE LINE OF ASTRONAUTS FLOATS, STILL.

ROY PUSHES a BUTTON on his WRIST. We HEAR STATIC.

ROY MCBRIDE

LIMA PROJECT. This is Major Roy McBride. I have taken control of the Cepheus, United States Armed Forces Space Division. I am attempting to reach Dr. Clifford McBride. Over.

Static. No movement.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Repeat: Lima Project, this is the Cepheus, of the United States Armed Forces Space Division. I am attempting to reach Dr. McBride. Do you read.

NO RESPONSE.

ROY TURNS his RIGHT WRIST OVER.

"MMU OXYGEN LEVEL: 21 PERCENT"

"THRUST LEVEL: 39 PERCENT"

HE MOVES toward the SURFACE of the LIMA PROJECT STATION. As HE DOES, he LOOKS to his RIGHT to SEE, maybe a mile away (hard to tell relative direction here), the very BEGINNINGS of a graphene arc.

EXT./INT. LIMA PROJECT STATION

Roy "floats" inside. The Craft/Station has a kind of LARGE A-FRAME.

Roy VENTURES through the CENTER of the STATION.

HUGE SPACES filled with SELF-REPLICATORS that do not resemble anything anthropomorphic, but rather look like the kind of machines which make AUTOMOBILES. WE HEAR Roy's BREATHING.

ROY'S P.O.V. - The robots are in repose, ready to be awakened. WE CONTINUE TO HEAR Roy's BREATHING...

He passes the anthropoid robots, and enters another, even larger, area.

ROY'S P.O.V. - A flurry of automated activity, as we pass EVERY SPECIES OF ROBOT, from giant vehicles to small, squat machines, gliding to and fro. Some are fitted with grabs and manipulators and cutting/welding equipment.

Again, no sign of humans. The robots move slowly, with secret purpose, WARNING LIGHTS whirling for the benefit of the unseen humans.

INT. INNER SANCTUM

ROY now ventures to SEE, on both sides:

WINDOWS, through which we can spot the INTERIOR of the LIMA PROJECT.

As Roy makes some final adjustments to his equipment, we notice one of the very small robots on the side of the A-Frame. A CAMERA mounted on it silently ROTATES towards Roy, and a RED LIGHT blinks on next to the camera. It knows Roy is here. Roy LOOKS RIGHT INTO IT:

ROY MCBRIDE

I am Major Roy McBride. Do you
read. I am attempting to reach Dr.
McBride.

AGAIN, no ANSWER. ROY PLACES EXPLOSIVE CHARGES on the DOORFRAME of the LIMA STATION.

They BLOW.

Just then, an APERTURE on the station opens up. ROY VENTURES INSIDE. LIKE HE IS ENTERING A DREAM.

INT. LIMA PROJECT - DORMITORIES

HUMAN BODIES are FLOATING, gravity-free. The FLUORESCENT LIGHTS FLICKER.

We STILL HEAR ONLY ROY'S BREATHING. LOUD, PRESENT. We ARE COMPLETELY INSIDE HIS HEAD.

Roy finds himself inside a KITCHEN-TYPE area, which is housed somewhere within a laboratory. There are machines and equipment and tables and sinks, but no people besides Roy.

There's ZERO GRAVITY here.

ROY'S POINT-OF-VIEW:

A DOOR IS OPEN, revealing a dark PASSAGEWAY lit only by BLUE LIGHT.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Roy enters/floats into it. ALL OF A SUDDEN, ALL THE MONITORS on each side--and there are several--switch on. THE LIGHTS BRIGHTEN. ON THE SCREENS: ROY'S FATHER! DR. H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE. Roy HALTS:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE

This will be the final message recorded by the Lima Project. Our efforts have come to an end, and its entire story must be told in the hopes that someday it will be known.

ROY MOVES CLOSER TO THE SCREEN. It is his FATHER, virtually seeming to speak from the dead:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

We came here to pursue mankind's most noble goal: the search for intelligent life beyond the Earth. But our telescope has repeatedly confirmed only the singular importance--and ephemerality--of our moon, oceans, and magnetic field. After extensive analysis, we now confirm that we are entirely alone in the reachable universe. We shall no longer honor false gods; there is no intelligent life elsewhere, and the rage of the cosmos will destroy us in time.

(MORE)

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

For this reason, we on the Lima Project had begun to devise a plan for a new system--with galaxies, stars, and planets. We dreamed to be the first lifeform to make the universe anew.

CLOSE ANGLE ON ROY MCBRIDE.

CUT TO:

INT. NARROW STAIRWELL

Roy CLIMBS the STEPS. We STILL HEAR, CONTINUING:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O)

With the vast stores of antimatter we have discovered here, our research focused on the creation of a new big bang. Such a project would take perhaps several thousand years to develop. But only such a bold, long-term endeavor would untether us from the earth and ensure the permanent survival of our species.

INT. CONTROL CENTER - STATION

Roy FLOATS TOWARD the Control Center. Like the Control Tower of a large airport, it's somewhat dark--but everything is ON. Multiple MONITORS, SCREENS, GAUGES, etc., all like a symphony of blinking, fluttering color and light.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O)

Our research is contained on the onboard VD recorder. It is the most extensive set of data ever assembled about the visible universe. This must be brought back to Earth so that our scientists can be convinced to act. However, our computer system is currently preventing all outside communication. As it is charged only with the continued pursuit of intelligent life, it has been unable to adapt to our changed prerogatives. All attempts to reprogram it have failed. With no alternatives, we sought to return to the Earth.

Roy looks around at the many screens in front of him; they are like SECURITY CAMERAS, constantly cutting from one angle to another. ONE ANGLE REVEALS:

A SPACECRAFT, with a GANTRY. MODEST SIZE. CLOSE SHOT ON ROY. THEN CLOSE SHOT ON IMAGE OF SPACECRAFT. THEN:

ROY SCANS THROUGH BASIC BLUEPRINT PLANS of the LIMA PROJECT'S CRAFT.

INT. DATABANKS - LIMA PROJECT

It is ROWS of DATA, stored. A CLOUD for all the information collected by the Project.

Roy FLOATS THROUGH IT, approaching TWO LARGE ORANGE STEEL CANNISTERS: "VOYAGE DATA RECORDER" He PULLS THEM OUT FROM THE FRAME. Over this, we STILL HEAR:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

A craft was assembled from 3-D-printed parts, piece by piece, out of view of the onboard system. But it was recognized upon completion, and our nuclear fuel has been intentionally destroyed by the system. This resulted in the catastrophic destruction of moon Larissa. All of us have suffered severe radiation poisoning. Brain death is imminent. The onboard system will likely maintain only our organ function in order for it to remain operational.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS

CLOSE SHOT: "DR. CLIFF MCBRIDE". A PAPER TAB, HANDWRITTEN. On the DOOR of his LIVING QUARTERS.

Roy FLOATS INTO/ENTERS the LIVING QUARTERS.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O.)

We hope we will be mourned by a Mother Earth that dared send so many of her sons and daughters into the unknown. In ancient days, human beings looked at stars and saw their heroes in the constellations. In modern times, our heroes have become creatures of flesh and blood.

(MORE)

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Others will follow us, and surely
 find their way home. Our mission
 must not be denied.

HE LOOKS AROUND. He SEES the SPACE. It is MODEST, with
 SCIENCE BOOKS, and DIARIES, and FAMILY PHOTOS everywhere,
 pinned on the WALLS. Then we HEAR Francesca's VOICE, more
 PRESENT than CLIFFORD MCBRIDE'S had been:

FRANCESCA'S VOICE
 "The brain is wider than the sky,
 for, put them side by side, the
 other will include, with ease, and
 you beside..."
 (beat)
 It's so beautiful... Do you want
 to hear another one...?

Then, APPEARING: FRANCESCA! SEATED, SOMEHOW STILL OBEYING
 GRAVITY as ROY FLOATS! She STARES, saying nothing.

Roy doesn't know what to do, or say. He STOPS HIS MOVEMENT.
 He lifts his ARM toward her...

She GETS UP, begins to WALK TOWARD ROY!!

NEAR HIM NOW, HE REACHES OUT, and...

HIS HAND AND ARM GO RIGHT THROUGH HER!!!! SHE WALKS RIGHT
 THROUGH HIM, sits down at the other end.

Roy LOOKS AROUND THE SPACE and SEES NOW that it's like his
 home where he grew up, his home from pictures. PROJECTED.

IT'S ALL HOLOGRAMS.

He SEES: HIMSELF, as a CHILD, on the FLOOR, PLAYING WITH
 TRUCKS. And his MOTHER, LEANNE, YOUNGER. His HAND can go
 right through them, too.

(As ROY FLOATS, these HOLOGRAMS remain "earthbound"; that is,
 they seem to have "gravity".)

Roy TURNS BACK to LOOK AT FRANCESCA. She is in conversation
 with someone "offscreen," smiling, looking lovely and warm
 and everything an idealized version of her would be.

CLOSE ANGLE ON ROY.

We HEAR the PITTER-PATTER of RAIN. RAIN? ALL OTHER SOUND
 DROPS OUT. And we:

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK - THE CLOISTERS - RAINY DAY

A lowered gray sky. Deserted. A monastery on the UPPER WEST SIDE of NEW YORK'S MANHATTAN ISLAND. A PORTCULLIS. COBBLESTONES. The VIDEO we saw, yes, but now we are "here," in the space.

A GROUP of children PLAY. ADULTS speak to each other, standing behind the children, watching them play, making small talk. The scene has a strange, dare we say, unearthly quality to it. There is a distance to it; not an emotional distance, but a visual distance. A haze, almost. A dreamlike quality.

A SMALLER GROUP of adults, and two children, are here, too. They are nearby and yet somehow apart.

We SEE: ROY'S MOTHER, LEANNE. Much YOUNGER. She seems PREOCCUPIED, though she smiles a lot as she attends to the children. Also here is some other woman we don't know, about Leanne's age. She is completely quiet, almost nervous, as she watches the children play.

Then there is H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE, who is involved with the children, making hats for them, drawing for them, joking with them.

AMONG THE CHILDREN: the young ROY. And the young FRANCESCA (though she is older than Roy--she seems around 16 or 17, he around 8). She has a grin from ear to ear; Roy does not, instead dedicated to whatever he seems to be DRAWING.

H. Clifford McBride stops clowning with another child and moves to Roy's side. Warmly:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE

Roy?

(beat)

Roy?

(to Young Francesca)

He gets very involved in what he's doing.

YOUNG FRANCESCA

(a laugh; a smile)

It's okay.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE

Sweetheart, I need you to listen to me for just a moment--you can go back to your drawing very soon.

Roy finally looks up--for just a brief beat.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
This is Francesca.

YOUNG FRANCESCA
(ebullient)
Hello!

ROY MCBRIDE
(back to his drawing)
Hi.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE
She's someone...very close to me,
someone I really care for. I want
you to meet her--I think you'll
really like her.

Roy keeps drawing--AND THEN TURNS HIS BACK TO HER A BIT.

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
It's not so easy for Roy to meet
new people. It's something we're
trying to work on with him.
(quieter)
We're hoping he'll break through it
someday...

Clifford approaches Roy. Not unsympathetically, he touches his son and attempts to communicate an important lesson about human interaction:

H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
(to Roy)
When someone talks to you, you say
hello, you look them in the eye.
You listen, and you ask how they
are--you don't want them to think
you don't care about them.

Roy REACTS IMMEDIATELY. He starts to get teary out of embarrassment and awkwardness. Sensing this, she moves to comfort him:

YOUNG FRANCESCA
It's okay, you can go back to your
drawing. He just wanted us to
meet.

Roy then eyes her directly, and without a word. She looks at his drawing. Warmly:

YOUNG FRANCESCA (CONT'D)
That's a wonderful picture. Is
that a rocket?

ROY MCBRIDE
 (nods; then)
 My father goes into space.

YOUNG FRANCESCA
 That's where I'm *from*.

ROY MCBRIDE
 (looks up, interested now)
 Where?

YOUNG FRANCESCA
 I'm from Mars. Which is really,
 really far.

ROY MCBRIDE
 Yeah. Sometimes it's more than 140
 million miles away. But right now
 it's only 80 million miles.

YOUNG FRANCESCA
 (again with a laugh)
I didn't know that!

ROY MCBRIDE
 Are you by yourself there?

YOUNG FRANCESCA
 No, but it feels like that
 sometimes. That's why I'm so glad
 I met you.

UNEXPECTEDLY, responding to her kindness to such a degree he can overcome his shyness, he hands his drawing to her. Francesca looks at the drawing and she is very moved. TEARS OF HAPPINESS come to her eyes. Roy STARES at the tears as though they are foreign objects. The SWELL OF EMOTION from her is as strange as anything he has seen.

YOUNG FRANCESCA (CONT'D)
 Oh--thank you so much! That's so
 sweet of you! It's beautiful!

She gives him a BIG, TENDER HUG. Roy ALLOWS HIMSELF to be "crushed" by the hug.

Roy's FATHER BEAMS...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HULL OF CRAFT - CORNER OF MCBRIDE RESIDENTIAL QUARTERS

A chamber that appears almost like an old "Iron Lung" machine. Roy APPROACHES IT.

CLOSE SHOT: "MCBRIDE, CLIFFORD, 788919-0323"

It's a small, illuminated medical identification card. WIDEN TO REVEAL:

ROY, COMING UPON his FATHER'S BODY, inside what looks like a kind of ELECTRONIC SARCOPHAGUS.

Dr. H. Clifford McBride exists in a vegetative state, resting in a large silver CASE. Through glass, we can SEE that his EYES ARE slightly OPEN, his BODY HOOKED UP to LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

MONITORS around the case MEASURE his PULSE and other VITAL SIGNS. He is KEPT COLD.

ROY moves to it, OPENS THE SARCOPHAGUS. STARES AT HIS FATHER'S LOBOTOMIZED FACE.

He LIFTS his FATHER'S STIFF, LIFELESS BODY out of its electronic SARCOPHAGUS, pulling off the DIODES and IVs which keep him "alive".

When the body EMERGES from the SARCOPHAGUS, it seems almost to FLOAT STANDING STIFFLY UPRIGHT. It starts SPINNING IN THE WEIGHTLESSNESS.

ROY GRABS the SPINNING BODY, in a way that becomes an EMBRACE. PULLING THE BODY WITH HIM, he FLOATS BACK OUT...

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE LIMA PROJECT STATION - IN SPACE

ROY releases his FATHER'S BODY INTO SPACE, PUSHING IT TOWARD the SURFACE of NEPTUNE.

IN the DISTANCE, WE SEE H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE'S BODY drift TOWARD a RING AROUND NEPTUNE.

The BODY comes in contact with a SMALL ICE ROCK. It SHATTERS INTO A MILLION PIECES. LIKE BROKEN WINDSHIELD GLASS.

Almost at the VERY INSTANT that H. CLIFFORD MCBRIDE'S BODY is destroyed, LIGHTS COME ON in a formerly DARKENED SECTION of the LIMA CRAFT.

EXT. SPACE - NEAR THE LIMA CRAFT - OUTSIDE 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

A spacecraft which remains DOCKED. It has been constructed for Dr. Clifford McBride's return, presumably. It NOW HUMS WITH LIFE.

INT. 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

Roy enters the cockpit, HOLDING the ORANGE VDR ("VOYAGE DATA RECORDER") CANNISTERS.

Examining the craft's SYSTEMS, he and we recognize that it is astonishingly similar to the Cepheus. (The spacecraft are all constructed by 3-D PRINTER, and there is a uniformity to their design and construction.)

The entire SYSTEM of the CRAFT COMES TO LIFE, ONLINE.

AS DOES: RADIO STATIC FROM THE EARTH! Communication has been restored:

ROY PRESSES THE RADIO BUTTON, TURNS DIALS FOR A CERTAIN CODE:

ROY MCBRIDE

SpaceCom. This is Major Roy McBride. I have taken it upon myself and have reached the Lima Project; all crew are deceased. I have recovered significant material for analysis, which I am now in the process of forwarding to you. The self-replicators here malfunctioned and must be destroyed to prevent any unforeseen further catastrophe. Therefore, I'm inputting target coordinates 34.34 North, 81.92 West from Earth standard vector 100.

(beat)

I'm going to attempt a return to the earth now. The onboard system indicates I'll be arriving in approximately 41 days and 9 hours. My journey will have kept me in an isolated state for a considerable period by that time. I...I am very much looking forward to the day that solitude ends. Over.

He FLIPS OFF THE RADIO.

He PULLS DOWN on a LARGE LEVER which looks almost like the kind of control switch for a 747 airplane.

He moves around the CAPSULE, OBSERVING a PRINTED CHECKLIST. Adjusts SEVERAL SWITCHES.

MOMENTS LATER

Roy is SETTLING IN to his COCKPIT SEAT. He is about to PUT an OXYGEN MASK ON. He activates the CRAFT'S GYROSCOPES and CONTROL STICK.

Then:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Outgoing mail. McBride, Roy M.
Send to Leanne McBride.

He SEES an IMAGE of HIS MOTHER. It's a photo of her, with him as a little boy. A little ANIMATED BEE flies around the picture, making a PUTT-PUTT SOUND.

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Record voice message.

After a BEEP--Roy begins to record his message. As we know, he's not much one for communicating--especially when emotions are concerned. But here...

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
Mother, I'm on a classified mission
right now.
(beat)
I am by myself.

THE CAMERA SLOWLY--almost imperceptively so--PUSHES INTO HIM:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)
(equivocating; then he
steels himself)
I am attempting now to return to
the earth. In the event I cannot,
I don't want you to wonder about
me.
(beat)
I'd like to express to you that I
realize that you gave me an
excellent childhood. I am grateful
to you now for attempting to
nurture friendships and other
relationships. Perhaps you don't
think I remember much, but I do.
Sometimes the smell of certain
foods will bring back exceedingly
pleasant memories... On this
mission I've encountered people who
knew father.

(MORE)

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

I don't know how much you know about this, but it appears he had another child, a daughter named Francesca. We both met her once. She and I talked. She informed me that father acted out of the noblest principles. And that he sacrificed himself in the name of science.

He stops. TEARS WELL UP AGAIN. He CLOSES HIS EYES and BOWS HIS HEAD. Then begins to speak again:

ROY MCBRIDE (CONT'D)

Mother, I, I was unable to protect her. I regret this--terribly. Even worse than I regret any negative feelings toward father. It's led me to commit acts that you would condemn--but were required by circumstance. It has forced me to be alone, a situation I now find unacceptable.

(exhales; regroup)

But I have succeeded in my mission. I want to say goodbye now, and whatever occurs on my return, I am forever your loving son.

He SHUTS OFF the RECORDER. ANGLE ON THE FROZEN IMAGE of ROY'S MOTHER.

EXT. SPACE - 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

The Craft's GANTRY RELEASES the ship. Slowly.

The CRAFT begins to move, its ROCKETS FIRING.

Almost at the same time: A BEAM, HIGH-INTENSITY, HITS A PART OF THE STATION.

It EXPLODES! In SILENCE. The colors of the explosion, set against the DEEP BLACKNESS of SPACE.

Then another SILENT and COLORFUL EXPLOSION.

INT. 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

Roy looks through his windows to SEE:

A SERIES OF LASERS HITTING VARIOUS PARTS of the STATION and TELESCOPE.

In SILENCE, the EXPLOSIONS ARE VAST, FEROCIOUS, and somehow oddly BEAUTIFUL.

They ILLUMINATE the dead BLACKNESS of SPACE even as they are utterly destructive, devastatingly so.

EXT. SPACE - 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

Roy's ROCKET starts to STAGE, AFTER its initial BURST. It leaves the CONTINUED DEVASTATION of the LIMA PROJECT in its wake as it PROPELS FORWARD.

INT. 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

Roy's HEAD SHAKES TO AND FRO; the ROCKET'S FORCE is ASTONISHING.

EXT. SPACE - 3-D PRINTED CRAFT

The CRAFT FIRES a NEW SET OF ROCKETS. It moves on, deeper and deeper and deeper toward the earth. The RADIO PIPES UP, and it's in the most straightforward, almost banal, tone imaginable:

SPACECOM VOICE

Major McBride, this is SpaceCom.
We have verified the authenticity
of your coordinates and have begun
to target sites accordingly. Upon
reentry to earth's orbit, we will
intercept your craft and you will
be debriefed. However, we do
acknowledge the potential of your
data files to transform rather
radically our view of what the
universe may hold.

(beat)

We wish you godspeed on your
journey homeward. US SPACECOM out.

Finally, Roy's ROCKET disappears from our view, hurtling back toward the EARTH.

The End