



STORY OF YOUR LIFE

Screenplay by

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Based on "Story of Your Life"
By Ted Chiang

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Louise cradles a NEWBORN GIRL in her arms. Her name: HANNAH.

Hannah reaches up.

Crooks her tiny hand around Louise's finger.

LOUISE (V.O.)

I remember moments in the middle.

EXT. BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Four-year-old HANNAH dressed as a cowgirl.

On a toy riding horse with wheels for hooves.

Giggling like she can't stop.

She pulls both finger-guns, aimed at us.

HANNAH

Stick 'em up!

INT. HANNAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Eight-year-old Hannah is tucked in bed.

Said to us as a prayer:

HANNAH

I love you.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Twelve-year-old Hannah glowers at us:

HANNAH

I hate you!

--and storms into her room.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Fifteen-year-old daughter HANNAH lies, eyes closed.

Hannah is too pale to be alive. Her head has been shaved in the last month.

LOUISE (V.O.)

And this was the end.

Louise holds her daughter's hand in hers.

Her thumb traces Hannah's knuckles.

A life monitor beeps as Hannah's heart stops.

Louise's grip on her daughter tightens.
Trembling. Knuckles flaring white.

A nurse hovers nearby, shutting down monitors.

LOUISE (V.O.)

But now I'm not so sure I believe
in beginnings and endings. There
are days that define your story
beyond your life.

CUT TO BLACK.

LOUISE (V.O.)

Like the day they arrived.

EXT. SKY - DAY

Storybook blue, patched with cumulous clouds.
Drifting down to find a tree line in motion.
Looking into a car on a road.

EXT. LOUISE'S SEDAN - DAY

Louise drives. Shadows slide over the windshield.

She looks older here. Hardened. Maybe even haunted.
Her hairstyle is different; longer.

File boxes full of books occupy the back seat of her sedan.
No child seat. No wedding band on her finger.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Louise pulls into a faculty lot and enters campus.

Overhead, a pair of F-18 fighters slice across the sky.

EXT. STUDENT CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Louise crosses the campus center.

A crowd of STUDENTS are huddled around the glass outside the
student center, looking in at a large TV. The crowd is too
dense for Louise to see what is on the TV.

Louise frowns, but keeps going.

Overhead, a second pair of fighter jets rocket past.

Louise looks up at the sky. Apprehensive.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM - DAY

Louise enters a classroom nearly full with STUDENTS, most already buried in books or with their laptops open.

LOUISE

Chapter five, everybody. Today we learn why Portuguese sounds unlike any other Romance language.

The kids crack open textbooks as Louise settles at her desk.

The course name is written on the blackboard behind Louise: "Advanced Linguistics" and "Dr. Louise Banks."

Someone's cell phone dings. Text message.

Louise scans the class.

Another phone chimes with its text message.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Did someone forget my cell phone rule?

FEMALE STUDENT

Sorry.

But the Student is drawn back to her phone.

More phones buzz and chirp. A wave of alerts wash over the classroom. Like a room of clocks all going off at once.

Louise frowns. Stands up.

Chatter among the students now, looking to one another.

MALE STUDENT

CNN has up-close footage in Japan.

STUDENT WITH LAPTOP

Where do I find that?

LOUISE

I'm close to making you all do a report on the Luddites.

Students are crowding around their closest neighbor with a large laptop and wifi access. The tension in the room continues to escalate as more students witness footage.

MALE STUDENT

Holy shit.

STUDENT #3

It's on all the feeds.

LOUISE

What's going on?

STUDENT WITH LAPTOP

Turn on the TV, Dr. Banks.

Louise grabs a TV remote off her desk and powers on a flatscreen bolted to the wall in the classroom.

LOUISE

What chan--

SEVERAL STUDENTS

(interrupting)

Any of them!

The screen comes to life to reveal AERIAL NEWS COVERAGE of a field in the wilderness.

Center-stage in the field is a STRANGE, SPHERICAL OBJECT, a perfect globe of metal. It reflects sunlight like its surface is water. But reflections on its skin distort in odd ways, creating an unnerving optical illusion that it's bringing the trees of the forest up against it.

But it's not. The tall grass and trees around the object have been flattened as if pressed down from concussive force.

Another helicopter edges into view overhead, and suddenly the scale of the object is clear:

It's at least ten stories tall.

Bumper text at the bottom of the screen reads:

"STRANGE CRAFT LANDS IN MONTANA"

Louise turns up the volume.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

--and apparently touched down forty minutes ago just north of I-94, we're, we're waiting to hear if this is perhaps an experimental vessel or something else--

More footage, closer to the ground. The spherical ship is immense. And seemingly without creases or windows.

ANCHORWOMAN (V.O.)

Actually, correspondents on Twitter are saying more objects like this have landed in as many as eight other locations around the world. We're waiting for confirmation-- yes? Can we--? Okay--

The footage changes to a live feed in Hokkaido, Japan. An identical SPHERE is parked in a stadium parking lot.

ANCHORWOMAN (V.O.)

This is from a site in Japan.

Chatter in the classroom is reaching unmanageable levels. Everyone talking to everyone else. Some on their phones.

Louise mutes the TV and addresses them.

LOUISE

Settle down! Settle down.

The kids obey, halfway.

MALE STUDENT

It's aliens.

STUDENT WITH LAPTOP

You don't know that yet.

MALE STUDENT

Come on! Are you going to argue this?

More chatter now from the university halls. Classes are spilling out. Louise's attention keeps going back to the TV.

ROTC STUDENT

This is like nine-eleven. It's another attack.

FEMALE STUDENT

Shut up. No one's been killed.

ROTC STUDENT

Yet.

Another FEMALE STUDENT gets up and hurries for the door. Hiding her face. She's crying.

The unease and shock of this emerging event is spreading through the whole class. Louise sees it start to happen.

LOUISE

Let's just take a breath. We don't know what this is yet. But I wouldn't be surprised if it's some new aerospace project.

STUDENT WITH LAPTOP

That is not a plane.

LOUISE

Or... whatever it is.

Louise looks back at the TV. Clearly mystified by it. The spherical object defies explanation.

ROTC STUDENT

What if it's really aliens?

LOUISE

It's not aliens. I promise you all get the week off if it is.

Her focus returns to the muted TV screen. She turns it off, and the black screen reflects her troubled face.

The class bell RINGS--

INT. LOUISE'S SEDAN - EVENING

Louise drives home. Listening to the radio.

PRESS SECRETARY (V.O.)

But for now we're simply asking for cooperation while authorities assess the object. Until further notice, the site is a no-fly zone.

Outside, on the street:

- A car accident ahead. A pickup has rear-ended a hybrid.
- A WOMAN is on a cell phone, in tears.
- A YOUNG MAN paces on a front lawn with blood on his shirt.

REPORTER (V.O.)

So you're saying it's not ours? Do you know if it's even from Earth?

Louise slows to a crawl, avoiding the wreck on the street.

PRESS SECRETARY (V.O.)
 We're still collecting information,
 coordinating with other nations.
 We're not the only ones with one of
 these in our back yard.

A group of PEOPLE stand at the curb, looking up at the sky.
 But nothing is there.

REPORTER (V.O.)
 If this is some sort of peaceful
 first contact, why send twelve?
 Why not just one?

Louise turns off the radio.

EXT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Her sedan pulls up at the lake house from the opener.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Louise, alone, on the couch. Half a bottle of wine left.

The place is furnished nicely, but there are telltale signs
 of a single occupant in a larger space. No family photos.

A recliner by the couch has become a surrogate bookshelf.

TV is on. More coverage of the alien landing.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)
 ...and at around eight hours after
 landing, there are still no signs
 of what might be called 'first
 contact.'

Changing channel. Footage changes to a snowy tundra where
 another UFO has landed and flattened a section of fence line.

This is a foreign channel. Louise gets international
 stations. The anchor speaks in Russian.

Two different military forces rally around the sphere.
 Spotlights shine on its surface. Armed men surround it.

The cameraman is shoved away by soldiers.

New channel: Another SPHERE, hovering over the ocean.

Fleets from three different nations threaten each other for
 possession of the massive UFO.

BRIAN WILLIAMS (V.O.)
 --none of whom can claim because
 this 'object' as it's being called
 is actually hovering over
 international waters. One Iranian
 cruiser has fired across the bow of
 the Indian fleet--

Louise changes the channel.

Finding: The press room in the west wing of the White House.

PRESS SECRETARY
 We have to entertain the idea that,
 if it is a kind of vessel, it may
 be unmanned.

The reporters clamor for answers, shouting over each other.

Louise lets out a tired breath, turns off the TV and tosses
 the remote. She's lost interest.

INT. LOUISE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Louise is asleep in bed. The covers are a mess. She's
 spooning extra pillows as if they were a bedfellow.

She wakes with a start, as if from a dream.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - MORNING

Louise returns to work.

The campus is empty. Two students hurry between buildings.

Louise passes the student center.

It's too quiet.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM - MORNING

Louise enters her classroom. Stops.

No one has showed up.

A note is scrawled on her blackboard:
 "ALIENS. SEE YOU NEXT WEEK."

Louise sighs.

INT. LOUISE'S OFFICE - EVENING

A cramped office with a window looking out on the city.

Sirens wail in the distance.

Louise has barely decorated the place. It's the sign of someone untethered from the world. Closed off.

Louise sits at her desk, working on her syllabus.

Streaming video news coverage plays on her computer.

ANCHORMAN (V.O.)

Forty-eight hours later, and still
no word from any nation on first
contact. Borders are closed and
flights grounded [STATIC]--

Louise's monitor winks off.

She frowns at it. Tries to reboot. No luck.

COLONEL WEBER (O.S.)

That was my fault.

Louise turns to see the source of the voice at her office door. COLONEL WEBER (50s) wears civilian clothing but his body language screams career military. Callused hands, sharp eyes, rigid posture.

COLONEL WEBER (CONT'D)

Precautionary measure, as you'll
soon find out. It will reboot after
I leave.

Behind Weber, two large MEN stand guard in the hall.

LOUISE

Who are you?

Weber has his I.D. ready; shows it to her.

COLONEL WEBER

I'm Colonel Richard Weber. You and
I never formally met but two years
ago you did some Farsi translation
for Army Intelligence.

LOUISE

I remember. Alan Boudreau hired me.

COLONEL WEBER

Alan works for me. You made quick work of those insurgent videos.

Louise crosses her arms. He's touched a nerve.

LOUISE

You made quick work of those insurgents.

COLONEL WEBER

That's what we do.

LOUISE

Uh-huh.

COLONEL WEBER

Point is, you're at the top of everyone's list when it comes to translation and you have another two years on your SSBI so you still have top secret clearance. And that's why I'm in your office, and not at Berkeley.

LOUISE

Okay...

COLONEL WEBER

I need you to translate something for me.

Colonel Weber places a pocket-sized digital recorder on Louise's desk.

He hits PLAY.

White noise, shuffling. Then murmured talk, and:

MAN'S VOICE

(on recorder)

Why are you here?

In response: A SERIES OF SOUNDS that have no Earthly comparison. An audio mixture of organic clicks, rushing water, whispers, and low-octave moaning.

Beat.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(on recorder)

Can you understand us?

Almost immediately, the SOUNDS return, this time slightly different. The bass tone is lower. The whispers raspy.

Louise listens, rapt. As if she's waking up from a long sleep. She leans in.

Weber studies her face while she listens.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)
(on recorder)
Do you come in peace?

Before an answer is heard, Weber stops playback and takes back the recorder.

COLONEL WEBER
Well? What do you make of it?

LOUISE
Is that...

COLONEL WEBER
Yes.

LOUISE
How many?

COLONEL WEBER
How many what?

LOUISE
How many of them were speaking?

Weber raises an eyebrow at her but answers.

COLONEL WEBER
Two. Assume they were not speaking at the same time.

LOUISE
Are you sure? Do they have mouths?

COLONEL WEBER
Keep your focus on the sounds.

Weber replays a portion of the recording. The alien VOICE sounds even stranger a second time.

COLONEL WEBER (CONT'D)
What would be your approach to translating this? Does any of it sound like words to you? Phrases?

LOUISE
I don't know.

COLONEL WEBER
(said not as a question)
What can you tell me.

LOUISE
I can tell you it's impossible to translate this from an audio file. To do this right, I need to be there. I need to be in the room, interacting with them.

Weber bristles at this.

COLONEL WEBER
You didn't need that for the Farsi translations.

LOUISE
It was Dari, not Farsi, and I didn't need it because I already knew the language. This--
(points at recorder)
This is a whole new ball game. You have to throw out the rule book.

COLONEL WEBER
I know what you're doing.

LOUISE
Tell me what I'm doing.

COLONEL WEBER
I'm not here to take you to Montana. It's all I can do to keep it from becoming a tourist site for anyone with TS clearance. Like it's goddamn Disneyland.

LOUISE
I'm not asking for a ticket to a show, Colonel. I'm talking about doing a job.

COLONEL WEBER
We will set up a safe room at a facility here in town where you can observe video of the conversations in real-time. I'll put you on the line with our team at the site.

LOUISE

No.

COLONEL WEBER

(beat)

What do you mean, 'no'?

LOUISE

It won't work that way.

COLONEL WEBER

You'll make it work.

Her patience wears thin.

LOUISE

Colonel, have they spoken to us in English?

COLONEL WEBER

No.

LOUISE

Have they played back any of our media, or given you any indication they understand us?

Weber doesn't have a reply for this. His eyes shift.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

So in order for this to work, I have to teach them English. The basics. Nouns, verbs. I can't do that remotely. I have to be in the room with them.

Weber and Louise stare down.

COLONEL WEBER

There is one opportunity here, and that is to study them remotely. If I leave here, your chance is gone.

Weber turns to leave.

Not content to let that be the end of it:

LOUISE

You going to ask Danvers next?

Weber pauses at the door.

COLONEL WEBER

Maybe, why?

She grins.

LOUISE

Ask him the Sanskrit word for "war"
and its translation.

Weber's jaws clench.

After the door shuts behind him, Louise's computer wakes up again. Louise keeps staring at the door. Her grin fades.

INT. LOUISE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Louise is asleep in her bed. Again with the formation of pillows around her.

She wakes to a rhythmic thumping. Low; dull.

Her hand goes to her heart. It's not her heart.

The thumping gets louder. A helicopter.

INT. LOUISE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dressed in a bathrobe, Louise crosses to the front windows looking out on her wide, flat front yard.

A Sikorsky UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter has touched down on the lawn. The passenger door is open, slid back to reveal someone riding in the rear compartment.

Her doorbell rings.

Louise answers it.

Weber stands at the door.

COLONEL WEBER

Good morning.

LOUISE

Colonel?

COLONEL WEBER

Gavisti.

LOUISE

That's the word. But what did
Danvers say it means in Sanskrit?

COLONEL WEBER
He said it means an argument.
What does it really mean?

LOUISE
"A desire for more cows."

COLONEL WEBER
Pack your bags.

It hits Louise: She got the job.

LOUISE
All right. Give me twenty minutes.

COLONEL WEBER
You have ten.

Louise glares at Weber for just a moment, then dashes off to her bedroom.

INT. BLACKHAWK HELICOPTER - MORNING

Louise (now dressed and carrying an overnight bag) hurries for the passenger compartment.

The rotor blades flatten the grass on her lawn and pull at Louise's coat.

NEIGHBORS across the street have stepped out on their driveways, curious about the helicopter.

Weber helps Louise inside and then shuts the door.

The helicopter rises immediately.

Beyond the lake house: A small town. Suburban.
Farther out: The city.

Louise drops into a bench seat still holding her bag.
As she buckles in:

IAN (O.S.)
Language is the foundation of
civilization.

Across from her: IAN DONNELLY (late 30s), Oxford shirt, wild hair, fierce eyes. Ian holds a book. He's reading from it.

LOUISE
Pardon?

IAN

"It is the glue that holds a people together, and it is the first weapon drawn in a conflict. Without language, we are nothing."

COLONEL WEBER

Louise, this is Ian Donnelly.

Neither Louise nor Ian offer to shake hands. They study one another as they talk.

LOUISE

That's quite a greeting.

IAN

You wrote it.

LOUISE

It's the kind of thing you write as a preface. Dazzle them with basics.

IAN

It's good. Even if it's wrong.

LOUISE

Wrong?

IAN

The cornerstone of civilization isn't language. It's science. Man doesn't need to tell everyone how to make fire. He just has to burn them with it.

COLONEL WEBER

Ian is an astrophysicist on loan from NASA. He is the man with the questions. You will be reporting to me but you'll take direction from him when you're in the shell.

LOUISE

The shell?

IAN

That's what they're calling the UFO.

LOUISE

So it is a ship, then.

Weber ignores that comment and plunges ahead:

COLONEL WEBER

We need to get a basic grasp of their language as soon as possible, with emphasis on science and math concepts. If you don't understand what Ian wants translated, ask him to clarify.

LOUISE

What's the rush?

IAN

Japan and Russia already have teams assembled at their landing sites.

COLONEL WEBER

China and Sweden now, too. Time is our enemy now.

LOUISE

I don't understand. What progress have the other teams made?

COLONEL WEBER

We don't know. No one's talking anymore.

LOUISE

Who stopped talking first?

Weber looks at Ian. Nods.

IAN

Japan and Russia.

COLONEL WEBER

Followed early this morning by China and Sweden.

(beat)

It's a race.

It sinks in with Louise. The other sites have learned something. Something they don't want anyone else to know.

EXT. MONTANA LANDING SITE - DAY

Wide angle on approach. A mile out.

Roads and highways are crowded with traffic, up against impassable military blockades.

In the distance: The ALIEN SPHERE.

It dwarfs the wilderness around it and stands out like a pinball dropped in a tiny terrarium. Its metal skin suggests movement; rotation or distortion. Yet it remains immobile.

At this distance, a low DRONE starts to resonate in everyone's sternum.

The Blackhawk lances over the treeline.

EXT. BASE CAMP - DAY

The spherical ship towers over the field where it landed. Its lack of front, back, up or down give it the appearance that it could roll in any direction.

In the flattened grass from its impact, a series of tents have been erected. Up close the ship looks majestic; ominous.

INT. BLACKHAWK - CONTINUOUS

Louise and Ian stare out the side window at the ship.

COLONEL WEBER

Every thirteen hours a series of circular portals line up and form a tunnel to a chamber inside.

(beat)

That's where they meet us.

A phone handset's cradle lights up by Weber. He answers it.

LOUISE

When's the next meeting?

Ian shrugs -- he just got here.

Weber hangs up.

COLONEL WEBER

They're waiting for us now.

LOUISE

The aliens. Are waiting for us.

EXT. HELIPAD - MOMENTS LATER

Colonel Weber, Ian, and Louise are escorted out of the helicopter and into base camp.

LT. MARKS (barely 30, disciplined; a man of rules) meets Weber and updates him as they walk:

LT. MARKS

Fragment team called in with the composite results.

COLONEL WEBER

Tell me.

LT. MARKS

Three unknown elements, plus trace levels of Scandium and Gadolinium.

COLONEL WEBER

We do anything with those?

LT. MARKS

One's an alloy for aerospace components, the other used for MRI machines.

COLONEL WEBER

Take them to Kettler.

LT. MARKS

Yessir.

COLONEL WEBER

(to Ian and Louise)

You will follow this man to medical. The procedure should take just a few minutes.

EXT. TENT COMPLEX - MOMENTS LATER

Lt. Marks leads them to a large tent emblazoned with a red cross on the side.

Nearby, the sphere looms over them. In this position, it has the optical illusion that it's rolling toward them, moments away from crushing all in its path.

A low, constant thrum emanates from it. At this proximity, it vibrates the fillings in your teeth.

Louise looks up at it as they cross to the tent.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - MOMENTS LATER

A staff of military medical personnel are busy testing new diagnostic equipment. A portable CAT scanner is being assembled in one corner. Another team works with some device attached to an exam table inside an oxygen tent.

Lt. Marks opens a flap into a room where we find a man in scrubs with a tray of hypodermics. This is DR. KETTLER; professorial, even-toned voice, but a predator's eyes.

DR. KETTLER
Louise Banks and Ian Donnelly?

Louise nods. Kettler gestures to two plastic chairs. They sit, while he prepares a syringe with a vial attached.

DR. KETTLER (CONT'D)
When is the last time either of you
have eaten?

LOUISE
Last night.

IAN
Same.

DR. KETTLER
I'm going to get some blood from
you, and give you an immunization
dose that covers a battery of
bacterial threats. Roll up your
sleeves, please.

Ian begins rolling up his Oxford shirt sleeve.

Louise notices Ian is complying, then follows suit.

Kettler moves his tray over and wraps a band around Louise's arm, just above her elbow. As he draws blood:

DR. KETTLER (CONT'D)
The booster is a kick to your
system, so you might feel some side
effects. Nausea. Dizziness.
Headaches. A ringing in your ear
like you have Tinnitus.

IAN
Oh joy.

INT. "CLEAN ROOM" - DAY

A miniature Silkwood. Contained showers. Dressing areas. Full HAZMAT suits hang on a wall.

Lt. Marks brings Ian and Louise in. They each have cotton swabs taped to their elbows now.

LT. MARKS

Climb into these. I'll help you with the helmet seals.

IAN

What kind of radiation exposure are we walking into?

LT. MARKS

Nominal. These are just for safety.

LOUISE

Is there physical contact with the, the-- am I the only one who has trouble saying "aliens"?

IAN

No.

LOUISE

Thank you.

LT. MARKS

There's a wall. Like a glass wall. You can't get to them.

LOUISE

What do they look like?

A flashing light winks over the exit door.

LT. MARKS

You're up.

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ian and Louise, now wearing full moonsuit gear complete with respirators, enter this tent that serves as the nerve center of base camp.

Weber is waiting for them. Already suited up like them.

Behind him: a large white board and rows of flat screen TVs.

On the white board: Twelve columns, with labels of countries. CHINA / JAPAN / SWEDEN / PERU / RUSSIA / etc.

Information is written under the columns, and spy satellite plus location photos are peppered throughout. It shows what every country is doing at their separate ship sites.

Studying the board is a MAN in a suit and tie. Arms crossed over his chest. This is AGENT HALPERN. We'll see him again.

COLONEL WEBER

Remember: We need answers as soon as possible. Why they are here. What they want, what they will give us. This is the priority.

Ian frowns.

IAN

What about teaching them our numerical system, so I can get into conceptual physics?

COLONEL WEBER

All the math in the world isn't going to help us if they're hostile.

LOUISE

You think a hostile race would just land and start talking to us?

COLONEL WEBER

You're the one who said language is the first weapon drawn in conflict. So let's not rule anything out.

Ian and Louise exchange glances as Weber leads them out of the ops tent.

EXT. SPACE SHIP - MOMENTS LATER

The craft is even more intimidating close-up. Its surface on the undercarriage portion seems to absorb light in a strange way, as if the entire ship were pulsing, though it's not.

Louise and Ian join a small contingent of MILITARY PERSONNEL also in HAZMAT suits.

Louise notices the soldiers are all armed.

She follows the others along a path marked by heavy electronics cables.

Ahead: A round porthole eight feet in diameter is set into the sphere; a notch in the skin of the ship like a recessed button. No other door, porthole, or window is visible. It's a smooth enigma of metal.

LOUISE

Amazing. There's no front or back.

IAN

No visible thrusters, either.

Suddenly the porthole slides open, and it's as if a thick sheaf of papers with a hole-punch through its middle aligned perfectly. Hundreds of layers of concentric spheres lock into position and create a tunnel leading up into the epicenter of the ship.

Louise and Ian pause, unsure if they should advance.

Weber and Lt. Marks go in first, with two more MEN carrying equipment.

Ian looks back at Louise, smiles, then ventures in.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The smooth-bore structure invites vertigo. Ten steps in and it's hard to tell up from down.

Louise reaches out and runs a suit-gloved hand along the ridges of the tunnel, trying to fathom its construction.

Behind them, the porthole closes to a crescent-moon and then seals up completely. More follow, the tunnel shifting behind them as they advance toward the inner chamber.

LOUISE

Colonel Weber? It closed.

COLONEL WEBER

It does that.

IAN

How do we get out?

COLONEL WEBER

The tunnel reforms in about forty-five minutes. That's when we go.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The chamber has no hard corners or edges. Vaguely rectangular. The floor and the ceiling are made of the same material and seem to be symmetrical.

The room is bisected by a transparent wall.

The MEN with Weber and Marks quickly set up an arsenal of video, audio, and other recording equipment to face this glass-like partition. Chemical sniffers.

Their heads have eyes and holes that might be mouths or nostrils or both. Their necks give their heads complete rotational movement, 360 degrees.

Material that doesn't seem organic to their bodies is draped around their arms near the shoulders. This is the closest thing to clothes, and a quick way to identify the two aliens from each other.

The lighting in the room, and the transparency of the wall between humans and aliens make it difficult to see details of the aliens. Everything is a bit dark and a bit blurred. Their forms undulate in ways that make them seem like deep-water fish, but it's unclear whether or not the space on the other side of the wall is air or something else. There is no hint of cavitation (bubbles), yet the aliens move in a way best described as "swimming."

They approach the platform, and settle behind it.

Louise and Ian stare in awe of the creatures.

Their lives have led them to here and now; one of the few people on Earth to speak with alien life.

Beat.

COLONEL WEBER
You're up, Doctor Banks.

Louise snaps out of her trance.

The aliens stand and stare back.

One crooks its head at Louise.

IAN
(sotto)
Seven? Seven arms?

Louise steps forward. Hesitant. Close to the boundary.

LOUISE
Hello.

Beat. No reaction.

Louise points to herself.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Human.
(repeats)
Human.

She pulls out a WHITEBOARD, tucks it under an arm. Grabs a dry-erase marker.

LOUISE
I need a visual aid.

She walks briskly past Weber and back to her spot by Ian.

IAN
I think they're watching you.

Louise begins writing on the whiteboard.

The aliens study her.

She shows the whiteboard to them, pointing at a word she's written in large block letters: "HUMAN."

LOUISE
Human.
(slower)
Huumaann.

She points to herself. Then to others on her side of the room, including Weber.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Human.

She points at one of the aliens.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
What are you?

Beat.

The aliens confer with each other.

One uses two of its seven arms to control a console on its side of the room. The console is like an upright desk built into the floor, angled so that we can't see what it's writing or controlling.

A brilliant LOGOGRAM appears on the transparent wall before Louise. The writing is a gorgeous hybrid of calligraphy and line-art symbol. It lights up Louise's face as if it were written in phosphorescent ink.

It looks something like this:



The taller, slimmer alien steps forward and points at itself with one arm.

It says something: Click-flutter-tone.

Louise smiles. Nearly laughs. Wants to cry.
She just had her first real exchange with an alien.

 LOUISE (CONT'D)
 (sotto)
 Are you getting this?

Ian checks with a bank of monitors.

 IAN
 Absolutely.

EXT. BASE CAMP - EVENING

Forty-five minutes later. The team exits the ship.

Louise still carries the whiteboard around like a talisman.

New words have been scrawled on it: "MAN / WOMAN / EARTH."

Ian takes notes on a laptop.

Colonel Weber stops Louise before the team reaches the tent.

 COLONEL WEBER
 I didn't authorize you to teach
 them how to read.

The HAZMAT helmet-masks and gloves come off now.
Louise fires back:

 LOUISE
 Why would I need authorization?

 COLONEL WEBER
 It's a security risk. Do I need to
 explain to you what that means?

 LOUISE
 It means if I play my cards right,
 they'll take some Shakespeare home
 with them.

 COLONEL WEBER
 They may be sitting on a mountain
 of data written in English. Hell,
 they may have hacked into all our
 websites. All they need is to learn
 how to read them.

LOUISE
It's the only way this will work.

COLONEL WEBER
I doubt other governments are training these things to read their language. Convince me.

Gesturing at the whiteboard.

LOUISE
Kangaroo.

COLONEL WEBER
What?

LOUISE
In 1770, Captain James Cook's ship ran aground on the coast of Australia. He led a party into the country and met the aboriginal people. One of his sailors pointed to the animals that hopped around with their young in pouches, and asked what they were called. The aborigine replied "Kanguru."

COLONEL WEBER
What's your point?

LOUISE
It wasn't until later that they learned "Kanguru" means "I don't understand."
(re: whiteboard)
I need this to make sure we don't misinterpret things in there. Otherwise this process will take ten times as long.

Time wasted is the key phrase to convince Weber.

COLONEL WEBER
All right. But submit your vocabulary before the next session.
(beat)
And remember what happened to the aborigines. A more advanced race nearly wiped them out.

Weber walks off with Lt. Marks.

Ian steps up next to Louise, watching the men walk away.

IAN
 Don't let him kill your buzz.
 You just spoke to an extra-
 terrestrial.

He grins at her. She grins back.

LOUISE
 Not a bad day.

IAN
 I want to call everyone I know
 right now. Do you realize how many
 arguments this settles? Seriously.
 Who would you call and brag to?

Louise's smile vanishes.

LOUISE
 I don't know.

Ian gets he's touched on something, but he doesn't know what.

IAN
 Oh.

LOUISE
 I guess, what, we just do it again
 when they return in a few hours.

Ian turns around and takes another look at the massive ship.
 Appraising it like a teenage boy seeing his first Ferrari.

IAN
 (to the ship)
 It's a date.

Louise leaves Ian and approaches the main tent.
 A faint, high-pitched RINGING fades in. Louise winces--

INT. LOUISE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Louise looks different in this sepia-tone memory. Back when
 she had short hair.

She's rocking a cocktail dress and pumps, donning earrings in
 front of a full-length mirror. Getting ready for a date.

Sound of a TV on, elsewhere in the house.

LOUISE
 (calling out)
 I'll be back late, but Jennifer is
 coming over. She'll tuck you in,
 okay, little-nose?

HANNAH (O.S.)
 ...Okay.

LOUISE
 I don't want any trouble. That
 means no pony rancher game after
 eight, you get too worked up.

HANNAH (O.S.)
 Mm-hmm.

Louise narrows her eyes. Something is amiss with Hannah.

INT. LOUISE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Louise steps out to find her daughter HANNAH (6) on the floor
 four feet from the TV, an animated movie playing on screen.

Hannah colors a hand-drawn illustration.
 She's the wagging-tongue-when-working-hard type.

Same fierce eyes and gentle hair as her mother.

LOUISE
 Did you hear me, babe?

HANNAH
 (not looking up)
 No ponies after eight, gotcha.

LOUISE
 What are you working on there?

HANNAH
 Mrs. Garriott said to draw what my
 Saturday morning cartoon would look
 like if I had one.

Louise is curious now. Takes her heels off and crouches down
 next to her daughter.

LOUISE
 Can I see? Is that a rocket ship?

THE DRAWING depicts a Man and Woman (stick-figures) inside a
 flying ship drawn Buck Rogers style. A smaller stick figure
 sits in the cockpit. The piece is colorful.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Who are these two in back?

HANNAH
You and Daddy. The show is called
"Hannah and Mommy and Daddy Save
the World." I'm the captain.

Louise's smile sinks. She looks pained.

LOUISE
Well. That sounds lovely.
(beat)
You know, it's okay to be upset
that your daddy and I...

Little Hannah breathes through her nose.

HANNAH
I know. I'm not.

Louise brushes Hannah's hair out of her eyes.

LOUISE
We both love you, very much.

HANNAH
I know.
(then)
It's just a cartoon. It's not real.

Louise bites her nails, staring at the drawing. The strange
RINGING creeps in again and--

EXT. BASE CAMP - EVENING

Back to scene; moments after the flashback began. Louise
stands alone. Ahead of her, Ian enters the ops tent.

She looks back at the ship. Confused.

EXT. MONTANA WILDERNESS - EVENING

High above the tree line, looking down at the land near the
landing site: Dozens of vehicle headlights bounce and move
off-road, approaching a growing cluster of trailers and
trucks parked near the trees.

Hundreds of people are making a pilgrimage to the landing
site and amassing at the military barricade a mile out.

EXT. TREE LINE - THAT MOMENT

Weber emerges from the path back to base camp and surveys the scene on the ground.

Stadium lights on mobile cranes have been rigged and pointed outward, so the soldiers have a clear sight of the barricade and the clearing.

Arcing around Weber, our first look at the civilian encampment outside -- it stretches as far as we can see in either direction, and headlights beyond suggest more arriving every minute.

People crowd around the barricade, which isn't more than a glorified portable fence with some structural reinforcements every twenty feet and the occasional HMMV used as a makeshift guard tower.

Civilians line up at it like spectators at a parade. The din of voices is like that of an outdoor stadium during a game.

COLONEL WEBER

Jesus...

Weber steps up into an armored personnel carrier (APC) that currently serves as the watch commander's base.

INT. APC - CONTINUOUS

Ducking his head, Weber enters the rear compartment, which resembles a military camper complete with built-in bench and table and kitchenette.

The watch commander, a man named SERGEANT RUTHERFORD, sips from a mug of coffee and stares at a topographical map of the area laid out on his table.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

Colonel.

COLONEL WEBER

Sergeant. That perimeter is too close to the site.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

We're a mile out. All due respect, I don't think anyone expected what we're seeing, sir. My men have contained it best we could.

COLONEL WEBER

Then we need a new plan.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

(re: map)

We have about four square miles of barricade to cover. But you get me two hundred more men, I can patrol the entire zone with enough for three shifts and support staff.

COLONEL WEBER

What about monitoring stations instead-- set down motion detectors, low-light cameras.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

Not as good. We could see a breach in plenty of time but we won't have any boots at the incursion point to choke it off. Best bet, you're catching trespassers as they get to base camp, and that's too late.

COLONEL WEBER

What's another plan?

Rutherford taps the logistics info he's scrawled on the paper atop his map: "200 MEN."

Weber shakes his head like a catcher denying a pitch signal.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

Sir. Why not?

COLONEL WEBER

Think it through, sergeant. You're asking to bring in a battalion of troops and camp them in a place where the only potential targets are creatures from outer space or their fellow Americans.

(beat)

Do you see how that's a problem?

SGT. RUTHERFORD

Yes sir. Let me show you the bigger problem.

EXT. APC - MOMENTS LATER

Rutherford leads Weber back out and points at the amassing horde of civilians.

SGT. RUTHERFORD

It's a couple thousand tonight. It will be twice that by tomorrow.

COLONEL WEBER

How much longer can you hold it here without more men?

SGT. RUTHERFORD

Three days, tops. Then either we need to push out at them, or they'll start pushing in at us.

Weber lets out a deep breath, frustrated.

EXT. STARFIELD IN SKY - NIGHT

A glimmering expanse overhead. A shooting star arcs across the sky, with a long tail.

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Two ARMY PRIVATES watch the sky from their guard duty outside the large barracks tent.

The shooting star puts them both on edge. One grabs his assault rifle and gently grips the trigger guard.

PRIVATE COMBS

You see that?

The other soldier (PRIVATE LASKY) just nods.

Nothing happens. The two men continue to hold their tension, alert and ready.

DRIFTING away from the Soldiers, FINDING Ian sitting on the grass with a sketch pad, staring at the spherical alien ship. Where the Private looked at it with dread and suspicion, Ian gazes at it with hope and fascination.

IAN

(sotto)

How do you fly?

The enormous ship dwarfs him.

RICHARD RILEY (V.O.)

(pre-lap)

Look at that thing.

INT. TALK SHOW STUDIO SET - MORNING

A political talk show space with a large screen showing the same Montana sphere. Host RICHARD RILEY (a Glenn Beck type) gestures at it. Then gestures at the camera. He speaks fast and emphasizes words as he talks:

RICHARD RILEY

This is aliens we're talking about. The most important time in our history as a people is right now, first contact with whoever is inside this thing, and who do we have running the show? The government. The same government that ruined our health care and bankrupted our military.

An image of the cluster of tents around the Montana site appears, obviously shot with a long zoom lens.

RICHARD RILEY (CONT'D)

Look at these people! Most of them don't even have guns. We could be facing a full-scale invasion and our president is ready to roll over and let them take our country--

Transmission lines flicker over the scene-- we're not in the studio, we're watching it on a TV in:

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - MORNING

One of several flat screens plays Riley's rant.

Other screens show foreign military forces gathering near alien spheres in other countries.

There's something unsettling about going from TV footage of the ship to being right by the real thing.

One news program shows riots somewhere. Could be Prague, could be Detroit.

Some SOLDIERS watch the news screens. Among them: PRIVATE LASKY, who pays close attention to Riley's show. Nodding. As if he might agree with some of it.

Louise enters the tent to find Ian and Weber already here, with other team members. Ian has a sketchbook, he's busy with an art pencil.

COLONEL WEBER

(to Ian)

Then we steer it that way, and see what we get.

LOUISE

Steer what?

COLONEL WEBER

This morning, the Korean team wheeled an exposed engine block and a balance scale into their sphere. And Japan is using music somehow.

LOUISE

Maybe they're getting desperate and playing show-and-tell without learning the language.

COLONEL WEBER

And maybe that will work for them. We need to gain ground today. You have your vocabulary list for me?

LOUISE

I do. It's long, and I don't know how long we'll have in a session.

LT. MARKS

Around an hour. After that, they leave for thirteen hours. We haven't figured out how to keep them longer.

Weber looks over the list of words.

COLONEL WEBER

You're going to teach them your name? And Ian's?

IAN

I like it.

COLONEL WEBER

I don't.

LOUISE

It's so I can learn their names. If they have names. Plus it will make my job easier when I have to introduce pronouns later.

COLONEL WEBER

(re: list)

These are all grade-school words.
Walk. Eat. Tool. We need to get
more specific.

LOUISE

Do you know what a Pulaski is?

COLONEL WEBER

(beat)

No.

LOUISE

It's a tool. Used by firefighters.
We can't start specific.

Weber makes a noncommittal noise and marks a check by some words.

Ian reveals to Louise his sketch of an ALIEN.

IAN

Heptapod. Seven arms.

(re: list)

Make sure the numbers one through
ten are on your list. I want to ask
them some basic math problems.

LOUISE

First things first.

IAN

Yes. That would be my numbers.

Louise confronts Ian.

LOUISE

Tell me how a math problem can ask
our heptapod friends what their
purpose is on Earth.

Ian takes the bait.

IAN

It would be a complex algebraic
proof, but it's feasible.

LOUISE

Simple beats complex.

Weber hands her the revised list.

COLONEL WEBER

Here. You can use everything on the list, but I'm adding one.

Louise looks down at the page. We don't see what it is.

LOUISE

That's dangerous. We could come off as hostile.

COLONEL WEBER

Then choose your demonstration carefully.

Lt. Marks enters the tent.

LT. MARKS

They're back.

All eyes go to the bank of monitors showing the convex part of the massive sphere where the circular portals align to form the tunnel.

Like a Spirogram of negative space, the round holes line up from different directions, and light from deep within the space craft spills out.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MORNING

Louise faces the transparent wall, holding a dry-erase marker in one hand. Ian stands near the whiteboard. Everyone is in full HAZMAT suits again.

Weber is suspiciously absent.

The heptapods watch Louise with a strange curiosity.

Louise points at herself.

LOUISE

Louise.

The whiteboard displays her name in large letters.

Beat. One heptapod speaks. Whisper-flutter-click.

On its side of the room, beyond the glass, the heptapod approaches its console. It draws something, hidden from view.

A beautiful LOGOGRAM appears on the glass.



IAN

Well, that's progress.

LOUISE

No. That's the symbol for "human" again. But with a little curl at the end of that leg. Probably to indicate a question.

IAN

They're getting confused.

LOUISE

You know what-- I can't do it like this. I just--

Louise takes her HAZMAT mask off.

IAN

Whoa whoa hey--

Weber's voice pipes in via intercom, from the ops tent:

COLONEL WEBER (V.O.)

You're risking contamination.

LOUISE

They need to see me.

Louise shirks out of the rest of her suit. She's wearing her civilian clothes underneath.

The heptapods advance a step closer to the barrier. Curious.

Everyone holds their breath a beat. Slowly, Louise puts a hand on her heart and repeats:

LOUISE (CONT'D)

My name is Louise.

She takes the whiteboard and writes furiously. Flips it around and shows: She's drawn their symbol for "human" next to the English word "HUMAN" and then a greater-than symbol leading to her name.

The two heptapods confer with one another.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Ian, introduce yourself.

Ian erases Louise's name on the board and writes his. He steps forward and shows it to them.

IAN

Ian. My name is Ian.

He points at it when he says it.

5) The numerals 3 > 2 shine on the transparent wall along with its heptapod logogram.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - LATER

Lt. Marks remains in the room in full HAZMAT suit, monitoring the equipment, sidearm at his belt.

LT. MARKS
That's time.

LOUISE
I'm just halfway down my list.

Abbott speaks. Water-crashing-basstone.

A logogram appears.

IAN
What's that? Goodbye?

LOUISE
(surprised)
No...

Underneath the logogram, the English word (copied in writing style from Louise's board) appears: "MORE."

LOUISE (CONT'D)
I think they want to keep going.

HANNAH (V.O.)
(pre-lap)
Another one!

That high pitch like Tinnitus bleeds into the sound and--

INT. HANNAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Six-year-old HANNAH sits up in bed, in her pajamas.

Louise sits next to her, closing a story book.

LOUISE
You are just insatiable.

HANNAH
Yes I am! What's that mean?

LOUISE
It means you'll never get tired of stories.

HANNAH
Well duh, then I would be boring.

LOUISE
One more, then bedtime.

HANNAH
The Giving Tree.

LOUISE
I read that one to you last night.

HANNAH
Yeah yeah.

LOUISE
Why hear it again?

Little Hannah smiles sweetly up at Louise.

HANNAH
It's just as good the second time.

Her words seem to have a profound impact on Louise.

LOUISE
Yes... It is, isn't it.

The high pitch tone emerges as:

IAN (V.O.)
Are we good?

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - EVENING

Back to scene.

Louise looks abruptly distracted. Confused.

IAN
Colonel Weber got his word in.
Let's just move on to something
else now, okay?

Louise is holding a HUNTING KNIFE in her hands.

On the transparent wall facing her, the heptapods have written a terse, angular symbol, and put the English translation under it: "WEAPON."

Louise consults her list, getting back in the moment.

LOUISE
Yeah... Okay.

COLONEL WEBER (V.O.)
(through speakers)
Get me answers, Doctor Banks. Stop
teaching and start asking.

LOUISE
We first need to distinguish a
weapon from other kinds of devices
or else they'll think everything is
a weapon.

Costello whisper-clicks at Abbott, then turns to leave. A
doorway irises open on the far wall.

Abbott wipes the console and the logogram vanishes.

LT. MARKS
They're leaving.

LOUISE
Wait. Wait!

She steps to the boundary and puts her hand on it.

Abbott pauses.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

Abbott crooks his head.

Louise, desperate, looks back at the printer attached to the
still camera capturing everything written by the heptapods.

She riffles through the pages, looking for the words.

IAN
What can I do?

Louise gives him two print-outs.

LOUISE
Hold these up.

Abbott looks back at the door where Costello left. Then at
Louise and Ian.

Louise finishes drawing. Shows the board to Abbott. Puts it
against the boundary. She's attempted freehand drawing their
gorgeous logograms, and she's actually done a great job.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Why are the heptapods on Earth?

It's not quite the phrasing; she hasn't taught them "why" but instead uses "heptapods purpose Earth" with a curl on the logogram for Earth.

Abbott stares a beat.
And writes on the console.

To reciprocate Louise's choice of heptapod writing, Abbott answers in English with two words.

"OFFER WEAPON"

Louise steps back from the boundary.
The phrase sends a tense hush through the team.

Abbott turns and exits.

The unidentifiable light source in the interview chamber dims and the transparent wall clouds until it's fully opaque.

Louise, Ian, Lt. Marks, and the other in-room Camera Techs face each other as if they've just learned a terrible secret.

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - NIGHT

An eruption of sound and chaos, joining in mid-debate with several people talking at once.

LT. MARKS

But you saw what they wrote--

IAN

--using a word they don't fully understand!

LOUISE

(to Weber)

And they could just as well be asking us to give them a weapon, as a request--

COLONEL WEBER

That wasn't a request.

Weber steps up to the giant white board surrounded by flat screens. More data has been collected by spy satellite about the other alien sites.

A new label has appeared on two locations: "BLACKOUT."
Nearby, Halpern is on the phone.

COLONEL WEBER (CONT'D)

An hour ago, a black cloud appeared directly over the Russian site, followed by a similar anomaly in Peru. DARPA has something like it, so odds are it's man-made, to throw a blanket over the whole site. We've lost eyes and ears. Last transmission from our spy in Peru said he heard gunfire.

IAN

Who's attacking whom?

COLONEL WEBER

We don't know. But I'm not taking any chances. You're both confined to base until further notice.

Those words trigger a reaction with Louise. The telltale pitch rises quickly, and in a flash--

INT. LOUISE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Hannah, now age 11, is having a fit in front of Louise, who stands with her arms crossed.

HANNAH

I'm grounded? Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me.

LOUISE

We had a deal. You do your chores or you don't get to sleep over at Riley's.

HANNAH

I said I'd do it when I got home!

LOUISE

Saying it doesn't make it true.

HANNAH

Mom, seriously!

LOUISE

I am serious, young woman.

HANNAH

I'm gonna miss the movie if I have to stay and vacuum and the movie is what bonds everyone the rest of the night!

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Like they'll be quoting from it and
I won't know the context and
Stephanie will use it as a wedge to
separate me from the other girls!

Louise can't keep a straight face. Hannah is just too precocious. Stifling a snicker:

LOUISE

Miss the movie, or miss the whole
night. Your choice.

HANNAH

Ugh. I swear, you had me just so
you could get free child labor.
When do I get to live my own life?
That's all I ask.

Hannah stomps off, leaving Louise shaking her head.

A door SLAMS, which jolts Louise in surprise and--

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - NIGHT

Present day. Louise stumbles, nearly falls. Ian catches her.

IAN

Whoa. You okay?

Louise holds onto the edge of a table, recovering from a sudden vertigo. She focuses on Ian.

LOUISE

I... I don't know.
(beat)
I guess the work is getting to me.

Ian helps her upright, where she faces a suspicious Weber.

COLONEL WEBER

When was your last check-up with
Kettler?

Louise lets out a weary breath. No two ways about this now, she's being sent to the doctor.

INT. DR. KETTLER'S TRAILER - LATER

Louise sits in a plastic chair. This isn't a tent but a sturdier facility with actual walls. She watches Private Lasky across from her, in another little plastic chair.

Lasky has his head bowed, his hands clasped together. His knee bounces nervously. He whispers under his breath.

The door to Kettler's office opens and Dr. Kettler steps out.

Lasky sits up, whip-fast.

DR. KETTLER
Louise, come in.

Louise looks back at Lasky as she goes. Lasky glares at her.

DR. KETTLER (V.O.)
(pre-lap)
How do you feel?

INT. DR. KETTLER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A pen light shines in Louise's left eye.

LOUISE
Overworked.

Kettler tries to be casual but comes off awkward:

DR. KETTLER
That makes two of us. I hear you collapsed in the ops tent.

LOUISE
Probably just lack of sleep.

Kettler readies a syringe.

DR. KETTLER
Well, you're not getting radiation poisoning. We'll see how your blood tests look, but for now I'm going to give you another boost. Try and sleep this one off, okay?

He sinks the needle into her arm.

Louise winces.

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

The compound has doubled in size.

EXT. CIVILIAN ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

The sprawl of RVs, campers, trailers, and cars parked outside the barricade rivals the biggest Burning Man gathering.

People gather around campfires, sharing dinner. Others huddle in front of portable TVs watching the news. Two photographers take long-lens photos from their roof. And then there is a small group of young MEN at a picnic table talking in low tones, dining on canned foods.

Hunting rifles and two handguns rest on the table. One of the young men is the ROTC STUDENT from the opener.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Louise wakes up on a cot in this darkened tent lined with bunks. It takes her a moment to get her bearings.

That same RINGING in her ears is back. She rolls over to face the other side. Ian sleeps in the cot next to hers.

He lies on his side, his blanket bunched up in front of him.

Louise notices: It's just like she does with pillows.

He stirs. Wakes. They make eye contact. Ian whispers to her.

IAN
Feeling better?

LOUISE
Yeah.
(beat)
I don't know.

IAN
I must admit, I'm starting to see the value of language.

LOUISE
That's what talking with aliens will do.

IAN
No. It's your approach to it. That's what impressed me. You steer us around communication traps I didn't know existed. Which probably explains why I'm single.

LOUISE

Oh believe me, you can be the best communicator in the world and still wind up single.

IAN

I find that hard to believe.

Louise studies Ian's face to see if he's being sarcastic. He's not. This is honesty.

LOUISE

My father worked for a big energy company. They'd relocate him every year to some new country, and I went with him. He used to say learning all those foreign tongues would make me the center of every party. But you know what people say when you're sixteen and fluent in seven languages? "You're smart."

IAN

Oh no. "Smart" is bad.

LOUISE

People are so afraid of smart.

IAN

No, they don't like it.

LOUISE

Right about now you're usually outside, staring at the ship. What are you looking for?

IAN

When I was six, my parents bought me a globe. One of those big ones on an iron floor stand. This was the same year I dressed up as a wilderness explorer for Halloween. My room was papered with hand-drawn maps of my neighborhood.

(beat)

I studied every inch of that globe, and it was the saddest moment of my childhood. It had all been explored already. Claimed, named, and labeled, top to bottom. My whole purpose in life, taken away.

(beat)

Next Halloween, I was an astronaut.

LOUISE

"To boldly go where no one has gone before."

IAN

And is that too much to ask?

(sigh)

I've spent the last thirty years staring at the sky. Trying to find a way out there. Now it's here, and I don't know how I feel about it.

LOUISE

Because you might finally get to explore the galaxy?

IAN

Because the heptapods may have already explored it.

Ian chuckles. Louise smiles at him. It's nearly a touching moment. Then:

A siren blares, from somewhere outside. Stadium lighting claps on from beyond the barracks tent, casting shadows against the tent's walls.

Ian and Louise sit up.

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Wearing coats over their pajamas/nightgowns, Ian and Louise step out of their tent--

And hear a new sound underneath the siren: A low, constant THRUM like a subwoofer emanating from the earth.

Soldiers run past with assault rifles.

Ian and Louise follow, toward the clearing...

To discover that the massive sphere is SPINNING in place on a strange axis. Bits of dirt, grass, and leaves show the speed and angle of its rotation.

The Soldiers stand at the ready, not sure what to expect.

Just as quickly as it began, the spinning stops. The THRUM dies down.

Someone cuts off the base camp's siren, and it's suddenly quiet, save for the sound of the wind.

LOUISE
What was that?

IAN
...I don't know.

Pushing in slowly on the heptapod ship...

AGENT HALPERN (V.O.)
(pre-lap)
You've had plenty of time to figure
it out.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - MORNING

Colonel Weber stands with rigid posture at a small table in the living space of this no-frills hotel room.

Agent Halpern is seated around a breakfast spread with two other men: GENERAL STAHL (late 50s) and Chief of Staff ERNIE BLACK (late 30s). Stahl is dressed in his stars and bars. Black wears civilian clothes.

AGENT HALPERN
We've been playing this your way,
but all your civilian team has
managed so far is to teach the
aliens grade-school English.

COLONEL WEBER
That's right.

GENERAL STAHL
You're proud of that?

COLONEL WEBER
It's bridge building, general. It's
the only way to get the answers
we're all eager to hear.

ERNIE BANKS
The President isn't so sure. He's
concerned that we're making our
sessions a classroom while other
countries have a trading post.

COLONEL WEBER
You can't trade without
establishing a dialogue first.

GENERAL STAHL

Explorers did it. You think any of them took time to teach the Indians Spanish?

AGENT HALPERN

It's also possible that the other countries are benefitting from all our hard work. If these aliens are networked at all, we're teaching all of them English, so they can communicate easier with everyone.

COLONEL WEBER

But even then, we're ahead of the rest of the world, because only we know what we've taught the aliens.

ERNIE BANKS

And it's enough to start asking the big questions. The people in that room shape the discussion. You brought in academics. It's time we bring in the big boys.

COLONEL WEBER

Who-- Halpern's CIA spooks? I was guaranteed another week with Banks and Donnelly.

AGENT HALPERN

That was before we got this intel.

Halpern drops a file folder on Weber's end of the table.

INT. BARRACKS - MORNING

Louise wakes up in her cot.

Across from her: Ian's cot is empty.

PRIVATE COMBS (O.S.)

Doctor Banks.

She's startled and looks at the foot of her cot--

Where PRIVATE COMBS stands. Sidearm at his hip.

LOUISE

Yes?

PRIVATE COMBS

Sorry for waking you, ma'am. I've been assigned to escort you around base camp and into the shell. Colonel Weber's orders.

LOUISE

Did something happen?

PRIVATE COMBS

No ma'am. It's just to make sure we're ready when it does.

LOUISE

If it does.

PRIVATE COMBS

...Yes ma'am.

LOUISE

Where is Ian?

PRIVATE COMBS

Waiting for you outside the shell.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MORNING

Louise and Combs approach the ship. The portal is open.

At the entrance, Ian waits with FOUR GREEN BERETS. He seems relieved to see her coming.

A second SQUAD OF SOLDIERS is building a heavily-armored bunker facing the ship, a hundred feet away.

Nestled in the field, under the shadow of the tree line: THREE M1 ABRAMS TANKS sit quietly, turrets pointed in the general direction of the ship.

Beyond: The sound of helicopters. And carried in the wind: distant car horns and a great rabble of voices, far off.

LOUISE

What is that noise?

PRIVATE COMBS

People at the blockade. Trying to get in. We had two sneak in last night. Patrol caught them half a click from base camp.

LOUISE

Reporters?

PRIVATE COMBS

No ma'am.

LOUISE

What happened to them?

No answer. Louise arrives and finds Lt. Marks with Ian.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

What is going on?

LT. MARKS

Security measures. Latest intel from two other sites hints at an escalation in the negotiations.

IAN

Escalation? What does that mean?

LT. MARKS

It means you get a security detail.

LOUISE

Well this is a cute little allegory for the Cold War, isn't it.

LT. MARKS

They're going in with you.

LOUISE

If they go in, I stay out.

LT. MARKS

They aren't here to start a fight.

LOUISE

How will the heptapods know that? It could look like a hit squad to them. This is how wars start. Do you get that?

Louise pushes past Lt. Marks and heads for the door.

Ian follows her.

The four Green Berets glance at Lt. Marks questioningly, then follow inside. Ian stops them with an open hand:

IAN

We'll call you if we need you.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Louise, Ian, and Lt. Marks enter to find Abbott and Costello waiting on the other side of the transparent wall.

New to the heptapod side of the room: FOUR TURRETS mounted on the floor, lined up just on the other side of the barrier. Seven snub-nosed barrels extend from a bulbous top, suggesting omnidirectional firing.

Everyone sees them. This doesn't look good.

 LOUISE
 Maybe they're cameras...

 IAN
 Exactly four. Same as the number of
 soldiers outside.

Louise looks back at Lt. Marks, who studies the new turrets with a cold, calculating gaze.

The portal remains open. It doesn't close behind them now.

 LOUISE
 At least they're leaving the door
 open this time. That's a good sign.
 (beat)
 Isn't it?

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MORNING

The four Green Berets stand inside the room. Watchful. Lt. Marks stands at the entry to the chamber, like a bouncer.

Louise's whiteboard has been replaced with a large flatscreen TV and attached digital drawing tablet.

Ian has a screen of his own, too, and it displays the Pythagorean theorem. As well as an animation of an equilateral triangle. He's been introducing math.

Ian says into a camera:

 IAN
 Session number eight. Geometric
 equations and the concept of
 intent, which will allow us to use
 the word "why."

 LT. MARKS
 Ask about the weapon.

Ian glances at Louise.

IAN

Right.

Abbott and Costello approach the transparent boundary.

MOMENTS LATER

The sentences on the flatscreen read: "Why does Ian give Louise an apple? Because Louise is hungry."

The written logogram is displayed: A gorgeous interwoven circle of loops, whorls, and symbols.

IAN (CONT'D)

What is that?

LOUISE

I think it's what we wrote.

(pointing)

Look. This is the word for "apple" but it's conjoined with their names... I can't tell where it starts or ends.

IAN

No front or back. Like their bodies. And the ship.

LOUISE

How do you begin to craft a complex statement like this? The relation each symbol has to another...

IAN

Maybe they're cheating.

Said more as a joke. But it gives Louise an idea.

LOUISE

We've never seen them write. Only the result. Let's see them in the act of writing.

Louise returns to the tablet. Erases the sentence on her screen. And then, instead of preparing words and displaying the result, she triggers the "live sketching" option that shows her writing the letters and words in real-time.

She writes the sentence: "Louise writes so heptapods can see her writing."

Abbott and Costello crook their heads.

Costello adjusts something on his console.
Then Abbott removes TWO DEVICES like glowing orbs and
approaches the transparent boundary.

Lt. Marks notices. Tenses. Snaps his fingers.
The Green Berets step forward.

LT. MARKS
What does he have?

LOUISE
Calm down. Calm.

LT. MARKS
(into mic)
One of them is approaching the
boundary.

Abbott reaches the boundary and holds up the orbs in two of
his seven hands. He places them at two points on the
transparent wall and begins to draw.

Abbott writes a heptapod sentence in real-time. With two
hands simultaneously.

It is poetry in motion. A dance of light. He begins the
sentence at opposite ends, and then writes phrases and
symbols in a perfect pair of arcs so that they connect as a
circle at the end.

LOUISE
Oh my god. Nonlinear orthography.

IAN
Wait, what did you say?

COLONEL WEBER (V.O.)
(over intercom)
Doctor Banks, outside.

She looks over at Ian: Am I in trouble?

Ian shrugs: I don't know.

EXT. SPACE SHIP - MORNING

Moving with Louise, Weber, and SERGEANT ENGEL (30s, gruff).
They walk away from the sphere.
Behind them, the portal remains open.

COLONEL WEBER
Explain. What did they write?

LOUISE

It's not what, but how. What we just saw was a kind of magic trick.

She shows him a photo of the circular heptapod phrasing.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

He starts at two opposite points and completes the sentence by joining them into a kind of loop. But to do this means he has to have the whole thing in his head before he begins. Every detail. The spacing has to be right or else you wind up with fragments; a mess.

(beat)

It's more impressive than that. He wrote the mirror image of it. It's reversed, so we can read it.

COLONEL WEBER

So? They're good at writing?

LOUISE

That's a result of the way they think. It's like they know everything they're going to say before they say it.

Weber opens the file folder he got from Halpern.

COLONEL WEBER

Do you know who this man is?

He shows Louise a photo.

THE PHOTO: Grainy surveillance snapshot of a SLENDER ASIAN MAN in a nice but slightly too-big business suit, surrounded by a throng of armed SOLDIERS, escorted into a building.

LOUISE

No. Who is he?

COLONEL WEBER

Yoshi Takamura. Japan's most prominent engineer. Invented a seismic retrofit system that lets a skyscraper withstand earthquakes twice as big as 2011.

LOUISE

And I take it he's being escorted onto the Hokkaido site. So?

COLONEL WEBER

You want to know why we don't have any engineers on our team yet?

LOUISE

Why?

COLONEL WEBER

Because we don't have any goddamn alien weapon to build.

Louise gets it now.

LOUISE

You think they got something from the heptapods?

COLONEL WEBER

I know they do. Two hours after this was taken they shipped in--

Snaps his fingers at Engel: "Remind me--"

SGT. ENGEL

Four trucks--

COLONEL WEBER

--four trucks of equipment from a nearby industrial plant.

SGT. ENGEL

And a titanium housing from Kyoto.

COLONEL WEBER

We're losing this race. If you and Ian don't get me results in the next 48 hours, I'm bringing in someone to replace you.

LOUISE

There aren't any shortcuts here, Colonel.

COLONEL WEBER

Not with your methods, no.

Louise sees the worry in Weber's eyes.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER

Louise somberly walks back in.

Ian stands near the boundary where Costello diagrams an equilateral triangle with two hands in real-time.

IAN

Yes, very pretty. Look at you go.
But I asked you to solve it, not
just copy my work.

LOUISE

Weber gave us an ultimatum. We get
whatever it is they're here to give
us in two days or they're going to
do something stupid.

IAN

C'mere.

Louise gets closer. He puts an arm on her shoulder and continues facing Abbott.

IAN (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Weber showed me a metal composite
two days ago, asked me to calculate
the force required to break it.

LOUISE

(sotto)

What kind of metal?

IAN

(sotto)

My guess: The ship's hull.
(off her look)
I didn't help them.

Louise looks woefully at the heptapods on the other side.

LOUISE

(sotto)

No doubt they found someone who
did.

With new resolve, Louise grabs a keyboard synced to the large flatscreen and types as she speaks:

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Give weapon to us now.

Costello goes to the console. Draws.

An intertwined, looping series of logograms appears.

Ian looks at it more closely.

IAN

Is that the symbol for my name?

Costello then draws some more.

The same phrase appears underneath in (clunky) English:

"LOUISE IAN NOT READY"

LOUISE

Not ready? Ready how? When?

Realizing they still don't comprehend each other's spoken language, Louise begins drawing the question in the heptapod's written logograms.

Ian watches her draw.

IAN

You don't use both hands but I must say you're really getting the hang of their language.

The result appears on their screen, and Ian's right: It's almost as good as what Abbott or Costello draws.

Beat.

Abbott and Costello confer. Whisper-gurgle-click.

The transparent boundary clears itself of all its writing.

Abbott approaches it with the two glowing pen-orbs. Sets them as far apart as he can reach, then draws two lines that meet in the middle to form one long, contiguous line.

Abbott then caps off the line with taller end-marks.

Abbott gestures at the line chart and speaks: Click-click.

LOUISE

Humanity. That's their spoken word for humans.

IAN

How do you know?

LOUISE

I remember how it sounds.

Finally, he places a dot at the far right end of the line.

The result looks like: |—————○|

Above it, a label that looks the same forward or backward; a terse little logogram with pluralization curls. Symmetrical.

IAN

I've seen that one before.

LOUISE

Session four. When I was trying to describe the difference between "now" and "later." They used that to represent "now."

IAN

So we're right there.

LOUISE

At the end of our timeline.

Costello then writes via the console and one English word appears above it all: "SOLVE."

IAN

Son of a bitch.

(beat)

He's giving us homework.

Louise frowns.

INT. HANNAH'S ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Hannah, age 8, sits on her bed, her arms crossed. Pouting. Grumping.

Louise peeks in on her way past.

LOUISE

What's with the grouch face?

HANNAH

I learned a terrible new word today.

LOUISE

From your father?

HANNAH

From my teacher.

LOUISE

(wait what?)

Oh? Which word is that? You can tell me.

HANNAH
 (disgusted)
 "Homework."

Louise laughs.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
 It's not funny! School has most of
 my day already. That's why they
 call it school. They can't make
 demands like this. It's illegal!
 Isn't it?

LOUISE
 Sadly, no.

HANNAH
 Well it should be.

LOUISE
 Oh, honey. I'm going to tell you
 something.
 (getting close)
 No one can make you do anything.
 But you have to think about the
 consequences. Okay? If you show up
 tomorrow and everyone else has done
 their homework but you, how do you
 think they'll feel?

Hannah sighs.

EXT. STARFIELD IN SKY - NIGHT

Time-lapse sequence. The heavens move like a canopy.

INT. MESS TENT - NIGHT

Louise eats alone.

Private Lasky eats his dinner two tables over. The rest of
 the dining area is empty.

Louise steals a glance at the Private.

Lasky is staring at her.

She nods at him.

PRIVATE LASKY
 You're the lady who talks to the
 aliens.

LOUISE

That's me.

PRIVATE LASKY

Let me ask you. Are you scared?

LOUISE

Scared of what?

PRIVATE LASKY

That they'll... do something to you. Like they're already doing something.

Louise is unsettled by his tone.

LOUISE

They're not the type.

PRIVATE LASKY

I saw you in Doctor Kettler's office.

LOUISE

That was for something else.

Lasky shakes his head; he doesn't believe her.

Ian enters, looking worse for wear.

He grabs a pre-made meal at the counter and joins Louise at her table. His eyes are bloodshot.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I didn't expect to see you out.

IAN

I'm hiding from Weber. He's got me working on that damn timeline every waking minute.

LOUISE

Any new ideas?

IAN

It's a timeline. I don't know what they're asking me to solve. Bayes' Theorem applied to global population?

LOUISE

Just a reminder, I flunked calculus. I have no clue what you're talking about.

Ian grabs a salt shaker from the end of the table.

IAN

Okay.

He pours a dollop of salt on the table between them. A few quick shakes.

IAN (CONT'D)

The current world population is hovering close to eight billion.

He then starts another pile of salt a few inches from the first one. Shakes quite a lot here.

IAN (CONT'D)

This group here represents the cumulative population of the whole history of humanity. Estimates put this at just over 100 billion.

Ian puts the shaker down and points at the small pile.

IAN (CONT'D)

What that means is: About eight percent of every human who ever lived is alive right now.

This sends a chill through Louise.

LOUISE

That much? Really?

IAN

If we were cancer cells and the Earth was a patient, the doctor would tell her she's dead. In fact, if you mapped this out in a graph to predict when humanity would die off, you get this:

Ian spreads out the salt like sand, and runs his finger through it in a line, punctuating one end.

The result looks like: |—————o|

LOUISE

They're warning us. We're about to die off.

Ian leans close.

IAN

But I can't tell that to Weber.
He'd see it as an alien threat.

LOUISE

Doesn't it scare you to lie to
command like that?

IAN

What scares me is being remembered
as the guy responsible for getting
a bunch of people killed, or worse.

This hits home with Louise.

LOUISE

That's a very real fear.

IAN

The heptapods are asking for a
solve. How do you solve this? By
all counts, we can last maybe
another fifty years on this planet
before we all die off.

LOUISE

You'll find a way.

She's sincere.

Ian smiles at her.

Louise suddenly winces and rubs her temples.

IAN

How are you holding up?

LOUISE

Headaches.

IAN

Stress.

LOUISE

Maybe.

(beat)

My brain is scrambled.

IAN

What I like to do to reset my brain
is make some gourmet macaroni and
cheese, pop open a bottle of beer,
and watch "The Thin Man."

Louise says the line as Myrna does.

Hannah, age 10, enters, and assesses the situation.

HANNAH

Oh no.

LOUISE

Come join me.

HANNAH

I make it a point not to attend pity parties.

LOUISE

This isn't about me losing the grant to Danvers.

HANNAH

Mom, I'm going to level with you.

LOUISE

Oh, here it comes.

HANNAH

I've got you figured out. Everyone thinks you're this ball-buster who does nothing but work.

LOUISE

Ha.

HANNAH

I've seen people's faces when you introduce me as your daughter. "When did this woman make time to have a kid?"

LOUISE

I'm such a monster.

HANNAH

That's what you want them to think. The truth is, your heart is too big. You love too much. You want the world to be a better place.

LOUISE

Nice try, kiddo.

Hannah comes over and hugs Louise tightly.

Louise hugs back, surprised.

HANNAH

We need more people like you, mom.

Hannah doesn't let go.

Beat. The wall inside Louise breaks. She starts to cry.

Hannah keeps holding on.

EXT. BASE CAMP HOUSING PRE-FABS - NIGHT

Louise falters on her way back to the housing pre-fab.

She notices tears in her eyes. Wipes them.

LOUISE

(sotto)

Ah, hell.

PRIVATE COMBS (O.S.)

Ma'am?

Louise is startled at the voice.

Private Combs stands a few feet away, rifle slung over his shoulder. Her escort.

PRIVATE COMBS (CONT'D)

You okay?

LOUISE

Yes... I just... What time is it?

PRIVATE COMBS

Twenty-one hundred. Need to get you inside before curfew.

LOUISE

Right.

(then)

Curfew.

PRIVATE COMBS

Because of the barricade. Too many civilians trying to get in.

Louise looks out at the tree line. Half a mile out, stadium lights illuminate the forest.

PRIVATE COMBS (CONT'D)

Patrol caught another group two nights ago.

LOUISE
They want to see the aliens.

 PRIVATE COMBS
No ma'am. They wanna kill them.

 LOUISE
Why?

 PRIVATE COMBS
Most believe this is end times.

Louise doesn't respond. But it worries her.

She approaches a small pre-fab structure. This is where she's been moved. Private Combs stands guard outside.

INT. HOUSING PRE-FAB - MOMENTS LATER

Inside it's not much bigger than a studio apartment.

Louise takes two steps into the combination living area and bedroom, and freezes.

Dr. Kettler sits at her small study desk with a book, wearing a pair of reading glasses.

Colonel Weber stands in the middle of the room with his hands behind his back.

 DR. KETTLER
Good evening, Louise.

 LOUISE
Dr. Kettler. Colonel. What are you two doing here?

 COLONEL WEBER
(gestures)
Why don't you sit down.

Louise cautiously approaches and sits on the small couch opposite him.

 DR. KETTLER
How are you feeling?

 LOUISE
I just need sleep. I'm fine.

Weber makes a noise. Louise glances at him.

COLONEL WEBER

Don't be dismissive. The doc is just trying to help.

LOUISE

Help me with what?

DR. KETTLER

The headaches. One moment you're here, the next you're staring off.

COLONEL WEBER

And the last two sessions, you haven't referred to the heptapod dictionary. You're reading it as they write it.

LOUISE

You've been monitoring me.

DR. KETTLER

I'm your doctor.

LOUISE

You're the military doctor.

DR. KETTLER

All this focus on alien language. It's got to be affecting you.

Louise lets out a breath.

LOUISE

You heard of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? The idea is, you immerse yourself in a foreign dialect enough, you start to dream in it. It re-wires your brain.

DR. KETTLER

Fascinating.

(then)

Are you dreaming in this language?

He holds up a piece of paper.

It says: "GIVE WEAPON" in her handwriting.

Louise blinks.

The paper now has a heptapod LOGOGRAM. It's not in English. It never was in English.

LOUISE
I... I guess so. Yes.

COLONEL WEBER
All right. Time to give you a
little break.

Beat. This throws Louise.

LOUISE
I need to keep translating. This
work is too important to stop.

Kettler stands up, taking Louise's book with him.
Weber starts for the door.

COLONEL WEBER
We'll call you if we need you.

LOUISE
Who's going to talk to them?

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MORNING

Standing before Abbott and Costello is Ian. Behind him stands
Lt. Marks with his squad of GREEN BERETS.

A new device has been rolled into the room: A TRANSLATOR.

It's been programmed with all the information Louise has
learned from the heptapods.

Ian glances over at where Louise normally stands. He
reluctantly leans forward and speaks into a microphone.

IAN
Hello again. Ready to do some math?

He looks over at the device, which whirs.

A second later, the heptapod LOGOGRAMS for what Ian just said
appears on the screen.

Beyond the transparent wall, Abbott and Costello stand
stoically. Watchful. Unmoving.

LT. MARKS
(into mic)
Give us the weapon.

The heptapods crook their heads at Lt. Marks.

Ian looks back at Marks with a sudden dread.

IAN
Let me handle this.

LT. MARKS
You have ten minutes. Prove you can
work faster than Louise Banks.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MORNING

Louise marches for the sphere.

As she approaches the portal, two GREEN BERETS from Lt.
Marks's group stop her.

LOUISE
Who's in there now?

GREEN BERET
Ma'am--

At that moment, Ian steps out of the tunnel.

Louise sees him...

He makes eye contact with her...

And her heart breaks. A personal betrayal.

IAN
Louise.

LOUISE
You son of a bitch.

She storms off for the operations tent.

He jogs to try and catch up to her.

IAN
This wasn't my idea! They built a
translator device from your work! I
had to make sure they didn't-- Hey!

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - MORNING

Louise pushes through the tent flap and zeroes in on Colonel
Weber, standing by the massive white board with the columns
of other nations with alien sites.

EVERY SINGLE TV SCREEN is filled with footage of violence.
Gunfire at the grounds of another alien site. Riots at
another. Naval warfare on the Indian Ocean.

On the white board, seven of the eleven countries now have the word "BLACKOUT" written next to them.

In another corner of the Ops Tent, a group of PHYSICISTS gathered at a glass drawing board displaying the timeline.

Surrounding the timeline in other colored markers are various physics equations and properties.

Ian comes in after Louise and sees her staring down Weber.

LOUISE

You put a piece of tech in the room
instead of me?

Weber hangs up his phone.

IAN

It doesn't really work. I'll have
better luck with my table of props
explaining mass and volume.

COLONEL WEBER

Why aren't you in there now?

LOUISE

I should be in there.

Weber dismisses Ian with a gesture and focuses on Louise.

COLONEL WEBER

I need you on another project now.

LOUISE

What's more important than working
with the heptapods?

Weber picks up a remote and points it at a TV.

COLONEL WEBER

You fluent in Mandarin?

LOUISE

Yes, why?

He hands Louise a set of headphones, and replays a video.

Louise watches the screen, headphones over her ears.

ON SCREEN: Footage of two CHINESE MEN meeting at a camp not unlike the Montana site. The camera capturing this footage is hidden, and far from the two men, zoomed in.

Muddled voices speak in Mandarin. Louise translates:

LOUISE (CONT'D)

He's saying each of the twelve is offering advanced technology.

(beat)

Their spies report none of the tech appears to be the same.

(beat)

Something about... gaining an advantage. No one can be trusted.

She meets Weber's gaze at this last bit.

The clip ends abruptly. Weber takes the headphones back.

COLONEL WEBER

We're getting a lot of activity at a Sichuan site rumored to hold a few nuclear warheads. China may be bringing a nuke to their alien visitors. To trade, or to detonate, either way it's bad news for us.

LOUISE

What about their translators?

COLONEL WEBER

We still have a few operatives on the ground, and far as we can tell, you're the only one who's cracked the language. Our foreign counterparts have reverted to the old days of bartering. Or worse.

Lt. Marks enters, riled up. Steps up to Weber.

LT. MARKS

May I have a word, Colonel?

Weber nods to Louise: Dismissed.

LOUISE

We're not done here. I want back in. I'm fit.

COLONEL WEBER

Get Doctor Kettler to sign off on it and we'll talk.

LT. MARKS

Sir...

Weber and Marks turn their backs on her.

She scowls, and breaks off to see Ian.

AT IAN'S STATION, he idly puts physics toy models in a box as he watches the team of Physicists who've taken over his job.

LOUISE

You went in without me. You let them push me off the team.

IAN

I didn't have a choice. And, by the way, they did the same with me.

(pointing)

Weber brought in a room full of monkeys to try and crack the timeline. I'm off the job.

The Physicists see him glaring at them. One of them takes the glass board and turns it so Ian and Louise are staring at the backside; all their writing is now backwards and harder to read. A sort of "screw you" gesture to Ian.

Ian flips him off.

LOUISE

I'm not going to just roll over. You don't switch players this late in the game. It sends the wrong signal.

IAN

So it does.

Louise follows his line of sight:

Lt. Marks and Weber are in the middle of a tense argument. We're too far away to hear it.

IAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

There's gotta be a way for us to get back in there.

Louise's attention drifts back to the glass drawing board, with the science team huddled at it.

From her POV, the timeline looks like this:

|—o—————|

And the logogram over the dot that means 'humanity' looks the same; it's an AMBIGRAM.

Louise's breath catches.

LOUISE

Ian. Look.

He sees. And stands up beside her. Hit by epiphany.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

The word for 'humanity' is an ambigram in their language. It reads the same front or back.

IAN

That's how the heptapods were seeing it, on their side! To them, we are at the beginning of our timeline.

LOUISE

From their perspective, humanity has a long future ahead. To us, we're nearly done. Which is it?

IAN

It's Schrodinger's Cat! It all comes down to choice. Louise -- we've solved it!

He charges off toward Weber, who's overheard Ian.

COLONEL WEBER

What kind of cat?

Ian doesn't go to Weber, though. He keeps striding right out of the tent.

LOUISE

Ian? Ian, wait--

EXT. BASE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Louise trails after Ian, who's headed right for the ship.

The grassy field between the tent and the entry to the alien ship is about a hundred yards.

LOUISE

You aren't going to tell Weber?

IAN

Not yet. Not until I confirm it with Abbott and Costello.

They've crossed maybe halfway to the portal.

An army APC is parked near the ship. PRIVATE LASKY unloads a heavy bag. Private Combs helps him carry it inside the ship.

Louise frowns. Noticing the two. She's becoming aware of her surroundings as she talks with Ian.

LOUISE

What do you mean about choice?

Louise looks around for the Green Berets that usually guard the tunnel entry.

IAN

That's what they're saying. The human race is either about to die off or we're just getting warmed up, and it's all about what choice we make with the heptapods.

The Green Berets are nowhere to be seen.

Ian and Louise are now maybe ten yards from the ship.

Private Combs exits the ship and marches right for them.

LOUISE

(distracted)

What, uh... what choice do you mean?

IAN

(re: Combs)

Who's this guy?

Private Combs gestures at the two of them: Turn back.

PRIVATE COMBS

The shell is off-limits.

IAN

We need to see the aliens.

PRIVATE COMBS

You just missed them.

LOUISE

We'll wait until they come back.

PRIVATE COMBS

They aren't coming back.

Behind Combs, Private Lasky runs out--

IN HIS HAND: A remote detonator--

LOUISE

STOP HIM! STOP--

A massive explosion rocks the scene, and debris from inside the interview chamber is blown outside like shrapnel--

Ian dives atop Louise as they go down, covering her--

A loud RINGING in her ears--

Ian is shouting but we can't hear him--

Private Combs gets up, assault rifle in his hands--

Private Lasky joins him, armed with an assault rifle of his own, just as the base camp SIREN starts wailing.

WEBER and SERGEANT ENGEL burst out of the ops tent--

Louise starts to get up and out of Ian's grasp--

Private Lasky raises his rifle to shoot at her--

Colonel Weber quick-draws and FIRES with his sidearm--

DROPPING Lasky a fraction of a second before getting a shot at Louise, his assault rifle firing wildly over her head--

Combs fires back at Weber and Engel--

Engel grabs Weber and the two hit the dirt while bullets smack into the earth around them--

Combs retreats to the smoking portal of the ship--

Louise pursues Combs--

IAN

Louise!

Louise reaches the entry and squints through the smoke--

SEEING a sudden glow from inside -- it silhouettes a stout heptapod figure and a human one -- and as Combs raises his rifle -- a great FLASH of light -- expanding like a tidal wave in all directions --

The sound of a SCREAM just as -- the entry portal SEALS up right before Louise can step inside. Leaving her stumbling back onto the lawn.

Beat. A sudden hush. No one moving.

Ian moves to Louise but stays down.

The ear-ringing starts to fade and the sound of Weber barking orders can be heard:

COLONEL WEBER
Secure the area!

IAN
Louise, look at me. Are you hurt?

Louise shakes her head. They start to get up.

Then, the alien ship begins to TURN. Rotating at an oblique angle, yet remaining in place. Like spinning a billiard ball on its axis.

The spherical craft reverses its hemispheres.
Now it's sitting upside-down from its previous position.

Beat.

A NEW PORTAL begins opening at ground level, at the same place as the previous portal. It lines up perfectly with the blackened grass from the explosion earlier.

The space around the portal glows.

Weber and Sgt. Engel reach Ian and Louise, grab them both, and pull them away from the ship. As their sleeves go taut from Weber and Engel pulling them--

INT. "CLEAN ROOM" - MOMENTS LATER

--now the four are in the middle of a heated argument, thirty seconds later.

LOUISE
We have to go in!

COLONEL WEBER
That was an unprovoked attack--

LOUISE
By us! Against the aliens!

COLONEL WEBER
Even more reason not to walk in there!

IAN
Weber is right. It's too dangerous.

LOUISE
You should be on my side!

IAN
I am--

LOUISE

They opened another portal! They're inviting us in because they want answers. The longer we wait--

COLONEL WEBER

Or they're setting an ambush.

LOUISE

That's not like them!

IAN

You don't know, Louise. You don't have the data to support that. Examine this logically--

LOUISE

I'm not some equation for you to solve, and neither are they!

IAN

I didn't mean it like that--

But Louise storms out of the tent, her emotions too raw right now, and too hurt by Ian's perceived betrayal.

Ian pursues, with Weber behind them.

COLONEL WEBER

Both of you, get back here!

EXT. BASE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Louise gets a dozen steps toward the new ship portal when Ian catches her by the elbow.

IAN

Louise-- wait.

LOUISE

Don't try and stop me.

IAN

I wouldn't dare. But I'll be damned if you're going in there alone.

She sees he's serious. Not because he wants in. But because he wants to keep close to her.

COLONEL WEBER

You don't get to decide that. I'm responsible for you, and I'm telling you now, you're not going inside without a formal invitation.

Weber, Louise, and Ian are suddenly bathed in the glow of a shimmering light.

Their heads turn toward the ship to see:

A SERIES OF LOGOGRAMS encircling the new portal.

COLONEL WEBER (CONT'D)

...What does that say?

LOUISE

It's my name. And Ian's. And the word for 'enter.'

She steps toward the ship. Ian follows. Weber doesn't make a move to stop them. He just stares.

INT. NEW INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER

Louise and Ian step into this chamber that appears identical to the previous one. The floor and the ceiling are designed as mirror images, built to function in either direction.

Costello stands at the console on his end.

Louise and Ian have a similar console built in on their end.

Costello draws on his, and heptapod writing appears on the transparent boundary between them.

But this time, an English voice speaks the translation for them via some unseen broadcaster.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Louise and Ian. Answer question.
Action with weapon against us.
Question... Why.

Hearing a vocal version of English makes Louise gasp.

LOUISE

That's a simulation of your voice, Ian. They have a spoken translator working.

Louise leans Ian against the console and then tries to figure out how to use it.

She finds the same glowing orbs she saw Abbott use in an earlier session.

A wide, clean panel serves as a tablet surface.

Louise begins to write.

IAN

What are you going to tell him?

LOUISE

That it wasn't us.

IAN

Pray he understands the concept of terrorism.

LOUISE

(sotto)

Actually, I pray he doesn't.

As she draws, the chamber's translation voice works both ways, turning her words into whisper-clicks for Costello.

She waits for Costello's reaction.

The transparent wall is cleared of the heptapod writing and Costello begins drawing a new statement.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Many weapons also tools make purpose unclear.

LOUISE

(as she writes)

Where is Abbott?

Costello responds. More heptapod writing appears.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Abbott was in room. Abbott was waiting for Louise and Ian.

Louise's heart sinks. Did the explosion kill one of the heptapods? Or is it wounded?

IAN

You know, maybe this was a bad idea.

LOUISE

Is Abbott dead?

IAN

Wait, you taught them about death?
When did we cover that word?

LOUISE

We didn't. Maybe someone else did.
Eleven other countries are talking
to them.

Costello writes more. Louise watches the curved writing
appear on the wall:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

I am waiting for Louise and Ian.
Solve.

The timeline appears again.

IAN

Choice. Write what I told you. That
both timelines are possible, it all
depends upon what we choose to do
with their help.

Louise nods.

Her console panel goes dark.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Write on here. Write in our
language.

Costello approaches the transparent boundary.

Louise stares at the orbs in her hands.
Looks up at Costello. Thoughtful.

IAN

What is it?

LOUISE

It's a complicated sentence. I'm
trying to figure it out.

IAN

You can do it.

LOUISE

Shush.

Louise approaches the boundary, opposite Costello.

She tentatively puts up two hands, then lowers one.

IAN

What?

LOUISE

I can't. I can't draw both ends at the same time.

She holds the orb in her right hand up against the glass.

As she does, Costello holds up one orb against the glass on his end, two feet to the left of her position.

Louise regards him curiously.

Costello speaks: tone-gurgle.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Solve.

Weber enters, back in his full HAZMAT suit, with Sergeant Engel carrying an advanced video camera with attachments.

Engel points the camera at Louise and the heptapod.

Louise takes a breath, and begins to draw one end of this elegant, complicated circle of logograms.

As she does, Costello draws on his end. Working in the opposite arc toward Louise's starting point.

IAN

What is he doing?

Louise's eyes widen as she realizes...

LOUISE

He's being my other arm. He's finishing my sentence.

IAN

That's impossible. Not only would he need to know what you're going to write beforehand... You would have to know what he's going to write!

The two co-authors finish simultaneously, connecting the arcs of their logograms into a circle.

REVEAL an angle showing Costello's hand perfectly aligned with Louise's, only the transparent wall between them.

Ian, Louise, and the Physicists from earlier are parked at a large table with small computer workspaces of their own, each working on a different section of the code.

The new team members are still obviously nervous and excited about being here. DENNIS (35) sits closest to Ian, while PETER (28) and GREG (26) compare notes opposite Louise.

Ian orders around the guys who, earlier today, were brought in to replace him:

IAN

We've got about eighty thousand unique, conjoined equations here, combined with the logograms Louise is translating. Tackle whatever you can, refer to me or Louise for clarification. We've been at this for a few weeks.

DENNIS

(raises hand)
Question.

IAN

You don't have to raise your hand, Dennis.

DENNIS

Will we get to visit the aliens?

IAN

Probably not.

Weber steps in and answers that question.

COLONEL WEBER

There's no reason to talk to them unless it's to crack a piece of this puzzle.

LOUISE

I disagree.
(off Weber's look)
We should keep in regular contact, even if it's just to say hello.

COLONEL WEBER

This code is our priority.

LOUISE

I want to keep talking to them.

COLONEL WEBER

Keep up with your translation work here, and I'll consider letting you back in there.

Weber turns and leaves; discussion over.

DENNIS

That guy sounds like my dad.

IAN

He's everybody's dad.

Louise rakes her fingers through her long hair.

PETER (O.S.)

What's this term here?

INT. LOUISE'S STUDY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Louise reads papers at her desk. She runs her fingers through her short hair, like she just did.

Her study is walled with books, and her desk allows her a view through the open door all the way down the hall.

Hannah (age 10) steps to the threshold.
Leans against the doorway.

HANNAH

Mom.

LOUISE

Sweetie.

HANNAH

What's the term for that thing, like a technical term, where we make like a deal, and we both get something out of it?

LOUISE

A compromise?

HANNAH

No.

LOUISE

You remember what it sounds like?

HANNAH

Like it's a competition but both sides end up happy.

LOUISE
Like a win-win?

HANNAH
More science-y than that.

LOUISE
You want science, call your father.

Louise returns to her papers.

Hannah frowns.

HANNAH
You always do that. You and Dad
both. Put in just a little effort
and then kick me to the other
parent.

LOUISE
Hannah, that's not fair.

HANNAH
It really isn't!

She storms off down the hall.

Louise watches her go. Tries to think of what to say.

IAN (V.O.)
(pre-lap)
Louise--

INT. OPERATIONS TENT - NIGHT

Louise snaps her head up, having drifted off to sleep at her
work table surrounded by computers.

IAN
Sorry.

LOUISE
No. I'm up.
(then)
What day is it?

IAN
I know, right?

LOUISE
I mean it. I can't remember when I
am anymore.

IAN

I don't know what day of the week it is, but it's the day you see what the heptapods have given us.

He turns his monitor around to show her:

A peculiar kind of JET ENGINE animation rendered 3D. Particle acceleration.

IAN (CONT'D)

Closest comparison would be cold fusion.

Louise doesn't follow.

IAN (CONT'D)

What this process does, it creates a room-temperature nuclear reaction in sexy little proportions through a vacuum jacket and a skinny film resistance heater, pushing that energy out the other end.

LOUISE

What does that get us?

IAN

Watch when I adjust the simulator to run it at full power.

Ian hits some keystrokes.

The simulation seems to disappear in a flash of light.

LOUISE

It went away.

IAN

I thought the same thing. Then I ran the numbers again. Best guess, it creates a cloaking field. But, if I play with the numbers a bit, I think I can get us a new form of air travel.

LOUISE

Like how new?

IAN

Like LA to New York in about nine minutes.

Louise catches her breath. Ian brings her in close and hugs her tightly. Holds on.

She melts and hugs back. He's breaking through to her.

LOUISE

Do you know what this means? It's not a weapon.

IAN

Yeah.

But then Ian's face falls. It could easily be turned into a very dangerous weapon.

IAN (CONT'D)

Yeah...

Dennis enters the tent and stops in his tracks.

The two break off, a bit embarrassed.

LOUISE

(to Dennis)

Hey. I just learned what you've been designing.

DENNIS

Yeah, about that. I'm at the tail end of the code, and... Did you add anything at the end?

LOUISE

What do you mean?

Dennis makes a few keystrokes on a monitor and brings up an image on a large flat-screen.

THE SCREEN shows a series of intertwined logograms. Like a Persian rug of alien data.

Dennis magnifies one corner... revealing:

"1 / 12" -- followed by an elegant little symbol.



DENNIS

They used Arabic numerals. One twelfth.

IAN

No. One of twelve.

(to Louise)

They're telling us this is just part of something bigger.

LOUISE
They're all meant to be combined.

DENNIS
What's that last symbol?

LOUISE
...My name.

INT. "WAR ROOM" PRE-FAB BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Another structure built with the same materials as housing, only this is a much larger space. It's filled with glass-walled conference rooms, phone banks, and more screens.

Louise, flanked by Ian and Dennis, confronts Colonel Weber at a conference table with Agent Halpern.

Halpern is the Man in the suit and tie we've seen before; the main contributor to the giant white board of intel.

She holds up the printout Dennis gave her:

LOUISE
This is just one piece of it. What they're telling us, right here, is that ours is one of twelve. We're part of a larger whole.

AGENT HALPERN
Or we're one of twelve contestants for the prize.

LOUISE
Who are you?

COLONEL WEBER
Louise, this is Special Agent Bill Halpern of the CIA. He's been overseeing the project.

AGENT HALPERN
What Colonel Weber means is I'm the one you should talk to from now on if you want to stay on the team.

This raises Louise's hackles. Still addressing Weber:

LOUISE
We need to talk to the other sites and help them with whatever they've gotten from the other heptapods.

Halpern shakes his head.

AGENT HALPERN

No can do. Right now the only thing that makes many of these nations competitive is the alien technology they've received.

LOUISE

Who's competing?

COLONEL WEBER

Everyone. All the time.

LOUISE

This is telling us the pieces go together.

AGENT HALPERN

Does our power source work all on its own?

IAN

Technically, yes...

AGENT HALPERN

There you go.

LOUISE

If I've learned anything from the study of their language and their way of thinking, it's that the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts.

AGENT HALPERN

That's a nice theory. Let me give you another one.

He points to a digital map of the world where the landing sites are highlighted with glowing dots.

Nearby is that large whiteboard with all the intel from the different countries in control of their own sites.

AGENT HALPERN (CONT'D)

We're all being given weapons. To fight among ourselves until only one faction of humanity remains.

LOUISE

That makes no sense.

AGENT HALPERN

It does if you consider the heptapods didn't come here in peace. We are a world with no single leader, not even with a global council. It's impossible to deal with just one of us. So they let us fight until one is left.

Halpern points at flat screen monitors.

AGENT HALPERN (CONT'D)

Russia is rolling two tank divisions to its borders, and we caught heat balloons in the engines of eight nuclear subs in Polyanna.

(pointing)

South American forces began mobilizing last week in major cities, shutting down harbors.

(another feed)

Japan and Korea are mobilizing their long-range missiles.

(at Louise)

We're on the brink. And our alien friends just gave us all a shove.

IAN

That's not the way they think.

AGENT HALPERN

It's the way we think, though. And that's what matters.

LOUISE

Look-- It's easy to prove my theory. Have other teams look for this symbol among the data they've been given. It will have their translator's name among these logograms.

AGENT HALPERN

That could simply be a receipt, so they know who accepted it.

LOUISE

Not if these belong together.

AGENT HALPERN

So what are you proposing? We get the data from one of the other countries?

LOUISE

And we offer our own in return.

Halpern looks to Weber. Is she serious?
Weber nods.

COLONEL WEBER

You were just saying how you wanna
see what the others are building.

AGENT HALPERN

That's the only way we'll come to
the table. A fair trade.

IAN

So it's a non-zero-sum game.

Louise hears this and it dawns on her--

INT. LOUISE'S STUDY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Hannah storms down the hall. Picking up right where we left
her from the previous flashback.

Louise sits forward, with that same look of realization:

LOUISE

A non-zero-sum game!

Hannah stops. Turns back around.

HANNAH

That's it! Yes! Thank you, Mom.

Hannah shuffles back into her room.

Louise slowly touches her face, an even deeper realization
now creeping into her conscious mind:

What did I just do?

COLONEL WEBER (V.O.)

(pre-lap)

What did you just do?

Louise seems to hear the voice beside her and look--

INT. "WAR ROOM" TENT - BACK TO SCENE

Weber stands at her side.

LOUISE
I'm-- I'm sorry?

COLONEL WEBER
What's your angle in all this?

LOUISE
In what?

COLONEL WEBER
Getting everyone to share their
discoveries. There must be some
gain for you with it.

Louise is still a bit lost, reeling from the effect she just had on her own memory.

LOUISE
Yes. I get to go home.

Louise turns and heads out, passing Halpern, who addresses his team of agents with phones in their hands.

AGENT HALPERN
Get London on the horn. Then reach
out to the other ten however you
can. Tell them we wanna make a
deal. And use this as your calling
card. See what it gets us.

He shows them the same SYMBOL SET that contains Louise's name in the written heptapod language.

Weber grabs a radio handset and triggers the base camp's speaker system.

COLONEL WEBER
Media teams to the war room.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Louise makes stands outside and stares at the ship as SOLDIERS and TECHNICIANS brush past her to the pre-fab building.

Reverse to reveal: The portal tunnel slides open. Inviting.

No one seems to notice but Louise.

She crosses the field to the shade of the massive ship.

Louise takes one look around, then steps inside.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER

A new set of recording equipment has been brought in but the chamber is otherwise empty.

The heptapod side is vacant as well. No Abbott or Costello.

Louise goes to the console and lets her fingers trace the edges of it. This is starting to feel more like home.

She looks back toward the tunnel out.

It remains open. She could leave now if she chose.

Louise approaches the transparent boundary. Tries to look deeper into the alien ship. She puts a hand on the wall...

And the boundary dissipates. Gone.

Louise tests to see if it will return, but it doesn't.

Cautious, she ventures deeper into the room. Now she's on the heptapod side.

The only other door is the one the heptapods use to leave at the end of each session. No one has seen any more of the ship. Louise ventures to this doorway.

She looks down the curved hallway beyond.

More doors line the walls.

Louise looks back at the human side of the room...
And then steps out, into the alien hall.

INT. CURVED HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Louise follows a subtle light trail down the corridor to another door.

LOUISE

Hello?

As she nears the door, it opens like an aperture.

Louise steps inside.

INT. STASIS CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

This room is circular, with a kind of sensory-deprivation tube in the center of the room. Light emanates from the central tube, haloing a heptapod inside.

Another heptapod steps into view. Costello.

Whisper-click, it says.

That same translator voice reverberates in this room, as if from the walls themselves:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Hello Louise.

LOUISE
Costello? Is that you?

Her words are converted into the hushed, waterfall sounds and organic clicks of the heptapod language in real time.

Costello waves.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
What is this place?

Costello speaks. The translator speaks.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Place for Abbott.

Louise looks again at the tube.

Abbott does not move. He's missing arms. His body looks wrong. Darker in places. Sunken in.

LOUISE
Is Abbott okay?

Gurgle-click-whisper.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Abbott is dead.

Louise is hit hard by this. She forces herself to look away.

LOUISE
I'm so sorry....

Costello whispers.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Abbott is a sign. Abbott has learned from Louise what all heptapods must learn.

LOUISE
I don't understand.

The lighting in the room shifts. The circular walls now reveal an elaborate series of logograms written densely, in a long chain, all the way around the room.

It's like a giant ring, with an inscription etched on the inside.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

This is the story of our people.
From origin to death. A span of two
point nine billion human years.

Louise marvels at it. Steps closer.

What she thought were solid lines creating the interconnected logograms are actually SMALLER logograms themselves.

LOUISE

It's beautiful...
(realizing)
How do you know the future?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

All of the moments in our life are
like memories. We do not perceive
time as humans do.

Louise follows the phrasing to the end.

LOUISE

Where are you right now?

Costello raises one of his arms and points.

A sliver of light cuts vertically across the logogram--

Almost at the very end of the phrase.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

The end for heptapods is coming.
This is why we are here. To learn
from you. And to help you.

LOUISE

Learn from us? Learn what?

Costello turns and looks back at Abbott's body.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Power to choose. Not to follow the
path of our story. To break from
what we know is to come, and choose
the unknown instead. That is the
only way for us to survive now.

LOUISE

Was Abbott supposed to die in the explosion? Was that his story?

Costello stares at Abbott a beat. As if in wonder.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

...No. Abbott chose a different path. He broke his future. And by his death, he has shown that all heptapods are free.

Costello turns his attention back to her. Whisper-click.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

You are the key. You choose life. Even knowing what the future holds. You light the way for us all.

Louise tries to unpack that statement.

Before she can, the ship begins to rumble and vibrate.

Costello waves at her. Click-tone.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Goodbye, Louise.

LOUISE

Wait. Wait, what are you doing?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

You must go.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The spherical ship powers up.

The ground trembles.

INT. INTERVIEW CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Louise hurries past the consoles, toward the exit--

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

--running full-tilt now as the series of ocular doors slide shut behind her, and the tunnel ahead of her begins to constrict, like eyelids closing--

EXT. BASE CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Louise runs out of the ship.

A heartbeat later, the portal closes behind her, sealing completely.

Louise stumbles on shaking ground and crashes to the grass.

She turns back and looks up to see:

More cables hooked to the ship SNAP as the sphere lifts.

The ship RISES into the air. Massive. Majestic.

The air beneath the sphere undulates like a mirage. It rises high into the clouds. The cloud cover parts to give it a clear path to the stars.

The entire base camp is out now, swarming the field and looking up at the ship.

A moment later, the rising ship burns out of the atmosphere and vaults into space at an angle like a shooting star.

Two other shooting stars join it from other parts of the world. Then four more.

Then all twelve are seen leaving.

Louise stands up.

COLONEL WEBER

What happened?

LOUISE

They left.

Beat. Weber doesn't exactly know what to say to this.

COLONEL WEBER

Christ. That's it, then.

LOUISE

What?

COLONEL WEBER

We got nine of the nations on the line, and they're at each other's throats. We're minutes away from global war.

Everyone's still looking up at the sky.

IAN
We're not dead yet.

The word "dead" triggers something in Louise and--

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A DOCTOR pulls the sheet over Hannah's head.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Louise stands at the grave.

EXT. BASE CAMP - BACK TO SCENE

Louise comes out of the flashes, back in present day.

Weber and others are making their way back to the War Room.

Ian has hung back to be near Louise.

IAN
You think we can do anything now?
Or are we out of a job?

Louise wobbles. The flashbacks are affecting her physically.

LOUISE
Hang onto me?

He grabs her and keeps her from falling.

IAN
Whoa now. I got you.

LOUISE
Promise--

And in a dull roaring sound, Louise's eyes roll back--

INT. LOUISE'S KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Louise stands at the refrigerator with her hand on the door.

She stops whatever she was about to do-- whatever she wanted to get from the fridge, that task is abandoned.

Louise reaches up and feels the length of her hair. Looks at her hands. Notes her wedding ring-- she's still wearing it.

From the breakfast table behind her:

HANNAH (O.S.)
 Promise me, Mommy.

Louise finds HANNAH, now age 7, seated at the table with markers and a sketch pad.

We hear an ethereal pre-echo of Louise's voice before she speaks, as if in a dream. "Promise you--"

LOUISE
 Promise you what, sweetie?

HANNAH
 You won't leave me like Daddy did.

Louise goes to Hannah's side and meets her eye-to-eye.

LOUISE
 Hannah, honey, your father didn't leave you. You'll see him a lot.

HANNAH
 He doesn't look at me the same way anymore.

Louise touches Hannah's hair. She has so much love for her daughter.

LOUISE
 That was my fault. I told him something he wasn't ready to hear.

HANNAH
 What?

LOUISE
 Believe it or not, I know something that's going to happen. I can't explain how I know, I just do. When I shared it with Daddy, he got real mad. Said I made the wrong choice.

HANNAH
 Why? What's going to happen?

LOUISE
 It has to do with a very rare disease. And it can't be stopped.
 (beat)
 It doesn't matter anymore. What matters is here and now. Okay?
 What do I always say?

HANNAH
 "Live each moment."

She brings Hannah in close, to hide the fact that she's trying not to cry.

Louise breathes in the smell of Hannah's hair.

LOUISE
 (to herself)
 Hold onto this moment--

EXT. BASE CAMP - BACK TO SCENE

Ian holds onto Louise.

She realizes she's back. Sucks in a breath.

Whatever she's feeling, she tucks it back inside.
 Two breaths later, she's back in control.

IAN
 What just happened to you?

LOUISE
 I remembered something.

IAN
 What was it?

Louise looks into his eyes. Considers not telling him.

LOUISE
 Why my husband left me.

Ian didn't expect that answer.

IAN
 You were married? How long ago--

LOUISE
 Come on. We can't let the CIA run
 that war room.

Ian watches her march for the war room.

INT. "WAR ROOM" TENT - MOMENTS LATER

A dozen screens line the walls of the main conference room, serving as video conference windows to the other nations who have been interacting with their own landing site.

Agent Halpern and Colonel Weber lean against the table at one end, a digital camera pointed at them.

Halpern is in mid-conversation:

AGENT HALPERN
And you can't do that without
expecting escalation from all
sides, Farak.

Halpern addresses a SAUDI SHEIKH on one of the monitors.

Other TALKING HEADS overlap and fight to make their points.

COLONEL WEBER
This is getting out of hand.

More screens show regional maps, tracking air and naval fleet movements. The world has mobilized its militaries.

Weber nods at the screens for Louise. Under his breath:

COLONEL WEBER (CONT'D)
Right now, forty-one thousand
nuclear warheads are armed and in
launch position. Only six thousand
of them are ours.

LOUISE
Who has the rest?

COLONEL WEBER
(re: talking heads)
Look around the room.

SAUDI SHEIKH
We are merely responding to acts of
aggression--

RUSSIAN REPRESENTATIVE
That is tantamount to war, Farak.

Louise attempts to interject:

LOUISE
Please. That's not what this is
about.

JAPANESE MINISTER
Who is this, Colonel?

COLONEL WEBER
Doctor Louise Banks. She's our
chief translator.

LOUISE

Right now we are each holding a piece to what the aliens left us. They are meant to be combined.

BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE

What's your evidence of this?

LOUISE

It's in the code. It's--
(to Weber)
--have you shown them the logogram?

AGENT HALPERN

We're not showing anything yet.

LOUISE

At the end of every one of our data streams, there's a marker. "One of twelve."

BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE

Are you saying you're already fluent in the alien writing?

LOUISE

Aren't we all?

Weber sees the impending escalation just by the reactions on the faces of the other representatives. He leans in:

COLONEL WEBER

We've just been putting our focus on that for some time--

JAPANESE MINISTER

Perhaps you will loan Doctor Banks to the rest of us to expedite the translation of some trickier elements--

AGENT HALPERN

We're not giving her up.

Now too many voices start overlapping, all arguing.

Louise looks to Ian: What do we do?

IAN

This is crazy. It's like something out of a novel.

The word 'novel' causes Louise to flinch; another headache. Before she can respond--

INT. LOUISE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Louise is asleep on the couch, spooning a throw pillow. She's napping in the middle of some long editorial project -- paper and books are fanned out on the coffee table nearby.

The doorbell rings and Louise stirs.

HANNAH (O.S.)
I got it!

Sounds of activity at the front door. Hannah speaks to someone on the front porch:

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'll sign for it.

The door shuts. A moment later, Hannah (age 11) enters with a package. Louise rubs her neck.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Delivery at the door, can I open it? Please please?

LOUISE
(smiles)
All right, go ahead.

Hannah tears into the package.

It's a HARD-BACK BOOK. The back jacket: A photo of Louise.

HANNAH
It's your new book! But it's not coming out until next month?

LOUISE
That's an advance copy.

Hannah opens it.

INSERT: The dedication page. It reads simply:

"To Hannah.
For saving the world."

HANNAH
You dedicated it to me! So awesome.
(re-reading)
What does this mean?

Louise stops pacing, takes the book.

LOUISE
I guess I was in a cryptic mood.

As she re-reads it, she becomes sad.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
It's a sign.

Louise looks up at her daughter, then her gaze lands on something on the opposite wall...

A FRAMED PIECE OF ART.
It's Hannah's drawing of her cartoon.

Louise locks her attention on this picture. Her vague depression lifts, with recognition:

Handwritten on the art is the title of Hannah's fictional cartoon show:
"Hannah and Mommy & Daddy Save the World"

And it's a giant rocket ship.

Louise pulls Hannah in close, hugging her, realizing:

LOUISE (CONT'D)
I wrote it because it's true,
Hannah. You save the world...

INT. "WAR ROOM" TENT - BACK TO SCENE

Louise gasps as she returns to the moment.

The argument has reached fever pitch, and no one is listening to anyone else anymore.

The Russian screen winks off as they end their call.
Another does the same.

Louise rushes to the mic, pushing Halpern and Weber out of the way. As loud as she can:

LOUISE
I know what it is. It's a ship.

The delegates grow quiet.

BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE
What is a ship?

LOUISE
What we have. They're components to
a massive spacecraft.
(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Britain: You have the formula to build a composite hull that is impervious to cosmic radiation.

The British rep balks but doesn't correct her. She continues, pointing at screens as she speaks:

LOUISE (CONT'D)

China: You have a design that revolutionizes life support.

(then)

Peru: You were given the key to manipulating gravity.

(and)

Japan: You have a way of creating pure water from air.

SAUDI SHEIKH

Our data is not part of some space ship. Your theory is wrong.

LOUISE

Sir, you have what might be the most important part. You were given a very small string of data that offers celestial coordinates. And what you'll find if you look there is a planet with an atmosphere very similar to Earth. You have a map.

JAPANESE MINISTER

What do you Americans have?

LOUISE

The way there. Our piece is a propulsion system.

(looking at Ian)

Our simulation seemed to disappear. Not because it's invisible, but because at full speed it travels faster than light.

The look on Ian's face: Shock, then a light-bulb moment.

She's right.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

We are at a critical moment, right here and now. We've outgrown our own planet, and we need to colonize if we want to give humanity a legitimate future. The decision we make in this room decides the fate of our race.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

We are either at the end of our story, or we're at the very beginning.

IAN

The timeline.

LOUISE

The test we were given. For us, the heptapods showed a timeline...

She trails off, as she looks out at the dozen screens.

The delegates are showing THE SAME TIMELINE on their screens, in different graphical versions. They all got the same test.

IAN

So you're familiar with it.

LOUISE

The choice we make now is the choice of those two paths.

(beat)

Who wants to go exploring?

One at a time, each delegate nods.

In some screens, a SCIENCE TEAM behind the delegate starts to celebrate. Men in LAB COATS. Others in CIVILIAN CLOTHING.

Ian clasps Louise on the shoulder.

IAN

Don't look now, but I think you just saved the world.

She beams... Then her smile fades.

LOUISE

I need some air.

Ian follows her outside.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Louise steps out with Ian close behind. Weber follows and stops them both.

The look on Weber's face: He's awestruck. Amazed.

COLONEL WEBER

Louise. You want to explain to me what you just pulled back there?

LOUISE

Sir?

COLONEL WEBER

What you just did. Closest thing I've seen was a magic act in Vegas, this guy called out every card in five different poker hands.

(pointedly)

How did you know what everyone else has? You just pulled off what three major intelligence agencies have been trying to do for the past two weeks. How?

Beat. Louise shrugs.

LOUISE

Best way to explain it would be... I remembered.

Halpern steps out with one hand on the door:

AGENT HALPERN

Colonel, they're asking for you.

Weber smiles and shakes his head at Louise, then turns and heads back inside.

Before he disappears, he looks back at Louise and Ian.

COLONEL WEBER

I never went to Danvers.

LOUISE

Excuse me?

COLONEL WEBER

When I came to recruit you. You asked if I was going to Berkeley.

(beat)

I never went. I didn't want anyone but you.

LOUISE

Then why tell me you were going to see Danvers?

COLONEL WEBER

If I had said you were the only option, would you have come?

LOUISE

...Probably not.

COLONEL WEBER

Now that we're at the finish line,
hopefully you understand why I
started with you like that.

Weber walks off, toward the war room. Louise looks on.

IAN

What now?

Louise turns and walks toward the helipad.

LOUISE

I'm going back home.

Ian catches up with her and matches stride. Smiling.

IAN

Home. I almost forgot what that
was.

LOUISE

You should come over. When you're
in the neighborhood.

IAN

Get me in the door, I'm liable to
move in.

LOUISE

Just don't bring that orange couch.

Ian stops in his tracks.

IAN

How-- You are freaking me out now.
I saw your lips moving when Weber
was talking to you a minute ago...
You knew every word he was going to
say as he said it...

(beat)

What's happened to you, up there?

Tapping her temple, lightly.

LOUISE

Ian... If you could suddenly see
your whole life, clear as day, all
your triumphs and your tragedies...
would you change things, even if it
meant losing the good with the bad?

IAN

I'm more of a one-day-at-a-time kind of man. I don't look back. I look forward.

LOUISE

That's... a really good answer.

Ian steps close to her.

IAN

Louise. I've been waiting for an experience like this my entire life. I just never thought that, with all that's happened, the highlight would be meeting someone from the same planet as me.

That's all it takes for Louise. She puts her arms around Ian, and kisses him on the mouth.

As the kiss intensifies, that high pitch returns, triggering--

INT. HANNAH'S ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Louise hugs Hannah (age 4) goodnight. Hannah is in pajamas and under the covers.

Louise goes to click off the light by Hannah's bed.

HANNAH

Mommy?

LOUISE

Yes, little-nose?

HANNAH

Why is my name Hannah?

LOUISE

Don't you like it?

HANNAH

I don't know yet. Where did it come from?

LOUISE

Oh, so this is another episode of your series, "Why is it this way?"

HANNAH

You make me curious about everything.

Louise smiles sweetly at her daughter. She then gestures at a wooden NAME PLAQUE spelling out HANNAH on the wall.

LOUISE

Your name is special. It's a
palindrome. That means you can read
it both forwards and backwards, and
it's still the same.

Hannah gets it right away.

HANNAH

I've decided. I like my name.

LOUISE

I love you, Hannah.

HANNAH

I love you, Mommy.

IAN (O.S.)

Well, I love you both.

Louise looks back at--

IAN, standing in the doorway. Smiling.
Ian is Louise's husband. And Hannah's father.

HANNAH (O.S.)

I love you too, Daddy!

Ian steps in and scoops Hannah and Louise into a bear hug.

A rush of noise again, and--

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Aerial shot, following a black sedan as it pulls up to the
driveway of Louise's house.

LOUISE (V.O.)

So that is your story, dear Hannah.

Louise steps out. It's a military vehicle; the driver leaves
her there.

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Louise chats with a STYLIST--

LOUISE

--have a big date tonight.

STYLIST

We'll pull out all the stops!

LOUISE (V.O.)

The heptapods gave us a choice, and we chose life. We chose to keep the human race going, in spite of all we'd done to kill ourselves off.

SERIES OF QUICK POPS:

- 1) Staring at blueprints of a MASSIVE SPACE SHIP in a design similar to the heptapod craft.
- 2) Celestial photographs, with a solar system circled in red.
- 3) A sheet of composite metal unlike any seen before, applied to a larger structure by WELDERS.
- 4) The launch site to the ark-like SHIP that towers overhead.

LOUISE (V.O.)

The story of our people continues. I can close my eyes and see moments in the future as we build the ark.

INT. LOUISE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Louise stands before a full-length mirror holding up a dress against her naked body. Her hair wrapped in a towel.

LOUISE (V.O.)

I'm about to make a choice, too. One that I will have to live with forever. I could go either way.

INT. LOUISE'S FOYER - EVENING

The front door opens: It's IAN. Dressed up as nicely as he can be. Bottle of wine in hand.

Louise is dressed beautifully. Her new haircut is short. Just like the flashbacks.

IAN

Wow. You look amazing.
(re: hair)
The change fits you well.

She flashes him a devilish grin.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE BALCONY - NIGHT

Louise steps onto the balcony to see the sunset.

Ian joins her. Takes her hand.

LOUISE (V.O.)

In some ways this choice saves the world, but I'm not thinking about that, Hannah. I never am.

Ian smiles down at her.

She smiles up at him.

This is the same scene as the first. Shot for shot.

Every flashback we've seen hasn't been from her past. They've been from her future.

The new element: Now we get to see it's Ian on the deck with her. His thumb traces her knuckles.

IAN

Louise... Do you... want to make a baby?

Beat. The twinkle in her eye, the thoughtful moment... It all breathes here.

LOUISE (V.O.)

I'm just thinking about you.

Then:

LOUISE

Yes.

And now we stay here a moment longer than the opening scene, and see that while Louise is smiling, a tear slips down her cheek. She is both the happiest and the saddest right now. Because she knows what happens next.

FINAL SERIES OF SHOTS:

1) Louise cradles NEWBORN HANNAH in her arms. Hannah crooks her tiny hand around Louise's finger.

2) Four-year-old HANNAH dressed as a cowgirl.

HANNAH

Stick 'em up!

3) Hannah, age 11, from when she's grounded:

HANNAH (CONT'D)

When do I get to live my own life?

4) Louise standing with a DOCTOR in a hospital hall. She's hiding her face in her hands. The Doctor reaches out and puts a consoling hand on her shoulder. Her body shifts from a sob.

COSTELLO'S TRANSLATOR (V.O.)

You choose life. Even knowing what is to come.

5) Hannah, on her death bed in the hospital. Holding Louise's hand. The two clinging to each other.

HANNAH (V.O.)

Hold onto this moment.

6) Louise at Hannah's funeral.

EXT. TOWER APARTMENT BALCONY - NIGHT

Louise, older now and no longer in the lake house, leans on the railing of her living room balcony. Staring out at the night sky.

LOUISE (V.O.)

It all happened, just like I saw it before you were born. Your entire story. Sometimes I feel like I lost you twice.

On the horizon, suddenly lighting up the darkness--

The launch of the first ark ship. Plowing upward, toward the depths of space.

LOUISE (V.O.)

But I can honestly say I wouldn't change a thing...

Louise watches the ark leave atmosphere.

Slowly, she smiles.

LOUISE (V.O.)

Because I didn't.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END